



CHAPTER 1

WHEN IN ROME

Angus had never been very interested in history until he visited it by accident one Tuesday night.

What?

Yes, you read that correctly. Something interesting happened on a Tuesday night. Amazing, we know. Nothing good ever normally happens on a Tuesday. But this particular Tuesday, against all odds, something did. We strongly suggest you read on and find out all about it. ***Ready?***

With a furious roar, the Roman soldier unsheathed his sword and ran full tilt towards Angus with a murderous look in his eyes.

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Argh! No, wait, that's not right. We've gone too far forward. Rewind a bit.

Angus leapt into the air with fright as the rumbling noise behind him grew to a deafening volume and a shrill voice cried, 'LOOK OUT!'

Mmmm. No, that's still not it. And that's the big problem with telling a story about travelling through time. It's really, really difficult to know the best place to begin. You see, some of this story takes place in the present day. Some of it takes place far, far in the future (when our books are rightly hailed as classics). And a lot of it takes place in the very distant past. We need to be careful to get things in the right order, or it won't make any sense. Perhaps we'd better start with something incredibly boring. You know, just to set the scene before we get to the laser guns and the Ancient Egyptians and the other really cool stuff. Let's open the story with some history homework.

So, here's our hero, Angus Roberts, sitting down one Tuesday night to do his history homework. Angus wasn't

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very interested in history. But it was a bit more than that. History was his absolute least favourite subject at school. He simply couldn't get his head around why he had to learn all this stuff. Angus just couldn't understand why anyone was bothered about what Queen Boudicca, to pluck a name out of thin air, had done to some random Romans hundreds of years ago. It all just seemed like lists of dusty, mouldy old facts and dates to Angus – it was very hard to imagine these were real people.

To make things even worse, his history teacher was very keen on getting her students to stand up and present their work in front of the whole class – and if there was one thing that Angus hated more than history, it was presentations. Standing up to deliver a speech in front of his schoolmates made his legs feel like they'd been replaced with half-deflated balloon animals.

This particular night he'd been struggling with a piece of history homework that he found so baffling and ridiculous it made him want to **scream**. With his pen poised at the top of a blank sheet of paper, he read the

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question again as the daylight faded outside his bedroom window:

How do you think ordinary people in Britain would have felt about the Romans in the years after the invasion? Imagine a conversation with one of them – what might they say? Have the Romans made their life better or worse? It's time to use your imagination!

The homework had been set earlier that day by his teacher, Ms Bancroft. She was friendly and funny and very keen on bringing history to life for her students. But, however hard Ms Bancroft tried, history just would not come to life for Angus. Something inside his brain simply refused to be interested in things that had happened hundreds of years ago. ***What was the point?*** He shook his head slowly and stared out of the window across the darkening garden. *Roman Britain*. He snorted with frustration. Who cared what some long-dead villager thought about some long-dead Romans? What could it possibly matter to him, now, today? *It's not even like they're real people*, he thought to himself angrily. *They're just piles of*

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bones somewhere deep underground. Who cares what they felt, or thought? It's all gone forever.

A small whimpering noise derailed his angry train of thought. The family's dog, McQueen, had wandered into his bedroom and was looking up at him with beseeching eyes. McQueen had been named by Angus's dad after an actor in an old film called *The Great Escape* – for the simple reason that he was always trying to **run away**. The small brown mongrel was constantly scanning for a chance to slip out of the door or underneath the garden gate. If you took him off his lead during a walk he would vanish into any nearby forest or across a field with a delighted bark. Sometimes it took hours to track him down; he just loved running off and being free.

‘I can't take you out now, boy,’ said Angus sadly. ‘I've got to finish this ridiculous question. And start it, for that matter. Don't suppose you know anything about Romans, do you?’ McQueen whined, and placed a soft paw on his leg. ‘No, of course you don't,’ Angus went on, ‘and no wonder. Who'd want to waste their time writing about what people who died a billion years ago thought? It's so stupid.’ And, making a sudden decision, he threw down

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his pen and puffed out his cheeks. Maybe a bit of fresh air would clear his head, which at the moment felt like it was stuffed with hot hamster bedding rather than intelligent thoughts about life in Roman Britain. ‘Come on, then,’ he said, getting to his feet. ‘I can always tell her you ate my homework, I suppose.’

McQueen responded with a delighted *yip* and capered round in circles as Angus found his coat on the back of the door and headed downstairs. ‘I’m taking McQueen out for a wee!’ he shouted through the living-room door. His mum, as usual, was sitting at the dining table, which was strewn with books and piles of paper. She was going for a big promotion at work and spent all her spare moments studying for the tests she’d have to take to get the new job. At his shout she gave him a distracted wave, adjusting her glasses with her other hand to pore more closely over a thick book full of figures.

‘Dad!’ Angus called out. ‘I’m taking McQueen for a walk!’ His dad had arrived home from his job absolutely exhausted, having left for work that morning before it was light. Nothing was visible of him except the bottom of his paint-spattered jeans and his feet, propped up on the

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coffee table in front of the sofa. A faint snore told Angus that he had fallen asleep, as the TV in front of him showed a documentary about archaeology.

‘And this,’ said the long-haired presenter, who was kneeling in a muddy ditch and holding up a small piece of dirty pottery, ‘gives us a **really exciting** insight into how people lived in Roman Britain!’ Angus made a rude face at him.

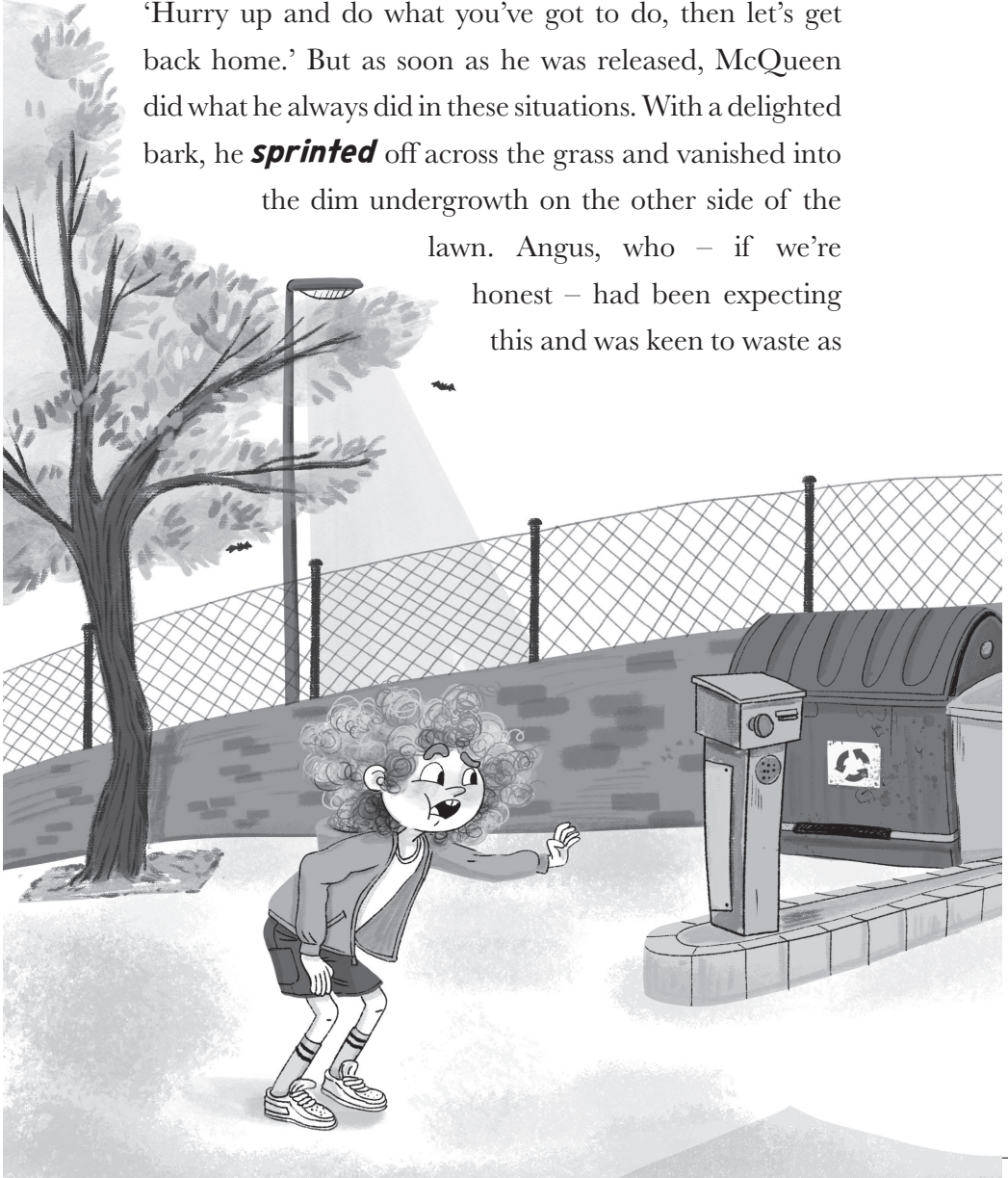
‘Done your homework?’ asked his mum, looking up briefly from her studying.

‘Erm, yep. Pretty much,’ replied Angus, winking at McQueen as he clipped on the lead and unlatched the front door. ‘See you in a bit.’ He closed the door, cutting off the TV presenter’s excited voice saying in a half-whisper: ‘You can really feel a powerful sense of what life must have been like all those years ago.’

‘Who cares what life was like *all those years ago*,’ said Angus to himself in frustration as he crossed the road towards the large park opposite his house, McQueen pulling on his lead in excitement. Street lights threw an unwholesome orangey glow over the trees and bushes, casting dark nets of shadow across a wide stretch of lawn

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surrounded by benches and bins. ‘Go on, then,’ Angus told the dog, bending down and unfastening his lead. ‘Hurry up and do what you’ve got to do, then let’s get back home.’ But as soon as he was released, McQueen did what he always did in these situations. With a delighted bark, he **sprinted** off across the grass and vanished into the dim undergrowth on the other side of the lawn. Angus, who – if we’re honest – had been expecting this and was keen to waste as



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much time as possible so he wouldn't have to do his homework, took off in pursuit.

On the other side of the park was a small narrow road that led to the car park at the rear of the local Hyper-Buy supermarket. As Angus approached, puffing and sweating, he was just in time to see McQueen's feathery brown tail vanishing through the wide gap at the bottom of the locked gates. 'Oi!' shouted Angus. 'They're ***closed!***'



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We can't go shopping now! Come back!' But there was no answer except for the distant pattering of claws on concrete. With a sigh, Angus dropped to the floor and rolled underneath the gates himself. During the day the road and the car park were always packed with cars, but at this time in the evening the place was deserted. Angus got to his feet inside the gates and looked up the steep slope towards the back doors of the shop, which were in darkness. Only a couple of street lamps cast pools of light on to the rows of empty parking spaces. There was no sign of the dog.

'McQueen,' hissed Angus in a stage whisper. There was something slightly **creepy** about the empty car park, which stopped him calling out too loudly. Rows of shopping trolleys could be seen arranged beneath plastic shelters, clipped together by short chains that gave a faint rattling noise in the breeze. A few trees outside the high brick walls cast eerie moving shadows that gave the unnerving impression that someone was moving in the darkness up by the back entrance to the shop. 'McQueen!' he repeated slightly more desperately, beginning to climb slowly up the hill and peering into

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the half-darkness. ‘Where are you, boy? What are you doing in here?’ He felt a further prickle of anxiety as his eyes detected another flicker of movement up by the doors – what if there were security guards who patrolled the car park by night?

‘**Here, boy!**’ he said more loudly still. And this time there was a short answering bark from halfway up the slope. Angus saw a small, dark shape flit past the uppermost street lamp, and headed towards it on tiptoe.

McQueen was capering round and round the lamp post, wagging his tail as if he’d done something hugely clever. ‘Got you!’ said Angus in triumph, grabbing him by the collar and lifting him up. But at that point something very unexpected happened. While Angus had been creeping up on his dog like a stealthy panther with slippers on, he had failed to notice the peculiar noise that had begun to fill the air. It was a **rumbling**, rattling noise, and it was coming from the top end of the car park, right beside the closed and darkened automatic doors of the supermarket. The same place where those creepy moving shadows had been unnerving him just a few moments before. And now that he’d grabbed the dog, Angus

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suddenly realized that the rattling noise was becoming louder and louder. Something was coming.

Glancing to his right, Angus was alarmed to see a large, shadowy shape approaching through the gloom. ‘What on earth is *that*?’ he squeaked to himself in a scared whisper. The ***metallic clattering*** was now filling his ears as the shape loomed even closer, rocking crazily from side to side as it careened down the steep tarmac of the car park, heading right for him. What on earth was it? It was too small to be a car – and besides, cars had headlights. But whatever it was, it was about to crash right into him. Claspings McQueen tightly, Angus turned away and broke into a panicked sprint, pumping his legs and puffing out his cheeks as he flailed frantically away down the hill towards the car-park gates. But it was no use – the shape was gaining on him too fast. Angus leapt into the air with fright as the rumbling noise behind him grew to a deafening volume and a shrill voice cried,

‘LOOK OUT!’

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It just so happened that Angus was running past one of the dim street lights that cast a puddle of faint light beneath it. And just before the shape hit him squarely in the small of his back, he was able to cast a split-second glance back over his shoulder and see exactly what was racing down the hill towards him. What he saw was so odd that for quite some time his brain simply refused to process it. And it was this:

The kindly lady who ran the cheese counter inside Hyper-Buy was rolling towards him down the steeply sloped car park, crouched in a large metal shopping trolley.

Yes, ***that's right***. You didn't read that sentence wrong. And just to prove it, here it is again.

The kindly lady who ran the cheese counter inside Hyper-Buy was rolling towards him down the steeply sloped car park, crouched in a large metal shopping trolley.

See?

The lady's name was Marge, and Angus recognized her from his many shopping trips, both with his parents and – more recently – on his own. She hadn't been working at the supermarket that long, perhaps a year. She was generally regarded as slightly weird and eccentric

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because she dressed in a selection of mismatched bright colours and greeted people with a strange, double-handed gesture – wagging her hands outwards as if she was pretending to be a small bird instead of using the more conventional single-handed upward-pointing wave. But people were willing to tolerate her slightly odd ways because, it was generally agreed, she ran the most incredible cheese counter in the country – if not the entire world. It even had a name – ***Marge's Fromages*** – and within months of it opening, people were making journeys from far and wide to visit this branch of Hyper-Buy to stock up on cheeses that nobody had ever tried before.

People just couldn't understand how Marge managed to fill her display with such a varied selection of interesting cheeses – and no matter how many times they asked, she would never say where they came from. Marge was small, with long curly hair and large plastic glasses. And even though she was considered a little odd, she was still the last person you'd ever expect to be rolling down a steep hill in a shopping trolley. (We're not sure who the first person

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you'd expect to be doing that would be, but she was definitely the last.)

With a startled '**Welp!**' Angus fell backwards into the trolley, still holding the small brown dog to his chest. The trolley gathered speed as it continued to rattle down the hill, clanking and shaking.

'What on earth do you think you're doing?' asked Marge as Angus flailed on his back in front of her. Rather than her usual supermarket tabard, she was wearing a T-shirt with a pink-and-purple striped pattern. She was seated comfortably at the back of the trolley with her legs crossed, gripping the metal sides as the trolley continued to gather speed.

'I might ask you the same question!' countered Angus, struggling up on to his knees. 'Why are you rolling down the car park in a trolley?'

'Just visiting one of my suppliers,' replied Marge matter-of-factly. Angus, whose brain was still struggling to cope with the concept of falling backwards into a shopping trolley in a car park at night, couldn't even begin to speculate about what that sentence might mean. Instead, he made a small, confused noise, which swiftly

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turned into a ***loud, alarmed noise*** as he looked ahead to see the high brick wall at the lower end of the car park approaching them at a frighteningly fast pace.

‘Prepare for temporal leap,’ said a new voice from the back of the trolley. It was a calm female voice, and Angus cricked his neck really quite badly as he flailed his head



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around to see who had spoken. Apart from Marge, there was nobody else there.

‘Though if you’re not prepared now,’ the voice went on, **‘you haven’t really got much time, cos it’s happening in, like, three seconds.’**

‘Who said that?’ shrieked Angus above the rattling of plastic wheels on concrete, which was now deafeningly loud. Finding a shopping trolley hurtling towards you is pretty hard to process. A *talking* shopping trolley . . . well, that’s proper fry-your-brain stuff. McQueen, sensing Angus’s confusion, whimpered and squirmed in his arms.

‘Optimal velocity achieved,’ continued the calm voice. **‘Hold on to your butts, kids. Here . . . we . . . go!’** And then something odd happened. Even odder than a talking shopping trolley. Instead of ***slamming hard*** into the brick wall, which to be honest Angus hadn’t been looking forward to much, the metal framework of the trolley began to glow bright silver.



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Small sparks ran up and down the sides, and there was a strange, growing noise like the rushing of a high wind. Just as this noise was building to a crescendo, there was a blinding flash of bright light and the wall, the car park, the street lights and everything else ***vanished***.