# CONN OF THE DEAD

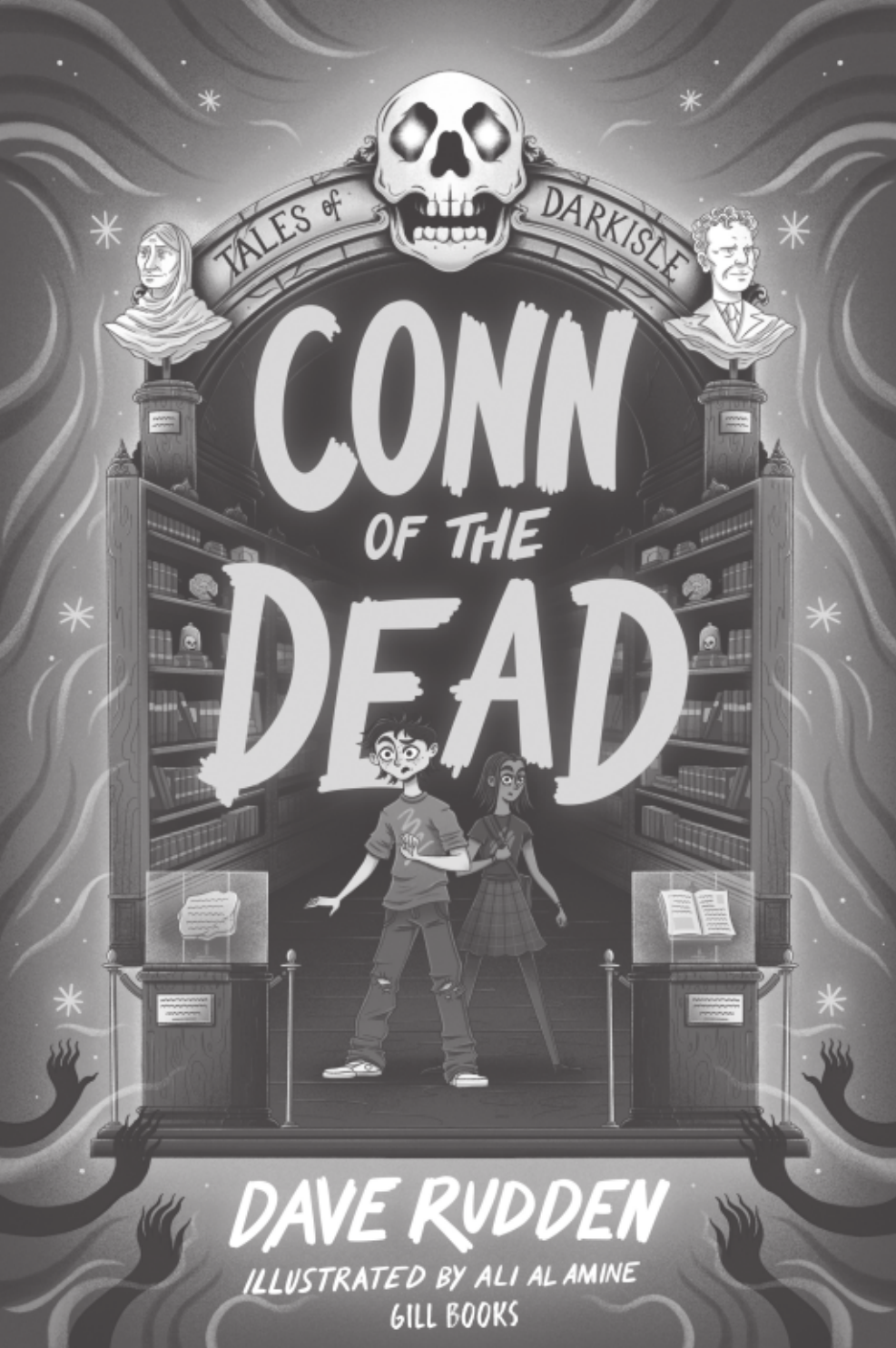


**Dave Rudden** is the author of the award-winning *Knights of the Borrowed Dark* trilogy, as well as multiple works in the universe of *Doctor Who*. Much like the main character of this novel, he should never be left unsupervised.

For more about Dave's books, reading guides and school visits, check out www.daverudden.com.



**Ali Al Amine** is an award-winning designer and illustrator of books. His biggest achievement is leaving medical school in 2018 to pursue a career in the arts and he hasn't looked back since. When he isn't bringing tales of necromancers to life, he can be found wandering the woods at his local nature reserve and frolicking in fields.


TALES of DARKISLE
CONN OF THE DEAD
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This book is dedicated to you, you weirdo.

I hope you like it.

*The Darkisle rises from the ocean like a tooth from a jaw, a black and jagged spur of rock covered by dead and dripping grass. It doesn't show up on satellites. It does not ping radar or trigger alarms.*

*The Darkisle, like evil, is not easily mappable, or detectable, or explainable.*

*But you know it when you see it.*



*How do you kill a zombie?*

You probably think you know the answer. You're probably an expert in zombie-killing. At least the zombies you see in movies and games. They're not even usually called zombies any more because *zombie* isn't a word that scares anyone. They're called biters. Or walkers. Or shamblers. Or creepers.

But whatever the cool new name is, the monster underneath is pretty much the same.

Tattered clothes. Rolling eyes. Chomping mouth. Skin that's salad green or bruised purple or white and wet as sausage meat.

And the rules for zombies have pretty much been the same forever too.

Don't let them swarm you. Don't let them bite you. Don't let any of their fluids get on *your* fluids (definitely don't let them use your toothbrush).

Aim for the head.

And, above all, remember: a zombie might look like your friend, or your mam, or your cool Aunt Doireann who sings along to death metal when she picks you up from school.

But they're not that person any more. They're just teeth inside a face you used to know.

You know the rules.

But what if a zombie learned them too?

Picture yourself in ancient Ireland. An Ireland so ancient that the only calendar is the sun in the sky and scratchings in stone. An Ireland so ancient that the whole island is a forest, a great and sprawling wood full of wolves and stags and tiny villages listening to things shriek outside their walls. Picture an Ireland so ancient and hostile that the Roman Empire took one look and decided to turn back.

Picture a mountain, tall and jagged, red and black as a scab.

On this mountain stands a zombie.

Maybe the zombie on the mountainside was once the kind of zombie you'd recognise. Maybe his clothes were once tattered. Maybe his eyes rolled and his mouth chomped.

Maybe, just maybe, he had loved ones who knew him.

But that's not the kind of zombie he is now.

Now, he is the Abhartach.

*Av. Her. Tock*. You pronounce it like you're angry at the word. Not just a creature risen from the dead, but a creature who can raise the dead himself. Shape them. Mould them.

Do you know how oysters make pearls?

If they get a little piece of grit in their mouth, they produce a protective substance to wrap around it, building it up layer after layer after layer, until the whole mass gets bigger and rounder and harder. Like a pebble rolled into a snowball.

The zombie on the mountainside has done this too, but he has done it with …

Bits.

*(Conn, that is disgusting)*

*(Wait! I'm just getting to the good part)*

*(You're getting to body parts!)*

*(That's what I meant!)*

Where was I? Oh yes.

BITS.


BITS

You know the bits I mean. Animal bits. People bits. All stolen from a hundred graves across ancient Ireland and gathered around a single zombie like a duvet on a cold, cold night.

There is no head to aim at. No one mouth to avoid. Now, the Abhartach is a heaving mass of arms and legs and tails and heads — a clot of flesh the size of a house, gnashing and writhing and chanting spells to draw more and more parts to his old and murderous bones.

*(Conn!)*

This is a zombie who's studied. A zombie with plans. A zombie who knows all the rules and all the weaknesses, and plans to make sure they never apply to him.

He is a haystack of horrors, raising dozens of arms to the sky and screaming through a hundred mouths—

*(CONN!)*