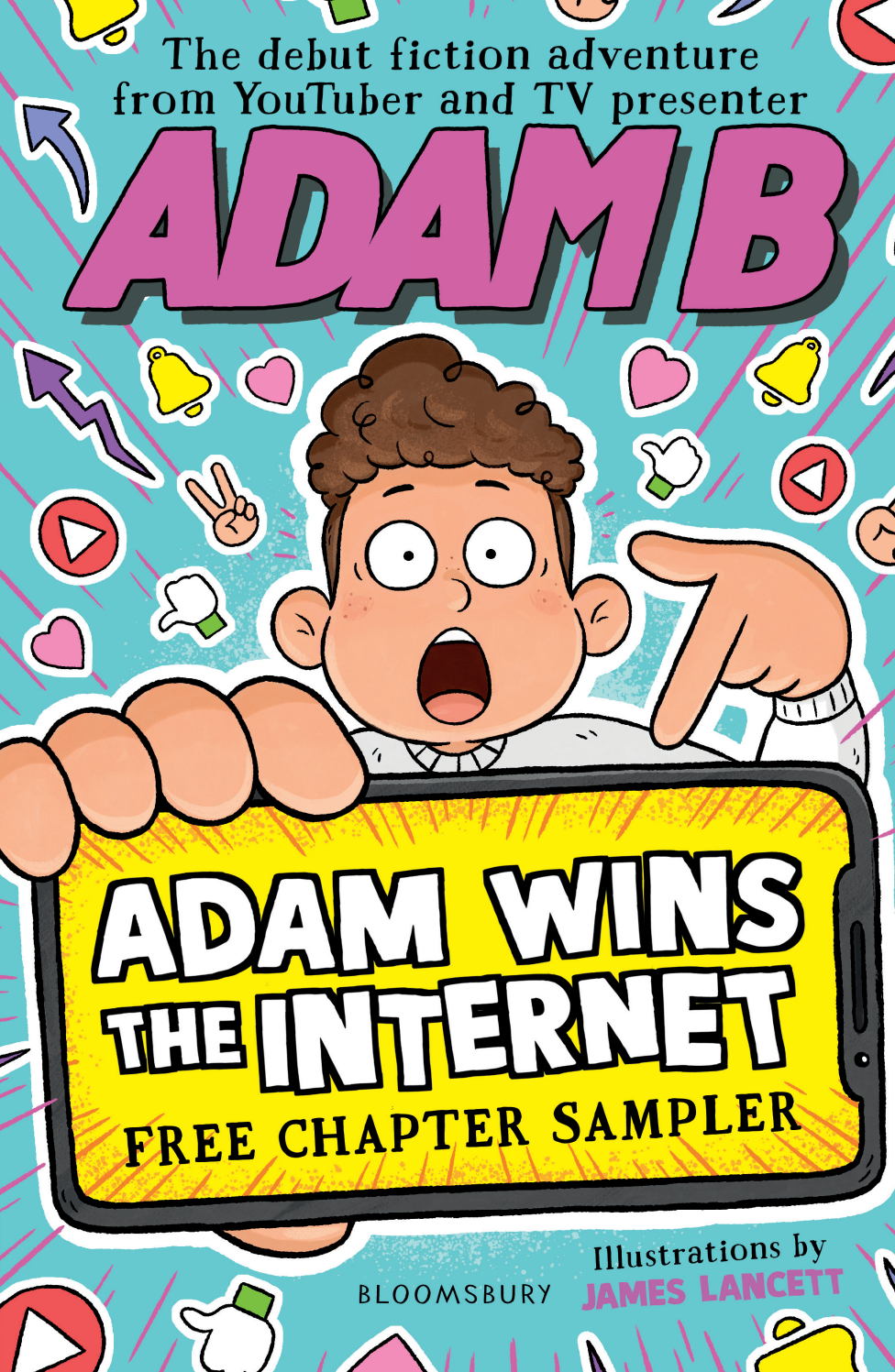
The debut fiction adventure from YouTuber and TV presenter

ADAM B



ADAM WINS THE INTERNET

FREE CHAPTER SAMPLER

BLOOMSBURY

Illustrations by JAMES LANCETT

ADAM WINS THE INTERNET

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BLOOMSBURY

1

The Heroes

It was morning. Not just any morning – Adam's favourite kind:

- Sunny
- Warm (except his feet, which at age thirteen no longer fitted in the bed he'd had since he was eight)
- Lazy. Slow enough for him to gather his thoughts, try to remember his dreams, plan which YouTubers to catch up on first …
- And best of all, it was the weekend. Nothing beats a long, relaxing lie-in on a Sunday mor—

'ADAM! You better be out of bed! We're leaving in ten minutes!'

Let's start again.

It was morning. Not just any morning. Adam's least favourite kind – the kind when you think it's the weekend, when actually it's a

MONDAY!

Adam had never literally leaped out of bed before, but there's a first time for everything. He had never tried to get both his gangly legs into his school jumper, or tried to brush his teeth with the handle of his toothbrush before, but hey, give him a break, he had just woken up from his first ever night of being thirteen, and teenagers are supposed to be rubbish at getting up in the morning, right?

'Oh, so you *are* alive?' his frazzled-looking mum managed to joke as Adam launched himself down the stairs, ducked under yesterday's 'Happy Birthday' banner that was still pinned across the



doorway, and did a sock-slide into the kitchen, where his mum and brother were just finishing up breakfast.

His mum didn't get far before Adam had hold of her and was spinning her around the kitchen, doing one of his 'dances', while singing one of his 'songs'. The dance in question was an Adam classic, and mostly involved him jumping around in circles. The song was also an Adam original, and, like all his

other songs, consisted of two words, bellowed in what can only be described as a 'non-tune'.

'Ohhhh … Weeeee're … Late, we're late, we're late, we're late. We're late, we're late we're laaaate!'

It was common for Adam to try to irritate his mum when she was already on the verge of erupting into a full-on, code red, fury extravaganza. You'd think that it would be the final straw for her, but in fact, weirdly enough, it almost never failed to make her laugh. Making people happy, even when 'happy' seemed like a million miles away, was one of Adam's greatest skills. He was a world-class cheerer-upper. Or, as his mum put it –

'You're a whirlwind of annoyingness, that's what you are!' she yelled between howls of laughter. 'Now pack it in before you make us so late that you get detention and I get fired.'

'Nice hair, Adam,' mocked Adam's brother as they made their way out of the kitchen. Callum was only two years younger than Adam, but he looked *four*

years younger, acted *eight* years younger, and was a genuine contender for Adam's title of 'Whirlwind of Annoyingness No. 1'. And Adam couldn't have been prouder of that.

'How long did it take you to make it look like you just got out of bed?' chuckled Callum as he jumped up and down in an attempt to reach all the way to the top of Adam's stratospheric head, to mess up his shock of bed-hair even more.

'Probably about as long as it took you to make your face look like it just got pushed out of a pig's bum,' quipped Adam.

'Adam!' his mum gasped. 'Too far!'

But Callum didn't think it was too far at all – he was chuckling toast out from between his teeth, and high-fiving his big brother in recognition of the funniest put-down of the day, so far.

'Seriously, though,' said Callum, once he'd finally regained his composure, 'you need to sort your hair out. You look like Mum after the time we put glue in her shampoo!'

Now it was Adam's turn to get gross with the toast. It sprayed all over the kitchen floor as he doubled over at the memory of that day.

'Her face!' he howled with laughter as he played the moment back in his mind. 'When she opened the bathroom door – her *hair* – I've never seen anyone so shocked!'

'Oh, not shocked,' his mum corrected him, '*furious*. Which is exactly what I'll be in five seconds' time if you don't get a move on!'



They had fifteen minutes before they would be marked as being officially late for school, and Mum had one hour and fifteen minutes before she'd be late for work, so Adam knew they weren't really in any serious danger. But Mum never saw it that way. All Mum saw was the multiple things that could go wrong to slow them down on their way.



Like, for instance, their car, which today took five attempts to splutter to life before choking to a stall at the end of the road.

The false start reminded Adam to dig in his pocket, fish out the 40p change from yesterday's lunch money and pop it into the cardboard box he'd wedged between the two front seats three months ago. It was a shoebox, with the lid taped on, a coin slot cut into the top and the words 'New Gearbox Fund' scrawled across it in purple marker pen.

They'd only had the car for four months, after their old car – the beloved 'Dadmobile' – was stolen from outside their house. Mum thought she'd found a real bargain with the used Ford Focus. The ad had read – '*New tyres, new brakes, new gearbox!*' so she spent every last penny on it. Sadly, after getting the car home, she discovered that the advert hadn't listed all the things the car *had,* it was a list of all the things the car *needed*.

A new gearbox was right at the top of that list, but, at six hundred pounds, they were a looooooong way from being able to afford it. Luckily Adam

had the problem under control – so far his 'New Gearbox Fund' idea had raised a whopping twelve pounds and twenty pence!

'Listen to all that money!' Adam gasped in mock amazement as he gave the box a shake. 'Not long to go now, Mum! This time in three years we'll be halfway saved up!'

'Adam, don't even joke,' his mum groaned, knowing he was probably right. 'I've had enough of this horrible old banger!'

It was a sentence that Adam struggled to make sense of. OK, he knew that, to Mum, a 'banger' was an out of date, unreliable car, like the Ford Focus they were sitting in, which was two years older than Adam, and was presently making a noise like an asthmatic donkey. But to Adam, a 'banger' was YouTube slang for a video that was an unstoppable, runaway, viral mega-hit. In Adam's mind a 'banger' was an amazing thing, not something that could ever be used in the same sentence as the words 'horrible' and 'old'. And a 'banger' was what he was watching right now. (Or

trying to watch – his phone was almost as useless as their car. It was bashed and beaten, with a camera that barely worked, and was five models out of date. But Adam was grateful for it, all the same. He knew his mum struggled to pay the six-pound bill every month, but he made sure it was money well spent. His phone was a window to another world, a window that he gazed through for hours each day, where no matter how down, or stressed, or worried he was feeling, there was always someone like him – another world-class-cheerer-upper – uploading content that would put a smile back on Adam's face. Through the window of his phone he could escape to the land of TikTok, surf the waters of Instagram, and, best of all, explore the endless realms of YouTube – a place where he dreamed he might one day migrate to and become a fully certified citizen. To be a YouTuber was Adam's greatest dream – a dream where he could follow in the footsteps of all his favourite YouTubers and deliver his cheering-up skills not just to his mum and Callum, but to *millions* of people across the globe. *Just imagine*

making that many people happy, he marvelled to himself.)

His favourite YouTuber, Ed Almighty, had posted a new video overnight, and even though Adam could only watch a few seconds at a time between bufferings, it was still one of the funniest things he had ever seen.

'I seriously don't understand what all the hype is about that guy,' groaned Callum, trying to lean himself forward from the back seat enough to see Adam's stuttering screen. 'He's so overrated. He didn't deserve *any* of those awards he got at WebCon last year!'

For the online community, WebCon was like the Oscars. It was where every web-fan like Adam dreamed of going. Adam would have especially loved to go last year, when Ed Almighty was the star of the show. Callum wasn't a massive fan of Ed Almighty. He was more into Jack OJ.

Adam thought they were *both* heroes.

'Adam, you could be a better YouTuber than Ed Almighty without even trying! I'm not even joking!'

'Ha!' Adam laughed as he reached a hand back to give Callum an affectionate hair-ruffle, like he was an obedient puppy. 'You're a good little brother, Callum, you know that? Yesh you are! Yesh you *are*! Who's a good boy? You are!'

While Adam appreciated Callum's compliment, he knew that Callum was very, very wrong about him. Sure, Adam would have loved to be a YouTuber. There was nothing in the world he wanted to do more! That's what that glue-shampoo prank on his mum had been all about – it was practice! He and Callum had made *dozens* of YouTube videos. But that's all they ever were – 'practice' videos, which sat on Adam's hard drive and had never even so much as sniffed the bandwidth of a journey to the realms of YouTube. The dream was never going to happen, and Adam knew it. And it wasn't just because his ancient old laptop took all night to upload a five-minute video, and it wasn't because the camera on his brick of a phone was half dead. It was because there was something about Adam that

Callum didn't know. Something that Adam didn't *want* Callum to know. A 'secondary school something.' Something that, if he ever found it out, would change Callum's opinion of Adam forever. And now that Callum was in his last year of primary school, and would join Adam's secondary school next year, Adam knew it was only a matter of time before his secret came out.

2

The Secret

Adam was grateful that, for now at least, his secret was safe. He didn't know how he would handle it if Callum ever found out … *when* Callum found out. He didn't dare think about it – the shame, the disappointment … Adam wished he could scrunch his eyes up, make fists with his hands and force the truth down a rabbit hole, all the way to the centre of the earth, where it would burn up and never be seen again. But this secret wasn't going anywhere. It was always there, hanging over him like his own personal storm cloud, always threatening to drench him in shame.

Mum stopped the car outside Callum's school, which was just a short walk down the road from Adam's. Adam and Callum kissed Mum goodbye, and Callum gave her an extra squeeze as he leaned in from the back seat.

'See you later, Adam. Bye, Mum. Love you.'

'Bye-bye, sweetheart. Love you …' Mum paused and glanced at Adam, almost as if asking him permission to say the words they both knew Callum so longed to hear, but Adam pretended to be too busy getting out of the car to notice. So instead Mum went with the best alternative. 'Love you *so* much.'

Adam knew they weren't the exact words Callum had been hoping for, not like what Dad used to say, but they would have to do.

Callum was through the school doors in twelve seconds flat. And six minutes later Adam was approaching the side entrance doors of his own school. He hated those doors. The closer Adam got, the more his secret rumbled overhead. The second he passed through them, the cloud over his head would give a thunderous

BOOM and his secret would rain down on him, making his transformation complete. Just like how the Hulk's secret is unleashed by anger, and Rogue's secret is activated whenever she touches someone, Adam's secret was activated by those double doors round the side of his school. Except, when Adam stepped through them, he didn't become one of the Avengers or the X-Men. No, Adam's secret was different. When Adam stepped though those doors he became …

'LOSER!'

The insults, the jeering, the mocking laughter – they all came barrelling towards him the second he was inside school. As usual, Bruce Kilter and his gang had been waiting for him.

Gone was the dancing Adam. No more singing. No more laughing toast all over the floor. When Adam was in school he became a completely different person. Head down, eyes down, don't talk, try to be invisible – those were Adam's four rules of survival, and some days they actually helped him avoid being noticed by Bruce and his hangers-on.



Today was not one of those days.

'Oi, loser! Don't ignore me, I'm talking to you!'

Bruce was right up in Adam's face in a flash. And his manure-like breath was right up in Adam's nose too. Adam could not understand how, with all their millions of pounds, Bruce's super-rich family couldn't buy him a place at a posh school far, far away, or maybe just buy him some manners, or at least some *new breath*.

Head down. Don't react. He'll get bored soon and leave you alone. Adam repeated this mantra over and over in his head. He thought of Bruce as a vicious cat with its claws out, waiting to rip something to shreds. And he thought of himself as a ball of wool. Any response, anything at all, even eye contact, would be like shaking the wool right in front of Bruce's face, giving him the green light to attack.

'Where are your manners, Beales?! You're not even looking at me! I bet you'd look at me if I pretended to be your mum, eh?You gave *her* enough attention outside your baby brother's school, didn't you? Kissin' her goodbye like you're a wee baby too!'

And while they're out shopping for some new breath, surely Bruce's family could afford to buy him a new personality!

Head down. Don't react. He'll get bored soon and leave you alone.

'I almost threw up when I saw that! The most messed up thing I've ever seen! I wouldn't kiss your mammy if you paid me! Know what I'm saying? No

wonder your dad decided to pop his clogs early! Nothing worth living for, know what I'm saying?'

Head! Down!

Adam's blood boiled.

Don't! React!

His jaw clenched.

He'll get bored soon and leave you alone!

It took all of Adam's strength not to lash out at Bruce. But Adam swallowed his rage. He bit down on his impulses, and marched on.

'Oooooh! I think he's getting angry! Look at him, clenching his teeth!' Bruce cackled with laughter like a particularly odorous hyena. 'Come on, Adam, take a swing at me. *Pleeease*, I'm begging you, just try it.'

Head down. Don't react. He'll get bored soon and leave you alone.

Just when Adam thought he couldn't take it any longer, his mantra finally worked. Bruce did get bored, and he hung back as Adam marched into his form room for registration.

In that moment, an idea bubbled up and began to

crystallise in Adam's mind. He knew what had to be done. It would take a dash of bravery, a pinch of guts and just a dollop of careful planning …

Ethan, Adam's best friend – well, *only* friend, if we're being honest – had been about to launch into his usual machine-gun routine of endless questions about Adam's weekend, but he stopped when he saw the steely glare etched into Adam's face.

'Whoa! *WHAT* is *UP* with *YOU?*' Ethan enquired, stepping forward to take a closer inspection of the expression. 'You look like you just bit the head off a *wasp*! I mean you look *ANGRY*! Are you, like, in a proper bad mood, or have you actually got toothache or something? Is it because I didn't come round on your birthday? Only, like, you did say you weren't doing anything. You said maybe next Saturday! And I couldn't have come yesterday anyway, my mum was making me clean my room *AGAIN*, and do my chores AGAIN, which I didn't do *AGAIN*, so she grounded me *AGAIN*. Is that why you're mad? Don't be mad … are you mad? We should call you Mad Adam.

Or is it the smell? The corridors smell pretty rank again, right? Like they've been cleaned with a mop that's been dipped in old meat then sprinkled with warm cheddar. Right? Or is "Angry Adam" a better nickname? Adam-angry. Adam-gry. Or has your mum banned you from watching YouTube again? Or maybe Adam-Mad. Or Maddadam … Madam!'

Ethan only spoke at one speed – one million miles per hour – and he decided that now might be a good time to take a breather.

'It's nothing,' said Adam, shrugging his backpack off his shoulders and opening the YouTube app on his phone. 'Best mood I've been in all year, as a matter of fact.'

His idea was becoming clearer now. The very thought of it began to excite him. His tiny triumph over Bruce … the thing Callum had said about him being better than Ed Almighty … his determination never to let Callum find out how uncool he really was … the fact that it was his birthday yesterday, and he was now officially a teenager and that made

him feel a tiny bit new, a teeny bit more special, a gigantic bit more like he'd had enough of being pushed around … together these thoughts had combined in Adam's head to concoct a truly explosive idea.

'The best mood you've been in all year? Really? Because someone needs to tell the face. I mean, that was some top-level bitterness back there. Or are you being sarcastic? *Were* you being sarcastic? Sarcasm-Adam. Sarcadam. You were being sarcastic, right? I can never tell with you!'

'No, seriously, I'm on top of the world right now,' Adam calmly assured him, all traces of his Bruce-induced-fury evaporated as he searched through the YouTube app and clicked 'add account'.

'Oh,' said Ethan, surprised. 'Well … like … *why*?'

'Because tomorrow I'm going to create my first actual piece of YouTube content, and I know exactly what it's going to be.'

'Wait! What!?!' Ethan's pitch shifted, a small ball of half-chewed gum falling out of his gaping mouth. 'Is that what you're doing *now*? Right now? On your

phone? You're doing it? You're finally, at long last, actually taking the one giant leap towards your lifelong dream? You're … you're … you're creating *your own channel*?'

Adam looked Ethan in the eye, and there, where the black void of anger had been, was now a twinkle of chilled cunning, a sparkle of slyness, and more than a glint of revenge.



3

The Plan

The rest of the day had been a BAD one for being bullied. Bruce had continued his tormenting over first break, and also over last break, and between those breaks he'd managed to squeeze in a spot of bullying over lunchtime too, when he had, one by one, taken every chip from Adam's plate and thrown them into the bin.

Usually an episode like this would put 'happy Adam' out of the picture for the entire evening. Instead of performing one of his renditions of 'When's Dinner?' or 'I'm Hungry' while dancing around his mum in the kitchen, he would shut

himself away in his bedroom and attempt to drown out his thoughts by playing loud music, or by turning off all the lights and trying to force himself to go to sleep, just so his brain didn't have to replay all the horrible moments of his day.

But this day was different – Adam *had* shut himself away in his room after school, but not because he was feeling bad, because he was the *opposite* of that – he was a frenzy of buzzing energy, making notes, packing bags, messaging Ethan and preparing himself for the day that would begin his career as a YouTuber.

Adam was just in the middle of cleaning up his PC's hard drive so that it would behave itself when it came to editing and uploading tomorrow's video, when there was a knock at his door, and Callum poked his little head in (actually, for the sake of accuracy, it was quite a large, round head, but it was on a little body).

He paused to take in the scene – music blaring, papers everywhere, string and wire all over the rug,

an old David Attenborough nature programme on the TV, and something that looked like hair gel mixed with bright green food dye dribbling off the edge of Adam's desk – then he finally spoke up.

'Are you ready to do my interview yet, Adam?' He used his extra special polite voice, the one he only ever unleashed when he needed someone to help him with his homework.

'Yes. Soon. Sorry. Bit busy right now, but I'll be there in a minute, I promise, Cal.' Adam used his extra special apologetic voice, the one he unleashed whenever he'd promised to help Callum with something, then completely forgotten about it.

'OK, cool, well, I'll be in my room, when you're ready.'

'OK, be there soon. Sorry. Again.'

'I can help, if you like? Maybe you might finish quicker if I do. What are you doing anyway?' he said, wandering into the room and gazing at the chaos.

'Sorry, Cal, it's kind of a one-man job. I'll be with you soon though. Promise.'

But Callum didn't take the hint. In fact, Callum didn't even appear to have heard. Something had distracted him. He'd come to hover behind Adam's shoulder, and he was staring at the open folder of videos on the computer screen.

Adam knew Callum was staring at one file in particular – one of their favourite videos of Dad. They'd watched it over and over again – 'First Day of Secondary School'. Mum had filmed it over a year ago, as Adam had been heading out of the door for day one at his new school and Dad was offloading non-stop advice.

Adam knew that Callum had memorised every word. 'Don't forget,' Dad began, 'your classmates will be feeling just as nervous as you, so be as friendly as you can. To *everyone*. Look out for them, the same way you'd like someone to look out for you. And just enjoy it, OK? You're going to love it! Mostly. Not all of it. Some of it'll suck.' And then he finished it all off with a mega Dad-hug and his favourite phrase – 'Love you *one million*.'

It was just a cheesy line that Dad had stolen from a superhero film, but Adam knew how much Callum missed Dad saying it to them.

He could tell that Callum was about to ask if he could watch the video of Dad again, but Adam did not have time for that.

'Hey! Callum! Earth to Callum! I'll come and get you as soon as I'm done, OK? But right now I need some space.'

'OK. Sorry. How long? Roughly?'

'Ten minutes,' Adam replied distractedly. 'Fifteen tops.'

'OK. Thanks, Adam.'

So Callum quietly backed out of the room, and Adam continued his frantic preparations while quietly feeling bad that next year, when Callum would be starting secondary school, he would never get to hear Dad's advice for himself.

Twenty minutes later, Callum's oversized head peeked back in through the doorway.

'Nearly done?'

'Two minutes. I promise!'

Ten minutes after that.

'Ready yet?'

'Allllll … most. Sorry, bud. Not long.'

Twenty-three minutes after that, Adam's forehead was resting on his desk, with his bulging backpack next to him, when his bedroom door quietly squeaked open one last time.

'Adam, it's been aaaaages …' Callum stopped there as Adam interrupted him with a deafening snore.

Callum's face dropped.

'OK. Never mind,' he whispered. 'Night, Adam. Can't wait to find out what you've been planning. Knowing you, it's going to be the coolest thing ever.'

And out he went, leaving Adam to sleep at his desk alongside his backpack, which was overflowing with the strangest array of odds and ends – a reel of Dad's old fishing wire, a pair of scissors, some gaffer tape, a big tub of slime and even Adam's radio-controlled car that he hadn't played with in

years. But weirdest of all was the purple papier-mâché octopus that Adam had made the previous summer, and which had been hanging from the ceiling of the school's art room until earlier that day …

Callum had got one thing right – it really was going to be the coolest thing ever.

Bloomsbury Publishing, London, Oxford,
New York, New Delhi and Sydney

First published in Great Britain in 2022
by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP

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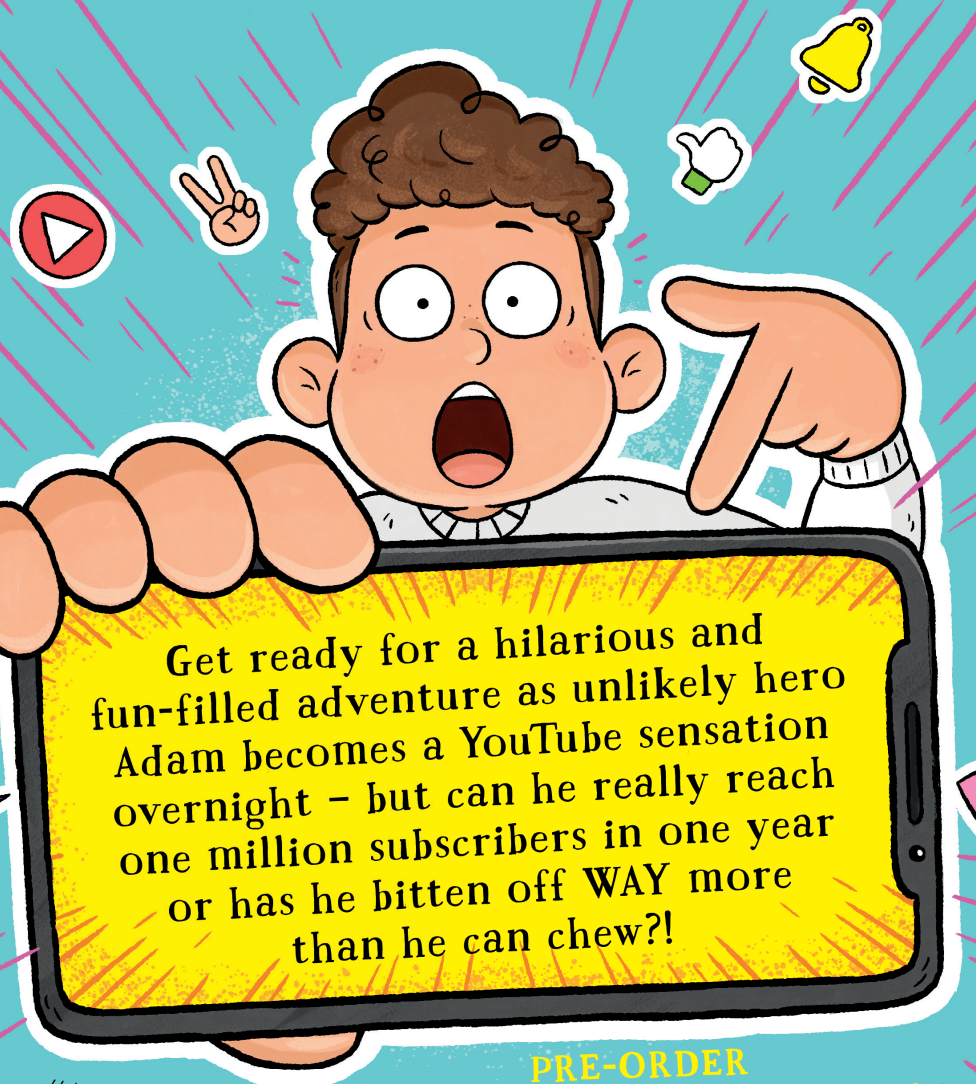
ISBN 978-1-5266-5565-3

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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Get ready for a hilarious and fun-filled adventure as unlikely hero Adam becomes a YouTube sensation overnight – but can he really reach one million subscribers in one year or has he bitten off WAY more than he can chew?!

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