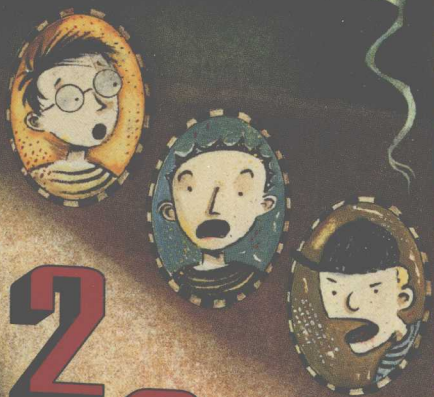


THE TIME WARP TRIO



2095

Jon Scieszka

Illustrated by Lane Smith

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by Jon Scieszka

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PUFFIN BOOKS

In memory of Dean Alexander E. Nagy—
teacher, historian, scholar, giant

PUFFIN BOOKS

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"Hey buddy, what's your number?" said a metal voice with a Brooklyn accent.

"I think that vacuum cleaner is talking to you," said Fred.

It was floating in midair right in front of us. And Fred was right. It did look kind of like an overgrown vacuum cleaner. The robot-vacuum thing floated closer. A beam of light shot out of its head and swept over us from head to toe. It raised one arm and pointed something at us that looked an awful lot like a laser gun.

"Don't shoot. We surrender. Take us to your leader," said Sam, holding up both hands.

"Hey buddy, what's your number?" Another robot arm extended a number pad at us.

"Give it a number," said Sam. "Quick!"

I punched in my phone number.

The red light blinked three times. "Wrong number."

Fred kicked the back of the robot. "Maybe we can knock out its power."

The red light blinked again. "You got five seconds, buddy."

Sam covered his head with both arms. "I can't believe I'm going to be zapped by a vacuum cleaner. Good-bye, cruel world."

"Three, two, one," said the robot. It jetted back a bit to get us all in its sights, then pointed its weapon directly at us.



Other books in
THE TIME WARP TRIO series

Knights of the Kitchen Table

The Not-So-Jolly Roger

The Good, the Bad, and the Goofy

Your Mother Was a Neanderthal

O N E

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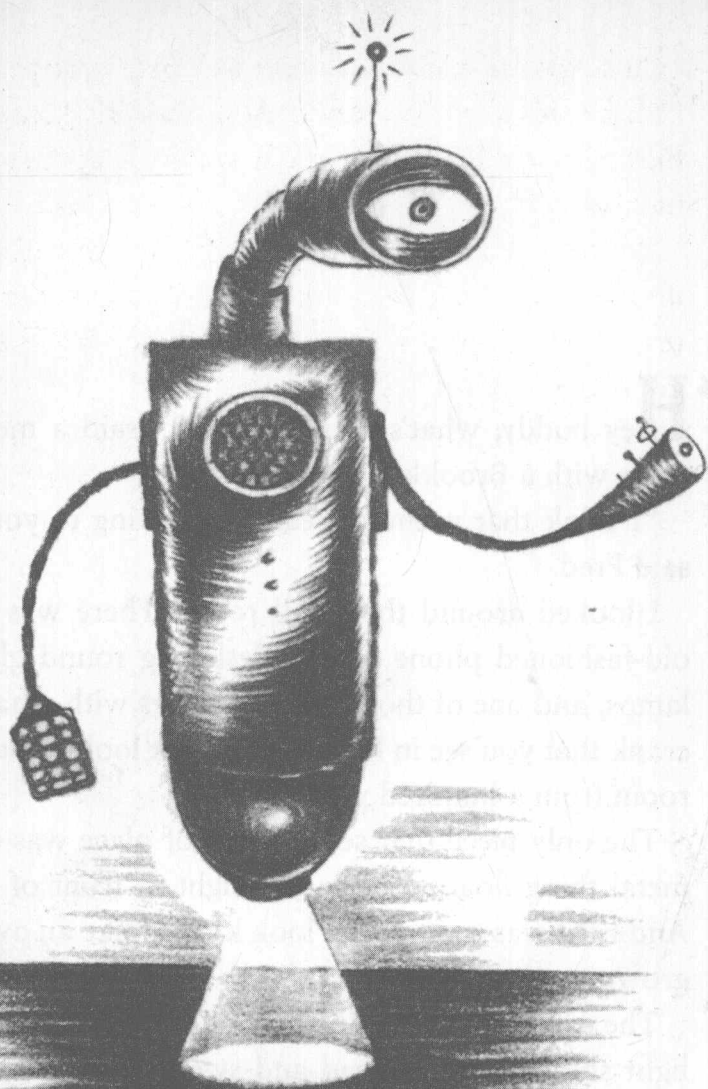
I looked around the small room. There was an old-fashioned phone on the desk, big round glass lamps, and one of those record players with a hand crank that you see in history books. It looked like a room from a hundred years ago.

The only piece that seemed out of place was the metal thing floating in midair right in front of us. And Fred was right. It did look kind of like an overgrown vacuum cleaner.

The robot-vacuum thing floated closer. A beam of light shot out of its head and swept over us from head to toe.

“Hey buddy, what’s your number?”

“It *was* the vacuum talking,” said Fred.



"I don't think that's a vacuum," Sam whispered. "I'll bet it's a police robot. And now it's going to blast us with its death laser if we don't give it our numbers."

"I don't understand," I said. "We tapped the magic square to go one hundred years into the future. But except for the robot, it looks like we've gone one hundred years into the past."

Sam rolled his eyes. "What a surprise. We've never had any trouble with *The Book* before."

The droid floated closer. Its metal voice sounded meaner now.

"Hey buddy, what's your number?"

"Let's run for it," said Sam.

We moved left. The robot moved left.

We moved right. The robot moved right.

"Joe, you're the magician," said Fred. "Talk to it. Show it a trick. Give it some dust balls to suck up."

I didn't know exactly what to say to a robot, but I figured a trick might impress it.

"Hello Mr. Vacuum—or Robot—Guy. Have you ever seen a human bend metal?" I took a quarter out of my pocket and tapped it on the table. "Solid, right?" I held it out in front of me, at opposite edges, between the tips of my thumbs and forefingers. "Observe."

A little red light on the robot's head blinked.

I wiggled the quarter back and forth until it looked like it was bending. "Now I'll straighten it out." I stopped and pretended to press the quarter flat. "Pretty amazing, huh?"



The red light on the robot's head blinked twice. It raised one arm and pointed something at us that looked an awful lot like a laser gun.

“Don’t shoot. We surrender. Take us to your leader,” said Sam, holding up both hands.

“Hey buddy, what’s your number?” Another robot arm extended a number pad at us.

“Give it a number,” said Sam. “Quick!”

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T W O

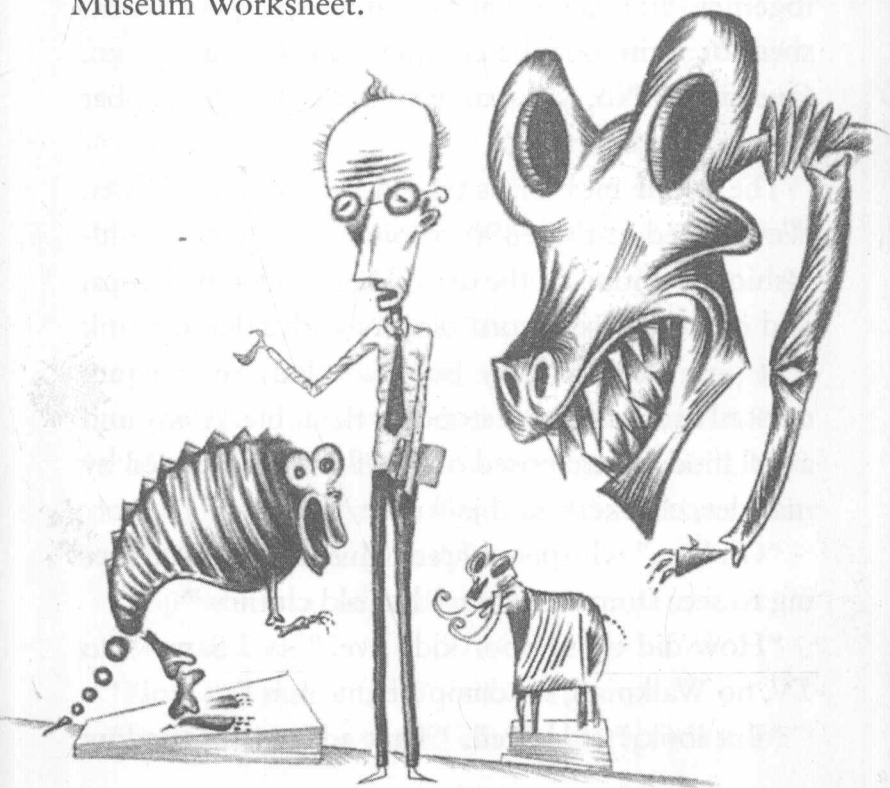
But before the Time Warp Trio meets its end by vacuum cleaner, let me freeze time, then go back in time to explain how we got to this time.

It was all our teacher's fault. It was Mr. Chester's brainstorm to take our class on a field trip to the American Museum of Natural History "To learn about how to live in the future from how people used to live in the past." That's what he said. Honest. We had to write it down on our Museum Worksheet.

Now don't get me wrong. I love the Museum. It's one of the best places in New York City. They've got a prehistoric alligator skull that's bigger than you, a herd of charging stuffed elephants, and a car with a hole in it from where it got bashed by a meteorite. If you sit close enough to the animal exhibits, it feels like you're right in the jungle or the mountain or the desert. And on hot summer days I like to go sit un-

der the blue whale hanging from the ceiling in the ocean life room. It's blue, and quiet, and cool. And it has an excellent pack of killer whales.

But going to the museum on a class trip is a whole different story. You can't go look at the war clubs in the Iroquois longhouse. You can't hang around the stuffed gorillas. And you can never check out the rubber ants in the gift shop. You always have to stay together and answer the questions on the dreaded Museum Worksheet.



So there we were—standing under the huge *Barosaurus* skeleton in the museum lobby with our whole class, listening to Mr. Chester.

“... which some people didn’t even believe existed. Does anyone know its name? It says *Barosaurus* on the plaque. Right. Now we’ll go in and look at the exhibits that show how people lived from 1890 up to 1990. Take a look and think about what things have changed in a hundred years. Stay together. You can either take notes for your worksheet or write out the complete answers as we go. Questions? No, you cannot check out the rubber ants in the gift shop.”

The whole mob of us trailed behind Mr. Chester. We stopped at the 1890s room. There was an old-fashioned phone on the desk, big round glass lamps, and one of those record players with a hand crank that you see in history books. A lady mannequin dressed in a long dress stood by the table. A boy and a girl model were posed on the floor surrounded by marbles, checkers, and jacks.

“Oh boy,” whispered Fred. “Just what I was hoping to see. Dummies dressed in old clothes.”

“How did those poor kids live?” said Sam. “No TV, no Walkman, no computer, no fun.”

“But look,” said Fred. “That ad out the window

says BEER 5¢. I'll bet pizza was a penny."

"... and changed the way people lived," Mr. Chester droned on. "Question Two on your sheet says, 'List five inventions we use today that people didn't use one hundred years ago.' Can anyone tell me one?"

Sam's hand shot up.

"Yes, Sam?"

"The zipper, invented by W. L. Judson in 1893. Or the electric vacuum cleaner, invented by Hubert Cecil Booth in 1901. Or the airplane the Wright brothers flew for the first time in 1903. Or frozen peas—"

"Thank you, Sam—"

"—invented by Clarence Birdseye in 1924. Scotch Tape, invented in 1929. And—"

"*Thank you*, Sam," said Mr. Chester.

Mr. Chester led our class to the next room. Fred, Sam, and I slowly worked our way to the back of the class, then sat down on a ledge in the 1920s room. Three gangsters were loading boxes. One held his machine gun ready.

"You've been reading the almanac again, haven't you?" asked Fred.

"How could you tell?" said Sam.

"Do you have a book of world records too?"

asked Fred. "I love that stuff like the biggest pizza ever."

"122 feet, 8 inches in diameter," I said, flipping a quarter up in the air.

"Wow," said Fred. "Now that's the kind of question I wouldn't mind answering."

I held up the quarter. "Would you like to see me bend metal with a little magic?"

Fred took out his Museum Worksheet. "No. But I would like to see you fill out this worksheet with a little magic. Why do we have to answer this stuff anyway? We should tell Mr. Chester if he really wants to find out this junk, he should travel back a hundred years with *The Book*."

"I'm sure that would go over big," said Sam. "Just like Joe's excuse that we couldn't do our math homework because we almost got run over by a woolly mammoth."

"Or your history paper on Blackbeard's awful singing," I said. "That was a real winner."

"What we really need," said Sam, "is someone who can show us how to use *The Book* the right way. Then we can travel around in time without worrying about getting killed while we look for *The Book* to get us home."

"Yeah," said Fred. "Whatever happened to your

uncle Joe? He gave you *The Book*. He should know how to use it.”

“I don’t know,” I said. “My mom says he comes and goes . . . whatever that means.”

“Then what about your mom?” said Sam. “She gave *The Book* to your uncle Joe. Let’s ask her how to work it.”

“Well, she did show me this one page.” I reached into my backpack and took out a dark blue book with twisting silver designs.

Sam jumped behind the corner of the gangster exhibit. “Oh no you don’t. Put that thing down. It might be loaded.”

“Don’t worry,” I said. “This is foolproof.” I flipped open *The Book*. “It’s called a magic square.” I showed them this page:

