Praise for *The Storm Keeper's Island*

Winner of the Books Are My Bag Young Readers Award

Shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards
Children's Book of the Year

Nominated for the CILIP Carnegie Medal

'*The Storm Keeper's Island* will blow you away. Magical in every way … Wise, warm and wonderful'
Eoin Colfer, author of the Artemis Fowl series

'Doyle has taken an ancient story and found something new and bold and wild in it … Only real bone-deep writers and storytellers do that'
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'Funny, dark and blazingly beautiful, *The Storm Keeper's Island* is a thrillingly inventive adventure'
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'Funny, heartrending, terrifying … I'm on tenterhooks for the next book'
Lauren James, author of *The Loneliest Girl in the Universe*

'A magical rush of an adventure story about family, bravery, and harnessing the storm within'
Anna James, author of *Pages & Co.*

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PROLOGUE

On a frosty winter morning, in the waters of a half-forgotten island, a merrow was swimming far from her home. Mist hung like a veil over the sea, clinging to her skin as she broke the surface: first a crown of coral and bone, then yellow eyes as wide as moons. A pale scar traced the curve of her jaw.

She stilled in the water.

There was a boy standing at the edge of the ocean. She could smell the sea-salt in his blood.

She licked her lips.

Storm Keeper.

She remembered him.

The boy's eyes were shut, his breath puffing from him in a trail of clouds. He stuck his hand out and wriggled his fingers above the water. For a moment he stood completely frozen. Then his body hiccoughed violently, as though something inside was trying to punch

its way out. He snapped his eyes open, fear threading itself into his frown.

Magic.

The merrow drifted closer. The sun was climbing into an ivory sky, and soon the island would be full of people bustling along the strand, cars sputtering into life as shop windows lit up like lanterns. She shouldn't be here, by the shore … so near the voice that had been whispering to her from its depths. But she had come anyway – to gaze upon the boy who had stirred Morrigan from her endless sleep.

After all these years, he had finally come.

The boy groaned as a spark jolted from his fingertips. 'Come on!' He kicked a clump of seaweed into the water. 'Come on, you stupid thing!'

Trapped magic.

The merrow frowned. Time was wearing thin. She could sense darkness moving beneath the horizon, swelling like a sea of its own as it made its way across the world. Towards the island. Towards the boy. *This* boy.

Foolish Dagda. He will lead us all to ruin.

The boy picked up a rock and flung it into the air. The merrow followed its arc, her lips twisting as it landed with a *plop!* right beside her head.

One heartbeat – two heartbeats – and then he spluttered

into life. He charged towards her, the water sloshing around his ankles and then his knees and then his hips.

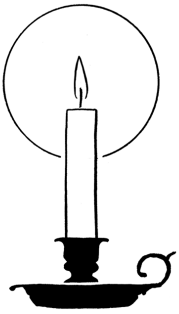
The merrow hesitated for the briefest moment, before her senses reclaimed her. She dipped under the next wave, her tail disappearing in a sheen of burnt silver.

N*ot now*, she thought, as she speared her way back to the undersea. N*ot yet*.

Her warriors were bound to another.

They would have to wait. For ruin, or the Tide Summoner.

Whichever came first.



Chapter One

THE TICKING CLOCK

Fionn Boyle lay sprawled on an old, threadbare couch and tried to scream himself awake. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he knew he was dreaming, but he couldn't open his eyes. He could only listen to the crooning voice that had made a home inside his head. It was hissing like a snake, burrowing deeper into his brain.

Tick-tock, the voice whispered. *Can you hear me, little Boyle?*

Fionn could see Morrigan in his mind's eye – her leering grin, too wide in her angular face.

Tick-tock, crumbling rock.

Three days, watch the clock.

She cackled, and a shadow came skittering towards him, its fingers reaching through the blackness of his mind. T*ick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock* … The words grew frenzied, the pitch climbing until it was no longer a laugh but a scream. TICK-TOCK, TICK-TOCK, TICK-TOCK.

G*et away from me!* Fionn tried to yell, but the words bubbled in his throat.

His body was spinning like a tornado, his arms thrashing blindly as he tried to pull himself back to consciousness. The couch groaned underneath him, the rusted springs heaving from the effort. H*elp me! She's going to claw my eyes out! P*lease –

There was a loud *splat!*

Fionn jerked awake as something cold and slimy slid down his nose.

He sniffed. Was that …?

'Ham,' came a familiar voice. 'It's crumbed.'

Fionn peeled the slice from his face.

His grandfather peered over him, his blue eyes twinkling in the dawn light. 'I'm afraid you were cycloning again.' In one hand he held an open packet of sliced ham, and in the other a bright orange block of cheese. 'I thought the ham might be more humane.'

Fionn pushed the matted hair from his eyes. A familiar fist of heat was blazing in his chest, the knuckles

of it rolling against his ribcage as if saying hello. The Storm Keeper's magic awake, just as he was.

Fionn sighed. 'Couldn't you have called my name, like a normal person?'

'When have you ever known me to be normal?' said his grandfather, nibbling a corner off the block of cheese. 'But besides that, I called your name eight times. I poked you three times and I shook you by the shoulders exactly once. The next logical step –'

'– was ham,' said Fionn, dragging himself into a sitting position and laying the offending slice on the armrest.

'I'm afraid so, lad.' His grandfather was watching him too closely, his brows raised above the tip of his horn-rimmed spectacles. 'Was it the same again?'

'Tick-tock,' said Fionn, with a grim nod. 'The countdown continues.'

Morrigan had been living in his head for many months, but two weeks ago his dreams had taken on a new sense of urgency. The voice, once disembodied and distant, now came with a countdown, grasping hands and clawing fingers, bloodless lips held too close to his ear. She was growing stronger, giddier.

'The countdown,' said his grandfather now, 'is somewhat concerning.'

A breeze slipped underneath the window and

wreathed the couch. Fionn pulled the blanket close around him. Last month, winter had crept over the island, sewing itself inside the wind and howling through the cracks in the walls. There were ice crystals webbing the windowpanes, and sometimes in the night, when Fionn woke gasping, he could see his breath hovering like clouds in the darkness.

'Why don't you go and lie down in my room, lad?' suggested his grandfather. 'The energy in there is very benevolent and handsome. And there's a nice storage heater that'll blow the socks off you.'

'I'm awake now anyways,' said Fionn, stretching his arms above his head and rolling his neck around until it clicked. Back in the summertime, he had surrendered his twin bed to his mother, insisting instead on taking up residence on Donal the shopkeeper's donated couch, which looked like it had been exhumed from a haunted house, and smelled not unlike abiding despair. It creaked awfully in the night and made the little sitting room seem even smaller than it was, but Fionn knew it wouldn't matter where he slept – Morrigan would still find him.

He rolled on to his feet. 'What time is it?'

'Time?' His grandfather was pottering back into the kitchen. 'You know very well I don't adhere to such arbitrary concepts.'

Time.

Fionn drifted towards the candle flickering on the mantelpiece, the only lit flame in a room full of candles. The wax was growing shallower – less a candle now, and more a milky blue puddle. Of course, it wasn't *just* a candle to begin with. It was his grandfather's essence, all of his memories gathered up in one magical concoction, borne of blood and sea, burning all day and all night, racing towards its end.

Time. His grandfather had borrowed an awful lot of it.

The reminder made Fionn queasy. Lately, it felt like everything was out of his control. As the nights ticked by and Morrigan crept closer to his days, he couldn't help imagining himself as the controller of a runaway train. He felt the darkness creeping in around the edges of him, the sorceress's countdown ticking in time with his pulse. Something was going to happen. Soon.

She will wake when the boy returns, Ivan had told him once, all too gleefully. *She will rise when the Storm Keeper bleeds for her.*

Fionn had not bled for Morrigan since the day she had awoken, but he had not succeeded in putting her back to sleep either. His journey to the Sea Cave during the summer still haunted him. He had come so close

to losing his sister, and then to drowning all alone in that endless darkness, with Morrigan laughing in his ear. The memory had grown hard and spiky, and often, when his thoughts wandered, he would find it digging into his ribs.

'Sandwich?' called his grandfather from inside the kitchen. 'I'll share the ham but the last of the mustard is all mine, I'm afraid. It's wholegrain. And French. *Très* expensive.'

'No thanks.' Fionn stared at the little flame on the mantelpiece. The magic inside him flared in recognition. He stuck his hand out above the glass trough, willing the flame to dance for him.

Come on … Come on …

Fionn was the Storm Keeper, the one the island had chosen to wield the elements in Dagda's name, for as long as his mind and body could bear it. The one to command earth, wind, air and fire, at little more than a simple thought.

It was supposed to be easy. It was *supposed* to be seamless.

He ground his jaw, wriggling his fingers the way his grandfather had taught him to. *Come on.*

The flame ignored him.

His face started to prickle.

Grow, he willed it. *Dance.*

His magic hiccoughed in his chest, nearly toppling him over.

Fionn dropped his hand with a sigh.

The sitting room filtered back into focus and he found his grandfather hovering beside him. 'It will come, lad.'

'It's been five *months*.'

'Maybe it will take one more.'

'I don't have one more!'

'For all we know, Morrigan is bluffing,' said his grandfather, unconvincingly. 'Spooking you, for her own amusement. Trying to get in your head.'

'She's already in my head, Grandad. I need to figure out my magic. *Now*.'

His grandfather frowned at his sandwich. 'It wasn't like this for me … It didn't require much concentration, really …' He moved his gaze to the candles filling the shelves around them – *the Storm Keeper's magic* – years of it, brewed and bottled. The same magic that now ran in Fionn's veins. 'You could always try burning one …' He trailed off at Fionn's expression.

'The last time I used candle magic, I vomited and passed out,' Fionn reminded him. 'I'm already full of magic. I just have no idea how to get it out of –'

Fionn's attention snagged on the bookcase over his

grandfather's shoulder – the one he had pored over last night, restlessly counting the columns of wax, name by name, wick by wick, until he fell into a fitful slumber. Every night he studied them meticulously, like a general cataloguing his arsenal, while his own weapon chugged and sputtered in his veins.

There was something not quite right about it now.

Halfway down the case, where the usual array of blizzards and snowstorms jostled for space between sunsets and sunrises, there was an almost imperceptible gap. Between *Saoirse*, which meant 'freedom', and *Suaimhneas*, which meant 'peace', *Spring Showers 2008*, was missing.

Fionn crossed the room in three strides, jamming his feet into his runners without stopping to untie the laces first.

His grandfather peered after him, chomping on his sandwich. 'Where are you off to in such a rush?'

Fionn shrugged his coat on and pulled his woolly hat over his ears. 'There's been a theft!'

'Good grief. Of what sort?'

Fionn narrowed his eyes at his grandfather. 'I think you know exactly what sort of theft I'm talking about. And thief too, come to think of it.'

His grandfather smushed the rest of his sandwich into his mouth all at once until his cheeks swelled up like

a blowfish and crumbs tumbled over his lips, then he pointed at his own face as if to say, I *can't talk right now, my mouth is suddenly very full.*

Fionn swung the front door open, and winter gusted right through it, curling the dark strands peeking out from underneath his hat. 'We're supposed to *save* them!' he said angrily, before slamming the door behind him and taking off down the garden path.

The gate swung open for him, and the shrubs, skeletal without their summer foliage, click-clacked a goodbye. Outside, a canopy of clouds smothered the rising sun. Fionn could see the usual flock of ravens patrolling the headland, chasing the seagulls back out to sea. The icy wind whistled alongside him, drowning out their faraway shrieks. It cleared stones from the roadway and tipped the flowers in reverie as he wound down the headland towards the strand.

He saw the whirlpool first. There, in plain sight of anyone who bothered to look, was the Storm Keeper's magic, skipping and dancing along the shoreline. Water twisted round and round, seafoam flying from its edges like cream from a mixing bowl. The longer Fionn watched it, the taller it became.

He swung his legs over the wall and stalked across the sand. 'Hey!' he shouted. 'Stop that!'

Across the beach, his sister turned to face him. She kept one hand outstretched towards the whirlpool, the other clenched around a turquoise candle that was burning upside down, devouring itself from the inside out. 'Hey, loser,' she said, through a wide grin. 'What are you doing down here?'

Fionn marched towards her. 'I told you a thousand times, you're not supposed to waste the candles!'

'I'm *practising*,' she said, turning back to the ocean. Her ponytail whipped through the air behind her, the ends of her winter coat flapping in the wind. 'Grandad said I could have it, so just take a chill pill.'

'It's not up to Grandad, it's up to me!' Fionn yelled. 'Blow it out!'

Tara's laughter soared into the air. 'You're so *dramatic*!'

'Coming from the girl who held a candlelit vigil the night Bartley Beasley went back to the mainland!'

She threw him a withering glance. 'I told you I'm not ready to talk about that yet!'

Fionn yanked her by the arm.

The whirlpool faltered.

'Get off me!' Tara barked, shaking him off. 'I'm concentrating!'

'The sun's almost up! Anyone could see you out here!' He glanced over his shoulder to where an old

woman in a grey shawl was pottering along the strand. 'See,' he hissed.

'Don't be so paranoid,' said Tara, not bothering to look. 'You're *always* down here. You're just afraid the islanders will see how much better than you I am at this. How the waves actually *listen* to me. And then they'll start to wonder about *your* magic. Why they've never *seen* it. *Oooh*. The Storm Keeper's sister – maybe they'll say the island should have chosen me.' Her lip curled in amusement, knowing she had touched a nerve. 'Maybe they're right.'

'*No*,' said Fionn quickly. 'You're just an idiot who's going through our stash of weapons faster than a bag of skittles, because you're incapable of thinking of anyone but yourself!' He took a shaky breath. 'If you didn't have less than ten brain cells, you'd *realise* that.'

Tara stuck her chin out. 'I have *loads* of brain cells. I always beat Grandad at Scrabble.'

'Then prove it,' said Fionn, glancing over his shoulder again. The old woman was gone. 'Put it out.'

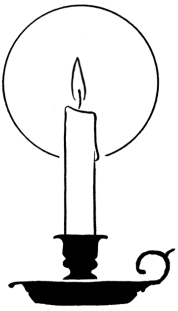
'Fine.' Tara crushed the remains of the candle in her fist and swung her free hand around until it was no longer facing the ocean but his face instead. In one icy deluge, the whirlpool leapt from the ocean and crashed over his head, soaking through his hat and pouring itself down his neck and into his clothes until streams of icy water

gushed out of his trouser-legs, bleeding into puddles along the sand.

'Happy now?' she said, smirking at him.

Fionn glared at his sister, his words chattering violently through his teeth. 'I wish, just once, we could bury *you* under a rock for all of eternity.'

'Try it,' she said, sashaying away. 'I'd be back before the week was out.'



Chapter Two

THE ROTTEN WAVE

An hour later, Fionn lingered outside Donal's corner shop, glowering into his hot chocolate. The sun had fought its way through the thicket of clouds, bringing an icy chill with it. It settled in the gaps between his toes and clung to the tip of his nose. All around him, fellow students milled by in scarves and hats and heavy winter coats, their bags *thu-thump*ing against their backs as they chatted animatedly along the strand. It was the last day of school before Christmas holidays and there was a giddiness in the air.

Fionn hardly noticed it; he was too busy staring at the marshmallow in his cup.

Do something. Anything.

He ground his teeth together, refusing to blink.

Give me a bubble. Just one little bubble.

His vision was starting to go funny.

Come on. Come on. Come on.

A horn sounded in the distance, making him jump. Fionn discarded his cup and rolled his neck around, blinking the tears from his eyes. Up ahead, the morning ferry was gliding into port.

He blinked again, this time in confusion. Not one ferry, but *two* – the second one gliding in the wake of the first.

Fionn frowned. In the five months he had lived on Arranmore, he had never seen one ferry so full, let alone two. He stepped out on to the strand and nearly crashed into the Aguero sisters. They divided around him, tossing identical veils of black hair in affront, as they made their way towards Fionn's sister, who was lingering outside the school gates. Tara caught his eye, then tapped her wrist, as if to say, *Hurry up, loser. You're going to be late.*

Fionn ignored her, turning instead in the opposite direction and tracking towards the pier. The boats were heaving with passengers. Most of them had spilled out on to the decks, where they stood shoulder to shoulder, like tightly packed sardines. When the second ferry horn blasted, they turned as one, suddenly standing to attention.

There was something eerily familiar about it all – this strange sea of faces, moving silently across the water, each one marked by wide, unblinking eyes.

Soulstalkers.

Fionn stared in silent horror as the first boat docked. A wave rolled out from under it, swelling and frothing as it galloped towards the beach.

It brought a shoal of rotting fish with it. There were so many that Fionn could hear them splatting against the sand from where he stood up on the strand. He could even see their fleshy insides, their gloopy eyes and tarnished scales piling up and up and up, with every towering wave that came after.

Down on the beach, someone screamed. Douglas Beasley tore out of the post office with a parcel under his arm and Donal appeared in the doorway to his shop, his hair floating about his head like a cloud. Up by the school, teenagers discarded their conversations and craned their necks in curiosity.

The rotten waves kept coming, dead fish filling the air with a putrid, clinging stink.

Fionn clapped his sleeve over his mouth to keep from gagging, but he could do nothing about the accompanying panic. It rose up in his chest, pounding its fists against his heart until he felt like he couldn't breathe.

She had finally done it. Somehow, Morrigan had called her followers home, and they had brought the shadow of death with them.

The thunder of nearby footsteps interrupted his rising hysteria. It came with his name, thrown up into the air like a football. 'OI! FIONN!'

Fionn snapped his head up to find his best (and only) island friend furiously sprinting towards him.

This was not usually the way of Sam Patton. Of the two of them, Sam was the unflappable one. He had seen so much more of the world than Fionn and was used to a more unusual life. It was what had drawn Fionn to him in the first place. That and the fact that Sam, despite growing up in London, was one of the original five families of Arranmore. He had all but announced as much when he first alighted on Fionn in September, emerging from a gaggle of zombie-tired teenagers and stalking across the schoolyard with the confidence of a celebrity. 'Storm Keeper!' He had looked Fionn up and down, as though making sure of it. 'You're a bit scrawnier than I expected but you do have a certain *look* about you. You remind me of my great-grandmother.'

'Sam Patton,' he had announced then, sticking out a leather-gloved hand. 'Great-grandson of the one and only Maggie. She was a Storm Keeper too. I've been waiting to meet you all summer.'

Sam was several inches shorter than Fionn, but his sense of ease made him seem ten feet tall. He had big brown eyes, brown skin, and curly hair. It bounced along his forehead now, as he pelted along the strand, a flute case tucked under his left arm, the other flailing around him like a windmill. He skidded to a stop. 'Look at the size of those waves!' he panted, before slapping his free hand over his mouth. 'U*gh*, that smell. It's getting *worse*.'

The waves were still piling on top of each other, crashing and foaming as they painted the shoreline silver. 'Where do you think they're coming from?' asked Sam, through his fingers.

'T*hem*,' said Fionn, gesturing at the pier. 'It looks like Morrigan's minions have finally found her.' Sam turned on the heel of his boot. 'Do you mean those passengers are –'

'Soulstalkers,' said Fionn. 'Can't you tell?'

Sam narrowed his eyes in suspicion. The first ferry was releasing its passengers out on to the island. They scuttled across the pier like crabs, men and women dressed in scarves and coats and hats and suits, all moving in the same direction, one after another after another. 'They don't blink,' he said, with a shudder. 'They just sort of *stare*.'

'I *told you* something was coming.' Fionn's insides were twisting and twisting. 'I've been saying it for weeks now.'

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.

Morrigan hadn't been bluffing; she'd been gloating.

Sam shuffled uncomfortably. 'Is this really an I-told-you-so moment?'

'I suppose not.' Fionn swung his schoolbag around and pulled out his notebook. 'Come on. We don't have much time. Let's get out of here before the beach fills up.' He tucked it under his arm and gestured for Sam to follow as he stalked off up the strand and right past the school gates.

They left the bell pealing into the sky behind them.

'Ms Cannon's bringing mince pies in today,' said Sam, looking forlornly over his shoulder as he hurried to keep up with Fionn's determined strides. 'They're my favourite.'

Fionn passed the notebook to him. 'If you help me save the island from oblivion, I'll make you a batch myself,' he promised.

'I'm holding you to that,' said Sam, slowing down to open the notebook. 'And I want gingerbread men too. *With* buttons.'

'Fine. Just read, please.'

On the first page, Fionn had numbered and annotated the five Gifts of Arranmore in his messy scrawl. Sam read them aloud as they walked.

1. **The Storm Keeper of Arranmore: to wield the elements in Dagda's name.** Aka me. See also: useless.
2. **The Sea Cave (earth): for that which is out of reach.** Used that one on Tara already. V. ungrateful.
3. **The Whispering Tree (fire): for that which is yet to come.** Probably should sort out the present before I go snooping around the future.
4. **Aonbharr the Winged Horse (wind): for danger that cannot be outrun.** Might get in a bit of trouble if I fly away from the island by myself and leave it to die?
5. **The Merrows (water): for invaders that may come.** This looks like the only option that can help us.

After a moment of contemplation, both boys trudging up the headland in silence, Sam slammed the notebook shut. 'Right then,' he said, adjusting the lapels of his blue pea coat. 'The Merrows it is.'

Fionn didn't miss the quiver in his friend's voice.

Merrows. Fionn had heard a dozen stories of the fin-tailed, blue-skinned army that patrolled the deep waters of Arranmore. According to Fionn's mother, in the evenings, when lips were loosened, talk in the pubs would often turn to the sea creatures and their fabled barbarism, their shark-toothed mouths. There would be whisperings of sightings

along the coast, mistaken seals and friendly dolphins re-embroidered with new details, the locals surrendering new tales like counterfeit coins. Fionn swore he had seen one once, buried in the folds of the ocean. He had felt something in his chest, a thread of magic going taut between them, but she was gone before he reached her.

'Is it a terrible idea?' he asked now.

'Not necessarily,' Sam reasoned. 'They'd certainly be helpful in the present … situation. Terrifying and hair-rising and guaranteed to give us nightmares for *years*, but definitely helpful. There is one small problem though …'

'We have no clue how to find them?' guessed Fionn.

'Pretty much,' said Sam, with a shrug.

Fionn set his jaw. He had been anticipating this. 'I think I know where we can start.'