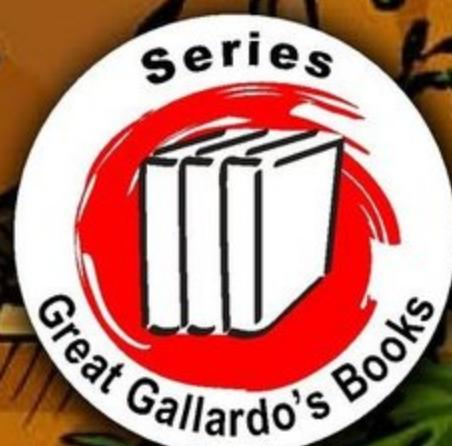
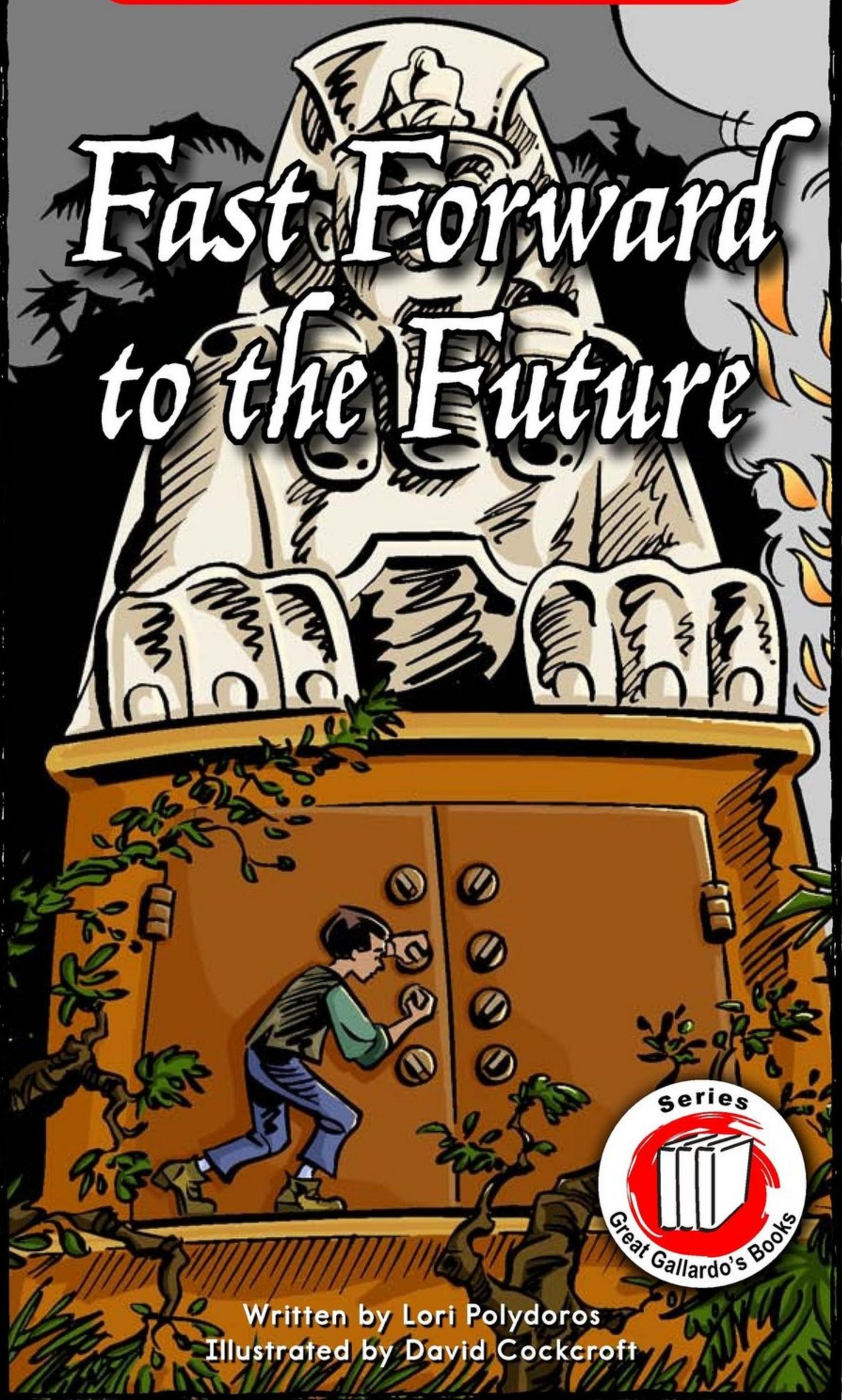


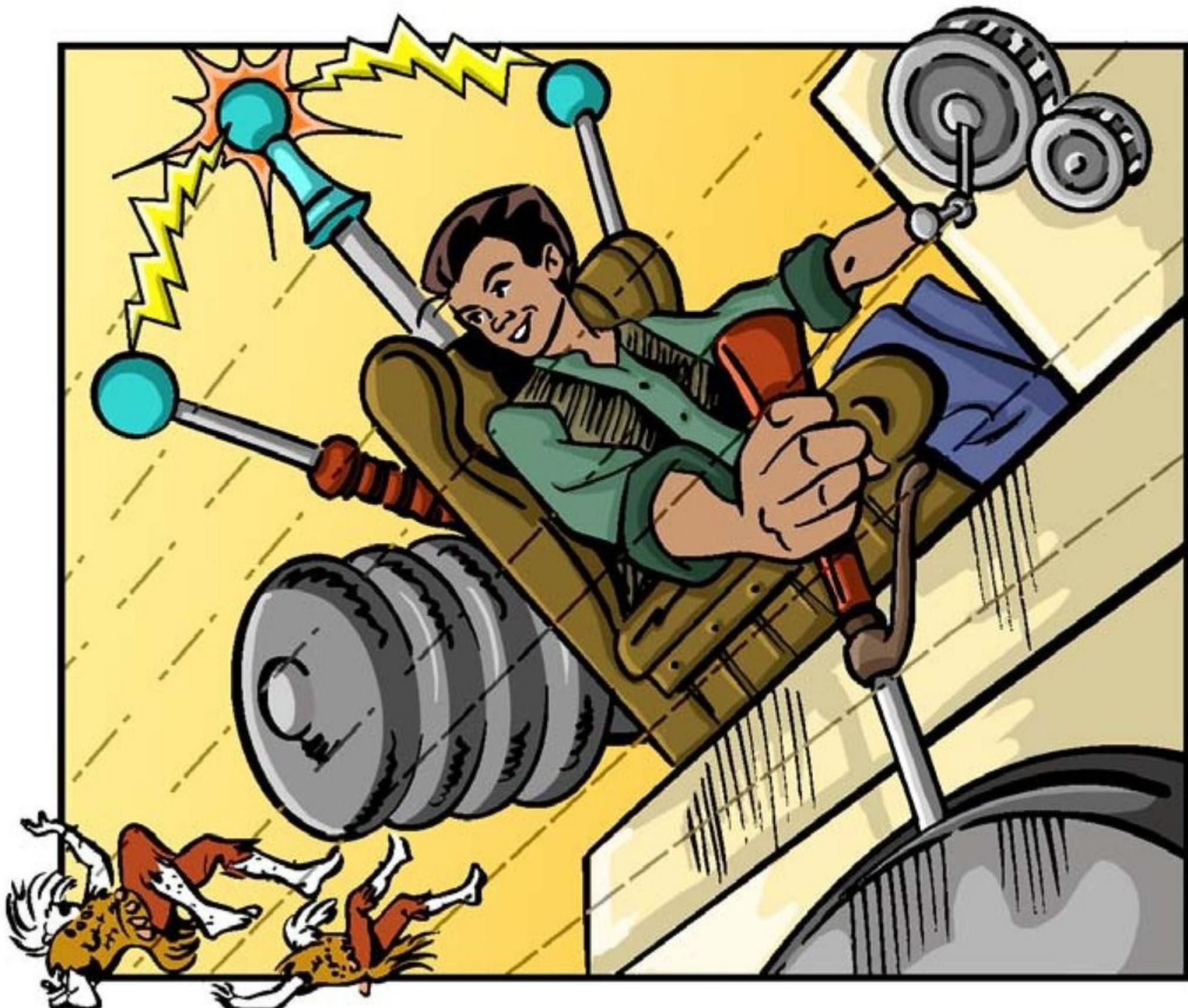
LEVELED BOOK • Y

Fast Forward to the Future



Written by Lori Polydoros
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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A Great Gallardo Book
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All Play and No Work

"Score!" Miguel Ventura's fingers flew over his video controller. He zapped swarms of alien crab monsters that cruised the beach on his TV. "I just beat the game!"

"Ya-hoo!" his friend Trevon yelled. They slapped a high-five.

"Time to get to work," said Miguel's sister, Teresa, as she checked her list. "Dishes first, then laundry, vacuuming, and dusting."

"Sorry, sis."

The boys laughed.

"We only finished the *first* game."

"Nine more to go!"
Trevon added.

Teresa planted herself in front of the TV screen. "Mom and Dad said we could only stay home if we did our chores."



The Ventura family owned a sandwich shop, which is where Miguel and Teresa often spent their afternoons and weekends helping out.

"You've got a handle on it, Tee." Miguel slid her aside.

"Fine!" Teresa tossed her list at Miguel. "You'll get grounded, not me."

Trevon shoved chips into his mouth. Crumbs cascaded down his chin like a waterfall.

Miguel flopped onto the cushions of the couch. "This is the life!"

Vrrrooom! Teresa revved the vacuum in front of the TV.

"Move!" Miguel yelled.

Teresa shrugged.

He flipped off the switch.

"You two are slugs!" She yanked the cord.
"Wasting your life away."

"If this is the life of a slug . . ." Trevor said.

". . . we'll take it." Miguel answered. "We've got all the time in the world."

Five minutes later, the phone rang. “It’s for you, Trevor!” Teresa called out.

“Hello?” Trevor mumbled into the phone. “Why?” He shrugged. “Fine. Be home in a minute.”

“What’s up?” Miguel asked.

“Mom says I have to go,” he said.

“What did you do, Tee?” Miguel rushed through the house. “You called Trevor’s mom to get him to leave, didn’t you?”

Silence.

“I’ll show her,” Miguel muttered under his breath as he slipped out the door, heading directly for the sandwich shop. “Even without Trevor, there’ll be no chores for me.”

Miguel had found the Great Gallardo’s books last year in an old chest up in the loft of his parents’ shop. The books belonged to his great-grandpa, a magician called the Great Gallardo. Somehow, Miguel was able to travel into the stories and become a character. Getting lost in the center of the Earth was the scariest thing he had done. Becoming the Scarecrow from *The Wizard of Oz* had been the most fun.

Dust covered the chest of books. An old wrench stuck out from the lid. Miguel slipped it into his pocket, knowing that he'd need it on his journey. Even after so many trips, he didn't have a clue how the magic worked. Miguel pulled out a small blue book. "*The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells," he said. "Cool, I get to go to the future!"



He started reading from page 326. "I heard nothing but the cracking of twigs under my feet, my own breathing, and the throb of my blood vessels in my ears." The words danced across the page and Miguel's heart quickened its beat. "*then some underworld Morlocks voices there caught I had heard and several they sounds in I closing and me the on the in and were . . .*"

Miguel's view blurred. His head whirled. Light coming through the window zipped in and out. Miguel spun faster and faster. Light and dark **transformed** into gray.

Was this time traveling? Miguel's body grew heavy and suddenly flung forward, slamming to the ground. Then all went dark.



Humanity Lost

Miguel found himself lying in a forest clearing at the base of a hill. A small girl lay curled up behind him. Curly hair adorned with flowers framed her face, which had delicate features.
Who was she?

A fire hissed from across the clearing. Flickering beams of light from the fire danced across the girl's dress. Flames sprang up from a pile of wood to catch nearby trees and bushes on fire and traveled through the forest like a pack of lions. Miguel panicked. As he jumped to his feet, he kicked an iron bar on the ground. Voices mumbled in the darkness beyond the firelight. Bushes rustled. Footsteps padded the ground. Miguel turned round and round. Someone was coming. *Something* was coming.

The flames exposed several white creatures with gorilla-like faces rushing toward him. Standing upright, they were about the same size as Miguel. Suddenly he remembered the story. These things were called Morlocks, ape-like beasts that lived underground . . . and they were **cannibals!**

Miguel gulped. The Morlocks nearly surrounded him.

"Wake up, little girl." He shook her, keeping one eye on the Morlocks.

Her big blue eyes opened. "I'm Weena."

"That means I'm the time traveler!" He picked her up. "And we're dinner for those Morlocks!"



Weena jumped out of his arms and sprinted into the forest, which grew brighter and hotter from the **inferno**. Miguel reached out, but she slipped away. For a moment, Weena stopped in front of the blaze, **mesmerized** by the dancing flames. Then she moved forward.



"No, fire!" He motioned toward the heat. "Ouch!"

Weena had no clue what he was saying. From the story, Miguel knew that 80,000 years into the future, human beings had changed and split into two groups. Weena was an Eloi, the people who lived aboveground. Over time, their easy life had made them weaker and less intelligent than the Morlocks, who were the **primitive** worker-class who lived underground and built machinery. The Morlocks only came aboveground at night to hunt the Eloi.

Miguel shivered. Smoke burned his nostrils. Weena stumbled back to where they started and collapsed. He tried to wake her, but he could barely tell whether she was breathing. From behind, Miguel felt fingers cling to his back. They gripped his neck and arms. He swiveled around, bent down, and grabbed the iron bar off the ground.

"I'm not your dinner!" He lunged toward the Morlocks, waving the bar in the air.

"Get away from us!" The Morlocks scattered.

He turned back. Weena had disappeared! His heart fell; he hadn't protected her.

Another Morlock tugged at his ankle.

Miguel kicked his foot out and scrambled up the hill.



A Beautiful Machine

From the hilltop, the glow of the fire illuminated the entire forest. Ashes and embers littered the ground, burning Miguel's feet. He wrapped huge green leaves around them.

A group of trees exploded like dynamite, sending Miguel to the ground. The ape-like creatures froze near the edge of the blaze. The fire singed their white hair, creating a **putrid** stench. They fell like dominoes, succumbing to the hungry beast of a fire. They, like Weena, had never seen a blaze like this. The future was nothing as Miguel imagined.

The surviving Morlocks streamed through the trees, the fire chasing them like a monster. Miguel followed them. Maybe they would lead him back to the **time machine**, and he could get home.

Miguel hustled past trees as tall as buildings and brushed against blue flowers as big as his face. There was no technology in the future, and Miguel surmised that was the reason why nature **flourished**. The Morlocks disappeared into an underground passageway, leaving Miguel alone near a marble statue of a sphinx.



The shiny valves around the sphinx's bronze base shimmered in the firelight. In the story, the Morlocks unscrewed the valves to open this statue so they could capture the time traveler inside it. Miguel was too close behind them for the Morlocks to set the trap this time. Miguel had figured it out—the time machine was inside!

Miguel pulled on the valves. Twisted. Tugged. They slipped through his fingers. Dread spread over him like a storm cloud. How would he get to the machine?

Miguel thought of Weena. Then he thought of Teresa and how he'd been mad at her when he left. *What if he never made it back?* Miguel leaned against the statue. Something from his pocket clanked against the bronze. *The wrench from the loft!*



He ripped the tool from his pocket and fit it onto the valves. *Perfect!* He **torqued** them hard. The front panel of the statue came loose, slid down into the ground, and revealed the time machine!

Miguel rushed over. It was beautiful; a cross between a race car and the gears of a fancy watch. The rectangular metal frame supported twisted crystal and ivory bars that interconnected, creating one continuous pattern. It was like the ultimate brain puzzle, the kind you could work on for hours yet never solve.

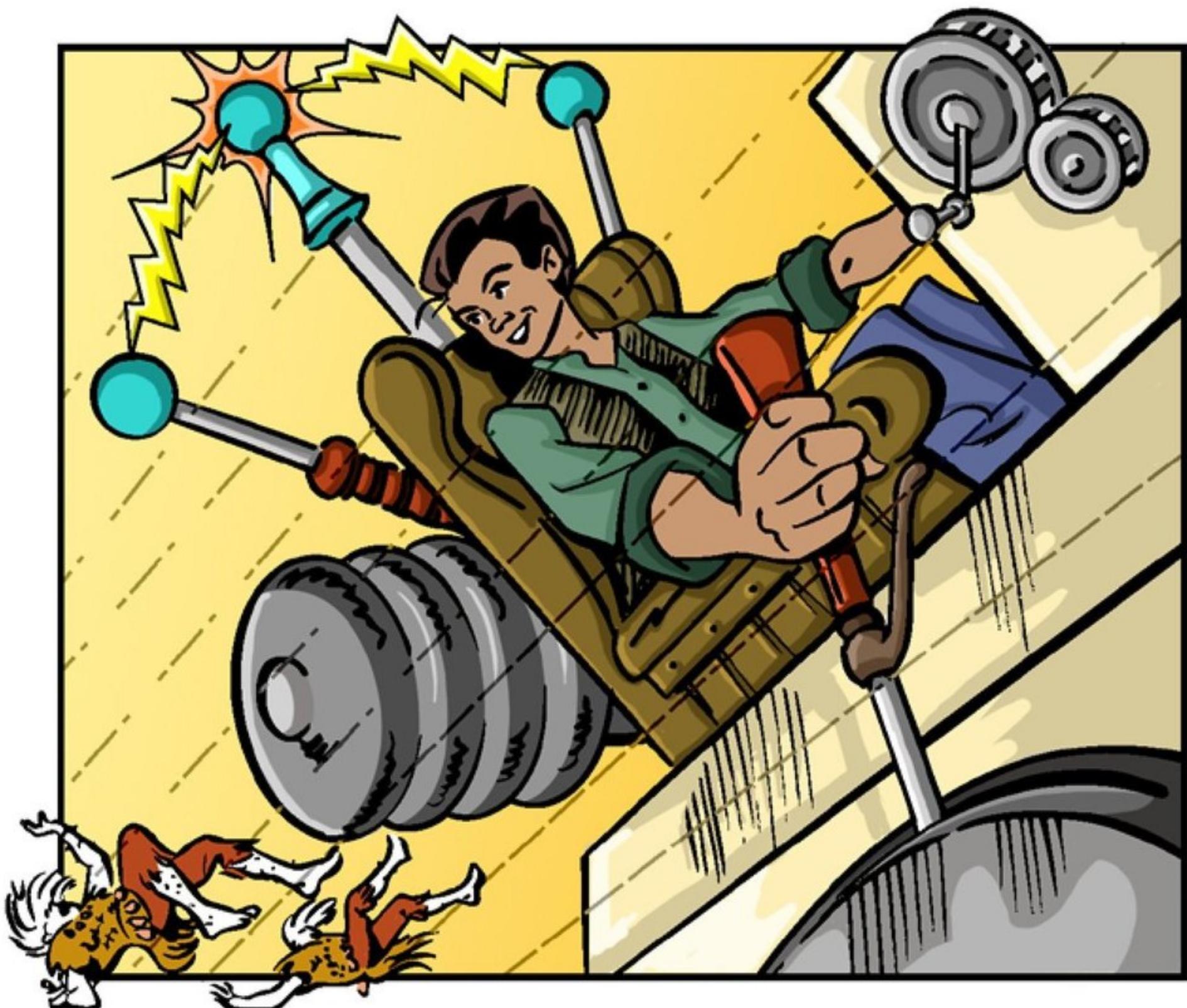
But to Miguel, the idea of time travel was the biggest puzzle. He knew it was impossible in the real world, but he fantasized about moving through space and time: the **fourth dimension**.

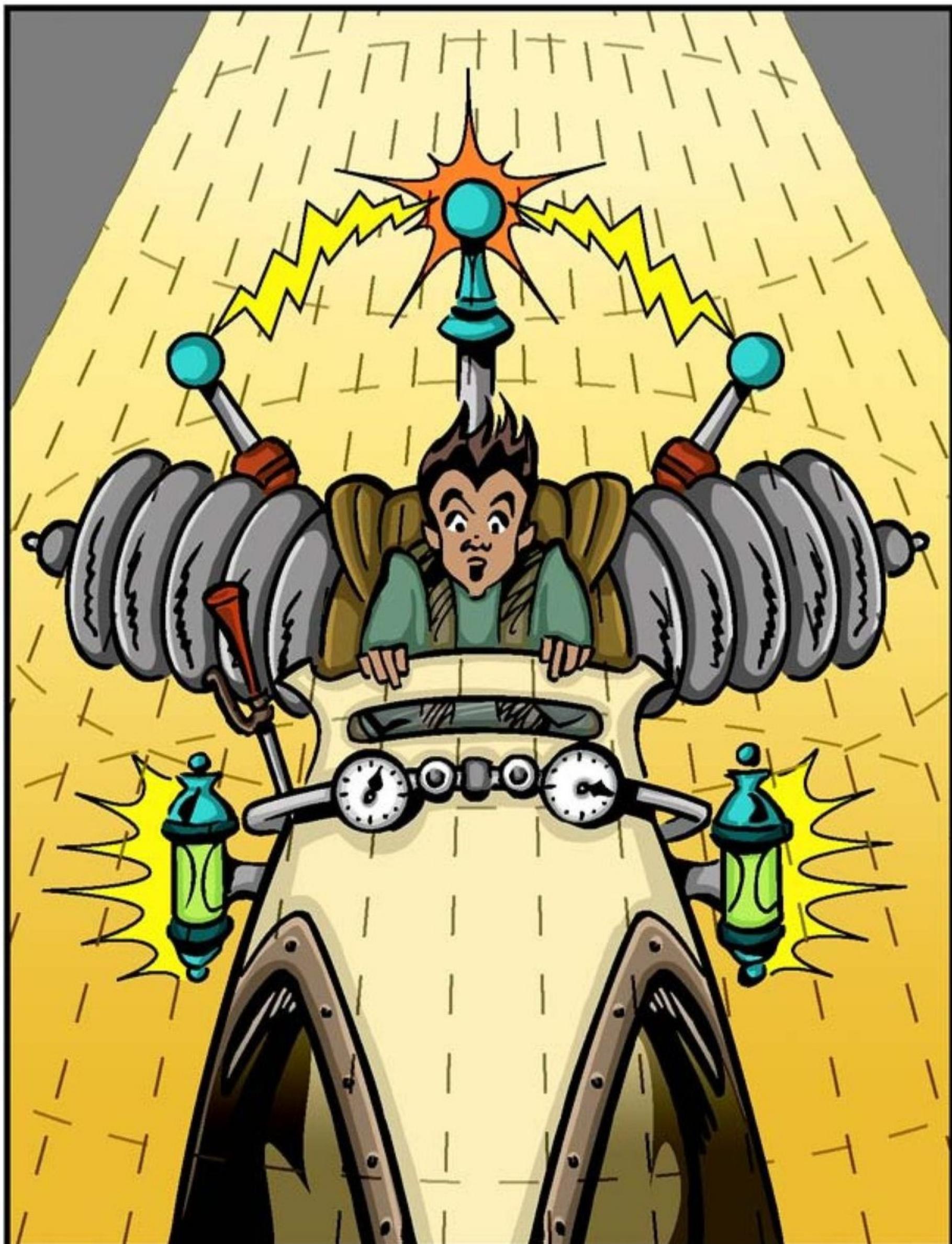
The front panel inside held two levers and three dials labeled with the numbers up to a million. The levers would take him forward and back. The dials would show how many days he'd traveled. How would he know which one to push?

The bronze panel of the statue shot up and clanked shut. He was trapped in the dark! His hands fumbled for the levers. He heard murmurs. Footsteps. Laughter. Miguel was not alone. Warm bodies pressed near him. They pulled on his clothes. Tugged at his feet. Grabbed his shoulders.

He backed against the panel, kicking, screaming, and flailing his arms, surrounded by the Morlocks' musty smell, their steaming breath, their fury. Miguel fumbled in his pockets. He pulled out the wrench and waved it. One of the Morlocks knocked it away.

He felt the prick of teeth against his neck. Miguel lunged forward, knocking his head into the closest Morlock for the ultimate head-butt! In that same instant, he reached out for the levers. The Morlocks tumbled out of the machine as Miguel's fingers clamped down onto metal. He pulled hard.





Blackness disappeared. Gray haze. Whirling thoughts. The dials spun wildly, like the second hand on a clock. All at once, Miguel's body surged forward. Everything stopped.

He'd gone forward. Fast forward.

Dying to See the Future

Miguel found himself thrust upon a black, endless plateau scattered with black bushes. The land was flat with no mountains, hills, rivers, or oceans. The sun hung in the gray sky. The fiery star was now orange, and its rays pulsed as if it were losing power.

From across the plain, a long creature crawled toward Miguel on thousands of feet. It rose thirty feet high and had overlapping greenish-black plates covering its body. Multiple black eyes stared him down. As it got closer, two horn-like antennas stretched out like hands. It was a giant centipede, and it was coming after him!

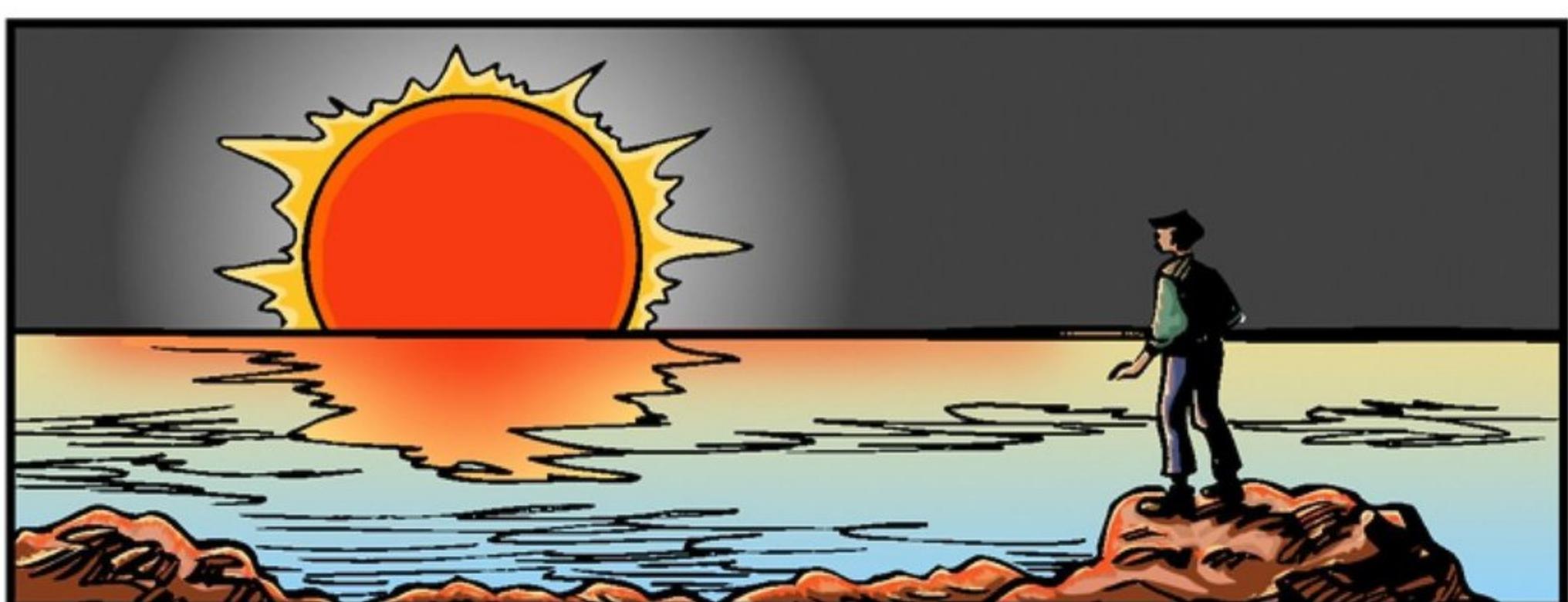
Miguel scrambled back into the machine. He tugged on a lever. Instantly, the sky grew darker. He whirled forward, but the alternating of day and night—sunrise and sunset—slowed. The dials spun forward again and again. The time machine stopped abruptly.



The sun, now red and large, hung along the horizon. The sky was an inky black, missing its moon, and highlighted by only a few pale stars. Like the scarlet of the sun, reddish rocks lined the beach where Miguel stood. Strange **fluorescent** green plants seemed to be the only thing growing.

The ocean was still—no waves, no breakers, no wind. Miguel sat down. It was hard to breathe. He remembered the same feeling when he'd hiked up Mount Whitney, the tallest mountain in California, with his mom. Oxygen was scarce.

The bitter cold nipped at his fingers as he cruised over the rocky beach. The red ball in the sky was a sad picture of what the sun used to be. Was he witnessing the death of the sun and the end of life on Earth? He swallowed. Such a huge question was hard to **comprehend**. A gust of fear and sadness brushed across him. He had to get home. But how?



From the craggy shore, Miguel stepped down onto a boulder. It moved under his feet!

He jumped back when a huge claw reared up from the ground. It was a crablike creature as big as a table! Its huge antennas swung like whips right at Miguel.

As he scrambled backward, Miguel tripped, slamming into the rocky shore.

The crab moved forward, its huge claws grasping, its eyes gleaming toward its next meal.

Miguel ran. As he turned back, the crab opened its mouth and lunged toward Miguel. Antennas swept over the back of Miguel's neck. His foot caught between two rocks. He tugged. Jerked. Kicked.

He was stuck!

The crab came closer.

Miguel squirmed.

Closer.

Miguel yelled.

Closer.



Miguel grabbed small rocks off the ground and began to throw. He picked up one after another, left hand, right hand, tossing them as quick as he could. The creature flinched. Miguel bounced more rocks against its hard shell. The crab slowed.

It was working!



Left. Right. Left. Right. He pictured himself in front of his TV, blasting the alien crabs from his video game. But this time, it was all too real! With one last heave, Miguel sent a basketball-sized rock sailing right into the crab's mouth. Its huge claws crossed in front. Its antennas swayed.

Miguel froze.

And then the crab turned and crawled away.

"Ya-hoo!" He wished Trevor could have seen this victory.

Miguel reached down and untied the shoe stuck between the rocks. His foot slipped out, and he headed for the time machine. The time machine had to be the key to getting home. Miguel remembered that the time traveler had ended up back in his **laboratory** when he went backward in time. Maybe Miguel would end up back at home if he tried to go backward in time instead of forward.

He sat in the saddle seat, pulled the other lever, and closed his eyes. He twirled. He spun. He could feel the air being sucked out of his lungs. Then suddenly, he was in the loft!

Miguel left the shop and ran home. He found Teresa dusting the living room.



"Nice of you to show up," she said.

Miguel walked over to her, grabbed the rag, and began to clean the bookshelf.

"Who are you?" she asked. "Not my brother—he doesn't work."

"Great-Grandpa Gallardo helped me out." Miguel thought of his fast-forward trip to the future and sadness filled his heart. "Time is short. You never know how bright or dark the future will be." He dusted the books. "And hard work keeps you strong and smart." He smiled at Teresa.

"You're off the hook this time," she smiled back. "But only if I get to zap alien crabs while you work!"



Glossary

cannibals	animals that eat other animals of the same species (p. 9)
comprehend	to understand the meaning of something (p. 19)
flourished	to have grown well because conditions are right (p. 12)
fluorescent	very bright in color (p. 19)
fourth dimension	the quality of time and duration added to the spatial dimensions of height, width, and depth (p. 15)
inferno	a fire that is burning fiercely or with great intensity (p. 10)
laboratory	a room with equipment for doing scientific work (p. 22)
mesmerized	fascinated or had the complete attention of someone (p. 10)
primitive	appearing to be in an earlier stage of development (p. 10)
putrid	foul smelling (p. 12)
time machine	a machine used to travel through time (p. 12)
torqued	turned using a rotating or twisting motion (p. 15)
transformed	changed in form or appearance (p. 7)

Note: The Great Gallardo's Books is a continuing series written by Lori Polydoros. Travel with Miguel Ventura as he experiences a classic adventure inspired by H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*.

Fast Forward to the Future
Level Y Leveled Book
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