

THE
**TIME MACHINE
NEXT DOOR**

SCIENTISTS AND STRIPY SOCKS



ILLUSTRATED BY
**REBECCA
BAGLEY**

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BLOOMSBURY


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BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY



BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain in 2023 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978-1-80199-108-7; ePDF: 978-1-80199-106-3; ePub: 978-1-80199-107-0

Typeset by Newgen KnowledgeWorks Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, India

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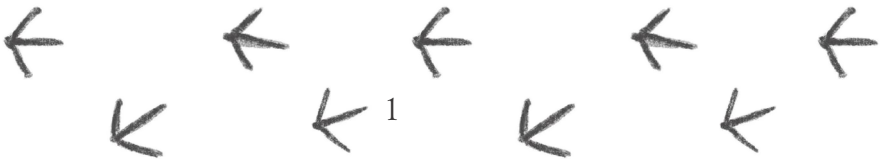


CHAPTER ONE

‘Should we call the **POLICE?**’

Sunil’s mum said, peering through
the curtains.

A glum man was sitting under
an umbrella on the soggy mattress
in their next-door neighbour Alex’s
front garden.

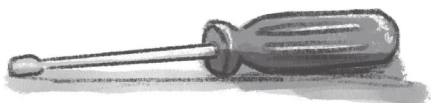
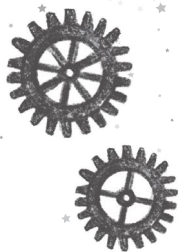




‘I’m not sure it is safe to leave Sunil with Alex if there is a strange man hanging around.’

‘It’s only Mr Shaykes. He’s **STRANGE**, but he’s not a **STRANGER**,’ Sunil’s dad said. ‘He owns the milkshake place up on the corner. Besides, Alex’s cat Mrs Chippy likes him.’

The cat was curled up on Mr Shaykes’s bright blue mackintosh and at his feet a kiwi bird, not





native to Manchester, pecked at his shoelaces.

‘What’s he doing?’ Sunil’s mum said.

‘He’s waiting for Alex to get back,’ Sunil said, looking at the roof.

‘Isn’t she home? She’s supposed to babysit!’

There was a gentle **THUD**.
A robin darted from the eaves of Alex’s house.



‘She’s home now!’ Sunil said.



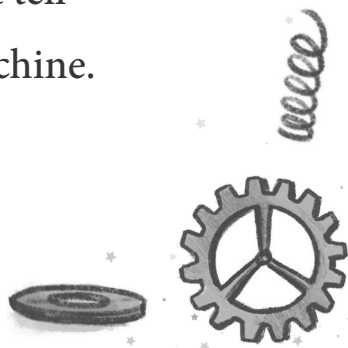
Before his mum could protest, he kissed both his parents goodbye and ran out of the front door.

‘She’s not in,’ Mr Shaykes said as Sunil marched past him.

‘She just landed,’ Sunil said.

‘She’s on the roof again?’ Mr Shaykes stood up, upsetting Mrs Chippy. He reached into his pocket. ‘I need to know what she’s doing.’

Sunil shook his head. He had promised Alex he wouldn’t tell anyone about her time machine.





‘I’ll give you this...’ Mr Shaykes held out a nub of an old chewed pencil. ‘It’s Charles Darwin’s favourite pencil.’¹

‘Why would I want that?’

1. Charles Darwin (1809–1882) was a very famous scientist. He didn't get a knighthood while he was alive because his ideas went against what the Church of England believed at the time but he did get one after he died.

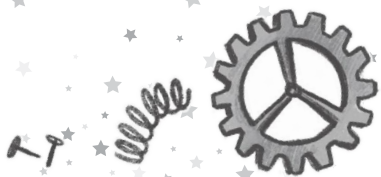


Mr Shaykes huffed, throwing the pencil on the ground. The kiwi dashed over to see what it was.

‘Tell me what she’s working on!’

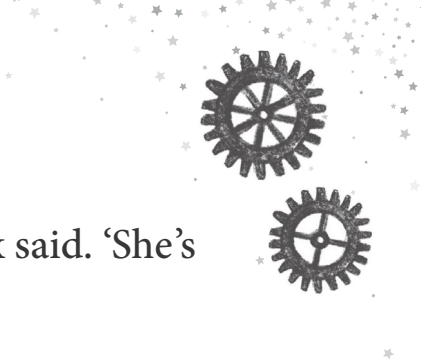
Sunil picked up the pencil. Alex opened the front door.

‘I’m okay,’ she wheezed. Her hair was a mess, she was wearing striped socks and she had black soot on her nose. ‘Oh, Sunil! I remember, come in.’





‘Alex! I need you to repair the Interesting Machine!’ Mr Shaykes said. ‘Without it my milkshake café will go **BUST!** Normal flavours just don’t get customers excited anymore.’



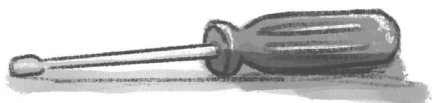
‘She’s working,’ Alex said. ‘She’s just not talking to you.’

‘I’m finding her the best objects and facts and she’s not interested.’

‘Like this pencil?’ Sunil held it up looking unimpressed.

‘I bought a load of Charles Darwin’s artefacts.’ Mr Shaykes put his foot in the door. ‘She won’t process them.’

‘Maybe she doesn’t like his music?’ Sunil suggested.



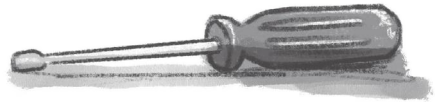
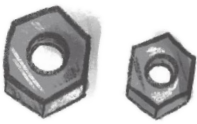


‘Try being nice to her,’ Alex said, kicking Mr Shaykes’s foot away.

‘What are you doing in there?’ he yelled as she shut him outside.

Alex turned to Sunil. ‘Do you really not know who Charles Darwin is?’

A smile flickered across Sunil’s face. He wanted to use Alex’s most exciting invention: a time machine. It worked on the principle that time slows down when you are bored. Alex’s machine harnessed the power




of boredom and followed objects' timelines through history. Alex called it the Boring Machine, or BM for short. It was dangerous and exciting and Sunil had been looking for an excuse for them to use it again. 'Could we use the Boring Machine to travel back in time and meet him?'

Alex frowned. 'I lost you last time.'

'You found me again,' Sunil said.

'It's not just that. I can't seem to replicate my experiments.' She





looked upset. ‘It means I don’t know precisely how time travel works, and that means it is dangerous.’

‘How are you going to find out how it works if you don’t try?’
Sunil said.

Alex smiled.