

Your imaginary friends are back ... with a vengeance

# INVISIBLE



# FIENDS

RAGGY MAGGIE

BARRY HUTCHISON

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藏书章

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To Mum and Dad.

For believing, even when I didn't, and for

having confidence when I had none.

Oh, and for all the food and money.





## PROLOGUE

What had I expected to see? I wasn't sure. An empty street. One or two late-night wanderers, maybe.

But not this. Never this.

There were hundreds of them. *Thousands*. They scuttled and scurried through the darkness, swarming over the village like an infection, relentless and unstoppable.

I leaned closer to the window and looked down at the front of the hospital. One of the larger creatures was tearing through the fence, its claws slicing through the wrought-iron bars as if they were cardboard. My breath fogged the glass and the monster vanished behind a cloud of condensation. By the time the pane cleared the *thing*

would be inside the hospital. It would be up the stairs in moments. Everyone in here was as good as dead.

The distant thunder of gunfire ricocheted from somewhere near the village centre. A scream followed – short and sharp, then suddenly silenced. There were no more gunshots after that, just the triumphant roar of something sickening and grotesque.

I heard Ameena take a step closer behind me. I didn't need to look at her reflection in the window to know how terrified she was. The crack in her voice said it all.

'It's the same everywhere,' she whispered.

I nodded slowly. 'The town as well?'

She hesitated long enough for me to realise what she meant. I turned away from the devastation outside. 'Wait... You really mean *everywhere*, don't you?'

Her only reply was a single nod of her head.

'Liar!' I snapped. It couldn't be true. This couldn't be happening.

She stooped and picked up the TV remote from the day-room coffee table. It shook in her hand as she held it out to me.

'See for yourself.'

Hesitantly, I took the remote. 'What channel?'

She glanced at the ceiling, steadying her voice. 'Any of them.'

The old television set gave a faint *clunk* as I switched it on. In a few seconds, an all-too-familiar scene appeared.

Hundreds of the creatures. Cars and buildings ablaze. People screaming. People running. People *dying*.

Hell on Earth.

'That's New York,' she said.

*Click*. Another channel, but the footage was almost identical.

'London.'

*Click*.

'I'm... I'm not sure. Somewhere in Japan. Tokyo, maybe?'

It could have been Tokyo, but then again it could have been anywhere. I clicked through half a dozen more channels, but the images were always the same.

'It happened,' I gasped. 'It actually happened.'

I turned back to the window and gazed out. The clouds above the next town were tinged with orange and red. It was already burning. They were destroying everything, just like *he'd* told me they would.

This was it.

The world was ending.

Armageddon.

And it was all my fault.

TWENTY-THREE DAYS  
EARLIER...



## Chapter One

# I DON'T LIKE MONDAYS

I awoke with a start, clutching at my covers, my skin slippery with sweat. It was the dream again. The long, dimly lit corridor. The locked door. The *clop-ssshk* of strange, unknown footsteps chasing me, then the soft giggle as I was dragged down into the darkness. The same story, night after night after night.

As always, the details of the dream quickly began to fade. I usually remembered the bigger things – the lights in the corridor going off; the grey, shapeless figure battering against the windows; even the voices on the other side of the locked door. It was the little details that got lost. I



always remembered the voices whispering to me, but I could never recall a single word of what they actually said. Hopefully it wasn't anything important.

I lay there for several minutes, slowly letting myself come round. There'd be no getting back to sleep, but lazing in bed for a few hours would be better than nothing.

Assuming I had a few hours. I had no idea what time it was. It was dark outside, but that didn't help at all. It was early January, and dark until almost half past eight these days.

From the corner of my eye I could make out the red glow of my radio alarm clock. I couldn't bring myself to turn and look at it. If I did then I might discover I had to get out of bed, and that was something I wasn't ready to do. Not yet.

There were noises downstairs. That had to be bad news. The rattling of plates meant Mum was up, and the burning smell meant she was making breakfast. It would soon be time.

I shuddered at the thought of what awaited me today,