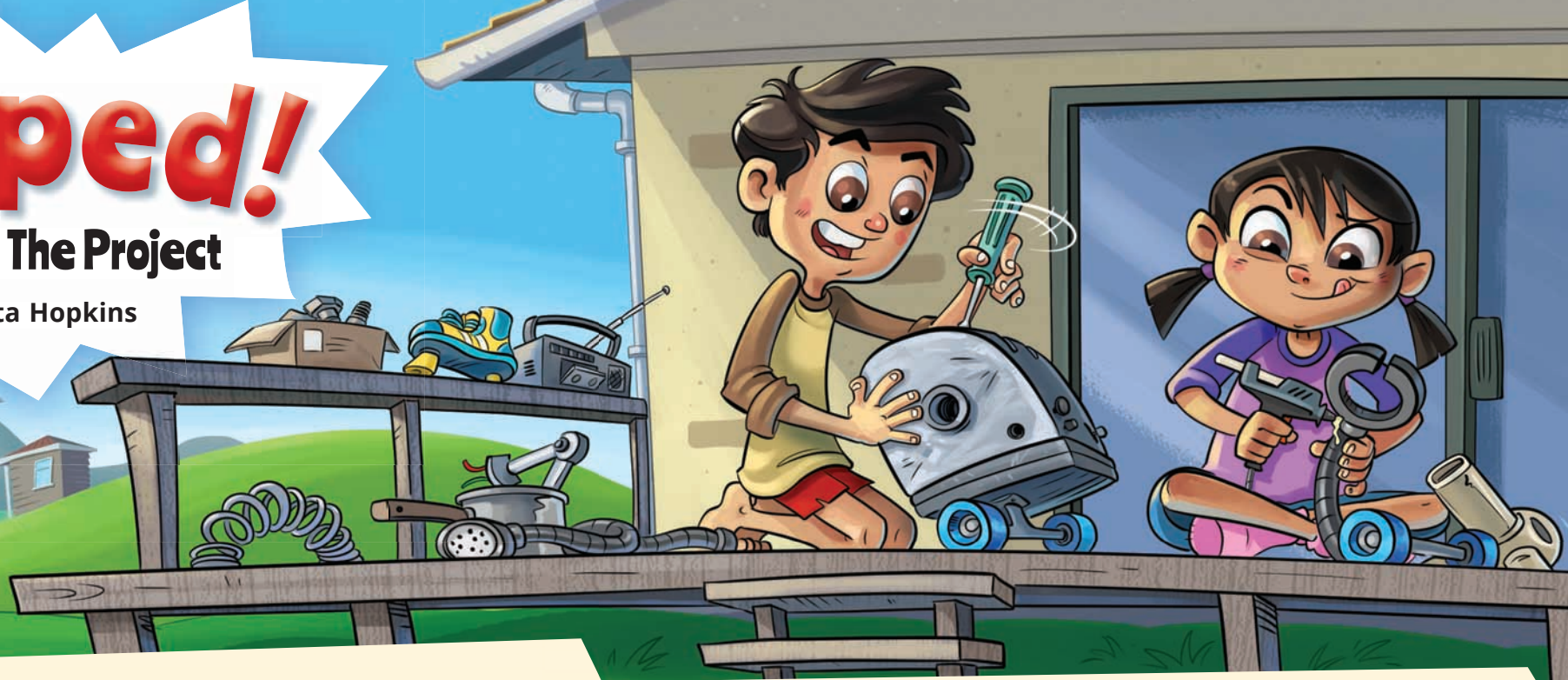


Zapped!

Chapter 1: The Project

by Renata Hopkins



Ana and Tai were building a robot for a school project.

"What shall we call it?" Ana asked.

"What about 'Tidy-bot'?" suggested Tai.

"Tidy-bot?" Ana giggled. It sounded funny and a teeny bit rude.

"Because it's going to do all our tidying up for us," explained Tai.

The twins had a list of jobs they had to do each week, and a robot helper was just what they needed.

"Maybe we should give it four arms," suggested Ana.

"Then it could do two things at once."

The twins looked at their robot. They had made it from an old toaster, a broken hairdryer, a pair of roller skates, and other bits of household junk they had found in the garage. It looked fantastic. There was just one small problem.

"I wish it worked," said Ana.

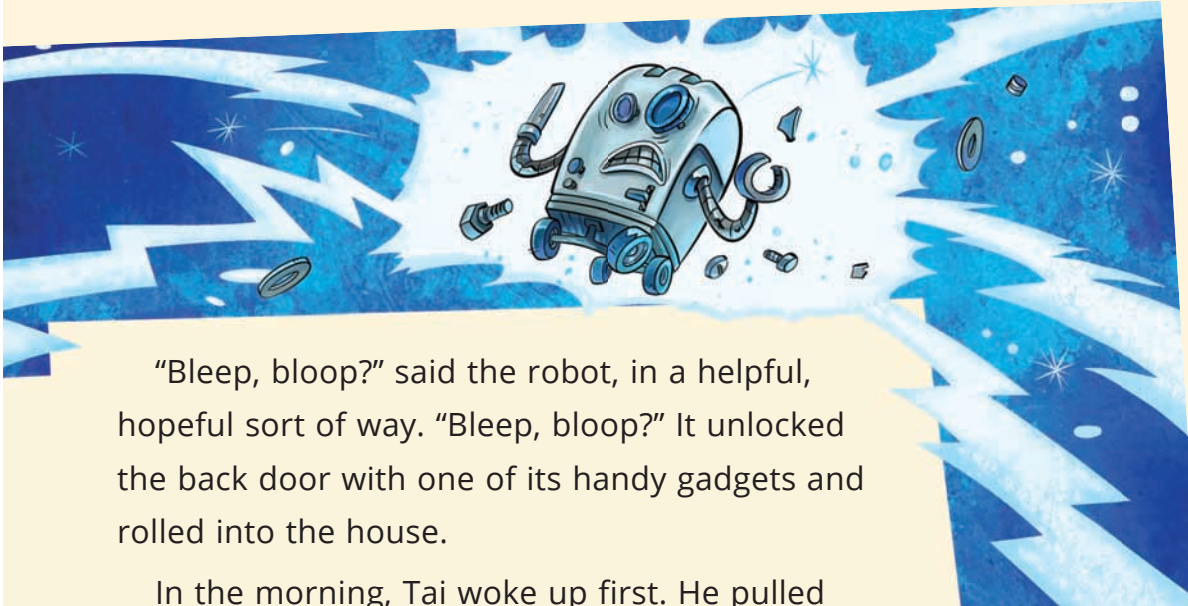
"Me too," said Tai.

Just then, they heard Mum calling.

"Kids! Come inside. You need to tidy your rooms before bed."

Ana and Tai sighed, at exactly the same time. They went inside, leaving the small, silent robot on the porch.

That night, a huge storm blew in. Tai and Ana could sleep through anything, so when lightning flashed and thunder boomed, they just dreamt of fireworks and volcanoes. They didn't see the lightning bolt hit the little robot. They didn't see the robot's bottle-top eyes spin or hear it start to squeak.



"Bleep, bloop?" said the robot, in a helpful, hopeful sort of way. "Bleep, bloop?" It unlocked the back door with one of its handy gadgets and rolled into the house.

In the morning, Tai woke up first. He pulled back the curtain and saw the rain. He jumped out of bed and rushed into Ana's room.

"Ana, it's raining! We left the robot outside. It might go rusty."

"Caterpillars," said Ana. She was still half asleep.

Tai tried again. "Ana! The robot's getting wet."

Ana sat up, yawning. "So what?" she grumbled.

"It's just a pile of old junk."

But she climbed out of bed and followed Tai to the porch. When they opened the back door, they both gasped. The robot was gone!

"Somebody's stolen it!" Tai wailed.

"Who would want it?" said Ana. "It doesn't even work."

Just then, the twins heard something – a bleeping noise, or maybe a blooping noise. They followed the sound to the kitchen. They pushed open the door and came face to face with their robot! It was holding a jar of peanut butter.

"Breakfast time," it said. "Bleep, bloop."

Usually Tai and Ana made a lot of noise. Now, they were very, very quiet.

"Toast?" asked the robot. "Or cereal? I am here to help."

Ana and Tai looked at each other.

"It works," they said, at exactly the same time.

"IT WORKS!" They did a crazy dance around the kitchen.



"Toast?" asked the robot again. "Or cereal?"

The twins had a lot of questions, but they were also quite hungry.

"Toast, please," said Tai.

"Cereal, please," said Ana.

"Bleep, bloop," said the robot. It rolled to the bench, took two slices of bread from the packet, and slotted them into its toaster head. Then it rolled to the pantry and grabbed a new bag of Rice Delights. The robot looked at the bag, puzzled.

"You have to rip it open," Ana explained.

"Rip!" said the robot. It gripped the bag and pulled – hard. Rice Delights exploded all over the kitchen!

"Uh-oh," said Tai and Ana, at exactly the same time. They looked at the clock.

"6.52," said Tai. "Mum and Dad will be up soon."

"Quick," said Ana. "Get the broom."

"You get it," said Tai.

"No, you get it," said Ana.

Meanwhile, the robot rolled to the fridge and opened the door.

"Milk?" it asked. Before Ana and Tai could stop it, the robot began to pour milk onto the Rice Delights – on the floor, on the bench, in Tai's hair!

"Stop!" shouted the twins.

Just then, smoke started coming out of the robot.

"Done," said the robot. Out popped two pieces of black toast.

"You mean 'burnt'," said Tai.

The robot wasn't listening. It was busy taking the lid off the peanut butter.

"Maybe you should give that to me," said Ana. She held out her hand. The robot scooped out some peanut butter and blobbed it onto Ana's hand.

"Not like that!" she shrieked.

Just then, the twins heard a door close and the shower start. Their mother was up.

"You have to hide!" said Tai. He rolled the robot out of the kitchen and into the laundry. Ana threw a towel over it.



“Stay there,” she said, “and be quiet.”

“Bleep, bloop,” whispered the robot.

Just then, the twins heard the roar of an angry mother.

“WHAT’S GOING ON IN HERE?”

Tai and Ana had a lot of cleaning up to do. It was half an hour before they could sneak away to see the robot. When they finally crept into the laundry, they both stopped dead in their tracks. The back door was open – and the robot had gone! Tidy-bot was on the loose!

“Yikes,” said Tai and Ana – at exactly the same time.

illustrations by Scott Pearson

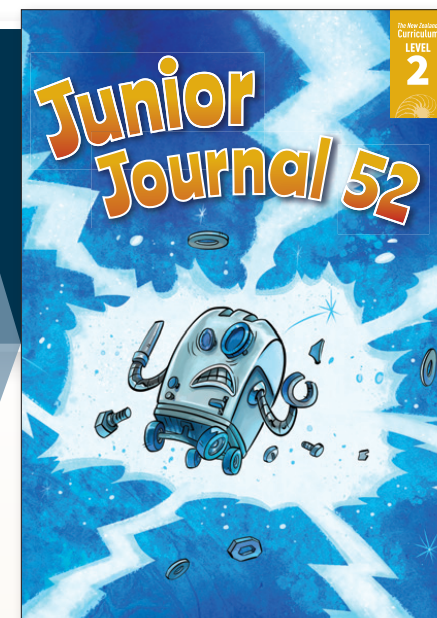
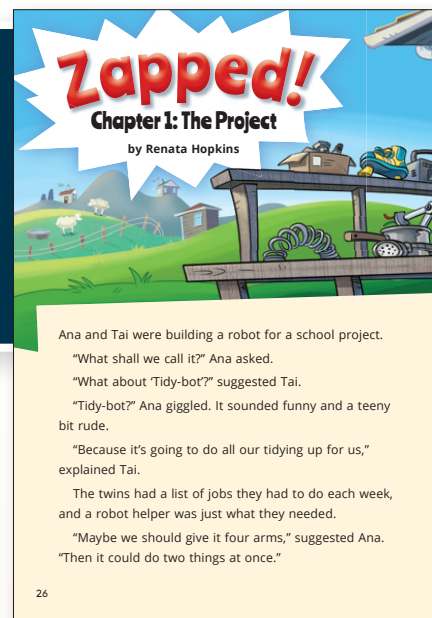


To be continued ...

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