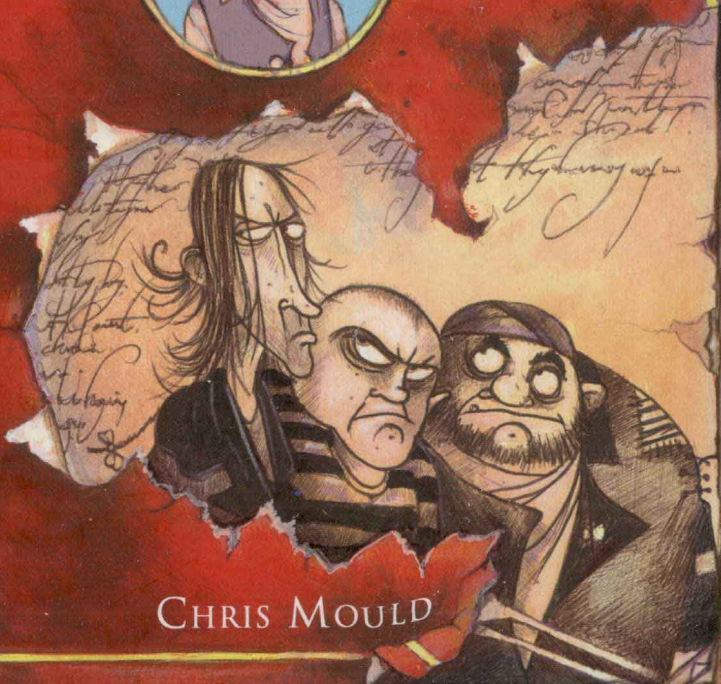


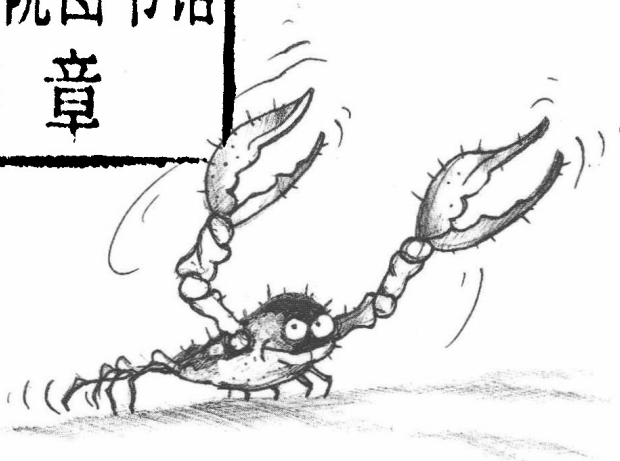
Something Wickedly Weird?

THE WOODEN MILE



CHRIS MOULD

工业学院图书馆
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THE WOODEN MILE

CHRIS MOULD



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For Thomas and Charlie Flather

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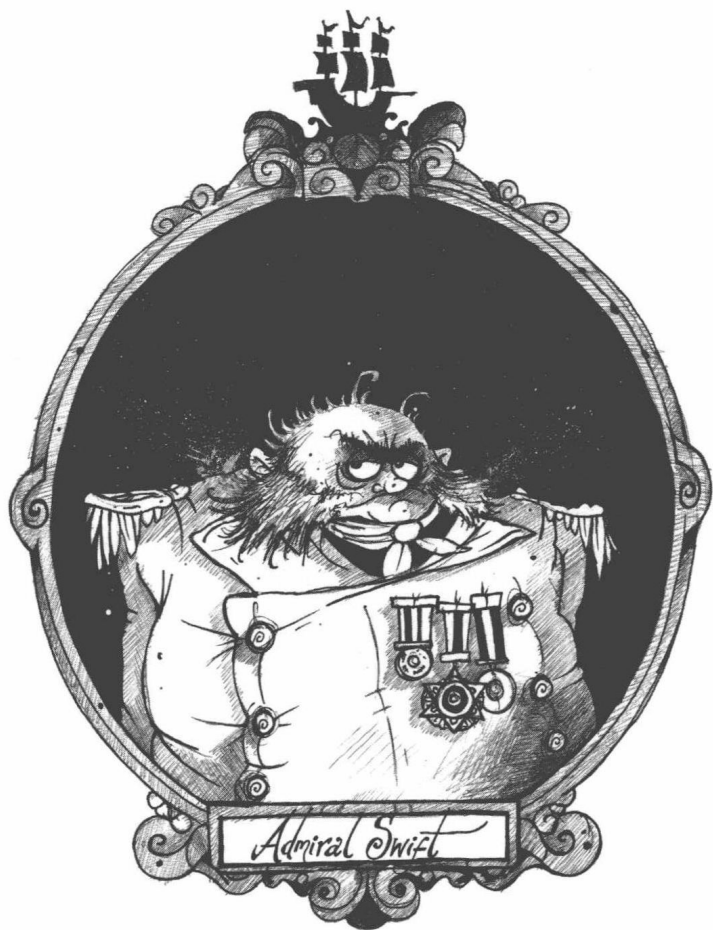
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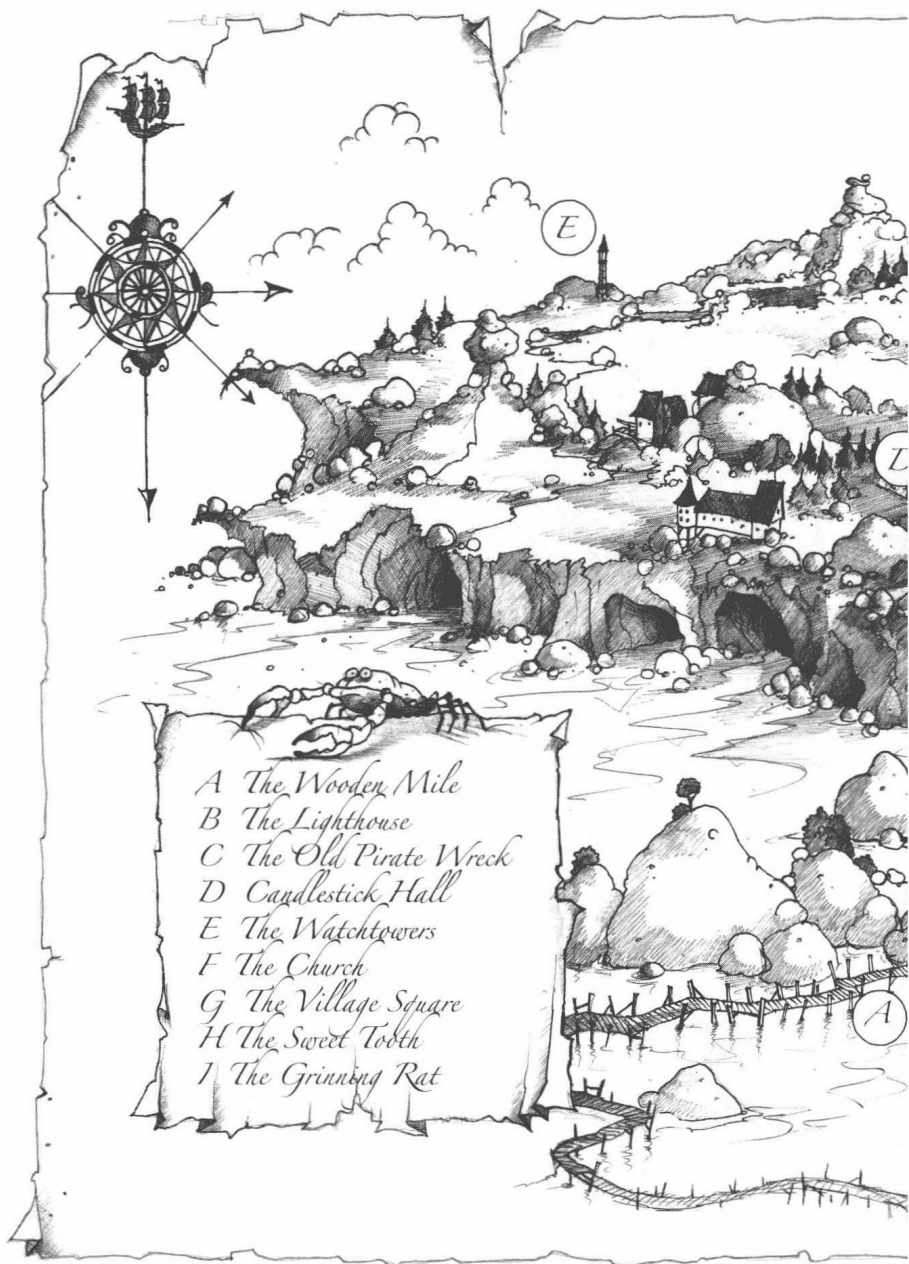
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- A The Wooden Mile
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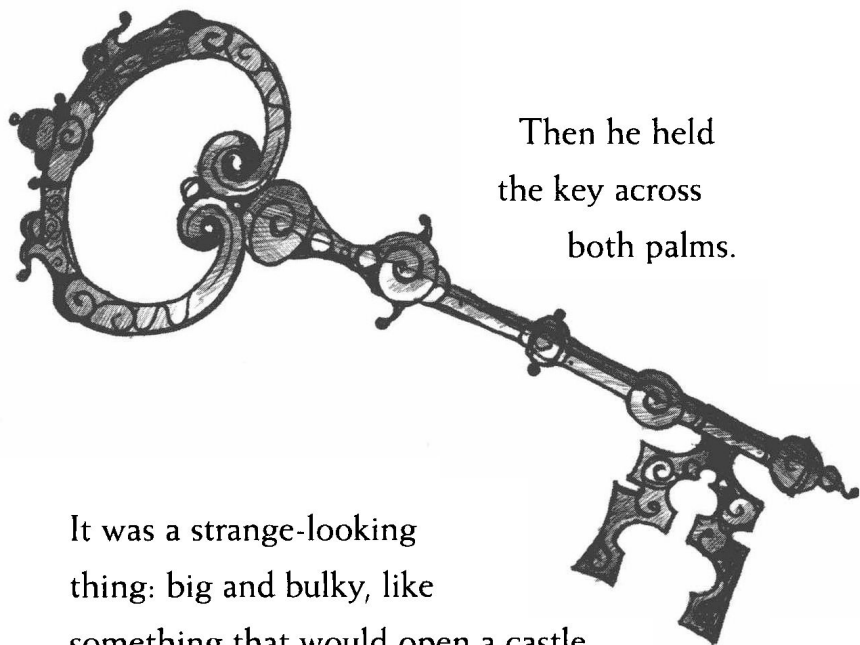
In a darkened industrial town, someone weaves unnoticed in and out of the alleyways until he finds the right doorway and forces a package through the letterbox.

This is not the very start of the story. It is simply a convenient place to begin. And you should be warned that when you delve into what has already happened and what lies ahead,

you will find this a dark and twisted tale.
Good fortune sits in wait around the corner, but grim misadventure lurks sneakily behind.

The package announced itself by landing heavily on the mat. It was addressed to Stanley Buggles. Inside was a short letter and a piece of folded cloth which, when unwrapped, revealed a large silvery-grey key. Not just any old key, mind you, but the key to a rusty cobweb-covered old secret. A secret that wouldn't come out on its own but would need coaxing out of its cage like a frightened bird (as is often the way with secrets).

Stanley read the letter. He read it quietly to himself several times and then he read it out loud to everybody. No one could quite believe it, but there it was in black and white.



Then he held
the key across
both palms.

It was a strange-looking thing: big and bulky, like something that would open a castle gate, and yet intricately decorated with swirls and scrolls. He placed it back in the cloth, folded it tidily and put it neatly back in the envelope with the letter.

Stanley Buggles. A sensitive little chap, his mother would say. A young wiry-framed little fellow who would usually be found wandering the woods alone, climbing the gnarled old branches just to get a peek at

the hawk's eggs, or lying in wait in the undergrowth so that he might catch sight of the fox cubs.

Like all mothers, Stanley's longed to protect him from the perils of the outside world, but she knew she couldn't keep him wrapped up for ever. And anyway, he was no pushover. Oh, no. If ever a kid could look after himself, here he was. Stanley could box like a champ. A proper little jack-rabbit he was, and like all true champs he had the heart of a lion along with that mane of stringy blond hair.

And whilst he had sat one afternoon in the hollowed-out trunk of a tree watching a kestrel circle over an open field, somebody three hundred miles away had sat writing the letter that would change his life for ever.

Letter by of Dist. in 1881

Penelope Spoonbill
Mayor of Crampton
The Rock House
Crampton Rock.

Dear Stanley Buggles,

It is with deep regret that I write to inform you of the sudden death of your great-uncle, Admiral Bartholomew Swift of Candlestick Hall.

As is dictated by the laws of Crampton Rock, the Candlestick Hall estate and further possessions of the aforementioned will pass into the hands of the youngest living relative, you, Stanley Buggles, with immediate effect.

Further paperwork will follow in due course.

In the meantime, in recognition of the circumstances, you are permitted to take care of the front door key, which I enclose. However please do not attempt to visit Crampton Rock until you are in possession of all documentation.

Please accept my deepest sympathy at your loss,
Yours Sincerely,

Penelope Spoonbill
Mayor of Crampton.



Now, first things first. Stanley had no knowledge of his relative, who was, in fact, the perfect example of a long-lost great-uncle. Except that now he was a *dead* long-lost great-uncle, which pretty much spoiled Stanley's chances of getting to know him.

It was decided, when the time came, that Stanley would go on his own to visit the house. He would be put on the train by his mother Marjorie and his stepfather Tristan Fletcher and he would be met by Mrs Carelli, the housekeeper, at the other end. She would be staying on at the house and would take care of Stanley during the summer.

Mrs Carelli informed them that she would be standing on the platform at Crampton Rock station. Mr Fletcher had described Stanley in his letter so that she might know him when she saw him.

'He is eleven
years old
with a pasty
complexion and
a skinny frame.



He will most likely be carrying a large brown case with the words Fletcher & Buggles Manufacturing on the side and looking like he doesn't know where he is going.'

'You can't miss him,' Mr Fletcher had scribbled at the bottom of his letter, explaining that Stanley was 'not really ready for such an adventure at all'.

But as things turned out, he was going to get one and it was about to land on him with one enormous **THUD**.

Stanley stared through the window of his carriage. As the train thundered along the tracks, the whole world looked completely still. The sun blazed across yellow fields and Stanley wondered what the place would look like.

When eventually the train ground to a