Books by Tom Mitchell

HOW TO ROB A BANK

THAT TIME I GOT KIDNAPPED

ESCAPE FROM CAMP BORING

WHEN THINGS WENT WILD

HOW TO STOP THE END OF THE WORLD

THE FIRST KID IN SPACE

TOM MITCHELL

THE FIRST KID IN SPACE



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To anyone who's ever lied about reading my books.
(Not that you'll see this.)

PART ONE

SELECTED EXTRACTS FROM FRANKLIN WILSON'S YEAR 7 SCHOOL REPORT, SUMMER TERM 2024

ART
MS HIRE
B2
Franklin shows some skill in the subject, but should work at controlling his pencil technique. Thankfully, we were able to catch the kiln fire in time and the school's insurance will cover the damage to the Art rooms.

CHEMISTRY
MRS JOHNSON
C2
I enjoy teaching Franklin despite Chemistry not being a subject he finds easy, unless it involves creating explosions – accidentally, he assures me.

DT
MR BRIDGEMAN, ON BEHALF OF MR TWEEDY
C3
Mr Tweedy is doing well and recovering from the accident. I'm sure we've all learnt from what happened – in particular, paying attention to instructions and ensuring focus when electric saws are involved.

PE
MRS WHITSON
D2
There comes a time in every PE teacher's career when they must realise that not all students are athletically able. I thank Franklin for reminding me of this weekly.



THE FIRST DAY

Franklin's summer holidays began with the following words:

'Get up, you lazy melon, there's shopping to be done.'

Spoken by his mother, the instruction came with a great sweeping-open of his faded *Hey Duggee* bedroom curtains.

What Franklin's mum didn't know was that he was already up, woken an hour earlier by the twin evils of the flushing toilet (his bedroom was next to the house's tiny bathroom) and dawn sunlight passing through the paper-thin curtains with the ease of machine-gun bullets through cobwebs.

Unusually, Franklin's mum's desire to shop had a specific target. There was to be no meandering through

charity shops today. At least, not before getting to Poundwreckers 'early doors', because it was vital to beat the crowds on the launch day of their 'So mad we should speak to a therapist 50% off all toiletries!' sale.

You might wonder why Franklin's mum needed to take him. He was twelve – old enough, Siri said, to be left at home. According to Mum, however, he couldn't be trusted. And as you'll find out, she was so very correct.

'Imagine,' said Mum on the bus. 'We could stock up and not have to worry about shower gel or toothpaste for the rest of the year. What a life.'

Franklin couldn't imagine his mum worrying about shower gel. In fact, he couldn't imagine her worrying about much at all. She lived through each day like a butterfly, fluttering gracefully from problem to problem, never staying too long. Did butterflies worry? Franklin wasn't sure. But they *were* elegant and beautiful. Like her.

The two of them got off the bus, and Franklin tripped over his laces – constantly undone, one of the universe's great mysteries – and would have fallen directly onto his face/the pavement if there hadn't been a postbox within grabbing distance.

'Can I get some Premier, Mum?' he asked.

Premier was the world's *premier* energy drink, one bottle guaranteed* to compensate for up to four hours' lost sleep. It was the invention (although she used the word 'discovery') of Franklin's/everybody's favourite YouTuber SparkleBunny.

Now, if you haven't heard of SparkleBunny, don't be fooled by the name. According to not only Franklin but everyone else, SparkleBunny was one of the most talented and informed YouTubers out there – you only needed to look at the size of her house to know this truth. She chatted about games mostly, but also 'lifehacks'. Franklin wasn't so sure about the lifehacks but never dared admit this. Like, she once said that washing your toothbrush in Premier would help fight tooth decay, and as much as he *wanted* that to be true, he knew it couldn't be. The rule of food and drink was that the nicer it tasted, the worse it was for your health.

Know this: in the last six weeks, approximately 85% of Franklin's daydreaming had been connected to Premier in some way.

Mum walked half a stride ahead, making directly for the local mall's gaping entrance. The building occupied the high street like a huge, crashed spaceship. There'd once been a church here.

'No,' she said over her shoulder. 'It's a con. By an American grifter.'

'Please,' said Franklin, who hadn't heard the word 'grifter' before. 'The competition.'

'No,' she said again. 'It does things to your kidneys. I saw it on Insta.'

What Mum didn't know was that Franklin would have quite happily traded an organ for the right bottle of Premier. The *winning* bottle.

She passed through the automatic doors that straightaway slid shut behind her with a self-satisfied *sss*.

It was as if the door sensor didn't register Franklin. And he didn't have time to stop. He collided with the glass with such a *thunk* that a nearby vaper gasped.

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* Not in the legal sense.



THE MALL

Rubbing his pulse-throbbing nose, Franklin entered a space that was brighter, but colder, than the summer morning outside.

You could well believe a church once stood here because the shopping centre retained an echoey stone-coolness. A cathedral of shops. Franklin had an urge to speak in whispers. And that smell! Halfway between coffee and bleach.

Mum was further ahead now, motoring away with swinging elbows towards Poundwreckers, determined that nothing would thwart her quest for toiletry bargains. No need of the touchscreen map for her – she once said that she knew this mall better than not only the back of her hand but its front too. And both

hands actually. And her arms – extending up to her elbows.

'F!'

A pack of kids stood outside a bubble tea café. But they drank no bubble tea. They held phones and chewed gum. And it was the tall girl with blonde hair and eyes that sparkled like a pit bull's diamanté collar that had called out. Her name was Maya.

Franklin stopped, even though he didn't want to, even though his mum was sailing off ahead into a sea of morning shoppers, even though he knew interacting with this group would surely end in bruised feelings and hurt egos.

(His, not theirs. Obviously.)

Maya pointed and said 'F!' again. This was sufficient for the group – two other girls, two boys, all popular – to momentarily shift their focus from their screens to whatever it was Maya wanted them to look at.

(Franklin.)

When they saw him, they laughed. Franklin raised a hand in greeting. Their laughter increased. And they continued laughing, even shaking their heads in disbelief. Franklin wasn't expecting a warm welcome but this seemed a bit much.

He looked down to what he was wearing: a white

anime T-shirt, jeans, white trainers. All fine. Were his flies open? Nope.

Maya spoke. Instantly, the laughter stopped.

'What are *you* doing here?' she asked.

'Vibing,' said Franklin.

One of the boys drank from a bottle of Premier. His name was Wes and Franklin thought that he was all right, comparatively, given how sneeringly mean the rest of Maya's people were.

'We're going to laser tag later,' Wes said, having finished off the drink with a self-satisfied sigh. 'Want to come?' The group struck up their laughter again, a pack of automatic hyenas. 'I'm joking, I'm joking,' said Wes at this reaction.

But Franklin knew that he *wasn't* joking. Franklin, like Wes, remembered that ninth birthday party – a day that lived in infamy. The momentous afternoon when Franklin had first played laser tag. And had defeated the rest of the guests in record time, shooting them up with the ease of a gnarly Western gunslinger. He'd won a soft toy tortoise, now lost. His skill was surprising, really, given how clumsy he was otherwise. Still, we've all got hidden powers.

'If you've finished, can I have your bottle, please?'

asked Franklin.

Wes looked to his Premier, then looked to Franklin.

'This?' he asked.

Franklin nodded.

'Don't bother with the contest,' said Wes. 'It's fixed. The winners will be American.'

'Imagine Franklin in space!' said Maya, laughing. 'I would *so* love to see that.'

Wes chucked the bottle. Not particularly hard, an underarm throw. It spun through the air and Franklin brought his hands together in an attempt to catch it. His palms clapped as the bottle sailed passed and smacked him in the centre of his forehead.

Maya's gang laughed so hard you'd think they'd self-combust.