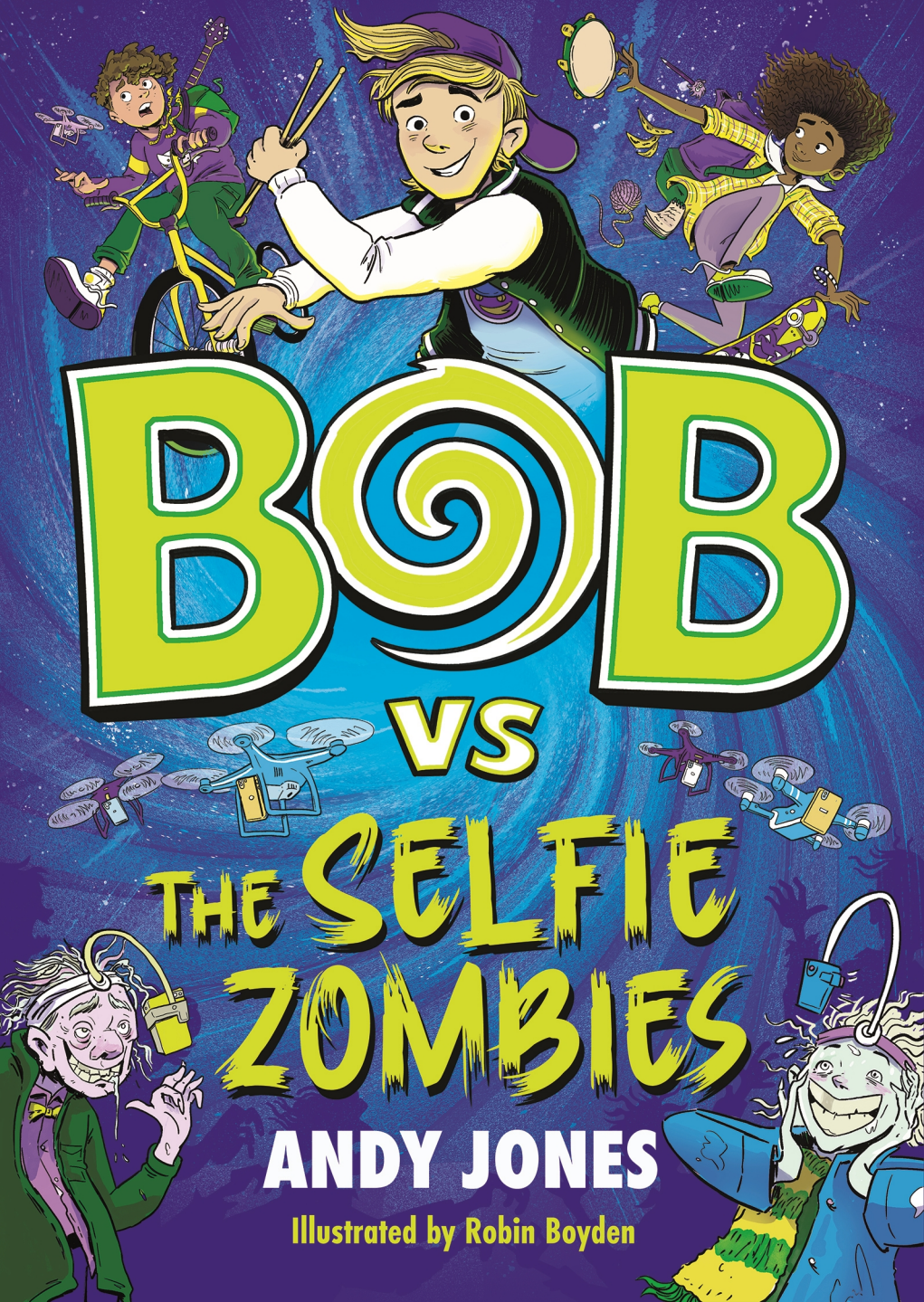


It's down to Bob to save the world . . . All he needs is TIME!



**THE PRESENT
NOWISH**



**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.



**THE TENTACLES OF TIME.
THE SCHNITZEL.
A TALENT SHOW.
PUKING ON A TRAMPOLINE.**

Our band is called the Tentacles of Time. There are eight reasons for this.

1) Our band is a rock band, and rock bands need names that sound a bit tough and a lot cool.

2) Our real names do not sound tough. They do not sound cool. I present you with:

Malcolm Schnitzel: Guitar and shouting

Robert Trebor: Drums and wailing

Trebor and Schnitzel – we sound like a pair of bakers or grave-diggers or drain-unblockers. Instead of a

wicked cool rock band. So, no real names.

3) Tentacles, though, sounds exactly the right amount of tough and cool.

4) And it rhymes perfectly with the science word for goolies.

5) Also, I like stuff about time.

6) On account of me being a time traveller.

7) Not that Schnitzel believes me, but he likes the name anyway.

8) I don't really have any more reasons, but what with tentacles normally coming in eights, it felt weird having a list of seven.

We almost didn't enter Griffin's Got Talent, because of school talent competitions not being particularly cool. But first prize is £50's worth of vouchers for the local shopping centre, where we could spend the prize money on getting band T-shirts printed.

Malcolm, as well as being a not-too-terrible

guitarist, is an amazing artist and he's designed a logo for the band. It's an octopus playing a guitar, grabbing a microphone, smashing up a clock and generally thrashing about. For £50 we can get two T-shirts printed with the rock octopus on it and still have some money left over for sweets.

Tonight is our final rehearsal for the big show.

It is – clearly – a very important rehearsal.

We need to be focused.

We need to be professional.

We need to practise until our fingers are raw.

But not so raw that we can't actually play tomorrow.

Just sort of a bit tender.

Except, 'practise until our fingers are tender' doesn't sound very rock 'n' roll.

But you get the point. It's important.

I tap my stick against the rim of the drum to count us in for our final – did I mention it's important? – rehearsal.

‘A one, a two, a one two three f—’

‘Say cheese!!!’

I pause with my drumstick in mid-air and turn towards Malcolm. What he should be doing is playing his electric guitar. He should be making the ground shake with powerful rock music. He should be rehearsing.

This is not what Malcolm is doing.

Malcolm, with his school tie knotted around his forehead, is holding his phone in front of his face and grinning like a chimpanzee in a banana factory.

‘What are you doing, Malcolm?’

‘Band selfie,’ he says. ‘For history, for when we’re famous.’

‘Malcolm, we are never going to get famous if you keep wasting precious rehearsal time taking selfies.’

‘Band selfies,’ Malcolm corrects, as if this makes even the slightest difference.

He’s still holding his camera at arm’s length, still

grinning like a monkey, still – apparently – determined to take his band selfie.

‘Smiiiiile,’ says Malcolm.

I’m not sure if what I do with my mouth really counts as a smile, but I at least show my teeth.

‘Perfect,’ says Malcolm.

‘Fine,’ I say. ‘Now perhaps we can get on with rehearsing.’

‘You bet,’ says the Schnitzel. ‘Let’s do it.’

I tap my sticks on the rim of my drum. ‘A one, a two, a one two three f—’

‘Boys!’ says a voice.

And even before I turn my head, I know exactly who it is.

Allow me to introduce Gloria Dizamale. Gloria Dizamale (also known as Gloria Dismal. Also also known as the Dismal One) has been my next-door neighbour for five years. She has been a source of constant embarrassment and annoyance ever since

my mother invited 'Dismal' to my sixth birthday party. Where she ate too much cheesy pasta then barfed all over my birthday present – a brand new trampoline.

Puking while bouncing on a trampoline is bad enough, but my new neighbour wasn't just bouncing, she was rotating, so that her cheesy vomit sprayed in a full circle, coating the nets, the floor and everyone else on the trampoline. You'd think most people, after throwing up their party lunch all over a trampoline and several young children, might stop bouncing. Not Gloria Dismal. She just kept on jumping and twisting and puking like it was some kind of performance at the world's worst and grossest circus.

The party was ruined – children screaming, mothers screaming, fathers laughing so hard they had tears in their eyes. It was like something from a scary movie.

Five years later, I can still hear those people screaming. And on a hot day, I can still smell cheese sick on my trampoline.

I never invited Gloria Dismal to a birthday party again, but what with her being my next-door neighbour she just turns up anyway. Not that anyone will go on the trampoline with her. And not that Dismal cares.

I read that vampires can only come into your house if you invite them. I don't know why anyone would do that – invite a bloodsucking monster into their house – but it's reassuring to know you have the option not to. Gloria Dismal is not like that.

She just barges in whenever she feels like.

Like this evening, slap bang in the middle of our final rehearsal.

It serves me right for not closing the garage door.

Our garage is at the bottom of a long and steep driveway, and Dismal crouches low on her skateboard as she hurtles towards us at terrifying speed. Sunlight flashes off her mirrored helmet as she swerves around Schnitzel's bike, jumps a garden gnome and skids to a stop, inches from my drum kit.

‘Boys!’ she says, flipping her deck and catching it in one hand. ‘Looks like I’m just in time.’

‘Do you mind?’ I say. ‘We’re kind of busy.’

Written down, that may sound reasonably polite (or politely reasonable, for that matter), but the way I said it – the grumpiness in my voice, the frown on my face – should make it clear that what I am really saying is, ‘Oi, Dismal, get the heck out of here.’

But this is Gloria Dismal we’re talking about.

‘Course, I don’t mind,’ she says, removing her helmet and freeing her hair, which springs up and out in one hundred thousand thick black curls.

‘We’re trying to rehearse,’ I say to Gloria. ‘Big competition tomorrow.’

Dismal flops down in Dad’s wheelbarrow, her legs dangling over the edge as if it were some kind of velvet sofa. ‘I know,’ she says. ‘And I’m here to help.’

‘Help? We don’t need help.’



Gloria looks first at me then at Malcolm. ‘Hate to break it to you boys, but I’ve heard you rehearse, and yes, you do. There’s a lot of tough competition. Lot of talented acts.’

‘What,’ I say, laughing, ‘like Maria Mamooli and her hamsters?’

‘Hamster juggling is a real talent,’ says Malcolm.

‘I’m more worried about Eno,’ says Gloria.

Eno Fezzinuff – he’s Year 7 like us, but is already the smartest kid in Griffin High School. Or at least that’s what Eno likes to tell everyone.

‘Apparently he’s invented something,’ says Gloria.

‘Inventing’s not a talent,’ I say. ‘Anyone can invent. Banging drums is a talent. And the Tentacles of Time do not need any help, thank you very much.’

‘You need a better song,’ says Dismal.

‘How dare you!’ I say. ‘How absolutely dare you!’

‘It doesn’t even make sense,’ says Gloria.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE #1

THE TENTACLES OF TIME

Lyrics: Trebor and Schnitzel

Hey yeah, we're the Tentacles of Time.
And we've got eight arms like an Octopus
Except we don't mean it literally
Because we've only got the two of us.

Tentacles, Tentacles, the Tentacles of Time
Yeah yeah yeah we're the Tentacles
The Tentacles of Time.



[CONTINUED]

WE DARE TO BE DIFFERENT.
A TAMBOURINE.
ENO FEZZINUFF.
AND THEN IT HAPPENS . . .

‘It makes perfect sense,’ I say. ‘The only thing here that doesn’t make any sense is you.’

‘What about the bit with you having eight arms even though there’s only two of you?’

‘That’s creativity!’ I snap.

‘And it’s a bit short,’ Dismal continues. ‘It only has one verse.’

‘Verse schmerse. We’re rockers. We’re rule-

breakers, we dare to be different.'

'In which case . . .' says Gloria, beaming as if she's just lured me into a trap, 'I have just the thing.'

As always, she is carrying a massive shoulder bag, which she now roots through as if looking for lost treasure. The bag is almost as big as Gloria, and it crosses my mind to pop her inside it, carry it back to her house and dump her on her own doorstep. But like I said, the bag is only almost as big as the Dismal One. Even with folding, I couldn't squeeze all of her in.

Dismal is busy pulling things from her giant bag. Scattered around her feet are a ball of wool and a pair of knitting needles, a half-knitted scarf, some leaves, four slightly brown bananas, a pair of joke glasses with spring-loaded eyes, a notebook and a pencil with a big fluffy thing on the end.

'Dismal,' I say, 'this is a band practice, not a jumble sale.'

'Ta da!' says Dismal, pulling a tambourine from her

bag and giving it a little shake.

‘A tambourine?’

Dismal grins, nods, and gives the tambourine another rattle. ‘Good, isn’t it?’

‘Gloria, we are a rock band. A hard rock band. And you cannot – under any circumstances – be a hard rocker with a tambourine.’

‘Just because no one has,’ she says, ‘doesn’t mean no one can.’

Gloria Dismal stares at me. Her eyes are large and wide and unblinking as she fixes me with her gaze. It’s very unsettling.

‘I . . . I don’t want to,’ I say, and my voice sounds weak under the full force of Gloria’s powerful stare.

‘Can’t hurt,’ says Schnitzel, the absolute fink.

Gloria hops out of the wheelbarrow in one – I have to admit it – rather impressive movement. ‘Give it a shake,’ she says. ‘You might like it.’

‘Will not.’

‘Might.’

‘Get back,’ I say. ‘Get that thing away from me.’

Gloria begins walking towards me like some sort of tambourine-wielding zombie.

‘Schnitzel!’ I say, my voice tight with panic. ‘Call her off. Stop her!’

Dismal laughs.

Schnitzel laughs.

And then someone else laughs. It’s the sort of laugh an evil villain would have if he was an eleven-year-old boy with a slightly breaky voice. As if my afternoon wasn’t going badly enough, now I have to deal with this.

‘Eno,’ I say, with a sigh.

And there he is – Eno Fezzinuff, sitting astride his bicycle at the top of my drive and looking – as he always does – immensely pleased with himself.

I really should learn to close the garage door.

‘I wouldn’t waste my time practising if I were you,’ says Eno. ‘Everybody knows I’m going to win Griffin’s

Got Talent. The rest of you are there to witness my greatness and nothing more. History, if it remembers you at all, will remember you as' – he holds up the finger and thumb of one hand in the shape of a capital letter L – 'losers.'

'Witness this,' says Gloria, holding up her tambourine and pretending to Frisbee it at Eno's head.

Eno flinches. 'Careful! You could have somebody's eye out with that thing.'

'Shoo,' says Gloria, rattling her tambourine at him. 'Before I really do throw it.'

'Fine,' says Eno. 'I'm going. But only because I'm bored with you.' And with that he sets off pedalling down the road and out of sight.

And then he pedals right back into sight.

He has attached a series of small lights to the spokes of his bike, and as the wheels turn, the lights spell out the word: losers.



Eno laughs his squeaky villainous laugh, and this time, when he vanishes from sight, he stays vanished.

Even so, the whole series of events has left me feeling all stressed and jittery.

‘Don’t worry about Eno,’ says Gloria. ‘He’s just jealous of us.’

‘Us?’ I say. ‘Who said anything about us?’

‘I did,’ says Gloria. ‘Just now.’

And again she rattles her tambourine.

But now her voice and the instrument sound faint
and far away.

My hands are tingling, my head has gone fuzzy,
there is a feeling of wet pressure all over my body and
I realise what's about to happen about one and a half
seconds before it happens.

And then it happens.

What Time Travelling Feels Like

It comes on slowly, a tingle in the middle of me, in my bones, in my blood, in my brain. Like hundreds of tiny ants crawling underneath my skin. That's the time-tingles, and if you're thinking it sounds absolutely hideous, you'd be absolutely right.

Next I get the drags. A feeling like being pulled in eight different directions. Like having a giant octopus wrap its tentacles around my arms, legs, body and head and then doing the octopus equivalent of the splits.

Then, just when it feels as if I'm about to be turned into a wet quivering pile of spare parts . . . Pop! I've travelled in time. Maybe a few minutes, maybe several years. But always forward. Always to the future.

It's confusing, frightening and a real pain in the bum. Particularly if you're in the middle of something important, like . . . like your last band practice on the day before the school talent show.

THE FUTURE 2043



A DROPPED CAKE.
A BIG BLUE-HAIRED BRUTE.
A FADED SCAR.
AN URN.

Someone is screaming.

At first I think it's me, and if it was, well who could blame me?

But it's not me; it's a fully grown man. And he's a big one.

He's as wide as a fridge-freezer and just as tall; taller if you account for his spiky blue hair. His thick arms are covered in tattoos, he wears a ring through the side of his nose, and has the kind of beard that would make a Viking jealous.

He'd look terrifying if he wasn't so clearly terrified himself.

At the man's feet is a great pile of steaming yellow mess that looks a lot like a dropped cake. Banana cake, judging by the smell.

The great brute backs away from me until he bumps into the fridge (nearly knocking it over in the process), his eyes never leaving mine, as if I might bite, as if I might explode, as if I've just materialised in the middle of the kitchen.

'He just materialised in the middle of the kitchen,' says the man. 'It's . . . it's . . . impossible.'

'Stay calm,' says a steady voice behind me. 'Take a breath, Malcolm. Everything is going to be OK.'

Malcolm? This big blue-haired brute is Malcolm?

I turn around to face the owner of the calm, steady voice.

'Hello, Bob,' he says.

NOT THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Jones began his career as an author writing novels for adults. Grown-up stuff about falling in love, falling out of love, falling in love again and having babies. All of which he has experienced in his own life. More recently, he has been writing books for children. Crazy stuff about genies, monsters, time travel and zombies. None of which he has experienced in his own life. Andy is also the author of *Unleash Your Creative Monster: A children's guide to writing*, and the novel *Wishes Come in Threes*. Andy lives on the outskirts of London (the best part in his opinion) with his wife, daughters and an assortment of other creatures.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Robin Boyden lives in Cheltenham with his partner and their ridiculous fluff ball dog Lupin. Robin has worked in the industry for over a decade, creating illustrations for the likes of *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, Bloomsbury, Nosy Crow and Penguin Random House. He is also the author and illustrator of the graphic novel *Georgia and the Edge of the World* (David Fickling Books) and the picture book *Gerald Needs a Friend* (Frances Lincoln Children's Books). When Robin isn't at his desk drawing, he's usually regretting spending so much time at the desk because his back hurts. Otherwise, he's out in the garden talking to plants and misidentifying birds. His favourite colour is all of them.



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