THE LAST WOLF

THE MOONHAVEN CHRONICLES

THE LAST WOLF

First published 2026 by Macmillan Children's Books,
an imprint of Pan Macmillan
The Smithson, 6 Briset Street, London EC1M 5NR
EU representative: Macmillan Publishers Ireland Ltd, 1st Floor,
The Liffey Trust Centre, 117–126 Sheriff Street Upper,
Dublin 1 D01 YC43
Associated companies throughout the world
ISBN 978-1-0350-3731-5
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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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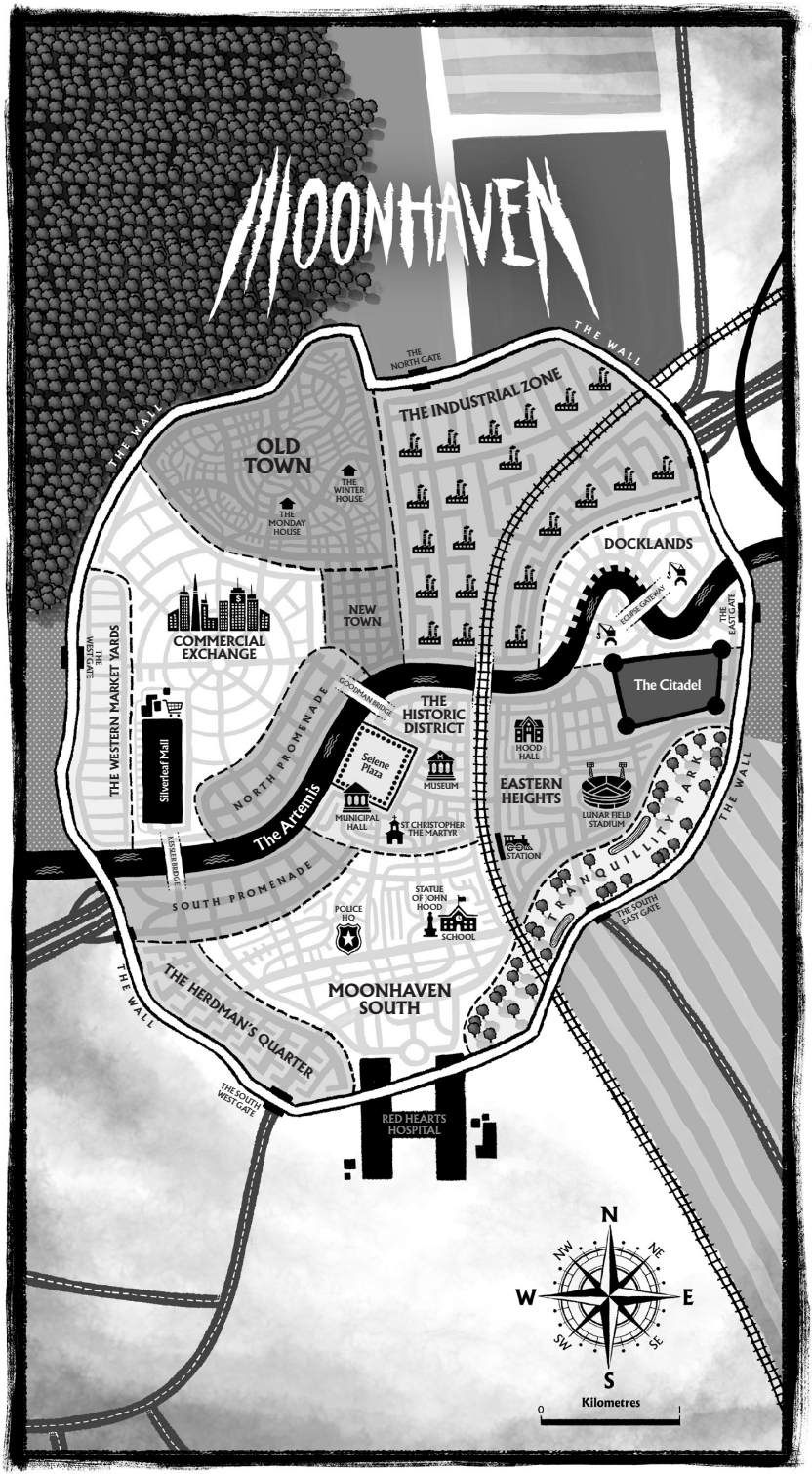
For my moon and stars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THE WALL
THE NORTH GATE
THE INDUSTRIAL ZONE
OLD TOWN
THE WINTER HOUSE
THE MONDAY HOUSE
DOCKLANDS
ECLIPSE OVERPASS
THE EAST GATE
NEW TOWN
COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE
THE WESTGATE
THE WESTERN MARKET YARDS
Silverleaf Mall
GOODMAN BRIDGE
THE HISTORIC DISTRICT
The Citadel
NORTH PROMENADE
Selene Plaza
MUSEUM
HOOD HALL
EASTERN HEIGHTS
The Artemis
MUNICIPAL HALL
ST CHRISTOPHER THE MARTYR
LUNAR FIELD STADIUM
TRANQUILLITY PARK
KESSLER BRIDGE
STATION
SOUTH PROMENADE
STATUE OF JOHN HOOD
POLICE HQ
SCHOOL
THE SOUTH EAST GATE
THE HERDMAN'S QUARTER
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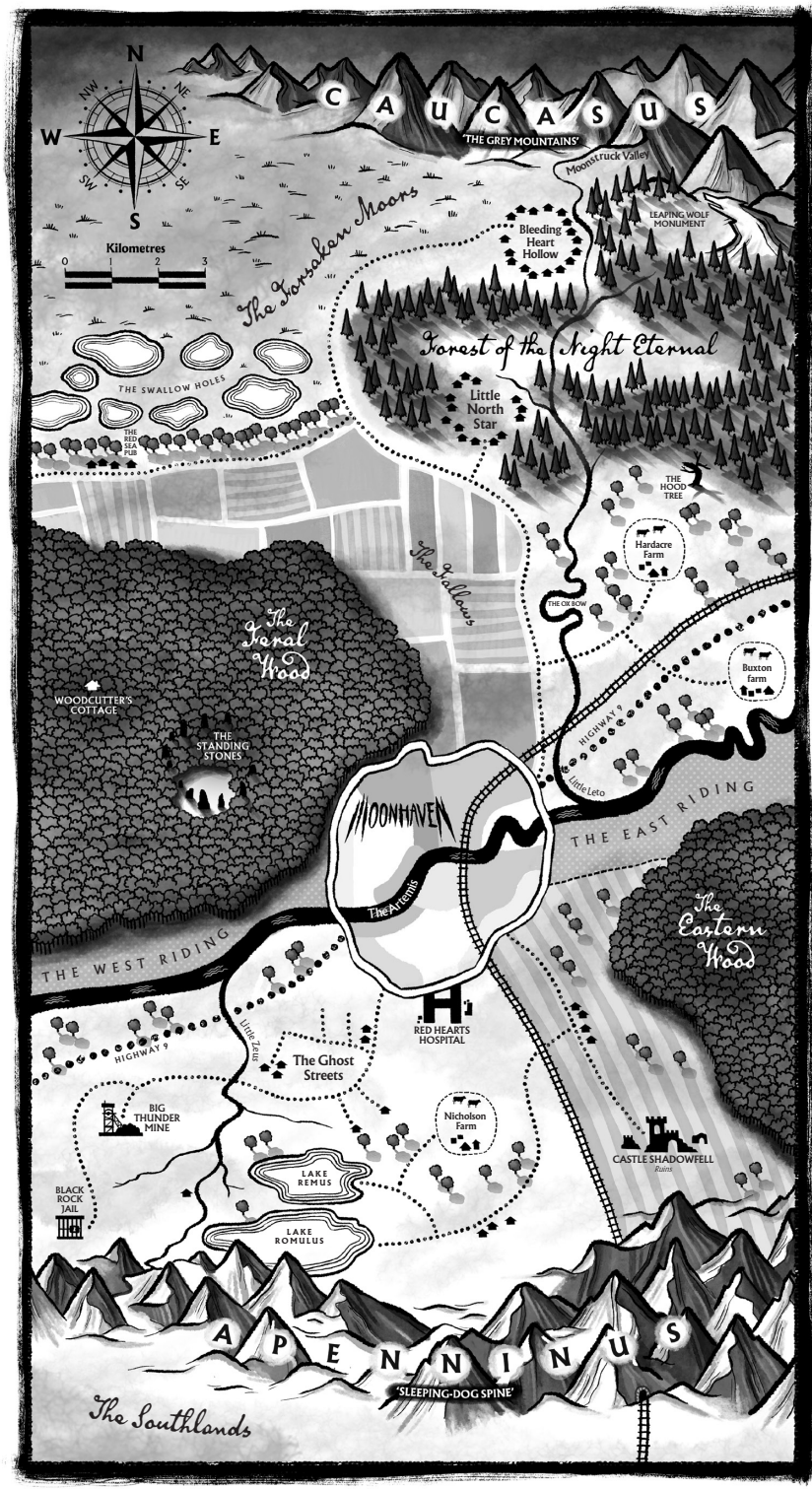
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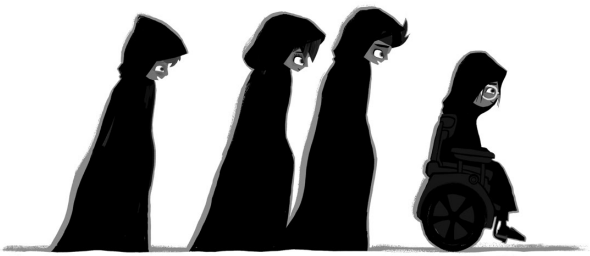
CAUCASUS
'THE GREY MOUNTAINS'
Moonstruck Valley
LEAPING WOLF MONUMENT
Bleeding Heart Hollow
The Forsaken Moors
Forest of the Night Eternal
Little North Star
THE SWALLOW HOLES
THE RED SEA PUB
THE HOOD TREE
Hardacre Farm
The Fallows
THE OX BOW
The Feral Wood
Buxton farm
WOODCUTTER'S COTTAGE
THE STANDING STONES
HIGHWAY 9
Little Leto
MOONHAVEN
The Artemis
THE EAST RIDING
The Eastern Wood
THE WEST RIDING
RED HEARTS HOSPITAL
Little Zeus
HIGHWAY 9
The Ghost Streets
BIG THUNDER MINE
Nicholson Farm
CASTLE SHADOWFELL
Ruins
LAKE REMUS
BLACK ROCK JAIL
LAKE ROMULUS
APENNINUS
'SLEEPING-DOG SPINE'
The Southlands



PROLOGUE

Tonight, the world is afraid.

Shapes shift in the shadows as huge clouds sail through the darkness, jostling for position above desolate streets. Cars sit empty in the driveways of silent houses. Curtains are drawn. Shutters are closed. Doors are locked.

A gentle wind stirs as the object of fear emerges from behind a cloud. The full moon. Round. Resplendent. Unapologetic.

Meanwhile, something is happening in Tranquillity Park.

Movement.

There shouldn't be movement.

People.

There shouldn't be people.

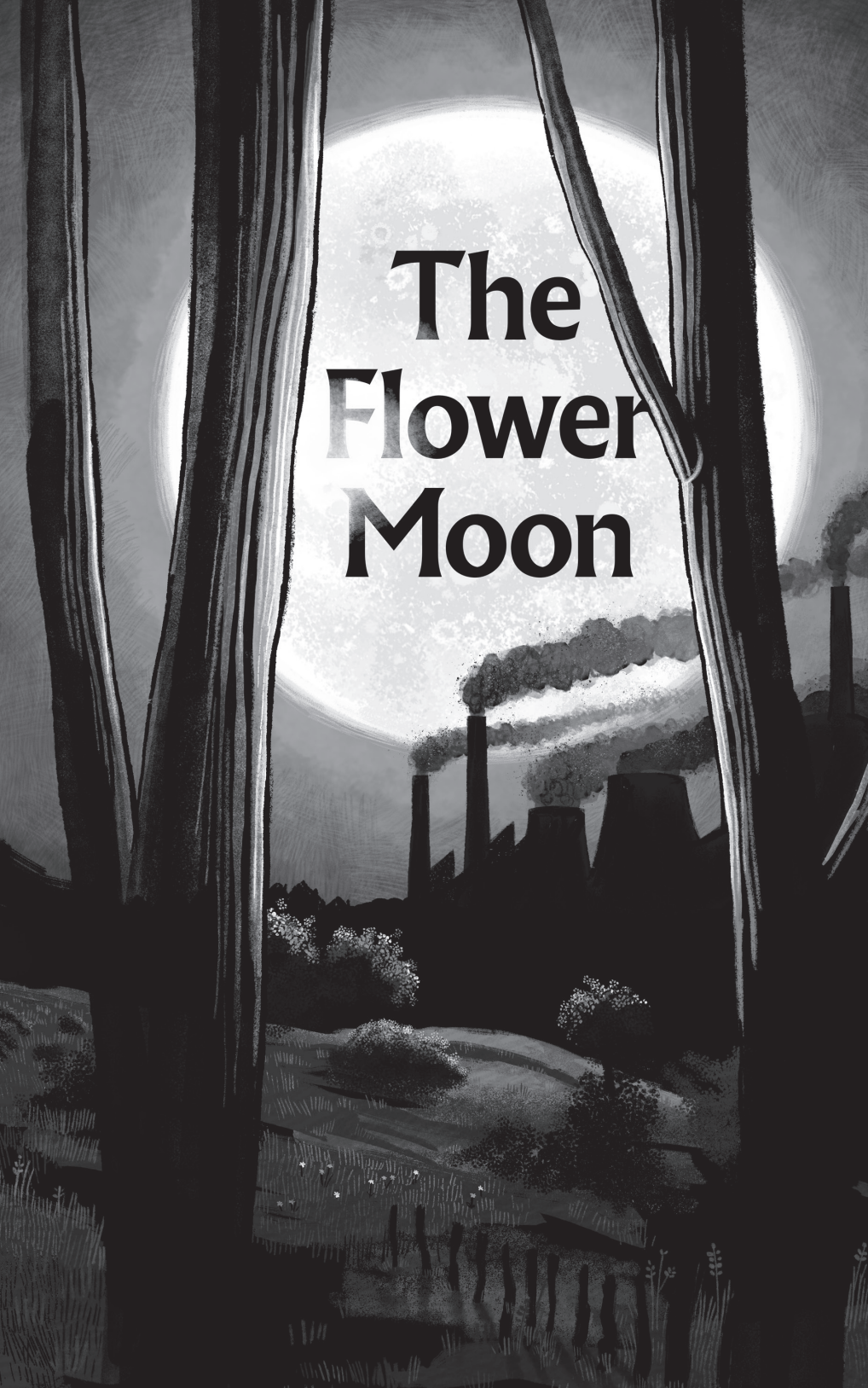
Four hooded figures – children – are moving confidently towards the deserted playground, cutting through the stillness like phantoms in the night. The Moonlighters are chatting happily and laughing, as well they might, because tonight they have the whole world to themselves.

Suddenly a howl. Long and low, but rising in pitch and intensity until it fills the skies. Raw. Untamed. Chilling.

It leaves behind the echo of something wild. Something ancient.

The children freeze and then scatter.

And the world is afraid.



The Flower Moon

THE WINTERS

Jax Winter woke with a start. His heart was racing and his chest rose and fell with ragged gasps. He sat up, trying to make sense of the nightmare, but the tiny fragments he could remember were already slipping away. Something had been hunting him beneath a blood-red moon. That much he knew. There had been running and there had been fear.

There was also no chance of going back to sleep, so he swung his feet out from under the duvet and jumped down from the top bunk. Tentatively he felt his way across the pitch-black room towards the window, found the small metal-beaded chain, and pulled. As he did so, the heavy moonblind began to rise and daylight flooded the room.

Jax
Jovi

Jovi, his twin sister, stirred in the bottom bunk. 'What time is it?' she asked sleepily.

'Just after six,' Jax replied, looking out of the window. 'Moonset.'

'Did you sleep?' asked Jovi.

'Not really.'

'Are you *still* having nightmares? It's been almost a month!'

'I know. But I just can't get the sound out of my head,' said Jax.

'Well, it was pretty terrifying.'

Jax peered through the branches of the sycamore tree. 'At least the Nighthawks haven't come after us for breaking curfew that night,' he said. 'Small mercies and all that.'

'True,' said Jovi, sitting up and stretching. 'I think we're in the clear.'

She climbed out of bed and walked over to join her brother at the window.

'What if it *was* a werewolf howl?' she asked, nervously. 'I know Meemaw said it was probably just a dog, but I've never heard a dog make a noise like that. Have you?'

'No,' said Jax quietly. 'I haven't.'

MEEMAW

Jax and Jovi could hear Meemaw, their grandmother, clattering about in the kitchen as she listened to the news reports on the radio.

'You're up early,' she said as the twins walked in. She rested her spatula on the side of the sizzling pan as the room filled with the smell of bacon, and kissed them both on the forehead. 'Sit down and I'll fetch you some breakfast.'

'The economy is turning a corner, according to reports in the City

this morning,' said the radio newsreader drily. *'Inflation has halved and is forecast to hit its eight per cent target within the next few months . . .'*

'Jax, did you get that homework done last night?' shouted Meemaw from the pantry.

'Er, not quite,' he replied. 'I'll finish it later.'

The old woman shook her head. 'You'd better! I don't want another letter home from school. Your father was just as bad when he was your age.'

She returned to the table and put down a plate stacked with pancakes and bacon alongside a small jug of maple syrup. 'Thank goodness he met Freya,' she continued. 'Such a good influence.'

Jax glanced up at his sister. He noticed that her eyes were suddenly shiny at the mention of their parents. It had been almost six months since Lars and Freya Winter had been seconded by the government to carry out secret scientific research on the lupine gene, but it felt like longer to Jax and Jovi. And not knowing when their mum and dad would be able to come home didn't make it any easier.

'. . . On Wednesday, ministers will set out reforms to boost productivity and cut out red tape for small businesses . . .'

'Come on, Jovi. At least two pancakes, young lady,' said Meemaw, frowning as she sat down. 'You can't go to school on an empty stomach. And both of you help yourselves to some orange juice. You need your vitamin C.'

'. . . They will also seek to overturn peers' amendments after suffering ten defeats in the upper chamber.'

Meemaw picked up the coffee pot and poured herself a mugful. She took a sip and looked at the twins. Her expression softened. 'Now then. What's with these long faces?' She sighed. 'Look, I know you miss them. I do too. But we have to remember that they've gone away for a good reason. They must have been asked to work on something very important, otherwise they would have come home by now. We have to be patient and we have to be brave. In fact, we should be proud of them.'

The children said nothing. Jovi blinked away a tear.

Meemaw put down her mug and removed her glasses.

'Listen, none of us really know what they're doing, but one thing I'm sure of is that they are missing you as much as you're missing them,' she said gently. 'I'm also certain that if they were allowed to get in touch with us, they would.' She put a hand on Jovi's shoulder. 'Just remember what I told you: as long as we're all under the same sky, we're together. In mind, if not in body. So, whenever you miss them, just look up, pick a cloud and blow it a kiss. Maybe your mum and dad will be looking up too. And who knows, maybe they will have picked the same cloud.'

THE PRIME MINISTER

Meanwhile, in the lower chamber,' continued the newsreader, *'the Prime Minister, Calista Fell, was once again addressing the reported wolf activity in Moonhaven last month.'*

As soon as they heard the name of their home town, Jax, Jovi and Meemaw turned to look at the radio.

'I know the public are worried about tomorrow night given what happened on Flower Moon,' said Fell, her rich, softly accented voice exuding confidence and authority. *'But they shouldn't be. There are three things that everybody should remember: firstly, and I want to be clear about this, there have been* zero *confirmed sightings of werewolves in Moonhaven. It is true that several locals claim to have heard a howl last month, and while we acknowledge the existence of these reports, there is absolutely no hard evidence to suggest the presence of an actual werewolf.'*

Jax and Jovi shared another look, their brows furrowing in sync.

'If there's no reason to worry,' said Meemaw, 'why has the media been talking about this so-called howl *constantly* for the last month? Honestly, you'd think there was nothing else going

on in the world. Fearmongering. That's what it is.'

'*Secondly, I'd like to remind everybody that there have been* zero *confirmed werewolf attacks anywhere in the world for nearly forty years.*' Her voice was suddenly shaky. '*Not since the Tucumán incident in Argentina, in fact. Every "sighting" since has proven to be either a hoax or an unfounded rumour. So we know that the curfew is still working.*'

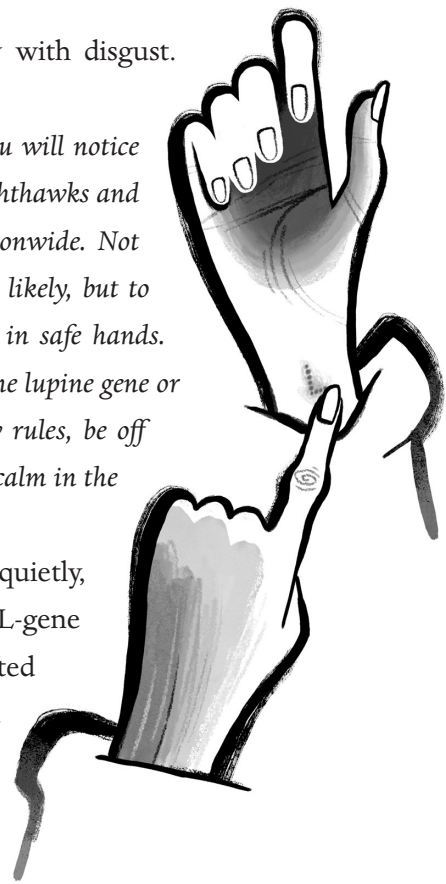
'I remember Tucumán,' said Meemaw quietly. 'The Night of the Red Moon. Just terrible. Those poor, poor people.'

'*Thirdly,*' continued the Prime Minister, '*I'd like to reassure everybody that tomorrow night, Colonel London Pike and the Nighthawks have a robust plan in place and will be even more vigilant than usual.*'

'Pike? Ugh!' said Meemaw with disgust. 'Horrible man.'

'*In fact,*' continued Fell, '*you will notice an increased presence of both Nighthawks and Wolf Slayers on the streets, nationwide. Not because they suspect an attack is likely, but to reassure the public that they are in safe hands. Everybody, whether a carrier of the lupine gene or not, should follow regular curfew rules, be off the streets by 6 p.m., and remain calm in the face of speculation and hearsay.*'

'Ah yes,' Meemaw said quietly, 'I was wondering when the L-gene would get a mention.' She lifted the sleeve of her cardigan and ran a bony finger across the



small, red, L-shaped scar on her wrist.

'*So, for clarity,*' said Fell, '*let me repeat the facts: there is zero evidence to suggest any elevated risk or danger associated with the upcoming Strawberry Moon, and* zero *reason to be alarmed.*'

Meemaw stood up, walked over to the radio, and turned it off.

'Righty-ho, that's quite enough of that,' she said briskly. 'You two better get yourselves off to school. If you leave now, you might actually get there on time for once.'

MOONHAVEN

The Winters' house was nestled in the heart of the old town, half a mile north of the Artemis River and a thirty-minute walk from the twins' school. The quaint, cobbled streets and honey-coloured stone buildings stood in marked contrast to the neighbouring industrial zone, whose dilapidated Victorian factories still employed the majority of Moonhaven's residents. Dozens of tall chimneys rose high above the cottage rooftops, belching plumes of thick, black smoke over the rolling hills,

desolate moors and sprawling forests that surrounded the town, as if to remind the residents who was in charge.

This area was famous throughout the world as a historic epicentre of werewolf activity. It was said that Moonhaven had originally been built, centuries earlier, as an urban fortress to unify and protect local farmers and villagers against wolf attacks and give them somewhere to hide from the moonlight. A literal haven from the moon. The ancient stone wall, three metres high and two metres thick, that surrounded the town still stood today.

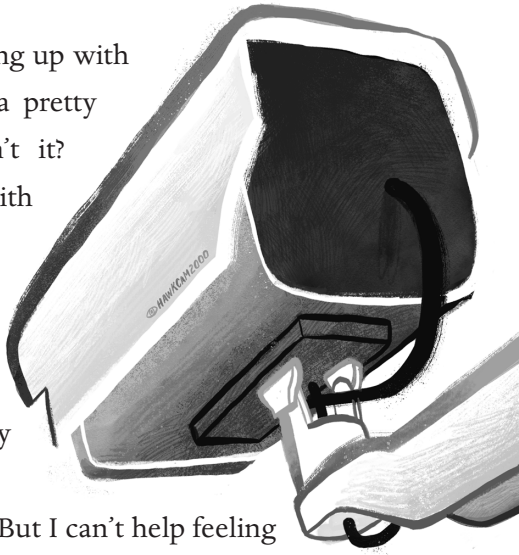
Protection. That was also the motive behind the thousands of surveillance cameras situated throughout the town – according to the Nighthawks at least. It was often said that a person couldn't scratch their nose in Moonhaven without London Pike knowing about it.

Sure enough, as Jax and Jovi walked to school, multiple cameras clicked, whirred and rotated on the walls, lamp posts and advertising hoardings that lined their route. It was something the townsfolk were used to, but an irritating presence, nonetheless.

On this morning, however, the twins were more concerned with the conversation they'd just had around the breakfast table.

'I've been thinking about it and I don't buy it,' said Jax. 'Why would they get Mum and Dad to work on more L-gene stuff? Surely they've

already done their bit by coming up with the skin test. I mean, that's a pretty definitive piece of work, isn't it? A doctor stamps your wrist with that little round needly thing, and if a red L appears, you're a carrier. It's perfect. How can you improve on that?'



'But why else would they have been seconded?' said Jovi.

'I don't know,' replied Jax. 'But I can't help feeling that something's not right. Remember what I overheard Dad say the night they were taken away?'

Jovi nodded. 'Yeah. That thing about salt. It was quite strange.'

'And the longer they're gone, the more suspicious I am. I know Meemaw said all that stuff about them getting in touch with us if they could, but seriously, the idea that Mum and Dad would be OK with not speaking to us for – what is it now – six months? It just doesn't make sense. I don't think they would *ever* be OK with that.'

'No,' said Jovi softly. 'Neither do I.'

A SILLY QUESTION

They walked on in silence for a few minutes, crossing the river and heading into Selene Plaza. Despite the early hour, it was already bustling with activity. Locals rushing to work were zigzagging across the square, angrily trying to avoid the many camera-wielding tourists keen to document their visit to a famous wolf town so close to a full moon. A platoon of Nighthawks was being drilled by a sergeant outside the Municipal Hall, while soldiers of the Hawks' sniper division, known colloquially as the Wolf Slayers, stood sentry around the square's perimeter holding long Howlstopper muskets, their silver-bullet bandoliers twinkling in the morning sun. Meanwhile,

a woman with a shock of white hair and a large dog was drawing a small crowd by the fountain. She was standing on a wooden crate, holding a sign displaying the words 'DO NOT FEAR WOLVES' and shouting something about the lupine gene.

'Can't believe old Raven is still at it,' said Jax as they walked past. 'Good for her though, sticking to her guns after all these years'.

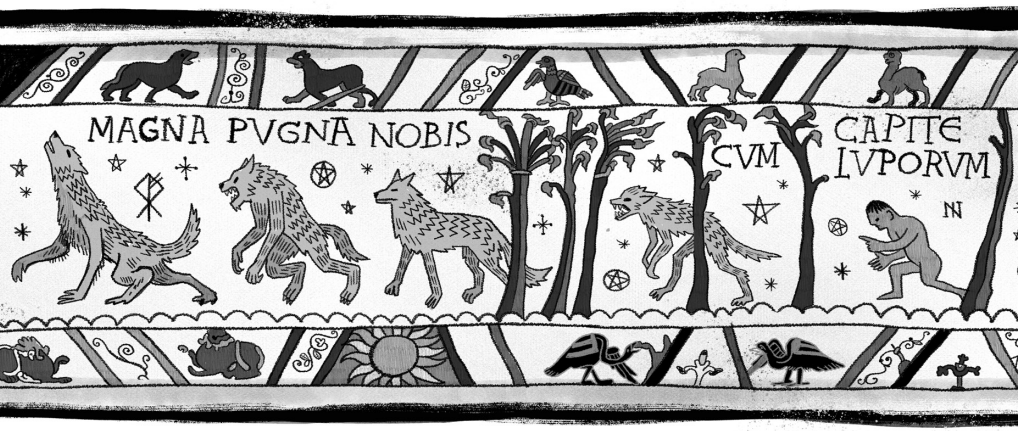
'Jax,' said Jovi hesitantly. 'Can I ask you a silly question?'

'Go on.'

'Do you believe, in your heart of hearts, that werewolves still exist?' she said. 'I mean, obviously the L-gene is a thing, but no one has seen an actual werewolf in real life for decades. Sometimes the idea of them seems so incredible, it's hard to believe they ever existed.'

Jax thought carefully before answering. 'But we know that they existed. I mean, our entire town was built to protect people from *something*. Just look at the wall. Plus, there are all those prehistoric cave paintings in South America, and don't forget the wolves on the Bayeux Tapestry. And remember the skeletons they found in Bulgaria that we learned about in the third grade? And what about that attack in Argentina?'

'Yeah, I know about that stuff,' said Jovi. 'But it all happened years ago. What about now?'



They walked past one of the Wolf Slayers, who side-eyed them suspiciously from beneath his helmet, and they subconsciously quickened their pace.

'I don't know what to think, but we both heard that sound on Flower Moon. What *was* it, if you don't think it was a werewolf?' Jax asked.

'Maybe it *was* a dog, like Meemaw said,' replied the girl uncertainly. 'A very big one? Or maybe even a regular wolf? There are still meant to be a few wild greys knocking about up on the Forsaken Moors, out by the Swallow Holes.'

'OK,' said Jax, 'but if werewolves *are* extinct, why does the government still keep everyone indoors whenever there's a full moon?'

Jovi didn't reply.

'And also,' continued Jax, 'what exactly is the research they are getting Mum and Dad to do?'

'Now *that* is a good question,' said Jovi as they approached the bronze statue of John Hood that stood outside the school. 'And one I'd like to know the answer to.'

JOHN HOOD
1798 – 1857
FIRST WOLF SLAYER
PRIDE OF MOONHAVEN

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rob Biddulph is a bestselling and multi award-winning children's author and illustrator whose books include the *Peanut Jones* trilogy, *I Follow the Fox*, *Blown Away* and *Odd Dog Out*. In March 2020 he started #DrawWithRob, a series of draw-along videos designed to help parents whose children were forced to stay home from school due to the coronavirus pandemic. The initiative became a global sensation, garnering millions of views and earning Rob a Guinness World Record for the largest online art class in history. In July 2020 he was named as a Point of Light by the British Prime Minister. He lives in London with his wife, their daughters and Ringo the dog.

Other chapter books by Rob Biddulph:

Peanut Jones and the Illustrated City

Peanut Jones and the Twelve Portals

Peanut Jones and the End of the Rainbow