

ALEXANDER
ARMSTRONG
EVENFALL
THE TEMPEST STONE

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To Rex, Paddy, Edward and Henry – 360 degrees of inspiration.

A.A.

Green Grow the Rushes, O

English folk song, origins unknown

*I'll sing you twelve, O
Green grow the rushes, O
What are your twelve, O?
Twelve for the twelve apostles,
Eleven for the eleven who went to heaven,
Ten for the Ten Commandments,
Nine for the nine bright shiners,
Eight for the April rainers,
Seven for the seven stars in the sky,
Six for the six proud walkers,
Five for the symbols at your door,
Four for the gospel-makers,
Three, three, the rivals,
Two, two, the lily-white boys,
Clothed all in green, O.
One is one, and all alone,
And ever more shall be so.*



PROLOGUE

My name is Sam Morley, but you might as well call me Sam Tempest – everyone else does. Tempest was my mum's surname. Two weeks ago, I was just a regular thirteen-year-old. Okay, one with a mum who'd died in a car crash when I was five, and who saved his dad's life only yesterday, but otherwise very run-of-the-mill.

Then it turns out I'm the Tempest, actually, which is a thing.

There are these magical objects that enhance a Tempest's power – a seal, which is like a big old chess piece; a chalice, which is a goblet; a signet, which is a pendant of lightning bolts that I used to wear round my neck; and a small gold knife called the Tempest blade.

My mum left me the pendant for my thirteenth birthday, and that started my Tempest powers going. In the beginning, I thought I was just daydreaming – but then I discovered I have the Sight, which means I can send what you might call 'my mind's eye' out into the world. Sometimes I can see through other people's eyes.

That's how I saw the accident that killed my mum seven years ago in Snowdonia.

As the Tempest I'm supposed to look after the Linnets: a massive global network of people who keep the world on an even keel. The whole WORLD. Headed up by five families called the Evening, this enormous magical organisation is constantly communicating through stories, or singing, or laughing – they laugh a lot – and it's them Mr Prendergast listens to for information.

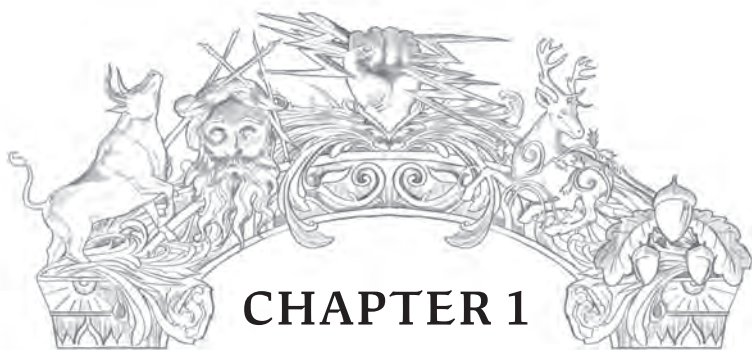
Mr P is a man of few words, which I completely understand because his main job is listening, not talking. He's head of the Elver, a crack team of him and five other enormous people, all incredibly strong and trained to within an inch of their lives to protect the Evening. Sadly, at the moment, it's him and only four other enormous people. Yesterday, I asked Mr P if the Elver were anything to do with elves. He said last time someone asked him that, he'd thumped them so hard they didn't know if it was Christmas or rice pudding. I don't know what that meant, but I got his meaning. If you get mine.

Anyway, the reason I'm telling you about Mr P is because it was him who first sussed that what he calls 'the harmony of nature' was out, and it happened right at the very moment we thought we had won our first battle:

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last night in Bellasis, the Tempest palace, against Georgie, an enemy so powerful that we're only now realising how lucky we all are still to be alive. Although we won, I lost part of my family and the Evening's strongest weapons too: the Tempest blade and my signet necklace.

We had hoped it was the end. But this was barely the beginning.



CHAPTER 1

Into Elsewhere

THE slice of the Tempest blade brought down chaos.

Even as the magical knife in Georgie's hand ripped through the air, a strange friction juddered all around Jimmy. He saw the spring rock, the Bellasis source of magical *óthr* water, start disintegrating, but no more, as they were immediately dragged upwards. Somehow Georgie had sliced through the world as if it were no more than the soft layers of puff pastry.

'Hold still,' he yelled.

The multiple layers of existence fell harder and faster around them in wildly different shades of light and colour, like the flipping pages of a scrapbook: beauty, then calm, then unbearable tension. And each had a smell – distinct and fleeting, but oddly familiar.

They landed hard in a new reality. No soft pastry about these edges. Jimmy gasped as bright light glared into his eyes, the sound of a car screeching to a halt, hooting. Beside him, Georgie swore.

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They were in the middle of a tiny French village in the early hours of the morning. Jimmy glimpsed a yellow van with *La Poste* on the side, a slightly decrepit stone building and a visitor centre with a modern glass front. Grass was growing between the cobbles under their feet, a faint whiff of coffee hung on the air and somewhere a bell was tolling. Jimmy swallowed hard. This was powerful magic, wild and dangerous in Georgie's hands.

Georgie made another movement with the knife. And then came hell.

In an instant, the air had turned *fetid*. The same bell was tolling as before, the same note, the same dying clang within the same bell tower, albeit in sharper, cleaner stone – but that was where the similarities ended. There was no visitor centre and certainly no coffee. The sky was thick with grey smoke and teeming with birds.

They were a long way from Bellasis.

'Where are we?' asked Jimmy, burying his nose in the crook of his arm.

Georgie sighed. 'When are we, you mean, Jim-Jam. We're on a magical mystery tour, fulfilling my father's dying wish. Getting ourselves something groovy and organic to cure the world of all the filth. And, with luck –' he tilted his head, whispering dramatically – 'I'm going to get my hands on the Champflower book.'

Champflower. One of the Evening families. Jimmy tried to sound nonchalant. 'What's this book about?' he said.

'Oh, it's clever. Looks like a book of stories, but actually

it's full of secrets.' Georgie batted his eyelids. 'If I don't find it here, in this ancient time, we'll pop back to when we just were, but much further south, away from your nephew Sam and his adoring idiots in their stupid cave, and ask Gil. He's my next project. Jimmy mark two. He *loves* me – just like you do.'

'No,' said Jimmy. 'No more kidnapping, Georgie. *Please*. You said you'd be all-powerful once you had the Tempest blade!'

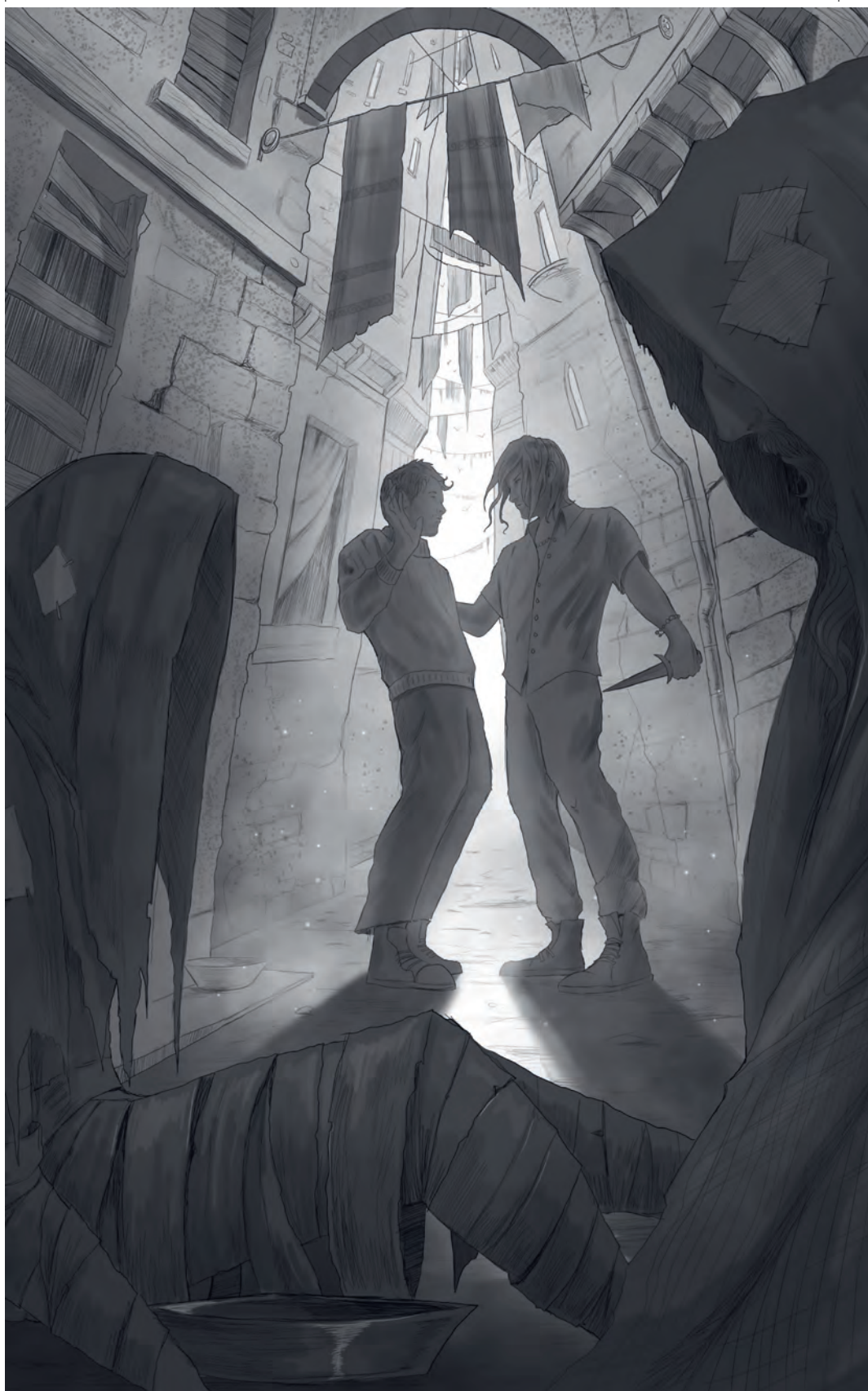
Georgie carelessly studied the blade in his hand. 'Yeah, but I say any old toot to you, Jim-Jam,' he said. 'Long as it shuts you up! With that book in my pocket, the world is mine for the taking! Moo-ha-ha, et cetera.'

They were attracting curious glances from people around them. People swathed in cloth like mummies; some wearing weird masks with long beaks. Two men had swords hanging from their belts and absently tossed something at them as they strode past. Jimmy flinched as whatever it was hit his leg and plopped into the filth at his feet. He bent down to look. A coin.

'Don't touch *anything*,' Georgie hissed.

Jimmy flinched away obediently. This was not the time to mess with Georgie. The man's golden locks, usually artfully dishevelled, were straggly with sweat and dirt. His right eye socket oozed, bloody from where Sam's *óthr* light had melted the eyeball in their recent battle, but the left eye gleamed with mad fire.

'Tell me you put the bag where I told you?' Georgie's



empty eye socket crinkled conspiratorially. 'I left your darling nephew's old rubbish in it, so he'll want it.'

Jimmy cowered and nodded, cursing the power Georgie had over him. If he could only think for himself, he would have left a message with the bag – something to reassure Sam, tell him to keep going, not to give up. Right now, he himself was scared. Scared like he hadn't felt since he was a child. Where had Georgie brought him? How soon till they could be back in Durham? He glanced again at the soldier's offering. The inscription round the dull grey coin's edge read *PHILIPPVS DEI GRA FRANCORVM REX*.

Philip by the grace of God, King of the Franks, he managed to translate.

They were in medieval France. There had been more than one King Philip of France between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, Jimmy remembered. Which one was this? He looked around helplessly. That cursed blade. He thought of its true owner – Sam, the Tempest – and called on all the memories of the weird stuff his sister was researching all those years ago, focusing his mind . . .

SAM . . . Please, Sam . . .

'Best get a wiggle on,' said Georgie, leading Jimmy up an uneven cobbled road between two walls. Jimmy noticed long white sacks tied up and bundled at the verges. The smell was the worst he had ever known. Oh God. These weren't sacks. They were bodies. Bodies in rough shrouds hurled into hasty piles.

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The road turned a corner and led to the stone gates of a large monastery.

‘Wait here,’ commanded Georgie.

A long column of people clustered at the gates, clearly desperate to get in. Jimmy noticed boot-faced monks with sticks fighting off the people at the front.

‘Seigneur!’ a woman shrieked. ‘Ayez pitié de nous! Have pity on us!’ A shove from one of the monks’ sticks sent her flying on to the cobbles.

Jimmy watched, fear twisting in his gut, as Georgie whispered something to one of the monks, who nodded and stepped back to let him slip inside.

The woman, meanwhile, had picked herself up. As she limped past him, Jimmy saw that her face was eaten away by black sores, bones visible where the flesh had rotted. Wrapped into the fold of her cloak was a baby.

Jimmy staggered back a short way along the cobbles, his mind whirring. King Philip of France . . . He glanced behind him at the piles of shrouded bodies. Philip the third, fourth or sixth, say, in the 1300s . . .

Oh God. *The Black Death*.

Georgie was back again, empty-handed. ‘No book, as it turns out. Which is *annoying*,’ he ground out, suddenly furious, then completely calm again. ‘I have one other errand to run before I go and find that circus kid.’

Jimmy’s head swam, thinking of the familiar way Georgie had chatted to the monks on the door. ‘Have you been here *before*?’ he whispered.

‘I never stand still, Jimbo,’ Georgie informed him. ‘You of all people should know that! What do you think I was doing after you gave me this blade? I went on a little gap yeeeah, meeting people, making friends in low places. Laying plans. Right, now don’t move a muscle.’

And off he skipped again.

Jimmy’s brain was doing somersaults. What had Georgie meant about laying plans and meeting people? How had he found the *time*? Did time function differently in these cursed spaces that the blade had revealed? And what did this mean for the future of the world?

Even with his nose buried in his shirt, the smell of so much death was starting to eat into him. Looking around, he noticed a group of men staring at him. One jabbed a finger at him, yelling in a harsh guttural language. They started advancing, one raising his heavy stick over his head.

‘Wooooo! I’m a ghost! *Je suis un fantôme!* Wooooooo!’ Georgie was back, wafting himself aggressively into their faces. ‘Clear off, losers!’ The men fled.

Georgie wrapped and knotted a little earthenware flask with a cork stopper into a polythene bag from his pocket. ‘C’mon, Jimmy-Riddle. I’ve got what we needed. Let’s bounce.’ He looked up, grinning broadly. Even the bloody mess where his right eye should have been was twinkling. He clicked his finger at Jimmy and strode off.

‘Are we going home now?’ Jimmy whimpered, following. The repugnance and sheer *wrongness* of the

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past few minutes was beyond the terrors of the worst nightmare.

‘In a manner of speaking,’ Georgie said. ‘You’re going to meet my mum.’

Jimmy gaped. ‘W-where does she live?’

‘Right here!’ said Georgie. ‘Let’s go RING ON HER BELL!’