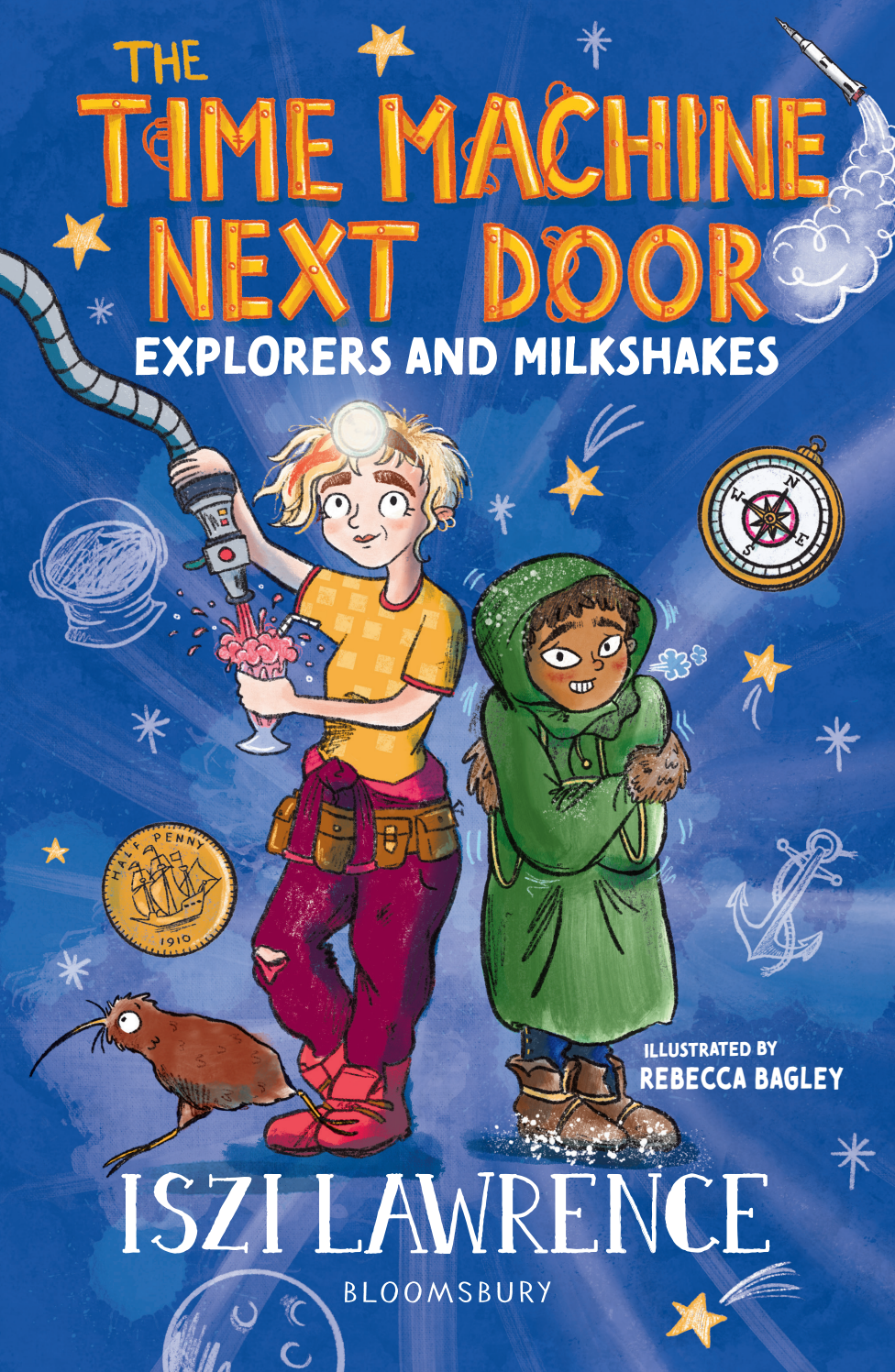

THE
TIME MACHINE
NEXT DOOR
EXPLORERS AND MILKSHAKES
HALF PENNY
1910
ILLUSTRATED BY
REBECCA BAGLEY
ISZI LAWRENCE
BLOOMSBURY

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Chapter Two

Alex looked nervously out of the peephole to make sure Mr Shaykes had left, then she turned to Sunil. 'Your parents didn't tell me you needed babysitting today.'

‘I’m not a baby!’ Sunil showed her the broken record in his jacket. ‘I need your help.’

‘Ah, so that is why Wiki was so interested in you,’ Alex said, looking closely at the record.

‘Wiki?’

‘The kiwi,’ Alex said. ‘He’s trained to sniff out interesting objects. Kiwis are the only birds to have their nostrils on the tips of their beaks.’

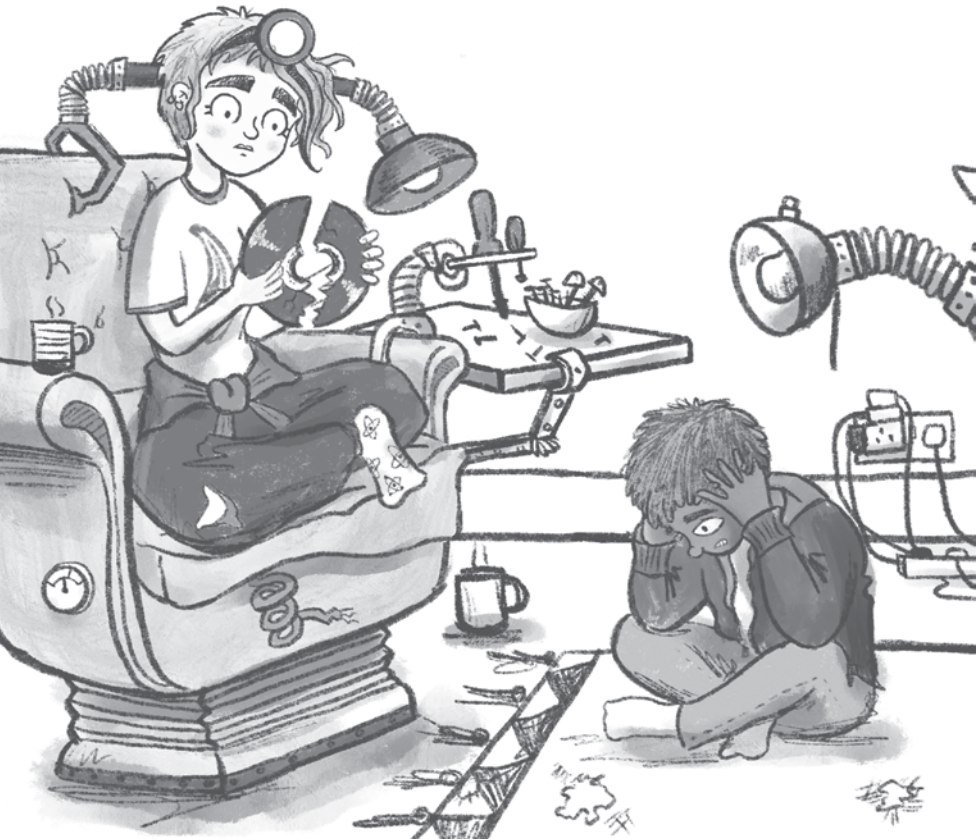
‘Can you fix it?’ Sunil asked, as Alex held two pieces together.

She shook her head. Sunil sat down on the floor. All hope was lost. His parents would never speak to him again.

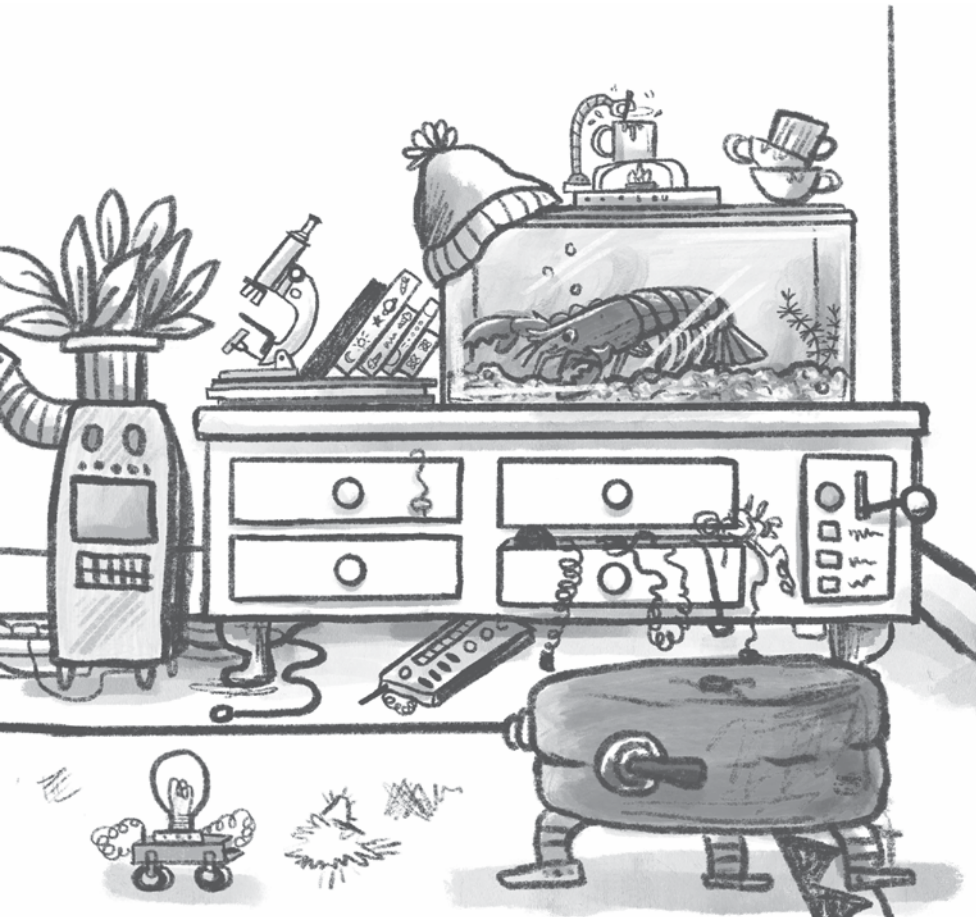
'*Bad Moon Rising*?' Alex said. 'It's just an old record. Why is it so important?'[1]

1. *Bad Moon Rising* is a song by the band Creedence Clearwater Revival & John Fogerty which was released in April 1969. It sounds happy and jaunty but is actually about a forthcoming apocalypse (the end of the world)! It contains the line, "I feel the hurricane blowin', I hope you're quite prepared to die." Eeek! It was written during the Cold War when many people were worried they would die because of nuclear bombs.

‘It’s from when my nanabapa came to England,’ he said. ‘The first record he bought. He kept it on his shelf. And now Mum keeps it on our shelf. And I broke it…’



‘We’ve got the fragments,’ Alex said, holding up a piece of the record. ‘Which means I can use its atoms to pinpoint its location in the timeline. Get that wrong and you



can end up anywhere. Last week, I got stranded at sea.'

She pointed to a large fish tank in the corner. It had a woolly hat on top of it and a lobster inside.

She's gone mad, Sunil thought.

He followed Alex past towering piles of wires and gizmos. In the middle of the house, by the staircase, was a large puddle of water. Sunil



looked up and realised that she had cut a skylight in her roof that wasn't all the way closed.

'I don't want to use the mattress every time,' Alex said, noticing his look. 'Before we go any further, you have to promise never to tell a word of this to anyone.'

Sunil wasn't paying attention; he'd picked up a piece of twisted metal from a pile and was playing with it.

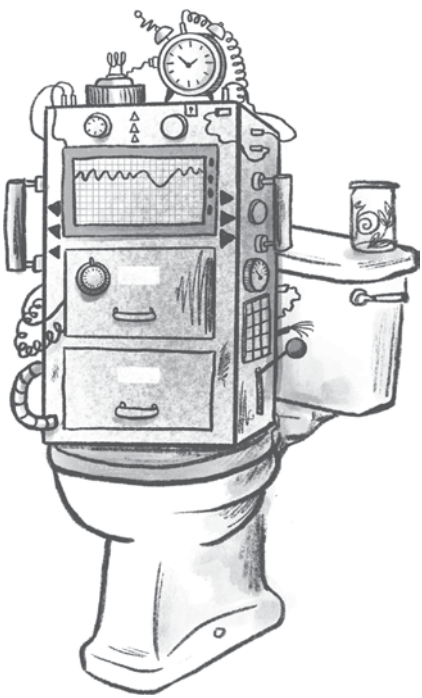
Alex frowned. ‘Swear that if you tell any other living soul, you will no longer support India at cricket. You’ll be an England fan instead.’

Sunil looked up. He could imagine what his cousins would say if he began supporting England. Alex stood with her arms folded, waiting for him to agree.

‘I swear,’ Sunil said, putting the piece of metal into his pocket.

Alex beamed. She opened the door with a flourish. Inside was

disappointing. On top of Alex's downstairs toilet there was an old filing cabinet with a lot of tubes and wires sticking out of it. There was a screen, some handles, and two drawers.



Sunil blinked. 'Can this repair the record?'

'Update complete,' said a computer voice. 'You look positive today.'

Alex blushed. 'I've programmed it to give me affirmations.'

'Your hair is shiny.'

'Thanks BM.' She started clicking different buttons and widgets. 'We don't need to repair the record if we can go back in time and get an exact copy. I've been wanting to tell people about BM for ages, but I haven't got it running perfectly yet.'








'You've invented a time machine?'

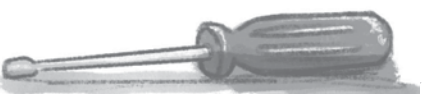
'I call it the Boring Machine. BM for short,' said Alex.

'I think you're marvellous,' the machine said.

'A Boring Machine?'

'You know how when you are really bored, time slows down?' Alex said.

'Yeah?'





'If time slows down when you're slightly bored,' she explained, 'then it will get slower still when you're super bored.'

'When you are mega bored, time stops,' interrupted the machine. 'Nice shoes.'

'Thanks,' said Sunil.

Alex's eyes sparkled. 'I calculated that it is possible to be so bored that the clock doesn't just stop, it ticks backwards.'



‘So can it take you back anywhere you want?’

‘Not quite. I need an old object that was there in the past, like this.’ She placed the fragments of Sunil’s broken record into a drawer in the side of the machine. ‘It uses an electron microscope to measure the atoms to see where it has been. Then, I feed the Boring Machine something dull…’

She ran back out of the room and came back with an old-fashioned

cassette tape. '... like a recording of grown-ups talking about mortgages.'

'Yummy,' said the Boring Machine as Alex placed it in a different drawer.

'How do you get back?' Sunil asked.

'The Boring Machine can't hold you down in the past for too long. If you get too excited your timeline finds you and brings you back to the present day.' She grinned. 'It feels like it's pulling you by the belly button.'







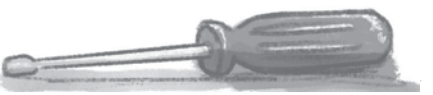


‘So, we aren’t going to repair the record?’

‘No, we’ll go to a shop, buy another copy and be back here before you can say strawberry,’ Alex said. ‘Are your hands clean?’

‘Yes,’ Sunil said, wiping the grease from the scrap metal onto his jeans.

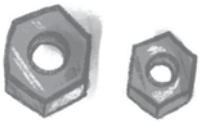
‘Just make sure you don’t let any clothing come into contact with the handles or it could follow that timeline instead of the record’s. I’ll get some peanuts.’



‘Peanuts?’

‘You’ll need something salty,’ Alex said, crossing the room and stuffing a packet of peanuts into her pocket. ‘Peanuts, check. Lucky socks, check. Hold onto the handles. Try not to reach out when you land. Keep your arms tucked in or you could hurt your shoulders. Ready?’

Sunil felt like his entire body was yawning. It was like doing a backflip except he missed the floor. He spun back so fast that colours streaked





in front of him. Gradually it slowed and the world assembled itself into a completely different place.