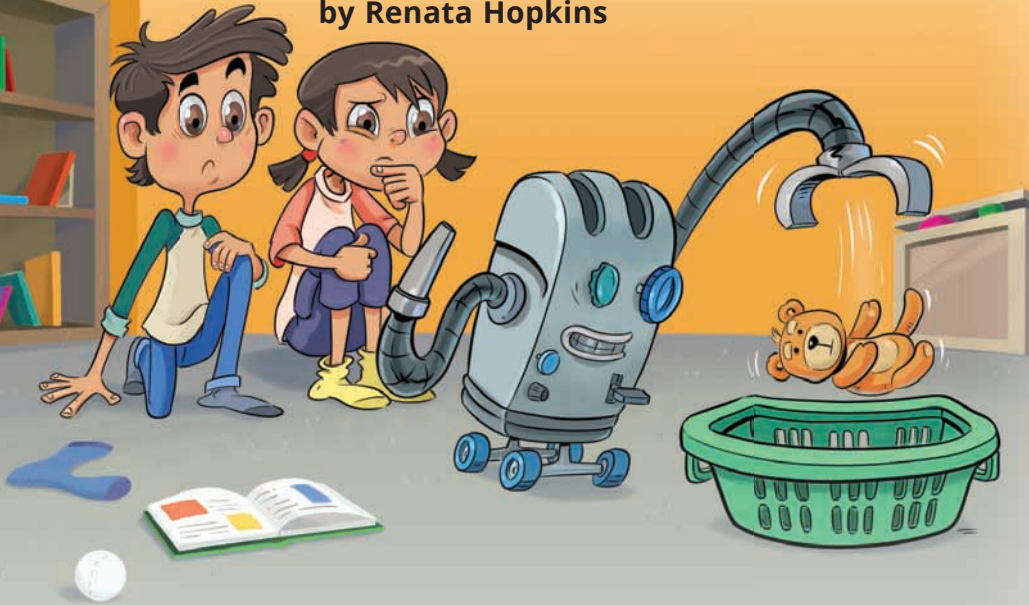


Zapped!

Chapter 3: Fun Time!

by Renata Hopkins



The story so far:

Tai and Ana made a robot for a school project. They called it "Tidy-Bot". When the robot was hit by lightning, it came alive! Unfortunately Tidy-Bot wasn't good at following instructions. The twins had to hide the robot after it caused big trouble, first at home and then at school. Later, when they got home, the twins learnt that other machines had also been behaving strangely ...

It was Saturday. Dad was out jogging, and Mum was planting tomatoes. Tai and Ana were giving Tidy-Bot a lesson in following instructions.

"It's simple," said Tai, looking around the messy floor. "The toys go in the toy box. The books go on the shelf. The clothes go in the washing basket."

"Now, tidy them up," said Ana.

Tidy-Bot picked up a soft toy and put it in the washing basket.

"Sort of," said Ana. "Try again."

Tidy-Bot picked up a smelly sock and tried to put it into Tai's mouth. Ana giggled. Tai didn't.

"We'll never win a prize at the science fair if Tidy-Bot can't actually follow instructions," he said.

"Can, can, can!" said Tidy-Bot. "Bleep, bloop!" The robot picked up a book and slid it onto the bookcase. The twins cheered.

"See?" said Ana. "All it takes is practice."

Tidy-Bot and the twins kept practising until they heard Dad arrive back from his run.

"Hey, kids," he called. "We'll be off as soon as I've had a shower." The family was going to the mall. Mum and Dad wanted to buy a new vacuum cleaner.

"Tidy could do some other jobs while we're out," Tai whispered.

"Good idea," Ana agreed. They asked the little robot to make their beds and put the dirty dishes into the dishwasher.

"Beds. Dishes," said Tidy-Bot. "Bleep, bloop."

Tai and Ana grinned. Mum and Dad were going to get such a surprise!

On the way to the mall, Dad said, "You guys have been acting strangely lately. I want you on your best behaviour today."

"You can look around," warned Mum. "Just don't touch things, OK?"

"Pinky promise," said Tai and Ana. They linked fingers and shook on it.

While their parents looked at vacuum cleaners, Tai and Ana watched the giant TV screens. The movie that was showing had dancing penguins that made the twins laugh.

But then a strange thing happened. The screens went blank. Next, a message appeared, in big red letters: "IT'S FUN TIME!"

"Weird," said Tai.

Just then, there was a loud whizzing sound. The twins spun round. All the blenders in the kitchen section had switched on at once.

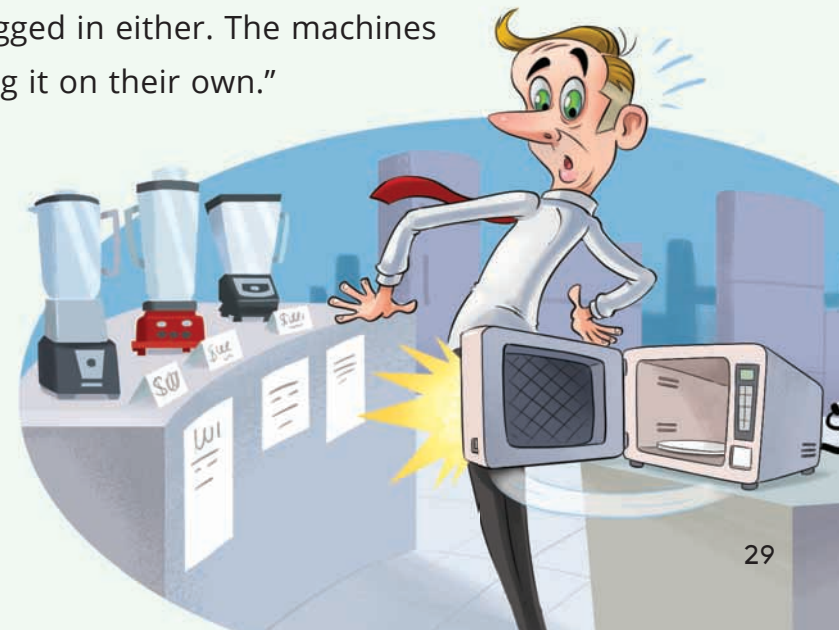
"Look, Tai!" Ana pointed to the power cords. The blenders weren't even plugged in.

"Crazy," whispered Tai.

A shop assistant came to see what was making all the noise. The blenders stopped whizzing.

"Did you kids touch something?" the man asked. The twins shook their heads. Just then, the door on a microwave popped open and smacked the man on the bottom. Tai and Ana tried not to giggle. The man's face went red. He slammed the microwave shut and stomped off.

"Ana," said Tai. "That microwave isn't plugged in either. The machines are doing it on their own."



All around the twins, machines started to move. The lid of a waffle maker went up and down like a hungry mouth, coffee machines puffed steam from their nozzles, and fridge doors opened and shut. But every time an adult turned round to see what was happening, the machines stopped.



Suddenly, a helicopter in the toy section took off and started whizzing around the shop. People pointed and laughed. Shop assistants came running. So did Ana and Tai's parents.

The family left without a vacuum cleaner.

"I don't know what's got into you," Dad grumbled, as they drove home. "Why can't you two behave?"

Tai and Ana didn't try to explain. They didn't know where to start. They just hoped Mum and Dad would forget to be mad once they saw Tidy-Bot's housework.

At home, the twins followed Mum into the kitchen. The bench was spotless. The dirty dishes had vanished. Mum beamed. So did the twins.

"Did you stack the dishwasher while I was getting ready?" she asked. Before Ana or Tai could answer, she opened the door to check.

"What on earth ...?" she shrieked. The dishwasher was stuffed full of sheets and pillowcases.

"Yikes," said Tai and Ana, at exactly the same time. If Tidy had put the bedclothes in the dishwasher, where had the robot put the dishes? ... In their beds, of course!



After the fuss finally died down, Mum and Dad went to have a calming cup of tea in the garden. Tai and Ana cleaned up all the mess. Then they went to look for their robot. They found it under Ana's bed. It seemed to be fast asleep.

"Look," said Tai. "It's all worn out."

"Poor Tidy," said Ana. "It wasn't trying to be naughty. It just gets muddled."

"What about all those other machines?" Tai wondered. "They seemed to like being naughty."

"They did stop," Ana pointed out.

But the twins were thinking. What if those unplugged machines hadn't had enough fun yet? What if they were just getting started? What might they do next?

"Whoa," said the twins at exactly the same time.



illustrations by Scott Pearson

To be continued ...

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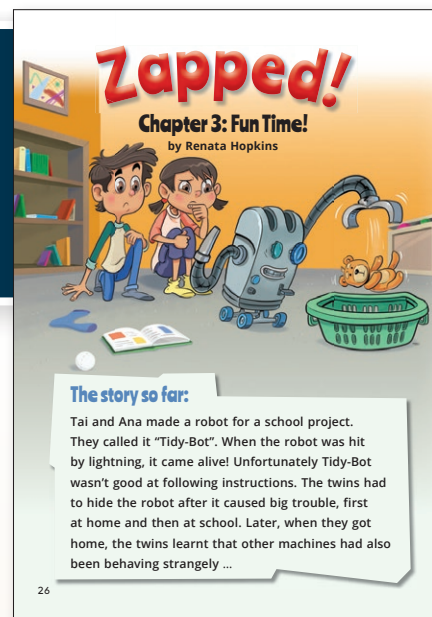
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