

OLLIE SPARK

AND THE EXPLODING POPCORN MYSTERY

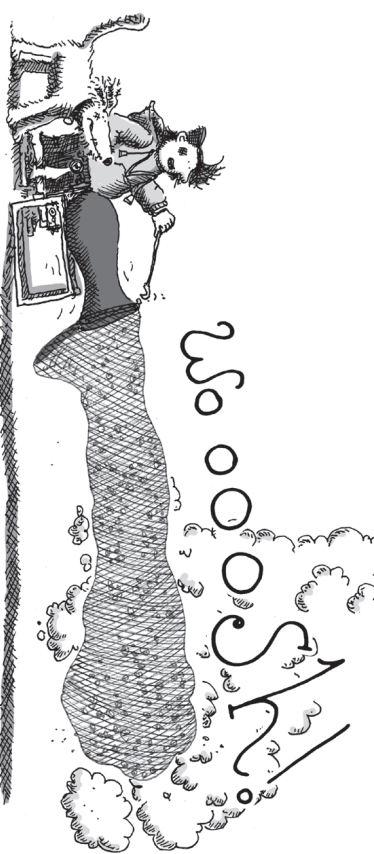
www.davidficklingbooks.com

Discover more fun with Ollie Spark in . . .



OLLIE SPARK

AND THE
EXPLODING POPCORN MYSTERY



GILLIAN CROSS
AND ALAN SNOW

db
FICKLING

David Fickling Books
31 Beaumont Street
Oxford OX1 2NP, UK

Ollie Spark and the Exploding Popcorn Mystery
is a
DAVID FICKLING BOOK

First published in Great Britain in 2023 by

David Fickling Books,
31 Beaumont Street,
Oxford, OX1 2NP

www.davidficklingbooks.com

Text © Gillian Cross, 2023

Illustrations © Alan Snow, 2023

978-1-78845-241-0

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

The right of Gillian Cross and Alan Snow to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Papers used by David Fickling Books are from well-managed forests and other responsible sources.



DAVID FICKLING BOOKS Reg. No. 8340307

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays, Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



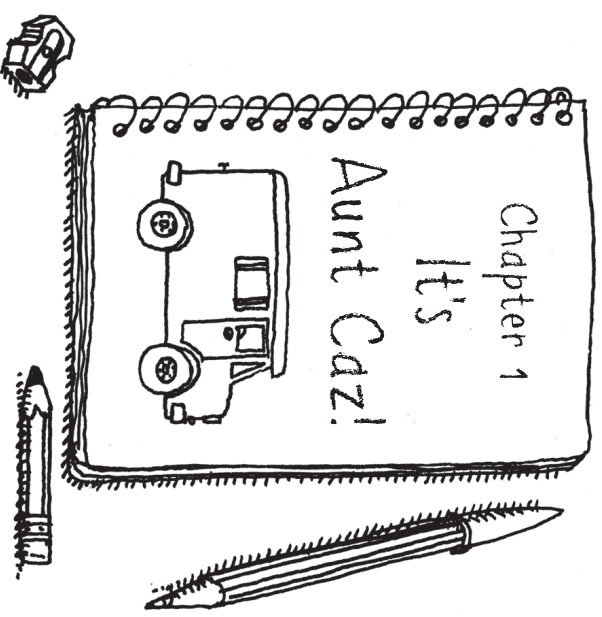
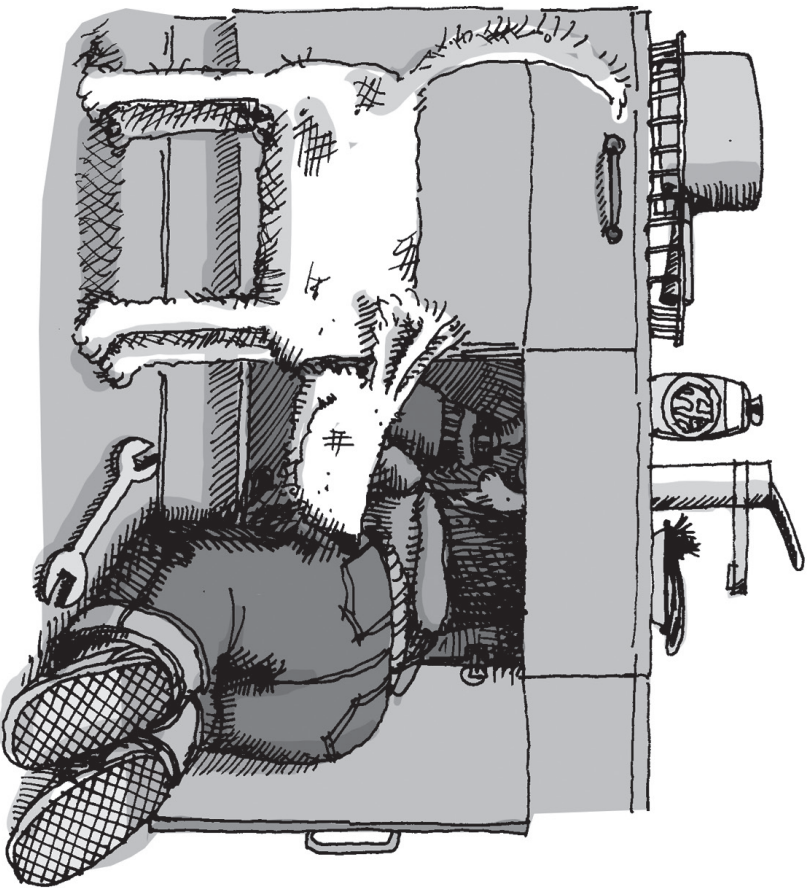
To Mirabella

G.C.



To Annie-May, Betsy, Sophia and Errol

A.S.



'Ollie!' All my little cousins were yelling at once.

'Look at this!'

Gasket started barking and nudging my leg. He could hear how excited they were.

'Wait a minute!' I yelled back. The kitchen sink was blocked, and I was underneath it, unscrewing the trap.

'No, Ollie! You've got to come *now!* AUNT CAZ IS ON TV!'

'What?!' I dropped the trap and shoved a bowl under the open pipe. Then Gasket and I raced into the living room.

Everyone else in the family was squashed in there, staring at the TV screen. It was filled with . . . Aunt Caz! She was beaming and holding up a gigantic golden trophy.



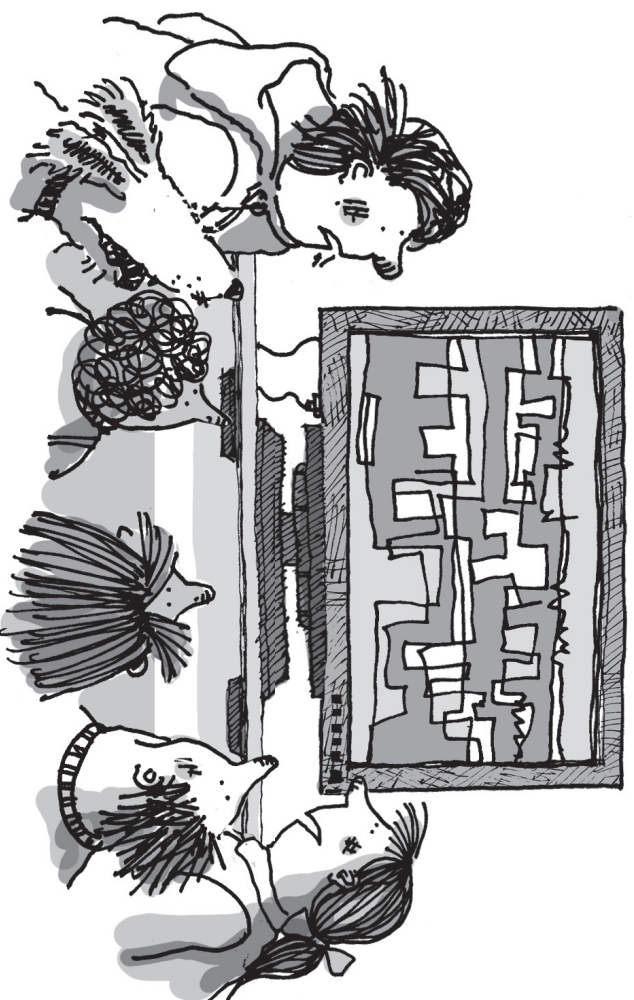
'I never *dreamt* I'd win!' she was saying. 'I haven't even told my family I was shortlisted!'

'She's won Best Spy Book of the Year!' whispered Aunt Dionne.

The camera switched to the interviewer. He was beaming too. 'We all love Beddington Potts!' he said. 'Everyone wants to know – what's his next adventure?'

Aunt Caz's eyes gleamed. 'I've got a really great idea! He's going to travel to –'

... *FJKE*!!!ORN^^*###WSNL%^^* ...



Oh no! The sound was going. The TV picture was breaking up.

‘Ollie! Fix it!’ everyone yelled.

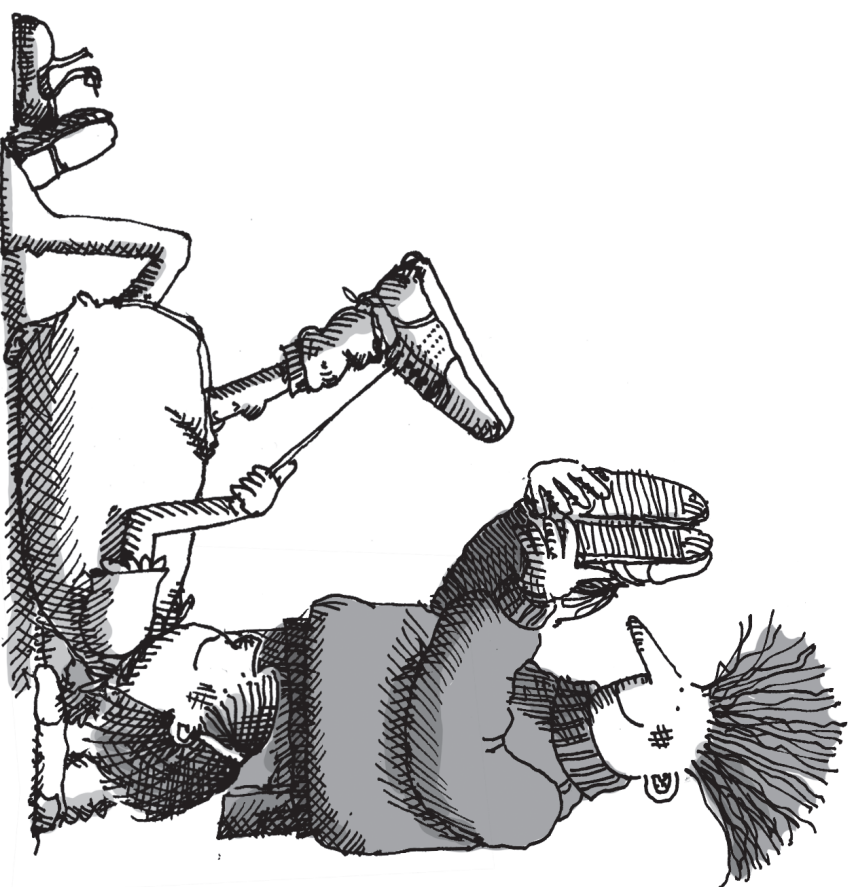
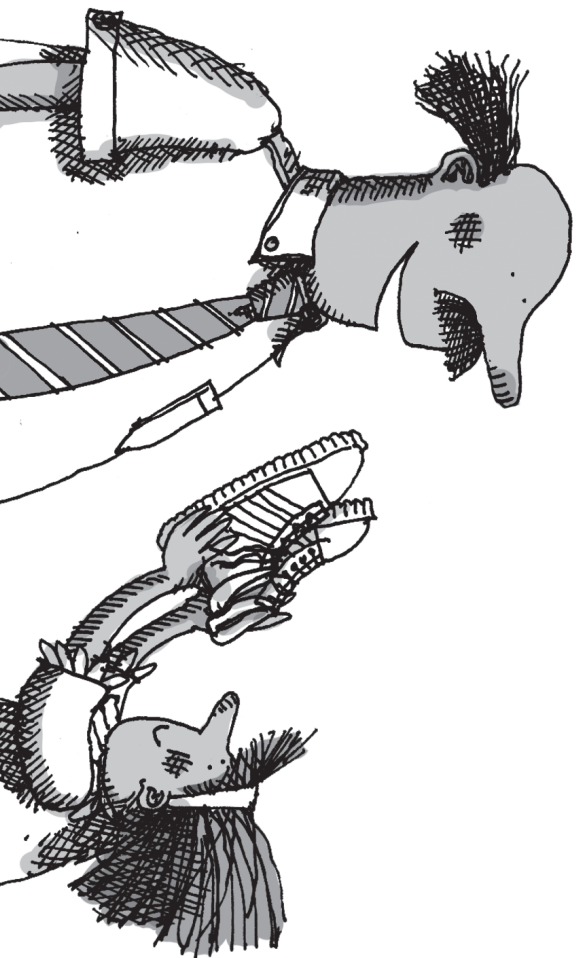
But before I could move, the screen went black. For a second, the room was totally silent. Then my littlest cousin, Arabella, started to wail.

‘It’s not FAIR! I want to see Aunt Caz! Ollie, make the picture come back!’

I shook my head. ‘Sorry. I think it’s a power cut.’

All the cousins started wailing. For a second, the noise was so loud I thought my eardrums would burst. Then Uncle Marek stood up and clapped his hands.

‘Get your trainers on! Quick!’ he said. ‘We’ll go down to the park and play football.’



‘YAY!’ The cousins stopped wailing and scrambled off to find their trainers.

Uncle Marek waved his hand at me. ‘You too, Ollie. You need some fun.’

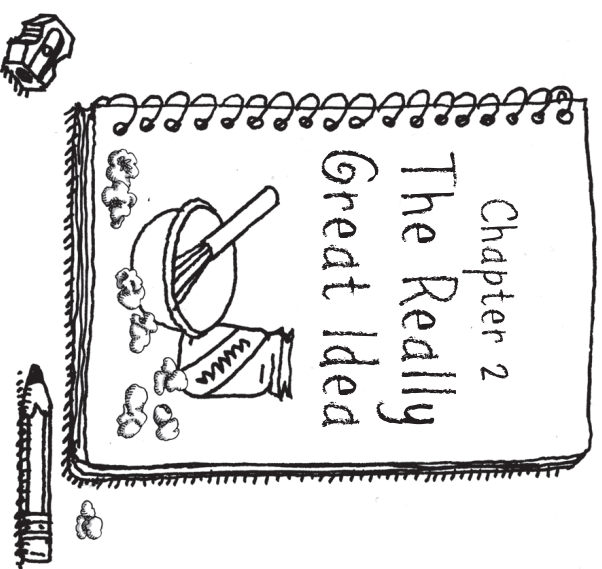
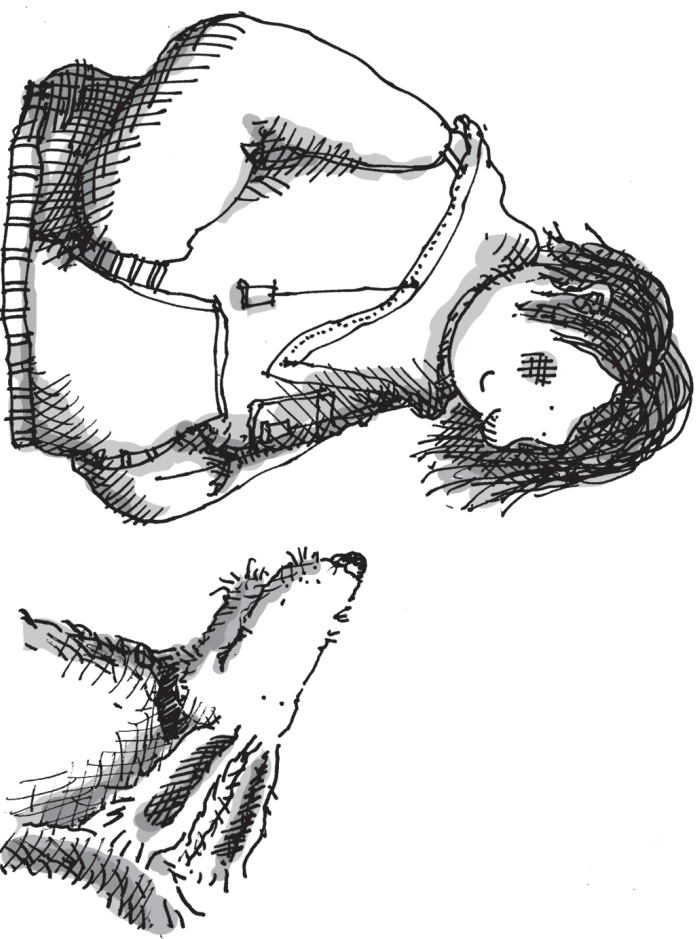
I was just going to say ‘Great!’ – when I remembered the sink. I couldn’t go out and leave it the way it was. Someone was sure to turn on the taps and flood the kitchen.

'I'll come later on,' I said. 'I just need to fix something first.'

I went back to the kitchen and unblocked the trap. As I fitted it back into place, I wasn't thinking about football. I was thinking about Beddington Potts. And the gleam in Aunt Caz's eyes.

'She's got another idea, Gasket,' I said. 'What d'you think it is?'

Would it cause as much trouble as the last one . . . ?



We couldn't wait for Aunt Caz to come home! She kept sending messages, but it was three days before we heard her battered old van come lurching down the road. Its brakes squealed as she pulled up in front of the house.

'Look, everybody!' She jumped out of the van, waving the trophy above her head. 'Beddington Potts is Top Spy! I WON!'

Arabella raced out of the house and threw herself

at Aunt Caz, hugging her round the knees. 'We played football and I got **THREE GOALS!**'

Aunt Caz scooped her up with her free arm, chanting, 'We are the champions!'

We all went wild, clapping and cheering, with everyone talking at the same time.

'What was it like being on TV?'

'Could you see yourself?'

'We lost the picture cos of a power cut.'

'Did you win a million pounds?'

'You're brilliant!'

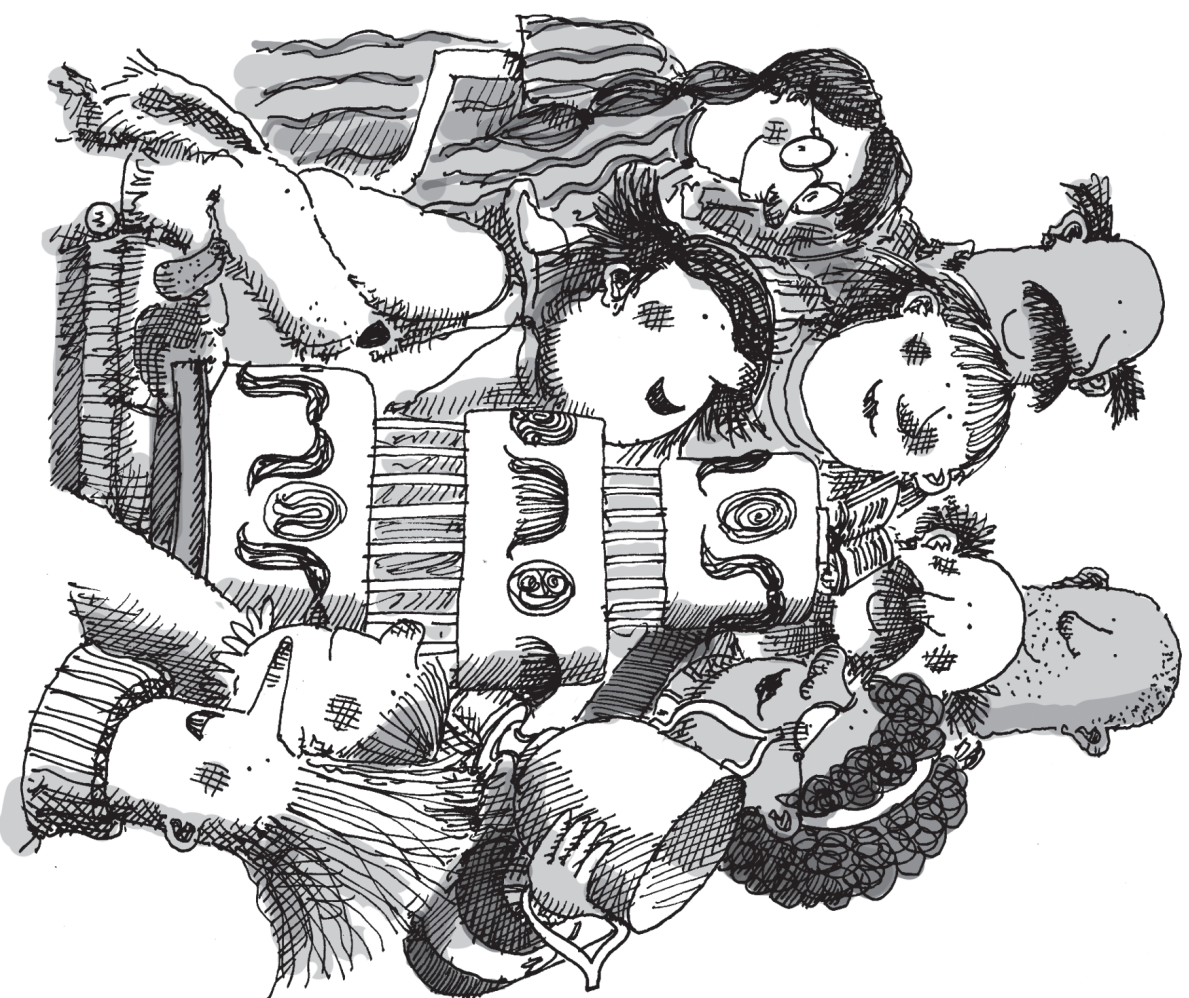
Aunt Caz stood there, grinning all over her face.

She lifted her hands up, to make everyone listen.

'I didn't win a million pounds. But I did win some money. And this trophy. *And . . . this!*'

She put Arabella down and opened the side door of the van. Inside was the **MOST ENORMOUS CAKE I'D EVER SEEN**. It had three layers, was covered in green icing, and decorated with pink jelly fingerprints and chocolate false moustaches.

Aunt Caz waved her trophy again. 'Bring the cake



inside, Ollie – and we'll all have some!

The cousins cheered again and I picked it up – very carefully – and carried it into the house. Mum was putting a stack of plates on the table – with a bottle of Dad's Special Elderflower Fizz.

'What about your next book, Caz?' she said, as she poured the Fizz. 'Have you started it yet?'

Aunt Caz looked puzzled. 'Didn't you hear what I said on TV?'

Mum shook her head. 'Our TV broke – just as you were starting. What did you say?'

'I told them about my next book.' Aunt Caz was bouncing with excitement. 'Beddington Potts is going to solve a mystery at a street-food festival. Isn't that a fantastic idea?'

A *street-food* festival? Why? For a moment that didn't make sense. Then I remembered. The books Aunt Caz wrote about Beddington Potts weren't just spy stories. They were spy stories *with RECIPES*.

Aunt Caz beamed. 'It's the perfect setting for a spy story! People from all over the world – cutthroat

competition – secret recipes – a huge prize – it's got everything!'

'But . . . ' Aunt Dionne frowned. 'Do you know anything about street food?'

'I'm going to do research,' Aunt Caz said. 'By running a stall of my own – at a *real* food festival!'

Mum and Dad looked at each other. Aunt Caz was a terrible cook.



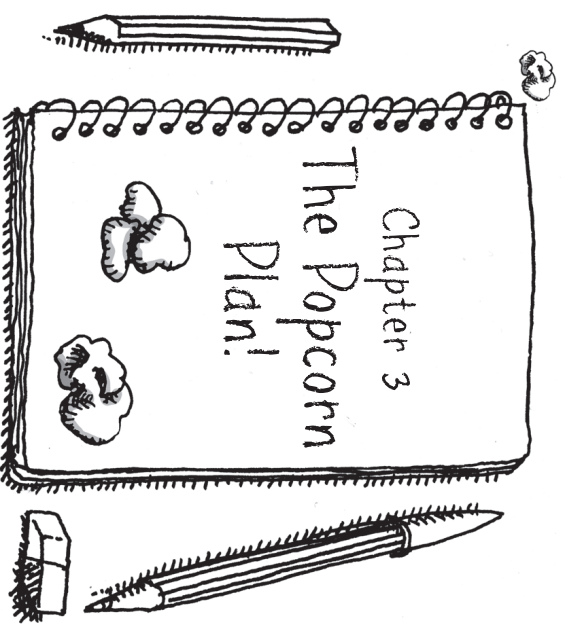
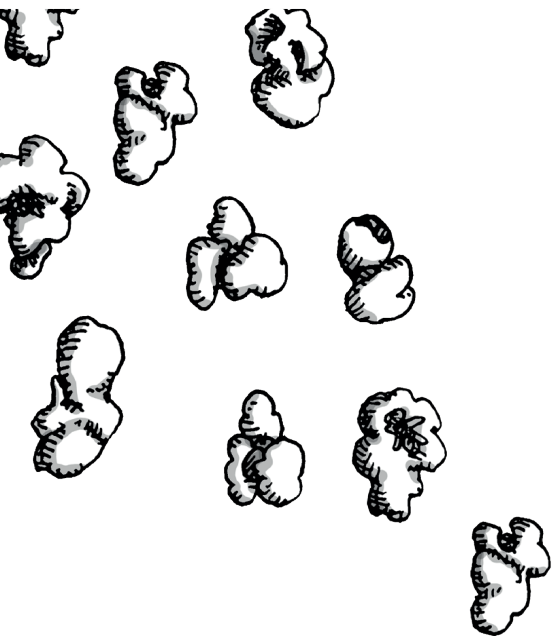
Aunt Caz laughed. 'Don't worry. I've got a great plan. And I've bought everything I need. I'll be off in the van – as soon as Ollie's set things up for me.'

I put the cake down on the table. 'What things?' I asked cautiously.

'The machine I bought with my prize money,' Aunt Caz was looking very excited.

'What *kind* of machine?' I said.

Aunt Caz beamed. 'It's a popcorn cannon!'



'A CANNON?' What was she talking about?

Aunt Caz laughed. 'It's a machine for making popcorn.'

'Yay!' Arabella pulled a chocolate moustache off the cake and stuck it on her face. 'Look, everyone! I'm Beddington Potts! And I'm going to make popcorn!'

All the other cousins copied her. While Mum cut the cake, they raced round the room in moustaches, shouting, 'No! *I'm* Beddington Potts!'