

CHAPTER ONE

Impervious to the prying eyes, the black tower kept hold of its secrets, its lifeless appearance the perfect façade to conceal the activities of those hidden inside. With no openings visible on the surface of the tower's exterior walls, the glass-like qualities of the obsidian rock from which it was made completed the illusion that the tower was a structure of solid mass. Behind the illusion though, lay a building of many rooms, and in a chamber located at the very heart of the tower, a teenage boy sat cross-legged on the floor looking as if he was practicing the art of quiet meditation.

The boy, Stephen Moonstone, was sitting with perfect stillness of a hand-carved statue; but if Stephen had truly been a statue then he would have been carved from gold. Stephen's skin glowed the same colour as translucent honey, his hair was naturally blond and his eyes had irises of bright amber, speckled all over with tiny, golden flecks.

The room containing Stephen, The Star Chamber, appeared to be unfurnished and empty but Stephen could feel strong waves of power flowing in and around it. Womb-like in its darkness, the chamber's walls reflected a rose coloured glow from small, red lights secreted at intervals around the edge of the floor. The Star Chamber, like the rest of the tower, was built of obsidian; but the Star Chamber itself had been created using the obsidian that had once comprised the inner sanctum of an ancient temple. Saturated with the holy energy of

centuries the Star Chamber felt alive to Stephen, because Stephen had been born a Golden Child, an exceptionally psychic child born with the gift of seven senses instead of five and he could harness the energy that pulsed unseen within the Star Chamber.

Sighing gently, Stephen released himself from his meditative trance, relaxing as he felt the rejuvenating effects of the Star Chamber surge through him. He stood and began to stretch, smiling to himself as he thought back to the previous day and the liaison mission he had undertaken as part of the work he did as a member of The Psychic Guild. The assignment had turned out to be a rather low-key affair, one that had needed Stephen to use only his psychic sixth sense rather than his Golden seventh; but still it had been the first time he'd been on a mission unaccompanied by an adult tutor and Stephen knew it represented a major landmark in his Guild designed psychic training program.

Stephen's smile widened as he remembered the look he'd seen on the archaeologists faces when he'd arrived at the site of their excavations. Searching an ancient burial site for relics, their digging had disturbed the graves of the Countess of Mulberry's long-dead children, with the result of her own long-dead self suddenly appearing, fully intent on revenge. Without a sixth sense the archaeologists hadn't been able to see the countess; but they'd certainly been able to see, and feel, the lumps of excavated masonry that she'd hurled through the air and pelted them with.

Watching the archaeologists cower behind an old moss covered headstone, Stephen had hurriedly contacted D.I.P.S.O (Department of Investigation for Psychic and Spiritual Occurrences and currently part of H.M. Government's Home Office) and arranged for the archaeologists' dig permit to be withdrawn. Then, engaging his sixth sense, he'd hurried over to talk to the countess who, after many apologies by Stephen,

departed huffily with much swirling of her ghostly, seventeenth century taffeta skirts.

“*Stephen ... I’m sat upstairs with Adam. Are you free to join us?*” A warm, deep voice floated gently into Stephen’s mind, projected telepathically across the ether of the invisible fourth dimension.

“*Sure. I’ll be right with you,*” Stephen replied in kind, walking over to the Star Chamber’s wall.

Placing one hand on the wall, Stephen waited for the hidden scanner to read his palm print. A small light flared quickly green and the tightly-fitted door slid smoothly open, allowing Stephen to leave to chamber. Walking through a softly lit vestibule, Stephen passed down a short, curved corridor and began to climb the spiral of the tower’s central staircase until he reached the fifth floor doorway that led to his uncle’s private rooms.

“Ah, there you are, Stephen. Come on in and join us,” said his uncle out loud, catching sight of him in the doorway and reverting to a more normal way of speaking for the benefit of the other person sitting in the room with him.

Coming further into the room, Stephen couldn’t help but notice his uncle give a quick anxious glance in the direction of his eyes and Stephen knew just what he was looking for. No-one had ever really proved exactly why it happened but not all Golden children retained their seventh sense as they grew older. For some, their psychic abilities faded away during the time of their teenage years and the first sign of this happening was if the amber of their irises began to return to a more natural colour. Since the day he’d reached his thirteenth birthday, Stephen had found himself uncomfortably aware of the close attention his eyes now received and found himself clenching his teeth against the heat he felt rising over his face as he crossed the room.

“Hi, Uncle Matt. Did you want me?” he said, resisting an

urge to squirm as sat down on a sofa opposite his uncle.

“We were just discussing the plans for our departure tomorrow and I wanted to be sure all your preparations are complete,” said his uncle, a light smile flashing through his own amber coloured eyes.

“I’m ready, Uncle Matt. I’ve spent the evening meditating and preparing in the Star Chamber,” said Stephen, relaxing as he saw his uncle’s gaze warm to a familiar smile. He pushed further back into the sofa cushions and grinned over at his cousin, Adam.

Adam, as well as being Stephen’s cousin, was also one of three acolytes who helped Stephen in the work he did for the Psychic Guild. Lessons in how to use his psychic powers had begun for Stephen at the age of three and he’d very quickly learnt that if a spirit had been one of life’s troublemakers while on earth, then death itself would do nothing to either change or improve them. Stephen’s acolytes stood guard and watched out for him during any spiritual confrontation where Stephen needed to use his Golden seventh sense – because the use of that sense normally involved the resolution of a spiritual disturbance of the more malevolent kind.

“Stephen, are you sure now?” his uncle probed gently. “Remember, you’ll be on your own when I leave tomorrow. Have you meditated deeply and taken on enough power?”

“As much as I can, I think,” Stephen replied carefully. “Yeah, I’m sure I’ll be fine while you’re away...”

“We’ll leave in the morning as planned then.”

The following morning dawned clear and sunny. The savage violence of the night’s storms had dispersed, leaving just a brisk but light wind to whip the blue sea into small, white crested peaks. A small bubble fronted Jet Ranger helicopter rose several feet above the helipad that lay concealed beside the Moonstone Tower and, travelling horizontally, began to pick up speed as it

travelled out over the sea. With increased vibration from the swiftly turning rotor arms, the helicopter soared up to its full flying altitude, soon leaving the black tower behind.

“Which plane are we taking when we get to the airfield?” Adam asked over the background crackle of the helicopter’s in-flight communications system.

“The fastest. The Lear,” Stephen’s uncle replied from the pilot’s seat, selecting just one of several available planes and helicopters from an impressive range of vehicles that were kept for the exclusive use of families in the Psychic Guild, and supplied by D.I.P.S.O.

“I just love that jet,” sighed Adam wistfully. “Can’t wait until I can fly it.”

“I know you do Adam, but it’ll be a while yet before you can fly that one ...”

Stephen, sitting in the seat behind Adam, suppressed a small sigh at the sight of his cousin’s mousy blond hair. Adam, Uncle Matthew’s only son, had been ‘Golden’ but at fifteen his slowly darkening hair held the only trace of this. Stephen normally preferred not to dwell on the reason for Adam’s altered appearance; the loss of the close bond he’d shared with Adam when they were both Golden children he still found too painful think about for long. It also called to mind another time Stephen preferred not to recall; the previous summer when his Aunt Melissa, Adam’s mother, had been abducted. Her ordeal had lasted several weeks despite the family’s increasing frantic efforts to find her. Found in the end, wandering aimlessly through the streets of London, his aunt had withdrawn into a state of paralytic shock, from which she had so far never recovered.

Pushing such images away, Stephen tuned his attention back to Adam’s conversation with his father, silently wishing that when Adam had lost his seventh sense he hadn’t also lost his

telepathic speech ability, *'headphones are so bloody uncomfortable!'*

"But that wouldn't help normal people, would it Stephen? They've never had the ability, have they?"

"Sorry," Stephen thought back to his uncle, mentally kicking himself as he re-centred his thoughts. He quickly reinforced the mind block that kept his private thoughts out of his telepathic speech pathway, a skill he'd only recently been taught and to his occasional embarrassment, not yet mastered.

The helicopter's communication system crackled into life again as the distinctive features of Land's End and the edge of the Cornish coastline came in sight, shortly followed by the air traffic control tower of the Guild's private airfield at Penzance.

"Moonstone Bird One landed safely. Thank you air traffic control," said Uncle Mathew, landing the helicopter with only the smallest of jolts back onto the ground.

"Moonstone Lear One is fuelled and ready to go, sir," replied the disembodied voice from the air traffic control tower.

"Thank you tower. We'll make our way over. Over and Out," said Uncle Mathew, cutting the engine and releasing his seat belt, while indicating to Stephen and Adam that it was safe to do the same.

Engineers and mechanics came running over from a nearby hangar and, crossing the tarmac apron, began to check and refuel the helicopter. The Lear jet stood ready for take off, its engine already started by one of the standby pilots based at the airfield. No time needed to be wasted in transferring luggage as each Moonstone property contained identical sets of possessions for each member of the family, an intricate feat of organisation undertaken by Sophia and Garath Moonstone, otherwise known as Stephen's parents.

Stephen followed his uncle out of the helicopter and for a few moments the two stood together, something their unusual

appearance normally led them to avoid doing in public. Both were tall, as were all the Golden people, although Stephen still had at least six inches and several more pounds of muscle to go before he would match his uncle's athletic six and half foot frame.

When Adam had joined them Stephen led the way over to the waiting jet. They all climbed aboard and Stephen settled himself into one of the large leather cabin seats while watching his uncle enter the flight deck and prepare once more for take off. This time instead of an uncomfortably noisy ascent, the sleek jet engaged full thrust and soared with quiet grace into a brilliantly vibrant, blue sky. Less than an hour later, the jet made its swooping run over the Sussex Downs and Stephen looked down on the private estate and ancestral home of the Moonstones, Lelune Manor.

From the air, Stephen saw the outline of the manor as a large open 'E' shape, with the main body of the house forming the back of the letter and the East and West wings, along with the stone canopy that stood over the front entrance, making the downward strokes. To the left of the main house stood a single story crescent-shaped building that had once housed carriages and stables but which now contained staff living quarters and a large leisure complex, including the family's swimming pool. Surrounded by gardens that included a woodland walk and ornamental lake, the manor grounds finished in a high brick wall and the whole estate provided the main residence for all the un-psychic members of the Moonstone family.

"Mum. Dad. It's great to be back," said Stephen, jumping away from the electric golfing type buggy they'd used to get from the airfield to the manor and submitting to one of his mother's more enthusiastic hugs.

"We heard the jet go over," said his mother, releasing him and allowing him to say hello to his father. "Now, are you all starving

or did you have breakfast on the plane?” his mother asked.

“Starving! The flight wasn’t long enough for the steward to cook breakfast,” said Stephen, his stomach choosing that particular moment to give a gurgling rumble.

“I thought so! I can hear your stomach from here! Come on. I’ve made the others wait for you,” she laughed, leading them all into the manor where a hot breakfast had been placed in dishes lined up on the sideboard of the Crimson Dining Room.

This room, like most of the rest of the manor, was not as grand as it sounded. The Moonstone family lived in the central section and west wing of the house and the furnishings, passed down through generations, looked as battered as the constant use by a large family could make them. The state apartments of the east wing were something to behold though. Furnished with rare antiques, these rooms were only ever used for formal occasions and remained generally ignored by the Moonstone family for the rest of the time; although Stephen knew his younger brother, Joshua, often snuck into the State Dining Room to try and fulfil his ambition of sliding the whole thirty foot length of the highly polished Louis XIV dining table in his socks.

Hungrily, Stephen picked up a plate from the sideboard and began to fill it with bacon, eggs and sausages. He could see his brother Joshua and his even younger sister Emily, already sitting at the table with two more of his younger cousins. Moving further along the buffet, he could also see his mother talking to his uncle.

“So his first solo mission. How did it go?” he heard her ask.

“He handled it brilliantly, Sophia. No trouble at all,” his uncle replied, making her laugh as he repeated Stephen’s account of the Countess’s flouncing fury.

“Do you think he’ll keep it, then?” his mother asked.

Stephen saw her risk a quick furtive glance in the direction of his eyes.

“Do you know ... I think he might, Sophia. He’s already much stronger than Adam ever was,” said his uncle. “I mean ... Adam’s seventh sense was part of his childhood, just the way he was. We still can’t prove if it had anything to do with ... well, you know ... what happened to Melissa, but as his seventh sense became weaker, I really think Adam was more relieved than upset. But Stephen. Well, Stephen finds the thought of its loss devastating, the same as I always did, and that really seems to make a difference.”

“Well, I hope you’re right, Mathew,” said Stephen’s mother. “The poor Silverstones haven’t even got one Golden child to give them hope.”

“Bah! The Silverstones! They’ve even taken to only marrying blond, fair skinned people to try and improve their chances. Much good that will do them! You’ve only got to look at you and Garath to know that!” growled Uncle Mathew dismissively, looking at the short, plump form of his sister-in-law, with her mop of unruly dark curls and eyes of deep brown. “It’s nothing to do with colouring or looks. Golden babies are just born that’s all!”

“Mathew! Don’t be so awful!” laughed Stephen’s mother, relaxing back in her chair as Stephen’s equally dark-haired father sat down to join them.

“Lord Henry Silverstone helped us appoint a new teaching assistant to help Mr Benson with that lot while you were away,” he said, raising his voice to be heard over the noise coming from the four younger children sat at the far end of the table.

“Is anything up with Mr Benson then?” said Stephen, taking his own place at the table.

“Nothing that keeping your brother in a straightjacket couldn’t solve!” said his father shortly, frowning a warning look down the table at Joshua as he saw him flicking baked beans across the table at his sister, Emily.

“Mr Benson will carry on teaching the children but Lindy Plumcotte will help to organise extra physical activities. She’s got loads of energy. And just as well ...” he finished irritably, watching Emily wipe tomato sauce off of the end of her nose.

“Plumcotte?” said Uncle Mathew sharply. “That’s not a Guild name. I take it she’s been vetted?”

“Relax Mathew. She’s fully vetted. We ran a full background check and Lord Henry himself viewed her surrounding light aura. Cool Blue. She passed with flying colours,” Stephen’s mother said, smiling warmly at her brother-in-law before rising from her seat to press the small buzzer on the wall that alerted the catering staff that the meal could now be cleared away. “Joshua! Stop flicking beans at Emily at once!” she called out sharply. “Come on you lot! What are you meant to be doing now?”

“I’m going with Uncle Garath to the stables,” said Adam. “We’re going to see Bessie’s new litter of pups.”

“Boring!” said Joshua loudly. “Lindy said she’d take us on an attic hunt.”

“Well be careful up there. Some of the old floorboards are cracked and I don’t want to find any of you stuck half way through any of the bedroom ceilings,” Stephen’s mother warned, as Joshua jumped up from his seat and raced from the room trailing his sister and cousins behind him.

“Lucky old Lindy!” said Stephen’s father, pushing his plate away and wincing at the still banging door.

“Goodness! I must go! I’ve got loads to do before Aunt Dorothea arrives tomorrow,” said Stephen’s mother, looking at her watch.

“Stephen, are you coming with us?” Adam asked.

“In a moment. I need him for a while first,” his uncle answered for him.

Peace descended on the room as it emptied.

“Stephen, Adam and I will be on our way quite early tomorrow. Are you sure you’re ready? Is there anything you need from me before I go?” his uncle thought to him.

Stephen tensed and sat up a bit straighter. For the first time in his life his uncle was leaving the country without him, going away well beyond the range of their shared telepathic link. Stephen knew he was young to be left alone but, without Adam, there were now only two Golden children of his generation left in Britain. The Guild had pushed forward his psychic development program and Stephen was equally determined to prove he was fully capable of directing and dealing with spiritual disturbances on his own. He knew he needed to, if he was ever to become to achieve his ambition to become a Grand Master of the Psychic Guild, like his uncle.

“I won’t let you down, Uncle Matt,” he thought back quickly.

“I know you won’t, Stephen. You did very well on your first solo assignment. If you need me, use a telephone and I’ll be back. Don’t forget that although Adam has to come with me, Marcus and Simon will be arriving tomorrow.”

Marcus and Simon were the other two acolytes assigned to Stephen and like all acolytes they possessed a highly developed psychic sixth sense that allowed them to see and hear any spirits that crossed back from the spiritual world of the fourth dimension to visit the living world of the third dimension. They couldn’t access the fourth dimension in the way Stephen could though, and had no telepathic ability; but their skills did provide Stephen with a certain amount of back-up if he found himself confronting a spirit of the nastier kind.

“I’m sure I’ll be fine, then. I hope you find Aunt Mel’s a bit better,” he thought back to his uncle, leaving the room to catch up with his father and cousin as they made their way across the grounds to visit the converted stable that now housed a large and airy canine nursery.