

Alexi Francis

# The Waking Wood

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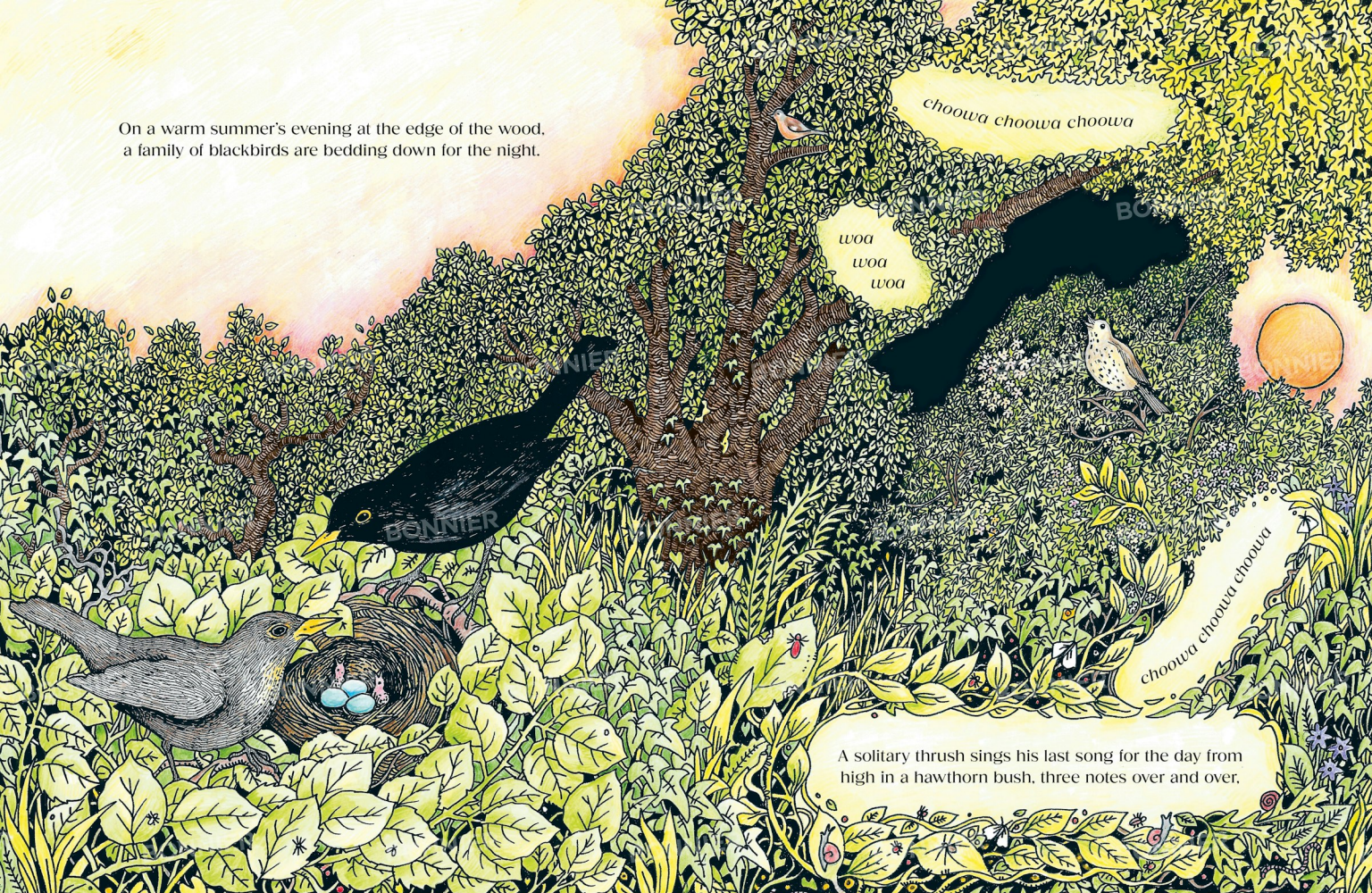
As the sun sinks down behind the trees in a glow  
of orange, a wood pigeon coo-coos herself to sleep  
while crickets hum and white moths dance.



All is serene and quiet now, except for a faint churring  
from the woodland edge, where trees meet heath.



On a warm summer's evening at the edge of the wood,  
a family of blackbirds are bedding down for the night.



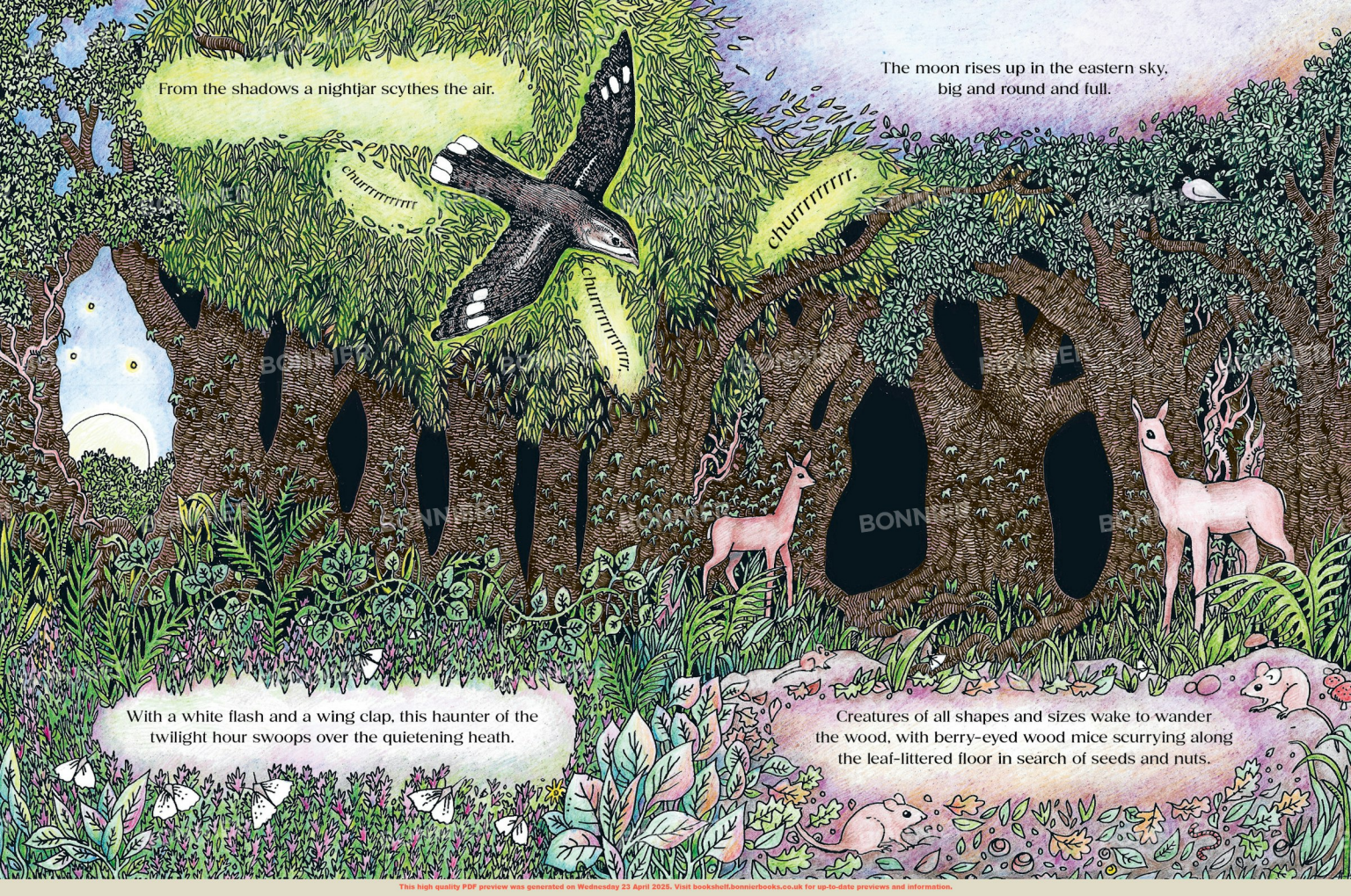
choowa choowa choowa

woa  
woa  
woa

choowa choowa choowa

A solitary thrush sings his last song for the day from  
high in a hawthorn bush, three notes over and over.





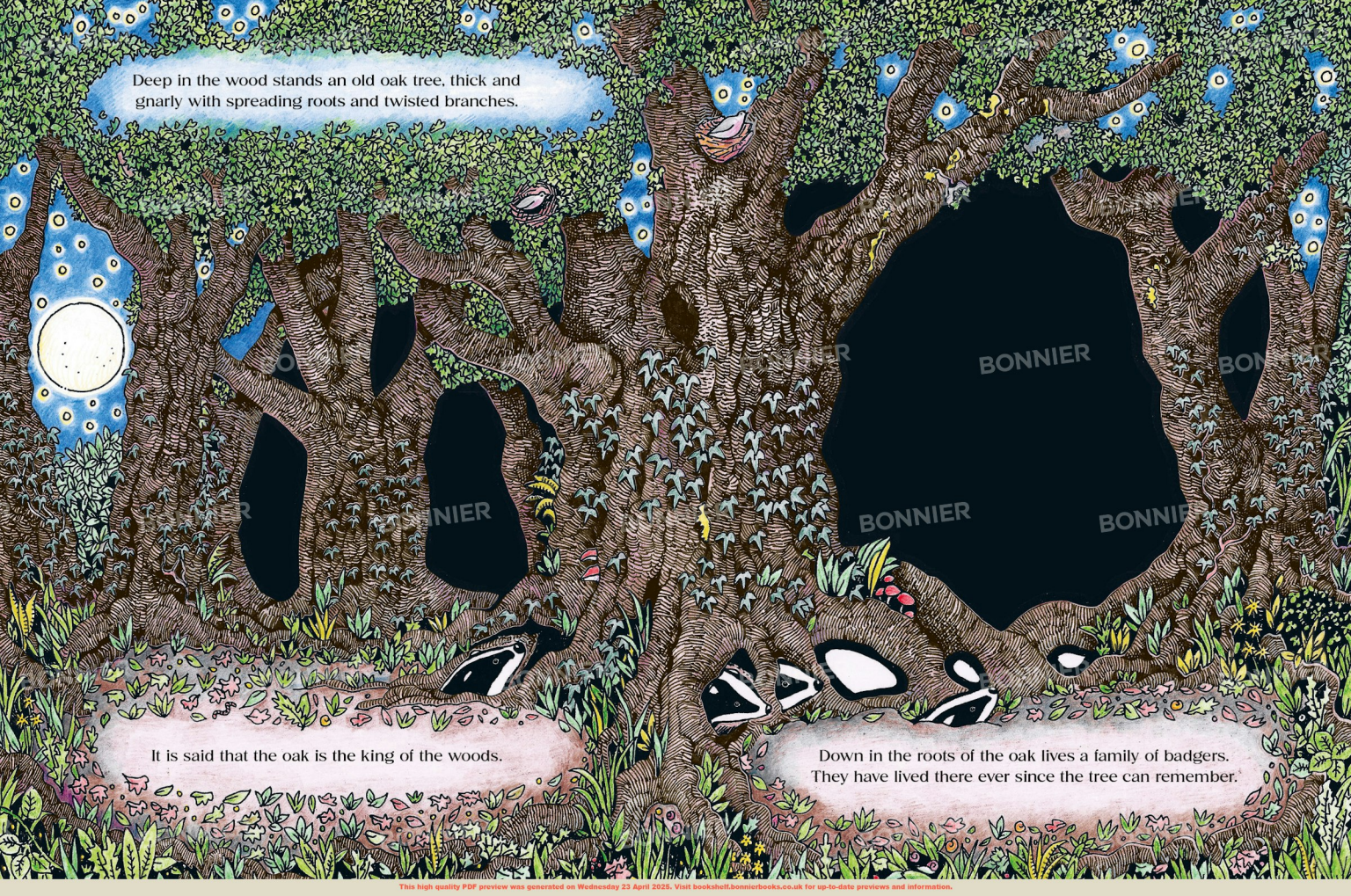
From the shadows a nightjar scythes the air.

The moon rises up in the eastern sky,  
big and round and full.

With a white flash and a wing clap, this haunter of the  
twilight hour swoops over the quietening heath.

Creatures of all shapes and sizes wake to wander  
the wood, with berry-eyed wood mice scurrying along  
the leaf-littered floor in search of seeds and nuts.



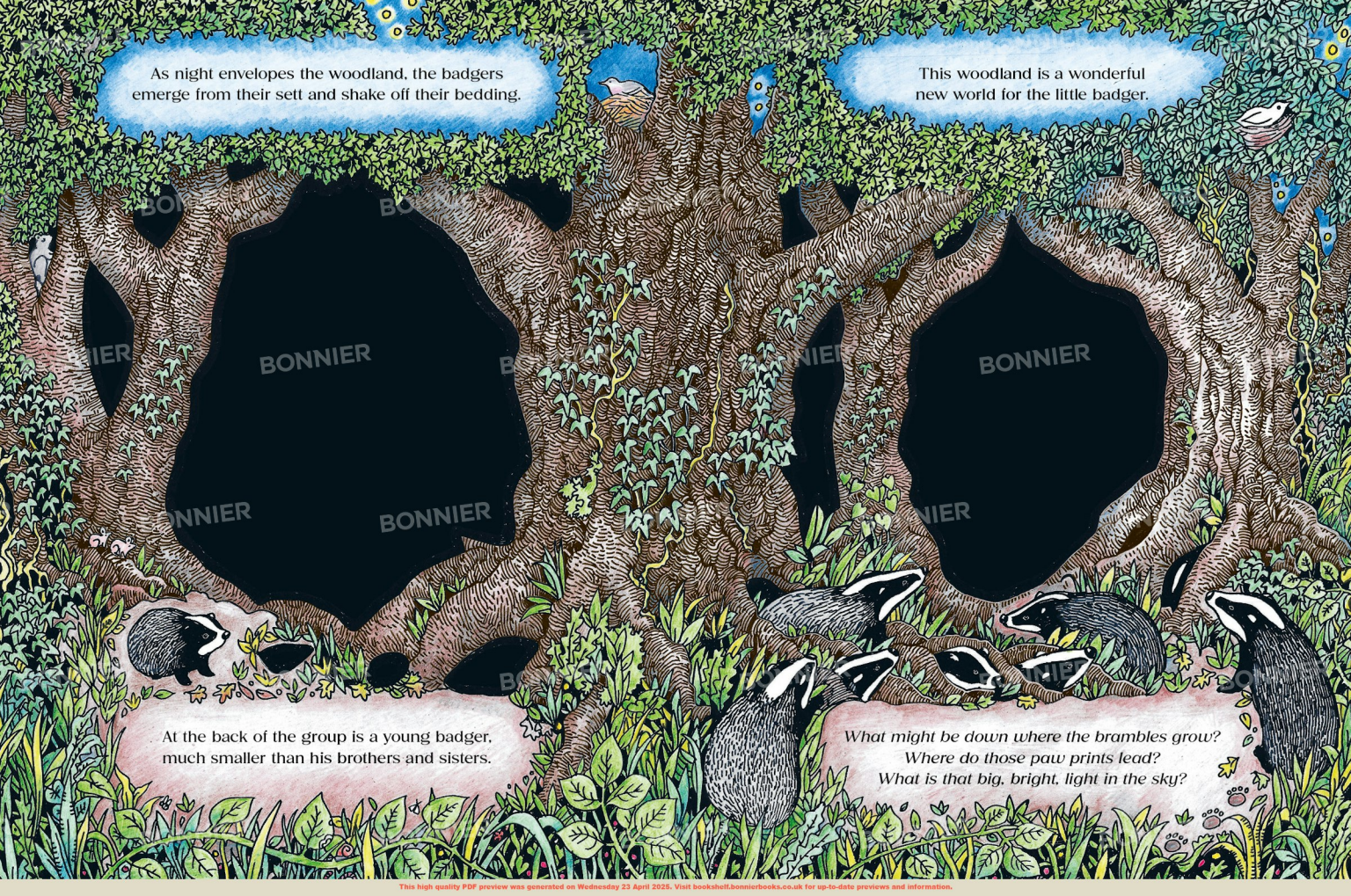


Deep in the wood stands an old oak tree, thick and gnarly with spreading roots and twisted branches.

It is said that the oak is the king of the woods.

Down in the roots of the oak lives a family of badgers.  
They have lived there ever since the tree can remember.





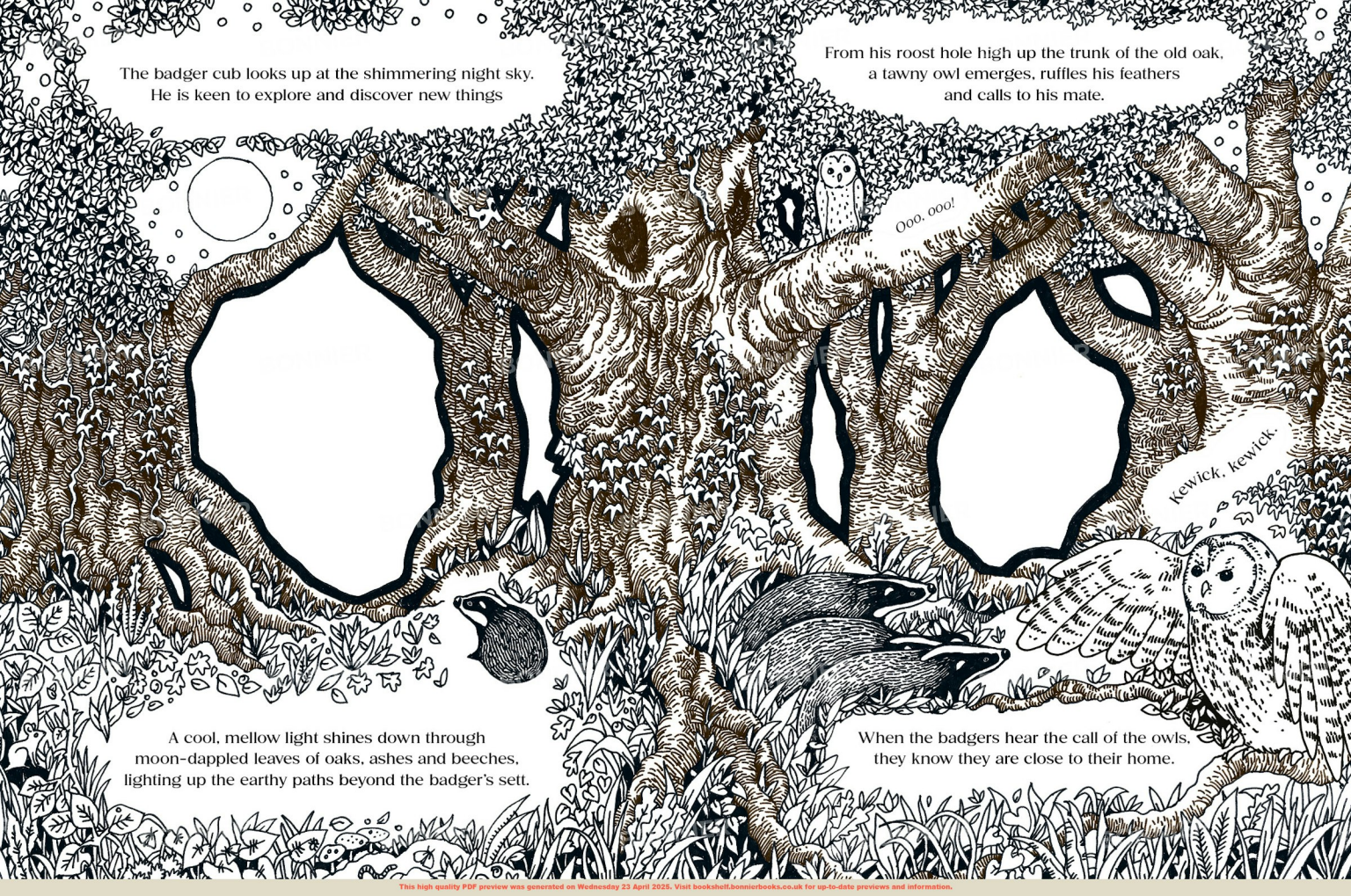
As night envelops the woodland, the badgers emerge from their sett and shake off their bedding.

This woodland is a wonderful new world for the little badger.

At the back of the group is a young badger, much smaller than his brothers and sisters.

What might be down where the brambles grow?  
Where do those paw prints lead?  
What is that big, bright, light in the sky?





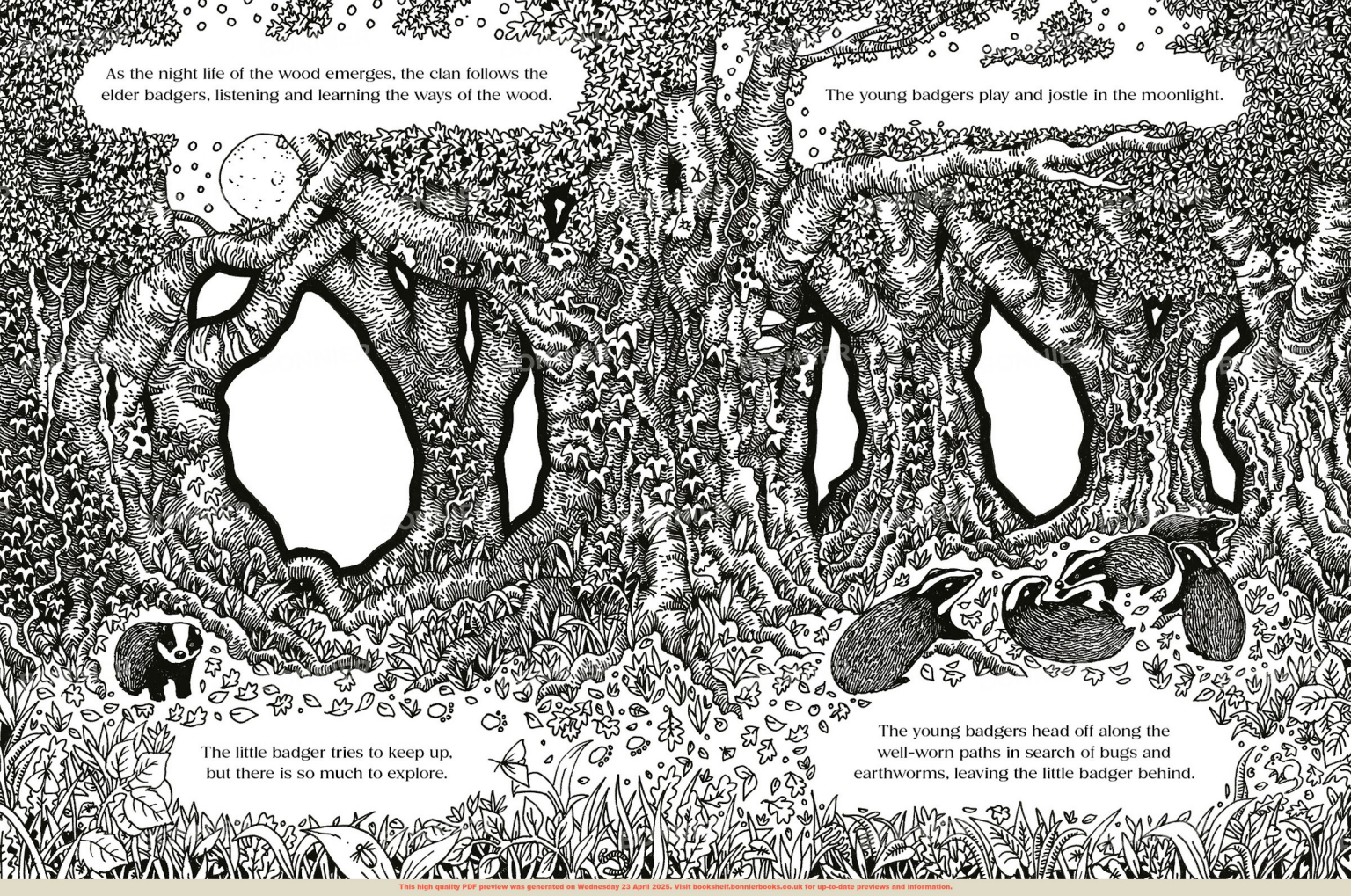
The badger cub looks up at the shimmering night sky.  
He is keen to explore and discover new things

From his roost hole high up the trunk of the old oak,  
a tawny owl emerges, ruffles his feathers  
and calls to his mate.

A cool, mellow light shines down through  
moon-dappled leaves of oaks, ashes and beeches,  
lighting up the earthy paths beyond the badger's sett.

When the badgers hear the call of the owls,  
they know they are close to their home.






As the night life of the wood emerges, the clan follows the elder badgers, listening and learning the ways of the wood.

The young badgers play and jostle in the moonlight.

The little badger tries to keep up,  
but there is so much to explore.

The young badgers head off along the  
well-worn paths in search of bugs and  
earthworms, leaving the little badger behind.






Just off the path the badger sees a light.  
In the shadowy roots of a hollow tree  
glow worm gleams luminous green.

Over roots and under brambles he wanders,  
away from the path and his family, and finds  
himself in a twinkling woodland glade.

Curious, the badger goes to take a closer look.

All around him, like fallen stars,  
glow worms glimmer and dance.



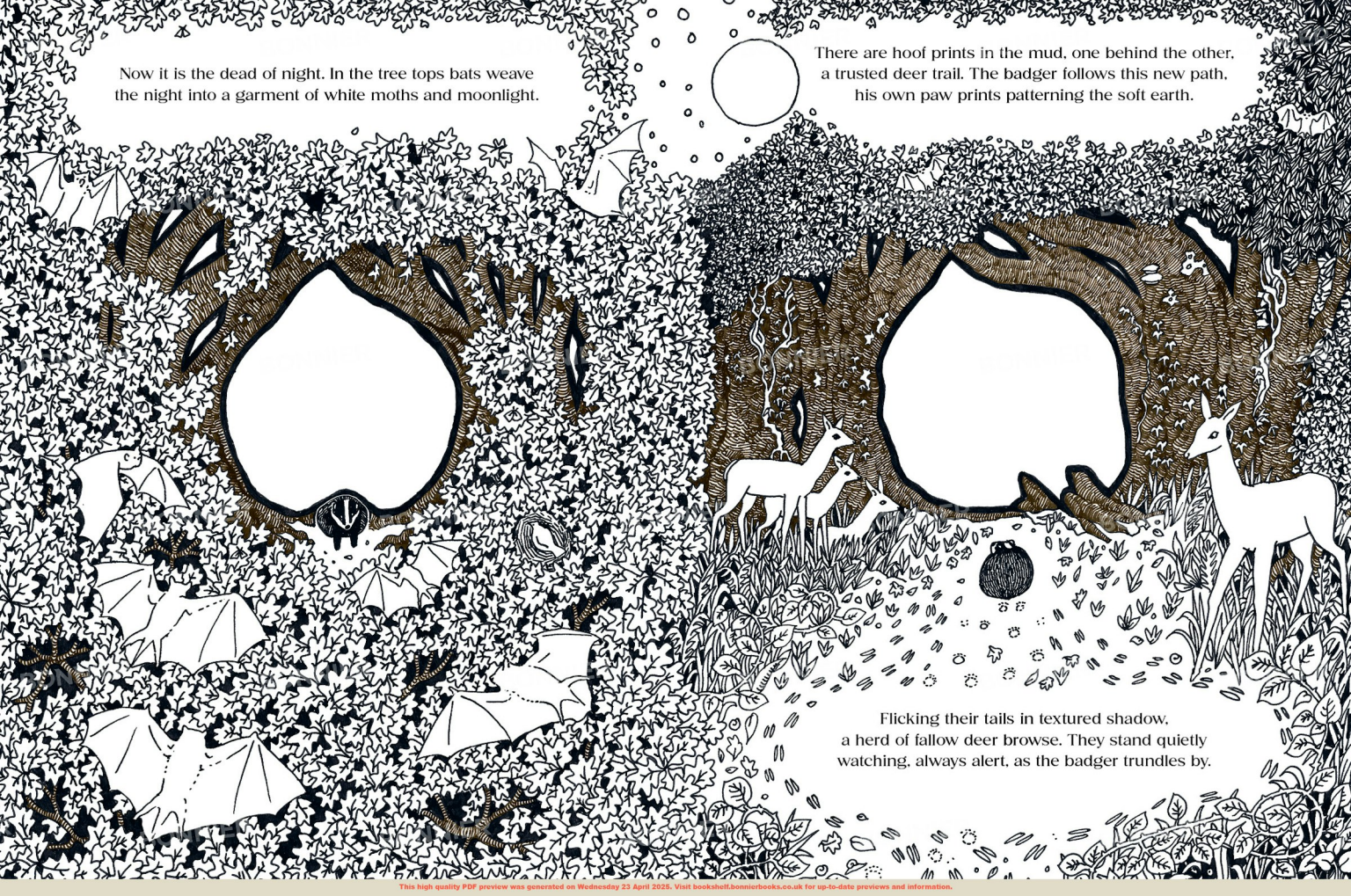


A gentle breeze brushes the moon-kissed tangle  
of bramble, moss, fern and leaves. The badger  
sniffs the air and the unfamiliar earthy notes.

As the wind whistles, he ventures onwards and deeper  
into the wood, further away from his family.

What else lies beyond the glade?



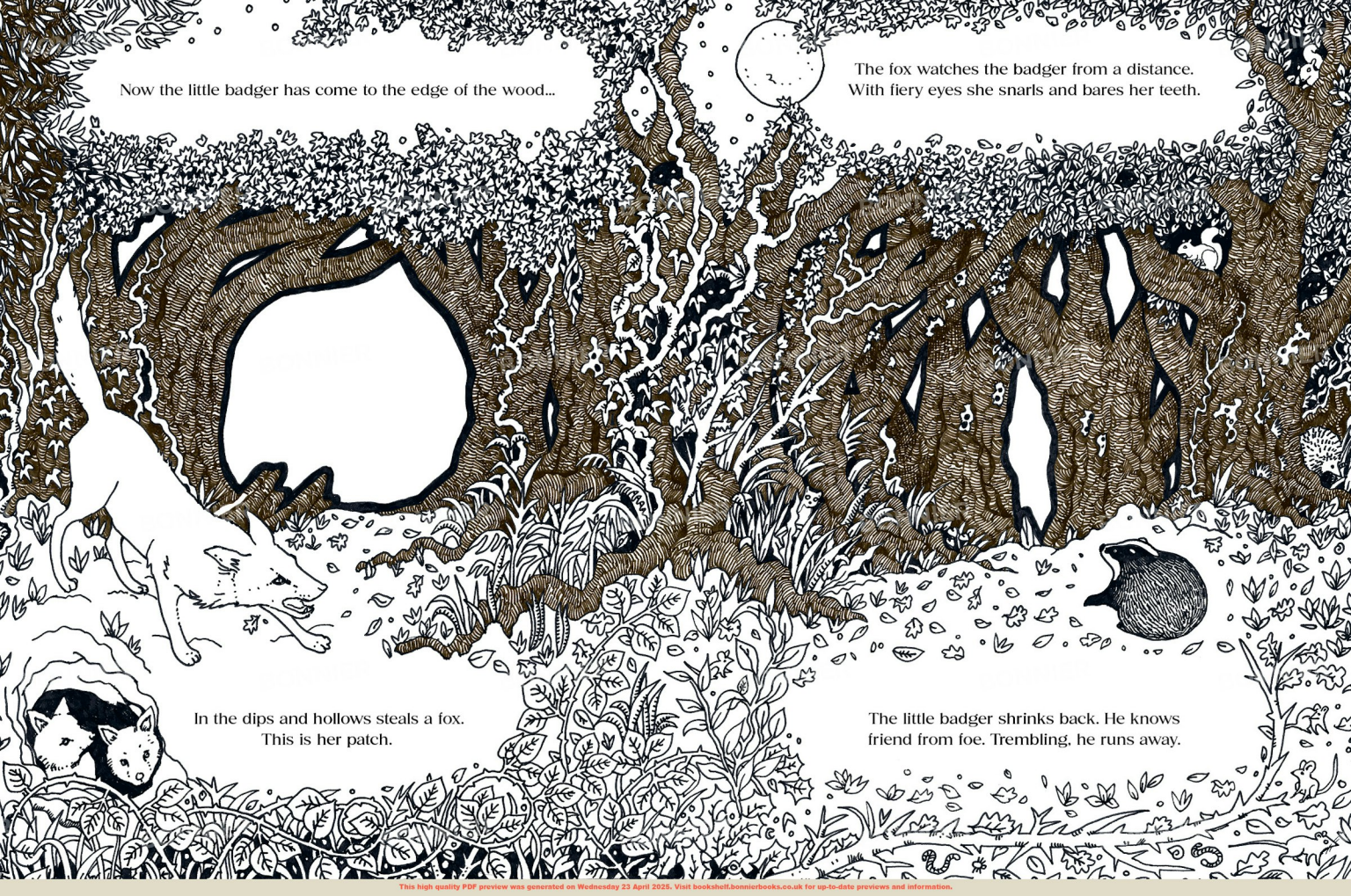


Now it is the dead of night. In the tree tops bats weave the night into a garment of white moths and moonlight.

There are hoof prints in the mud, one behind the other, a trusted deer trail. The badger follows this new path, his own paw prints patterning the soft earth.

Flicking their tails in textured shadow, a herd of fallow deer browse. They stand quietly watching, always alert, as the badger trundles by.





Now the little badger has come to the edge of the wood...

The fox watches the badger from a distance.  
With fiery eyes she snarls and bares her teeth.

In the dips and hollows steals a fox.  
This is her patch.

The little badger shrinks back. He knows  
friend from foe. Trembling, he runs away.



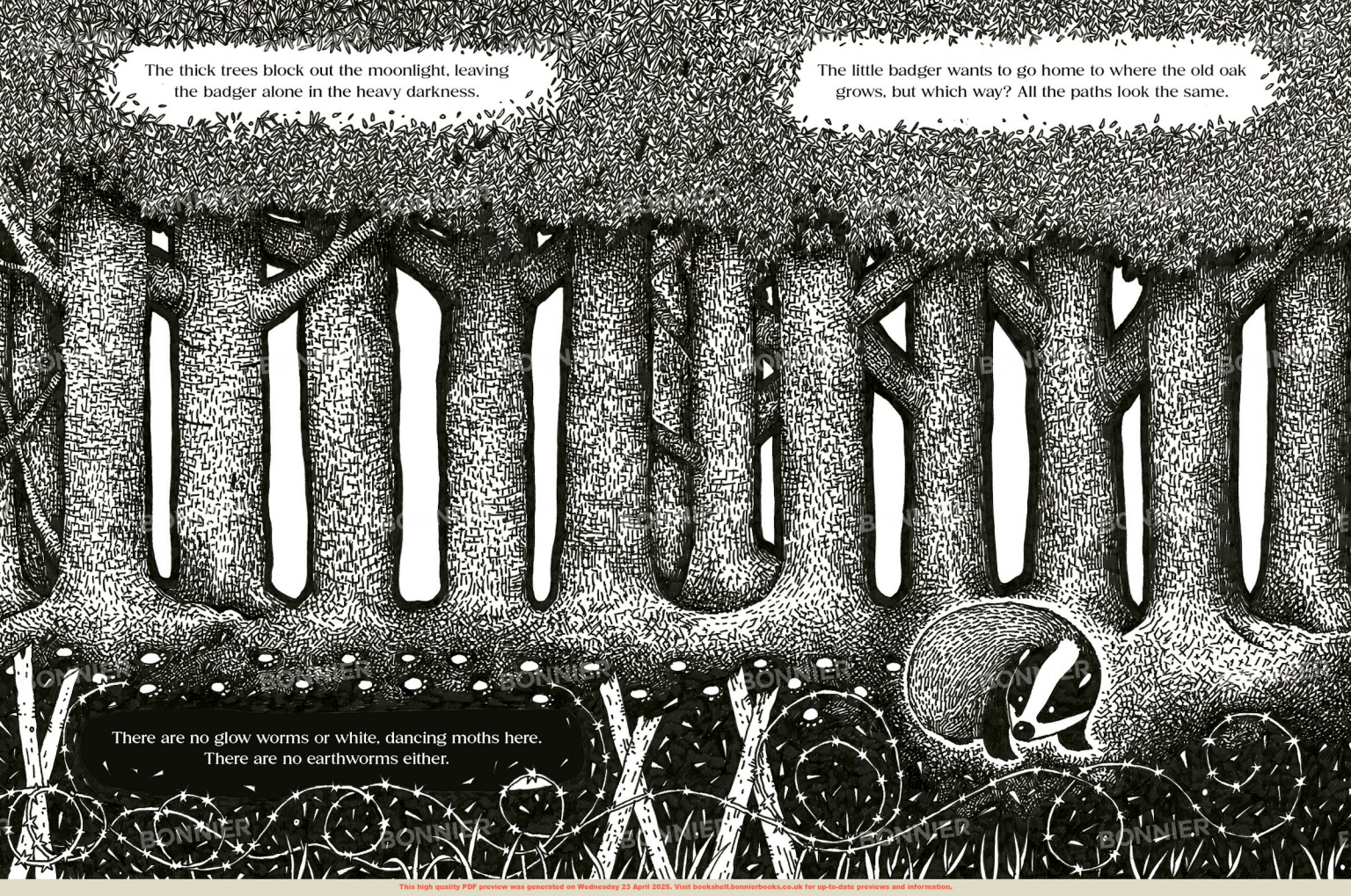
Alone in the dark and the little badger is lost,  
far from his family and far from the wood he calls home.

Cautiously, the young cub places one tentative foot  
before the other and sniffs the ground. It is covered  
with sharp, pointed pine needles that prickle his feet.

Here giant, towering pine trees with spiky branches stand  
in straight rows, looming, unlike the welcoming trees the  
badger knows, the oaks, the ashes and the beeches.

This wood doesn't look like home,  
and it doesn't smell like home either.





The thick trees block out the moonlight, leaving  
the badger alone in the heavy darkness.

The little badger wants to go home to where the old oak  
grows, but which way? All the paths look the same.

There are no glow worms or white, dancing moths here.  
There are no earthworms either.



Ooooo!

Kewick!

Listen.

Ooooo!

Kewick!

The old owl spreads his wings – he knows  
this wood, each branch, each twig.

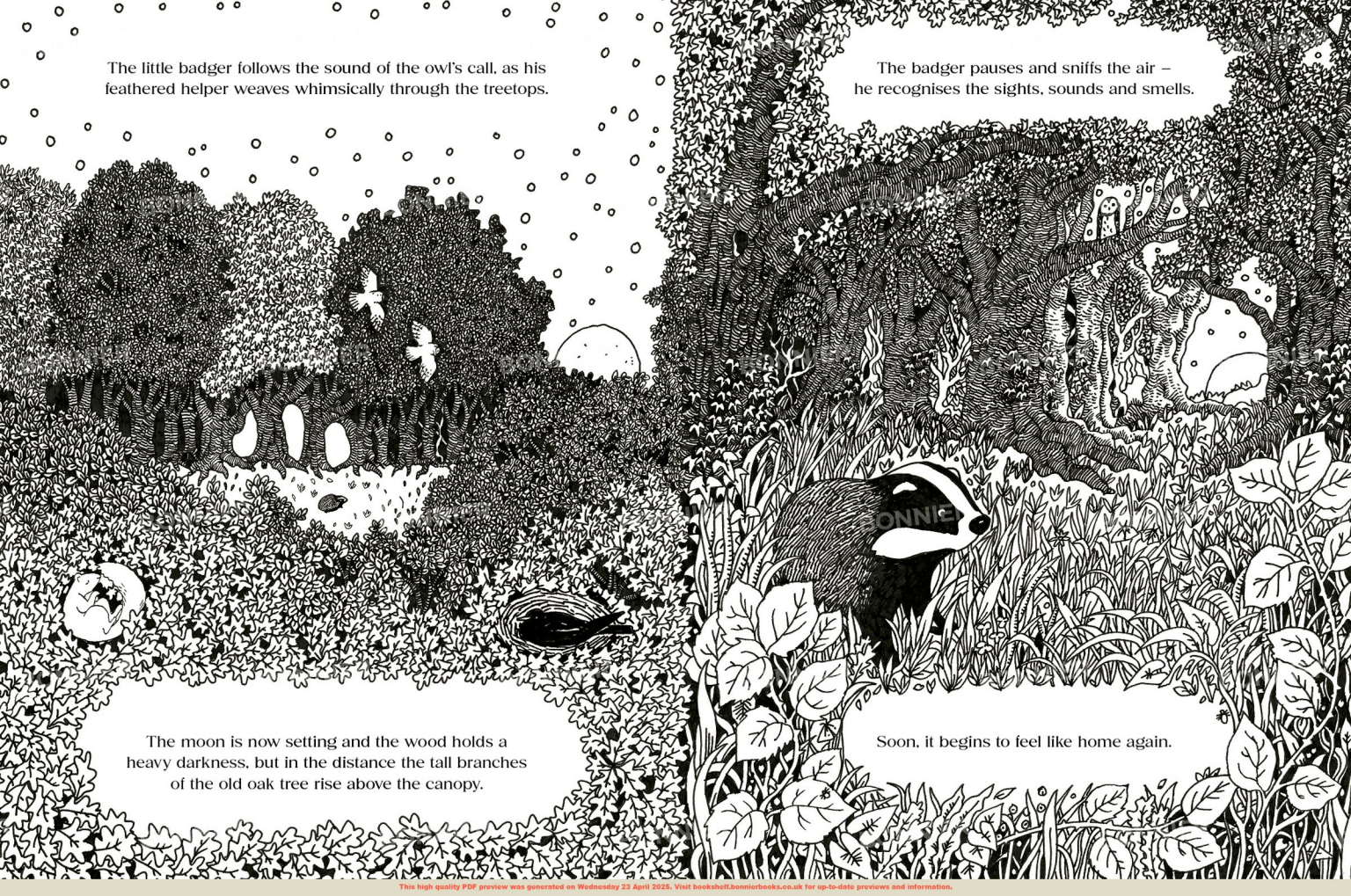
Ooo, ooo!

Kewick!

The little badger recognises the owl's call and looks up to  
the treetops. Remembering the lesson he learnt from his  
elders, he knows the owl's call will guide him home.

Silently the owl glides, and the young badger follows,  
while the moon, now low in the western sky  
showers the wood with silver.





The little badger follows the sound of the owl's call, as his feathered helper weaves whimsically through the treetops.

The badger pauses and sniffs the air – he recognises the sights, sounds and smells.

The moon is now setting and the wood holds a heavy darkness, but in the distance the tall branches of the old oak tree rise above the canopy.

Soon, it begins to feel like home again.



Home at last, the young cub runs to greet his family.  
Still foraging beneath the old oak's branches, the little  
badger's parents welcome him with eager eyes.

The young badgers jump and tumble with joy,  
rolling around in the earthy leaves for one last play  
in the glade before they bundle to bed.

How happy they are to see each other! They greet the  
little badger, cuddle him and rub noses.

One day, when he is older, the little badger will be able to  
wander the whole wood. For now, he must learn the ways  
of the wood and not stray too far from the clan.

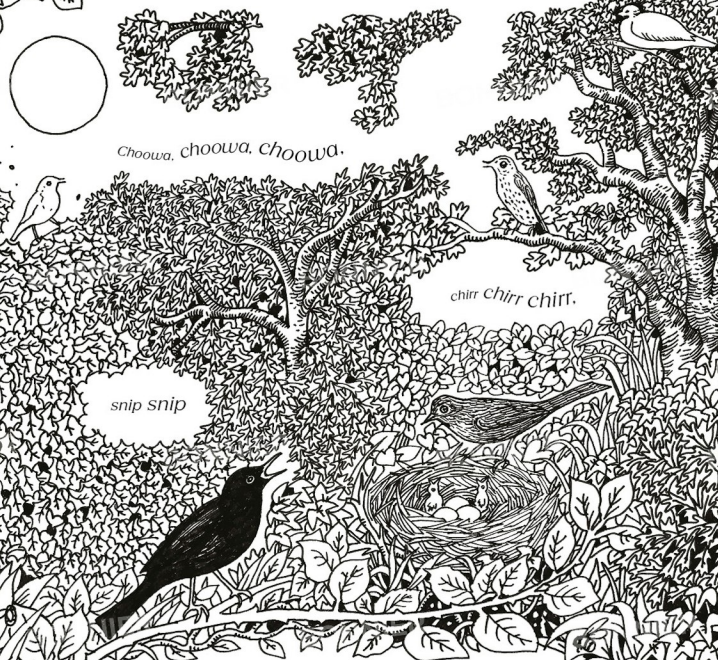


In the east, the sky begins to lighten  
and everything is tinged with blue.  
Slowly it turns to rose pink and then to yellow.



With the growing light the badgers settle  
down in their sett, happy to be home  
and tucked up for a long day's sleep.

A sweet song pours forth from a holly bush as a robin  
finds his morning perch. Soon he is joined by the thrush  
and a blackbird; the dawn chorus is underway.



Sunrise and another day in the waking wood begins.



### About the Author:

Alexi Francis is a writer and illustrator living in Brighton, UK. She has a BSc in Zoology and has been involved in wildlife surveys in the UK, Crete and Cambodia. Alexi has self-published several books of nature writing pieces accompanied by her pen and ink illustrations. *The Waking Wood* published by Big Picture Press is her debut picture book.

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