



The Halloween Parade Problem

Cat and his friend Mouse couldn't wait to march in the town's Halloween parade on Saturday. "I'll wear my baseball uniform," said Cat.

Mouse grinned. "I'm almost done making my secret costume," he said. "Please come over on Friday to see it."

Friday morning, Cat ran next door to Mouse's house. He found his friend in the yard. Mouse waved hello, darted into his shed, and switched on a light bulb the size of a lima bean.

by Maggie Murphy
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Cat peered in. Dozens of cardboard boxes, their outsides blanketed with tinfoil, sat atop a worktable. Mouse had glued countless pieces of uncooked, painted pasta onto the boxes' silver surfaces to make screens, switches, dials, and buttons.

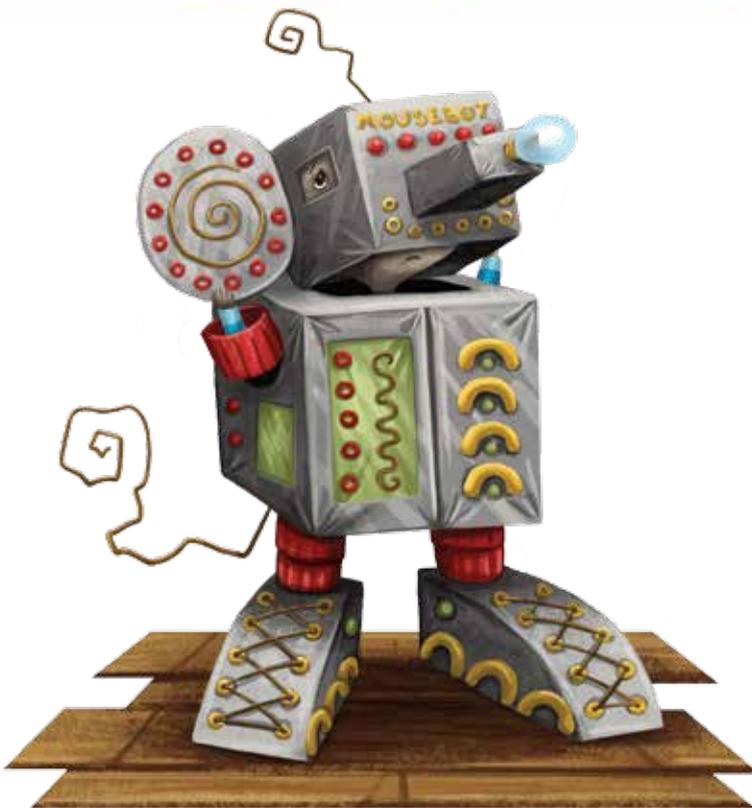
“What a fantastic robot costume!” cried Cat.

Mouse sighed. “I can’t wear it in the parade.”

“Why not?”

As if to answer the question, Mouse whisked on the costume and looked out through two square openings in the robot’s head. Two real eyes stared at Cat. Five macaroni eyes also seemed trained on him. Above them, like a single eyebrow, alphabet soup letters spelled: MOUSEBOT.

The robot’s shiny face smiled. Mouse’s furry face frowned.



“Mousebot, you’re amazing,” said Cat. “I don’t see the problem, buddy.”

“The problem is walking fast,” said Mouse. “Making this costume was lots of work and lots of fun. I gave all of my attention to painting pasta and such. When I tried on the boxes, I stood still in front of mirrors. Somehow, marching in the Halloween parade dropped right off my radar screen.” He spoke in Mousebot’s mechanical voice: “I. Must. Walk. Slowly.”

“Not all robots zip and skip,” said Cat, shrugging.

Mouse took three careful steps forward. “The parade will be over by the time I cover two feet of ground.”





“Let’s talk about uncovering two feet,” said Cat. “Consider taking off those clockwork robot shoes. They’re great, but they’re almost as long as mouse skis.”

With difficulty, Mouse tilted his head to see his wire shoelaces. “Oh. Cat. That. Just.”

“Won’t,” said Cat. “Be. The. Same.” He stared at his boxed-in friend. And he had an idea. “What if . . .” Cat shared his thoughts.

“Yes!” Mouse outsmiled Mousebot.

The next day, Cat arrived at the parade field wearing his slugger outfit and pulling a wagon. It was loaded with something half-hidden beneath a floppy baseball pennant. He lined up to march last, behind a unicorn who looked a little like Skunk and a superhero who looked a lot like Alligator.



Horns tooted. Onlookers applauded as the parade began. Cat whipped away the pennant, revealing an orange box with wide cutaway windows. Inside it sat Mousebot. Quickly, Cat taped signs to the wagon's sides. They said:
FREE ROBOT TOY ON GAME DAY!

Off Cat strode, with Mouse riding comfortably. Moments before the parade ended, Cat stopped the wagon. He placed the toy box on the grass, opened it, and pretended to wind up Mousebot.

The crowd cheered when the robot stood up. It waved to the audience and walked seven steps. Then it threw a tiny baseball to Cat, who made the catch. Cameras flashed.

“Thank. You. Cat,” said Mousebot. “You. Are. The. Best.” 🐜

