

SAM HAIN
OCCULT DETECTIVE
THE REGENTS



BRON JAMES

This is a preview for Sam Hain: The Regents
For the full version, please visit www.samhaincasebook.co.uk

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The interdimensional entities are real, though.

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PROLOGUE

He knew they were following him. They had been ever since he'd left the café. He'd seen them there not half an hour ago, sitting only a few tables away from him. Not that he had really paid much attention to them at the time, they had just been on the peripheries of his vision, but now that he was aware they were following him, he couldn't help but notice there was something strange about them.

It wasn't much past ten o'clock when Sam Hain had walked into the café. He had ordered a large cup of tea (English Breakfast, dash of milk), paid for it with a fistful of coins, and sat down at his usual table by the window, looking out onto Hampstead high street. He'd idly watched people wander back and forth past the window, going about their day, and he sipped his tea. This had always been his favourite place to come and relax. It had been a couple of weeks since Sam and Alice had investigated a string of murders in London's east end, inadvertently landing Sam on a list of suspects when the police learned he hadn't been sent by Scotland Yard after all. *This is the thanks I get for banishing a murderous entity*, Sam had thought when he first saw the photofit approximation of his face on the news, *it's not my fault they were expecting the killer to be human*.

Thankfully, the police never knew his true identity, and after almost two weeks of only leaving the house to make a few stealthy, disguised runs to the corner shop (as well as a few cloaking spells for good measure) Sam was starting to feel confident that he wasn't in any immediate danger. The news had pretty much forgotten the whole thing after a couple of days, after all, and he'd had no trouble with the authorities since. He decided, rather wistfully as he gazed up at the cloudy skies above Hampstead, that he could take this time to sit and drink his tea in peace. So he did.

For the rarest of moments, Sam was able to relax and forget all of the burdens of his life, of the ghosts and demons and other paranormal phenomena he had to regularly deal with in his weird world. He idly thought about calling Alice for a friendly chat, maybe invite her out for dinner, and the idea of something so perfectly normal in his far from normal life made him smile. He sat back in the café's chair, contented. For once, Sam Hain could enjoy his cup of tea and not worry about anything out of the ordinary happening at all.

Only a few short moments later, probably no more than a minute or two, two men had entered the café and sat down a few tables away from Sam. The men wore identical black suits, clearly expertly tailored, with slim-style silk ties. Their eyes were covered by narrow pairs of sunglasses, the lenses seemingly opaque and as black as their suits. They both appeared to be in their forties, their faces worn and chiselled like stone. One of them was tall and slender, his short hair slicked back with more gel than was probably needed, while the other was slightly shorter and stockier, his hair thin and receding. Sam had thought very little of them at the time, not giving them more than a cursory glance as they'd sat down.

However, now that they were following him down the street, he cursed himself for daring to relax. He thought back to how they'd entered the café, and realised they hadn't even ordered anything. They had simply walked in, sat down at a nearby table and stared ahead in complete silence – both of them had been facing him, and he couldn't seem to remember hearing them talk to each other – and now there they were, no more than ten feet behind him, following him down the road.

Maybe I'm just overthinking things, Sam thought to himself as he quickened his pace. *It's the middle of the day, what harm can they do?* He took a quick glance over his shoulder. There they were, the two men in their well-tailored suits and eyes concealed by dark glasses, walking in eerily perfect unison. *Don't be so paranoid, why would they be following you?*, he tried to assure himself, but he couldn't shake the uneasy feeling. He rounded the corner onto a cobbled alleyway, grey brick buildings enclosing the narrow passage ahead of him. *Secret service? Demonic possession? Two men who really dislike my hat? Oh Christ...*

About half-way up the alleyway, Sam leaned against the wall and waited, his eyes trained on the corner from which he had just come. If they were following him, he thought, they'd turn into this alleyway too. If not, and this had all been sheer coincidence and utterly unnecessary paranoia, they

would walk on past without even glancing in his direction. He wanted it to be the latter, he wanted them to just walk past so he could carry on with his day, but he had a sneaking suspicion that that would not be the case. It wasn't long until the two men came into view, and Sam's heart sank. They turned the corner and stood staring at him. Moving away from the wall as calmly and casually as he could manage, feeling like he was about to be in a Wild West style shootout, Sam tipped his fedora hat towards the two men. They both nodded back at him in unnatural unison.

'Oh, good,' Sam said under his breath, 'they are following me.' Turning around, he continued to walk up the alleyway, gradually walking faster and faster until, before he knew it, he'd broken into a run.

His feet pounded the cobbled street as he ran, carrying him forward as if by a will of their own. His greatcoat billowed out behind him, and Sam would probably have enjoyed how dramatic he must have looked in that moment were it not for his sudden rush of fear and adrenaline. Behind him he could hear two sets of feet starting to run in pursuit. He tried not to think of the two men chasing him down. He thought he had seen the bulge of a gun concealed beneath each of their jackets, but maybe in his panic he was now just imagining things. He was running blindly, no escape plan, no idea where to go other than somewhere where they weren't. Another side alley was coming up on his right, and he turned into it without a moment's thought.

A busy antique's market filled up most of the street. *Bollocks*. He kept on running, weaving his way through the crowd of shoppers browsing the stalls, hazarding a quick glance behind him every now and again. The men were still in pursuit, but the throngs of people antiquing were getting in their way. One of the men thrust an elderly woman out of his way as he charged through the crowd, sending her staggering into a display of 1920's china teacups. There was an audible gasp from several people, followed by the sound of smashing crockery. Neither of the men stopped or even turned around. They just carried on moving forwards.

Ducking into another passageway (some of the side routes in London can be fantastically long and labyrinthine), Sam hid himself amongst the bins in what was presumably the back courtyard of a shop. It was dank and unpleasant, and the smell coming from the bins would normally have made him retch. He was too fixated on hiding to notice the stench. If they found him there, he had no way of escape; they'd have him cornered. As much as he wanted to know who they were and why they were following him, he had a feeling he didn't want to find out on their terms. A trickle of sweat ran down the side of his face.

Peering from between two large black bins, Sam looked out into the courtyard. It seemed empty, but as he moved to get a slightly better view he could see them. The two men jogged around the corner and into the courtyard, their ties flopping as they ran, and came to an abrupt stop. They stood stock still, surveying the area. Sam held his breath, desperate not to make even the slightest of sounds. He felt his entire body tense up.

The two men stood there for a while, their bodies motionless but their heads slowly turning as they looked around, like eerie sentinels. It felt like an eternity had passed for Sam, but after just over a minute one of the men put his finger to his ear, pressing on a wireless earpiece. He nodded a single stoic nod, and the two men turned and strode out of the courtyard, rounding the corner and walking out of sight.

Sam Hain breathed a sigh of relief, emerging from amongst the bins and dusting himself off. *Bloody hell...*

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