BOB vs THE SELFIE ZOMBIES

ANDY JONES

Illustrated by Robin Boyden

Piccadilly PRESS

First published in Great Britain in 2023 by
PICCADILLY PRESS
4th Floor, Victoria House, Bloomsbury Square
London WC1B 4DA
Owned by Bonnier Books
Sveavägen 56, Stockholm, Sweden
www.piccadillypress.co.uk

Text copyright © Andy Jones, 2023
Illustrations copyright © Robin Boyden, 2023

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

The right of Andy Jones and Robin Boyden to be identified as author and illustrator of this work respectively has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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

ISBN: 978-1-80078-348-5
Also available as an ebook

1

Typeset by Emily Bornoff
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



Piccadilly Press is an imprint of Bonnier Books UK
www.bonnierbooks.co.uk

To Me

As this is a book about time travel, perhaps I am allowed to dedicate it to someone from the past. Perhaps I will dedicate it to eleven-year-old me. Andrew, it must seem incredible to think you grow up to become an author. But trust me, kiddo, you can do it. Just pay attention in English class, OK? Oh, and grow your hair long while you still can.

'I never think of the future – it comes soon enough.'

– Albert Einstein, mathematical genius.

'Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.'

– Author unknown. But still a genius.

THE PRESENT NOWISH



1

A CONFUSING PLACE.
A FISH-FINGER CHOO-CHOO.
TIME GOES FAST.
A CRACKLE BENEATH THE TABLE.

Mum wasn't the best cook in the world. I mean, if she had been, she'd have worked as Head Dinner Lady at a ten-star restaurant instead of in a garage as a mechanic. But she was a good cook. Even if her hands were usually covered in engine grease. She baked pies, cooked casseroles, made her own pizzas. She cooked Spanish food, Sri-Lankan, Mexican. Mum said the kitchen was her 'happy place', and I honestly believe you could taste that in her cooking.

Dad – if I had to guess – would say the kitchen is his 'very confusing place'. And you can taste that in

his cooking. Which is unfortunate now that he has to prepare all our meals.

He's fine with the simple stuff – sausages, burgers, chips and so on. It's when he tries to actually cook that things get . . . interesting. Chicken and pineapple pie, baked bean and tuna curry, stilton and egg pizza. It's not the worst food in the world. It's just . . . weird, I suppose is the kindest way of putting it. Even my dog Zem (who's favourite things to eat include shoes, sticks and sheep poo) turns his old wet nose up at Dad's cooking.

Luckily, it's fish fingers, chips and peas tonight, and the opportunities for Dad to mess it up are relatively small. Although, as he places my supper on the table, I see he has created another food sculpture.

I started big school this year, but Dad still likes to arrange my food into the shapes of faces, animals, tanks, volcanoes, rockets and whatnot. As if I was still nine or ten years old, not eleven and a bunch of months. Honestly!

He's looking at me now, waiting for me to say something about his latest creation.

'What is it?' I don't mean to sound sulky, but that's the way it comes out.

'It's a choo-choo,' says Dad.

'You mean a train.'

'*Choo-choo*,' says Dad, pulling an invisible steam whistle. He grins.

I don't.

'What's up?' says Dad. 'You used to love choo-choo trains.'

'I also used to like shoving crayons up my nose. I'm not a baby any more, Dad.'

'No one's saying you're a baby. It's just . . . you know, I thought it was fun.'

And, looking at it again, I suppose the train is kind of cool. Four fish-finger carriages lined up on a circle of French-fry train tracks.

'What are these?' I say, pointing at a row of peas.

‘Passengers,’ says Dad. ‘They’re pea-ple. Get it?’

‘I get it,’ I say, smiling. ‘It’s awful, but I get it.’

Dad shrugs. ‘I’m a dad. It’s my duty to make awful jokes.’

‘Sorry for being grumpy.’

‘We all get grumpy,’ Dad says. ‘Grumpy is allowed. But just . . . don’t be in such a hurry to grow up, OK?’

‘OK,’ I say, loading my fork with a slice of fish-finger train carriage and a few pea-ple.

‘It’ll come soon enough. Time goes fast,’ Dad says, clicking his fingers. ‘Trust me.’

I scoop up a forkful of supper, but a single pea drops to the table and rolls onto the floor.

‘Escap-pea!’ says Dad.

‘Good one,’ I tell him.

Zem, sensing food, climbs out of his basket and hoovers up the little green escap-pea. Beneath the table, something makes a muffled, crackly sound.

My first thought is that he’s farted.

This would be very bad news indeed. Zem is a big, old dog and he has been known to clear a room with a single – often silent – dog-guff. He has been known, in fact, to clear an entire village hall. In a competition for the world's most toxic dog-parps, Zem would be World Champion. Although why anyone would arrange a competition like that, I have no idea.

The crackling sound happens again. Dad and I swap worried looks. And then – just as we're about to run from the kitchen – I remember that I have my walkie-talkie between my legs. It crackles a third time, immediately followed by the voice of my best friend.

'Bob. Bob, are you there? Over?'

Dad gives me a stern-ish look. 'What have I told you about walkie-talkies at the table, Bob?'

'Well, strictly speaking, it's below the table,' I say.

'Hmmmmm,' says Dad.

'Bob?' says the walkie-talkie. 'You there, Bob? Over.'

Dad smiles and nods at me: Answer it.

‘I’m here,’ I say into the walkie-talkie. ‘Over.’

‘Ready for rehearsal?’ says Malcolm. ‘Over.’

‘Just got to finish my supper. Over.’

‘Whatchahavin? Over.’

‘Fish fingers. Over.’

‘Did he arrange them? Over.’

I glance at Dad. His expression gives nothing away.

‘Train,’ I say to Malcolm. ‘Chips for tracks.’

‘Cool,’ says my best friend.

Dad clears his throat, glances at my supper, mouths the word: Supper. Mouths the word: Over.

‘Got to go,’ I say to Malcolm. ‘See you in the garage in ten minutes. Over.’

‘See you there. Over and out.’

I put the walkie-talkie down and stab my fork into a few chip train tracks.

‘Make sure to chew that properly,’ Dad says. ‘You know, choo-choo it properly.’

And when he laughs, it makes me laugh too.