

JOSEPH DELANEY

~THE~

SPOOKS

SEVENTH
APPRENTICE



A BRAND NEW EPISODE IN THE SERIES THAT INSPIRED THE MOVIE

SEVENTH SON

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About the Author

Also by Joseph Delaney

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About the Book

WARNING: NOT TO BE READ AFTER DARK

SPOOK'S: Seventh Apprentice is a haunting stand-alone story, and a perfect introduction to the world of The Wardstone Chronicles. You don't have to know the Spook's books to enjoy it but for all the existing fans of the series out there, this is a must-read.

Assisted by his apprentice, the local Spook protects the County from the creatures of the dark. Whilst the Spook is away on a dangerous job, his seventh apprentice, Will, is compelled to help a boy whose father has been kidnapped by a ruthless and bloodthirsty witch: a witch who has the body of a woman and the face of a pig. But Will has never encountered a real witch in the flesh before. And his dark-fighting skills are not yet advanced enough to fight an enemy of such power . . .

This story will chill your blood and frighten you to your very bones. Just remember not to read after dark.

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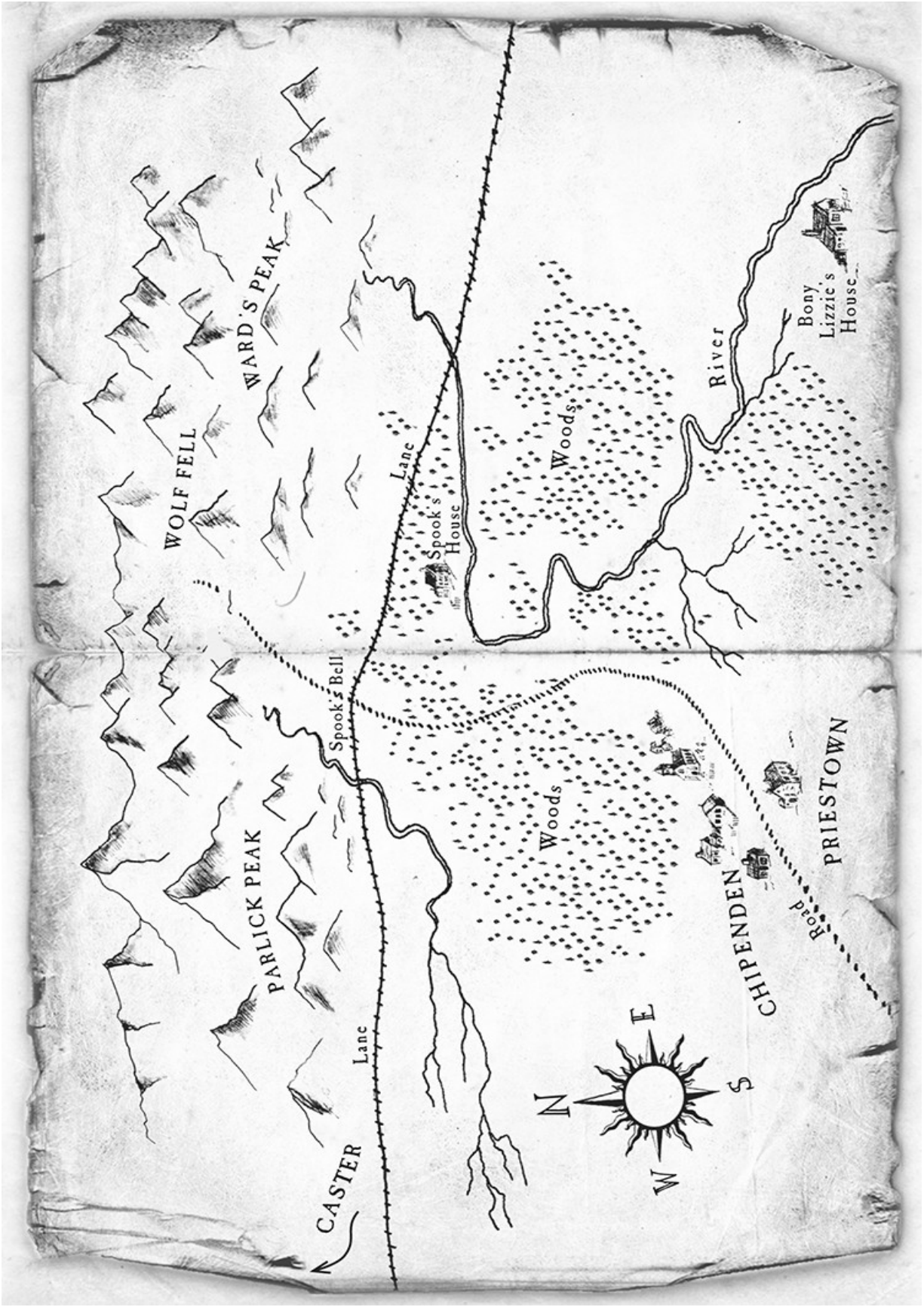


JOSEPH DELANEY

RHCP DIGITAL

for Marie





CHAPTER 1 THE LAZIEST APPRENTICE



I'm Will Johnson, apprentice to John Gregory, the Chipenden Spook.

It's a very dangerous job. Two of my predecessors were slain by boggarts - troublesome entities that are mostly invisible but sometimes take on the shape of animals such as cats, rats, horses and dogs. Often they do little damage and simply scare people. Then it's a spook's job either to move them away or bind them in pits so that folk can get on with their lives.

However, some boggarts are lethal. For example, there's an extremely dangerous type known as a ripper. They usually start by killing cattle but eventually prey upon people, ripping out their throats and draining their blood.

My master's first apprentice, Benjamin Roberts, was struck dead by a stone chucker, a violent sort of boggart with six arms that throws missiles - sometimes even large boulders. It split Benjamin's skull wide open and dashed out his brains on the grass.

Mr Gregory's second apprentice, Paul Preston, was attacked by a deadly goat boggart as he walked across a muddy field near Wheeton. The creature's horns pierced him under the ribs and speared his heart. He died instantly.

My master's next three apprentices ran away because they found the job too difficult and scary. Mr Gregory is still annoyed that he wasted all that time training them.

His sixth apprentice, Brian Houghton, completed his five-year apprenticeship successfully and is now practising his trade somewhere south of the County. So far he has been the Spook's only success. This is hardly surprising: ours is a dangerous and terrifying occupation. We fight the dark, dealing with ghosts, ghaists, boggarts and witches.

I'm the Spook's seventh apprentice, and now it's my turn to be trained. Recently I've been thinking of running away myself - before my master kicks me out. The truth is, my apprenticeship hasn't been going too well and recently things got a lot worse . . .

One cold December afternoon, just a couple of weeks before Christmas, we were in the garden. I was shivering despite my exertions - I'd been using the Spook's silver chain, casting it at the practice post. It's a way of dealing with witches. If you do it right, the chain forms a spiral in the air and falls over the witch, pinning her arms to her sides. Then you can drag her away and put her in a pit. So far I hadn't accompanied the Spook when he'd been summoned to deal with witches, and I certainly wasn't looking forward to meeting one. They kill people - sometimes even young children - and drink their blood or cut away their bones, which is why many end up in a pit dug by my master or his apprentice.

My practice session hadn't gone too well. In theory, this should have been easy: a wooden post kept still; a witch wouldn't. However, I'd managed only about twenty successful throws out of more than fifty attempts. My final throw of the session was the worst of all: I somehow managed to wrap the chain around my head and shoulders; I slipped and fell heavily to my knees. Struggling to my feet, I readied myself for a lashing from the Spook's tongue.

Sure enough, it came immediately: 'That's not good enough, lad!' he snapped angrily, the look in his green eyes making me cringe. He was tall - I hardly reached his shoulder - and his black beard had only a few flecks of grey. His fierce face looked like it was chiselled from stone. He was not someone to be trifled with.

'Have you been keeping up with that extra practice I set you?' he demanded.

I couldn't meet his gaze, hanging my head instead. I was supposed to work with the chain for an hour each day. I had been going to the practice post but I hadn't actually cast the chain much. It seemed like a waste of time - I never got any better at it - so I'd mostly spent my time leaning on the post and staring into space, daydreaming.

The Spook shook his head angrily. 'Give me your notebook, lad!' he demanded, holding out his hand.

He gave each apprentice a blank notebook in which to keep a record of everything we learned and the things we encountered. He flicked through the pages now, and I waited for his anger to erupt. A lot of the pages were blank - too many. When he'd given me lessons, pacing backwards and forwards beside the bench in the garden, I'd taken notes - I could do nothing else under the Spook's fierce gaze. But whenever he'd sent me up to the library to make additional notes from the books there, I'd done little work - sometimes nothing at all.