"A funny adventure about friendship, courage and... jellyfish!"
— PATRICE LAWRENCE, AUTHOR OF *ORANGEBOY*

FIREBLOOM



From the author of HAARVILLE

JUSTIN DAVIES

Illustrated by Francesca Ficorilli

Praise for FIREBLOOM

'Stuffed to the gills with adventure, heart and jellyfish. Last one to read is a squelchy sea slug!'
Maria Kuzniar, author of *The Ship of Shadows* series

'Sweet, compassionate and funny... Justin is a splendid world-builder.'
Patrice Lawrence, author of *Orangeboy*

Praise for HAARVILLE

'Utterly magical and instantly transporting. You'll want to visit Haarville again and again.'
Amie Kaufman, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The World Between Blinks*

'A wonderfully imagined, ridiculously unique story.'
Clare Povey, author of *The Unexpected Tale of Bastien Bonlivre*

'An eccentric and fantastical mystery.'
Kirkus Reviews



FIREBLOOM

This book is for all the inspiring young readers and storytellers I meet, including Alba, who shared their jellyfish joy with me when I visited their school.

Alba, I asked you if my next book should have jellies in it… You said yes, so here they are! – J.D.

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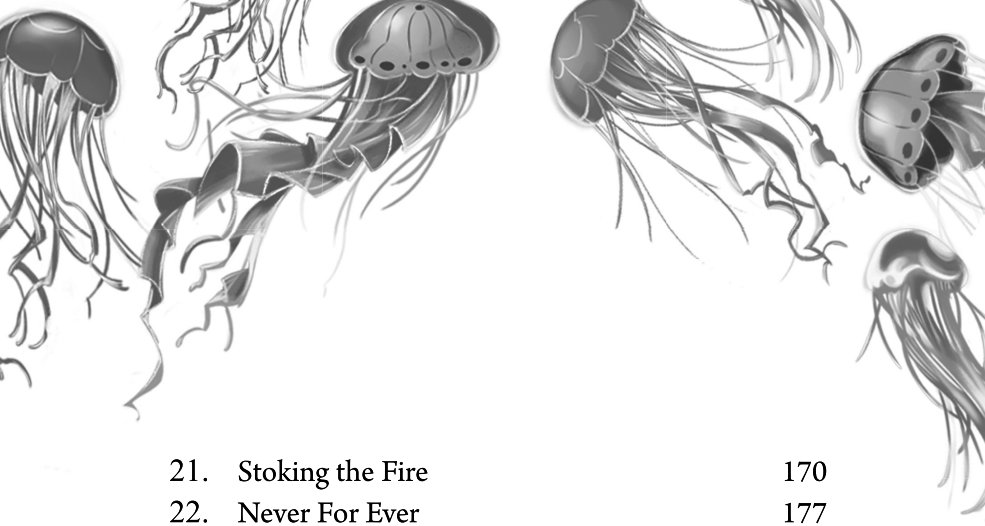

Doocot
Chain walk
Chain walk
Chain walk
Dial House
Old Briny's Salt Cellar
Poker's Nook
Twisted Tentacle Inn
Shellery
Jelly Seeker's Cove
Stormcliff


Vorpal Towers
N
W
E
S
Winch lift
Vorpal ladders
Jellicary
Lion's Mane Café
The Smucks' cottage
Bluff-Reach Steps
Cliff-Climb ladders
Bluff Cove
Sandhopper Steps
Whalebone wind flutes
Sting shed
Bloom Bay
Lighthouse



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All quotes in this book are taken from
The Sting Winkler's Handbook
by Agnes Smuck.



1.
The First Sting Bites the Deepest

I have never been stung by a Stormcliff jellyfish.
No Smuck ever should.

– *from* The Sting Winkler's Handbook *by Agnes Smuck*

The night before the Firebloom Festival began was almost as exciting as the festival itself.

At least, that's what Tally Smuck was thinking as she hung from the final rung of the Cliff-Climb ladder above Bloom Bay. She twisted her neck to look down in an attempt to judge the distance she was about to drop, but her salt goggles were so dirty she couldn't see a thing.

Too bad. Tally let go.

"Thank the krakens," she whispered, as her feet made contact with the sand and her knees buckled to absorb the impact.

Staying crouched for a moment, Tally whipped off the goggles. The wind had dropped during her climb down, so the risk of eye-smarting salt spray off the waves had disappeared. She picked up a handful of sand. It was still

warm from being heated by the sun all day. As she let the grains run through her fingers, Tally smiled at the tiny particles of quartz sparkling in the moonlight like diamond dust.

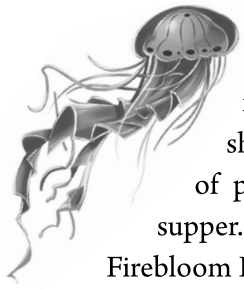
Standing up, she turned to look out across the bay, taking a moment to enjoy the sound of the surf bubbling on the shoreline. Any other time of year, she would have been deafened by massive waves, whipped up to a frenzy by the constant wind crashing on the shore and towering rocks that gave Stormcliff its name. In those conditions, no sensible Stormcliffer would dream of leaving home without their salt goggles firmly clamped to their face. But now, and for the next week, a soft breeze was as much as they needed to worry about.



It always fascinated Tally how the weather seemed to know to calm down whilst the Firebloom Festival took place. Just thinking about the festivities to come sent an excited shiver up her spine. Tonight, she had the bay to herself. But this time tomorrow the beach would be packed with locals and visitors, all gathered to witness the first firebloom, when thousands of jellyfish would put on their spectacular light show, just as they had at the same time every year since before anyone in Stormcliff could remember.



Tally kicked off her shoes and rolled up her trouser legs, then made her way across the sand. The excited spine-tingle had fizzled away, replaced by a nagging knot



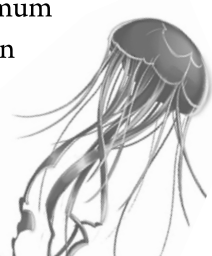
in her stomach, and she suddenly wished she hadn't piled quite such a large dollop of potted plankton on her kelp crackers for supper. She had never felt this nervous about the Firebloom Festival before.

It wasn't the arrival of this year's visitors that was giving her the jitters. Tally was as eager as everyone else to meet the tourists lucky enough to have secured a seat on the once-a-year sailing to Stormcliff from the mainland. Some of them would have waited a long time for the chance to witness the legendary display put on by the Stormcliff jellyfish.

Nor was it the prospect of helping Grandad Isaac and Mandeep – or Mandad, as Tally had always called Grandad's husband – with this year's jellyfish-sting harvest. If you were a Smuck, you had no choice. The jellies had always been their responsibility and Tally had been allowed to help her grandads in the sting shed at harvest time since she was six years old.

No. The thing making Tally's stomach twist and tumble like a tangle of dried seaweed was whether this would be the year she would finally become a Sting Winkler. Just like Grandad was. Just like her mum had been.

Tally smiled. She had a few clear memories of her mum, Ama. But the clearest of all was the last time she stood with her, just like this, in the surf the night before the festival began six years ago. It had turned out to be her mum's last ever Firebloom Festival – she'd died later that same year. But when she'd been alive, Tally's mum had liked to greet any jellies that had arrived in



Stormcliff's waters early, to let them know that they were welcome and that they would be taken care of during their stay. That night, she had held Tally's small hand in hers and told her that one day it would be her job to do the same: to talk to the jellies and gain their trust, to be a Sting Winkler, just like generations of Smucks before her.

That's why tonight, Tally had come down to the bay to greet the jellies alone. Just as her mum had done.

Not that the jellyfish understood her yet, of course. She'd need to be a Sting Winkler for that to happen, and even though she was already twelve, there'd been not so much as an inkling of any winkling. Tally couldn't help but worry that her abilities should have shown themselves by now. After all, Grandad had become a Sting Winkler when he was eleven, as had Tally's mum. What if hers didn't arrive at all? No, that couldn't happen. Could it … ?

Tally squeezed her eyes shut, twisting some of her copper-tinged curls around a finger, whilst tapping her chest in the spot where a tiny jellyfish hung on a chain.



Stormcliff's very first Sting Winkler, Agnes Smuck – Tally's who-knew-how-many-times-great-grandmother and famed Victorian jellyfish seeker – was said to have carved the jelly out of a strange amber-coloured gem she'd found washed up on the beach when she first came to the isle of Stormcliff many

years ago. Now, as she stepped into the surf, Tally sent her ancestor a silent plea for help.

Biting her lip, she scanned the surface for signs of jelly life. For a few minutes there was nothing but a ribbon of moonlight dancing on the gentle ripples, then Tally spotted a flickering blue light about an oar's length away, just under the surface.

"There you are!"

The first flicker was followed by one, then two, then three more. As the jellies washed closer, their markings became more defined, flashing bright circles on their smooth, translucent domed tops.

With her fingertips just breaking the water's surface, Tally waited to greet the first jellies of the year. And maybe, just maybe, she would feel a connection – like a true Sting Winkler should.

Only, these jellies seemed reluctant. They were holding back, pulsing gently against the tide, faintly flashing their blue circles, one after the other. It was almost as if they were whispering amongst themselves.

"It's alright," Tally whispered back. "You know me."

She held her breath. Five seconds, then ten. Finally, one of the jellies displayed a sequence of flashes, before bobbing closer until Tally could reach out and ever so gently stroke it. The jelly glowed briefly, then faded to an eerie milky white. Tally waited, her feet sinking into the sand, but she didn't dare move.

Then, in a single rapid movement, the jelly turned sideways, sucking itself in, before exploding in a series of

rapid flashes radiating from its centre, across its dome and sparking along its tentacles as it billowed away.

"Hey!"

Tally reached out, but as she did, a single sparking tentacle lassoed back and whipped across her arm.

For a moment, she could only stand in disbelief, her skin throbbing.

She'd been hoping for a sign that she was a true Sting Winkler. Instead, Tally was the first Smuck to ever be stung.

And it hurt.

It hurt a lot.

