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Out of Time

Bumblebee Books

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to a wonderful Mum and Dad
who always encouraged me to follow my dreams.
I miss you both and think about you everyday.
I hope that I've made you proud.

Part 1: Max

Chapter 1

Sunday 9th January 2022

Bang!

The blast had been sufficient to knock 12-year-old Joe Jackson to the floor, with enough force to render him unconscious.

As the dust began to settle, the ground around the site of the explosion weakened to such an extent that a large hole began to form – unfortunately, the ground started giving way at the exact spot where Joe was lying.

The small town of Highcross was a typical community located in the middle of England. It had a relatively small population and included the type of boring high street that can be found in many places throughout the country. It's a quiet, sleepy kind of town. The type of town in which very little happens.

There was, however, one interesting fact about Highcross: during the Second World War, it was home to a very important munitions factory. This had obviously made it a target for the Luftwaffe[1] , and it also explained why there had just been an enormous explosion. It was quite common for unexploded World War II bombs to be found in Highcross, and that's exactly what had just happened on this wintery Sunday afternoon.

"Great job!" shouted the supervisor of the bomb disposal team who had just dealt superbly with the latest unexploded bomb.

1. The German Airforce during WWII

None of the team had seen Joe exploring the area and so were completely unaware that he'd fallen through the ground just a few metres from where they were currently standing.

"Let's get packed away, lads!" shouted the supervisor. "Just cordon off that hole. We'll get it filled tomorrow," he added, before leaving the scene with the rest of his team.

A few minutes later, Joe started to come round. *Where am I?* he thought hazily, lifting his head and glancing around him.

Joe was a little more curious and adventurous than the typical Highcross youngster. He was of average height for a boy of his age, with slightly messy ginger hair and two distinctive moles on the left side of his face. He wasn't remotely interested in the usual things 12-year-old boys are generally so passionate about, such as football. Instead, Joe had a flair for travel and adventure, often finding himself in tricky situations. In the last year alone, two search parties had been launched because Joe had managed to get himself lost. He had never, however, found himself underground before.

Why did I try to find an unexploded bomb? he wondered. *I'm such an idiot! How am I supposed to get out of here?!*

Suddenly, Joe remembered that he had his mobile phone on him. He pulled it out of his pocket and, to his complete surprise, found it undamaged. There was, however, no signal.

"Help!" he shouted, as loud as he could.

There was no response.

He was on the very outskirts of town, and it was rare for people to come here, though he supposed there might be the occasional dog walker.

Of course, unbeknown to Joe, the area had been cordoned off.

"Help!" he shouted for a second time.

Once again, there was no response.

How long have I been unconscious for? he wondered.

He was starting to get very worried now. After all, the hole was far too deep for him to climb out of. However, when he turned on the flashlight on his phone, he saw something interesting – something that gave him hope.

This wasn't just a hole. There was a passage leading off it.



Maybe this will lead to an exit! he thought excitedly as he headed into the dark passage. Most people would have been scared to walk down a dark, underground passage alone, but not Joe. To him, this was just another adventure.

Joe made his way along the passage for five minutes, with only his mobile phone flashlight illuminating the way. Then, slowly but surely, the passage opened out into what appeared to be a large cave. Slowly, Joe flashed his torch around the space – it was enormous.

After checking his phone battery, which had plenty of charge left, he walked further into the cave and waved the flashlight around again.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw something flicker.

What was that? he thought, spinning around.

He was getting scared now. He was sure something had moved in the cave.

He stood still for a few moments, listening intently, and what he heard made his blood run cold. Footsteps seemed to be approaching him from behind.

He swung around in the direction of the sound and shone the flashlight in front of him. Joe wasn't the type of person to feel fear; that's why he was so accustomed to getting into scrapes. Right now, however, he was terrified.

There was somebody in the cave with him.

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Mrs Jackson was frantic. She knew that Joe often found himself in difficult situations, and she was used to him coming home at different times, but he wasn't normally this late.

"He'll be okay, Patricia," said Mrs Jackson's next-door neighbour, Eve. "He always turns up."

This didn't help Mrs Jackson feel any better. It also didn't help that Mr Jackson worked on an oil rig in the North Sea for half the year; this certainly made dealing with Joe's 'adventures' even more challenging.

"We need to go and look for him," said a tearful Mrs Jackson. "No one has any idea where he went after this afternoon!"

"Of course," said Eve. "I've already asked our neighbours; they're looking for him now. We'll find him, don't worry."

***

A couple of miles away, the search party had already started looking for Joe in an area of Highcross where he'd gone missing before. Of course, they didn't realise that Joe was on the other side of town.

"Joe!" came the shouts of the crowd. It was very dark now and the temperature was dropping rapidly.

"It's much too cold for anyone to survive out here overnight," said one of the worried members of the search party.

"Don't be so negative," said another.

After a while, Mrs Jackson and Eve joined the search party. They had decided not to tell Mr Jackson. *There's no need to worry him yet,* thought Eve. *We'll find him soon.*

After an unsuccessful hour, however, the group was ready to abandon the search.

"It's too dark to see anything," said one of the searchers, "we have to call the police."

It was at this moment that another member of the group remembered something. "There was an unexploded bomb disposal over by the railway bridge earlier today," he told Joe's mum.

Mrs Jackson took a deep breath, trying not to panic.

"Don't worry," Eve told her in a soothing tone, trying to keep her calm. "He won't be there; the bomb disposal unit will have checked for people in the area."

Mrs Jackson nodded, though she didn't look convinced.

"We'll go and have a look!" came a shout from the crowd. "You go home and wait by the phone."

A tired Mrs Jackson agreed, heading back to her house with Eve whilst the rest of the group headed over to the site of the earlier controlled explosion.

"Look at this," said David – one of the members of the search party – as he looked down at the cordoned off hole in the ground, "it's enormous!"

Slowly, the search party inched closer to the hole, peering down into its depths.

"Some of us are going to have to go down there," David continued. "Do we have enough torches?"

"Yes, we do," came a response from the crowd. "We have plenty."

"Okay," said David, turning to the rest of the group, "are there any volunteers willing to come into the hole with me?"

The people of Highcross were always very proud of their role as helpful members of the community, and – as a result – it didn't take long for six people to volunteer.

"Okay," said David, "let's go down and have a look. The rest of you stay here, and if we aren't back within an hour, call the police and the fire brigade."

The others nodded, exchanging apprehensive looks.

With that, the seven brave volunteers made their way, slowly

and carefully, into the hole.

"There's a passage here!" David said to the others, once they were all down. "Let's go and have look!"

After making sure everyone had a torch, David led the way into the dark passage that Joe had only recently entered himself.

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"Who's there?" asked Joe, his voice shaking.

There was no reply.

"I know there's someone there… I just saw you!" he shouted.

"Please leave me alone," said a quiet voice from the darkness. "Just turn back and go."

Joe jumped at the sound of the voice. "Are you trapped down here?" he asked after a moment.

Again, there was no answer.

By now Joe was beginning to feel extremely uneasy. There could be anybody down here with him! "You're making me nervous," he said quietly.

"Don't be nervous," came the reply, "I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to be left alone."

After a moment of hesitation, Joe shone his phone flashlight in the direction of the voice and, finally, he saw who was in the cave with him. "You're just a kid!" he gasped.

"My name is Maxelon," said the stranger, "and I come from the planet Proxima Centauri b."

Joe took a step back. Now he was feeling even more uneasy. *Great,* he thought, *I'm down here with a crazy person.*

Maxelon looked like he was about 15 years old. His skin was very pale, and he had jet black hair. He was wearing a silver suit with what looked like a black waistcoat. Hanging at his waist, he wore a utility belt with lots of strange-looking gadgets hanging from it.



“What are you talking about?” asked Joe, just as the cave lit up. He took another step back, shocked at the sudden illumination.

“You don’t need your torch anymore,” said Maxelon.

Joe looked around him in awe. The cave was unbelievable, its walls covered in different coloured rocks and what looked like sparkling gemstones. In the centre of the cave stood an amazing-looking computer.

“What is that?” asked Joe, pointing at the machine.

“It’s my console,” explained Maxelon. “It’s for contacting my planet. It should also let me travel between here and there.”

Joe looked at Maxelon, frowning. “Should?”

“It’s broken,” sighed Maxelon. “I’ve been stuck on this planet for almost a year.”

Joe approached the console and looked at the blank monitor. “How did you get here?” he asked.

Maxelon explained that he had accidently crashed here during a visit to our galaxy. “My ship was destroyed on impact, but I was able to grow this computer. I had hoped it would help me get home,

but I've not been able to power it up," he said sadly.

"Grow a computer?" asked a very suspicious Joe. He was beginning to think that someone was playing a trick on him. He looked around the cave to see if there were any hidden cameras. He might be on one of those game shows.

"Yes," replied Maxelon. "We can organically grow our technology. We call it *Organa-tech* and, thankfully, I'd brought plenty of seeds with me."

Joe was feeling even more confused when, suddenly, the console came to life. "What's happening?" he asked, wide-eyed.

Maxelon ran over to the monitor. "It must be picking up power from the satellites around the planet," he told Joe. "The hole that just appeared in the ground is letting the signal through! There's not enough power to contact home, but it will allow me to charge my trekker."

"Your trekker?" asked Joe.

Before Maxelon could answer, the sound of voices floated over to them – someone was entering the cave. In an instant the console powered down and the light that had been illuminating the cave went out. Apart from the occasional beam of torchlight, the cave was engulfed in darkness once again.

"There you are!" shouted David, running over to Joe. "Your mum's worried sick!"

"Maxelon?" shouted Joe, looking around the cave.

There was no sign of his new friend and, just like before, there was no response.

"Who are you talking to?" asked a bewildered David.

"Nobody," replied Joe quickly.

David and the other six members of the search party looked around the cave, but there was nobody else there.

David turned back to Joe, concerned. "We need to go."

The group headed carefully down the passage and back to the hole, where they were helped up by the waiting members of the search party. As they walked, the only things Joe could think about were Maxelon and his strange homegrown computer.

Chapter 2

Monday 10th January 2022

"Time to get up, Joseph!"

Joe opened his eyes to see his mum looking down at him.

"You don't want to be late for school."

Joe yawned loudly. He was tired; it had been a late night.

"I'm sorry for shouting at you last night when you got home," said Mrs Jackson, gently placing a hand on her son's arm, "I was just angry. I'd been so worried!"

"I'm sorry, Mum," said Joe quietly. "Are you going to tell Dad?"

Mrs Jackson had already decided she wasn't going to worry her husband while he was so far away. "As long as nothing like this happens again," she told Joe, "then there's no need for your dad to find out."

"Thanks, Mum."

With that, Mrs Jackson left Joe's room and headed downstairs to make breakfast.

"Hi Milo," said Joe as he sat up in bed.

Milo was the family cat who frequently slept at the end of Joe's bed, and Joe considered him to be one of his best friends; they would often sit together while Joe told him tales of his recent adventures.

"You don't judge me, do you?" Joe said to Milo. "You can keep a secret, can't you?" The cat just stared at him. "I think I met an alien yesterday," Joe continued.

Milo looked at him for a couple more seconds before scampering downstairs for his breakfast.



After breakfast, Joe packed up his bag and headed out for the day.

"Have a lovely day at school," said Mrs Jackson, "but make sure you come straight home after."

"I promise," replied Joe.

Joe meant what he said about going home on time; he had absolutely no intention of getting back late. He also, however, had no intention of going to school. He simply had far too many unanswered questions.

Had he imagined what had happened in the cave? Was there really an alien living under Highcross? And what on earth (or not) was a trekker?

I need to find out what's going on down there, he thought as he walked down the street, away from his house.

Joe made his way carefully to the railway bridge, making sure to stay away from the main routes where he might be seen by teachers or classmates.

Before long, he was back at the hole. There was still a rope

cordon around it, but it hadn't yet been filled in.

Am I crazy? he thought as he lowered himself down into the hole. Today, it was much easier to see the way, as the bright morning winter sun was illuminating the hole. It also made it much easier to see the passage he'd walked through the evening before.

"Maxelon!" he shouted as he walked along, the light from the sun getting weaker and weaker until, once again, he found himself in pitch blackness.

He reached for his phone, turned the flashlight on, and held it out in front of him as he walked. He could see the entrance to the cave getting closer and closer, and as he entered the cave, it immediately lit up just like it did before.

Maxelon was standing at the console in the centre of the cave.

"Hello again," said Joe, relieved that Maxelon and the computer were still here – relieved that he wasn't going crazy.

"Hello," replied Maxelon, turning to face him. "Why have you come back?"

"I needed to check that this was real," he said, gesturing at the computer and the cave in general.

"Well, it's nice to see you again. It's been very lonely down here," admitted Maxelon.

Nodding, Joe approached the central console. "Is it still working?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Maxelon. "It's not at full power, but I've managed to charge my trekker. I've also been able to charge my Silver Sphere."

"What's a Silver Sphere?" asked Joe.

"I'll show you later."

As Joe walked around the computer, inspecting every part, Maxelon explained that he came from a city called Tamiran. There were two species living on Proxima Centauri b, he said. The Tamirans were a peaceful and technologically rich species who had been trying to find life on other planets to make friends with. The other species on Proxima Centauri b were the Wolfians. They were warmongering creatures who aimed to take over any other planet they could find. However, they didn't have the technology to travel to different worlds like the Tamirans did.

Joe listened to all of this, utterly transfixed; he was fascinated by the story of life on another planet.

"Do you mind if I call you Max?" he asked, once Maxelon had finished.

"Why?" asked Maxelon.

"It sounds better," Joe replied, shrugging. "My full name is Joseph, but I much prefer Joe."

Maxelon thought about this for a second. "Max sounds great," he agreed.

Joe nodded. "Max it is."

Max took what looked like a magnifying glass from his utility belt.

"Why do you have a magnifying glass?" asked Joe, intrigued.

"This is how people from Tamiran travel," Max explained. "It's called a trekker. It can take me anywhere in the world."

Joe couldn't believe what he was hearing. "So you're saying… we could go anywhere in the world? Right now?"

"We?" Max responded.

"Yes," Joe replied. "We. Me and you. I promise I won't say a word about any of this to anyone."

"I need to go to the Pyramids of Egypt," said Max.

Joe could barely contain his excitement. "I've always wanted to see the Great Pyramids!" he exclaimed. "We've literally just studied them in school."

Max pressed a button on the handle of the trekker and an image of the pyramids appeared in the glass.



Then, suddenly, a swirling portal appeared in front of the magnifying glass, which Max simply walked straight through. Though he hesitated a little, Joe thought it would be best to follow.

There was a flash of light as he passed through the portal, and then there was just darkness.

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"Where are you?" Joe shouted, panicked.

There was no response.

Joe glanced around in the gloom, terrified. It was then that he noticed a light coming towards him.

"Joe, stay there." It was Max. As he got closer, Joe realised he was wearing a torch on his belt.

"Where are we?" Joe asked. "I thought we were going to see the pyramids."

Max looked at Joe. "And that's exactly where we are," he replied.

"I'm confused," said Joe. "It just seems like you've brought us

to another cave somewhere."

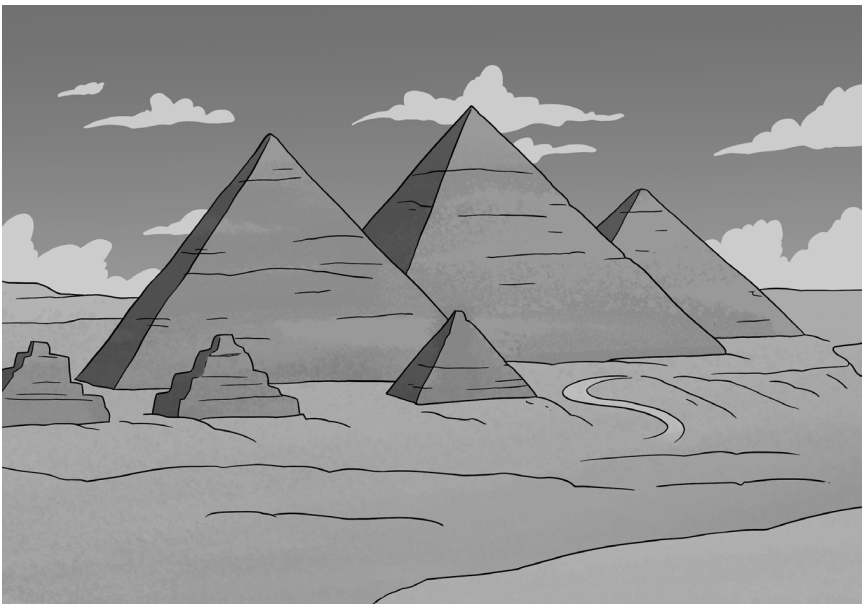
Max sighed. He was beginning to look frustrated. "Joe, we are at the pyramids," he told him. "The trekker has brought us exactly where we wanted to go. We are inside the Great Pyramid."

"Oh," said Joe, looking around him.

Noticing a ray of light coming from a corridor ahead, they started walking towards it. As they got closer to the sunlight, Joe could feel the excitement growing inside him, getting stronger and stronger. He was inside one of the pyramids!

This must be a dream, he thought.

As they stepped out into the light, however, Joe knew he couldn't possibly be dreaming. The heat of the Egyptian desert hit him in an instant, the brightness of the sun making him squint. He was about to see the pyramids.



The sight was even better than he could have imagined, the outline of the three huge pyramids dominating the skyline as he stared up at the impressive structures.

They spent 20 minutes wandering around the pyramids, Max looking very carefully at all the stones that made up the building blocks.

"What are you looking for?" asked Joe.

"Nothing you need to worry about," replied Max, before stopping in his tracks. "Come on, let's go home."

Joe was disappointed at having to leave ¬– after all, this had been the strangest and most unbelievable day of his life – but at the same time he knew he had to get home. Max asked Joe to keep everything he'd seen and heard today a secret, and Joe nodded his understanding.

When Max pulled out the trekker, Joe saw that it was now showing an image of the cave under Highcross. Just as before, a portal appeared, but just as they were about to walk through it, the ground started to shake. A second later, the portal closed.

"What's going on?" Joe asked Max.

The shaking got worse and worse until there was a great flash of light and some kind of sonic boom. Joe and Max were thrown instantly to the floor.

After a few disorientating seconds, Joe opened his eyes and stood up. He could hear people behind him screaming and shouting. They were pointing in the direction of the pyramids.

When he turned around, he realised why the people were so upset – the pyramids were gone!

Max was sitting on the ground, his head in his hands as he mumbled to himself. Joe could just make out the four words he was repeating over and over.

"I was too late."

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They were simply gone. One minute, Joe and Max had been standing in front of the pyramids, and the next… they were just… gone!



"Where are they?" asked an extremely startled Joe.

"Well," said Max, "it's a rather long story." He went on to explain that the pyramids had been stolen by a thief from Proxima Centauri b and transported far back in time. The thief's name was Dardan and he was the leader of the Wolfians. He had stowed away on Max's spacecraft so he could travel to Earth, and he'd tried to take control of the ship. This was what had caused it to crash to Earth.

The crash – and subsequent explosion – of Max's ship had been so powerful that it had opened a portal into time. Max had been stranded in the 21st century, while Dardan had been thrown much further back in time. Unfortunately, he had access to the same technology as Max.

"He was able to steal some *Organa-tech* seeds," explained Max,

“so he’s been able to grow a computer just like mine. The pyramids are very powerful; they’re full of ancient mystical power. Clearly, Dardan has been able to power up enough energy to transport them back to the past.” He sighed. “I’m not sure where his source of power has come from, but the pyramids will provide him with unlimited energy, so he’ll be able to travel wherever and whenever he wants to. And, more importantly, he’ll be able to transport other Wolfians to this planet.”

Joe frowned. “Wait… you said travel wherever and whenever? Does he have a time machine?”

“Yes, he does,” replied Max casually.

“Let’s go then!” Joe shouted, getting very excited now. This was shaping up to be his most amazing adventure yet! “We need to stop him!” he added.

Max gave Joe a disapproving look. “I can’t take you with me; this isn’t a game. It’s extremely dangerous. I shouldn’t have even brought you here – I’m taking you home.”

Joe, however, wasn’t going to take no for an answer. “You can’t go alone,” he pointed out, “you’ve already said it will be very dangerous.”

Max shook his head. “I’m sorry but it’s just too risky. You have a family you need to get back to. It’s time for you to go home.” Once again, Max raised the trekker out in front him. He was careful to check that nobody could see what he was doing, but everyone was more concerned with the missing pyramids anyway.

Once again, the image of the cave appeared in the magnifying glass and a portal appeared in front of them. Quickly, Joe and Max walked through the swirling portal, soon finding themselves back in the cave.

“What’s so special about the pyramids?” asked Joe once the portal had disappeared.

“What do you mean?” responded Max.

“You told me that they were very powerful. What were you looking for there?” Joe asked.

Max leant against the central console. “You are the first person from Earth to learn the truth about some of the ancient monuments,”

he explained.

Joe gave Max his full attention, listening intently to every word he was saying.

"This planet has been visited many times by life from other galaxies," Max began. "Dardan and I are not the first. The ancient people of Earth had friendly alliances with many different extra-terrestrial visitors. As tokens of friendship, these visitors often left gifts for the people of Earth. Many of your ancient monuments – such as the pyramids and Stonehenge – are extra-terrestrial. They still contain the power of these ancient aliens."

Joe shook his head in wonder. He was simply amazed at this story. "What happened to all these aliens?" he asked.

Max shrugged. "Nobody knows. They were ancient alien races, so they might have gone extinct. Proxima Centauri b was also visited by them, but approximately 4,500 Earth years ago, the visits stopped. Us Tamirans continue to celebrate the visitors, whereas – for some unknown reason – the people of Earth forgot."

"This is amazing!" said Joe. "So tell me: what were you looking for at the pyramids?"

Max explained that he was checking for movement. "When my console powered up yesterday, I was able to find out exactly when but not where Dardan is. I could also see that a strange signal had been building over the centre of Cairo. I knew it must be Dardan trying to use the power of the pyramids. I was hoping I'd have enough time to time-lock the pyramids, but I needed to wait for my console to gain more power."

Joe had become so captivated by this amazing story that he'd totally forgotten to check the time. When he glanced down at his watch, he gasped. "Oh no, school finished an hour ago – I need to get home! Are you still going to be here tomorrow?"

Max approached the keyboard on the central console. "I'm afraid not. I need to stop Dardan from doing too much damage and make sure I can take him back to Proxima Centauri b. It has been really nice meeting you, Joe. Thank you for being so friendly."

Feeling rather sad, Joe said goodbye and turned to walk back down the passage. As he did so, the cave started vibrating and the

roof started to collapse. “What’s happening?!” he screamed.

Max had no idea; he could only watch helplessly as the entrance to the passage was completely blocked by falling rocks.

“I’m trapped!” shouted Joe.

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The central console was now lit up like a Christmas tree. Max was frantically pressing all kinds of buttons, but nothing seemed to be working.

“What’s happening?” shouted Joe.

Max had absolutely no idea, but he knew it had to be Dardan who was causing it.

The monitor powered up and a series of numbers and images flashed on and off the screen. “So that’s where he is,” Max said to himself as, once again, the monitor went blank.

Suddenly, the console started beeping. “We need to go,” said Max, “now.”

“Where?” asked Joe.

“Anywhere. The console is going to explode!” said Max as he grabbed the trekker from his belt. He pressed the button on the side of the strange magnifying glass and an image appeared on the glass. This was followed by another swirling portal.

“Run!” ordered Max.

They both ran through the portal and found themselves standing on the bank of the River Thames in Central London.



“We’re in London!” Joe exclaimed. “This is so weird!”

“My cave and console have been destroyed,” Max sighed. “Unless I can find Dardan, I’m going to be trapped here forever.”

Sitting down, Joe and Max looked out over the river towards the Houses of Parliament.

“If Dardan gets his way, this will be destroyed as well. I need to find him,” said Max.

All this talk of destruction was scaring Joe; his sense of adventure had been severely challenged today. He had a feeling, however, that Max couldn’t capture Dardan on his own. “Can you also travel in time?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Max.

Joe thought for a moment. “Does that mean that you could go to wherever Dardan is, capture him, and return back to this exact time?”

“Yes,” replied Max.

“So… are you going to travel through time to find Dardan?”

“Yes,” said Max again.

“Can I come with you?” Joe asked.

Max thought about this for a second as he looked at all the people enjoying their peaceful lives in the wonderful City of London. “Yes,” replied Max. “I need your help.”