

# AMOS THE AMAZING



JORAH KAI



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A MESSAGE OF HOPE  
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*NEVER GIVE UP!*



The world's spiciest ice cream, a trip to Chongqing's rural countryside, and a strange collection of curious belongings begin this unforgettable tale that mixes Solarpunk science fiction and high fantasy for a thrilling modern fairytale.

Amos, a puckish 12-year-old boy who hides his insecurities behind a mask of mischief, dons strange artifacts he uncovers from his father's childhood bedroom. A peculiar power pulses through his body as he slips into a world of magic and monsters, where the dangerous-amber-eyed huli jing—a nine-tailed fox-spirit—draws him out, steals his soul, and poisons his grandpa.

Against all odds, Amos chases the fox into the Dreamland, where he meets friends and foes along the way on a perilous and fantastic journey to recover his soul before all is lost. A spine-tingling adventure full of imaginative characters and dazzling creatures, Amos the Amazing will delight adults, teens, and anyone who dares peer beyond the shadows.



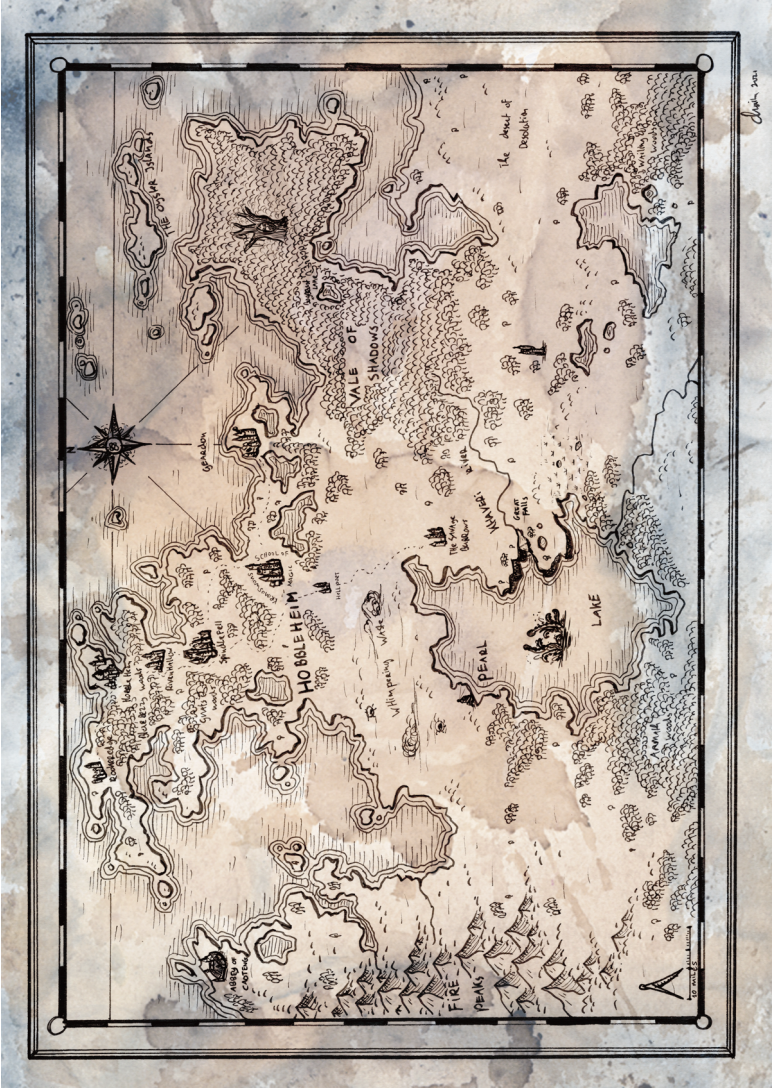


MAP OF CHONGQING





MAP OF AN'YATRA





## CHAPTER 5

### THE DEAD AND THE LIVING



Amos sat stunned as red, dim dancing lights swam in the darkness. His breath was trapped, increasingly claustrophobic in his dizzy chest until he felt tiny little paws scratching and prodding him. The scratch of blood broke the spell, and Amos snapped out of his reverie with a lurching gasp. “Ouch, Thunder!” he cried.

Amos heard Grandma creaking up the steps, with an overbearing chorus of sighs and suffering. Dazed but determined not to be caught, Amos slid out of the closet, brushed himself off, and rushed to stand beside the bed, looking casual.

Grandma popped her head in, “You didn’t shower?” she scolded. “It’s been half an hour already; what were you doing?” Her eyes scanned the room and returned to him, lingering on the fresh cat scratches on his legs. Amos glanced around guiltily, but Thunder was nowhere to be seen. “It’s dinner time! Hurry up!”

With eye rolls of impetuous fury, Amos stormed off to the bathroom. Amos showered, changed into his pajamas and bunny slippers, and stomped to the kitchen. His feet knew the way, but Amos drifted in a snow globe of his imagination. The nook was real. It had whooshed open, and something was

back there in the darkness. Could what he had dreamt been real? *What did it all mean?*

Downstairs, the kitchen table was laid out in a delicious hotpot feast. Plates of vegetables and meats of all colors, shapes, and sizes layered the table around the central steaming spicy pot of bubbling, broiling red chili oil. Amos sat down, grabbed his chopsticks, and went fishing inside. After all the exercise and sun he had gotten today and after his nook-stupor daydream, he was lightheaded, exhausted, and humiliated. Still, the food was so delicious and spicy. It rejuvenated him with the magick of ghost peppers, the secret of Chongqing spice. Still, his thoughts wandered past the closet into the abyss. Amos wolfed down bowls of crunchy lotus root, slices of tripe that looked like old dish towels, and spicy hot beef strips.

“Thanks, Grandma,” Amos said. A tired smile jerked the corners of his mouth into a rictus-grin.

Grandma, for her part, let him eat as fast as he wanted and didn’t complain when he ran upstairs after dinner.

His pounding heart jackhammered in his ears as he crept into the murky closet and felt for the hidden place. He reached in with both hands, jamming one finger into something wooden and hard. The trunk! He dragged it out into the dim evening gloom of his Papa’s childhood room and shoved open the latch.

Amos gasped, his trepidation forgotten, as the trunk creaked open stiffly. Dusty air puffed into his face, and a shimmering glint of metal caught the moonlight. He unwrapped a necklace that held a ring and pendant, both marked with the triple swirls of what looked like inter-connected trees and slipped it over his head. There was something else, a piece of paper folded in half. He opened it, examining the flowing script, unlike anything he’d ever seen. A portent, a mystery? A conundrum. He slipped it into his pocket. He shook the silken fabric in circles, and dancing dirt devils fluttered around the room until the cloak was simply dusty, not dust-caked. With a

flourish, he slipped the silken red robe over his head. Something changed with the sound in the room and how he perceived it. It took a moment to realize that his heart wasn't pounding anymore. It was like everything; his breathing, his heart, and time and space itself had slowed down.

Calmly, he tiptoed to the hallway stairs and listened. Grandma was cleaning up after dinner. If only I could creep down the stairs as silent as a caterpillar, Amos thought, squinting in concentration. When he opened them, he was already at the bottom of the stairs. He peered around in surprise. *How did I do that?*

Amos snuck towards the door, but there was no sign of Thunder or Rufus. Grandma hummed while she washed up after dinner, the contented sound of family life. For a moment, he froze at the doorway.

The hot pot had warmed his belly and washed away some of the indignity of the day. He could picture himself turning around, going to help her put away plates and dishes and the easy conversation of evening chatter. In another world, there was an Amos with no notions of skulking around in a dusty old cloak. Then he blushed, embarrassed at himself, for he was a boy of 12, a prime age for skulking. "Whatever!" he said and prepared to skulk hard. *If you want something you've never had, you have to do something you've never done.*

He turned the handle carefully, opening the door without making a creak. Thunder slipped by his feet and out the door, and Amos padded quickly behind. Outside, Thunder hopped down the way toward the forest. The rusty red moon above was fat and full. Amos whistled at the blood moon as the air pulled him away into the vacuum of night, and then came the crack as the heavens split asunder. It had been warm, and the ground was dry, but a single drop of cool rain dripped down the back of his neck.

Amos followed Thunder around the sweet-smelling lavender hill and around the bend. Amos loved his new cloak, light and sleek, and as the rain softly drizzled down, he pulled

the hood up around his head. Thunder chased a butterfly into a bush and soon hopped out the other side, and they were together again. Lightning exploded in the sky, and the night cracked all around him like an exploding cannon. He barely managed to stay on his muddy feet.

Thunder flew through the air and caught the lovely many-colored butterfly under one paw. Moments later, raising the paw to examine it, the butterfly took off again, off the path and into the trees. Thunder bolted after it. Amos followed, racing down a slippery slope until he came to rest next to a large tree stump under the protective canopy of foliage.

His necklace twinkled silvery, faintly humming with power in the moonlight, and Amos could feel the hair on his neck stand on end. The barrier between his imagination and the unknown blurred as secretive and stealthy things crept. Amos heard a chittering all around him in the darkness, and glowing eyes appeared all around him, like in his dreams. Suddenly, Amos found himself entirely lost in the dark woods, far from home.

Under the canopy of trees, the fresh air was infused with the fragrance of pine and lavender flowers. Amos didn't know that he had stopped exactly over the eighth stone age cultural site discovered in China, dating back more than 20,000 years, along the Bachuan River. They had been full of ancient, beautiful, and almost mystical bronze Dragon lanterns and an entire host of ceremonial stone warriors, a little Terracotta Army. He only knew that as rays of moonlight reflected in a large puddle, revealing pools of glowing, milky orbs, he was not alone. Some said the old Tongliang Ming Tombs were haunted or a thinner barrier to neighboring magical worlds. Right now, all Amos knew was that the many eyes that watched him in the gloom were not of Tongliang, not of this earth, and somehow, as his necklace began to hum with hidden power, Amos knew it was all his fault.

Thunder began to growl, a low, guttural sound, as the singing cicadas caterwauled all around him. The milky orbs



scattered with a low chittering, and it grew darker. A nebulous green fog rolled around his feet, and Thunder hissed and sprang away, leaving him all alone. Amos held his breath, hoping it would soon pass, rammed his eyes closed, and counted back from ten.

When he opened them, his heart skipped a beat as he gazed into the mercurial amber eyes from his nightmares.

A sly, slinky red fox padded toward him, and a shiver ran down Amos' spine. Its beaked nose touched his. Rows of razor-sharp fangs slavered. The fox-spirit spoke in a terrible voice that grated his nerves, rooted in a petrified stupor.

"Hello, boy. I've been looking everywhere for you."

Amos froze, his breath caught in his chest.

"Who...who are you?" Amos stammered.

"I am the gloom, foolish boy. I am the crack in your light. I am the hungry wolf come home for dinner. You couldn't resist playing with your toys, could you? And here I am, to eat your foolish soul." The huli jing lifted its head back to laugh with a terrible callous coldness as tears leaked down Amos' cheeks and dripped from his glasses. The boy who always got away finally knew what it was like to be completely without hope. The fox curled up around Amos, inhaling him like a fine perfume. Its nine shadowy tails fanned out around him like the bars of a prison cell. Amos was trapped in the clutches of a huli jing, a fox-spirit trickster. He now knew that demons were real, and the boy's mind, stretched to its limit, suddenly snapped. The forest was silent, and time dripped like sweat from his brow. The fox licked its lips, savoring his fear, and it occurred to Amos that there could be something worse than death. It pressed its nose against the boy's cheek until a salty tear fell from his eyes. A long scratchy sandpaper tongue licked the side of his face, leaving a sticky, cloudy residue across his glasses. It was at that moment when the fox-spirit brushed against the silver world tree pendant that Amos first felt their spirits intermingle. It was a strange coupling of the fox-spirit's

joy and his fear. The Trickster reeled back and sniffed at the boy's neck.

"You're not *the boy*, not exactly. From here, but not entirely. How peculiar. A strange one, with a strange smell, covered in trinkets you know nothing about," the fox whispered. It sniffed again, curiously. "But you'll do, won't you?" The fox inhaled him like he was a delicious meal. "Yes, you'll do." The Trickster lifted its head back as if in laughter and a guttural, slow, syrupy sound creeped out as its jaw cracked, dislocating. Suddenly, it lurched forward and engulfed the boy's head.

Amos shivered as a numbing tingle spread through him. Slack-jawed, tears rimmed his spectacled eyes, and the vicious, ice cold burning pain spread quickly out from his chest cavity to his extremities. Amos felt some essence—the 'He' part of 'Him'—leaking into the Trickster's hungry mouth. He bit his tongue until the taste of tangy iron filled his mouth. His vision blurred and twisted into a möbius of colors and memories, drawn painfully from his core, a life of experiences draining rapidly out his eyes, nose, mouth, and ears. And something else happened too, a twinning of his sensation, a doubling of his eyes. He was both a very hurt, weak boy, and a very powerful, hungry Trickster. One dwindled, while the other expanded hungrily, greedily, bleeding the boy dry.

In the darkest abyss of hopelessness, a small sliver of light shone down upon the boy as the Earth and moon hurriedly parted ways. Feeding, sucking the soul from the boy, the Trickster barely registered a blur of white fur soaring through the air until it collided with an astonishing force that left the Trickster winded, even as the beast tore deep into the huli jing's exposed neck. The beast's savage maw tore through fur, and flesh and blood, to the bone. Amos—no—the fox-spirit yowled and struck out with its vicious tails. The furry white blur held on doggedly, ripping, biting, and tearing, and the two beasts snarled and whirled like primordial forces of nature.

The fox-spirit exhaled a noxious green gas into the beast's face. Gagging, it finally released its death grip upon the fox's

throat. The Trickster shifted forms and drew a long, dark magick-runed blade that dripped with a purplish ichor, and it sailed through the air, and Amos heard a pitiful yelp. On the ground, Amos, spent and hovering between life and death, closed his eyes. He heard the cries of battle and felt a pungent magick envelop him. And then there was silence. After a time, the cicadas and crickets resumed their dance of life, and the creatures finally exhaled. The last thing Amos remembered before the blackness swallowed him was the haunting song of the forest.

## CHAPTER 6

### A SMALL SLIVER



The hula jing's nine lashing tails strike out at the fluffy beast in a rapid-fire assault, caving deep red gashes into its body, but the feral creature only growled and thrashed and tore all the harder. The Trickster could smell the dog's fear, but it was fear for the boy, a protective concern. It would not relent or be scared away, the Trickster knew, reeling dizzily as a crimson tide, its own lifeblood, washed over them both and the world pulsed darkly. It was time to go.

The Trickster focused on a gem that pierced its right ear and conjured a stinking cloud of noxious yellow gas that spewed from its mouth and the hole in its throat. The guardian beast gagged, retched at the putrid haze, and released the fox, who became mist-like. Shadows swirled, and reformed into the shape of a tall, androgynous humanoid. The Trickster kicked the beast with a leather-booted foot, that sent it flying back end over end, and drew a black dagger that oozed a purplish ichor. As it snarled, the wound was torn open and began to bleed again. *No ordinary bite*, the Trickster cursed, pressing one hand to the wound to staunch the flow of blood, as the other tossed the dagger skillfully through the air. It pierced deep into the belly of the beast, who whimpered, standing protectively over the fallen lump that used to be

Amos' body. From its bloody maw came a vicious bark. It would clearly fight to the death to protect the child.

*Amos, now adjusting to life behind strange amber eyes and the dispassionate, calculating coldness of the Trickster, dizzily looked upon the bloody and ragged Rufus. By some artifice he didn't understand, Amos' spirit was contained within, and bound to the shapeshifter. He found himself in a savage yet beautiful forest full of serene majesty. Areas of the woods were recently burnt and scarred by war, but the living forest seemed quick to adapt and regrow. It felt intelligent, cunning, and ferocious.*

The Trickster fumbled in its cloak full of things for a murky reddish vial and managed to bite the cork off. It evaporated like translucent smoke, before being swallowed down in one gulp—the taste reminiscent of the sins of the donor: greedy, selfish, and cruel. A gentle coolness that numbed to the bone magically stanching the blood flowing through the clenched fist and partially closed the wound. The bleeding lessened but did not stop. One long, delicate finger plucked a rolled-up bandage from another enchanted pocket and applied it to the injured throat. The bandage pulsed and glowed with Elven runes, becoming a second layer of skin. It would hold, for now. A wound like this would need powerful magick to heal. *Curse that damnable beast.*

Amos felt warmth course through him—through them—and wondered what was happening. How had he become a dark passenger in this cursed Trickster. The horrifying wounds began to close—he was grateful—but as he glanced at the motionless boy in a crimson cloak upon the ground, spectacles scattered underfoot, it dawned on him that he was looking upon his own still form. He had been spirited away from the life he knew. He suddenly felt a rush of fear, which like the magick in that flask, somehow fed and rejuvenated the Trickster.

The Trickster reached again into the multitude of tiny pockets and produced a little lantern. Setting it down, it quickly grew to full size and began to glow and whistle, expelling a thick greenish mist. The groping fog wrenched the

edges where worlds rubbed against each other and opened the Foggy Way—the way to An'Yatra. *Home.*

As the smoke cleared, the Trickster emerged in a heavily tangled grove of low, fine-fingered yew trees, a savage yet beautiful forest full of serene majesty. Areas of the woods were recently burnt and scarred by war, and the Trickster stopped to lean against one ancient, sprawling Senator yew that had survived both fire and axe. From its touch, the Trickster felt its tremendous age, thousands of years, and the incredible suffering it had endured as it had worked with its family to repel invaders of the Vale. Some had fared worse and connected via roots, and the Trickster felt the palpable suffering of each and every tree that had been taken from the Fae grove. The living forest seemed quick to adapt and regrow, however, and the Trickster marveled for a moment at its intelligence and cunning ferocity. The grasping boughs shined only a dim hue from the luminescence of alien creepers, but it was enough for the nimble Trickster to navigate what outsiders called The Green Hell - a place particularly unwelcoming to strangers - that the Trickster had once called home.

A secretive shuffling drew their attention to the nearby foliage. A little Vroog—a sneaky, scuttling, little beast—stuck one furry head above the leaf canopy as wide brown furry ears twitched in curiosity. When it saw the Trickster glance in its direction, its milky eyes melted into black pools of dread, and the tentacles surrounding its mouth twitched nervously. All six of its short legs backtracked quickly into the canopy of tree cover. A commotion rustled, quickly disassembling whatever traps the Vroogs had mucked up to catch the unwary traveler, and the chittering things scrambled away; hungry might they be, they were cunning enough to run.

The Trickster donned a shadowy hood and faded into the forest. The second skin covering the wound would not hold for long, and they were far from home. Despite the unwelcome clawing fingers and thorny creepers, the hostile forest

begrudged the Trickster passage. Creatures scurried out of sight and hid until the dark shadow passed.

Alert for intrusions or spies of the Summer Queen, yet oblivious to the curious eyes of the boy on the inside, the Trickster took rest under an ancient yew tree. Long fingers dipped back into the wondrous cape to produce a simple bone flute. The Trickster's cruel, tusked mouth, at odds with the delicate Elven features and eyes like galaxies, played a few haunting notes before slumping down to rest a moment, exhausted.

A cold, wet nose nudged the Trickster's crown of horns and licked its face, bristling against the Trickster's protruding lower jaw tusks. The Trickster's eyes shot open, a feral gaze focusing slowly upon the beast as one hand shot to a rune-carved dagger. It was only a Shantak, a huge bird-like beast with scales instead of feathers, larger than an elephant, with six legs and two pairs of long tentacles that sprouted from the tops of its limbs. The Shantak whinnied and stomped the ground, smelling the Trickster's bloodied face as it phased in and out of sight, moving to and fro with natural illusory magick. The Shantak had responded to the pheromonal call of the bone flue, and the druid Trickster grabbed the beast's neck and painfully climbed onto its back.

Despite its immense size and jaw-dropping speed, the Shantak was graceful and avoided trees and creatures alike. A shadowy blur, it was too fast to be hunted and avoided all manner of predators. As the beast raced through a makeshift path, the Trickster's ears twitched. They kicked at the beast to race forward as a translucent, lumpy, toad-like creature lunged forward, a mass of pink tentacles at the end of its snout shooting out to ensnare them. The bulbous clay giant rose on its back haunches. An eyeless face sniffed the air and brought its feelers up to catch the approaching breeze. The beast roared, spun around, and the Shadow drew a black runed sword. As the mass of tentacles swooped down at them again, the Trickster's blade cut up in a lightning-fast arc, crackling

with power and severing the entire trunk. The lumpy creature roared in pain and fell to the forest floor, but the pair were already long gone.

Their shadows raced across the land, chasing twilight, and soon they were past the forest and around the lake that bordered Hobbleheim and north, by Geardon, through the smallfolk hills of Pook country.

The Trickster, quickly fading from loss of blood, spurred the beast on. The Shantak picked up speed for a sprint along the road to Kronoswons, moving like the wind. They blew by the occasional traveler so fast that in the purplish dusk, the beast passed like a blur, gone sooner than it had come.

A young Pook family was heading home in a chugging steam-powered carriage with a fat basket of fresh-caught fish as the beast raced along the cobblestone road, but so quickly did the shadow beast sail, and so dark was its passenger that only the two young children noticed and sat up straight. Astonished, they felt the sensation of whooshing, blowing their hair back. Their parents, discussing their dinner plans and the best combination of spices for Geardon river fish, never even noticed.

Soon the beast and rider arrived at the modest towers and spires of Kronoswons. Magically barred from entering the grounds, the Shantak could only dump the Trickster uncereemoniously at the gift shop entrance. It nuzzled its master for a moment and then turned and disappeared as fast as it had arrived.

*Amos gasped in amazement.* The castle gift shop bore a logo that read 'Kronoswons School of Magick.' Everything seemed so fantastic, yet utterly normal, and Amos desperately wished he was here under any other circumstance. *Am I dead? What will happen to me now?*

The Trickster tried to rise but collapsed with a wet groan, their long flowing hair spilling out of a black-feathered cap.

“Get the Mistress,” the beleaguered Pook giftshop worker cried, and a crowd quickly gathered around them. The shell-



shocked girl held the prone druid with care, shaking in her bloodied apron.

“Who’s that now?” called a woman from the crowd.

“Looks a bit like one of those Slowmorth types....” answered a gruff, bearded Dwarf.

“Is that an Elf? Could it be?” a timid student asked as she dropped a handful of books and sweaters.

“I’ve never seen an Elf before,” replied her curious friend.

“Naw, darling, look at the tusks. It’s an Ork for sure,” the gruff Dwarf answered.

“She’s an awfully pretty Ork then...” said a boisterous first-year.

“She?” came a scornful voice followed by a haughty laugh. “Watch your tongue, foolish freshman, that’s Shugo the Shadow, deadliest assassin on either side of the Savage Sea, a handsome devil he is—” drawled a thickly accented portly Pook in an elaborate gleaming gown.

“That can’t be Shugo! Shugo’s been dead for years!” growled the gruff Dwarf.

“Don’t much look dead to me—” the gilded Pook said.

“Make way,” commanded a stocky, robed Dwarf who carried herself with quiet authority as she pushed her way to the front of the crowd. Wearing the school robes of green and white, all recognized her as Luka Starlight, the school’s esteemed headmaster. She gazed at the druid with smoldering, doe-brown eyes and reached a starshadow-black hand over the druid’s porcelain-pale face to brush away the hair.

The druid’s distinctive amber eyes shot open in recognition, and bloodied lips whispered, “Luka....”

“Asht’arra,” Headmaster Luka Starlight said, shaking her head, leaning heavily on a wooden staff capped with a crystal orb. She wore a sad smile. “You should not have come here, Trickster. You are not welcome. Not anymore.”

The druid’s eyes pleaded for mercy but found no anger or malice in Luka’s eyes, only pity and sadness. Luka stood slowly and whispered, “*porta diastasis*,” as she gestured with the staff.

A third eye opened above her nose and glowed with celestial power, and the crystal cap of her staff sparkled as magical energies gathered around the fallen form. The headmistress of magick commanded a portal to crackle open and engulf the Trickster.

The crowd leaned forward, quiet but intensely curious. A portal to a dark, spired gothic castle ripped into mid-air. It was the Slowmorth Academy of Magick. “I believe this is where you meant to be, and I presume they will tend to you.”

“No, wait—” the shadowy druid tried to stall for time. Unceremoniously, the headmaster’s staff pushed the crumpled form through the portal. For just a moment, as the druid’s consciousness faded, Amos’ beamed to the surface and grasped Luka’s hand. Her eyes flickered with recognition as the word ‘help’ bubbled to the druid’s lips. But it was too late.

The spell pulled them apart.

With the dizzying energy of whirling particles dissolving and reconstructing the wounded druid, the Trickster landed like an old newspaper at the gates of a second magick school in one day. The Trickster’s eyes shut as the crumbled figure slammed into the school’s entrance.

Amos sunk deep into a dark place, a dreamlike place.

The portal closed, and that was that.

## THANK YOU

Thank you for checking out this two-chapter excerpt of the Solarpunk Fantasy novel *Amos the Amazing*. It was a labor of love by author Jorah Kai and an incredible team of editors, artists, and contributors, and we have a lot more in store for you after this book. We hope you are interested to learn more about Amos and his story.

The eBook goes on sale on October 31, 2022, at all major distributors and some library services, and there is a paperback edition also. If you are interested in preordering *Amos the Amazing*, you can check out the Amazon link here:

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them and share them with your friends, and every review counts to help pass the SOLARPUNK message on.

Thanks so much for the gift of your time and attention, and we hope you have a wonderful day—cheers, from your friends at More Publishing.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Someone once told Jorah Kai to *write what he knew*, but since he was 12 and knew very little, the avid reader set off on a life-long journey to master a variety of esoteric subjects. He's been a lifelong student, martial artist, musician, English teacher, writer, newspaper columnist, editor, web designer, dance music producer and touring DJ, black rock city existential detective and philosopher, fire-breathing gypsy circus performer, standup comedian, and family man, all of which offered many profound insights into the human condition. He now lives in the solarpunk capitol of Asia, Chongqing.

Kai enjoys conversing in foreign languages because it's more mysterious, and he enjoys playing guitar and eating pizza. He has lived at the confluence of two mighty rivers, the Yangtze and the Jialing, with a large and loving family for many years as a human being and forever after as the most immortal of all supernatural beasts, *a writer*.



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