

The Chase

“Yee-haw!” The cry of the herder was loud enough to be heard across the prairie, but the crack of his whip made sure that the humans knew he was coming. “Take them to the left!”

Pounding the ground behind him were a dozen mounted cowbots. Each metal man was painted yellow and had the same fixed expression. They all rode steel horses with legs that moved like pistons. Some of them were swinging lassos around their head. Others were carrying large nets. Some of these were already filling up with disgruntled humans.

Ever since the robots had invaded Earth in 2025, humans had been allowed to live in small villages outside the big cities. Normally, the robots left them alone. Except for one day a year. During the chase, the bots would head out on horses and try to catch as many people as they could. Mostly they were all released back into the wild at the end of the day. However, some would be offered well-paid jobs as performers or engineers in the city. Most of the humans didn’t mind the annual chase.

Kelvin disagreed. He was fed up with having to run away every year and this year was even worse. The siren sounded just as he reached the final level on his computer game. That was a step too far. This year, he had a plan. He’d read the rules of the hunt very carefully. There was nothing in the book that forbid the humans from fighting back. Of course, he didn’t want to destroy any of the robots, that was a crime punishable by life in prison. Instead, he just wanted to get his own back.

The previous night, Kelvin had set out into the dust bowl behind his house and dug half a dozen deep holes. He’d covered them with fern leaves and swept dirt on top of those. It was only because he knew where they were that he’d avoided them during the chase. Already they’d claimed two of the cowbots, but there were still ten more.

Over the years he’d learnt that the robotic horses were very good at running in straight lines, but couldn’t turn very quickly. He used this to his advantage by zig-zagging as he ran. The other people

in his village had copied him, and he could hear the frustrated cries of the herders behind him.

Digging hidden pits wasn't all he'd been up to during the night. A few hundred yards away was a small group of trees, and he'd spent a few hours tying very fine but very strong nets between them. Unless you were very close, you wouldn't know they were there. If you were that close on a horse, it was too late. His lungs were burning, and his heart racing, but he could practically feel the trees around him. Once he got there, he knew the other herders would become entangled.

"Oomph!" The word escaped him along with his breath. A rope snapped around his ankles and dragged him to the floor. He rolled onto his aching back and looked up into the grinning yellow face of a cowbot.

"Bad luck, little human!" the tinny voice crackled. "Better luck next year!"



RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. How many cowbots were there to start with?
2. When did the robots invade?
3. How many holes did he dig?
4. How did he run to escape the horses?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What does the word "mounted" tell us about the cowbots?

V

Find another word to replace "entangled".

E

Explain why Kelvin doesn't normally agree with the annual chase.

P

How do you think Kelvin will try to stop the chase next year?

I

How did Kelvin feel as he got closer to the trees? Explain your answer.