

JACK ROBERTS AND THE ISLAND OF IDEAS

by

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(First two chapters)

Chapter 1

IDEAS DAY

The coast was clear. *Now* was the time for Jack to make his move. A pair of night vision goggles would've made his mission far easier to complete; instead, he had to fumble his way along a line of flowerpots perched on a shelf. A face mask would've been handy too; the earthy aroma of rotting roots was flying around his nostrils like a seagull circling for chips.

By the time he had reached the far corner of the greenhouse, Jack's vision had adjusted to the duskiess. The prize was now in sight. With wide eyes and shivering fingers, he delicately picked one of the chocolate bars growing on a small tree sitting on the floor inside a terracotta pot. The sapling had grown from a single bar planted the year before and sprinkled with the top-secret plant food he had invented. A few drops of this special solution once a day would make a tree grow from almost any food you could think of!

Suddenly, the security light flared into life and alerted Jack to a chilling silhouette standing in the doorway. The image of the approaching predator reflected around the glass panels like a giant kaleidoscope. Without hesitation, he delved into his pocket, pulled out a striped sweet and popped it in his mouth. Almost instantly, his skin changed to match his surroundings; he was now completely camouflaged - but the figure continued to advance closer! Jack took in a large nervous breath. As he did so, he accidentally sucked the sweet into the back of his throat which, in turn, made him cough violently. After a few splutters, he managed to spit it back out onto the stony floor. It rolled along, collecting small particles of dirt as it did so. There was no way he was

putting *that* back in his mouth! But, without the camouflage candy, he was now completely visible again. His mission had failed!

He gulped nervously.

“Jack! You know the rules. Hand me that chocolate!” scorned his Mum disappointedly, “You need to come back inside and eat your veggies before even *thinking* about pudding!”

What made things worse, was that he watched her nibble a piece of the chocolate before wrapping it in a tissue and stuffing it in her jeans pocket. It was naughty, because only the day before, she had told him that she was on a strict diet of soups and shakes.

Jack sighed and then half smiled to himself. It didn't *really* matter because none of this was real; he was actually staring out of the window blissfully unaware that Miss Peterson was attempting to teach 6P a spot of Spanish before the weekend. He was daydreaming about his inventions and what they *would* be like if they *were* real and how proud his Mum would be if she was still around.

Jack Roberts was the sort of boy who, one minute would sit and think, and the next be scrambling to find a pen....or crayons... even paint, whatever he could write or draw with, because Jack had an incredibly creative mind. Getting his thoughts down on paper wasn't always easy because his head worked faster than his fingers. If there was one thing he wanted more than anything in the entire world, apart from the chance to see his Mum for one final time, it was to be an inventor! And he didn't mind what types of inventions either; from gadgets to games, to comic book characters and cars. That said, he faced two problems;

1. He was only in Year Six

2. His drawings were always thrown into the bin at the end of term

Being in Year Six was only a minor stumbling block compared to not having copies of his work. After all, how could he be an inventor if he didn't have any inventions to show?

He had once plucked up the courage to confront Miss Peterson, but her answer was; "I'm very sorry Jack, we don't have space to keep *everything*".

Feeling dejected and not brave enough to do anything else about it, he never approached the subject again. He was dealt a further blow when a careers advisor had visited the school and suggested he look into something more achievable, such as a chef, an electrician or even working in the local boatyard like his Dad. This filled Jack with frustration, but also a determination which fuelled his ideas further.

The weekend whizzed by and it was soon back to the usual manic morning routine of a school day; this always involved Jack struggling to get his jumper and socks to feel right because the material made his teeth feel funny. His gloves were no better. He wished they were lined with silk so he didn't have the bobbly material scraping his dry skin. Then there was his sister, moaning the whole time about everything. Her complaints varied slightly on a daily basis but today they were about having goose bumps on her legs, getting her hair wet, wanting to live somewhere other than the West Coast of England, and always having to walk Jack to school.

"Why can't I have a lift?" yelled Izzy.

Dad's girlfriend, Sarah (who was already late for work and looked very irritated), had to remind her that she would be incredibly lazy to be chauffeured to school because you could get anywhere across town, on foot, in less than twenty minutes. Jack's school could actually be done in 4.36 minutes – Jack knew this because he'd timed it on the Smart Watch he got for his birthday six weeks ago. It was a cheap one from China but it did the job. He also knew that Izzy's school was only an extra 3.19 minutes which would be even quicker for her because year nine's have longer legs.

Despite the stressful start to the day, Jack perked up when he remembered what day it was. He always looked forward to Monday mornings because it was the day that Miss Peterson allowed the class to get their minds moving. Monday was "*Ideas Day*" (or as Jack called it, "*Monday Fun Day*"). After a weekend away from the classroom, Miss Peterson felt it was the best time to think of different ways of doing things. She understood that something as simple as an empty box, with the help of your imagination, could be transformed into absolutely ANYTHING!

The only downside to these lessons was that, next year they would end; at least for Jack anyway. Niggling in the back of his mind was the fact that he was heading for big school and lessons would be very different. Monday's would change, and Jack didn't like change.

As always, class 6P was buzzing with activity; painting, drawing and sticking, in what could only be described as a huge collision of creativity. Jack imagined this is what it would be like to work for Google, or even NASA!

Some kids were wearing old, oversized shirts, which had been donated by the parents to protect their uniforms and he thought it made them look like secret lab

technicians (except for a small number of boys who had to make-do by wearing ladies blouses which made them look like they belonged in an eccentric pop band).

Miss Peterson stapled a selection of the children's work onto the noticeboard, then made her way through the gaps between the desks looking over the shoulders of her pupils, occasionally asking questions and complementing on what she could see – everyone loved Miss Peterson. She stopped at Jack's desk and hovered just above his mound of messy hair which, like most mornings, he'd not bothered to comb.

“Very interesting” she said intriguingly.

Jack didn't respond. He wasn't being rude, he was just daydreaming again.

“Jack?” she called as she placed her hand on his shoulder.

This made him jump and he had to spend a split second to remember where he was. He didn't want a repeat of the previous week when he'd accidentally called Miss Peterson “*Mum*”.

“Oh I'm sorry Miss” Jack apologised “I was just thinking about stuff”.

“What's this?” she asked gently tapping one of his drawings.

“They're *Memory Goggles*! You see, every time you look at something, it gets stored in the brain, a bit like a computer. There's a scanner in the goggles that looks down your eyeballs at the part of the brain where those memories are stored. I looked it up over the weekend when thinking about my Mum....look, here's a map of where the memories travel.”

Miss Peterson's eyes lit up.

“Think of a memory and the goggles will get it for you!” he continued while pointing to the map of the brain “Older memories are stored here and for newer

memories, the goggles search here. They play them back in 3D and you can even download them!”

“Wow!” Miss Peterson acknowledged excitedly, then lowered her voice so that no one else could hear, “Listen, I’ve just heard about a competition to find the country’s next generation of inventors, how do you feel about entering? It would be great to get Port David Junior School on the map!”

Jack almost burst with excitement. Miss Peterson smiled.

“But there’s just one problem” he said with a frown.

He reached into his bag which was so large, he could quite easily fit inside it himself. “You see miss. I’m just not sure which piece of work to enter – I have so *many* ideas!”

Jack pulled out an enormous folder bursting with plans, papers and diagrams.

“I’ll take the lot and in return I’ll give you five merits!” Miss Peterson excitedly giggled. Then she assertively grabbed the folder and, with her other hand, picked up the drawing of the *Memory Goggles*.

Jack leaped out of his chair “But Miss Peterson! They are my *only* copies”

Just then Mr Simpson, the head teacher, appeared at the door. Old Man Simpson was nice enough, nobody knew how old he was but he’d taught Jack’s Dad and, according to reports, was ready to retire even then. By the smell of his breath, he hadn’t brushed his teeth since then either! There was even a secret school song which had been chanted in the playground for decades. It went:

“Coffee breath...

Coffee breath...

He breathes on all the girls,

He breathes on all the boys,

He breathes on everybody,

So they can't make a noise,

Coffee breath...

Coffee breath..."

It was surprising how long the ditty had survived the generations without him even catching wind of it. It was supposedly one of the school's best kept secrets (despite the fact that his breath didn't smell like coffee at all but, more like mouldy honey mixed with horse droppings).

"Mind if I have a word Lucy?" said Mr Simpson with a wink.

The class giggled because he always used Miss Peterson's first name.

"Of course Mr Simpson" she replied and they disappeared into the corridor together.

Jack didn't notice when she came back into the classroom. He was too busy scribbling down more ideas, spurred on by the thought of potentially winning the competition.

Chapter 2

JACK'S INVENTION

The crumbling paint on the outside walls, the pokey windows and the draughty fireplace gave Jack's house a bit of character. He wished it was slightly bigger and less spooky at night time but, on the whole, he was happy living there.

By 6pm, Sarah was in the bath singing along (badly) to old music, Jack was sat on a beanbag in the lounge reading a book called "*An Alien Lives In My Shed*" and Izzy was at the kitchen table doing girlie dances in front of her phone. She was meant to be doing her homework but decided not to because Dad had just, indirectly, said it was pointless. He'd told her; "I've never *ever* used algebra since I left school. They only teach it so you can help your own kids do *their* algebra homework".

After he'd shared his words of wisdom, he sat down to watch a program about building new cars from bits of old ones, whilst loudly sucking an out-of-date mint imperial. It was one of the many sweets Jack's Mum used to bring home from work, given to her by the people she looked after. Jack always refused to have one as he was sure that bits of fluff (or dried snotty tissue from an elderly person's pocket) might be stuck to them.

Jack's Mum had often complained about her job; mostly to do with the money and the hours but the people she cared for made it worthwhile and the sweets were an

added bonus. Jack once heard her say; “*that place will be the death of me*”. And it was, she had been taken far too young by a cruel disease passed on by one of the elderly residents. To many, she was seen as a hero (along with the countless others in her line of work), to Jack, she was his world and he constantly needed distractions to ease the pain of his loss. Coming up with crazy inventions helped - along with playing computer games, watching videos and, most recently, reading books.

Jack turned the page and read the next paragraph, which conveniently led him to the end of the chapter. He put the marker in place and closed it.

“Dad, can I borrow your phone to watch a few videos?”

“Don’t drop it” said his Dad handing it over “I know what you’re like”.

It was a blatant dig at Jack’s clumsiness but Jack had heard it a thousand times before so let the comment wash over his head. He carefully cradled the phone in one hand and launched YouTube with the other. His finger jabbed a video which had only been uploaded four hours before called; *Pranking My Folks With Fake Dog Poo On New Carpet*. His tummy fluttered as he heard his favourite American accent; “Hey guys, this is Zayn Hudson and welcome to my channel”.

At the last count, Zayn had created three hundred and seventy-nine videos and, so far, Jack’s favourite was where Zayn had secretly filled an old jam jar with orange juice and green food colouring. The murky concoction looked exactly the same as the dirty water used for rinsing paint brushes in art lessons. To his classmates disgust, he decided to drink it in front of them. They all thought Zayn was crazy for gulping down such a disgusting liquid but he never let on what the real ingredients were. Jack would have tried doing this trick himself at school but was scared he’d forget which jar had the orange juice inside and end up drinking the real dirty paint water instead. He also

wished he had a YouTube channel so he could sell various ‘merch’ (just like Zayn) and put the money towards getting his inventions made. Alas, Jack couldn’t even stand up in front of the classroom without getting wobbly knees and a dry throat, so didn’t want to risk the embarrassment.

“Remember to smash that ‘Like’ button and subscribe” giggled Zayn as the shaky footage showed his Mum about to berate him, while she inspected a pile of plastic poo on the new lounge carpet.

Jack let out a loud chortle. But then his attention was caught by the adverts over on his Dad’s TV programme which, for some reason, were louder than the main programme.

Mr Roberts pushed himself up off the sofa and announced “Back in a minute!”

Jack nodded, paused the phone and watched the TV with anticipation. At this time of year, the adverts always featured the latest toys, games and gadgets and the new ideas stirred up his passion for inventing.

First of all, there was an advert for a new board game.

“Play with the family this Christmas!” announced the voice from the TV speakers.

The object of the game was to roll the dice and move around the board picking up various cards. Each card featured a musical note which needed to be grouped together to make chords. Once you had a series of four chords, you could place them in the middle of the board, where the special computer chip inside each card would sound them out to create the winner’s song!

Jack loved playing board games with his family (despite Izzy getting stroppy if she couldn’t have the red counter) so was fixated on the screen right through to the

closing words of the advert; “*Buy before Christmas and it comes with a FREE air guitar!*”

The next advert should’ve made Jack feel even *more* excited (and mega proud) had it been in different circumstances. It was for an epic new ride at ‘Scream Theme World’ in Florida; one of the world’s biggest parks.

As the pictures whizzed across the screen, Jack’s eyes widened and he jumped up shouting; “That’s mine! Dad, that’s mine!”

He spun around to the empty sofa, he’d forgotten his Dad had nipped to the kitchen, or the toilet...or probably both. He sighed and turned back to the TV.

“What’s yours son?” boomed his Dads voice as he came back into the room.

Jack sprang back to life like a toy with new batteries and blurted out; “Dad! *The Z-z-zip* Roller Coaster, I just saw it on TV”.

“Wooo, slow down son” said his Dad, taken aback by Jack’s outburst.

“I designed it, at school, a few years ago. I did this wicked drawing of a new ride and it went up on the classroom wall. Then it was thrown away. Now the ride is going to open at *Scream Theme World*, I just saw the advert!”

“Oh Jack, I’m sure it’s just a coincidence” reassured his Dad.

Jack’s face turned from a look of disbelief to a look of anger, followed by a look of disappointment and then sadness. His eyes began to water.

“That’s mine, I swear it, I swear on Mum’s...”

“Don’t say it Jack...” scolded his Dad.

He was soon interrupted by Izzy who had overheard the conversation “There’s no way you would’ve invented a roller coaster, you don’t even like those *baby* rides outside supermarkets!”

“I did!” protested Jack “and I do, I mean...”.

“What’s all this noise?” barked Sarah as she rushed into the room.

“Jack says one of his inventions has just been on TV” explained Mr Roberts using his fingers as quotation marks.

“Oh!” said Sarah not quite knowing what to say.

“It probably just *looks* like his ride, but it obviously isn’t” he chuckled.

“He’s sooooo delusional” provoked Izzy.

Sarah, not having any children of her own and, being relatively new to the family thing, was a little more sympathetic “Leave him alone you two”.

Jack attempted to get a word in but his voice was lost amongst the babble.

“I’m just being honest” said his Dad.

“Well he is *fairly* talented” said Sarah in Jack’s defence.

“Not *that* talented” said Izzy.

“But he’s only eleven” pointed out their Dad.

“He *looks* like *seven*” sniped Izzy.

“STOP! I JUST WANT SOMEBODY TO LISTEN TO ME!” Jack screeched.

The room fell silent.

“I may be small but I can do BIG things!” he croaked. Then he sniffed, wiped his nose and raced upstairs.

“Awkward!” commented Izzy sarcastically.

“The weird thing is,” said Mr Roberts stroking his chin, “the same thing happened to me when *I* was his age. I was convinced I’d come up with the idea for *The Haunted House Hotels*, you know, those places where businesses send their staff on

team building weekends, and you get greeted at the door by a butler who looks like Uncle Pete?”

To be fair, Uncle Pete (Jack’s *Great* Uncle Pete) wasn’t the best looking man in the world. His bony arms always stuck out of the end of his sleeves because he struggled to find clothes to fit him and he always looked ill. He was a friendly chap though and useful at Halloween.

“The Haunted House Hotels? Your idea?” added Sarah “If only! We could’ve retired by now!”

Mr Roberts agreed with a small laugh and continued; “Hey, I must’ve just had the same idea at the same time as the big boys, just like Jack. He’s obviously a chip off the old block”.

Jack hid underneath his duvet; his eyes red, puffy and watery. Izzy decided to follow him – she revelled in any opportunity to tease him!

“Jack, you so did *not* invent the new ride at *Scream Theme World!*”

Jack, now feeling extremely tetchy, flicked the duvet from off his head and jumped out of bed to chase her but accidentally lost his balance and fell against a cupboard door. It sprung open and out fell a telescope, five hundred and twenty three Dragon Adventure Trading Cards (most were swapsies) and an old digital camera.

Jack’s face suddenly froze and he wiped away a tear “My camera! I remember, I took a photo of the drawing. I’ll prove it!”

“You took a photo of a drawing?” mocked Izzy.

Admittedly, it did sound silly, so he felt he needed to explain that he was just practicing with the camera in case he needed it in a hurry. After all, you never know

when you might spot something suspicious like a UFO passing your bedroom window. Mind you, the more he tried to explain, the sillier it made him sound.

“You’re as dotty as Auntie Dot” remarked Izzy.

Auntie Dot was Uncle Pete’s wife and was *always* doing and saying odd things; the family had countless anecdotal stories about her. She’d recently sent Jack a thank you card, thanking him for the thank you card he’d sent her in the first place, which was thanking her for his birthday present. She also once rang Uncle Pete from her mobile phone and, whilst in the middle of the conversation, panicked that she’d lost her phone. That was until Uncle Pete pointed out that she hadn’t lost her phone because she was in the middle of speaking to him on it! For reasons like that, she was known as Auntie “Dotty” Dot.

Jack scrambled over to where his camera had fallen on the floor and frantically tried to switch it on.

“Come on! Work you stupid thing!”

This made Izzy laugh once more.

“Try using a charger Einstein” she said sarcastically.

She’d learnt about Albert Einstein, and how intelligent he was, in a physics lesson and thought that, by using his name, it would make *herself* sound clever. But it didn’t.

“When I get this thing working, you’ll be sorry!” said Jack, hitting the camera in frustration.

“Yeah, I can’t wait to see the genius’ work. Mind you, being creative does run in the family”. Izzy's face was now smug.

Jack looked up from the camera, “What do you mean?”

“Oh I wrote a poem for a school project years ago and I got the head teacher’s award for it. It was inspired by you actually, it was called *My Brother Is A Monster*.... I wonder where it is?”

She dashed off to her bedroom to try and find it. Meanwhile, Jack’s mission was to hunt for the camera charger. Once he had this, he would have proof, because the photos on the camera would have the date digitally stamped on them. He looked everywhere, even under his mattress where he stashed some of the plans to his most precious and mind-blowing inventions.

Just then, another thought pinged into his head; "The memory card! I'll just take it out of the camera and put it in the computer - why didn't I think of that before?"

His messy bedroom looked like a giant toy-eating monster had sneezed the contents of its mouth all over the floor but, despite the mess, he spotted the laptop half sticking out from under his science kit. He raised the lid, pressed the power button and tried stuffing the fiddly memory card into the side of the machine.

Jack couldn’t believe it - it *didn't* fit! This was even more annoying than saving your biggest present till the end on Christmas Day, only to find it was a year’s supply of underwear.

He decided to spend the next hour trying to redraw the roller coaster, but he couldn’t get it looking as good as when he first drew it a few years before. Besides, without the photos, he couldn’t *prove* he was the actual inventor of the newest and best roller coaster ride in the whole wide world!

He lay on his bed to sulk once more. The rhythm of the pelting rain and the whistling wind screaming past his window sang him an enchanting song, sending him into a zombie-like trance as his eye lids grew heavier and finally into a deep sleep.

A short while later his Dad popped his head around the bedroom door to check that he was OK. In other circumstances he would've woken him because he hadn't cleaned his teeth, but he decided to be kind and not disturb him. Besides, Mr Roberts was enjoying listening to the sound of Jack murmuring random sentences such as; "*No, I prefer prawn cocktail flavour*" and, "*I like picking my nose*". Jack's Dad listened for a few minutes more, kissed him on the cheek and giggled to himself as he quietly closed the bedroom door, leaving him to sleep.

Jack woke up to the sudden noise of Izzy squealing like a chimpanzee down in the kitchen. She *always* made a noise when others were trying to sleep and this annoyed him. Selfishly, if *she* was awake, she thought the whole house should be. Jack then heard her thunderous footsteps running up the stairs and she came bounding into his room.

"No school today!" she announced.

"What?" asked Jack sleepily, "Is it Saturday already?"

He was slightly baffled by her statement *and* by the fact that he was still wearing his school uniform in bed, literally all of it; even down to his pair of mismatched socks.

"Take a look outside" said Izzy raising her eyebrows as if pointing them towards the window.

Jack pulled the cord to open the blind. He squinted and then flinched to dodge a mass of light streaming into the room, like a million torches which had been switched on right outside the window.

"Dad's just had a text message to say that both of our schools are closed because of the snow" Izzy said excitedly.

Jack's eyes readjusted to the light and, just for that moment, he'd forgotten about his roller coaster and camera from the night before. So, just for *that* moment, he became a little bit excited himself. It didn't snow as much in the winter as it used to, so today suddenly felt extra special.

"Oh, by the way, I couldn't find my poem" said Izzy whilst tapping the small plastic aquarium of Sea Monkeys sitting on Jack's shelf.

He looked at her confused.

"Y'know", she continued with an impatient glare, "*My Brother Is A Monster*....the one I told you about. Still, at least I've now got all day to look for it!"

She gave a silly laugh and left the room.

"Sisters are so annoying!" mumbled Jack.

Then, the previous evening's events came flooding back to him.

He looked around his room and spied his rocketship-shaped money box.

He had an idea.

"Yes!" he shouted triumphantly to himself.

His plan was to see how much he had saved and, either buy a new charger for his camera, or a memory card reader for his computer - depending on which he could find in the shops first. He grabbed his camera and bolted downstairs.

"Sarah, can I go out?" he asked as he rushed into the kitchen with his coat half on.

"Someone's excited for the snow" she replied "Of course you can but..."

"Thanks" interrupted Jack as he slunk out of the back door, being careful not to slip on the step.

"What about your breakfast? And your teeth?" called Sarah looking miffed. But her words just faded into the distance, he was so eager to leave, there was no time for a bowl of Brekkie Pops or egg and soldiers in his favourite volcano egg cup; the one which glowed red when he slotted his egg inside.

It was a slow trudge towards the town centre. Firstly along Truman Street, then passed the mysterious Folly Cottages; a row of six identical houses which, despite their immaculate appearance, always seemed unoccupied. Sure, there were curtains in the windows and even ornaments on the windowsills but, they just seemed lifeless and Jack couldn't remember a time when he saw anybody go in or come out. There was even an urban legend he'd overheard in the playground about six fishermen who'd once lived in the cottages, and how they'd all perished together, on their boat, in the great storm of 1975. After that, they had supposedly come back to watch over their belongings and haunt their properties to keep people away. Jack wasn't entirely convinced that the story was true but, out of curiosity, he always took a sneaky glance as he went by to try and catch a glimpse of any movement. Today was no different to usual though, not a soul in sight. After the sixth cottage he decided that, instead of taking the slushy main road, he would turn up Drury Hill - a steep and narrow cut through. The shops here were much smaller and old fashioned but they seemed more interesting to him which is why he preferred to go this way. Mind you, it meant he had to dodge the odd patch of yellow snow around the bases of the lamp posts because the early morning dog walkers also liked this route.

"I bet you don't get *that* in Narnia!" he chuckled to himself.

He passed ‘Papa Dom’s Indian Restaurant’, a small hardware store called ‘Nick’s Nacks’ and an antique clock shop appropriately called ‘The Second Hand’ (though Jack thought a better name would’ve been ‘Antique Clock Wise’). He had no interest in what they were selling, but he liked the magical window displays full of decorated trees, fake wrapped presents and twinkling fairy lights. But the Christmassy feeling was short-lived because, as Jack ascended further up the hill, the more treacherous the slippery pavement became. He felt like a spider attempting to climb out of the bath; moving his legs but getting nowhere. The arctic conditions (along with his knack of not always being able to control his bodily actions) soon got the better of him. He became more unstable and ended up nosediving into a pile of freshly laid snow. Izzy had once remarked that he was so clumsy, he could trip up in an empty room so he wasn’t surprised this was going to happen.

Jack pushed himself back up, checked that nobody saw him make a complete idiot of himself and used the nearby shop window as a mirror to make sure he looked brave enough to carry on. He was about to leave when, instead of looking *at* the shop window, he started to look *through* it. He couldn’t believe his eyes. Perched on a shelf in this small shop was a book which made him creep gradually closer to the glass. Clear as day, he could read the words on the front cover; “*My Brother Is A Monster*”!