Praise for *Utterly Dark and the Face of the Deep*

'Reeve is an exceptional writer and world-builder . . . A dark and deep adventure encompassing peril and self-discovery that will carry you away on its tide'
***The Times*' Best Children's Books of 2021**

'I was captivated by Utterly herself in this immersive coming-of-age narrative'
***Books for Keeps* Books of the Year 2021**

'In this tense and exciting supernatural thriller, readers are immediately immersed in the magic and mystery . . . a great edge-of-seat adventure for those who like a book to keep them guessing to the end'
***BookTrust***

'A roller coaster of a story with the survival of orphaned Utterly Dark, one of the most charming and feisty young heroines, at its heart'
***LoveReading4Kids* Book of the Month**

'Reeve's story has the weft and warp of myth . . . a slow-burning, darkly involving read'
***Literary Review***

'A wonderful story, expertly told'
**Peters' Book Review**

'Magnificent . . . magical storytelling'
**Jenny McLachlan**

'Utterly gripping . . . Another brilliant adventure from Philip Reeve'
**Piers Torday**

'An absorbing, brilliant book. A glorious read. I loved my journey to Wildsea'
**Lisa Thompson**

'Absolutely extraordinary writing, like Charles Dickens writing Ursula K Le Guin . . . I can't think of anyone who does worldbuilding the way Philip Reeve does'
**Ross Montgomery**

Also by Philip Reeve

Utterly Dark and the Face of the Deep

**Mortal Engines Quartet**
Mortal Engines
Predator's Gold
Infernal Devices
A Darkling Plain

**Railhead Trilogy**
Railhead
Black Light Express
Station Zero

**Fever Crumb Trilogy**
Fever Crumb
A Web of Air
Scrivener's Moon

**Mortal Engines 'Expanded Universe'**
Night Flights
The Illustrated World of Mortal Engines

**Goblins Series**
Goblins
Goblins vs Dwarves
Goblin Quest

**Larklight Series**
Larklight
Starcross
Mothstorm

**Other Novels**
No Such Thing As Dragons
Here Lies Arthur

**With Sarah McIntyre**
Oliver and the Seawigs
Cakes in Space
Pugs of the Frozen North
Jinks and O'Hare Funfair Repair
The Legend of Kevin
Kevin's Great Escape
Kevin and the Biscuit Bandit
Kevin vs the Unicorns

PHILIP REEVE

# UTTERLY DARK

## AND THE HEART OF THE WILD

FICKLING
d b
David Fickling Books
31 Beaumont Street
Oxford OX1 2NP, UK

UTTERLY DARK AND THE HEART OF THE WILD
is a
DAVID FICKLING BOOK

First published in Great Britain in 2022 by
David Fickling Books,
31 Beaumont Street,
Oxford, OX1 2NP

www.davidficklingbooks.com

Text © Philip Reeve, 2022

Cover and inside art by Paddy Donnelly

978-1-78845-286-1

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

The right of Philip Reeve to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Papers used by David Fickling Books are from well-managed forests and other responsible sources.

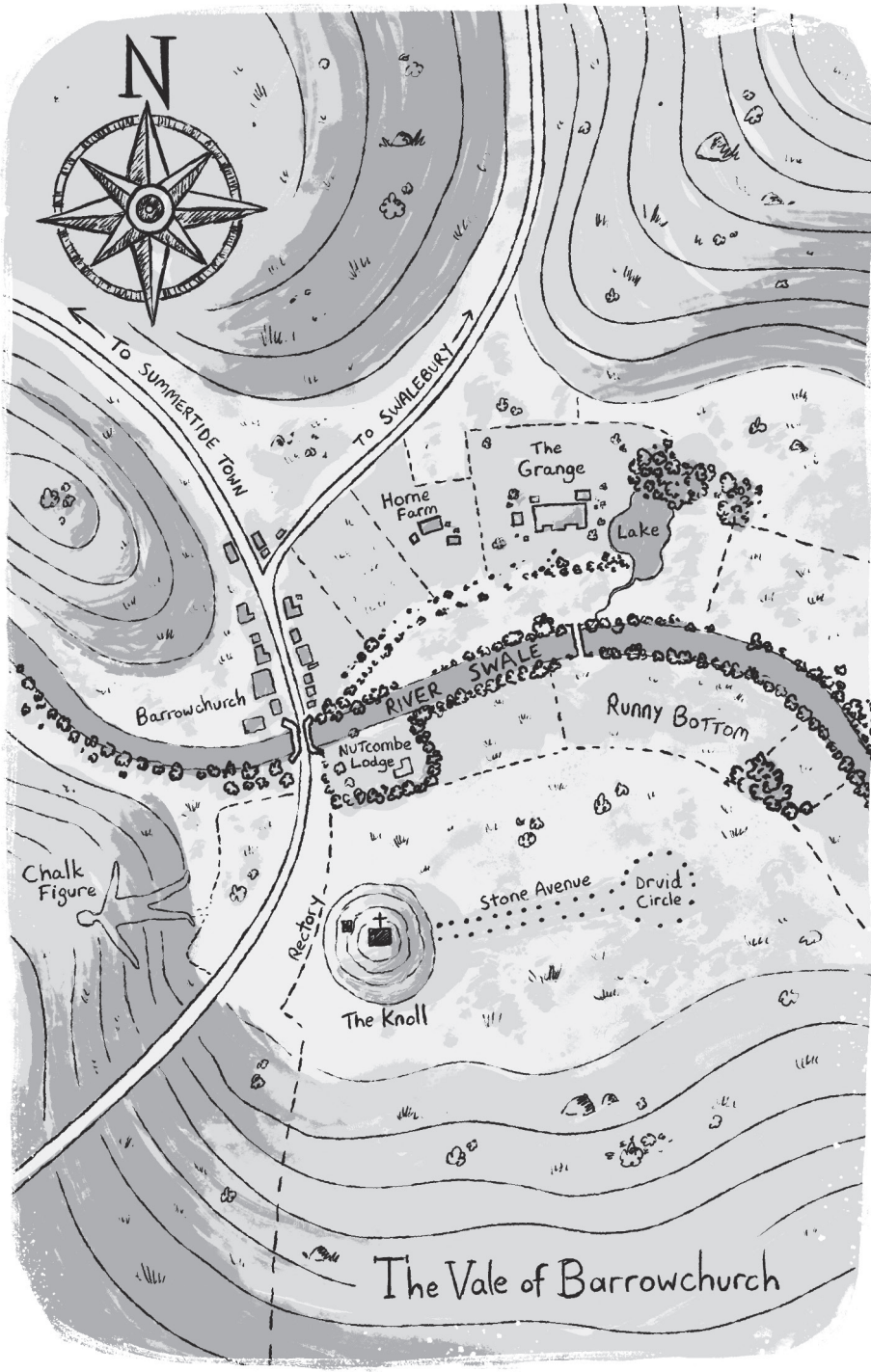



DAVID FICKLING BOOKS Reg. No. 8340307

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 12/16pt Goudy by Falcon Oast Graphic Art Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A

To Liz Cross, for guiding this and so many of my other stories through the wild woods.


N
To Summertide Town
To Swalebury
The Grange
Home Farm
Lake
River Swale
Barrowchurch
Nutcombe Lodge
Runny Bottom
Chalk Figure
Rectory
Stone Avenue
Druid Circle
The Knoll
The Vale of Barrowchurch



# 1
# THE STORM ON SUMMERTIDE

Dusk was settling upon the downs as Figgy Dan came to the crest of the giant's hill. Below him in the twilight, a tree-lined river snaked its way through the broad valley. On the far side of the river lay a village, and a big house with a lake in its grounds. Figgy had passed that way before. The village was called Barrowchurch, and the people at the big house had been kind to him; they had given him a hot meal and a hot bath. So he tugged his pink coat tighter to keep out the wind and started down the track, past the huge chalk figure that the people of olden times had carved into the hillside there.

The pink coat was a very shabby coat, but then Figgy Dan was a very shabby man. His hair was long and

tangled, and his face was hidden by a straggling beard. Tin cooking pots dangled and jangled from the old sheepskin pack he carried. He walked in an odd, jerky way, and he stopped sometimes to strike his own head, or box his ears. 'Oh, leave me be, won't you!' he shouted, although he was entirely alone up there on the downs. 'Oh, won't you never stop your banging and your booming, you old bullroarers?'

The pink coat had been red once, and Figgy had marched in it all up and down the Low Countries, fighting the French. Somehow, during all those battles, the noise of the guns had got inside his head, and when he went home to England it had stayed with him, booming and roaring inside his skull. He could not hear, he could not sleep, he could not hardly think. Trying to escape the din, he fled ever westward, to places more and more remote, until he fetched up at last on Summertide, among the Autumn Isles, a scattering of islands so remote they had been left off the maps entirely, and few people had ever heard of them at all.

The guns in Figgy's head still roared on Summertide, but the noise was fainter here, as if distance from the mainland muffled it a little. Or so it had seemed to Figgy, until this particular October night. Now the booming was louder than ever. 'Shut your noise!' he shouted, as he stumbled down the old chalk road to Barrowchurch, and he started to weep at the thought that all his travels

had been in vain and he never would escape his private artillery.

Then he noticed how the wind was gusting over the brow of the down behind him, and how the fading light had taken on a brownish tinge. Glancing back, he saw bruised clouds sprawling across the western sky. A sudden blink of lightning lit the whole world white.

The thunder boomed, and Figgy began to run. He was glad the booming was outside his head this time, but the booming on the inside had left him with a terror of loud noises. Besides, when a man has only one set of clothes, he does not want to be caught out in a storm, and this storm looked set to be a tartar, rushing over the downs on a wind that seemed to have blown up out of nowhere. Figgy had heard strange stories of the haunted seas that lay west of the Autumn Isles. That was where this hurricane had been brewed; he would have wagered money on it, if he'd had any.

By the time he reached the hill's foot and started out across Barrowchurch Common, the thunder was roaring like whole batteries of guns. Hail came down like grape-shot, stinging Figgy's face and ears and hands, striking the road and bouncing high so it could fall down on him again. He would be soaked through or frozen long before he reached the big house.

Then, in a long flash of lightning, he saw the church ahead of him.

Figgy remembered this church from his first visit. It was a spooky sort of church, built on top of a wooded mound that rose out of the broad flatness of the common, unnatural-like. The church seemed to think it unnatural too, for it crouched on the mound's top with the air of a man who'd climbed on the back of a sleeping elephant for a joke and now feared it might wake and throw him off. But it was closer than the village, so Figgy ran towards it.

This being October, the trees had mostly lost their leaves, so the rain pelted him as hard while he climbed the steep side of the mound as it had out in the open. Just as he neared the top and saw the lych gate into the churchyard ahead of him, a bright flash of lightning showed him a lady standing on the path not three yards away.

'Lor' bless us!' said Figgy, and stopped short.

He thought he had seen a ghost. The wooded mound seemed just the place for wandering spirits, and this was just the sort of night they would be wandering on. Besides, it was easier to believe in ghosts than that a fine lady would be out here all alone in such a blow.

But the lightning came again, and reassured him that the lady was not a ghost. Not only that; she was a lady Figgy knew. She was Miss Inshaw, from the big house, where they had been so kind to him. The butler had told Figgy to sling his hook, but Miss Inshaw had come out and said no. Her late father would not have wanted her

to turn away any man who had worn the king's uniform, she'd said, and she had sent Figgy round to the stables, where the hot meal and hot bath had happened.

Standing there in the downpour, he felt a little less cold and hungry for just remembering it.

The lightning flashed. At the same instant there came a clap of thunder so loud and so close overhead it made poor Figgy cry out in terror. Miss Inshaw, who had been standing there in the wind and rain as if in a dream, turned and saw him. He backed away, ashamed of his dishevelled state, and made a little bow to show he meant no harm. He did not know if Miss Inshaw recognized him, but he was glad she did not seem afraid of him.

'Can you hear it too, sir?' she asked.

'Meaning the thunder, miss?' said Figgy. 'How could I not?'

'No, no – behind the thunder, and in the gaps between. Listen! Can you not hear fairy music?'

What with the thunder outside his head and his own personal cannonade still booming on within, Figgy could barely hear her voice, let alone any bloomin' fairy music. But Miss Inshaw seemed happy about it, so he nodded, just to please her.

'I knew it!' she shouted, over another rending crash of thunder. 'I have always said that Barrowchurch Knoll is a fairy hill. On a night like this, the fairy folk are sure to be abroad!'

'Begging your pardon, miss,' said Figgy. 'Shouldn't you think about getting indoors? If you don't mind me saying, you'll catch your death out here . . .'

Miss Inshaw did not seem to hear him. She was pointing towards the lych gate. A huge, old oak tree stood next to it, ancient and evil-looking, but she was gazing at it like it was a vision of Paradise.

'Look!' she said. 'Oh, look!'

She stepped off the path and started across the gnarled web of roots that covered the slope below the tree. Afraid for her, afraid for himself, afraid of being left alone with the dreadful thunder, Figgy went after her. Light seemed to be coming from beneath the tree. It was not the jaggedy, fleeting light of the storm but long red-gold shafts. They shone out from a place between the tree's roots as if a door had opened there and somewhere inside the hill the sun was setting on a better day.

'Oh, come see!' Miss Inshaw called, as if Figgy were one of her genteel friends and not just a raggedy tinker man. Figgy started to wonder if she was quite right in the head. But he shyly scrimble-scrambled his way across the wet roots to join her. 'Look!' she said.

The sky split open above them.

Side by side, they stood in the light and stared at something wonderful.



# 2
# THE WEDDING

The wedding had been the talk of the island of Wildsea for months, ever since the excitement of last autumn's awful storm had faded. So many people had come to watch the ceremony that the little church behind the dunes at Marazea was packed to bursting, and the congregation spilled out into the churchyard, and stood upon the churchyard wall, straining to catch the words of the marriage service drifting from inside.

But Utterly Dark heard the service very clearly, for the bridegroom was Utterly's guardian, Uncle Will, and the bride was her friend Aish, and so she had been appointed Chief Bridesmaid. Her friend Lucy Dearlove and Lucy's little sister Emily were bridesmaids too, and they all three stood by Aish's side at the altar, with floral

crowns perched on their heads, and the rest of their persons clad in new dresses of sprigged muslin, which Uncle Will had ordered all the way from Bristol for the occasion.

Some of the grander islanders, who lived 'over the hill' on Wildsea's sheltered east coast, had been shocked when Uncle Will and Aish announced their engagement. They had declared it a most scandalous, unsuitable and ill-advised match. After all, the Darks of Sundown Watch had been Watchers on Wildsea for countless generations, and were one of the island's most important families, while Aish was just a troll-woman from the Dizzard hills, and did not even seem to have a surname! But most people rightly sensed that Aish was important too, in her own way, and besides, they knew she had rescued Will Dark when he was washed ashore from a shipwreck the previous year. Since Wildsea people believe that what you save from the sea is yours for ever, it seemed only right and proper they should wed. When Reverend Dearlove read the banns on Easter Sunday there had been a friendly cheer from the rougher elements of the congregation, a murmur of satisfaction from everyone else, and Utterly had been able to nudge Lucy and whisper, 'I *told* you they would soon be married,' which had been extremely gratifying.

'Marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, deliberately, soberly and

in the fear of God,' said Reverend Dearlove, trying to sound stern but not really succeeding, because Will and Aish were among his dearest friends and he was delighted to be marrying them.

Uncle Will looked really almost respectable, thought Utterly, in his new plum-coloured coat and his good white breeches and buckled shoes. As for Aish, her large, strong-featured, somewhat hairy face had grown very much prettier since Utterly first met her, but then perhaps all faces did when you grew to like their owners. Today she looked perfectly beautiful, standing in the sunbeam that came in through a high window to light up the altar. Utterly had been slightly afraid she would wear her head-dress of antlers, which would not have been at all the thing for church, but she had left the antlers off, and the wreath of spring flowers, which Utterly had helped to weave, looked lovely on her dark red hair. She wore a dress of cream silk, which was a gift from Will, and very well it suited her, with Utterly, Lucy and little Emily holding up the train. And if she still had rather a lot of strange trollish charms and ornaments hung around her neck, and carried an unusual bouquet of moss and oak-twigs, nobody minded, for she looked so radiantly happy.

Even Egg, who had been far from delighted when Mrs Skraeveling made him put on shoes and comb his hair flat with water, had brightened when he saw her. 'The

whole island is blooming and so is Aish,' he said, and nodded his approval. Egg was only eleven, and Aish was no one quite knew *how* old, but Egg regarded himself as her minder all the same.

'If any man can show just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter hold his peace,' said Reverend Dearlove.

Silence fell. The congregation held its breath, praying that no one would know of a reason why the wedding should not happen, but also just *half* hoping that someone *might*, because wouldn't that be thrilling?

And for a moment, Utterly thought someone *was* going to speak, for she heard a sound that was a little like a throat being cleared, or perhaps a roll of far-off thunder, or the low growl of an animal. It was the sort of sound you felt as much as heard, trembling in the cool old granite flagstones beneath her slippers, and thrumming through the wood of the pews.

The sound gave Utterly the feeling that Mrs Skraeveling called 'someone walking over your grave', but which Utterly thought was a certain sign of magic in the air. She looked quickly at the scrubbed, expectant faces of the congregation, but no one else seemed to have heard it. Even Aish, who had sharper ears than most, was gazing lovingly at Will, quite unconcerned.

*So perhaps I imagined it,* thought Utterly. But she didn't think she had.

'I require and charge you both . . .' said Reverend Dearlove, breaking the silence, and the service went on its sonorous way until at last Will and Aish were married, and the vicar was able to say in his own everyday voice, 'You may kiss the bride, Will!'

'Ugh!' whispered Utterly, Lucy and Egg, looking away. They all thought kissing was perfectly disgusting, and felt quite certain they would never go in for that type of thing when *they* were grown-ups.

But although Will and Aish's kiss was warm and loving, it did not go on for too long. Soon they were outside in the sunshine, accepting the congratulations of neighbours and well-wishers. Then Utterly and her friends were able to look forward to the most important part of the day, which was the food. Utterly and Egg had helped Mrs Skraeveling with the preparations for the wedding breakfast that morning and, as Egg kept telling anyone who would listen, it was going to be a feast fit for Nebuchadnezzar himself. (Egg was not entirely sure who Nebuchadnezzar was, but thought he must be someone pretty grand because he had two Zs in his name.)

So everyone went up the long track to Sundown Watch, the bride and groom riding on a flower-bedecked wagon, the children running beside it, the villagers following, and two of Aish's Dizzard friends playing old, old songs on a fiddle and a flute. The track was steep, the climb hot, but at the top long trestle tables had been set

up in the gardens of the Watch, with awnings to shade them, and there was cider, and small beer, and lemonade. The next few hours were mostly talk, and laughter and eating.

But you could have too much of talk and laughter, Utterly discovered, and it turned out that even eating palled after a while – or, at least, there came a point when it seemed wise to take a break from it, in case you burst. The fiddler and the piper were playing reels now, and a few couples were already venturing out to join Will and Aish upon the portion of the lawns that had been set aside for dancing. Utterly left them to it and slipped off alone. She went around the house to the seaward side, then followed the steep cliff-path down into Blanchmane's Cove, wondering what the sea made of it all.



The sea was where Utterly had come from. She had been washed ashore in a basket on the 21st of February twelve years before, when she was just a tiny baby. She had grown into a girl with such dark eyes and such straight silk-black hair that it was generally believed on Wildsea that her parents had been a Chinese merchant and his wife whose ship had foundered in the Western Deeps. But lately she had come to doubt that story. For during the great storm of the previous October she had

somehow been washed or carried away from Wildsea and had adventures on the Hidden Lands, those islands that appeared mysteriously sometimes out on the western sea. Those were the islands the Watchers of Wildsea were supposed to watch for, for they were the home of the mysterious and powerful Gorm, who haunted Wildsea's oldest legends.

How she had reached the Hidden Lands exactly, and what she had seen and done there, Utterly could not quite recollect. Nor could Uncle Will or the boy called Egg, who had ventured after her to fetch her home. All the memories of their visit to the Hidden Lands had faded like dreams as soon as they set foot on Wildsea again. But Utterly had been left with the oddest feeling ever since, that her parents had not been merchants at all, and that the ancient power that dwelled in the western deeps had some profound connexion with her. The Gorm *cared* for her. How else could she, and Egg, and Uncle Will have been allowed to come safely home, riding a little frail boat over that angry sea which drowned all ships?

❖

The sea did not look angry as Utterly scrambled down the cliff-path to it on the evening of the wedding. It had been unusually quiet ever since the storm, and today it looked as meek as a kitten and as sleepy as a sloth. It

had barely enough energy to push its little wavelets up the sand. Tangles of kelp washed limply in its shallows, and it made no effort to weave them into terrifying weed-men, which it had delighted in doing not so long ago. The white-clad lady who was the Gorm's human form did not rise from the gentle swell offshore to smile at Utterly. And when Utterly stood on the wet sand at the water's edge and announced, 'Uncle Will and Aish are married now,' the sea did not answer her, or show the slightest interest.

Utterly missed it. She missed its moods, and its rages. She missed its terrors. Last October it had risen in such a fury that it had torn down the cliff outside her bedroom window and flattened the vicarage, and people had found seaweed hanging from the trees three miles inland. Now it had grown so lazy that the fishermen of Merriport were starting to talk about sailing their boats around Gull Point and fishing in the western deeps. None of them had mustered the courage to actually *do* it yet, but they were *talking* of doing it.

It was as if the Gorm was sulking. Or perhaps she was so lonely out there in her half-imaginary Hidden Lands that she had given way to melancholia, and no longer had the heart to brew up storms and tear tall sea-cliffs down?

*Perhaps I should go to her,* thought Utterly, feeling suddenly sorry for the lonely and terrible old Gorm. All she need do was wade out into those little waves and set

off swimming for the far horizon. The Hidden Lands would be waiting for her there, just out of sight.

For a moment, the temptation was very strong. She even took a step or two towards the sea's edge. But before the gentle waves could touch her slippers, a voice from behind her called, 'Utterly!' and she looked round to see Egg waving frantically from the clifftop.

'Utterly!' he yelled, 'Aish and your uncle are setting off to ride to the Dizzard. And I have saved you a helping of that fruit pudding!'