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opening extract from

Grubtown Tales: The Far From Great Escape

written by

Philip Ardagh

published by

Faber Children's

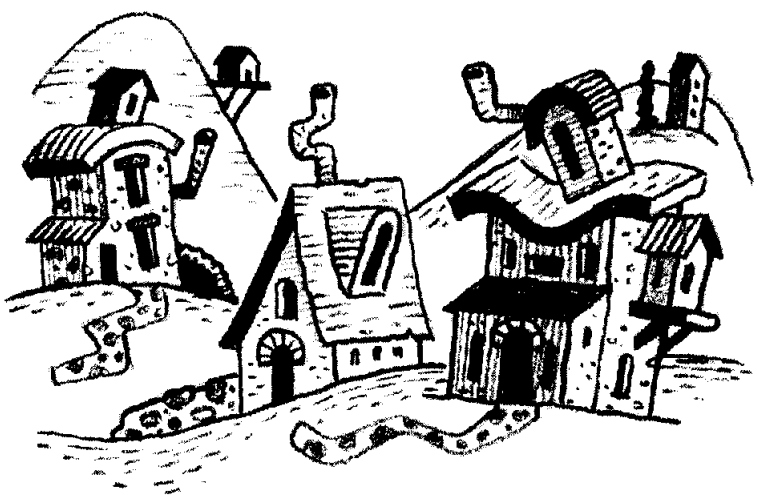
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A bit about Grubtown

You won't find Grubtown on any maps. The last time any map-makers were sent anywhere near the place they were found a week later wearing nothing but pages from a telephone directory, and calling for their mothers. It's certainly a town and certainly grubby – except for the squeaky-clean parts – but everything else we know about the place comes from Beardy Ardagh, town resident and author of these tales.



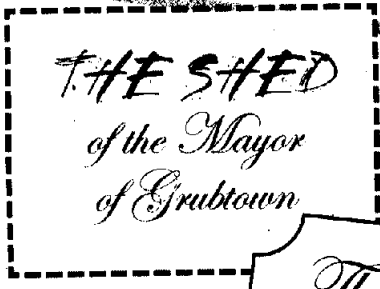
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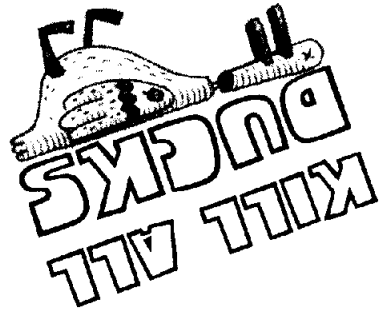




THE GRUBTOWN RIFLE CLUB

THE GRUBTOWN TRIFLE (& JELLIES) CLUB

THE GRUBTOWN POLICE DEPARTMENT

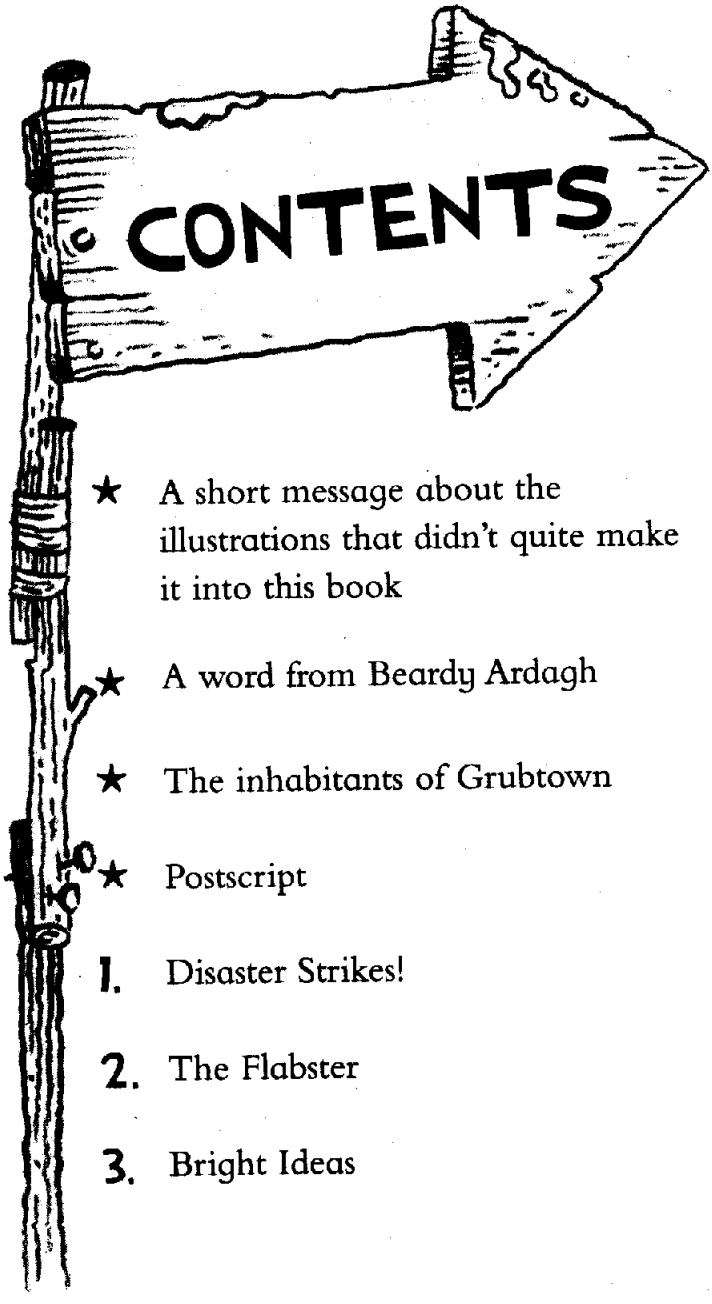


Wretching's Dairy

JIP
THE PELICAN
★ ★ ★
GRUBTOWN'S OFFICIAL MASCOT

GRUBTOWN COASTGUARD & DECKCHAIR DEPARTMENT

THE RUSTY DOLPHIN CAFE



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A short message about the illustrations that didn't quite make it into this book

Grubtown is very fortunate to be the home of the well-known artist Partial Coggs. When he found out that fellow Grubtown citizen, Beardy Ardagh, was writing about events which have happened in the town, he got very excited. He not only got excited, he also got in his car and drove straight over to Beardy Ardagh's house. On the seat next to him were a number of sketches of key Grubtown inhabitants . . . because Partial Coggs wanted to draw the pictures for this latest book. Beardy Ardagh, however, was – and still is – very happy with Jim who has already drawn the pictures for

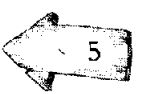


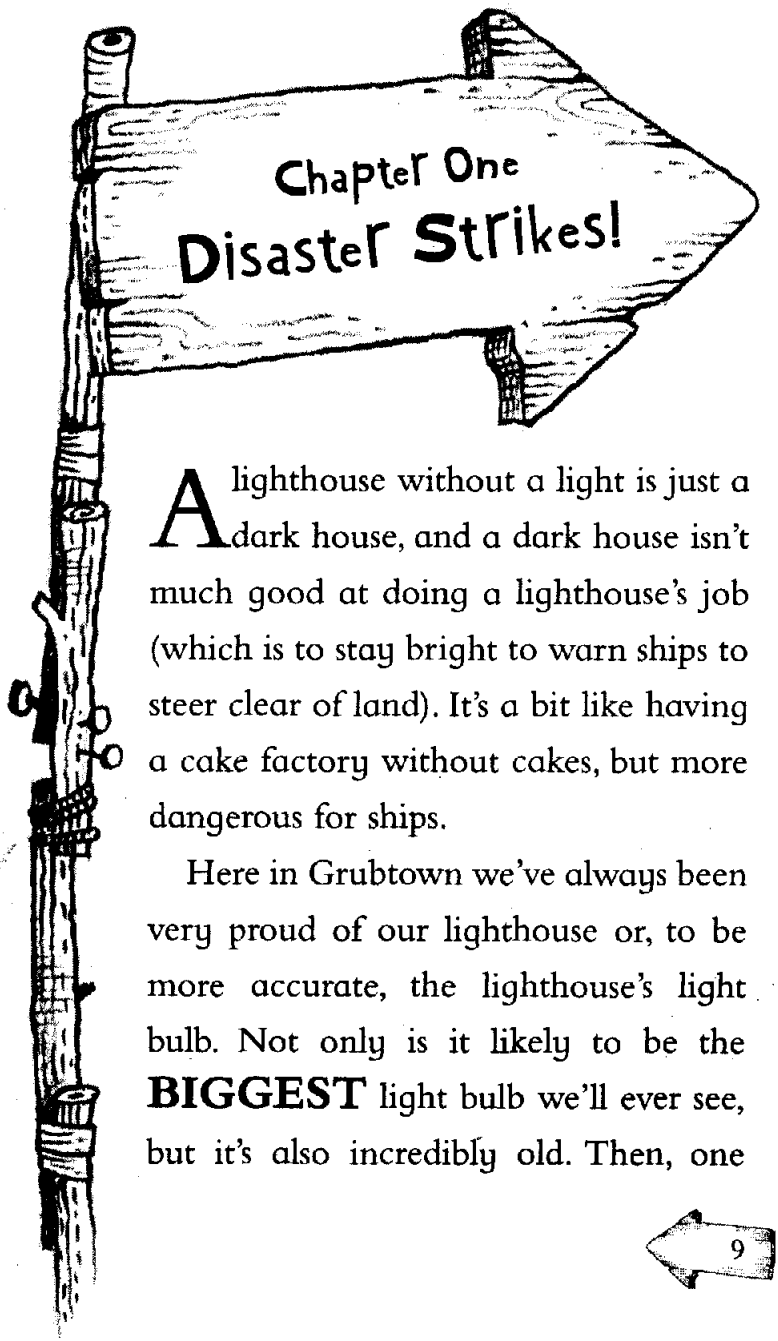
the other books and told Mr Coggs so. To cut a long story short, Mr Coggs burst into tears and locked himself in the downstairs loo. And he is still in the loo at the time this explanation was written. Oh dear.



The Inhabitants of Grubtown

At the back of the book (starting on page 127), you'll find a list of some of the people who live in Grubtown, including Jilly Cheeter, Mango Claptrap *and* Partial Coggs in the hope that, on hearing this news, he might STOP SULKING AND COME OUT OF THE DOWNSTAIRS LOO. Not all of the people in this book appear in this list and not all of people in this list appear in this book. Is that clear? We do hope so.





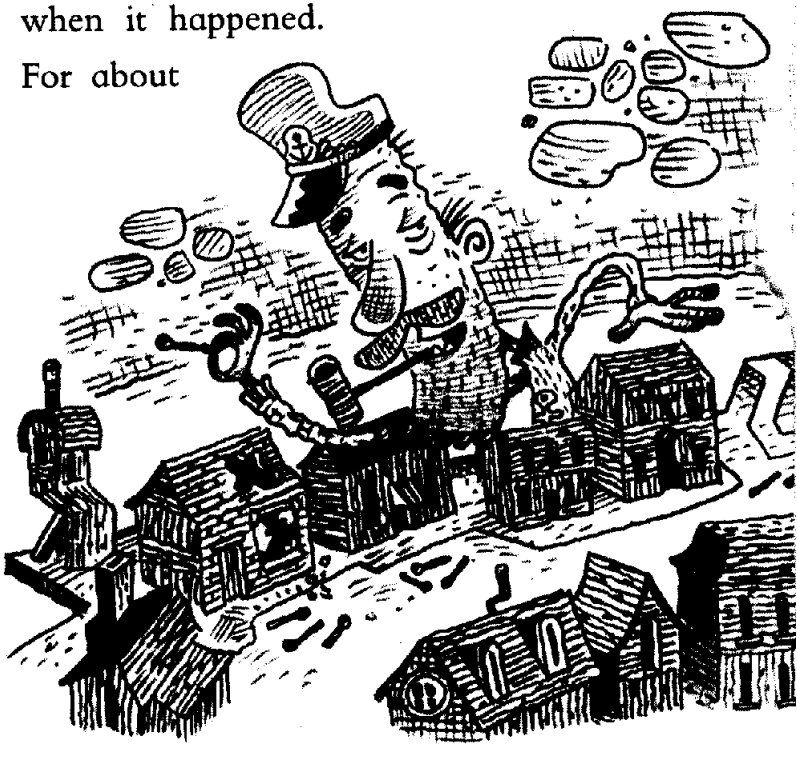
Chapter One
Disaster Strikes!

A lighthouse without a light is just a dark house, and a dark house isn't much good at doing a lighthouse's job (which is to stay bright to warn ships to steer clear of land). It's a bit like having a cake factory without cakes, but more dangerous for ships.

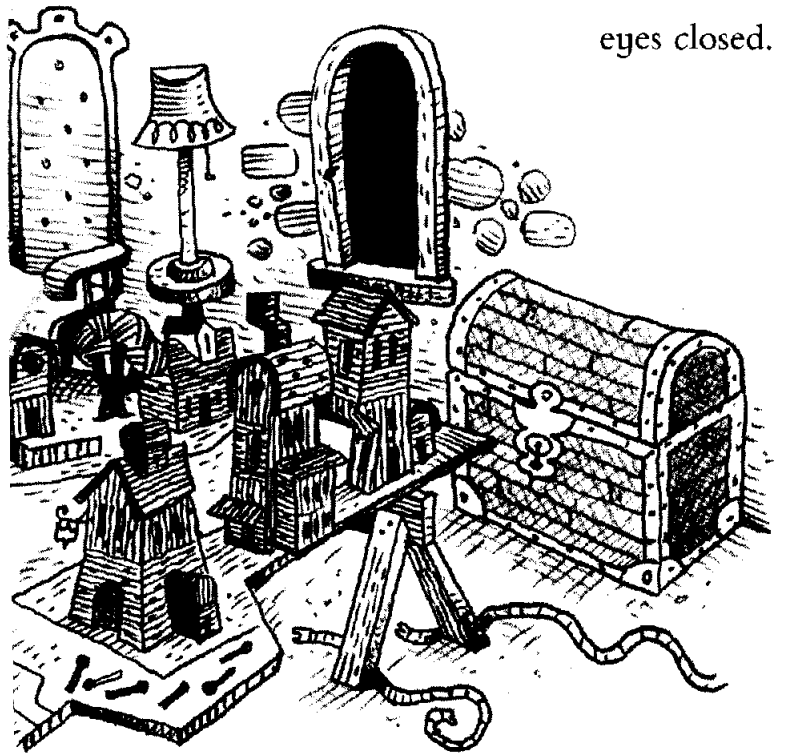
Here in Grubtown we've always been very proud of our lighthouse or, to be more accurate, the lighthouse's light bulb. Not only is it likely to be the **BIGGEST** light bulb we'll ever see, but it's also incredibly old. Then, one

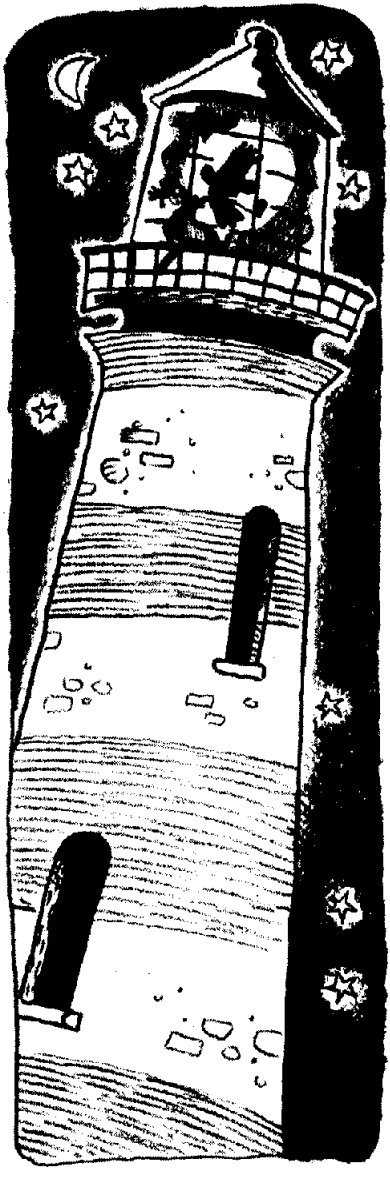
night, it finally went 'ping' and stopped working. It's still ridiculously big for a light bulb and it's still ridiculously *old* for a light bulb but somehow it's not as exciting now that it doesn't work.

Most of us townsfolk will never forget the night that the lighthouse light finally went out. Garlic Hamper, our lighthouse keeper for the past thirty-three years, was sitting in his circular living-room in the lighthouse when it happened. For about



as long as anyone can remember, Garlic has been making a model of Grubtown out of matchsticks. He was just about to add another stick to the roof of Purple Outing's recently repaired Music Shack when he heard the 'ping' and instantly noticed that the beam of light that should have been sweeping past his tiny window wasn't (sweeping past his tiny window). Instead, outside was as dark as a black bat with its eyes closed.





The rest of the lights in the lighthouse were working fine, though, so Garlic had no trouble finding his way up into the lantern room which housed the bulb and the great big lenses which beamed the light into the night. Only now, of course, the lenses weren't doing anything.

In case there was just a loose connection stopping the flow of electricity from reaching the bulb, Garlic Hamper

gave the whole thing a swift kick with one of his official lighthouse-keeper's standard-issue black lace-up boots. (This had worked in the past.) But he had heard the dreaded 'ping' and, deep down in the brainiest part of his brain, knew what it must mean.

This was an emergency. But what should he do?

Panic?

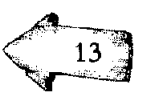
Close his eyes and pretend it never happened?

Hope that if he did nothing things would somehow put themselves right?

Garlic Hamper thought fast and he thought well.

QUESTION: Who do people usually call in an emergency?

ANSWER: The fire, police, ambulance or coastguard services.



QUESTION: And what do a fire engine, ambulance, police car and coastguard's vehicles have in common?

ANSWER: LIGHTS . . . FLASHING . . . ON TOP.

Like a lighthouse has!

If he could get ALL of the emergency services to come as fast as possible, he could have them line up their vehicles on the waterfront with lights flashing. That way, at least, any passing ships might see something to warn them they were near land. Ships such as that great big one that was heading *right his way*. (Garlic planned to send out an emergency all-frequencies radio message too.)

He cranked a large handle to his right which set off a siren which wailed like an injured whale moaning through a megaphone. This would be heard right out to sea as well as summoning help. Next, he –



CRUNCH!!!

Too late.

That great big ship had just hit something very solid indeed.

It was certainly a night I won't forget in a hurry. I was one of the Grubtown citizens who was enjoying the 'Hot Chocolate and Bubble-Wrap-Popping Night' at **THE RUSTY DOLPHIN**, as the ship – which turned out to be called *The Plucked Grape* – ploughed up the beach towards it.

When Garlic Hamper's siren started its terrifying whaley wail, Chevvy Offal (of Offals's Sunbeds) shouted, 'Run for your lives!' dropping a large sheet of almost-completely-popped bubble-wrap to the floor, and dashing for the door.

'Stay calm, everyone!' shouted The Rusty Dolphin's owner, Camshaft Thrift, above the

noise. 'Don't panic!' His words might have sounded better if he hadn't been elbowing his way past his customers as he spoke them. He had the cash register under his arm.

The mayor's brother, Hacking-Cough Gomez (who'd been enjoying a hot chocolate with extra marshmallows and whipped cream topping) started coughing frantically. Fellow Grubtown citizen, Mrs Awning, who



was sitting at the next table, tried slapping him across the back – in case he was choking – but missed. Instead she hit her wrist against one of the cafe's wooden pillars, so ended up being one of the few people injured that night. (On the way to hospital later, she fell out of the back of the ambulance when it swerved to avoid a duck, and ended up with a badly grazed elbow.)



The music for the bubble-wrap evening was being provided by the Grumbly girls, seven charming girls whose voices sound surprisingly like the lighthouse siren. In fact, when the siren first started, I'm sure I wasn't alone in thinking that this was a new chorus to one of their songs. Later, of course, they wrote a song to commemorate the whole experience. (They always do that kind of thing.) It was called, '**We Nearly Got Hit By A Ship, But That Didn't Stop Us From Singing**'. When, some months later, the song title appeared on one of their posters, someone wrote underneath it: **WHICH IS A SHAME** (and there's no way you can prove that it was me).

I made it out of the cafe just in time to see the front – the hull? – of an enormous ship loom out of the darkness and bulldoze its way up the short distance of beach and into **THE RUSTY DOLPHIN** with that terrifying

CRUNCH!!! sound I mentioned earlier.

The cafe was destroyed as easily as one of Garlic Hamper's matchstick models would be if I was to step on it (which, I must confess, I've done by mistake in the past).

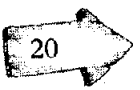
The noise was so loud that it travelled far inland and even through the (very thick) walls of Grubtown Jail, reaching the ears of the handful of prisoners inside.

Very few people get locked up in Grubtown because Mayor Flabby Gomez would rather convicted criminals spend their own money on feeding, cleaning and keeping themselves warm, than the town having to do it for them. (He likes to use the town's money for more important things, such as the Mayor's Emergency Cake Fund.) There were eight prisoners inside the jail at the time, which was a lot by Grubtown standards.

A long-time inmate was a chap called Mickey 'Steamroller' Johnson who'd done some wild and dangerous things with his steamroller in the past. Just about everyone – including me – feels a lot safer knowing that he's safely behind bars and hopes that he's not going to be released sometime soon. (I like to be able to wander down to the newsagent's to buy a copy of **BIG BEARDS WEEKLY**, or some straw for the troll in my airing cupboard, without the fear of ending up as flat as a pancake.)

Another prison regular is Hobo Browne, and he was in jail on the day of the mighty crunch. Hobo is either a smelly tramp, a gentleman of the road, or a homeless person, depending on your point of view. Whatever he is, he's also a nice bloke and Constable Gelatine had kindly had him locked up (again) for a few days, so that he could have a comfy bed and some cooked meals for a few days.

This left six other prisoners. And these six



other weren't in the slightest bit interested in the noise they'd just heard. Why not? Because these six prisoners were far more interested in themselves. And they were making BIG plans.

