

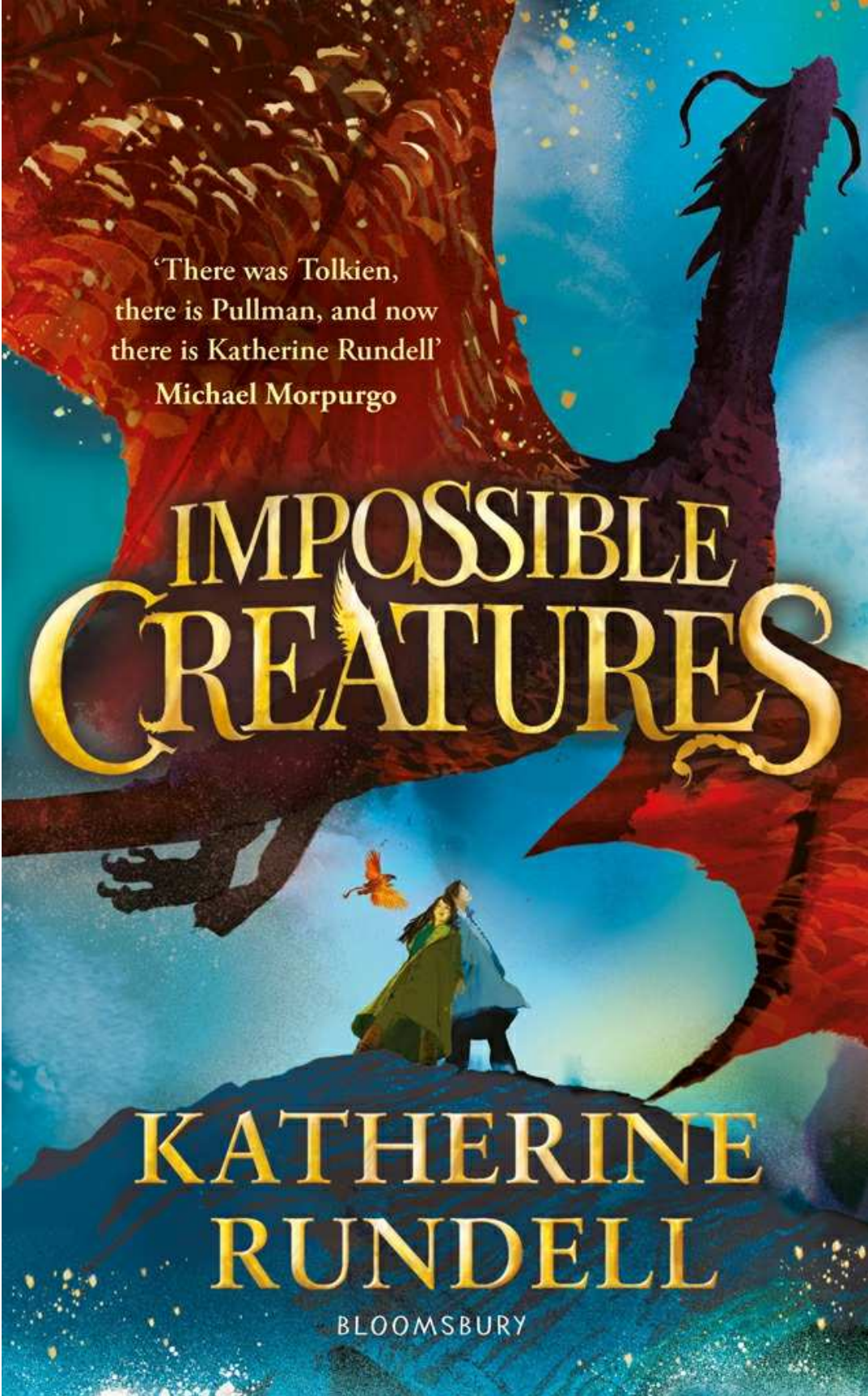
‘There was Tolkien,
there is Pullman, and now
there is Katherine Rundell’

Michael Morpurgo

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

KATHERINE
RUNDSELL

BLOOMSBURY



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Praise for

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

'There was Tolkien, there is Pullman, and now there is Katherine Rundell. Wondrous invention, marvellous writing. This book is her best yet, and that's saying something'

Michael Morpurgo

'Katherine Rundell is a phenomenon. She not only understands what fantasy is for and why children (and the rest of us) need it, but she crafts original and brilliant books that delight readers of all ages and kinds, while stretching our minds and filling our hearts'

Neil Gaiman

'I love Katherine Rundell's writing ... Readers who already know her books will seize this with delight, and new readers will love it and demand all her others at once'

Philip Pullman

'A marvellous imaginative fantasy told with great style and sparkle – a book to race through in a day and keep for a lifetime'

Jacqueline Wilson

'Fantastically exuberant, wildly imaginative, impossibly brilliant. Rundell's best, which is something to be marvelled at. It made me want to yell, or laugh, or bite something'

Kiran Millwood Hargrave

'Between the covers of *Impossible Creatures* is a world as enchanting, as perilous, as richly imagined as Narnia or Middle Earth'

Frank Cottrell-Boyce

'A soaring odyssey of burning fierce heart and wit'

Piers Torday

'A menagerie of delights. So packed with magic you'll want to take notes. *Impossible Creatures* is a world you'll want to move into'

Patrick Ness

'I savoured every moment of *Impossible Creatures*. An absolutely magnificent story!'

Abi Elphinstone

'A rare and remarkable feat of glittering imagination from a truly masterful storyteller. The best thing since Pullman'

Catherine Doyle

'A thrilling and page-turning epic ... My Book of the Year'

Lauren St John

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

KATHERINE
RUNDELL

Illustrated by
Tomislav Tomić

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

Books by Katherine Rundell

Rooftoppers

The Wolf Wilder

The Explorer

The Good Thieves

Impossible Creatures

For younger readers

One Christmas Wish

The Zebra's Great Escape

For adult readers

Why You Should Read Children's Books, Even Though You Are So Old and Wise

Super-Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne

The Golden Mole and Other Living Treasure

Edited by Katherine Rundell

The Book of Hopes

In memory of Claire Hawkins, my great-aunt, who lit my childhood

'The griffin is both a feathered animal and a quadruped;
its body is like that of a lion, but it has wings and the face
of an eagle.'

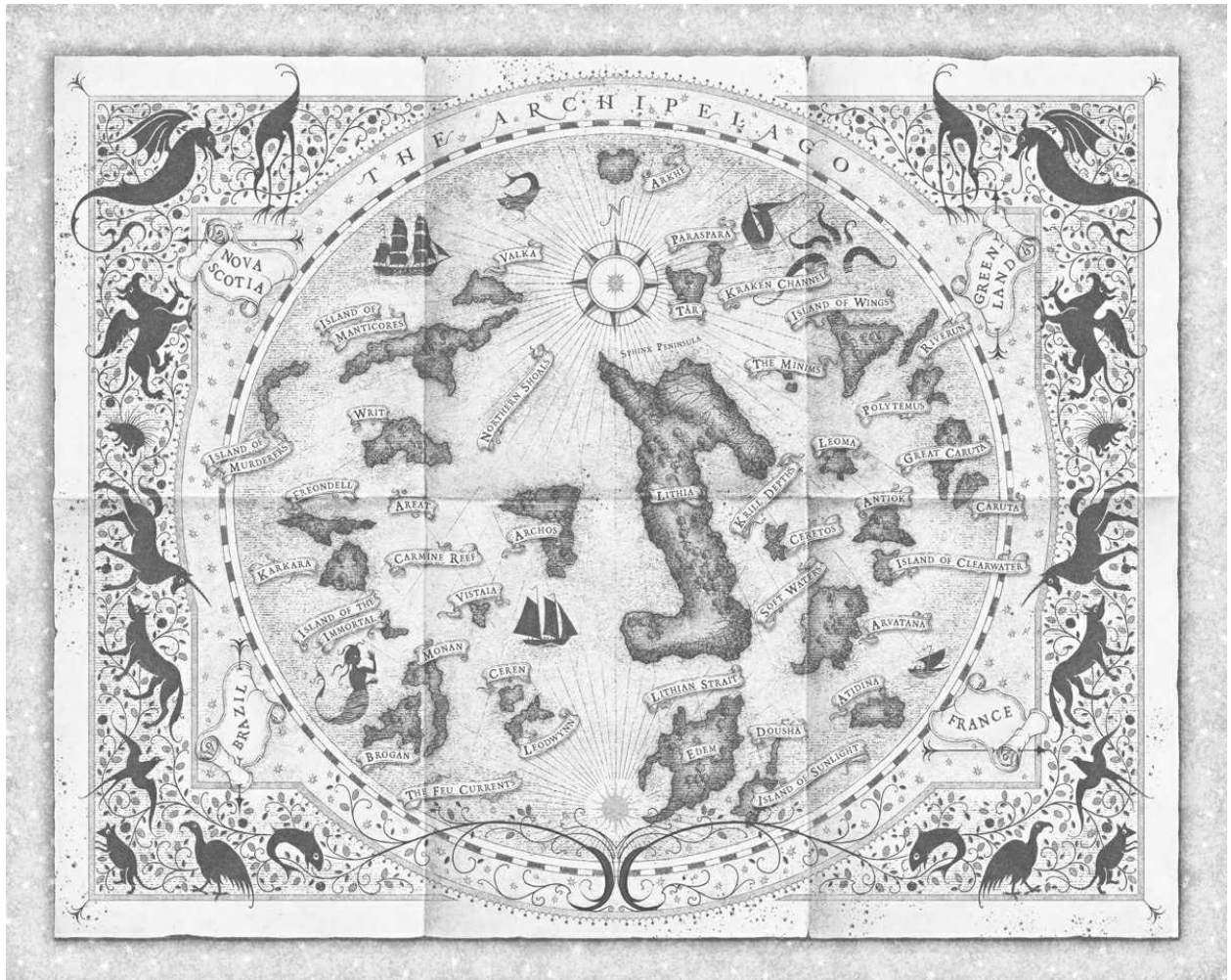
Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* (c. 600)

'His mouth is death and his breath is fire!'

The Epic of Gilgamesh (Mesopotamia, c. 2000 BCE),
probably the earliest written reference to dragons

'I sing the progress of a deathless soul.'

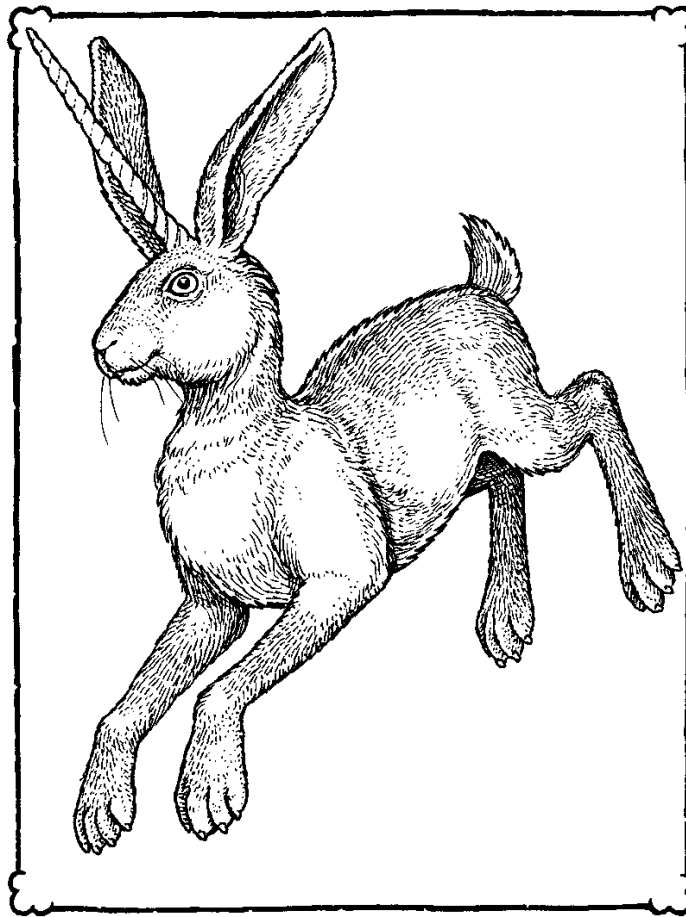
John Donne, *Metempsychosis* (1601)



THE GUARDIAN'S BESTIARY

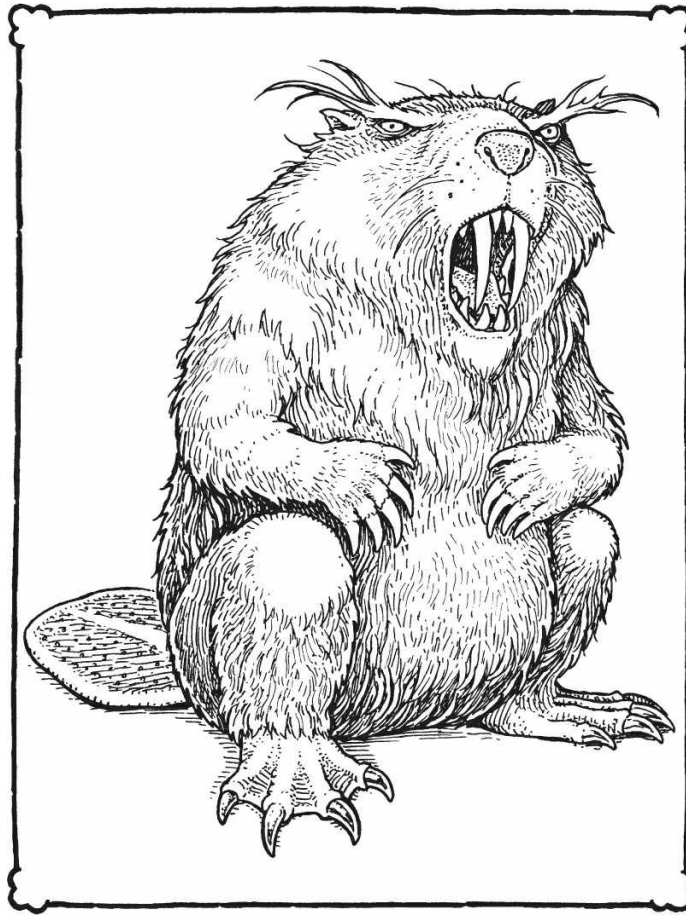


There is a secret place in our world that is care fully hidden, to keep it safe from us. It's a wild magnificence of a place: a land where all the creatures of myth still live and thrive. It is known as the Archipelago: a cluster of thirty-four islands, some as large as Denmark, some as small as a town square. Across the islands, thou sands of magical creatures run and fly, raise their young, grow old, die and begin again. To us they're half forgot ten, and were long ago dismissed as children's stories. But we have not destroyed them; they survive. They are plentiful, and shining, and real. It is the last surviving magical place.



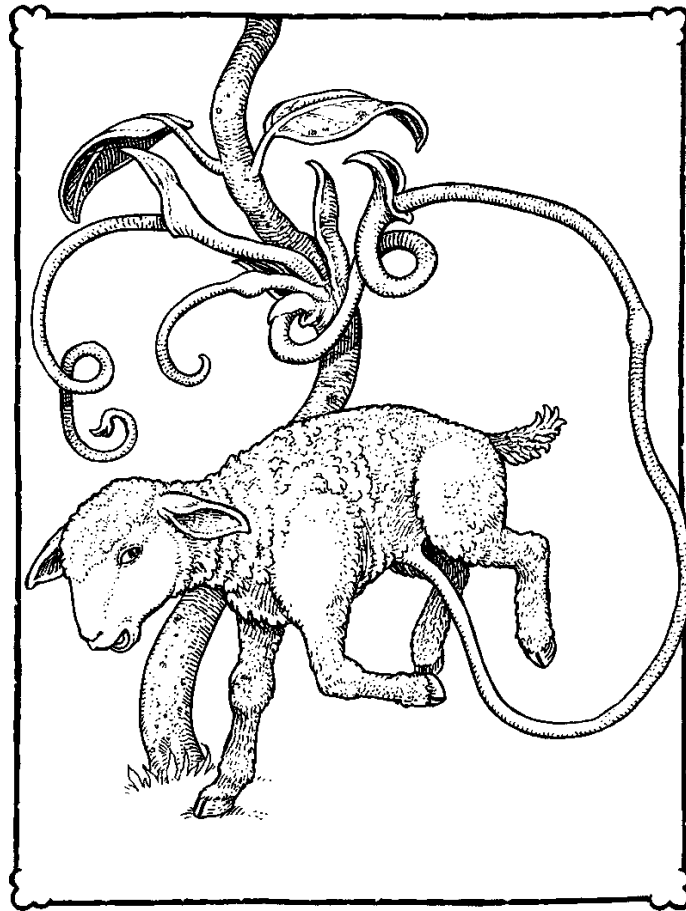
Al-miraj

Al-mirajes are horned hares of dazzling beauty. Their ears are long and pink on the inside, and their horns pure gold. During the mating season, where the al-miraj treads, fresh shoots of greenery rise from the earth; they can carpet a barren field with grass within an hour. The al-miraj is said to seek out the valiant, the wise and the good. Queen Arian of Lithia once sought to give one to her fiancé, only to see the creature shun her suitor and joyfully greet her maidservant. She married her maidservant instead and they lived happily ever after, with a garden full of gold-horned hares.



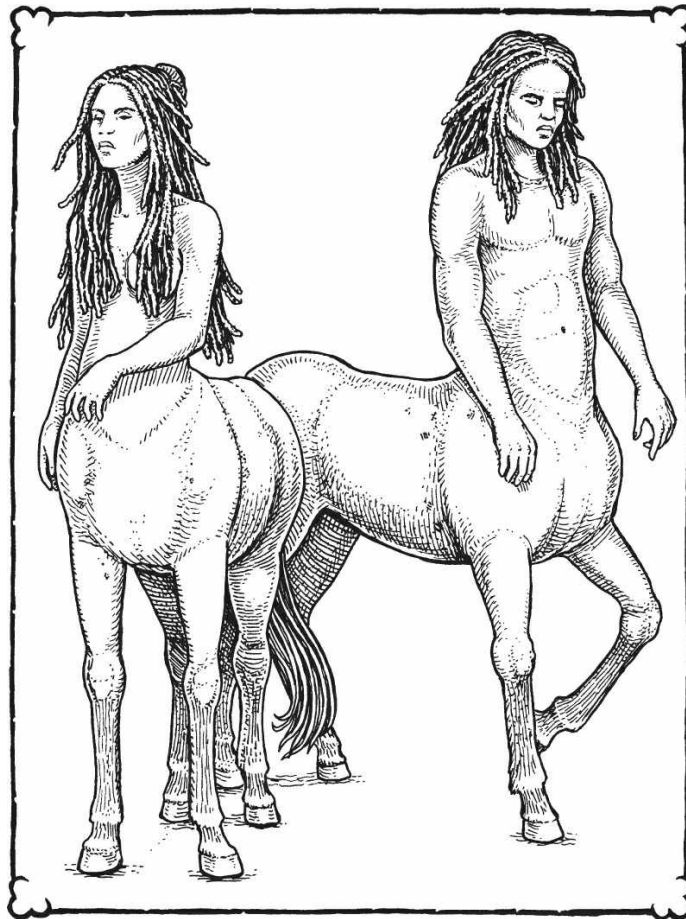
Avanc

The avanc is a swamp-dwelling carnivore, resembling a fanged beaver. The teeth of the avanc, which are bone-white and pointed like pins, grow an inch every day, and they keep them trimmed and sharpened against rocks, trees and occasional humans. The softness and lustrous beauty of their fur can lead children to take liberties. Those children who do so, do so only once.



Borometz

Also known as the 'vegetable lamb', the borometz grows from a green stalk, to which it is tethered by a tendril. The lamb reaches one foot in height; its skin is green and its wool is white. If the lamb eats all the grass within the reach of the tendril, both the lamb and the plant will die. For this reason, many people in the Archipelago carry seeds, to plant around the borometz's stalk if they see one. Their wool, given freely to those they trust, makes the softest cloth in the known world; cloth which lasts hundreds of years, and smells very faintly of the earth.



Centaur

(female: **centauride**)

Centaurs have the body of a horse and the torso and head of a human. While they are skilled artisans in a variety of crafts, much centaur culture focuses around food, because they must eat a dozen times a day, to fuel the needs of their bodies and tremendous brains. They are great culinary inventors, and centaur feasts take place at every full moon, spread out under moon light. They serve forest fruits, piled three feet high, and ferocious crab-apple spirits, and the feasting lasts all night and into the next day.



Chimaera

The chimaera resembles a lion, but has a second head, that of a goat, and a tail which ends in the face of a snake. These three faces all have individuated brains, nervous systems and strong opinions. This makes it difficult for the chimaera to achieve as much havoc as it otherwise might, as it generally fails to agree with itself as to what to do next.



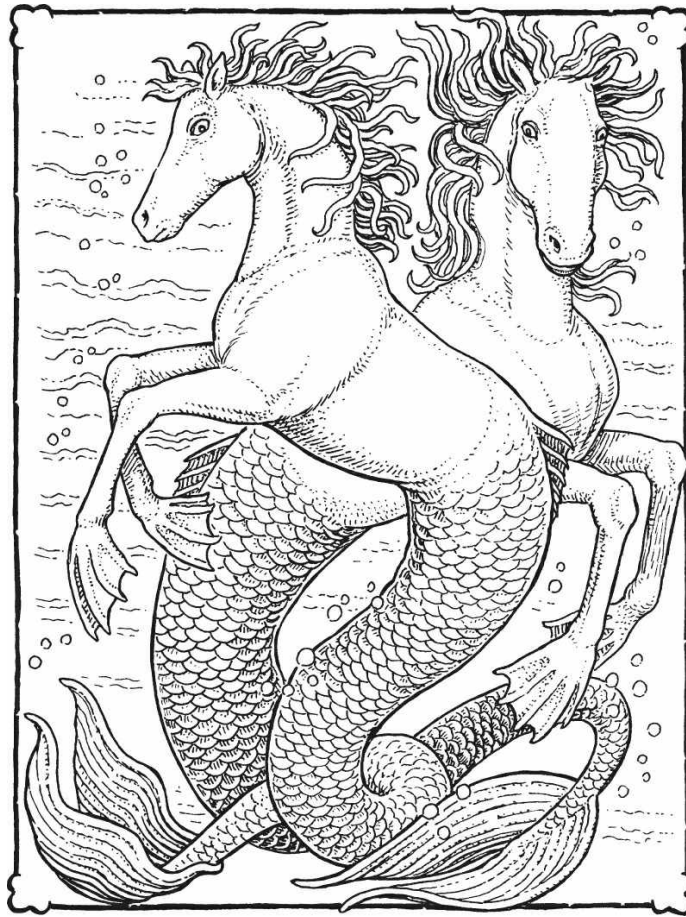
Dragon

There are thirty-seven species of dragon in the Archipelago. The largest – the red-winged dragon, which is black with a scarlet under-wing – is as large as a cathedral. The smallest, the jaculus, can sit comfortably on the joint of your thumb. The yellow dragon, slim-winged and long-tailed, is the fastest in the sky, while the bronze-tailed aquatic dragon is able to breathe underwater, and has been known to spend its entire adult life beneath the ocean, erupting to the surface only to hunt occasional sailors. The silver dragon, which can live up to four thousand years, is thought to be the oldest creature in the world. It is unpredictable in temper, as befits one who has seen so much.



Griffin

Griffins have the body, tail and back legs of a lion, and the head, wings and front claws of an eagle. Though they do not speak aloud, they learn astonishingly fast, and can understand the entirety of a human language within days. When fully grown, their wingspan is broad enough to shelter a child underneath it. In cold weather, their bodies radiate warmth. The griffin is more reliant than any other creature on the glimourie in the soil and the air; they are among the world's most magical creatures. [*Addendum, by Frank Aureate: For the last five years, griffins have become rarer and rarer. The reason is unclear, but it is possibly connected to a fading in the glimourie. Their status now is believed to be near-extinct.*]



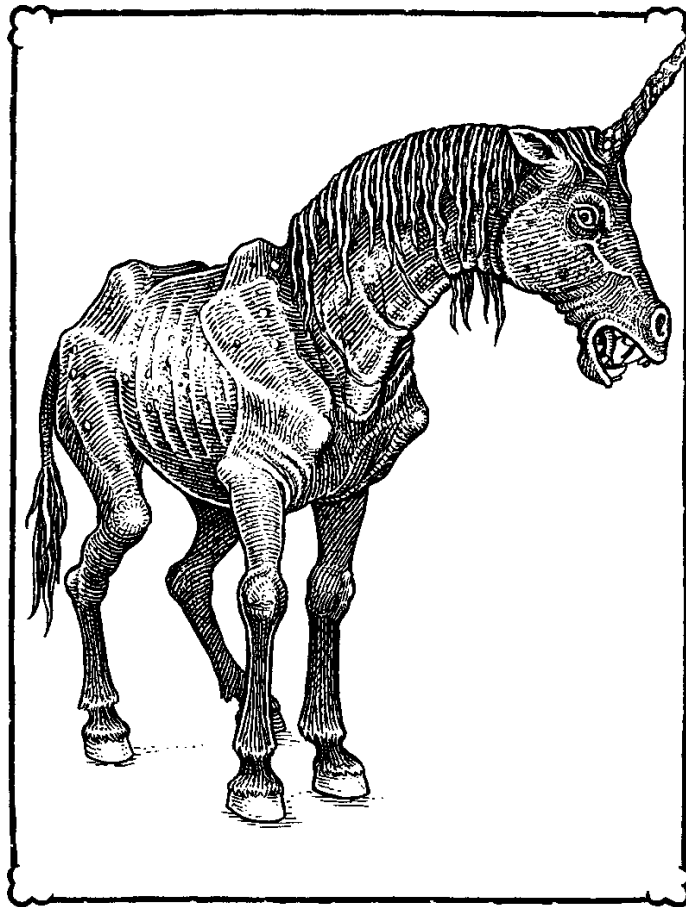
Hippocamp

Hippocamps are the true sea-horses of the oceans. They live in herds of ten to twenty; the male is larger than the female, but the female is swifter. They range in colour from emerald green, to grey, to, in the north-west, the shining pink of coral. Some are tamed and ridden by nereids. All boats in the Archipelago must, by law, run on wind or sun, so that the water will remain unpolluted, and the young hippo camps (known as 'hippolines') can grow into their full lustrous beauty.



Kanko

A foxlike creature the size of a mouse, the kanko's tail is split in two, allowing it to perform extraordinary feats of balance. Also known as 'light foxes', their saliva has luminescent properties, and has been used in paintings, particularly in Japan, where they originate. They have a rich, attentive intelligence despite their size, and are known to bring luck. The nest of a kanko, therefore, mustn't be disturbed; but they have been known to nest in inconvenient places – in shoes, hats, pockets, and, once, in the beard of a gentle man on the day of his wedding.



Karkadann

Karkadanns resemble unicorns, if unicorns had vicious souls and canine teeth. One of the few creatures in the Archipelago who kill for sport as well as food, they eat meat, prefer ring human flesh, and grass, for digestion. The hide of the karkadann ranges from pure black to purple, and the skin sags from their bones. The horn is black, and the tip carries a poison which can cause agonising gangrene, paralysis and death. They can be kept at bay with the horn of a unicorn, but, as you are extremely unlikely to have a unicorn to hand, that is frankly of limited help.