

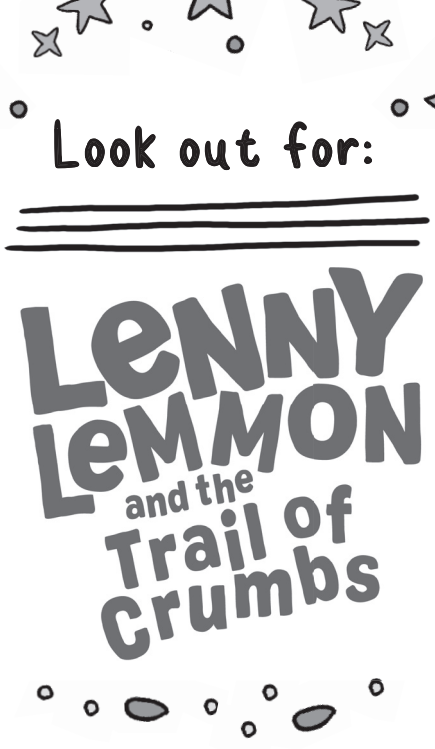
Lenny Lemmon and the Invincible Rat

BEN DAVIS

illustrated by
JAMES LANCETT

nosy crow

Look out for:



FOR ELODIE
B. D.

TO MY AMAZING WIFE MARTY
AND OUR FUTURE KIDDO WHO
WE ARE YET TO MEET.
J. L.

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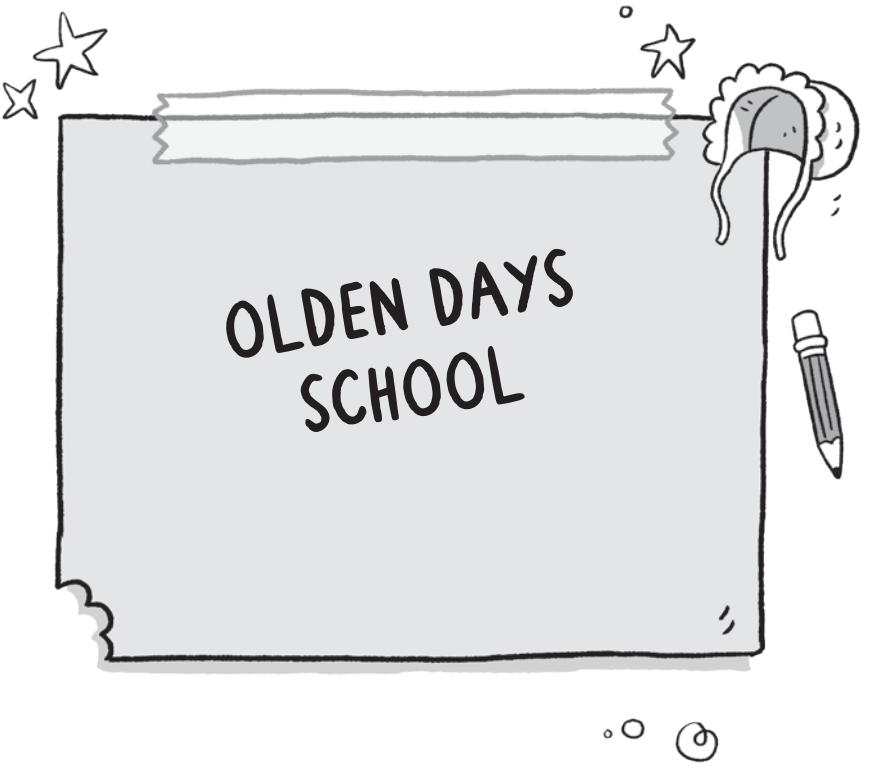
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"I wish you'd tell me what's in that box," says my best friend, Sam.

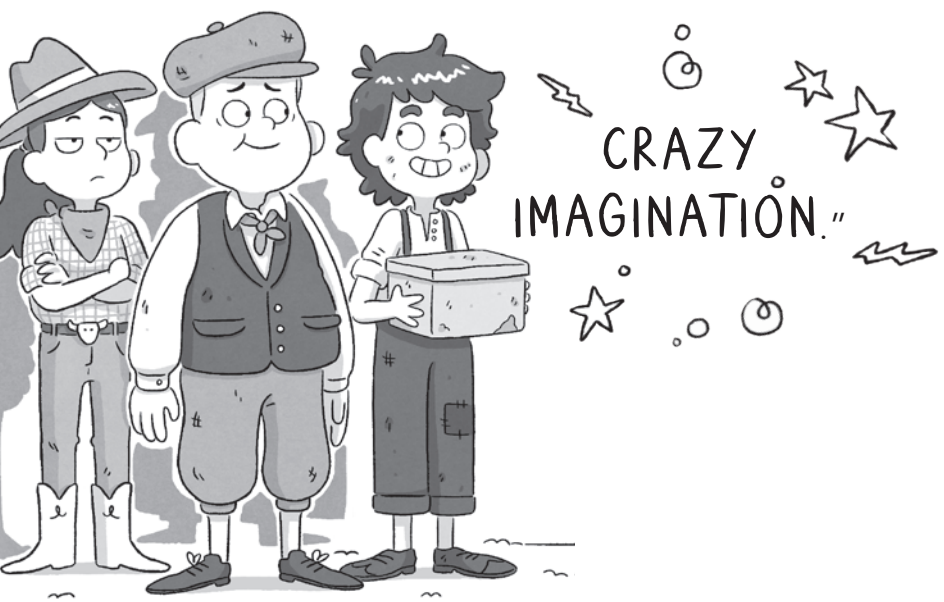
We're standing in the playground waiting for Ms Bottley to let us in. That's how we roll now we're in Year Five. None of that waiting-with-Mum nonsense any more.

They drop us off at the gate and that's that. It's a great system.

"Not a chance," I say, gripping it tight. "It's a surprise."

Sam stands back a little and fidgets with his fingers. He always does that when he's nervous. "But I thought I heard something moving in there," he says.

I tut and shake my head. "You and your



Sam is wearing a blue cloth cap, with a grey waistcoat buttoned all the way up to his neck. He doesn't always dress like that. The school asked us to come dressed up as kids from history. We're doing a whole day in



That means old-fashioned lessons, no modern technology and the teachers act like teachers from hundreds of years ago. They reckon it's a good way to get us to learn about history or something, but that's

not the important bit. You see, this isn't just



this is



OK, maybe that's being a bit dramatic. It's more of a competition. But it is a very important competition. The Head, Mr Greenford, announced that whichever Year Five class does best at Olden Days School will win a **PRIZE**.

I glance across the playground at class 5A. They're lined up **PERFECTLY**, in total silence. Well, they would be. After all, they're



They always get PERFECT grades, they always show PERFECT behaviour, and at the Christmas assembly they all sing like PERFECT angels. It's enough to make me want to throw up, to be PERFECTLY honest.



I can tell by the way they look down their noses at us in class 5B that they think they will TROUNCE us in this

OLDEN DAYS

competition, just like they TROUNCE us in sports, spelling, singing and everything else in the world. Well, not if I have anything to do with it. You see, I guarantee that no one else has brought in what I have. When Mr Greenford sees it, he will award us FIRST PRIZE straight away. To be honest, I don't know what the PRIZE is, but the PRIZE isn't

important. The main thing is that we beat 5A for the first time ever.

5A: 275

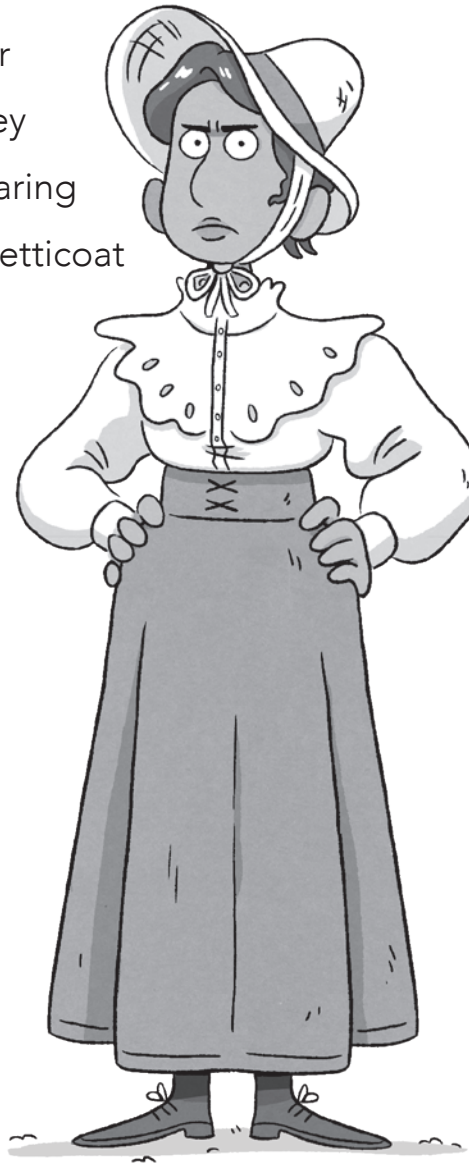
5B: 1!

"You think my uniform is OK?" says Sam, running a hand down his waistcoat. "I've gone for authentic Victorian."

I would give him one of my trademark reassuring shoulder slaps, but I need both hands for the box. "Sam, you look straight out of *Mary Poppins*."

Sam gasps and clamps his hands over his chest like he's been shot. "But *Mary Poppins* is set in the Edwardian period!"

The classroom door opens and Ms Bottley stands there. She's wearing a white bonnet and petticoat and her face is DEAD SERIOUS and STRICT, even though she's not normally like that. This must be what teachers were like in the OLDEN DAYS.



"5A CAN LINE UP IN AN ORDERLY FASHION, SO WHY CAN'T YOU? DO IT NOW!" she yells so loud it makes Kieran Roscoe squeak like a startled hamster. "IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER."

Now, hang on a second. No one seems to know whether she means alphabetical by first name or second name. My name is Lenny Lemmon so I'm in the middle no matter what, but Zoe Andrews is zipping up and down like



"BY YOUR SURNAMES!" Ms Bottley booms.

WOW. Why were teachers so LOUD in the



I stick behind Amelia Kelly and eventually we sort ourselves out. I see Sam near the head of the queue, standing up so straight he looks like he's swallowed a rake.

Amelia, who is holding a tub of what looks to be sick, turns round and looks at my box. "What's in there?" she asks, all snooty like normal.



"None of your beeswax," I say, pulling it closer. "What's in yours?"

"It's gruel, like orphans used to eat. I made it myself," she says, then sticks her tongue out.

"KELLY! FACE THE FRONT!" Ms Bottley yells.

I can't help but snigger to myself. Amelia never normally gets told off. Maybe the

OLDEN DAYS

won't be so bad after all.

"You may now enter the classroom and



stand behind your desks," says Ms Bottley. "IN SILENCE!"

Inside, everything is different. For one thing, the tables are all gone. I'm usually on Red table, with Sam, Hugo, Parvati and Lydia. Now there are only little desks that seat two, and there are name tags on each one and OH GREAT, I HAVE TO SIT NEXT TO AMELIA.

"Oh no," she says.

I blow her a silent raspberry. I'm not exactly skipping for joy about it either.

It's only then I notice a WEIRD thing by Ms Bottley's desk. It's a huge black square on



a wooden frame. At the top of it, in white writing, it says "FRIDAY".

"Hey, miss, what's that?" I ask.



Ms Bottley shouts. "CHILDREN SHOULD BE SEEN AND NOT HEARD!"

That sounds WEIRD. I'd rather it be the other way round. Like, being invisible but still having a LOUD voice. I'd go up behind my brother while he's trying to do his stupid skateboard tricks and yell "BRANDON IS A STINKFACE" so loud he falls off.

Everyone is standing behind their chairs rather than just sitting down. Why? Why did



people think up all these WACKY rules? It would have been bad enough living in a time with no Xbox without all this added stress.

"If you must know," says Ms Bottley, "this is a blackboard."

Makes sense. It's a board and it's black. It looks old too. Hey, if it helps us win the PRIZE, I'm fine with it.

"How can you not know that?" Amelia whispers at me through the side of her mouth. "You're so stupid."

Before I can reply, Ms Bottley BARKS at us to sit down. She's normally really nice, so this is WEIRD.

She picks up a tiny white stick and starts writing on the blackboard with it. It makes a

HORRIBLE SQUEAKING NOISE

that makes my teeth itch.

Amelia frowns at my box, which I've carefully placed on the table. "That stinks," she whispers.

"So do you," I reply.

She kicks me under the table and I cry out.

Ms Bottley spins round. "WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?"

"Amelia kicked me!" I say.



"Did not!" she shoots back. The liar.

"One more



from either of you and I will send you **BOTH** to the Headmaster's office," says Ms Bottley.

That's not a big deal to me. I'm always in there. And not because I'm naughty or anything. I'm always trying to do

THE RIGHT THING.

But

THE RIGHT THING

isn't always

THE RIGHT THING,

it turns out. Mum says it's because I'm

UNIQUE.

I look over at Amelia. She's gone all **PALE.** If she got sent to Mr Greenford's office,

it would be a HUGE DISGRACE. Like the King being handcuffed and bundled off to jail.

"Now," Ms Bottley goes on, "I see you have all brought in some historical items. Bennett has a full uniform. Very good."

Sam beams with pride. Or relief, probably.

"Kelly has brought in a pot of gruel." She points to a table at the back of the room where Amelia's tub of sick sits stewing. I think I'll be at the back of the queue for that, thanks very much.

"And I see Sharma has brought a book: *Wuthering Heights*. Good."



Wuthering Heights is a book? I thought it was this rubbish old song Mum always sings when she's in the car with the windows down. She sounds like a cat out in the rain, desperate to be let into the house.

Ms Bottley goes all around the class, complimenting everyone on their



stuff, but I see her eyes falling on my box every now and then. I bet she's saving it for last because she knows I've brought something really special. Something 5A

could only DREAM of. Plus, Amelia keeps staring at it and scooching away from me. She's such a snob.

"OK, Lemmon," Ms Bottley finally says. "What have you brought?"

I grin at her. I'm not sure if grinning had been invented in the

OLDEN DAYS

because everyone always looks dead miserable in OLDEN paintings and photos, but I decide to take my chances. "I'm glad you asked, Ms Bottley. Because I've brought

in something

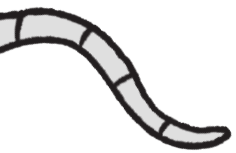
VERY SPECIAL INDEED.

Something that is going to win us the PRIZE, no problem."

I see Sam staring at me from the other side of the room. He looks worried. Then again, he always looks worried.

"Stop shilly-shallying and show us then," says Ms Bottley.

Here we go. I open the flaps of the box, grip the metal handle and pull out the cage, placing it carefully down on the table. Amelia



SHRIEKS and runs across the room to the sink where we swill our paintbrushes.

"This is Ratty!" I say, pointing.

Inside the cage, the rat sits quietly, looking out at Ms Bottley. He seems to have calmed down a little since earlier on. I'm glad, because he's

BIG

and

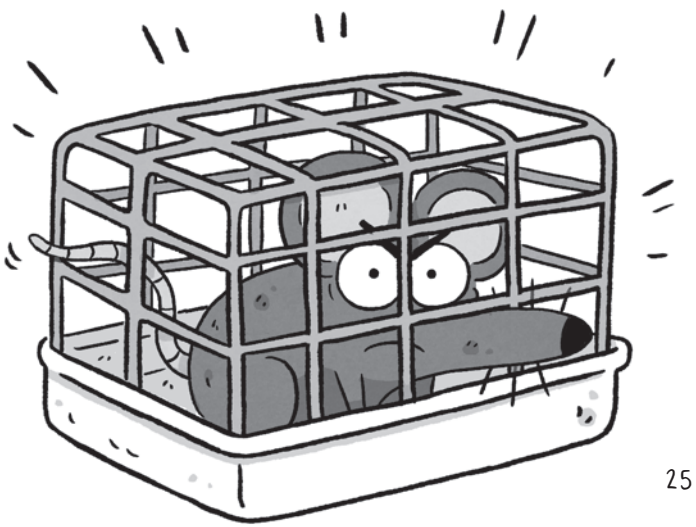
SURPRISINGLY STRONG.

Ms Bottley takes a step closer. "Is that a REAL RAT?"

"Yeah!" I say. "I remembered that last week you told us there were loads of rats around in the

OLDEN DAYS,

so I thought this would be PERFECT!"



Ms Bottley looks like she's forgotten she's supposed to be an old-fashioned teacher as she peers through the bars at Ratty, who stands up on his hind legs and stares back at her.

"OK, Lenny. Well, it's certainly … different. Go and put it on the drawers over there," she says.

"But Parvati is allowed to keep her book!" I protest.

"Yes, but Parvati's book isn't scaring the



out of Amelia," Ms Bottley says back.

"It might," says Parvati. "There's a



in it."

"Just…" Ms Bottley stands up straight and rubs her forehead "Be quiet and put the cage on the drawers."

I exchange a look with Ratty, a bit like, "I'm sorry, mate," and take the cage over to the drawers. I put him in front of the books display board so at least he's got something to read.



When I get back to my seat, Sam is still staring at me, but Ms Bottley YELLS at everyone to face the front and his head whips round so fast, he looks like he's been attacked by an invisible ninja.

Everything's really boring after that, mainly Ms Bottley writing a load of nonsense on the board, which we copy down into our books. And Amelia STILL shields her work from me. What could I possibly be copying from her? And don't get me started about the sound chalk makes. It's





and makes my skin go ALL SHIVERY.

Ugh. How did



kids stand for this? Super-long days of boring school, before going home to a cold house with no TV and catching some horrible disease of the lungs and having to live in a metal tube for the rest of your life? No thanks.

"Now, you will be drawing geometric shapes," Ms Bottley booms. "You may go to your drawers if you need equipment."



Amelia puts her hand up. "What is it, Kelly?" says Ms Bottley.

"My drawer is next to the rat, miss."

Ms Bottley sighs wearily. "Lemmon, go and move the rat off the drawers so Kelly can fetch her things."

Normally, I'd be annoyed at having to get up and do stuff, but I want to check up on Ratty, so I'm happy to make the five-step journey.

I pick up the cage. Huh. This might be a problem.

"Ms Bottley," I call out.

"WHAT HAVE I TOLD YOU, LEMMON?





DO NOT SPEAK WITHOUT RAISING YOUR HAND!" she yells back.

I raise my hand.

"What is it, Lemmon?"

"RATTY'S ESCAPED."

