

THE
**STONE
AGE
CLASH**

JOSH LACEY
ILLUSTRATED BY **GARRY PARSONS**



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The Viking Attack
The Roman Invasion
The Maya Sacrifice



‘We’ll be back this afternoon,’ Mum said to the twins. ‘Have fun with Grandad. Behave yourselves.’

‘We will,’ Scarlett promised.

‘We always do,’ Thomas added.

It was Saturday morning. The twins had come to spend the day with their grandfather, while their parents drove to IKEA.

‘Try and do your homework,’ Dad suggested. ‘Then you can have a day off tomorrow.’

‘Grandad will be the perfect person to help you,’ Mum said. ‘He’s brilliant at making things.’ She turned to her father. ‘The kids have to make some Stone Age models for their homework. You’ll help them, won’t you?’



‘Of course I will.’ Grandad had a twinkle in his eye.

When Mum and Dad had gone, bumping down the track through the forest in their car, Grandad turned to the twins. ‘We’re going to learn all about the Stone Age, are we? So, how shall we do this? Shall we read a book? Look at pictures on the internet? Or would you rather do something more interesting?’



Grandad lived in a little cottage in the middle of a forest, more than a mile from the nearest neighbour. His home had low ceilings and rickety windows which allowed chilly breezes to blow through all the rooms.

Opposite the cottage was a large barn with a notice pinned to the closed door.



Grandad didn’t want anyone to wander into the barn and damage any of his inventions, or themselves. Nor did he want anyone to see the enormous contraption which filled one



end of the workshop. They might be tempted to step through the doorway in the middle of the machine – and they would then find themselves in a wormhole which could send them backwards or forwards through history to any date and location that they chose.

Grandad had tried to explain exactly how the wormhole transported people through time and space, but neither of the twins could understand his explanations.

Wait until you've spent twenty or thirty years studying physics and mathematics, he always told them. Then you might be able to understand how it works.

Grandad led Thomas and Scarlett to his workbench, which was covered with odd devices, most of which looked as if they were only half-finished. A hundred jam jars held things that might be useful one day. Tools hung from nails hammered into the wall.

'Who's going first?' Grandad asked.



Both twins said ‘Me!’ at exactly the same moment.

Grandad laughed. He beckoned them over.

‘I can’t do everything at once,’ he said. ‘You’ll have to take turns.’

Grandad gave each of the twins a little black earpiece, a translator which would allow them to understand any human language that had ever been spoken on Earth.

Next he fixed a tiny transmitter into each of their mouths, stuck to the back of their front teeth; it would allow them to speak all those languages.

‘What about our clothes?’ Thomas asked. ‘We can’t go back to the Stone Age looking like this. They’ll think we’re aliens.’

The twins were both dressed in their normal summer clothes: trainers, shorts, and T-shirts.

‘You can look in those bags,’ Grandad suggested.

In the far corner of the barn were a bundle

of black plastic bags stuffed with clothes. Thomas and Scarlett rummaged through them, searching for something which looked as if it was from the Stone Age. They ended up tipping up the bags and emptying their contents on the floor, then sorting through the piles of breeches, ruffs, shirts, ballgowns, petticoats, jerkins, scabbards, belts, helmets, caps, scarves and other items of clothing from every era of history.

‘This is perfect,’ Scarlett said, holding up a brown tunic which looked as if it had been cut out of an old blanket. ‘Look! There’s another for you.’

The tunics had been made for adults, but with the help of some scissors, Scarlett cut them to fit herself and her brother.



They were knee-length, sleeveless, and looked surprisingly similar to the pictures of Stone Age clothes that they had seen at school.

Thomas pointed out one problem. 'In the Stone Age, they wouldn't have worn pants.'

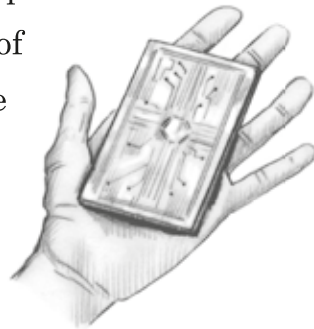
'I don't care,' Scarlett said. 'I'm keeping mine on.'

'Yeah, me too.'

The twins stripped down to their underwear, then put on the tunics.

Grandad handed each of them a device about the size of a phone. If you pressed the button in the middle of this device, you would be returned to the present, where not a single second would have passed, however long you might have spent in the past.

Each tunic had a pocket, perfectly fitting the device. (Pockets hadn't actually been invented



by the Stone Age, but no one would be able to see them under the tunics.)

'Are you ready?' Grandad asked.

The twins both nodded.

'Excellent,' Grandad said. 'Let's get this warmed up.'

He sat down at the main controls, then flicked the main switch from *OFF* to *ON*.

The time machine shuddered into action. A loud groan came from somewhere deep inside its mechanism. Metal creaked. Lights flashed. Tubes gurgled.

Grandad flicked more switches and typed a command into a keyboard. Next he had to set the date. He called out to his grandchildren: 'When was the Stone Age?'

'It started about three million years ago,' Scarlett replied. 'And ended about four thousand years ago.'

Grandad put his hand on the dial. 'You want me to set it for three million years ago?'

‘No,’ Scarlett said. ‘That’s too far back. We wouldn’t meet any *Homo sapiens*, only earlier versions of humans.’

‘So what shall I set it for?’

‘Can you send us to Stonehenge?’

‘Sure.’

‘Then set it for five thousand years ago, please. That’s when they started building it.’

‘I don’t want to see Stonehenge,’ Thomas said. ‘I want to see a smilodon.’

‘A what?’ Grandad asked.

‘A sabre-toothed tiger,’ Thomas explained. ‘I’ve always wanted to see one of them. That would be so cool.’

‘Sorry, you can’t,’ Scarlett said.

‘Why not?’ Thomas said.

‘Smilodons died out ten thousand years ago, and I want to see Stonehenge, which was built five thousand years ago.’

‘That’s not fair,’ Thomas said. ‘Why do we have to do what you want to do? Why can’t

we do what I want to do?’

‘Because if we do what you want to do, we’ll both be eaten by a sabre-toothed tiger.’

‘I’ll be fine,’ Thomas said. ‘I’ll fight back.’

‘With what?’

‘My brains.’

‘You don’t have any.’

‘Ha, ha.’

Grandad interrupted them. ‘Come on, kids, please, stop bickering. You need to make a decision. I have to set the date on the dial, and quickly, or the machine will overheat. When are you going back to? What are you going to see?’

The twins replied at the same time:

‘Stonehenge!’

‘Smilodon!’

‘Make your minds up,’ Grandad said. ‘Choose one or the other. Come on, please. Give me a date. I have to set the dial.’

Each of the twins was determined to get

their own way.

‘Stonehenge,’ Scarlett said.

‘Smilodon,’ Thomas insisted.

‘Stonehenge.’

‘Smilodon.’

‘Stonehenge!’

‘Smilodon!’

‘Stonehenge!’

‘Smilodon!’

Grandad was holding his head. Suddenly he had a brilliant idea. ‘I know! Why don’t you each go to different times? Thomas can see a sabre-toothed tiger, and Scarlett can look at Stonehenge, then you can come back here and tell me and one another all about it.’

Neither of the twins liked that idea. What if one of them had more fun than the other? What if smilodons turned out to be more exciting than Stonehenge, or vice versa? That would be so annoying! So unfair!

Grandad was about to despair, when he

thought of something else. ‘I’ve got another suggestion,’ he said. ‘You could go back in time twice. Together. First you can both go and find yourselves a sabre-toothed tiger. Once you’ve seen it, come back here. Then go again to have a look at Stonehenge.’

The twins both nodded. That was a much better plan.

Delighted to have found a compromise, Grandad set the coordinates for the location: Stonehenge, Wiltshire, England. He moved to a different dial. ‘Now I need to set the date,’ he said. ‘When do you want to go back to? When were sabre-toothed tigers roaming around?’

‘They first appeared about two million years ago,’ Scarlett replied. ‘Then they died out about ten thousand years ago.’

‘You’re going to have to be a little more specific than that.’

‘Let’s go a million years ago,’ Thomas suggested.

‘A million years ago?’ Grandad said. ‘Really?’

‘No,’ Scarlett said. ‘A million years is much too far in the past. Like I said, Homo sapiens didn’t even exist then. The first people only arrived here in Britain forty thousand years ago.’

‘Fine,’ Thomas said. ‘Let’s go back to forty thousand years ago.’

‘Yes? We’re agreed?’ Grandad had his hand on the dial. ‘Forty thousand years ago – you’re both happy with that?’

‘Sure,’ Thomas said.

Scarlett was nervous, unsure what they might find when they emerged from the wormhole, but she nodded too.

‘Forty thousand years ago, coming right up.’ Grandad turned the dial through hundreds, then thousands of years, heading further and further into the past. Ten thousand years ago. Twenty. Thirty. And forty.

As soon as the dial reached the correct setting, Grandad pulled a couple of levers, tapped a command on the keyboard, and pressed a button.

‘It’s ready,’ he called to his grandchildren.

Thomas was already marching towards the doorway in the middle of the machine.

‘Wait for me,’ Scarlett called out to her brother, but Thomas took no notice. He stepped through the door and disappeared into the darkness on the other side. Not wanting to be left behind, Scarlett threw herself after him.



Scarlett stared at the bear.

The bear stared back. He had fierce eyes, shaggy fur, and big front paws, which he lifted into the air, ready to rip Scarlett's head from her neck.

What should she do? Run? Fight? Call for help? Hope her brother came running to rescue her? Or . . . ?

Of course! She had an easy way to get out of here. She could press the button on



her device and be returned to the present. She'd stumble straight back into Grandad's workshop.

She reached under her tunic – and immediately, startled by the sudden movement, the bear let out a wild, loud roar, and shambled forwards, his head rocking from side to side.

I'm going to be eaten by a bear, Scarlett thought to herself. *Unless I can outrun him? Or climb a tree? Or fight back?*

But she knew she couldn't do any of those things. Bears are fast, strong and aggressive.

The bear opened his mouth, showing his sharp white teeth – and a weird shrieking noise filled the air.

Where was that coming from?

The bear?

No. The bear looked as startled as Scarlett herself.

The noise came again. Louder, more piercing. And Scarlett realised that, whatever

it was, that bizarre sound was coming from behind her.

She wanted to turn around, but she didn't dare take her eyes off the bear – who seemed to be just as confused and surprised as herself.

Before either of them could act, a stone whistled past Scarlett's left ear, sailed through the air, and thumped into the bear's middle.

The bear looked down at the place where the stone had hit him. He rubbed his belly. Then he lifted his huge shaggy head, and looked at Scarlett, and growled angrily.

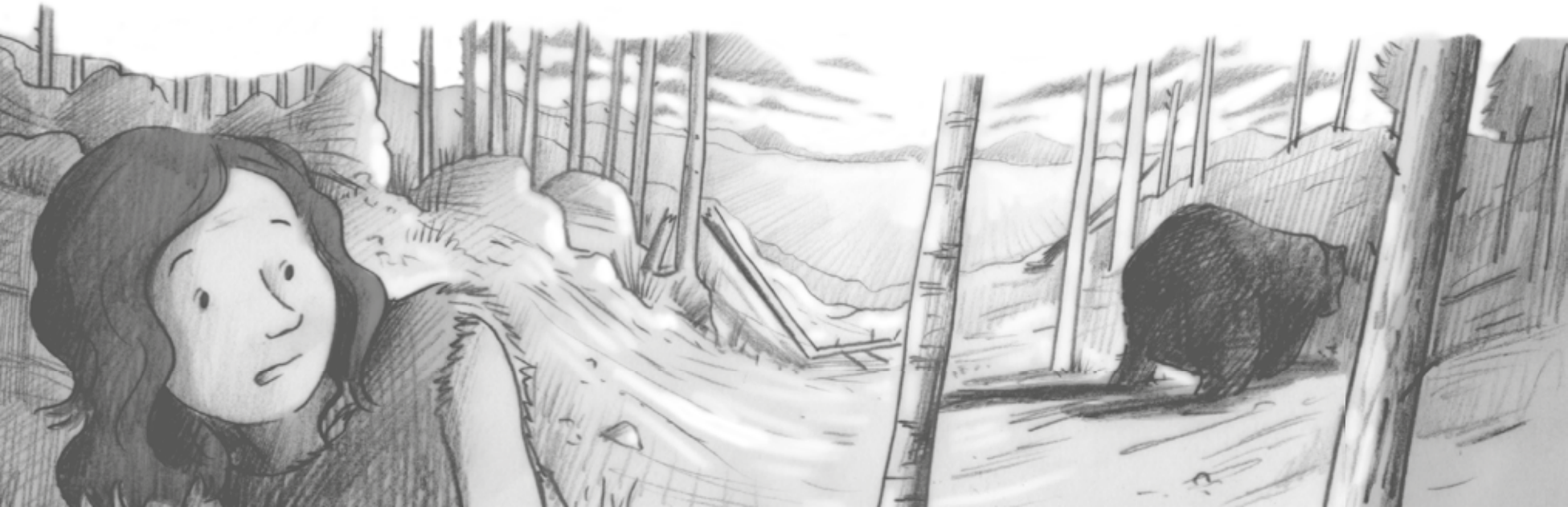
Don't blame me, Scarlett wanted to say.

I didn't throw that.

Another stone followed the first. Clonking against the bear's skull.

The bear hesitated. He glared at Scarlett with his fierce dark eyes: deciding whether to attack or run away.

A third stone smacked into the middle of the bear's forehead, and that made up his mind. He seemed to give a shrug of his big shoulders as if to say: *I'd prefer a lunch which doesn't fight back. Some honey, perhaps. Or a tasty bunch of berries.* He gave a loud snarl, warning Scarlett not to try anything stupid, then dropped to the



ground, and ambled away on all fours in the opposite direction.

Scarlett turned around to see who had saved her.

She came face to face with a very hairy man.

He wasn't as hairy as the bear, but he was still the hairiest person Scarlett had ever seen.

He had hairy arms, hairy legs and a hairy chest. He wasn't wearing any clothes other than a piece of leather wrapped around his middle.

Long straggly hair hung down to his shoulders. He had a big head with a wide forehead and a broad nose.

He was holding a stone in his right hand. His expression was fierce and wary. He might have rescued Scarlett from the bear, but he didn't look friendly. More like a man who was worried that he now had to fight off a second attacker.

He backed away, not letting his eyes leave

Scarlett's face.

When there was a good distance between them, he turned around and hurried into the forest.

Scarlett looked around. The bear couldn't be far away. If she stayed here, alone, unable to defend herself, she would get eaten. She was sure about that.

She hurried after her saviour. She didn't know anything about him, and wasn't sure whether to trust him, but she didn't want to be eaten by a bear. Better to stick with this hairy man. Whoever he might be.

The forest was dense and gloomy. Thick foliage blocked out the sky. There were no paths through the undergrowth. Scarlett wasn't wearing shoes, so she had to tread lightly, avoiding sharp sticks and thorns, watching where she put her feet.

From a safe distance, Scarlett made sure she didn't lose sight of the hairy man. She could

see he was carrying a simple backpack, made from sticks and dried animal skin, strung together with leather cords. Also slung across his back, fastened to the backpack, was a long wooden spear, almost as tall as he was. A few items hung from his belt: a couple of skinny little stones which looked as if they had been sharpened to a point, almost like knives; a rabbit pelt; some pieces of dark meat; a bone which had been carved into an ornament; and several bundles of leaves which looked as if they had come from different plants.

Scarlett would have liked to know if he was carrying all his possessions or simply a few of them, enough for a day, having left everything else in a home somewhere, a camp, a cave, a house, or wherever he based himself. Did he live alone? Was a family waiting for him? Had he come to hunt and forage? Would he be taking food home for his wife, his parents, his children, or the rest of the tribe? Maybe she'd



get a chance to ask him all these questions, but not yet. For now, she just had to keep up with him, and keep him in sight. He moved much faster than her. She put her head down and hurried through the forest after him.



Trees.

That was all Thomas could see.

Trees, trees and more trees.

Oh, and a big lump of rock. Thomas saw it when he turned slowly on the spot, looking in every direction.

In the middle of the forest stood a stone. Probably three times as tall as himself.



And much wider. Knobbly and mossy and impressively solid.

Where was his sister? What had the time machine done with her? Had they been separated?

He shouted her name. ‘Scarlett?’

No answer.

‘Scarlett! Hello? Are you here?’

Again no answer came back, nothing but the rustling of leaves and branches in the strong wind. A cold breeze was blowing. He felt chilly.

He’d start walking. That would warm him up. He’d walk until he found Scarlett. She must be nearby. There was only one question. Which way should he go? Every direction looked the same.

He heard a noise like a snuffle. As if someone had been crying, but was trying to stop.

‘Hello?’ he called out. ‘Scarlett?’

No one answered.

‘Scarlett?’ he shouted more loudly.

‘You here?’

He looked around, but couldn’t see anyone. He walked round the lump of rock, but didn’t find anyone. He was alone. He felt sure of that.

Until the snuffle came again.

He called out. ‘Hello? Is anyone there?’

No one answered. There was nothing to see. Nothing except trees.

He must have imagined it. That was what he thought, anyway, until he heard the snuffle *again*.

This time, he realised where it was coming from. The other side of the rock. Directly opposite him. Out of sight.

He put his head down and ran as fast as he could around the rock. Determined to catch them. But they must have been running at the same time as him, because when he got to the other side, they weren’t there.

Very clever. But not clever enough. He ran on, then whirled around and doubled back,



expecting to smack straight into his opponent. But there was still no sign of them.

Fine, he thought to himself. I don't mind if you want to be annoying. I'm still going to catch you, because I bet I'm a faster runner than you.

He did three circuits of the rock, then three more, but he didn't catch a glimpse of the sniffler, whoever they might have been.

Tired out, he stopped, and over the sound of his own heavy breaths, heard giggling.

Coming from above him. He put his head back, looked up, and saw a face peering down at him from the top of the rock.