

Widurok



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by

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THE KING'S ENGLAND PRESS

2016

ISBN 978 1 909548 55 8
WIDUROK
is typeset in Book Antiqua and Hergest,
and published by
The King's England Press
111 Meltham Road
Lockwood
HUDDERSFIELD
West Riding of Yorkshire

2nd impression, 2016

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by

4Edge Ltd
Hockley, Essex

To my father,
and all those who daydream
of time-travel.

PART ONE

the kingdom of east saxon

east
angle

mercia

Widurot

Walla

River
Rochingas

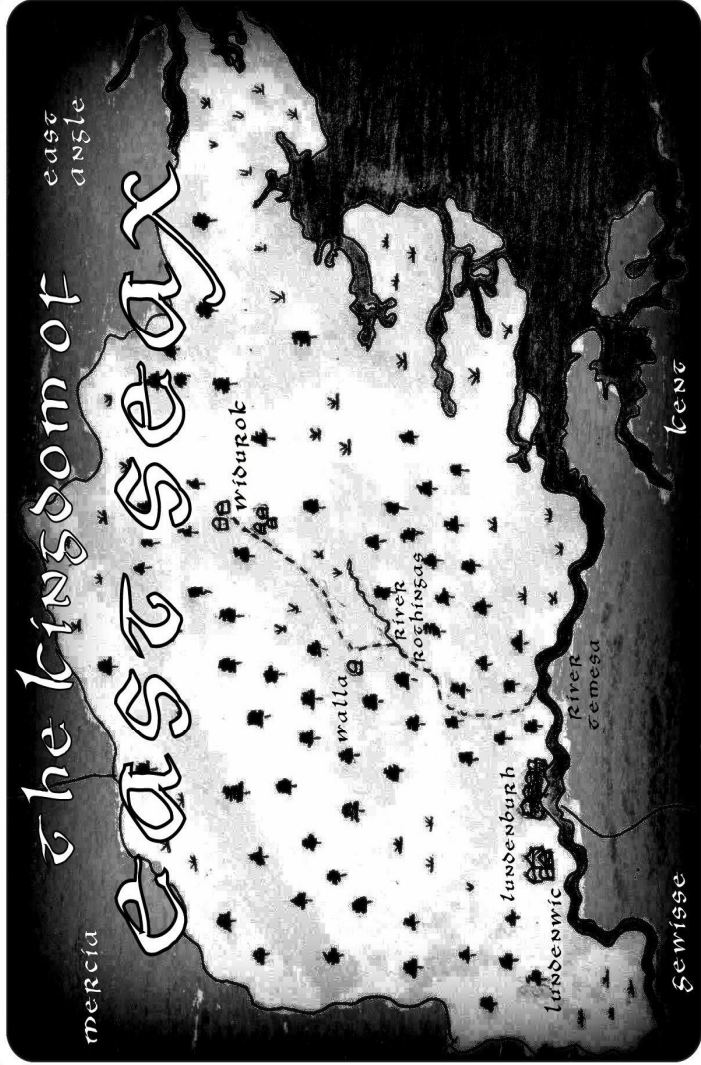
lundenburh

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River
Temesa

sewisse

lense





Chapter One: The Pocket Watch

"Hey Millie?" George whispered, "Millie! Are you awake?"

"I am now," his sister grumbled and turned over to face him. Twilight shone through a gap in the thick curtains onto her brother. He was sitting fully awake and clothed on the edge of his bed.

"I think I've lost Grandad's watch."

"What watch?"

"The funny pocket one that he gave to me today, before we went out."

"Umm, he loves that old thing," Millie replied sleepily, wondering why George was bothering her with this now.

"I woke up dreaming about it. I've checked my jeans and it's not there." George rose to his feet. "I'm going to go out and find it."

"*What?* It's the middle of the night! Don't be stupid. Just go back to sleep."

"I can't sleep. Anyway, it's not even that dark. I'm pretty sure it dropped out of my pocket when we were sitting by the skateboard ramp."

Millie pulled the duvet over her head. The power of sleep was commanding her to block George out and sink back into unconsciousness. With no more protests from his sister, George quietly opened their bedroom door and slipped down the stairs of their grandfather's old house.



Chapter Two: Cost

George jogged lightly down the lane with his hands in the pockets of his hoodie and his thick hair bouncing over his face. He headed towards the village churchyard. If he cut straight through the graves he would get to the footpath that led directly to the playing field.

At the churchyard gate George paused. He was slightly reluctant to be alone in the night with the dead, but surely at thirteen you shouldn't believe in ghosts? He took a deep breath and tried hard to consciously put any dark thoughts to the back of his mind. He was *just* taking a short cut.

He lifted the heavy old gate open, willing the rusty hinges to remain silent as they grated against each other. Then with his hands back in his pockets, he headed to the far corner of the churchyard that led down towards the playing field.

Somewhere, the eerie hoot of an owl made George quicken his pace back into a gentle jog. Away from the streetlight the graves stood like dark shadows rising up from the ground. George felt his heart rate quicken and set his eye to the closest source of light as comfort, a brightly lit window of a house. But now, not looking where he was going, George suddenly tripped on the edge of a protruding tree stump and fell hard onto the ground. His hands were

still tucked into his pockets and it was his head that took the full force of the fall. George lay on the grassy ground dazed and winded.

Rising onto his knees, he cupped his head in his hands, wincing in pain.

“Ahhh!”

As he started getting his breath back and regaining his full senses, he looked up. The night seemed to have got darker. Something had changed. There was no light coming from any of the houses and the clouds no longer had the orangey glow they normally reflected from the cities. In fact, from the small amount of moonlight, George could only make out trees surrounding the church and the graves. George stood up and squinted his eyes into the dark. Now he felt even more dazed and confused: the churchyard was surrounded by forest! That wasn't right. He turned around to check he was still facing the direction he had been heading in and almost jumped out of his skin. Directly behind him was an enormous ash tree. George was certain he had not seen it here before and he definitely had not just walked past it. He slowly edged his way around the tree to check the church was still in sight. But confirming his worst fears, the church was not there!

“Maybe it's just too dark and I can't see it,” George muttered, seeking some logic. “*It is the middle of the night.*”

But no, he should be able to make out a grand building such as a church, especially as he could still see the outline of gravestones ... although ... they too were different. There weren't as many stones, and the ones he could distinguish seemed to be very spaced out, although still quite orderly.

George stood next to the tree for several moments not knowing what to do. In the stillness of the night, noises

from the forest seemed to grow louder and George became more afraid. The rustling of leaves, the scurrying of some creature, the flapping of wings and then, from further away, the shouting of men!

George remained still, trying to hear which direction the men were coming from as the sound of their voices grew closer. He felt vulnerable standing out in the open ground and quickly ran towards the trees. As he did so a dark grey riderless horse trotted past him and towards the ash tree. George crouched down next to a bush and looked back out to the churchyard. It could no longer be rightfully described as a churchyard, now it was more an open space with a tree in the middle, surrounded by two rings of gravestones.

Through the woodland that surrounded this open space George could make out beacons of light flashing through the trees, which corresponded to the sound of voices. The men were close now. George heard running feet approaching where he crouched, followed by the beating of horse hooves.

"Prince Saeward!" shouted the owner of the footsteps in a thick, slightly Germanic, accent. "Over this way, I can see him in the clearing!"

George crouched down even lower in the bushes. Were they talking about him? The footsteps, followed by hooves, abruptly stopped at the edge of the open space, a few metres away from where George was. He cautiously peered through the leaves.

"There he is, do you see him sir?"

The man talking was standing next to a horse mounted by a young man he had addressed as Prince Saeward. He was pointing towards the huge ash tree. By the light of the torch flame the man was holding, George could guess he

was in his early twenties. He was dressed in a cloak and in the same hand as the torch, held a full-faced bronze-coloured helmet. Beneath his cloak, lengths of woollen cloth were bound around his calves and on his feet was a pair of simple leather sandals. The young man on the horse was almost still a boy. He was dressed in much the same attire, although he wore a fine cloak that draped itself luxuriously over the horse's buttocks and thighs. Attached to the saddle was a heavy-looking sword with a hilt of bone.

Maybe they were participating in some kind of travelling show, or returning from a fancy dress party, George tried to reason to himself.

The young prince pivoted in his saddle, keeping a firm grip on the horse's reins. He looked eagerly into the clearing.

"Yes, yes!" Saeward whispered in great excitement.

George followed their line of vision and saw an unsaddled horse standing next to the ash tree that he had fallen beside a few minutes ago. From his viewpoint the horse appeared to have eight legs, instead of four. But surely that must be shadows caused by the light of the moon, which shone onto the dark beast.

Saeward reached for his bow.

"Pass me an arrow Aldwyn," he softly commanded down to the man on foot, his eyes sparking with the thirst of a hunter about to catch his prey. Aldwyn swung down the leather quiver that had been resting on his shoulder. But as he was selecting the finest arrow for his master, another rider approached on the other side of Saeward, concealed from George's viewpoint.

"Sir ... would it not be unwise to kill here?" the rider stammered anxiously. "You know what place this is!"

"Of course I know! The local villagers come here to worship the old gods," Saeward snapped. "What of it?"

"They're not that old. What of the consequences? It's sacrilege!" The panic in the rider's voice overshadowed his reasoning.

"Quiet! You're going to disturb the kill." Saeward reached down and took the arrow from Aldwyn. He felt angry that the magic of this moment now seemed slightly tainted. There *was* a part of him that knew it would be wrong to shoot the grey stallion here. But it was such a unique animal and such a magnificent prize. This was his chance, his moment of recognition. He could prove himself to his father, the King, and bring home one of the greatest of all gifts.

"The old gods are dead," Saeward replied coldly in answer to the rider. "It's time the East Saxon people learnt that."

George watched spellbound as Saeward rested the arrow against the curve of the wood. He pulled back on the flight until the string would stretch no more and then released the arrow.

George heard an unworldly noise from where the animal had stood. With his heart pounding he turned to look. The stallion lay on its side wildly kicking its eight legs, still silhouetted by the moon, but now with the arrow protruding from its side.

Saeward shouted loudly to his men and other shouts responded from around the clearing. He dug his feet into his horse and rode towards his fallen prey.

The animal stopped kicking and rested its head on the ground. To George it seemed as though the fallen horse had turned his head to look directly at him – as though he knew

he was hiding here in the bush. A shiver ran down his spine. What was this creature? What had it been doing here, staring up at the ash tree? Who were these men? But now was not a good time to answer such questions. Now was a good time to creep from the bush and put some space between him and the men.