

SAM HAIN

OCCULT DETECTIVE



A KRAMPUS CAROL

BRON JAMES

This is a preview for Sam Hain: A Krampus Carol.
For the full version, please visit www.samhainscasebook.co.uk

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Father Christmas is real, though.

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PROLOGUE

It was the week before Christmas, and all through the house an argument was brewing between a son, mother and spouse. Their voices were raised and cut through the air, until one bellowed out that it just was not fair...

"It's not fair!" The boy exclaimed, his voice striking that delicate pitch somewhere between being deep and yet shrill. "Why do I have to stay here?! The other guys aren't being forced to stay home."

"You're not going to Barbados for Christmas, and that's final," Sharon intoned. Her words were crisp and sharp - not unlike the winter weather - and she was trying her best to not snap. With Christmas only days away, she didn't need the extra stress. "We're having a nice family Christmas at home. We said this weeks ago."

"But that was before the squad bought their tickets!"

"And you'll have plenty more opportunities to go on holiday with your friends in the future. It's not even a week until Christmas, and you don't want to disappoint grandma and grandpa do you?"

Tyler spat in frustration. "I'm sixteen, mum, I can do what I like!"

"Don't you dare spit in this house, Tyler!" Sharon snapped. Her mask of remaining calm and collected had been broken; the pent up stress of making everything perfect for Christmas, the difficult negotiations with parents and in-laws trying to ensure everyone was happy, and now a petulant teenager who wouldn't think twice about leaving his family behind at Christmas was too much to pretend to cope with. She shouted with an anger which seemed to be drawn from another dimension, and was more guttural, more primal than one would expect from a middle-class woman. "That's disgusting and there is no excuse for it! There's no way you're even dreaming of going anywhere now." She spun on her heels to face her husband. "Are you not going to say anything, David?!"

David - or Dave, as he preferred to be called in all but the most serious of situations - was halfway up a ladder trying to fix a series of fiddly ornaments to the very top of their eight-foot Christmas tree. He leaned precariously off of the ladder, trying desperately and futilely to hook a bauble onto one of the branches. "Your mother's right, son, and don't spit in the house," he said, but offered no further input.

"That's not what you said to Becks! How come she's off with her boyfriend and I'm stuck here?!"

"They're having Christmas Day with his family this year, and Boxing Day with us. That's how relationships work! She's not jetting off for a party with other irresponsible teenagers!"

"Listen to your mother," Dave chimed in, trying to seem supportive, albeit somewhat distantly. The baubles were proving to be a bit too heavy for the topmost branches and were threatening to slide off at any moment.

"Yeah, really helpful, Dave, thank you. We've got your parents and mine coming in a couple of days. This place isn't even half decorated yet and we're having this stupid argument!"

"I'm decorating the tree, aren't I? You're not the only one stressing out about it all!" He bellowed, accidentally dropping one of the glass baubles on the floor and shattering it. "Oh for Christ's sake!"

"Is it too much to ask to just have a nice family Christmas?!" Sharon railed at no-one in particular. Her eyes were wild and her face was turning progressively redder.

"Ugh, you're ruining my life! I hate you! I wish you'd just butt out of my life," Tyler shrieked, and he stormed out of the room, making sure to slam the door dramatically behind him and putting extra effort into stomping up the stairs.

The sound of conflicts fading and reigniting carried on until midnight, when Sharon and Dave eventually decided to put it to rest, turn out the lights and head for bed, ready to deal with things, ideally more rationally, in the morning. A few hours later, the muffled sound of thumping could be heard coming from the roof, but it was barely enough to rouse any of them from their sleep.

It wasn't until the following day, when Tyler reluctantly decided to leave his self-imposed sulk in his bedroom, that he noticed something wasn't quite right. He had been dreading coming downstairs, knowing the argument was likely to continue, but to his surprise there was no further confrontation. No arguments, no shouting, and no cold shoulders. Even more surprising was the fact that his parents were not anywhere to be found at all. Normally, having the house to himself would've been a dream come true for Tyler, but something about it felt wrong. He wandered around the house, calling out for his mum and dad, but he neither saw or heard anyone else. It was as if the house had been abandoned.

It was then that he saw the note. An aged looking piece of parchment hung from one of the branches of the Christmas tree, a message scrawled across it in a sharp and aggressively scribbled handwriting.

**IF YOU DO NOT FROM THIS LESSON LEARN
FOR YOUR MISBEHAVIOUR YOU MUST BURN
YOU HAVE ONE DAY TO SET THINGS RIGHT
PRAY I NEED NOT RETURN THIS NIGHT**

Beneath the note was a shiny red bauble, the screaming faces of Tyler's parents reflected on its surface.

CHAPTER I

The weather outside was frightful, but the fire was so delightful. Sam Hain reclined in his armchair, his feet perched on the edge of the coffee table, neatly resting beside the chaotic piles of books, paper, and clutter. He bathed in the warm glow of the open fire, taking a sip of tea and letting out a deep and satisfied sigh.

Despite the usual untidiness of Sam's home, Yuletide decorations adorned the living room and brought some much needed festivity to the otherwise unkempt flat. Holly and ivy were draped along the mantelpiece and bookcases, almost looking as if the place was becoming overgrown, and several sprigs of mistletoe hung merrily from the shelves. A small altar had been set up by the window, where a Yule candle flickered peacefully and wisps of smoke rose from a cast iron cauldron, filling the air with the scent of burning frankincense. A stone statue of Cailleach Bheur, the Queen of Winter, stood towards the back of the altar; Sam had decided to dress her in a Christmas hat and scarf, to bring a bit of festive cheer to the miserable old hag.

Sam glanced across the room to where his Christmas tree sat, a rather small potted spruce with twinkling white fairy lights winding around its tiny branches. It was one of his favourite times of the year. The days were cold and crisp, the cafes warm and welcoming. Festive cheer decorated the city and the people, and a sense of magic and joy permeated the air. Plus, for Sam, it was one of the few times of year he could relax, unwind, and really enjoy the festive season. As with every year, with his landlady away visiting family in the Cotswolds, he had decided to spend Christmas on his own and make the most of the peace and quiet; he was more than happy to go out and enjoy mulled wine with good company, but for Christmas itself, when everyone goes off and does their own thing, Sam too would do his own thing, and spend the day eating mince pies and watching crap - yet entertaining - television.

He spared a thought for Alice, who wouldn't be having quite as quiet and peaceful Christmas. She had been conscripted into work for late night shopping almost every night of the week, and had drawn the short straw having to work on Christmas Eve and Boxing Day too. In between that, her family was coming to visit; it was her first year of playing host to the family Christmas, and she wasn't feeling the most relaxed about it.

Earlier that week, after meeting up for a drink in the festive wonderland of Covent Garden, Alice had invited him over to join her and her family for Christmas dinner. Sam politely declined the offer, reasoning that he didn't want to intrude on their family gathering. And, although he didn't share this part with her, he didn't feel too comfortable with being the odd one out at the dinner table; Sam and socialising were not a natural fit.

"Be careful, mister!" Alice had teasingly warned him. "With that attitude towards a family Christmas, you'll have those three ghosts that haunted Scrooge after you."

"How's that different than every other day?" Sam had rebutted with a laugh. "Besides, I'd like to see them try and break through my flat's metaphasic barrier and moonstone protection grid."

"There's no such thing as an "off" switch with you, is there?"

"Unfortunately not, no."

He was content, though. As he sat there before the crackling fire and the low light of the living room, he couldn't think of anywhere he'd rather be. *Since there's no place to go, let it snow*, Sam wished, *let it snow, let it snow*.

Of course, it did not snow. Despite optimistic wintery forecasts and weather warnings, London remained its grey and rainy self. The soft, white quilt which blanketed the quaint villages so frequently depicted on Christmas cards was not something Londoners often got to enjoy. Instead of a white Christmas, the city was generally treated to bitterly cold winds and the occasional torrential downpour. Even on the rare occasions when it did snow, the pristine gleam of freshly fallen snow was quickly lost to greyish-brown slush and black ice.

The sound of rain splattering against the window tapped softly in the background, mixing in with

the light crackling of flames from the fireplace. Amongst the gentle ambient cacophony, another noise came tapping, as if a hand were lightly rapping on wood. Sam paused and listened, and the noise came again; three quick, rhythmic knocks came drumming on the door. With the exasperated sigh of a man whose peace has just been shattered, he put down his tea and the book he was reading, and reluctantly got up to answer it.

Stood on the doorstep was a boy, no older than his late teens, with his hoodie pulled up and partially over his face. What was once a light grey fleece had turned almost entirely black from the rain. He was soaked through, and if Sam was less paranoid and wary of what entity he might have been inviting in, he would have offered the boy to come inside and warm up. Instead he stood there in the doorway with indignance towards this interruption which - Sam was attempting to deduce - may or may not be something sinister wearing a human mask.

“Hello,” he said curtly.

“Are you Sam Hain?” The boy on the doorstep asked. His voice cracked pubescently.

“I am...” Sam raised a quizzical eyebrow at his unexpected caller. “Where did you get this address?” He wasn’t much in the habit of giving out his home address to people, let alone people he’d never even met before.

“Your location tag on Twitter,” the boy replied, and he produced his phone from his jeans’ pocket to show Sam. On the screen was one of Sam’s recent tweets, along with a map, a marker placed perfectly on top of where his house would be.

“Huh. Fair enough. I’m going to have to stop it from doing that then. But I doubt you’re here just to double-check this was my address. Who are you?”

“I, uh,” the boy hesitated, almost reluctant to speak, “I-I’m Tyler, Tyler Stretton. You’re legit about the occult detective thing, right?”

“Yes, I’m “legit,”” Sam said with a weary roll of the eyes.

“You know, like, magic and stuff, yeah? Can you handle curses and demons and shit?”

“Yes,” Sam replied dully, “magick is real, and I’ve had more encounters with demons and extradimensional entities than I’d care to count.” He was about to close the door before this kid started to take the piss out of him - it wouldn’t be the first time - but as he looked down he saw the boy looking back at him with pleading eyes. His face was pale and wrought with fear and doubt. Something had clearly disturbed him, and Sam assumed that was where he came into the story.

“Um, I kind of need your help,” Tyler said. It sounded almost as if saying those words caused him pain.

Sam sighed reluctantly, but he couldn’t turn away someone who needed his help. He stepped back from the doorway and gestured for the boy to enter. “Okay then, Tyler, Tyler Stretton. Come in, I’ll put the kettle on while you tell me about your case.”

“No, there’s no time,” Tyler replied. Rather than offer any further explanation, he thrust a scrunched up piece of paper into Sam’s hand, along with a twenty pound note. “I know it’s nearly Christmas, but I don’t know what else to do and I really need your help. That’s all I’ve got, but we need to go now.”

With an understanding nod, Sam quickly pocketed the money and began to unfold the scrunched up piece of paper. It felt soft to the touch, more like old parchment paper, and thick black ink marred the page. He read the message scrawled across it and nodded again. “I guess we’re on a bit of a deadline then,” he said.

“Can you help me?”

“Explain the details on the way, there’s no time to lose.”

If you have enjoyed this short excerpt from *Sam Hain: A Krampus Carol* and wish to buy the full story, please visit www.samhainscasebook.co.uk for this and more in the *Sam Hain – Occult Detective* series.