

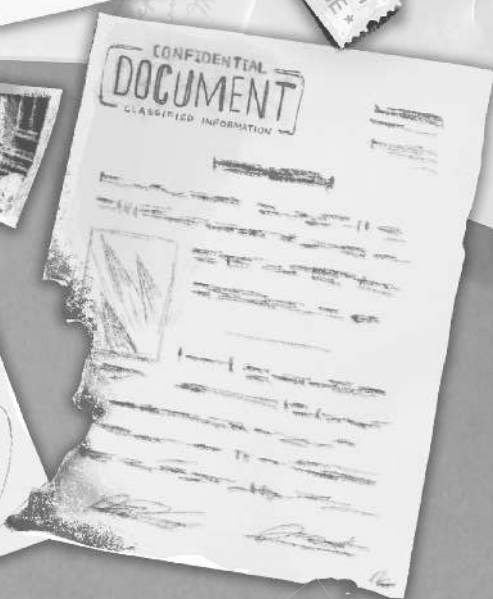
"A perfect shot of horror." JENNIFER KILLICK

FEAR FILES

HIDE and
SEEK

FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR

CHRISTOPHER EDGE



FOR ALEX,
WHO ALWAYS TELLS
THE BEST GHOST STORIES

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FEAR FILES

HIDE and
SEEK

CHRISTOPHER EDGE



WALKER
BOOKS



There is only one emotion that is as old as life
on Earth - and that emotion is FEAR.

Scientists have identified four levels of fear:

LEVEL 0: NO FEAR

LEVEL 1: LOW FEAR

LEVEL 2: MEDIUM FEAR

LEVEL 3: HIGH FEAR

But there is another secret level reserved
for the most extreme cases of this emotion:

LEVEL 4: BEYOND FEAR

CAUTION.

Nobody knows who started the DARKIVE - a database
of the strange and unexplained. The files
recovered in the DARKIVE leak have all been given
a LEVEL 4 rating, indicating that the experience
took the subject beyond the normal bounds of fear.

CONFIDENTIAL

DARKIVE FILE NUMBER: 454707

SUBJECT: ADAM FLYNN

LOCATION: [REDACTED]

FILE NOTES: HIDE AND SEEK

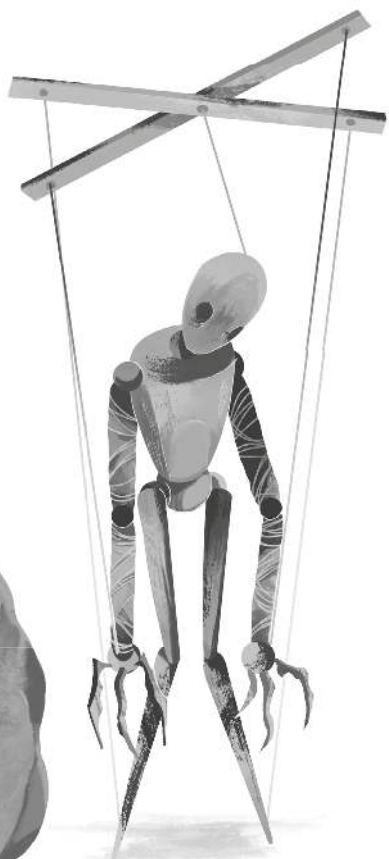
THE SUBJECT CLAIMS TO HAVE NO MEMORY OF THE EVENTS
DESCRIBED IN THE FILE, BUT THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT
WAS OBTAINED USING THE EXPERIMENTAL BURIED MEMORIES
RECOVERY PROCEDURE, ALLOWING HIM TO RELIVE THE
EXPERIENCE. NOTE: THE SIDE EFFECTS CAN BE DANGEROUS.

**DESTROY
AFTER
READING**

DISCLOSURE OF THIS CLASSIFIED

INFORMATION MAY ENDANGER PUBLIC SAFETY.

**TOP SECRET. AUTHORIZED EYES ONLY.
LEVEL 4 CLEARANCE REQUIRED.**



“Adam! Wait for me!”

I ignore Sol’s shout as I hurry across the field, dodging past cowpats as I try to put some serious distance between us. Milky swirls of mist roll across the meadow, making it difficult to see exactly where I’m heading, but that doesn’t matter now. I’ve just spent the last ten hours trapped in a two-man tent with Sol, listening to him snoring as I tried to get to sleep on an inflatable mattress that had sprung a leak. And when I finally did drop off, Sol woke me up ten minutes later saying he needed a wee.

I thought it would be fun to come camping with my best friend, but I didn’t realize how annoying he could be.

“Where are you going?” Sol asks, panting for breath as he falls into step beside me. “I thought we were going to play cards in the camper van.”

When Sol invited me along on this weekend camping trip, he said his mum and dad had booked a wild

glamping experience. I thought there'd be safari tents and solar-powered showers, cosy hammocks, a fire pit and an outdoor pizza oven – maybe even a games room with table tennis and air hockey. But after they picked me up on Friday evening, Sol's parents drove for miles before parking their camper van in this farmer's field in the middle of nowhere. There's nobody else around and the only facility I've found so far is the grubby toilet block at the bottom of the field.

"I don't want to play cards," I reply, still feeling like Sol's tricked me into coming along on this trip. "I'm going to explore. There's got to be *something* we can do around here."

"Maybe we should wait until the mist clears," Sol says, peering ahead into the soft white haze as the field starts to slope upwards. "We don't want to get lost."

I shake my head as I keep walking. "We're not going to get lost," I tell Sol, wondering when he became such a worrier. "I just want to see what I can find."

He shrugs. "Suit yourself, but I don't think there's going to be much of a view."

He's been like this since the trip started. Sol's

usually always up for an adventure, but it seems like he's determined to make this the most unfun weekend ever. The only game he's brought to play is Uno and I'm getting bored of him beating me every time.

I thought we'd stay up late telling ghost stories, but last night Sol got spooked before I even finished mine and said we had to go to sleep straight away because his mum had a migraine after the drive. That was his excuse, anyway, after his dad knocked on the flap of our tent to tell us to keep it down. Sol nearly jumped out of his sleeping bag when he saw his dad's shadow crawling up the canvas. I think maybe the only reason he's invited me on this trip is because he's scared of the dark.

I gaze up into the morning sky. The sun looks like a silver coin, hidden behind clouds that seem to stretch all the way to the ground. There's a slight dampness in the air, but it doesn't feel cold as we trek towards the top of the field. In fact, I'm starting to wish I was wearing a T-shirt like Sol instead of my light grey hoodie.

"The sun will soon burn this mist away," I say, sweating a little now as we reach the brow of the hill. "Look, it's already starting to clear over there."

Over the rise, the field rolls away towards the edge of a woodland. The thin line of trees is still veiled in the lightest of mists, but beyond this I glimpse the blurred outline of roofs and chimneys. It looks like the ghost of a village, rising above the treeline.

"There you go," I tell Sol with a grin as I start in this direction. "Now we've got somewhere to go."

The sky seems to brighten with every step as we tramp down the field, the twirling trails of mist slowly melting away as Sol hurries to keep up with me.

"I didn't notice this place when we arrived last night," he says, frowning a little as he follows me over the stile in the far corner of the field.

"It was dark then," I reply, heading down a track that looks like it leads to the village. Through the gaps in the trees, I can see a high stone wall that stretches in both directions. The honey-coloured stone seems to glow as the sun finally breaks through the clouds. It almost looks like the wall circles the village, keeping it safe from prying eyes. "But we're here now and I hope the shops are open."

A **ghost village** (also known as a **lost village**) is a village that has been abandoned by its residents and left deserted. Some villages are abandoned because of natural disasters, while others have been taken over by the government, with residents forced to move out of their homes. Ghost villages are a common location for reports of supernatural activity.



Wall built
to keep
visitors out?

Or to keep something in?
(See DARKIVE FILES
43380 [La Mussara],
50628 [Tyneham]
and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for
further information.)

2

The track beneath our feet turns into cobbles as we approach an arched gateway. Through this I can see steps leading down to a winding street, the houses on either side built out of the same honey-coloured stone.

But before I can head through the archway, Sol grabs hold of my arm.

“What does this mean?” he asks, pointing towards a strange word that’s carved directly above the gateway. I glance up at the faded letters; the word etched in the keystone looks almost worn away by time.

APODIDRASKINDA

“It’s probably the name of this village,” I reply with a shrug of my shoulders.

“Apo-did-ras-kinda?” Sol says, sounding doubtful as he reads the word aloud. “It doesn’t sound very British.”

“That’s because most places in Britain were named by the last people to invade,” I reply, remembering what Miss Coe taught us in geography. “The Normans, the Saxons, the Vikings. This place looks like it’s been here

for centuries, so it was probably named by the Romans. It *kinda* sounds like an Italian footballer.”

Sol groans at my lame joke as I lead the way through the gateway, the last swirls of mist disappearing as we step into the sunshine. It’s getting warmer all the time and I push up the sleeves of my hoodie as we climb down the steps and start heading down the cobbled street. The pavements are narrow and there are no cars around so we can just walk in the middle of the road. I can’t see any people either and the only sound is the padding of our footsteps on the cobblestones.

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In ancient Greece an early version of the game of **hide and seek** was called **apodidraskinda**.

Maybe the village
is named after
the game?

Or maybe the
game was named
after this place...

I glance around at the houses, wondering where everyone is.

The terraced cottages all look identical. The only differences I can see are the numbers on the front doors, each one painted the same pale shade of green. I can't see inside any of the houses as their windows are hidden behind closed wooden shutters, even though it must be nearly ten o'clock. Apparently the people who live here like to wake up late at the weekend.

"Where is everyone?" Sol asks me.

"Maybe they're all sleeping in," I reply as the street winds its way to the right. "I mean, I would be too if your snoring hadn't woken me up."

"I don't snore!" Sol protests.

"You so do!" I tell him. "You kept me up most of the night with the racket you were making! I thought you were going to blow the tent down."

"Maybe you should have brought your own tent then," Sol mutters. "I didn't know you were such a light sleeper."

He says this like it's an insult. Sol and I never used to argue – we've been friends since we started primary.

But he's *really* bugging me now. I think about how we'll be heading to secondary school soon. If Sol's going to carry on being so annoying, maybe I need to think about making a new start on the friendship front too.

I pick up the pace, walking more quickly as Sol sulks by my side.

A bicycle leans against the wall of one of the houses on the right, but there's no sign of the person who left it there. In fact, as I peer more closely at the bike's rusting frame, it doesn't look like anyone's ridden it in years. Ahead of us, the cobbled street ends in another archway and through this I see half a dozen steps leading up to what looks like the village square.

My stomach growls, reminding me that I've only had a cereal bar for breakfast.

"Let's see what this place is about," I say, hurrying up the steps as Sol follows close behind. "At least it looks like there's a cafe."

The square is bathed in brilliant sunshine, and I look around at the colourful buildings painted in pastel shades, starting with the picture-perfect bakery on the corner. Beneath a blue and white striped awning, chairs

and tables are set out on the pavement, but as I peer past these to see what treats are displayed inside the shop window, I see the blinds are drawn and the notice on the door says CLOSED FOR BUSINESS.

“It’s shut,” Sol grumbles, kicking at an empty box that’s been left outside the bakery. “This place is like a ghost town.”

There are more shops arranged around the square, the old-fashioned signs hanging up outside each one telling me what they sell. Toys. Antiques. Ladies’ fashions. Books and gifts. Every shop has its shutters drawn and there’s no sign of anyone around.

It looks like this whole *place* is closed for business.

There’s a bandstand in the centre of the square. The yellow dome of its roof looks like a scoop of ice cream, but as I step towards it, my heart skips a beat as I glimpse a figure standing in its shadow. For a second, I think it’s a man or maybe even a ghost, but then I realize it’s just a statue.

“There’s something over here,” I call out as I walk across the square. The statue stands with its back to me. It looks like it’s made out of bronze as I get closer,

skirting past the painted railings as I head for the bandstand steps.

“What is it?” Sol asks, sounding a little worried as he hurries to catch up with me.

“It’s a statue, obviously,” I say as I climb the steps with Sol close behind. “And it looks like it’s trying to hide.”

It’s cooler beneath the bandstand roof, but the statue that stands in front of us seems to shine with a golden glow. It’s the figure of a man dressed in long flowing robes, the stiff lines of his carved toga making him look like an ancient Roman. But it’s the way the statue is posed that makes me think it’s trying to hide. Its bronze hands are pressed against its carved face, covering the statue’s eyes completely.



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In ancient Egypt statues of people and gods were sometimes referred to as **shadows**.

“I don’t like it,” Sol says as he hangs back at the edge of the bandstand. “This place gives me the creeps, Adam. Let’s head back to the campsite now.”

“Everything seems to give you the creeps nowadays,” I mutter in reply.

I don’t know why Sol’s turned into such a spoilsport. We used to have so much fun making up our own games or just playing the usual classics. Last Christmas, we kept the same game of tag going for nearly a whole week in school and only stopped when Sol got caught tagging me onstage in the middle of the Christmas show. I bet that’s the first time Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer has ever told Ebenezer Scrooge, “You’re it!”

I just wish I could get away from him for a while.

I stare at the statue and then look around at the empty square. We’ve got the whole place to ourselves, and this gives me an idea of how I can remind Sol what fun actually is. I turn to face my friend, mimicking the statue’s pose as I briefly cover my eyes. Pulling my hands back, I throw down my challenge with a grin.

“How about a game of hide and seek?”



3

"I don't know," Sol replies, still looking nervous as he glances around the square. "We really should be getting back. My mum and dad might be wondering where we are."

"Just one game," I plead. "I'll hide and you seek."

Sol shakes his head. "I don't want to."

"OK," I say, thinking quickly as I flip my suggestion. "How about *you* hide and *I'll* seek? Then when I find you, we can head back to the campsite."

Sol frowns, but he doesn't shake his head this time. "OK," he agrees reluctantly, "but just one game."

"Deal," I reply with a grin. "Let's make it a good one." I turn round, covering my eyes as I rest my head against the bronze statue. "You better get hiding because I'm starting to count *now*."

I hear Sol scrambling to move as I start counting out loud. The statue feels strangely warm against my forehead and I keep my hands clamped over my eyes. I can hear Sol's footsteps on the cobblestones and resist

the urge to sneak a peek. I always think the game is more fun when you get to hide, but this was the only way I could get Sol to play. I run through all the places he could pick as I carry on counting, every number I call taking me closer to the start of the hunt.

“...ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred!” I raise my voice to a shout as I spin round on my heels. “Coming to find you, ready or not!”

Leaving the statue behind, I race down the bandstand steps. The brightness makes me blink as I step back into the sunshine. Sol’s got the whole village to hide in, so I’m going to have to be on top of my game to track him down. Using my hand to shade my gaze, I scan the square and feel my heart sink as I spot Sol straight away.

He’s hiding behind the cardboard box he kicked before. I can see the top of his head as he crouches in the shade of the bakery awning. The cafe tables and chairs don’t even disguise his hiding place. Sol’s making himself so easy to find that the game’s going to be over straight away. It’s almost like he doesn’t want to play.

And then I remind myself: he *doesn’t*. Sol only agreed to play the game because he knew he could give himself

away. That's why he didn't want me to be the hider.

I clench my hands into fists, thinking about all the times I've gone along with what *he* wanted to do because I didn't want to make a fuss. He's supposed to be my best friend, but he's acting like a spoilt brat. I want to march up to Sol right now to tell him this, but then I get a better idea. A way to get my own back on Sol and let him win the game at the same time...

Turning away from the bakery, I head instead for the passageway that brought us to the square. I tread lightly so Sol doesn't hear my footsteps. If I'm going to make my plan work, I can't let him realize where I'm going. Tiptoeing down the archway steps, I leave the square behind as I head back down the cobbled street.

If Sol doesn't want to play hide and seek, then neither do I. I'll just leave him crouching like a grouch behind that cardboard box. I wonder how long it will be before he catches on to the fact that I'm not coming to find him.

The shutters on the windows of the houses are still closed as I pass them by. There's nobody around. I quicken my step as the street winds its way to the left.

My footsteps echo on the cobblestones and I glance back over my shoulder to make sure Sol's not following me. If I hurry, I'll be back at the campsite before he even thinks about leaving his hiding place.

The narrow street twists more sharply and I frown as I follow the bend round. Something feels different, but I can't work out what it is. An eerie silence hangs in the air and I have to stop myself from breaking into a run as I spot the archway at the end of the street.

Now I can just head straight back to the tent and when Sol realizes I've gone, he'll come and find me.

The sun shines brightly, but faint swirls of mist still cling to the gateway. I race up the steps, two at a time, eager to leave this place behind.

The sunlight dazzles me for a second as I step out into the open again. I squint, and then look around in disbelief as I see the colourful buildings. The picture-perfect shops look exactly the same as they did before. I can see the bakery on the corner and the bandstand with its statue in the centre of the square.

I'm right back where I started.

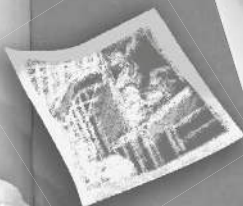
If you play hide
and seek,
do you like to
hide or seek?

HIDE []

SEEK []

Anderson,
did you leave this
here? The DARKIVE
isn't a place for
practical jokes!

Negative.
This wasn't in
the file before...



Entrance
to village

Main street

Village Square

ADAM'S ROUTE

Impossible! How can
the street bring him
back to the village
square? Adam says
he was awake for
most of the previous
night. Maybe lack of
sleep caused him to
take a wrong turning
but not notice?

Maybe the street led him
back here on purpose? (See
DARKIVE FILE 2712 "The
Town That Changed Places"
for further information
about the theory of
HOSTILE CARTOGRAPHY)



4

OK, so maybe Sol was right when he said this place creeped him out.

The village square is still bathed in sunshine, but the sight of it sends a shiver down my spine. This can't be right. I must have taken a wrong turn, but there was no wrong turn to take.

Once again I see the shutters drawn across the shop windows and the tables and chairs set out on the corner in front of the bakery. I call out Sol's name as I head over there now. We've got to get out of this place.

There's no reply to my shout, so I holler again as I push past the tables and chairs. "Sol! I'm not playing any more. Come out wherever you are!"

But the cardboard box he was hiding behind before stands empty in the shade of the awning. There's no sign of Sol anywhere.

A sudden crackling hiss makes me jump in surprise. It sounds like it's coming from the centre of the square. I turn round and notice for the first time the speakers

that are fixed around the bandstand. That's where the noise is coming from.

Squinting, I shade my gaze with my hand as I start walking towards the bandstand. I can see the statue, sheltered from the sunshine, standing with its back to me. There's nobody else around, but I can't help feeling that someone's watching me.

Another burst of static crackles from the speakers, making me jump again. Maybe Sol's discovered how to switch them on and this is his way of playing a trick on me.

"Come on, Sol!" I call out, looking around to see if I can spot his hiding place. "This isn't funny now."

In reply, I hear a strange giggling voice coming from the speakers.

"Olly, olly, oxen free! No north, no south, no tails I see! Come one, come all, come see me! Olly, olly, oxen free!"

This isn't Sol's voice. I can't even tell if it belongs to a boy or a girl. But as the final words of this sing-song chant echo round the square, I feel the hairs standing up on the back of my neck.

And then I see the children.

They're walking in from every corner of the square. I can see girls and boys in groups of two and three, all heading towards the bandstand. At first I think this must be some kind of school trip. The children all seem to be wearing school uniforms, but as I look more closely I realize that none of these uniforms seem to match.

There's a tall boy in a dark blue blazer who's got a shock of red hair. Walking beside him is a blonde girl who's wearing a grey pinafore dress with a short-sleeved

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Olly, olly, oxen free is a saying used to call timeout in a game of **hide and seek**, telling players that are hiding that it's safe to come out. It's usually called at the end of a round of the game. Some people call out **All in, all in, all in free** or **Come out, come out, wherever you are instead**.

white shirt underneath. Another girl with braids in her hair wears a military-style jacket, red with yellow piping on the collar and sleeves. Some kids have got maroon-striped ties while others have green and red ones, and some aren't even wearing ties.

A girl with bobbed black hair who looks like she's stepped out of some K-pop drama walks straight past me. She's dressed in a white-collared light blue top with short sleeves and a matching plaid skirt, although her blue trainers don't look strictly school uniform. She hurries to catch a boy in a grey tank top and shorts who's kicking a stone across the square and I follow them, searching the gathering crowd for any sign of Sol.

The children are assembling in front of the bandstand steps. There must be more than a dozen of them here. Standing on my tiptoes, I glance around at the huddled group. They all look like they're waiting for something to begin.

The different styles of uniform suggest the pupils could come from schools around the world. Maybe a school trip?

Some of the uniforms sound quite dated...

I can see faces of every colour, but I can't spot Sol's amongst them as the loudspeakers crackle into life again.

"Olly, olly, oxen free! No backs, no sides, no fools round me! The game is on, so come *quickly*! Olly, olly, oxen free!"

It's the same sing-song voice as before, and the nonsense words it's speaking send a fresh shiver down my spine. I look around to see who else is coming, but I can't see anyone. No teachers, no grown-ups, no more kids straggling in from the arched gateways that stand on each corner of the square.

It looks like everyone's here. I need to find Sol.

"Excuse me,"



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No backs, no sides, no fools round me is an old saying that used to be shouted out by the seeker at the start of a game of **hide and seek**.

In chasing games like **tag** (or **tig**), the player who does the chasing is known as it . When they catch a player who is running away they call out, Tag, you re it! Sometimes the person who is it is called the chaser, the tigger or the **itter**



I say, approaching the girl with the bobbed black hair. She's standing near the back of the group next to the dark-haired boy in the grey tank top. "My name's Adam and I'm looking for my friend, Sol. He was here a few minutes ago, but I can't find him now. He's wearing a khaki green T-shirt and cargo shorts. Have you seen him?"

The girl turns towards me, but it's the boy who answers first. "Maybe the Itter got him," he says.

I stare at the boy as he sizes me up, only realizing now