

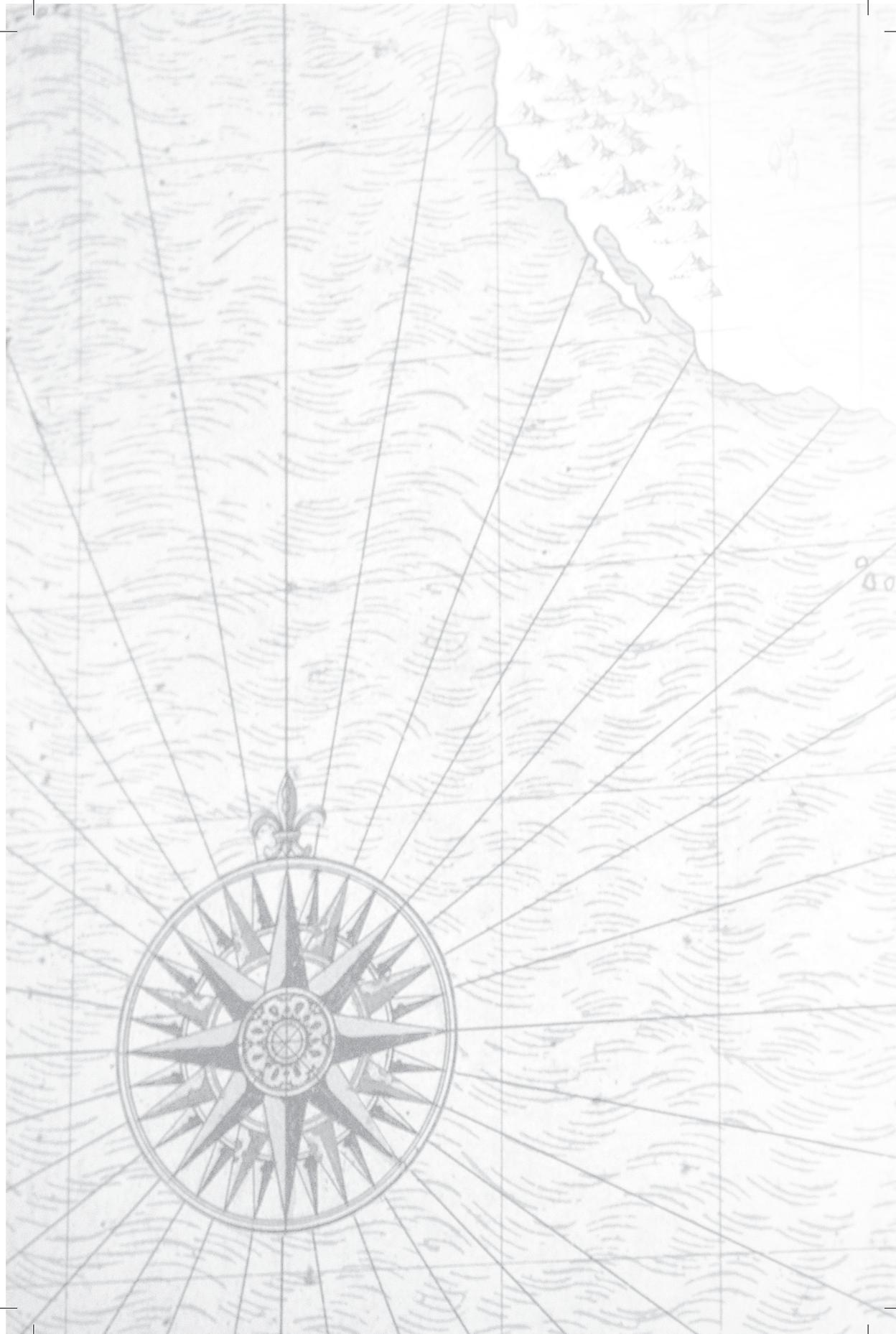
What if the fantasy worlds you imagine

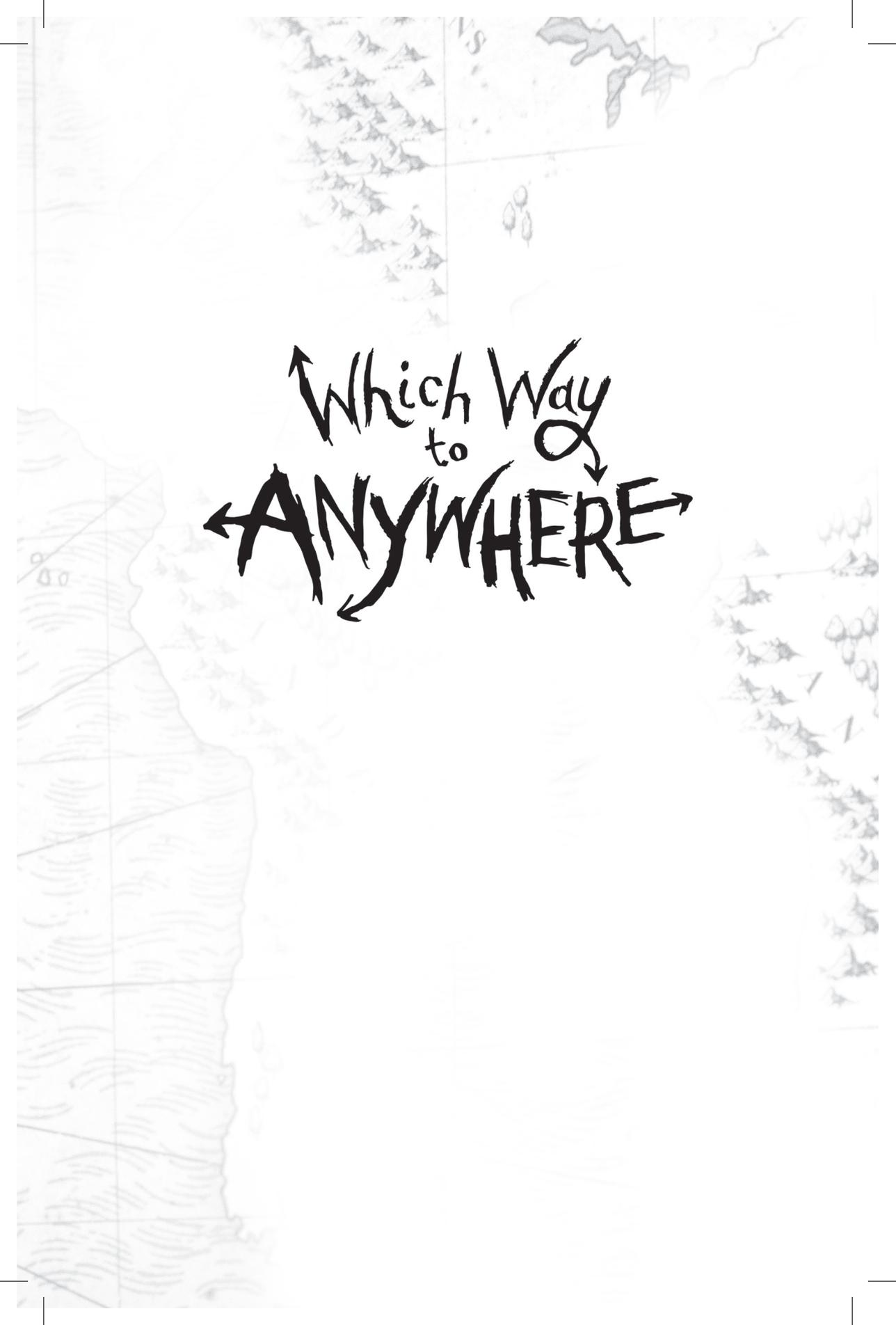
The maps you draw and re-draw,

The lands that you shape with forests
And hills, the islands, the seas,

What if they are

REAL?





Which Way
to
ANYWHERE

© This book is dedicated to my wonderful family
Simon, Maisie, Clemmie and Xanny ©
because True Love and Beyond
and Family is Everything

HODDER CHILDREN'S BOOKS

First published in Great Britain in 2022 by
Hodder & Stoughton Limited

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CRESSIDA COWELL



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HODDER

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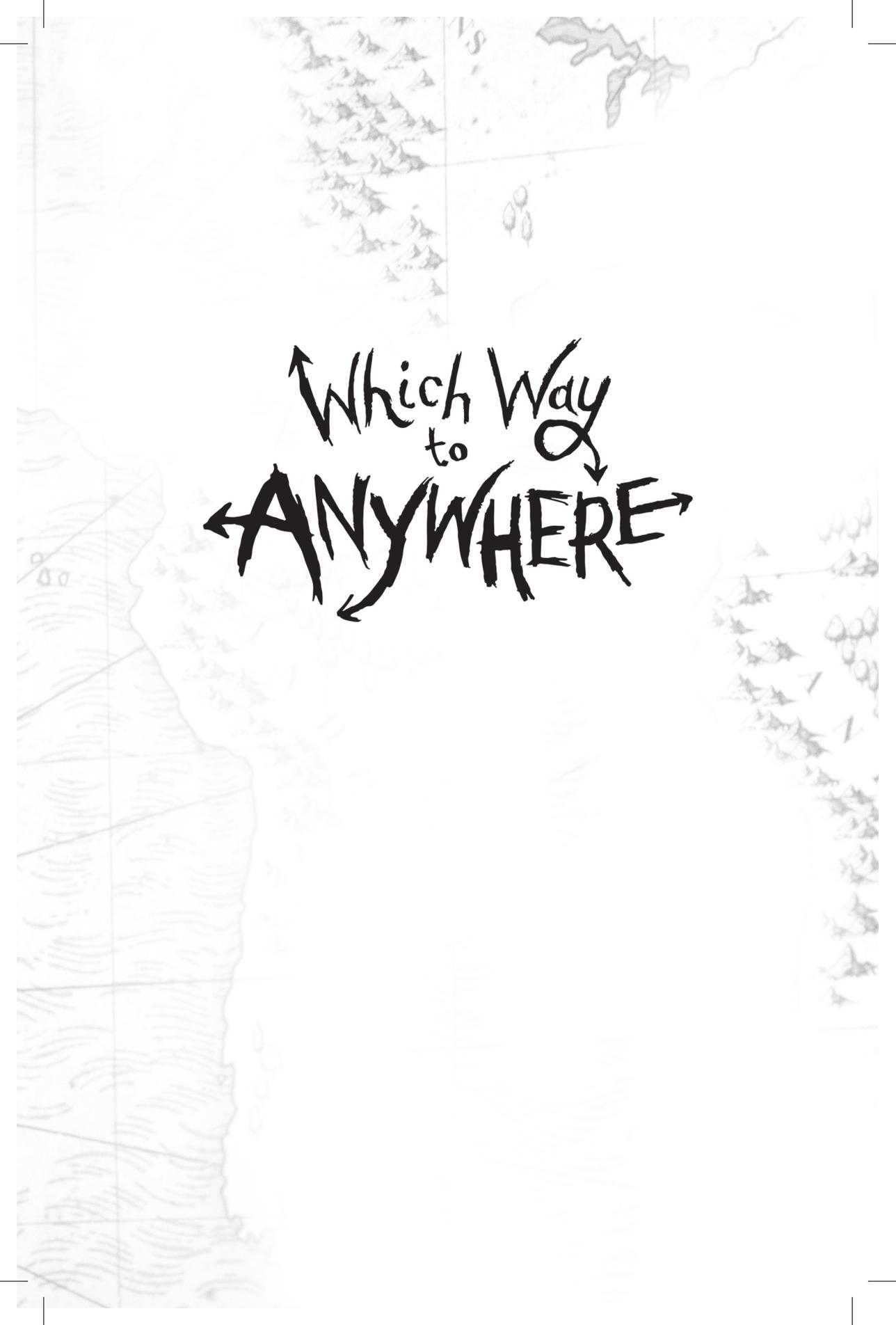
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'The Neverland is "a map of a child's mind" ...'

J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*



'The Neverland is "a map of a child's mind" . . .'

J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan



This is a story with four heroes,
Who will be your favourite?



Ka O'Hero



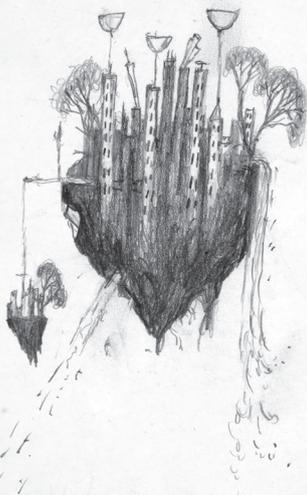
Izabird
O'Hero

Theo Smith



Mabel
Smith



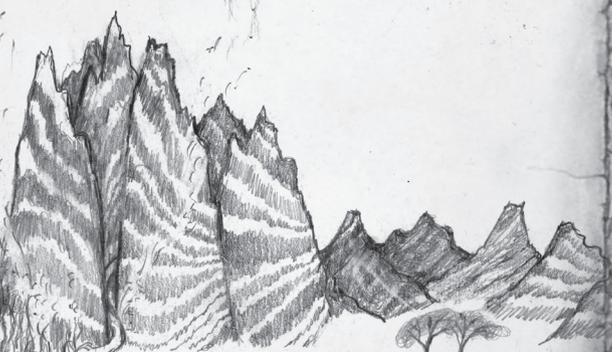


GRATE SILKLESS

DESERT

the world of

EXCELSIAR



The Sea of Cress

THE FORREST
of the
OBHO RRARGAST



THE
WATER
FALL

Beware!!

The Prison
of the
Obhorragast
(Beast)

NO MAN'S LAND

Spotted Lake





I am the Storymaker.

I have great dark wings that can fly like a bird through time and space and galaxies.

I have eyes that see into people's hearts.

Climb on my back and fly with me, child, but get a good hold of my neck, for I fly SWIFT.

Black holes do not scare ME.

I can shrink to the size of the head of a pin. I can grow vaster than the universe.

Hold tight as I jump from planet to planet.

See my cloak of stars!

How bright it is. How dazzling.

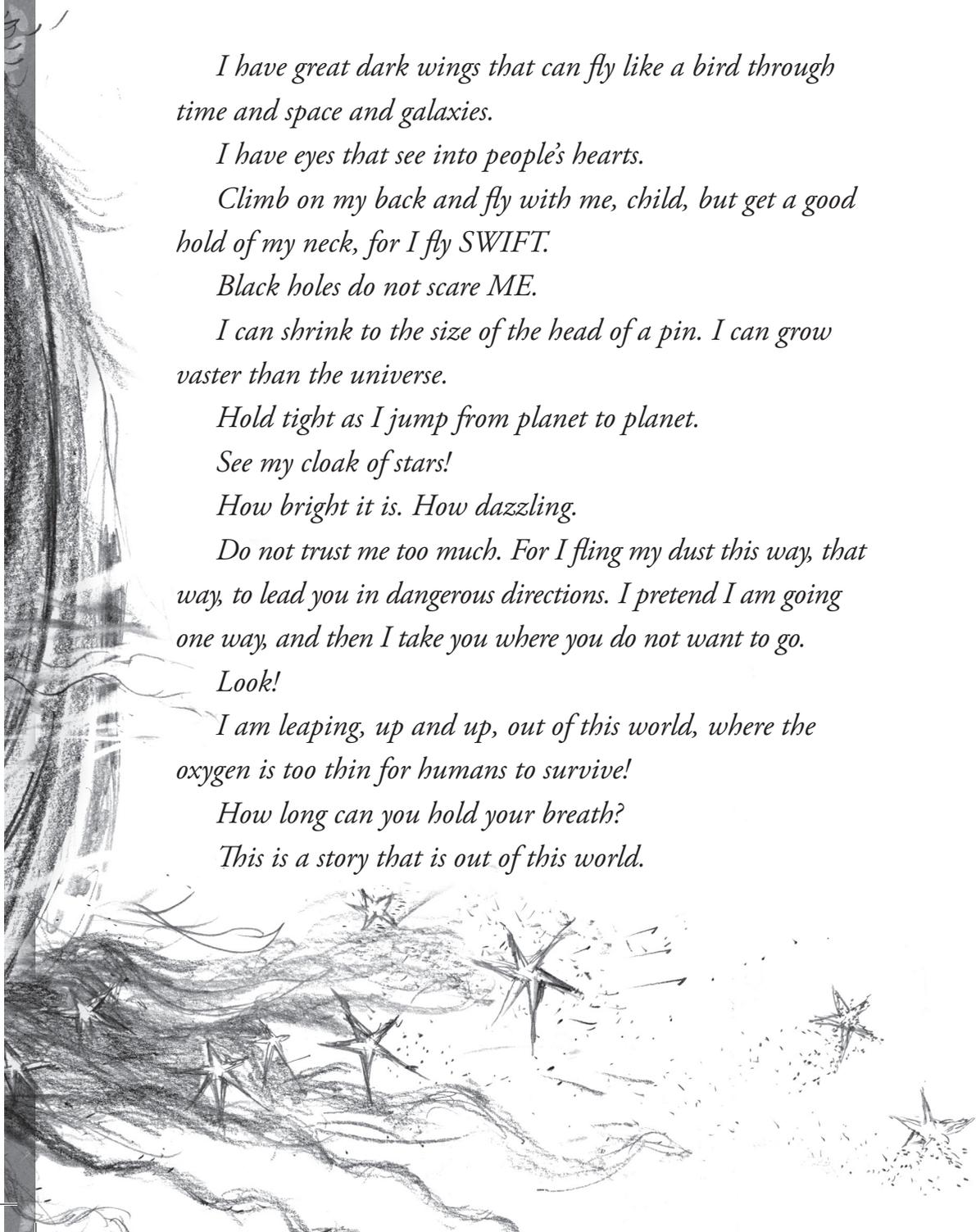
Do not trust me too much. For I fling my dust this way, that way, to lead you in dangerous directions. I pretend I am going one way, and then I take you where you do not want to go.

Look!

I am leaping, up and up, out of this world, where the oxygen is too thin for humans to survive!

How long can you hold your breath?

This is a story that is out of this world.



This is a
story that is
**OUT OF THIS
WORLD**

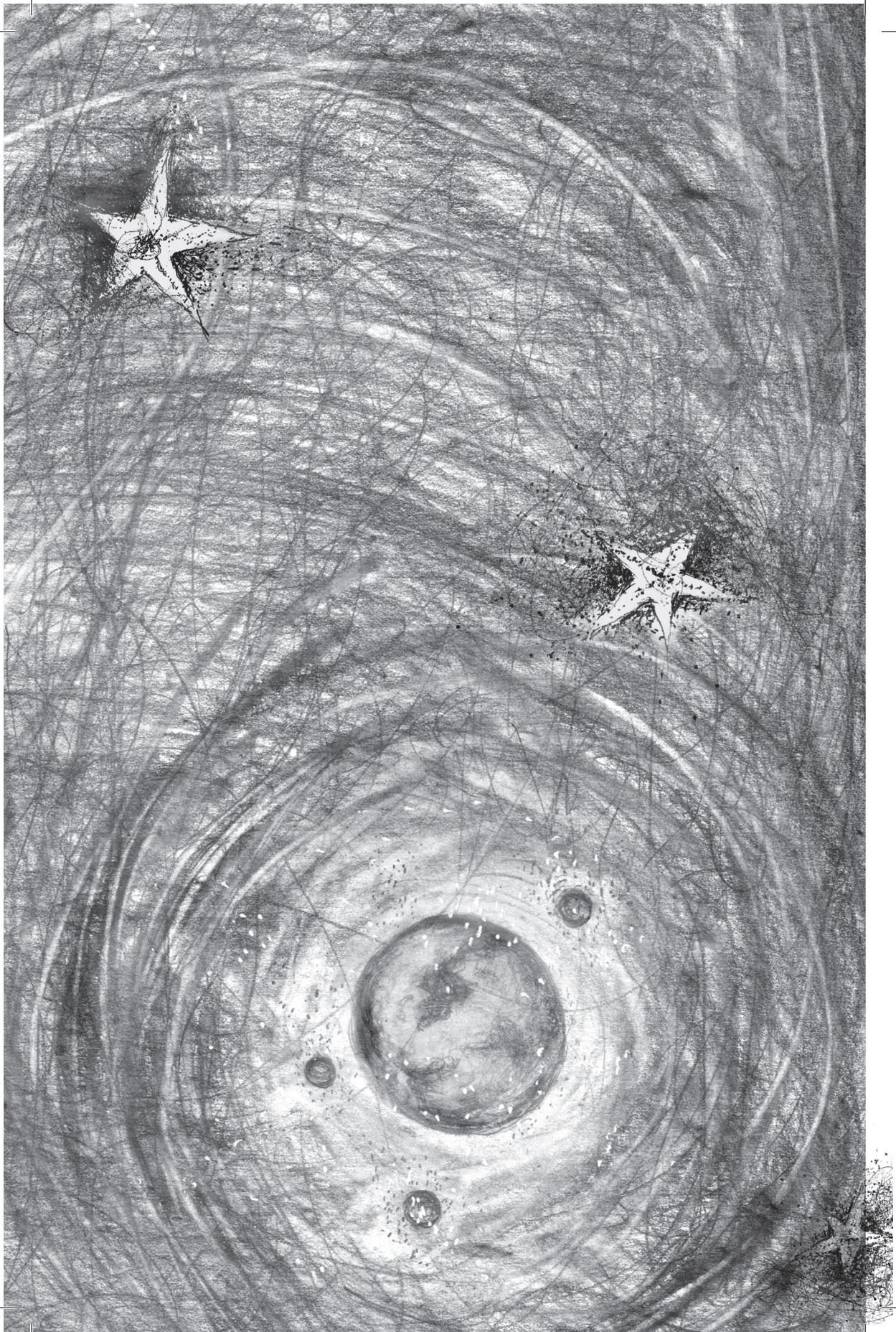
So... come with me



If you dare, and take the

*Which Way to
Anywhere...*

*Now, come with me if you dare
And enter a world you have never seen before
Through the ragged 'X' made by the
swordstick of a pirate
Can you see that world shining from
the other side of the page?
What you thought was solid melts away
And something different is left behind
Another map behind the map you thought
was there before?
There could be buried treasure or a grave
for all your dreams
You will be the same, but someone else entirely
Pause a moment
And imagine what that world might be like...*



IMAGINE...

Imagine somewhere unlike anywhere your human eyes have ever seen before.

I know this will be hard for you because it is difficult to imagine any other world than your own, particularly if you are a grown-up and your imagination has become stiff and hard and slow. So remember what it was once like to be a child, if you must, to help you imagine this other world. This other planet.

This planet is called Excelsiar and it has three moons: one pale orange, one a beautiful turquoise, one purple and green. The sun is redder than your own sun, and many of the mountain ranges are striped, almost as if they are made out of candy. And, oh, the jungle in that world! A jungle so green it makes your eyes ache, with rivers that burn and smoke.

Most of this planet is covered in an ocean that can be black as ink, and red as wine, and the creatures in that ocean glow starlike in the glorious darkness as they swim lazily through the seas. Many of these animals you will recognise from worlds all across the universe: whales, porpoises, jellyfish . . . but in the enormity of this particular dark ocean, the jellyfish can be large as islands, drifting ominously with their tentacles hanging down.

There are great continents with land masses that are

either sinister wastelands of dust-blown desert or tangled jungles brimming with life. Every now and then the forest is punctuated by the stripy mountains that climb up into the violet clouds, and there are floating cities built on gases, populated by all sorts of creatures that perhaps you thought were just myths. The skyscrapers and the trees have twisted round each other in spirals, the roads can be rivers all on fire, the buildings are growing, very slightly, every day, like big bamboos.

Now, calm your breathing, for there are truly terrible things in this planet's jungle who hunt by the smell of fear, and they hate human beings with a hungry, bloody hatred. They can sniff out fear from a distance of several miles, and you do not want to draw the attention of these creatures. You do not want them to sense that you are here. The instant you find yourself becoming anxious, the sweat beginning to form on your forehead, the first flutterings in your stomach, make your heart slow down.

HOLD YOUR BREATH.

Are you ready?

Hang on to the sides of this book very tightly.

Sharpen your wits.

Open your eyes, clean those smears off your glasses, prick up your ears.

Cling tight to the hairs on the back of my neck.

Hold your breath.

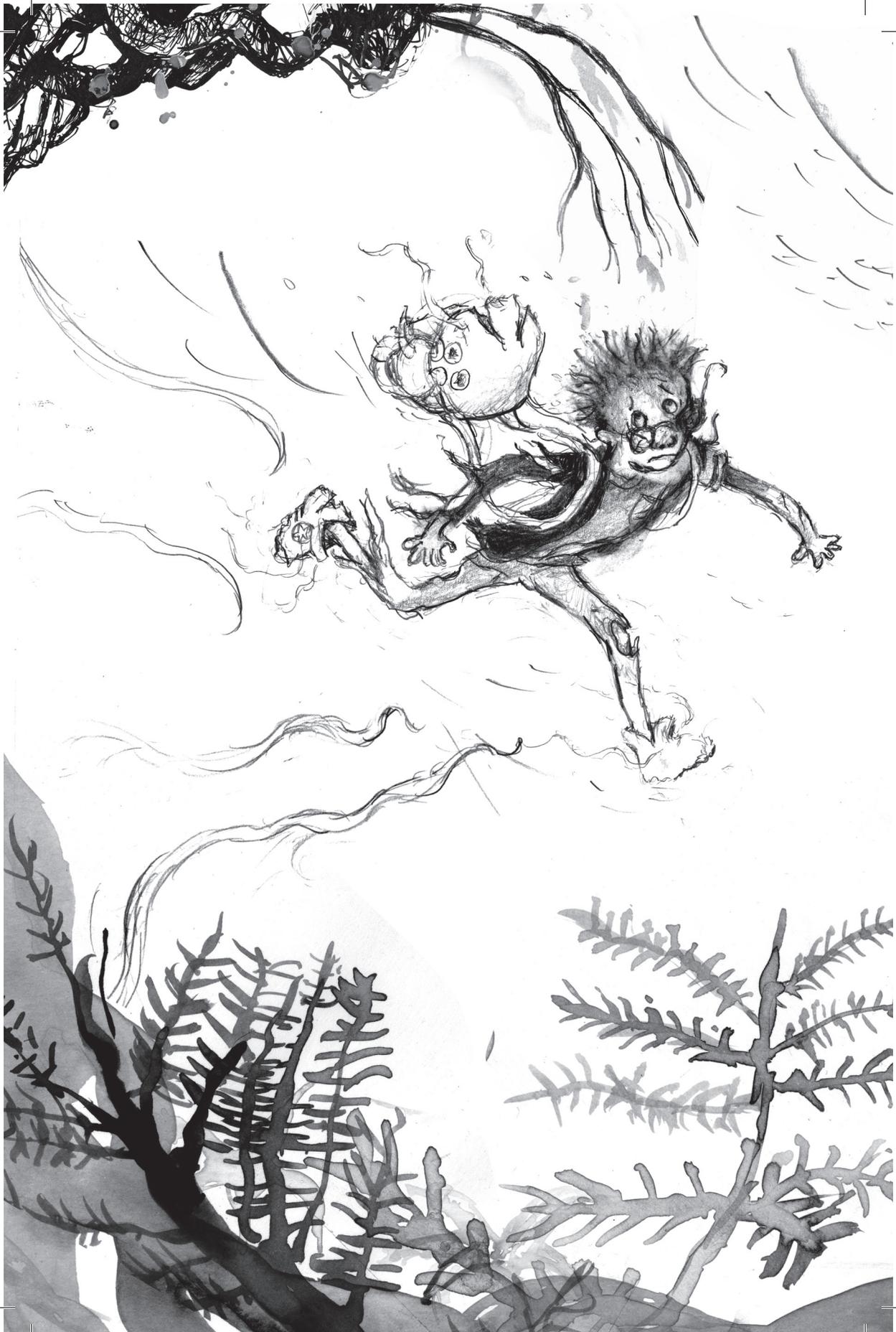


We're going in.



↑ part
One →







Chapter 1 The Hunted Boy

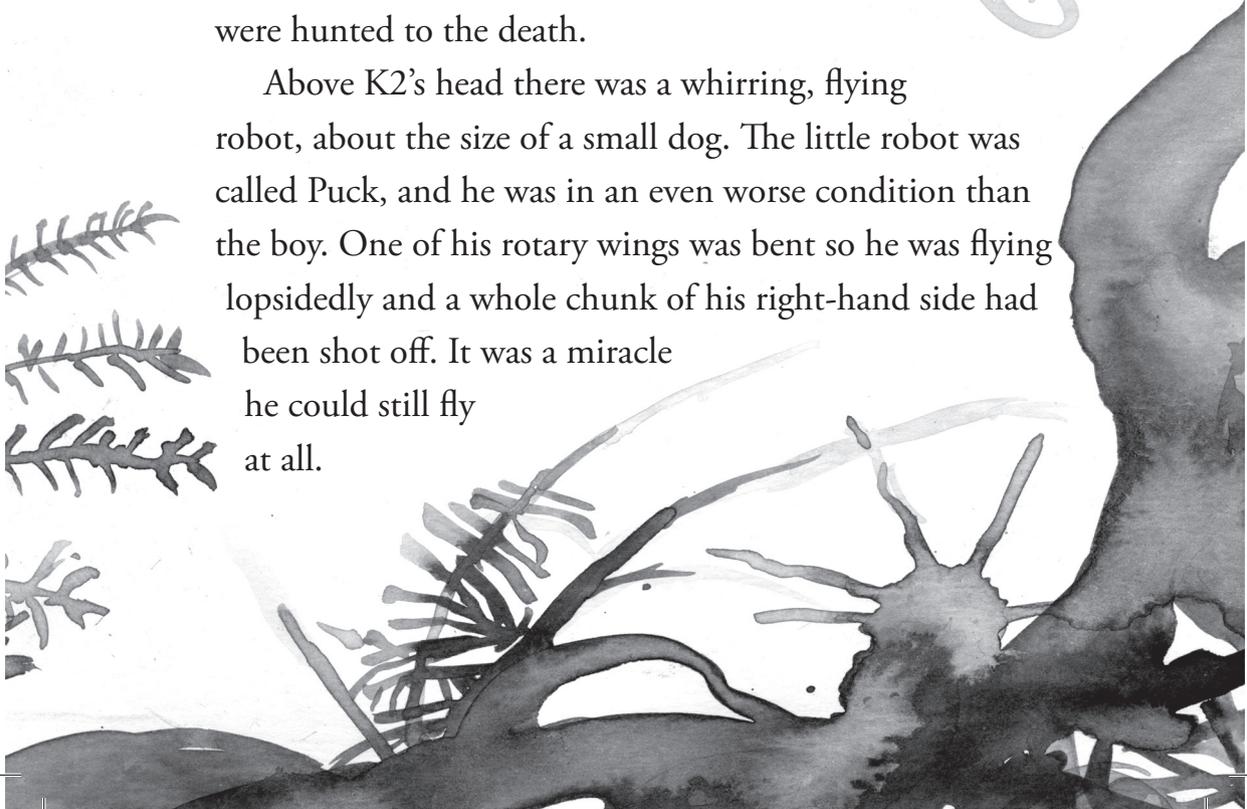
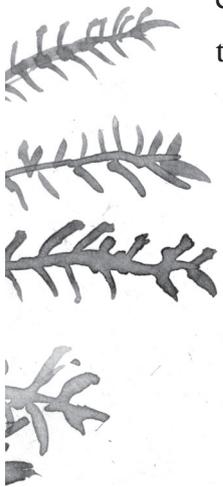
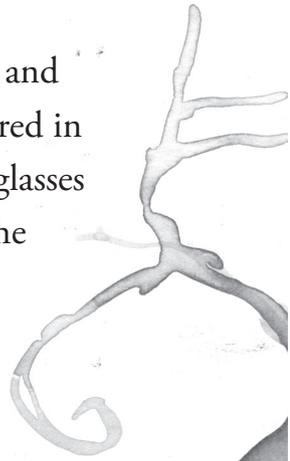
On the planet with three moons, a young human boy was running through the choke of a vividly tangled jungle, heart pounding, chest heaving with sobs, absolutely petrified.

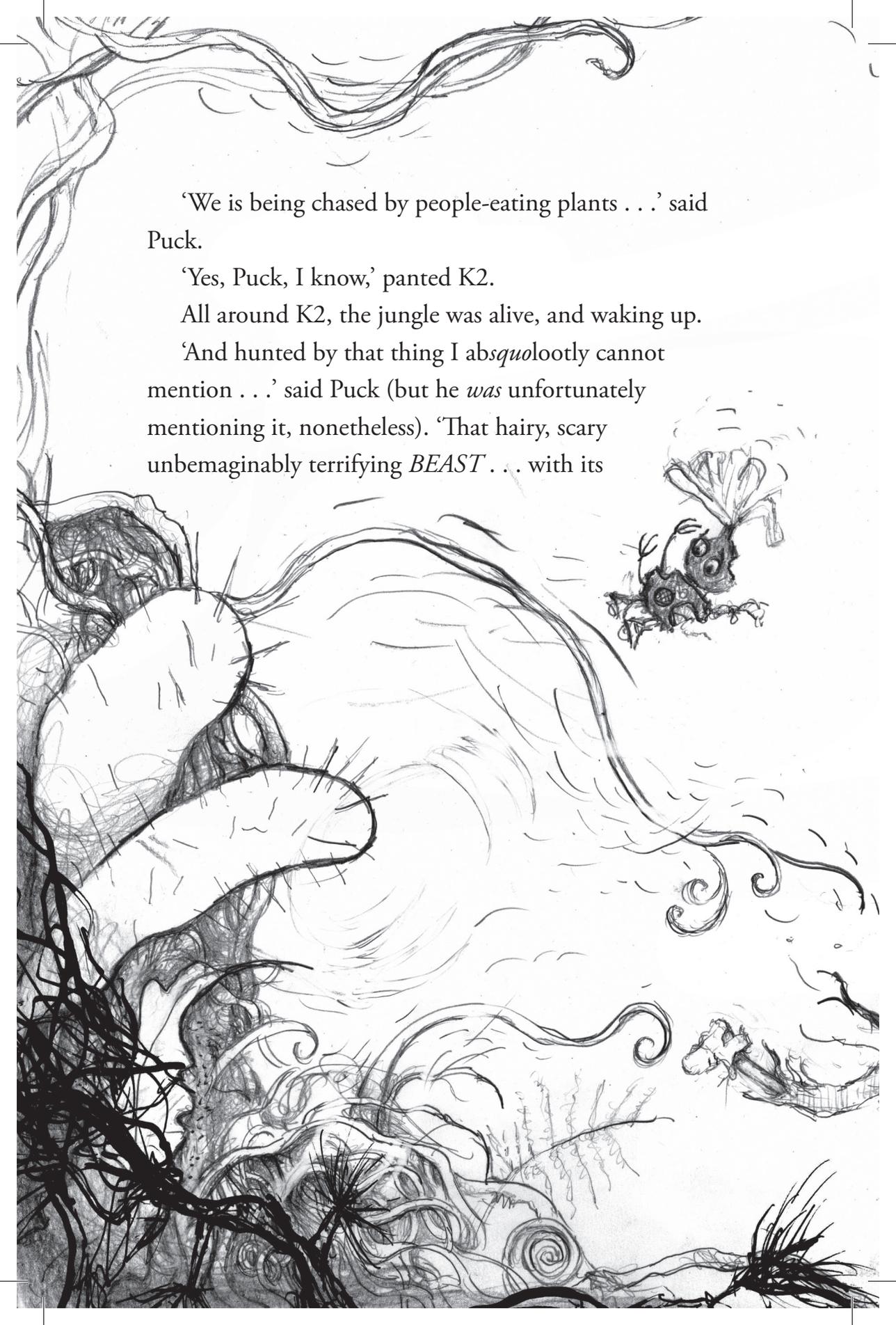
The boy was called K2 (pronounced 'Kay Too'), and he was rather ordinary-looking, thin as a twig, covered in grazes, his clothes in rags and ruins about him, his glasses so scratched and broken he could barely see where he was going.

K2 was right to be so terrified.

For *this* was a planet where human beings were hunted to the death.

Above K2's head there was a whirring, flying robot, about the size of a small dog. The little robot was called Puck, and he was in an even worse condition than the boy. One of his rotary wings was bent so he was flying lopsidedly and a whole chunk of his right-hand side had been shot off. It was a miracle he could still fly at all.





‘We is being chased by people-eating plants . . .’ said Puck.

‘Yes, Puck, I know,’ panted K2.

All around K2, the jungle was alive, and waking up.

‘And hunted by that thing I *absquolootly* cannot mention . . .’ said Puck (but he *was* unfortunately mentioning it, nonetheless). ‘That hairy, scary unbemaginally terrifying *BEAST* . . . with its



grabbers and its stingers and its big . . . what's the white pierce-y unloving bits on the ends of the gnashing things called?'

'Teeth,' gasped K2. 'But *please* don't talk about it, Puck! That Beast and those others all hunt by the smell of fear, and the more you *talk* about them, the harder it is to stay calm . . .'

But K2's stomach had already liquefied with terror, and the vegetation must have caught the smell of his fear, for nearby vines unwrapped themselves from tree branches, reaching out long tendril fingers, growing in front of K2's eyes.

'Is . . . there . . . anything . . . you . . . can . . . do?' cried K2, as one long curling python of a vine whipped out languorously and tripped K2 up. He just about squirmed out of its grip, staggered to his feet, and ran on, limping even more than he had been before.

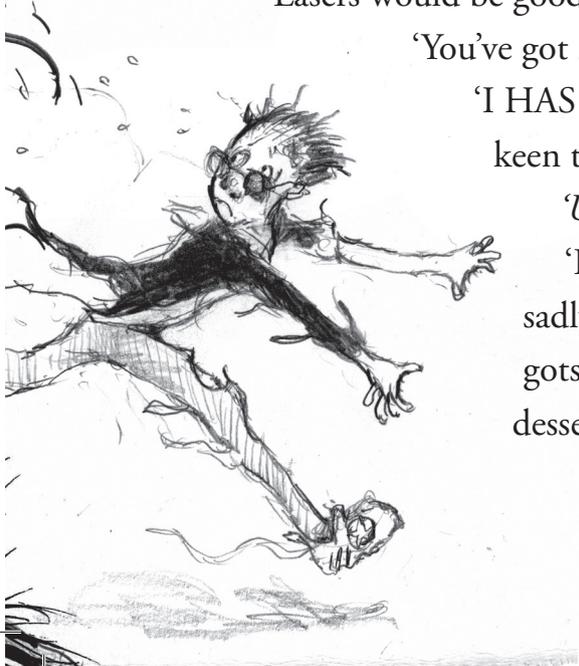
'Lasers would be good!' said Puck, enthusiastically.

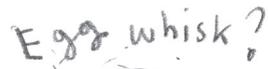
'You've got *lasers*?' said K2 in excitement.

'I HAS got lasers!' said Puck, always keen to please.

'*Use the lasers, Puck!*' squealed K2.

'I *has* got lasers,' Puck admitted sadly, 'but I's afraid's my lasers gots jammed up with sand in that dessert.'





Egg whisk?

I think he means 'desert', thought K2, because that would make more sense.

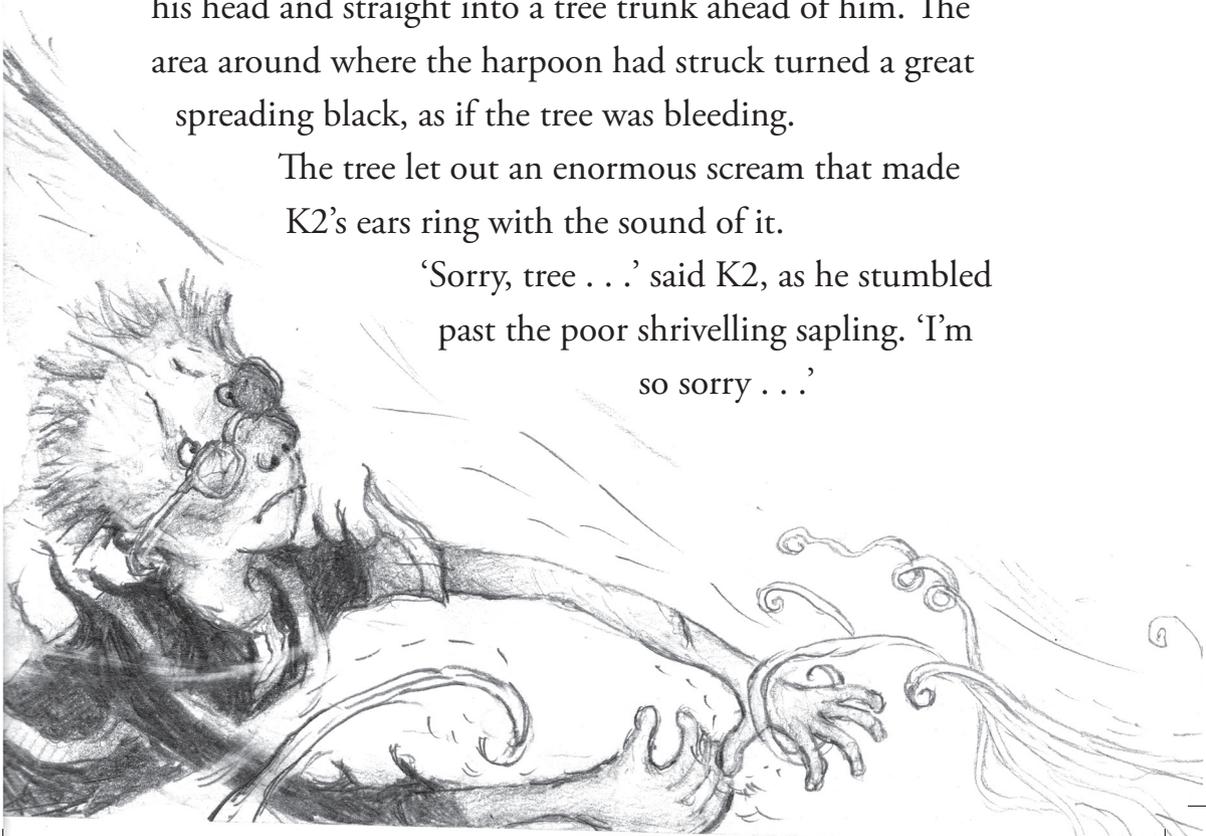
'Let me see . . . what's I squat in here instead?' Puck put out a little robot arm with an array of attachments, like a more sophisticated version of a Swiss army knife. 'Fork? . . . *No* . . . Tin-opener? . . . *No* . . . Ice-cream scoop? . . . *No* . . . Egg whisk? . . . *No*.'

WHEEOOOOOOOOOWWWWWW!

K2 ducked just in time as a great harpoon shot above his head and straight into a tree trunk ahead of him. The area around where the harpoon had struck turned a great spreading black, as if the tree was bleeding.

The tree let out an enormous scream that made K2's ears ring with the sound of it.

'Sorry, tree . . .' said K2, as he stumbled past the poor shrivelling sapling. 'I'm so sorry . . .'





'I's sorry, too, K2!' wailed Puck. 'I's got nuffink helpful!'

'Don't worry, Puck, that's not your fault, you've done your best . . .'

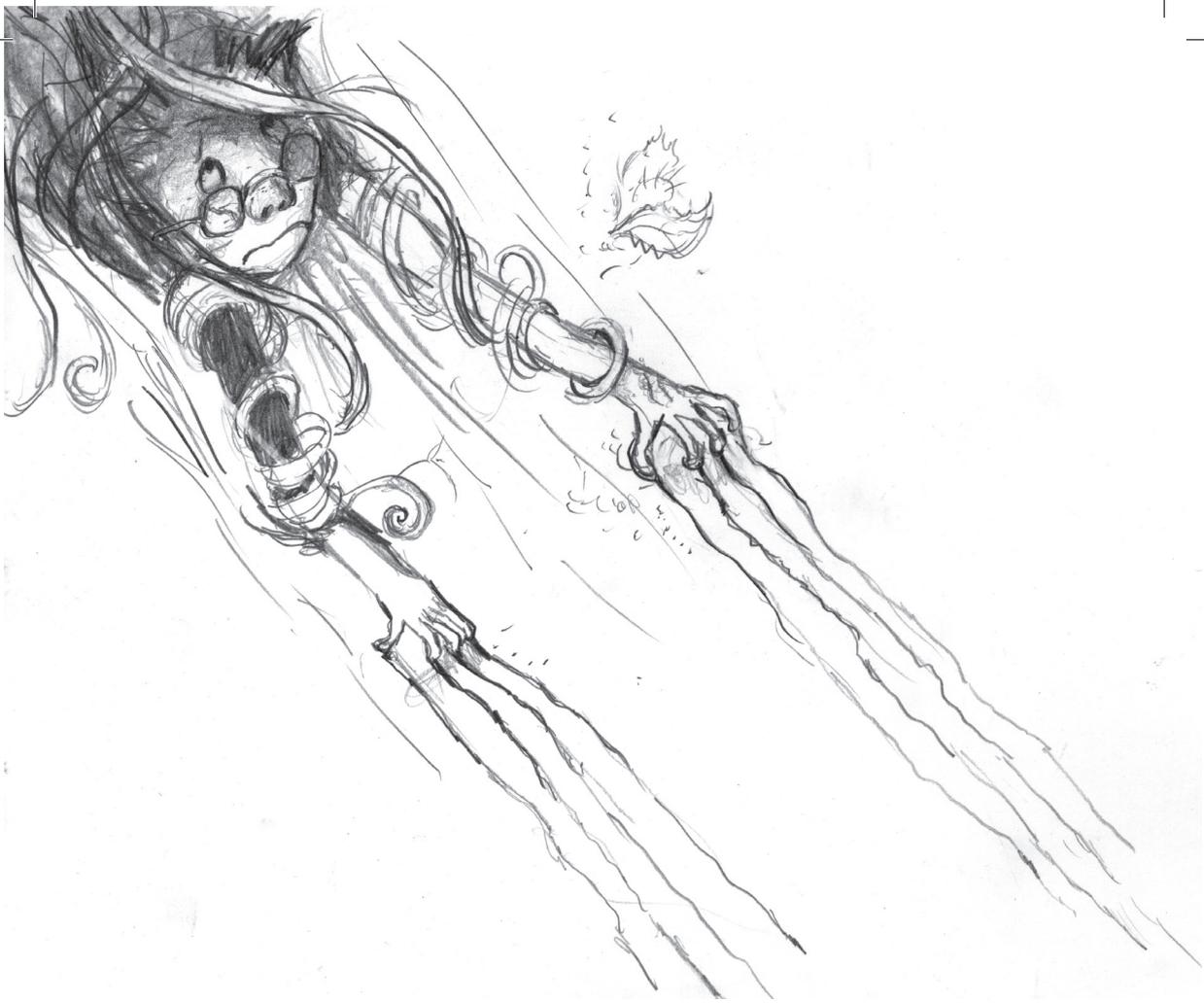
K2 was in Big Trouble, but he knew that his robot was in dreadful danger too.

'You hide in my rucksack,' he recommended. 'They hate robots nearly as much as human beings. Go in there, and keep quiet and maybe they won't find you. That's an order, Puck!'

The little robot dived down into K2's rucksack, for robots have to obey orders, even if they don't want to.

K2 could smell the Beast that was chasing him now, a rich, hot stink that reminded him vaguely of the scent of lion, for he had breathed it once before when he visited a zoo. But this was a far more powerful, angry stench and it exploded the memory of the poor weak reek that came from the caged lion he had inhaled before, and replaced that faint echo with something far more scary.

All around K2 the trees were reaching back their branches to comfort the stricken, poisoned tree, murmuring soothing noises, and he knew that underneath the ground where he could not see, they were



stretching out their roots through the sluggish soil, and at any moment, the roots would push through that mud and vegetation that was already bulging up in leaf-quakes underneath him, and catch him by the ankle . . .

And if they caught him, the Beast would be on him.

WROOOOOOUUUUAAAEERRRRR!

The astonishing roar reverberated around the jungle and around K2 as if he was being turned over like a big ocean wave, and as the sound drummed right into the heart of his body, he no longer knew whether he was running *away* from the Beast or *towards* it.

And the Beast caught him.

Or more precisely, another great tendril of vine came licking around K2's ankle, tripping him up, and although he shook it off, he stumbled, and that slight hesitation enabled another tendril to get a good hold of his other foot, and he was tipped over on to the ground and in five seconds flat, wrapped all around with vines and stems as thick as curling ropes . . .

. . . and dragged across the jungle floor to face the Beast.



No wonder this boy's mother was getting such terrible headaches...

Perhaps this was a little
too scary an opening . . .

And I've just realised, it isn't really the start of the story.

So save your very reasonable, heart-beating, stone-cold terror for a moment, for we will not carry on in that dangerous world right now. We will wait until you are more prepared.

I'll just leave K2 being dragged to who knows WHAT dreadful fate, while I go back and explain how and why he was so very far from home in the first place.

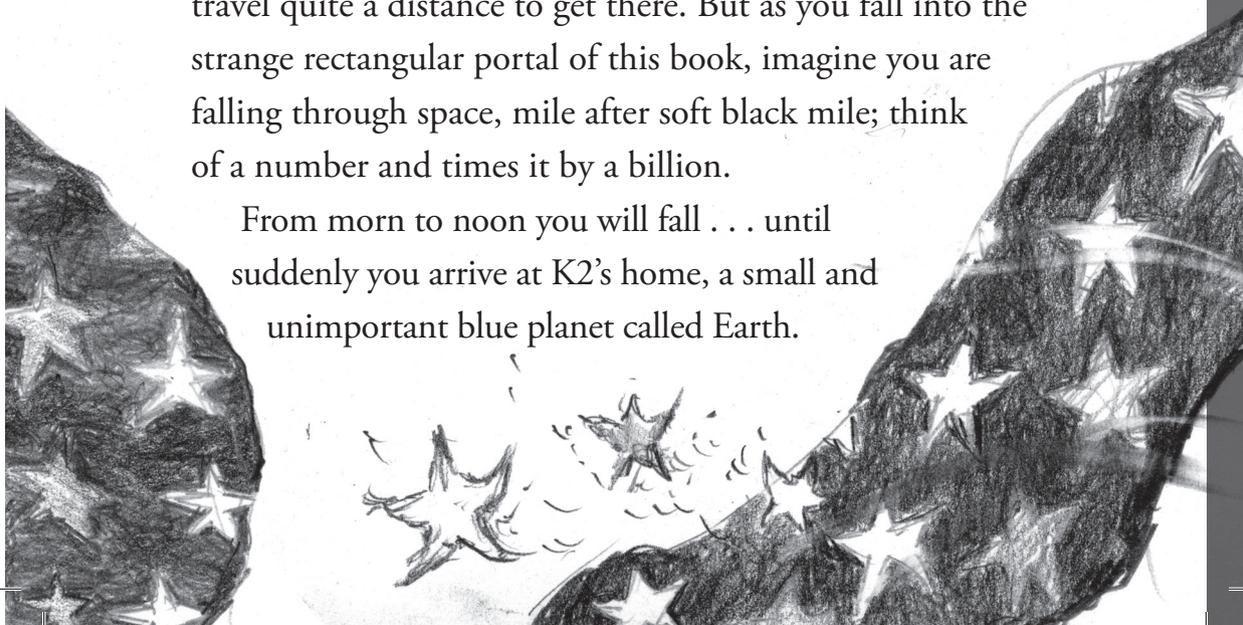
For K2 was a long, long, LONG way from home.

Let me just check my tablet, where I have the official guide to all the worlds in all the universe . . . yes I'm right.

Sooooooooooooooooo many longs, there isn't room to put them all here.

I do not know where you are, dear reader; you could be literally *anywhere* in the numberless galaxies, so this planet may be very familiar to you or you may have to travel quite a distance to get there. But as you fall into the strange rectangular portal of this book, imagine you are falling through space, mile after soft black mile; think of a number and times it by a billion.

From morn to noon you will fall . . . until suddenly you arrive at K2's home, a small and unimportant blue planet called Earth.



The official Guide to all the worlds in all the universe

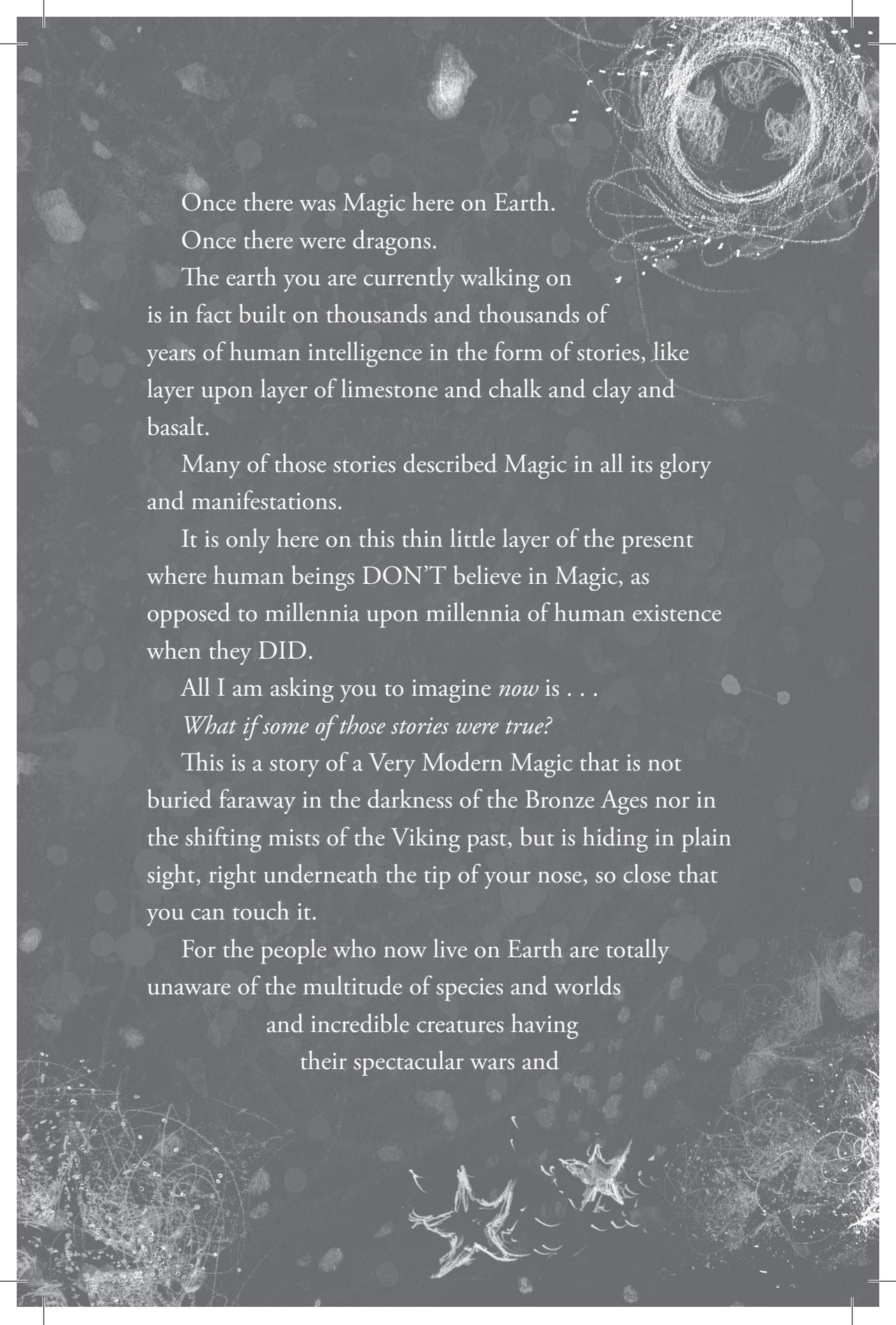
UNIVERSAL GOVERNMENT ALTERNATIVE ATLAS



PLANET EARTH.
ALL MAGIC HAS
LEFT THIS PLANET.
OR HAS IT?

OFFICE CARRIER: GRIMM BOUNTY HUNTER





Once there was Magic here on Earth.
Once there were dragons.

The earth you are currently walking on
is in fact built on thousands and thousands of
years of human intelligence in the form of stories, like
layer upon layer of limestone and chalk and clay and
basalt.

Many of those stories described Magic in all its glory
and manifestations.

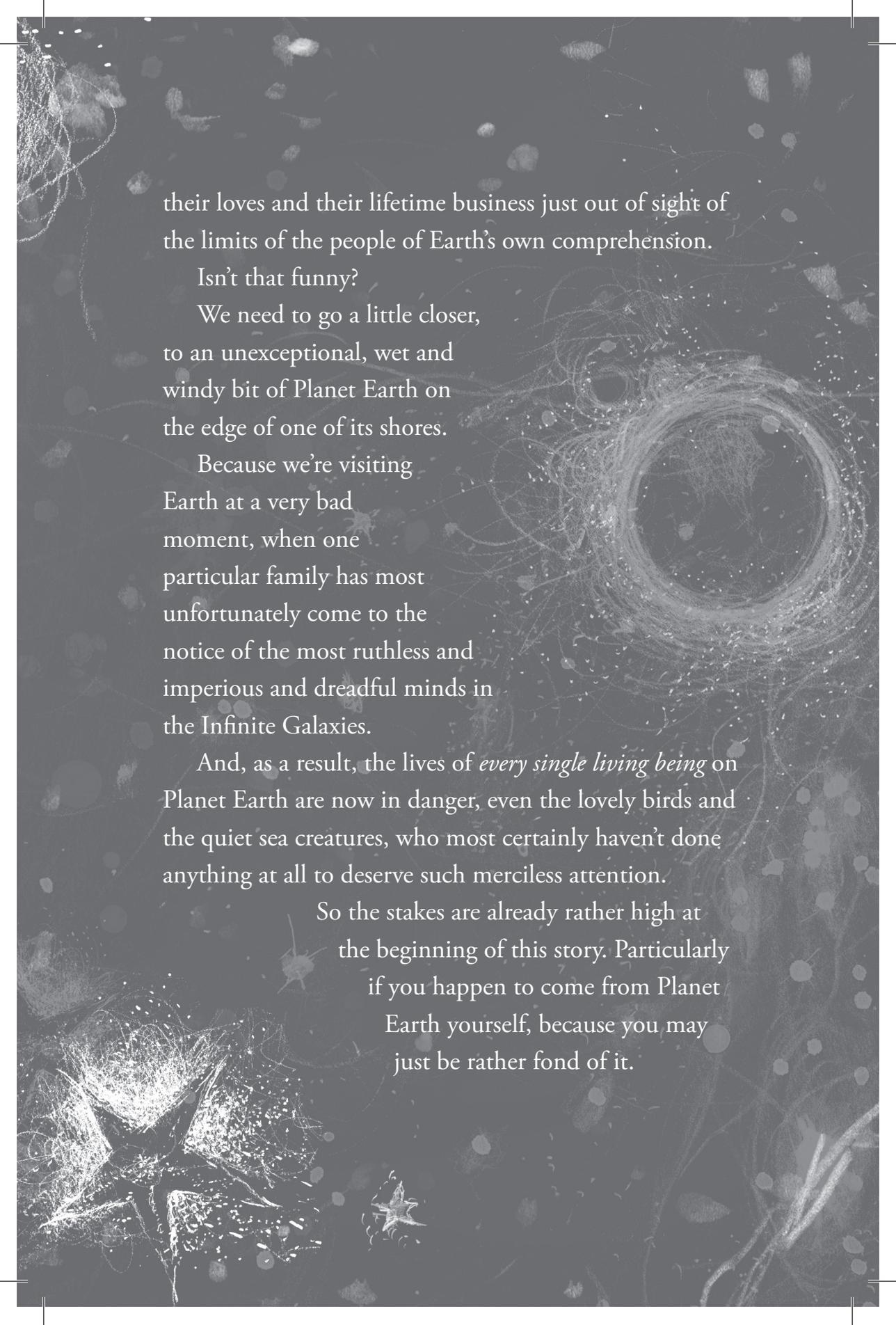
It is only here on this thin little layer of the present
where human beings DON'T believe in Magic, as
opposed to millennia upon millennia of human existence
when they DID.

All I am asking you to imagine *now* is . . .

What if some of those stories were true?

This is a story of a Very Modern Magic that is not
buried faraway in the darkness of the Bronze Ages nor in
the shifting mists of the Viking past, but is hiding in plain
sight, right underneath the tip of your nose, so close that
you can touch it.

For the people who now live on Earth are totally
unaware of the multitude of species and worlds
and incredible creatures having
their spectacular wars and



their loves and their lifetime business just out of sight of the limits of the people of Earth's own comprehension.

Isn't that funny?

We need to go a little closer, to an unexceptional, wet and windy bit of Planet Earth on the edge of one of its shores.

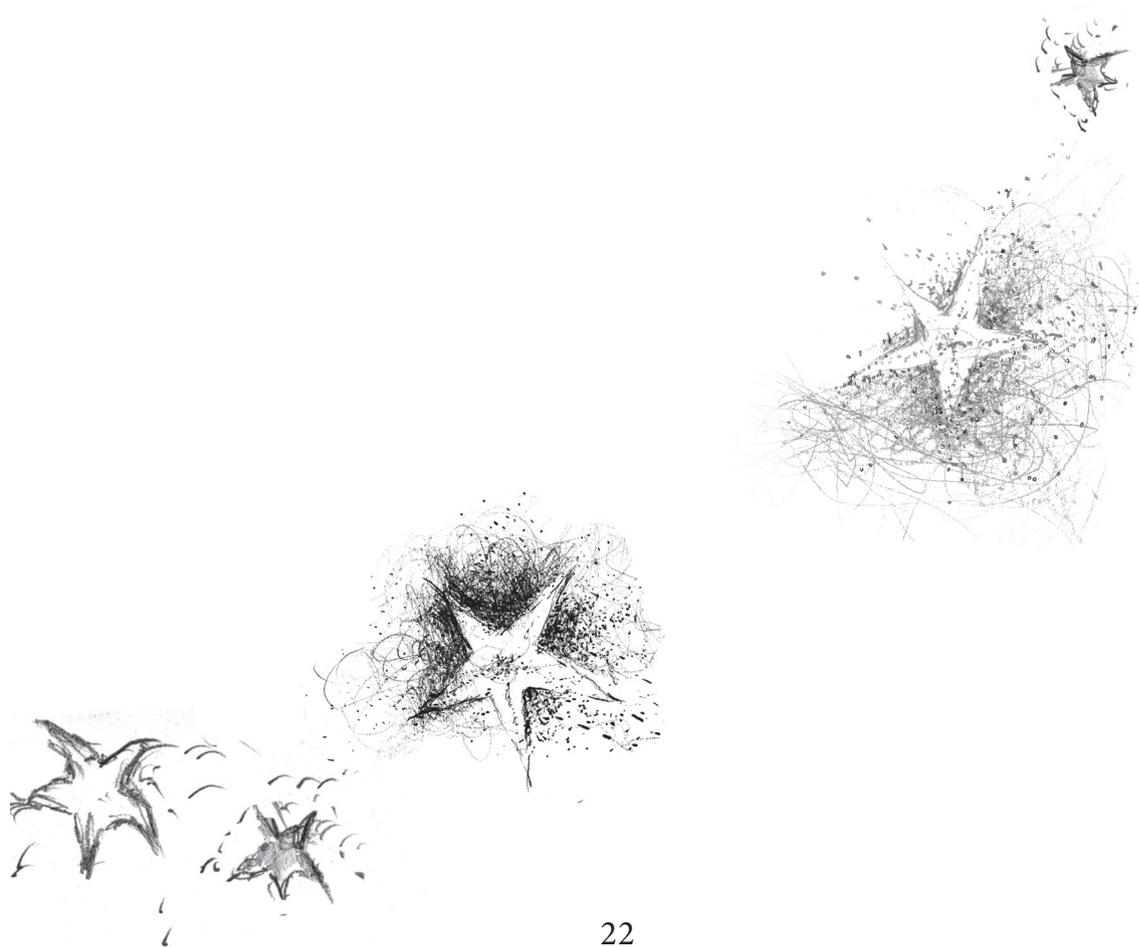
Because we're visiting Earth at a very bad moment, when one particular family has most unfortunately come to the notice of the most ruthless and imperious and dreadful minds in the Infinite Galaxies.

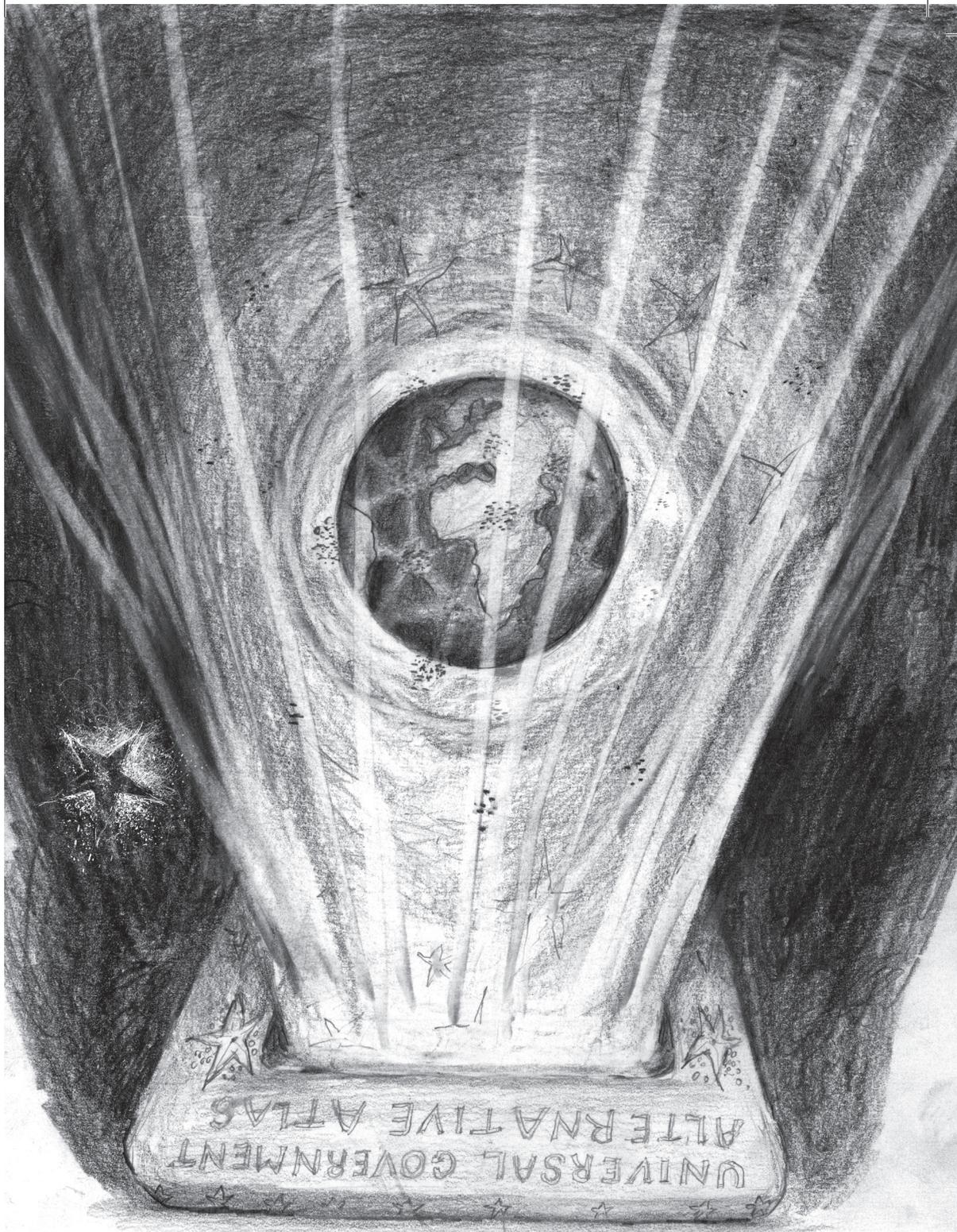
And, as a result, the lives of *every single living being* on Planet Earth are now in danger, even the lovely birds and the quiet sea creatures, who most certainly haven't done anything at all to deserve such merciless attention.

So the stakes are already rather high at the beginning of this story. Particularly if you happen to come from Planet Earth yourself, because you may just be rather fond of it.

So, cling tight to my wings again.
Adjust your thinking caps.
Make brave your heart, make clever your fingers.

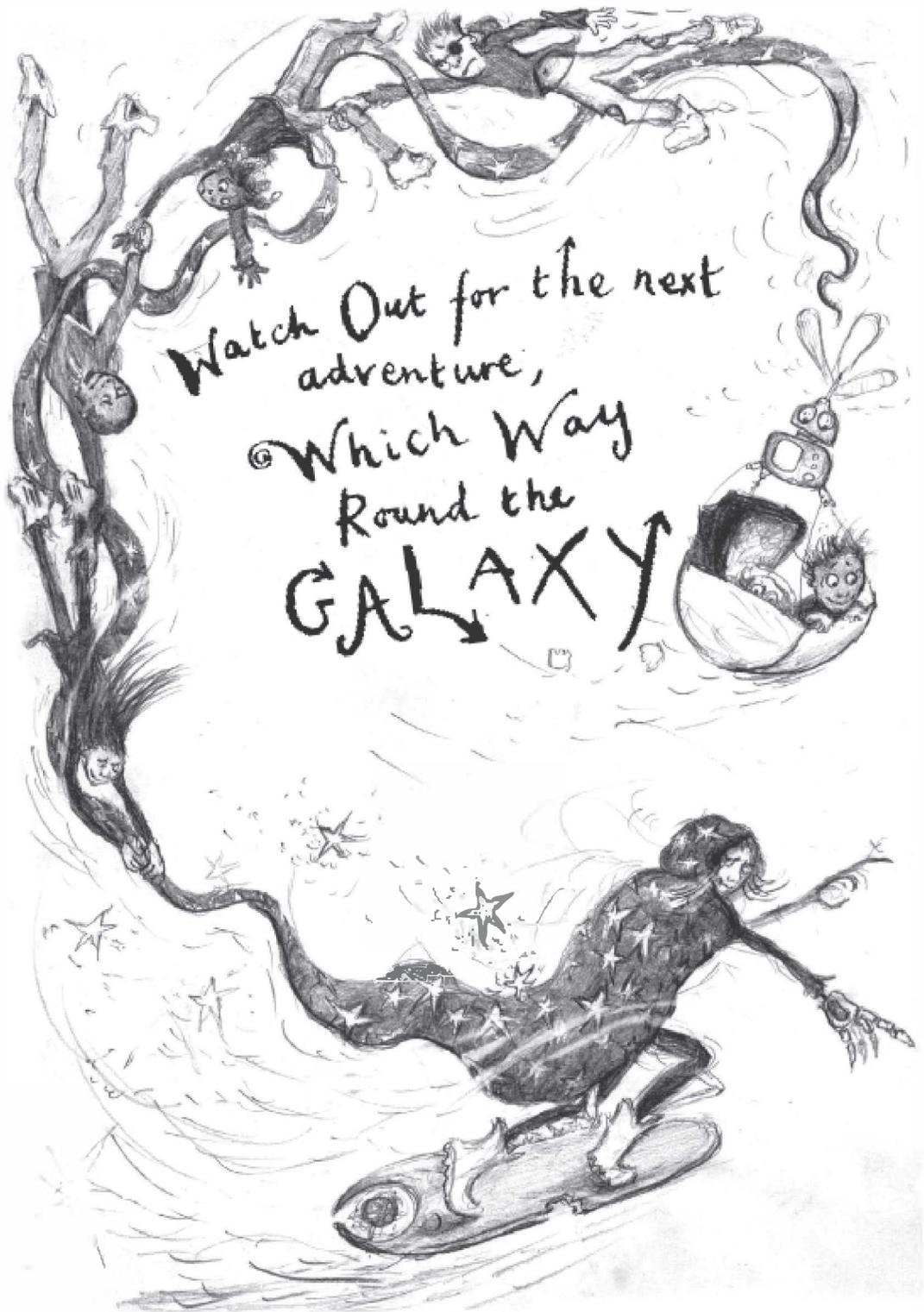
We're going in.





Hold your breath.
We're going in...





Watch Out for the next
adventure,
Which Way
Round the
GALAXY