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

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Text and illustration copyright
© Cressida Cowell, 2022

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

HB ISBN 978 1 444 96819 4
Exclusive Edition ISBN 978 1 444 97103 3
Signed Edition ISBN 978 1 444 97104 0
Trade Paperback ISBN 978 1 444 96904 7

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A

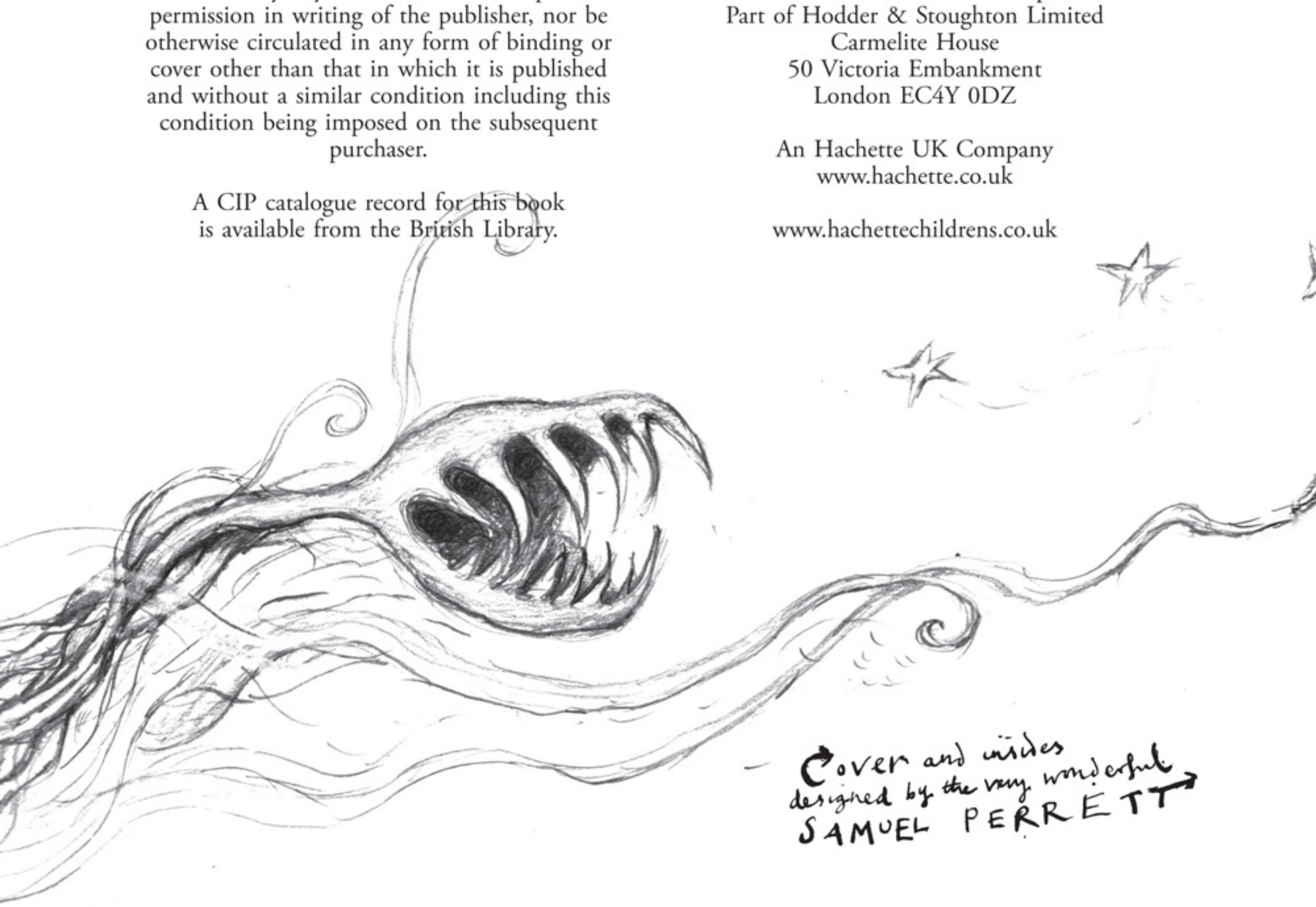
The paper and board used in this book are made from wood from responsible sources.

FSC www.fsc.org MIX Paper from responsible sources FSC® C104740

Hodder Children's Books
An imprint of
Hachette Children's Group
Part of Hodder & Stoughton Limited
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

www.hachettechildrens.co.uk



Cover and insides
designed by the very wonderful
SAMUEL PERRETT



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.

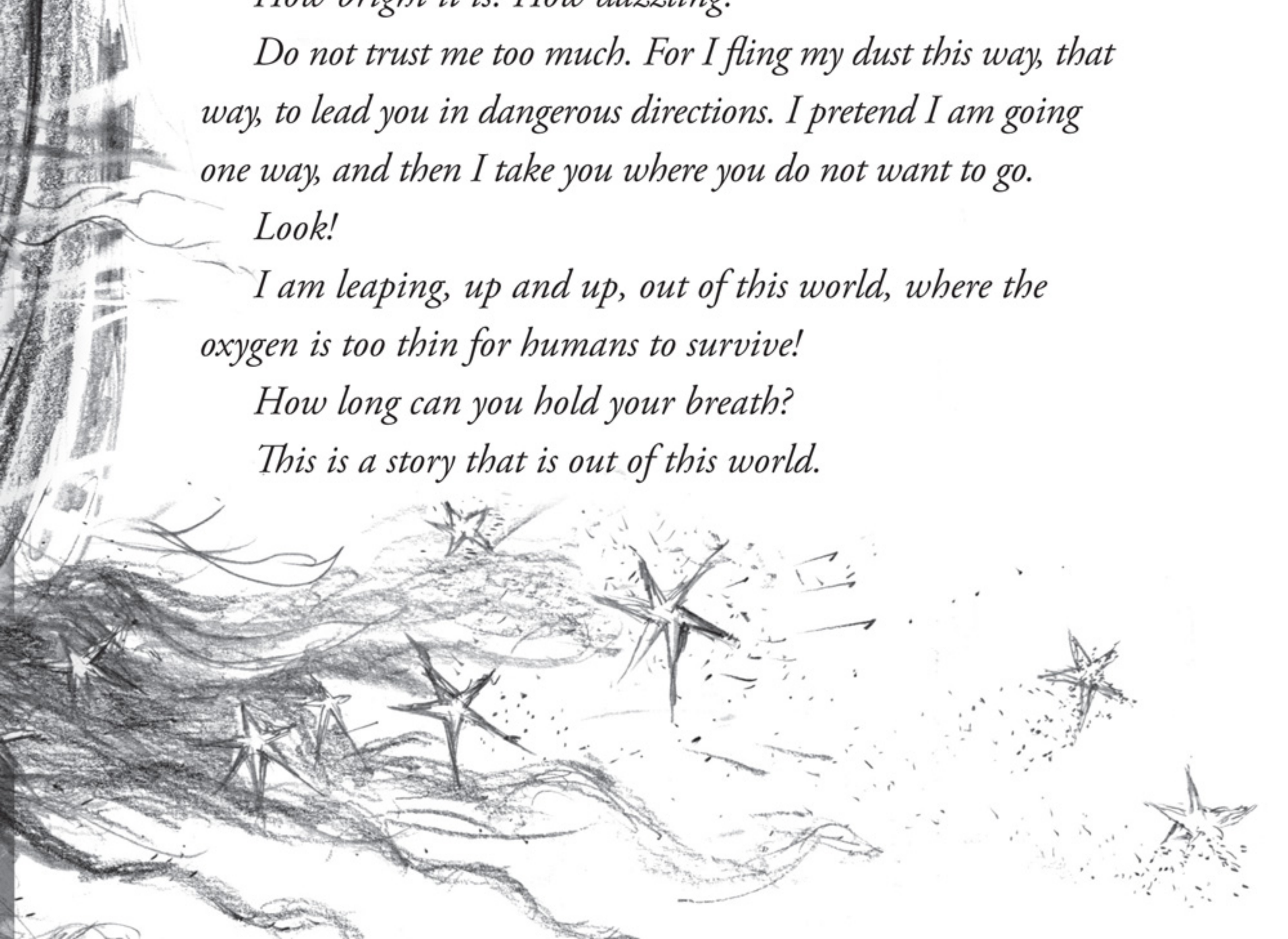
Do not trust me too much. For I fling my dust this way, that way, to lead you in dangerous directions. I pretend I am going one way, and then I take you where you do not want to go.

Look!

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

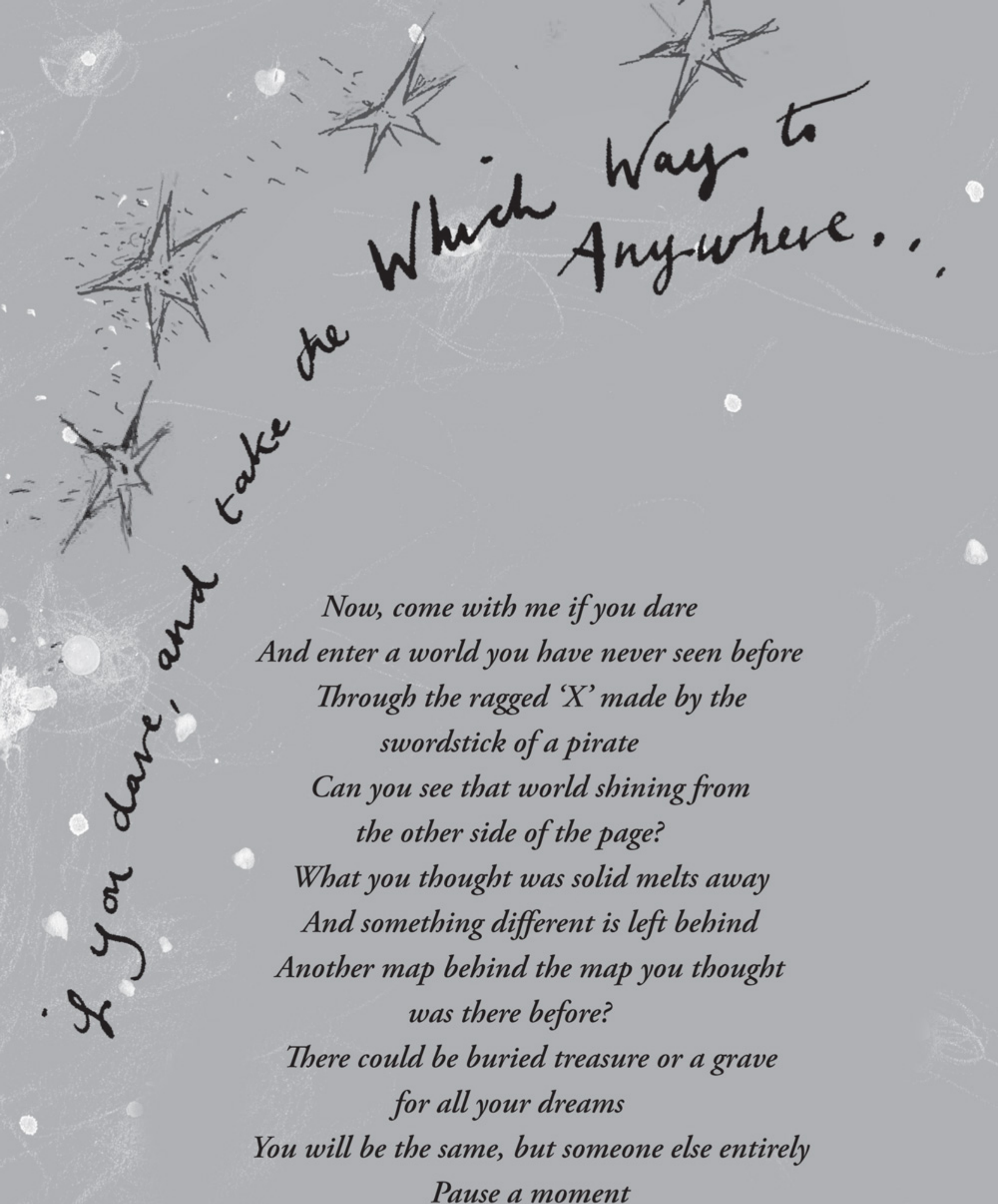
How long can you hold your breath?

This is a story that is out of this world.

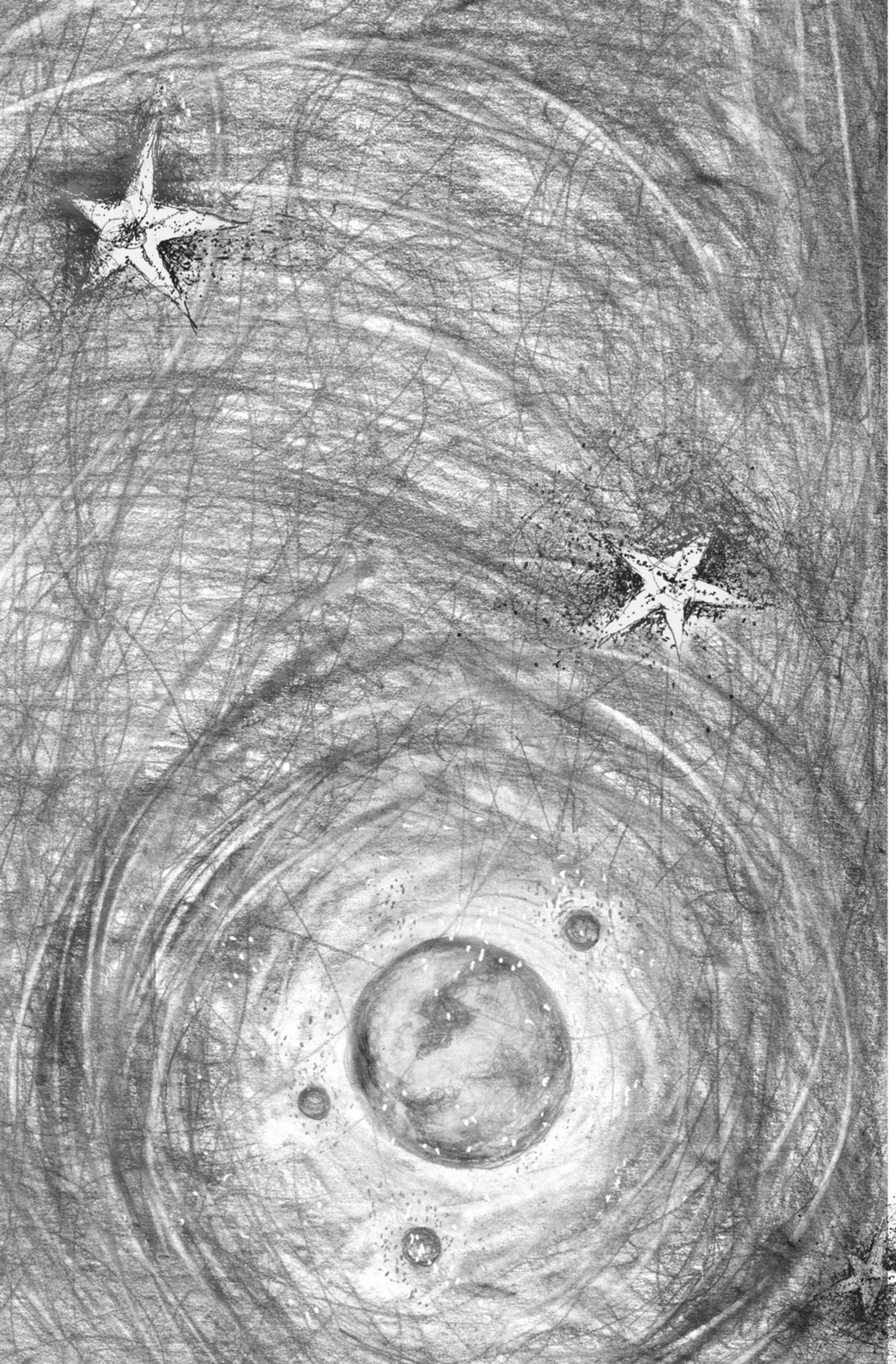


This is a story that is OUT OF THIS WORLD.

So... come with me



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.

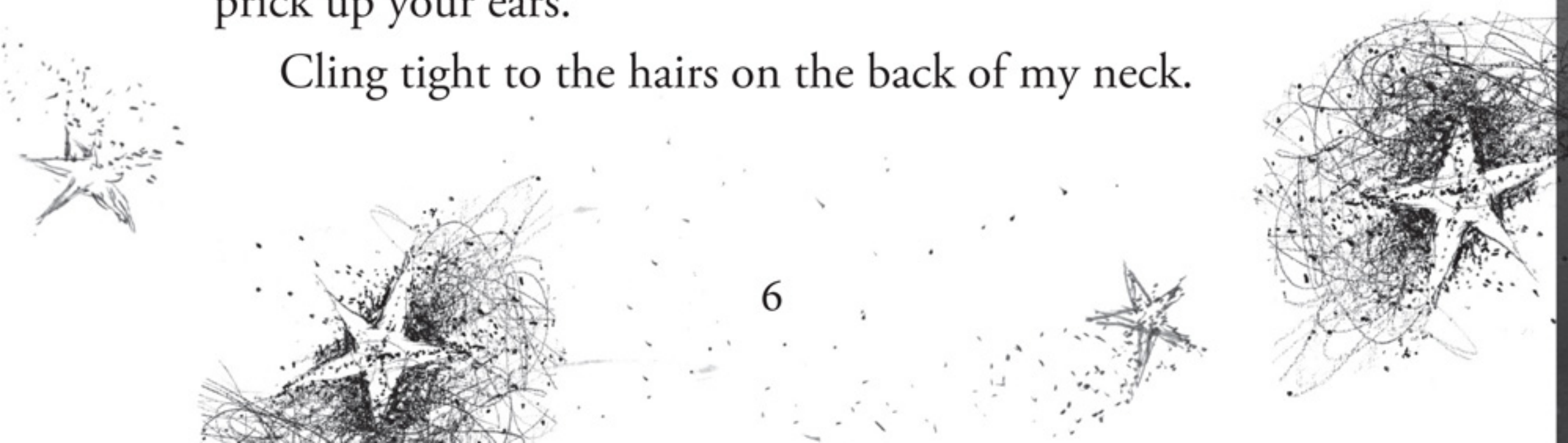
Are you ready?

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.

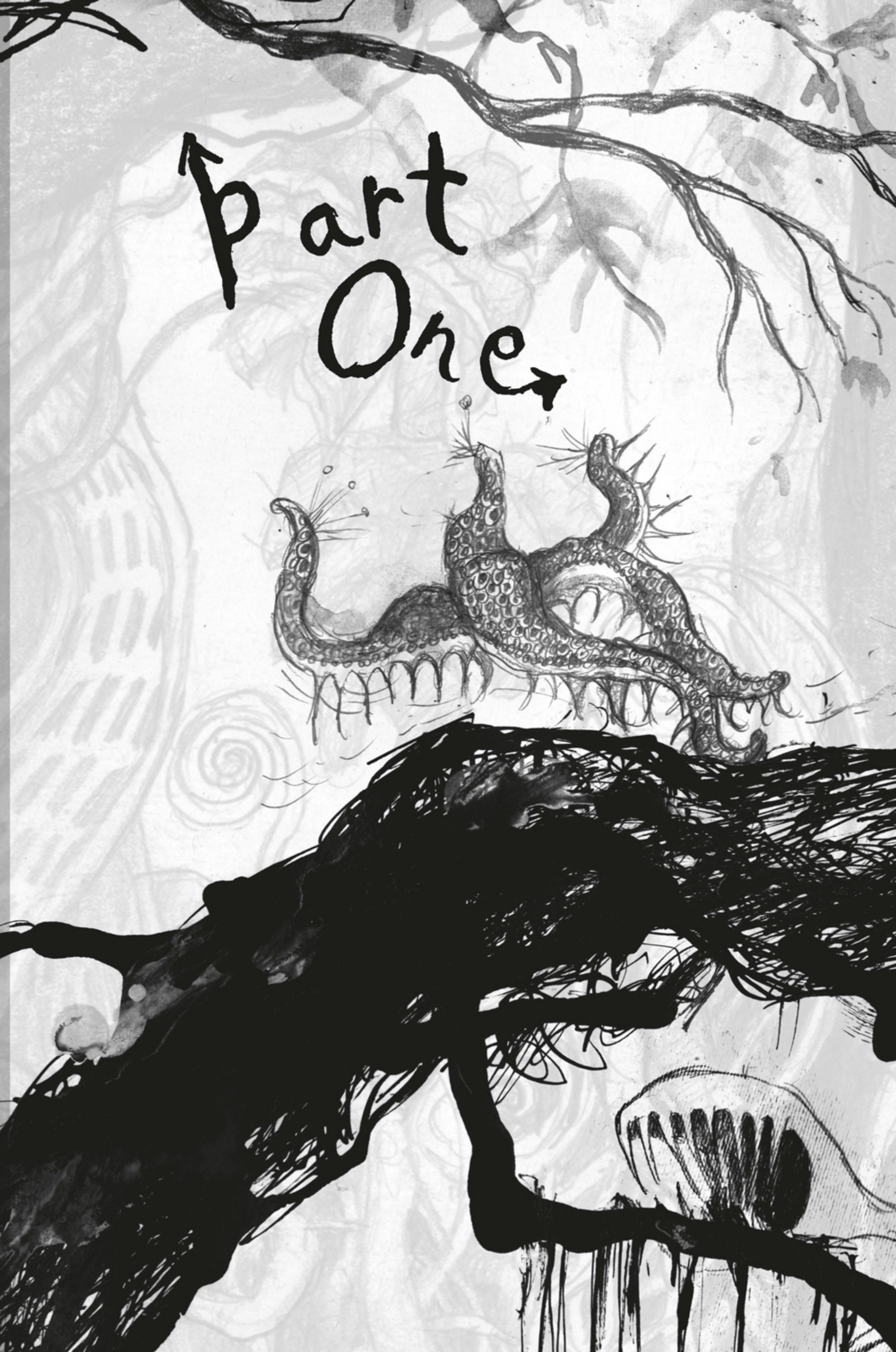


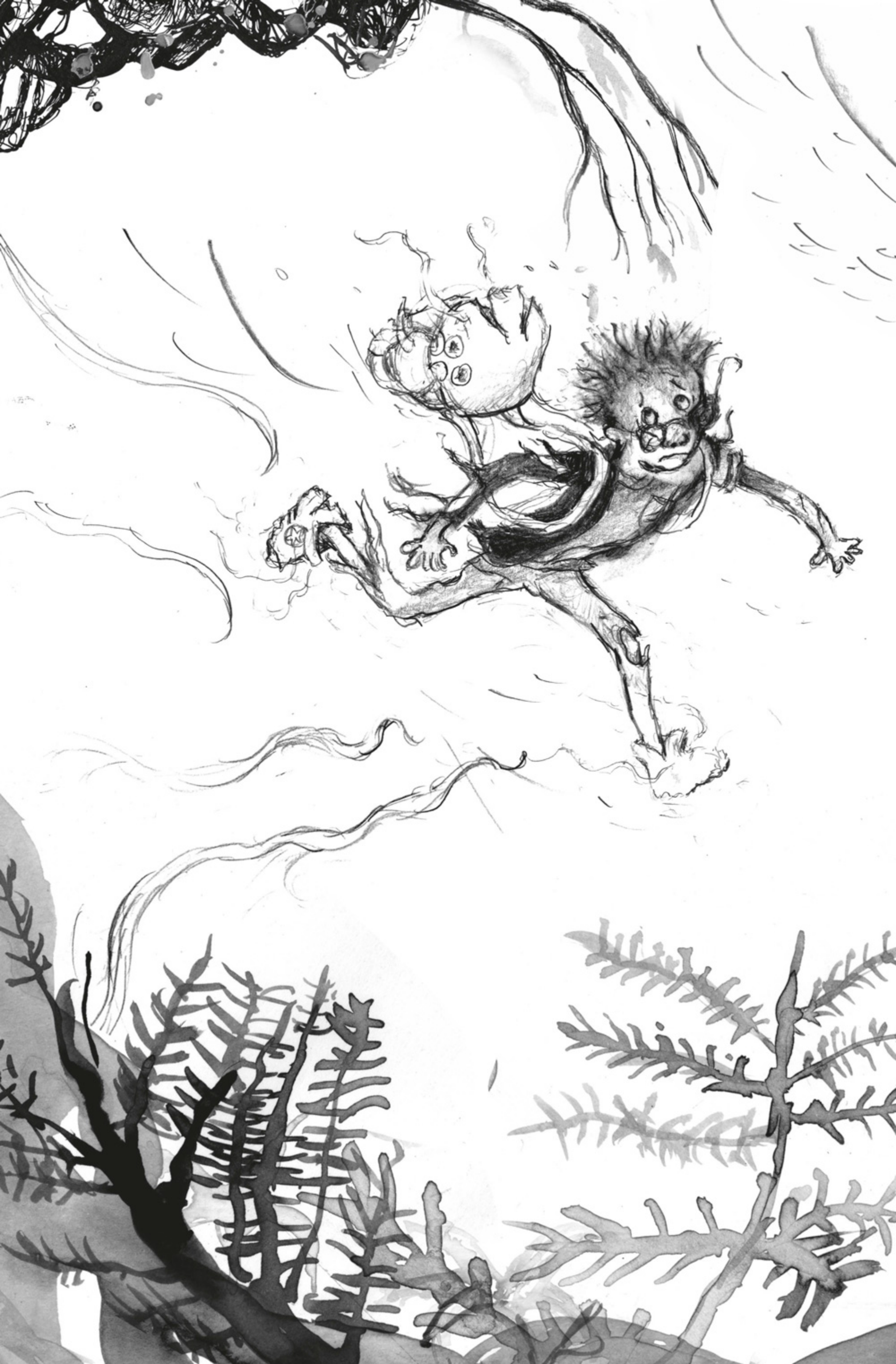
Hold your breath.

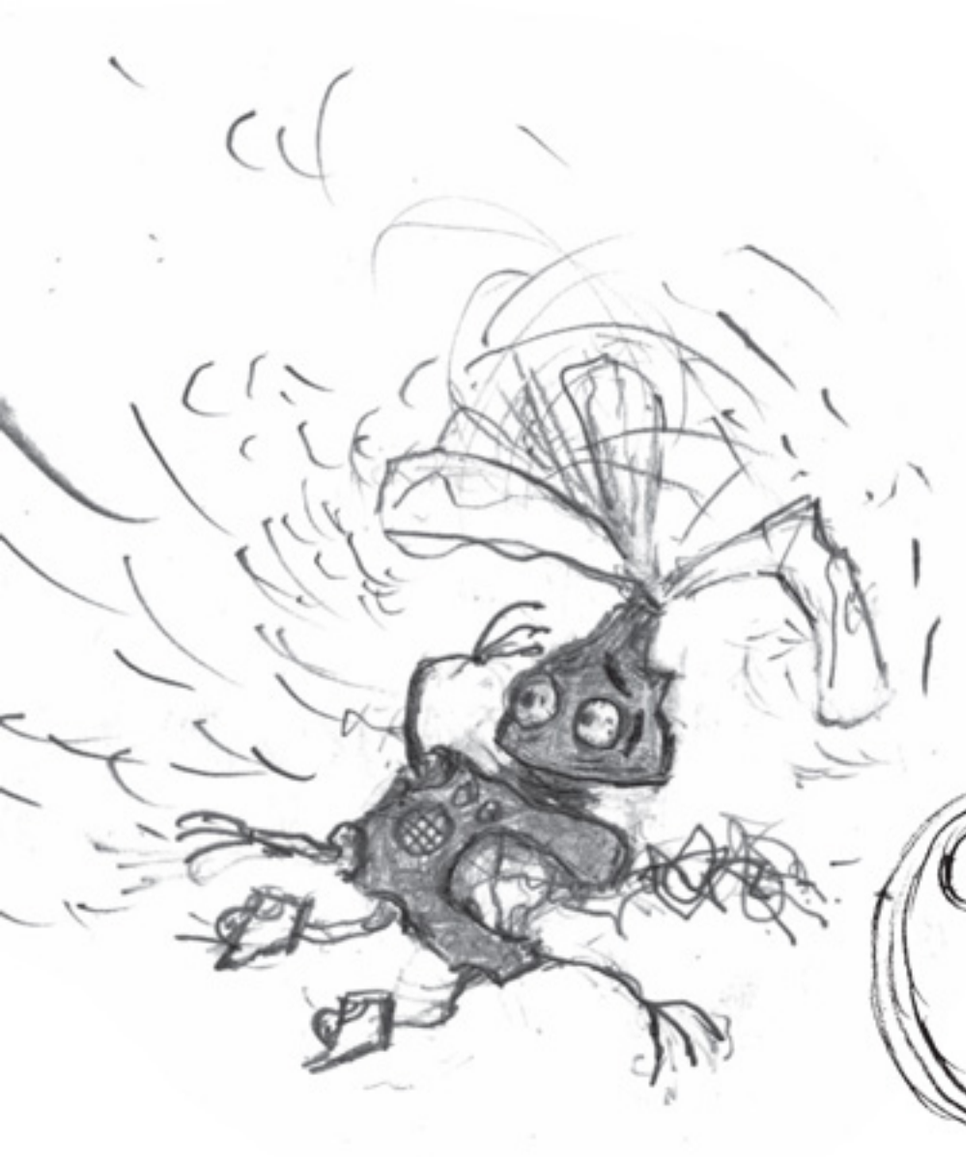
We're going in.



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 ab*squo*lootly cannot mention . . .' said Puck (but he *was* unfortunately mentioning it, nonetheless). 'That hairy, scary unbemaginably 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 afraids my lasers gots jammed up with sand in that dessert.'