



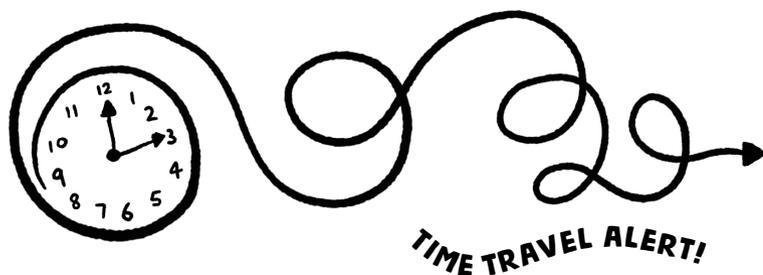
↳ SUNDAY AFTERNOON PLANS

'In the beginning there was a load of nuffink, which suddenly exploded into dust and biscuits. Then all the dinosaurs were born, followed by jelly and monkeys.'

My younger brother Fred still hasn't got the hang of the Big Bang. Or evolution. The definition of which is: A *GRADUAL PROCESS IN WHICH SOMETHING CHANGES INTO A USUALLY BETTER FORM OF ITSELF*. Apart from younger brothers—they're only put on this planet to disrupt our Sunday afternoon plans with no intention of evolving into normal human beings ever.

Let me know when someone invents

time travel so I can go back to last Sunday afternoon at the cake shop, to stop Fred doing what he was just about to do before I gave my order to the Cake Shop Lady.



Last Sunday Afternoon at the Cake Shop

Me: 'HI. CAN I HAVE ONE EXTREMELY CHOCOLATEY DOUBLE CHOCOLATE CHIP MUFFIN, AND A SLICE OF EXTRA LEMONY LEMON DRIZZLE, PLEASE?'

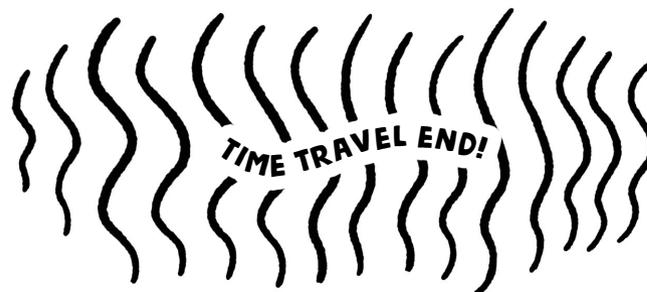
Cake Shop Lady: 'CERTAINLY. AND THE THREE CREAM DOUGHNUTS?'

Me: 'EH?'

Cake Shop Lady points to the front of the cake cabinet which Fred has squeezed his head into, and licked the cream off an entire plate of doughnuts.

Me (blushing): 'OH. HE'S NOT WITH ME.'

Cake Shop Lady points to a sign stating All Licks Must Be Paid For, which I'm pretty sure they only put up when Frederick Albert Fox walked in.



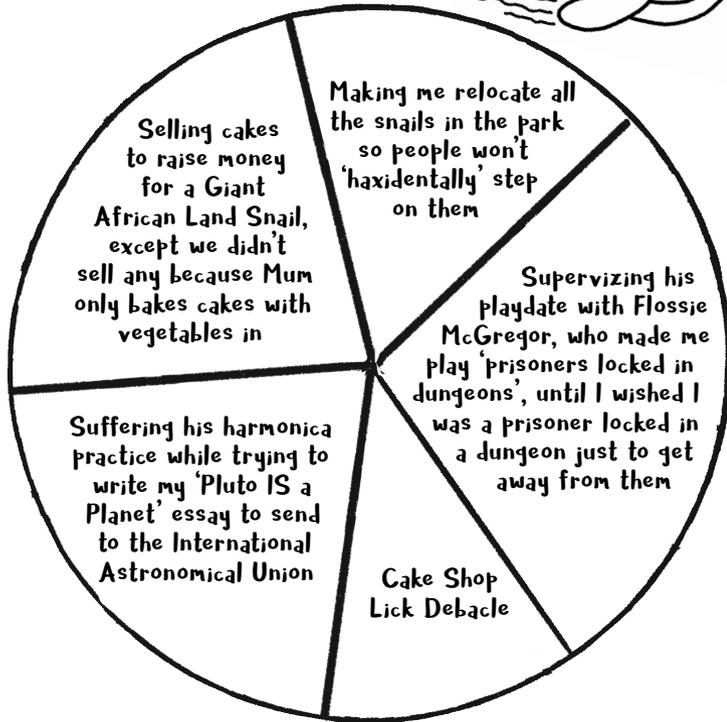
Not only did I have to buy all three cream-deprived doughnuts, I couldn't eat them because: lick.

I PAID FOR CAKES I DIDN'T EVEN EAT.

And I'm a cake fanatic, so that's heartbreak in a sentence right there.

I like a cake. I also like a cake chart. Never pie. Always cake. Here's the breakdown of how Fred has managed to ruin Sunday afternoon plans for me in the past five weeks:

FIVE WAYS FRED HAS RUINED MY SUNDAY AFTERNOON PLANS



CUT to *THIS* Sunday afternoon and there's a new one to add: we're packing for the school trip.

Well, I'm packing, while Freddie fills his suitcase with biscuits, toast (with jam on),

and a tub of mint choc chip ice cream.

'Sure you don't need any jumpers, Fred?'

'Nope.'

'Or pyjamas or a toothbrush?'

'Flint Danger never needs a toothbrush.

He just packs bravery.'

Flint Danger has got a lot to answer for. Fred's favourite programme is **DANGER QUEST**, with the world's most awe-inspiring adventurer:

'I'VE ROARED WITH LIONS, SWUNG WITH MONKEYS, EATEN GROSS-LOOKING BUGS, AND HAD SCORPIONS LIVING ON MY FACE. I'VE SWAM SHARK-INFESTED OCEANS WITH A BROKEN LEG, AND DRANK MY OWN PEE EVEN WHEN I DIDN'T HAVE TO. DANGER BY NAME, DANGER BY NATURE.'

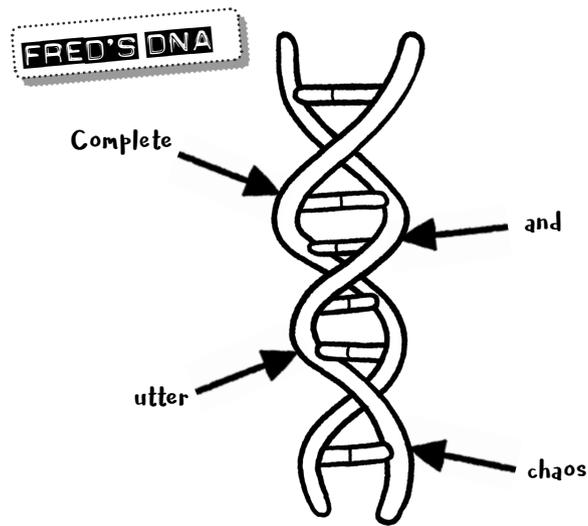
Flint Danger spends a lot of his time eating and drinking things you wouldn't find in the supermarket.

'TO SURVIVE IN THE WILD YOU NEED TO LIVE ON THE EDGE,' he says,



abseiling into a volcano with no shoes on and barbecuing a tarantula. 'DANGER IS IN MY DNA.'

To be honest, Flint Danger's DNA is mainly suntan and denim. And it's all his fault we're off to the woods for a few days—Fred thinks Danger is in his DNA too, and he's not far off:

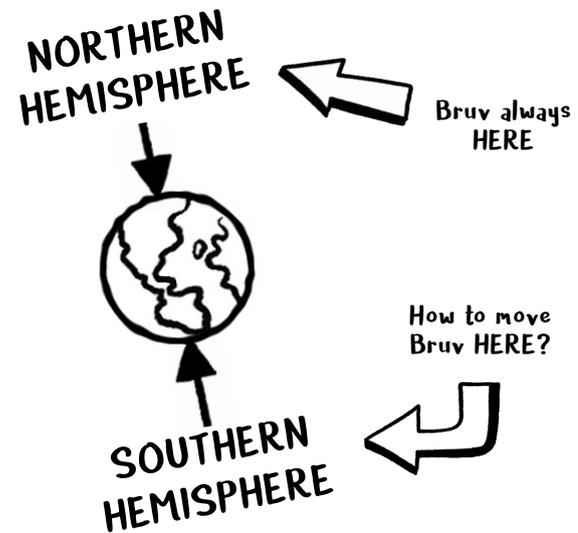


'We're going to live on the hedge in the jungle all by ourselves,' Fred says, packing his loo-roll binoculars. 'There'll be cock-a-doos, meringue-a-tangs, and man-eating penguins.'

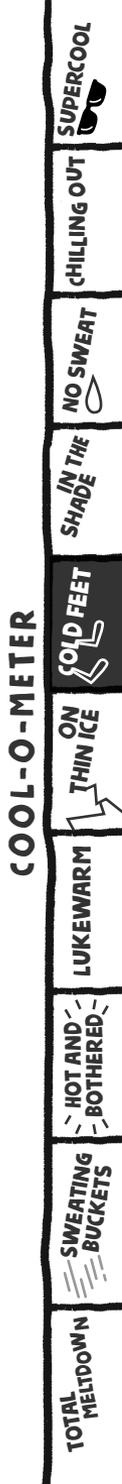
'We're going down the A420 to the local

wood, Fred, with about a billion parent helpers. And penguins are naturally found in Earth's southern hemisphere,' I say, remembering the episode where Flint Danger lived with a colony for a week to prove how manly he was.

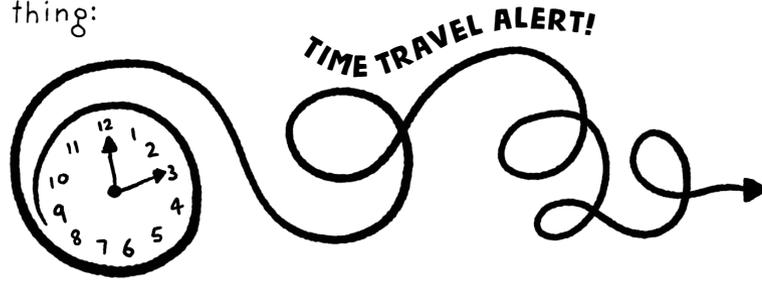
It's a shame Fred isn't in Earth's southern hemisphere too.



It's also a shame I didn't spot the danger of this trip. If only I could have gone back in time before Mrs Parker interrupted our water cycle lesson a few weeks ago, so



I could go to the loo and miss the whole thing:



A Few Weeks Ago in Our Classroom

Mrs Parker (actually singing): 'YOU'VE GOT TO SEARCH FOR THE HERO INSIDE YOURSELF...' (This goes on for ONE WHOLE MINUTE. We don't know where to look. It's a relief when it's over.)

'I'm very excited to announce this year's Mentor Trip to Whispering Woods! Only a select few will be picked to go—do sign up; it's a chance for that inner hero to shine through!'

Cue MASSIVE slideshow about leadership and campfires. I almost nod off, until the slide about star-gazing grabs my attention.

Liam, who actually does nod off, suddenly wakes up and whispers: 'What's a Mentor

Trip to Whispering Woods?'

He may be my best mate, but he's forever oblivious. I wonder if he ever spends any of his life blivious.

Jess (rolling her eyes): 'They do it every year, you specimen. Some lucky Year Sixes get the chance to go away with the younger ones and help them learn about nature. It's about being all responsible and, y'know, not just how your hair looks.'

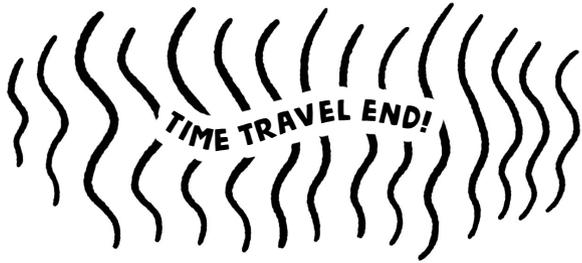
Jess is the only sane person I know, and spends half her life rolling her eyes at Liam.

Liam (restyling his hair): 'LUCKY Year Sixes? That sounds like pure tormenture, man-bro.'

Me: 'Um, a few days out of school with no Mr Fisher? Doesn't sound like pure tormenture to me.'

Our Year Six teacher Mr Fisher is a fun-free zone, and can detect a pencil doodling a pie chart, instead of writing about the ancient Greeks, from three miles away.

Liam (now eating hula hoops): 'Count me in!'
Because Mr Fisher can also detect
someone eating crisps from three miles away
too, which is Liam's favourite pastime.



Little did we know it was going to involve
writing a TWO-PAGE essay on why you
should be picked, and raising the money to
pay for your place. Liam did a sponsored
wear-all-his-clothes-to-school-at-the-same-
time, while I ran an after-school astronomy
club. I was a bit miffed my oblivious best
mate managed to raise all his money in one
go, even though he had to be taken to the
medical room for heat exhaustion.

And I wonder what on earth I was
thinking, as I watch my little brother
unstick half-licked lollipops off the wall
and chuck them in with my socks.

But as Fred always says: 'YOU'VE
ALWAYS WANTED TO EAT A MILKY
WAY, HAVEN'T YOU STAN?'

Yes. Yes I have. Well, not EAT a Milky
Way. SEE the Milky Way.

I'm crazy about space. I can't get enough
of it (I can't get enough of the other type
of space either, having to share a room
with my brother). Stargazing in our back
garden is useless. I'm pretty sure Mum's
twenty strings of fairy lights can be seen
from the International Space Station.
And there's no chance of camping in a
place remote enough to have a dark sky,
because Mum won't go anywhere without
'A DECENT M&S AND A PLUG SOCKET,
STANLEY.'

A few nights beneath an unpolluted sky
was too good to pass up.

'There will be franchas, won't there?' Fred
asks, sitting on my spring-wear jumpers.

'I hope not.'

'What about lanky badgers?'

'LANKY badgers?'

'Them black and white horsey fings.'

'You mean zebras?' I tut, lifting him out and replacing him with my comfiest pyjamas. 'Not down the A420.'

'What about knitted effalants?'

'Mammoths died out thousands of years ago, Fred.'

My brother's knowledge of wildlife is sketchy at best. His favourite book is **TWO BY TWO**, and he can't remember all the animals in that, despite it being only eight pages long and having been read to him every night since he's been alive. He thinks lav-lav snakes live in the toilet, robins are only alive at Christmas, and snails are appropriate pets to keep in the house.

'It's about time Angus had a holiday,' Fred says, having already packed lettuce.

Wherever Fred goes, Angus the snail goes, with a fetching felt-tip A splodged on the side of his shell so he can't get lost. He loves snails so much, they were the

18



top five things on his Christmas list. At least Angus is only three centimetres high, unlike Giant African Land Snails, which are bigger than your face and awake for most of the night. Thankfully Mum bought him a jigsaw instead.

She didn't say no to camp though, for obvious reasons.

'It'll be more fun than a bag of weasels!' she waltzes in, lifting Fred out of the suitcase and swapping the contents with stuff he actually needs.

'Fun for you maybe, with endless Mum O'Clock,' I sulk. 'You get to have time off Fred.'

'Today is another yesterday unless you grab life by the hands,' she says, quoting one of her bonkers fridge magnets. 'Besides, Fred will be no bother, will you pickle-pops?'

Mum holds his chin and tilts his face up to hers.

'As long as you use your indoor voice.'

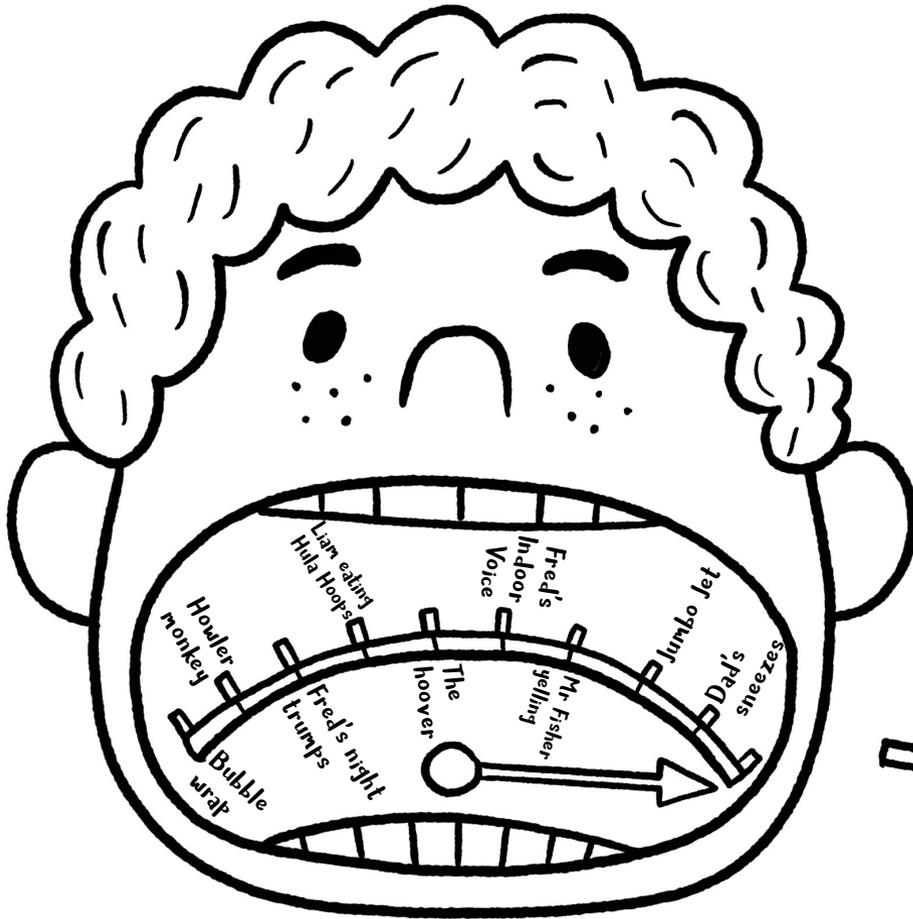
19

'But I'm gonna be outdoors,' he frowns.

'Exactly.'

Fred's outdoor voice is off the scale on the **NOISE-O-METER**.

ON THE SCALE



'You'll learn so much about yourselves, my little monkey-fleas,' Mum says.

I already know all I need to know about myself. I like plenty of me-time and preferably RIGHT NOW seeing as Fred has stripped down to his pants having packed everything he was wearing.

'Did you at least manage to get me a slouched beanie?'

According to Liam, it's an essential part of our campfire wardrobe, along with trainers that aren't canvas pumps handed down from one of my many cousins.

'I've got something better than a slouched beanie.' Dad walks in the room and hands us both a hat. 'The Knitting Ninja strikes again!'

OFF THE SCALE

Fred's
Outdoor
voice

COOL-O-METER

TOTAL MELTDOWN

SWEEPING BUCKETS

HOT AND BOTHERED

LUKEWARM

ON THIN ICE

COLD FEET

IN THE SHADE

NO SWEAT

CHILLING OUT

SUPERCOOL

He's become so obsessed with knitting lately, everything he gives us is made of wool. So far I've been given a tank top, a cape, arm warmers, and a snood. I don't know what some of those things are. Surely it's only a matter of time before I get knitted pants.

Fred is excitedly wobbling his head, showing off a bobble hat with an F on the front, and a bobble so humungous I wouldn't be surprised if it caused a solar eclipse.

'You've got one too!' Dad pops it on. Except mine has a letter S.

'Now everyone will know you're related when you sit around the campfire!' He slaps me on the back, as Fred jumps around the room completely nude, having packed his pants too.

'Great,' I say, shoving it in my rucksack and hoping it'll never sit on my head again, while Dad persuades Fred to put some clothes on.

The doorbell goes. Gran has dropped by

to see us off.

'You didn't think I'd forget, did you?' she whispers, pulling out a package wrapped in string. 'Salted caramel brownies for the midnight feast.'

I can always rely on Gran for cake. Unlike Mum, who only ever puts vegetables in hers, including just lately parsnips. I'm THIS close to taking her to court for crimes against cake.

'I'll take care of those,' Mum says, grabbing them and fumbling with my rucksack.

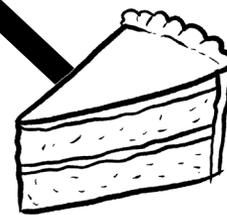
'Don't forget, Stan . . .' Gran pulls me to one side. 'They'll tell you to stick to the paths, but if you do happen to wander off, always leave a trail behind you.'

She hands me a ball of red wool.

'They'll also tell you not to go in the woods at night, but if you do, use this.'

She takes out a head-torch.

'Keeps your hands free for hacking



through the undergrowth and fighting off beasts.'

'We're only going down the A420, Gran.'

'That's what they all say, Stanley, that's what they all say.'

I gulp.

As soon as the car's loaded, we're on our way to meet the coach at school. It's too late to pull out now. That's what happens to your Sunday Afternoon Plans when you've got a little brother.

↳ WOULD YOU RATHER?

The Milky Way is hidden from one third of humanity due to light pollution. It might also be down to Flossie McGregor's massive cloud of sugar-spun hair blocking out the sky.

Flossie is Jess's younger sister and Fred's best friend. Her hair often arrives five minutes before she does. She used to be the neighbourhood's only pirate captain, but now she's evolved into something else.

'Hmm . . . She inspects me with her magnifying glass as I walk through the school gates. 'I deduce spaghetti for lunch.'

'Flossie, I'm in a bit of a rush,' I say, noticing leftovers of Bolognese on my sleeve.

'I'm not Flossie! I'm Defective McGregor,