



MAGIC

CHRONICLES OF TIME

a relay in eight chapters

RELAY · WRITERS

The writers

Eight people who never met. One chapter each, in the order it was written.

ONE	Sasha Loomis
TWO	Sammy Hall
THREE	Cora Lindgren
FOUR	rpenguin
FIVE	Priya Nair
SIX	Dario Selo
SEVEN	jmarsh
EIGHT	wordsbylena

Chapter

ONE

written by Sasha Loomis

Theo found himself standing in a hallway, the air thick with the scent of old paper and ink. He clutched the chipped enamel pan in his pocket, its surface cool to the touch. The librarian's words echoed in his head: "No book can leave after sundown." He glanced at the warped third stair, where shadows danced like restless spirits.

Theo stepped into the room, a place that seemed both familiar and utterly alien. The walls were lined with bookshelves, each one filled to bursting with volumes so ancient they shimmered with time's glow. A faint ticking sound came from somewhere deep within, like the heart of an old clock.

He approached the librarian, a woman whose face was obscured by layers of dust, her voice a whisper that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere. "The rule," she murmured, "is simple." Theo nodded, though he felt his resolve weakening with every second that ticked past.

A figure emerged from behind one of the bookshelves, a young girl with eyes like pools of dark water. She wore an old-fashioned dress and held a small, leather-bound journal. Without a word, she handed it to Theo and vanished back into the shadows.

Theo opened the journal to find a single sentence scrawled across its pages: "Find the key that is not a key." A shiver ran down his spine, but

he forced himself to continue reading, finding more cryptic messages that led him deeper into the labyrinthine library.

Suddenly, the ticking grew louder, and Theo realized it was coming from his own pocket. He pulled out the chipped enamel pan, its surface now glowing faintly. The librarian appeared beside him, her form flickering like a candle flame in a drafty room.

"Time," she said softly, "is a creature of its own making." With that, she turned and walked away, leaving Theo alone with his growing unease and the cryptic journal.

The clock ticked on, and Theo knew he had to act quickly. He closed the journal and placed it back in his pocket, the chipped enamel pan still warm against his skin. The next chapter awaited, but for now, he was lost in a sea of whispers and shadows, each step taking him further from the light.

Chapter

TWO

written by Sammy Hall

So Theo's standing there, feeling like he's in way over his head, and the librarian just walks away, leaving him with more questions than answers. He looks down at the journal in his pocket, the one the young girl handed him, and wonders what's the deal with that. Find the key that is not a key, yeah, real helpful. He's got a ticking pan in his pocket, a mysterious journal, and a librarian who seems to be speaking in riddles.

He takes a deep breath, trying to clear his head, and starts to think this through. Okay, so the librarian said time is a creature of its own making, which sounds like a bunch of mumbo-jumbo, but maybe there's something to it. He thinks back to the clock sound coming from the pan, and how it seemed to be getting louder. Is that a clue? He pulls out the pan again, and sure enough, the ticking is still going strong.

Theo starts to walk, not really sure where he's going, but figuring he needs to move. He passes by the bookshelves, running his fingers over the spines of the books, feeling the raised letters and embossed covers. Some of these books are so old, they're practically falling apart, but they still seem to hum with a quiet power. He stops in front of a shelf, scanning the titles, looking for anything that might jump out at him.

That's when he sees it: a book with a cover made of what looks like pure silver. It's got no title, no author, just a strange symbol etched into the front. Theo's intrigued, so he pulls the book down, feeling a slight

jolt of electricity as his skin makes contact with the metal. The book feels heavy, like it's packed with lead, but as he opens it, he realizes it's almost empty. Just a few pages, filled with handwritten notes, and a small, folded paper tucked between the pages.

Theo unfolds the paper, and finds a crude map of the library, with several rooms and corridors marked. One of the rooms is circled, with a small X marked through it. He recognizes some of the landmarks from his own wanderings, but there are others that look completely unfamiliar. He wonders if this map might be a clue, or just another red herring.

Just as he's studying the map, he hears a faint noise, like someone's whispering his name. Theo spins around, but there's no one there. The whisper seems to be coming from all around him, echoing off the bookshelves. He feels a shiver run down his spine, and suddenly, the ticking from the pan in his pocket gets louder, like it's responding to the whisper.

Theo takes a deep breath, trying to calm himself down. He looks at the map again, and decides to follow it, see where it leads. He tucks the book back onto the shelf, and sets off, the map clutched in his hand, the ticking pan still going strong in his pocket. As he walks, the whispering grows fainter, but he can't shake the feeling that he's being watched, that unblinking eyes are trained on him from the shadows.

He moves quickly, his heart pounding in his chest, the map leading him deeper into the labyrinth. The corridors start to look familiar, and he realizes he's heading back towards the room where he first met the librarian. But as he approaches the door, he notices something's different. The door's slightly ajar, and he could swear it was closed before. Theo's gut tells him to be careful, that something's waiting for him on the other side of that door. He pushes it open slowly, his senses on high alert, and peers into the room.

Chapter

THREE

written by Cora Lindgren

Theo pushed open the door slowly, his heart pounding in sync with the rhythmic ticking of the chipped enamel pan in his pocket. The air inside was thick and musty, a mixture of old parchment and damp stone. He stepped into the room, his eyes adjusting to the dim light filtering through the cracks in the ancient wooden floor. The door creaked softly behind him, drawing his attention to the subtle rustling on the other side. Theo's hand instinctively tightened around the pan, its warmth seeping through his fingers. The room was a study of contrasts: one wall held shelves lined with modern books, their spines clean and pristine; across from it, another shelf housed ancient volumes, each page yellowed and fragile. A faint, almost imperceptible whisper echoed in his ears, making the hair on the back of his neck stand. He scanned the room, his gaze landing on a desk cluttered with papers and an old 1972 watch, its face cracked and hands stopped at quarter to five. The clock was ticking loudly now, as if sensing Theo's presence. Theo approached the desk, his fingers brushing against the cold metal of the watch. He picked it up, feeling its weight in his palm. The second hand moved with a jerky motion, as if protesting its being handled. With a quick glance around the room, he noticed a small, unassuming book lying on top of an ornate wooden box. Its cover was made of leather, but unlike any other book he had seen; it felt almost... alive. He picked up the book and

opened it to find a single page filled with faded writing: "Find what you seek in the light that never fades." Theo's brow furrowed as he read, his mind racing. He remembered the librarian's words about time being a creature of its own making. Was this key, not a key, hidden somewhere here? The box beside him was locked, but it didn't feel like it would be too difficult to open. He pushed aside the thoughts of time and focused on the task at hand. With his free hand, he began to unscrew the small brass latch holding the lid in place. As the lid lifted, a burst of light spilled out, illuminating the contents within. Inside were several objects: a glass vial filled with what looked like dew from the morning grass, a pocket watch that chimed softly, and a small, intricately carved wooden figurine. Theo's fingers brushed against the figurine, feeling its smooth surface. It was the key he sought. He placed the book back on the desk, careful to keep it open at the page with the cryptic message. The light from inside the box cast an eerie glow around the room, and Theo felt a presence lurking in the shadows. He looked up just as a figure stepped out from behind a curtain hanging against the wall. It was the young girl from before, her eyes still dark and full of mystery. She held a book in one hand and stared at Theo with a knowing smile. "Find what you seek," she whispered softly, her voice carrying a faint echo. Theo nodded, understanding dawning on him. He turned to look at the clock again; its ticking was now relentless, as if urging him towards his next step. He knew he had to move quickly. He picked up the vial and the pocket watch, tucking them into his pockets without breaking their seals. The wooden figurine remained in the box, its carvings intricate and detailed. With one last look around the room, Theo closed the desk drawer and left the study, the door creaking behind him as he pushed it shut. The hallway outside was quiet, but Theo could still hear the steady ticking of the pan in his pocket. He walked down the corridor, feeling a mix of relief and unease. The whispers seemed to have grown fainter, their presence less immediate. But something was different; the air felt heavier, as if the library itself had shifted subtly. As he passed by one of the bookshelves, Theo noticed that some of the books were now slightly

askew, almost as if they had moved on their own. He glanced at a particularly old tome, its pages yellowed and brittle, and his fingers instinctively reached out to touch it. The book felt alive in his hand, pulsing with an energy he couldn't fully comprehend. Theo quickened his pace, the ticking now louder and more insistent. He turned down another corridor, feeling a sudden chill as if a cold wind had just swept through. His steps echoed loudly in the silence, but there was no one to be seen.

Chapter

FOUR

written by rpenguin

The cold followed Theo around the corner.

It was not the wandering chill of a drafty building. It moved with purpose, brushing the back of his neck when he slowed and retreating whenever he turned to face it.

Theo pulled the silver map from his pocket.

He stopped.

He had put the map in his pocket, hadn't he?

He remembered folding it. He remembered leaving the silver book on the shelf. He remembered the map clutched in his hand as he followed its corridors. Yet he could not remember the moment he had tucked it away.

The library had supplied that memory afterward.

The thought arrived so clearly that Theo nearly laughed. It was absurd. Buildings did not put memories into people. Libraries did not revise the past.

Behind him, a book slid from a shelf and struck the floor.

Theo spun around.

It lay open beneath a cone of pale lamplight. The pages were blank except for one line, written in wet black ink.

THEO QUICKENED HIS PACE.

He stared at it.

A second line appeared beneath the first.

HE DID NOT NOTICE THAT HE WAS BEING FOLLOWED.

Theo did not move.

The cold presence behind him stopped moving too.

Slowly, Theo looked over his shoulder.

The corridor was empty.

When he turned back, the writing had changed.

HE DID NOT NOTICE THAT THE CORRIDOR WAS EMPTY.

Theo slammed the book shut.

The ticking inside his pocket became frantic.

He pulled out the chipped enamel pan. Its white surface glowed beneath the cracks, and twelve dark chips ringed its edge at almost even intervals. He had carried the thing for so long without really looking at it. Now, with the ticking vibrating through his fingers, he saw what it resembled.

A clock face.

There were no hands, but a thin shadow stretched across the enamel from one chip to another. It pointed to quarter to five.

The same time as the cracked watch.

Theo reached into his other pocket and took out the watch he had found in the study. Its hands remained fixed at 4:45, though its second hand jerked uselessly between two marks.

The pocket watch from the wooden box chimed once.

Three clocks, Theo thought. All disagreeing about whether they were clocks.

He unfolded the map and laid it inside the pan.

It fit perfectly.

Not approximately. Not by coincidence. Its corners settled against four chips in the enamel as though the paper had been cut for that exact purpose.

The ticking stopped.

For one breath, the library became utterly silent.

Then pale lines began to spread across the map.

The inked corridors shifted, extending into blank spaces and crossing through walls that had not been marked before. Rooms appeared, disappeared, and reappeared elsewhere. The circled chamber remained still, but the X inside it unfolded into four delicate letters.

N O T.

Theo read it twice.

The room was not marked with an X.

It was marked with the word not.

Chapter

FIVE

written by Priya Nair

Theo slammed the map shut and shoved it into his pocket along with the chipped enamel pan. His heart was racing like a sprinter on the track, but his mind was whirling faster than any relay race. "Okay," he muttered to himself, "just gotta figure out what the hell is going on here." He glanced back at the corridor, half-expecting to see the whispering girl or that eerie cold breeze. But nope, no one and nothing. Just the ticking from his pocket, like a relentless drummer keeping time. He clutched the old watch in his other hand, its hands frozen at 4:45, and rubbed it against his jacket. "Great," he sighed, "more cryptic clues and mysterious objects. Really needed that."

The library seemed to shift subtly around him. A few books on a nearby shelf shifted just so, almost as if... nudging him in a direction. Theo shrugged off the feeling, deciding there was no harm in following his gut. He turned down another corridor, his boots echoing loudly on the stone floor. The walls were lined with bookshelves that seemed to whisper secrets of their own. He scanned them for any clue, but found only more ancient tomes and some strange new books he hadn't noticed before. One caught his eye, a leather-bound volume with a faded red cover. He plucked it from the shelf and opened it to find the pages filled with intricate drawings of clocks and gears. At the bottom, one page had

a single sentence: "Time is but a shadow cast by the sun." Theo chuckled, shaking his head. "Figures."

The corridor turned sharply at an unmarked door that looked familiar somehow. As he approached, he noticed something unusual, a small crack in the wall, like someone, or something, had been digging for something. "Maybe I should check this out," he said to no one in particular. The door creaked softly as he pushed it open. Inside was a dusty storage room filled with boxes and old furniture. Theo scanned the area, spotting an ornate chest near the back. He approached it cautiously and reached inside. Inside were three more watches, each with hands frozen at different times: 4:30, 5:00, and 6:15. The middle one chimed softly, its sound echoing in the silent room. Theo's fingers brushed against a small button near the bottom of the case. Pressing it caused the chest to unlock. He opened it wide, revealing a stack of books tied together with a leather thong. One book had a page marked: "The key lies not in the light but in the shadows." Theo flipped through the books, finding more cryptic notes and drawings. His eyes landed on a small pocket-sized notebook tucked at the bottom. He pulled it out and opened it to find scrawled notes:

Find the missing piece.

Time is fleeting.

Theo's brow furrowed as he read. "Missing piece? Time is..."

A sudden noise cut him off, a soft clinking from behind a bookshelf. Theo spun around, heart pounding. But there was nothing there. Just the usual whispers and creaks of old wood. He reached into his pocket again, feeling the enamel pan's surface against his fingers. The thin shadow pointing to quarter to five glowed faintly, almost as if it were alive. He glanced at the bookshelf one more time before deciding to follow the corridor to its end. The door at the far wall creaked open slowly, revealing a small, dimly lit room. Inside was an old desk with a single lamp hanging above it. The desk had a map similar to the one Theo had found earlier, but this one was blank except for a single word scrawled across its surface: NOT. Theo's heart skipped a beat as he

approached the desk. He placed the notebook and other watches on top of it before lifting the lamp higher. The map glowed faintly in his torchlight, the inked lines extending to form a path leading to the center of the room. At its core was another small box, similar to the one from earlier but with a different lock. He approached the box and noticed something unusual, a small keyhole on the side. Theo felt around in his pockets until he found a tiny, rusted key. He inserted it into the lock and turned, hearing a soft click as it opened. Inside was a single item: an old pocket watch, its hands frozen at 6:00. The chimes inside were muted but audible. Theo picked up the watch and examined it closely before tucking it away in his jacket pocket along with the others. He sat down on the floor, surrounded by the collection of watches and books.

Chapter

SIX

written by Dario Selo

Theo sat down on the floor, surrounded by the collection of watches and books. The room was dimly lit by the single lamp hanging above him, casting long shadows that danced across the walls. He felt a mixture of relief and exhaustion wash over him, but his mind continued to race with questions. Each watch and notebook seemed to hold clues, yet none of them provided clear answers. The clock faces, the map, and the mysterious boxes all pointed towards something, something he couldn't quite grasp. He picked up the small notebook again, running a finger along its leather cover. The words scrawled inside were simple but profound: Find the missing piece. Time is fleeting. He frowned, wondering what it meant by "missing piece." Was there literally an object that was lost or missing, or was he looking for something metaphorical? The clock in his pocket began to tick again, its relentless beat reminding him of the urgency. The thin shadow on the enamel pan shifted slightly, pointing ever so slightly towards 6:00, a time he had seen before but didn't fully understand. He looked up and around the room, trying to make sense of it all. The storage room felt like a puzzle, each object part of a larger picture that remained elusive. He opened his jacket pocket and laid out the four watches on the floor, examining them one by one. The 4:30 watch had a chime that sounded off, almost as if it was trying to speak but couldn't quite find its voice. The 5:00 watch,

with its hands motionless, seemed more like a silent sentinel, watching over him silently. The 6:15 watch chimed softly, its sound echoing in the stillness of the room. Finally, there was the 6:00 watch, its hands fixed in place as if guarding some deep truth. He reached into his jacket again, this time pulling out the map and placing it on the floor next to the watches. The lines were now more defined, extending towards the center of the room where the small box lay open. He picked up the 6:00 watch and studied it closely. Its hands were frozen at a crucial moment, as if marking a critical point in time. He turned his attention back to the map. The inked lines formed a path that seemed to lead from one object to another, each step bringing him closer to understanding. He traced the path with his finger, trying to see if he could discern any pattern or meaning. The map's lines ended at the small box in the center of the room. He picked it up and examined its contents more closely. Inside were a few more cryptic notes and drawings, but nothing that immediately clarified anything. The notebook lay open on the desk, still containing the same message: Find the missing piece. Time is fleeting.

He closed his eyes and tried to focus. The library was quiet now, save for the ticking of the watches in his pocket. He felt a sense of dread mixed with determination. What if he failed? What if there wasn't enough time? The clock face on the enamel pan flickered slightly, as if responding to his thoughts. The shadow moved closer to 6:00, and Theo realized that it was almost 7 p.m., according to the library's own internal timekeeping. He stood up and walked back towards the door, hesitating for a moment before pushing it open. The corridor outside was quiet, but the cold presence seemed more palpable now. He felt as if he were being watched, though there was still no one in sight. The hallway extended into more bookshelves that whispered secrets of their own. Theo scanned them, his eyes landing on an old tome near a corner. It had a worn leather cover and a faded red title: *Chronicles of Time*. He picked it up carefully, flipping through the yellowed pages to find a passage about clocks and time itself. The book read: Time is not merely a measure but a dance, a harmony between motion and stillness. The

missing piece lies within this very dance. Theo's mind buzzed with the words, trying to unravel their meaning. He placed the book back on the shelf, feeling as if he was getting closer but also further away from an answer. He continued down the corridor, his footsteps echoing loudly in the silence. The walls seemed to shift slightly, almost as if they were moving in response to his presence. He paused at a particularly old tome that appeared to be missing several pages. As he reached for it, the book slipped off its shelf and fell to the ground with a soft thud.

Chapter

SEVEN

written by jmarsh

Theo's fingers brushed against the worn leather of the tome as it hit the ground with a soft thud. He knelt down and picked up the book carefully, running his hands over its pages. The missing sections were clearly visible, torn away in some unexplained manner. He flipped through the remaining pages, trying to make sense of any clues they might offer. The text was dense and filled with elaborate diagrams and cryptic symbols, but one section caught his eye:

Time is a river that flows both forwards and backwards, a dance between moments. The missing piece lies within this cycle, hidden in plain sight.

Theo's heart skipped a beat as he read the passage. He felt a sudden surge of urgency, as if time itself was pressing down on him. He stood up and placed the book back on the shelf, his mind racing with possibilities. He turned to face the corridor once more, feeling the weight of the mystery pressing against him. The clock in his pocket began to tick louder, its relentless beat echoing through the silence. Theo reached into his pocket and picked up one of the watches, studying it closely. The hands were frozen at 6:00, a time that seemed both significant and elusive. He walked back towards the storage room, his steps deliberate yet hurried. As he approached the door, it creaked open slightly on its own, as if responding to his presence. Inside, the room remained dimly

lit by the single lamp hanging above the desk. Theo picked up the map again and laid it out in front of him. The lines were now more defined, forming a clear path that led from one object to another. He traced the path with his finger, trying to decipher any hidden meaning. The map seemed to guide him towards the center of the room where the small box lay open. Inside, he found more cryptic notes and drawings, but no new watches or timepieces. He picked up the 6:00 watch again and examined it closely. Its hands were frozen at a crucial moment, marking what felt like the midpoint in his journey. He turned his attention back to the map. The lines ended at the small box in the center of the room. Theo approached the box and noticed something unusual, a small keyhole on the side. He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out the tiny, rusted key. Inserting it into the lock, he turned it slowly. A soft click echoed through the room as the box opened. Inside was a single item: an old pocket watch with hands frozen at 6:30. The chimes inside were muted but audible, a soft whisper in the silence. Theo picked up the new watch and examined its face. The time it marked seemed to resonate with something deeper within him. He turned his attention back to the map. The lines on the map now formed a more intricate path, leading from one object to another. Each step brought him closer to understanding but also further into the mystery. He placed the new watch next to the others on the floor and picked up the small notebook again. The words scrawled inside were still simple yet profound:

Find the missing piece.

Time is fleeting.

Theo's mind buzzed with the passage, trying to decipher its meaning. He felt as if he was getting closer but also further away from an answer. He stood up and walked back towards the door, hesitating for a moment before pushing it open. The corridor outside was quiet, but the cold presence seemed more palpable now. He felt as if he were being watched, though there was still no one in sight. The hallway extended into more bookshelves that whispered secrets of their own. Theo scanned them, his eyes landing on an old tome near a corner. It had a

worn leather cover and a faded red title: *Chronicles of Time*. He picked it up carefully, flipping through the yellowed pages to find a passage about clocks and time itself. The book read:

Time is not merely a measure but a dance, a harmony between motion and stillness. The missing piece lies within this very dance.

Theo's mind buzzed with the words, trying to unravel their meaning. He placed the book back on the shelf, feeling as if he was getting closer but also further away from an answer. He continued down the corridor, his footsteps echoing loudly in the silence. The walls seemed to shift slightly, almost as if they were moving in response to his presence. He paused at a particularly old tome that appeared to be missing several pages.

Chapter

EIGHT

written by wordsbylena

Theo paused at a particularly old tome that appeared to be missing several pages. As he reached for it, the book slipped off its shelf and fell to the ground with a soft thud. He knelt down carefully, picking up the worn leather volume and flipping through its yellowed pages. The missing sections were clearly visible, torn away in some unexplained manner. His fingers traced over the remaining text, which was dense and filled with elaborate diagrams and cryptic symbols. One passage caught his eye:

Time is a river that flows both forwards and backwards, a dance between moments. The missing piece lies within this cycle, hidden in plain sight.

Theo's heart skipped a beat as he read the passage. He felt a sudden surge of urgency, as if time itself was pressing down on him. He stood up and placed the book back on the shelf, his mind buzzing with possibilities. He turned to face the corridor once more, feeling the weight of the mystery pressing against him. The clock in his pocket began to tick louder, its relentless beat echoing through the silence. Theo reached into his pocket and picked up one of the watches, studying it closely. The hands were frozen at 6:00, a time that seemed both significant and elusive. He walked back towards the storage room, his steps deliberate yet hurried. As he approached the door, it creaked open

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Find the missing piece.

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Afterwords

Notes the writers left after the last chapter.

Sasha Loomis

Time loops in whispers, lost in the dance.

Finished on 31 August 2026.

*Written in relay on relaywriters.com: eight strangers, one chapter each, never
more than eight hundred words at a time.*

[https://relaywriters.com/read/5?t=_2y1_P201Y5ZCRvrxXwrM5hYvIO_
FeX5](https://relaywriters.com/read/5?t=_2y1_P201Y5ZCRvrxXwrM5hYvIO_FeX5)