

DEAD YARD

SEEDS OF DOOM



To my mum and dad, who taught me the value of a good story.

PJK

For my Uncle Robert, who was always there for me.

MJ

LITTLE TIGER

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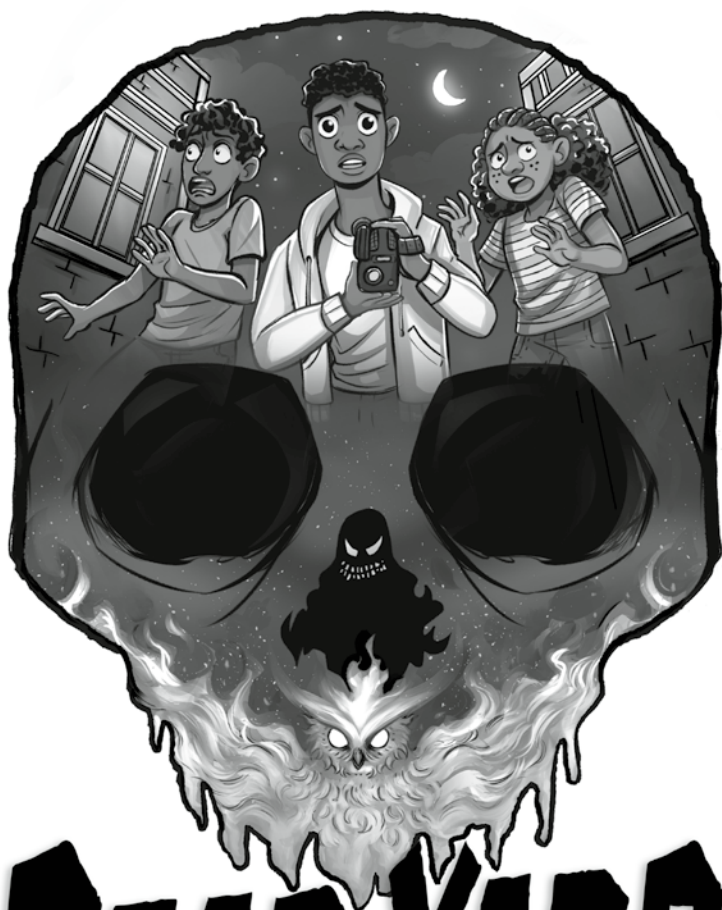
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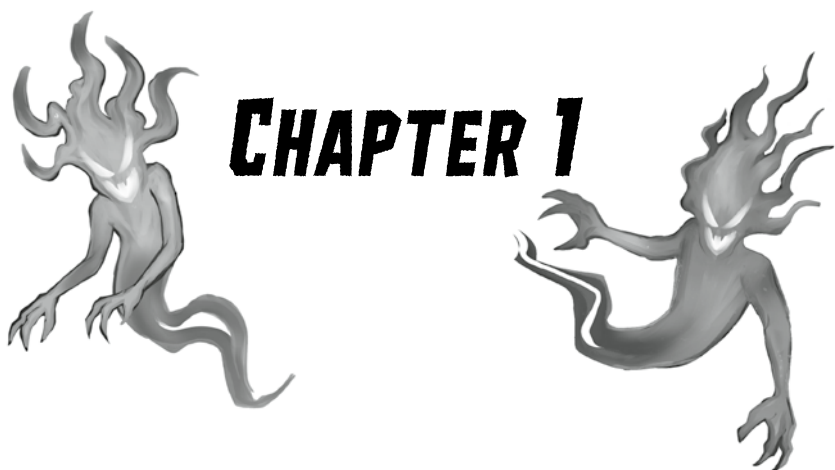


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LITTLE TIGER

LONDON



CHAPTER 1

Long shadows stretched across the cobbled walkways like ghosts reaching up from graves. The shadows hid a ghastly wolf-like creature from view. It hunched over, prowling, ready to pounce. The creature's empty eyes set on a girl in a denim jacket who was eyeing up a fruit stall. It approached her quickly, clawed hands spread and fangs bared. The creature let out a ferocious growl, aiming straight for the girl's neck. She spun round in fright, shielding her face, screaming. Until—

THWACK! A metal walking stick cut into the camera frame, cracking the wolf-like figure on its arm.

“Owwwwww-uh!” a voice moaned from underneath the wolf mask.

“Get away from her!” a tiny old lady with an Irish accent barked. Her next hit knocked the mask right off the boy’s face, revealing angular features creased in pain. He tried dodging the elderly attacker, but she was like a miniature bandit, brandishing her weapon with lethal precision.

“Ow! Get off me!” The boy shielded himself from the onslaught of licks from the walking stick, the little old lady deaf to his pleas.

“You heard Mrs Mulligan! Leave di girl alone!” warned the Jamaican fruit seller who worked behind the stall. She’d protectively pushed the bewildered girl in denim behind her and was in a fighting pose, wielding a plantain.

“CUT, CUT, CUT!” a despairing voice called from behind another market stall. It belonged to a skinny boy with a TWA (Teen-Weeny Afro, as his mum liked to call it) underneath an orange beanie. He carried what could only be described as a dinosaur of a camcorder slung across his narrow shoulders, and a clearly home-made clapperboard.



“You ladies are *ruining my shot!*” he shouted, snapping the clapperboard shut with every word.

“Jermaine... Jermaine Campbell, dat you?” The fruit seller squinted at him through her thick lenses. “What nonsense are you up to now?”

“Sorry, Ms Josephine. I’m doing ... homework,” Jermaine said distractedly, checking on his two cast members. Half the talent was battered and bruised while the other half was trying not to giggle at his monster scene falling to pieces. No amount of post-production effects was going to fix this!

Jermaine’s best friend Assad, looking more annoyed than hurt from the beating, ripped off his fake furry gloves and picked up the cheap werewolf mask he’d been wearing. With Jermaine’s old camcorder, the mask had actually looked pretty scary in the test footage. But now, in the weak early evening light, it looked more like a scruffy dog in need of a wash.

“Bro, *please* tell me you’ll delete any footage of me getting beats?” Assad complained.

“Well, I wouldn’t have hit you if you weren’t being a menace!” Mrs Mulligan snapped, her walking stick thumping on the ground to

emphasise her annoyance. “Scared me half to death, you did!”

Jermaine waved his hands, trying to calm the situation. “It’s pretend! It’s just for a movie—”

“Ooh, listen, listen!” Assad interrupted. “Where do they make werewolf movies?” He grinned at the two old ladies, who stared back at him, baffled. “In *Howl*-ywood! Get it?”

If Jermaine had the budget, he’d have made a tumbleweed blow across Goldhawk Road just to show how dead Assad’s joke was. But then he’d need a whole stash of tumbleweed to cover how many awful gags his best friend cracked on the regular.

“Errr, are we done here?” Annette, Jermaine’s neighbour and lead actress, reappeared from behind Ms Josephine’s humongous house dress. “I’ve got some stuff to do and have to be home before it’s dark.”

Jermaine raised an eyebrow. “By ‘stuff’, you mean that Ms Marvel fanfiction— OW!” Annette elbowed Jermaine, clearly not ready for the world to find out what she got up to on the library computers instead of her homework. “Anyway,

yeah, we're done." Jermaine sighed, putting his props in his nan's two-wheeled shopping trolley. It wasn't the coolest way to transport his kit, but even he had to admit it was handy, and had a kind of retro vibe. Besides, his little sister Kayla had "borrowed" his kitbag (translation: taken without permission, knowledge or blessing) and hadn't returned it yet. Actually, his monthly raid of her room was probably about due – he had *a lot* of stuff to get back...

"Maybe we can reshoot this scene tomorrow?" he asked hopefully. "I'll just get some atmospheric shots tonight. There's some perfect dodgy-looking alleyways round the M&S in Hammersmith that have the right light composition now that the sun's setting—"

"Excuse me!" Ms Josephine interrupted loudly, making the kids jump. "You aren't going to no Hammersmith! Not with your great-great-uncle Carl's dead yard tonight – God rest his soul. Wait till I call your mammy and tell her..." She trailed off as she fished out her brick of a mobile phone. Adjusting her glasses on the bridge of her nose, she peered down at the screen. "One of you youngsters

help me with this ting, nuh?”

“Move!” Jermaine hollered, and the three friends scattered before Ms Josephine could remember her phone passcode. Laughing, they jogged off towards Shepherd’s Bush Green, ducking round pedestrians on the crowded pavement and slowing down only when they reached the giant angel statue in the centre.

Catching his breath, Assad handed over the bedraggled werewolf costume. “Sorry, bro. Maybe we can finish the scene next weekend?” He smiled sheepishly. “Mum wants me to help her do the groceries, get unsi and stuff.”

“I don’t have a lot of time left, you guys!” Jermaine moaned in despair. “The junior film competition deadline is in, like, four weeks. How am I supposed to make the next *Poltergeist* if I don’t get into the summer programme?”

“Four weeks? Yee-ikes.” Annette shrugged, taking her mum’s jewellery off and pocketing it. “Well, I’m good for reshooting tomorrow. I could use the extra Ps.” At this she held out a hand expectantly, and Jermaine begrudgingly smacked a crisp fiver into her palm.

Then Jermaine turned to Assad with a pleading gaze.

“OK, OK,” said Assad. “Guess I can make tomorrow, as long as it’s late afternoon?”

“Yes, mate,” Jermaine quickly answered, relieved.

“Safe, lads. You’d better get home before the aunty gossip mill gets there first!” Annette called over her shoulder as she went off to get her “stuff” done.

“I guess that’s a wrap,” Jermaine said, holding out a fist for Assad to bump.

“In a bit, yeah?” Assad replied.

Assad took a right where Jermaine went left, both boys heading back home. The area was strangely empty given how it was only early evening. But with the sky rapidly darkening, he suddenly realised just how alone he was on the cold grey street.

Picking up the pace, it didn’t take him long before he got to 159 Lakeside Gardens, the house he’d lived in his whole life. Dragging the trolley up the steps, he unlocked the door and was immediately greeted by the flavourful wafts of West Indian cooking being pumped out of the kitchen.

“Muuuum. I’m hooooome!” Jermaine called,

dropping the trolley in the hallway. He entered the kitchen where his mum was stirring stewed chicken in a Dutch pot large enough to feed a small army, which, to be fair, was roughly the amount of people in his extended family.

“Oh, you’re done gallivanting around the market then?” His mum actually side-eyed him. Apparently Ms Josephine was faster on the phone than Jermaine had thought! His mum turned away from the stove and gave him a kiss on the forehead, which he tolerated only because it got him closer to his *actual* goal: the large tray of Jamaican beef patties on the countertop.

“Come to Papa.” He grinned, wiggling his fingers. His mum deftly smacked his hand with a rolled-up tea towel. “Ow!”

“Not so fast, JJ,” his mother chided. She used the pet name he’d had since he first watched JJ Abrams’ *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and picked up the family’s old Sony camcorder. “You know this food is for the wake tonight. Go make yourself useful somewhere else ... or better yet...” She paused dramatically, sniffing him loudly. “Go and have a shower.”

“No one ever told the hobbits to shower on the way to Mordor!” he grumbled, swatting her away in annoyance.

“You shall not pass!” Mum teased, stretching her arms out protectively in front of the food. “We’re leaving to go to your great-great-uncle Carl’s dead yard in one hour.”

“But Muuuuuuum,” he protested. “I’ve got all this editing to do! Mrs Mulligan and Ms Josephine ruined my scene!”

“And I’d rather you didn’t make a *scene* here, JJ,” she said sternly, flicking her towel again. “Your great-gran, Miss Nell, needs our support; her brother has just passed away. Anyway, won’t it be nice to see everyone?”

“I didn’t even know him like that! And I literally saw everyone on Easter Sunday!”

Easter. Now there was a delicious time to be Caribbean. Nothing like eating your bodyweight in food, wearing scratchy church clothing, next to a blaring sound system! But that was practically a week ago. No one needed to see extended family that often.

“Well, you can see them again because you *are*

going to the wake. Wouldn't you want your family to turn out for the premiere of your debut film, hmm? Now go shower!"

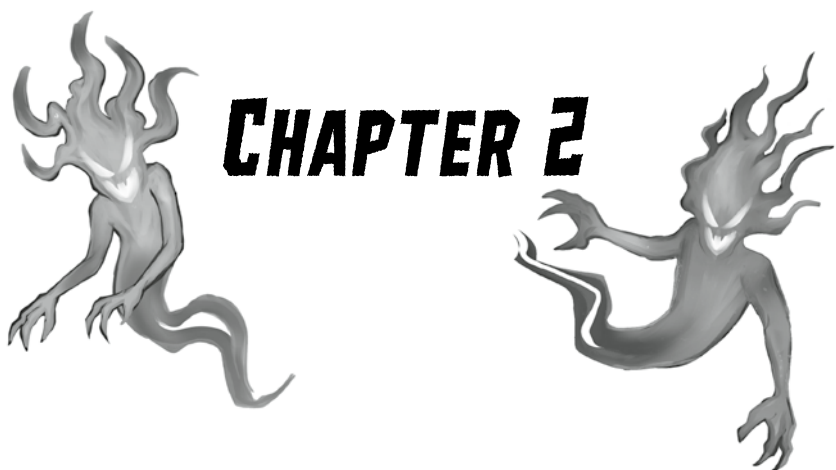
"Ugh, fine." Jermaine sighed. "But don't expect to be my plus one on the red carpet in ten years' time!"

He left the kitchen in a huff, scowling at the flickering light in the hall that, rather than doing its job, was casting weird shadows along the wall.

Dad really ought to check out that bulb.

He shivered again. It was weird; the place he called home suddenly didn't feel like it. A draught blew in, and he had an eerie feeling that there were *eyes* on him. Eyes that he couldn't see. And that smell, what was it? Something wet and proper stinky, like compost or earth ... like the smell of zombies fresh out of the ground...

And then, out of nowhere, a cold, skeletal hand shot out of the shadows, grabbing his arm.



“AAAAAHHHH!” Jermaine screeched, wrenching his arm from the hand’s clutches.

The cold grey hand belonged to Miss Nell, who shrieked right back. “Oh, Jermaine, what a fright you did give me!”

“What a fright *I* gave *you*?” Jermaine blurted, his heart still pounding. “I didn’t even hear you creep up!”

“I’m so sorry, baby,” said Miss Nell.

Jermaine’s normally cheerful great-granny looked tired and sad, with dark rings under her bright brown eyes. She hastily attempted to wipe the mud off her hands on to her trousers, which proved about as effective as trying to dry your

hands by dipping them into the Thames.

“Yuh come back from your filming now then, big Mr Spielberg?” Miss Nell chuckled at her own joke.

“Spielberg?” Jermaine cracked a smile. “Actually, I’d prefer Coogler...” He paused when he saw his great-gran looking blank. “Ah, never mind. Have you been out gardening again? You’re supposed to be resting!”

Miss Nell laughed. “Yuh don’t know my family back home were farm people?” She grinned proudly. “It’s in the blood. It’ll take more than the community garden to slow me down!”

The pair leant against the wall in the hallway, Jermaine on a step slightly above. “What were you planting this time then? Did your aubergines come in?”

Miss Nell kissed her teeth. “It’s too early in the year for dat. No, I was just planting a cassava seed for Carl. He kept some at his house. When we were kids we used to play outside, picking fruit and vegetables... But that’s a long time gone now.” She idly picked at some dried mud on her trousers as she spoke, a faraway look in her eyes. “I know Carl wasn’t a well-liked man. Most people didn’t

even want to be around him – may his spirit be preserved in Jesus’s name.” She made the sign of the cross swiftly as she said this. “But he’s still my brother, yuh know? And the fact that he kept hold of the cassava seeds... Well, maybe his heart was still in Jamaica after all this time.”

Miss Nell’s eyes filled with tears. Unsure what to say, but not wanting to see his great-granny upset, Jermaine held her hand tightly.

“What was it like back then with you and great-great-uncle Carl? You must have some stories!” Miss Nell liked to tell stories from back home, like most old people did. Kayla had no time for them, but Jermaine rated them pretty highly. After all, every director needed inspiration.

Miss Nell wiped her face and brightened. “I have just the story for you, one that’ll beat all them little duppy stories you like to watch! Yuh ever hear me talk about the Ole Higue?”

“Old what?”

“Ole Higue. Just a regular old lady,” she said airily. “Apart from the skin-shedding...”

Jermaine’s eyes widened. “You what? You mean, like a snake?”

“Yup.” Miss Nell nodded sagely. “You do *not* want to meet her, I can tell yuh dat!” She leant forwards, gazing at him with watery, cloudy eyes. “The Ole Higue keeps to herself. She never troubles nobody during the day. But at night she takes off her skin and shoots into the sky like a fireball!”

“That’s wild! But why?” Jermaine asked, fully invested.

“So she can feast on people’s blood! She won’t often attack men, but women – yes. And children? A delicacy!”

A chill crept over Jermaine, but he tried not to show his fear. He didn’t do a very good job of it, as Miss Nell cackled at her great-grandson’s reaction.

“Mm hmm. She’ll feast and feast on the youths dem – suck up all their blood until they’re just skin and bones.” She shook her head. “I seen the Ole Higue myself, you know. Me and Carl. You wanna hear the story?”

Jermaine’s heart was doing backflips. Gulping, he nodded.

“Every child in Jamaica knows that when the sun goes down it’s time to go home. We didn’t have

street lights back then, so when there's no more sunlight it's *really* dark outside." Miss Nell seemed distant, lost in her memory.

"Well, Carl and I were playing in the cornfields just outside our village when we felt some kind of heat above us, yuh know? We looked up and saw a streak of fire pass over, flying straight for our road. That was when I knew it was the Ole Higue looking for dinner." Miss Nell's hand gripped Jermaine's tighter as she spoke.

"When I tell you Carl and I ran like we never ran before and will never again! My heart was in my throat. I was so scared I nearly tripped. Carl held my hand and pulled me all the way home. I'll always remember how he looked out for me then."

Jermaine remembered what his mum had said about always showing up for family. This was probably the first nice thing he'd heard said about Uncle Carl.

"We slammed the door behind us and I pushed the key in to block the keyhole so she couldn't get through," Miss Nell continued. "We prayed and cried and begged her to leave cos we could feel the heat from her body even through the closed door.

Eventually she left us alone, but that day is burnt in mi memory. I hope you never know fear like that, child.”

Miss Nell sighed and let go of Jermaine’s hand, closing her eyes. “Yes, Holy Father, I will never forget. The next day three children on my street were sick, and it hurt my heart to see dem like that. All skin and bone, weak and sick, with the ugliest bruises on their body, like they’d been bitten.”

Jermaine crossed his arms as though putting up a barrier between him and his fear of the tale. “How do you stop the Ole Higue?” he asked softly. “Like, with garlic or something?”

Miss Nell chuckled lightly. “Something like that. If you come across her skin you can put chilli flakes in it and rub it all around until it get good an’ stuck in the flesh—”

Jermaine gagged, imagining a stickier version of the inside of his old, used werewolf mask. “Inside her skin? Gross!”

“Well, if yuh do that, when she tries to put it back on, it’ll burn her until the sun finish her off ... that’s if yuh can find the skin, of course.” Miss Nell smiled sadly, looking down. “I wish me and

Carl had done that. Maybe then the other kids would have been OK. I used to wonder if she'd come back for us ... finish the job..."

"Oi!" A high-pitched yell made Jermaine jump about a metre in the air. It was his sister Kayla coming down the stairs and making a racket with each step. Unlike Jermaine, Kayla was fully ready for the wake in a black dress with puffy sleeves and her shiny church shoes. Her curly hair – much like Jermaine's except bigger – was tied up into two puffs, adorned with sparkly black ribbons on either side of her head. She carried a shoebox painted in green and gold glitter, with the words *RIP GREAT-GREAT-UNCLE CARL* in big, sparkling black letters on the side. "If you're both just chilling down here, can you help me make more ribbons, please? I'll cut you guys a commission for labour!"

Miss Nell chuckled. "Oh, Kayla." She smiled warmly at the girl as she inspected the ribbons in green, black and gold, like the Jamaican flag. "You're a born entrepreneur! But wouldn't it be nicer to give them to the guests as gifts? You know, as a keepsake?"

"Sure," Kayla said sweetly, then muttered under

her breath, “It can be a loss leader.”

Miss Nell raised an eyebrow. “Eh?”

“Hmm?” Kayla pretended not to hear her and quickly disappeared back up the stairs.

Jermaine picked up his camera bag to make his way upstairs to his studio (his bedroom). Inspired by Miss Nell’s story about the Ole Higue, he wanted to upload his footage from the day and start sequencing clips before the dead yard began. Maybe he could turn Ms Josephine’s unwanted cameo into an Ole Higue scene. She was old and scary enough...

“JERMAINE CAMPBELL!”

Rats.

“Why are you still down here, stinking up the place?” His mum had burst out of the kitchen, taking off her apron hurriedly. She eyed Miss Nell, who guiltily hid her muddy hands behind her back.

“Oh, it’s you, Granny, covered in mud and compost! You were meant to be resting.” Clearly Jermaine wasn’t the only target of Mum’s annoyance. “Both of you need to clean up and get ready for the wake.”

“It’s called a ‘nine night’ or a ‘dead yard’, not a

wake!” Miss Nell sniffed haughtily as Mum ushered the two of them upstairs to get clean. “Charmaine, if you’re not careful, we’ll lose our history – you and the kids don’t know nothing about our roots. We have to honour Carl, and how can we do that if we don’t even use the correct names for our traditions?”



After Jermaine had showered and got himself changed, he couldn’t help but look longingly at his camera with all that unedited footage, calling to him enticingly as it sat next to his—

“Muuuuuum! Where’s my laptop!” he yelled, galloping into the kitchen where his mum was packing away the last of the precious patties.

His mum shrugged. “Maybe Kayla has it?”

Jermaine scowled. Of course it was Kayla. Ooooooh, he was gonna get her into such trouble with their dad!

“Where’s Dad? We’ll see how he feels about her using a computer unsupervised!” Jermaine complained. Despite being a big, friendly giant,

his dad was the only one who could get Kayla to listen, and avoid being sucked into buying one of her products.

“He’s going to meet us at the wak— At the dead yard.” His mum smiled sweetly, avoiding Miss Nell’s side-eye from across the kitchen table. “So we’ll see him there. Get your jacket on and carry these patties, will you?”

This was like torture!

Jermaine sighed. “Fine, but I’m taking my camera with me,” he pouted, defeated.

Miss Nell beamed at him. “Dead yard is an important part of our culture, but also Carl will get the good send-off he deserved. Plus...” she added softly, just loud enough for Jermaine to hear, “sometimes strange things happen at a dead yard when you’re waiting for a spirit to pass over.”

Jermaine shivered at that, a surge of excitement for the event suddenly taking hold. The idea of a found-footage-style horror like *Cloverfield* was pretty enticing! He returned to his room, put on his jacket and slung his camera over his shoulder. After all, if anything creepy *were* to happen, what better way to see it than through a lens?