IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES
THE NEVERFEAR

KATHERINE RUNDELL

Illustrated by
Tomislav Tomić

BLOOMSBURY
CHILDREN'S BOOKS
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK
Bloomsbury Publishing Ireland Limited
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 AY28, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain in 2026 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Text copyright © Katherine Rundell, 2026
Illustrations copyright © Tomislav Tomić, 2026
Map by Virginia Allyn
Cover illustration by Daniel Egnéus

Katherine Rundell and Tomislav Tomić have asserted their rights under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author and Illustrator of this work

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be: i) reproduced or transmitted in any form, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by means of any information storage or retrieval system without prior permission in writing from the publishers; or ii) used or reproduced in any way for the training, development or operation of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, including generative AI technologies. The rights holders expressly reserve this publication from the text and data mining exception as per Article 4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive (EU) 2019/790

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

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4088-9751-5; TPB: 978-1-5266-8373-1; Export PB: 978-1-4088-9750-8; Export Exclusive HB: 978-1-03-720850-8; Waterstones Signed Exclusive HB: 978-1-03-720469-2; eBook: 978-1-4088-9749-2

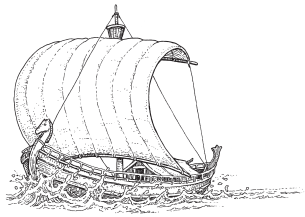
2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Typeset by Six Red Marbles India

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com and sign up for our newsletters
For product safety related questions contact productsafety@bloomsbury.com



FIRE AT MIDSUMMER

Every year, the citizens of the Glimouria Archipelago celebrated the longest day of the year with a feast. Tonight, while the sky would deepen to navy and the moon would rise, it would never grow dark. Glimourians would gather to eat Midsummer cake, traditionally as large as a bicycle wheel and tall as a smallish horse. They would drink dryad wine, and salute the glory of the light.

Midsummer celebrations varied across the thirty-four islands of Glimouria according to custom. On the Island of Antiok, centaurs galloped around great bonfires which sparked red and purple and blue. Off the coast, mermaids met to play their way through the night on flutes forged from lobster shells. On the mainland of Lithia, small sticky children chased gold-horned al-mirajes through the streets, trying to tie ribbons around their necks.

And in the fishing village of Arno on the Island of Arvatana, murder was being done.

Arno was made up of small, sturdy houses and a patchwork of meadows. It was home to herds of tiddy mun, a bog creature which conjured mist every night. The tiddy mun caused the meadows of mistflowers to thrive, the petals of which were used in the making of medicines and ointments, the principal trade of the island. It was a lush, wet, flourishing place.

It was hard, but not impossible, to burn.

Two dozen men, masked and armed, swarmed into the quayside market that morning. They came with crossbows and lances and torches, and they burned and slaughtered their way through the square. The sky swallowed the villagers' cries as it grew black with smoke and the houses flared to ruins and the meadows to ash. The men were ruthless and fast, trained in death.

They were not, though, unwatched. A ship called the *Fair Warning* had drawn alongside the coast with an intention to land. The ship's owner was Vigo Nex, a man with a diamond set in his canine tooth and morals so loose they flapped when he walked. But though he was a pirate, he was not a fool. He held up a fist to signal to his crew.

'Pull out, fast! Get out of range of the shore.'

Vigo put a glass to his eye. It was centaur-made, and allowed him to see every smear of soot on the cheeks of the terrified villagers who stood bound and captive by the quay.

The attackers wore masks over the upper halves of their faces, black snakeskin with slits for eyes. All wore the same bracelet: a snake with its tail in its mouth.

'New trouble,' Vigo said, and spat on the deck of the boat. As he watched, one of the masked men reached into a cloak and withdrew an oval hand mirror. To Vigo's astonishment the other bandits shrank back with sharp cries. One seemed barely able to stand, paralysed in a sudden half-crouch of fear.

The man uttered a shout and the mirror in his hand seemed to throb. Its glass pulsated in a silvery vibration, and from its surface leaped a tiger.

The captives screamed as the tiger landed on the ash-coated stone and breathed in the burning air. Its pupils were black flames. Its muscles moved under its skin like pistons, and its presence on the quay was a hellish thing.

The tiger set back its head and roared, its jaw hinged open, its tongue vibrating in its mouth. The sound sent barbs of horror running down the back of Vigo Nex.

The man with the mirror made a gesture, and one of the captives – an old man – was singled out from the others and shoved forward.

The tiger drew back, plaiting its muscles together, and then, in an arc of claws and teeth, it pounced. A woman screamed. The tiger picked up the old man's body in its jaws, and with a leap of deadly grace it surged back into the mirror with its prey.

One of the masked men looked out to sea. He shouted

to the man with the mirror and pointed towards the *Fair Warning*.

'Quick, you dawdlin' idiots!' said Vigo. 'Haul away! Set fast, nor'-east! D'we have powdered wind?'

'Yes, sir!'

'Then *use* it! Now!'

A pirate hurled a handful of white powder at the sails and they billowed suddenly fat. There was a commotion of ropes and running as the boat turned in a churning of waves and shot out over the open water.

Vigo waited until the village was a black blur in the distance. Then he drew breath, and summoned his first mate.

'Did yer witness that, Pavel?' Vigo came from the High-veld of Freondell, where the drink was strong and the nights dark, and philosophical disputes were resolved by who could headbutt the most people in the shortest time. The accent was hoarse, and with iron spikes nailed through it.

'That tiger!' Pavel's face was white-grey with fear. 'I heard stories o' such a thing but I thought they were too cruel to be true.'

'It was an evil thing. I can' let that go on. We need to report it.'

Pavel looked stunned. 'You're not goin' to the Gardai?'

Vigo snorted. He had never willingly gone within a hundred yards of Glimouria's police force. 'Never. But we'll pass on an alert. We're pirates, no' cowards.' And then Vigo suddenly roared: 'Fidens Nighthand!'

'What?'

'I'll tell Nighthand. He's the bravest man I ever met, an' I don' necessarily mean tha' as a compliment.'

'I heard Nighthand's dead.' Pavel ran his tongue over his pencil-thin moustache. 'He's not been seen in the bars and taverns for more'n a year.'

'Course he's not dead, man! D'ye never listen to the ratatoskas? Nor the mermaids? They're not singin' their songs for fun – it's *news*. He's no' the drunken smuggler yer knew. He helped trace the new Immortal bairn. He's an ally o' the sphinxes.'

'Where is he then?'

'He's got some palace off the coast o' Lithia with a lass he has the love-aches for. They say she's got the learnin' of a dozen women: always bein' hounded by the Senate for advice. They'll know what to do, and who to tell.'

'But, Captain, the risk—'

'Pavel!'

'Sir?'

'Shut yer mouth. If we go fast we'll ge' there in time for their feast. Send Rixo to me.' And Vigo Nex turned and roared to his crew: 'Set course for the Palace of Glimt!'