

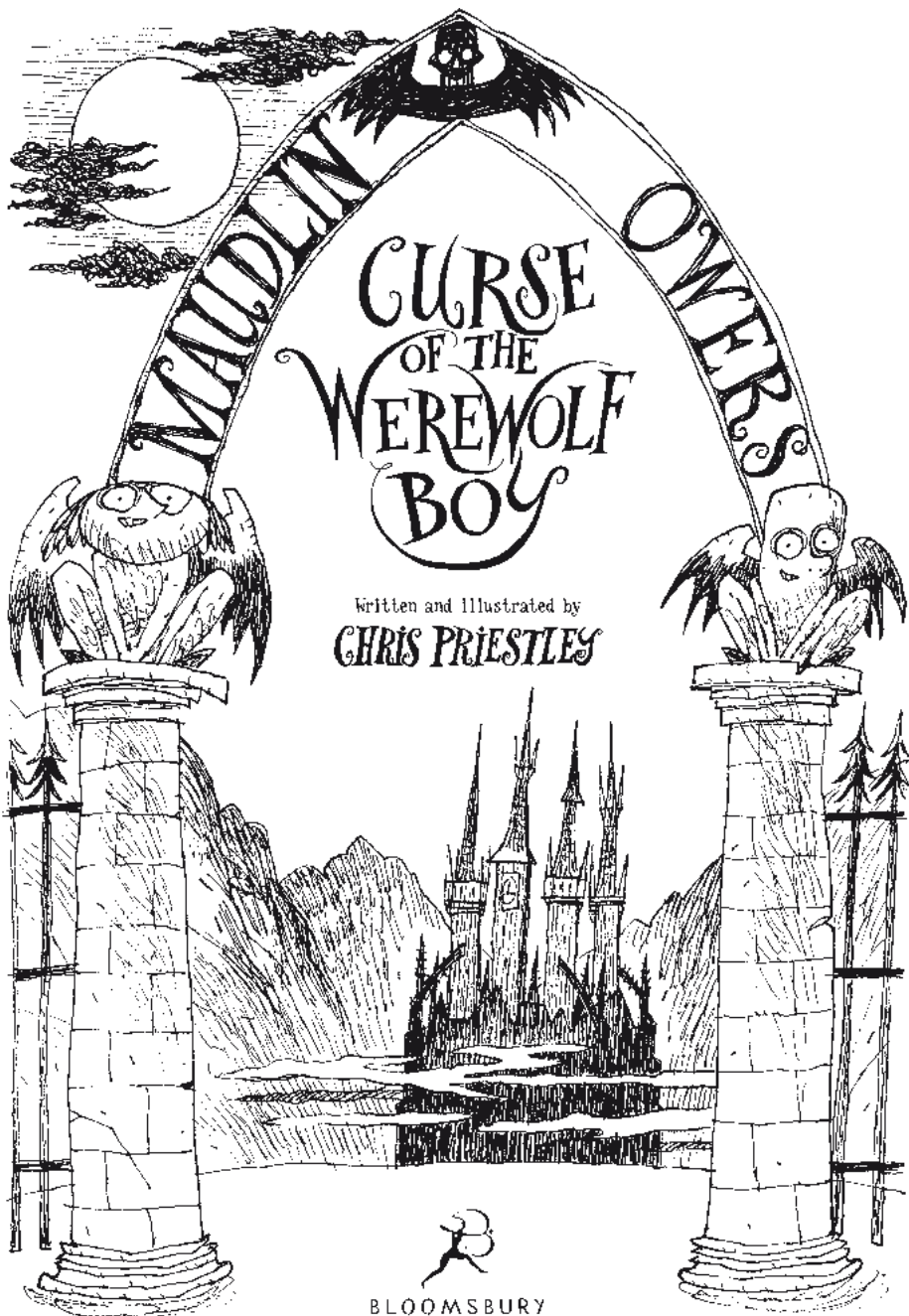


CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF BOY



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BLOOMSBURY



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BLOOMSBURY

LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY



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Uncle Montague's Tales of Terror
Tales of Terror from the Black Ship
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*

Mister Creecher
Through Dead Eyes
The Dead Men Stood Together
The Last of the Spirits

MAUDLIN
TOWERS
& ENVIRONS



PUG'S
PEAK

PIG'S
PIKE

MAUDLIN
MINE
(disused)



MAUDLIN
TOWERS

MAUDLIN
MOOR

MAUDLIN
MERE

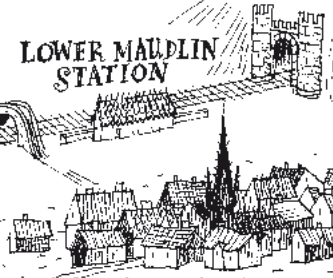
MAUDLIN
MARSHES

THE STONES
OF MAUDLIN



MAUDLIN
WOODS

LOWER MAUDLIN
STATION



LOWER MAUDLIN

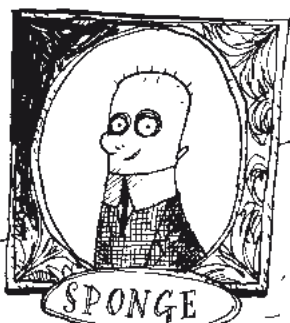
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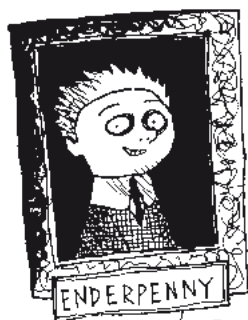
PUPILS



MILDEW



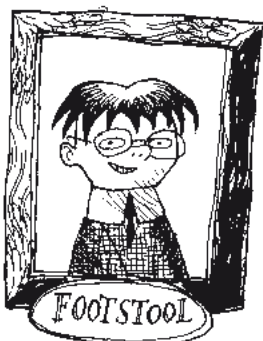
SPONGE



ENDERPENNY



KENNINGWORTH



FOOTSTOOL



FURTHERMORE

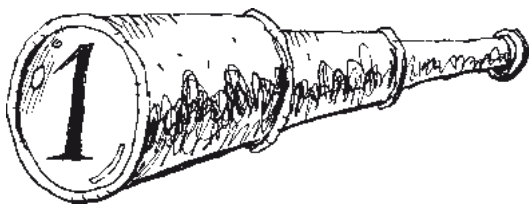


HIPFLASK



FILBERT

mildew is a hero



A Viking in the Ha-ha

Mildew and his friend Sponge were taking a much needed breather on the twice-weekly jog up the side of Pig's Pike. They stood panting, gazing down at the blackened and gloom-laden, gargoyle-infested monstrosity that was their school.

Maudlin Towers School for the Not Particularly Bright Sons of the Not Especially Wealthy sat between the twin hills of Pug's Peak and Pig's Pike in the windswept north country of Cumberland, squatting like an obscenely ornate jet brooch pinned to the bosom of a sour-faced duchess.

Mildew's full name was Arthur Mildew, but no one in the school used first names. Sponge's full name was Algernon Spongely-Partwork, but everyone called him Sponge. They were not happy.



‘I’m not happy, Sponge,’ said Mildew.

‘Me neither,’ said Sponge with a sigh.

Mildew helped Sponge take off the backpack that their criminally insane sports teacher, Mr Stupendo, insisted the boys wore on these runs as an extra layer of torture. Mildew groaned with the effort, dropping the backpack to the ground.

‘What on earth have you got in there?’ he said. ‘It weighs a ton.’

‘Stupendo caught me filling it with socks again and forced me to load it up with the contents of my trunk.’

Mildew opened the pack and saw items of clothing, shoes, several books and a brass telescope.

'Why on earth do you have a telescope?' he asked.

'I don't really know,' said Sponge. 'My Uncle Tarquin bought it for me last Christmas. I'd forgotten I even had it to be honest. I wish I hadn't.'

'Bad luck,' said Mildew. 'It's rather heavy.'

'I know. By the way – why have you got a bandage on your arm, Mildew?' asked Sponge. 'Did you have an accident in the half-term hols?'

'I've tried to tell you three times now, Sponge,' said Mildew. 'But every time I do, you start to hum to yourself and I get interrupt—'

'Put some pep into it, Mildew!' shouted Mr Stupendo, stroking his horribly large mustachios, his bald head glistening like a damp egg. 'Why, at your age I could lift a dead sheep over my head with barely a bead of sweat!'

Mr Stupendo had been a circus strongman before the life of a sports teacher had tragically caught his eye.



‘But, sir,’ pleaded Mildew, ‘my knees.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Mr Stupendo, cuffing him round the ear and sending him sprawling headlong into the bracken. ‘You’re far too young to have knees, Mildew. Come on! The last one to the top is a Russian.’

Mr Stupendo bounded up the path. There were pitiful groans from the boys around him as Mildew got to his feet, and their wretched, downtrodden whining suddenly stirred something in him.

‘Look here,’ he cried, waving his fist in the air. ‘What say we show old Stupido what we’re made of and beat the old hippo to the top?’

‘Shut up, Mildew, you blister,’ said Kenningworth, cuffing him playfully round the ear and sending him sprawling into the bracken once again.

Mildew saw the boys disappearing up the track as he got to his feet. He spat out a piece of the indigenous flora and stared down at Maudlin Towers, a cloud-shadow darkening its already grim and grimy, gargoyle-encrusted walls. *Surely*, he thought, *this must be the very worst of schools.*

‘Are you all right?’ said Sponge.

‘I suppose so,’ said Mildew with a sigh that he hoped might hint at the enormity of his despond.

‘Someone needs to teach Kenningworth a lesson,’ said Sponge. ‘My mother says he –’

‘Shhh,’ said Mildew, pointing down towards the school grounds. ‘Never mind Camelfroth or your mother. What’s that?’

‘What?’ said Sponge.

‘There!’ said Mildew. ‘Running along the bottom of the ha-ha.’

‘The ha-ha?’ said Sponge.

‘Yes,’ said Mildew. ‘The ha-ha.’

‘The ha-ha?’ said Sponge.

‘Stop saying ha-ha!’ said Mildew.

‘But what do you mean?’ said Sponge. ‘What are you talking about?’

‘The ditch at the end of the sports field, you chump,’ said Mildew. ‘It’s called a ha-ha.’

‘Oh,’ said Sponge. ‘Really? What’s it for?’

‘To stop sheep wandering into the school grounds,’ said Mildew.

‘Why on earth would sheep want to wander into the school?’ said Sponge, shaking his head and smiling. ‘If I were them I’d –’

‘Never mind that,’ said Mildew. ‘Look! There!’

Sponge followed Mildew’s pointing finger. Running along the bottom of the ha-ha was a man. That was quite extraordinary in itself as the only man in Maudlin Towers with any inclination to move at speed was high above him leading a chorus of ‘Mildew is a Russian!’

But more unusual still was the fact that this man appeared to be wearing a winged helmet and carrying, albeit with some difficulty, what looked, even from that distance, remarkably like a large axe.

‘Wait,’ said Mildew, and rummaging around in Sponge’s backpack, he produced the telescope.

Mildew searched for the figure and focused in on its blurred form.

‘There’s a Viking in the ha-ha!’ said Mildew.

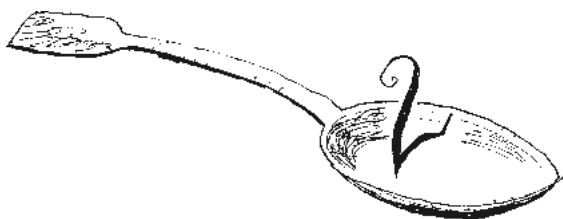
‘A Viking? But there can’t be,’ said Sponge.



‘And yet there is,’ said Mildew, handing him the telescope.

The boys stared at the Viking in silent amazement as he disappeared out of sight behind a laburnum bush. Before they could say anything, Mildew and Sponge were knocked down like skittles and trampled on by the rest of the boys as they returned from the peak of Pig's Pike.

'Last one to the bottom is a poet!' trumpeted Mr Stupendo as he bounded by.



A Kerfuffle in the Corridor

Mildew and Sponge returned to the school to shower and get changed. If anything, the boys dreaded this more than the exercise itself, the freezing water for the shower coming straight from the beck that ran – rather quicker than the boys – down the side of Pug’s Peak.

They dressed as hurriedly as possible and headed off to discuss the mysterious sighting, finding a quiet spot just outside the trophy room.

‘Who shall we tell first about the Viking, Mildew?’ said Sponge when his jaws had finally stopped rattling with the cold. ‘Although I wonder if they’ll believe us.’

‘Of course they will,’ said Mildew. ‘Why wouldn’t they?’

‘Well, I saw it myself and I scarcely believe it,’ said Sponge.

‘I know what you mean,’ said Mildew. ‘We need to pick our moment. We don’t want to be mocked.’

‘Any more than usual,’ said Sponge.

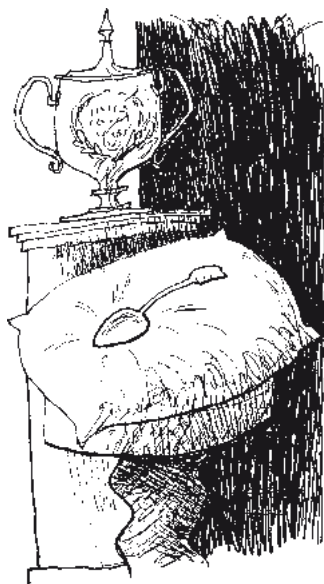
‘Quite,’ said Mildew. ‘Oh no, here comes Kenningworth. Quick – in here.’

The boys ducked into the trophy room as Kenningworth and some of the other boys strode down the corridor towards them. They said nothing until they heard the footfalls die away.

The trophy haul at Maudlin Towers was a sorry sight. The school had a long history of failure in almost every branch of the sporting arena. Were it not for the school’s own tournaments – like the dreaded Fell-Runner’s Cup – the room would be empty save for a couple of items of special significance to the school’s history, like the much revered School Spoon.

‘Did you hear that?’ said Sponge.

‘What?’



'It sounded like breathing.'

'Breathing?'

'In the room with us. But not us.'

Mildew and Sponge surveyed the room but saw no sign of anyone else.

'There's no one here, Sponge,' said Mildew. 'You're imagining things.'

Sponge didn't look convinced.

'Can we go, Mildew? I don't like it.'

'Of course,' he said with a smile. 'You are such a –'

Suddenly there was a loud sneeze and both boys almost leaped out of their skin.

'Eeek!' squeaked Sponge, knocking into Mildew, who banged into one of the cabinets, nearly knocking it over.

They hurried from the room without a backward glance and off to their maths lesson with Mr Painly, who walked to the blackboard and began to write in chalk thereon.

'Very well. If $x = 5$ and $y = \text{Brazil}$, what is the square root of Thursday?'

Almost two hours later, the boys staggered out of the classroom hollow-eyed and filled with self-loathing and a mind-numbing sense of limitless despair – as they did after every maths lesson.

'Break time,' gasped Mildew in the voice of a man released from prison after serving many years for a

crime he did not commit. 'At last. We have much to talk about, Sponge.'

But before they could say a word, they were distracted by a great kerfuffle ahead of them.

'Look,' said Sponge. 'A kerfuffle.'

'Yes,' said Mildew. 'What on earth is occurring?'

The corridor was full of boys who were being herded like reluctant rabbits towards the hall. Mildew grabbed a passing rabbit by the arm.

'Hipflask,' he said. 'What's happening?'

Hipflask shrugged his bony shoulders, making his hair quiver like a startled spider.

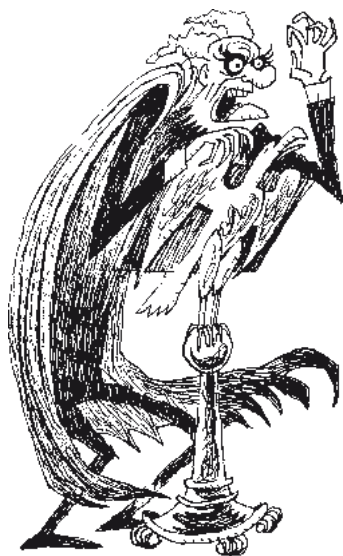
'No one knows, Mildew,' he replied. 'Everyone's been told to go to the hall.'

'Perhaps we're not the only ones who've seen the Viking,' whispered Sponge as Hipflask walked on.

'Perhaps,' said Mildew.

They stepped into the river of boys and were carried along in its flow until they came to rest midway down the packed assembly hall, each boy speculating noisily with their neighbour as to what might be happening.

'Silence!' boomed Reverend Brimstone, his face glowing hellfire red, leaning over the lectern, wide-eyed, his eyebrows leaping about his forehead like crazed porcupines.



The boys were immediately quiet. Flintlock, the groundsman, stood silhouetted against a window, rifle in hand.

'What's he doing here?' whispered Mildew, who was sure Flintlock was looking at him.

Sponge shrugged.

'Thank you, Reverend,' said the Headmaster, walking forward and smiling.

Reverend Brimstone gave one last growl before retreating, making the first couple of rows of boys step back with a whimper.

'My boys,' said the Headmaster, smiling wistfully. 'My dear, dear boys. As you know, I think of you as my own children. In fact there are many of you whom, it's fair to say, I prefer to my own children.'

There was a plaintive cry from the Headmaster's two sons, who attended the school. The Headmaster paid no heed, but carried on smiling benevolently.

'As you know, there was a spate of thefts at the school before we broke up for half-term. A

baffling variety of items were stolen – Reverend Brimstone’s armchair, the hall clock, and so on.’

Reverend Brimstone stared boggle-eyed at the mention of his stolen armchair and lurched forward alarmingly.

‘Quite what lay behind these incidents,’ continued the Headmaster, ‘is hard to fathom. But we shall get to the bottom of it, mark my words.’

‘However,’ he went on, ‘I’m afraid – and I can hardly bring myself to give voice to the words – the theft of the hall clock pales into insignificance next to this new abomination ...’

‘What’s gone now?’ whispered Mildew with a withering look at Sponge. ‘The staffroom door knob?’

Sponge tittered.

‘Shut up, Mildew,’ said Kenningworth, ‘accidentally’ nudging him in the ear with his elbow. The Headmaster carried on.

‘I’m afraid I must tell you that ...’ He paused and shook his head as though not quite able to believe the words he was about to utter. ‘Only this very morning, some boy – or boys – has – or indeed, have – stolen the School Spoon!’

The gasp that followed this revelation rattled the windows. Mildew turned to stare at Sponge.

‘The sneeze, Mildew,’ whispered Sponge.

The Headmaster looked out at them, sadness in his eyes.

‘It is hard to imagine how anyone in their right mind could even contemplate a crime of such outrageous villainy – of such depravity. I need not remind you that the School Spoon belonged to our beloved founder, Lord Marzipan Maudlin, the seventh Earl of Maudlin, whose ancestral home we are so fortunate now to inhabit.

‘With no children to inherit it, Lord Maudlin, the end of his noble line, left Maudlin Towers in his will, with instructions for this glorious school to be founded within its lofty walls. The School Spoon was perhaps the greatest of all the mementos associated with Lord Maudlin, for he was given the Spoon, in person, by none other than the Duke of Wellington and King George III themselves!’

The boys gasped, as they always did, when told this. Quite why the Duke of Wellington and George III had given Lord Maudlin the Spoon, or what its significance might have been to anyone concerned, was never explained.

‘Someone – or ones – among you knows – or know – who is responsible for this appalling crime, and I would encourage anyone who has such information to come forward now.’

There followed a long silence broken only by the damp swish of swivelling eyeballs as each boy looked at his neighbour. But no one spoke up.

‘If someone were to come forward now,’ said the Headmaster, ‘then they might – and, I stress, only *might* – expect some degree of leniency. But this is your final chance.’

The Headmaster looked out expectantly, but his expectation was squashed. Reverend Brimstone strode to the edge of the stage like a rabid moose.

‘If you do not come forward now and are subsequently revealed to be the culprit, you will be taken to the usual place and burned at the stake!’

Some of the more imaginative boys began to sob. The Headmaster tapped the reverend’s arm and whispered into his ear. The vicar looked confused and aghast.

‘I’ve been informed that we no longer burn boys at the stake,’ said Reverend Brimstone mournfully. ‘There has apparently been a change in the school policy. Why I seem always to be the last to know, I can’t fathom, but never mind. Where was I? Oh yes. Rest assured, there will be terrible consequences for all if the School Spoon is not found. Terrible!!! Parents will almost certainly be summoned!’

There was a collective shudder from the boys. There was no greater threat. Most boys would

gladly be burned at the stake rather than have their parents roll up at the school at any time, kissing them and asking to be introduced to their chums – but to be *summoned by the headmaster*. It was too terrible to contemplate.

‘Now I would like us all to bow our heads and think for a moment about our dear departed colleague and esteemed physics master, Mr Particle, who sadly passed away during the half-term holidays after a short illness ...’

Mildew noticed that there was a strange glance exchanged between the Headmaster and Flintlock at the end of this request. He might have seen more had Kenningworth not knuckled him on the top of the head to encourage him to think pleasant thoughts about Mr Particle.

‘What are we going to do?’ whispered Sponge afterwards. He had a morbid fear of any contact with his parents.

‘I don’t know,’ said Mildew thoughtfully. ‘But something, be sure of that.’

Bloomsbury Publishing, London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi and Sydney

First published in Great Britain in October 2017 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP

www.bloomsbury.com

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

ISBN 978 1 4088 7308 3



Typeset by Newgen Knowledge Works Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, India