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Beginning at the End

by Greg Wilson

The an-Ruuda spent six hundred years fighting to free themselves undead monsters. Sunshine was often their only weapon, so it's not surprising they believe the souls of the righteous dead rise up to shine down and keep us safe. The farmers of the Regimental Kingdoms bury their dead to thank the earth for its bounty. As flesh becomes soil, then potatoes, then flesh again, so too, they believe, does the world make new spirits out of old.

The pirates of Bantang Ini and Bantang Barra believe we're reborn as ourselves, living our lives over and over again until we get them right. And I met a tiger from Thind who said that dead is dead and all the rest is monkey foolishness. He asked me to ring a bell to remember a friend of his, though, so perhaps tigers can be foolish too.

But in the Karaband, where I was born, we believe that when people die, they get to tell the story of their life one last time. It doesn't matter if it's filled with great deeds and poetry. All that matters is whether the person telling it enjoys hearing it again.

All of which is to say, I'm truly sorry about poisoning you, but I really do need that amulet. We have a few minutes until the paralysis runs its course, though, and I've been told I'm a good listener. It can be hard to begin, so repeat after me. Once upon a time…