



Impossible Creatures by Katherine Rundell

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Discussion Questions

1. Impossible Creatures begins with three short quotes, or epigraphs, excerpting writing from three very different (and quite old) time periods. How do these quotes relate to one another? What can you predict about the story based on the author's choice of epigraphs?
2. Our names hold power. There is a scene in the story when Christopher and Mal discuss the "prophetic" nature of her name and how families' naming choices differ between their cultures. Do you know where your name comes from etymologically, or why it was chosen for you?
3. Why do you think the Archipelago remains hidden from our world? Why might it need to be safeguarded and kept safe from us?
4. The Archipelago is referred to as the 'last surviving magical place'. Why do you think it's the only one left? What might have happened to the other magical places mentioned in the story?
5. The centaur Petroc mentions that his people have been waiting for 'her' for a hundred years. Who is this 'her' and why is the centaur concerned about her being a child?
6. Christopher says, 'She won't give up. It's not something she knows how to do.' What does this tell you about Mal's personality and attitude? Can you think of times when you or someone you know didn't give up even when things were tough?
7. If you were Petroc, what would you say to convince others to believe in the importance of saving the glimourie? What reasons would you give?
8. Naravirala says that power should never be in the hands of only one person. Why is it important for power to be spread out instead of concentrated in one person's hands?
9. How do you think sharing power can help prevent the misuse of power? What kinds of problems might arise if one person has too much power?
10. At the end of the book, in a chapter entitled, "The Beginning, Again," Rundell writes of a baby being born. We are told the baby's exclamation was the same words Mal spoke as she rocketed toward the Somnulum. Where else in the story did we see life cycles or birth, death, and new beginnings discussed, for animals or for humans?

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Author Biography

Katherine Rundell is a multi-million-bestselling author whose novels for children have won the Waterstones Children's Book Prize, the Blue Peter Book Award and the Costa Children's Book Award, among many others. *Impossible Creatures* was Waterstones Book of the Year 2023, and in 2024 Katherine was named the British Book Awards Author of the Year and *Impossible Creatures* won the Children's Fiction Book of the Year. She is a Quondam Fellow of All Souls College and a Fellow of St. Catherine's College, Oxford, where she works on Renaissance literature. Her books for adults include *Super-Infinite*, winner of the Baillie Gifford Prize. Very occasionally she goes climbing across the rooftops of Oxford, late at night.

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Author Interview

The Archipelago is a hidden world where magical creatures of every kind thrive. What research did you do to help create your collection of mythological animals?

I spent many wonderful hours in libraries researching the magical creatures that we were once absolutely convinced were real. I read mythical encyclopedias, old manuscripts (in my other work, I research Renaissance literature at Oxford, so I have access to fantastic, dusty archives), and ancient histories, all to create a file with hundreds of pages of notes about my creatures. We used to believe there were unicorns in the wild, which makes perfect sense, really, given that narwhals exist. The line between possible and impossible in the natural world is so very thin: there are many things that seem like they should be glorious myths—giraffes, hedgehogs, swifts—that are true.

***Impossible Creatures* is already being called an “instant classic.” Which books and authors, both classic and contemporary, were your biggest influences when writing *Impossible Creatures*?**

I’ve always loved fantasy, and grew up reading the masters. Narnia, especially, gave me endless happiness. And I adored Tolkien, Ursula K. Le Guin, E. Nesbit’s *Five Children and It*, Diana Wynne Jones, Philip Pullman—and the older work too: Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, *The Odyssey*, the old Norse sagas, and Greek myths. I love the scope that modern fantasy gives authors to write about urgent truths—about power, and loss, and endurance—in a way that also offers a thrilling journey and a feast of pleasure.

***Impossible Creatures* is full of action and adventure. How do you bring such gripping action to life?**

Thank you so much! I’m thrilled you think so—I wanted to create a story that would grab children by the wrist and not let them go until the last page. I think children deserve huge, wild adventures, so at every step, I asked myself: Would I find this exciting, if I was reading it for the first time? Can I make it bolder, sharper, brighter, swifter?

What message do you hope readers take away from *Impossible Creatures*?

I wanted to write a book that would be, first and foremost, a great sweep of adventure and action and delight: I don’t think it’s fair to offer children a story and then bludgeon them with a moral. But the book is, in part, about the threat of endangerment: about the idea of fighting with everything you have to protect that which is vulnerable, because what is lost is lost forever. And I wanted to suggest to children that our own world is one of such magnificence that if we were not familiar with it—if we were to discover it anew—it would knock us sideways with astonishment.

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