



“Wilbur!” cried Fred excitedly.
“Are you ready to play Guess Who?”

Fred Ferret loved their daily game before opening time.

His fluffy little head disappeared into the props barrel as he flung out the things he *didn't* want. A wooden knight's sword, some floppy elephant ears. Even a squawking cuckoo clock flew past Wilbur's freshly polished counter.

Wilbur ducked. **“My hat,”** he yelped.

"You nearly knocked the feather clean off!"

"Sorry, Wilbur." Fred's head reappeared from the barrel complete with cowboy hat.

"Guess who?"

Wilbur looked up from dusting the till.

"Um, Cowboy Jim from the burpy donkey story?"

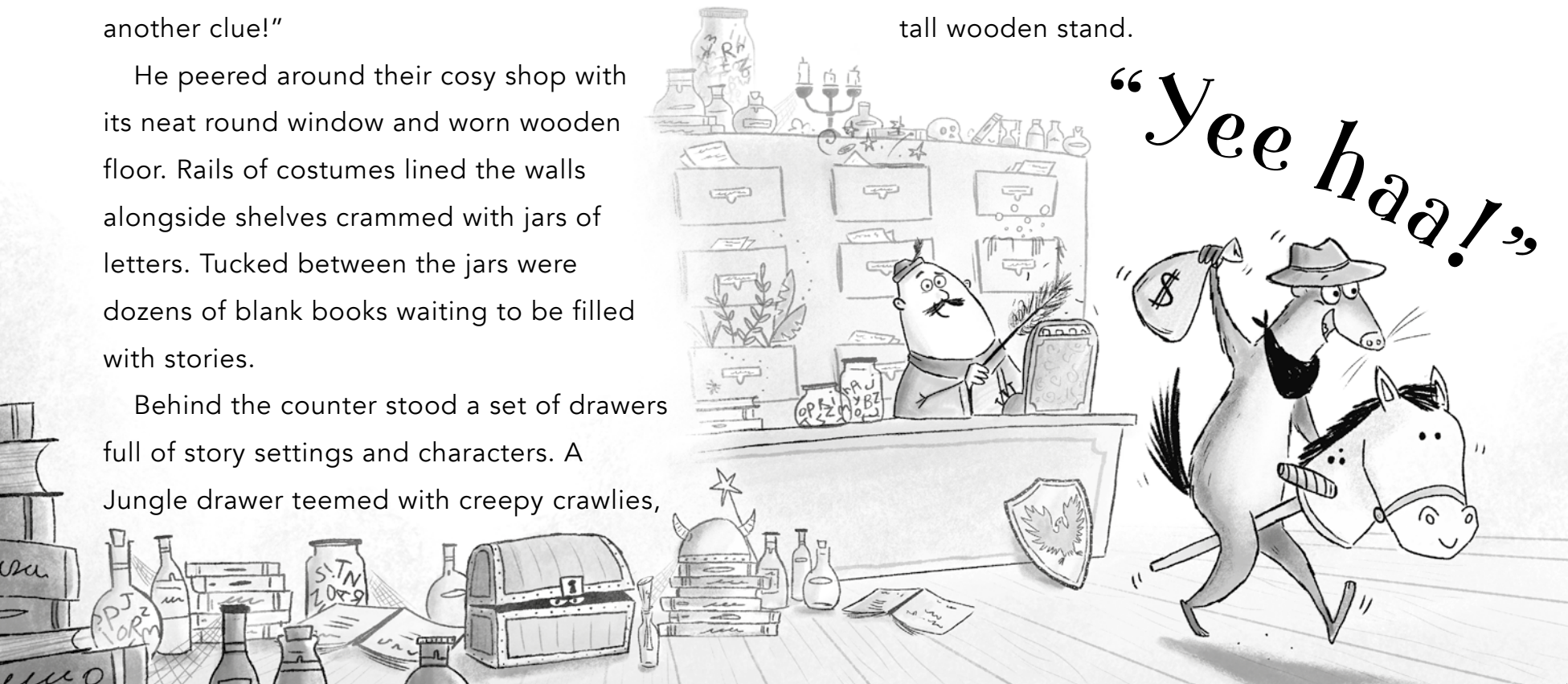
"Burpy?" giggled Fred. "No, here's another clue!"

He peered around their cosy shop with its neat round window and worn wooden floor. Rails of costumes lined the walls alongside shelves crammed with jars of letters. Tucked between the jars were dozens of blank books waiting to be filled with stories.

Behind the counter stood a set of drawers full of story settings and characters. A Jungle drawer teemed with creepy crawlies,

while the Ocean one brimmed with bright fish and the Space drawer fizzed with aliens and black holes.

To the side of the counter sat a chest of smaller props. Fred opened the lid and pulled out a bright red bandana. He tied it around his neck, grabbed a clinking money bag, then unhooked a hobby horse from a tall wooden stand.



"Oh, I know!" called Wilbur. "Wild Will Ferret, the meanest outlaw in town?"

"You got it!" laughed Fred, tossing him the money bag. "Well done!"

Fred trotted after Wilbur as he opened the shop door and set the chalkboard outside on the sunny pavement.

"Ahhh," Wilbur smiled. "The perfect day for **an adventure!**"

"Sure is," replied Fred. "And we're ready and waiting."

Back inside, costumes tidied away and props back in the barrel, they'd just started oiling Sir Squeakalot the knight when **ting! ting!** went the brass bell above the door.

"First customer!" cheered Fred. "But who will it be? A grouchy granny? A bonkers bear? A crusty old—" He stopped as a small mouse marched through the door. "Oh."

"Oh?" scowled the mouse. "Oh! Really? Is OH all you can say?"

"I'm s-so sorry," began Fred. "I—"

"Typical!" Mouse tutted. "Disappointed I'm not a bear. Well, *let me tell you*, I'm as brave as one. And don't get me started on *skilled*. Why, I can balance a chair ... on my chin ... while tightrope walking ... across a swamp! *AND* fit seventy-three marshmallows in my cheeks all at once."

Fred and Wilbur exchanged glances. What a boasty little fellow!

"So, sir, what can we do for you?" asked Wilbur.

"Isn't that obvious?" replied the mouse. "I want an adventure. **A story adventure.** Isn't that what your shop sells?"



Suddenly two drawers behind the counter wriggled open. Any mention of a new story and the characters inside were all ears!

Mouse's eyes widened as an octopus's tentacle flopped out of one and a snake slithered out of the other. Fred dashed to pop them away.

**“ESCAPED
character
ALERT!”**

“Keen beans, Olivia and Stanley!” grinned Wilbur. “Though not right for your story, Mouse.” Wilbur prided himself on finding the right story for every customer.

“Let's get started, shall we?” Making a quick list, Wilbur wandered around the shop gathering bits Mouse could 'try for size'...





"Perhaps a brush with a **brontosaurus?**" pondered Wilbur.



"Or a **thrilling whodunnit?**"

"Or a **fairy tale!**"

"No, no!" Mouse dumped the curls at once. "I want something awesome

– *amazing* – *incredible*.

Something out of this world."



"Out of this world..." Wilbur twiddled his moustache. "Of course!"

He grabbed two shiny silver costumes off a rail, handed one to Fred and swept Mouse into the changing room.

When he came back out...

"I'm a **Space Mouse!**" he cried.



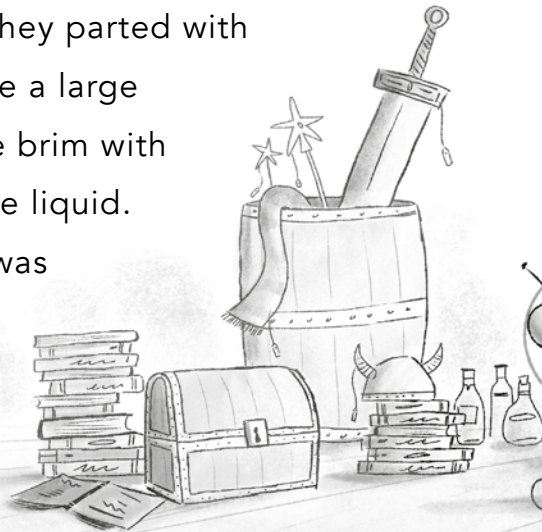
“And I’m a **Space Ferret**,” Fred exclaimed, popping up from behind the counter.

Mouse glowered. “Wait – you’re coming? I don’t need a babysitter!”

“Fred always goes with the customer,” said Wilbur. “On every adventure...”

No sooner had he said the word ‘adventure’ than a blank book on the shelf gave a little jiggle as if itching to get the story started.

“Right then!” Wilbur whisked the feather from his hat and waved it over a patch of bare floorboards. They parted with a **swish!** and up rose a large cooking pot full to the brim with a shimmering inky-blue liquid. Hooked over the rim was a big silver spoon.



“This is the **Story Pot**,” Wilbur told Mouse as Fred fished out an alien from the Space drawer. He was small and green and clutching a jar filled with a gooey yellow liquid. He dived into the pot with a snorty little giggle.

Next they added the jiggling book and a sprinkle of letters from a jar.



"Letters?" shrugged Mouse.

"All stories need **words...**" said Fred.

Wilbur spooned in an assortment of story props – twinkling stars, dice, screwdrivers and lots of stinky cheese. Then he handed Fred three objects to put in his backpack.

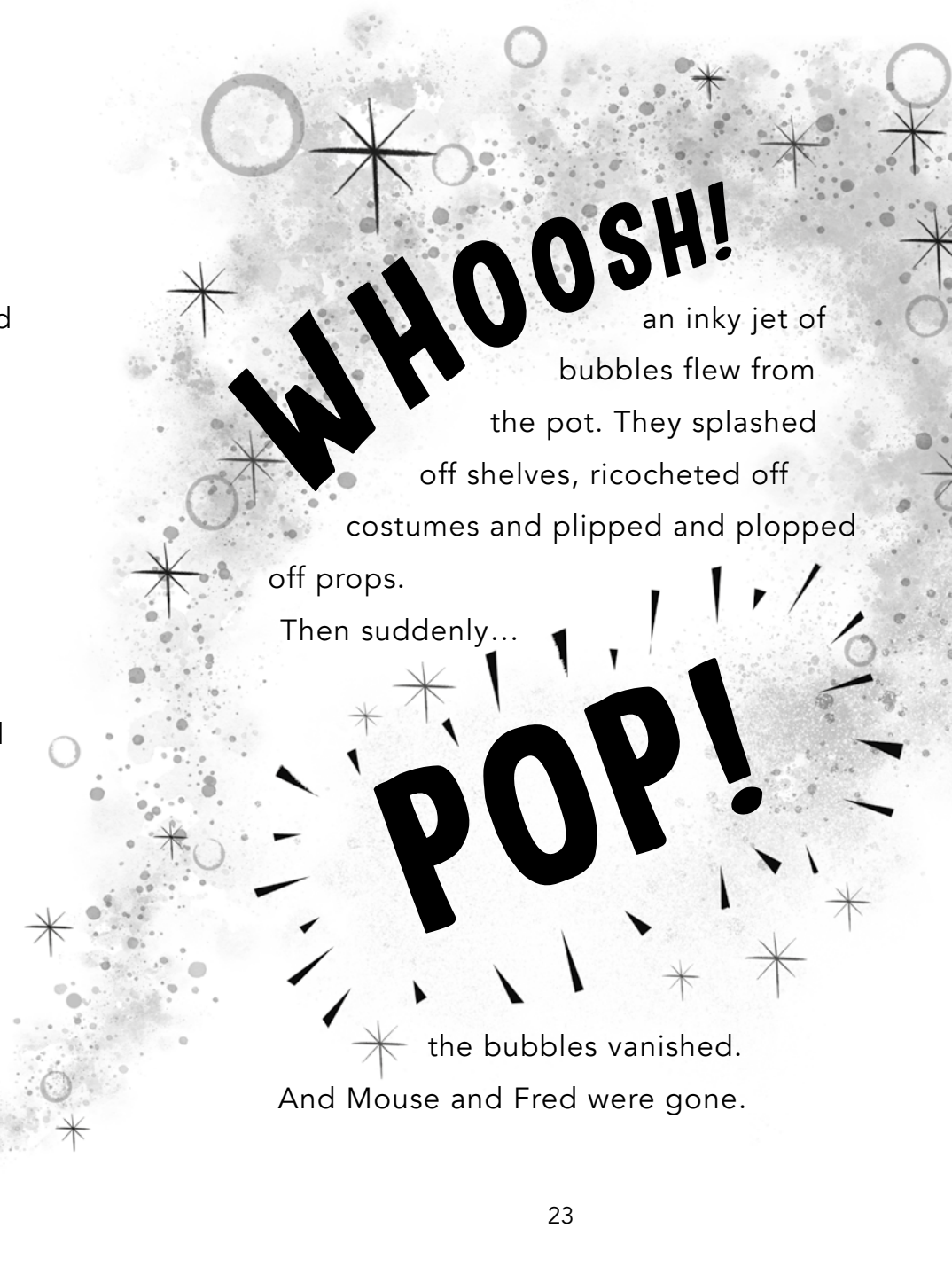
"Emergency items," Fred told Mouse. "To get us out of tricky situations."

"Biscuits?" Mouse frowned. "A toy shield? **Party poppers!** No lasers? No moon buggies? No—"

"Just stir it," Wilbur said with a wink. "And remember, Mouse, your story is what you make it."

"Yeah, yeah!" As Mouse started to stir, Wilbur passed Fred a small toy rocket, which he slipped into his pocket.

"All set then!" Fred cried, holding the spoon too, and...



WHOOSH!

an inky jet of bubbles flew from the pot. They splashed off shelves, ricocheted off costumes and plipped and plopped off props.

Then suddenly...



POP!

the bubbles vanished. And Mouse and Fred were gone.