

SUPER SPIES



by Renata Hopkins
illustrated by Andrew Burdan

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Chapter One

Hide and Seek

“COMING, READY OR NOT!”

Manu dived behind a clump of bushes. He was glad he'd worn his green T-shirt instead of his yellow one. It was much better camouflage for hide and seek. Manu peered through a gap in the leaves. He saw Sophie creep into the clearing. She looked around, listening.



“Hey, Manu. Do you want to hear a joke?” She was being sneaky, trying to make him laugh so he would give himself away. As if! Manu kept quiet and still.

“Knock, knock,” called Sophie. She listened for any noises. When Manu stayed silent, she went on with the joke. “Who’s there? Canoe. Canoe who? Canoe come out now?”

Manu didn’t laugh. But he did make another loud noise, “HIC!”

“Ha! Found you!” The bushes shook, and Sophie’s grinning face appeared through the leaves.



Manu stood up. “Only because I hiccupped. I think I ate too many pancakes for breakfast. Uncle Mike’s pancakes are so good.” Manu was staying at Sophie’s farm for a whole week. Every year, the cousins had a special breakfast to celebrate the start of his holiday.

“HIC!”

“I know how to stop hiccups,” said Sophie. “Rub your tummy and pat your head.” Manu tried. It wasn’t easy. “Maybe the other way works better. Pat your tummy and rub your head.”

Manu tried again. “Hey, I think it’s working. The hiccups seem to have ... HIC!” Nope. They were still there. Manu tried holding his breath. He tried doing a handstand. He tried holding his breath *and* doing a handstand.

“Give me a fright,” Manu suggested. “That’s supposed to stop hiccups.”

“BOO!” shouted Sophie. Manu hiccupped. Sophie pulled a crazy zombie face. Manu hiccupped.

Suddenly Sophie froze. She pointed at Manu’s shoulder. “Don’t move,” she said. “Stay completely still.”

“Why? What is it?” shouted Manu.

“There’s a wētā on you!” Sophie said. “It’s crawling down your back.”

“Get it off!” Manu twisted around, but he couldn’t see anything.

Sophie tried not to laugh. “Just kidding,” she said. Manu glared. “Don’t get mad,” Sophie said. “You told me to scare you.”

“HIC!” Manu groaned. “It didn’t work anyway.”

Just then, the kids heard a strange sound.

“What the heck is that?” exclaimed Manu.

“Don’t ask me,” Sophie whispered. They heard the sound again.

HISSE! CRACKLE! SCREEEK!

Whatever it was, it was close by. Just on the other side of the trees.

* * *

HISS!

CRACKLE!

SCREEEK!



Chapter Two

Strange Noises

Sophie and Manu crept towards the sound. Manu wasn't sure, but he thought he heard voices under the other noises.

Suddenly, Sophie stopped. "Wait, I know what that is." She looked embarrassed. "I forgot I had it. Come on."

When they came out of the trees, Manu saw Sophie's backpack hanging on a fence post. Their hats and water bottles were in it. They'd left it there while they played hide and seek.

Sophie unzipped the backpack and pulled out a walkie-talkie radio. "Grandma gave me two for Christmas. She thought they'd be useful. Especially since we don't get cellphone reception everywhere on the farm." She handed it to Manu.

The radio had an aerial on one side and buttons to change the channel and the volume. There was also a big button on the other side. Sophie explained that you pushed it when you wanted to talk.



“Cool.” Manu turned the walkie-talkie over. It had a clip on the back so it could be hooked onto a belt. “Where’s the other one? If we both had walkie-talkies, we could play spies instead of hide and seek.”

“Mum has it,” Sophie said. “So we can keep in touch when I’m out on the farm.” She checked her watch. “It’ll be lunchtime soon. That’s probably why she called.”



Sophie took back the walkie-talkie and pushed the talk button. “This is Secret Agent Sophie, reporting to base. Come in base. Over.” The walkie-talkie made a bleeping sound when she let go of the talk button.

There was a short silence. Then the cousins heard a scratchy voice. “Hello, Secret Agent Sophie. This is the All-Powerful Ruler of the Universe speaking. Over.”

Sophie grinned. “Hi, Mum.” She passed the walkie-talkie to Manu.

He pressed the talk button. “Hi, Auntie Alex – Manu here. Over.” He paused. “Wait. Make that Secret Agent Manu.” The unit bleeped as he took his thumb off.

“How’s everything with you kids?”



“We’re good,” Manu reported. “We heard you calling before, but the walkie-talkie was in Sophie’s backpack. Over.”

“Nope, that wasn’t me,” said the scratchy voice. “Wait a second.” There was a pause. Then the radio hissed again. “Dad said he didn’t call, either.”

“But it switched on. And we heard someone talking.”

“You might have picked up someone talking on another radio,” Aunty Alex explained.

“HIC!”

Sophie took the walkie-talkie from Manu.
“It’s OK, Mum,” she said. “The only weird noise
we can hear now is Manu. He has the hiccups.”

Another burst of noise came from the walkie-
talkie. “Some lunch might help,” said Auntie Alex.
“Can you secret agents head back to base soon?
Over.”

“Copy that,” Sophie replied. “Over and out.”

* * *



Chapter Three

Who's Talking?

Sophie was about to put the walkie-talkie back in her backpack. Then she stopped. “Maybe I should carry it,” she said, “in case we hear something else.”

“Copy that,” Manu said. He liked the way it sounded. “What did Aunty Alex mean before? About us hearing someone else?”

Sophie held out the walkie-talkie. “See these channel buttons? It’s like choosing the channel on TV. We’re on channel fourteen at the moment, and Mum and Dad are too. That’s why we can talk to them. But if someone else was also using that channel, and they weren’t too far away, we might pick them up, too.”



“How close would they have to be?” Manu asked.

“I’ll show you.” Sophie picked up a stick and crouched down. She scratched some tree shapes into the dirt. “Let’s say that’s the forest.”

Manu found another stick. He crouched next to Sophie and drew two stick people by the trees.

“And that’s us.”

Next, Sophie drew two rectangles and added a triangle on top of one of them. “Here is our house and here’s the garage.” She added some more details to the map: paddocks, the neighbour’s farm, the main road.

“From here, the range is about this big,” explained Sophie. She drew a big circle with Manu’s stick figures in the middle. Her house was inside the circle. So was part of the next-door farm, part of the main road, and part of the forest. “Mum lets us play over here because we’re in range.”

Manu stared at the map. “So, that means the other radio we heard came from inside the circle too?” He felt a tingle of excitement.

Sophie nodded. “Otherwise, they’d be out of range, and we wouldn’t be able to pick up their signal.”

She handed Manu the walkie-talkie. “You wear it. I don’t have a belt.”



Manu started to clip the walkie-talkie on. Suddenly it crackled back to life. “Listen!” The cousins leant in close. Through the hissing static, they could hear voices.

“What are they saying?”

Manu strained to hear. “I don’t know. It sounds like a different language.”

“Let’s try to talk to them,” Sophie suggested.

Manu pushed the talk button. “Kia ora. This is Manu and Sophie. Can you hear us?” The cousins waited for a reply, but nothing happened.

No voices, no hissing – nothing.

“Maybe they didn’t want us to hear them,” Manu said. “I wonder who they are.”

“And *where* they are,” Sophie said.

She looked around, as if the mystery talkers might be hiding behind a tree. “We’d better keep our eyes peeled and our ears switched on.”

Manu clipped the walkie-talkie onto his belt. “Yes, because we’re spies.”

Sophie grinned. “Manu and Sophie – super spies!” She swung her backpack onto her shoulder. “Let’s go back to base and get our spy kits. We have a mystery to solve.”

* * *



Chapter Four

Spy Kits

Manu ate the last bite of his sandwich. He hadn't hiccupped for ages. Sophie had finished her lunch and was writing in a notebook.

Manu leant over to look. She was writing a list.



“A map?” asked Manu.

“Yes, like the one we made in the forest this morning,” said Sophie. “So we can keep track of where we’ve searched. I’ll get some paper.”

“What are you doing?” asked Uncle Mike.

“We heard someone else on the walkie-talkie this morning,” Manu explained. “We’re spies and we’re going to try to track them down, so we need a map.”

Uncle Mike nodded. “Good idea,” he said.

Together, the cousins drew some trees, Sophie’s house, the paddocks, the neighbour’s farm, and the main road. Manu marked a cross by the trees.

“That’s where we were this morning when we heard the walkie-talkie.”

“The farm manager next door has a two-way radio on her quad bike,” said Aunty Alex. “I bet that’s who you heard.”

“No, it sounded like a different language. It must have been someone else,” Sophie replied. “Or *something* else.” She started to draw a UFO on the map. “Like aliens.”

Aunty Alex laughed. “Why would aliens land on our farm?”

“I don’t know. Maybe they like sheep.”

“Don’t worry, Aunty,” Manu said. “We’ll solve the mystery.” He looked at Sophie’s list. “We need some cool gadgets,” he said. “Like infra-red laser goggles.”



“You could take our old binoculars,” suggested Uncle Mike. “They don’t use lasers, but they’d be handy in a spy kit. I’m not sure where they are, though. Have a look through the drawers.”

“Awesome!”

Sophie wrote “binoculars” on her list. It was quite hard to spell.

Manu felt something nuzzle his hand. He looked down and saw Sophie's old sheepdog, Possum. She wagged her tail and looked up at him hopefully. Manu stroked the dog's soft ears.

"Sorry, Possum," he said. "My sandwich is all gone."

"You could take her with you," said Aunty Alex. "She could be your sniffer dog."

"Cool," said Manu. "I didn't know Possum was a sniffer dog."

His aunty laughed. "She's not. But she's pretty good at sniffing out leftovers."



The phone rang in the hall and Aunty Alex went to answer it. Sophie started to hunt for the binoculars. “You look in those drawers,” she told Manu. “I’ll look in the cupboards.”

The first drawer that Manu opened had lots of interesting things in it: a yoyo with a broken string, a ball of rubber bands, a paper fan. He kept looking.



“I don’t mind you two playing a game,” Uncle Mike told Sophie and Manu. “But you need to be sensible, OK?”

“Yes, Dad. We know the rules,” Sophie promised. She tried to copy her dad’s deep voice. “Stay together. Don’t go past the fifth marker post in the forest.”

Manu joined in. “Close all the farm gates. Wear your pōtae in the sun.”

“Top marks for listening, secret agents.”

Aunty Alex came back in. “That was Jeanette from up the road. Munchkin got out of her pen again.”

“Have they looked for her at the school?” asked Uncle Mike. “That’s where they found her last time. She’d eaten all the silverbeet in the community garden.”

Manu was only half listening. He’d just found the binoculars in the drawer. “Check these out.” He showed Sophie.

“Nice! And look what I’ve found.” She held up a magnifying glass. “Now we can look at things close up *and* far away.”

Aunty Alex was pouring two cups of coffee. “Did you kids hear what we said just now?”

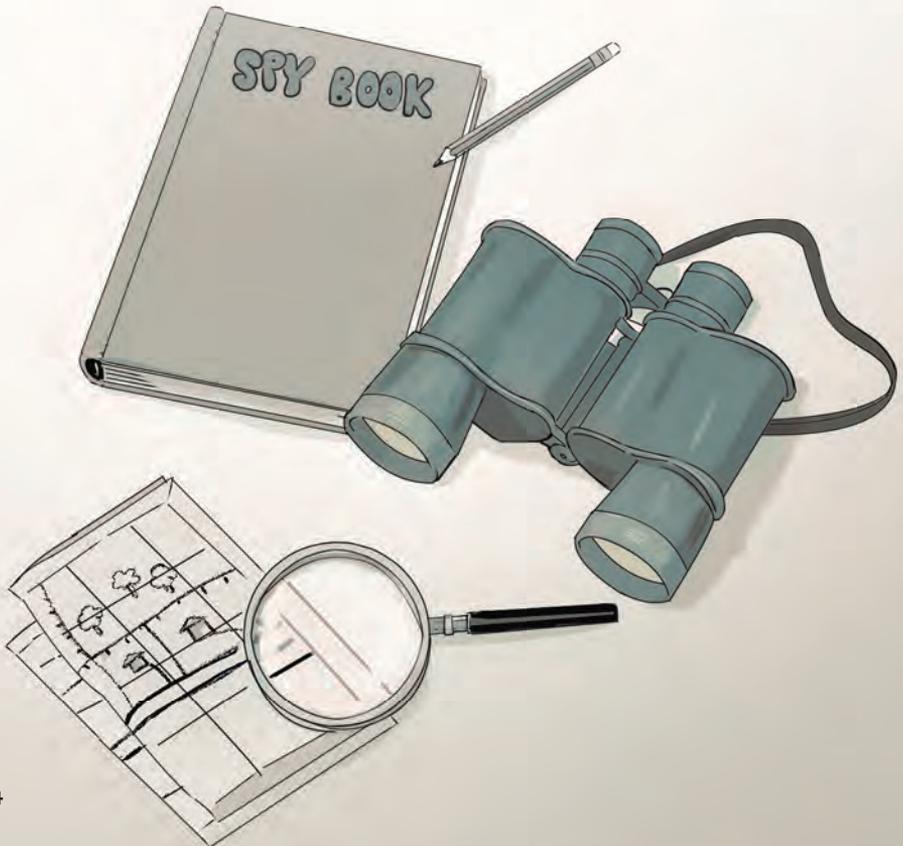


Sophie and Manu gave her a thumbs-up.
“Listening is one of our special spy skills,” Manu told her.

Sophie put the spy gadgets in her backpack. She went to the pantry and found some muesli bars and apples. “Ready, Agent Manu?”

“Ready,” said Manu. “Are you ready, Agent Possum?” Possum wagged her tail. “Then let’s go crack this case!”

* * *



Chapter Five

On the Trail

Sophie and Manu had been spying for nearly an hour. Their walkie-talkie had switched on once, but it had just been Uncle Mike checking in. They hadn't heard any more mysterious voices. They hadn't spotted any aliens. They'd only heard sheep bleating and birds chirping. They tried to get Possum to pick up a scent, but the old dog was more interested in snoozing than sniffing out clues.

Suddenly, Manu stopped walking. "Hey, look." He pointed to a shape in the dirt. "Pass the magnifying glass."

Sophie got it out of her backpack. Manu took it and crouched down. "Check this out."

There was a footprint in the dust. “A proper clue! I’ll write it in our spy log,” said Sophie. She took out her notebook and wrote on a fresh page:

CLUES

1. Footprint in forest.
Near second marker post.

She marked it on the map.

Manu looked through the magnifying glass. The shoe had left a zigzag print in the dirt. Something about it looked familiar. “Uh-oh,” Manu said. He stood up and pressed his shoe into the ground next to the footprint. His sneaker left the exact same zigzag pattern.



Sophie groaned. “It’s *your* footprint.” She scribbled over her writing, then stuffed the notebook back into her bag. “Now we’re back to zero clues.”

“HIC!” Manu groaned. “No! Not again.”

“That’s probably why we haven’t found anything,” Sophie said grumpily. “Spies need to be silent and stealthy. They need to creep and sneak. They can’t go around making loud, weird noises.”

“It’s not my fault,” Manu replied. “If you were better at scaring me, the hiccups might have stopped.”

“I tried,” Sophie said. “But there’s nothing really scary to scare you with.” She looked around, then bent down and picked up a stick. “Look out, a SNAKE!” She wagged the stick at Manu, who just laughed. “See? It might be scary if there were real snakes around here. But there aren’t. There’s nothing scary at all.”



Possum was staring at the stick in Sophie's hand. She made a hopeful whining sound.

"She wants you to throw the snake," Manu said. "I mean, the stick."

"Do you want this, girl?" Sophie held the stick up. Possum gave a small, excited bark. "One, two, three!" Sophie hurled the stick down the slope. Possum chased after it. She bounded over a tree stump and kept on running.



Manu stared at the tree stump. Something about it looked odd to him. "Hey, where's my hoodie?" He pointed to the stump. "I left it there when we were playing hide and seek this morning."

Sophie shrugged. "You must have taken it back to the house."

“I’m sure I didn’t,” Manu replied. “Someone’s stolen it. Maybe it was the same people we heard before.” Just then, Possum came trotting back up the slope with the stick in her mouth. “Good girl, bring it here.”

Possum dropped the stick at Manu’s feet. He picked it up and pulled a face. “Yuck, dog slobber.” He raised the stick to throw it, but Possum wasn’t watching Manu any more. Her eyes were fixed on something behind him. She gave a short bark. Manu turned to look, but he couldn’t see anything. “What is it, Possum?”

Possum’s ears pricked up. She began to creep past Manu and Sophie. “She’s seen something,” Manu whispered.



“Probably just a weka,” Sophie said. “We’ve seen them up here before.”

Manu liked weka. They were such cheeky birds. Sometimes they stole things they found lying around. He remembered an adventure with a weka last time he had stayed at Sophie’s house. “A weka couldn’t drag my hoodie away, could it? HIC!”



“Shhh,” Sophie hushed. She pointed up the slope. Possum had frozen in the middle of the track. She didn’t blink or move a muscle. “Stay, Possum,” said Sophie. She walked up the hill and stood next to the dog. “Don’t worry,” she said to Manu. “If a weka runs out, she won’t chase it. Mum’s trained her not to.”

“What if it isn’t a weka?” asked Manu nervously.

Just then, Possum gave a low growl. The bushes beside the track rustled. Sophie and Manu looked at each other. They moved closer, expecting a weka to dart out at any second. Instead, they saw four eyes staring back at them.

* * *



Chapter Six

Tracks

“AAARRRRHHH!”

Sophie and Manu yelled at the top of their lungs. The owners of the four eyes yelled right back. Possum barked and yelped. Then ...

“Don’t let your dog bite us,” said a scared voice. “We’re coming out.”

Sophie and Manu leapt back as two heads popped up.

A boy and a girl came slowly out from the bushes, both keeping their eyes fixed on Possum.

“Will he bite?” asked the girl.

“She – not he,” said Manu. “And she’s friendly. She won’t bite – promise.” He patted the old dog on the head to reassure them. “Her name’s Possum.”

“Hi, Possum,” said the girl. “My name’s Rosa.”

“I’m Jose,” said the boy. “We’re twins.”

“I’m Manu.”

“And I’m Sophie. We’re cousins.”

The four children smiled at each other. Possum gave a small yip, then flopped down on the track with her tongue lolling out. She looked like she was smiling as well.

“Sorry for yelling,” Sophie said. “We were expecting to see a weka in the bushes. Not you guys.”

Just then, Manu noticed something sticking out of Rosa’s pocket. “Hey!” He pointed. “You have one, too.”

Sophie’s mouth fell open in surprise. “What channel are you on?”

Rosa pulled a walkie-talkie out of her pocket. She held it up. The screen showed the number fourteen.



“That’s the same as us,” said Sophie. “We heard you talking!”

“We heard you too,” Jose admitted. “But we couldn’t really tell what you were saying.”

“Same here,” Sophie agreed.

“We were being super spies,” explained Manu, “to see if we could solve the mystery.” He grinned. “And I guess we did.”

“We were being trackers,” replied Rosa. “We were on the trail of a wild animal.”

“A hiccup-potamus,” added Jose. The twins tried not to giggle, but when Manu and Sophie burst out laughing, both twins joined in.



“HIC!” Manu couldn’t believe it. “The hiccups should have stopped,” he said. “I got a *real* fright just now.”

“My grandma says to eat a spoonful of peanut butter,” said Rosa. “We don’t have any with us, but we have some bananas.”

“We’ve got apples and muesli bars,” said Sophie. She unzipped her backpack. “We can share.”

While they ate their snacks, the twins told Manu and Sophie about themselves. Their family had moved to New Zealand from the Philippines three years ago. They had just shifted here for their dad’s new job on a nearby farm. Sophie got out the map, and the twins showed them where their house was. It turned out the twins were the same age as Sophie, so they would be in her class when school started again.



Their conversation was interrupted by a crackle from the twins' walkie-talkie. Again, the voice that came out spoke a language that Manu and Sophie didn't know. Jose and Rosa took turns replying in the same language.

"That was our mum," Rosa explained after they'd signed off. "We told her we've met you. She said we can play for a bit longer."

"HIC! Aargh!" Manu rolled his eyes. "I guess the snacks didn't work."

Together, Manu and Sophie explained all the things they had tried to stop his hiccups. The twins laughed when they heard about the stick-snake.

"We have ulupong in the Philippines," Rosa explained. "They're poisonous snakes that spit venom."

Sophie and Manu were impressed. "How big are they?"

Rosa held her arms wide apart. "About this long."
"Whoa! Have you ever seen one?"



“Only in a zoo,” Jose admitted. “But I’ve seen scorpions. We have them too.”

“There aren’t any dangerous animals here,” said Rosa. “Mum likes that it’s safe for us to explore.”

“Although we did see some strange footprints beside the track,” added Jose. “We couldn’t figure out what animal would have made them.”

“We’re pretty sure it wasn’t a hiccup-potamus,” Rosa smiled. “Come on, we’ll show you.”

The twins led the way to the top of the hill before veering off into the trees. “See, there.” Jose pointed to a dusty patch of ground. Manu and Sophie crouched down to look.

“They look like sheep tracks,” Sophie frowned, “except for those bits.” Beside the footprints, there were long swipe marks, as if something had swept along the ground.



“Maybe it’s a sheep with a broom,” joked Manu. “A really tidy sheep.”

“Or a sheep with a long tail,” suggested Jose.

Just then, the children heard another strange noise. It didn't come from their walkie-talkies. WHEEEG! Possum sat up. Her ears swivelled towards the sound.

“What was that?” asked Jose.

HEEEURCH! They all listened. “It sounds like a donkey with a blocked nose,” said Sophie.

“Or like a sheep crossed with a lion,” said Manu. “A baa-lion. That would have a tail.”

GROOOINK! Possum gave a sharp bark and started to run towards the sound.

“Come on!” The four children took off after her.

* * *



Chapter Seven

WHEEEG!

Manu, Sophie, Jose, and Rosa chased Possum through the trees.

“Slow down, Possum,” shouted Sophie.

The kids ran faster. They came out of the trees into bright sunlight. Below them, the hill levelled out to an empty paddock. A thick patch of gorse and mānuka bushes grew along one side.

“Where’s Possum? She can’t have crossed that paddock already,” said Jose. “Not even at turbo speed.”

“Hey, look!” Manu pointed. “Those bushes are shaking.”

Sophie pulled the binoculars out of her backpack. “Yes! I can see something moving in there.” Just then, a bark came from inside the bushes. “Come on!” she shouted.



The children ran down the slope and along the fence line until they found a gap in the bushes. They pushed their way in. Rosa stopped to pull something off a clump of prickles. “Hey, look at this,” she said, holding up a blue cord.

“That’s off my hoodie,” said Manu. “How did it get there?” Just then, the weird sounds started again. They were very close.

“It sounds like a dragon burping,” said Rosa.

“Or like my dad, when he eats a really hot chilli,” said Sophie.

The children looked nervously at each other.

“Are you sure there aren’t any dangerous animals around here?” asked Jose.

Suddenly, they heard a sharp yipping sound. They followed the noise until they came out into a clearing. Possum was crouched in front of a thick patch of gorse.

GROOOINK – HEEEURCH – WHEEEG!

The bushes shook. Whatever was in there, it wasn’t small.

“You guys go that way,” Manu whispered. “And be ready to run.” Sophie and Rosa crept to the left. Manu and Jose crept to the right. Possum barked again. The kids caught a flash of white behind the bushes. “Look out!”

GROOINK
HEEEURCH
WHEEEG!





A horned, hairy monster burst out at them. The monster was waving a blue flag. The four children bolted.

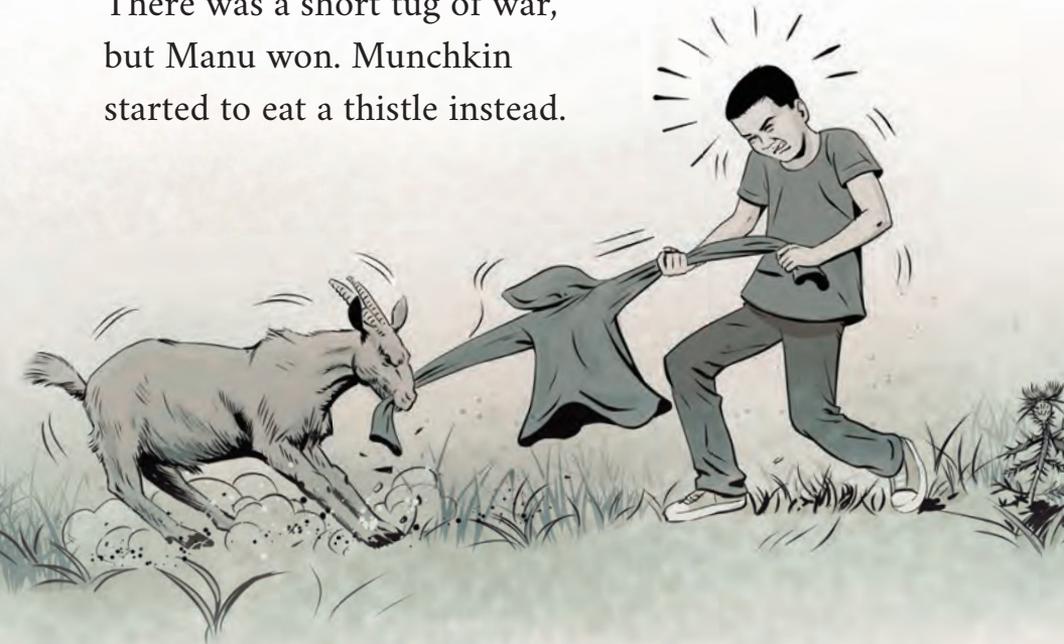
Possum sprang into action. She bounded left and right, yipping and yapping. In no time, she had backed the monster against the fence. She gave three happy barks. They seemed to say: “Calm down. What’s all the fuss?”



“That’s Munchkin!” Sophie exclaimed. “Our neighbour’s nanny goat.” Munchkin bleated and swung her head. The blue flag hooked over her horns flapped around.

“And that’s my hoodie!” laughed Manu. “It’s stuck on her horns.” Munchkin dropped her head and pushed her nose into the pocket of the hoodie. She started to munch on something.

“I think I left some crackers in there,” remembered Manu. He took a few steps towards the goat, reached out, and grabbed a hoodie sleeve. There was a short tug of war, but Manu won. Munchkin started to eat a thistle instead.



Sophie unclipped the walkie-talkie from Manu’s belt. She pushed the talk button. “This is Secret Agent Sophie calling base. Come in base. Over.” They waited for the radio to crackle to life.

“This is base,” said a voice. It was Uncle Mike this time. “What’s up, secret agent? Over.”

“The Simpson’s goat is out,” Sophie explained. “Possum has her bailed up by the back paddock. Over.”

The radio beeped and hissed. “Didn’t you hear Mum at lunchtime?” asked Uncle Mike. “She told you Munchkin was on the loose.”

Sophie raised her eyebrows at Manu. He shrugged. “Umm, I think we missed that part,” Sophie admitted. “Over.”

There was a pause. Then laughter came from the walkie-talkie. “Good job, secret agents,” said Uncle Mike. “I’ll call Jeanette and let her know you’ve found the runaway. Then I’ll bring the ute over to take her back. Over and out.” The radio beeped.

Munchkin stared at the four kids. She made another strange noise. “No way,” said Sophie. “Did she just ...”

Manu started laughing. “Yes! She’s caught my hiccups!”



Sophie turned to the twins. “Hey, when Dad comes, we should ask if we can have a sleepover this week. We could start a super spy club!”

All the children started talking at once. They could make up a secret code language. They could use a tent for their spy headquarters. They could play spotlight tag in the dark. Super-secret-spy spotlight!



Manu grinned. It was only the first day of his holiday. Already, he had solved a mystery, made two new friends, and caught a runaway goat. He couldn't wait for the next adventure.

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Editor: David Chadwick

Designer: Simon Waterfield

Series Consultant: Dr Kay Hancock

Consulting Editors: Ariana Tikao and Emeli Sione

Research shows that there is a positive relationship between the amount of reading ākongā choose to do and their reading achievement. The CHAPTERS series is designed to help year 3 ākongā make the transition to chapter book reading, which is an important aspect in developing an independent reading habit. The accompanying teacher support material provides suggestions about how teachers can vary their level of support so that all year 3 ākongā can read and enjoy the books and use them as a springboard into further reading.



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CHAPTERS



Super spies Sophie and
Manu are looking for clues.
Who (or what) is making the
weird noises in the forest?
And who do those strange
footprints belong to? Find
out if the cousins can solve
the mystery.



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