

KYAN GREEN

AND THE INFINITY RACERS



COLM FIELD

Illustrated by DAVID WILKERSON

BLOOMSBURY

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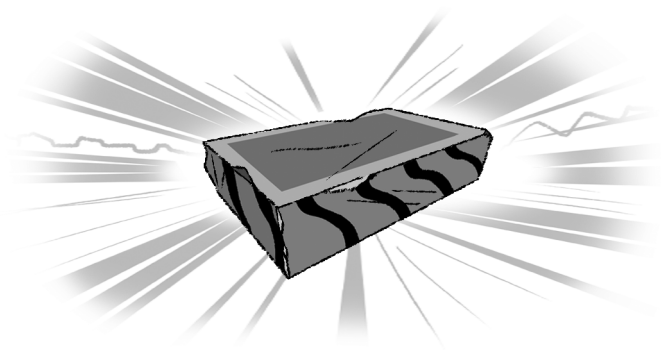
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We found the Infinite Race on the first day of the summer holidays, when we were helping my dad plug leaks in the roof.

Well, I say *we* found – my sister Celestine swears she saw it first. But all she did was point at an old box, which my grandma would say is like finding a mouldy sandwich in your room and saying you invented penicillin. And I say *we* were helping, but while *I* had the vital job of holding the second torch to make sure Dad didn't put his foot through the ceiling, Celestine had been told to stay on the floor below us and 'foot the ladder', which if you ask me is one of those jobs you ask a little kid to do so they feel *involved*. Like drawing a smiley picture of the sun, or

seeing if they can be quiet for ten whole minutes.

Anyway, so Dad was stomping around the loft, grunting, grumbling and spraying more foam than a fire extinguisher. I was sat in the hatch, legs resting on the ladder, aiming the torch at him and thinking about how my best friend Luke was probably playing on some shiny new console while I was having to 'earn' half an hour on my tired old tablet. And then, suddenly, Celestine pointed up past me, and said, 'What's that, Ky?'

(Just to be clear: if I say that Tines said, 'What's that, Ky?' what she *actually* said was, 'What's that, Ky? Kyan, what's that? Let me see, Kyan. Kyan? Kyan. Ky? What's that? Ky, what's . . . ?')

I looked nervously around the dark, cobwebby loft. There were at least fifty bags and boxes, all shapes and sizes, all covered in dust. Mum says everyone who rented this flat before us left things here, but our landlord Mr Stringer won't let us throw them out. The first time I came up here, I loved the treasure I found. *A globe! Trading cards that nobody's ever heard of!* But then I found this weird home-made Princess Elsa doll that gave me nightmares for weeks.

'Actually, Tines,' I said importantly, trying to ignore Elsa's freakily human hair sticking out of a black bag by the

crumbling brick wall, ‘my job is quite important you know, and . . .’

And then I caught a glimpse of the box Celestine was pointing at, sticking out of a bag that was just behind me. On the side of it was a picture of something that makes every kid’s heart soar. It was a racetrack.

OK, so maybe a hundred years ago it would’ve made every kid’s heart soar. Oranges were big news back then, according to school, so a racetrack would’ve been the real deal. Still, I had nothing better to do, so I shone the torch at it.

‘Where’s the light gone?’ Dad yelled, and there was a thud. He said a word we weren’t supposed to say, and I shone the torch back on him. There was dirt on his face and he was rubbing his head.

‘You swore,’ I said.

‘No I didn’t,’ he replied. ‘And you weren’t shining the torch anyway.’ We looked at each other for a moment, stuck in a shotgun stand-off nobody could win. Then Dad disappeared, *pfft-pfft-pffting* with his expanding foam to the other end of the loft. Still sitting, I fixed the torch under my leg so that it stayed pointed at him, turned around, and hefted the racetrack over my shoulder, on to my lap.

It was in an old box, older than the board games we get from the charity shop where the kids on the cover are dressed like Peter Rabbit. This box was brown cardboard, and somebody had *drawn* the racetrack on it. It wasn't scrawled on though – not all messily, like if I'd done it. This road was a thick, black tarmac that looked solid and neat until I looked closer, and saw it was in fact made up of hundreds – no, *thousands* – of these tiny squiggly shapes, all clustered tightly together. The road carried on along the base of the box and up the sides.

I turned the box over, and saw that travelling along this road were all kinds of cars, lorries, even helicopters. They raced up and around the lid of the box, then as the racetrack continued around the other side, they dissolved into tiny squiggly shapes once again, above letters printed out like flames . . .

'*The Infinite Race*,' I read. 'Sounds lame.' But still, I balanced the box on the edge of the hatch and lifted the lid.

Beneath the instruction sheet was a stack of black racing track pieces, not that different from Scalextric except that they were made of metal instead of plastic. I lifted out the top piece, and saw that it had a chequerboard at one end, like the finish line for a race. At the other end,

stuck to it, was a metal racecar. It looked old; *old-old*, the kind of car there'd only be black-and-white videos of.

'C'mon, let me seeeeeee!' Celestine whined from the bottom of the ladder, and I was just about to let her. I really was. But then Dad called out, and I told her to wait by pointing at her the way I saw a bus driver do to Mum once, just before she shouted at him.

'You'll have to shine the torch down here, Ky,' said Dad. 'The hubcap transformer is sticking to the elephant's trunk and I have to regenerate.'

Actually, he *didn't* say that, but that's the kind of nonsense I hear when Dad tells me to do anything to help him fix up the flat. So I put the piece of track back in the box, stood up, and shone the torch in his general direction.

'Not there, the bacon-foil relay! George Foreman setting!'

I moved the torch again, and Dad gave a thumbs up. I sat back down, turned back . . . and nearly fell through the hatch.

Celestine wasn't footing the ladder.

Celestine was at the top of the ladder.

'Whaddya doing? Get out of my face!' I whispered, flinching back.

‘I wanna l-o-o-k,’ Celestine whined. All of a sudden she snatched at the track piece I was holding, and we had a mini tug-of-war right on that ladder, me clinging to the chequerboard end, Celestine gripping the end with the car on it.

‘Not yet! Go back down, Dad’ll go mad! Stop! Celestine, STOP!’

‘I’d best not hear you two fighting!’ Dad warned from the dark. I froze. Celestine ducked down.

‘Er, no, Dad,’ I said.

‘The same goes for later. I don’t want to hear about trouble from your grandma, and I *really* don’t want any trouble if you come back before Mr Stringer’s visit.’

‘Yes, Dad!’ we both said.

‘Although to be honest, I really *don’t* want you back here till he’s gone,’ Dad added. ‘That’s why your grandma’s taking you to the park. You know what he’s like about kids.’

‘And humans,’ I added. I don’t like the way Mum and Dad sound nervous when they talk about Mr Stringer, especially when he’s so rude to them.

‘Did you really nearly call him Mr Stringybum last time, Dad?’ Celestine said.

Dad cackled.

‘Yeah, don’t go putting that in my head.’

Dad went off spraying foam again. After a moment, Celestine climbed back up, and we kept fighting more quietly, like he'd asked.

'It's mine!'

'Get down before—'

‘I saw it first!’

‘You’ll drop it.’

‘I won’t drop it!’

'You'll drop it, now get *off*—'

CRACK.

It happened as soon as Celestine grabbed the metal car. I felt a shock of electricity up my arms, and let go. There was this moment of pure terror as I saw Celestine's face widen in surprise and thought *No no NO, she's going to fall!* But she didn't, not yet. I looked up at her, and saw to my amazement that her thick cornrows were standing up on end, uncurling before my eyes, and just as everything seemed to *sloooooooooow doooooowwwwww*, I smelt it.

'Eeeeeeeeeuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuwwwwwwwww,' I said.
 'Wwwhaaaaaat's thaaaaaat ponning?'

'*Smelllllllt iiiit, dealllllllllllt iiiit,*' Celestine began to say back, but then she gasped, and looked past me. As she did, I heard the roar of a crowd, an impossible crowd standing in an impossible breeze that lifted the hairs on my arms,

beneath the warmth of a sun I could feel but not see,
and . . .

‘*Loooooook—*’ Celestine began to shout. I heard the *vvoomVoomVOOM!* of a powerful engine right behind me, and Celestine *did* start to fall back, and without another thought I grabbed out at her, knocking the car from her hand . . .

‘OUT!’ Celestine finished, and time returned. There was the clatter of the metal racecar tumbling down the ladder, slapping the floor and rolling away out of sight.



Then there was silence. I sat there, holding on to Celestine's T-shirt, breathing hard. The breeze faded, and her hair fell back down, untied, messy.

'Did you *see* that?' Celestine squeaked. I shook my head. I'd heard it though. A crowd, a car. I'd felt it too. A sun, a breeze. And I'd smelt it, a smell that I could place now. It was burning rubber, the smell our car made for a while last year.

It was the smell of a race. An impossible race. I was about to say *how* impossible it had to be when I saw Dad *stomp-stomp* out of the dark, a thunderous expression on his face.

'KYAN, WHY DID YOU LET CELESTINE UP THE LADD-ARGH!'

CRUNCH.

That was the sound of my dad's foot going through the ceiling.