



STEVEN SAVILE



CRAZY 8 PRESS

TO THE ADVENTURERS IN ALL OF US
WHO ALWAYS WANTED TO OPEN THE DOOR . . .



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First edition



There is a house. It is unlike any house you have ever visited, and yet in many ways it is the same as every house you have ever lived in. It has passageways, rooms, and doors. But the doors of this house are made of living wood and open everywhere and everywhen. This is a house in which the impossible is possible, the improbable probable. This is a house in which magic is commonplace and the common place is magical. This house is called Tanglewood, and one of its doors might well open beside you, if the time is right.

How will you know if the time is right? You'll know because it will be when you need it the most.

That was how it happened for Matt Fisher.

Matt was an ordinary boy, unremarkable in every way save one, but that one special thing was what drew Tanglewood to him and convinced the house to open its doors.

You see, at age six Matt had believed that the world was a magical place. He had watched people do impossible things. They sawed beautiful assistants in half. They made things disappear in puffs of smoke. They bent spoons with their minds and made seeds grow in the palms of their hands. They showed him a wonderful, exciting world of possibilities that made him sit cross-legged on his bedroom floor with his arms stretched out and fingers wiggling as he tried to move

his toy soldiers around by the power of his mind alone. But by the time Matt turned fourteen he was older and wiser, and he had stopped believing in magic. He knew about trap doors and secret compartments. He understood what the word “misdirection” meant, and “sleight of hand,” and knew that the world was just a lonely, boring place where nothing very remarkable happened to ordinary boys like him, and no matter how hard he strained his mind and wiggled his fingers, those toy soldiers weren’t going to dance. There was no magic. At least none worth believing in.

All those things his six-year-old self had known for sure to be true the fourteen-year-old Matt was equally sure were just tricks, and the world had already played too many tricks on him. “Fool me once,” as the saying went, “shame on you.” Matt was not about to be fooled twice. When his mom died the day before his tenth birthday it was just easier for him to stop believing in everything, because then when they didn’t happen, when they didn’t miraculously save someone he loved, he couldn’t be let down. It was a defense mechanism.

But that special thing, the thing that drew the house to him, was that no matter how sensible he became, and how grown up, no matter how much easier it was to just stop believing in everything that was wonderful and stop thinking that under even the most mundane sheet of rusted iron there could be something fantastic waiting to be found, he couldn’t quite bring himself to.

He was a dreamer, it was his nature, and that part of him that would always be six was right, the world was a magical place.

Of course, that cut both ways. Because he couldn't help but believe, because he left himself open and vulnerable to it, the world was also a painful place for a boy like Matt Fisher.

But then pain and magic so often walk hand in hand.



It was getting late.

He should have been home half an hour ago, but with no one waiting for him Matt had developed the bad habit of losing track of time. Mrs T. called him a “time optimist.” It was a nice way of saying he spend most of his days in a world of his own. Only he wasn't on his own now. He was being followed. He didn't know how he knew, but he did. Maybe it was the prickle of the fine little hairs on the nape of his neck, maybe it was the smooth-sided stone of unease that sank into the pit of his stomach, or maybe it was just the fact that the shadows around him didn't add up when he counted them. It didn't matter. Someone was following him. He could hear a peculiar shuffle-drag-shuffle sound of limping of footsteps behind him, but when he glanced back over his shoulder there was no one there.

But that wasn't right. There was someone there. Matt started to move a little faster, looking back over his shoulder every ten and twenty steps until he was running. He caught glimpses of his reflections in the shop windows as he raced past, and there was never anyone behind him in the glass, but he knew they were there. All he had to do was look down

at the shadows at his feet. There was one too many and it stretched further than all the others because it came from a different time, where the sun was lower in the sky, only Matt didn't know that.

He darted between parked cars, running out into the road as a car slammed on its brakes. He didn't dare look around as the driver hammered on the horn. There was a narrow alley between two of the shops. It led to more shops, older shops off the main street, with windows full of curious little things, and another alleyway that in turn led to the street that bargain hunters had forgotten, and on the corner the huge old department store with its boarded-up windows that, in the wrong kind of light, looked like an ogre's face all screwed up and glaring out at the city around it. It had been empty as long as Matt could remember.

There were high wooden fences up around it, plastered with signs saying "Scheduled for Demolition," and behind the fences two towering yellow cranes with wrecking balls hanging limply from their arms.

Matt didn't stop running until he hit the blue wooden fence. He could see into the demolition yard through one of the cracks. Part of the external wall had already come down, leaving a gaping hole in the side of the old building. Inside he could see old shop mannequins lined up, their bodies posed so they looked like terrified shoppers trapped inside as the walls came down. One of the wrecking crew had no doubt thought it would be funny.

"Isn't it?" a voice whispered in Matt's ear, so close his bones

tried to crawl out through his skin in fright.

He spun around, looking left and right in absolute panic.

There wasn't another soul in the street.

There was, however, a door made of living wood, but it was not one of the house's doors. It had been, once, before it had become a bad seed and blown away on the wind to fall where it might. Now that door opened and the creature that had been following Matt Fisher stepped through into the empty street. His voice had traveled before him—not as fast as his shadow, for light travels faster than sound—but now he was here, impossibly tall and skeletally thin, dressed head to toe in the funeral garb of an undertaker. He tipped his top hat, and Matt saw the shadows flit across his gaunt features. His skin was the color of ash, and his voice when it came again possessed the crackle of fire. "Ebenezer Twig at your service, boy. And you shouldn't be here."

Matt felt the cold touch of Twig's shadow against his cheek and flinched.

He stepped back, bumping into the wooden fence.

He moved sideways, still pressed up against the fence until the hasp of a padlock pressed into his back. His shirt caught on it and ripped.

Twig started to walk slowly across the street. Everything about the man's movement was menacing and awkward, as though beneath the fine clothes he had the body of a giant stick insect, his joints backwards so that his stride was more of a lollop that began and ended with him bouncing on his heels.

He dragged his left leg slightly.

“It’s really not safe for you here,” Twig said, and Matt knew that he was telling the truth. But where Twig wanted Matt to believe he’d come to rescue him from some unseen threat, Matt knew better.

The door slammed behind him.

Twig twitched involuntarily, the skin around his mouth pulling back to bare his tombstone rows of teeth as though it was somehow attached to the door.

“Master Matthew,” Twig said, holding out a bony white hand. He was still thirty yards away, barely at the bottom of the steps and across the wide road, but his voice was right up beside Matt’s ear, his foul breath prickling Matt’s skin. “Don’t make this any more difficult than it needs to be. Please. Come with me.”

Matt flinched, stumbling backwards. Perhaps the padlock hadn’t been fastened properly, perhaps the door opened for him because he needed it to, it didn’t matter either way because the result was the same. The door swung open behind him and Matt Fisher fell, sprawling on his backside. But he was up as quickly as he went down, spun on his heels and took off running as though his life depended on it, over the rubble, between the hulking cranes. With his head up he could see the mannequins peering down in various states of panic. He didn’t look back once. He kept his head down, watching the shadows chase his feet, snapping at his heels. He pumped his arms and legs furiously, even as his lungs burned in his chest. He ran. And then he ran some more.

He knew that all it would take was for Twig’s shadow to

catch his ankle and he'd go sprawling across the broken bricks.

Just one touch . . .

"Oh, don't be so tiresome, boy," Twig's voice came—impossibly—from somewhere in front of him.

Matt stumbled, trying to look backwards and forwards at the same time. It was no more than a fleeting glance over his shoulder, but it meant he wasn't watching his feet. As his foot went down it caught the side of a broken piece of rubble that shifted traitorously, turning his ankle, and Matt tripped. He threw his hands out in front of him to break his fall, but that only made the pain worse because his hands hurt where the jagged edges of stone dug into them and his knees hurt where other sharp stones cut through his jeans.

Tears stung his cheeks.

He gritted his teeth and pushed himself back up to his feet and started to run again. "Leave me alone!"

He felt Mister Twig's breath up against his cheek as the strange man whispered, "You really do have an overdeveloped sense of self-preservation, don't you, boy? I'm not going to hurt you. I'm here to help you. I've got an offer that you would be very foolish to refuse."

But Matt wasn't listening.

There was a door in front of him. It was corrugated iron and didn't have a handle. He pried his fingers into the narrow crack where it rested up against the wooden frame and dragged it open. The metal grated over the stones, setting his teeth on edge. On the other side he saw a makeshift passageway that led through scaffolding and the dustsheets draped over them

to what had once been the basement elevator shaft. He heard Mister Twig behind him. That was all the encouragement he needed. Matt stepped through the doorway and pushed the sheet of corrugated iron back into place behind him. He grabbed a handful of heavy stones and wedged the door shut before ducking beneath one of the struts of scaffolding and running down the passage to the elevator.

There was no point pressing the call button, of course. There was no power into the old building, hadn't been for years, meaning there was no way the doors were ever going to open, and no way the elevator car was going to carry him up to the frightened mannequins.

And yet as he stood there the elevator doors screeched and groaned and tantalizingly slowly folded open, to reveal Ebenezer Twig standing behind them. Folded up inside the cramped car, Twig's shadow had become less human than ever. It started to move, flexing and stretching and finally unfurling as it crept out of the elevator towards Matt.

He found a door. Only this wasn't any old door. But then he didn't need any old door. This was a Door. Capital D. And it was exactly the kind of door he needed. It hadn't been there a moment before, but Matt didn't know that. It was dark. He didn't notice the slight shimmer around the frame as he tugged at the handle or the ripple of blue sparks that sizzled and spat from the lock as he pushed the door open. He looked over his shoulder to be sure Twig wasn't right behind him, and for a moment couldn't see him.

Twig stepped out of the elevator.

He had removed his top hat and held it in long grey fingers. Twig stretched them as though playing an exaggerated scale across the brim of the hat and they cracked one knuckle at a time.

“If you go through that door I won’t be able to help you, boy,” Twig said, behind him. His shadow had crawled halfway up the scaffolding, moving with unnerving grace denied its master.

The air around Matt was suddenly cold, the temperature plunging as the shadow reached down, coming within inches of his scalp. “You’ll be lost to me forever. You may think that is a good thing, Master Matthew, but believe me, it isn’t.”

Matt stepped through the doorway and slammed the Door behind him.



International bestselling novelist STEVEN SAVILE won the Scribe Award for best young adult tie-in novel for his book *Shadow of the Jaguar* for the British tv show *Primeval*. He has written more than a dozen novels and sold more than half a million copies worldwide. He has written for *Dr Who*, *Torchwood*, *Primeval*, *Stargate*, *Warhammer*, *Slaine*, *Fireborn*, *Pathfinder* and other popular game and comic worlds. *Silver*, his debut thriller reached #2 in the Amazon UK charts in the summer of 2011. He is currently writing the Moonland Diaries YA adventures. Visit www.stevensavile.com to keep up to date with new releases.

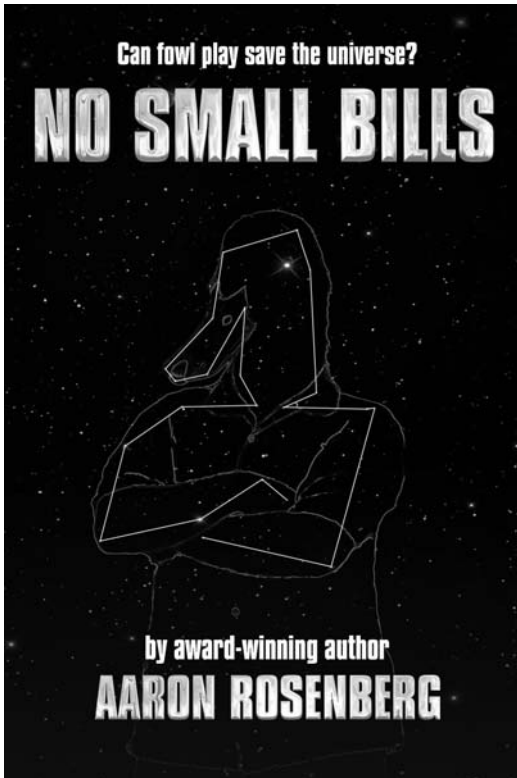
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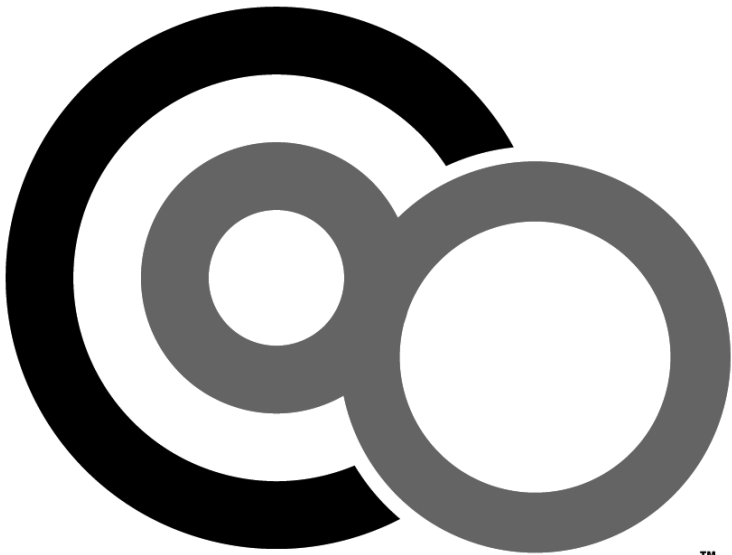
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