

Zapped!

Chapter 4: Machine Mayhem

by Renata Hopkins

The story so far:

(You can find chapters 1–3
in *Junior Journals* 52–54.)



Tai and Ana made a robot for their school science fair. They called it “Tidy-Bot”. When the robot was hit by lightning, it came alive! Unfortunately, Tidy-Bot was not very good at following instructions, and the twins had to hide the robot after it caused lots of trouble. Then other machines around town started acting strangely. How much trouble would these crazy machines cause ...?

Tai and Ana had a problem. Tomorrow was the day of the school science fair.

“If Tidy does something crazy, we’ll get the blame,” Tai said. “Again.”

That morning, Tidy-Bot had tried to feed the cat. Only, the robot had emptied the tin of cat food into Dad’s shoe. It had been quite yucky to clean up.

“Maybe we should tell Miss Simpson that we didn’t finish our robot,” said Ana gloomily.

“If Tidy-Bot had an off switch, we wouldn’t have to worry,” Tai replied.

The twins looked at each other.

“What if ...”

“... there *is* one?”

Tidy-Bot was made from broken gadgets – with lots of buttons. Maybe one of them would work? After checking that their parents were busy, the twins ran to Ana’s room. They took Tidy-Bot out of the wardrobe.

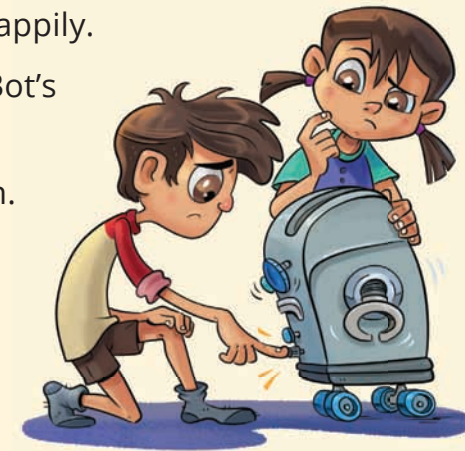
“Hey, Tidy,” said Ana. “Is it OK if we press your buttons?”

“Bleep, bloop,” said Tidy-Bot happily.

Tai pressed a button on Tidy-Bot’s toaster tummy. The little robot giggled. Ana tried another button. Tidy-Bot giggled louder. Then Tai pressed the button for making the toast pop up. At once, Tidy-Bot’s giggles faded, and the little robot slumped.

“Sleep mode!” said the twins, at exactly the same time. Ana pressed the button again, and Tidy-Bot popped upright.

“Bingo!” shouted the twins.



The next day, the whole school was busy setting up for the science fair. One class had built catapults that fired ping-pong balls. Another had made battery-powered cars that moved when a propeller spun round. There were lots of other robots too. They looked great, but they didn't really do anything.

"You're still the coolest, Tidy-Bot," Tai whispered to their sleeping robot.

"And we're going to prove it," Ana added.

They checked the sleep button on their robot's tummy one last time, just to be sure. Then, as their class started to leave the hall, Ana saw something strange. The caretaker had left the big electric steam mop in a corner. Ana thought she saw it jiggle. She nudged Tai.

"Hey, that machine moved."

Tai looked, but the steam mop just sat there. "Are you sure?" he asked. "We haven't seen any other weird machines since the mall."

The mop stayed completely still.

"I guess I must be seeing things," Ana said. She and Tai ran after their class.

After dinner, the family returned to school for the science fair. First, the twins showed Tidy-Bot to Mum and Dad.

"Wow!" said Dad. "This little beauty must have kept you busy."

Tai and Ana grinned. "That's for sure."

Next, the principal welcomed everyone. But halfway through her speech, the twins heard a familiar noise.

"Bleep, bloop!"

Tai and Ana spun round. A little girl was standing next to the robot table. She had just pushed Tidy-Bot's sleep button.

"Eek!" gasped Tai and Ana, at exactly the same time.

Tidy-Bot began rolling along the table.

"Wow, kids," said Mum. "You didn't say your robot could move!"

Tidy-Bot started to place the other robots in a neat row.

"Look," said another parent. "It's tidying up!"

"Tidy up," repeated Tidy-Bot. "Bleep, bloop!"

Everyone started to clap. Tai and Ana beamed. But just then, there was a loud noise. In the corner, the steam mop was jiggling and buzzing.

"Who turned that on?" said the bewildered principal.

"Wait," said Miss Simpson. "It's *not* turned on."

She headed for the mop. Whizzz! The mop took off towards the crowd. Brave Miss Simpson dived for it, but the mop zoomed past her.



Pandemonium broke out. Kids laughed, and adults shrieked. A group of parents tried to herd the mop into a corner, but it puffed out steam and raced towards the display tables.

Zap! Zap! Zap! Tiny lightning bolts shot out of the steam mop. They hit the robots, the cars, and the catapults. Then everything happened at once. The catapults fired. The cars

zoomed off the table and began speeding around the crowd. The robots started moving.

"We have to stop them!" Ana shouted to Tai.

The hall was in an uproar. People were tripping over cars, ducking ping-pong balls, and running from the mop.

"Ana," Tai shouted over the noise. "You know how Tidy-Bot sometimes gets things mixed up when we give him instructions?"

"Yeah, so?" Ana yelled back.

"Maybe we can confuse these machines the same way."

In a flash, Ana saw what Tai meant. She ran towards a group of zapped machines.

"Hey, you lot," she shouted. "This way!" Ana ducked right, and the machines charged after her.

"No – this way!" Tai called, going left. The machines swerved after him.

"Copy me," said Ana. She started to spin round. Three cars flipped over, and their propellers popped off.

"Now do this," said Tai, jumping up and down. Nuts and bolts went flying, and two robots toppled over.

Other kids joined in the crazy game of Simon Says.

"Roll over!"

"Cartwheel!"

"Stand on your head!"

More machines fizzled and conked out. But the steam mop was still zooming around the room. Suddenly, it turned and headed for the twins. At the same time, Tidy-Bot saw the pile of broken machines.

"Tidy up!" said the little robot, rolling towards the junk pile. It didn't see the speeding mop.

Wham! Tidy-Bot and the mop collided. They flew into the air and came down on top of the mechanical mess. There was a tremendous crackling, zapping noise. Then everything was still.

"Phew!" said all the kids and adults, at exactly the same time.



Later that night, Tai and Ana looked at the box they had brought home. It held a very untidy, very broken robot.

“Poor Tidy-Bot,” said Ana. “We’ll miss you.”

“It was fun,” agreed Tai. “But I won’t miss all the cleaning up.”

Ana nodded. “It’s way easier to do our own jobs.”

They went to brush their teeth.

“Do you think there could be more zapped machines out there?” Ana asked Tai.

“Who knows?” Tai replied. “We’ll have to keep our eyes open.”

“And our ears,” joked Ana. Tai grinned.

“BLEEP, BLOOP!” said the twins, at exactly the same time.

illustrations by Scott Pearson

The End

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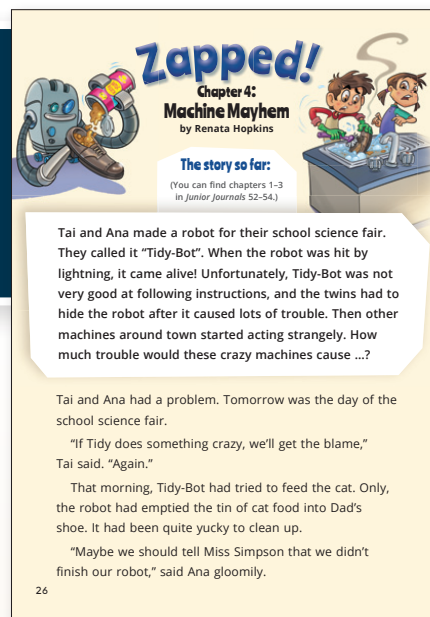
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