



NINJA AND THE DANCE SHOW

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.

Night had fallen on the scrapheap; every corner and avenue was lit up by the bright stars sparkling above. Down below, business was as usual for the NumBots. The sounds of recycled metal clanging, wires buzzing, and engines whirring meant the bots were awake and running their nightly errands.

Amongst the hustle and bustle, NinjaBot was silently shuffling through the scrapheap. So silently in fact, that the other bots didn't even notice him drift past. Making a hushed appearance was typical of Ninja, whose jet-black mask usually blended into the darkness of the night. This made it ever so startling for the other bots when he emerged out of thin air.

He stopped beside KittyBot and UnicornBot, who had gathered around a piece of rubber, pinned to what looked like an old freezer door. A list of names were scribbled down in oil.

"What are you looking at Kitty?" Ninja's question made Kitty jump!

"Ninja! I didn't see you there! Unicorn and I are looking at the sign up sheet for the Robo-Dancing Show. I've just put my name down.....I would love to show everyone my dancing skills." Kitty said.

Ninja turned to Unicorn. "What about you Unicorn? Are you going to enter the dance show?"

Unicorn giggled, then blushed. "Oh not me, I prefer singing to dancing, but I will definitely come and watch." she said, her eyes drifting off as she dreamed about singing on a big stage. Then she continued. "What about you Ninja? Are you signing up?" but as usual, Ninja had vanished into thin air! Whoooosh!

Inside the tatty wardrobe that he called home, Ninja loved to dance. Whenever he felt sad or troubled, he would switch on the old radio set he once found in the scrapheap and dance until the sun came up!

At bedtime, Ninja could hardly sleep, all he could think about was the show. When he closed his eyes, he was on stage, all of his friends clapping and cheering as he grooved and jived to the beat. The feeling was amazing.

But then he thought about how his friends had never seen him dance before and he couldn't help but worry...What would they think if he took to the stage? Would they laugh at him? What if he fell over and looked silly?

Tossing and turning in his bed, Ninja couldn't decide what to do. Eventually when he fell asleep, he dreamt about dancing on the moon and stars...his eyes lighting up with every turn.

The next night Ninja woke up with a smile on his face. His previous dream had made him feel so happy and warm inside. But no matter how hard he tried to hold onto that fuzzy, warm glow, he was unable to shake off his fear of performing in front of his friends.

His thoughts were interrupted by a creaky knock on the door. It was trusty Rusty! Rusty had his head screwed on and was full of helpful advice.

"Hey Ninja, I just signed up for the Robo-Dancing Show, do you have some extra oil to loosen my joints?"

"Of course, no problem", replied Ninja, passing Rusty a spare can of greasy oil.

"Thank you", Rusty grabbed the can with a loud creak, then turned around to leave, when Ninja stopped him.

"Rusty, wait! I...er...I...can I ask you a question?"

Rusty noticed Ninja was looking at the ground, twiddling his thumbs. He was clearly very deep in thought; Rusty could even see his cogs whirring! "What's up, Ninja? Is everything OK?" Rusty asked.

Ninja shuffled awkwardly. "Well...I guess...it's the Robo-Dancing Show...The thing is, I love dancing - it's my most favourite thing to do in the whole wide world! But...I only ever dance when I'm at home alone, never in front of other robots...or my friends. I'm scared they will laugh at me..."

Rusty put his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Ninja, we would love to see you dance! If you enjoy dancing, then why don't you give it a try?!"

Behind his mask, Ninja started to smile. He thought about his dream of dancing on the moon - and Rusty's words of encouragement. "OK I'll do it!" he cried, heading straight to the old freezer door to scribble his name beneath Rusty's.

In the nights leading up to the show, Ninja couldn't stop dancing. He whirled and twirled around his wardrobe, perfecting every step and turn. As each move became more and more familiar Ninja began to feel more confident. His fears of dancing in front of his friends slowly started to fade away.

Eventually, the night of the show arrived. A long line of bots wound around the scrapyard as they queued to buy their tickets from a battered and broken, red telephone box. Just ahead was a magnificent stage, made from an abandoned car bonnet. Dangling above was a string of car headlights, lighting up the stage so it dazzled against the backdrop of the night sky.

Rusty patted his friend on the back, "Good luck Ninja, you'll be great." Unicorn gave Ninja a big hug. "You're so brave for stepping up and giving it a go - I wish I was as brave as you!"

The bots took their place in the audience, except Rusty, who was performing first. He pulled out Ninja's large can of oil and began to spread it on his arms and legs. "Now I'm ready!" he called out.

Rusty had chosen to dance to his favourite type of music - heavy metal. When the sound of guitars and drums pierced the air, Rusty began creaking and crashing around the stage. The crowd cheered as he tumbled around, sometimes on the beat...sometimes missing the beat completely. Nobody seemed to care or notice! They applauded the passion of their friend, who finished his dance with a loud BANG as his creaky legs collapsed. Everyone went wild! All except Ninja, whose nerves had come rushing back as soon as the performance was over.

The lights on the car bonnet stage dimmed again, and the bots could just make out the outline of Kitty, who was poised centre-stage. A chorus of violins and cellos filled the scrapyard, and Kitty began to elegantly prance around the stage. Claws and paws pointed, Kitty performed the most perfect and breathtaking dance the bots had ever seen. By the end of her performance, most bots were in tears at the sheer beauty of her movements.

Sniff sniff. "I've never seen anything so beautiful" blubbered Unicorn, wiping a big tear from her cheek.

Ninja's stomach churned at the thought of going up next. "How do I follow that?" thought Ninja, as he nervously tiptoed onto the stage. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and pictured that he was at home in his wardrobe. "I love dancing and I'm going to give this my best try," he whispered to himself.

The music started and he let it sweep over him. Forgetting where he was, the cheers and clapping became background noise. He felt like he was floating as he glided across the stage, bopping and jamming to his favourite song, it was going well!

Then Ninja went for his grand finale - he leapt through the air. Wheels spinning and arms outstretched, he landed perfectly, and only then did he remember the large audience in front of him.

All around Ninja, his friends smiled and waved up at him, clattering, clapping, and crashing their robot parts together in admiration.

“Ninja, that was awesome!” cried Rusty. “We’re so proud of you!”

“We never knew you could dance!” cheered Unicorn. “I wish I could dance as well as you...”

Ninja had an enormous grin beneath his ninja mask; he had loved every moment, but most of all, he was proud of himself for facing his fears.

For days and weeks after, Ninja’s friends asked to see his dance again and again! Everytime he completed his grand finale, his friends would jump up and down in delight, crashing their body parts together in applause. As a result, Ninja’s eyes would sparkle as brightly as the moon and stars above him, just as they did in his dream.

SCRAPHEAP QUIZ

1. What colour is NinjaBot’s mask?
 - a. White
 - b. Black
 - c. Red

2. How did NinjaBot feel before the show? Why?

3. How did NinjaBot feel after the show? Why?

[Extra resource can be downloaded from <https://numbots.com/downloads-page/>]