

On the Level



by David Michael Slater • illustrated by Andrés Martínez Ricci

For Annie and Tommie's new racer—DMS

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Summary: When Nevil Level fears he cannot win the soapbox race, his friend Mini
Screwdriver offers to help him cheat.

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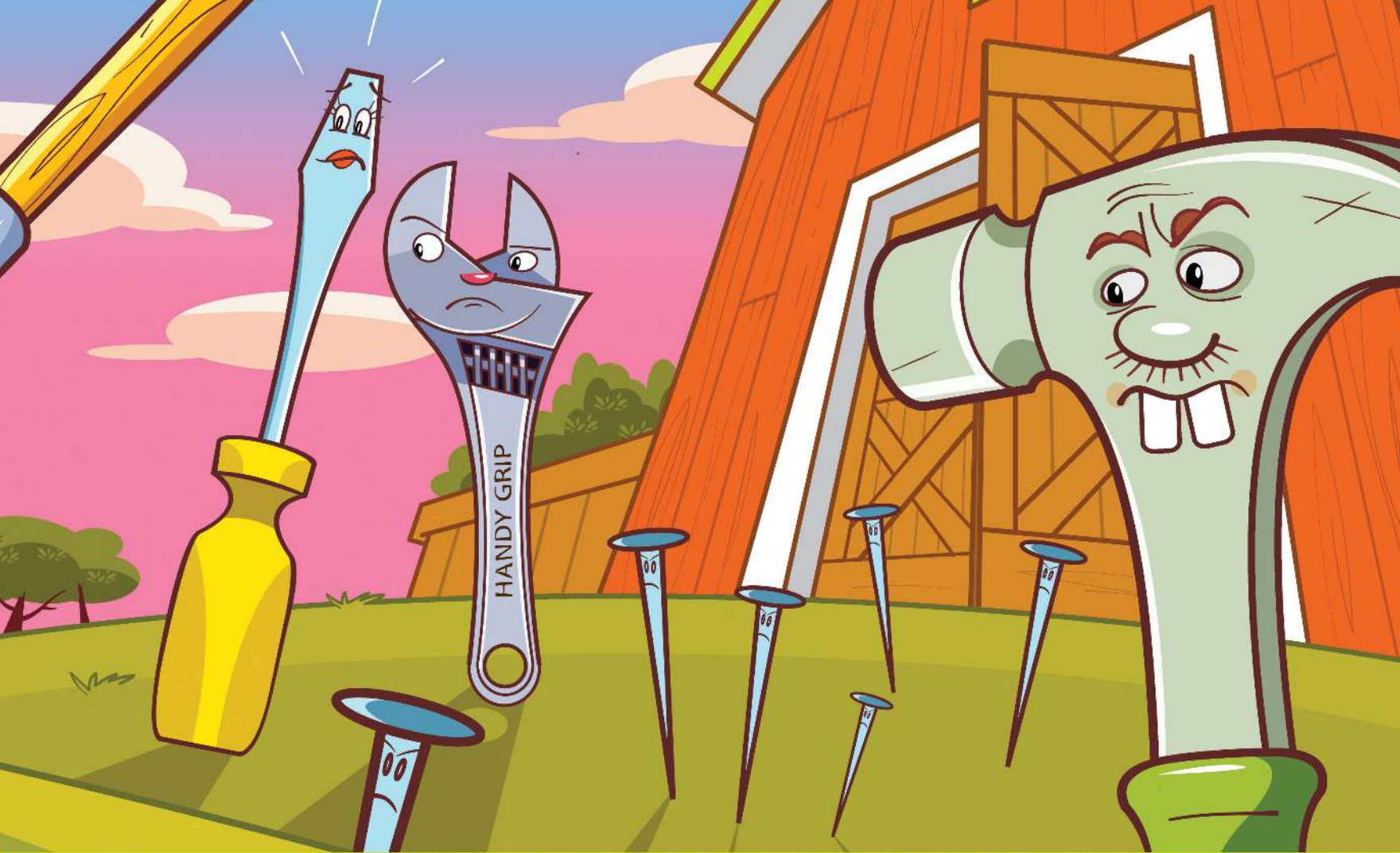
BANG! The starter's gun fired. Nevil Level leaned forward, and was off.

The run began well. Nevil was calm. He focused on the finish line. Wind whistled through his soapbox racer as he aimed his car straight and true. He was flying!



But then, halfway down the training hill, the Level Devil jolted. Then it jumped, jostled, and jerked. Nevil tried to hold steady, but he lost control. The car tipped and rolled. Then, it skidded to the bottom of the hill on its side.

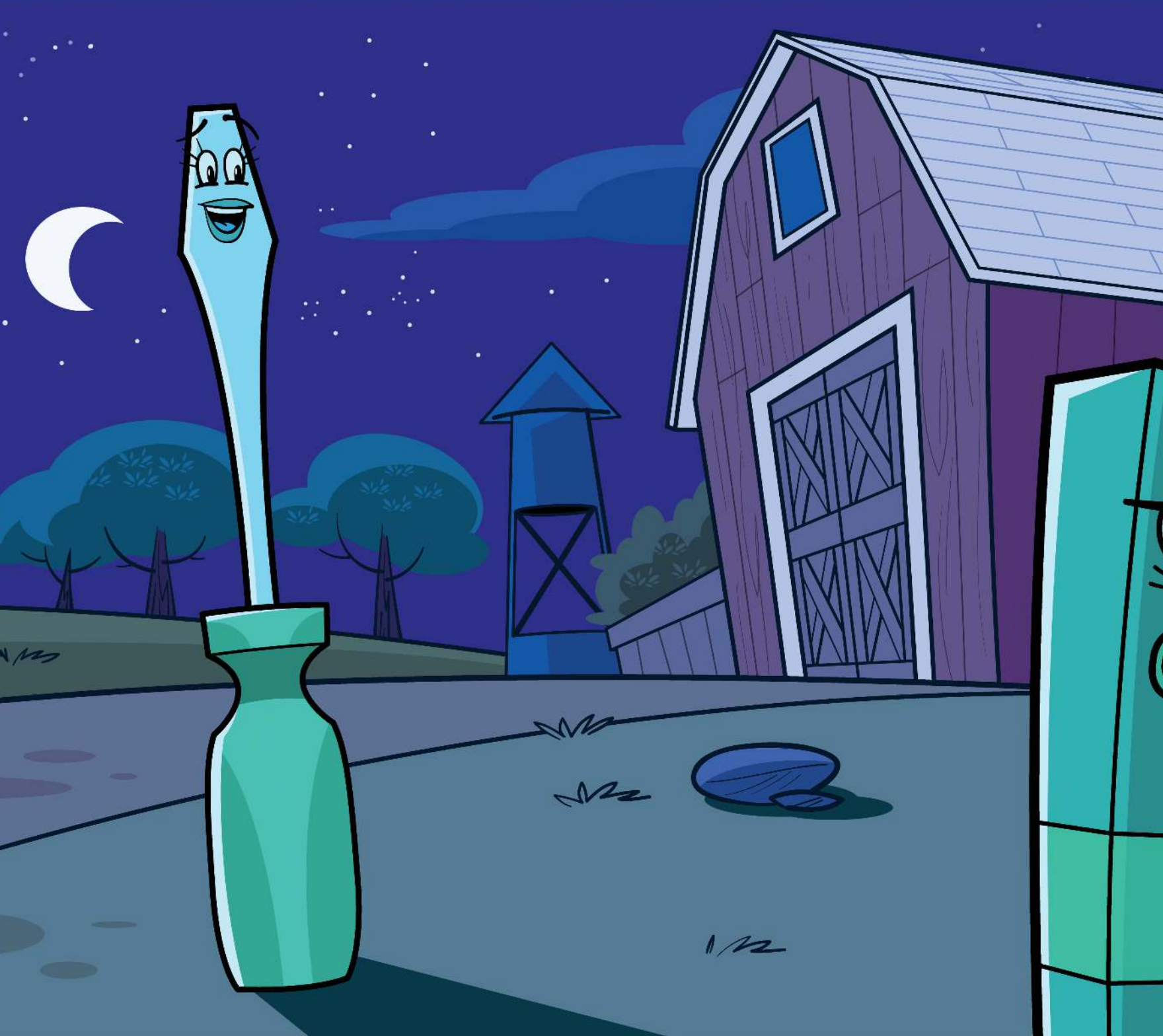
The tools rushed over to help. But Nevil was fine.

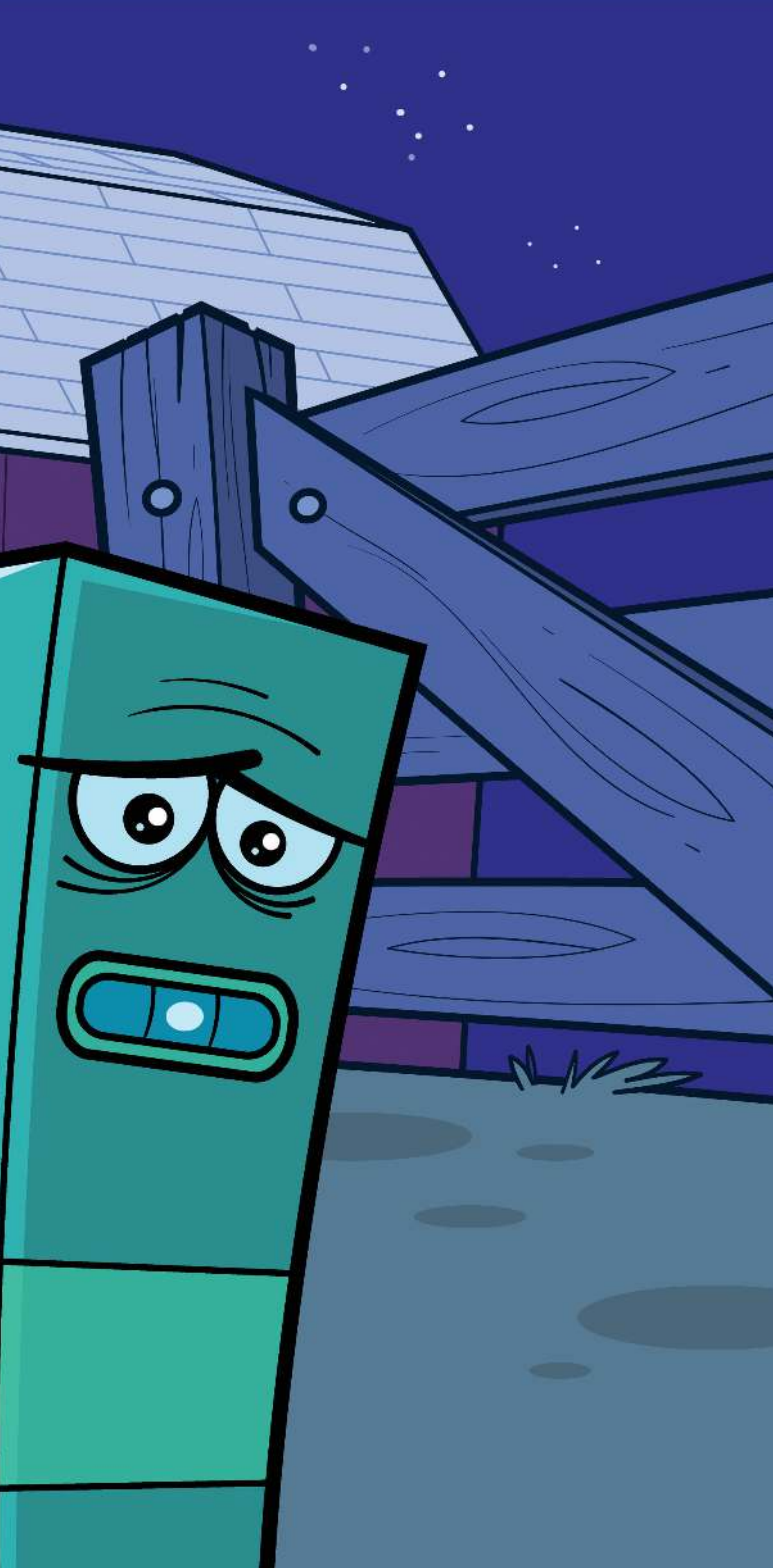


"How was my time?" he asked.

"I gotta level with you," said Don Hoe. "Not good. And the race is tomorrow."

"We've never won that trophy and we never will," grumbled Henry Sprinkler. The tools all stomped away.





"I believe in you," Mini Screwdriver said shyly later that night.

"I don't know why I volunteered," Nevil snapped. "I'd have to cheat to win!"

"But Nevil!" Mini gasped, "you can do it on the level. Isn't your motto 'Straight and true?'"

"Well, my level best isn't good enough!" Nevil howled. "I'm changing my motto to 'Straight and through' – as in, I'm through. I'm outta here." Nevil stormed off.



Mini didn't know what to do. She thought about getting the tools to help, but they'd been awfully mean. She racked her mind for an idea, trying to think outside of the toolbox. Finally she called out, "Will you race if I help you cheat?"