

PRAISE FOR IFI:

[*IFI*] includes everything a child finds incredible and intriguing; alliteration, wacky characters, a dastardly villain, comedy, danger, and an incredible storyline! ... This book begun the wacky action from the very beginning, and didn't let it go until the last word on the last page!

★★★★★ Sam Capell (age 12)

“An exuberantly silly melange of Doctor Who and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory ... written for fans of David Walliams' humour and kooky characters.”

Books + Publishing

“Dave Leys is an exciting new voice in the children's book world. His debut novel, *The Institute of Fantastical Inventions*, is a must read for children who like clever humour. This book is packed with original jokes, snappy dialogue and hilarious scenarios.”

Tim Harris, Author



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THE INSTITUTE OF FANTASTICAL INVENTIONS

DAVE LEYS

HARBOUR PUBLISHING HOUSE

**TO LEE, DECLAN AND OWEN
- I COULDN'T INVENT A MORE
FANTASTICAL FAMILY**

BUBBLING UP

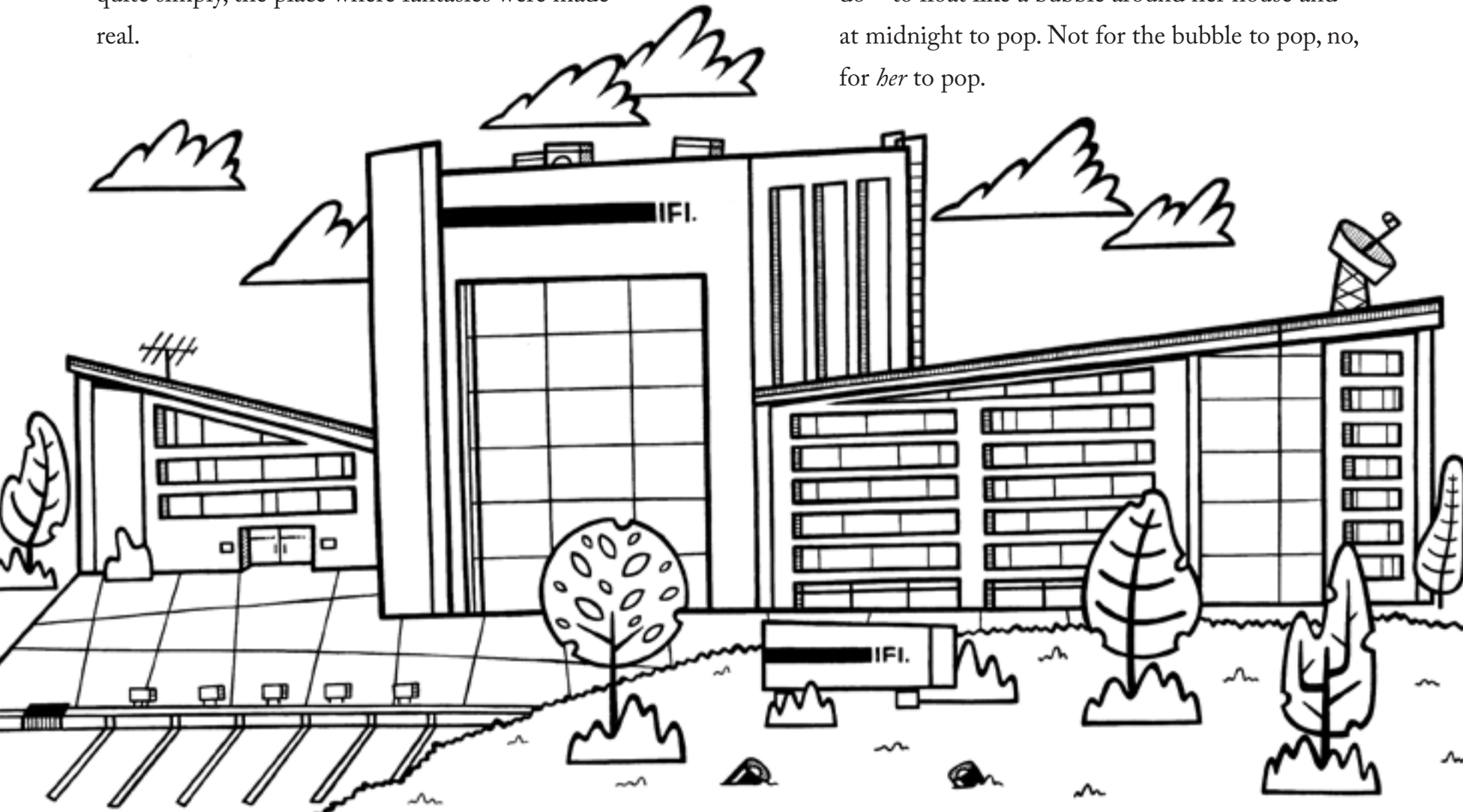
Leo McGuffin had what was almost certainly the best job in the world. He was Chief Technical Officer at the Institute of Fantastical Inventions.

The Institute of Fantastical Inventions, or IFI, was a privately run company specialising in taking the wishes of ordinary people, those things that each of us desires but never believes can actually happen, and turning them, by a process of outlandishly complex science and gadgetry, into reality. You had always secretly wanted to be an astronaut but were too short, too round or had poor eyesight? Never fear, the IFI could make it happen. Wanted to climb a South American

mountain but scared of heights and hated to travel? The IFI could solve those issues for you and help you realise your dreams.

The Institute of Fantastical Inventions was, quite simply, the place where fantasies were made real.

Right now, Leo was working on a particularly interesting and intricate fantasy. A client named Dame Geegaw had come in a month before and described something she had always wanted to do – to float like a bubble around her house and at midnight to pop. Not for the bubble to pop, no, for *her* to pop.



When it was first established, the inventors at the IFI had discovered that part of making dreams come true was interpreting what the fantasy actually meant. In this instance, the first part of the fantasy, the floating part, was relatively straightforward to understand, although tricky to achieve. However, what exactly did it mean to pop? Did this woman want to make the sound of a bubble bursting? Did she want to feel a rush of air? Or did she in fact want to burst and spread all over the room the way a soap bubble does when it erupts, leaving a faint soapy residue on the bath? It was terribly difficult to make sense of what some people wanted and, if truth be told, there was a certain artistry to it all, even though the IFI claimed to be totally and absolutely one hundred per cent scientific.

Leo bent over the table and ran his hands through his hair in frustration. He was sure there was a way to make someone float like a bubble, but the chemicals he had been working with were

just not doing the job.

I need a break, he thought. He walked to the lunchroom and spied Dr Andrea Allsop sitting at one of the white Formica benches. Her brow was furrowed and she was leafing through a notebook as she devoured her sandwiches.

“Mind if I sit next to you?” he asked.



Dr Allsop hardly looked up but nodded her head. She had a reputation for being a workaholic. Rumour was she had waterproof paper and pens so she wouldn't have to stop solving equations while she showered.

Leo nibbled his sandwich and poured himself a glass of lemonade. How on Earth could he solve the gravitational issues of flotation? "There must be a way!" he blurted out.

"I beg your pardon?" asked Dr Allsop, frowning.

Leo had obviously interrupted her thoughts about some important scientific problem. "Sorry," he said, moving to get up from the bench. As he did so, he knocked over his glass of lemonade. With a fizzy surge, it spilled in a cascade of bubbles all over the front of Dr Allsop's lab coat. Leo's eyes lit up. It was as if a treasure chest had opened. "Of course!" he cried. "It was right in front of me. The bubbles in the soft drink!"

"You awful man!" cried Dr Allsop. "Look what you've done!" Her face grew red as she pointed to

her lab coat dripping with lemonade.

But Leo McGuffin had not even heard her. He was too busy rushing back to his laboratory. It was so simple. All he had to do was to extract the bubbiness out of the lemonade, synthesise it with some harmless compounds, inject a little sugar to make the experience sweeter and boil the whole mixture down into pill form. Then, whoever took the pill would rise from the ground as gently as a sunflower petal carried aloft by a hillside breeze.

When Leo McGuffin had a great idea, the execution was invariably pure pleasure. He gathered everything he needed – a beaker, a Bunsen burner, a test tube (which he found in a cupboard), a yard glass (which was filled with brown liquid that he poured down the sink), a mortar and pestle, and a pair of tweezers.

All afternoon he beavered away until by five pm he had before him his first batch of silver almond-shaped pills. He sighed and relaxed his shoulders. The wonders of science were not

available to just anybody. Most ordinary men and women went about their shallow lives as if there was just a surface to things – cars, aeroplanes, medicines – and that all humans could do was touch the exterior of these objects. But scientists, ahhh, scientists saw the world differently. They understood the mind-boggling mathematics, the phenomenal physics, the beautiful biological rhythms of life and nature! Yes, he was a lucky man indeed to be able to comprehend the code underpinning the mystery of it all.

Enraptured by his own brilliance, caught up in this reflection, he didn't hear Dr Andrea Allsop approach. In fact, Leo had no awareness of her presence until she announced it by a sharp slap to the back of his skull.

"Ouch!" he said, almost knocked off his stool. "What on Earth?"

He turned around. If earlier Dr Allsop had been red in the face, now she was a deep crimson.

"You silly nincompoop," she said slowly, her

breathing heavy. "First you spilt your lemonade all over me and failed to apologise."

He noticed a slight discolouration on her coat and opened his mouth to say sorry, but she dismissed him with a wave.

"Then imagine my surprise – no, my horror – when I went to retrieve the invisibility essence mixed with formaldehyde I had stored in a yard glass outside my office." She took a deep breath. "What do you think I found?"

Oh no, he thought. The brown liquid he had poured down the sink.

She noticed the movement of his eyes and came closer, glowering. "Now it's dawning on you. There happens to be a CCTV camera above where I had left it. I viewed the film. It was you! You poured away weeks of hard work! You!"

Her voice had risen to a pitch that reminded Leo of crystalline growth – hard and sharp. It gave him a lump in his throat he was not quite sure what to do with.

Dr Allsop rubbed her temples. It was clear to Leo she was in pain.

“My head,” she said dully, “it throbs. You have given me a headache with your thoughtless incompetence.” She leaned in closer. Leo felt the warmth of her angry breath waft over him. She picked up two of his pills. “Aspirin,” she said, “just what I need to ease this migraine.”

He was about to speak, but the glare she gave him seemed to restrict his airwaves. Helplessly, he watched her pop the pills in her mouth. Dr Allsop walked towards the door, facing him all the way so she could continue to harass him.

“Why they ever made a nitwit like you Chief Technical Officer here,” she began, “I’ll never fathom.” Something happened in her throat and she hiccupped once, then twice. “I beg your pardon,” she said. Leo observed how her eyes nearly crossed, then she began to float.

It was almost imperceptible at first, a slight drift upwards that could have been mistaken for a

skip of her feet. But then, irresistibly, she slipped up into the air until she was suspended, as if in a bubble, a good metre or so above his head. Her notebook dropped to the floor.

“Yes!” cried Leo. “It worked! Eureka! Yowza! Hooray!”

Not surprisingly, this wasn’t the wisest reaction he could have had.

Dr Andrea Allsop, twisting and turning in the air, her body cocooned inside an invisible sphere of atmospheric pressure, glared down at him. “Do you mean to tell me that wasn’t aspirin? Explain. Yourself. Now,” she said, each syllable an exercise in menace.

“I ... uh ...” All of Leo’s brilliance evaporated, much like a bubble losing its surface tension.

Still floating, Dr Allsop flapped her arms back and forth, drawing ever closer, like an angry bird and he her potential prey. “I am lodging a formal complaint with management. Three black marks in one day. Ignorance. Insolence. Irresponsibility.

You will lose your job! You'll be thrown on the scrapheap!"

Leo's brain raced. This sounded serious. Lose his job? Unthinkable. Yet this woman was sure to follow through on her threats. He needed to devise a solution, and quick. As Dr Allsop circled above him, cawing in anger and triumph, he laid out the problem. She was furious. She wanted revenge. Her revenge might result in his demotion or possible sacking. He needed to change part of the equation. It was a simple matter of logic.

Leo employed his rational mind to the problem. He needed to change her emotion from anger to happiness. But how? Kiss her? No, she wouldn't let him, wouldn't enjoy it if she did. In any case, he couldn't reach her face to do it.

Step back, he thought. What did people do when they were happy? They laughed. How do you make someone laugh? You tell them jokes. That was it!

So he began.

"What did the receiver say to the radio wave?" he asked. "Ouch! That megahertz!"

She glared at him.

"What did the biologist wear on his first date? Designer genes." He looked up hopefully.

Her mouth twitched but her eyes remained hooded.

Fine, he thought. Time to pull out his best joke. "How do you stop an astronaut's baby from crying?" he called out. He waited. He waited some more. "You rocket!"

Her bottom lip trembled, her cheeks quivered. Dr Allsop couldn't help herself ... she began to laugh. Her body spun in airy circles, the redness draining from her face and her fists unclenching as all the tension left her. She reached out her hand and Leo guided her down to the floor. Deftly he looped his hand around her wrist to stop her floating away again.

She bumped up against him and murmured fondly, her eyes soft, "You fool!"

Leo was pleased to note that her whole energy had changed. Almost as if her temper, nudged and manipulated by his humour, had ... burst.

That was it! The solution to the second part of the fantasy. He would make Dame Geegaw burst through the power of laughter!

“Double eureka!” he cried. There was not a moment to lose. Letting go of Dr Allsop’s wrist, Leo rushed off to the chemicals and liquids room.

Unanchored, Dr Andrea Allsop drifted towards the ceiling. “McGuffin!” she yelled. “Get me down from here!”

But it was too late. Leo was already hard at work. Boiling down pages from joke books, old film reels of slapstick routines and red clown noses, turning them into a thick syrup he would use to create a funny pill.

One week later, Dame Geegaw arrived in the foyer of the Institute of Fantastical Inventions. Behind her spectacles, she trembled with excitement. She entered the Client Satisfaction

Maximisation Suite, where Leo McGuffin, Chief Technical Officer, awaited her.

“Madam,” he said, “here at the Institute of Fantastical Inventions our mission is to provide only the very best service and the satisfaction of all desires.” He handed her a red velvet case containing two pills and a set of instructions. “I assure you, your experience will be buoyant and so amusing you will ... burst with laughter.”

With those words, he returned to the laboratory, confirmed in his belief in the power of science.

