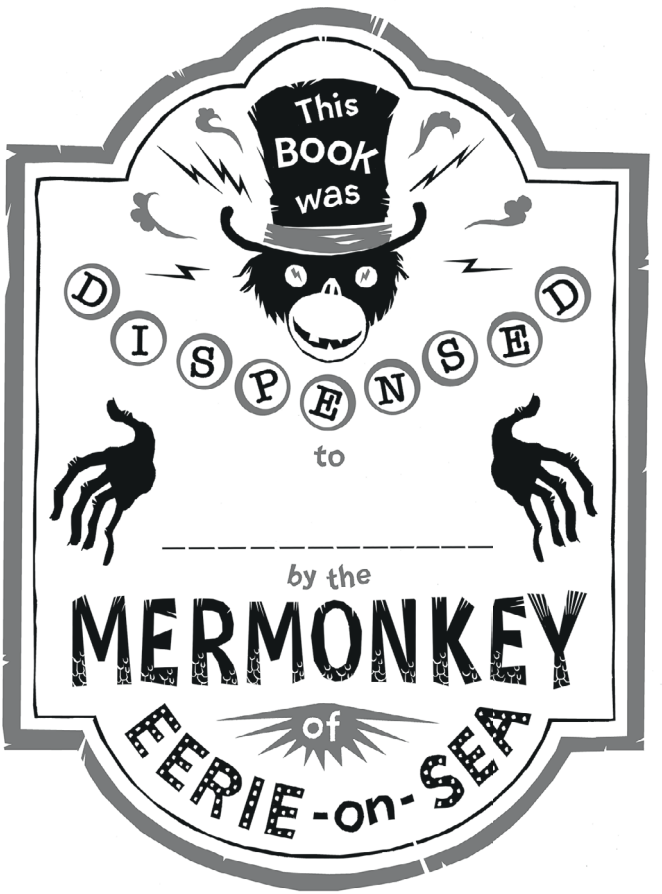

AN EERIE-ON-SEA MYSTERY
SHADOWGHAST
THOMAS TAYLOR


This
BOOK
was
DISPENSED
to
_____
by the
MERMONKEY
of
EERIE-on-SEA

The Eerie-on-Sea Mysteries:

Malamander
Gargantis
Shadowghast

SHADOWGHAST



THOMAS TAYLOR

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR



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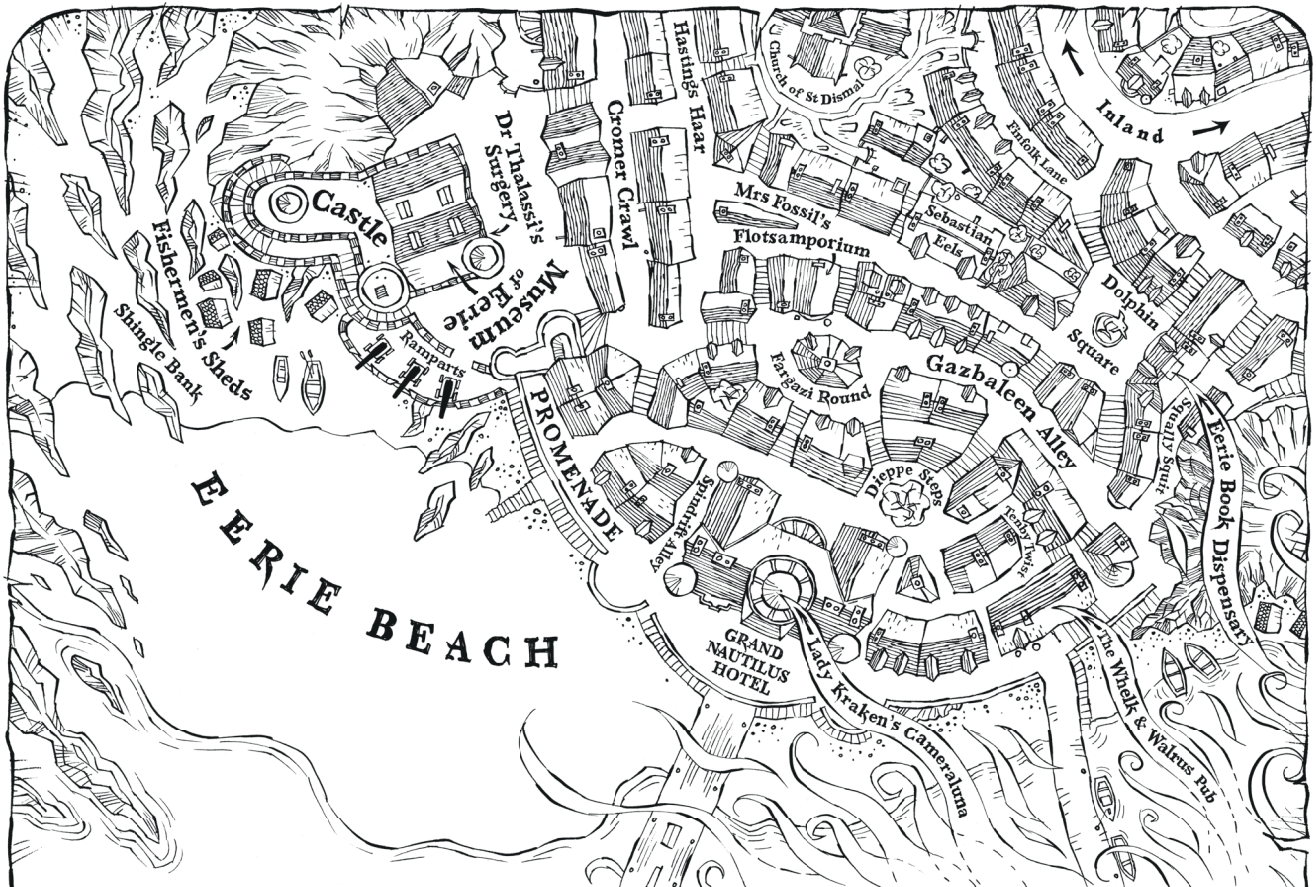
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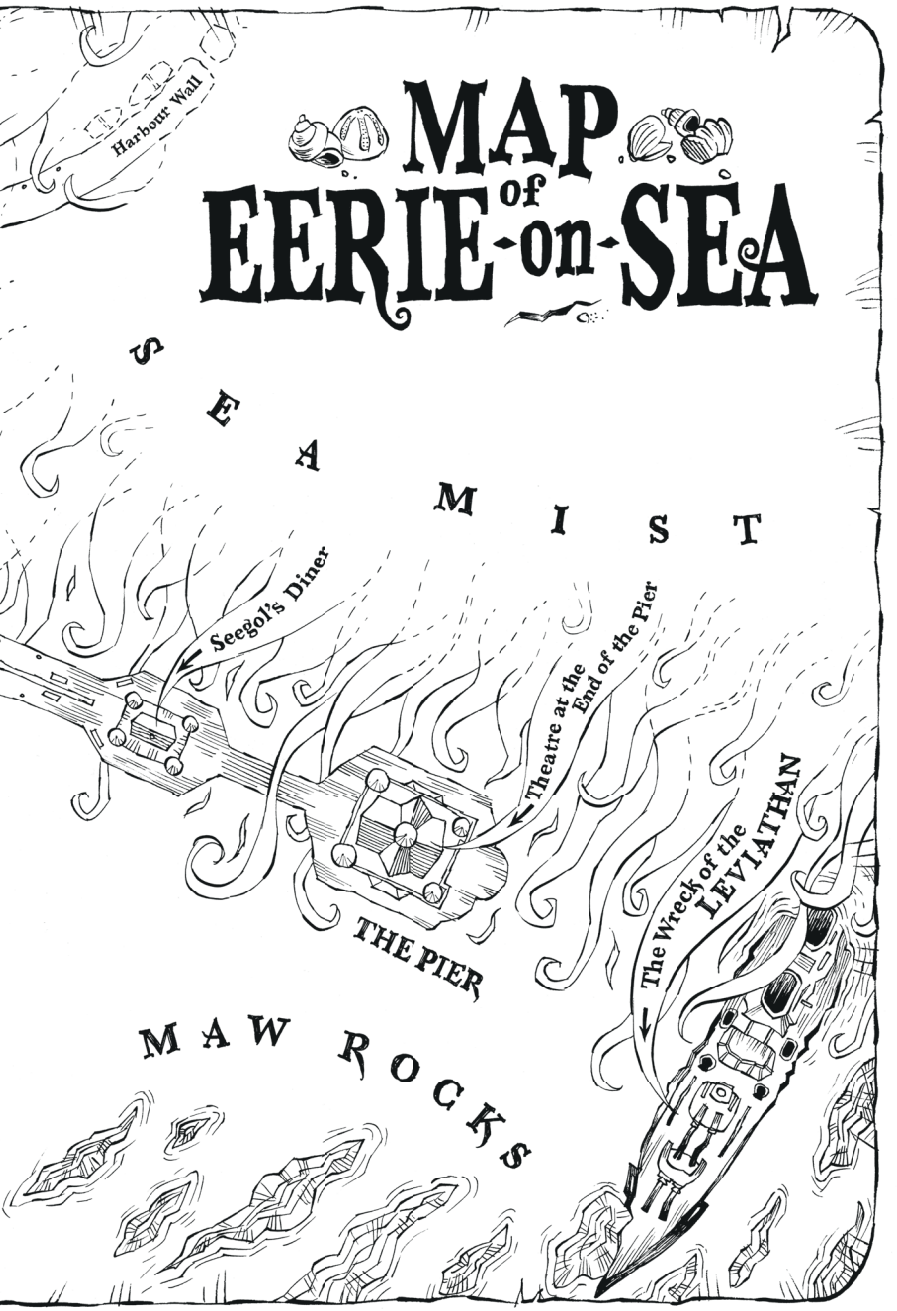
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For Benjy — *T.T.*


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Museum of Eerie
Ramparts
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Shingle Bank
Cromer Crawl
Hastings Haar
Church of St Dismal
Finfolk Lane
Inland
Mrs Fossil's Flotsamporium
Sebastian Eels
Dolphin Square
Fargazi Round
Gazbaleen Alley
Dieppe Steps
Sprattle Alley
PROMENADE
Tenby Tiptoe
Squally Spit
Eerie Book Dispensary
GRAND NAUTILUS HOTEL
Lady Kraken's Cameralucina
The Whelk & Walrus Pub


MAP of EERIE-on-SEA
Harbour Wall
SEA MIST
Seegol's Diner
Theatre at the End of the Pier
THE PIER
The Wreck of the LEVIATHAN
MAW ROCKS

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ALL HALLOWS' EVE

DO YOU REMEMBER your first Ghastly Night?

The first time you saw Eerie-on-Sea's special Halloween show?

The first time you gathered on the pier with your friends and family, and huddled in the cold night air – and the glow of the manglewick candles – as you waited for the magic to begin?

Perhaps you were carried there on your dad's shoulders, toffee apple in one hand, sparkler in the other? Or perhaps you peeked from snug inside your mum's coat as the puppet master lit the lantern.

Remember how you blinked in the beam of eerie light?

Remember how the strange fumes tickled your nose?

Remember how you gasped in wonder as the showman's hands conjured puppets of shadow – forms and

phantasmagoria that crept and capered above you in the smoky autumn air?

And did you see it?

Did you catch a glimpse of that *extra* shadow – one not made by the skilful showman's fingers?

A shadow not cast by anything at all?

A crooked figure, cavorting in dark delight at the edge of the lantern's beam, never – when you turned to look – quite where you thought it was, but always there, hunting, tormenting, *snatching* the showman's shadow puppets one by one till the show was ended.

And the smoke curled away to nothing.

And all the shadows were gone.

And no sound remained but the hiss of the lantern and the creak of the pier and the churn of the endless sea.

Well? *Do* you remember?

Did you ever see the Shadowghast?

But what am I saying?

Of course you didn't!

You've probably never even heard of Ghastly Night, or manglewick candles, or any of it.

Unless, that is, you've been to Eerie-on-Sea before, and asked too many questions. But even then, I'm sure you'd have forgotten this strange tradition of ours, falling as it does on the night the rest of the world knows as Halloween. Like most people at this time of year you're probably too

busy carving pumpkins or planning your trick-or-treat costume to pay much attention to the funny old ways of a little seaside town. Too busy make-believing in goblins and ghosts to worry about the one legend of a bad spirit that might actually be true.

And that's fine.

For you.

But if you lived in Eerie, you'd see it differently. If you stayed behind when the summer tourists left, and the candy-coloured signs of seaside fun faded into the dark of winter, you'd know. You, too, would hurry a little faster through the blustery streets as the days grew shorter and the shadows long. And when the end of October finally arrived, you'd put up a manglewick candle for protection too.

Just in case.

Just in case this is the year that Ghastly Night is forgotten and no showman lights a lantern on the pier to conjure shadow puppets in offering to the dark. For if that should ever happen, so folks say, the Shadowghast – enraged by the insult – would hunt instead for the shadows of the living.

But I see you're smiling.

You're still thinking the Shadowghast is nothing more than a silly superstition.

No more than a trick of the light.

Only, remember this: at the heart of every legend is a spark of truth. And when the sunlight dies and you're

running from the shadows through the deepening streets of Eerie-on-Sea, a spark – no matter how small – is sometimes all you need.

Unless that trick of the light is actually a trick of the dark.





BIRTHDAY BREAKFAST

SOME WORDS just seem to belong together, don't they? Like *magic* and *lantern*, or *strange* and *shadow*, or *fireside* and *story*. But right now, in the light of morning and the warmth of the hotel dining room, no words seem to go together quite so well as *hot* and *buttered* and *toast*.

And I should know. When it comes to breakfast, I, Herbert Lemon – Lost-and-Founder at the Grand Nautilus Hotel – am something of an expert. Which is why I'm concealed behind this giant potted fern, pressing my nose against the glass panels in the dining room wall as the kitchen staff load trays of delicious things onto the sideboard, experting as hard as I can.

Today is a special day, and a breakfast to end all breakfasts is spreading out before my eyes, dancing up my nostrils, and making my gums go tingly.

Don't believe me? Well, come and press your nose to the window next to mine and take a look for yourself at the heaps of sizzled sausages, at the stacks of bacon rashers, at the mounds of crispy, hot hash browns. At the eggs, fried white with yolks ready to run, or scrambled to light and peppery perfection; at the honey-glazed button mushrooms, seared tomatoes and piping-hot baked beans; at the toast, fried or hot and buttered (yes!); at the baskets of just-baked, golden-flaked continental pastries; at the waffles and maple syrup; at the breakfast doughnuts, sparkling with sugar and filled with Chef's speciality raspberry jam.

And in the centre of it all, towering above the silverware, fine bone china and antique knives and forks, stands an enormous cut-glass bowl full to the creamy brim with a festive and magnificent sherry trifle, topped with a single glacé cherry.

No wonder my window is getting fogged up! I bet yours is too.

Because, you see, today is Lady Kraken's birthday. And Lady Kraken, the owner of the Grand Nautilus Hotel, has long since decreed that on her birthday a special breakfast will be served, and all – *all* – the hotel staff are invited.

The lady herself won't be present, of course. She never is these days, not now that she's become such a recluse. But once her own breakfast – a single hard-boiled egg and a thimble of ground cumin – has been carried up to the

sixth floor beneath a gleaming silver dome and served in her private chambers with a small cup of black coffee, the rest of us can tuck in.

At least, that's the theory. But there's a complication…

"Hurry along!" come the peevish tones of Mr Mollusc as he claps his hands in clammy command. "Let's get this over with. The sooner you all get back to work, the better."

And I duck down below the glass panel as he strides across the dining room, twitching his moustache in anticipation of the bacon and pastries. You see, while it's Lady Kraken who is giving us all breakfast this morning, it's Mr Mollusc, the hotel manager, who decides who eats it first.

And last…

"Are you worried you won't get any?" asks a female voice behind me, and I do a jump. A hotel guest must have found me hiding in the fern! I should turn around to see if she needs something, but I can't tear my eyes away from the dining room, where the breakfast situation is developing in alarming ways.

Mr Mollusc has seated himself at the best table and is waving the waiters over to pile sausages and eggs on his plate. On the far side of the restaurant, the chambermaids – who will be next – are already beginning to gather in a hungry queue.

"Well, I didn't get any last year!" I explain to the person behind me. "Or the year before that. Me not getting any of

Lady Kraken's birthday breakfast has almost become part of the tradition."

"Oh," says the voice. "That's sad."

"Well, I *might* get a croissant," I admit as I see a waiter lay three of the buttery pastries at the manager's elbow. "If there are any left. But only once it's been lying around a day or two to get all stale and chewy."

"This year will be different, Herbie," says the voice. And it's a lovely voice too, like dark honey, and it makes the nape of my neck go all ticklish. "I promise."

I feel a hand straighten my cap gently, then pat me on the shoulder. And I go still.

The breakfast smells have stepped aside, making way for a wisp of perfume, though it's gone before I can get a good sniff. I'm left wanting to smell that perfume again. I finally turn around to see who was speaking, but there's nothing there now except the fronds of the fern I thought I was hiding behind. I get a bit tangled in the pesky plant before I can step back out into the lobby to see who it was.

There are people at the reception desk, checking into the hotel. A stout, red-faced man with a homburg hat is being handed several room keys by Amber Griss, the hotel receptionist, while two tall men dressed head-to-toe in black stand behind him, laden with boxes and cases. None of these seem like the lovely-voice-and-perfume type, but beyond them is a fourth figure.

A woman is standing beside the brass elevator, her back to me. She is tall and willowy, with raven hair, and she wears a black embroidered coat that catches the light in odd ways. I find myself wishing the woman would turn around, but she doesn't.

Then something strange happens.

The clouds over Eerie-on-Sea part, and a ray of golden sunlight streams through one of the tall hotel windows, and over the group.

And I see…

Something!

Something wrong with the scene, with the way the light falls, or the way the shadows are cast, or…

I rub my eyes and blink as I try to get a fix on the strange effect, but just then the lift arrives and the woman with the raven hair steps into it. The men with the luggage crowd in behind her. The elevator door closes, and they are gone.

I rub my eyes again. Maybe I'm going a bit bonkers due to lack of breakfast.

But I can't help wondering about the woman with the raven hair.

Who is she? What did she mean?

"And," I ask out loud, "how does she know my name?"





THOMAS TAYLOR has always lived near the sea – though that's not difficult in the British Isles. He comes from a long line of seafarers but chose a career as an illustrator because it involves less getting wet and better biscuits.

His first professional illustration commission, straight out of art school, was the cover art for *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J. K. Rowling. This led to a lot more drawing until he finally plucked up the courage to try writing for himself. It turns out that turning biscuits into books is even more fun when you get to create the story too.

Thomas currently lives on the south coast of England, where there are a lot of tumbledown old seaside theatres. He once volunteered to be part of a magic show, and was apparently turned into a toad! It was a trick, of course, but sometimes, when he looks in the mirror, he's not so sure…

AN EERIE-ON-SEA MYSTERY

Welcome to Eerie-on-Sea, where nothing is as it seems.

On the eve of Ghastly Night, a hypnotic stage magician turns up in Eerie-on-Sea – and makes an unexpected claim on Herbie.

Violet's guardian, the owner of the Eerie Book Dispensary, vanishes into thin air … and others soon follow.

Are these events connected? Herbie and Violet are determined to find out. But surrounded by so much shadow and illusion, will they ever uncover the truth?

"Taylor's magical touch makes you believe the impossible."
Catherine Doyle
author of *The Storm Keeper's Island*







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