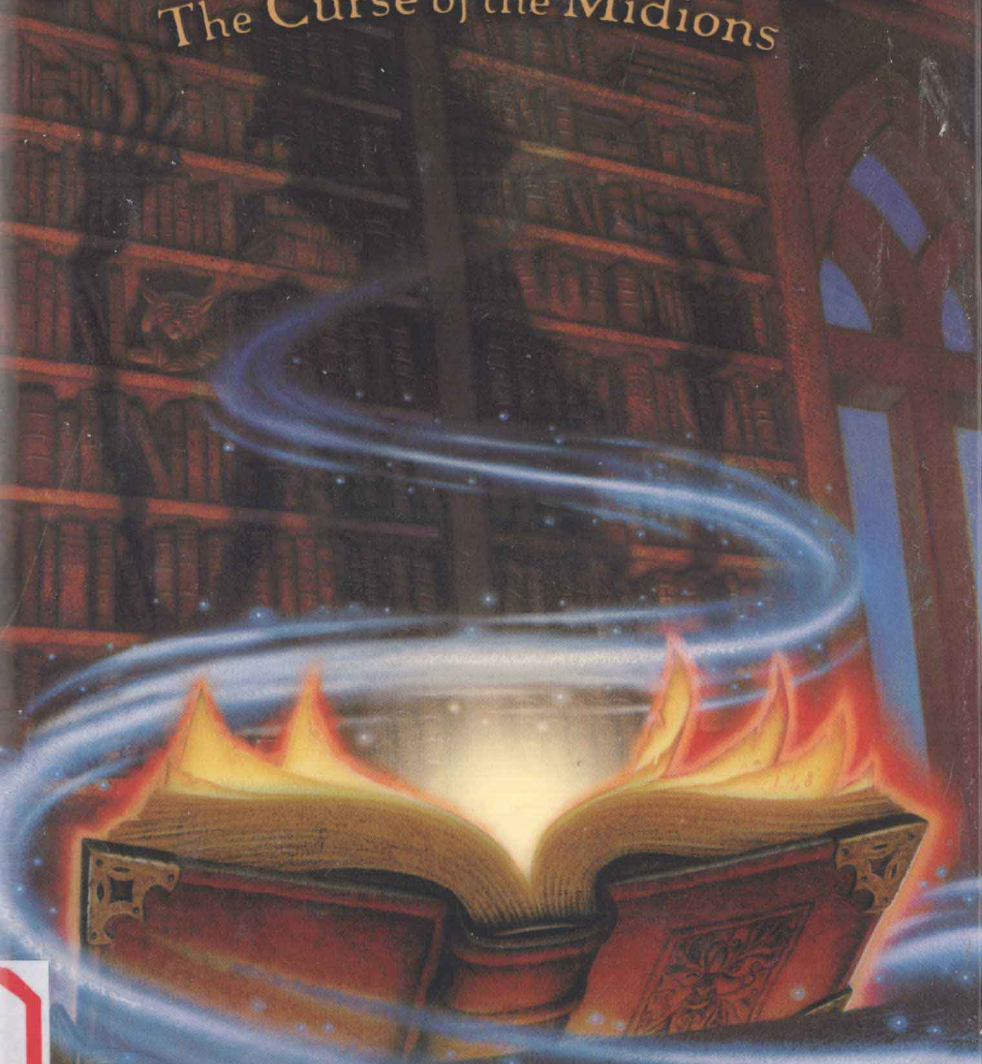


GRIMMOIRE

The Curse of the Midions

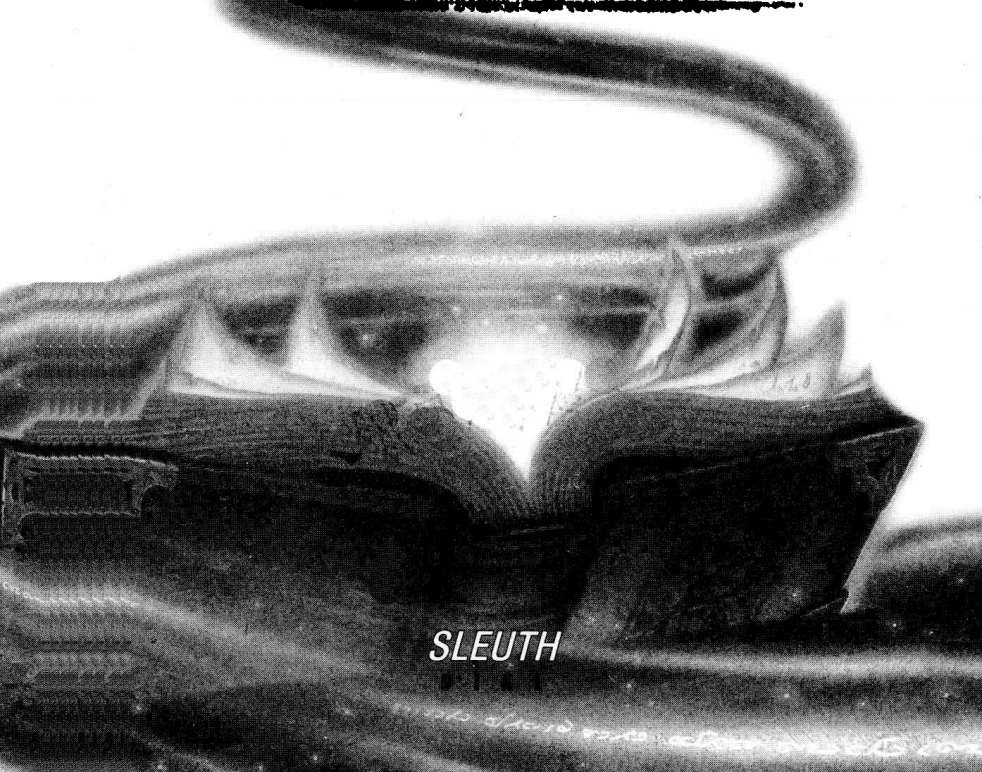


BRAD STRICKLAND

GRIMOIRE

The Curse of the Midions

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CHAPTER I

Welcome to Hag's Court

Jarvis Midion was worn out after the long, long overnight airplane flight from Atlanta to London. His head ached from the rattling of the Underground car into which his family trooped early in the morning. Usually Jarvey was most cheerful in the morning, but lack of sleep made him crabby. Now he had the grumpy thought that the three of them were marching along the sidewalk like a pathetic circus parade with their suitcases trundling along behind them. "There it is," his father said, pointing to a building ahead. It stood in the dark corner of London called Hag's Court.

It wasn't much of a hotel, in Jarvey's opinion. It was a weather-beaten brick building, with a pub

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on the ground floor. The pub's signboard showed a warped, dwarfish, leering creature over the name of the place, the Spriggan. The hotel itself didn't even have a lobby, just an odd-shaped nook with a counter where a chubby-faced woman with frazzled red hair had Jarvey's father sign the register.

"Just the three of you, then, ducks?" asked the woman with a smile that showed enormous front teeth.

"Just the three," his father agreed. "I'm Cadmus Midion, this is my wife, Samantha, and this guy here is our son, Jarvey. He's just turned twelve." He ruffled Jarvey's brownish blond hair, brushing it up into spikes, and Jarvey frowned in annoyance.

The woman looked startled, but then gave him a smile. "You're here on holiday, then?"

Jarvey's dad shook his head. "Business, and a sad business at that. Last week I received a letter telling me that my great-grandfather Thaddeus Midion had died in London, and we've flown over for the reading of the will."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Very old, was he, then?"

"I honestly don't know," Jarvey's dad confessed. "To tell you the truth, I didn't even know I *had* a great-grandfather until the letter came. But I suppose he must have been pretty old. I'm thirty-four myself, so he couldn't have been very young!"

The woman turned around and fumbled inside a set of dark cubbyholes for a key. "Here we are," she said brightly. "I'll put you in rooms five and six, shall I? It's a lovely set, two bedrooms and between them a bath *en suite*, quite large. Let me lead you up to it, you'll never find it else." She chuckled. "We've lost Yanks in the mysterious winding halls. Some say it's the mischief of the Spriggan that misleads them!"

"What's a Spriggan?" Mrs. Midion asked curiously.

"Well, it's a kind of evil spirit, isn't it?" the woman replied with a chuckle. "Like a pixie, or sprite—like Puck in Shakespeare's play, you know. Causes mischief, the Spriggan does, sours milk, breaks

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mirrors—with me, he steals my keys and lays them down just anywhere!”

Jarvey caught the quick, almost frightened look that his mother gave to his father. Mr. Midion pursed his lips and glanced at his son, silently shaking his head: *Don't say anything*, the look said.

The woman didn't notice any of this as she led them up a gloomy, narrow, twisting stair. They went around corners and past closed doors, struggling with their three suitcases, until she stopped at the very end of the passage. “Here we are!”

She unlocked the door of Number 5 and flattened herself against the wall so they could squeeze past. The room boasted a big canopy bed with a small round bedside table sporting a chunky white telephone and an old-fashioned wind-up alarm clock. A single narrow window looked out into the green branches of a tree.

“Bath is just through there, and the smaller bedroom is beyond it,” the woman said. “Have a lovely

time, then, and if you need anything at all, my name is Mrs. Macauley, but please call me Grace.”

As soon as she had closed the door, Jarvey dropped his suitcase. “I wish I could have stayed home.”

“You’ll love London,” Mrs. Midion said. She was just an inch taller than Jarvey, and her light brown hair looked frizzed and tired after the long flight. Her brown eyes pleaded with Jarvey to be pleasant.

“Maybe I’ve got a Spriggan following me,” Jarvey returned.

“That’s just superstition.” His dad sounded very sure of himself.

“Then why am I always in trouble at school?” Jarvey asked.

“You’re tired,” Mrs. Midion said. “You should have slept on the plane. Go check out your room.”

“Okay.” Jarvey lugged his suitcase into the passage between the rooms and reported, “The bathroom’s about the size of my closet!” The bedroom on the

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far side was half the size of his room at home. He set his suitcase down and walked back into his parents' room.

The tiny TV there was showing the morning news, with a blond man and a dark-haired lady soberly talking about cricket or something. "You'd better unpack," Mrs. Midion said. "Then please catch up on your sleep so you won't be so cranky when we go sightseeing."

"I don't want to sleep," Jarvey grumbled. He didn't add *because that's when the bad dreams come*, but the thought lingered in his mind.

"You're just grouchy because you're sleepy," his dad said.

His mom tried to smooth Jarvey's rusty brown hair, without much success. "Try to enjoy yourself," she said. "We have to go to the reading of the will tomorrow, and then we'll spend Friday, Saturday, and Sunday exploring London."

"But baseball tryouts are Friday," Jarvey said.

“Coach Brock knows you have to be away,” his dad said. “Make the best of it.”

“But I wanted to be the pitcher. After last season—”

“I know, I know,” his father said. Dr. Midion put his hand on his son's shoulder. “You had some bad breaks after that one great game. But if I can give up teaching summer session, then you can give up a couple of days of baseball practice. Besides, we may get rich from this! What if my mysterious great-grandfather Thaddeus was an eccentric billionaire? Maybe when we get back I can even buy a baseball team!”

Jarvey grunted. His dad had an irritating way of being upbeat about everything. His dad loved to spend hours reading, but Jarvey always wanted to be outside, and he would rather be out on a baseball field than doing almost anything else. Odd things didn't happen on the baseball diamond—well, anyway, not so many of them.

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Jarvey felt a yawn coming on and tried to stifle it, but that only made his jaw joints ache. Finally he couldn't keep it in. His mom chuckled. "Playing games all night on your GameMax."

"Did not," Jarvey muttered. "Power pack went dead halfway through Galactic Death Run 3000."

His father sighed. "Son, this is a golden opportunity for you. You can see a new city and maybe soak up a little bit of learning. This is London, Jarvey! This is where Shakespeare wrote his plays and George III planned the war against the Americans during the Revolution. Where Winston Churchill kept the country together even when the Germans were bombing it during World War II. It's a place of heroes and history, Jarvey! The Tower of London goes all the way back to Roman times. You won't find anything that old in Bayesville, Georgia!"

"What about the dirt?" Jarvey shot back. "I'll bet it's just as old as London dirt!"

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His dad laughed. "I'll concede the point. But cheer up, son. It'll be fun. You'll see."

Jarvey couldn't help yawning again. While he had sat slumped by the dark window of the transatlantic jet, his mom and dad had snoozed away. Maybe they were right. Maybe if he slept for an hour or so he'd feel more human.

Back in his room, Jarvey kicked off his Nikes and peeled off socks, jeans, and red T-shirt. The shower sputtered out a thin stream of tepid water. He showered, then toweled off, pulled on some shorts and a clean white T-shirt with BAYESVILLE BOMBERS stenciled on it, and then slipped between the sheets.

He was asleep before he knew it.

One of the dreams came: The July day a year ago, when the Bombers were up against the Center Street Chargers, the day he was so angry.

In the dream, Jarvey felt a strange sense of dread.

It had happened halfway through the third inning. Once already he had struck out, and he had done a miserable job out in left field. His game was off that day. He had overrun an easy fly, missing it by five feet, and then had fielded a wildly bouncing grounder only to drop the ball.

The Charger pitcher was a tall, rangy kid with a mean face who grinned as Jarvey stepped up to bat. "Easy out!" the pitcher behind him had called.

Somehow the first two pitches, high and just inside the strike zone, flew by with no time passing. Jarvey didn't even hear the umpire call the strikes. The pitcher was winding up. Jarvey felt anger at himself building—what was wrong with him today? He should do better than this, should be able to—

Crack!

Something struck Jarvey in the face, hard enough to sting, and he heard everyone yelling. He stood dazed. The ball, the ball—

Was vanishing over the fence.

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Jarvey became aware that he was holding the stump of the bat. The rest of it lay in shattered splinters.

"Run the bases," the umpire ordered, and Jarvey began the jog.

The first baseman gave him an unbelieving stare. "How'd you do that? I didn't even see you swing!"

Jarvey didn't answer. He couldn't. He had not swung.

His bat had exploded, and the ball had flown away. That wasn't the first time something strange had happened. In first grade, the class field day had been ruined by a steady, hard rain, and Jarvey had felt furious about not being able to go outside.

Then the classroom window had blown out, shattering into glittering shards, making Miss Daly scream in alarm. A suddenly pounding rain had whipped in on a cold wind. The class had to leave the classroom and go down to the cafeteria for the rest of the day.

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Second grade, and Jarvey had been humiliated when he hadn't been able to spell a word at the board. The lights overhead had flared to incredible brightness, then had exploded, one after another, with tinkles of glass and puffs of smoke. Kids yelled and ducked under the desks. The whole school had lost power. The buses had come early that day.

But never had anything so disturbing happened outside, never on a baseball field.

In the dream, Jarvey's feet grew heavier and heavier as he tried to run the bases. He could barely move.

A crooked little monstrous creature waited at home plate.

"You're the Spriggan," Jarvey said, wondering how he even knew that word.

"No," the creature had said with an evil grin. "You are."

Jarvey's eyes jerked open, and he rolled out of bed, his heart beating hard. Then he realized that

it had all been another dream, one of the dreams he had come to dread. He crawled back under the covers, trying to control his rapid breathing.

His parents always told him he was imagining things.

After the window incident, they had explained that his anger hadn't caused the window to shatter. It must have been the force of the wind, his dad had insisted. And the classroom lights had blown because of a short circuit, and his home run had just shown that he was stronger and quicker than he knew. Of course, he had played badly in every other game, because his nerves were on edge waiting for something else to happen. His parents reassured him after his bad dreams too: He was just keyed up, excited, upset. Dreams didn't mean anything.

Jarvey wanted to agree with them, because if they were right, he wasn't—well, crazy. Even though crazy things happened around him sometimes, and more than once his parents had been called to a