

Chapter 1

For Sale



‘Well, I guess that’s it,’ said Archie. ‘The Professor’s not coming back.’

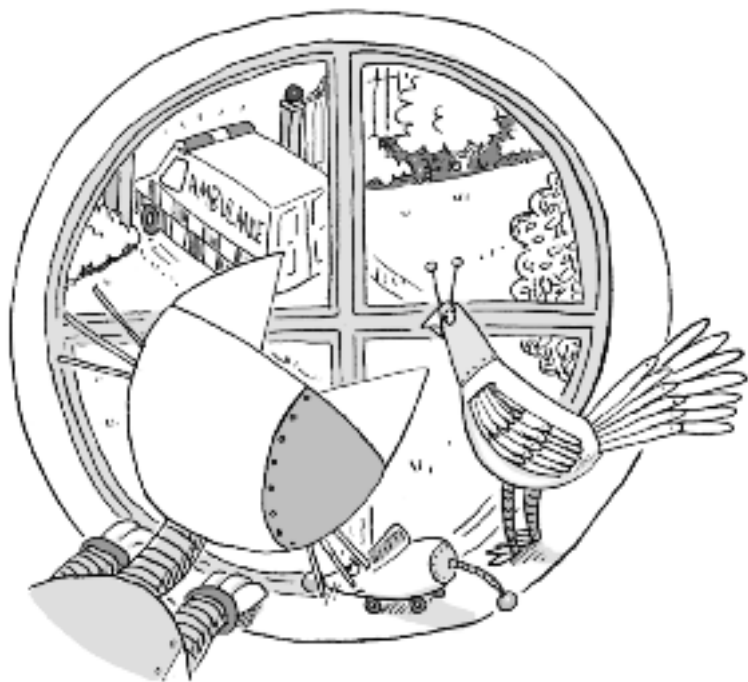
Archie the robot cat watched gloomily as a man wearing overalls attached a *For Sale* sign to the gatepost in front of the house. Archie’s robot companions – Flo the bird and Sparky the mouse – joined him at the attic window.



‘What are we going to do?’ asked Flo.

‘Good question,’ said Archie.

Archie, Flo and Sparky had been living alone in the big house ever since Professor McVitie had been taken away in an ambulance six weeks



before. He was very old and quite frail, and the longer he was away, the more their fears grew.

‘One thing I remember the Prof saying before he left,’ said Archie, ‘was that if he didn’t come back, we should check the emergency file he left on the computer for instructions.’

‘Well, what are we waiting for?’ said Flo, leading the way out of the attic and down to the Professor’s cluttered workshop in the basement. The three of them settled in front of the Professor’s computer.

‘Here it is,’ said Archie, and clicked on a folder named *Goodbye Petbots*.

The Professor’s friendly old face filled the screen. ‘Petbots,’ he began, ‘if you’re watching this, it looks like you’re on your own.’ He dabbed the corner of his eye with a handkerchief.





‘Oh, Professor,’ gasped Flo.

He went on. ‘I’ve put together some little films to show how you were built from start to finish, so that if anything goes wrong or you breakdown, you will be able to fix each other. I’ve made a folder with blueprints, wiring



diagrams, mechanics – everything you’ll need to help keep yourselves in good repair now I’m gone. All the details are in my notebooks and I’ve labelled all the boxes in the workshop that have spare parts.’ The Professor smiled broadly. ‘You’ve looked after me well, Petbots. Now it’s time to look after yourselves. Goodbye and good luck.’

The film clip ended.



Professor McVitie was an inventor. He’d often told the Petbots the story of how they came to be. The Professor had lived like a hermit in the big old house, and hardly ever went outside. He ordered everything he needed online – food, clothes, parts for his inventions – so there was



no real reason for him to leave the house anyway. Besides, the Professor felt that any time away from his inventing was a waste of time. After a while, though, he began to get lonely and he decided he needed some company.

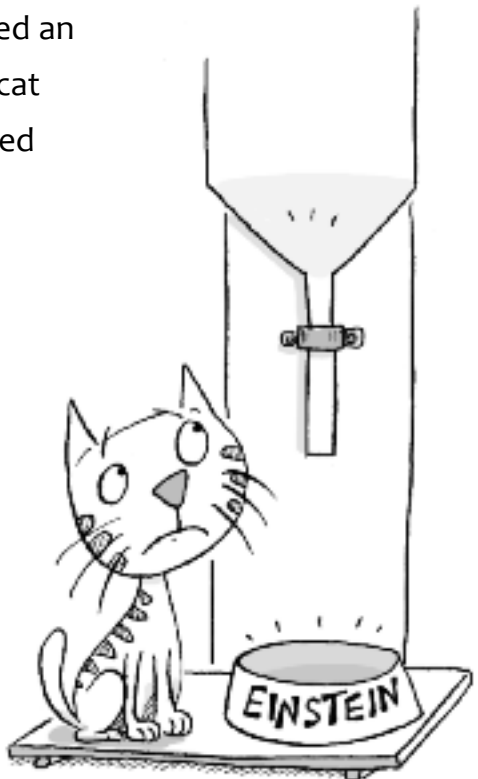


A dog would be out of question, of course – going for walks and throwing sticks wouldn't fit in with his busy inventing schedule – and he decided to get himself a cat instead, because cats are much more independent. So, on a

rare trip out of the house, the Professor visited the local cat home, picked out a likely candidate from the feline inhabitants, filled out the relevant forms and took his new companion home.

It didn't go well.

Although he invented an ingenious automated cat biscuit dispenser to feed his new friend, it only worked when he remembered to fill it. Einstein the cat therefore began to look for food elsewhere. He became very popular with the



neighbourhood children, spending more and more time in their houses and less and less in his own. Eventually he just moved out. The Professor didn't even notice until the neighbours

came to the house to bring Einstein back, but they all agreed that Einstein would be better off staying where he was.



‘If only there was a pet that could look after itself completely,’ said the Professor as he waved Einstein goodbye. ‘One that didn’t need feeding. One that could even help around the house . . . Wait a moment! That’s it!’ A brilliant idea flashed into the Professor’s mind. ‘Petbots!’

He stayed up all night working on plans and ideas, and by the morning, the first Petbot blueprint was finished.



Robot Cat 1. RC1 for short.

‘Fantastic!’ said the Professor. He’d found a way to combine his need for a companion with his skills as an inventor. He couldn’t have been happier.



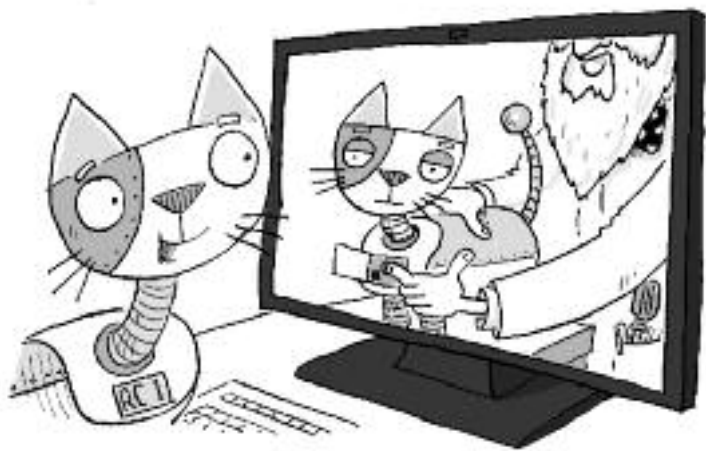
In the Professor’s workshop, the Petbots were looking at the computer files that the Professor had left. One folder was labelled, *Start Here* and Archie clicked it open.

‘That looks interesting,’ said Archie, opening a file called *Video Diaries*.

It was a time-lapse film showing Archie’s own construction – bolt by bolt, rivet by rivet, and circuit board by circuit board – made over a period of six weeks. When he was finally complete, the Professor flicked a switch and



Archie's eyes opened for the first time. To Archie, it felt a bit like watching himself being born.



‘Awesome!’ he said.

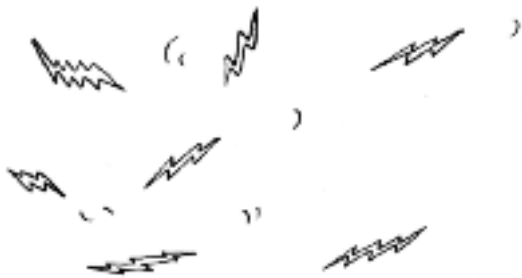
‘Welcome to the world, RC!’ said the Professor in the video clip. ‘Ha, sounds like Archie! Well, Archie, I’m the Professor. It’s lovely to meet you!’

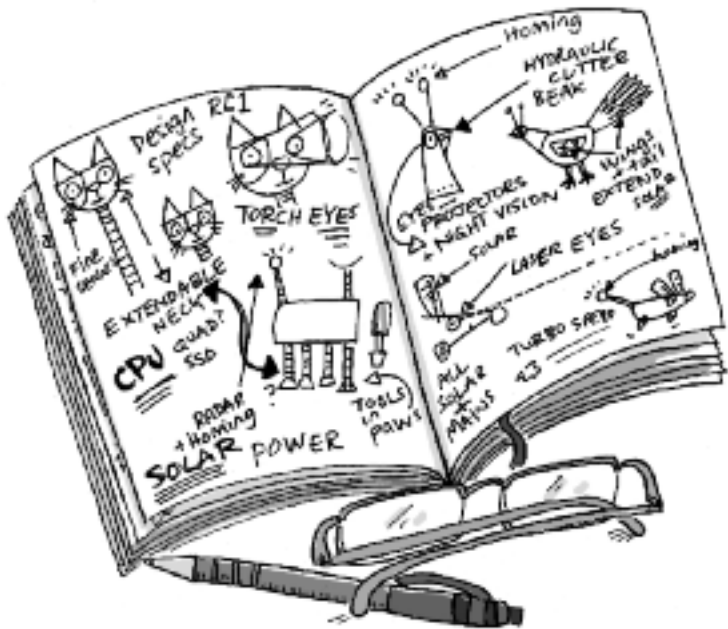




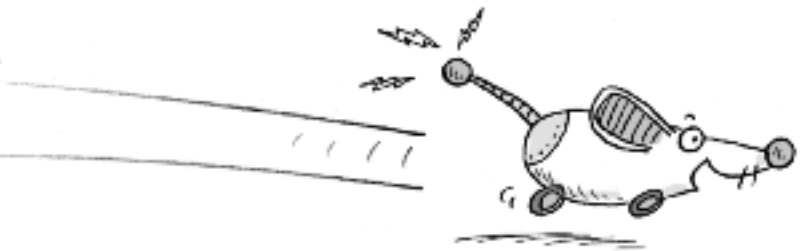
From that day, Archie had been the Professor's constant companion, and soon after he was joined by

Flo the bird – named after the Professor's favourite aunt – and Sparky the mouse, who got his name from the trail of sparks he left behind him when he was going at full speed. The Professor designed them all to have some special talents too.





Archie was in charge of the day-to-day running of the household, with the help of the others, of course. They did the washing, cleaning and cooking, and kept the Professor company when he was feeling lonely. He was very grateful to have

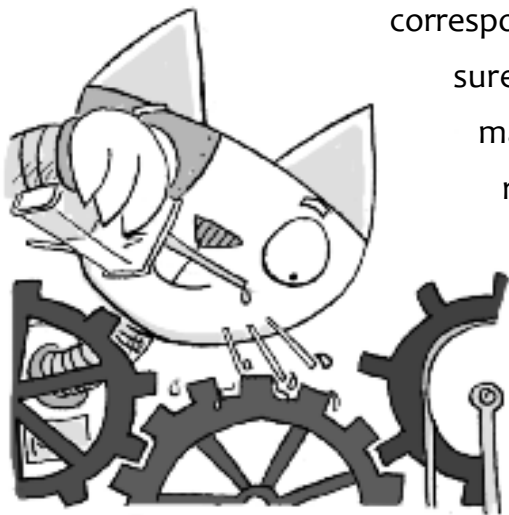


them looking after him, and they enjoyed making him happy. When he made a new invention, he would often show the Petbots first, and Archie even helped him out in the workshop now and then. He helped more and more as the Professor got older and his eyesight wasn't so good.

After the Professor went away, they kept up with their daily chores, making sure everything would be clean and tidy for him when he returned.

Archie monitored the Professor's email and correspondence and made sure the workshop machinery was all running smoothly.

He and Flo checked the food supplies,





and Flo and Sparky made sure the house was in good repair, clean and dust free. They worked together, just as they always had, keeping things as they always had been, but now there was no Professor to care for, the Petbots began to wonder what would happen next. Looking after the Professor and the house was one thing, but would they really be able to look after themselves and everything else without him?

It was clear everything was going to change.