

STORY
WALKER
365

7 to 10
YEARS

BUILDING BEAUTIFUL INSIDE

CRACK THE CODE

A Story by Arkedelic



STENZONCO

CRACK THE CODE

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CRACK THE CODE

“Three minutes left!”

Jane shouted from across the darkened room.

Nik didn't look up. He was too busy punching numbers into the keypad on the glowing treasure chest. “I've got it! 1739!”

Beep. Red light.

“Try 1937!” he said.

Beep. Another red light.

“Nik, wait—” Sid began.

“Just let me do this!”

The buzzer blared again.

“Two and a half minutes!”

Nik's fingers moved faster. 3197. Beep. Red. 7139. Red. The Squad's first-ever escape room challenge at the town library was spiraling out of control. They had entered as the favourites —



the Sunshine Squad, after all. Five friends. One hour. Riddles, puzzles, secret locks. Escape to win.

But now, the hour was almost up.

And they were trapped.

“Time’s up!”

The overhead light turned on. The fake wall didn’t open. The digital timer blinked: 00:00:00.

The room guide stepped in. “Oh no,” she said cheerfully. “You were one code away!”

Nik threw his hands up. “We lost because that keypad lagged! And also, the music was distracting. Who puts bird sounds in a library?”

Sam folded her arms. “We lost because someone kept guessing codes without solving the actual riddle.”



“That’s not fair!” Nik snapped.

“Guys,” Mario said, always the peacemaker. “Let’s just go upstairs.”

Jane grabbed her clipboard and walked out in silence.

Up in the beanbag lounge, Nik flopped onto a squishy chair and buried his head in his hoodie.

Sid sat next to him, quiet for a while.

“You okay?” he asked eventually.

Nik shrugged. “I could’ve cracked it. I knew the logic.”

“But you didn’t follow the logic,” Sid said gently. “You rushed.”

“I had to! We were running out of time!”

“Not really. You started rushing at the twenty-minute mark.”

Nik didn't respond.

Sid continued, "You do that sometimes. Like you're trying to outrun the pressure. Like if you stop for even a second, you'll mess up."

Nik stared at the ceiling. "Because sometimes I do mess up. And if I just go faster, I don't have to think about that."

There it was.

The real code.

The next morning, the library offered a rematch round. New puzzles. No extra fee.

Jane didn't want to go. Sam had swimming. Mario was 50/50.

But Nik surprised them.

"I want to try again," he said. "But this time... I'll do it differently."

That got their attention.

Round two.

The Squad entered the escape room again. A new setup. Different clues. A timer reset to 60:00.

"Okay," Jane whispered. "Let's stay calm this time."

Nik nodded. He let Jane read the first clue out loud. Twice. He waited while Sam decoded the Latin phrase etched onto a mirror. He held the flashlight steady for Sid without tapping his foot.

And when the music got louder? He asked the guide to lower it — calmly.

At the thirty-minute mark, they hit a tough clue. A cipher inside a book, linked to a wall map, pointing to a riddle about moon phases.





Nik's fingers twitched. His brain raced ahead. He could guess a few likely answers. He could try the lock now.

But this time, he paused.

Instead, he looked at Jane. "Want to work through it together?"

She blinked. "Who are you and what have you done with Nik?"

He smiled. "Trying something new."

They cracked the cipher with ten minutes to spare. The final lock clicked open with 4:22 still on the clock.

The door swung wide. No alarms. No fluster. Just five wide smiles.

"Wow," the guide said. "That was smooth."

"Yeah," Nik said, almost to himself. "It was."

Later, on the library steps, Mario handed around mini muffins from the café. Jane sipped hot chocolate. Sam high-fived Sid.

Nik sat quietly for a moment, watching the traffic roll by.

Sid nudged him. "So?"

Nik grinned. "Turns out, the real code I needed to crack was in my own head."

THE END

THE 60-SECOND SLOW CHALLENGE

What you need:

A timer or stopwatch, one small task (like stacking blocks, drawing a pattern, or solving a short puzzle), and a partner to play with.

HOW TO DO:

- 1 Choose a simple task — something you can finish quickly, like building a five-block tower or writing your name three times.
- 2 Now set the timer for 60 seconds. But here's the twist:
You have to complete the task as slowly and carefully as possible. If you finish too early, you lose the round!
- 3 Focus on every movement — steady hands, calm breathing, quiet mind.
Notice how it feels to stay in control instead of rushing.
- 4 Swap turns with your partner. Each round, talk about what changed: Did your hands shake less? Did your thoughts slow down?

- 5 For a fun bonus — try again later in the day and see if your patience “score” improves!

Reflection/Purpose: This challenge helps children experience that slow doesn't mean weak — it means steady. It builds self-control, time awareness, and mindfulness under playful pressure. Like Nik's rematch in the escape room, it turns focus into a choice, not a reaction. Over time, it helps children link calm attention with confidence — a real superpower in school, sports, and friendships alike.

FIVE FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT BEATING THE CLOCK: TIME CHALLENGES AROUND THE WORLD



1. SAMURAI TRAINED TO ACT IN A HEARTBEAT

In ancient Japan, samurai warriors were trained to make decisions in the time it took to draw their sword — just a few seconds! The idea was to stay calm even when time was short. True skill wasn't in speed, but in clarity.

2. THE WORLD'S QUICKEST PUZZLE SOLVERS

Speedcubers — experts at solving Rubik's Cubes — compete worldwide to beat the clock. The current world record for a single 3×3×3 solve is 3.05 seconds, set by Xuanyi Geng of China on April 13, 2025, at the Shenyang Spring 2025 event. But even these lightning-fast solvers say: real success isn't about speed — it's about focus under pressure.

3. THE “ONE-MINUTE MEDITATION” IN TIBET

Tibetan monks practise a silent one-minute meditation where they focus only on one breath cycle. It sounds easy, but it trains incredible self-control. Many say this single minute feels longer, and clearer, than a whole hour spent rushing.

4. OLYMPIC SPRINTERS MEASURE TIME IN BLINKS

In the 100-metre race, the difference between gold and silver is often less than one-tenth of a second — the time it takes to blink! Athletes spend years training their reactions, showing that mastery is really about preparation, not panic.



5. THE “SAND MANDALA” CHALLENGE

Tibetan monks create intricate patterns from coloured sand for days or weeks — and then, in a single moment, sweep them away. It’s a powerful reminder that not every challenge is about holding on; sometimes, it’s about releasing perfection when time says it’s done.



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THE LAST LOCK

The countdown timer on the wall flashed 00:45.

“Forty-five seconds!” shouted Misha, his voice somewhere between panic and excitement.



Anya was already scanning the clues spread across the table — coded notes, number tiles, and one stubborn padlock that refused to open.

Sasha hovered near the timer, chewing his lip. “We’re not going to make it,” he muttered.

“Stop saying that,” Anya said, steady but firm. “Think. Not rush.”

Misha exhaled. He remembered what she’d said earlier — that when everyone talked at once, they stopped hearing the room. He closed his eyes for half a second, listening.

Click.

He heard something faint — a tiny rattle inside the lock. “Wait!” he said suddenly. “It’s not numbers, it’s letters!”

Sasha blinked. “Letters? But the clue said—”

“Look!” Misha pointed to the poster on the wall. The first letter of each riddle spelled TIME.

Anya’s hands trembled slightly as she spun the dials: T... I... M... E...

Ten seconds left.

The lock popped open.

Everyone gasped — a mix of disbelief and laughter.

But before they could pull the door open, the siren blared, signalling the final second had ended.

They looked at each other. Had they made it — or were they just one heartbeat too late?

- Did the team still win even though the timer ran out?
- How did they feel — proud, frustrated, or something in between?
- What did Misha, Anya, and Sasha learn about teamwork from the challenge?
- What would they do differently if they got another chance to “crack the code”?
- How might slowing down, not speeding up, change how they play next time?

Your turn to finish the story

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