

TIME VENTURE



By Rawan Hage Hassan
Illustrations Kassem Wahid



Sam

Sam, a Lebanese 8th grader living in California, is having a hard time feeling he belongs. It's the 80s and Sam was new to the States. He tried to focus on how he was safer here than back at home, but not everyone made him feel safe. Curtis, a chubby and loud boy gave him a hard time at school during

orientation week, blurting racist and hurtful remarks at the way Sam looked and spoke. Curtis went after everybody at school with his two friends Sig and Mathew by his side. On day one of the 8th grade, Sam was already nervous about his new surroundings and found himself facing Curtis with his



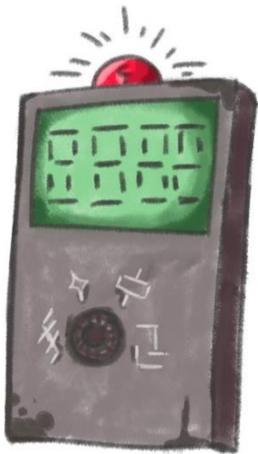
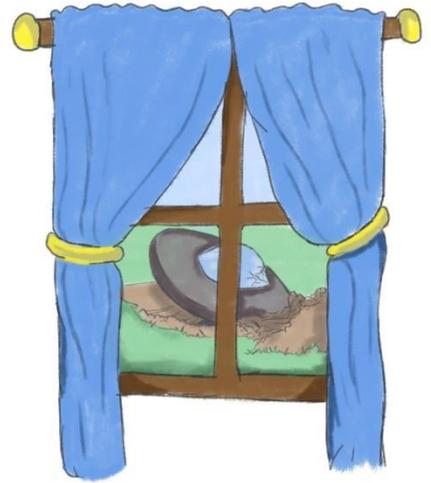
Curtis

small gang. They shoved him and yelled “camel jockey” and “terrorist” and eventually took his lunch. Sitting on the ground defeated, Sam noticed three other kids. But these kids had a much brighter and softer energy than the first three. John, Lee, and Mindy introduced themselves to Sam and shared their food with him. Finally, a warm welcome. He invited them to his house after school. They all ate Sam’s mom’s famous *makloub*, played games, and had great fun. Sam had never felt so close so quickly to a group of friends before.

After everyone went home, he noticed bright flashing lights coming from his backyard. He peeked out the window and saw a giant floating disk.

It wasn't like anything he had ever seen before. He ran out of his room straight to the yard to investigate.

As soon as he arrived near the sliding glass door, he saw that the mysterious UFO had gone. Right before going back to his room, a red light caught the corner of his eye. He approached the source and discovered a machine roughly the size of his Game Boy. As he picked up the cold and



surprisingly light device, he felt an indescribable sensation of euphoria but also torment. He immediately knew this machine held great power. It had a screen displaying odd and foreign symbols with a number panel that glowed red. The metal was incredibly dense for how thin it was and almost lighter than air.

He fidgeted with the machine and turned a small knob on the side from 0 to 1. A bright green flash appeared and he felt that nothing had changed, except when he checked his watch, he saw that he was now ten minutes in the past. He even saw his friends leaving the house just as they were earlier. "How could this be possible? How is this happening?", Sam said to himself in a quiet voice. He wrapped the device with a blanket, hid it under his bed, and couldn't wait to tell his friends about it the next day.

Sam met with his friends and insisted the meeting be private and so they met under the bleachers. He explained the device and asked them what they should do with it. Each friend tossed in an exaggerated example like saving Lincoln or stopping Hitler. They get lost in conversation when Curtis, Sig, and Mathew came in and called them out on their ridiculousness and loser ways. "Time machine? You've got to be kidding me. That's the most ridiculous thing any of you losers ever said.", said Curtis. Sig and Mathew laughed at what they thought was a hilarious comment and all three walked away still laughing. As soon as they left, Sam and his group felt defeated.

John, in anger, said "I hate Curtis and his goons. *They're* the real losers here, not us!". The rest sat in silence, unsure if John was even right about that.

"Maybe *we are* the losers, John.", said Lee defeatedly. "We're the idiots talking about time travel as if it's even real -"

"So, you think I'm a liar?!" interrupted Sam. "This *is* real. We are not losers, Lee. They are. Don't you see the power we hold here? We can do anything."

"Come on, Lee." Mindy added. "Have a little trust. We can use this to our advantage." Lee nodded his head and Sam began to pace around. His eyes widened like he had just had a great idea. "From now on I'll be bringing

the machine to school with me. Then we will see who the losers really are.”, said Sam.

As soon as Sam got home, he ran up the stairs to his room and took out the device. “This will surely teach you not to mess with us, Curtis”, Sam said to himself as he twisted the knobs and took him back to the moment when Curtis and his goons approached them under the bleachers.

“Time machine? You’ve got to be kidding me. That’s the most ridiculous thing any of you losers ever said.”, said Curtis. Sam felt a massive surge of *déjà vu* as everything in front him replayed before his eyes. Sam remembered that he is here for a reason. And that reason is to stand up for himself and his friends. “Leave us alone, Curtis! Don’t you have anything better to do?”, Sam said as he tried to conceal his fear and look brave for his friends.

Everybody went silent and Mindy put her hand over her face to cover her smile. Curtis was shocked and for a moment speechless until he said “You’re going to regret ever talking back to me, Sam. You *and* your loser pals.”. Curtis, Sig, and Mathew stormed off and began cause trouble elsewhere.

“That was amazing! That’ll show him!”, cried Mindy. Lee seemed a bit unsure if what Sam said was for the best and he added “What if he gets even meaner now? What if this made things worse.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m sure it’s over”, replied Sam.

After using the device to save face with Curtis, the group is victorious and Sam grows closer to all of them, especially Mindy.

As Sam laid in bed that night, the mysterious bright flash from his window returned. He jumped out of bed and saw little, grey-colored men with large eyes that made you feel hallow when looking into them. He felt his heart drop as he knew they had returned to take back what belonged to them, but he wasn’t ready to give up that power just yet. They simply stood there. Sam knew it was a threat. He didn’t know how he knew, but he did.



The next day at school Sam saw that Curtis had crossed the line with his evil and malicious ways.

“Hey Sam!” shouted Curtis from across the courtyard. Curtis, Sig, and Mathew all walked toward Sam with purpose. “I don’t know who you thought you were yesterday but I do know that I need to put you back in your place.”, said Curtis.

Sam looked at his friends unsure of what Curtis meant, cracked a sarcastic smirk, and said “I’m not sure where you think my place is, Curtis, but it’s surely nowhere beneath you.”

Mindy, Lee, and John all looked at each other surprised with Sam’s quick tongue but before anyone could react, *BAM!* Curtis struck Sam and he hit the floor. Curtis and his goons got away before any teacher could see.

“Sam! Are you okay?!” shouted Mindy.

“I’m fine.”, he replied with tears in his eyes.

“We need to give up on trying to fight Curtis”, said Lee. “Talking back might’ve seemed like it worked last time but now look at what happened. No time machine could fix his corrupt personality.” Mindy and John sat in silence but you could tell by the looks on their faces that they agreed with Lee.

Sam’s friends didn’t think the device could help them in this situation, but Sam had a different idea. What if Curtis and his goons never met? Or better yet, what if Curtis was bullied when he was younger and never turned out to be the way he is today?

“I’ll fix this, I’ll put Curtis in his place. I’ll make sure he never bothers us again in the future or the past.”, Sam said with determination. He

wiped off the blood from under his nose and walked home with nothing but troublesome plans brooding in his mind.

Mindy began to worry about Sam. What he said felt troubling and she decided to consult her sister Sarah. Sarah was a spiritual type and consulted her tarot cards on many things and was always there for Mindy if she ever needed help.

“Sarah, I’m worried about Sam. I feel like he is about to do something extreme and I’m not sure if I can stop him.”, said Mindy.

“Well let me use my cards and see what he’s planning might bring him.”, replied Sarah.

Sarah shuffled her cards and two fell out. One titled *‘The Hermit’* and one titled *‘The Tower’*. From the images alone, Mindy felt that it couldn’t be good news. Sarah looked up at Mindy and said, “If he goes through with whatever he is planning, he will lose everything and end up alone. Try to get through with him and stop him from making this mistake.”

Mindy, in a rush, stumbles to her landline to call Sam and warn him, but it seemed that he wasn’t able to take her calls. He had used the machine to go back four whole years into the past.



Sam was engulfed in a bright white light and felt strong winds nearly push him off his feet and all of a sudden, everything was calm. He took a look at his calendar and saw that he was in September 7th, 1979.

“Now to find Curtis and put *him* in *his* place.”, said Sam to himself alone in his room. He left for the elementary school to find Curtis.

It was odd looking at a younger version of the same person who made Sam feel so bad about himself, but, in another way, it felt empowering. He knew that, with his machine, he could always solve any problem thrown his way.

Younger Curtis was just starting at his new school at the time. He had just met Sig and Mathew. “Without Sig and Mathew, Curtis would be alone. With nobody on his side, I’m sure he wouldn’t be able to grow into the bully we all know him as.”, Sam thought to himself.

All it took was for Sam to slip notes into Sig’s and Mathew’s cubbies that say “Curtis is a bed wetter and dreams of being a disco girl.” As soon as their recess came around, Sam saw how Sig and Mathew avoided Curtis and exchanged whispers and giggles after he tried to approach them. It was done. Sam was sure Curtis’s reputation could not recover from that any time soon. At the bottom of the social food chain, he is powerless.

Just as Sam wanted to return to his own time, he saw the little grey men appear before him. One alien was standing in front of the two others and the moment Sam locked eyes with him he heard a voice echo in his head. *“You shouldn’t have done that. Return what belongs to us.”* This sentence repeated in his mind and with each time it repeated it got louder and louder and Sam’s heart would beat faster and faster until he had burst into a sprint. He ran as fast as he could to no use. They grabbed him from behind and dragged him by his feet into the giant disk he saw in his yard that one night. All of a sudden Sam’s vision faded to black as he lost consciousness.

He woke up back in his bed with a staggering headache and noticed that he was back in the present day without his machine. If Sam’s plan worked, he wouldn’t need the machine anymore and it wouldn’t matter. All he could think about was sharing his experience with his friends.

Sam went back to school the next day eager to see the results hoping it wasn’t all a dream. He saw Curtis was eating alone and extremely shy now. This made Sam feel guilty but he still looked forward to telling his friends all about his adventure. He approached each one of them separately and saw that none of them recognized him. Not even Mindy, who was now in a close friendship with Lee. Everything had fallen apart. Heartbroken, Sam realized that he should’ve never used the device to hurt Curtis. Although it may have seemed like it solved one problem, it took away his

friendships, and now, just like Curtis, he too ate alone. And as he ate his *tabbouleh*, he watched his friends from a distance and in a way wished nothing had ever changed.

