

Invisidog

the accidental secret agent

in

a nose for adventure



As remembered by

R U Abitmad esq

Preface

Warning

This book should not be read by those of a nervous disposition or delicate nature. It contains distinctly eccentric people, computer programming cats, post modernist squirrels, stupid pheasants, mathematical ants, incredible machines, one bloody nose, some cat poo and frequent references to the Adams conjecture.

You have been warned!

Still reading?

off we go then.....

These are the names you'll need to know right from the start. I'll introduce everyone else as we go along!

Professor Osbert Abitmad

brilliant-ish scientist, terrible cook, animal lover.

Doctor Drucilla Abitmad

animal psychologist. Married to Professor Abitmad.

Stella Abitmad

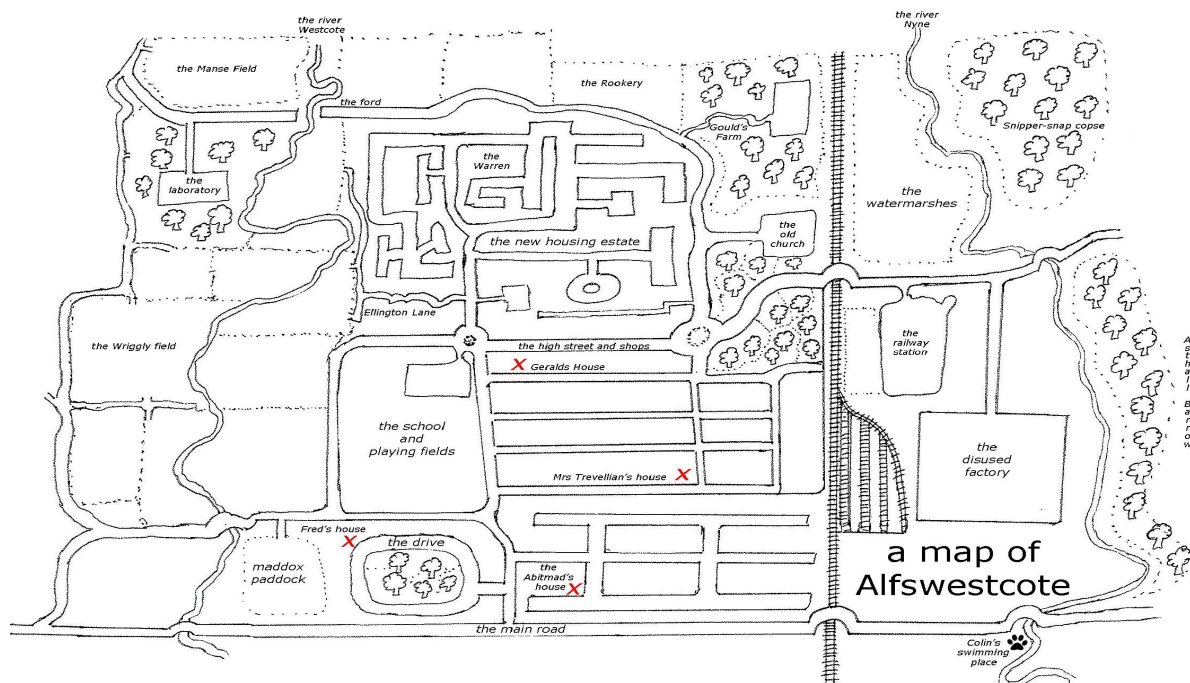
daughter of Professor and Doctor Abitmad.

Sox Paisley

criminal mastermind secretly posing as the Professor's cat.

Colin aka Invisidog

the Abitmad's dog. Coward, sleep addict, hero (but doesn't know it yet).



The first bit....how it all started

The Professor got Sox as a Christmas present.

Around tea time on Christmas Eve there was a knock at the front door. Stella ran down the stairs and opened the door, expecting to see a friend or relation grasping parcels or at least Christmas cards. No one was there. Stella looked up and down the empty street. As she shrugged and turned to close the door something caught her eye.

On the cat was a doormat. Sorry, I meant to say; on the doormat was a cat. The cat wasn't wrapped in Christmas paper, which was good news for the cat but it did mean he didn't look very festive, just cold.

A card attached to the cat's collar with a piece of string read "To: Professor Abitmad. My name is Sox, I like three meals a day, a soft bed, central heating, satellite TV and I'm grouchy if woken before noon". On the other side was printed "if this cat goes wrong please take to the vet".

What was really odd was that the card didn't say who had sent the Professor a cat.

Also hanging from the cat's collar was a nametag. Reading it the Professor was confused, not for the first time I hasten to add. The nametag read "Paisley, Sox" but the cat clearly had white feet. The Professor quickly worked out that the cat had white feet so he could see them in the dark, he made a note of this in his "Brilliant Ideas Notebook".

The Professor's notebook was jam packed with great discoveries and inventions: such as a pollen filter for bees who have hay fever, a portable folding web for spiders who go camping, and a special prong for liberating cheese from mousetraps without setting them off. Stella's favourites were satellite navigation systems for pigeons with no sense of direction and a machine to measure the speed of oncoming cars so rabbits, badgers and hedgehogs can safely cross the road.

The speed gun worked fine for most animals, but when tested by pheasants it had to be scrapped because, as everyone knows, pheasants are so stupid they ended up measuring the speed of trees, lamp posts, the sky and often their own feet. Which didn't make it any safer for them to cross the road.

Sox quickly became part of the Abitmad household putting on the act of the faithful devoted family cat. But under the surface, how can I put this, his other activities grew ever more daring and sinister. The family never suspected that his late night exercise involved anything more than normal cat type activities. He ran a mouse protection racket and gambling games such as "spin the shrew" and "dodge the dustbin" where he fleeced the other cats of their treats and catnip. But these were only mild amusements compared to the real prize.

And that was in Professor Abitmad's laboratory.....

One afternoon in the living room Sox was having his favourite daydream. "Just a few more months" he thought "and I will be the most powerful cat that ever lived. The only thing standing in my way is the Professor's stupid dog Colin".

Sox laughed one of those laughs that villains always laugh when they've come up with their diabolical master plan. In fact he laughed so much he fell off the back of the sofa and got stuck between the sofa and the radiator. Luckily Stella was on hand to pull him out by the tail. "How undignified" he thought, feeling very glad no one but Stella saw what had happened. "If that ever got out I wouldn't be able to walk down the street and it would completely destroy my credibility as a super villain!"

Sox and Colin avoided each other as much as possible. Sox thought Colin was stupid, dim-witted, clumsy, lazy and worst of all "a dog". What Colin thought about Sox is unprintable but is along the same lines...only worse! So, now we know where we stand don't we!

Meanwhile in a secret location somewhere in South West England (The Abitmad Laboratory) Colin was trying very hard to be asleep.

He was meant to be helping the Professor with his animal testing. This wasn't the sort of testing where scientists do horrible things to animals. Everything the Professor did was designed to help animals. In fact Colin suspected that the animals only agreed to be tested because of the free food and the bus fare home.

Today's test involved some very dodgy looking squirrels answering questions on Jane Austen. One of the squirrels had even offered Colin some nuts in return for a quick look at the answers. Colin thought that today's test was a complete waste of time because, as everyone knows, squirrels have no interest whatsoever in Jane Austen and wouldn't know a gothic novel if it bit them on the nose. "No" thought Colin "squirrels are, without exception, post modernists".

When Colin came to collect up the papers his worst fears were realised. Four of the squirrels had eaten the test paper, two others had buried them under the floor tiles (to come back and finish later) and the other had made a valiant effort but got no marks at all because he thought that Jane Austen played for Arsenal Ladies football team.

"Another wasted day" thought Colin "I wish the Professor would get on and finish whatever it is that he's been banging and crashing about on in the other room". Colin tidied up, switched off the lights and went to wait for the Professor in the car.

Colin tried to nap in the car but to no avail. Every time he was about to drop off there was a loud crash and a bright flash of light from the laboratory. Eventually the Professor emerged from the building accompanied by a cloud of bright orange smoke. He flapped away the worst of the smoke and locked up.

The Professor got into the car and started the engine. As they pulled away he turned to Colin, who out of politeness had woken up, and said "well Colin old chap it works, my greatest invention is finished and it works and tomorrow I'll let you see it".

Bit number two.....home life

The journey home was boring, but it always was. Colin tried to nap but it was no good. The Professor was in a good mood "and that" thought Colin "was much, much worse than him being grumpy". All the way home Colin had to endure the Professor's Abba and Barry Manilow mix tape accompanied by some very bad singing. It was particularly worrying when the Professor took his hands off the steering wheel and waved them around in time to the music.

I'm sure you've heard of "Dad dancing", well "Professor dancing" is much worse!

When they got home all Colin wanted to do was get something to eat and relax in front of the TV. The Professor had other ideas.

"Family meeting" he shouted at the top of his voice as they walked through the front door. There was silence. Once again the Professor bellowed "family meeting" at the top of his voice. Once again there was silence.

They opened the living room door, there was a funny smell. "Phew wee" thought Colin "hot cat".

Sox was asleep in front of the gas fire, which was on full. He was so close that his fur was almost on fire. Colin turned the fire down to low and stood on Sox's nose "by mistake" on the way past. Sox almost woke up but that would have taken far too much effort. He obviously was dreaming because he rolled over onto his back expecting to have his tummy tickled. "Oh please do put it away" thought Colin "some of us are about to eat".

A door opened upstairs and Doctor Abitmad, the Professor's wife, shouted "you make us food and we'll be down, I've got some paperwork to finish and Stella is doing homework in her room"

The Professor was crestfallen, it was his big moment, he'd invented his most brilliantly inventive invention and he had to wait until suppertime to tell everyone.

"No-one takes any notice of me except you Colin" said the Professor, but Colin wasn't listening.

Stomping into the kitchen the Professor started banging and clanging pots and pans and muttering under his breath. He was a truly awful cook because he never followed, or remembered, recipes. The family always winced when he brought food to the table saying "I thought it would be a really good idea if..."

The Professor's "really good ideas", concerning food at least, were usually really bad ideas. Tonight was OK though, all he had to do was put the remainder of last night's chilli into the (specially modified) microwave and open a big bag of tortilla chips! Even he couldn't mess that up, could he?

Colin went upstairs to say hello to Stella. He pushed her door open quietly – remembering that she was supposed to be doing her homework. Stella was standing on her bed shaking her head violently backwards and forwards with her eyes closed and playing air guitar. Although Stella had in-ear phones Colin could make out the track from across the room. When the guitar solo came in Stella's face contorted, leaning back her fingers darted up and down the fret board of her imaginary guitar.

"That's some serious shredding going on there" thought Colin "I wish she was as good as that on a real guitar". Stella had been learning guitar but had found it was not quite as easy as it looked. Colin was getting fed up with hearing "E" and "A" chords. Next week she was learning "D".

"Bliss" thought Colin! "You can play just about anything with three chords".

He was still undecided about whether it was a good idea to get Stella the electric guitar and the amplifier that goes up to 11 for her impending birthday.

"Aaaahhhh" shrieked Stella opening her eyes to find Colin sitting by her bed looking at her. "Don't do that Colin; don't go sneaking around and surprising people".

"I wasn't the one with my eyes closed" thought Colin.

The microwave was whirring and the kitchen was thick with an acrid smoke when Stella came in.

"Dad, what **is** that smell?" cried Stella.

"I thought I'd heat the tortilla chips up under the grill" he replied from behind the copy of his Inventor Monthly magazine.

"You idiot Dad, you're meant to take them out of the bag first"

Stella turned the grill off and pulled out the smoking mass of melted plastic and tortilla chips. She ran out of the kitchen into the back garden grasping the grill tray. Dumping the seething smoking mass into the dustbin she thought "I was looking forward to tortillas too".

When Stella got back into the kitchen she was confronted by her mum.

"What have you done Stella, what is all that smoke?"

"It wasn't me, I didn't do anything, I wasn't even here, it was him, it was all his fault, he did it" she growled, pointing at the Professor

Colin, by this time, had joined everyone, except Sox (who was still fantasising about having his tummy tickled), in the kitchen. The argument between Stella and her mum was in full swing.

"Um" thought Colin "I wonder if someone ought to tell them that their dustbin is on fire?"

Colin wandered to the back door. Yes, his fears were confirmed. The bin was actually on fire. Flames lighting up the back garden like bonfire night.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH THE BIN IS ON FIRE" screamed Stella.

"What did I tell you" thought Colin

"OSBERT, GET SOME WATER.....NOW!!!!" yelled the Doctor.

The Professor looked up from his magazine "Why, are you thirsty?"

"NO I'M NOT THIRSTY. THE DUSTBIN IS ON FIRE YOU IDIOT"

To cut a long story short; the following half an hour consisted of the entire family getting soaked through (including Colin), a lot of shouting, a lot of finger pointing and the microwave whirring and whirring and whirring.

When the shouting stopped the chilli was completely dried out and totally inedible.

"Come on Colin" said Stella "We're going to the chip shop"

"Excellent" thought Colin "going with Stella means getting a sausage to eat on the way home and nobody gets to find out"

Bit number three.....the invention

Colin burped loudly, a long lingering sausagey burp "BUUUUUURP".

"Ex-quooooz-me" thought Colin. Stella laughed loudly. "Was that some good sausage then?" she asked. "Certainly was" mused Colin, the peppery overtones still lingering in his nostrils.

Colin was Stella's soul mate. She often thought she had more in common with him than either Mum or Dad. She didn't have many friends at school. Her best friend Frida Riley (nicknamed Fred) was thought to be a "fruitcake" by the rest of her class. Fred mostly wore things that were a little large for her and really, really old fashioned. She swooshed about school leaving a faintly hippy smell as she went. She wrote poetry about love, death, tragedy and romance and always carried a tatty black notebook tied up with a purple ribbon. What the notebook contained was a mystery even to Stella.

Fred's mum and dad were both artists, their cavernous, rambling old house was full of brilliantly weird stuff, including a full sized stuffed bear up on his hind legs just inside the front door that made everyone jump as they came in.

Fred's older brother Dante was really cool. He was in a band called "Alien Noise Radio" that were, in their own words, "going to be really great when they get it together". All they seemed to do was sit around talking about how great they were going to be. They did have a brilliant song called "noise" which was exactly what it said in the title.

Stella fancied Dante a lot but he was really old and she only got to see him when he came back from University for the holidays. Stella knew that to him she was only his little sister's mate but he did pop up in her fantasies quite a lot, not that she would admit it to anyone, especially Fred.

Fred appeared in Stella's daydreams quite a lot too, which was hardly surprising as they were best friends. She imagined them running away together and meeting strange, interesting people, living a traveller's life with no one telling them what to do. The most regular dream was of them lying on a beach on a hot night talking for hours about life and the universe, watching the stars and listening to the sea. This fantasy helped Stella go to

sleep on those nights where loads of stuff was whirring around in her head, which was most of the time.

By the time Stella and Colin got back to the house the chips were almost cold, and Colin was peckish again. The family sat down at the table and started tucking in to their chips.

Colin had managed to wrangle some biscuits out of the Doctor by putting on his "I'm really, really hungry" face which also involved looking up with his big brown eyes and wobbling his bottom lip. His tummy was rumbling loudly (from the sausage, not from hunger) which the Doctor took for it being empty. He had to try really hard not to burp again because another sausage flavoured burp would definitely give the game away.

"Now that we're all here..." started the Professor.

The Doctor looked up from her chips "Yes, let me tell you about my day. Well I got up and.."

"No, no, no" implored the Professor "I've got something really important to tell you all"

"Oh, and my day wasn't important I suppose" blurted the Doctor.

It was all about to kick off again, Stella thought she ought to step in and defuse the situation.

"Mum, let Dad tell us about his news, then you can tell us about your day. How's that for a solution?"

Sox had decided to join the rest of the family in the kitchen. He lay down in the corner and yawned a yawn so wide you could tell what he'd had for breakfast!

"Ah" began the Professor "this will be of particular interest to you Sox. I'm so glad you were able to join us." The Professor just doesn't realise that sarcasm is lost on cats.

"Something for me? Excellent!" thought Sox paying attention for once.

"Today" Professor continued "I have completed my most inventive invention. And, before any of you say or think anything, I can tell you that it works. It has taken months of planning and preparation, lots of false starts and disappointments, moments of doubt..."

"Oh do get on with it Osbert" butted in the Doctor "what does it do?"

"Oh, um, yes, what does it do, um good question" the Professor picked up his glass of squash.

"I'd like you to raise your glasses as I propose a toast to celebrate the success of the Abitmad Cat Fur Ball Vaporiser, patent pending etc etc"

"Wow" thought Sox "even better than I thought. I had my socks set on the Professor's fresh breath spray for mice (which would make catching them so much more pleasant). But this is the biggie! Why catch 'em when you can vaporise them. ZAPPPPPP good bye Mr Mouse!!!!"

The glasses clinked, the orange squash splashed and the toast was toasted.

Before the glasses were back down on the table the Doctor saw an opening, a minute lull in the conversation.

"Anyway, that's all very interesting, but how was my day? Well I got up this morning and had some toast (that toast reminded me) and jam, very nice it was too. And then I went to work in the car, in the car I was listening to the radio when I thought I don't want Radio 2 I'll see what's on Radio 4....."

Stella was trying very hard not to give the game away by yawning. She was employing her "mum technique number 2". This meant counting to 20 then nodding your head and saying "mmmmm" or saying "yes, I agree". It seemed to work fine, she had tried counting to 10 but this was too short a period and counting to 30 was too long. Yes, 20 was just about right.

The Professor didn't listen and made no effort to look like he was, after the first few minutes. Stella took on the responsibility of humouring her mum grudgingly.

Sox meanwhile was far away in his fantasies. The statue that the feline world had erected of him stood 30 feet tall in gleaming white marble. The inscription read "Sox Paisley, the greatest cat that ever lived 9 lives".

"The greatest cat isn't great enough, I will be the greatest animal, the greatest everything and nothing can stop me ha ha ha".

The voice in his head was that of a diabolical mastermind of such evil proportions that even Sox quaked in his socks. He paws-d the fantasy for a moment. "All I need" he thought "is the Professor's invention. And that will be like taking cheese from a mouse, once the mouse is gagged and bound up of course"

"In fact I think I'll start by vaporising Colin. That will give me grrrreat pleasure" He opened one eye and sneered at Colin.

Colin noticed the look and thought "you stupid, stupid cat".

Bit number four.....the bone

Now, I must tell you something that is vital to the story. I would have told you before if I had remembered.

Now that the Professor's invention is out in the open what I'm about to tell you becomes very relevant to the story. So read this very carefully.

I'm sure you've guessed it so it'll come as no surprise but Colin isn't exactly in-fact-ually completely and utterly what he seems. Oh yes, he certainly is a dog, all dog in fact. Which is more than can be said for Sox, if you get my drift.

The circumstances of how the Abitmad family ended up with Colin I'll cover at some future point. However, saying the words "some dogs are not tough enough to join the police" in front of him would be a little bit insensitive.

Anyway, a couple of months ago Colin was snuffling about in the undergrowth at the bottom of the garden when he found a bone. This was no ordinary bone because when Colin picked it up it started talking. Yes, I feel as silly writing it as you do reading it so do bear with me.

"Yikes, a talking bone, this is just too weird" he thought dropping the bone.

"Hello Colin" said the bone

Colin stepped back away from the bone "not only is it a talking bone, it's a talking bone that knows my name, I've finally gone completely bonkers" he thought.

As if the bone knew what he was thinking it continued. "No Colin you haven't gone completely bonkers. I am the new MI5 Xv950 (Mk 2) stealth bone. Listen very, very carefully"

Colin wasn't going anywhere. His mouth was open so wide in amazement if he'd walked forward he'd have dug a furrow in the lawn like one of those giant earth moving machines.

The bone continued.

"We are aware of the Professor's work and are very keen that it doesn't get into the wrong hands. The wrong hands could push the wrong buttons or point it in the wrong direction and we wouldn't want that would we Colin?"

"Um, no" Colin shook his head earnestly.

"So, it is a matter of National Security that you become our inside man" said the bone. Before Colin could correct the bone it said.

"Of course I mean 'inside dog'. We realise that you are a complete coward and know nothing about spying, espionage, disguises, self defence etc etc"

"True" thought Colin "Stella made me wear an Aston Villa football shirt to a party once. But everyone still knew it was me."

"That's why" said the bone "we're enrolling you on the new MI5 correspondence course 'So, you want to be a spy do you sonny'. In thirty easy parts you'll go from a cowardly no-hoper to a running, jumping, spying, killing machine. OK maybe not killing but definitely the rest."

"Wow wee" mused Colin "the name is Bond, Colin Bond"

Finally, the bone said.

"You'll find an Xv950 (Mk 2) under these bushes every Tuesday at about half past four, unless it's raining when it'll be in the shed. Xv950s aren't water resistant I'm afraid, cut backs in defence spending you know. The bone will guide you through everything you need to know. Good luck. If your cover is blown the department will deny any knowledge of anything at all. You're on your own mate!"

"Gee thanks" thought Colin.

"Anyway" said the bone "everyone will think you're bonkers when you tell them you've been getting instructions from a talking bone. This bone will self-destruct in 5 seconds. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1"

With that the bone fizzed and spluttered smoke. As it burned and shrivelled up it began to resemble a cat poo.

"Brilliant" thought Colin. Not only the fact that he was going to become a secret agent but the fact that Sox would get the blame for leaving "little parcels" on the lawn and, on rainy Tuesdays, in the shed.

So, if you ever find a random cat poo in your garden it may just be the remains of an Xv950 (Mk2).

Bit number five.....Sox gathers the gang

From the moment Sox had heard the Professor explain about his new invention (the Cat Fur Ball Vaporiser) he had been so excited he could hardly sleep.

Not to draw attention to himself he worked out when the family would expect him to be asleep. At those times he would stretch out and close his eyes and just pretend to be asleep. All the while he'd be working on his dastardly plan. Actually, not completely "all the while" but more like "some of all the while". He did inadvertently drop off on a few occasions. OK, he dropped off on a lot of occasions.

"I can be more evil and devious in my sleep than most can be when they're wide awake" Sox thought stifling a yawn.

Sox had to call the gang together for an extraordinary general meeting. The plan was almost fully formed in his mind so there was no time to lose.

He needed gang members with specialist skills, brains, brawn and inside knowledge. Each one had to be the best in their field and on the top of their game in order to pull off the crime of the century. But, he'd have to settle for what he could get.

Before Sox came along the gang was called "the front gate gang". I think I'd better explain. They were originally called "the hole in the fence gang" but someone had nailed a piece of wood over the hole. Being too lazy to climb over the fence they decided to use the front gate. This gives you an idea of the calibre of gang members Sox had at his disposal!

The next evening Sox, as part of his twilight stroll, posted a message for the rest of the gang. They were to meet him at their secret hideout the following night (after Coronation Street). The message was delivered via a special code of scratches on Sox's favourite lamppost.

Even though the message was in code he couldn't be too careful. He checked that the coast, and inland, was clear before casually sauntering up to the post. While pretending to yawn he had another good look around. There was someone coming so he switched to "plan b" which involved sniffing the remains of a hotdog dropped by a pigeon that had been distracted by a passing bus.

Moments later he was back to "plan a" skilfully scratching the secret symbols that said.

"Meeting tomorrow after corrie, at our secret hideout (it's behind Mrs Trevellian's greenhouse for those who've forgotten), bring food and something to sit on as the grass is bound to be wet, make sure you're not followed. Signed by his evilness Sox"

It was amazing how so much information could be passed on by a series of scratches on a post. He didn't actually know if the secret messages ever worked because he had always bumped into a member of the gang and got them to pass the message on for him.

The following day dragged for Sox. As usual he was alone in the house: Colin and the Professor were at the laboratory, the Doctor was at her office and Stella was at school.

The time passed as slowly as a really slow slug without enough slippery stuff to slide successfully. Sox paced the kitchen. It was 30 steps wide by 28 steps long. That wasted about 2 minutes and there were hundreds of minutes left until the meeting. It was so frustrating. Sox went over and over the plan in minute detail. He went over everything that could possibly happen, imagining how he would deal with it and come out on top. He knew that this was how sports men and women prepare for important matches so that they are mentally prepared for anything that their opponent throws at them.

He knew it worked too, someone had once thrown a saucepan at him and he'd been able to dodge it because he was mentally prepared.

All that thinking can really tire a criminal mastermind out. Sox decided, after a spot of lunch, to have a catnap to be on tiptop form for the meeting. When he awoke it was getting dark and Stella was crashing around the kitchen looking for the new box of tea bags that had been put away "safely" by the Professor after the previous weekend's shopping trip.

Sox opened one eye, which took lots of effort, then closed it again.

"Eyelids are soooo heavy" thought Sox trying to hold back a yawn.

"OK cat" said Stella "what have you done with the Tea Bags" prodding Sox in his stomach with her toes. "I know all about you, you thieving pussy cat, you criminal feline mastermind. Come on Sox tell Stella where you've hidden them or else I won't let you watch corrie"

Sox tried not to panic. "How could she possibly know" he thought "I've been so careful. Everything I've done I've always left clues implicating Colin." Sox wracked his brain. Everything was always meticulously planned and executed.

"Some squealer must have snitched and pointed the finger at me. It must have been Loose Tongue O'Toole. I'll scratch him from my Birthday Card list. And..and..and..I'll set the gang on him" thought Sox seething with anger.

Sox had got completely the wrong end of the stick about poor old Loose Tongue. He wasn't called Loose Tongue because he was a snitch, it was because once he'd tried to eat a wasp. The wasp had stung him on the tongue to try and avoid being eaten. When the swelling finally went down O'Toole didn't get back all of the feeling in his tongue. Subsequently from that day on he meowed with a lisp and his efforts at drinking milk resulted in most of the milk on the floor and very little in his mouth. The only redeeming feature about the whole affair, as far as Loose Tongue was concerned, was that he shared a house with a dog called Ginge (a retriever) who managed to lap a greater percentage of liquid onto the floor than he did. And all without the aid of a wasp sting.

And that is the real reason he's called Loose Tongue.

Anyway to get back to the action. Sox was literally squirming; from anger, the panic that he might have been found out and because Stella's toes were tickling his tummy.

"Stop it" thought Sox "this really isn't fair, I'm meant to be a criminal mastermind... oooh....oooh..up a bit...up a bit..there...just there..oh yes...oh bliss...don't stop"

Stella turned away and started looking through the kitchen cabinets. Sox opened up his eyes. He was on his back with his legs in the air...again.

"This keeps happening. I really must stop doing this. But it is rather pleasant" thought Sox.

"Anyway" said Stella, her head and shoulders deep in one of the food cupboards "it couldn't have been you because you're only a stupid pathetic idiot cat without one intelligent thought in that vacant head of yours"

Stella, as you can probably guess, was more of a dog person than a cat person. Sox, although deeply wounded by Stella's description of him, was relieved that she didn't actually know about his true identity or his sinister plan.

"Notes to self" he thought "Number one: put Loose Tongue back on birthday list, he might come in useful if I need more help stealing the Professor's machine. Number two: add Stella to the list of people to vaporise (directly after Colin). Number three: um..."

While Sox pondered "number three" Stella found the tea bags in a tin labelled "pasta" (where else?), made some tea and crashed out on the couch.

The rest of the family drifted in over the next couple of hours like ships returning to harbour. That makes it sound serene and wonderful! Far from it, these ships were being steered by insane ferrets dressed as pirates. I think the word to describe it is MAYHEM!

Colin looked down his nose at Sox and thought "So, how was your day then stupid cat? Been catching up your beauty sleep have you? Oh, it must be so thrilling to be a cat. I expect you never get bored. I mean, you've got to have a brain to experience boredom haven't you. Ah ha....one nil to Colin. Woo I'm on fire tonight!" Colin didn't realise what a prophetic thought that would turn out to be.

Sox looked up and hissed.

In Sox's fantasies he always had a cutting remark or witty put down ready to take the wind out of the witless dog's sails. But in reality he invariably ended up hissing or throwing a paw (with claws) in the general direction of the dog.

Colin took the hiss as evidence that Sox was incapable of an intellectual thought and reinforced the belief he had that Sox was just a really really stupid cat.

The evening meal came and went. It came via a pizza delivery boy and went into the family's stomachs. Stella fed Colin bits of pizza covertly under the table.

"It doesn't get much better than this" thought Colin munching through his third or fourth mouthful. Suddenly he bit into a chilli.

"Hot, hot, hot, hot, hot!!!!!!" he had to break cover from under the table and make a "b line" for his water bowl. "coming through" he thought jumping over a supine Sox.

"I think I'll stand here for a moment and hang my tongue into the water, boy that's going to burn later" thought Colin reflecting on the inevitable passage of the chilli.

Sox by this time had joined Stella in front of the TV. Stella was watching the news. Sox has little or no interest in the news, it never gave the news from a cat's perspective and if anything glorified dogs, which to a cat is totally unacceptable. Where as corrie was real life, the opening scene even had a walk on part for a cat.

"Put corrie on, put corrie on it's almost time" thought Sox.

It was no good he'd have to take action. He knew that the "corrie button" on the remote control was the one on the top right. He padded across the sofa and "inadvertently" stood on the correct button to get what he wanted.

Half an hour of tears and laughter later Sox stepped through the cat flap into the cold clear night air.

"Now to gather the gang. Once I unveil my plan they'll have no choice to hail me as the criminal mastermind I am"

Bit number six.....Sox unveils his master plan

As Sox "strutted his stuff" down the pavement he imagined himself immortalised in rhyme. He could hear the disco beat in his head (although it could have been a passing car).

The breeze ruffled his fur as he walked. He was a lean mean love machine.

"Monday Night Fervour" starring Sox the cat. Hit the music maestro.....

*You know that I'm the main feline
The one who's gonna put them dogs in line
The one that don't take no jive
I'm the greatest gangster mastermind*

*You ladies you'd better take care
Cos I'm the one make you stop and stare
Five minutes with me and you'll find
I'm the greatest lovin' mastermind*

*I've got 9 lives and I've only used one
Baby my show's gonna run and run
I'll amaze you time after time
I'm the greatest livin' mastermind*

*Me and my boys in the neighbourhood
Doin' the things that bad cats should
We're rulin' the street number 1 to 39
No foolin' I'm a ruling mastermind*

*I'm the greatest it ain't no lie
I'm the greatest and I'll tell you why
I've got the words an' I got the timing
I'm the greatest at rhyming masterminding*

"Oh yeah" thought Sox

"I'm THE cat and that's a fact, I've charm and I've got tact, you'll tickle my tummy, you'll stroke my head, then I'll dig my claws into your leg. I'll give you pleasure, I'll give you pain, just one look and you'll love me again. I was born too late but still I'm groovy, I'm that dude from the 70s movie"

Sox's fantasy was getting out of hand. "Oo, oo, oo, oo, I've got 9 lives, I've got 9 lives" he sang in his head in a very high voice.

Suddenly the disco beat had gone and there was silence. Sox shook his head violently to try and dislodge the disco tune that was going around and around inside his brain. The car posing as a mobile nightclub disappeared into the darkness.

"I hate brain worms" Sox thought "once those tunes get into your head that's it for days and days" he continued on down the street trying, in vein, to banish the tune from his head.

When he got to Mrs Trevellian's house the gate was already open. "Good, I'm not the first" he thought. Sox liked to be last if he could so that, as leader, he could make a dramatic entrance. Being leader in his opinion was fifty percent intimidation, fifty percent respect and fifty percent show business. As you can tell despite being a criminal mastermind Sox had an extremely poor grasp of mathematical concepts.

In his opinion, and Sox had an opinion on everything, being a criminal mastermind would gain him the respect of his gang members. He would deal out swift and painful justice to any of the gang that stepped out of line, the intimidation part. He would also appear larger than life courtesy of the show business element.

He'd worked hard on the show business part of his leadership skills. He had to appear confident and self-assured. He had to exude an air of authority that made him beyond reproach and his decisions beyond question. To do this he employed tactics such as always taking the high spot when with the gang so that he could look down upon them, or standing when they were lying down. This tactic is often referred to as one-upmanship amongst humans so I suppose amongst cats it would be called one-upcatship. He used breathing exercises to keep him relaxed. This along with meticulous preparation made his delivery of orders and speeches calm, assured and authoritative.

He walked slowly yet purposefully along the side of the house. Breathing deeply and composing himself for his great entrance. As he rounded the rain water butt at the side of Mrs Trevellian's green house he took a large breath stood up really straight and thought

"It's show time!!!!!"

"Hi Sox" said a voice from the darkness "looks like we're first" Sox deflated like a birthday balloon that's been left behind the sofa for three months.

The voice in the darkness belonged to Zuse. The only cat in history to be a member of the British Computer Society. The society didn't know Zuse was a cat obviously. Zuse was happy to have the initials MBCS after his name but he did think that the membership fee was a bit steep. He had thought about owning up to being a cat in the hope that he could get a reduced membership rate. There was the risk however that he'd get thrown out of the society.

Zuse was a wizard on all things computer related. He had been with his human (Gerald) for many years. They had lived in a single room above a chip shop while Gerald was at University. They now lived in a nice two up two down one street across from Mrs Trevel-

lian. Gerald was a computer "enthusiast". All day he worked on computers for a large financial institution. In the evening he came home and worked and played games on the home computer. As long as Zuse could remember he'd sat on the desk and watched Gerald using the computer. And learned!

How do you think he paid for his membership to the computer society? I'll give you a moment to think about it, and the slower readers who always sit at the back picking their noses a little longer! (don't worry I always sat at the back and my bogies were legendary)

Exactly, you've got it in one. Gerald's on-line bank account became, for Zuse, the gateway to him becoming a cat of means. This very fact was pivotal to the success of the great robbery being planned by Sox. Sox had to stay very close to Zuse and make sure he did nothing to upset him. Sox needed Zuse more than vice versa. Luckily, for Sox, Zuse didn't realise this and only thought Sox was being nice to him because he was an all round pleasant fellow.

Poor deluded Zuse.

"So, um, we're first, um, are we" started Sox trying to make conversation

"Um, yeah, I guess so, nobody else here yet" replied Zuse

Sox was struggling to make conversation as they had very little in common. In fact Sox wondered if there was anyone, apart from Gerald, who had anything in common with Zuse.

"So what have you been up to today?" asked Sox, and immediately wished he hadn't. Zuse was the sort of cat who wouldn't say two words from one week to the next. But get him started and you just can't shut him up.

Zuse thought for a moment before beginning.

"Well since you ask I was having a problem with the net connection so I toggled into DOS and did a ping, that was fine, then looked at the IP config, that was fine. I really was stumped so I looked at the security settings to see if the firewall was playing up, it was fine too. Then I had a thought, maybe when I'd installed the latest service pack it might have overwritten something in the registry so I ran a registry health check, that came back clean so the next thing I did was..."

Sox, by this time, had switched off and was watching a fluffy cloud that resembled a Vietnamese Pot Bellied Pig drift slowly across a full moon. He wondered what oriental wisdom would read into such a sign. He thought that a pot bellied pig, being fat, was probably a sign of bountiful riches coming his way. It was definitely a sign, ancient oriental wisdom was always right...possibly.

Suddenly Sox noticed that Zuse had stopped talking. Someone or something was coming around the greenhouse. They could hear a strange squeaking sound like a gate with rusty hinges swinging in the breeze. They hid behind the bucket that covered the rhu-barb plant and waited, and waited. The sound was getting closer and closer, louder and louder. It couldn't be anything natural, nothing natural would make a noise like that. They were about to make a run for it because, as Falstaff said in Henry IV, "the better part of valour is discretion" when they heard a voice.

"Anybody here, guys, anybody" it was Dutch. Both Sox and Zuse let out a huge sigh of relief, which was more than Dutch was doing. He has wheezing badly. Actually on a

scale of one to ten he was wheezing very well. He was not a well pussycat at all. Sox and Zuse feared he might expire at any moment.

Sox rolled his eyes. This was the calibre of his hench cats he had to work with.

"Have you taken your inhaler?" asked Sox

"Yes, I'll be OK in a minute" wheezed Dutch.

Dutch was actually from the Netherlands via Harwich after he'd inadvertently wandered onto a ferry. Don't ask how he managed it, he just did! He ended up with his humans, a very nice "older" couple called Jo and Peggy, after they had told their Doctor that they didn't like children. The Doctor had suggested that they get a Dutch Cat, which they did. Everyone was happy. Jo and Peggy loved Dutch and he loved England despite his asthma getting worse.

Dutch spread a supermarket carrier bag on the wet grass and made himself comfortable. Despite having asthma he was the largest and strongest member of the gang. He could have easily overpowered Sox if he'd have wanted to but he was very laid back, almost horizontal. He'd joined the gang because when he arrived from the Netherlands he didn't know anyone. The gang seemed to be an ideal way to make new friends and somewhere to go in the evenings.

Dutch's wheezing was getting quieter. Sox and Zuse were scheming quietly. Suddenly the silence was shattered.

"WOOOO, YEAH, OH, BISH, BASH, BOSH. GAAAANG. HOW ARRRRRRE YOU"

It could only be one cat. His name was Manic. Manic by name, manic by nature.

"We're all fine" replied Sox "make your self comfortable"

"WILL DO MR BOSS MAN, WOOO WEEEE, HOW YOU DOING DUTCH?" Manic was incapable of being quiet or sitting still.

"I'm fine except for being a bit short of breath and having a headache" replied Dutch. Quietly!

"OH WOW, THAT'S A REAL DOWNER THAT YOU'VE GOT A HEADACHE, WHY HAVE YOU GOT A HEADACHE DUTCH?" asked Manic. Loudly!

"Because some stupid cat is shouting in my ear that's why" replied Dutch

"TELL ME WHO IT IS AND I'LL GO AND TELL THEM TO SHUT UP" said Manic looking around for who was making the noise.

"Sheeeesh!" Dutch shook his head.

Manic was sometimes called "Adie" by people who thought it was clever to make a joke at his expense. Manic never got the joke, but there again he'd never heard of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The reason Manic was a little manic was not because he suffered from the disorder. He had been a calm somewhat timid cat who liked nothing better than curling up in front of the fire for a long snooze. Until something changed his life. He was run over by a car.

The car didn't actually run over him but it did whack him really hard. I'd seen a fruit fly but I'd never seen a cat fly – until Manic. When he landed he lay motionless for a couple

of minutes. He finally came round with a splutter, spitting out the bits of road that had ended up in his mouth as he skidded up onto the pavement. Now whether it was the near death experience or the huge clout on the noggin, he got from the car bumper, we'll never know but from that moment on Manic was...well....manic. His name wasn't even Manic until he had the accident, it was Manx because he had no tail. Now he did have a tale (to tell)! It didn't take long for everyone to adjust to calling him Manic it seemed only natural.

Manic was vital to Sox's masterplan. Manic was fearless to the point of stupidity. He was once in a coma for a week after eating a poisonous toadstool he found amongst the trees behind his garden.

When Manic finally came round he was a changed animal. As well as being manic he was also, how shall we say, now a bit weird!

"While I was unconscious I saw things that no other cat has seen. I could fly. The trees spoke to me. It was a spiritual experience. Spiritual I tell you." Manic told the gang.

"Yeah" replied Sox under his breath "you're a basket case and you almost killed yourself. Nothing spiritual about that."

Although a live wire Manic could be counted upon. Sox only had to wind him up and let him go. He was an all action cat! Breaking and entering was his speciality, usually without the breaking. He would squeeze through the narrowest gap in the smallest highest window. He had even broken into a house by lowering himself down the chimney. Luckily there was no fire in the grate. He did leave sooty paw prints through the house so it turned out to be not as covert an operation as originally planned.

The last member of the gang to turn up was always late. It is called "fashionably" late by some people, who obviously don't know how to tell the time. Although only having to make her way down the garden, Mrs Trevellian's cat, Molly made sure that everyone noted her arrival. Between you and me she was a bit of a diva. Sox put up with this blatant tardiness because secretly he had a soft spot for Molly. He thought it was a secret but in truth the whole gang, and the entire cat population of South West England, knew.

"Hi fellas" purred Molly. She walked right through the middle of the group with her tail held high as smooth as if she were on casters. Her bottom wiggled provocatively.

She had their attention. "hello Miss Molly" the gang said in unison. She had them eating out of the pads of her paws. Such power made her feel really good. "I've still got it" she thought settling down next to Sox who was trying very hard to keep his composure.

Sox stood up. This was it, his moment of triumph. The moment he unveiled the master plan. He took a deep breath, composed his thoughts and opened his mouth to speak. There was a loud rasping noise from the back followed by school-kitten giggling. "sorry Sox, just slipped out" said Dutch sheepishly "do continue"

Sox wasn't going to let a minor gas escape derail his plan.

"well, lady and gentlemen we stand on the cusp of greatness. We are about to write ourselves in to history. Not only cat history but all history. Our bravery, skill, cunning will be the stuff of legend. What we do now we do not just do for ourselves but for all cat kind. Our names will be used in hushed reverence. We will be rich beyond our wildest dreams we will...."

"Excuse me for butting in Sox" butted in Manic, who was having trouble sitting still "what you're saying sounds great, doesn't it gang, but what exactly are we going to do?"

Sox was momentarily knocked off his stride. "Um, well, I was getting to that"

He began to walk slowly across in front of the others. Their eyes followed him and when he was sure he had their undivided attention he continued.

"My friends, we are going to steal Professor Abitmad's latest invention"

Manic couldn't keep quiet any longer "uh, um, can I ask you what I consider to be a very pertinent question Boss" Sox nodded. "ARE YOU COMPLETELY OUT OF YOUR TINY MIND"

Sox casually walked over to Manic, who by this time was cowering because he knew what was coming, and slapped him across the side of the face with his paw.

"Mr Manic, do afford me the courtesy of at least listening to the plan before questioning my mental state" snarled Sox his nose almost touching Manic's nose.

"So, some of you are wondering how we are going to achieve such a dazzling piece of criminality" Sox continued. There was some half-hearted nodding from the back.

"The disused warehouse down by the station will be our hide out. This is where we'll take the invention after we've stolen it"

The others were looking at Sox quizzically.

"You're wondering how we're going to steal it aren't you!" there was more nodding from the back

"Manic will break into the laboratory and let the rest of us in. We will need two very large cardboard boxes, one for the invention and one for us. We put the invention in the cardboard box and drag it outside. We drag the other cardboard box outside and all get in"

The others weren't nodding anymore. They had their mouths open wide in disbelief. Had Sox lost the plot?

"Um" said Dutch raising a paw "as far as I can see this will leave us high and dry outside the lab. How do we get to the hide out?"

Sox smiled "this, my friends, is the genius bit! While we are liberating the machine from the laboratory our resident computer genius will go on-line and order a courier to come and pick up the boxes from the laboratory. And deliver them to the disused warehouse. The stolen invention and all of us will get a free ride across town to our new hideout. It will be as easy as that."

Sox expected rapturous applause at least. There was silence apart from whirring from a number of cat brains.

Dutch was first to speak "well Sox, I think it may just work. We'll need to tie all of the detail down but hypothetically it has a good chance of success. We might have to round up some more muscle dependent on how heavy the invention it."

Now that Dutch had spoken it was safe.

"IT'S A GREAT FANTASTIC MARVELLOUS GENIUS PLAN, CAN'T FAIL, REALLY REALLY CAN'T FAIL, BRILLIANT, FANTASTIC, A CAN'T FAIL PLAN...what if I can't break in? I do

houses and sheds, I've never done a laboratory before." blurted Manic "most animals want to get out of laboratories not break in to them"

"You'll be fine Manic, just fine" Molly was the calming influence for once.

Zuse had been thinking hard and not saying anything. He cleared his throat the others turned. What he was about to say might float or sink the whole project.

"Well peoples" Zuse started "the first thing is that it's do-able" the others were hanging on his every word because there was usually a big "BUT" coming along. American people call a bottom a butt. So to clarify, the gang weren't waiting for a big bottom to come along they were waiting for the word "but". They didn't have to wait long.

"BUT" continued Zuse "there are a few things that I'll have to set up before we can go for it. Firstly I'll need to set up a business so that we can book the courier without suspicion. What do we want to call the business?"

Manic was leaping up and down "ooh, ooh, ooh call it 'Sox and the gang' "

He was very close to getting another slap not only from Sox but Dutch as well.

"That is the most stupid thing you've said tonight. We might as well give the police our photos and draw them a map. No, we need something classy that will sound like a real company" Said Sox.

Dutch looked up and muttered "How about 'The Shawset Corporation'?"

"I can go with that" nodded Zuse

"Brilliant" said Sox "The Shawset Corporation it is. We're in business. By the way Dutch what made you think of that?"

"Don't know, just popped into my head. I think it's French" Dutch gathered up his carrier bag and started for home.

Bit number seven....Colin's secret spy training

By the time the Professor unveiled his master invention, the Cat Fur Ball Vaporiser (in case you'd forgotten already), Colin was only about half way through his secret spy training. The regular Tuesday ritual of finding the bone and listening to the lesson at first had been quite an exciting prospect. However many of the tutorials had him wondering what use they would be in the real world of spies and espionage. Lots of the stuff that you learn at school feels like that doesn't it. I can tell you that it **will** all come in useful at some point...honestly. For example when you do Quizzes or play Trivial Pursuit all those facts you thought you'd never need might end up winning you a prize. But it's doubtful.

The bone insisted that prior to the following week's exciting instalment Colin was to have practised what he had learned this week. He wondered how, for example, he was going to practise a Sea Rescue when he lived many miles from the sea and the river that ran through the town only came up to his tummy even in the winter.

He did in fact practise the Sea Rescue. Out on a walk with Stella one afternoon after school he found a large branch that had blown down in a storm. He carried it as far as the bridge that spanned the river. Skilfully he pushed the branch through the railing so that it splashed into the water. The branch started to float away on the current (slowly). Colin leapt over the railings crashing into the water with a mighty splash. Stella was yelling at him but he had to finish the exercise despite being threatened with not only a bath but soap as well! He shuddered, not because the water was cold but because the mention of soap always sent shock waves through his body. He stood up. The water only reached halfway up his legs. "Pathetic" he thought walking and picking up the branch that had become beached in the shallow water. "Just pathetic". He dragged the branch out of the river and left it on the bank.

"What **were** you thinking Colin you stupid dog. You're going to regret jumping into the river when I get the soap onto you" Stella bent down and attached the lead to Colin's collar.

"I **think** I was doing my homework, unlike you. Now I'm going to make you regret using the forbidden word SOAP" thought Colin having a really good shake and showering Stella in water and foul smelling river mud.

"Now it's not only me that needs a bath. I think we're even!"

Other lessons were much more fun to practise. The lesson covering counter intelligence where he had to steal a passport form from the Post Office without anyone seeing was really exciting. Heart racing he casually wandered away from Stella, who was queuing for stamps. Using his silentest, sneakiest, creeping he slid through the gap that the staff use for getting in and out from behind the screen. Success, he was behind the counter. Standing up on his hind legs he looked down the list of forms. Motor Tax, Driving Licence, Premium Bonds, Travel Insurance and right at the bottom the Passport form. Colin deftly took a form and slid back through the gap in the counter. No one had seen. By now his heart was beating so strongly he could hear it in his ears. Wow what a thrill, he was hooked, he wanted to have that feeling again and again. His excitement came to an abrupt end as Stella slapped the side of his head with the back of her hand.

"Drop it Colin you bad dog. Where did you get that? Huh? If I can't trust you I'm not letting you off the lead in future"

"But, but" thought Colin giving Stella his best adoring look

Colin had put a lot of effort into convincing Stella she didn't need to use the lead when they went for walks. Now this secret service training was threatening to undermine all that good work.

The jungle survival unit of the course was a complete waste of time although special guest presenter Yar Reams was quite entertaining. But he doubted very much whether he'd ever come face to face with a twenty foot snake in a leafy town in South West England.

Also, he'd got completely the wrong end of the stick with the desert warfare module. When the bone had introduced the topic Colin immediately thought "YUMMMMM". He imagined throwing pudding at each other – he was going to really enjoy doing the homework on this one! The bone immediately put him straight. It explained that while a bowl of steaming apple crumble and custard delivered to the face of an opponent might knock them off their guard for a few moments it wasn't the usual chosen means of attack for secret agents. "Pity" thought Colin "eat one, throw one, eat one, throw one... mmmmmmm".

The bone also pointed out that desert (the dry sandy place) is spelt with one 'S' while dessert (the pudding) is spelt with two.

"Yes" thought Colin "when you said desert how was I to know it was the one with only one 's'. I realise that they are pronounced differently but however you say it I immediately think PUDDING!"

On the Tuesday prior to the announcement of the new invention the bone introduced Colin to his agent network. He wasn't on his own on the project to keep the Professor's inventions secure. There was another agent who lived in the same town, a human, who was known by the code name Jerry Mouse.

Jerry Mouse was a surveillance expert and had rigged up covert cameras that were trained on the laboratory that he could monitor via his computer. If anything weird happened at the lab Jerry Mouse would know about it immediately (as long as it didn't hap-

pen when he was at work or at weekends when he went shopping). If Jerry Mouse suspected anything he would send Colin a non-standard Xv950 (Mk2) stealth bone with a message.

Jerry Mouse lived a couple of streets across from Mrs Trevellian's house with a seemingly eccentric cat called Zuse. Oh what a small world it is!

Bit number eight.....another brick in the ant wall

Good to his word, the day after announcing his new invention to the family, the Professor gave Colin a practical demonstration.

Colin woke very early (for him). He stretched and yawned. His whole body trembled due to the awesome power of the yawn. He slumped back into his basket and closed his eyes. "mmmmm that's really comfy" he thought snuggling down into the warm blanket "another five minutes won't hurt".

Colin had a cute sense of smell. Before you go thinking about puppies and bunny rabbits I must apologies for my typing. That should read an acute sense of smell.

The reason he had woken was because his highly trained sense of smell had alerted him. Something along the lines of "HEY WAKE UP SLEEPY HEAD I CAN SMELL FOOOOOOD". His nose had also alerted his stomach, which had begun to grumble emptily. It was really really early but he was not mistaken there was definitely a food smell in the air.

"Oh my goodness" thought Colin "the mice have broken in again and they're cooking themselves bacon with black coffee on the side". His sense of smell was so good he could even tell that the bread in the toaster was whole-grain. He hauled himself up on to his feet. His mouth felt disgusting and furry.

Opening both eyes fully he slowly came round. One part of him was saying "you'd better go and find out what's going on, you're head dog in this house" and the other part was saying "who cares who's making food just think how nice it would be to be asleeeeeeep".

Colin shook himself, the equivalent of splashing your face with cold water. He was awake and ready for action. He spat out the piece of chewed blanket that was in his mouth. Suddenly the dream about eating a juicy steak all came flooding back. He crept

slowly towards the kitchen door spitting out bits of blanket fluff as he went. All of the lights were all on. He reasoned it couldn't be mice as they don't ever put the lights on because they can't reach the switch.

"Anything could be behind the kitchen door making breakfast; burglars, meerkats, aliens, breakfast TV presenters. I mean **anything at all!**" As you can tell Colin still wasn't fully awake. He summoned up all of his bravery and quietly pushed the kitchen door with his nose. He opened a gap just wide enough to see a slice of the kitchen from the door across to the sink. He heard footsteps coming closer and closer. Before he could get his nose out of the way excruciating pain shot through his body. He yelped loudly.

The next thing he knew Doctor Abitmad was kneeling down next to him rubbing his nose. "I'm so sorry Colin did I shut your nose in the door?"

"What a **stupid** question, of course you shut my nose in the door, whose nose did you think it was huh?" thought Colin. He was glad it was only the Doctor and not an alien or even worse a breakfast TV presenter. His nose was throbbing but getting a cuddle first thing in the morning made up for it.

The bread popped up in the toaster. The Doctor ruffled the fur on Colin's head and got up to finish making her breakfast. It was very early. It was still dark outside and looked really cold. However illogical it sounds, because you cannot actually see anything when it's dark, it did look cold.

"I didn't think you'd be awake Colin" said the Doctor pouring herself a cup of coffee "I've got a meeting in London and have to get the early train"

Alternating bites of toast and slurps of coffee the Doctor unlocked and opened the back door. "Do you want to go out?" she enquired

"Do I look like I want to go out in THAT?" thought Colin. He wandered to the back door, stood on the step, scanned the darkness, sniffed the air with his bruised nose and wandered back into the warmth of the kitchen.

"I thought you might want a wee" said the Doctor swooshing out her coffee cup under the tap and putting it on the draining board.

"Unlike some people I can control my bladder, running the tap doesn't really help though does it?" thought Colin.

The Doctor gathered up her coat and briefcase and with a piece of toast still in her mouth opened the back door to leave. She turned to Colin and offered this advice.

"Why don't you go back to bed for a bit Colin you look rubbish. See you tonight. Byeee"

The kitchen light went out, the back door slammed and she was gone.

"I might just do that" thought Colin "thank you for your candour, you'd look rubbish if someone had slammed your nose in a door at stupid o'clock in the morning when most decent folk are still tucked up in bed"

Colin made his way back to his basket. The blanket was still warm. Settling down he looked forward to a couple of hours of quality sleep!

The next thing he knew Stella was shaking him and singing into his ear!

"Lazy dog, lazy dog, you're the laziest dog there ever was" she sang. Then she put on her lowest most portentous voice "Colin...King Of SLEEP".

Colin was not amused. Not even a bit. He didn't see the funny side at all. There was nothing remotely funny about being woken up. He wished she would go away and let him sleep.

Stella stood up. Walking away she delivered the bombshell....

"It's ten to eight, if you're not ready to go in five minutes flat you won't be going to the laboratory today."

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH" Colin leapt to his feet and shook. Slurped a couple of mouthfuls of water (most of which went on the floor) munched a couple of mouthfuls of dry biscuit from his bowl and he was ready for action. By the time Stella came back into the kitchen he was sitting by the back door. And this time he did need a wee!

It was going to be an easy day for Colin as there were no external candidates coming into the laboratory to be tested. He would punctuate his day by monitoring the ant colony and the rest of the time he would nap. And of course the Professor was going to show him the new invention at some point.

The ant colony, or Antropolis as it was called, was one of the Professor's long term experiments. The basic hypothesis behind the experiment was that sufficient ants given sufficient time and sufficient resources would build an ant sized replica of the Empire State Building. This experiment was based loosely on the "Infinite Monkey Theorem" which states that enough monkeys striking typewriter keyboards at random would, given enough time, type the complete works of William Shakespeare. While probability states that this is possible, in reality the time needed before it might happen is longer than the age of the universe. But, as with anything random it might happen tomorrow, you just can't tell. The Professor was hoping that his ants would not take as long as the age of the universe and sometime in the next six months would be nice!

When Colin and the Professor got to the laboratory the first thing Colin did was to check on Antropolis. It was just as he'd left it the night before. When the experiment had been set up the ants had very quickly built a standard, run of the mill, ant's nest. The Professor had spoken at length to the ants taking part in the experiment about evolution and experimentation. To the side of the nest he had supplied ant sized bricks and double glazed window units. But, it was no use, the ants were quite happy in their standard nest. The Professor had almost given up on the colony ever producing a cottage let alone the Empire State Building. He couldn't bring himself to evict them back to the piece of grass at the side of the laboratory, their original home, so there was a wall of the laboratory that would forever be Antropolis.

Around eleven Colin stopped for his coffee break. Colin didn't actually drink coffee as the caffeine made him cranky but he never got out of the habit of stopping for a drink around eleven. He went to the supplies cupboard in the kitchen; the biscuit tin was in a very sorry condition. One bourbon, a rich tea and enough dust to reconstruct a digestive. That was it; no creams, no jammys, no choccys what was going on! What a disaster.....

The Professor had been crashing around behind the security doors of his personal laboratory all morning. Just after eleven the doors creaked and swung wide. The Professor stood beaming a huge smile in the doorway. He saw Colin and the smile evaporated from his face. He looked directly into Colin's eyes scowling.

"Oops" thought Colin swallowing surreptitiously.

"Was that, by any chance, the last Bourbon Colin?" demanded the Professor

"Might have been" thought Colin.....

Bit number nine.....thanks fur the memory

The Professor took off his white laboratory coat and hung it up on the peg.

"Can't have coffee without a biscuit Colin, now can we" said the Professor struggling to get into his raincoat whilst meandering towards the door arms flaying.

"Guard the lab old boy I'm going for supplies" and with that the door slammed and Colin was alone in the laboratory.

Colin wandered to the door and prodded it with his paw to make sure it was properly closed. Only now did he realise just how quiet that laboratory was without the presence of the Professor. Almost spookily quiet. He padded toward the open door that led into the Professor's private laboratory. He could hear the "tip tap" as every paw hit the linoleum tiles. Boy it was quiet. It made him feel really uneasy. He told himself not to be so stupid nothing had changed since the Professor had gone to the shop. Using logic made him feel a little better, but not much. He certainly wouldn't like to spend the night there alone it made him shudder to think about it. The MI5 training had helped but underneath it all he was still a complete coward.

He looked through the doorway leading to the inner laboratory. He couldn't see the new invention. In his mind's eye he expected the contraption to be a huge box with dials and flashing lights. He poked his head further through the doorway and scanned the room. It was very odd there was nothing in the room that even resembled an invention.

One thing he did notice though was that the grill covering the fresh air duct in the ceiling was only hanging on by one screw. "I must make the Professor aware of that" Colin noted "if it were to fall on his head it might knock some sense into him" he chuckled to himself.

As he wandered back into the main room, wishing that the Professor would hurry up with the biscuits, something caught his eye. Something was going on in Antropolis. There seemed to be a lot of activity. Standing on his hind legs he peered through the glass wall at the colony. This was very odd. He could make out a figure five laid out neatly in ant sized building bricks. If he could have scratched his head, without falling over, he would have.

At that moment the Professor burst back into the laboratory. The peace was shattered. Colin was relieved, although by that time he was getting used to the quiet. The Professor dumped a carrier bag onto one of the desks and went to hang his coat up. Colin could hardly contain himself he trotted over to desk and thrust his nose deep into the bag.

"Oh wow" he thought, almost delirious "jammies, choccies, wafers, creams.....oh bliss"

The Professor hauled Colin's head out of the bag "what have I told you about dribbling on the food" he grumbled.

"Sorry" thought Colin "just got a bit carried away".

Within moments Colin had been forgiven his hygienic misdemeanour; the Professor was slurping coffee and dunking his biscuit and Colin was making a huge mess with a packet of wafers.

Walking over to the white board on the wall opposite Antropolis the Professor picked up the board rubber and went to erase a problem he'd been working on. Colin suddenly made the connection. He leapt across the laboratory knocking the Professor away from the board.

Have you figured out the connection yet?

The Professor was sitting in a puddle of coffee. Colin was fearful for his safety.

"I hope, for your sake Colin, you had a very good reason for doing that" the Professor hauled himself to his feet. Colin nodded. The Professor liked puzzles so Colin was (for the time being) forgiven.

"OK, from your actions you wanted to stop me doing something"

To this Colin nodded.

"My coffee is poisoned?" Colin shook his head.

"The board rubber is a bomb" Colin rolled his eyes in disbelief and shook his head

"You don't want me to wipe the board?" Colin nodded

"Ah we're getting somewhere" the Professor loved games like this

"You've worked out the answer?" Colin shook his head

"You want me to leave the problem to give you more time?"

Colin shook his head and walked across the room toward Antropolis, the Professor followed, intrigued.

"Well Colin" started the Professor "you don't need to worry any longer about the problem I've worked it out. The answer is..." the Professor leant over and peered into the ant colony "oh my goodness....the answer is...five"

The Professor was in shock. He slumped down on the one of the chairs. All he said for the next ten minutes was "oh my goodness" over and over and over. The gravity of what had just happened took a while to sink in to Colin's head. OK so the ants had solved a maths problem, so what? All that this meant to Colin was that ants were better at maths than construction. The problem that worried him most was whether there was one really gifted genius ant or whether all the ants worked together on the problem like a giant ant computer. If it was one genius ant how would they know which one it was? It's not like he'd be wearing a tee shirt with a picture of Albert Einstein on it.

If Colin had known more about the way an ant colony works he would have quickly realised it was the latter. Because Antropolis was in laboratory conditions the colony didn't have to use resources on things like: protecting the colony, searching for food, building flood defences, etc etc. They were probably bored!

At lunchtime, whilst eating his cheese and pickle sandwiches, the Professor set the ants another conundrum on the white board.

"Let's see how long it takes them to figure this one out! The last answer they got might have been a lucky guess"

Colin had cleaned up (with his tongue) the last of the wafer crumbs and licked the wrapper. He liked to see a job through to the end! The Professor had washed his coffee cup out and was wiping his hands on a disgusting tea towel.

"Come on Colin let's show you the Cat device" said the Professor throwing the tea towel towards the sink.

Colin followed the Professor into the inner laboratory and had a good look around.

"Have you spotted the device?" asked the Professor. Colin shook his head. This was very strange indeed the Professor was incapable of building anything small. When Stella was younger the Professor had made her a rocking horse that she needed steps to get up on.

"Here's the first part" said the Professor opening a briefcase "This is the control unit... small isn't it?"

Colin couldn't believe it. He stood on his hind legs with his paws on the workbench to get a better look. Wow it looked great!

"And, see over there on the floor, the metal plate" Colin nodded "that is the receiver. When I activate the device anything on the plate is vaporised. Shazzam!"

As if to answer the question Colin was forming in his head the Professor continued.

"You're asking yourself why the device doesn't vaporise the whole cat" Colin nodded, that was precisely what he was thinking.

"Well, at the moment it would vaporise the whole cat. Not exactly what I had in mind"

"Exactly what I had in mind though" thought Colin

"But very shortly I'll be able to target the beam to within a millimetre. Once I've done that it'll not just be fur balls but swallowed golf balls as well. We'll be able to vaporise any foreign object inside an animal without cutting them open...isn't that exciting?"

The Professor took a fur ball, kindly donated by Sox without his knowledge, from a sealed sandwich box and placed it on the metal plate. Returning to the briefcase he turned the machine on. Colin was deafened. The Professor seemed oblivious to the noise.

"Are you deaf? Can't you hear that?" thought Colin "no, of course you can't, you are human the frequency is far too high for you. I don't think listening to Abba and Barry Manilow all these years has helped either"

Colin felt particularly unwell. The noise was so loud he was close to passing out. He vaguely remembered his legs giving way. Things went black.

The next thing Colin knew the Professor was stroking him on the head. As he came round he tried to remember where he was and what day it was.

"We'll have to get you earplugs next time old chap won't we" said the Professor in a kindly voice.

Colin got unsteadily to his feet and followed the Professor over to the metal plate on the floor. The fur ball had gone. Colin was mightily impressed by the device, despite it rendering him unconscious. He was still coming round and felt very unsteady. As he walked from the metal plate he was sure he felt something touch his paw but when he looked down there was nothing there. He put this down to his imagination and went to find his water bowl in the kitchen.

After all that excitement he badly needed a sleep. And sleep was something he never did badly!

Bit number ten.....that night at supper

Colin was: out for the count, unconscious, dead to the world, pushing up zeds, in the land of nod, taking forty winks, in dreamland, comatose, crashed out, zonkers. He was utterly and completely asleep - and he liked it that way.

The incident with the Professor's invention may have had a really dramatic effect on him and drained all of his energy. Or maybe he was just lazy. Whatever the cause the effect was that Colin was in a deep deep sleep when the Professor shook him gently at home time. Colin was having a real problem getting his legs synchronised. This caused him the slur to the left and right and made his walk to the car twice as far as it should have been.

"It's all right for you humans" thought Colin "you've only got two legs to use. I've got four. Plus, I've got lots of combinations to move them in"

Can I just interject here (if Colin doesn't mind) to tell you about the different combinations of leg movements that dogs use for propelling themselves. The first method is that the dog moves both legs on the same side of his body, this is called "pacing". The other method is called "trotting" this involves the dog moving diagonal pairs of legs. Pacing is easier and slower, trotting is faster and uses less energy as the dog's body doesn't roll from side to side. I guess the final movement we might call "bounding" this uses the dog's powerhouse in its back legs to leap forward landing on its front feet. The back legs then swing forward ready to power the dog forward again. Next time you see a dog see which method he's using. Maybe he'll have his own way of moving! Or maybe, like Colin, he prefers to ride in the car.

Anyway, to resume the story. Colin smiled to himself remembering the previous Christmas when the Professor had stumbled his way across the living room. He had blamed his inability to co-ordinate his legs to the fact that his left leg had "gone to sleep" due to sitting down too long. "and the Sherry Trifle had nothing to do with it" thought Colin.

Colin used the fact that there was no Abba or Barry Manilow blaring out of the car stereo to grab a few minutes more sleep. In fact the soothing sound of Radio Four news was quite soporific. Some people believe that you can learn things you hear when you are asleep. If this is true Colin must always be completely up to date with current affairs. A news bulletin on the radio or TV is Colin's cue to close his eyes and doze.

Back at home a couple of hours later the whole family, now fed and watered, sat at the kitchen table and chatted. Colin was snoozing under Stella's chair and Sox was sprawled in a most undignified manner by the cooker.

The Professor looked up from the book he was reading.

"Oh, by the way" he started "I showed Colin the invention today, didn't I boy"

Colin heard his name and opened his eyes just a slit before closing them again.

Sox's eyes opened and he sprang to his feet. It was as if someone had found his switch and moved it from the "sleepy cat" setting to "action cat". He wandered from the cooker to the Professor's chair and started rubbing his body against the Professor's leg and purring. This was just a ploy so that he could hear everything that the Professor had to say about the device.

"Yes, yes, yes, the device worked brilliantly. I don't think Colin realised how small and light it was! You should have seen his face when he saw that the machine fitted into a briefcase! We vaporised one of Sox's fur balls ZAAAP didn't we Colin."

"I didn't know you'd got one of my fur balls, you never asked ME!" thought Sox indignantly.

"It all worked brilliantly. The funniest thing though was something that I hadn't considered. The super high frequency I use to disperse the fur made poor old Colin pass out. I think that's probably why he's a bit groggy tonight!"

"Note to self" thought Sox "ear defenders for the gang, I don't want the gang unconscious when I vaporise Colin. In fact I don't want to be unconscious when I vaporise Colin. Where's the fun in victory if you are not able to revel in it. Oh and a briefcase sized cardboard box for the robbery."

As if to echo Sox's thoughts the Professor wound up by saying "we must get Colin some ear defenders before I run the experiment again."

Hearing the word "experiment" Stella looked up from her science book, in which was concealed a copy of Total Guitar magazine.

"Oooh Dad, can I use the lab in the evenings next week please" asked Stella.

The Professor looked up interestedly. He would have liked Stella to be more inclined towards the sciences and wondered what the fascination with guitars was. So when Stella showed any interest in science the Professor gave his 100% encouragement.

"Of course, what's the project? Do you need any help? What apparatus do you need, anything special?" The Professor was fired up with enthusiasm.

Stella didn't want to disappoint her dad but she really didn't want his help. He would turn a seemingly simple experiment into an epic journey of discovery, often ending up somewhere completely different. And as far as marks were concerned at school if you

didn't get the answer they were looking for you didn't get the marks however brilliant your discoveries.

"No Dad, if I'm going to learn I need to do the experiment myself without your help. But you can help me by checking my results, how about that?"

Stella was good at diplomacy. By letting her dad be involved a little meant she got to use the laboratory and she didn't hurt his feelings.

"That sounds really good" the Professor was enthused

Stella thought for a moment "Dad, do you still have those beetles? The experiment requires I test certain types of music on insects."

The Professor thought for a moment and scratched his head.

"Probably not the same ones that you'll remember from before. You can use Dirk, Barry and Stig. Oh and you'll probably remember George from the first experiments. What's the experiment?"

"I need to see whether the insects prefer modern pop music or pop music from the 1960s"

"That's a really good experiment Stella you should get some great results. All the boys are in to their music in a big way"

"Thanks dad you're a star" said Stella looking up at the clock on the cooker.

"Eurostar" thought the Professor "very good ha ha very good, I'm a train, woo woo!"

Stella hadn't realised what the time was and snapped her "science book" closed.

"Gotta go!" she mumbled making her way into the living room. Followed by Sox.

She switched on the TV before slumping down onto the couch and fumbling for the remote control. The controller was never in plain view it was usually somewhere down between the cushions.

She felt Sox snuggle down by her feet. The channel on the TV changed. Sox had the remote control! A familiar theme tune filled the air.

"Ah, Corrie, what more could an evil genius cat desire...apart from world domination of course?"

Stella reached for the remote control. Sox hissed and lashed out with his claws. They were going to watch Corrie. Stella didn't have a choice.

Bit number eleven.....plans come together

Colin was recovering well from his ordeal at the laboratory. Those more cynical amongst us did think he was playing the wounded soldier a little too well just to squeeze the last bit of sympathy out of the family. But who can blame him!

Sox was unable to sit still he was so excited. He had a nasty bruise where he'd clawed himself to see if he was dreaming. The bruise was very real. It was true. He would soon be the most powerful cat in history. Everything was going to plan. In fact it worried Sox that everything was going a little too well. Something was bound to put a mouse in the works. A mouse in the works is just like a spanner only the mouse has whiskers.

Zuse had set up a website called shawsetcorp.com on Gerald's internet account. There was a small risk that Gerald might log into his internet control panel before the robbery. If he did he'd see the new website which would give the game away completely. After the robbery it wouldn't matter. The website was registered to Gerald and the police would come knocking on his door. By then, Zuse calculated, he would be long gone! Plus, the police would not believe Gerald if he told them that his pet cat had set up the website. They would be falling about with laughter!

Using the new website address and email accounts Zuse set up an account with a courier company using Gerald's bank details. Zuse was pleased with his work especially because the email address he used was gerald@shawsetcorp.com, which would incriminate Gerald still further!

Dutch had been busy too rounding up a group of the most muscle bound monster cats he could find. They all made Dutch look scrawny by comparison. You're probably asking yourself how Dutch managed this. Or maybe not! I'm going to tell you anyway. As you'll know by now, Dutch wasn't, how shall I say, the sharpest knife in the cutlery drawer. However in comparison to these monster cats Dutch was a veritable genius. These mob-

sters looked up to Dutch although actually looking down on him, if you can understand, because they were taller.

One of the mobsters had even taken part in "Britains Strongest Cat". But, true to form, he'd misunderstood what he had to do and thought the competition was who could make the smelliest bottom burps. He was disqualified in the first round for making a smell so potent that one of the judges passed out and the sports hall had to be evacuated until the odour subsided.

So be warned, these mobsters are called the "Fur Rule" cats. Unless you are outside or in a well ventilated room always give these guys a wide berth! Of course if you have no sense of smell you can tell if they're around because your flowers will all droop and the petals fall off.

The "Fur Rule" cat gang were supplying the boxes for moving the invention, and themselves, to the hideout. The gang lived behind the electrical shop in the high street so it would be easy for them to steal a box. Boxes that the televisions, fridges and stereos arrived in were simply thrown out into a covered area behind the shop, there for the taking. A couple of these would be just the job.

One thing I do need to clarify before we go any further is that Zuse was blissfully unaware that Gerald was actually an agent working for the security services under the guise of Jerry Mouse. Just as Gerald was blissfully unaware that his "faithful" cat was in fact siphoning money out of his bank account. They say ignorance is bliss. If it is then Gerald and Zuse were two happy bunnies.

Also unknown to Zuse Gerald had a secret MI5 laptop computer. His MI5 bosses had asked him to be really careful with it, not show it to strangers and certainly not to leave it on any trains. It was this secret computer that had the links to the surveillance cameras overlooking the Professor's laboratory.

Manic was in serious training for the break in. He had a daily route that involved drain-pipe work, tree work, jumps from building to building, roof slides and landing rolls. He had learned a lot of the moves from a cat called Parker whose motto was "run fast, run free". Parker was a pretty weird cat who believed that a cat had to be at one with his body before he could be at one with his environment. Manic thought Parker was pretty creepy with all of his meditation and chanting but the moves he taught him were really awesome.

Molly was busy planning details of the great getaway after the robbery and going over the timings again and again while catching up on her sleep.

Mrs Trevellian suspected nothing. In fact no one suspected what was about to unfold.

Sox posted details of the plan, but just in case asked Molly to spread the word as well.

"Robbery set for next Tuesday.

Rendezvous nineteen hundred hours by the gap in the hedge behind the laboratory.

Courier booked for nineteen thirty hours.

Courier to deliver boxes to disused warehouse, the hide out, nineteen forty five hours.

Conceal invention and return to own homes by twenty hundred hours with believable alibi.

Everyone remember to bring earplugs just in case we need to use the invention!

Signed -master of all things criminal Sox”

The wheels were in motion. It was too late for the gang to stop now. All that was left for them to do was wait.

Bit number twelve.....evil is almost afoot (11”)

“Oh why didn’t I say to rob the laboratory tonight” thought Sox. Having to wait the whole weekend, Monday and all day Tuesday was starting to seem like an eternity. He quickly reprimanded himself. “If a job is worth doing it is worth doing properly” he thought quoting somebody or other who had nothing better than to make up quotes “everything has to be perfect, this will be the perfect crime, we **will** make history. What difference does it make whether I’m master of the universe today or if I have to wait until Tuesday”. Despite all of this positive thinking he desperately wanted it all NOW NOW NOW!!!

Of course to everyone else it was just a normal weekend. Time trundled past as fast as a tortoise on roller skates. Saturday was really boring. Colin mooched around the house, went for a look around the garden then returned to the house for a sleep. He repeated this every two hours or so. No one was around. The Professor and Doctor Abitmad had gone shopping and Stella was barricaded in her bedroom supposedly doing homework. Colin’s high point of the day was barking at a pigeon who had the bare faced cheek to stride across the Professor’s manicured lawn as if he owned it. This did little to brighten things up. Sox was no where to be seen so there was no entertainment to be had there. It was very boring. “I wish something really exciting would happen” thought Colin, checking under the bushes for a stealth bone for the fifth time that day.

The Abitmads came home from shopping at about four o’clock. As they opened the back door Stella came down the stairs with very little grace. I think that is the polite way of saying it sounded like a wall falling down. She was grasping her overnight bag and a handful of CDs.

“Going to Fred’s for a sleep over, bye Mum, see you tomorrow” shouted Stella as she half fell towards the front door.

“Does Frida’s Mum know you’re coming...” Doctor Abitmad’s words were cut short by the front door as it slammed.

Colin smiled to himself. Stella hadn't been doing homework she'd been making compilation CDs for the sleepover.

Doctor Abitmad put the bags of shopping down onto the kitchen table and did a little dance around the kitchen. The Professor came through the back door with the last of the bags to find his wife midway through a jig.

"What ever has got into you Dru?" he asked putting the carrier bags down.

"Sleeeep over!!!!" sang the Doctor

The Professor's eyes opened wide, he gave a little whoop and joined his wife dancing around the kitchen table. True to their surname they were both a bit mad. Funnily enough the Doctor only became a bit mad when she married the Professor.

Colin wandered back into the kitchen. He had been waiting by the front door. He was sure that Stella would be coming back when she found she'd left him behind. But after a few moments he knew she wouldn't be coming back, gone were the days when he used to go on sleepovers with her.

Colin must have looked stunned at the sight that greeted him because the Doctor stopped jiggling and knelt down to give him a stroke. Colin was bemused. Had the whole family, except him, lost the plot?

"Who's a good boy then" said the Doctor right into Colin's ear, it was very loud.

"Um.....um...is it me?" thought Colin

"Yes, you're a very good boy, yes you are"

Colin was wagging his tail but didn't quite know why because he was being deafened! Then the coin dropped...kerching! Colin reprimanded himself for being so stupid. Stella was on a sleepover so the Abitmads would be having one of their "romantic evenings". Like everything, the Abitmads idea of a "romantic evening" wasn't quite the same as everyone else's. They warmed up with a long hot bath to get really relaxed, had a bite to eat then they got down to the serious stuff. A marathon session of Scrabble on the kitchen table.

They had even invented new ways of playing Scrabble to make it more exciting. Before each game they would turn over a home made card with an instruction on it. If the card said "elements", for example, they would get double points for names or symbols of elements made with the letters. The best scores were for ZN (Zinc) or ZR (Zirconium) - eleven points doubled to twenty two just for putting a "Z" in front of an "N" or "R".

There were also harder ones like "film stars" or "pop groups" which they didn't have a clue about and seldom scored double points.

Colin settled down in his basket. It was going to be a long long night!

Stella arrived at Fred's house and put her bike into the shed. She waved at Fred who she could see in the kitchen. Things were certainly looking up. Dante was back from University for the weekend and he'd brought a friend, one of the other guys in the band. Stella couldn't believe her luck, this was going to be so great.

The Pollock's kitchen was where the family spent most time, mainly due to the lack of central heating in the huge rambling old house. It was always warm and cosy and smelled of coffee and cooking. An ancient radio, tuned to Radio Three when the dial fell

off, would forever provide classical music or jazz day and night. The heat came from an enormous range that almost filled one wall. On the back hotplate was a large coffee pot with a wisp of steam curling from its spout.

"Coffee Miss Abitmad?" Enquired Dante picking up the coffee pot with an oven glove.

"Please" Stella mumbled, her heart was in her mouth. She was trying so hard to be cool but it was completely impossible.

Dante was being a good host. He passed Stella a mug of coffee and did the introductions.

"You know Ed Larkin don't you, from the band, allegedly plays the bass don't you mate. Ed this is Stella. Stella's OK, you'll like her."

"Wow" thought Stella. This was a breakthrough. For the first time she'd been introduced as a person in her own right not just "my little sister's friend". And Dante thought she was OK. It just got better and better.

They all stood around drinking their coffee for a while chatting about bands and films. Then the subject of what they were going to do later came up.

"What we thought" said Fred turning to Stella "is that we could do something different tonight, we usually go to a gig or watch a movie right? We thought it would be good if Ed told your fortune"

Stella coughed a mouthful of coffee mostly back into her mug. The suggestion had taken her a little by surprise. Stella wiped her mouth with a tissue and cleared her throat. "Yes, that'll be great" she spluttered. Despite having reservations about it she didn't want to appear to be a wet blanket.

Her reaction had obviously said more than her words did!

"It's only a bit of fun Stella" said Ed reassuringly "it's not like we're going to be doing a séance or anything. I bought some tarot cards and a book about what each means. Each card has more than one meaning so we'll all draw some out and make up a story from the meanings we like, what do you think?"

Put like that it didn't sound too bad. Stella smiled, Ed smiled and Fred wiped up the coffee that had ended up on the floor.

Very late that evening in Dante's room, lit only by candlelight, the four sat cross legged around a large handkerchief laid out on the floor. Atmospheric music played in the background. Stella was beginning to enjoy herself, all of the attention gave her a warm fuzzy feeling.

What question did Stella want answered by the cards? Stella thought hard but there was nothing she wanted to know that she was going say in front of Dante! She settled on "what was going to happen to me next week".

Ed turned over the first card, then the second and third. No one spoke as he carefully laid out the cards face up on the handkerchief. He continued until he had seven cards arranged in a horse shoe shape.

He looked at the cards for a little. He scratched his chin and frowned. Stella was starting to feel uneasy. With a very serious face Ed looked up directly at Stella.

"Sorry Stella, this doesn't look good" he said in a very low voice. Stella was mortified, all of the blood seemed to drain from her face and her stomach clenched up inside.

"Oh my goodness why?" Stella was close to tears, she just wanted the ground to open and swallow her up.

Stella turned to Fred who was desperately trying to keep a straight face. When their eyes met Fred burst into laughter, followed by Dante and finally Ed.

"I hate you all, that was a really wicked thing to do" Stella punched Fred on the arm "but I guess it was quite funny"

"Forgiven?" asked Fred holding her arms open wide.

"Forgiven!" Stella reached across and gave Fred a hug.

After looking up a couple of things in his reference book Ed was ready to give his verdict.

"OK here we go. You've got the fool card. That doesn't mean you're a fool. I'll say you're going on a journey and you don't know where you're going, or can't see where you're going. You're going on this journey because of the magician, he's not really a magician in your case I think he's a trickster. Who's the trickiest most evil person you know?"

"Oh definitely our cat Sox" giggled Stella

"Boo hiss" added Fred

"You're going on this journey and you don't know where you're going. It's because of your cat Sox. I think he's kidnapped you."

Everyone laughed.

"Wait a minute" Ed continued "what's this over here? Someone is coming to rescue you. Who could that be?"

"Colin to the rescue!!!!" cried Stella.

By this time Stella and Fred were rolling around on the floor giggling uncontrollably. It was one of those giggling fits that you think has finished but you look at the other person and it all starts again. It probably took a good five minutes to bring the giggles under control.

When everything was quiet again Ed held up both hands and looked very serious.

"I know you're laughing now but the cards have spoken. These things I have prophesied will come to pass....probably on Tuesday after the soaps"

And now all four of them were rolling around on the floor giggling and holding their stomachs.

Bit number thirteen.....robbery!

Tuesday was a typical Tuesday. It came after Monday and directly before Wednesday. The sun came up. Stella went to school. Colin had the day off from the laboratory and tried to sleep. Nothing outstanding or memorable about that I'd say.

Sox was pacing the kitchen like a cat on a hot tin roof. Maybe because he was excited or maybe because he'd burned his paws walking across the cooker looking for his breakfast. Who knows? Well, he knows but it would be no good asking him because he probably wouldn't tell you.

At four thirty Colin sauntered casually out into the garden to find the stealth bone and work through this week's lesson on the MI5 correspondence course. The bone was under the bushes as usual. The detectives among you will have deduced, correctly, that it was not raining!

The lesson was extremely boring and, Colin thought, a complete waste of a stealth bone. It was entitled "how to fill in an F267/O expense claim form" (the "O" standing for overseas). Firstly, he thought, I don't claim expenses, especially overseas ones, and secondly I have appalling handwriting. The bone fizzed and shrank to resemble a cat poo as normal.

"That's funny" thought Colin "there's another used stealth bone further under the bush – better check it out"

Colin pushed himself as far under the bush as he could and pressed his nose against the stealth bone.

"EUUUUGHHHH" It was real cat poo! "I'll have that smell in my nostrils for weeks now. I'll get that cat Sox the next time I see him!!!" thought Colin wiping his nose on the damp grass.

Six thirty.

Sox was making his way to Mrs Trevellian's to meet the gang. Stella was in the laboratory playing a selection from "Pet Sounds" to beetles Dirk, Barry, Stig and George. Colin was asleep in his basket at home and the ants in Antropolis were busy working on the tricky problem the Professor had scrawled on the white board that afternoon.

Six forty five.

Sox and the gang were on their way to the rendezvous point. There had been a minor disaster already. Dutch had been charged with bringing sticky tape for sealing up the boxes. He'd put his head through the roll of tape to make it easier to carry and because his ears flipped back up he was unable to get it off again.

There was a commotion in the High Street as two cardboard boxes slid, as if by magic, up the pavement. Every now and again a corner of the box would rise and a cat's head would pop out and have a look around. The "Fur Rule" cats, who were pushing the box from inside, were literally in the dark about where they were! The boxes wove their way up the pavement much to the amusement of passing cars and pedestrians.

Gerald was home from work and was reviewing the surveillance camera recordings on his secret laptop. Nine a.m. the Professor arrived. At twelve thirty the Professor went to the shop, to get his lunch. At five thirty, the Professor locked up and went home. Six fifteen, Stella arrived on her bike. Stella didn't lock her bike and she left the front door open. Gerald sighed. Stella would never make an MI5 operative. A box popped up in the corner of the screen and blinked the word "LIVE". A whole day's action reviewed in 15 seconds. Just how boring was that. At six forty nine Gerald switched off his PC and went to make some supper.

Seven o'clock precisely.

The clock on the church tower was slightly fast and had already chimed seven times when the two groups met at rendezvous point. Manic had already had a slap from Molly for getting too excited. The "Fur Rule" boys found it extremely amusing that Dutch had a roll of sticky tape stuck around his neck. In a moment of rare humour one of the "Fur Rule" gang suggested that pulling tape off the roll would make Dutch's head spin!

Having started the ball rolling they all wanted to get in on the act. The "Fur Rule" cats were seriously unfunny.

"Yeah...we should call him Dutch Tape from now on...ha ha" said another of the gang.

Sox needed to restore some order if the plan was going to work.

"QUIET..." a hush fell over the group "firstly, Mr Clever cat, it is duct tape not Dutch tape, and secondly, no talking unless absolutely necessary. Molly, go and see if the coat is clear...I mean coast"

There was some sniggering at the back followed by some shushing from the more responsible members of the gang.

Molly disappeared through the hedge as silent as a smelly one. If the other cats had thumbs they would have twiddled them as it was they looked through the hedge in silence. Moments later Molly was behind them.

"Not good" said Molly. The gang all jumped out of their skins and Dutch had a small seepage of air from under his tail. "fraaaaap"

"Don't doooo that" said Sox

"Who did reconnaissance on this job?" asked Molly. All the cats looked at each other trying to figure out who to blame.

"Um...I did" admitted Manic

Molly was beside herself with rage.

"And you didn't spot the surveillance cameras? What are you - blind or something Manic? Never send an amateur to do a professional's job. We might as well go home now. Forget it. Job's off. Thanks for your time and good bye. Feel free to whack Manic really hard as you leave..."

"Woah, woah, wait a minute, back up, job's not off" protested Manic "sorry I didn't spot the cameras but I can fix it honest. You point them out Molly and I'll fix 'em"

"You'll have to be quick" mumbled Sox very unimpressed "we're already late"

"Quick is my middle name" replied Manic.

"I didn't know you had a middle name" noted Dutch

"Oh shut up Dutch" Molly was in no mood for games. It was becoming obvious that she was now running the operation. In her opinion the best man for the job was usually a woman.

Molly and Manic disappeared into the darkness. Good to his word Manic disabled the cameras in double quick time. Molly pointed out the locations and Manic was up the tree or post before you could say "look there's a cat up that tree or post".

For most of the cameras it was easy just to pull the lead out of the back. After wrestling with a couple of stubborn leads he just resorted to pointing these cameras in another direction.

Within minutes the two were back with the gang.

"OK fellas, see the opening on the side wall. That's the air duct. I want the grill off and Manic in the duct in the next thirty seconds."

Sox barked orders at the gang. Which was strange because he was a cat. In less than twenty seconds Manic was being cat handled into the air duct and was complaining bitterly because "someone" had claws out!

"Get in and open the front door, we'll meet you round there with the boxes" shouted Sox at Manic as he disappeared into the air duct.

The duct was very dark. Manic scampered as quickly as he could through the piping. Left and then right, straight and then right, then straight on again. There was still no sign of light. Manic stopped to catch his breath. He could feel that he was standing on a grill...and then he wasn't. He was falling. Cats nearly always land on their feet. They usually perfect this by the time they're seven weeks old.

Now whether it was that Manic didn't have a tail or simply because he was lacking in the brainpower department is up for debate but the end result was that Manic ended up laying on his back on a briefcase with all of the air knocked out of him. He didn't stay there long. Long enough though to look up and see that the grill he stepped on was only held on with one screw. No wonder it gave way!

Using a move perfected by Mr Parker he slid from the briefcase flipping himself onto his feet before he hit the floor. He silently crept across the laboratory towards a slither of light coming through the door on the other side of the room.

He put his head round the door. The lights were on but there was no one there. Manic ran as quickly as he could towards the front door to let in the gang, but they were already in.

"Someone left the door open" said Sox "how thoughtful, we're very late we need to work fast or the courier will be here."

Molly wasn't so sure "feels like a trap to me" she mumbled.

The gang made their way across the outer lab. One of the "Fur Rule" boys, who wasn't dragging the huge cardboard box, spoke.

"Forty two"

"What?" said Sox turning

"Forty two, the answer to the problem on the white board"

"I don't care what the answer is. We're looking for the Professors invention. Everyone keep your eyes peeled for a briefcase" said Sox trying to sound like he was in control of the operation.

"Um excuse me Sox" offered Manic

"Shut up Manic" snapped Molly

"No..no..really..." continued Manic getting very excited "I know where the invention is...I landed on it when I fell through the ceiling"

"Oh no...did you break it you stupid cat?" Molly was losing patience.

"No I don't think so..it's through here" gestured Manic leading the band through into the dark inner laboratory.

"Up there, look, on the bench...am I good or am I good!" said Manic proudly.

Sox tried to savour the moment but there wasn't time.

"Quick guys, get the briefcase and the metal plate it's resting on into the small box and get it taped up"

The gang worked quickly and efficiently. Within moments the box was ready for transport. Zuse looked at the clock on the wall. It was bang on seven thirty.

Bit number fourteen....caught red pawed!

Suddenly they heard a noise from the outer laboratory. It was the sound of a loo flushing. Someone was there. And so was the large getaway box. They were doomed. There was no way out except back through the air duct. Manic would probably have made the jump from the laboratory bench to the opening but the others wouldn't have stood a chance.

Stella was bemused and scared at the same time. When she'd gone to the loo the front door was on the latch and the floor was clear. Now the door was wide open and there was a giant cardboard box like an island in the middle of the linoleum tiles. It hadn't blown in from outside the night was quite still.

Stella closed the front door and summoning up all of her courage went to investigate. "I wish Colin was here, he'd protect me" she thought opening the door to the inner laboratory. She reached around the doorframe and fumbled for the light switch.

The strip lights spluttered into action. She was face to face with Sox who was standing on the bench. Next to him was the box containing the invention.

"Sox, what are you..." but before Stella could finish the sentence she was falling.

Two of the largest cats had launched themselves at the backs of her knees causing them to give way. Another cat had jumped from one of the high cabinets onto her chest causing her to fall backwards. On the way down Stella's head crashed against the doorframe.

Stella lay motionless in the doorway. A small trickle of blood from her nose dripped onto the white tiles.

Molly turned to Sox "what are we going to do Sox? This wasn't in the plan".

Sox had to think fast and when you think fast you're not always at your most logical.

"She's seen me so she knows it's us that have stolen the invention"

With a snap decision Sox gave the order to bind and gag Stella and put her into the large box. The room was suddenly illuminated by headlights of a van as it pulled up to the front door. The gang heard the van engine stop and saw the lights turn off.

Stella was proving a problem to get into the cardboard box. She was still unconscious but very heavy even for a team of monster cats. With one last mighty effort Stella was finally curled up in the box. The lid went down and the sticky tape went on. The smaller box containing the briefcase went on top.

As they were pushing the boxes into the outer laboratory there was a knock at the front door. The door, which was on the latch, swung open. The cats skidded this way and that. Two disappeared into the toilet, a couple hid under the workbench and the rest concealed themselves wherever they could find a space.

"Hi there, hello, anyone at home? Courier for your boxes" a voice shouted from the door.

Two men entered the laboratory cautiously.

"They must be expecting us Jo" said one of the men "here are the two boxes as per the order"

Zuse felt great that his plan had come together but didn't feel so great about hiding in a lab coat pocket. The half eaten fruit sweet that was in the corner of the pocket was now stuck firmly to his bottom. Getting that off was going to hurt.

The second man had stopped and was looking at the white board

"Forty two"

"What?" said the first man

"Forty two, the answer to the problem on the white board"

"Are you going to help me with this box or what?"

"I'll do the 'or what' bit" said the second man laughing.

Together they lifted the box containing Stella and the box with the invention into the back of the van. They didn't spot the trail of blood that was on the bottom of the box as it had been dragged from the inner room.

The cats started to emerge from their hiding places but quickly had to hide again as the first man came back into the room and placed a piece of paper on the work bench. He turned and slammed the door behind him.

The cats slowly emerged from their hiding places. Headlights illuminated the back wall of the outer laboratory as the van pulled away from the building.

"We did it Sox, we did it!" Manic was jumping up and down.

Sox didn't look quite as happy as Manic thought he should have. In fact Sox looked quite sick. The cats congregated in the centre of the lab. Molly got up onto the workbench and addressed the gang.

"Firstly Sox would like to thank everyone for their contribution to this brilliant operation. Zuse, your part of the operation was faultless. The boxes are on their way. To Dutch and the boys I'd like to say what magnificent muscle you are. But someone please get that roll of tape from round Dutch's neck! Manic, despite failings on the reconnaissance front you did some great breaking and entering. You didn't know that the front door was going to be open! But we do have a problem. At this moment Stella, one of Sox's humans, is on her way with the invention to our secret hide out. With this I'll hand you over to Sox"

There was silence as the gravity of what had happened sank in. Sox jumped up beside Molly on the workbench.

"Thanks Mo" said Sox nuzzling Molly on his way past

"Yes we do have a problem there's no getting away from it. But it's not a disaster. I've given it some thought and this is what we'll do."

Sox sounded grave. But he was starting to sound like a true leader. The others hung on his every word.

"Everyone go and sort out your alibis. Zuse destroy everything that might incriminate us. Destroy the website, the email addresses, everything."

Zuse nodded.

"I will decide on the way forward and will be in touch. At the moment we're safe. Our next move will be make or break. We need to be absolutely sure what we're doing"

There was nodding of heads and mumbled words of agreement.

"OK you lot...scram...I'll be in touch"

With this the cats ran one at a time from the front door to the nearest cover, the hedge by the entrance, and disappeared into the night. Sox was last to leave but before he left he shredded the piece of paper the van driver had left on the work bench with his claws.

If you haven't figured it out already the piece of paper the van driver left was the receipt to say they'd picked up the boxes. Not only did it have the client as "The Shawset Corporation" but it also had the delivery address. Sox's secret hide out wouldn't have been so secret if that had got out!

Bit number fifteen.....Colin gets a message on the emergency bone!

By eight thirty the Professor and Doctor were getting concerned about Stella's whereabouts. The Professor had called the laboratory there was no answer. The Doctor had called Fred's parents but Stella hadn't been there.

Stella's mobile phone was on the kitchen table. As usual it was not in Stella's pocket! Colin was asleep in his basket. Sox was asleep on the back of the sofa.

"You're in charge Colin we're going to take a ride out to the laboratory to find Stella. Her bike may have had a puncture."

The back door slammed and the Abitmads were gone. Colin opened one eye and then closed it again. Then he did something very odd. He woke up! It had taken a while to sink in but something was very wrong. Stella was never this late. He went to the back door and looked out into the blackness. He didn't know what he was looking for. He just stood there looking.

Meanwhile the Abitmads had arrived at the laboratory. They had found Stella's bike outside. They had found the front door open. They had found Stella gone!

They were both extremely worried. The Doctor who was usually analytical and unemotional gave the Professor a big hug. "I hope our baby is OK" she whispered in the Professor's ear.

"She'll be fine" replied the Professor picking up the telephone.

The Doctor turned away.

"Forty two"

"What?" said the Professor

"Forty two, the answer to the problem on the white board" replied the Doctor

The Professor walked over to where the Doctor was standing and gave her another hug.

"The police said they'd come immediately, they want to know if anything has been stolen."

On reaching the door to the inner laboratory the Professor turned open mouthed, towards the Doctor who also had her mouth wide open. They both spoke at the same time so neither heard the other.

They tried again but again they spoke at the same moment.

"You go first" said the Professor.

"No you go first" replied the Doctor.

"OK...I'll go....my invention, someone's stolen my invention"

The Doctor became very very angry indeed.

"To hell with your invention. Look down at your feet you stupid pig headed man. It's blood. It's Stella's blood"

Thankfully at that moment the police arrived or the Professor's blood might have been spilt too. The Abitmads were obviously in shock and were probably not the best people to explain what had happened. But the police are used to dealing with people in shock they do it everyday.

The Professor and the Doctor bumbled incoherently at one of the policemen as the other went to have a look around.

"It's forty two Sarge"

"What?" said the first policeman

"Forty two, the answer to the problem on the white board" replied the second

"Go check the other room" said the first policeman waving an arm toward the door to the inner laboratory.

The second officer mumbled something and followed the wall round checking the cupboards until he reached the door.

"Over here" he shouted "blood"

"Yes, that's what we were trying to tell you" said the Professor "our daughter has gone and the blood on the floor is hers we're sure"

"Looks like they got in through the air vent" said the second officer.

The first officer laughed.

"Excuse him Professor he's very new to the force, only something as small as a cat would be able to get through an opening that size"

"Could have been a cat" replied the second policeman. The first policeman glared at him. "Go and wait in the car I'll be out in a minute"

The officer turned to the Professor "what I suggest is that you lock up here and have a cruise round town, we'll also get everyone on the look out. If your daughter has fallen over and cracked her head she may be suffering from concussion and not know where she is. If we don't find her then obviously we'll need to step up the search and get the forensic boys in. Don't worry we'll find her."

The Abitmads decided to call in at home to see if Stella had returned on foot or left a message on the answerphone. While they were home they'd get a flask of tea for the car. Colin was really pleased to see them. He met them at the door wagging his tail vigorously. He was looking forward to seeing Stella. They walked straight by him without even saying hello. They were both looking very pale and worried. He put his head out of the door and looked into the black of the night. Surely Stella would be here in a moment, she was probably just putting her bike away in the shed. But Stella didn't come. His heart sank. What if she never came back?

Without Stella Colin didn't know what he would do. He stared into the darkness for what seemed an eternity wondering how he could live without her. She was his best friend in the world. He felt completely empty as if a part of him had been stolen away.

Were his eyes deceiving him or was there really a dim light deep in the bushes? No, there was certainly something glowing. He crept out into the darkness. As he got closer, and more worried, he began to make out a familiar shape glowing in the dark. It was an Xv950 (Mk 3) stealth bone, the night version (the only difference to the Mk2 was that it glowed).

"You took your flaming time!" said the bone before Colin even got close to it.

Colin jumped back in amazement.

"Sorry Colin, better stick to protocol and all that" the bone continued.

"This is an EM1 high priority emergency message from Jerry Mouse"

Colin felt proud, he knew what an EM1 was from his course. He knew to listen to the bone then bury it after it had turned into a cat poo.

"Message reads. Surveillance cameras down seven o'clock, no signal. Laboratory breached via unsecured fresh air duct. Agent on site at eight o'clock. Stella Abitmad possibly taken by force, blood found at scene. Only clue is a shredded invoice. Words that can be reconstructed are "The Shawset Corp". By the way the answer is forty two"

That was it, the lot, the whole message. The bone fizzed and spat like a firework on a dark November night. In line with his training Colin deftly dug a small hole and buried the remnants of the bone. "No one would ever believe me if I told them I voluntarily buried cat poo" he thought returning to the warmth of the house.

Colin was completely stumped. What was he meant to do? His training hadn't told him about finding and freeing hostages, that lesson was still weeks away.

He lay down in his basket and replayed the message in his mind over and over until his brain hurt.

Meanwhile in the living room Sox had been wrestling with the problem of what to do about Stella. He was not as evil as he liked to think he was. The obvious thing to do was to vaporise her using the machine. He couldn't bring himself to even consider it. In all of his plans he had never actually thought about vaporising anyone, except maybe Colin. He thought that by threatening people with the machine he'd get what he wanted. He'd never contemplated actually using it.

After much deliberation he set on a plan. He and Molly would go to the secret hide out get the machine and hide it somewhere at Mrs Trevellian's house. Stella would escape from the box, it was only a matter of time, but who would believe her if she said a cat had kidnapped her. Especially as she was suffering from concussion after banging her head.

Sox was happy with this plan. He would get Molly and rescue the invention. They'd have to be quick, Stella could wriggle out of the sticky tape that was binding her and escape at any time. Silently he dropped down from the back of the sofa and padded into the kitchen. Colin was in his basket. His eyes followed Sox as he made his way across the kitchen towards the cat flap.

You know when sometimes the most obscure facts stick in your brain. Things that you are unlikely to ever use and end up taking valuable brain space. These facts seem to pop back into your thoughts randomly. Only yesterday when I was making a cup of tea I thought about the 1966 World Cup Final. England played West Germany at Wembley they won four goals to two after extra time, Geoff Hurst scored the last goal and there was a dodgy decision made by a Russian linesman, did the ball cross the line or not? I remembered all this just because I was making tea. The experts call it association. I was looking at my cup and my brain went and got the information about a cup, any old cup! I wished it hadn't but you don't get any choice!

Colin watched Sox's back legs and tail disappearing through the cat flap. He suddenly had one of these random memories come flooding back into his head.

It was Christmas. The family were all sitting in the living room after eating Christmas dinner. Stella had tied tinsel around his neck. He remembered how warm and cosy it was and how the Christmas tree lights twinkled as it started to get dark outside.

Stella was sitting on the floor giving out the presents. (This is going somewhere I promise). Colin remembered her giving him a small parcel and saying "take this to Dad it'll make him laugh". He carefully gave the parcel to the Professor and rested his head on the Professor's knee to watch him open it.

The thing Colin remembered most vividly was not that the present contained a pair of paisley socks but the label. It had the word SOCKS in large letters on one side. He remembered the Professor turning over the label and seeing some words he didn't understand. He remembered the words though..... LES CHAUSSETTES.

Colin sighed. It was a lovely dream but it didn't help him find Stella. He was resigned to feeling a helpless, hopeless failure.

He replayed the message from the stealth bone in his head yet another time. When he got to the part about the clue into his head popped a vision of Sox leaving through the cat flap followed by the vision of the Professor opening his present.

What linked "Shawset Corporation" and the Christmas present and the cat flap? It was beginning to hurt Colin's head. I think anyone else would have made the connection ages ago but Colin wasn't the brightest bulb in the light bulb shop.

Suddenly, as if someone had put another coin in the electricity meter, all the lights came on in Colin's head. Colin was squinting to see. As he became used to the light, metaphorically speaking, everything came into sharp focus.

"I know the answer!" he thought "It is so simple it has been staring me in the face....."

He leapt out of his basket and skidded across the kitchen. For once in his life he looked like he was in a hurry!

Colin had never attempted to leave the house by the cat flap before, but there was no time to lose. He got his front legs and his head through and found himself stuck. He was neither in or out of the house. How undignified! He wasn't going to be beaten by a cat flap. Stella needed him and he was not going to let her down. He struggled, he squirmed, he pushed, pulled and wriggled. Suddenly with a crack the frame around the cat flap came away from the door.

"Oops..sorry!"

With the flap now on the floor there was enough room for Colin to get his bum through. He raced across the lawn and with one enormous leap he cleared the back gate. He was now bounding down the road at top speed.

*Woah hold on a minute. Stop it right there Colin. **STOP!!!!!!** Before you go any further would you mind explaining to everyone what made you break the cat flap and go racing down the road. Oh, and by the way I was very impressed how you cleared the back gate. I didn't think you had it in you!*

"Well" thought Colin "it wasn't the fact that the Professor had paisley socks for Christmas or that the cat's name is Sox Paisley. The thing that made the connection was the label on the present. It said "LES CHAUSSETTES" which I guessed was French for "The Socks" and the label left at the crime scene said "The Shawset Corporation". So I made the connection that Sox was behind Stella's disappearance. Maybe not Sox on his own but certainly "The Sox Corporation". Sorry about breaking the cat flap can I go and save Stella now?"

I guess so, off you go.

With this Colin was off at high speed down the road. Colin made straight for Mrs Trevelian's house. This wasn't just a lucky guess. He regularly saw Sox going in or out of the gate when he and Stella were out on their walks.

By the time he got to Mrs Trevelian's house he was very out of breath. Despite being an MI5 agent he wasn't very fit. He stood just outside the gate and panted for a few moments. Someone was coming. He quickly ducked into next door's hedge and peered out through the twigs. Moment's later Sox and Molly strolled casually out of the gate and they were being all "lovey dovey".

"Yuk" thought Colin "I really don't know what she sees in him".

Colin gave them twenty or thirty metres start and then slipped out of the hedge and followed. The lesson on his correspondence course called "*Following the bad guys without them knowing*" now came in really useful. He darted between the dark places that the street lamps didn't reach. When out of the cover of darkness he hid behind trees and even the post box. Every time he stopped he did take a moment to have a good sniff to see who'd "been" along the route that day.

Colin started to get worried. They'd gone quite a way. They were now out of the streets of houses and into roads only punctuated by the occasional street lamp.

Up ahead a large black building loomed menacingly. As he got closer Colin gasped at the building's size. It was crumbling, the windows were broken, and half of the tiles on the roof were missing. There were no lights, just blackness.

At that moment the moon that had been behind the clouds slid into a patch of open sky. The silvery light cast menacing shadows. Colin, by this time was very scared and quaking in his paws.

Sox and Molly disappeared through the large door on the front of the building. Colin didn't know what to do. Should he go in after them? Should he sneak up to the building and look through one of the broken windows? Should he go and get help? Should he wait for them to come back out?

After a few seconds deliberation he decided to see if he could sneak a peek.

Bit number fifteen.....Colin, hero or zero?

Inside the abandoned warehouse Sox and Molly were "discussing" what they should do. OK, they were having a huge argument. Stella, although still tied up tightly with sticky tape, had kicked her way out of the huge cardboard box. She had propped herself up against the wall opposite the window. Thankfully she had nothing more than a bloody nose and a bit of a headache to show for her ordeal. The moonlight cast a shaft of silvery light across the room picking out the box containing the invention. Colin's nose could just be seen in the bottom corner of the window as he peeked in on the scene.

"I say we vaporise her" said Molly firmly starting to pull the briefcase from the cardboard box.

"We can't do that, that's just not right" spluttered Sox

"You know what your trouble is Paisley? You've got no spine. You call yourself an evil mastermind but you're as timid as a kitten. I've met mice with more guts than you" Molly was sometimes brutally honest and sometimes just brutal!

Molly had pulled the briefcase out of the box and was dragging the metal plate across the room towards Stella. Stella was very afraid. The invention and the metal plate could mean only one thing – she was going to be vaporised. There was fear in her eyes but she couldn't scream because of the sticky tape over her mouth. Desperately she wriggled and squirmed but it was no good the sticky tape was just too strong.

"I **am** an evil mastermind" remonstrated Sox "only a mastermind would be able to plan such an operation and get what he wants purely by the use of threats".

"You're nothing but a maggot" spat Molly "put your ear plugs in, if you haven't got the guts to go through with this stand to one side and let me finish the job".

Colin watched as Molly dragged the metal plate towards Stella. His heart was pounding so fast and loud he was surprised Sox didn't hear it. He had to do something to save Stella, and quickly. It would mean being very brave. He remembered how he felt when he thought that he might not see her again. He never ever wanted to feel like that again. As long as he remembered that feeling he could be brave for Stella.

Silently he dropped down from the window and made his way round the building to the main door. Pushing the door with his nose it silently swung open. It was extremely dark inside. He could just make out a door across the room. It was ajar and a slither of moonlight was drawn across the dusty floor. He padded across to the door and opened it a fraction more with his paw.

Peeking into the room he could see Sox beside the invention. Molly had almost reached Stella with the metal plate. There was no time to lose. With one bound he was across the room knocking Sox off his feet. The two of them rolled across the floor fighting like cat and dog. Sox was wriggling and scratching. Colin was having problems holding him down. Then things got much worse. Molly was suddenly on Colin's back pulling his collar. Colin was struggling for breath because the collar was pulled so tight. He was starting to feel faint, he had to get Molly off his back but that would mean letting Sox up from the floor.

Colin jumped up onto his hind legs. Sox was now free and sprinted towards the invention. Molly was still hanging on his collar her eyes wide and insane. He shook his head vigorously sending her sliding across the floor, still grasping his collar that had slipped loose.

Before he could gather his thoughts he was being deafened. Sox had switched on the invention. He knew he only had seconds until he passed out he had to turn the machine off. He hadn't noticed before but both Sox and Molly were wearing earplugs. The earplugs that the Professor had put into the briefcase for him!

On wobbly legs he staggered towards the machine.

"Do you expect me to bark?" thought Colin

"No Colin, I expect you to croak!" thought Molly with a manic laugh.

The inky black cloud engulfed him once again just as in the laboratory. He felt his legs give way. Colin was down, sprawled, unconscious in the middle of the room.

Sox switched the machine off.

"Let's pack the machine up and get away before he comes round" Sox pleaded.

"Finish it, FINISH IT" hissed Molly dragging the metal plate back across the room towards Colin. "Help me get the plate under him or it'll be you on this plate getting zapped".

The two cats positioned the plate next to Colin and with all of their strength rolled him over onto it.

Molly returned to the controls of the invention and pressed the button. Stella was wriggling desperately and crying. Her best friend in the world was about to be vaporised and there was nothing she could do to save him.

Stella watched as Colin started to become transparent. She could see the metal plate through his body. She couldn't watch. She closed her eyes tightly and sobbed uncontrollably.

With a huge bang the machine exploded filling the room full of smoke. It had only ever vaporised fur balls before. The strain of vaporising Colin had been just too much – there was quite a lot of him!

Colin opened his eyes. He was stretched out on the metal plate with a huge headache! The room was full of smoke. The cats were pawing the invention and mewling at each other. If he could sneak round behind them in the darkness and the smoke he could free Stella.

Stella opened her eyes Colin was gone. Vaporised? Maybe he got away when the machine exploded? She was now really frantic. She wriggled and squirmed with all of her might. Suddenly the sticky tape gave way as if it had been cut. Her hands were now free. She struggled to free her feet.

Colin had managed to get behind Stella and had nibbled the tape holding her hands together. He turned round. He was face to face with Sox. It was very strange Sox was watching Stella struggling with the tape around her feet. He was looking straight through Colin as if he wasn't there.

"Am I dead? Maybe I'm a ghost?" thought Colin, somewhat bemused "no, I can't be a ghost, ghosts can't nibble sticky tape can they!"

By this time Stella had freed her feet and pulled away the tape that was across her mouth (which really hurt because it was also stuck to her hair). She leapt to her feet and grabbed Sox by the scruff of the neck. She held him up in front of her.

"You vaporised Colin you evil cat, he was my best friend and you killed him."

"No he didn't, woo hoo, I'm here, over here Stella!" thought Colin as loudly as he could jumping up and down and wagging his tail.

Molly was getting away. Colin leapt across the room slamming the door before she could reach it. Molly froze in shock. How had the door slammed on it's own? The moment of indecision gave Stella the chance to grab her by the scruff with her other hand.

You know what they say don't you "two cats in the hand is worth the whole gang out in the bushes"!

"Into the box you go you evil pair" said Stella bundling the cats into the large cardboard box.

"You'll spend the rest of your nine lives in jail, you're lucky we live in England in some parts of the world it would be a one way trip to the vets for you."

Stella sealed the box by folding the flaps over each other.

She sat down on the floor and as the gravity of what had happened sank in she started to cry. Colin couldn't stand to see her cry so decided to give her a cuddle. He nuzzled his head into her lap.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH" Stella jumped three feet in the air and was screaming hysterically.

"I didn't deserve that". thought Colin "I only came for a cuddle".

As he walked across the room to retrieve his collar he noticed something really strange. When he walked in front of the window he didn't cast a shadow in the moonlight.

He then had another amazing insight. A light bulb moment – and this time it was a really bright light bulb.

"I've already decided I'm not vaporised and I'm not a ghost" he thought.

"So, if that is true and I don't make a shadow then I must be invisible!"

It was all starting to make sense.

"Sox looked right through me as if I wasn't there – because I wasn't! Stella screamed when I gave her a cuddle because she couldn't see me!"

"Wow, this is just bizarre"

He walked across the room and slipped his collar back on.

"Colin, where have you been?" cried Stella.

"You missed all of the excitement; the machine blew up, I got free and captured Sox, a ghost slammed the door allowing me to capture Molly, I sealed Sox and Molly in the box, I sat down on the floor, the ghost touched me, I screamed and you came back. That's what you missed!"

"That's odd" thought Colin "I thought I was invisible"

At that moment the headlights of a car drawing up outside illuminated the room. They heard the car door slam and waited in silence. The door swung open and a man grasping a torch burst into the room.

"I've come to save you" said the man.

"Too late" laughed Stella "I don't need saving thank you and nor does my dog".

"Ah...um..oh...right" said the man "my name is Gerald, you don't know me but I was the one that told Colin you'd been kidnapped. Colin and I work together. We thought there may be an attempt to steal one of your Dad's inventions. Sorry I didn't get here sooner. I had to call a lot of couriers before I found the delivery address of those boxes."

Stella scratched her head this was getting more like a bad dream the longer it went on.

"The least you can do Mr Gerald is give us and these boxes a lift home if that's OK."

Gerald nodded.

Stella knelt down and gave Colin a hug. Colin's collar, that wasn't properly fastened, fell to the floor.

Stella screamed.

Colin had disappeared.

Putting his nose back through the collar Colin flipped it back over his neck.

Colin reappeared.

Gerald laughed and laughed and laughed!

"You know what your brilliant idiot father has done Stella don't you?"

Stella shook her head.

"He thought he'd invented a machine to vaporise fur balls and all the time he wasn't vaporising them he was just making them invisible!"

Stella pinched herself. She wasn't dreaming this was really happening.

Gerald thought some more.

"I think that the metal name tag on Colin's collar is what's making Colin visible. We must destroy the invention. Just think what would happen if it got into the wrong hands... which it almost did."

Stella nodded and for once in her short life she was completely lost for words. But not for long.

"Are you from the secret bit of the government?" she asked

"Um...maybe" replied Gerald.

"Look Gerald" said Stella "only you, me and Colin know that Colin can become invisible. The machine blew up so there is no chance of anyone else ever using it. What do you say to keeping this to ourselves."

"I'll have to clear it with my bosses but I don't see why not, you'll have to do the same course as Colin though."

"Colin's done a course? Now I know you're pulling my leg!" giggled Stella.

Stella knelt down again and gave Colin a huge hug.

"What do you say my famous disappearing reappearing friend?"

"Just call me Invisidog" thought Colin.

Colin will return as Invisidog in...

"The spy that licked me."

Oh and before I go I must tell you that the ants in Antropolis solved the problem that the Professor had set them on the whiteboard. The answer to the Adams conjecture is indeed forty two.

Ivisidog character glossary

Colin a.k.a Invisidog

Colin is named after legendary leader "Colin of Wessex" who had much more success when he changed his name to Malcolm. He became King of Scots. This however could be a complete lie. Not the bit about Malcolm being King of Scots which is true, Malcolm came for the lineage of the Kings of Wessex. But the other bit about him formerly being called Colin.

Osbert Abitmad

The Professor is like an Osbert Lancaster cartoon character. Nestled in the 1950s the long suffering moustached raincoat trilby wearing chap is someone to whom life happens as a series of unfortunate events. Brilliantly brilliant or brilliantly stupid you never know.....it just depends whether his brain is in gear!

Drucilla Abitmad

Although the name Drucilla seems to be synonymous with wicked witches Dr Abitmad as more of a "Dru". She's intelligent but slightly eccentric. Funnily enough the Doctor only became a bit mad when she married the Professor.

When not wearing a business suit she is most often seen in baggy jumper, jeans and wellies with "pulled through a hedge backwards" hair. Being an animal psychologist means spending time in the field, more accurately spending time in a field (hence the wellies)!

Stella Abitmad

Before she was born the Professor wanted to call the baby Haldron if it was a boy and Quark if it was a girl. After receiving a large slap from his wife they agreed on calling the baby Hal if it was a boy and Stellar if it was a girl. Stellar then became shortened to Stella. It has nothing to do with the R U Abitmad's penchant for a certain brand of lager.

Sox Paisley

Was going to be named after the gangster Spats Columbo in the 1959 film "Some Like It Hot". He is only called Sox so his Dad can use the joke about Paisley Sox.

Dutch

A bit of an amalgam. His parents are big fans of Black and White films. Even as a kitten Dutch looked like a character called Moose Malloy who appears in the film "Farewell My Lovely". The name also comes from a character called Swede Anderson from the film "The Killers". They were going to call him Swede Malloy but ended up calling him Dutch. Just proving that whilst cats are great at local geography they're pretty useless at international!

Zuse

The computer expert cat is named after Konrad Zuse. Zuse is credited with the invention of the modern programmable computer (the Z1 between 1935/40) and the first fully functional programmable computer (Z3 1941). Zuse has the unique accolade of being the only cat ever to be made a member of the British Computer Society.

Manic

Manic the cat was (before his accident that made him manic) called Manx. Manx is a breed of cat without a tail. Whether Manx was actually a manx cat – or just that he had lost his tail I don't know and it is of little consequence.

Molly

Her real name is Sarah but a gangster's girlfriend is known as his moll so she got the nickname Molly, which stuck. Molly is Sox's girlfriend – or he'd like to think so. The use of the term Moll in this case is only that of gangster's girl not any of the other definitions.

Gerald

Gerald aka secret agent Jerry Mouse got his codename because of his likeness to the rodent hero of Hanna Barbera's cartoon Tom & Jerry. Gerald's character is very much like the mouse from the early cartoons prior to Warner Bros and Chuck Jones getting hold of him.

Fred Pollock

Frida (Fred) Pollock is named after the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo who achieved fame from the late 1920s for her vibrant realism and symbolism. Of course the family name Pollock is the same as the American abstract artist Jackson Pollock. The phrase "what a load of Pollocks" came about after a joint exhibition of Mr and Mrs Pollock's work.

Dante Pollock

Fred Pollock's older brother is named after Dante Gabrielle Rossetti one of the main artists behind the Pre-Raphaelite Movement. He is at University and plays guitar and shouts in a band called "Alien Noise Radio".

Ed Larkin

Friend of Dante Pollock from University. Bass player in the band "Alien Noise Radio". Named after the poet Ted Hughes and his family shares the surname of the celebrated poet Philip Larkin (no relation). Funnily enough Ted Hughes daughter is called Freida. A romantic interest in an Invisidog book? I should think not!

The "Fur Rule" cat gang

The muscle that Dutch assembles to help with the robbery. Named themselves after the semi-wild feral cats – because they were.

Mr Parker

Mystic Zen cat. Manic's mentor. Teaches body mind balance. Named himself after Parkour "l'art du déplacement" (the art of movement). Also known as the "free running" cat.

Antropolis

The ant colony in Professor Abitmad's laboratory. The equivalent of a living computer. Antropolis has developed problem solving capabilities due to the fact they've got nothing else to do.

About the (dubious) source of these stories

Randolph Um Abitmad, Randy to his friend, was born at a very early age. His somewhat unusual middle name came as his father paused for thought while registering the little chap.

Randolph's gift for making up stories emerged whilst at school. He revels in telling the story of how he wrote an essay so convincing he left a gullible history teacher believing that the Battle of Hebden Bridge was between some drunken Salvation Army Bandsmen and an innocent Millwall supporter on his way back from a carol concert.

His talent was spotted by Heza Lyre of "Complete Fabrications" the public relations recruitment and building contractor company. Heza got the young Randolph a job at the Queenham Echo where his creativity went from strength to strength. His finest hour was writing a glowing review of sporting dinner held by the local football club. Unfortunately the dinner had to be cancelled due to a waterlogged pitch. He didn't let the fact that the dinner was cancelled stop him printing his fine review.

Shortly after this incident Randolph landed his dream job making up stories for a national newspaper. He was given complete creative freedom to make up stories about pop stars, film stars, sportsmen (plus their wives and girlfriends) and the politicians that the owners of the newspaper didn't like.

Randolph lives in a leafy London borough with his Russian wife Stolichnaya and his children Sapphire and Gordon. He also claims has a dog named Tonic. No one has ever seen them so it is very likely he made them up too.