

SAM HAIN

OCCULT DETECTIVE

THE GRIMDITCH BUTCHER



BRON JAMES

*This is a preview for Sam Hain: The Grimditch Butcher*  
*For the full version, please visit [www.samhaincasebook.co.uk](http://www.samhaincasebook.co.uk)*

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The interdimensional entities are real, though.

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## PROLOGUE

That Wednesday had been just like any other for Douglas Norton. He had shut the shop at six o'clock, counted up the day's earnings, binned the produce that was no longer fit for sale, and then stopped for a couple of pints with the lads at *The Hog's Head* before heading home that night. This was a regular routine for him, and he would always take the same route home every night. It usually took no more than quarter of an hour, unless, of course, he needed to pick something up from the corner shop.

Tonight, Douglas didn't need anything from the corner shop, and he had started to make his way back home not long after nine o'clock. He turned left at the end of the road and into the gravel alleyway which ran along the back of a terrace of houses. It was the quickest route back home, leading around the back of the terrace, past the garage, and then down into the cul-de-sac where he lived. To one side of the narrow pathway stood the monotonous plain brick façade of the rear of the houses, the brickwork only occasionally broken up by graffiti or a downstairs-bathroom window; to the other side, suburban gardens hid behind tall wooden fences, and trees peeked their leafy heads over and reached down to any passers-by below. At either end of the path stood two lamp posts, but there were no other lights along the length of the alleyway, and the path was so long and winding that for the most part the road ahead was shrouded in darkness.

The gravel crunched noisily beneath Douglas's feet as he walked along. The night was a lot colder than it had been earlier that week, and Douglas briefly regretted not bringing a coat with him; the past few days had been unusually warm for January, but today, the weather decided it was still very much in the depths of winter. A chilling wind came blowing down the alleyway, and Douglas clutched his arms around himself to brace against the cold. It was then that he heard it.

It was not a noise he expected to hear down the often empty alleyway, and it was certainly not a noise he had heard before. It was like a low, guttural growl, a rumbling roar echoing off of the alley's walls. Douglas felt his body tremble with the noise, as if a low-flying aeroplane had just soared overhead, and then there was complete silence. An eerie stillness hung in the air. He turned around to see what on Earth could have produced such a sound, but he couldn't see anything. The alleyway behind him was dark and empty. Presuming it was just a weird effect caused by the wind blowing through the alley, or maybe the rumble of an oncoming storm, he turned around to carry on his way. Without explanation, Douglas felt a sudden and strange searing sensation pierce through his stomach, and shortly followed by the feeling of something warm and wet. He looked down.

His white shirt being stained crimson red with blood was the last thing Douglas Norton ever saw.

## CHAPTER I

The breakfast news was very rarely a source of good morning entertainment. On-going news stories would be briefly covered, broken up by smaller local news pieces, followed by several iterations of the weather and the ever pessimistic coverage of traffic on the M25. Alice watched the footage of motionless cars with very little interest as she chewed on a piece of slightly blackened toast. She only really had the television on to keep an eye on the time to make sure she wouldn't be late for work, but at least she now knew how long some people had been waiting in traffic whilst driving into central London, and she was particularly grateful not to be one of them.

'All right, I'm off,' Rachel announced as she walked through the living room, throwing on her jacket, 'I'll see you in a couple of days, I suppose.' She was going away on a mandatory two-day course of team-building exercises for work. Alice did not envy her.

'Have fun!' Alice chimed sarcastically. 'It won't be as bad as you think...'

*'The body of a man was discovered in an alleyway in Grimditch earlier this morning,'* the newsreader announced, his voice just as flat and unmoving as his face, *'police on the scene of the murder are trying to piece together-'*

'A group of incredibly dull people for fake meetings, role-playing interviews, and getting teams to try to build bridges out of straws and tape. It's going to be an absolute riot,' Rachel retorted, rolling her eyes. 'How drinking-straw-architecture is in any way connected to customer service, I'll never know.'

'Look at it this way,' Alice said, swallowing the last bite of mildly burnt toast and standing up, 'it'll probably be better than working on the refunds desk for two days.'

'We'll see,' Rachel said doubtfully, and she hugged Alice goodbye, 'I'll see you on the other side.'

'See ya,' she said, and Rachel walked out of the front door, slinging her overnight-bag over her shoulder as she left.

*'is the third incident to have occurred this month.'* The newsreader straightened himself, maintaining a cold and unblinking stare down the camera. *'Now here's Tom with the weather.'*

*'It's looking grim, Jim,'* announced Tom with the Weather, pointing to a map of London which had little cartoon clouds with sad faces on them.

Alice peered at the bottom-left side of the television screen to check the time. 07:13. She gulped down the last of her cup of tea, and headed to the bathroom to quickly clean her teeth before having to leave. As much as she didn't envy Rachel's team-building days, she also wasn't too enamoured with the idea of spending the next eight hours standing behind a till accepting a seemingly endless barrage of refunds and exchanges. She'd just started to clean her teeth when she heard a knock at the door.

'Fuhgut sum-thun?' Alice foamed through a mouthful of toothpaste as she pulled the door open, expecting to see Rachel there. However, standing in the doorway was not Rachel, but the familiar figure of Sam Hain, his greatcoat flowing down to his ankles and the rim of his fedora tilted over his eyes, clutching a crumpled newspaper beneath his arm.

'Have you seen the news?' He asked, holding up the paper and entering the flat. He glanced at the television, which was now recounting the story of a hamster who had climbed up a drainpipe, and – assuming this meant Alice had been paying attention to the rest of the news that morning – sat himself down on the sofa. 'Ah, excellent, you have. I won't need to fill you in then.'

'Wuh?' Alice frothed. 'Hol' on.' She darted off to the bathroom, spitting out the minty foam and quickly rinsing her mouth out before returning to the living room. She watched the news for a second to try to catch up with what Sam was saying. A hamster had climbed up a drainpipe and, despite having caused a blockage survived a barrage of attempts to unblock it, had been reunited with its owner. 'Right, so what's got you interested in this story about a hamster?' She couldn't quite fathom the importance of a rodent in the drainpipe, but from what she'd come to know of Sam Hain, anything was possible.

'No no no,' Sam said, unfurling the newspaper in front of him, 'nothing to do with hamsters. This.' He pointed a finger at a news article, a page-long piece about a recent string of murders in the east end, headlined with the tasteful title *The Grimditch Butcher*. 'You haven't been following this then?'

Alice shook her head. 'Nope. And?' She didn't much care for sensationalist news coverage of murder victims.

'And? And what?! Three dead, all in similar circumstances, in the past month! And one of them was found in the early hours of this morning.'

'Why am I not surprised you get excited about murder?'

'It's not the murder itself, it's this.' Sam took out a sheet of folded paper from his inside pocket, and laid it out in front of Alice. Printed on it were pictures of the previous two murder cases, the bodies of

the victims prominently displayed in the centre of each image. In each case, the bodies were laying on their backs, limbs sprawled out and their clothes stained red around the abdomen, a pool of blood coagulating around them. Any police involvement had mostly been cropped out of the images, so each one focussed largely on the bloody corpse, although the occasional elbow or hand still found its way into shot.

‘Elliot Ferguson, a candlestick maker, and Brian Mayweather, a pastry chef, were both found dead within these past few weeks, both in similar circumstances. And now, there's been a third.’ Sam detailed, indicating to the bodies pictured.

‘Wait, hold on. Did you say “candlestick maker”?’ Alice asked.

‘Well, yes. Elliot Ferguson was a candlestick maker.’

‘Is that even a real profession? Aren't candlesticks made in factories now we're not living in the middle ages?’

‘Well, yes, I suppose so, but that's not the interesting point! What links these victims?’ Sam said, pointing to the pictures again.

‘They were stabbed in the stomach...’

‘Yes, and...?’ Sam asked, gesturing as if trying to lead Alice to the answer.

‘There's obviously something weird about it, otherwise you wouldn't be looking at me like that.’ Alice looked back at the pictures, but didn't say anything more about them.

‘No? Okay then, see the stab wounds, here and here,’ Sam pointed, ‘do you notice anything about them?’

‘They're like patterns.’

‘Yes, but, these aren't just any patterns,’ Sam sounded far too enthusiastic for someone who was looking at pictures of formerly-living people. He pointed at the patterned wounds again. ‘These symbols, they look like sigils. They're symbols of power, used for evoking and manifesting a spell-caster's intent.’

‘What intent?’

‘That depends on the one who is casting them. They can be invoked to do anything, from making it rain and boosting lottery chances, to inflicting pain and summoning demons. Very powerful magick in the right – or wrong – hands. And these people... Well, these aren't just your run-of-the-mill murders, and they're certainly not a part of a ritual spell to attract health and prosperity. This is blood magick.’

Alice stared at the images for a while longer before looking back up at Sam. ‘And you're thinking we should go and investigate a murder which is more than likely linked to powerful, sacrificial blood magick rituals?’

‘Absolutely,’ was his simple reply.

‘To be fair, I don't even know why I had to ask,’ Alice said, looking for her shoes. ‘So what do these sigils mean?’

‘I have no idea,’ Sam said frankly, ‘but I have a plan to find out.’

‘What's the plan?’

Sam stood up, straightening the lapels of his coat. ‘We'll take a cab to Grimditch, we'll be there in about quarter of an hour. The magickal footprint of this will still be fresh, we'll be able to sense any disturbance in the Akasha. With any luck, the coroner won't have moved the body to the morgue yet, and I can get a proper look at the carvings in the latest victim.’

‘Yes, with any *luck*...’ Alice said, pulling on her boots. She wasn't particularly enthusiastic about the idea of starting her day with a corpse, but she couldn't deny she was interested in seeing it from Sam's unique point of view. There was something almost exciting about a magickal murder, although Alice

was sure she'd probably change her mind quite quickly when face-to-face with the reality of it. She double-knotted her laces and stood up.

'All right then, let's go,' Sam said, making his way out of the door. Alice started to follow.

'Wait. You may want to lose the hat at least before we go anywhere,' she said.

'Why?'

'You want to go to a crime scene, and you're dressed like you're on your way to a fancy dress party as a film noir detective. If you were any paler, you'd actually be in black and white.'

Sam stood still for a moment, contemplating her suggestion. 'The hat stays,' he announced, as if coming to an important conclusion, and marched off down the corridor and towards the stairs.

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