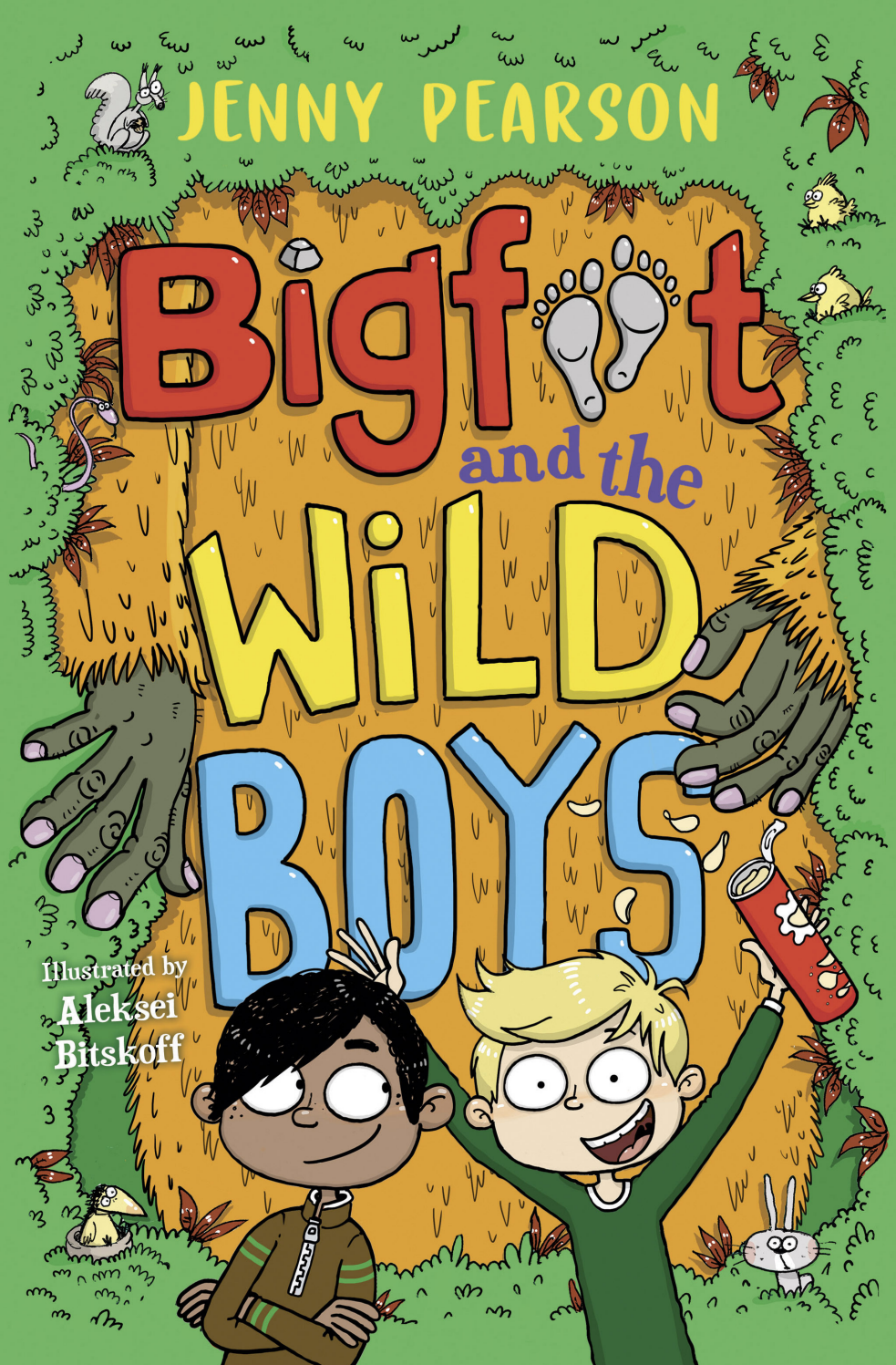

JENNY PEARSON
Bigfoot
and the
WILD
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Illustrated by
Aleksei
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Barrington Stoke

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Penelope and Oliver West

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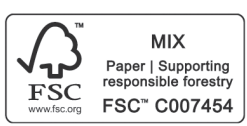
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CHAPTER 1





A Whole Lot of Average

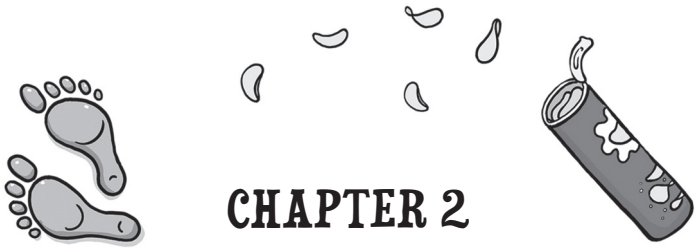
The kids at school called me Average Joe. I hated it because of how much it suited me. My name is Joe, and there is no denying it – I was average. I was middle of the class in most subjects. OK at sport and music and art. I just didn't stand out at anything. Nobody noticed me. I suppose I never did anything that was worth taking notice of.

Everyone else seemed to have their thing. Or things – if you were my best mate, Tiago. He's amazing at languages. He can speak Spanish and Portuguese and a bit of Italian.

He's also the A-team goalie. Tiago may not be that tall, but his arm span is immense. Mr Sniper, our PE teacher, gave him the nickname "The Albatross". That's a bird with a wingspan of three metres!

So, yeah, Tiago is awesome. Yes, he's super talented, but he isn't a big-head about it. He's always told me that I'm great as I am. He says I'm way above average when it comes to being a best mate. But I just really wanted to be good at something. I wanted to find my thing. I wanted to start secondary school a new person. Someone that people noticed. I just wasn't sure how I would do it. But then the universe spoke to me. Twice. And I knew what I had to do.

When the universe speaks, I reckon you should listen to it.



CHAPTER 2

The Universe Speaks

It was day three of the summer holidays. Tiago and I were lying on his bed watching YouTube. We were in a food coma. We'd eaten an extra-large stuffed-crust pizza, a side of cheesy garlic bread, a bucket of chicken wings, a bag of popcorn and a tub of chocolate-brownie ice cream.

We had started off watching gaming videos but somehow ended up watching something called Human Hungry Hippos. This involved people lying on skateboards and being dragged about as they collected balls in washing baskets.

It looked quite fun. We decided we'd try it when our stomachs weren't in danger of exploding.

Then we'd watched a video about actual hippos. I had no idea they were so savage! Or that they could run at thirty miles per hour! Or that their jaws can open up to over a metre wide!

It was during the next video we watched that the universe spoke to me for the first time. The video followed this guy – Wildman Mike.

And. I. Was. Transfixed.

Wildman Mike is an outdoor adventurer. He lives off grid, out in the wilderness. I don't know which wilderness exactly, but it looked very wild. There were snakes and massive spiders and everything!

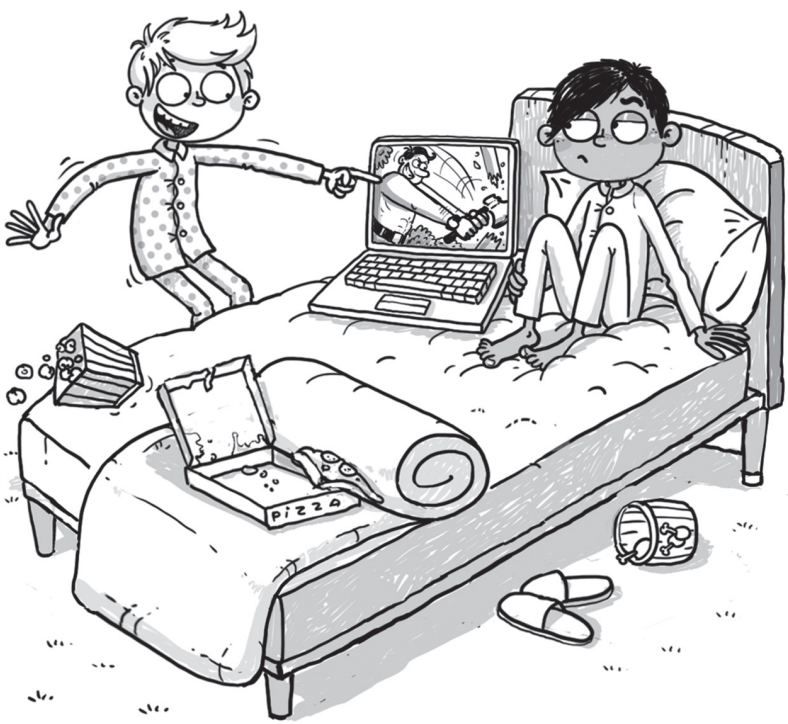
Mike had this huge axe to chop down trees. He set traps to catch animals for food. He had these huge bulging arms and big sturdy legs

and could start fires with his eyes! OK, that last bit was an exaggeration. Mike used flint and steel to light fires. But still. He was amazing!

There was nothing average about him.

I jumped up and pressed pause. "That's it, Tiago!" I said. "The universe has spoken!"

Tiago raised an eyebrow. "It has?"



"Yes! Him! That's who I am going to be!"

Tiago pointed at the screen. "You're going to be a sweaty forty-year-old dude who doesn't own a shirt?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I'm going to be an adventurer!"

Tiago looked unsure. "Joe, mate. You cried when you got lost at the soft-play place."

I chucked a piece of popcorn at him. "I was seven," I replied. "And I didn't get lost. I knew exactly where I was. Everybody forgot about me! I was stuck in the ball pit for a whole hour!"

"True, but that was because you didn't have the upper-body strength to pull yourself up the rope ladder."

"I was *seven*!" I repeated. "And nobody remembered I was even there! And do you know *why* nobody remembered I was there?"

"I think it was because a lot of other stuff was going down," Tiago said. "Amelie threw up on the slide. Justin's mum set off the fire alarm with those sparkler candles. Si couldn't remember where he put his shoes. Milo's mum was freaking out because she thought that she'd smelled peanuts and that Milo would die from an allergic reaction." Tiago paused for a moment and ran his hand through his hair. "Sheesh, that was one intense birthday party."

"No! It wasn't because of *any* of those things," I said. "It was because I am so forgettable!"

"What are you talking about? You're not forgettable ..." Tiago trailed off. I could see he was trying to stop himself grinning. "Sorry, what's your name again?"

I knew it was a joke, but it also felt too true. "My name's Average Joe!" I said, and flopped down next to him. "I *am* forgettable! No one notices me!"

Tiago looked at me out of the corner of his eye. "I'm noticing you wailing like a baby right now."

"I'm speaking the truth! What about our Year Six Leavers photo?"

"That was just your bladder's bad timing," Tiago said.

"But Mrs Cartell knew I'd gone for a wee," I said. "No one noticed that I wasn't back for the photo, so now I'm not even in it! There is no record of me ever being in Year Six! Well, I won't be forgotten about again. At secondary school, I'm going to be known for being somebody. People are going to notice when I'm not around. I'm going to be an adventurer! I'm going to be a Wildman!"