

## **Chapter 1**

### **The Ground Opens Up**

Not so very long ago, in a place not too near to here and a time aside from this one, the people of the town of Jupe Sito bustled and bandied around, completing their daily errands and entertaining themselves on the town's medieval high street.

Named for the town's two founding sisters, Jupe Sito was buried within the Lesser Arthurian Mountains, just north of the Teton Pass. It was through here that the Snake River meandered. The source of that river, located fifty miles north, could be found in the centre of Jupe Sito. Here, the water trickled out of a raised mound of earth known as Dead Man's Bar.

The Bar could be found in the middle of the high street, which had been hastily named Shire Duke Street after the current mayor. It was along this street, and past the river's source, that Sam and Bobby were soon to walk.

"I'm thinkin' of buying some mandrake root for Ma," Sam mused thoughtfully as her eyes lingered on the shop front of the apothecary.

Bobby scoffed, "You know she won't appreciate it." He was still munching away on a pulled pork burger that he'd bought from the Snack Shack on the covered market. "I know she's in pain at the moment but..."

"I don't need you to tell me!" Sam snapped, throwing her hand in the air as if some hidden magic could silence him. "It's just a nice gesture." With that, she marched into the shop, leaving her brother behind her.

While he waited impatiently on a bench just up from the store, he watched the passers-by around him. Most were dressed in the drab attire of the townspeople: threadbare robes atop once-white-now-grey undershirt and trousers. However, some of the people wore far more luxurious attire, their colourful clothing juxtaposing with the dull stone of the shopfronts.

Eventually, Sam reappeared, a large paper bag in her hands and one gnarled finger of a mandrake root poking out of the top. "Let's get a move on, then."

As the siblings walked further along the street, a strange sound began to emanate from beneath their feet. On their right and just ahead, the protruding mound of Dead Man's Bar began to undulate. Sam and Bobby approached tentatively, as did many others.

Quite suddenly, the Bar dropped downwards, descending into the earth and leaving an abyss in its place. At the same moment, the air seemed to be sucked towards it and a strange silence fell.

Sam, Bobby and the townspeople stared in shock and awe, unable or unwilling to turn away. From the abys, a thick black smoke began to appear, gliding upwards and outwards, slowly but surely reaching for them all.