

 **PRAISE FOR *RACE TO IMAGINATION ISLAND*:** 

'Bursting with incredible ideas and edge-of-your-seat action, Race to Imagination Island is a cannon-blasting, explosive whirlwind of fun.'

Jennifer Bell, author of *Magicalia*

'Pacy, funny, gloriously inventive and perfectly pitched for kids.'

Abi Elphinstone, author of *The Unmapped Chronicles*

'The most fun you can have sitting down unless you're riding on a cawhawk.'

Chris Smith, author of *Kid Normal*

'One of the most joyful books I have read . . . The only problem with Imagination Island is that you never want to leave.'

Jenny McLachlan, author of the *Land of Roar* series

'Brilliant, bonkers and visually spectacular. An incredible world of pure magical escapism.'

Laura Ellen Anderson, author of the *Amelia Fang, Rainbow Grey and Marnie Midnight* series

'A wildly inventive rip-roaring ride!'

Rashmi Sirdeshpande, author of *How To Change The World*

'Whipfast, thrilling and full of heart – the perfect escapist adventure!'

Ross Montgomery, author of *The Midnight Guardians*

'A brilliantly bonkers, ferociously fun, action-packed dive into the marvellously mad mind of Mel Taylor-Bessent.'

Jack Meggitt-Phillips, author of *The Beast and the Bethany*

'This book fizzes with creative energy.'

Joseph Elliott, author of *Nora and the Map of Mayhem*

'You'll LOVE racing to Imagination Island!'

Maz Evans, author of *Who Let The Gods Out?*

'A brilliantly engaging voice – kids are going to love this wild ride through Imagination Island!'

A fast-paced, fantastically fun adventure.'

Andy Shepherd, author of *The Boy Who Grew Dragons*

'The world beyond the lightstream is inviting, inventive and vividly imagined.'

Guy Bass, author of *Stitch Head*

'A wild and wacky race brimming with wonders, bursting with brilliance, and teeming with thrilling surprises around every corner.'

Jo Clarke, author of *Libby and the Parisian Puzzle*

'Brilliantly imagined, perfectly paced and so much fun!'

Justin Somper, author of *Pirate Academy*

'An exhilarating adventure, brimming with whimsical wonders.'

Nicky Smith-Dale, author of *Betty Steady and the Toad Witch*

'A riotously fun and colourful story guaranteed to entertain.'

Hannah Gold, author of *The Last Bear*

For Mum, who always told me to believe in dreams and the power of my imagination.



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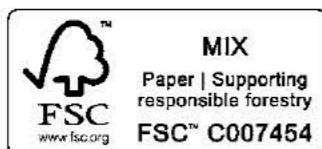
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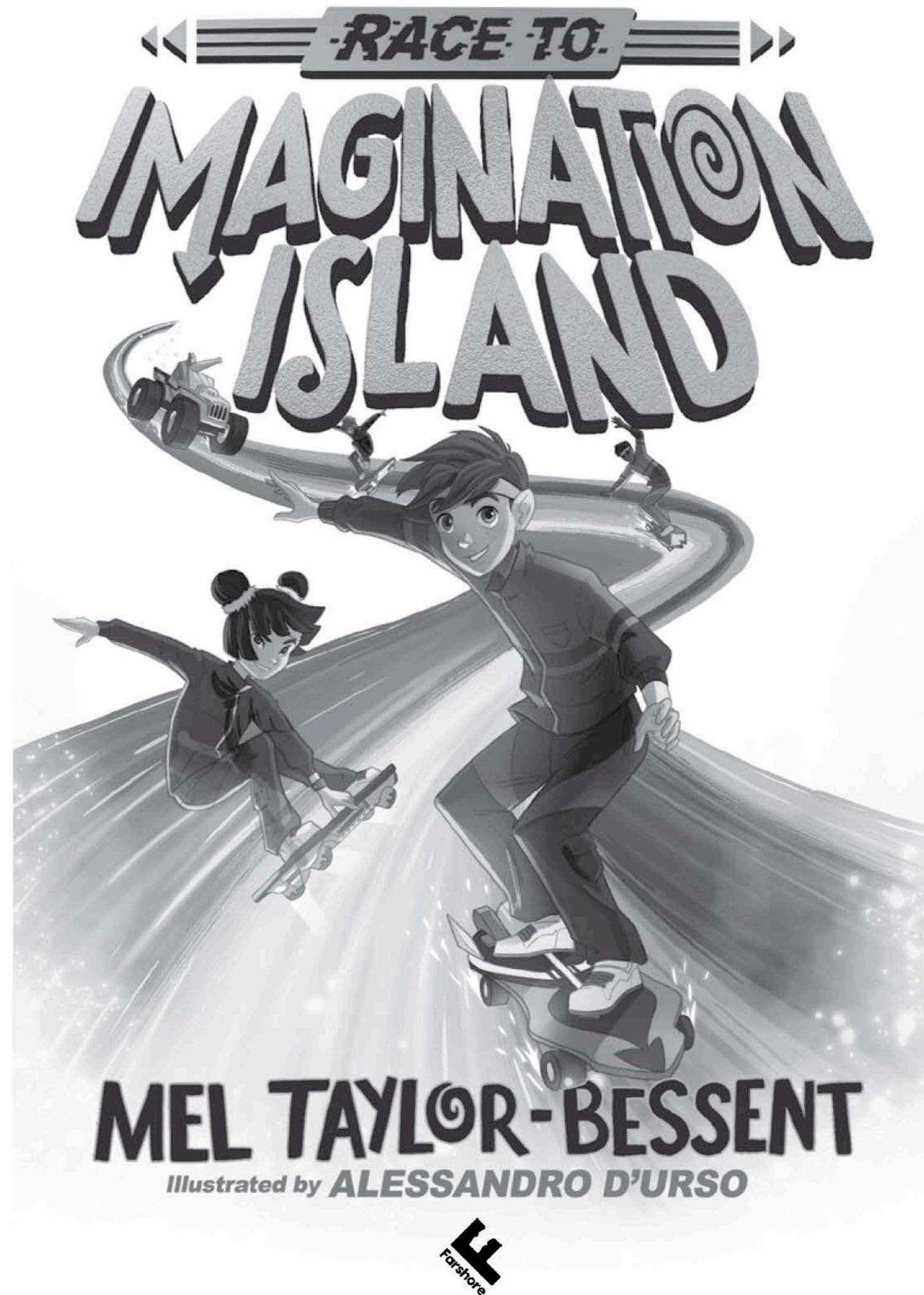
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IMAGINATION ISLAND

AREA 1

HI-YAAAAH'S HIDEOUT

HIDEAWAY HUT

WEATHER MOUNTAIN

YETI RIVER

MUCUS MOUNDS

M.A.P. ROOM

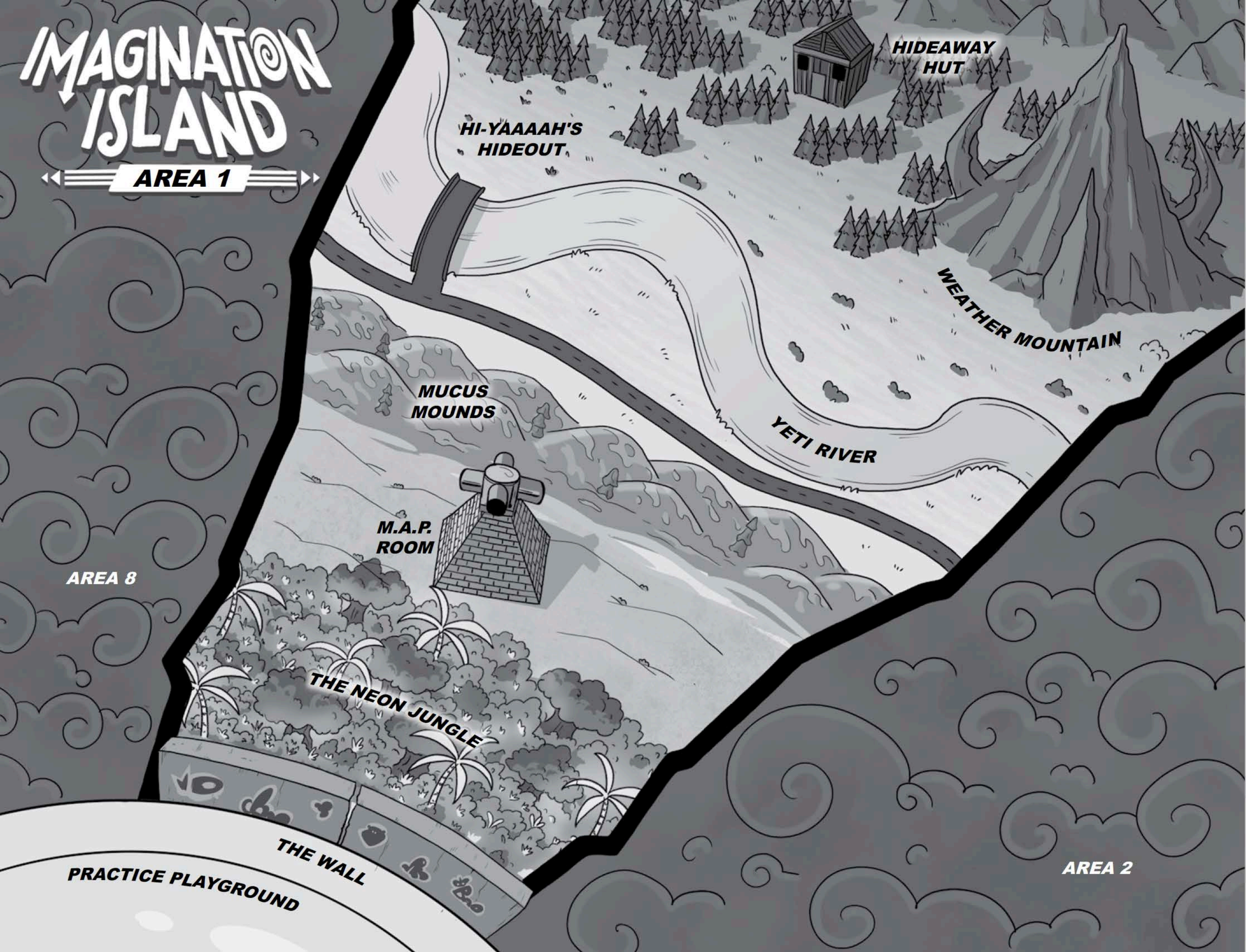
THE NEON JUNGLE

THE WALL

PRACTICE PLAYGROUND

AREA 8

AREA 2





'If you can dream it, you can do it.'
– Walt Disney





PROLOGUE

Many moons ago, an astronomer, a poet, a princess and a pirate stumbled into a magical land.

The astronomer observed the skies and stars.

The poet dreamed his visions to life in words.

The princess was an inventor with bold ideas and an eye for numbers.

And the pirate was an explorer of the deepest oceans and scavenger of the seas.

These four did more than just observe and dream and invent and explore. They imagined so deeply that real magic stirred within them. And they found themselves transported to a place where anything they thought of came to life.

They called it . . . Imagination Island. And they were its first four Protectors.

Others imagined their way to Imagination Island over the years. But time took its toll. All too soon, its Protectors grew old, and the magic was in danger of disappearing. And so a Race was devised, to ensure the island's survival. A Race to find four new Protectors.

That Race starts . . . *NOW*.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

Observers! Dreamers! Inventors! Explorers!
The time has come to crown four new Protectors of Imagination Island.

Do you have what it takes to invent new animals, control the weather, manipulate the landscape, dream up wild and wondrous creations and protect this magical place? Then we need you!

Come to Imagination Island to compete in the Race.

And it is a Race. Make no mistake about that.

Hidden around the world are sixteen lightstreams that will bring you to us.

Sixteen chances to enter the Race of a lifetime.

Four prizes greater than gold.

If you're aged six to sixteen, your time has come!

But be warned. The Race can end at any time. If you fail a challenge, or are the last to reach a checkpoint, you'll return home immediately, never to set foot on Imagination Island again.

Think you have what it takes?

Then Imagination Island is waiting . . .

Chapter 1

SPLAT!

“**T**hey’re saying there’s just one lightstream left!
JUST ONE LIGHTSTREAM LEF—”
Oof.

Luca flew through the air and landed on the ground with a solid splat. A group of burly teenagers, who had been blindly checking their phones for updates, landed on top of him.

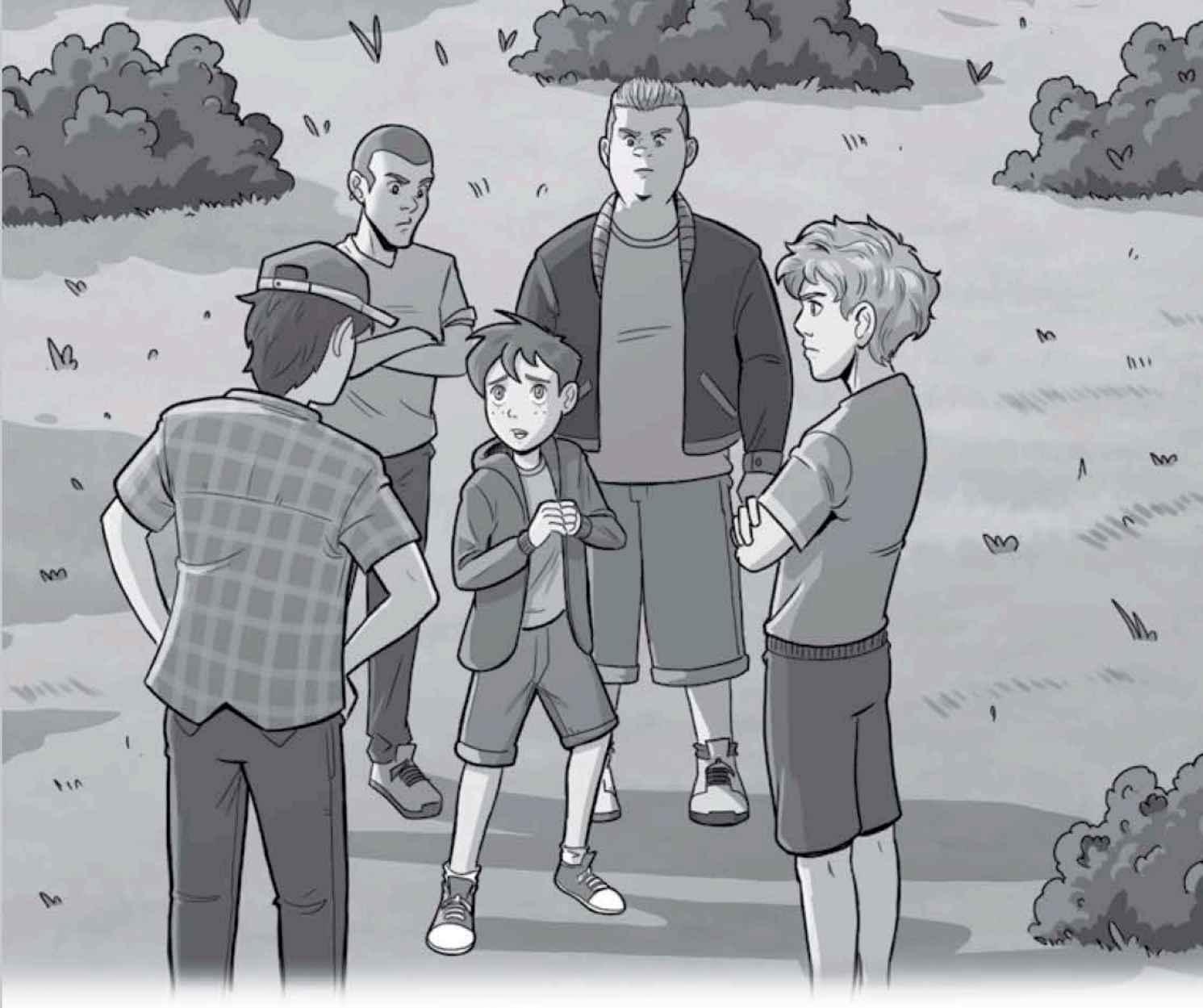
“Watch it!” one of the teenagers yelled.

“Wanna look where you’re going next time?” another shouted.

One of the largest boys kned Luca in the ribs as he scrambled up.

“Trying to follow us, were ya?” he growled. “Thought you could use our intel to find the last lightstream?”

“No, no, I —”



“This scrawny thing thinks he has a chance of going to Imagination Island!” one of the boys yelled. The others laughed, circling Luca like ravenous dogs.

“How old are you anyway? You know you have to be at least six years old to get to the island, right?”

Luca’s entire body shook. “I’m ten,” he managed to croak.

The boys howled harder.

“No way you’re ten,” one of the other boys said. “You’d snap in two if I sat on you.”

SPLAT!

Luca kept his nose to the ground, closed his eyes tight, and willed a nearby puddle to swallow him whole. He hated being shouted at. He hated being ganged up on. And he really hated people noticing how small he was for his age.

His heart pounded. Were these kids about to beat him up? Would his siblings come back to save him? Would he lie there for so long he’d dissolve in the rain?

He squeezed his eyes tighter and tried to slow his breathing. He knew he was being . . . what did his dad call it? – Irrational? Away with the fairies? Childish? – but he couldn’t stop the thoughts from coming. Would these teenagers kidnap him? Take him to their secret hideout? Would they give him a special potion that numbed his brain, so he didn’t feel anything when their pet grizzly bear’s sharp teeth tore through his skin?

Luca tried to remember what his mum told him to do when his thoughts took him to these wobbly places. Ground yourself in the real world. Plant your feet on the ground, breathe slowly and focus on one smell or sound in the air.

“LUCA!” a voice shouted from the top of the hill. “HURRY UP!!”

Luca peered through his eyelashes. How long had

he been lying there? Where had the teenagers gone? Had he magically willed them to disappear?

He swallowed.

Had they even existed in the first place?

Luca squeezed his eyes shut again. The real world was dangerous – but his imagination was much, much worse.



Chapter 2

TITCH

“**M**essing around again, Titch?” Luca’s sister shouted. She marched towards him, his other siblings trailing behind like a bumbling game of Follow the Leader.

Luca grimaced. “*Frank-ieeee!* Don’t call me –”

Frankie pulled him to his feet so fast, she practically gave him whiplash. “Is Imagination Island one big joke to you? We have a lightstream to find. The last lightstream. It’s now or never and I’m not missing out because of YOU.”

Luca huffed. His siblings had become just as obsessed with finding the island as the rest of the world, and he was sick of it.

“I’m going to make Imagination Island give me LOADS of money and ice cream,” Frankie’s twin brother Felix said.

“I’ll make Imagination Island build me a car out of solid gold,” said Luca’s eldest sister, Piper.

Luca brushed the dirt from his knees. He wished everyone would stop talking about Imagination Island for one second.

“Lulu?” a small voice whispered. Luca felt a gentle hand slip into his.

“We didn’t mean to leave you behind. Are you mad with us?”

Luca squeezed his youngest brother’s hand. “I could never be mad with you, Otis,” he said, smiling at the big brown eyes and mop of curly hair staring back at him. “I’m sick of the others though. Why don’t we leave them here and go play castles and cawhawks?”

Otis shifted from foot to foot.

“You can be the cawhawk if you want?” Luca added. “I can teach you how.”

“I . . . don’t think I want to,” Otis said, squirming. “I’m too old for castles and cawhawks now. I want to play computer games with Felix and go to space camp with Ruby. I want to search for lightstreams with everyone else.”

“But . . . you’re six!” Luca laughed awkwardly. “You’re always the knight defending the castle and I’m the

fire-breathing, invisible, indestructible cawhawk that wants to –”

“It’s babyish,” Otis said. “Cawhawks aren’t real, and castles aren’t cool, and everybody knows it except y–”

Luca’s heart juddered. Otis’s eyes widened.

“Sorry, Lulu. That’s not what I meant.”

Luca thought about all the creatures he’d invented over the years – cawhawks, oceanbirds, time-lions that had clocks for manes and could travel through time. They were his proudest creations, his closest friends. And his most pathetic pastime, apparently.

“Let’s just look for the stupid lightstream then,” he sighed. “The quicker someone finds it, the quicker everyone stops talking about Imagination Island, right?”

“For real?” Otis squealed. “You’ll actually help us?”

Luca shrugged.

Otis took his hand and beamed. “We can go on a REAL adventure, Lulu, instead of a pretend cawhawk one!”

That, thought Luca with a sigh, was exactly what he was afraid of.



Chapter 3

THE SEARCH

“Are you sure this is safe?” Luca said.

His brothers and sisters ushered him up the hill, looking in every direction for the last lightstream. According to witnesses from across the globe, the lightstreams resembled fizzing walls of light, or strange rainbow towers, but Luca half expected a creepy shadow monster to rise out of a dirty drain and chase him down the road.

“We don’t know anything about this Race,” Luca went on. “What if it’s dangerous? What if it’s some evil villain’s way of collecting kids and brainwashing them?”

“Don’t worry, Titch,” Frankie sniggered. “Nobody’s going to want to wash your brain.”

Luca bit his lip. It was normal to feel like an alien

from outer space around your own family, right?

Piper pulled her phone out of her jean pocket and whizzed her eyes across the screen. “The fifteenth lightstream was found by a boy from Yamanashi, Japan,” she read. “He spotted it while helping his parents give tours of Mount Fuji. ‘He’s going to do really well,’ said his family, ‘because he loves climbing, running and swimming in the Fuji Five Lakes. He’ll use his brains and his agility to get through each challenge.’ Doesn’t sound like a trick to me.”

“He’s got to be one of the winners,” Frankie declared. “Where does he rank in the prediction charts?”

Piper scrolled through her phone. “He’s –”

“Number three,” a high-pitched voice interrupted.

Luca might have guessed Ruby would know. She pulled her neat plait over one shoulder, adjusted her round pink glasses, and then held her hands behind her back like she was about to recite Shakespeare.

“Hiroto is from Japan and was born in October,” Ruby continued. “He’s fifteen and a half years old, and he’s number three on the prediction charts, behind Tiago from Portugal, and Tamal from India.”

Frankie threw her arm around Ruby’s shoulders. “Is there anything you don’t know, BrainBox?”

Ruby frowned. “The whereabouts of this last lightstream, for a start. Although, according to my calculations, we should at least be in the right country.”

“You’d make a pretty good racer, you know, Rubes,” Frankie said. “You remember everything.”

“I think you and Felix would be good,” Ruby replied. “You’re athletic and strong and –”

“Cunning? Good looking? Ridiculously modest?” Felix said, tossing his head back like he was in a shampoo advert.

Ruby blinked. “Something like that.”

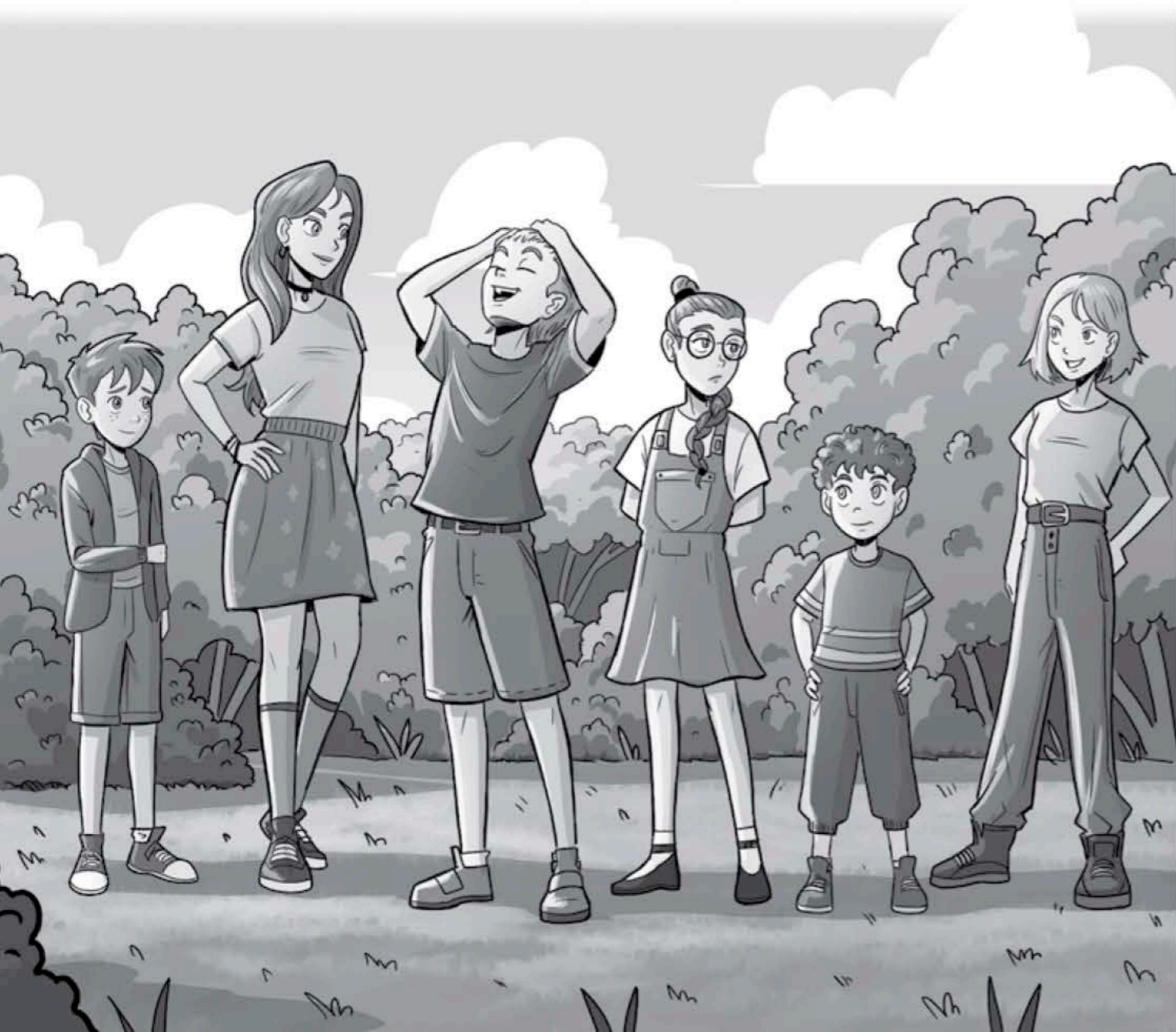
“It should probably be Piper,” Felix said reluctantly. “She might be sassy and annoying and angry at everyone, but she’s confident and the tallest, and she’s great at bossing everyone around.”

Piper flicked her hair off her shoulder with a smug grin. “Don’t forget about Otis,” she said, lifting him up into the air. “He could win by blinding everyone with his cuteness.”

“What about Luca?” Otis said, giggling as Piper swung him round like an aeroplane.

Luca was tiptoeing along the cracks in the pavement, trying not to fall off.

“Luca?” Piper scoffed. “Luca would be a disaster.”





Chapter 4

NOT NORMAL

“Luca could never go to a magical island!” Frankie said. “He’s afraid of his own shadow.”

“He’s afraid of lightning,” Felix said.

“He’s afraid of arguments!” Ruby added.

And the dark.

The dentist.

Birds.

Falling over.

Echoes.

Tall buildings.

Feeling dizzy.

Trousers without belt loops.

Old books.

Books without pictures.

Books with too many pages.

Books with pages torn out.

Suspicious plants.

Plants without any suspiciousness at all.

Open water.

Fizzy water.

Water that doesn’t look like water water!

They had been going on for ages when they finally realised Luca wasn’t behind them.

Miserably, he jumped through a hole in a nearby fence and trundled down the hill behind the old fire station. Back when it was open, his dad would take him to work when he was too scared to go to school, and Luca would instantly feel calmer among all the protective equipment and first-aid kits.

Luca loved how safe he felt there. The woods behind the station were hidden from the road, so no bullies or dogs off their leads could chase him. There were no streams or rivers to fall into. There weren’t even any open fields to expose him to sunburn or alien invasions.

Today, though, as Luca meandered through the tree trunks at the bottom of the hill, something about the woodland felt different. Sure, the fire station was closed, and the overnight rain made the leaves glisten

like stardust. But the trees looked brighter somehow, and a sweet, sugary, candyfloss smell grew stronger with every step he took.

It was only when he looked into the sky and stared

at the ominous grey clouds that he realised where the light was coming from. And it wasn't the sun.

A rainbow glow was sparkling between the trees below him.



“There he is!”

Luca tore his eyes away from the shimmering light and looked round. His brothers and sisters were marching through the trees at the top of the hill.

“Surprised to see you here, Titch,” Frankie shouted. “Don’t these woods give you the creeps?”

“Whooo!” said Felix, lifting his hands and making spooky noises.

Piper cackled. Ruby frowned. Otis didn’t know whether to laugh at Felix or give Luca a hug.

Luca looked back at the light. The sweet smell engulfed him. His skin prickled. The air felt like it was fizzing.

“That’s not . . .” Frankie pointed at the trees in the distance and fell silent.

“Can’t be,” Felix said. “Luca couldn’t have found the –”
“LIGHTSTREAM!” Piper, Frankie, Felix, Ruby and Otis yelled together.

Luca held out a *don’t come any closer* hand.

“It’s . . . it’s alive,” he stammered. “It’s hissing and moving and sparking. I don’t like it. We should report it to the police. It could be dangerous. It could be –”

His siblings burst into a run towards him. Even little Otis, caught up under the others’ feet, ran faster than he ever had before.

“GET IT!” Felix yelled, almost losing his footing as he pushed past Frankie and Piper.

Ruby, who didn’t have a sporty bone in her body, tripped over every rock, ant mound and fallen branch, but managed to stay upright most of the way, until . . .

Otis’s feet got caught under hers.

Ruby stumbled.

Piper, Frankie and Felix crashed into them.

And all five of Luca’s siblings rolled in one giant tangle of arms and legs towards the lightstream.

“Watch out!” Piper yelled.

“It’s mine!” Felix shouted.

“I want to go to Imagination Islaaaaand!” Otis squealed.

“We need to decrease this velocity!” Ruby cried.

“We need to *voooooote!*” Frankie wailed. “We need to decide who’s going!”

The sweet smell of strawberry, sherbet and vanilla grew so strong, Luca felt like he was swimming through fizzy lemonade. The lightstream seemed to be growing stronger too. It bubbled and frothed and foamed in the middle, and tiny bolts of rainbow lightning sparked at the edges. Luca glanced at his siblings. They were rolling down the overgrown hillside, gaining momentum and inching towards the lightstream faster than that time

they tried mattress surfing down the stairs.

Luca felt dizzy. “Keep back!” he shouted, waving frantically. “You don’t want to slip and –”

A loud *POP!* rang through the air.

The lightstream collapsed and the edges disintegrated, taking with it the sweet candyfloss smell, the fizzing air, and . . .

“LUCA!?”