

SAM HAIN

OCCULT DETECTIVE



STORM IN A TEACUP

BRON JAMES

*This is a preview for Sam Hain: Storm in a Teacup.  
For the full version, please visit [www.samhainscasebook.co.uk](http://www.samhainscasebook.co.uk)*

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Gods and their powers are real, though.

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## PROLOGUE

They say that once is happenstance, twice is a coincidence, and that thrice is a pattern.

For the people of the Royal Borough of Kensington, it didn't really matter. All they knew was that it was a bloody nuisance.

While the rest of the city had been in the grips of an increasingly sweltering heatwave, in west London there had been a series of sudden and inexplicable storms. When the sun was shining warm and bright above the city, torrential rain was pouring down over Kensington. When the rich blue skies across London were tranquil and clear, thunder and lightning would rage in the thick grey clouds over Hammersmith.

At first, no one paid any thought to this other than a simple, "oh no, I should have brought an umbrella". After all, British weather has a habit of being frustratingly fickle. The storm seemed to come and go with the same tempestuous temperament of a tantrum-prone toddler; as swiftly as the clouds had gathered, with the rolling of thunder and a volley of rain, they cleared, giving way to the sunny blue skies beyond.

When it happened a second time, when the swirling storm clouds gathered and quickly blotted out the sun, and when lightning struck and thunder boomed and the rain soaked the streets, people thought it a little odd. It seemed unusual – almost vindictive – that such weather would manifest exclusively over Hammersmith and Kensington twice in just a couple of days, while only three miles away people were laying in the grass and getting sunburned in Green Park. But then, this was no usual storm.

The third time it happened, the people of West Kensington had had quite enough of this nonsense, thank you very much, and could really do without being cold and soaked to the bone in the middle of summer. In spite of their complaints, the storm clouds still circled overhead, rain poured in a seemingly endless torrent, the winds blew and thunder rumbled and lightning streaked the sky.

If one were to take a walk through Hyde Park at this time, one would be able to see the divide which separated this localised weather phenomenon from the rest of London. Almost exactly halfway along the park, the storm simply stopped. Thick black cloud met bright blue sky similar to how the sea meets the shore. On one half, the sky was heavy with clouds, veined by lightning and pouring with rain; the other, it was clear and vibrant, the sun shining bright. It was almost unnatural how precise the edge of the storm was. Even the rainfall seemed to end along a straight edge, more like a watery veil than a natural shower.

According to the weather forecast, this was all due to an unstable pattern of air, with wind currents creating low pressure pockets. Many chalked this up to another strange and unpredictable effect of climate change, and thought little more of it. It seemed like a reasonable enough explanation for the sudden inexplicable storms which frequently left two entire boroughs shrouded in rain and darkness. For the people of Hammersmith and Kensington, however, this answered nothing, and ignored two main things which stood out in their minds.

The storms were too precise, too specific, to be the effects of an unstable air pattern. For firstly, they always engulfed Hammersmith and Kensington only, coming to an abrupt stop at the edge of the boroughs. And secondly, at precisely three o'clock in the afternoon each day, a bolt of lightning would strike Hammersmith's King's Mall with remarkable accuracy.

The soaked residents of west London were not the only people to pay close attention to the unusual weather. In the north of London, down in a basement flat on Constantine Road in Hampstead, Sam Hain watched the weather forecast with increasing interest.

## CHAPTER I

Very few people would describe Sam Hain as a man who took much of an interest in the goings on of normal day-to-day life.

It was as if the everyday reality of the world was all too commonplace and mundane to hold his attention for more than a few seconds. He would be the first to admit that he was no master of small-talk, and that many of the things going on in the world which people seemed to consider important had a habit of entirely passing him by. Pop culture, reality TV, celebrity gossip, and properly filing tax returns, were all things which fell outside of his sphere of understanding, and thus Sam rarely gave any of them a second thought. While some might have felt as if he was aloof, not really listening, or just socially inept, the fact of the matter was that Sam's life was often so wrapped up in the weird that he had simply forgotten how to engage with the normal.

One would assume, quite accurately, that this would mean that something as universally dull and uninteresting as the weather would hold little to no relevance for Sam Hain. On the vast majority of occasions, one would be right. Talking about the weather was his last resort for finding some form of common ground with the normal world. However, on this particular day, there was only one thing on the occult detective's mind. Only one topic of small-talk he would wilfully indulge discussing to excruciating lengths.

It had all started that Wednesday. The summer's heatwave beat down on the city as temperatures continued to soar into the thirties (in Celsius; the high-eighties to low-nineties if you prefer your temperatures measured in Fahrenheit), and – with little else on his agenda for the day – Sam had decided to go for a walk. When he found himself at loose ends, without a case or a mystery or an adventure to keep his mind from stagnating, he would step out of the confines of his basement flat in Hampstead and follow his feet wherever they chose to lead him. He found that, more often than not, his seemingly aimless meandering tended to lead him to precisely where he needed to be, whether he realised it or not. That day had proven to be no different.

By early afternoon, Sam's feet had led him to Hampstead high street, down into the underground station and onto a Northern Line train heading into the centre of London, and casually striding through the entrance of Hyde Park Corner. He had not been the only one to be drawn there, as the paths were lined with families ambling about in the shade of the trees, and the grass was littered with the bodies of sunbathers lazing in the light. The sun was high in the sky, gleaming like a white hot orb above the vibrant green of the park, while the people embraced every moment of it.

Venturing along the seldom-used winding pathways which criss-crossed through the park, away from the densely packed thoroughfares, Sam tried to stay in the relative cool beneath the shade of the trees. He lifted the brim of his fedora to wipe away the beads of sweat which had started to gather on his brow. He was not a man who was very well accustomed to summer, much preferring the brisk cold winds and crisp air of the winter.

After a short while wandering, taking in the rich shades of green which seemed to make Hyde Park glow in the radiant light of the sun, Sam found himself walking towards the Serpentine lake. The water sparkled and seemed to glisten an idyllic blue, something one usually does not expect of the water in London, which has a habit of being a particularly unpleasant brownish-grey. He carried on walking along the waterfront, gazing out across the Serpentine as he began to head towards the lakeside café.

Sitting outside of the café, beneath the shade of the table's parasol and overlooking the lake, Sam slouched back in his chair. His cup of coffee rattled on the tabletop as he accidentally nudged one of the legs when he made himself more comfortable. He perched a pair of teashades on his nose, taking the edge off of the glaring light which beamed and reflected from the water's surface, and sipped his coffee. Out across the lake, people bobbed about in hired pedalos. There was something soothing about watching the little boats slowly dance in circles over the sparkling blue water. Sam took a drag on the cigarette which was lazily burning in his hand, and exhaled a plume of smoke. This, he thought, was a very pleasant day.

It was as if the universe had read his mind at that moment, and it decided to mix things up a little.

No sooner had he been lulled into a laid-back and relaxed atmosphere did things start to turn. On the horizon, a black mass was forming above the other side of the park. The once blue sky quickly turned a disconcerting shade of grey. Thick black storm clouds hurriedly swirled in as if from nowhere. The distant rumble of thunder echoed throughout Hyde Park, and without a moment's hesitation the rain began to fall in a heavy torrent. The fact that the storm had ushered in so suddenly was not the strangest thing to Sam. The strangest thing was that it had not quite reached where he was sat.

Above Sam Hain, above the riverside café, above the eastern half of Hyde Park and, as it so happened, above the rest of London, the sky was still perfectly clear. The sun shone high in the cloudless sky, and people continued to enjoy lazing in the grass and peddling about the lake.

Halfway across the lake, however, was a very different story. The rain fell in an endless cascade, as if a heavy and very wet curtain had descended like a veil between the two atmospheres. People quickly leapt up from their former sunbathing spots, picnics were brought to a swift conclusion, and they scurried to the nearest shelter beneath the trees, attempting to cover their heads with bags and books and anything else they had to hand. They were not the only ones; two ravens who had been happily picking at crumbs left from the picnickers had taken flight and sought refuge, perching in the bough of a tree, looking very wet and disgruntled at the storm. The lake-faring revellers who were still in their pedalos on the Serpentine made an about turn through the turbulent and stormy waters to peddle back towards fairer shores.

Sam placed his coffee cup back on its saucer with a delicate clink and took one last drag of his cigarette before stubbing it out on the tabletop. *That's odd*, he thought as he stared at the stark divide between the two very disparate halves of the park, *that is very odd indeed*. He stood up from the table, fastening the top button on his blazer, and slowly walked towards the edge of the lake. He strode up to the lip of the lakeside, almost falling in when he tripped over a large and apparently immovable stone he had somehow failed to notice in his path. Muttering in frustration at the inanimate object, and his now bruised-feeling toe, Sam gazed out across the water towards the storm. The more he looked at it, the stranger it became. It looked as if two different realities were at play, one summery and overly temperate, the other in the midst of a violent storm.

Ahead of him, he could see trees swaying this way and that in a strong wind, which amounted to no more than a mild breeze by the time it reached Sam. The distant side of the lake, towards the bridge which ran through the very middle of it, thrashed with choppy waves, while calm waters delicately splashed against the shore he was standing on. Beneath the surface, he was sure he could see a long and shadowy shape writhing and twisting just below the water, but no sooner had he seen it did it disappear. Where the rain fell, it bucketed down in a relentless, drenching torrent, yet inexplicably seemed to end with an abrupt edge, creating a very definite border between the two climates. Farther in the distance, some way out towards the west, storm clouds swirled as if revolving around a single focal point, while lightning violently streaked the blackened skies. Hyde Park was merely caught on the tail end of the storm.

Everything about the weather was strange, inexplicable, and almost certainly not natural.

Sam Hain was enthralled.

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