

# The **BIG BANG** Fair

“As you all know, The Big Bang Fair is next week,” said Miss Spindle.

All of Class 6A sat up in attention. All but one. Anil leaned back in his chair and threw a weary glance around the classroom.

Everyone had been talking about The Big Bang Fair for weeks. Miss Spindle had promised a special prize for the best science project. Danny was building a ship with his grandfather. Cassandra was making a skyscraper. The twins were designing a worm hotel. Even Toby, the second-laziest boy in class, had gone to the seaside to collect shells.

Anil didn't understand all the fuss. Most of the class didn't even like science.

“You've all been asking me about the prize,” continued Miss Spindle, her eyes sparkling as she looked at them, “and I can now reveal what it is.”

An excited murmur rippled across the classroom. Anil smirked. It can't be that special, he thought. Probably a jar of sweets or a handshake from the Head. Good thing he hadn't bothered with a project yet.

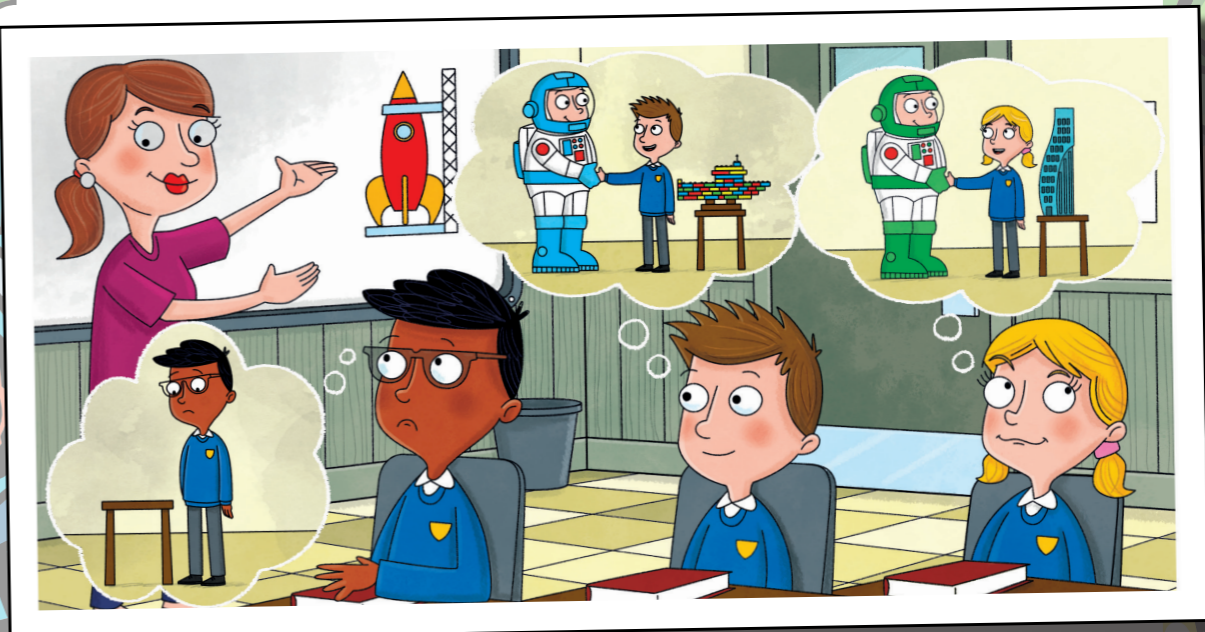
“The student with the best science project will visit the headquarters of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in America.”

Anil's mouth fell open.

“You mean NASA, Miss?” said Cassandra. “I know all about them. They're rocket scientists.”

“Yes, Cassandra,” said Miss Spindle. “Two of their astronauts will be visiting us to judge your efforts. You've had plenty of time to plan your projects so I expect you all to present your best work.”

Anil couldn't believe what he was hearing. There was less than a week to go until the fair. If he didn't have a project, he wouldn't just get into trouble. He'd be embarrassed in front of actual astronauts! Actual astronauts from NASA!



He groaned silently and put his head in his hands.

*What was he going to do?*

At lunch, Cassandra wouldn't stop talking about the prize.

“NASA's headquarters are going to be amazing,” she said. “I'd better decide what to wear.”

Anil snorted. “Who said you're going to win?”

“Nobody else is making a skyscraper,” retorted Cassandra, a scarlet flush reddening her cheeks. “It's even got lights and a garden roof.”

She folded her arms and looked at Anil. "And at least I have a project. Bet you haven't done anything, have you?"

"Have, too!" snapped Anil, the words out of his mouth before he could stop himself. "My project's so brilliant that the astronauts will beg me to work with them."

"Oh, yeah?" said Cassandra, eyeing him suspiciously. "What is it, then?"

"Can't tell you," said Anil. "It's a secret." And before she could ask him anything else, he stuffed the last of his sandwich into his mouth and walked off.

As soon as he got home that afternoon, Anil marched into the kitchen. Mum was wrestling his little sister, Priya, into a highchair.

"I need a project for The Big Bang Fair," he declared. "Something good enough to amaze a real astronaut."

"Ni-ni," squealed Priya, hurling a blob of custard onto the floor.

Mum tutted. "Have you checked in the shed?" she said.

"I think some of Grandad's old trunks are in there."

"I thought Grandad was a fossil hunter," said Anil, puzzled.

"How's that going to help?"

"Fossils are a kind of science," said Mum, ducking another scoop of custard. "And he collected lots of peculiar things on his travels. There must be something you can use. I'll help you look as soon as I've put Priya to sleep."

After shovelling down his tea, Anil took a torch and headed to the bottom of the garden. He didn't know what he would find in Grandad's old trunks. So long as it helped him impress the astronauts and beat Cassandra.

The shed was hidden behind a curtain of ivy. Dad had meant to tidy it up when they'd moved in, but he hadn't had time. Anil cracked open the door. The shed was shrouded in a veil of darkness. He cast his torch across the space. Cobwebs glistened from the rafters. Something scurried in the shadows. He licked his lips and glanced back towards the house. Mum was still feeding Priya. She saw him looking and waved. He swallowed and turned back to the shed.

"Don't be such a scaredy-cat," he whispered.

Taking a deep breath, he stepped inside.

