

MARK LATHAM



The
Headless
Horseman

OF SLEEPY HOLLOW

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Introduction

“Faith, sir,” replied the story-teller, “as to that matter, I don't believe one-half of it myself.”

- D.K.

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow has long held a fascination for scholars of the supernatural, and, more commonly, those who study the rise of the “urban legend.” For this short tale by acclaimed American author Washington Irving, based on snatches of folklore and ghost stories from the Dutch settlement of Tarrytown, New York, is widely believed to be a fiction, dreamt up from Irving’s vivid imagination. That it has come to capture the public imagination, becoming known as a real slice of American folk mythology rather than a mere story, is testament to the power of the narrative. Parallels may well be drawn between Sleepy Hollow and the British tale of *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* – another fictional character widely believed to have existed in old London town.

But what if *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, and its grim story of the unfortunate schoolteacher Ichabod Crane, was not a fiction at all? What if, in the tradition of his peers across the world, Washington Irving had stumbled upon a supernatural truth, an esoteric mystery so dark as to defy the rationale of everyday folk? Wrapped in the disguise of a storybook, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* merely hints at the true nature of the Headless Horseman. For these ghastly spirits are not just found in the state of New York, nor even on American soil. Headless spirits are a unique, sentient form of wraith, and tales of their terrifying exploits have been recorded since the Dark Ages.

The book you hold in your hands uncovers certain uncomfortable truths. Truths that reveal the Headless Horseman, and others like him, to be at large in the dark places of the world. Should one encounter a headless spirit of this type, then it is said that tragedy will surely follow, for the one common thread of all the tales of headless spirits is that they are harbingers of evil and dismay. For most common folk, it is better to go through life not knowing of the existence of these fell entities. If you are such a soul, better to close this book now than to have the safe haven of ignorance torn from you. But if you are of a more intrepid mind, and would rather have the truth at any cost, then read on, if you dare ...

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