

Sunil lives next door to an amazing inventor – Alex.
She has harnessed the power of boredom to slow time down, stop it and put it in reverse. They use her time machine – the Boring Machine – to explore the past. But things don't always go smoothly...

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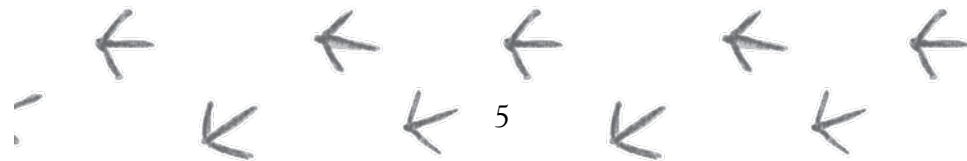


CHAPTER ONE

‘Don’t be silly, Sunil,’ Sunil’s mother said. ‘You know the way, we walk there every day. I’ll be there to pick you up.’

‘But what if something happens?’ Sunil felt anxious.

‘Like what?’



Sunil's mind went blank; suddenly he couldn't think of anything. 'What if the school is shut? Or the road is blocked?'

She chuckled. 'You can always come back home.'

'What if you've gone out?' Sunil said in a whiny voice.

'You're a big boy now. It's only ten minutes.' Sunil's mother gave him a kiss on the forehead. 'You'll be fine. We'll start tomorrow, hmm?'



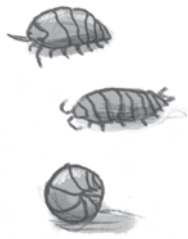
Sunil nodded, reluctantly. He picked up his cricket ball and went out into the garden. It was a sunny day and he tossed the ball to himself while trying to work out why walking to school alone made him feel so nervous.

It made no sense. He'd had many adventures where he had ended up by himself.



Although then, he had always known that his babysitter Alex was looking out for him.

Alex wasn't just his babysitter. She was also an amazing inventor and had invented a time machine called the Boring Machine. It used the power of boredom to slow time down. It concentrated the boredom so much that it could stop time and make it tick backwards. By harnessing this power, it could send people into the past.



Sunil supposed that when he was in the past, he always knew that if things became too exciting or the Boring Machine ran out of fuel, his timeline would find him and pull him up by his belly button into the present day.¹ He always knew he could get home.

But the trouble with the present day was, there was nothing to pull him back to where he belonged.

1. You can find out about more of Sunil and Alex's adventures in the other books in the *Time Machine Next Door* series.



Alex wouldn't be there right next to him when he walked to school.

Feeling frustrated and silly, Sunil threw his ball higher than he had meant to. It **bounced** off the slowly rotating blade of Alex's wind turbine... and **fell** into her back garden.

He pressed his face against the crack in the fence. It must have landed somewhere between the brambles and the disassembled jet ski. Sunil saw there was also a large pile of rocks. These were new.



The three closest to him had the words Kyoto, Kinshasa and Kingston scrawled on them in permanent marker.

He sighed, and walked through the side gate to ring Alex's front doorbell.

The bell rang loudly, but there was no response.

He rang it again. No response. He knew she was in. He could hear her running around and knocking things over.



‘Alex!’ he called through
her letterbox.

Mrs Chippy, Alex’s cat,
approached him. ‘Hello short
person. I’m just going to brush
myself on your leg.’



Mrs Chippy
wore a special
collar Alex had
invented called
a Talk Torc that
translated his
body language
into English.

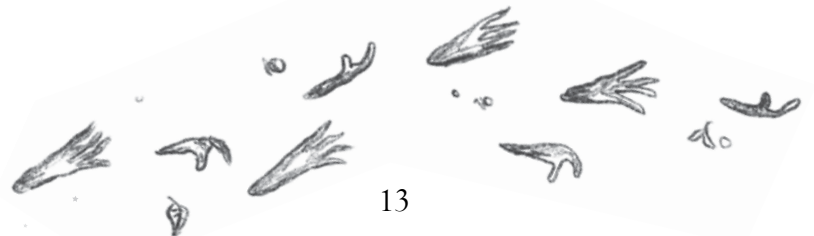
‘Hello Mrs Chippy,’ Sunil said,
watching the cat weave between
his legs.

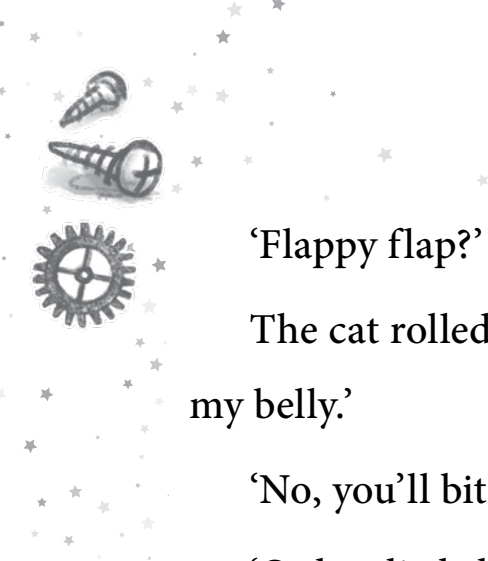
‘You’re mine now, I’ve wiped my
face on you,’ Mrs Chippy said.

There was a massive **crash**
from inside the house.

‘What’s going on?’

‘Alex put me out. She didn’t
want me to hunt the flappy flap.’
Mrs Chippy yawned and walked
away to flop into a sunny patch on
the front lawn.





‘Flappy flap?’ Sunil asked.

The cat rolled over. ‘Touch my belly.’

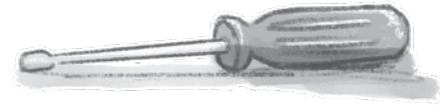
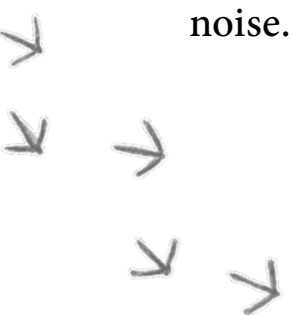
‘No, you’ll bite me!’

‘Only a little bit...’

‘What’s a flappy flap?’

‘I’m too busy to answer stupid questions,’ Mrs Chippy huffed and began to lick himself. ‘I need to clean the horrible human stink from your legs off me.’

There was another **crashing** noise.



Sunil peeked through the letterbox into Alex’s cluttered hallway. The coats had fallen off the hooks, the mannequin was leaning against the wall, and the books had been knocked off the shelves. There was more stomping and a shadow *zoomed* past. Alex ran after it with a large butterfly net.

‘Peep!’

Wiki the kiwi was looking up at him from the scattered books, his small eyes blinking in confusion.



‘Wiki? Is Alex babysitting you again?’

Wiki *peeped* again as Alex thundered up the stairs.

‘Alex!’ he called loudly. ‘I’m coming in!’

‘No!’ Alex shouted from upstairs.

‘Wiki is upset,’ he yelled.

Sunil stuck his arm through the letterbox and reached for the latch on the other side of the door. He didn’t feel guilty. It didn’t count as

breaking in when someone was home, right?

He stepped inside.

The shadow appeared from around the corner, *zooming* at him like a possessed fruit bat.

‘Shut the door! Shut the door!’ Alex yelled, running back down the stairs.

Sunil quickly closed it. The creature, whatever it was, landed against the shut door, scrabbled to get purchase on it and slowly





slid to the floor. Wiki shrieked and tried to claw at it with his feet but was held back by Sunil as Alex **crashed** her net down on top of it.

‘Got you!’ Alex yelled, picking it up out of Wiki’s reach.

‘**Squark**,’ said the creature.

It looked a lot smaller now it wasn’t flying. It had a frog-like face and turned its large owl-like eyes on Sunil, its brown fur bristling and short little tail vibrating in rage.

‘Is that a bat?’ Sunil asked,



letting go of Wiki, who was staring angrily up at it.

‘Of course it is not a bat. It is a luopterus...’ Alex said, panting.

Wiki was growling at her feet, apparently not liking having competition.

‘It’s a dinosaur!’ Sunil gasped.

‘He is not a dinosaur. And he needs to go home,’ Alex said, kicking open the door to the downstairs bathroom where she kept her time machine.

‘He looks like a pterodactyl,’

Sunil began.

‘Pterosaur,’ she corrected, trying to keep hold as he wriggled. ‘An anurognathid to be precise.’²

‘An a-nure-rag-nay-thid?’

Sunil said carefully. ‘But I thought pterosaurs are dinosaurs?’

2. Pterosaurs were flying reptiles that were alive at the time of the dinosaurs. They are the first vertebrates (non-insects) known to have powered flight. There are two flavours of pterosaur: pterodactyloids (big with short tails) and rhamphorhynchoids (smaller with long tails). There is a lot of debate about which group anurognathid pterosaurs fit in, as they are small but with short-ish tails.

‘They’re flying reptiles. If it’s a real dinosaur you want to see, there is one trying to attack me right now!’ Alex said, trying to avoid Wiki, who was *peeping* and scratching at her ankles.³

‘But pterosaurs are from the time of the dinosaurs!’ Sunil said excitedly. ‘I want to go!’

3. Alex is correct. Birds are dinosaurs. They evolved in the Jurassic Period and are cousins of theropod dinosaurs like velociraptors. Grown-ups say that birds ‘evolved from’ dinosaurs as though birds are distinct from them, but really, they are dinosaurs. Triceratops and pigeons belong to the same family.

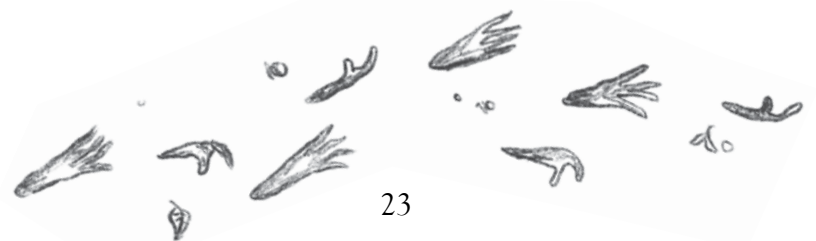
‘No, it is too dangerous,’ Alex said.

‘But you went back! And got a pet pterosaur!’ Sunil whined.

‘Dave is not a pet!’ Alex said.

‘Then how come you’ve called him Dave?’ Sunil asked.

‘He just looks like a Dave,’ she explained. ‘He accidentally got caught in my jacket when my timeline pulled me back to the present day. That’s the thing about travelling back so far in time,



it requires a lot of boredom to hold you there. You never have long to explore.'

'I want to see dinosaurs fight!' Sunil demanded.

At this, Dave escaped Alex's clutches and started flying round and round the small room, trying to find a way out.

'What makes you think wild animals randomly fight each other?' Alex asked.

She quickly shoved Wiki out of

the downstairs toilet and closed the door. He started *peeping* angrily outside.

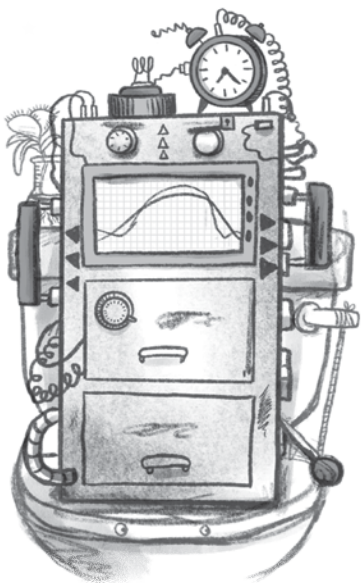
'Because they want to know who would win,' Sunil said. 'Don't you want to know?'

'No I don't!' Alex said. She started up the Boring Machine. 'I just need to get Dave back home. Pronto.'

'Why can't we keep him?' Sunil said.

'It's cruel. He'll miss his friends,'





Alex said, impatiently slapping her hand on the side of the Boring Machine to wake it up.

‘Good afternoon,’ said the Boring Machine. Sunil thought it sounded a bit grumpy and wondered why.



‘BM, do you have fuel?’

Alex asked.

‘My top drawer is at maximum capacity,’ the Boring Machine said curtly.

‘I filled it full of black and white pictures of people queuing,’ Alex explained to Sunil. Then she turned back to the Boring Machine. ‘So you have enough boredom to slow time down, reverse it and keep us back in the past for a while?’

‘Correct.’



‘And in your bottom drawer, do you still have an object to follow through time? The fossil from Qinglong?’ Alex asked.

‘Correct.’

‘Oh, can I see?’ Sunil asked.

He was disappointed with what Alex revealed in the bottom drawer of the Boring Machine. He had been hoping for some claws or teeth or a skull. Instead there was a grey rock with a smooth concave depression in it.



‘It is a trace fossil,’ she explained.⁴ ‘I think it’s the side of an egg, the impression it left in the mud...’

She paused and looked at it closely, as though she was seeing something for the first time.

‘Where did you get it?’ asked Sunil, looking it over.

4. A fossil is something that has been buried for so long it has turned to stone. Like a T. rex tooth. A trace fossil is where something left an impression (a mark) and it turned to stone. Dinosaur footprints are trace fossils and so are bite marks!

‘Oh, I bought a massive collection of rocks from loads of places on Earth.’ She grinned. ‘That way if I ever need to go anywhere, I can just find one from that location and use it to travel back there.’

‘Are we going to travel back to the time when this fossil was made?’ Sunil asked.

‘Yes!’ said Alex.

‘No!’ said the Boring Machine.



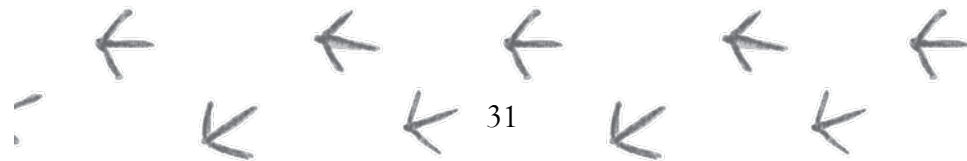
CHAPTER TWO

The Boring Machine made a low buzzing noise.

‘Are you cross with me?’ Alex asked.

‘No,’ it said.

‘Then tell me how to fix you,’ she ordered.



It buzzed again.

Sunil had snuck back out into the living room and was feeding Wiki from the woodlice jar to keep him happy while Alex tried to fix the machine.

‘Please BM, I need to get Dave back home,’ he heard Alex plead.

‘I’m unable to comply,’ the Boring Machine said.

Sunil noticed the door to the downstairs bathroom open.

Alex inched out, trying to make sure Dave the pterosaur stayed inside. Sunil held onto Wiki just to be sure.

‘Can’t you fix the Boring Machine?’ Sunil asked.

‘No. It won’t let me travel back more than a few thousand years. And we need to go back millions to take Dave home.’

‘But you invented it, why can’t you fix it?’

‘Don’t worry, I have a plan.



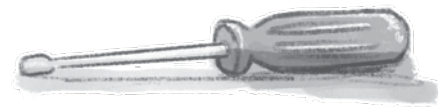


I invented something for precisely this eventuality!’ she said excitedly.

Alex ran over to the sofa and moved some cushions out of the way. She triumphantly held up a pink beanie hat with a lightbulb attached to the top of it.

‘What’s that?’ Sunil asked.

‘A thinking cap!’ she said proudly and put it on her head. ‘It is a machine I invented to help me with solutions to problems I can’t work out the answer to.’



‘OK...’ Sunil winced. It really was hideous. He waited a moment. ‘Has it told you the answer?’

‘Not yet,’ she said. ‘It needs fuel.’

‘Fuel? Like the Boring Machine needs boredom?’ Sunil asked.

‘Yes, the thinking cap needs brainwaves.’ Alex paused. ‘You know when you stumble on the right answer? That feeling of excitement and smugness you get when you realise you are the most brilliant person in the world?’





Sunil hadn't had many experiences like that. 'Like when you find your dad's keys for him?'

'Yeah, only I need something a bit stronger than that,' she said. 'Ask me a question.'

'Er... what is your name?' Sunil asked.

'Something difficult!' Alex huffed.

'What is forty-three times sixty-seven minus two?' Sunil asked.

'Two thousand, eight hundred and seventy-nine,' she said.

The lightbulb on the hat glowed a little before fizzling out. Wiki peeped.

'Were you right?'

Sunil pointed at the hat. 'The bulb only lit up a little bit.'

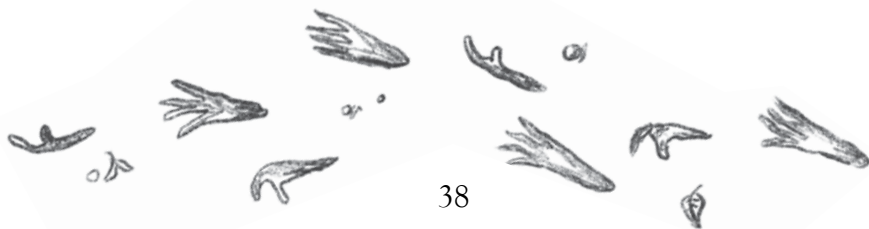
'Of course I was right!'



Alex said. 'But I'll need a bigger problem than that... a problem nearly equal to the size of the problem I need the thinking cap to solve in the first place.'

Sunil frowned. 'So what is the plan? Travel back in the past and put it on other people's heads so you can collect their biggest brainwaves?'

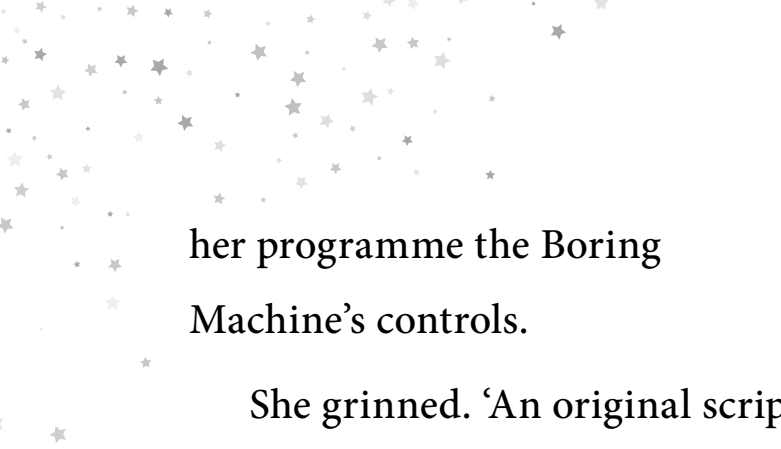
'That... is a much better idea than what I was thinking,' she said, the lightbulb glowing dimly.



Alex began searching through some papers and objects from her shelves. She seized one, and giggling with glee, she went back to the bathroom door, the lightbulb on her hat glowing faintly. With Sunil's help, she managed to squeeze them both inside while keeping Wiki and Dave separated on either side of the door. She quickly stuffed the papers into the Boring Machine's drawer.

'What are those?' Sunil watched





her programme the Boring
Machine's controls.

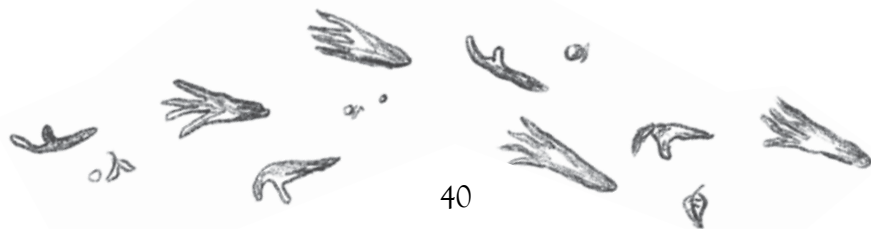
She grinned. 'An original script
of the 1940s film *Tortilla Flat*.'

'I've never heard of it,'
Sunil said.

'Oh it stars...' Alex grinned as
the lightbulb on her hat glowed
faintly. 'Hedy Lamarr!'

'Is she an inventor?' Sunil asked.

'Yes she is! Quick, grab onto the
handles!'



It was at this point that Dave the
pterosaur decided to swoop down
and land on the back of Sunil's
head. As the Boring Machine
started to flip Sunil backwards
in time, the pterosaur got caught
up in the movement, grabbing
onto his jumper before they both
disappeared.

Left behind, Wiki continued
peeping at the closed door.

