



FLAMINGO AND THE RAFT

By Tor Caldwell

In an old part of the town there's a huge scrapheap, protected by a high metal fence. It's full of lots of different things, waiting to be re-used or made into something else. During the day, people come and go and the scrapheap is busy with the noise of shouting and machinery. But at night, when everyone has left, the scrapheap really comes alive. Because that's when the NumBots come out of hiding.

All was silent in the scrapheap, the bots were sleeping peacefully as daytime drew to a close. The soft humming of the cables and coils filled the air, adding to the stillness of the twilight. On the far side of the scrapheap, past the cluster of makeshift homes, you would find the most peaceful place - The Scrapheap Lake. Not even the soft hum of the cables could reach this silent paradise.

In the middle of the lake was a small island, and in the middle of the island was an even smaller wooden birdhouse. This charming birdhouse belonged to FlamingoBot, who loved living in the middle of the island in the middle of the lake, but with every other bot on the mainland, it could get very lonely. Every night, Flamingo would wake up, stretch her wings, and roller skate straight to the bank of the lake, where all of her friends lived. She would always travel on one roller skate, her other leg bent elegantly at the knee.

On a particularly cold and wintry night, Flamingo was waking up to another night of roller skating and candy floss eating!

"Helloooo world!" She squawked across the lake. But only her own echo replied. She sighed as she set off for another journey to the mainland. This journey filled Flamingo with dread. Most Flamingos loved standing in water, but not FlamingoBot! The ice-cold water would freeze her legs until they became numb!

As soon as her long elegant legs slipped into the frosty lake, she flapped her wings manically, the water splashing and splurging around her as she squealed and squawked from the cold! She came hurtling towards the edge of the lake, coughing and spluttering, leaving behind her a trail of frothy bubbles.

As she neared the shore, she regained some self-control, found her feet and sashayed her way to RustyBot, who was perched on the grass, watching her frantic exit from the lake.

Rusty noticed her shiver as she dried her feathers next to him on the bank. "If only there was a way for you to get across the lake without getting so cold!"

Flamingo considered this whilst fastening her roller skate onto her standing leg.

"If only I could float!" She chuckled as she wobbled.

"A raft!" cried Rusty. "You need to build a raft!"

Yes, that was the perfect solution! There would be no more cold nights in the lake - Flamingo could drift across the water, relaxing whilst munching on candy-floss. She zipped off, straight to the scrapheap where she knew she would find something to build her raft with.

As she spiralled on her one roller skate, she almost collided with TractorBot.

Swerving at the last minute, she skidded to a halt. Tractor chortled. "Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"Sorry Tractor," Flamingo replied. "I'm building myself a raft so I'm on my way to find something to make it with!"

Tractor scratched his large head, "Make sure it's very strong - otherwise it might break!"

Thanking him for the advice, she began searching the scrapheap.

"Something strong, something strong, something strong...hmmmm...." She pulled out an old steel ironing board. "BINGO!"

She lined the edges with a set of baking trays and found a recycled plate she could use as the steering wheel. She was thrilled with her creation, but it was SO heavy that she had to get Tractor to come back and help her carry it to her friends at the lake.

"I did it, I did it, I did it!" Flamingo cheered as they approached Rusty. "I've built a raft!"

She hopped into her makeshift raft and Tractor gently pushed her onto the water. "Yiippeeeee" she cried as she glided across the surface of the lake. But as she drifted towards her house, her raft began to sink lower, and lower, and lower, until she was almost fully submerged below the water.

Flamingo's wings splashed around until her head popped above the water's surface. Eventually, she managed to stand, firmly placing her roller skate on the bed of the lake.

"My raft!" She cried. "Where did it go?"

Before turning to head back to the lake's edge, she watched through sad eyes as the last of her raft disappeared beneath the water, leaving behind a small smattering of bubbles.

"It's gone!" She squealed, once again, clambering back to the shore.

"Oh dear," said Tractor. "Maybe it was *too* strong!"

Rusty agreed, "perhaps you need a lighter material to build your raft."

Flamingo shook her feathers and poured the water out of her roller skate. "No bother - mistakes help us to improve!" she chirped. Despite the failed attempt, Flamingo was still determined to build her raft. "A lighter material - bingo!"

Off she skated back to the scrapheap to start her search for a new raft, her long neck winding into the gaps and cracks of the junk. She made her way through hundreds of pieces of recycled rubbish, tossing out bits she didn't need: toppled toasters and busted blenders.

"Too heavy..." she muttered as she heaved a television out of her way.

"Ouch! Too hot!" She yelped as she chucked an iron over her shoulder.

As she continued to sift through the pieces of scrap, she came across something brown, square, and extremely light...

Flamingo gasped with delight. "A cardboard box! Bingo!"

Needing a sail, she dug out an old piece of newspaper, which she attached to the box.

Bursting with excitement, she returned to the lake with her very light sailing raft.

"Look, look!" She called to Tractor and Rusty. "I have a new raft!"

The bots helped Flamingo onto the water and for a beautiful moment, she and the raft bobbed on the lake's surface...

"Bingo! I'm floaaaaa-" Flamingo gurgled and guzzled. She didn't get to finish her sentence as her beak filled with water.

"Nooooo!" Flamingo spluttered, as the cardboard raft slowly drooped into the water, then vanished beneath the surface. All that was left of the raft was a ripple of bubbles!

"It sank!".

Trying to get back to the dry shore, Flamingo flapped her wings in a frenzy. In between breaths she panted back to Rusty and Tractor.

"Nothing - is - working," she gasped.

"Don't give up Flamingo, you can do this!" Rusty beamed.

Flamingo plopped herself onto the bank of the lake, shaking her soaked feathers.

Extra focussed, she looked out across the lake, the ripples on the surface glistening in the moonlight. She watched as the water bobbed gently, until something floated into her eye line. What was that? Squinting, she realised it was a log! The cogs in Flamingo's mind whirred and whizzed.

"Bingo!" She yelped so loudly she made Tractor and Rusty jump! "Wood floats! I can build my raft with wood!"

Without waiting for a response, she zoomed off again on one leg. She searched the scrapheap hurriedly in her excitement and eventually found a wooden wardrobe door. She untangled it from the surrounding scrap, along with a wooden spoon which she would use as an oar.

On returning to the lake with her new raft, she began to worry. She'd already failed twice - would she be able to try again if she failed a third time?

With Rusty and Tractor watching on nervously, Flamingo sat on her raft, and holding her breath, she gently pushed herself into the water with her wooden spoon.

A few seconds passed, she teetered and tottered, but the raft remained afloat. Using her wooden spoon, she rowed around the lake, safe and dry!

"BINGO! I knew something would work eventually!" she cheered. "Now I can travel back and forth from my island without getting cold legs!".

After many tries and a few flops, Flamingo's determination paid off. Perched proudly atop of her sturdy raft, all winter she sailed across the lake wearing a triumphant grin upon her beak. Meanwhile her friends would cheer on from the shore, inspired by her perseverance.

Flamingo learned that every wobble and waver in her journey only made her stronger and her mistakes were stepping stones to success! And so, with each ripple beneath her raft, Flamingo enjoyed her success whilst riding the waves of her own possibilities. BINGO!