

JUSTIN SOMPER

Also by Justin Somper

VAMPIRATES: Tide of Terror

VAMPIRATES: Blood Captain

VAMPIRATES: Black Heart

VAMPIRATES: Empire of Night

VAMPIRATES: Immortal War

VAMPIRATES

DEMONS OF THE OCEAN



uclanpublishing

*For my dad, John Dennis Somper,
with love and thanks for sheltering me from the storm.*

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**Crescent Moon Bay,
east coast of Australia.
The year 2505.**

THE STORM, THE SHANTY AND THE SHIP



As the first crack of thunder broke over Crescent Moon Bay, Grace Tempest opened her eyes. A flash of sheet lightning broke behind the curtains. Shivering, she threw back the bedclothes and walked over to the bedroom window. It had broken free and was wide open, beating in the gale like a glass wing.

Grace reached out to pull it back. It required some effort and the rain drenched her in the process, but she managed it. She fastened the window but left it slightly ajar – not wanting to entirely shut out the storm. It had a strange, rough music with too many drumrolls and clashing cymbals. It made her heart race from excitement as well as fear. The rainwater was icy cold on her face, neck and arms. It made her skin tingle.

Across the room, Connor was still asleep – his mouth wide open, one arm flopping over the edge of his bunk. How could he sleep through such a racket? Perhaps her twin brother had clean exhausted himself playing soccer all afternoon.

Beyond the lighthouse window, the bay was empty of ships. This was no night to be out sailing. The lighthouse beam swept

across the surface of the ocean, illuminating the troubled waves. Grace smiled, thinking of her dad up above in the lamp room, watching over the harbour, keeping everyone safe.

Another sheet of lightning cracked and splintered outside the window. Stumbling back, Grace careered into Connor's bed. Her brother's face suddenly crinkled and then his eyes opened. He looked up with a combination of confusion and annoyance. She stared down at his bright green eyes. They were the exact same shade as hers – as if an emerald had been cut in two. Their dad's eyes were brown, so Grace always thought that they must have taken after their mother. Sometimes, in her dreams, a woman appeared at the lighthouse door, smiling and looking down on Grace with the same piercing green eyes.

"Hey, you're all wet!"

Grace realised that she was dripping rainwater onto Connor.

"There's a storm. Come and look!"

She grabbed his arm and pulled him out from under the bedclothes, dragging him towards the window. He stood there, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, as another vein of lightning danced in front of them.

"Isn't it amazing?" Grace said.

Connor nodded but was silent. Although he had lived all his days in the lighthouse at the edge of the shore, he had never got used to the raw power of the ocean – its ability to change from a calm millpond one moment to a raging furnace the next.

"Let's go and see what dad's up to," he said.

"Good idea." Grace grabbed her dressing gown from the bedroom door and wrapped herself up. Connor pulled on a hooded sweater over his T-shirt. Together they raced out of the

bedroom and climbed the spiral staircase up to the lamp room.

As they made their way up, the noise of the storm grew louder. Connor didn't like it one bit, but he wasn't about to share that with Grace. His sister was quite fearless. It was strange. Grace was as thin and bony as a rake, but as tough as an old boot. Connor was physically strong; but Grace had a steely mental strength that he had yet to gain. Perhaps he never would.

"Well, hello there!" said their dad, as they emerged into the lamp room. "Storm woke you up, did it?"

"No, *Grace* woke me up," Connor said. "I was in the middle of a really good dream! I was about to score a hat trick."

"I don't understand how anyone can sleep through a storm like this," Grace said, "It's too noisy and too beautiful."

"You're weird," Connor said.

Grace frowned and jutted out her lip. Sometimes, though they were twins, she felt they were polar opposites.

Their dad took a sip of his hot gum tea and beckoned to them.

"Grace, why don't you come over here and get a ringside seat for the show. Connor, come and sit by me."

The twins did as he said, squatting down on the floor on either side of him. Instantly, Grace was fascinated, enjoying the chance to watch the raging bay from the highest vantage point. Connor had a flash of vertigo but then he felt his father's reassuring hand on his shoulder, sending waves of calm through his body.

Their dad took another sip of his tea. "Who'd like to hear a shanty?" he asked.

"Me!" Connor and Grace answered in unison. They both knew exactly the shanty he would sing. He'd sung it to them for as long as they could remember, from the time when they'd been babies – in

matching cots, side by side – and couldn't even understand the words.

“This,” he announced grandly – as if he hadn’t done so a thousand times before – “this is a shanty sung by people long before the new flood came and made the world so wet. This is a shanty about a ship that sails through the

night, through all eternity. A ship that carries a crew of damned souls – the demons of the ocean. A ship that has been sailing since time began and will voyage on until the very end of the world . . .”

Connor trembled with delicious anticipation. Grace smiled from ear to ear. Their dad, the lighthouse keeper, began to sing.

*“I'll tell you a tale of Vampirates,
A tale as old as true.
Yea, I'll sing you a song of an ancient ship,
And its mighty fearsome crew.
Yea, I'll sing you a song of an ancient ship,
That sails the oceans blue . . .
That haunts the oceans blue.”*

As her dad sang, Grace looked out through the window at the bay below. The storm was still raging but she felt perfectly safe, looking down from such a height.

*“The Vampirate ship has tattered sails,
That flap like wings in flight.
They say that the captain, he wears a veil
So as to curtail your fright
At his death-pale skin And his lifeless eyes
And his teeth as sharp as night.*

*Oh, they say that the captain, he wears a veil
And his eyes never see the light.”*

Connor watched as his dad used his hand to mime a veil. He shivered at the thought of the captain’s horrible face.

*“You'd better be good, child – good as gold,
As good as good can be.
Else I'll turn you in to the Vampirates
And wave you out to sea.
Yes, you'd better be good, child – good as gold,
Because – look! Can you see?
There's a dark ship in the harbour tonight
And there's room in the hold for thee!
(Plenty of room for thee!)”*

Both twins looked out to the harbour, half-expecting to see a dark ship waiting for them there. Waiting to take them away from their dad and their home. But the bay was empty.

*“Well, if pirates are bad,
And vampires are worse,
Then I pray that as long as I be
That though I sing of Vampirates
I never one shall see.
Yea, if pirates are danger
And vampires are death,
I'll extend my prayer for thee –
That thine eyes never see a Vampirate . . .”*

The lighthouse keeper reached out his hands to touch both children lightly on the shoulder.

“... and they never lay a hand on thee.”

Connor and Grace had known what was coming but still they jumped, before bursting into giggles. Their dad enfolded them in a hug.

“Who’s ready for bed now?” he asked. “I am,” Connor said.

Grace could have watched the storm all night, but she couldn’t prevent a long yawn from escaping.

“I’ll come down and tuck you in,” their dad said. “Shouldn’t you stay here and watch the bay?” Grace asked.

Her dad smiled. “It won’t take a moment. The lamp is on. Besides, Gracie, the bay is as empty as the grave tonight. There isn’t one single ship out there. Not even the Vampirate ship.”

He winked at the twins, set down his mug of tea and followed them downstairs. He tucked them both back into their beds and kissed first Grace, then Connor goodnight.

After he turned out the bedroom light, Grace lay there, tired but too exhilarated to sleep. She looked over at Connor, who once again was sprawled right across his bed, perhaps already back in the throes of his earlier dream.

Grace couldn’t resist one last glance at the bay. She pushed back the covers and padded across the floor to the window. The storm had softened just a little and, as the lighthouse beam swept across the waters, she saw the waves had lost some of their turbulence.

And then she saw the ship.

It hadn’t been there before, but there was no mistaking it now.

One solitary ship, out in the middle of the bay. It hovered there, as if quite unaffected by the storm around it. As if it was sailing on the calmest of waters. Grace’s eyes traced the outline of the silhouette. It made her think of the ancient ship in her dad’s shanty. The ship of demons. She trembled at the very thought, imagining the veiled captain staring back at her through the dark night. But truly, the way this ship just floated there – as if suspended from the moon by an invisible string – made it appear to be watching, waiting. For something . . . or someone.

Up above, in the lamp room, the lighthouse keeper saw the same ship out in the unsettled waters. As he recognised its familiar shape, he couldn’t help but smile. He took another sip of his tea. Then he lifted his hand and waved.