



Chapter One

Mist Over Pegwell Bay

Pegwell Bay had something you don't see very much these days. It had a Viking ship. A huge Viking ship. Longer even than the longest bus. It was decorated with dozens of coloured shields along the sides and a great dragon head at the front staring out to sea.

In Viking times, which were so long ago that even the oldest person you know probably won't remember them, Norse warriors sailed the seas in splendid ships like the one at Pegwell Bay. It took fifty men to row one of these magnificent craft across the swelling waves, as the Vikings

made their way from the burning deserts of Africa to the freezing waters of the Arctic Circle – all without the help of a map or a decent travel-sickness pill.

Today, however, this particular Viking ship – the *Hugit* – wasn't going anywhere. It had been put on concrete blocks by the council years ago as a tourist attraction and now it looked rather forlorn and defeated. As if it had been wheel clamped by a particularly keen traffic warden. On this cold winter afternoon, it wasn't even attracting any tourists.

The only person to show any interest in the ship was Joshua, who was six and didn't have an opinion about the council yet. He was quite pleased that the ship stood still. It meant he could run around it with his plastic sword, shouting and banging his chest as if he'd just landed an advance party of Norsemen on the shore. His older brother and sister, Katie and Gary Lloyd, looked on from the top of the hill overlooking Pegwell Bay. Even standing in the shelter of the long-closed *Eric the Red Sip 'n' Snack Shack* didn't stop the cold wind from last night's storm biting into their faces.