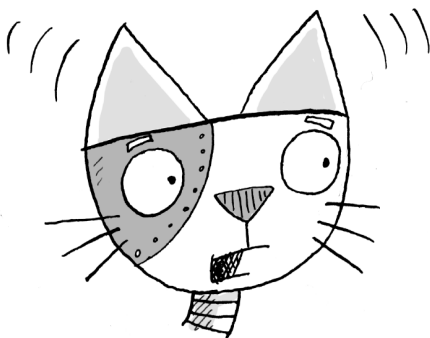


Chapter 1

Settling in



‘I thought everybody had gone home!’
whispered Archie. ‘Who on earth is that?’

Archie the cat and Sparky the mouse were hiding in the school’s stationery cupboard. Archie’s radar ears had detected an unexpected person coming up the stairs and they’d dived into the nearest hiding space.

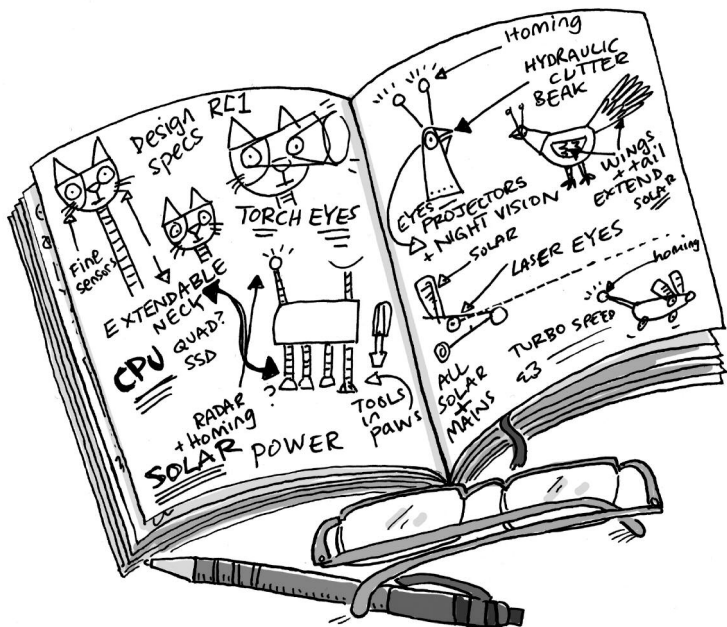


‘I hope Flo’s okay,’ said Sparky. He zipped backwards and forwards nervously behind the door leaving a trail of sparks behind him.

Flo, the third of the Petbot friends, had flown to the hatch in the corridor ceiling that led up to the attic when she’d heard the footsteps. She’d struggled to pull the ladder up behind her. Even with her super-powered beak, it wasn’t easy. Just in time, the hatch shut with a *bang*.

Radar ears? A trail of sparks? Super-powered beak? Yes, Archie, Sparky and Flo were not everyday animals. They were Petbots, each with their own special robot skills. They had lived very happily with the Professor who’d made them until he got ill. His house was sold and the Petbots had to find a new home – which they did in the attic of a school.





They'd been exploring their new home one evening, thinking no one was around. The Professor had always told them about the danger of discovery – he'd warned them other people might dismantle them to see how they worked, and would be unlikely to be able to put them back together again. So when they heard

someone else in the school, they knew they had to keep hidden.

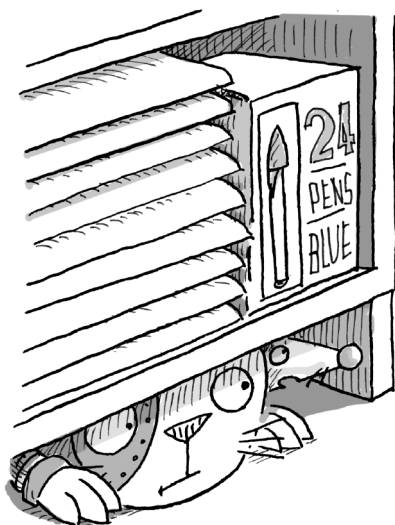
‘What’s that noise?’ said a gruff voice coming upstairs. ‘Some of you kids still up there messing about?’

Archie turned off his torch eyes and hid with Sparky in the far corner of the cupboard,

underneath the last row of shelves.

They could hear the footsteps getting closer. ‘Who is he?’ whispered Sparky.

‘Flo?’ asked Archie through their internal communication system. ‘Can you see anything?’



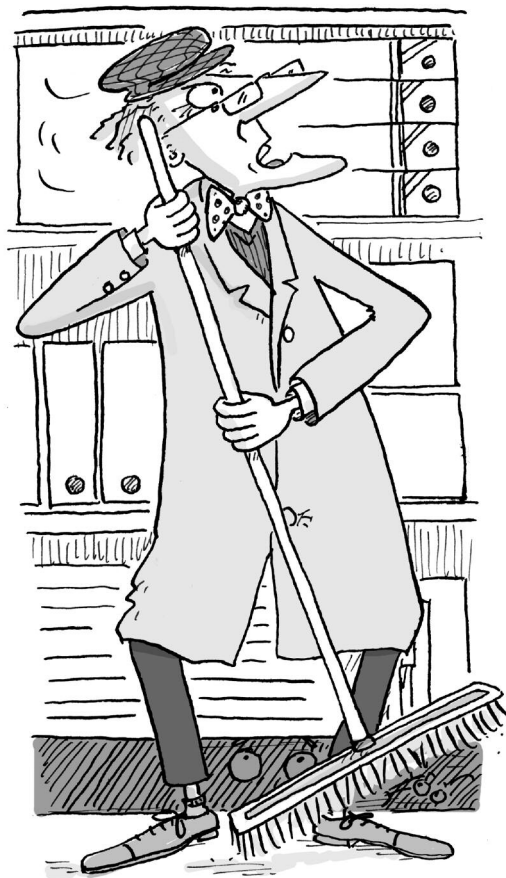
Flo opened the hatch a crack and peeked through, trying to see who the gruff voice belonged to.

‘Looks like a caretaker or something,’ she said.



It was indeed. Albert Sparrowhawk, the school caretaker, walked into the top floor corridor, carrying an outstretched broom for self-defence. He had just returned to school after a nasty bout of flu and was even grumpier than usual. He noticed the door of the stationery cupboard was ajar, marched over and swiftly pulled it open, half expecting to see someone hiding inside. He carefully looked around the walk-in cupboard.

Archie and Sparky powered down, desperate not to be discovered.



After a few tense moments, Mr Sparrowhawk gave a sigh.

‘Humph. Nobody here,’ he said to himself. He’d hoped to catch a naughty pupil up to no good. He slammed the door shut behind him.

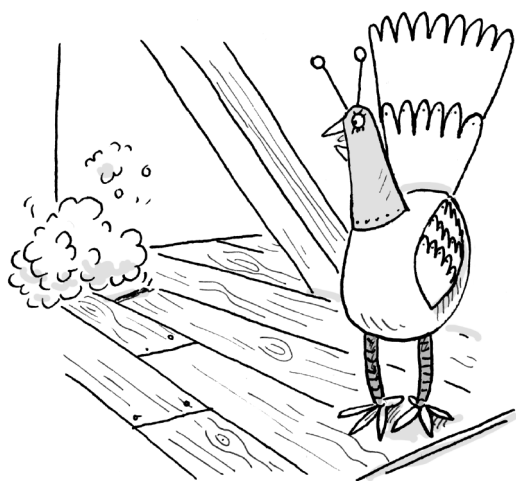
With the caretaker still wandering about on the landing, Archie and Sparky were stuck inside!

The caretaker's attention had switched to the messy landing. 'Look at the state of this floor. I dunno, I'm away for a couple of weeks and the place goes to the dogs,' he continued. 'I'll get this swept up, mend that handle on the door of 5A, then it's time for a cup of cocoa, lock the place up for the weekend, and off home. Glad I've got the weekend off.'

When Flo saw the caretaker move in her direction with his broom, she pulled the hatch shut and sat wondering how to rescue Archie and Sparky.

Just then, Archie powered up and spoke to her again. 'We were looking for a more secret route in and out of the attic – I've got an idea

how to get out of this cupboard without being spotted! Stay very still by the hatch, and don't move a gear.'



'But why . . . ?'
she began to ask.

Then she saw a
small puff of smoke
wafting up through
the attic floor.

Down in the
stationery
cupboard, Sparky

was using his laser eyes to cut a hole in the ceiling. When he'd got through three sides of a square, Archie used his extendable legs to rise up and stop the section of the ceiling clattering down while Sparky cut through the last side.

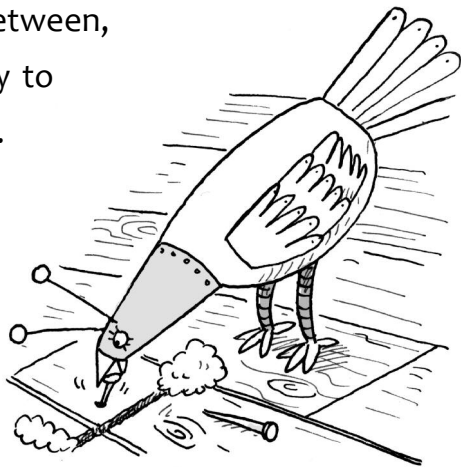
‘Careful how you aim your laser,’ said Archie, slightly concerned. ‘I’d rather like to stay in one piece.’

Sparky giggled.

When the hole was complete, Archie said to Flo, ‘All done down here. Can you sort out the floorboards up there?’

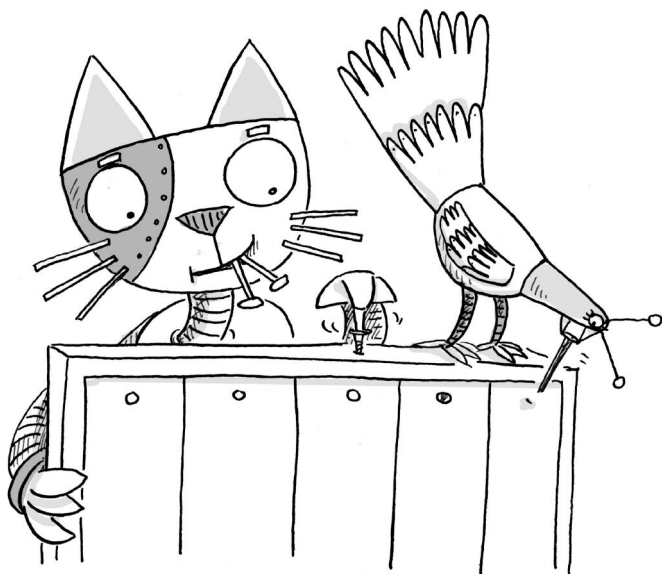
Using her powerful beak, Flo pulled out the nails in the floorboards that the smoke had risen between, and lifted them away to make a new opening.

‘Hi, Flo!’
whispered Archie,
his green eyes
glowing in the
darkness below.



Sparky sped up through the hole and parked himself in his favourite spot by the attic window, watching and waiting for the caretaker to leave.

Archie and Flo spent the rest of the evening making a door for the new attic exit and discussing the problem of Albert Sparrowhawk.



‘That was scary this evening,’ said Flo. ‘We were caught off-guard and almost spotted!’

Sparky nodded. ‘We thought we’d have the run of the school after home-time, but not any more. And we hoped we could sneak around while teachers and pupils were in class in the day, but the caretaker could be anywhere, at any time!’

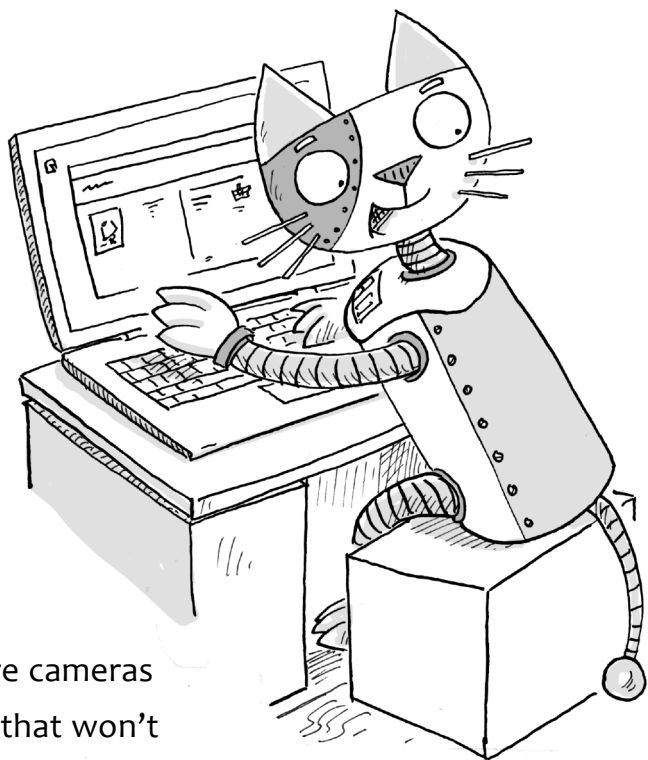
‘That caretaker is going to be popping up all over the place,’ wailed Flo.

‘What we need,’ said Archie, ‘is some sort of early-warning system to make sure we avoid him.’

‘Have we got anything we can use in the stuff we brought from the old house?’ asked Sparky.

‘Not really,’ said Archie. ‘We’ve only got the Professor’s old computer, a laptop, one camera, his notebooks and some spare odds and ends. We can scrape together a couple





more cameras
but that won't
be enough. I'll have to order some equipment
online, like I used to do for the Professor.'

'There's still some money left in his secret
supplies account – we can use that,' said Flo.

‘But how will we get our hands on it when it’s delivered?’ asked Sparky.

‘I’ll have to make sure it’s delivered this weekend, when nobody’s here.’ Archie paused. ‘And it will have to be signed for . . . but I can think of a way to deal with that,’ he said, and smiled mischievously.

