

THE Accidental SECRET AGENT

Tom McLaughlin



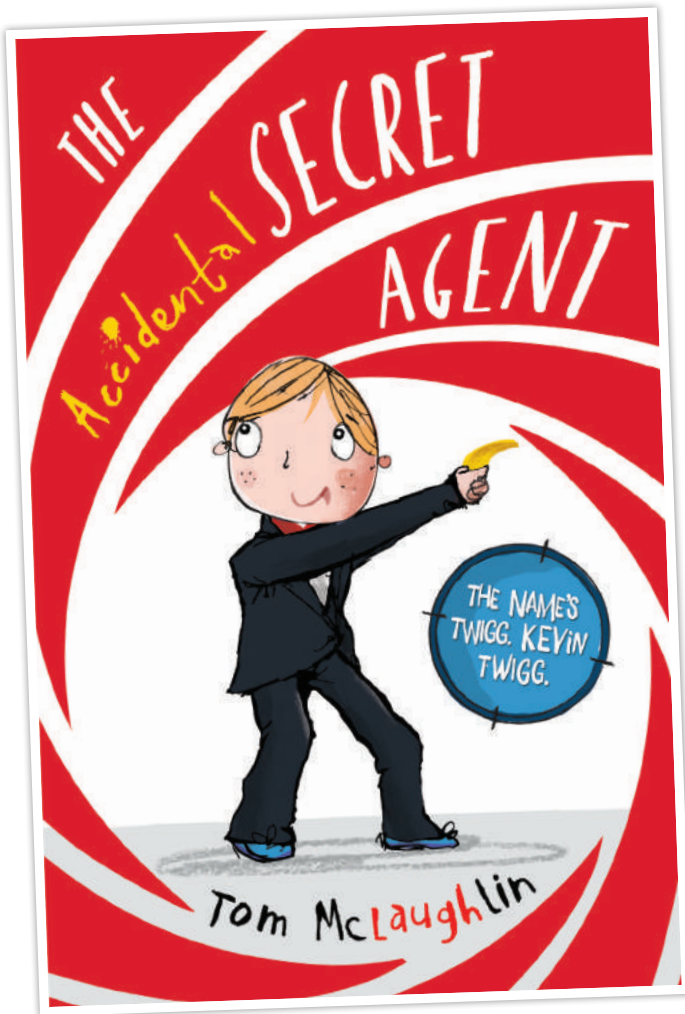
INTRODUCTION

Find out how Kevin Twigg went from schoolboy to secret agent in this hilarious spy spoof!

Kevin is just an ordinary boy, an ordinary boy with a dream – to be a super spy. Unfortunately, opportunities for thirteen year old boys to become spies are fairly limited.

But a chance encounter with an actual spy means that Kevin finally gets his chance – by switching places with him, he can become an international boy of mystery! Only now, the fate of the world might just rest in his hands...

This is a spy adventure for children aged 9+, which blends fast-paced action with a lot of laughter – and along with the humour there are serious points to think about and discuss, especially around the fantasies and reality of espionage, and the role of the internet in our world.



TOM McLAUGHLIN

Before becoming a writer and illustrator Tom spent nine years working as political cartoonist for *The Western Morning News* 'thinking up silly jokes about even sillier politicians'. Then, in 2004 Tom took the plunge into illustrating and writing his own books. Since then he has written and illustrated picture books as well as working on animated TV shows for Disney and Cartoon Network. He lives in Devon.



Here's what Tom says about enjoying stories with children the whole day through!

http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/feb/21/why-stories-arent-just-for-bedtime-tom-mclaughlin?CMP=share_btn_tw

The Accidental Secret Agent is his new stand-alone title with a cast of great new characters, following Tom's widely acclaimed and enjoyed debut novel ***The Accidental Prime Minister***.

THE Accidental SECRET AGENT

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REVIEWS OF THE ACCIDENTAL PRIME MINISTER

This book made me laugh...but it also made me think a lot... A quick, highly entertaining read with the potential to provoke brilliant discussion amongst its young readers. Parent

It raised interesting discussion points about politics and the extent to which decisions which may seem like great ideas to you might affect others. Parent

This is an exciting story which mixes laughter with realism and is educational. 12 year old

Tom McLaughlin's writing is great to read, humorous and light yet full of opinions and questions. Parent

Download *The Accidental Prime Minister* reading notes

THE Accidental PRIME MINISTER
Tom McLaughlin

INTRODUCTION

When Joe tells a local news reporter exactly what he would do if he were leader of the country, the video goes viral and Joe's speech becomes famous all over the world!

Before long, people are calling for the current leader to resign and give someone else a go... and that's how an ordinary boy like Joe ended up with the most extraordinary job. Now the fun can really start...

'Hats for cats! Pet pigs for all! Banana shaped buses! Swimming pools on trains!'

A HILARIOUS STORY OF ONE BOY'S METEORIC RISE TO POWER!

This book is an enjoyable read which provides great talking points to spark off discussions about politics, citizenship, and elections. In the run-up to the 2015 General Election in May it will get children thinking and talking – and laughing!

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Then, in 2004 Tom took the plunge into illustrating and writing his own books. Since then he has written and illustrated picture books as well as working on animated TV shows for Disney and Cartoon Network. The *Accidental Prime Minister* is his debut children's novel.

He lives in Devon.

See Tom's **'A dyslexic author's writing tips for dyslexic kids'** at the end of these notes. And have a look at what he says about enjoying stories with children the whole day through!

http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/feb/21/why-stories-a-reat-just-for-bedtime-tom-mclaughlin?CMP=share_btn_tw

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Illustration: © Tom McLaughlin

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FOR TEACHERS AND READING GROUPS: DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY IDEAS

READING AND TALKING ABOUT *THE ACCIDENTAL SECRET AGENT*

INTRODUCING THE BOOK

Look at the cover and the blurb, set the scene, and read aloud the first chapter to introduce the book—and maybe one or two tasters further on to attract children into the story.

Then read the book all the way through, either reading aloud to everyone together (this book makes a great ‘chapter’ read!), or letting people read and experience the book for themselves.

TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK: SOME BOOK-TALK QUESTIONS

Get everyone to share their first responses to the book. This could be with the whole group—or children could discuss in small groups, and then share their main feelings and questions with everyone.

Then explore further what people think about the story. Encourage lots of discussion—there are no wrong answers!

- How did you feel when reading this book? And when you’d finished it?
- Which parts of the story do you remember most?
- Did you skip any parts? Which ones?
- Was there anything that took you by surprise?
- Did you quickly get involved in the story? What caught your attention?
- Did the story hold your interest? How did it do this?
- What did you especially like about the story? - e.g. the humour; the action; that it’s a story where children are in control and getting the better of adults?
- Were there any parts you didn’t make sense of?
- If you gave up on this book can you say why?
- What were the funniest bits for you?
- Talk about anything you learned from reading this book, or things that got you thinking.
- Are there things you’d now like to find out more about?
- What single word (or two!) describes this book for you?



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IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION WITH YOUR CLASS OR READING GROUP

WOULD YOU REALLY LIKE TO BE A SPY?

'I used to love it, the travelling all over the world, the beautiful girls, the dental cover; it was amazing. There's only one downside.'

'What?' Kevin asked, his mouth open wide with astonishment.

'All the running around, the violence.'

'What about it?' Kevin asked eagerly. 'Oh, I see, that was the downside.' (p38)

He'd forgotten that he was an accidental secret agent. Then it hit him. He felt his blood run cold and his chest felt heavy. (p142)

'I am a spy. I work for a secret organisation called MI7 and we keep the world safe....' (p211)

The Accidental Secret Agent is a great spy spoof with a mad and funny plot.

It also makes some serious points, to get you thinking, especially about espionage and what it is really about.

The words 'secret agent' often make us think first of James Bond, and daring and glamorous adventures.

Look at the quotes above, and talk together about what spying can really involve – for example:

- governments and organisations employing people to find out the secrets of rivals and other governments
- close and secret observation of someone
- gathering information

Why might people become spies? For money? To help their country? To help another country? Or maybe forced into it by blackmail? Is it all action and excitement, or is it mostly a job which needs to be discreet and professional?

Can you think of people or organisations that might engage in spying? (Possible groups include: government agencies, crime syndicates, activist or terrorist groups, rival commercial organisations, paparazzi, employers, parents, retailers, web-site owners).

In **The Accidental Secret Agent**, Jake Pond, whose place Kevin takes as an agent, works for MI7.

In real life the equivalent organisations are MI5, the Security Service, and MI6, the Special Intelligence Service. Have a look at their websites - www.mi5.gov.uk and www.sis.gov.uk to see what they do.

Spying is a lonely game, and one which requires immense courage and patience. Many a spy has spent long, sleepless nights, wondering when his cover may be blown, and what terrible fate lies in store for him if he is betrayed, or gives himself away. A spy who is sent to uncover the secrets of an enemy country has troubles enough. But a spy who renounces his own country and seeks to work for an alien power faces almost certain torture and death if he is discovered.

(From the introduction to the story *The salesman and the superspy*, about Oleg Penkovsky and Greville Wynne).

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SECRET AGENTS AND ADVENTURERS IN FICTION

Make a list together of all the storybook spies and adventurers you can think of. There's James Bond of course, Alex Rider, Laura Marlin, Ruby Redfort, Percy Jackson... who else do people enjoy reading about?

Which are your favourites of these? What do you specially like about them?

HOW CAN YOU TELL YOU'RE IN A SPY STORY?!

Kevin squeezed in between two burly men. Both were wearing sunglasses. Both had shaved heads that scraped the top of the car, such was the enormity of their noggins. (p48)

The Accidental Secret Agent has all the ingredients of a classic spy story, including goons, gadgets, and a mission to save the world.

What else can you spot?



THE BRAINS BEHIND THE EVIL PLAN...

'There's something else, someone he's working for, someone who's pulling all the strings.' (p183)

In thrillers and spy stories, the brains behind the dastardly crimes very often turns out to be the person you least suspect!

How soon was it before you worked out who is the evil mastermind in this story? Did you spot a clue early on? Much later in the story? Or did you get it wrong?! Think back on the story together and see how many clues you can come up with..

FUN AND LAUGHTER!

Talk about what kind of things you find funny – and what especially makes you laugh in this story.

In what ways does author Tom McLaughlin bring in the humour?

Here are some of them – which are the funniest things for you?!

- Kevin himself and the things he does and says
- The surreal plot line – that a 13 year old becomes a secret agent, and the amazing things that happen
- Spoofing all the elements of a spy story
- Wordplay and jokes – e.g. with P's name: **'Yep, P.'** **'Yippee?'** (p60)
- Running jokes – e.g. with cheese, and aftershave
- Toilet jokes
- Sarcasm – e.g. **'Not entirely sure about your management skills there, P...'** (p62)

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WHAT IF THERE WERE NO INTERNET?

'Maybe the world would be better off without the internet?'

'The world wouldn't work without the internet! It's not just funny cat videos; it's the way we communicate with each other...' (p162)

Talk about this. What does everyone think?

Make two lists of the arguments for and against the internet. Discuss these arguments and then vote.

You could have an informal discussion or set up a formal debate – e.g. 'This house believes that the world would be better off without the internet.'

BOOM, BOOM, SHAKE THE ROOM!

You've probably noticed that all the **chapter headings** are the titles of well-known pop songs, most of them well-known to adults more than to children!

When you're reading this book aloud to your class or group you could talk about how the headings fit the chapters – and give them a rendition of the songs that you know!



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IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES WITH YOUR CLASS OR YOUR READING GROUP

CHARACTERS AND CARICATURES

Talk about the characters in the story: make a list of them all, and get everyone to have a go at the 'Scrambled Names' and 'Who Am I?' activities on pages 13 - 14.

Think about the difference between **characters**, drawn in some detail, and **caricatures**, where some features are exaggerated and others are over-simplified.

In *The Accidental Secret Agent* which do people think are caricatures and which are characters, described in more detail?

Then ask children, working in pairs, to note down everything they can think of about the characters you've all identified in this story.



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MAKE A STORYBOARD OF KEVIN'S ADVENTURES

Together collect a list of all the things that happen to Kevin in this story.

Imagine you're making a film of his adventures and decide which scenes you would include, and in what order.

Here's a storyboard template to use as you plan out your film.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



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THE STORY BACK HOME!

One of the scenes in your film might be where Kevin is back home and telling his parents all about his adventures.

Do you think he tells them everything?! Might he make it sound even more dramatic? Or might he edit things in case they found it all too worrying?

What might Elle chip in and say?

In small groups share out the parts of Kevin, Elle, and their parents. Jot down ideas for the things he's going to tell them, and then have a go at role-playing this scene.

When everyone's practised their scene, act them out to each other – and see how many different versions you have of **The Accidental Secret Agent!**

THE WAY SPIES SPEAK?

In this book there are a number of slang words and phrases, especially ones which are the sort of things which a secret agent would say, or which you find in spy thrillers.

Here are some of them: talk about what they mean and look them up to check them out.

SPOOK SPEAK	WHAT DOES IT MEAN?!
1. Getting up in someone's face (p5)	
2. In the zone (p27)	
3. Goons (p53)	
4. Gander (p96)	
5. Turn the screw (p98)	
6. Warp factor ten (p120)	
7. Getting all up in your grill (p229)	

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IMAGERY: SIMILES!

Her eyes were like pools of chocolate, warm chocolate, gooey chocolate. (p27)

This is how Kevin describes Alesha's eyes. The author often gives some vivid images by using similes – describing something by comparing it to something else, and saying what it is like. Here's another one:

His head felt like a washing machine of bad thoughts, each one spinning round and round on a never-ending cycle. (p7)

Have a go at completing these similes, thinking up your own comparisons:

Her eyes were blue, like

The car horn blared like

He slid down the zip wire like

As he jumped from the helicopter, his insides felt like



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CARTOON-STYLE SCREAMING

'**WHAAAAAAAAAAAAEEEEEEEEEEK!**' *he squealed like a piglet.* (p30)

Make a list together of lots of comic book 'sound' words like POW! BAM! KAPOW! SPLAT! WHACK! BOOM! SMASH! CRASH! Then make large cardboard cut-outs of all these sounds.

Get children to choose which ones they want, and then in groups of two or three come up with a tableau of an action shot from ***The Accidental Secret Agent*** – with one person holding the word up to complete the picture.

They then hold that position and you could take a photo – and with these photos you could actually create a comic strip or comic book.



SPREAD THE WORD!

Make a power point together to tell everyone about ***The Accidental Secret Agent*** and get more people reading and enjoying it.

Think who your audience will be and how you might attract their attention and interest – it could be your friends, or parents thinking about buying the book for their children, or librarians buying the book for the library.

Make a plan of what you want to say and what could go on each slide. Why do you think people will want to read your book? Which excerpts will attract them to the story?

Include in your presentation:

- An attention-catching title and first slide
- Simple, clear bullet points
- Excerpts from the book

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MORE ACTIVITIES

CHEESY WORDSEARCH

Kevin and his family absolutely love cheese!

'...You camembert a meal without it!' Mum said, winking. (p42)

Here are 12 different kinds of cheese. Look for them in the squares - across, down, up, and from right to left. When you've found them, you could be inspired to make up your own cheesy jokes!

CAMEMBERT

GOUDA

CHEDDAR

EDAM

STILTON

FETA

HALLOUMI

GRUYERE

EMMENTHAL

BRIE

PARMESAN

RICOTTA

Q	W	E	M	M	E	N	T	H	A	L	Z	W	Q	X	F
Y	P	D	X	V	N	A	B	C	X	A	S	F	Z	V	K
Z	V	A	L	O	X	S	E	P	Q	W	Q	X	O	P	T
B	M	M	B	X	V	E	R	E	Y	U	R	G	K	Z	R
S	F	F	D	Z	Q	M	M	V	W	X	A	Z	B	G	E
W	X	G	X	Q	V	R	Z	G	O	U	D	A	X	J	B
H	M	Z	G	B	M	A	W	X	Z	B	D	Q	Z	B	N
A	Q	X	Z	X	F	P	Z	B	R	I	E	V	X	Z	E
L	X	J	K	Z	J	X	E	R	Z	A	H	F	C	H	M
L	Q	Z	V	A	Z	A	T	E	F	Z	C	K	B	G	A
O	W	S	V	T	Q	L	S	Q	V	T	X	Z	Z	K	C
U	V	X	Z	T	W	A	D	F	X	Q	W	F	G	J	X
M	P	B	V	O	X	N	O	T	L	I	T	S	Z	G	Q
I	E	T	K	C	Z	L	J	G	X	S	Z	P	J	V	Z
J	Q	X	W	I	X	Q	Z	V	F	Q	M	H	V	Z	F
P	J	Z	V	R	M	Q	B	X	W	Z	G	X	Q	W	J

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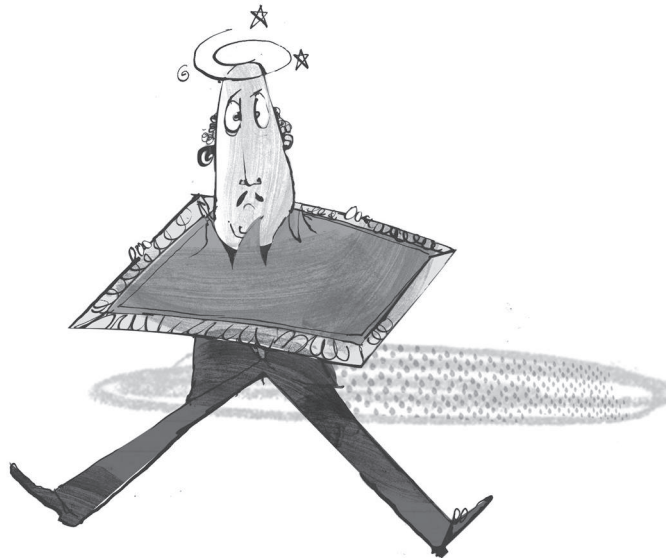
Tom McLaughlin



SCRAMBLED NAMES

These are the names of characters in *The Accidental Secret Agent*, with the letters all scrambled up. Can you unscramble them to see who's who?

CHARACTER	UNSCRAMBLED
KNIVE	
LEEL	
TEPE	
KNULP	
HEASAL	
PADE JONK	
VIBORAIN	
LYLENS	
KID MATHE	
THYMIOT	



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WHO AM I?

These characters from **The Accidental Secret Agent** are telling us something about themselves. Can you match up what they are saying, to the right names?

1	I'm the toughest of the tough. A person who's scared of no-one.	
2	I'm a millionaire who's just moved back to Croydon. I have a teenage daughter and a company called Sky Tech.	
3	I have eyes like pools of chocolate and I really love cat videos.	
4	I used to be a sat-nav, now I'm a pair of slacks fitted with a ROFL chip.	
5	I really hate computers. Order, manners, and a civilised world is what we need.	
6	I keep my garden immaculate – and like all my family I am very fond of cheese.	
7	I needed to take some time out from my job – and found poetry.	
8	I am a gadget maker – I've invented anti-gravity butter.	
9	I keep getting carried away, pretending I'm the secret agent in the movie of my life.	
10	I am not the best of drivers.	

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THE THINGS YOU HAVEN'T DONE!

Kevin has some second thoughts about being a secret agent - there are things he wants to do before he dies for his country, like growing a beard, or blowing a bubblegum bubble as big as his own head!

What are your three ambitions right now?!

Three large, empty circles with a yellow outline, arranged horizontally. These circles are intended for the reader to write down their three ambitions.

HOW ELSE MIGHT THIS STORY HAVE TURNED OUT?

After their bank break-in Elle tries to get Kevin to come home and forget about being a secret agent. But Kevin realises he's stuck in the middle of everything and needs to solve the case. And so he goes to Sky Tech to look for Dr Brainiov and find out he and Mr Snelly are up to....

Here he is at the gates of Sky Tech – and here's your chance to write your own version of this story.

What could happen next? Does Kevin get through the gates - or decide to do something completely different? If he goes into Sky Tech what or who does he find there?

Kevin was back in his MI7 suit and standing outside a dilapidated building on an industrial estate with a sign which read: Sky Tech on the wall and gigantic forbidding gates.

'Rightio', Kevin said. Kevin always said Rightio when there was anything strenuous to be done, like understanding algebra or getting out of a chair after a particularly big lump of cheese. He took a step back and ran towards the metal gate with all his might. It occurred to him a couple of seconds into his run-up that he wasn't entirely sure what he was going to do when he got to the gates... (p152)

What happens next?

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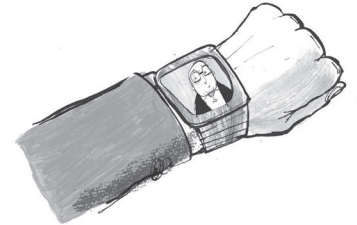
DESIGN A SUPERGADGET!

At MI7 Kevin meets the chief gadget maker who is called T.

She has invented an amazing suit fitted with an on-board computer system called 'Wearable, Artificial, Lifesaving, Intelligence', or WALLI for short.

WALLI can talk, hear through its pockets, and set off rocket jet packs on Kevin's shoes.

What gadget would you create for Kevin to help him in his job as a secret agent?



Draw your design here – and give your gadget a name!

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for drawing a gadget design.

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MORE READING

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	ISBN
MORE BOOKS BY TOM MCLAUGHLIN	The Accidental Prime Minister	OUP	978-0192737748
	The Cloud Spotter	Bloomsbury	978-1408854976
	The Diabolical Mr Tiddles	Simon&Schuster	978-1847388803
	The Story Machine	Bloomsbury	978-1408839348
MORE STORIES ABOUT SPIES AND SECRET AGENTS			
Jan Burchett, Sara Vogler	Spy Master: Traitor's Game	Orion	978-1444010701
Elen Caldecott	Spooks and Scooters	Bloomsbury	978-1408852736
Lauren Child	Ruby Redfort: Look Into My Eyes	HarperCollins	978-0007334070
Steve Cole	Young Bond: Shoot to Kill	Red Fox	978-1782952404
Louise Fitzhugh	Harriet the Spy	HarperCollins	978-0007155026
Stuart Gibbs	Spy Camp	Hodder	978-1444910254
Anthony Horowitz	Alex Rider: Stormbreaker	Walker	978-1406360196
Julia Lee	Nancy Parker's Diary of Detection	OUP	978-0192739384
Lauren St John	Laura Marlin Mysteries: Kidnap in the Caribbean	Orion	978-1444003277
Kim Slater	Smart: a mysterious crime, a different detective	Macmillan	978-1447236672
Rebecca Stead	Liar and Spy	Andersen	978-1849395427
Robin Stevens	Jolly Foul Play: a Murder Most Unladylike Mystery	Puffin	978-0141369693
Katherine Woodfine	The Mystery of the Clockwork Sparrow	Egmont	978-1405276177
NON-FICTION ABOUT SPYING			
Henry Brook	Spying	Usborne	978-1409550141
Paul Dowswell	True Stories of Spies	Usborne	978-1409593515
H. Keith Melton	Ultimate Spy	DK	978-0241189917
A FEW MORE FUNNY BOOKS!			
Julian Clary	The Bolds	Andersen	978-1783443055
Roald Dahl	Matilda	Puffin	978-0141346342
Liz Pichon	The Brilliant World of Tom Gates	Scholastic	978-1407120690
David Solomons	My Brother is a Super Hero	Nosy Crow	978-0857634795
Danny Wallace	Hamish and the Worldstoppers	Simon&Schuster	978-1471123887
David Walliams	Billionaire Boy	HarperCollins	978-0007371082

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ANSWERS

CHEESY WORDSEARCH ANSWER

Q	W	E	M	M	E	N	T	H	A	L	Z	W	Q	X	F
Y	P	D	X	V	N	A	B	C	X	A	S	F	Z	V	K
Z	V	A	L	O	X	S	E	P	Q	W	Q	X	O	P	T
B	M	M	B	X	V	E	R	E	Y	U	R	G	K	Z	R
S	F	F	D	Z	Q	M	M	V	W	X	A	Z	B	G	E
W	X	G	X	Q	V	R	Z	G	O	U	D	A	X	J	B
H	M	Z	G	B	M	A	W	X	Z	B	D	Q	Z	B	N
A	Q	X	Z	X	F	P	Z	B	R	I	E	V	X	Z	E
L	X	J	K	Z	J	X	E	R	Z	A	H	F	C	H	M
L	Q	Z	V	A	Z	A	T	E	F	Z	C	K	B	G	A
O	W	S	V	T	Q	L	S	Q	V	T	X	Z	Z	K	C
U	V	X	Z	T	W	A	D	F	X	Q	W	F	G	J	X
M	P	B	V	O	X	N	O	T	L	I	T	S	Z	G	Q
I	E	T	K	C	Z	L	J	G	X	S	Z	P	J	V	Z
J	Q	X	W	I	X	Q	Z	V	F	Q	M	H	V	Z	F
P	J	Z	V	R	M	Q	B	X	W	Z	G	X	Q	W	J

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SCRAMBLED NAMES

CHARACTER	UNSCRAMBLED
KNIVE	KEVIN
LEEL	ELLE
TEPE	PETE
KNULP	PLUNK
HEASAL	ALESHA
PADE JONK	JAKE POND
VIBORAIN	BRAINIOV
LYLENS	SNELLY
KID MATHE	MAD KEITH
THYMIOT	TIMOTHY

WHO AM I?

1. **Elle**
2. **Mr Snelly**
3. **Alesha**
4. **WALLI**
5. **Mr Plunk**
6. **Kevin's dad**
7. **Jake Pond**
8. **T**
9. **Kevin**
10. **Mad Keith**