

Tabby smiled. "It's OK, Ash. I'm sorry I said you were bossy. I mean, you are bossy, but—"

"Well, well, well! What's this?"

My heart sank. I recognised that voice immediately. Standing behind us was Barry "Knuckle" Sandwich, dressed as an evil alien. Beside him were the rest of his gang: Clarissa, Lee and Jaya, dressed like Barry – and smirking at me.



"Nice costume," sneered Barry. "Where'd you find it – a bin?"

I groaned. "Leave me alone, Barry. I've got more important things to do tonight than talk to you."

"As if!" said Barry. "Me and the gang haven't seen you in weeks. It's time we had a little catch up!"

They stepped towards me menacingly. Tabby leaped between us.

"Run, Ash! I'll hold them off. You start looking for the machine!"

She pushed me through the doors, and I tumbled into the sports hall. The whole room had been decorated to look like a spaceship. Every wall was covered in shimmering foil, and the ceiling was lit up with sparkling stars.

There was a DJ booth on the stage shaped like a rocket, and hundreds of children dressed as different aliens were dancing around me.

The hall was also filled with all kinds of different stalls. There were games stalls, food stalls, stalls handing out glasses of bright purple fruit juice ... Any one of them could be hiding the aliens' robot-making machine!

I gulped. Finding the machine wasn't just going to be hard. It was going to be *impossible*.



# 3

## THE SECRET SEARCH

"ASH!"

Aunt Emmy's voice crackled through my headset, almost making me jump. I spun around, but couldn't see her anywhere.

"Up here on the stage!"

My jaw dropped. Emmy was in the DJ booth, wearing a giant, blue alien head covered in wobbly tentacles.

"I locked the real DJ in the broom cupboard and stole his costume," she said into her watch so I could hear. "It's perfect – I can see the entire room from up here. Also, it turns out I'm a pretty good DJ."

She turned up the volume and all the children cheered.

"Now, come on!" she said. "We need to find that machine before the mayor arrives."

I ran into the nearest stall and peeked through the doors. It was pitch black. Could the machine be hidden in here?

Suddenly, a huge alien, with razor-sharp teeth and yellow eyes, leaped from the darkness.

"AAAARGH!" I screamed, shoving the alien as hard as I could.

The alien fell over. It was made of wood.

"Congratulations."

A teacher in a green jumpsuit stepped out from behind a curtain, his eyes unblinking.

He pointed at a sign behind him.

"You have defeated the alien. You win a prize."

