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Opening extract from

Worlds Explode

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PREVIOUSLY IN DARKMOUTH (AND THE MESS THINGS WERE LEFT IN)

It was, everyone on the Council of Twelve agreed, a bit of a mess.

Actually, it was a *lot* of a mess. In fact, 'mess' understated things a little. It was more of a disaster really. A catastrophe. A complete catastrophe.

It was, everyone on the Council of Twelve eventually agreed, a complete catastrophe.

What was the worst part of the catastrophe? There was so much to choose from.

Darkmouth was the last town left on Earth where Legends of myth still invaded, but Hugo the Great, the only active Legend Hunter left to fight them off, was lost on the Infested Side.

As if that wasn't bad enough – and it was very, very bad – Darkmouth had been left in the hands of his son Finn, a boy still almost eleven months away from his thirteenth birthday when he would become Complete as a Legend Hunter.

Worse yet, this boy was not exactly top of his Legend Hunter class. Which was some achievement given he was the *only* boy in his Legend Hunter class.

Somehow, that wasn't even the end of the mess.

The Twelve had managed to plant a spy in the town. Steve, a Half-Hunter from a long line of Legend Hunters, had never properly hunted until he arrived in Darkmouth. It turned out he had never properly spied either, as his cover was blown by Finn, the very boy he was supposed to be keeping a close eye on.

There should have been a positive in the form of Steve's daughter, Emmie, who not only befriended Finn, but also showed a desire and heart for fighting Legends that the boy lacked. Except it was increasingly clear that her enthusiasm would cause trouble someday – and that day came when she helped a Legend, Broonie the Hogboon, escape back to the Infested Side from which all Legends come.

And then, just to add icing to the whole cake of catastrophe, Darkmouth turned out to be harbouring a traitor. Mr Ernest Glad was supposed to be a Fixer, a helper, a lifelong friend to Hugo. Instead, he was collaborating with the Legends and helped them invade. And he ended up opening a gateway to the Infested Side

and pushing Finn's mother, Clara, through it. Eventually, Clara was rescued by Hugo, but he became trapped in the world of the Legends.

Yes, Finn did shove Mr Glad into the gateway, trapping him and turning him into a million points of light. And yes, he did admittedly defeat a Minotaur and stop an all-out invasion of Legends.

But buildings were destroyed. People were hurt. Every goldfish in Darkmouth disappeared. Hugo the Legend Hunter was gone.

And it would not help matters at all if the boy tried to get him back. No, that would only end in further, final catastrophe.

Or something far worse.

'The Arrival of the Human'
From *The Chronicles of the Sky's Collapse*,
as told by inhabitants of the Infested Side

When the human stepped into this cursed world, the sky changed colour. A gateway had opened from the Promised World. There were two voices, that of a human boy and a man. But when the gateway closed only the man remained and, as the army arrived to capture him, the sky went from its usual bleak grey to an entirely different shade of abysmal grey.

It is true that all of this was witnessed and described by one of the ancient Graeae sisters, and it is also true that it was not her turn with the single eyeball they shared between the three of them. She could sense it, though, she insisted, just as she could sense the advancing army. She had felt their tremor through her only tooth. Just before it fell out.

The army followed the fleeing human across the dead earth. Shimmering armour covered his body, yet by the time the chase was over he had suffered wound after wound until the redness of his flowing blood was vivid against the desolate land where even the soil desires vengeance.

Escaping deep within the scorched forest, the Legend Hunter glanced behind to see if they were

closing on him, only to stumble at the edge of a crater in the earth. He grasped desperately at a petrified branch, but, when it broke, the crack echoed across the land.

The human fell.

The army converged.

Through the wood, creatures of every sort crept forward. Two-headed and goat-backed, serpent-tailed and poison-tongued, scaled and leathery, hairy and fire-scorched. They moved as one, encircling him, howling, snarling, barking, yelping, expressing their bloodlust in a thousand voices.

The human hauled himself to his feet, pain obvious in every fighting breath, and turned, slowly, to take in the full scene and absorb the great futility of his situation. Having done this, he then did something most surprising.

He smiled.

At this time of all times. In this place of all places.

It caused a momentary hesitation, a brief quietening of the army.

What did he know?