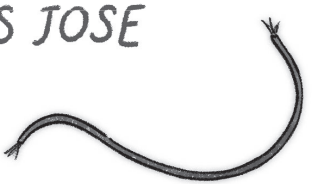
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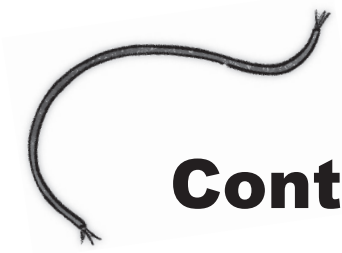
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For my nieces and nephews





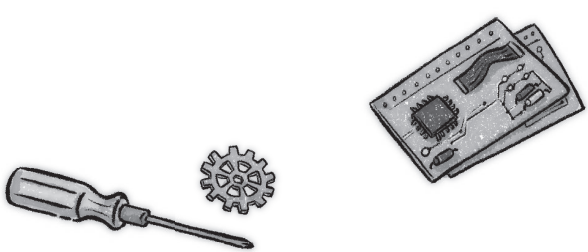


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1
A Little Test Run

It was one of those glorious September days when it feels like summer will never end. The sky was a giddy cartoon blue, the breeze was warm and smelled faintly of bonfires, and the countryside all around the little village of Snorebury-on-Sea glowed gold, as if King Midas himself had sneezed everywhere.

It was the perfect day to launch a submarine out of a tree.





'OK, let me see . . . batteries are fully charged, rudders are in position, periscope is down . . .' Leonora Bolt muttered instructions to herself as she flicked switches on the large control panel in front of her. She was sitting inside the cabin of her six-metre homemade deep-sea explorer, the *Aquabolt*. It was wedged precariously in the remains of the treehouse at number 5, Primrose Lane.

'Air pressure – check. Fuel levels – check. Otter seatbelt – oh no, hang on . . .'

Perched on a cashmere cushion beside Leonora was her pet otter, Twitchy Nibbles. His bright eyes fixed her with a look of dismay. His nostrils flared. Leonora leaned over and tickled the pale bib of fur beneath his chin with her oily fingers. Then she strapped him in.

'Hey, don't worry, Twitch. This'll be a piece of cake.'

Twitchy let out a low, harrumphing growl



and buried his head beneath his paws as Leonora completed her last-minute inspections. As she adjusted valves and clicked dials, she could feel excitement fizzing away inside her like a Jacuzzi full of sherbet.

Everything was ready for the test run. She'd calculated all the angles and velocities. She'd rehearsed the route 327 times in her mind. The wind speed was low, and the tide was high. This was going to be absolutely perfect.

Leonora couldn't afford any more mishaps. Last night, when she'd been in the submarine up in the treehouse, experimenting with ultraviolet light, she'd made all the local squirrels glow in the dark.* They'd lit up the little garden like Christmas lights. Of course, she'd turned the UV off again the moment she'd

* No squirrels were harmed during the making of this chapter. Some squirrels glow bubble-gum pink under UV light. Also, wombat poo is cube-shaped. Keep reading for more incredible animal science!



realized – but what if the neighbours had seen? It was a silly mistake. A close call. She *had* to be more discreet.

BRUUN!! BRRUNNN!!
BRUUU-UUNNNNNG!!!

Leonora turned the ignition and the diesel-electric engine roared to life. Great swirls of grey smoke filled the garden. Tree branches shuddered, launching leaves high into the sky. The motor made a strange HACK, HACK, HACK noise like a hoarse donkey coughing up hay . . . but then it sputtered off again.

'Oh no, what is it *this* time?' Leonora sighed and scrambled out of her seat. She turned and opened a large metal compartment behind her. 'I'm so useless at fixing this,' she mumbled, prodding the engine inside with a screwdriver. Her fizziness was starting to get flattened by anxiety.

You see, Leonora wasn't *supposed* to be





launching a subaquatic vehicle out of a tree. Or illuminating the local wildlife. She was *supposed* to be doing the exact opposite of that – lying low, keeping her head down, *blending in*. For Leonora Bolt was a nine-year-old girl in hiding.

Now, in fact, Leonora thought she was pretty good at this hiding malarkey. Not too long ago, she'd been hiding on tiny Crabby Island just off the coast. OK, not *hiding* exactly. More like being forcibly hidden, imprisoned there from the age of three by her ghastly uncle, Lord Luther Brightspark. He was a mediocre professor who'd become ridiculously rich and famous by stealing Leonora's remarkable inventions. And he'd stolen her parents too, so that Leonora had grown up her whole life thinking she was an orphan.

Recently, though, her life had been transformed. It had all started when Jack, a boy from Snorebury, which was on the mainland,

had accidentally found himself marooned on her island. Together with Leonora's housekeeper, Mildred, and the hapless ferryman Captain Spang, they'd escaped her uncle's clutches. Then Leonora had discovered that her parents were alive and being held hostage at a mysterious ocean location. Hence the submarine. Leonora was going to get her family back and *nothing* was going to stand in her way.

Leonora rubbed her forehead with her wrist, leaving a dirty smudge. Could the problem be the fuel injection pump, or clogged air filters? She'd need to investigate, which meant more delays.

She shivered, refusing to think about the possibility of her uncle finding her before she'd finished. The last time she'd seen him, she'd scuppered his lifelong plans to own a powerful new technology – a human emotion formula. She'd banished him back to Crabby Island using

an amazing teleporting machine she'd invented: the Switcheroo. Foiling his wicked schemes had been Leonora's greatest-ever achievement. She swore she would *never* let him win. She knew, though, that if he was still alive, he was going to be angrier than a whole sackful of scorpions.

That's why Leonora was now living undercover in Snorebury (a designated World Weariness Site and Area of Outstanding Natural Monotony, winner of the Most Tedious Village award for 463 years running). It was a picture-postcard place, where people ironed their lawns, polished their dustbins and hoovered their children, a humdrum haven where she hoped her uncle couldn't find her – although she worried that the dangerously boring residents *might* start to notice things like neon rodents adorning the hedgerows. Or marine vessels appearing out of the blue. The speed of light was 299,792,458 metres per second, which Leonora calculated



was only half the speed of village gossip. In short, a few more failed attempts and her cover would be blown.

'Well, I think I need some spare parts,' she said, shutting the engine compartment again. 'Looks like launch day's postponed, Twitch.'

Twitchy's ears pricked up. His whiskers stopped wobbling. Leonora unclunked his seatbelt and gave him a cuddle. Then she pulled

