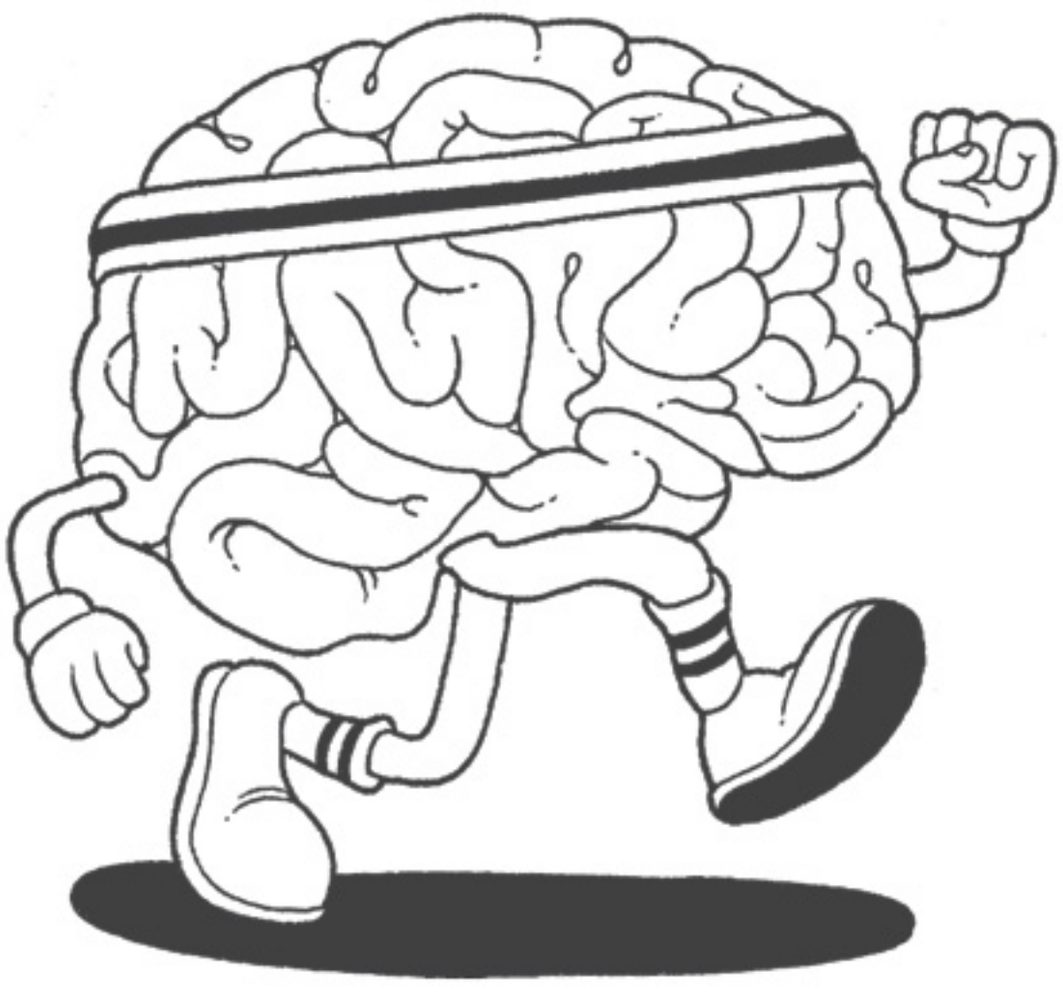
YOU ARE AWESOME

Matthew Syed

ILLUSTRATED BY

Toby Triumph



wren & rook

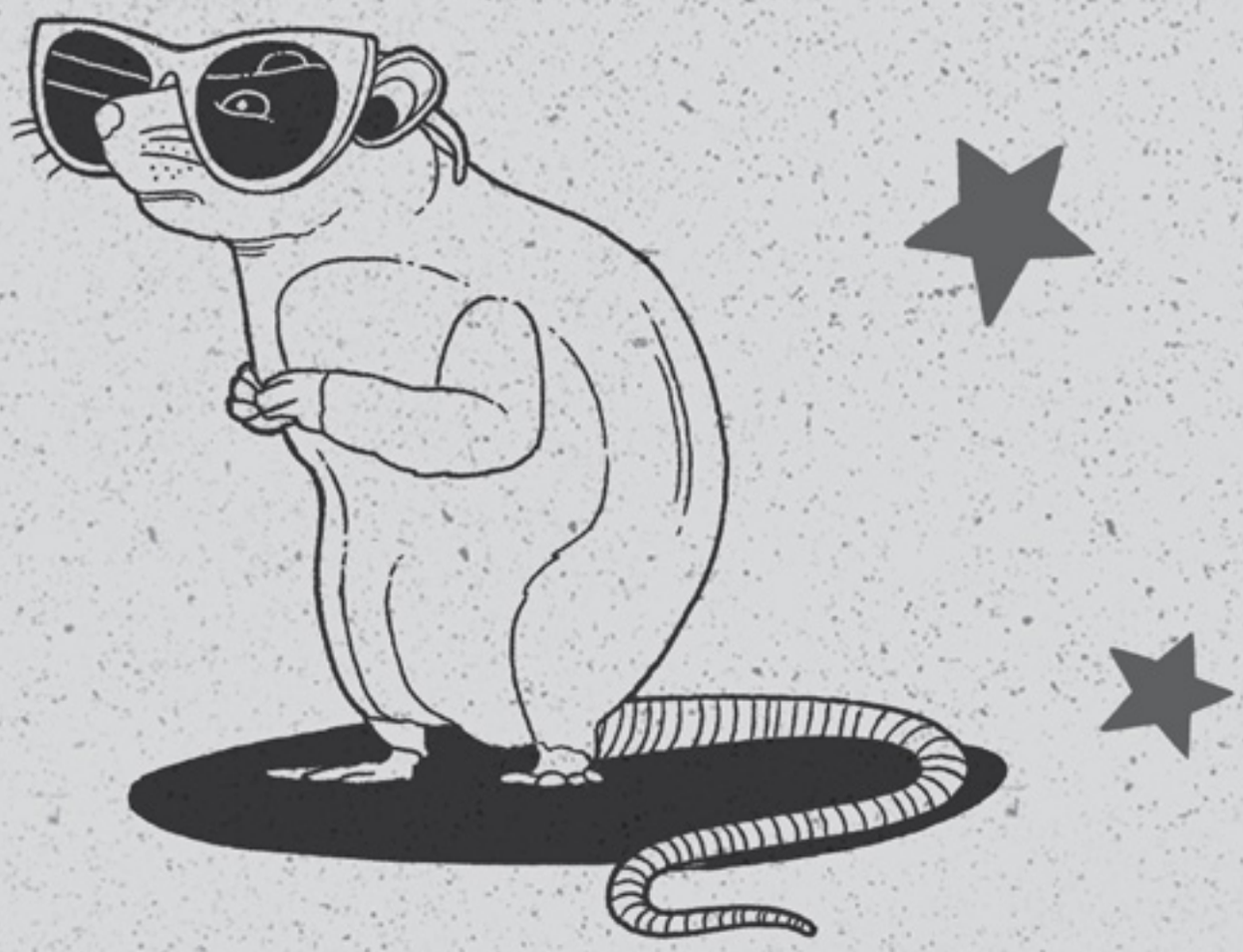


Getting good at stuff is not as hard as you might think. In fact, anyone can get (much) better at almost anything

BUT YOU'RE BUSY, RIGHT?

Tell me about it. There's so much to do – homework, sports, time with friends, keeping up with Instagram … Finding the time to **do** everything can be a challenge. Trying to be **good** at everything can be even harder.

That's where this book comes in. It's going to let you into the secret to being awesome, and tell you things that people at the top of their game know about success. If you've got a friend who seems to ace exams with no effort, or a brother who is annoyingly better than you at tennis, or even if you just feel like you're not quite sure what you're best at – then this book is for you.



What's involved? Well, we're going to get up close and personal with success, delve inside our brains to understand how we learn new skills, and equip you with strategies to build your confidence and fulfil your potential. We'll bust some myths along the way about what it takes to stand out from the crowd, share some stories of how super-successful people made it to the top, and provide all the support and advice you need to achieve your personal awesomeness.

So, if you're up for the challenge then let's get started … We haven't got any time to waste if you want to be an awesome vlogger, pianist, physicist, tennis ace, chess grandmaster, deep sea diver, heart surgeon, prime minister, computer hacker, MI6 agent, footballer, mathematician, archaeologist, teacher, plumber, barrister, barista, chef, travel writer, dog groomer, TV presenter, basketball player, rock star, astronaut or cheese sprayer (no, me neither on that last one, but apparently it is a thing, and if you're going to be one, you might as well be awesome at it).

Oh, and by the way, that perfect selfie, that great maths result, or the amazing piano performance …? They were lying if they said they didn't practise.

FROM KID AVERAGE TO KID AWESOME

1

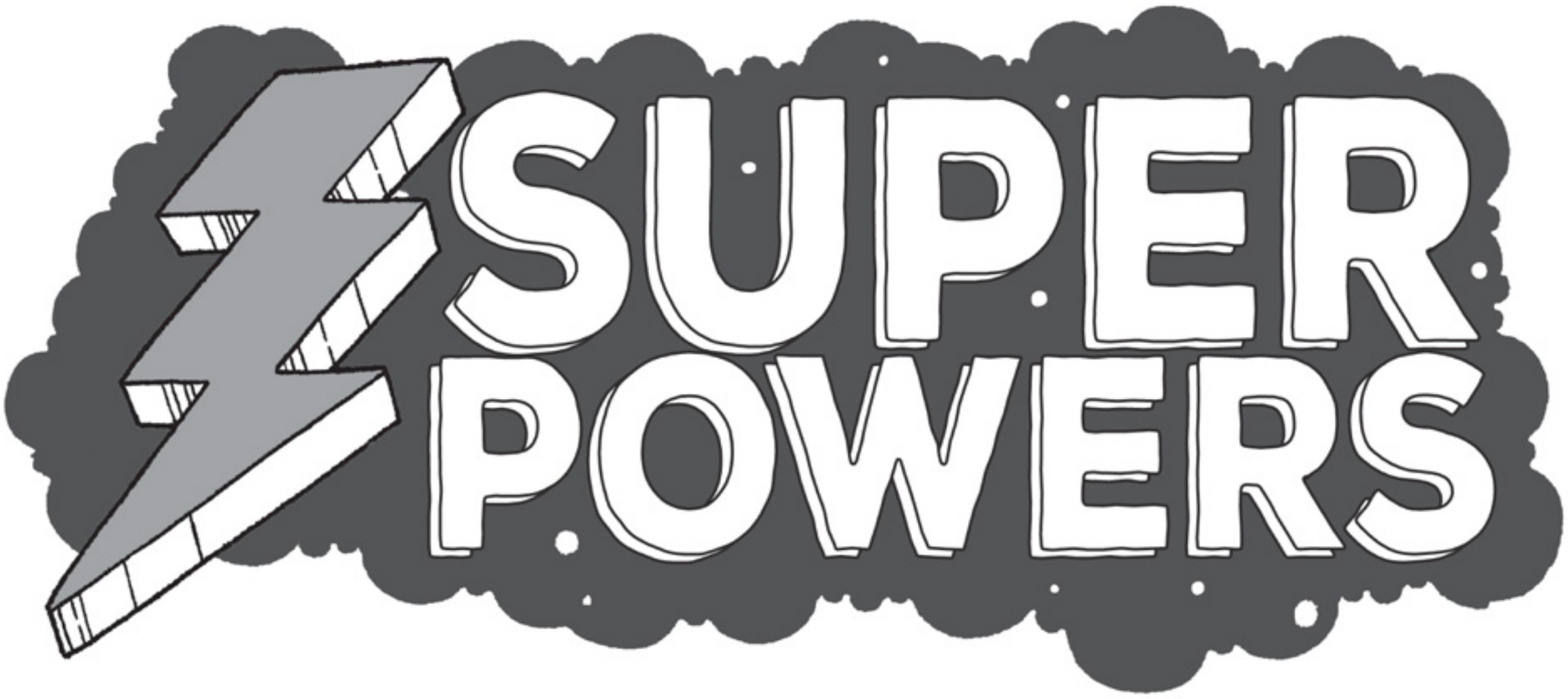
*Imagine a very ordinary kid. Living in a completely ordinary street. On the outskirts of a totally ordinary town. You can probably see where we're going with this already. This kid (let's call him **Kid A**) probably spends his weekends hanging out in the ordinary shopping centre, and then goes home to eat an ordinary dinner in his ordinary house. Yep, you've got it. It's all fairly, um, ordinary …*

As for the town's famous sons and daughters – you know, people born in the area who went on to do great things and change the world – well, there really aren't many. Apart from a TV weatherman and a guy who might – no one is quite sure – have invented a crucial bit of the tumble dryer in the 1980s. But that's it. Honestly, this place is duller than a dull day in **Dullsville.**

So, I hear you asking, why are we beginning this book here? What's the point of zoning in on **Kid A**, in his ordinary bunk-bed in his ordinary bedroom? Well, that's exactly the point, **Kid A** IS ordinary. Just like any other kid. Perhaps just like you? But something amazing is about to happen.

KID A'S LIFE IS ABOUT TO CHANGE. FOREVER.

Now, he isn't going to be bitten by a radioactive spider or struck by a thunderbolt that gives him ...



Instead, returning from school one day, **Kid A**'s mum and dad are outside the house waiting for him.

They are up to something. **Kid A** is sure of it. His mum is hopping backwards and forwards like an over-excited frog and his dad is smiling. Yes, smiling. And **Kid A** knows that this can only mean one thing. They've got some kind of surprise in store.

'Close your eyes', squeals his mum mid-leap.

Kid A complies, but inside is seriously hoping this doesn't turn out to be anything like the last 'surprise' they pulled. The one with the trampoline, which ended with an embarrassing call-out to the fire brigade ...

With great excitement, Dad hauls open the garage door.

'Right, you can look now!'

For a moment, **Kid A** thinks he's missing something. His

parents stand beside him, beaming with pride.

'Um, it's a table', says **Kid A**, sounding puzzled.

'I know it looks like an old table!' said his dad springing forward, but SEE, it's a table tennis table!'

Before **Kid A** can respond, his mum thrusts a table tennis bat and ball into his hand, and before he can say 'ping pong paddle', he's facing his dad across the net.

'What are you waiting for?' his mum shrieks, now close to a mild frenzy. His dad is also looking positively dangerous. Like he might injure himself or someone else in the close vicinity. He's doing wild warm-up stretches with his legs and bending into positions that **Kid A** has never seen before (except maybe the ones you might see in a pretzel).

'Come on, let's have a go!' his dad shouts from the other side of the table.

Kid A stares over the net at his dad. His evening really has taken an unexpected turn. But in spite of this, he holds the bat ready and waits for his dad to serve … and this is where we press the pause button on the story. Why? Because **Kid A** has reached a big fork in his life.



The kind where he faces a choice between two paths. One path will see him carry on living his ordinary, unremarkable life. The other path will take him on an **awesome and incredible journey**, and it all comes down to what happens next.

But let's save the best until last, and begin with the path that leads to **Kid A** becoming …



KID AVERAGE

OK, back to the story. Concentrating hard, **Kid Average** waits (slightly longer than he thought he might have to. His dad went back into the house to get his lucky sports headband). Next thing he knows, the ball comes whizzing across the net like a bullet. And **Kid Average** misses it. Completely. Well, that was unlucky, he thinks. Dad seems good at this. Maybe he just got lucky though. Or maybe it was those stretches (or that headband). **Kid Average** tries again. This time, the ball slices sideways, bounces off the table and spins out of the garage door.

‘Never mind’, says his dad. ‘Try again.’

Turning a fancy shade of beetroot, **Kid Average** is not exactly enjoying this.

He makes another attempt at serving. This time, the ball scrapes over the net, only for his father to return the serve with such force that the ball comes back at him like a missile. It connects with his end of the table and then hits him full force on the elbow.

‘Come on, buddy!’ Shouts his dad, still jumping about like a pro. ‘You can do better than that.’

Kid Average collects the ball from the garage floor and considers asking for the headband to use as a bandage. He shuffles back to the table but his heart just isn’t in it. As far as he’s concerned, he could face further humiliation from his dad (who seems to have found his inner Olympian) or be in his bedroom with his games console. Just then, the console wins.

‘I’ve had enough’, he says, setting the bat on the table. ‘But thanks anyway.’

For a while, his parents blame each other. Or rather his mum blames his dad for being too competitive, but it quickly becomes clear that **Kid Average** just doesn't have the **fire** in him to take up the challenge.

'But I'm no good at it,' protests **Kid Average** when his dad suggests a game the following week. And, to be fair, his bruises have only just faded from the last time ...

'Why don't you practise with Andrew?' his mum suggests. This was **Kid Average**'s worst nightmare. Never mind his dad, his brother was more competitive than Mo Farah in the 10,000 m final. There was no way he wanted a pasting from that muppet, who was bound to tell everyone at school about it, too.

'No thanks', sighs **Kid Average**, who takes himself off to his bedroom. 'He's bound to be better than me anyway.'

Time goes by. His dad takes up golf and the table-tennis table in the garage begins to gather dust. His mum piles his dad's new golf clubs on it for a while, before she gets fed up with the lack of space. Eventually she takes it apart, stacks it to one side, and sells it to their next-door neighbour for an absolute bargain.

Meanwhile, **Kid Average** continues to shuffle through life. His school reports suggest he could try harder, but it never happens. In his eyes, challenges are obstacles, and definitely best avoided. Instead, he ignores his parents' pleas to get out more and rarely leaves his room. There, with his console in hand and snacks within easy reach, he sets about, well … doing …

NOTHING.

It's fair to say that **Kid Average** is living up to his name.

But one day he's surfing through sports videos, looking for something to pass the time, when he comes across a live stream of the National Table Tennis Championship Finals. Seeing this brings his not-so-amazing ping-pong debut back to him. The match is taking place inside a huge hall, watched by hundreds of spectators. The camera zooms in on the player with the ball in hand. He's totally focused and completely calm, as if perhaps he's been working towards this moment for a long time. **Kid Average** sits up straight. His attention is glued to the screen. Because the player on the screen in front of him, preparing to serve for the championship, looks strikingly familiar …



KID AWESOME

Now let's rewind to the point where **Kid A**'s story reached that fork in the path. He's facing his dad across the net, remember? **Kid A**'s first attempt at hitting the ball goes seriously badly wrong. The second try is worse and the third attempt results in a bruise the size of the table-tennis ball on his elbow. Unlike **Kid Average**, however, he doesn't give up.