

I groaned. Speaking of mindless robots, my annoying little sister, Tabby, was running up the stairs to find me. We'd only spent two days in hiding together, but she was already doing my head in.

"I'm searching for Emmy," I said. "She said earlier she was going to sneak into town to find out what the aliens are up to, but I can't see her anywhere."

"Let me try!" said Tabby, reaching for the telescope. "Maybe I can find her."

I snatched it away. "No! You'll break it. You're always kicking footballs and swinging around tennis rackets without thinking. If it wasn't for me, you'd have destroyed all of Emmy's inventions by now."

Tabby rolled her eyes. "You're such a bossy older brother!"

"I have to be bossy because you're so babyish," I grumbled.

Sure enough, Aunt Emmy's battered old car sped down the road and came to a screeching halt outside the lighthouse. Tabby and I looked at each other – something was wrong. We charged downstairs to meet her without a second to lose.

"Emmy, what is it?" I asked. "Did the aliens realise you weren't a robot?"

"Not at all!" she replied, wheezing for breath. "My disguise worked brilliantly."

Emmy had made her own shiny, green jumpsuit out of bin bags to blend in with the robots. She'd also painted her eyelids white with a dark dot in the middle – when she blinked, it looked like her eyes were still open.

"So why were you running?" asked Tabby.

Emmy tore a piece of paper from her pocket and slammed it on to the table.

"Because of *that!*"

I looked down. It was a poster, but what was written on it made my heart stop.



Tabby frowned. "A start-of-term party? I've heard of an end-of-term party, but why celebrate the start of term?"

"Because the aliens are setting another trap!" said Emmy. "First they got the mayor, then they got all the grown-ups, and now they're going to get the children."

Soon, every person on Finney Island will be turned into a mindless robot!"

I shook my head in disbelief. "But why, Emmy? What do the aliens want?"

"Who knows?" said Emmy. "But if we don't find out how they're changing everyone into robots and learn how to turn them back, then everyone will be stuck as a robot forever – including your parents!"

I bit my lip. I really missed Mum and Dad. I hadn't seen them since I had shorted their circuits with Emmy's soup zapper at home. I hoped they were still OK.

"We have to stop that party," said Emmy. "If we don't, then by tomorrow we'll be the only humans left on Finney Island. Everyone, put on your thinking hats!"

At this point, Emmy actually put on her THINKING HAT 5000. (It's an invention she made to improve her brainpower, but to me

it just looked like a crash helmet covered in old light bulbs.)

"Could we run around town and rip down all the posters?" I suggested.

Emmy shook her head. "That will draw too much attention to ourselves. If the aliens realise that I'm the only adult who's not a robot, then we're doomed. And remember, you two aren't even supposed to be outside!"

"So why don't we just go to the party?" said Tabby.

I gave her a withering look. "Tabby, now's not the time to be having fun."

"That's not what I mean, Ash," she said.

"Think about it: if the aliens are planning to turn all the children into robots at the party, maybe they'll have some sort of big machine to do it. Once we find that, we can work out how to stop them."