



## UNICORN AND THE BIG RACE

*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.

It was a clear night in the scrapheap, a full moon cast a silver glow over the piles of recycled metal that the NumBots called home. A busy night lay ahead for the bots, who were waking up one by one to the distant sounds of metal clinking and clanking, and cables fizzing and hissing.

Beneath the moonlight, UnicornBot was lying on her back in the scrapheap, gazing up at the night sky whilst tucking into a large stash of marshmallows - her favourite of course. Along with marshmallows, Unicorn's biggest pleasure was the art of music. So much so that Unicorn was often heard before she was seen! Singing as much as she could, Unicorn found a song in everything and, as she lay with her marshmallows, she began humming along to the whir of the cables ahead. But all of a sudden, her gaze was broken by something shimmering in the darkness...What was that? Unicorn stopped singing and sat up.

There right ahead of her was the shiniest golden trophy she had ever seen! When she looked closer, she could see something written across the front. "The Great Scrapheap Botathon Champion". She gasped - this was the cup for the Botathon race which was taking place very soon! ~~The Botathon was a very long race - like a marathon - but for robots only!~~ She'd always wanted to take part but the race was an entire lap of the scrapyard, which was very far indeed.

Unicorn gazed at her toothy reflection in the sparkling cup, she liked the idea of winning something as shiny as the trophy in front of her, but in order to win it she would have to come up with a clever way to train...After all, the scrapyard was bigger than 10 playgrounds! She needed advice, and there was only one bot she was going to get it from. Unicorn headed straight to her friend RustyBot.

Unicorn found Rusty sitting in a crumbling bathtub, smearing his arms and legs in greasy oil.

"Hi Rusty" She said, sitting down next to him with a plonk. She began to talk at him frantically.

“I-want-to-enter-the-botathon-but-I’ve-never-had-to-practise-for-anything-like-it-before-what-do-I-do?” She took a large gasp of air and then smiled a big toothy grin.

Rusty laughed. “Unicorn, I know you can do this without my help! Surely you’ve had to practise for something before? How did you become so amazing at singing for example?”

Unicorn pondered this for a moment. Then she realised how she had passed her singing exams! “I practise little and often!” Everyday, Unicorn liked to sing one song as best and as loud as she could, then rest until the next night to allow her voice to recover. Once she had mastered a particular tune, she would move on to another song and so the routine began again.

“So all I need to do is practise a little bit each day!” Unicorn thanked Rusty and headed straight out to practise!

With 10 nights until the race, Unicorn would complete one lap each night, followed by a delicious lunch of squishy marshmallows. With every stride, nap, and marshmallow snack, Unicorn became more and more confident. After each lap, the scrapyard didn’t seem as enormous as she had initially thought.

In no time at all, the night of the race arrived. Tyres lined the dusty track around the scrapyard, with two disused lamp posts standing beside the starting line. A ragged curtain had been hung between the two posts with the words “The Great Scrapheap Botathon” painted across it in bright red.

After completing her stretches, she limbered up to the starting line where KittyBot was prancing on the spot, her tail twitching behind her. As Kitty turned to say hello to Unicorn, she made a very large crreeeeaaaakkkk.

“Kitty!” Unicorn gasped. “You’re creaking! You need to re-oil yourself!”

Kitty shook her head and brushed her whiskers. “Nonsense!” she replied. “I completed ten laps yesterday and I was absolutely fine! I even got a personal best! This will be a doddle for me.”

“Ten laps?” Unicorn repeated in shock. “In only one night? That’s a lot of miles in one night! When did you rest?”

“Well Unicorn, I’ve been very busy. I didn’t have time to practise until last night...I don’t need rest, I need that golden trophy. I must win it!” Kitty purred, hiding a yawn from Unicorn with her paw.

Unicorn had completed 10 laps just like Kitty...but not in one night! That didn’t sound like her little and often approach...

She had opened her mouth to reply, when a dark shadow swept over her from behind. Unicorn spun around and ended up face-to-face with NinjaBot. Ninja had a habit of appearing with very little notice. He crept up to the starting line without saying a word.

“Ninja? I didn’t know you liked racing! Are you taking part too?” Unicorn asked.

Unicorn wasn’t sure, but she thought she saw Ninja blush beneath his mask. He looked down at the ground as he said “I’m going to try...well...actually...I haven’t really practised...”

She smiled at her friend, revealing her big goofy teeth. She thought to herself “completing a whole lap of the scrapyard without any practice would be very difficult indeed” and it certainly didn’t sound like her little and often approach...but she didn’t want to put Ninja off, so instead she patted him on the shoulder, then she turned her focus to the race track ahead.

“Good luck everyone!” Unicorn called out to her friends. Ninja waved back weakly, whilst Kitty was too focused to respond. Rusty waved a chequered flag above his head, creaking as he did so.

“On your marks - get set - GO!” Rusty dropped the flag and the bots were off!

Kitty raced ahead, so far ahead in fact, that the others lost sight of her. Unicorn maintained a steady pace, singing out loud as she whizzed around the course.

When she turned the corner, she saw Ninja bent over the side of the track, panting heavily. “Ninja! What’s wrong?” she called out.

“Oh Unicorn, it’s no use. I’m so tired! I haven’t practised at all, I don’t know the course and now I have a flat tyre!” he replied.

And with that, Ninja disappeared to rest his sore joints. Unicorn continued to zip around the race course, singing loudly as she did so. Well over half way, Unicorn drew level with Kitty, who was making some very strange noises. Clunk. Clank. Creeeeek.

“Kitty, it really sounds like you need some oil...Look! You have all sorts of error codes!” Unicorn called out.

Kitty replied in between gasps for air. “Unicorn...I am....so tired...10 miles...in one night...is too much...my body feels like lead!”

“But Kitty, your body is made of lead!”

It was no good. Kitty fell away from the track to find herself a large meal of carbonara with extra carbon, and to have a long nap. A very long nap.

Unicorn scanned her surroundings. She was on her own - way out in front! She steadily galloped across the course, the breeze rushing through her rainbow-coloured mane. Finally she spotted a large crowd of bots - they were surrounding the Botathon finish line! Not only did she manage to complete the whole race; Unicorn came first, and with that won the sparkling, golden trophy! She celebrated; waving her hooves in the air, dry ice emerging from beneath her.

Rusty rushed up to her with a big smile. "You did it!" he cried. He handed her the enormous, golden trophy - it was just as shiny as it had been when she first laid eyes on it in the scrapheap. She held it up to her face and, like before, she saw her large, toothy grin smiling back at her.

As she beamed back at herself, she reflected on the night's race.

Ninja had not trained at all. That didn't work!

Kitty had crammed her 10 laps of practice into the night before the race. Well that definitely didn't work either!

Even though Unicorn had completed the same distance as Kitty, Unicorn had practised a little bit each night, leaving enough time to rest and relax in between! Now that DID work!

### **SCRAPHEAP QUIZ**

1. What is UnicornBot's favourite snack?

- a. Marshmallows
- b. Popcorn
- c. Ice-cream

2. Why was KittyBot unable to finish the race?

3. Can you think of something you could practise little and often?

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