



PUFFIN

MEET THE TEAM

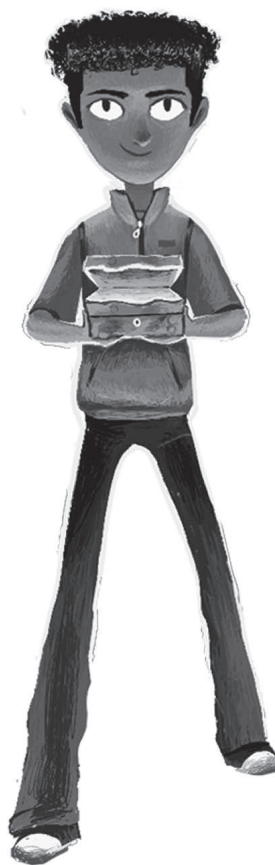


HAL

ROSE

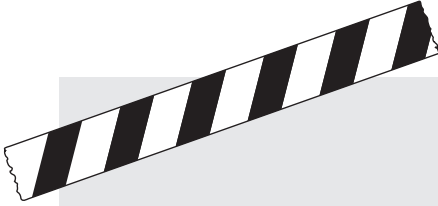


JOE



DEBBIE





BEFORE YOU GO ANY FURTHER, A WARNING:

**OVER THE FOLLOWING PAGES, AT TIMES
YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DECIDE WHOSE
STORY YOU WISH TO FOLLOW.**

**CHOOSE WISELY . . . NOT EVERYONE
IS WHO THEY SEEM.
YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF AT A DEAD END.**



FOLLOW JOE BONES - TURN TO PAGE 1



FRIGHT CLUB RISES

We'd decided, in light of what I'd heard (and the fact we were now stuck with the finger), that we needed to have a better look in the box.

The question was where to do it. My house was full of family after the wake, Debbie's was full of siblings who would no doubt barge in, and Hal was worried he didn't have enough snacks to successfully host.

Rose lived in a tiny, rose-covered cottage, certainly not somewhere secrets could easily hide, but her nanny was out, so we all agreed it was our best option to be able to talk without nosy adults around.

I thought Mum and Dad might want me to stay home, but they both seemed relieved that I wanted to see my friends. Plus, Carl was hanging around and I think Mum was afraid I'd keep pushing for a murder investigation.

We sat on the floor, huddled around the box. The finger had stopped scratching.

‘He definitely said *Fright Club*?’ Hal asked me.

‘Definitely,’ I said.

‘Whatever that is, it sounds excellent,’ Debbie said, and before any of us could stop her she’d grabbed the box and flipped the lid open.

‘It sounds . . . dangerous,’ Rose said quietly, leaning back like the rest of us as Debbie rifled through the box as if it was a tin of sweets.

The first thing out of the box was the severed finger. It pinged off Debbie’s nose and made straight for my forehead, flicking it over and over. I got the impression it was annoyed.

‘All right, all right,’ I cried, trying to calm it down. Now I knew the finger belonged to Gran, I had an overwhelming urge to befriend it.

A creak came from the hallway and I looked up to see Rose’s bedroom door was slightly ajar.

‘I thought we closed that,’ I whispered.

Rose leaped to her feet and ran to check no one was there.

‘It’s clear,’ she said, craning her neck into the hallway. She pushed the door shut and rattled the handle, making sure it was closed this time. ‘I told you - my nanny is out.’

‘What else is in the box, Debbie?’ Hal whimpered, clearly keen to get the whole thing over with.

‘Weird hat,’ Debbie said, pulling out a small crown made of gnarled wood, just like the box itself. It was delicate but so contorted it looked sinister.

Upon seeing the crown, the severed finger took a break from flicking my forehead and began scratching numbers into Rose’s wallpaper.

‘Oh, that’s rude,’ Hal said with a tut.

332 1987 44 42

‘What do the numbers mean?’ I asked, but of course no one knew.

Debbie handed me the box. ‘Your go, Joe,’ she said.

‘We’re not each taking turns, are we?’ Hal fretted as I reached inside and pulled out a tattered, but otherwise entirely ordinary, book. It was bound in blood-red leather, with gold embossing that read **FRIGHT CLUB LOGBOOK**.

As I flicked through the pages, I found centuries of notes, too scrawled and scribbled to read quickly. But I could make out a few repeated words – vampire, demons . . .

‘What . . .’ I whispered and my hands began to tremble.

I turned back to the very first page. In ink more faded than all the rest were the words:

Fright Club: solvers of supernatural crimes.

Underneath was an annotation:

Member of the Alliance since 1666.

There was a strange symbol next to the words, made up of skulls and stakes and fire and tombstones.

Most worryingly of all, in the same writing I recognized from my birthday cards over the years, were notes about imprisoning demons alongside doodles of skeletons and fangs and all sorts of strange creatures. Had Gran been imprisoning demons in between writing sweet birthday cards?

I turned the page to find an intricate drawing of a creepy snow globe, complete with a charred snowman at its centre – just as Debbie took the box back and pulled out the exact same snow globe.

Mandy Blood: Imprisoned in snow globe ✓

Mr A. Curse: Imprisoned in snow globe ✓

Gory Murderman: Imprisoned in snow globe ✓

I hesitantly inspected the snow globe. Its base was covered in carvings of holly and, as I turned it in my hand,

I could've sworn the charred snowman's little coal eyes followed me.

Even though the snow globe was small, the weight of it suggested it really might have contained demons. I placed it carefully on the ground next to the other items.

'It's always grans,' Rose said with an admiring smile. 'When I'm one, I'm going to be up to all sorts - it's the best time, exactly when no one will suspect you.'

'This would explain why she wasn't afraid of the spooky stories here in Grim . . .' I muttered.

Finally, folded neatly in the very bottom of the box, we found the map. Green and lumpy, dry and wrinkled, it was, once we had scuttled back and spread it out between us on the floor, as long and wide as a single bed.

'This is dried skin,' Hal said, running his hand over it. 'Very old, dried skin.'

I winced, hoping he might be wrong. I couldn't believe Hal was touching it, given he was terrified of most things.

'Ew, the skin of *what*?' Rose said.

'Something green!' Debbie said, her eyes glinting.

It was making *my* skin crawl and then crawl again because I couldn't stop thinking about the skin map and the fact something had to have been skinned to make it.

I could just make out the writing across the top of the map: **GRAVEWORLDS**.

I scanned the map. The Grim graveyard seemed to be marked at the top, with graves splintering down like the roots of a tree to what looked like cities. Places with strange names like Devilbend, Hightower, Clinks, Veilooo, Cap Rot, Moonpen, Little Cackle . . . Each one had an official-looking emblem – a devil, fangs and bats, a ghost, a goblin face, a werewolf, a frog.

‘Woah,’ I whispered. ‘Does this mean there are different places *underneath* our graveyard?’

I looked at my friends. This was HUGE! If this map was right, no wonder so many weird things happened in Grim – the town was on top of a load of supernatural cities!

Rose and Hal exchanged nervous glances. Debbie’s eyes were alight with fire as she ran her hand over all the names and places.

‘Do you think anyone knows about this?’ I said. ‘Aside from my gran?’

The room was deathly silent.

Clearly everyone was as stunned as me. It was the biggest discovery since . . . I think it was the biggest discovery of all time!

‘Let’s put it away,’ Hal said, trying to fold it up and stuff it back in the box. Rose was nodding in agreement next to him.

‘It could be a trick,’ she said. ‘Or a trap? We shouldn’t

take it too seriously and get ourselves into danger. A sinister figure like Cloakman would know how to tempt you. He might want you to be drawn to the graveyard – so he can . . . strike.’

‘But when he was speaking to Gran at the wake, he didn’t know I was there,’ I pointed out.

‘Are you sure?’ Rose countered. ‘Maybe he knew you were listening?’

She had a point. But I was sure he’d been surprised when I jumped out. I had to know more about Fright Club and how it linked to my gran. If she had wanted me to have this weird box and to learn about worlds under our own, it had to be for a reason. Another thought hit me.

‘If Fright Club was some kind of supernatural crime-fighting organization,’ I said, ‘that means with this information *we* could solve the mystery of who killed my gran. Cloakman might be from one of these places here on the map! We can find him!’

‘Joe,’ Hal said quietly. ‘Maybe your parents are right; no one killed your gran – she was just old. I think we should pretend we never saw the box and get back to normal. I’m very happy *not* knowing what lives in any of these places.’

‘You could just carry on walking around Grim as normal knowing *this* is all going on underneath us?’ I said

as I flicked through the logbook. There were several pages with lists of members. Over the centuries it looked like there had been lots of different people in the club. I spotted Gran's name at the end of the list:

Lillian Erieson
Michael Mare
Gretal Bones

I recognized the names above her from stories Gran had told me. They were some of her best friends.

'Lillian and Michael both died a long time ago,' I said, holding up the book so the others could see the list.

'Probably because of this club,' Hal said, his eyes firmly on the finger, which was scuttling around the snow globe and tapping it.

'Gran was in Fright Club with her friends. What if we -'

'No,' Hal said.

'Yes!' Debbie cheered.

Hal turned to Rose. 'Who knows what would happen if we ventured into these worlds. It could ruin all our lives.'

Rose shifted awkwardly. 'I think Hal might be right.'

'Come on, Hal,' I pleaded. 'Remember all the cakes my gran made for you? And she'd use her nice plates that she

didn't use for anyone else! She told us never to be scared, that she would always look after us. Now we need to do this for her. It's clearly what she wanted.'

'She was very comforting,' Hal conceded with a sad sniff. 'Before I knew about all of this.'

We sat in silence, looking at one another. I fidgeted nervously. I was going to start Fright Club up again, with or without them; I had to for Gran. But I wanted to do it with them.

'Fine,' Hal said eventually, caving under the pressure of my extremely sad face. 'But please can we just solve the mystery of Cloakman and then never open that box again? I want you to have some sort of closure, Joe. But I also - as your friend - don't want you to perish in a place called, for example -' he scanned the map - 'Devilbend.'

'Fine,' I said, though I wasn't sure I meant it. Now I knew these worlds were there, right under my nose - worlds my gran was somehow a part of - it would be nearly impossible to bury it all in a box again. I wanted to know more, especially if it had been a secret my gran kept her whole life - a secret she wanted to share with me.

'Before we officially start the club,' Debbie said, 'we really need snacks. And by we, I mean me.'



We climbed the steep stairs back to Rose's room, our arms full of strawberry laces, chocolate cake and (of course) boiled eggs for me.

We were all chattering excitedly as we piled back into Rose's room, but we stopped in our tracks when we saw someone was already there.

'What is this?' Rose's nanny said. She was in the middle of the room, holding the snow globe aloft, turning it slowly to inspect it. She was a tall woman, broad and imposing, with a pinched face that looked like it belonged in an old painting.

'It's an ornament?' Rose said, as if the question were silly.

This was not good. We didn't need nosy grown-ups getting in the way. Luckily, we'd put the map back in the box, and I noticed that thankfully the finger was nowhere to be seen.

Rose's nanny swivelled to face us and narrowed her eyes at Rose.

'It's Debbie's,' Rose said.

Debbie smiled sweetly. 'I made it myself.'

The nanny looked at the snow globe one more time then placed it carefully on Rose's bedside table.

'And what's on the wall?' she gasped.

In all the excitement we'd forgotten about the finger and its number scratching.

332 1987 44 42

Rose gulped. 'Um . . . art?'

'I call it *Painful Maths . . . on Bedroom Canvas*,' Debbie said quickly. She was really very good at lying. 'I really feel the Tate Modern will gobble it up one day.'

'Yes, Debbie drew it for me,' Rose said, sensing her nanny wouldn't want to tell Debbie off.

Rose's nanny cocked her head to the side. 'It is interesting . . . Is it *carved* into the wall?'

'Lovingly by fingernail,' Debbie said, smiling sweetly again.

'Right,' Rose's nanny said, clearly unsure how to deal with Debbie. 'It's getting late, so time to go home soon, my dears, but please do enjoy your snacks first.'

She threw one last suspicious look in our direction and then headed out of the room.

'Oh, and don't fill your tummies too much at this hour,' she said softly. 'You might have nightmares.'

'Of course,' Rose said, closing the door firmly. No one said a word as we listened to her footsteps going downstairs.

'That was close,' I said. 'I thought your nanny was out?'

'So did I,' Rose said. 'She's stealthy - moves like a domesticated ninja. That was all too close; if she found out about Fright Club, she'd never let me see any of you ever again. Excellent quick thinking, Debbie.'

'No one can find out,' Hal said, looking intently at Rose. 'None of our parents would be too happy we're starting some supernatural club!'

We all nodded in agreement.

The coast clear, we pulled the map out of the box and spread it back out on the floor. Rose took the snow globe off the bedside table and placed it on the map. As soon as she did so, the finger emerged from under the bed and started tapping at the snow globe.

'Apologies on Debbie's behalf for taking credit for your artwork,' Hal said to the finger.



The finger stopped tapping for a moment to stare at Hal. Or at least it *felt* like it was staring, given it had no eyes!

‘You’ll get used to Hal,’ I told the finger and it got back to tapping the snow globe.

‘What do you think it’s doing?’ Rose said.

Just then, light burst from the snow globe and the little charred snowman opened his mouth – a black hole rippling as if it was screaming. Snow whipped about inside and the light snaked from the globe to the map, reaching out like tentacles and illuminating the big city at the Graveworlds core: Devilbend.

‘That’s what the finger was doing,’ Hal whimpered. ‘You don’t think we’re going to get sucked into the map or anything, do you?’

‘Are there instructions for what we should do?’ Rose asked.

I consulted the logbook. Right at the beginning was a handy list.

A Fright Club Deadident must be chosen to wear the crown.

‘*Deadident*, instead of president,’ Debbie said with an approving nod. ‘Nice. And by the way, it should be me.’

‘No, I think me,’ I said. ‘It’s my box.’

Soon a mini brawl broke out, with Debbie and me vying for the crown while Hal and Rose stayed neutral and suggested we play rock, paper, scissors to decide.

In the end I wrestled the crown on to my head and held a boiled egg aloft in a sort of paltry threat – or poultry threat. (I did think of that pun at the time but decided not to say it aloud for fear of being branded less than one hundred per cent cool.)

*Release the finger to awaken the Demon Snowman.
Then turn out the lights.*

‘Do we have to follow *every* instruction?’ Hal asked.

‘Yes,’ the rest of us chimed, and Rose hit the lights.

The map glowed, the finger twisting under the light of the snow globe and casting sinister silhouettes on the walls.

The Deadident holds the finger aloft.

Before I could offer the crown to someone else, Debbie picked up the finger and tossed it over to me.

I raised it shakily in the air.

‘What’s next?’ Debbie asked, trying to rip the book from my grasp.

I held firm. After all, I was the Deadident of Fright Club now. I was wearing the crown, Debbie!

The Fright Club members chant their names, while holding hands.

We began to chant our names. Debbie was belting out hers, while Hal was whispering his. Rose and I provided a steady middle-ground chant that sounded just right. The Goldilocks of creepy chants.

We heard another creak outside the door.

Everyone jumped.

‘It’ll just be the old floorboards,’ Rose said, though she sounded unsure. She got up and pushed her chest of drawers against the door, just in case.

She sat back down cross-legged beside me and we all huddled closer. ‘What now, Joe?’ she whispered.

Joe Bones came a hiss and I realized the charred snowman was speaking.

Hal Skelly

Debbie Grimes

Rose Underwood

Then the light in the map went out, submerging us in darkness.

We all screamed!

‘What’s going on in there?’ Rose’s nanny called.

‘Scary film!’ Rose lied.

The bedroom light flicked back on.

‘Who did that?’ Rose said. That’s when I realized I’d dropped the finger in shock because it was now bouncing back from the light switch, clearly having taken matters into its own . . . finger.

‘See,’ Debbie said. ‘The finger is great! So useful. Long live the severed finger!’

‘Is that it?’ I asked, looking around the room. Everything looked the same. Had we started the club?

‘Look,’ Hal said, pointing at the snow globe.

Letters, in what looked like blood, were appearing on the glass.

**To officially become Fright Club, all members
must be approved by the Alliance. Meet at
Splatter in Devilbend, midnight tomorrow.
Entry is via 666 Fantom Drive.**

‘We’ve got to go to Devilbend,’ I said with a gulp.

‘It’s who – or what – the Alliance is that worries me,’ Hal said quietly.

The Fright Club box rattled. I picked it up and looked inside. Somehow it was now full of coins. And not just any

old coins; they were transparent, stamped with the faint outline of a horned demon and filled with what looked a lot like blood . . .



FOLLOW JOE - TURN TO PAGE 49



FOLLOW HAL - TURN TO PAGE 63



FOLLOW ROSE - TURN TO PAGE 72