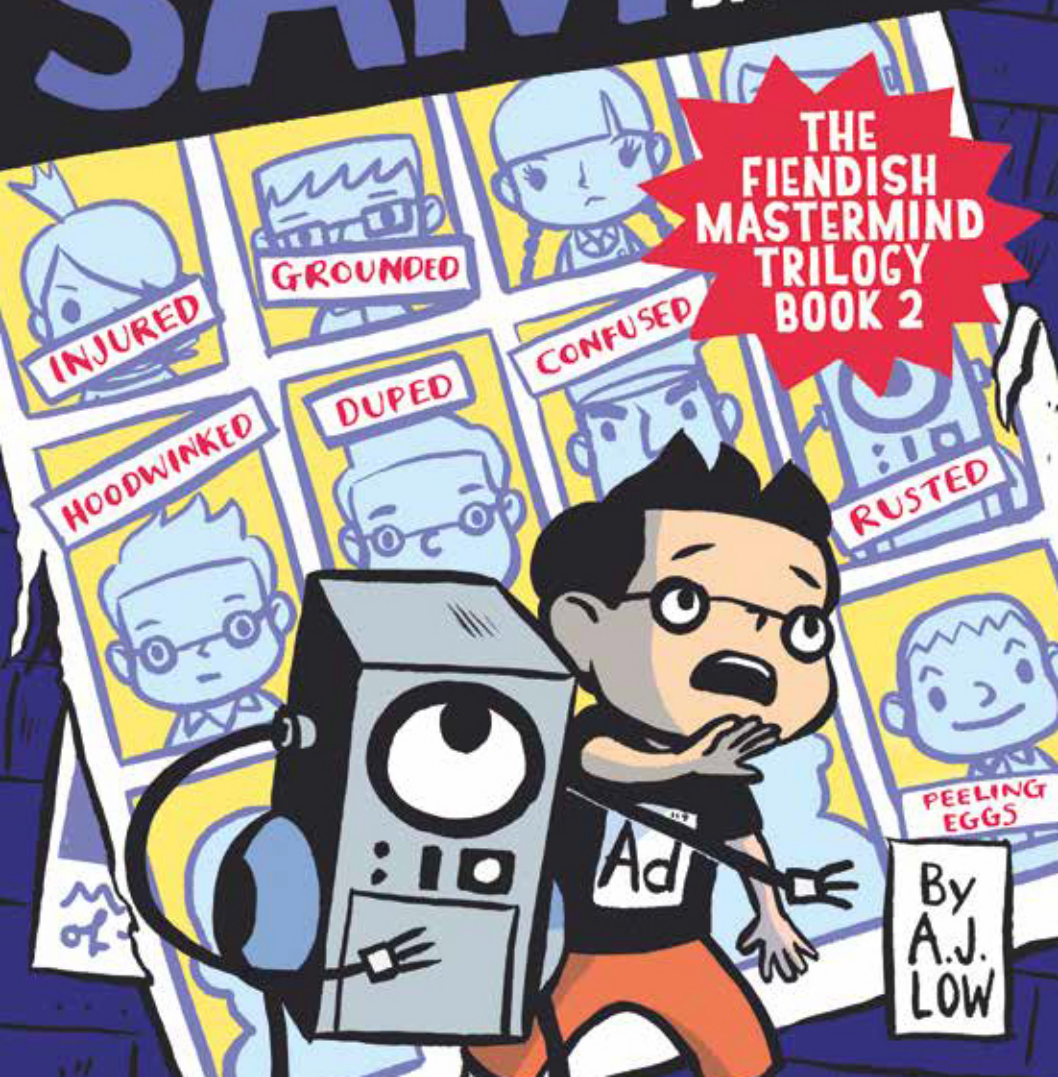


SHERLOCK SAM

and the
**STOLEN
SCRIPT** in
BALESTIER

THE
FIENDISH
MASTERMIND
TRILOGY
BOOK 2



By
A.J.
LOW

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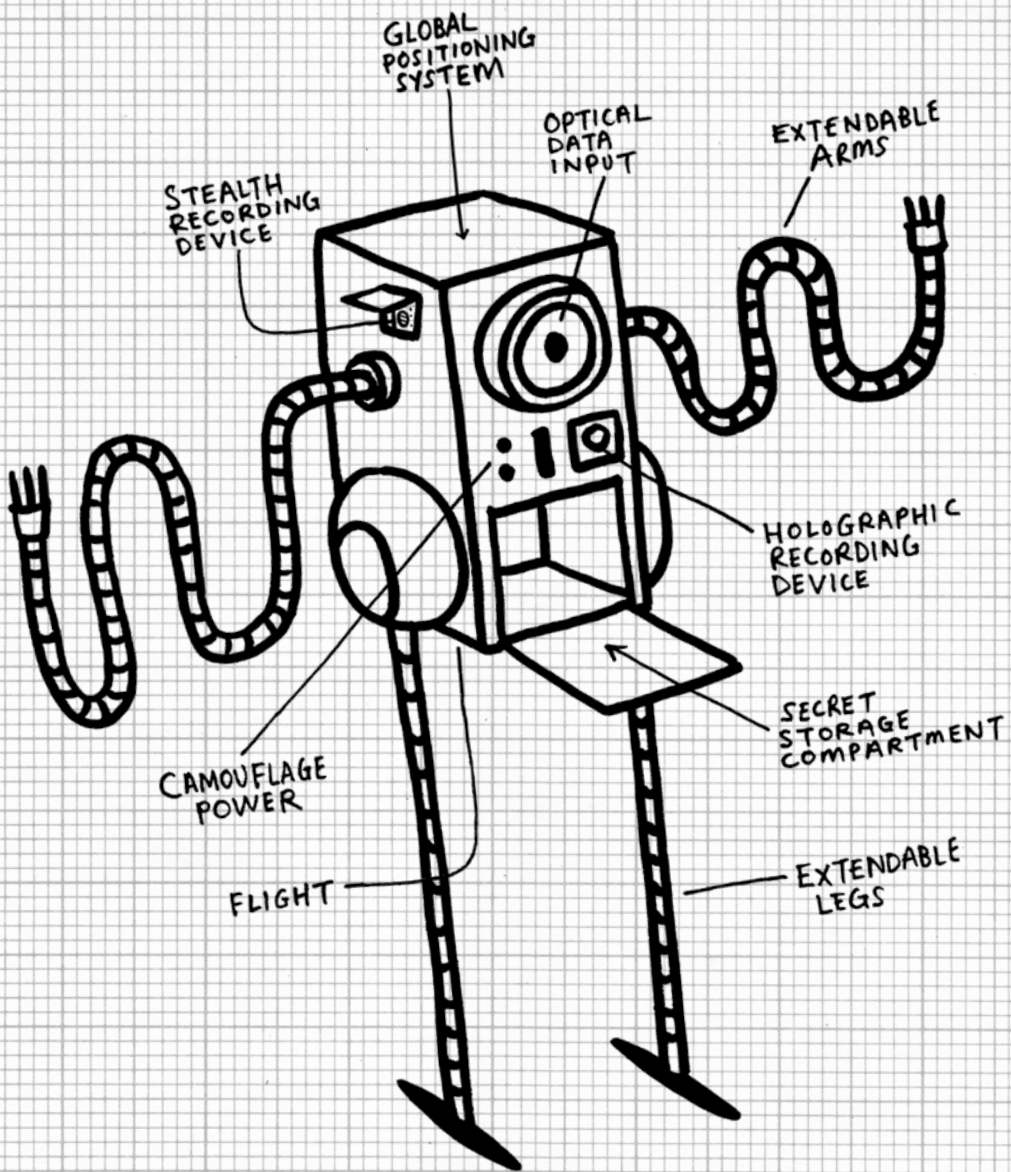
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CHAPTER ONE

"I-am-feeling-neglected," Watson said.

I was lying flat on my bed with my face buried in my pillow.

"Umm nog arglod to gib yob agee nou urgblaghs," I replied.

"Unfortunately-I-do-not-have-a-program-that-can-translate-that," Watson said as he walked over and pulled himself up on the bed to sit next to me.

I lifted my head and repeated, "I said, I'm

not allowed to give you any new upgrades. Dad and Mom said that it was my punishment for sneaking out to MacRitchie, remember?"

"I-was-referring-to-cleaning-my-not-so-secret-compartment," Watson said. "I-can-sense-crumbs. So-can-ants."

"Actually, there is something I've been meaning to ask you," I said, sitting up and looking at my robot. "When did you learn Malay?"

"I-do-not-understand-what-you-mean," Watson replied. He stretched his legs out and got off the bed.

"When we were solving the case of the vanished robot in Penang, you translated 'live long and prosper' from Malay into English. How did you know how to do that?"

"As-with-most-things-I-must-have-picked-it-up-from-watching-television," Watson said.

"I don't remember watching *Star Trek* in Malay in Penang—"

"Perhaps-you-installed-a-translation-program-in-me-and-forgot-because-you-were-distracted-by-a-cupcake," Watson continued as he walked across the room, over my scattered toys.

I was about to argue with my robot but I had to admit that there was some truth to what he was saying. I had, on more than one occasion, been distracted from my task at hand by cupcakes and other delicious baked goods, not to mention savoury delights. Although, for me to forget installing an entire translation program was—

"Hey, what's that sound?" I said, turning towards Watson.

The sound ceased abruptly.

"I-do-not-hear-anything," Watson said. By now, he was standing close to the bedroom door.

"It sounded like...vacuuming!" I yelled as I scrambled off the bed. "And it sounded like it

was coming from your stomach!" I pointed at his offending tummy accusingly.

Deciding to investigate further, I walked over to him and bent down to press my ear against Watson's metallic tummy but all I heard was his circuits quietly whirring.



"Are-you-delirious-from-lack-of-food?" Watson politely inquired. "Your-last-snack-was-a-whole-twenty-three-minutes-ago."

"No, I distinctly heard vacuuming coming

from your secret compartment," I said, straightening up and narrowing my eyes at my robot. "I know what vacuuming sounds like. It's what wakes me up every Sunday morning when Dad cleans the house."

Watson remained silent.

I had been suspicious for a while now, ever since I found out that Watson had been reading books on computer programming. Could it be possible that he had learned to upgrade his own systems? Could he have installed a self-vacuuming function? Could he vacuum my bed after a late night Khong Guan biscuit snack attack? Could he —

"Sam! Dinner!" Mom called out from the living room.

I dashed out the door that Watson conveniently held open, almost tripping over a toy robot. I knew Mom had made *nasi lemak* tonight and there was no way I was going to be late for that.

Instead of our usual dinner at the dining table, Mom had covered the living room table with old newspapers and laid out the *nasi lemak* dishes there. It was a special occasion and we were allowed to have dinner in front of the television—something that Mom usually disallowed because she said we were too messy. However, tonight was the mid-season finale for Singapore’s most popular local television show, *Masters of the Screen*, and Mom said that we could watch it *while* having dinner!

Wendy and Mom were already seated cross-legged on the floor. By the time Watson took his place next to me, I had already piled my plate high with *ikan bilis*, slices of fried omelette, three fried fish and two chicken wings. To top it all off, I had a heaping spoonful of *sambal belachan* that I was going to mix into the piping hot, fragrant *pandan* rice. Mom’s homemade *nasi lemak* mixed with her made-from-scratch

belachan was without rival.

“We’ll talk about it later,” I said to my robot, while taking a big spoonful of rice.

“The-*belachan*-oil-is-dripping-down-your-chin,” Watson replied.

“Gross, Sam,” my older sister Wendy said, wrinkling her nose. She was in Primary Five and a year older than me. She wanted to be an artist one day and her fingers were currently stained with paint from her art class. She got mad at me last week when I asked her to paint over the Blu-Tack stain on my wall.

Mom sighed and handed me a paper napkin. “Table manners, Sam,” she said.

“Is Dad working late again, Mom?” Wendy asked as she took a bite of her fried omelette.

I lowered my head and stared at my rice, the steam fogging up my glasses. Mom had assured me more than once that Dad was not missing family dinners because he was still mad at me. Dad was a genius scientist and

was just trying to get as much work done on his top-secret teleportation project before it got too busy at work. However, I knew that Dad was still quite disappointed with me for what happened in MacRitchie and I was worried that he didn't want to spend time with me. I missed having him around at dinnertime, especially when it was *nasi lemak* night. He would always sneak me an extra chicken wing or two.

"Dad said that Sam could have his share of chicken wings tonight," Mom said, smiling at me. "But just one extra, okay?"

I looked up at Mom and smiled slightly. I promised myself that I would be extra well-behaved so that Dad would trust me again.

"But he's coming on the school excursion tomorrow, right, Mom?" I asked, taking another spoonful of *sambal belachan* for my rice. Like Mom, I loved chili of all sorts. Nothing was too spicy for my Peranakan genes.

"Yes, of course he is. He's already taken leave from work," Mom said, as she pulled the bowl of *belachan* closer to her. It was too far for me to reach now without having to get up. Wendy snickered under her breath.

"The-probability-of-both-your-classes-winning-the-lucky-draw-to-go-for-the-excursion-is-astronomical," Watson said. He had already eaten his share of recycled batteries that he consumed as his power source.

"It's not astronomical, Watson," I corrected, gearing up to explain to my robot exactly how mathematical probabilities worked. "It's actually just—"

"Eat your chicken wing before it gets cold, Sam!" Wendy said. She gave me a forced smile that made me suspicious. If I didn't know any better, I would think that Wendy didn't want to learn more about mathematical probabilities. But that couldn't be; everyone loved mathematics—and science, too! If Dad

were here, he would listen to me, for sure.

One of the reasons why Wendy and I had been able to convince Mom that we should be allowed to watch *Masters of the Screen* while having dinner was because we said it was research. This happened about a week ago. Mom had given us her patented please-kids-do-you-think-I-was-born-yesterday look, but she was smiling slightly as she agreed to our request.

Wendy and I were rather stunned, to be honest. I whispered, "Wonder Siblings powers, activate!" My sister looked slightly confused, but bumped her fist against mine anyway. On hearing Mom's approval, Dad had muttered "ingenious" and earned himself a glare from her.

It was research because Wendy's Primary Five class and my Primary Four class had won the school lucky draw to visit the site where the series was being filmed. *Masters of*

the Screen was a drama series set in the 1950s about the booming film industry in Singapore, and featured actors playing real-life titans of golden age Malay cinema, like Run Run Shaw and P. Ramlee. Even though it was only the first season, everyone was already talking about how fantastic it was. It had everything: drama, action, comedy and even romance! In my opinion, the only thing it was lacking was superheroes. I made a note to mention this to the director if we met him.

"Jimmy, Nazhar and Eliza will be going as well, right?" Mom asked, looking at Wendy, who nodded in reply. Her mouth was full.

I wanted to add that my arch-nemesis, James Mok, would be there too as he was in my class, but I decided against it. I was trying not to bring up unpleasant memories. So instead I asked, "Auntie Kim Lian will be a chaperone too, right, Mom?"

Mom grinned widely and said, "Yes!

She's so excited about it. The actor that plays P. Ramlee is one of her favourites. When she learned that Dad and I would be chaperones, she immediately called me to ask if she could help too."

Auntie Kim Lian was Jimmy's grandma who looked after him while his mom was working. Jimmy had told me that his four sisters complained nonstop last night about not being able to attend. I also wondered if James had obtained the same permission that I did to bring his robot along, though James preferred to think of Moran as a servant rather than a friend. I had not seen the butler robot since the first time James had revealed him to us, after faking his own disappearance in MacRitchie.

"It's starting!" Wendy exclaimed. We all fell silent and watched the credits unfold as we continued to eat Mom's delicious dinner. The theme song was one of the most played songs on the radio these days, too.

After about ten minutes, a commercial came on and I said, "I wonder why that cleaning uncle was acting so suspicious."

"What cleaning uncle?" Mom asked.

"You mean the man who was sweeping the floor in the background at the start?" Wendy replied. "I think he's just an extra, Sam. Why would he be acting suspicious?"

"He kept looking at the camera and he seemed to be sweating a lot. He kept wiping his face," I continued. "I think he might actually have a bigger role to play than we think."

"I think you just miss being a detective," my sister said, before clapping her hands over her mouth. "Oops. Sorry, Sam, I didn't mean that."

I shrugged. There was no point in pretending that I wasn't allowed to investigate suspicious activities anymore. At least until Dad and Mom said otherwise.

"By the way, did I tell you guys that the director is actually an old university friend of

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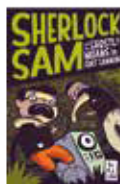


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