

THE  
LOST  
SOUL  
ATLAS



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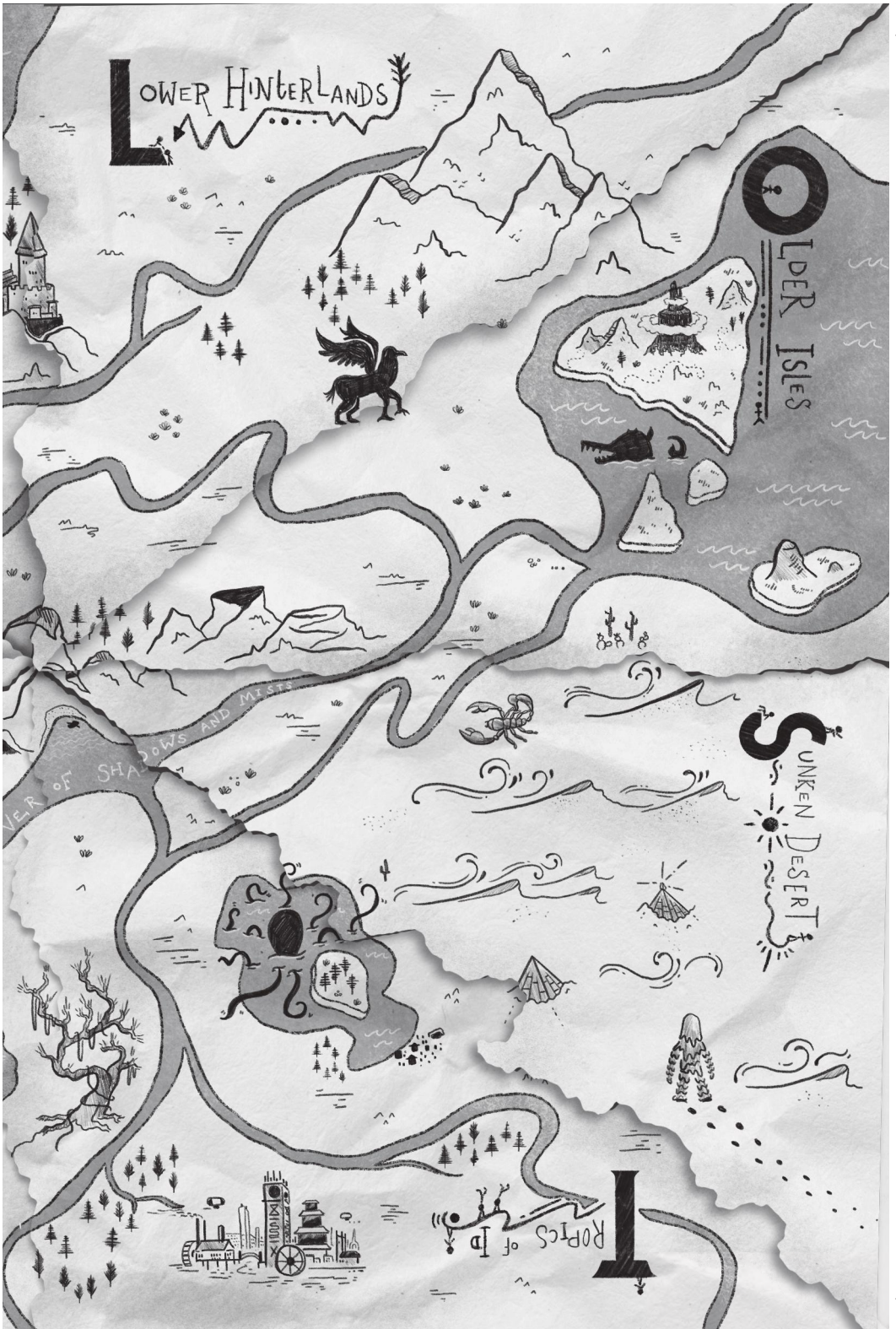
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## Prologue

# The Beginning

*In the beginning, the Gods were bored. There was nothing to do any more. They had made their world and their creatures. They had played and built things and flooded things and dried things. And now they were bored.*

*The souls of the people weren't bored. They had memories to hold on to and stories to tell. They had loved ones to watch over and places to haunt. They quite enjoyed being dead.*

*But Gods can be jealous beasts, for why should people have all the fun?*

*And so the Gods decreed that when souls arrived in the Afterlife, they would enter a state of blissful unknowing. They would forget their time on earth. Memories were banished to the edges of the Afterlife.*

*And so it was.*

*It was the God of Winter Mornings who suggested they should all try a memory or two. Just to see what the fuss was about . . . The memories entered their beings, fed them smells and sights and sounds and feelings. For*

*a small time, the Gods existed purely within those small snatches of life. But once tried, the Gods wanted more. They wanted bigger, stronger memories. Memories to make them feel . . . alive.*

*The Gods took matters into their own hands. With just a flick of their heavenly fingers, they could create all the memories they needed. Destruction was rained down upon on the earth. Wars were waged. Walls were built. The earth was mined and torn and sundered. Seas rose and fires ravaged. Everything got a little hotter. Memories got a lot stronger. Souls arrived more quickly. Their memories hoarded more readily. The Gods feasted. And so, it was.*



## Chapter 1

# The End

And so, it was. This was it. The end. Twig couldn't look at those eyes. Or the arm aiming. It didn't tremble, that arm. Not even a bit. Neither did Twig. 'Go on. Do it then. I dare you.'

And the whole world exploded.



Wherever he was, it was dark. Deep dark. The thick, heavy dark that claws at your throat and scratches at your eyes. The kind of dark that picks you up and tosses you around and holds you close and whispers promises and pulls you apart. And just as Twig no longer knew if he even still existed, a neon sign burst into life and stilled him in its light.

**WELCOME TO THE AFTERLIFE!**

'Oh.'

That was the only word he could think of for quite some time.

The sign was broken. It made that fizzing, static sound that a loose connection makes, and the bulbs behind some of the letters flickered, spat and gave up. Without the bulbs, the sign now read

## **WE COME TO LIFE!**

Twig shuddered and gave the sign a cautious poke. A whole string of lights blossomed around him, glittering and twinkling along the edges of an old cobblestoned path that stretched and twisted into the darkness. They made Twig think of the time they had all wrapped fairy lights along the graves between the shacks and bought fish and chips and—

*And the crows dive in for the chips and  
'Here's to us! We're the Beasts of the City  
Wilds!' and we all race to the top of the  
gargoyle tomb so we can look out over  
everything that's ours . . .*

The memory was like a snatch of dream, refusing to stand still. The more Twig tried to grab hold, the more his thoughts dimmed and fuzzed at the edges. He rubbed at his arms and wished he was in more than just his shorts and T-shirt. It wasn't the warmth he wanted, but the security of being wrapped tight. He peered into the dark stretching from the path. It was a forest, Twig



decided, a very thick, very dark, very foresty forest. Every so often, a branch would shuffle in the breeze and a leaf would catch in the twinkle of the lights. Twig imagined he could hear the rustle of branches being pushed aside, the snuffle of something lurking.

His head throbbed. What was it that had happened, exactly? He reached around to rub the pain from the back of his head and his hand came away bloodied. There had been something . . . It was silver and pointing and he'd known how dangerous it was, to be pointed at like that with . . . what was it? Twig could remember the laugh, cold and iced and hollow, that had sent shivers down his spine. The eyes he couldn't look at. The *clap. clap. clap.*

Another light fizzed into life, its bright red arrow pointing forward. 'OK. This way it is,' Twig said out loud, and was surprised by the dullness of his voice. Like he was being quietened. Everything seemed quietened. Even his footsteps along the path were just the whisper of a step.

There were more signs now. Twig slowed to read each one and to touch the letters. He liked the feel of something real and solid under his fingertips.

**BE WELCOMED AT OUR WELCOME  
CENTRE! 2 MILES**

**KEEP TO THE PATH!**

**YOU ARE SAFE AND HAPPY!**

**GOLDEN GATES AHEAD!**

**LEAVE YOUR TROUBLES BEHIND!**

**EVERYTHING IS FINE!**

**STAY ON THE PATH!**

**EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE DROP-OFF POINT  
– ALL BAGS TO BE LEFT HERE**

**FOREST TRAIL CLOSED – ENTRY PROHIBITED**

**DO NOT FEED THE BANSHEES**

**IT IS ALL SO LOVELY HERE. JUST PERFECT.**

Some signs were nailed on to wooden stumps, others lit in bright lights like the signs down the High Street and casinos where Twig and the Beasts would scout for dropped coins and open pockets—

*‘Watch it!’ and hands are reaching and  
someone is yelling and the coppers are  
pointing and . . .*

But the memory was like seeing something underwater, all vague and choppy and not quite there.

It made him a bit panicky, not being able to remember, but as soon as he thought that, another feeling washed over him, whispering through his mind, *Everything is so lovely here. Keep walking. You have nothing to worry about.*

‘I have nothing to worry about,’ Twig said, and kept walking. The further he walked, the lighter the sky became, like he was walking his way to morning. He focused on walking towards the light, and with each step, he felt his spirits lift, as if the light from the sky was seeping inside him. By the time he reached the **WELCOME CENTRE – 1.5 MILES** sign, it seemed that nothing really mattered any more. Even the forest didn’t seem so sinister. Twig paused to admire the brilliant swirling green of a leaf, fallen on the path, and watched as a line of tiny stick-figure people weaved their way across the cobbled stones and into the forest. They were like little drawings come to life. They hummed a happy sort of tune as they walked, and each one carried an assortment of bits and pieces on its head or back. Buttons, a ring, an ancient-looking bell. One had tied a string to an old rusted **MEETING SPOT** sign and was heaving it along the ground, inching its way slowly forward. The smallest of the figures turned to Twig and waved a little stick-figure wave. The kind of wave one gives an old friend.

That was when the *thing* saw Twig. Flying overhead, a darkened patch against the light blue of the sky. It had

been looking for the boy. Searching. And now it had him in its sights, it would not lose him again. It circled, closer and closer. And just as Twig started to walk again along the path, the thing clicked its beak and swooped.