

H A U N T E D



FIELD OF SCREAMS

JOEL A.
SUTHERLAND

Illustrations by
Mark Savona

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CHAPTER FOUR

There was a chill in the air as we drove north on Highway 97 from Kelowna to Wight Farm near Ellison Lake. We passed the movie theatre, the university and then the airport. The farm was just a little farther ahead.

“Move over,” Grace complained. She was sandwiched between me and Ryan in the back seat. All three of us were drinking Slushees from the corner store near our house — Mom had bought them for us as a treat since we were splitting up for the night. Only I’d opted to get a jumbo, which was the size of a small bucket. Mom was driving and Aunt Kelly was riding shotgun.

“For the millionth time, I’m over as far as I can go,” I said.

“Quit elbowing me.”

“I’m not! I haven’t touched you this entire trip!”

“You both smell like ham sandwiches and



armpits,” Grace said, her nose wrinkled in disgust. “Boys stink.”

Ryan laughed. So did Mom and Aunt Kelly.

“You ate the same sandwiches we did,” I reminded Grace.

“Yeah, but I don’t have smelly armpits.”

“Don’t worry, Grace,” Mom said, looking back at us in the rear-view mirror. “We’ll get rid of the stinky boys and then you’ll have the back seat all to yourself on our way back to the movie theatre.”

Grace cheered.

“You’re pretty excited to see *Pony Pets*,” Ryan said with a smile.

She nodded. “Mom said it’s a short movie and Aunt Kelly said we’ll probably have time to go for hot chocolate before we pick you up. Right, Aunt Kelly?”

“Sure. Anything for my favourite niece.”

Grace was Aunt Kelly’s only niece, but I didn’t want to burst my sister’s bubble.

“You never buy me hot chocolate,” Ryan said.

“You’re not my favourite niece.” Aunt Kelly shrugged her shoulders. “Sorry about your luck.”

All the joking during the drive made me forget for a moment where we were headed.

But then we pulled up to Fall Fright.

WELCOME TO FALL FRIGHT
OPEN FRIDAY TO SUNDAY IN
SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER
PREPARE TO SCREAM!

The paint on the sign was faded and peeling, and the sign was leaning to the left. It looked like a strong breeze might knock it down at any moment.

I instantly had a terrible feeling. Call it intuition or a premonition or a sixth sense, but whatever it was, it was *real* — we had to turn around that instant.

Instead Mom pulled into the parking lot — a large grass field turned into a giant mud pit thanks to the day's rainfall — and killed the ignition.

I figured the terrible feeling was probably just me thinking about my dad and all the times we'd come here. I missed him so much, but now that I'd gotten over my resistance to going to Fall Fright I knew he'd want me to keep on doing the things we used to do together.

I took in my surroundings. Things seemed a little odd. The parking lot was less than half full but it was only 6:45 p.m. The Scare Staff would just be starting to fill the farm's attractions. Maybe the storm had kept a lot of people away.

"I'm not trying to rain on anyone's parade,"



Aunt Kelly said. She paused, looked at the wet world outside her window, considered what she'd just said, laughed briefly, then continued, "but this place looks like it's gone downhill."

"The offer to come to the movies with us instead is still on the table," Mom added.

Grace perked up. "Yeah! Come to Pony Pets!"

I looked at Ryan. He looked back at me like he was wondering if I wanted to bail.

I shook my head and said, "Nah, that's okay. After being stuck inside all day it will be nice to be outside for a bit."

"All right," Mom said. "We'll meet you back here at ten o'clock. Give me a call if you want me to come pick you up early, okay?"

"Okay," I said, then slapped my forehead. "I left my phone back at home." In the kitchen, where I'd overheard my mom and aunt talking about me, a memory I was trying to forget. I hated people being concerned about me. I hated people treating me like I was a little kid. Was it so weird that I needed some time to get over my dad dying? I was able to return to Fall Fright, wasn't I?

"Don't worry, Dare," Ryan said. "I've got mine."

"Good," Mom said. "And remember: keep to the left."

“Keep to the left?” I had no idea what she was talking about.

“In the maze. I read an article about it. If you keep your left hand on the left wall, you’ll eventually get out without becoming turned around and disoriented. It kind of takes all the fun out of mazes, but it works.”

My skepticism must have been plainly written on my face, because she added with conviction, “Google it.”

“Okay, I believe you,” I said with a laugh, then thanked her, took the last sip of my Slushee, said quick goodbyes to Grace and Aunt Kelly, and hopped out of the car. Ryan got out the other side and we started walking through the parking lot. Mud squished loudly underfoot and we had to step carefully around puddles that had formed in tire ruts.

We walked toward the booth, passing a family with their three young children. The parents did not look happy, and all three kids were on the verge of tears.

“Did they think that was funny?” the dad said.

“If they did, it’s a sick joke,” the mom agreed. “You know what I’m going to do? I’m going to write an angry letter.”



As she said *write an angry letter* the dad mouthed the words with her. He'd obviously heard this threat from his wife before.

"I'm serious," she said. "Handwritten. And with stern language."

They walked to their car and continued grumbling as they helped their kids into their seats.

"What do you think that was about?" I asked Ryan.

"No idea," he said. "But remind me to never upset that family."

"Yeah," I said, smiling. "I don't think you could handle the stern language they'd sling at you in a letter. Handwritten, no less."

We reached the ticket booth, a small wooden box similar to something you'd see at a really old movie theatre, but it had been constructed to look like a coffin. There was a sign on the window that listed admission prices and operating hours, but the booth was empty.

"Hello?" I called.

No one answered.

"Hey, look at that." Ryan pointed at a black bell with a skull and crossbones printed on it that sat on the wooden ledge beneath the window. Next to the bell was a small handwritten note that said,

PLEASE RING FOR in red lettering, but whoever had written the note hadn't completed the sentence.

"Ring it," I said.

"No way! You ring it."

"C'mon. Ring it."

"I'll ring you."

"All right, I'll do it. Chicken." I raised my hand and moved it slowly toward the bell.

"Wait!" Ryan shouted.

I yanked my hand back as the blood drained from my face. "What?!"

He took a step back, pulled his phone out of his pocket, and pointed it at me. "I want to record this." He pressed a few buttons on the screen. "Okay. Go ahead."

"Jerk," I said. I raised my hand again and moved it into the booth with only the slightest moment of hesitation, chiding myself for allowing him to freak me out.

I quickly pressed the bell before I could freak out again. Knowing the bell was some sort of joke prop, I had expected to receive a slight shock or hear an ear-splitting sound effect, but neither of those things happened.

Instead, a shrill *ding* rang out, just like one of those metal bells you see on the counter of a hotel.



I looked at Ryan, still filming me on his phone, and shrugged.

“I guess there’s nobody—”

I didn’t finish my sentence. A man with an axe planted squarely in his head slammed against the inside of the ticket booth window.

“Help me,” he moaned.



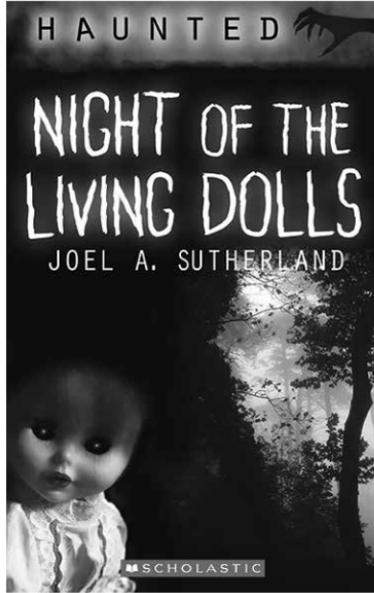
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joel A. Sutherland is the author of *Be a Writing Superstar*, numerous volumes of the Haunted Canada series (which received the Silver Birch Award and the Hackmatack Award), *Summer's End* (finalist for the Red Maple Award) and *Frozen Blood*, a horror novel that was nominated for the Bram Stoker Award. His short fiction has appeared in many anthologies and magazines, including *Blood Lite II & III* and *Cemetery Dance* magazine, alongside the likes of Stephen King and Neil Gaiman. He has been a juror for the John Spray Mystery Award and the Monica Hughes Award for Science Fiction and Fantasy.

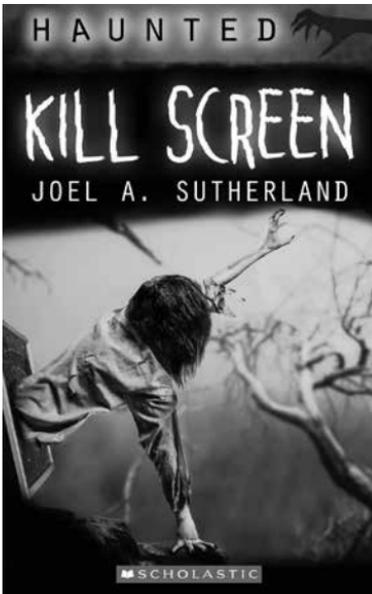
He is a children's and youth services librarian and appeared as "The Barbarian Librarian" on the Canadian edition of the hit television show *Wipeout*, making it all the way to the third round and proving that librarians can be just as tough and crazy as anyone else.

Joel lives with his family in southeastern Ontario, where he is always on the lookout for ghosts.

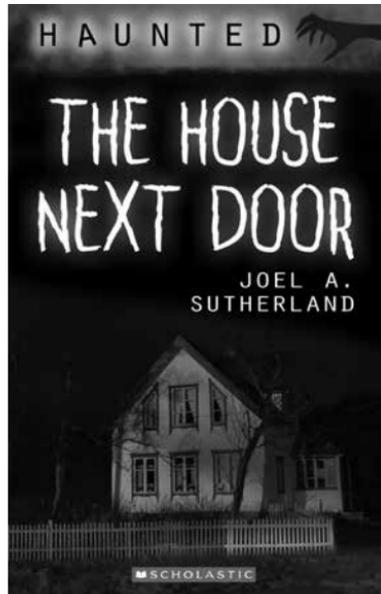
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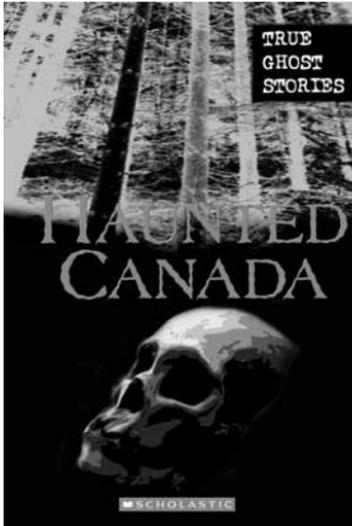


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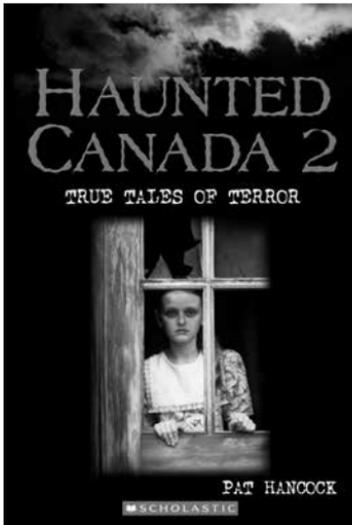
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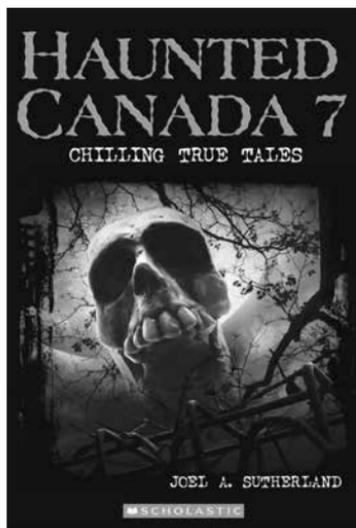
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