

“I’m sorry, Sir. I didn’t mean anything—”

“Everything is just a big joke to you. All you think about is yourself.”

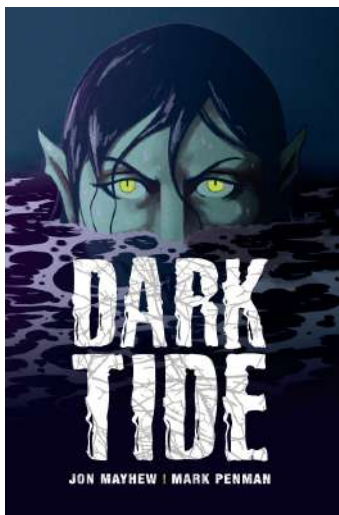
“I was only messing about,” Samir whispered, his voice small.

“Ah yes, hilarious, isn’t it? Laughing behind my back,” Medon sneered. “Other people can mess around too.”

“Sir, have you done something to my friends?” Samir blurted out.

“You ought to be more careful, young man. Actions have consequences. You should know that by now — although perhaps you don’t. You’re lucky to have any friends, the way that you treat them.”





“Great,” Adam murmured.

His father drove towards the village. Dark Cove depressed Adam. The place huddled at the base of tall cliffs as if it was hiding from the world. Everything was grey and dull. The cottages had cracked chimney pots and loose roof tiles. Winter storms stripped the paint from window frames and rusted every bit of exposed metal. Sad fishing boats bumped against the little harbour wall as if they were desperate to break free from their ropes and drown themselves in the black, miserable sea.

“One day, we’re going to buy a little shop here and sell ice creams to the tourists,” said his mum, gazing into the distance.

“There aren’t any tourists,” Adam said as he looked out of the window. “Only us.”

“There will be,” his dad said, turning into the narrow lane that led down into Dark Cove. “One of these days, things will pick up for Dark Cove. Some day soon, the Mermaid will smile on us







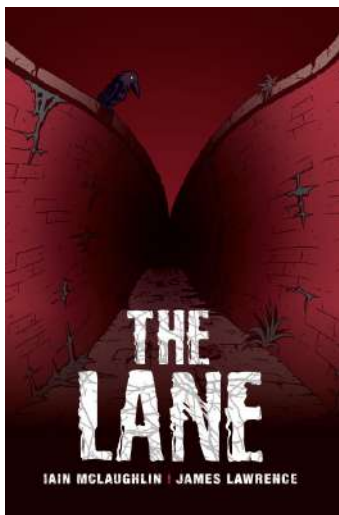
Grace swallowed and kept walking. It was so dark she couldn't make out the sign clearly from a distance. They hurried on together and found that the sign was fixed high up on two tall posts. Grace read the sign as they passed beneath it. "Funland," she said.

Austin was shaking his head. "It can't be," he said. "There's no way we walked that far. Funland isn't this close to my house."

"This is Funland?" Grace asked. She'd heard of the funfair but had never been before it closed down. She didn't know it was still here. "Have you been here before?" she asked Austin.

"No, but I've seen photos of it online," Austin said. "After it burnt down it was just left in ruins. They say it's dangerous and it's supposed to be blocked off."





“I’ll tell you later,” Joe said, nursing his bleeding head. “When we’re out of here.”

They ran as fast as they could. The wind blew rain into their faces. Branches whipped out towards them but they pushed them away. Something was still moving in the dark of the woods. Could they hear breathing? They kept running. The wind whistled and the branches lashed.

They could see the lights of the street at the far end of The Lane. They ran faster. The wind raged. The bushes thrashed all around them. Was there something in the darkness?

The street ahead was close. They were almost there. The light started to brighten the path under their feet and they could see where The Lane joined the street, passing between two crumbling houses. One last branch hit Joe’s face. He swatted it away and just ran.

They were out of The Lane. They had made it to the other side, into the light. Joe and Mira







when they didn't know he was watching, to see how they behaved. He peered in through the window of a year-seven science lesson. At first glance it looked pretty normal. The teacher was asking questions and it looked like an ordinary busy classroom. But as he watched a little longer, he saw something wasn't right.

The girl near the front kept raising her hand. And every time she did, the boy beside her would drop his pencil. The teacher pointed to the same word on the whiteboard, then a kid in the back row took a sip from his water bottle. The same pattern, over and over again. Hand, pencil, whiteboard, water. They were robots in a museum, acting out a lesson. If Leo had only glanced into the room as he passed, he wouldn't have thought it looked strange.

Creepy.

How long had he been here, stuck inside whatever this was? Why had it felt so real when it





She knew she should have stayed there with them instead of sneaking off.

Out here the light was fading and the temperature was dropping. Soon the strip of pink light on the horizon would go and she'd be left alone in a cold graveyard in the dark.

But she'd felt like she had to come. She'd been thinking about the figure she'd seen at the church all day. If he had really taken a body out of the ground, the police should know. She just had to find some proof that a grave had been tampered with, then she could call them.

She wandered around the uneven stones, hunched forwards with her arms crossed tightly over her chest. There was no sign that any of them had been disturbed. Maybe she'd imagined the dark figure.

Salty wind whipped into Maya's face and stung her eyes. It was time to go. The last of the light had gone from the sky, and she'd be walking back to town in darkness.

