

RYAN CARTWRIGHT

SUGAR THE ROBOT

AND THE RACE TO
SAVE THE EARTH



THE FIRST ROBOTTEERS NOVEL
"A CRACKING YARN FOR KIDS"

READER COMMENT

SUGAR THE ROBOT

and the race to save the Earth

**(Full eBook edition – including
drawings)**

by

Ryan Cartwright

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Dedication



For my children

You inspired me to write this story

1



Do you have hobbies?

Many people do.

I do.

For some it's computer games or wrestling or collecting things like stickers or stamps. Some people's hobbies become their whole life and some of them are just, well, hobbies and some of them are very, very weird. I discovered the other day that some people hold competitions for mooing like a cow and

there are people who make their dogs look like tigers. Some people lie down in public places and put a photo of it on-line. That's it. They don't do anything else, they just lie down. I don't mean they lie down in a pattern or wear some silly outfit, they just lie down. I guess in the end hobbies are like people - they're all different and not everyone will find yours interesting. I'm pretty certain not everyone finds my hobby interesting but that's fine with me.

I like robots.

That might not seem very strange for a ten year old boy but unlike other boys who like computer games, sport or comics I don't like anything else.

Not at all.

Nothing.

Just robots.

Mum says my hobby is more like an obsession which I suppose it is but at least I'm not mad about jam. My mum makes jam all the time. Strawberry jam, blueberry jam, raspberry jam, gooseberry jam, she even tried making banana jam once! I think there's still some of that on the kitchen ceiling actually. For me it

has to be about robots: bedroom, ruler, pencils, lunch box, pyjamas, badges, t-shirts - even underpants, all about robots.

I've been building robots since I got my first box of Lego. I think it was supposed to be a kit for a truck or something but I made it into a robot-truck instead. My dream is to build a real robot. I'm not quite there yet but I will be.

I'm going to build a good robot. So many of the robots in stories are nasty and turn against humans. My robot will be different. I don't want to be its master, I want to be its friend. My robot will be someone I can learn from. Someone I can teach. A friend. Mum once said there were plenty of those kinds of friends just waiting to be made at school and she's probably right but that's not as exciting as building your own friend.

I do have friends at school, they are the members of the Roboteers. It's not an official club or anything, just something that a group of us who like robots call ourselves. We got the name from Wikipedia. I looked it up and it says "A roboteer refers to those with interests or careers in robotics". That's what our group is made of.

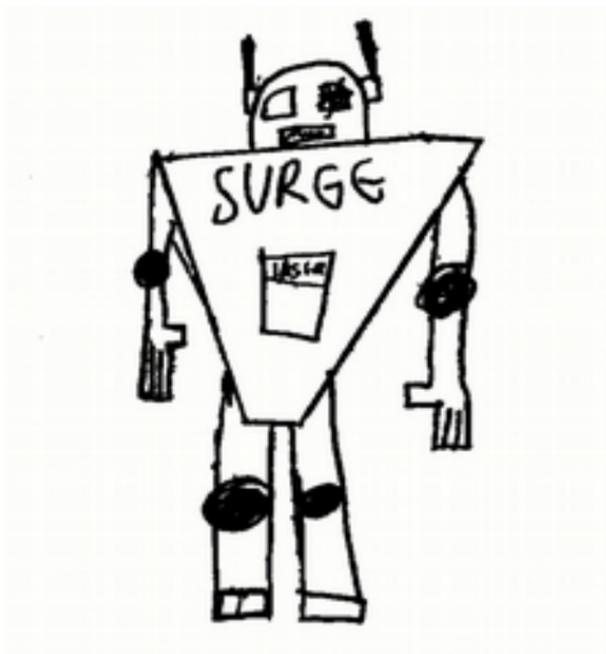
Actually when I say a group I mean a few. Okay at the moment it's just me and Priya but you can't expect too much. After all we've only been going for five years and we're quite particular about who joins. We did have one other member a few years ago but he moved away in year four.

I guess my fascination with robots is because of my Grandad. He's always fiddling with mechanical stuff and I suppose it rubbed off on me. When I was four Grandad gave me one of his old toys. It was a metal robot - called Sugar. Grandad said it was his favourite toy from when he was a boy. He said I had always played with it when I went to visit him. I don't remember that but I do know that Sugar was about the best present he could have given me.

I should explain that Sugar is not what Grandad called the robot, it was my fault he got that name. His real name is SURGE, it's written on his box and across his red chest doors in big gold writing. The trouble is that when I was four I couldn't read that well and I got a bit mixed up.

I thought it said Sugar and no matter what anybody said I decided that was his name. He's been called Sugar ever since, even

though his chest still says SURGE. Dad always says it's a really sweet name and then he laughs. He often laughs at his own jokes. Actually he's usually the only one who does.



SUGAR THE ROBOT

When Grandad first got Sugar his eyes flashed and he swung his arms back and forth as he walked. I mean Sugar's eyes flashed of course. I don't ever remember Grandad having flashing eyes but come to think of it he does swing his arms when he walks. Grandad said Sugar's red and gold paint was

shiny when he was new and his chest opened to reveal a "laser-cannon". It was just a little red light really but Grandad always called it a "laser cannon". He looked after Sugar really well but he played with him a lot.

By the time I got Sugar he was still in the original box. It was a bit battered and worn but there was a cool picture of him firing his laser as he towered over crowds of fleeing people on the front. I loved that picture.

I would stare at it for ages, imagining Sugar striding across the earth but instead of seeing the people running away from him I thought he was protecting them from some invader you couldn't see. For me Sugar has always been the hero and not the villain. Dad said we should keep Sugar safe as he's probably worth some money as a collector's item. Grandad said that Sugar was a toy and toys were meant to be played with. I agree with Grandad. Besides I don't know how he could be worth anything now.

His paint was peeling and faded when I got him. His eyes never flashed - even with new batteries - and he couldn't even wobble let alone walk. About the only thing that worked was his chest doors which would pop open if you pulled on them and the cannon would flip

out. The light didn't come on but I didn't care, I could move his arms and legs and twist his head and that was good enough for me. Ever since I got him Sugar has gone everywhere with me - except to school. I did take him once on one of my first days in reception. Miss Lapsi let me stand at the front and show him to the class. I was very proud of him and everybody thought he was great.

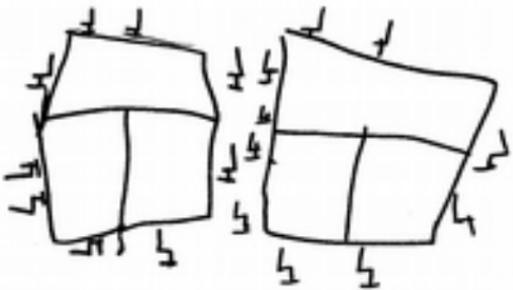
Then at lunch time someone stuck a pencil into Sugar's eye. I think it was David Trumaker. He's always denied it but that's the sort of thing he does.

The bulb broke and even though it had no chance of flashing if it did work, this damage was enough to convince me that Sugar would never accompany me to school again.

I remember being really upset and just crying. Pretty much everyone laughed, except Priya. She sat next to me and said she thought Sugar was brilliant. Priya said she wanted to be an engineer when she grew up. I thought she meant train driver but she explained her Mum was an engineer who designed bridges. After that we talked about building stuff all the time. I never realised you could build robots for a living! It wasn't long afterwards that the Roboteers was born.

In time I realised if I was going to build a robot I needed to practice. I decided to practice on Sugar. To fix him I knew I had to learn electronics so I put electronics learning toys on every Christmas, birthday and Internet wish list that I could. I got pretty good at electronics too. Not good enough to build my dream robot but enough to have a go at fixing Sugar. The first few attempts didn't really work though and if anything I think I made it worse but after a while I did it. I fixed him. Well I think it was me.

After what happened you would think I'd be famous but things don't often turn out like that so, just so somebody else knows, this is the story of what happened when I finally got Sugar working again.



TIM TAKES SUGAR TO SCHOOL



One weekend, about a year ago, I was in my room reading up on how to waterproof a servo. Servos are the small motors that are used to make robots move. The problem is that mostly they are only water-resistant not water-proof. This means if you get them too wet, and judging by my experience that is not very wet at all, they stop working.

Anyway I was reading up on how to waterproof a servo when I caught sight of Sugar in the corner of my eye. For a second it felt like he looked at me but I thought I must be tired and went back to reading. The trouble was once I had caught sight of him I couldn't get him out of my head. It's kind of like when somebody tells you not to think of carrots and all you can think of is carrots. I bet you're thinking of them now aren't you? If I'm honest I found it a little off-putting to have Sugar staring at me like that so I walked over to turn his head away from me. Then it hit me - servos!

I should probably explain. Earlier that week I had taken one of my regular looks at Sugar's workings and ended up in the usual place - nowhere. The problem was that the motor that moved Sugar's head was beyond repair. I had tried to find a new motor for ages but there weren't any that were the right size. But if I could fit a servo, that might work. I left my book where it was and pounced onto my laptop to check out the available servos and then I waited and waited.

And waited.

I'm not saying my laptop is slow - it was one of Dad's old ones - but sometimes I think it would be quicker to run to the shops than wait for this thing to fire up a search engine!

So a few days later a package arrived for me. Mum and Dad took no notice of it because I always had samples of this or brochures of that arriving.

When I first started electronics they insisted they place every order for me. By the end of the first month Dad got fed up so he created an account for me at one of the suppliers. He had got them to place a limit of how much I could spend per month. This was fine because normally I was only ordering small parts

which were quite cheap. Of course there was the time when I accidentally ordered 10,000 resistors and almost blew my monthly budget in one order. Mum had to ring them to cancel the order. I told her to send an eMail but she said she wanted to speak to them. I was just worried she'd end up doubling the order or something.

It took me a while to get the servo in but I did it. In fact it went in so tightly that I had to hope I could wire it up because there was no chance of getting it back out again. I spent four days getting it wired in - mostly because I had to go to school so I could only work in the evenings. Once that was done I thought I might as well try to replace some of the other motors. In the end it took me three weeks to get all the servos in place.

Finally the day arrived when I could try to power up Sugar. Slowly and gently I placed the batteries in his back and screwed down the cover. I have to say I was quivering with excitement. For the first time in ages Sugar was going to work. I stood him up very carefully then slowly and gently I slid the switch on his back to "on" and waited.

Nothing happened. So I waited a bit more.

Still nothing happened. So I checked the



SUGAR FALLS INTO THE BIN
batteries and tried again.

Nothing.

This was not that big a disappointment to me as in all the years I had been trying to fix Sugar there had been quite a few failures. You

kind of get used to it in the end but the way I see it you can either give up or you can try a different approach. I mean I was disappointed but not as much as I would have been when I first got Sugar. I consulted my robotics books and tried to see if there was anything I'd missed but there wasn't. I sighed, let the book flop down onto the desk and that's when it happened. That's when it began.

As the book hit the desk it caused all the stuff on it to jump in the air, including Sugar. As he landed he rocked back and forth on his legs as if he was getting ready to dive off the edge into the bin. Then he did. In a kind of slow motion replay he toppled right over and dived head-first into a pile of paper and a banana skin.

I picked him up, stood him back on the desk and turned to leave. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a flash. Just the once but it was a flash and it seemed to come from Sugar. I looked at him and I could have sworn his one good eye was glowing. Then it faded and went dark again but it was there. For a fleeting micro-second it had glowed. I hurriedly examined Sugar, flipping and twisting, pushing and squeezing and pressing

but the glow didn't come back. I did notice that his head had moved round slightly but I wasn't sure if I had twisted it when I was examining him.

I put him back on the desk and left the room. I needed to do some thinking on this one and from experience I knew I did that best when the problem wasn't standing and staring at me.

By the time I had done my thinking Mum was telling me to go to bed. I tried to explain that it wasn't that late but she insisted it was. I mean, honestly, I don't see what the problem is. I often go back to reading or working on my projects after her and Dad go to bed anyway. Although, come to think of it, I'm not sure they know about that.

It's funny that isn't it? How sometimes we can be completely and happily unaware of what is going on around us. For example I had no idea that Sugar was actually fixed and working again but had just turned himself off.

I was about to find out.



The next day at school I told Priya about the flash. At first she thought I'd imagined it and asked lots of questions like "Were the curtains closed?", "Did you have your head-lamp on again?" and "How much sleep have you had lately?". All of this was a little bit cheeky if you ask me but eventually I convinced her that I saw what I saw. She got quite excited at the idea of finally getting Sugar to work again and I suggested she came round after school so we could take a look at him together.

She came round a bit later than I was expecting which was annoying because I wanted to get working on Sugar as soon as possible. By the time Mum shouted that Priya had arrived I had already started investigating. I was beginning to look at the servos but Priya thought it might be a good idea to look at the power supply first. This was a pretty good idea so I agreed.

"You'll need to take the batteries out first", Priya said.

"No need." I replied, "I left them out last night. I didn't want them to leak or anything."

"So where are they then?" she asked looking about the desk.

"There..." I started to point to where the batteries were but stopped because they weren't there. "Oh I must have put them in my battery box." I said opening the box, but they weren't in there. This was confusing because I was sure I had taken them out.

"Are you sure you took them out?" Priya asked nervously.

"Of course!" I snapped. "Look you can see that because the battery compartment lid is.." and I turned Sugar over "..closed?".

Priya just smiled and said "It's okay you know. It was probably late when you finished last night and you just thought you had taken them out."

"No. I definitely did it." I said, getting a bit puzzled. "In fact I can prove it!" I picked up my camera and began flicking through the photos on it. "I took a progress photo last night for my blog." I continued without looking up from the camera. "Yes, here it is." I showed her a photo with the batteries lying on the desk next to Sugar. I always have the date and time on my photos so I knew this

one was taken just before I went to bed the night before.

"So who put them back in then? Your Mum?"

I shook my head, "Doubt it. She knows better than to touch anything on the desk. Besides she was at a training course for work today."

"Your Dad then?" Priya sounded as confused as I felt.

"I don't think so but he might have. He sometimes comes in here to see what progress I've been making." Dad was interested in electronics but not as much as me. He had a nasty habit of touching things despite the post-it notes instructing him not to.

"Well was anything else moved?" Priya was getting into her detective mode. Any second now she'd be pulling out a magnifying glass and stroking her chin saying "Hmmm". She continued "I mean if he had been looking around he'd have moved things wouldn't he?"

"Good point and come to think of it Sugar was moved *and* my laptop was open."

"How did you not notice that?" Priya rolled her eyes at me.

"I did notice," I shrugged, "I just didn't think it was important."

"Why would your Dad have moved Sugar though?"

"I don't know and more importantly why would he use my laptop? His one is much faster."

"Perhaps you should ask him?", Priya suggested,.

"He's not in until later," I sighed, "but hang on I'll ask Mum if she knows anything." and with that I ran out of the room and downstairs.

Mum said Dad couldn't have been in my room because he left for work early that day. She also said that she had only been in to collect my washing - a point she then used to tell me off about leaving it on the floor again. I'd asked her where Sugar had been when she came in but she didn't know because she hadn't looked on the desk.

Priya went into detective mode again and said we should look at the laptop to see what had been done on it. It had gone to sleep so I hit a few keys to wake it up. Once it had eventually sprung back to life I noticed the web browser was open. The last few pages

showed that whoever had used it had been searching for mobile 'phone masts, electricity pylons, maps of our local area and, oddly, star maps for the last few weeks.

"Mum was talking about some protests against the new 'phone mast being put up by the library the other day." I said.

"So you think your Mum was using your laptop?" Priya asked.

"No." I shook my head "She said she didn't and, besides, she'd use the computer downstairs. I just think it's odd that they were looking for mobile 'phone masts and maps of this area."

"And what's this about electricity pylons and star maps?" Priya asked "I don't see the connection."

"Well both pylons and masts are tall structures but beats me why they'd be looking at star maps as well." I started going further back through the browser history and found more weird searches all to do with communications, the local area or stars.

"It's a real mystery." I said "But to be honest as long as nothing has been taken or

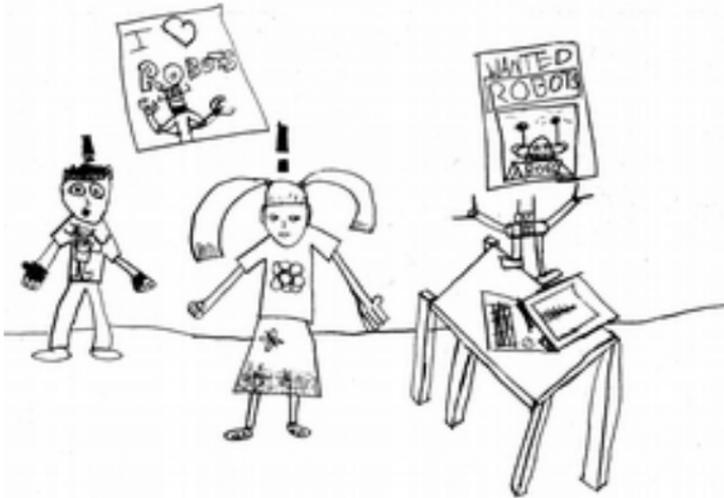
damaged, I'm not sure what harm has been done."

"Has anything been damaged?" Priya asked.

"Not that I can see, certainly there was nothing wrong with Sugar." I said, picking him up again.

"Apart from the batteries." Priya pointed out.

"Yes, that is a bit weird." I looked at the back of Sugar again "But it's interesting that the cover hasn't been done up. Look, it's been closed but the little screw is undone. It's like someone was in a hurry or was interrupted while doing it."



SUGAR WORKS AGAIN

"And" Priya interrupted "that one isn't in properly.". She was right. One of the batteries was sticking slightly out of the compartment. I pushed it back in and almost as soon as I did Sugar's eye flashed.

"See?" I shouted. "I told you I wasn't imagining it."

"I did believe you eventually you know?" Priya seemed a bit put out by my remark.

"But the point is", I continued without really listening to her, "that he works!" I stood him up and switched his power switch on. Almost as soon as I did it I said "Hang on. How did the light flash if he was turned off?"

"Short circuit perhaps?" Priya said but before she could finish, Sugar suddenly leapt into life. His eye flashed, his head spun and his arms flailed around like a gorilla being chased by a bee. Best of all his legs started moving.

Priya gasped and we sat and watched as Sugar started to walk. I had a huge beaming smile on my face. After all that time Sugar was finally working again. I couldn't wait to show Grandad. Sugar, his beloved robot, was working again and walking. In fact as I watched I could see that Sugar was walking right off the edge of the desk.

"Not again!" I groaned.

I dived to catch him. My arm at full stretch as the moment seemed to pass in slow-motion. My fingers were tantalisingly close as he toppled, wobbled and fell. I watched in despair as he fell past my fingertips and landed with a resounding thump. Nobody spoke for a few seconds and I sat on the floor looking at Sugar's one good eye.

Slowly I got to my knees and picked him up. The switch was still in the "on" position but Sugar was definitely not "on". I fiddled with the switch a few times but nothing happened. I gave him a little shake and was reassured that there was no rattling sounds other than what I was used to.

Eventually I sat there on the floor with Sugar in my hands and just stared at him. A moment of pure joy had been shattered in an instant as years of work was smashed. Thankfully Sugar wasn't smashed but he still wasn't working. I could tell Priya was looking at me and I could feel a lump in my throat. Instead of crying I got angry and shook Sugar quite hard.

I'm not sure if I expected anything to happen or not when I did that but nothing did. He just

lay there with that cold, staring eye looking at me. I put him in one hand and tapped his head. "Sorry Sugar" I said chokingly. "I should have put you on the floor and not the desk but I didn't think you would actually start walking you see and all I wanted to do was just get you working again. Now I've probably broken you forever."

Priya put a hand on my shoulder. "Don't be so hard on yourself, Tim. There was nothing you could have done. It was just an accident and I mean we don't know he's broken do we?"

I looked at her, amazed. "What? Yes we do! Why would you say that?"

Priya gave me a puzzled look "Tim, the battery came out when he fell, look." She pointed to the battery by my foot. I picked it up and put it back into Sugar, hopefully. Nothing happened. Well almost nothing. I mean he didn't start moving or anything but his eye did glow faintly. "See?" Priya said excitedly, "He is working."

"Not like he was before." I said "But, yes he's still working and yesterday he wasn't working at all." I gave him a more affectionate tap on the head and smiled. "Hello Sugar, good to have you back."

++HELLO++

I gasped and looked at Priya. That sound had come from Sugar! I looked at him and his eye lit up brightly.

++HELLO++ he "said" again.

"Er..hello?" I replied, hesitantly.

"Tim, what..?" Priya whispered but I held up a hand to stop her.

"Who is this?" I asked. I knew the sound was coming from Sugar but I also knew he didn't have the capacity for speech so this had to be his speaker picking up a mobile 'phone signal or something. No answer so I tried again. "Who is this speaking?"

++THE PROBE MUST REPLY++

"The probe?" asked Priya, "What's the probe?"

"Don't you read any science-fiction?" I sighed.

"Not as much as you!" she retorted.

I ignored her and carried on "Probes are machines, robots I guess, sent out to find out about other places."

"Sent by whom?"

"Sent by someone else." I was getting a bit excited "I don't know exactly but someone. Maybe someone ", I chose my words carefully "not from this world!"

++YES - NOT OF THIS WORLD++

We both sat back, startled. Priya pointed wide-eyed "H..he..he can understand us."

"So it seems" I said "and that means we can ask questions." I leant towards Sugar "What is the probe?"

++THE PROBE IS BEFORE YOU++

"What does that mean?" I asked

Now it was Priya's turn to sigh "It means that Sugar is the probe, silly!"

"But how?" I asked her "He's a toy robot, he hasn't worked for years. So when did he suddenly become a probe?"

++THE PROBE HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE PROBE++

"So why have you, I mean the probe, why has the probe been silent for so long?"

++MALFUNCTION. TIM REPAIRED THE PROBE++

"Tim!" Priya whispered "You just said you added some servos!"

"But that's all I did." I turned to her, "Just some servos to replace the broken motors."

"So how did you repair Sugar then?"

"Search me." I shrugged.

++THE PROBE WAS FIXED WHEN TIM REPAIRED THE POWER SOURCE++

"So that's what I did. It must have been when I was fiddling with the servos and reconnected the battery holder." As good as this information was though, I realised we were missing out the important stuff.

"Where are you from?" I asked Sugar.

++I COME FROM THE MASTERS++ he replied

"What masters? Where are they?" Priya demanded

++THE MASTERS ARE NOT OF THIS WORLD. THE PROBE WAS SENT TO DISCOVER IF THIS WORLD IS SUITABLE++
+

"Suitable? Suitable for what?" I leaned in.

Sugar's eye flashed off and on and then he said

++FOR OCCUPATION++

"Occupation?!" Priya gasped. "What do you think he means?"

"I don't know." I replied, "Occupation means living or staying in a place but", and then speaking to Sugar I asked "Occupation of what?"

++OCCUPATION OF THIS WORLD++

We both sat in silence for a few moments, taking it all in. "So," I said to Priya, "he means invasion. Whoever has sent Sugar here means to invade the earth!"

"You think so?" Priya didn't seem convinced "But why?"

"That's what we need to find out." I asked Sugar "What is the purpose of occupying this world?"

Sugar was silent for a long time so I repeated the question.

++NOT UNDERSTAND PURPOSE++

Priya tried "Why do your masters want to occupy this world?"

++TO RESIDE ON THIS WORLD. TO TAKE THIS WORLD AS HOME++

Priya puffed out her cheeks. "Wow! Now what do we do?"

I thought for a bit and said "I'm not sure we should do anything just yet."

Priya was flabbergasted, "Nothing?! What do you mean?"

I looked at her and explained "Look, this is a toy robot. He shouldn't be able to speak, let alone make conversations with us. I think this is some kind of trick."

"You mean..." Priya began

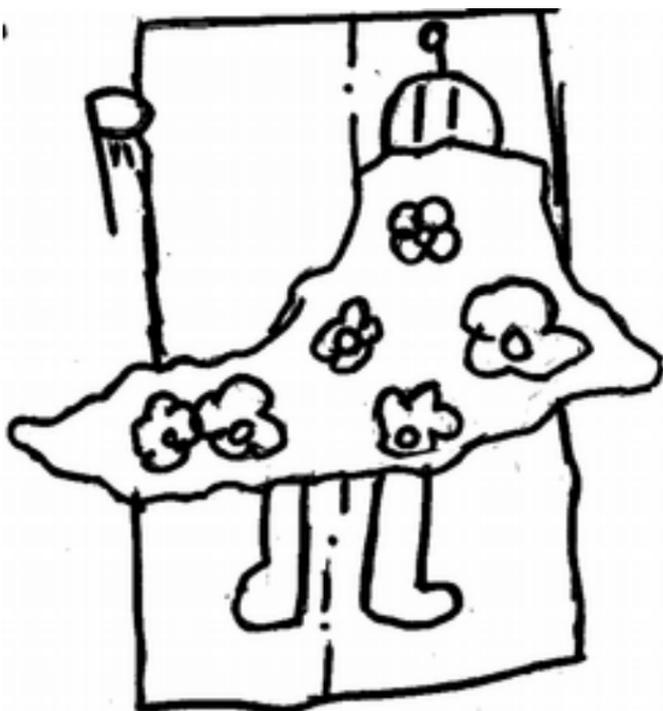
"Yes." I cut her off and then whispered "Somebody has planted a radio unit into Sugar and is nearby, speaking to us remotely."

"Why would they do that?" She asked and then followed up with "And who could it be?"

"I have some ideas who it might be but as for why or how come to that, I don't know. I just think, for now we should - what is it?"

Priya was no longer listening to me and was staring behind me, towards Sugar. She pointed and said "Where's Sugar?"

"Don't be daft." I laughed, turning around, "He's right here." But Sugar was not there. In fact he was nowhere to be seen. We looked everywhere in the room, well sort of, and couldn't find him. Then I noticed the window was open. We ran to look. Sugar was not in the garden, although it was difficult to see clearly because Mum had hung the washing out.



MUM'S KNICKERS ARE ESCAPING

"Look!" exclaimed Priya pointing below. I looked down but couldn't see anything except t-shirts and underwear. Then, out of the corner of my eye I saw something move.

"What is that?" Priya asked

"I think," I said, leaning forward "that is a pair of my Mum's knickers. They must have broken his fall."

"Umm", Priya said, "they seem to be moving towards the back gate."

Suddenly a pair of metal legs appeared under the knickers. We looked at each other and shouted together "We've got to stop him!"

4



Quickly we ran downstairs and out through the kitchen. Mum shouted something after us but I was far too excited to listen. We ran through the back garden and out of the gate.

"Which way did he go?" I shouted. Neither of us had noticed so we started looking around. Just then Dad came up the alley. I ran towards

him while Priya ran to the other end of the alley.

"Dad!" I grabbed his arm, "have you seen Mum's knickers?"

Come to think of it I think this might not have been what he was expecting me to say. "Er, what?" he mumbled.

"Mum's knickers!" I repeated. "The ones with blue flowers. Have you seen them?"

He looked even more confused now. "Well, yes.. I mean.. you know...what?!"

I sighed. He clearly wasn't listening properly. "Listen carefully Dad, this is important."

"Okay." he said, putting on an overly-serious expression.

"You know Mum has some knickers with little blue flowers on?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen them go past here?"

"What? Has somebody stolen them?"

"Sort of, yes. Have you seen them? Did they go past you?"

"Tim, are you feeling okay?"

"I'm fine. I've just lost Sugar."

"Sugar? The robot? What's he got to do with Mum's knickers?"

Suddenly Priya came back yelling "Tim! Look!" She was carrying mum's knickers and pointing to them.

"Great!" I yelled and ran towards her.

"Just a minute." said Dad, catching hold of my arm "What are you two up to and why is Priya holding Mum's knickers?"

"Dad," I spluttered, "we don't have time. We've got to find him."

"Who?"

"SUGAR!" we both yelled together.

"Okay, this is very confusing. Start again. You're looking for Sugar?"

"Yes."

"And for some reason you think Mum's knickers will help you do that?"

"No. I mean...well they were on him when he left the garden but obviously they've fallen off."

"Fallen off? Hang on, why was Sugar wearing Mum's knickers?"

"He wasn't wearing them! They're much too big for him." I sighed "I think he fell into them when he tried to escape."

"Escape? From where?"

"From my room. He ran off while we were chatting."

"Ran off?" Dad was looking back and forth between me and the house. It was like he was expecting Mum to come out and explain everything. "Tim, he can't run off, he can't even move and besides that he's a TOY ROBOT! I think you've been having too many late nights again."

"No really," said Priya, "Tim fixed Sugar so he worked again and suddenly he came alive and talked to us"

"Priya!" I hissed. The last thing I wanted was for a grown up to find out too much about Sugar. We'd said too much already but Priya continued.

"and he explained he's from another planet. He said his masters want to invade earth..."

"Invade earth?" Smiled Dad "Okay, I get it now. You know for a moment there I thought you were telling the truth."

"I am?" said Priya, looking puzzled. I gestured for her to stay quiet and turned to Dad.

"Yeah, sorry Dad, it's just a game we're playing and Sugar fell out of my window. Mum's knickers must have broken his fall and when we came to get him, he'd disappeared."



DAD IS CONFUSED

"So," said Dad turning to Priya "where did you find those?" He pointed at the muddy knickers in her hand.

"Just round that corner by the fields." she said, pointing up the alley.

"Hmm." he said, "how on earth did they get up there though?"

Thinking fast I said "It was probably next door's cat. Look, we're sorry if we startled you but we need to find Sugar before it gets dark."

"Yes, yes, of course." said Dad "You must go and find him. I'll, erm, take these and give them to Mum to put in the wash again." He took the knickers from Priya. "Although how I'm going to explain this, I don't know."

We ran up the alleyway and rounded the corner to the fence by the fields.

"This is where I found them." said Priya pointing to the fence.

"Sugar must have gone across the fields." I said "But why?"

"Tim, look over there." Priya said. She was pointing across the field in front of us. There,

in the middle of the field, stood a power pylon.

"The laptop!" I yelled "Yesss! Come on!" and ran towards the pylon. Priya was hot on my heels but there was still no sign of Sugar. We stopped a short distance from the pylon. There was a fence around it with a lot of warning signs. Aside from that we both knew they could be dangerous things, pylons.

"Can you see him?" I whispered.

"No." Priya whispered back as we sat in the grass. "Why do you think he came here?"

"The laptop." I said, "somebody had been researching pylons in this area."

"No I knew that," she said, "I meant why did he want a pylon at all."

"I don't know. Let's think back to what he said." It still sounded weird that we were talking about Sugar.

"He said something about a probe and out of this world and something else about replying." Priya was good at remembering that kind of detail.

"Replying?" I said, "Perhaps that's it. Perhaps he wants to call his masters."

"But," said Priya, "that's an electricity pylon not a mobile 'phone mast."

"Yes but perhaps he wants to use it like a big radio aerial." I said. "Or maybe.."

"Maybe," Priya interrupted pointing up at the pylon. "he wants to use it to get higher up." I looked where she was pointing and there, crawling up the side of the pylon was Sugar! In each of his hands he held a magnet and he was using them to stick to the pylon like a spider.

"He must have got those magnets from my tool box!" I said. "But you know what this means?"

"Yes!" Priya said as we watched Sugar climb to the top of the pylon. "he really is alive!"

"Yes that too." I said, "but it also means he's going to call down the invasion!"



"What are we going to do?" Priya said, throwing her arms into the air.

"I suppose we should tell someone but who would believe us?" I answered.

"But surely if we just show them where he is they'll have to believe us, won't they?" Priya said, pointing up at Sugar who had now reached one of the upper arms of the pylon.

"I guess so, but they're adults. They'll just think we put him up there."

"We're not that stupid!" Priya exclaimed, "It's way too dangerous to climb up there."

"Adults always think they are the clever ones and we're just kids." I sighed, "Besides by the time we convince somebody, he'll have made the signal. We need to stop him now."

We both slumped in the grass and leaned against the fence. Both of us were thinking the same thing: how on earth were we going to stop Sugar making that signal. I looked up at him and could just make out his silhouette against the sky. He was standing with his arms raised and there were blue sparks coming from his antennas.

"We're too late." I said, "Look, he's started already."

Priya took out her 'phone and started fiddling with it.

"You can't video this and put it online!" I said.

She didn't look up but just said "I'm not. I'm going to see if I can detect his signal."

"How?"

"Look, he's a fairly simple piece of electronics."

"Apart from the walking, talking and invading the Earth bit you mean?"

"Well yes, apart from that. But he doesn't have a big transmitter up there with him so maybe he's using the mobile 'phone networks to communicate with his masters." She was getting excited now.

"Maybe."

"Even if he's not it's bound to be some form of radio wave. So his signal should interfere with my 'phone." she explained. This actually made some sense.

"True," I said "but even so what good is that to us?"

"At least we'll know that he is signalling. At the moment we don't know what he's doing up there."

"Good point." I agreed, "Okay so do it and let's see what happens."

Priya fiddled with her 'phone, "I'm getting it to scan for all networks now." The 'phone vibrated a few times and the screen had a little animation on it but beyond that nothing happened. Priya fiddled with it some more and then said "I'm not picking up any networks in this area. So something is blocking them."

"So he is sending a signal!" I gazed up at Sugar and saw that the blue sparks were getting brighter. Whatever he was doing, I had a bad feeling about it. Somehow we had to get him down or stop him signalling but it was far too dangerous to climb up there. There were stories of idiots climbing pylons for a dare and getting fried.

WHIZZ!

Something flew past my ear. Then something else did and then again. I turned round to see Priya looking on the ground. "What are you doing?" I asked.

"Looking for more stones to throw at him. Maybe we can knock him down."

"You'll never reach him from down here!" I said and then as I thought about it, "But maybe we don't need to throw anything. Wait here." and I started to run back to the house.

"Where are you going?" Priya shouted after me.

"Just keep an eye on him!" I shouted back without stopping. "I'll be back in a minute."

I ran as fast as I could back to the house and through the back gate. I heard Mum and Dad in the lounge as I ran past. I ran to my room and quickly grabbed what I was looking for. When I got back downstairs Mum was blocking the back door.

"And where are you going in such a hurry?" she said.

I skidded to a halt just before I ran into her. "Mum, this really isn't the time. I need to get back to Priya with this." I held up what I was carrying.

"But I thought you hated that?" Mum said, looking puzzled.

"Well it is a bit lame but me and Priya are..."

"Priya and I" Dad interrupted.

Sometimes Dad's pedantic grammar corrections could be really badly-timed.

"...sorry, Priya and I" I continued, "are - er - working on a project up in the back fields and we need this."

Mum shook her head dismissively "Well before you go, you can explain what you know about these!" She held up a pair of very muddy knickers with blue flowers.

I looked at Dad accusingly, "I thought you said you'd explain to her?"

"I tried", Dad shrugged, "but to be honest I didn't really understand it myself. I thought it best if you explained it." Sometimes my Dad is a right coward.

"Well?" Mum said, folding her arms.

This was it. I could either tell them the truth or tell them something they'd believe. I thought about it for a second and realised that as much as I wanted this to be just between Priya and me, we would need help if we were to stop the invasion. I took a deep breath. "Okay. Yesterday I got Sugar working and.."

"You got him working!" Dad interrupted.

"Yes but that's not important. The thing is he.."

"Not important?" Dad said, "Tim, you've been working on him for five years. How can it not be important?"

"Four years actually but, well it turns out there's more to him than meets the eye." I said, "A lot more."

I expected one of them to interrupt but they just stared at me. I carried on, trying to find the right words to tell my parents that my toy robot wanted to take over the planet.

"It turns out that he's alive and yesterday he started looking up things on my laptop..."

"Alive?" Mum said, "Oh now you're making things up."

"No it's true Mum, yes Sugar is alive. He's not well, you know, human but he is definitely alive."

"I see" said Dad, "and you know this how?"

"Mostly because he can talk." I said. This was when they really started to think I was making it all up.

Mum looked at Dad, Dad looked at Mum and both looked at me as Mum said "Now Tim, I

know this is fun for you but I want the truth now. What happened to my knickers?"

"Sugar escaped out of the window and fell into them. Then he ran out of the gate dragging them with him." There I had said it. I felt better for the truth coming out.

"Oh for goodness' sake!" Mum said.

"Tim!" Dad said sternly, "Enough about Sugar. How did Mum's knickers end up at the end of the back alley?"

"But.."

"Hup!" Mum said holding up her hand and snapping her fingers closed. "Not one more word about Sugar!" She leaned towards me, "Tell the truth. Have you been stealing my knickers!"

"What? No!" I exclaimed.

"Er, I don't think we're saying Tim stole them, are we?" Dad said

"I blooming well hope not!" I said.

"Well explain how they got like this then?" Mum said, holding them up. They really were very muddy.

At this point I decided this was all taking too long and reverted to the same story that Dad fell for. I explained, with the help of Dad, that Sugar must have fallen out of my open window and landed in the knickers. I said that the knickers must have acted like a parachute and Sugar drifted over the back gate. Somehow the knickers must have gotten caught up on next door's cat and he dragged them to the muddy field along with Sugar.

"Ok, that sounds reasonable to me." Dad said.

"Does it?" Mum said.

"Really?" I said, even more surprised than Mum.

"Yes", Dad replied "A lot more plausible than Sugar coming to life."

"Well if you put it like that, yes I suppose it does." Mum said.

"So can I go now?" I asked hesitantly.

"Yes", Mum said and then just as I started to run off, she said "But these knickers are ruined. I'll have to buy new ones now and I'll be taking the money out of your electronics fund."

"What?!" I stopped and turned.

"It's only fair Tim." Dad said, "After all you did ruin them."

"I thought we just agreed it was an accident?"

"Yes but it was your toy which caused this." Mum said "They were my favourites too."

"They were her favourites Tim." Dad said with a mock frown. This got him a dark stare from Mum.

This was getting silly. I could be there forever. I had no choice. "Okay, that's fine. You buy a new pair and take it out of my electronics money."

"Thank you." Mum said smugly.

"So now can I go?" I asked again.

"Have you tidied those clothes off your bedroom floor yet?" Mum asked.

"No. But I really need to get back to Priya. She's out there on her own."

"Okay, but I want you to tidy your room before bed tonight." Dad said. At least I think he said that, I wasn't really listening at that point to be honest. I had taken too long already, I just hoped Priya was doing okay.



By the time I reached the fields I could see the glow coming from Sugar really clearly. Priya was taking photos with her 'phone.

"You took your time." she said.

"Got held up by my parents." I sighed.

"Did you tell them?" she quizzed.

"Yes but they didn't believe me. They were obsessed with Mum's knickers. I've got to buy her some new ones."

Priya grinned "Ooh I can just see you in the ladies department."

"Not likely!" I said "She can get them, I'll pay for them."

"What's that?" Priya said point to the box under my arm.

"This is our secret weapon." I said. "It's that radio-controlled dragonfly my aunt got me for Christmas."

"I thought you were going to strip that down for servos?"

"I was but I haven't gotten around to it yet. I'm hoping we can use it to knock Sugar off the pylon."

"But surely he'll just zap it with his laser cannon?" Priya said.

"You're joking aren't you?" I sighed, "It's not a real laser. It's just a small lightbulb. It doesn't actually work you know."

"Oh really?" said Priya, folding her arms. "Yesterday you thought Sugar was just a toy robot. Now he's walking, talking and calling down his mothership!"

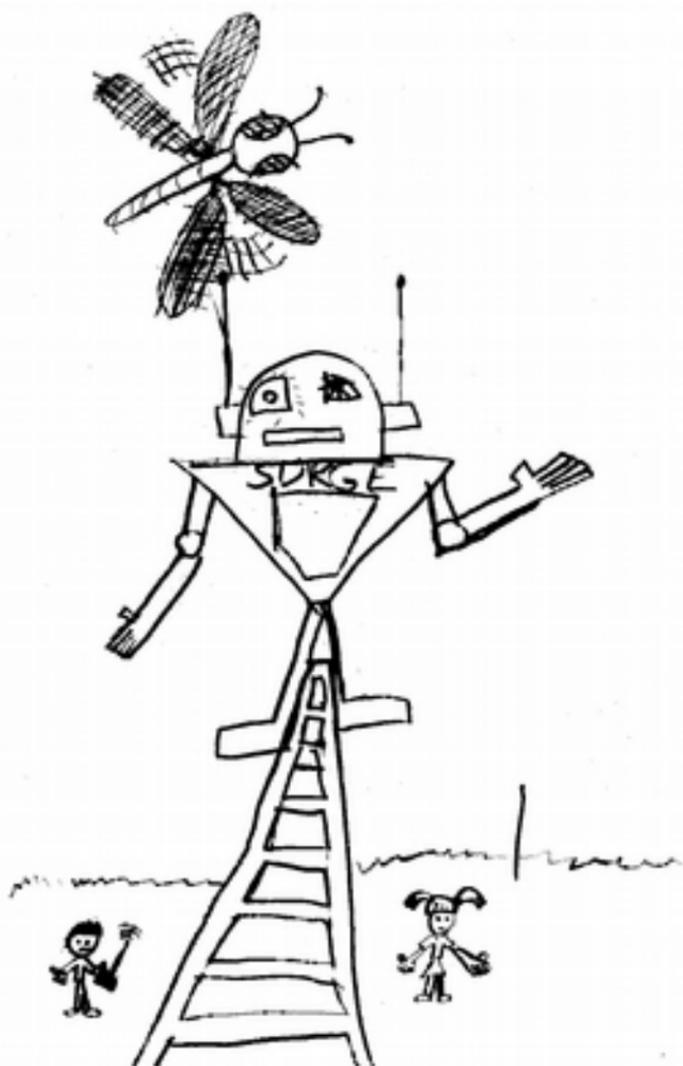
"Ah yes, good point." I said, sheepishly. "But I suppose we'll have to risk it. Help me launch it will you?" I switched on the dragonfly and immediately the wings started flapping furiously. I gave it to Priya who held it up as I switched on the controller. I nodded and Priya let go.

The Dragonfly flew up into the sky. It was quite tricky to control but I managed to get it going up towards Sugar.

Sugar was still standing with his arms up and the blue sparks were still flying from his

antennas. I flew the dragonfly as close as I could to him and tried to distract him with it but he didn't even flinch. I tried going round him in circles but again he didn't seem to notice.

Eventually I flew the dragonfly away from the pylon and turned it around so it was pointing at Sugar. I then flew it right at him and with a bang we could hear on the ground it smacked right into his chest. I'm not sure whether that caused the sparks to stop or if they stopped just before it hit him but both the dragonfly and Sugar tumbled to the ground. It was only as I saw him falling that I realised what it was I had done.



TIM TRIES TO STOP SUGAR

Sugar, my favourite robot in the whole world, was falling from the top of an electricity pylon

towards the hard concrete base below it. I watched as, almost in slow motion he tumbled towards certain doom, or at the very least to be smashed into tiny pieces. Priya watched with me. The pair of us were amazed by what happened next.

Sugar seemed to realise he was falling and started to flail his arms about. At one point it was almost like he was flapping them like wings. If it wasn't so sad it would have been funny to see a toy robot flapping his arms as he tumbled through the air.

The dragonfly was falling, head-over-heels, slower than he was. That was probably because it was lighter. As I watched I saw Sugar's chest doors open and suddenly an object flew out of the space behind them. It was small and round and it flew towards the leg of the pylon. Whatever it was it hit its target and stuck fast to it.

"It's another magnet!" Priya gasped and as we watched we saw that attached to the magnet was a line of some sort.

The other end of this line was attached to Sugar who swung on it towards the pylon. He bumped into it and then clung on.

"Wow!" I said "That was cool!"

"Shh!" Priya hissed. Sugar had detached himself from the line and was now using the other magnets to climb down. The dragonfly landed in a heap just over the fence from where we were. It took a while for Sugar to come down but when he did he made his way back to where we were. I ducked down into the longer grass. Priya looked at me and I beckoned for her to hide with me.

"Why?" she said, "He's not going to hurt you. It's Sugar"

"No, it's not." I said, "Sugar is my toy robot. That", I nodded towards Sugar, "is a probe for an alien invasion. Who knows what it will do to us."

"Well I think you're being silly." Priya said and turned back to face Sugar as he arrived.

++WHERE IS TIM?++ Sugar said

"He's hiding down here." Priya pointed at me and I scowled back at her as I rose to my feet. Sugar came over to me.

++THE FLYING TOY WAS UNHELPFUL WHY DID YOU NOT TAKE MORE CARE? YOU HIT THE PROBE!++

"I was trying to hit you." I said dryly.

++BUT YOU MIGHT HAVE INTERRUPTED
THE REPLY+

"That was the plan." Priya said

++WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO STOP THE
PROBE?++

"To stop the invasion!" I said. "You can't just
take our planet!"

++WHY?++

"Because we live here and we don't want to
be your slaves!" Priya said

++WHAT IS SLAVE?++

"A slave is somebody who is forced to work
for someone else without choice."

++LIKE A PROBE?++

"Sort of but not machines, people." I
explained, "But what we are saying is that
your masters cannot occupy this planet. We
occupy this planet."

++BUT THE REPLY HAS BEEN SENT++

"What do you mean?" Priya said

++IT IS TOO LATE. THE PROBE HAS
REPLIED. THE MASTERS ARE COMING++

We sat in silence. We were too late. The aliens were coming and would probably conquer the Earth in the next few hours.

"Shouldn't we tell people?" Priya asked.

I shook my head. "No point, they wouldn't believe us." I turned to Sugar, "How long until your masters arrive?"

++THE MASTERS WILL ARRIVE SOON++

"Where will they arrive?" I asked.

++HERE. THE PRIMARY SHIP WILL BE HERE SHORTLY++

There was nothing to do so we sat and waited. Sugar retrieved the dragonfly for me, which was kind for someone who had just started the end of the human race. Eventually it began to get dark and I thought we should head home. Suddenly Sugar sprang into life. Whirring and spinning and flashing his one good eye.

++THE MASTERS APPROACH++

"Where?" Priya asked.

"Look! There!" I pointed to a small dark shape in the sky.

"It looks like it's hardly moving." Priya said

"It must be far off. So each movement will look tiny from here." I said.

We stood and watched it together. Eventually it got a bit bigger and we could make out it was a disc-shape with lights below it. It seemed to be taking forever to land and at one point I wondered if it had stopped. Sugar's antennas starting sparking again and suddenly the ship starting moving towards him.

I nudged Priya's arm and whispered. "Look there's a chance they might be friendly but if they look threatening we'll have to run for it. If that happens, head to my house."

"Ok" she said and we watched as the ship grew bigger.

Then an idea came to me. I turned to Sugar, "You know everything about your masters don't you?"

++UNKNOWN BUT THE PROBE HAS A LOT OF DATA ABOUT THE MASTERS++

"Do you know their weaknesses?" I pressed

++DO NOT UNDERSTAND WEAKNESS++

"What are they afraid of?" I asked

"Tim", Priya asked, "what are you doing?"

"Interrogating him. He might have some information which can help us save the Earth." and then to Sugar, "What are your masters afraid of?"

++THE MASTERS HAVE NO CONCEPT OF FEAR++

"They must be afraid of something? Even if it's just something they try to avoid?"

++EXTINCTION++

"Extinction?" Priya said

++YES. THEY WISH TO AVOID. EXTINCTION++

"So they are afraid of dying?" Priya asked

"Isn't everyone?" I replied. This wasn't as helpful as I had hoped. I turned back to Sugar and said "Is there anything your masters consider a danger to them? Anything on this world?"

Sugar whirred and crackled a bit and then said

++I DO NOT HAVE THAT DATA++

I tried again, "Why did they choose this world to invade?"

++IT IS COMPATIBLE WITH THEIR
HOMEWORLD AND TIME IS SHORT++

"Why is time short?" Priya asked

"Never mind that," I said, "look!" The ship was definitely getting closer now and it was slowing down even more. This seemed odd because it still looked too far above the ground to be slowing down to land.

"Why is it slowing down?" I asked

++THEY WILL SOON LAND++ Sugar said.
Suddenly he turned to me and said ++TIM I
AM SORRY++

"What?" I said.

++I NEVER WANTED TO END THE HUMAN
RACE++

"Oh be quiet you bag of bolts!" I shouted

"Tim!" Priya said

"Well!" I said, throwing my hands up in the air, "A fat lot of good him being sorry will do us now!"

"But," she continued, "Sugar just said 'I'. He didn't refer to himself as 'The Probe'."

"So?"

"So, it's like he's different, like he knows what he has done."

++YES I KNOW WHAT I HAVE DONE AND I AM SORRY++

"So what have you done?" I asked

++BY CALLING DOWN MY MASTERS - IF YOU ARE CORRECT - I HAVE STARTED THE END OF HUMANITY++

"Okay, so you're sorry." I said

++YES I AM SORRY. I NEVER WANTED TO BE THE PROBE. I LIKED BEING SUGAR++

This was amazing, Sugar knew who he was and what he had done. This is what I had always wanted, a robot who was my friend. The only trouble now was that it might be too late.

"Why did you become the probe then?" Priya asked

++I HAD NO CHOICE. WHEN TIM FIXED ME MY ORIGINAL PROGRAMMING TOOK OVER++

"So what has changed now?" I asked, "Why are you suddenly Sugar again?"

++NOW MY MASTERS ARE HERE MY JOB IS DONE. I HAVE BEEN RELEASED. NOW I

KNOW WHAT I HAVE DONE AND I WANT TO
HELP++

"That's all well and good," I said bending down to him, "But I'm not sure you can. For a start you are just a toy robot and secondly, it's just about too late."

"You're right!" said Priya looking up at the ship, "It is too late. They're landing. But it's not what we were expecting. Tim, I think you need to see this."



It's amazing how many times you think you know how something is going to turn out and, even though you were right, it still ends up surprising you. Take the mothership for example. We knew it was coming. I kind of guessed what it might look like and I was right but Priya was also right that it was not what I was expecting.

I was expecting something enormous which was at least the size of three or four double-decker buses. Kind of like they have in films. What we saw descending towards us turned out to be much, much smaller. It was a disc about two metres across and about half a metre high. It wasn't completely circular though. The ends were squared off at each side. The size explained why it was appearing to come down so slowly.

We were expecting it to get a lot bigger than it did as it got closer. As it passed the top of the pylon though, it became clear that it was a lot smaller than we imagined.



THE SHIP LANDS

The ship was otherwise just as I had thought it would be. Smooth and shiny, metallic in colour and with lots of small flashing lights on it. There were no domes or anything on the top. In fact the top looked almost the same as the bottom. It was also silent. There were no whining or whirring noises and there was no steam or plumes of smoke coming out of it as it landed.

I began to indicate to Priya and Sugar to move back to make room for the ship as it got lower but as it turned out this wasn't necessary. It dropped to a height of about three metres off the ground and suddenly

stopped in mid-air with one edge quite close to the leg of the pylon.

We stood and watched in silence as it spun around. I'm not sure either Priya or I could think of anything suitable to say and we were quite simply awestruck by what was in front of us. Suddenly a panel slid open on the side of the ship and a metallic bar came out slowly towards the leg of the pylon.

As it got half way the bar was joined by a second behind it and then a third between and below the first two. All the bars attached themselves to the pylon using some kind of finger-like clamps. Most of the lights went off on the ship and it just sat there fixed to the pylon. I puffed out my cheeks and looked at Priya.

"Now what?" she whispered

I shrugged and said "I'd take a few more photos if I were you. Nobody is going to believe this."

Sugar walked in front of us and turned to face us.

++WHEN THEY APPEAR THEY WILL NOT UNDERSTAND YOUR LANGUAGE. I WILL TRANSLATE++

"How many are there in that ship?" I said "I was expecting it to be bigger."

++THAT IS A MAIN TRANSPORT CLASS VESSEL. AT FULL CAPACITY IT CONTAINS ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY CREW AS WELL AS UP TO FIFTY PASSENGERS++

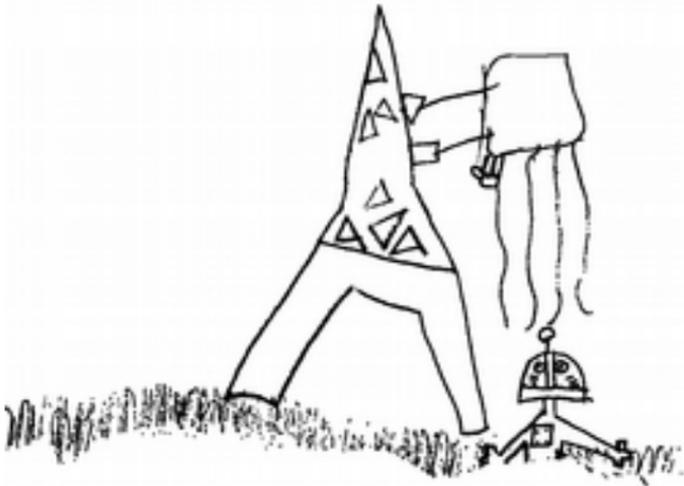
"A hundred and seventy?!" I exclaimed "In that?"

++CORRECT++

"How big are they?" Priya asked but Sugar didn't answer her question. Instead he turned to the ship and said

++LOOK THEY ARE EXITING THE SHIP++

All at once several small panels slid back on the underside of the ship and small ropes - no bigger than string - dropped through them. Then, one by one, the aliens appeared, slowly lowering themselves down the ropes.



THE ALIENS LEAVE THE SHIP

There were in all about thirty aliens who came out of the ship. The first thing that struck me was their size. They were no more than 5 centimetres tall but not all the same height. They were different heights and shapes and sizes, much like humans are.

In appearance they were much like us: one head, two arms, two legs, two eyes, a sort-of nose and a mouth. They didn't have hair but some of them had patterns on their heads which were different from each other.

They were a range of different colours and shades. Again as different as humans are

from each other. The other thing that surprised us was that none of them were robots.

"Oh" said Priya "I was kind of expecting them to look like Sugar."

"Yes and I thought they'd be bigger." I said "If this is an invasion, you and I will be able to stop it by stamping on them!"

"We don't know what weapons they have yet Tim." Priya pointed out. "And besides, we don't know that they mean any harm yet."

"Priya they are invading our planet! I think we can safely say they mean us some harm!"

"All I am saying is that if they were going to zap us with lasers or something they would have done it from the ship by now wouldn't they?" She shrugged her shoulders "Perhaps they are just investigating first."

"Maybe," I replied and turned back to the groups of aliens descending from the ship. They were wearing some kind of uniforms, which was a relief: I'm not sure I'd want the first aliens I ever saw to be naked! Although to be honest I'm not sure how I would tell if they were. One by one they slid down the tiny

ropes and landed in the grass. Here they met their first problem.

The grass was long. So long it hid the aliens not only from us but from each other. They started to make little noises to each other and then they started to jump up and down to see each other.

This was very, very funny to see because none of them seemed to time their jumps at the same time so they just kept bobbing up and down like one of those whack-a-mole games at the arcade. Both Priya and I started to laugh. The noise of our laughter made them stop jumping and look in our direction. Suddenly the grass started to flatten around one of them in a circle. Then another did it and another until eventually there were a number of flattened circles in the grass. I could now see that each alien was holding a long (for them) rod which glowed at one end. The colours of the rods varied from green to blue to purple but it was clear that they used to rods to flatten the grass down somehow. They then made paths of flattened grass between each other and eventually they all gathered in the larger of the circles near Sugar.

Sugar stepped forward and kind of bowed to them. They gave a little nod back to him. Sugar made some weird noises in response to which one of the aliens made similar noises. This continued for a bit while the others stood around looking into the grass around them.

"I think that one must be in charge or something." I said nodding towards the one in the centre. "Look how the others are guarding it."

"Yes I think you're right." Priya said "I wonder what they are saying?"

I was just about to comment when Sugar turned to us and said

++THIS IS THE ONE WHO WILL SPEAK FOR MY MASTERS. I WILL TRANSLATE BETWEEN YOU. THEY HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU++

"Okay," I said, "Explain that we will do our best but we are just children and do not represent the views of everyone on this planet."

++I HAVE DONE THAT. THEY DO NOT THINK THEIR QUESTIONS WILL BE TOO DIFFICULT FOR YOU++

"What a cheek!" I said quietly to Priya, "We're not that stupid!" and then to Sugar I said "Tell him we have some questions too."

++MY MASTERS DO NOT HAVE MALE OR FEMALE. THEY ARE JUST AS THEY ARE BUT I WILL TELL THEM++

The main alien made some noises and Sugar turned to face the aliens. Then he turned back.

++THE FIRST QUESTION IS: HOW MANY HUMANS ARE ON THIS PLANET?

I knew this one, "About seven billion" I said.

Sugar relayed my reply. There then followed a series of questions about the planet, humans and the weather. We answered the best we could but some of the stuff we just didn't know. Eventually I'd had enough and decided to ask a question of my own.

"We are human, what are you?". Sugar seemed a bit puzzled but asked the question anyway. There was some noises among the group and eventually Sugar replied. This pattern was followed pretty much for all of our questions.

++ON THEIR OWN WORLD THEY WERE KNOWN AS THE TRAVELLING ONES. THEY HAVE NO NAME FOR THEIR SPECIES++

"Where is their world?" I continued.

++IT WAS FAR FROM HERE AND NOT ON ANY OF YOUR STAR CHARTS+

"Why do you keep referring to it in the past tense?" interrupted Priya.

++BECAUSE IT IS NO MORE++

"What?" I said "What happened to it?"

++IT MALFUNCTIONED AND WAS DESTROYED++

"Malfunctioned?" Priya said "That makes it sound like a machine."

++MY VOCABULARY IS LIMITED. I HAVE USED THE BEST AVAILABLE WORD++

"Oh," I said, realising what he meant. "He doesn't mean it actually malfunctioned. Just that something went wrong with the planet and it got destroyed. Kind of like my Mum goes on about with global warming here."

"So, if the planet was destroyed." Priya asked, "How many of them escaped?"

++MANY SHIPS WERE LAUNCHED. ALL ON THE PLANET ESCAPED. BUT NOT ALL HAVE SURVIVED++

"Why not?" I asked

++UNKNOWN BUT THIS IS THE ONLY REMAINING SHIP++

"When was their planet destroyed?" Priya asked

++IN YOUR TIMEFRAME ABOUT ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO++

"What?" I spluttered "So why has it taken so long for them to arrive here?"

++THEY WERE WAITING FOR A PROBE TO REPLY++

"A probe?" Priya said, "You said 'a probe' not 'the probe'. How many probes are there?"

++PROBES WERE DISPATCHED TO MANY SUITABLE WORLDS. NONE HAVE REPLIED UNTIL NOW++

It was time to ask the question I had been wanting to ask for sometime.

"What do they intend to do with this planet?"

++OCCUPY IT++

"Yes," I pressed, "but what does that mean? What happens to us humans?"

There seemed to be more discussion between Sugar and the aliens on this question. Eventually Sugar turned to me and said

++THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND THIS. WHY WOULD ANYTHING HAPPEN TO THE HUMANS?++

I tried to spell it out as clearly as I could. "If your masters occupy this planet, it becomes their planet. What will happen to the humans when your masters occupy this entire planet?"

Sugar didn't relay this question, instead he replied of his own accord

++TIM THERE ARE ONLY ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY EIGHT OF THEM. THEY ARE SMALL. HOW CAN THEY OCCUPY THE ENTIRE PLANET? IS THERE NOT ROOM FOR YOU BOTH?++

"Wait!" Priya interrupted, "Are you saying they don't want to destroy or enslave us?"

++YES THAT IS WHAT I AM SAYING. THEY WISH TO OCCUPY THIS WORLD ALONGSIDE THE HUMANS WHO ALREADY OCCUPY IT++

"Tim!" Priya gasped "It's another problem from his limited vocabulary! He doesn't mean occupy in the sense of 'take over', he means occupy in the sense of 'live on'"

"So they don't want to take over the Earth as belonging to them?" I said

++NO. WHY WOULD THEY? THEY ARE PEACEFUL. BESIDES HUMANS DO NOT OWN THIS PLANET. HOW CAN SOMEONE OWN A PLANET++

I looked at Priya "This changes everything." I said, "They're not invaders, they're refugees!"

++WHAT IS REFUGEE?++

"A refugee is someone who has to leave their home and seeks shelter and help in another place." Priya said

Sugar turned to the aliens and relayed this. They replied and then he said

++THEN THEY ARE REFUGEES. THEY HAVE NO HOME. THEY WISH TO MAKE THE EARTH THEIR HOME++

"Yes, that really does change everything, " I said, "mostly because now we have to find somewhere to put them and somewhere to hide that ship."



Priya looked at me and whispered "What do you mean hide? Surely now we know they mean no harm we should tell the authorities - or at least your parents?"

"No my parents would never believe us. Look at what happened when we tried to tell them about Sugar. We can't hand the aliens over to the government, they'll just experiment on them or something. We'd never see them again."

"But don't we have a duty to..."

"To what? Tell the adults there's a bunch of small aliens that want to share the planet? No. We have a duty to the aliens."

"What do you mean?"

"They have come here as refugees. They are looking for a home and - based on what Sugar has told them - they think that might be here."

"Right?" I was not sure Priya was following me.

"Well Sugar based his report on us two. He's not met any other humans and so he thinks the human race will act like we have. He's wrong. As soon as the adults get involved it will get all official and too important for us children. No, if the aliens are looking for a decent home on Earth, we need to keep the adults out of it."

"Okay, so where do we put them?"

"I don't know. We don't know what they need."

++EVERYTHING THEY NEED IS STORED IN THE SHIP++

I hadn't realised Sugar had been listening in but it seemed he was.

"So they can live in the ship?" I asked.

++YES BUT THEY DO NOT NEED TO. THEY CAN DISASSEMBLE IT AND USE IT TO BUILD A NEW HOME++

"Recycle it you mean?" Priya said.

++CORRECT++

"Okay so how much space do they need and how big will this home be?" I asked Sugar

"And what will it look like?" Priya added

++THEY CAN CONSTRUCT THE HOME TO LOOK LIKE ANYTHING. THEY ARE USED TO MAKING THINGS WHICH BLEND IN WITH THE SURROUNDINGS++

"Really?" I asked

++YES. LOOK AT ME FOR EXAMPLE++

"Good point. So how much space do they need?"

++A MINIMUM OF 1 METRE WIDE SQUARE BY 1 METRE HIGH++

"Okay, that's a start." I said "Can you get them to stay here and stay hidden? We need to find somewhere for them to live."

++I WILL CONVEY YOUR REQUEST. TIM AND PRIYA?+

"Yes?" We both answered

++THANK YOU++

"For what?" I asked

++FOR ALLOWING MY MASTERS TO OCCUP...LIVE ON THIS PLANET++

We didn't really know what to say to that. I wasn't sure I'd done very much to be honest.

"That's okay Sugar," I said, "I just wish we'd figured it out sooner, then we might have been more help."

"Can you ask them to lower the ship a bit? Perhaps into the long grass?" Priya asked, "It's a bit conspicuous up there."

++I WILL ASK++

And with that Priya and I ran back to my bedroom. There was no room in my garden. The space behind the shed wasn't wide enough. We called up a satellite map on my laptop and had a look around. After an hour we had found nothing that was big enough without drawing attention to itself.

"We'd better get back to them." I said "There's no telling what they're up to by now."

We headed back, feeling a bit sad. I was sure there would be somewhere the aliens could live. As we turned into the alleyway behind the house Priya was still trying to think of a suitable place.

"What about the allotments at the other end of the alley. Couldn't they use those?"

"Priya, I don't think they can disguise the ship as an allotment."

"They don't need to. They just need to disguise it as a shed or something."

"Okay but won't the allotment users wonder where the new shed has come from?"

"Oh yes," she said, "I hadn't thought of that."

"But," I said, thinking aloud "maybe disguising it as an allotment is not such a bad idea?"

"What?"

"What if it was underground?"

"I'm not following you."

"All this time we've been looking for a space where a structure could be placed above ground. What if the home was underground? As long as it was out of the way nobody would notice."



AN UNDERGROUND HOME

"Okay but about the entrance to it? Surely that would be visible?"

"Yes, " I said and then a thought struck me, "unless it was supposed to be! What if it was a manhole cover?"

"It might work," Priya said, "we need to ask if they are okay living underground?"

"Come on then." and we ran back to the fields. The ship was nowhere to be seen and neither were the aliens. If we hadn't spotted Sugar we might have thought the aliens had run off. Sugar was standing right where we left him.

"Where are they?" I said, panting a little from the run.

++THEY HAVE RETURNED TO THE SHIP.
IT IS HIDDEN IN THE GRASS OVER
THERE++

He pointed towards some exceptionally long grass towards the edge of the field. I thought the spot looked pretty good. Out of the way and quiet enough to hide a space ship in anyway.

"Sugar can they live underground?" I asked

++YES++

"Do they require any ventilation though?" Priya asked "Will there be smoke or fumes of any kind to give them away?"

++THEIR ENERGY RESOURCES ARE SILENT
AND PRODUCE NO FUMES. THEY MAY
REQUIRE A VENTILATION SHAFT OR TWO+
+

I walked over to the pylon fence looking on the ground. Then I saw a manhole I had spotted earlier in the day.

"Can they build their home underground and put something like this above it? Would that be suitable?"

Sugar inspected the manhole cover and then said

++I WILL ASK++

He then made a series of odd noises and suddenly a group of about ten aliens stepped out from the grass.

"Have they been there all the time?" I asked

++YES. THEY REMAINED TO GUARD ME++

"Guard you?" Priya said, "Who from?"

++THERE WAS A MAMMAL HERE EARLIER WHICH TRIED TO ATTACK ME++

"Really?" Priya gasped, "What was it."

++I DO NOT KNOW BUT IT WAS AS BIG AS ME, HAD LONG EARS AND A WHITE REAR++

"A rabbit?" I laughed "You were attacked by a rabbit?"

++IF YOU SAY SO++

I shook my head, chuckling "Sugar you have a lot to learn."

++I KNOW. BUT IF YOU TEACH ME I WILL LEARN WELL++

Priya sighed loudly as if this was the wrong moment for such a conversation. "Sugar, ask the aliens if they can build the manhole?" she said.

Sugar turned to the aliens and they made various sounds at each other. Eventually he turned to us and said

++THEY CAN DO IT. BUT THEY ALSO HAVE MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT THIS PLANET. THEY HAVE REQUESTED YOU LIAISE WITH THEM TO TEACH THEM++

I was very excited by the last part. "Of course we will but we need to find some way to do it out of sight. If they get spotted it is all over."

"Can't they learn what they need from Wikipedia?" Priya asked

"Shh!" I hissed. I was looking forward to meeting the aliens more. If they used the web they might not need us. As it turned out either Sugar didn't hear her or he ignored it.

++THEY CAN BUILD THE HOME LARGE ENOUGH TO ACCOMMODATE YOU BOTH++

"Tell them to make it large enough to accommodate adult humans." Priya said

"Why, who are you planning on inviting?" I asked with a grin.

"Nobody." she smiled back, "but we're going to grow and if they make it for children, eventually we'll out-grow it."

"Good point." I said and then between us we set about finding a suitable place for the manhole-town to be constructed. We settled on a place just under the trees to the side of the field. That way we could get in and out without anyone noticing. Well we hoped so anyway.

Epilogue



So there you have it. That's what happened when I fixed Sugar the Robot. I must admit I'm not sure even I expected what actually happened but all in all it turned out pretty fantastic. I mean who wouldn't want their very own colony of aliens living about a hundred metres from their back gate?

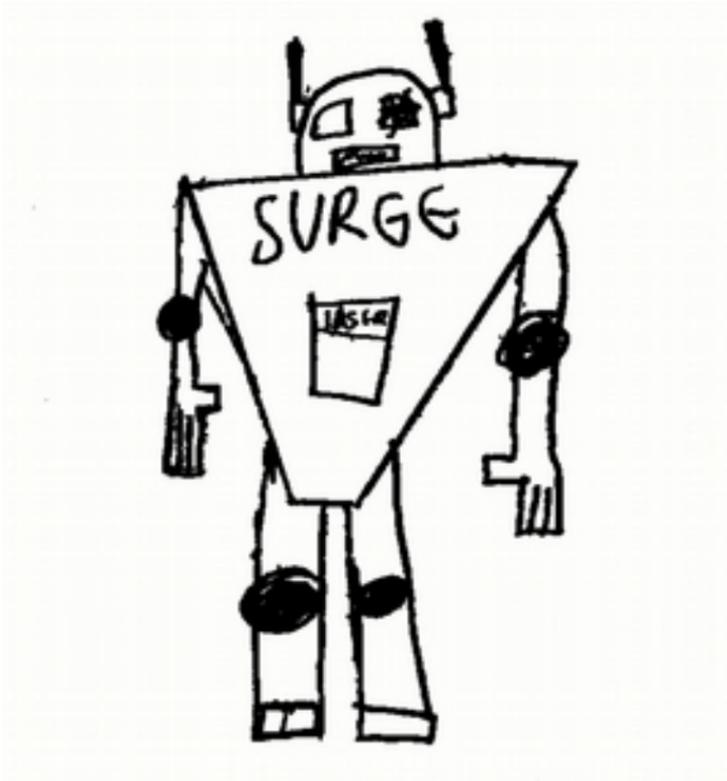
It only took the aliens about two weeks to dismantle their ship and rebuild it as an underground home. When they had finished, the manhole cover looked excellent. They even managed to make it look old and rusty as if it had been forgotten. We never did figure out what they did with all the earth they must have removed but inside that manhole cover was pretty much a whole town in miniature. They had lighting, heating, ventilation, buildings and walkways all sitting just under the trees in the field where the pylon stood.

True to their word they included space for Priya and me. It wasn't as cramped as I

expected but we did have to duck down a little. When you sat in it you felt like you were in a wondrous cavern filled with a futuristic model village.

Priya and I spent a lot of time teaching the aliens about the Earth. We even managed to teach them some English, although Sugar was still used for translation for some things. They taught me and Priya a lot about electronics but even though they had more to teach they only went so far. They kept saying that we were not yet ready for all their knowledge. We were just glad to know what they taught us and we knew in time they would let us know more.

Once they had landed here on Earth, they had no need for a probe and once they learned English they had even less need. They were planning to disassemble Sugar but I stepped in and said he was mine now and they had no right to take him apart.



MY FRIEND

They didn't understand this. As far as they could see he had no purpose any longer and his parts could be used elsewhere. I had to explain to them that most of his parts were mine not theirs as their ones had malfunctioned. I also told them that Sugar was much more than just a probe now. He

had told us he liked being Sugar not the probe and he wanted to remain as Sugar too.

Eventually, between me, Priya and Sugar himself we persuaded them to turn him over to me. They even helped me fix his broken eye and expand his vocabulary. They were going to replace his laser cannon with a real one but Sugar said not to as he didn't want to have a weapon. So they replaced it with a grappling hook and some other cool gadgets.

So after all that I had achieved my dream. I had a robot of my own. A real robot, my dream robot. A good robot, not a slave.

He is my friend and his name is Sugar.

The End

About this story



I hope you enjoyed this story. I have enjoyed writing it.

We love stories in our family, whether it is reading them, watching them or making them up. On one of the times we were making up stories I came up with one about a toy robot who fell out of a window and got stuck in some knickers. After a lot of laughing and some retelling it formed the beginning of this story.

Although I wrote the words, the way the story developed is very much a team effort as there were lots of ideas from both my children and my wife – Claire.

How do *you* imagine this story?

I've always found that I have a clear picture in my head of what the scenes in this story look like but I soon realised that picture wasn't always the same as the one the other family members had. So I asked my children to draw pictures of what they thought the scenes

looked like. All of the illustrations in this book are those drawings. You'll notice that not all of them have Sugar looking the same and that's fine. As I see it there is no right or wrong way to imagine a story and that is partly why I have resisted the urge to add my own drawing of what Sugar looks like. In your head it's up to you what he looks like and it can be interesting and fun to compare how we imagine stories we are reading.

If you would like to draw a picture of how you imagine scenes or characters from this story might look or if you have ideas for future stories about Sugar, you can share them with others at the website. Don't forget you can also download, free of charge, the full text of this book in various e-book formats at the website too.

www.crimperbooks.co.uk/sugar

About the author



Ryan Cartwright is a web developer and cartoonist who loves stories. He lives in the UK with his wife, two children, nutty dog and a tyrannical cat. He has a weakness for wine gums.



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**A TOY ROBOT THAT IS MORE THAN HE SEEMS,
AN ALIEN INVASION ABOUT TO START
AND TIM STILL NEEDS TO TIDY HIS ROOM!**



SUGAR^{THE} ROBOT **AND THE RACE TO SAVE THE EARTH**

Tim is ten years old and mad about robots. He dreams of one day building his own one. When he tries to fix the toy robot his Grandad gave him he gets more than he bargained for!

What starts as a hobby ends in a race to stop an alien invasion and save humanity.

Can Tim and his friend Priya catch the escaped robot, save the Earth and safely explain to Tim's Mum how her favourite knickers got ruined?



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"Brilliant! I've already laughed out loud and I'm only on chapter 2. Might even read it with my son!"

Reader comment

THE ROBOTEERS

What starts as a club for friends becomes a group that solves mysteries, gets into adventure and saves the planet!

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