



TOTO

**THE NINJA CAT
AND THE MYSTERY
JEWEL THIEF**

DERMOT O'LEARY

ILLUSTRATED BY NICK EAST

PROLOGUE

It was gone midnight when Mayor Dick Whittington, riding a giant horse and with his trusty cat companion, Tom, tucked inside his coat, finally arrived at his destination: the top of **HAMPSTEAD HEATH**, the highest point in the whole of **MEDIEVAL LONDON**.



Overlooking the capital, they could easily make out St Paul's Cathedral, standing proudly, the beacon for all Londoners, its tall spire jutting up into the cold clear night sky.

For a while, they said nothing, content to take in the view of the city they had helped to build and keep safe.



With a quiet purr, Tom finally emerged from his master's coat, climbed out and stretched, arching his back. He then nuzzled at Dick's neck, before jumping down effortlessly from the horse on to the mossy grass below.

Both Dick and Tom were exhausted, but this task had to be **COMPLETED IN SECRET**, under the cover of darkness. This was partly due to their fame (in late medieval London, everyone knew the Mayor and his cat) but also due to the importance and power of what Tom carried with him.

'Are you sure about this, Tom?' Dick whispered as loudly as he dared, afraid of being overheard. 'You won it fair and square by **DEFEATING AN EVIL** that would have plagued this city, maybe even the whole country. **KING RODERICK THE ABSOLUTELY FILTHY DIRTY** is beaten and his rat army have fled thanks to you. Now with this **MYSTERIOUS, MAGICAL COLLAR**

you're the most **POWERFUL ANIMAL IN THE WORLD!** Because of the strength it gives you, no one can best you in combat and, most incredibly, you can speak to me in my tongue.'

'Don't you think I know that, my old friend?' the wise cat replied. 'That's all the more reason to do what I do tonight. I can't risk this collar falling into dangerous hands. The animal world is safe for now, but should this collar be found by the wrong cat, rat or dog ... Now, come and join me – it's time.'

His master dismounted and dug out a small silver box from his horse's saddle bag. He carried it over to Tom, and they stood together at the side of a pond.

The human smiled at his companion. 'I'll miss our chats, Tom.'

'Oh, don't worry, Dick, I'll still understand you, but now I won't have to answer back. I can act like a regular cat and ignore you!'

Dick laughed and ruffled Tom's fur. 'Well, if you are sure this is the right thing to do, rest assured, I'll honour our agreement: half will go to the Tower of London, and half will be lost for all time.'

The cat nodded and pawed at the collar. It unclasped and came apart into two perfect circles – one of flawless diamonds and one of deep blue sapphires – shining in the moonlight. No matter how many times they saw it, both human and cat found its beauty staggering.

Taking one last look, ***TOM PLACED THE DIAMOND BAND*** into a

velvet pouch and carefully popped

it back into the

SILVER BOX.

Snapping it shut, he threw it into the deep inky pond,



and they watched it slowly sink to the bottom, eventually disappearing from sight.

THE TWO FRIENDS SMILED AT EACH OTHER.

Although Tom felt sad that he'd never get to speak in the human tongue again, it was a small price to pay.

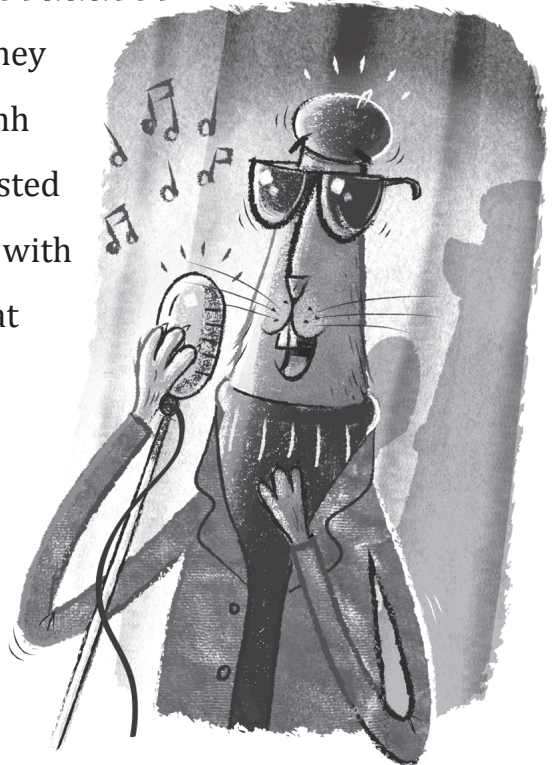
He jumped up into the warmth of his master's coat, and they mounted the horse and started the ride back into London and their cosy beds. Tom was certain that, with his enemies beaten, all the animals of old London town, and indeed ***THE WORLD, WOULD BE SAFE*** ... and so they were for the next 600 years.

UNTIL ...

CHAPTER I

'RATTY DAYS ARE HEEERRREEE

AGAIINNNNNNNNN, yes they are, yes they are, oooohhhh bbbabyyy!' the singer blasted out, as he finished his set with a bow. 'You've been a great audience, thank you and good night!' he called to the wild crowd.



'CATFACE, CATFACE, CATFACE!' they chanted, as he wiped the sweat from his brow, waved to the adoring throng one last time and made his way off stage.

TOTO THE NINJA CAT and the gang had come to see their friend play at the legendary **PAWS ROBINSON JAZZ AND MILK BAR IN SOHO IN LONDON**. All the hippest cats, dogs, ferrets, foxes and even pigeons were here tonight. Paws Robinson welcomed every kind of animal – you just had to be cool, which meant: be true to your animal self; no cat or any other kind of fights; love your neighbour; and love your music. This was certainly the place to be.

Toto was enjoying the last night off she'd be having for a while. Tomorrow some human diplomats would be arriving from France, and their animal equivalents would be coming with them. So, she'd be on duty looking after the **FRENCH ANIMAL AMBASSADOR** Monsieur Raton Laveur.



PAWS ROBINSON
JAZZ AND MILK BAR

CLAP
CLAP

CLAP

CLAP
CLAP

CLAP

CLAP CLAP

For Toto and her boss, Larry, babysitting animal diplomats would be an easy security assignment, and after all the adventures she'd had since becoming a fully fledged **NINJA CAT**, 'easy' sounded just fine.

Catface had made his way down the stairs at the side of the stage, and was weaving his way across the floor to where his friends were seated at a candle-lit table. Dressed in a black roll-neck sweater and a midnight-blue velvet jacket, topped off with a beret and dark shades, he certainly looked the part of a jazz crooner!

Around the table with Toto were:



Her cheeky, but brave and **loyal brother Silver**, who, because Toto was almost totally blind, acted as her eyes and considered himself to be her deputy – even though he unintentionally caused as many problems as he solved!



Her newly **adopted brother Socks**, who'd joined the family from Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, although he still kept in touch with his gang of street urchins: the Battersea Bruisers



Toto's boss Larry, head of the UK branch of the Ancient Order of International Ninja Cats



And their police dog friend, **Sheila Snarlingfoot**, who was head of Criminal Investigation Animals (CIA) and had been put in charge of planning security during the ambassador's visit

As Catface slid into a chair, a huge, fluffy, brown-and-red cat wearing a fedora hat appeared behind him.

'Catface, my friend, **THAT WAS IMMENSE** ... wild set,' he drawled in an American accent.

Everyone gasped as they realised it was the legendary **PAWS ROBINSON HIMSELF!** He was the owner of the club and was one of the finest cat jazz musicians in the world.

'Y'all must come round again some time so I can have dinner with this crazy gang of misfits,' he said, and then put a huge, warm paw on Toto's shoulder.



‘I heard about what you did to save Catstonbury Festival – we musicians owe you all our deepest gratitude. You keep up the good work with this fine gentleman.’ He nodded to Larry, before calling out to a passing waiter: ‘Drinks on the house for this here table. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I gotta go play a set myself – been a pleasure speaking with y’all.’

‘THE PAWS ROBINSON!’ Silver blurted out as soon as Paws had mooched off towards the stage. ‘Came to see us! Catface, you’ve arrived!’

‘Oh, it’s nothing really,’ replied the rat. But he looked very pleased with himself as he leaned back in his chair and took a sip of his cold Jersey milk. ‘You know my talent is as much a curse as anything else, but I’d hate to let my public down by hiding it away.’

‘CATFACE, THIS IS ONLY YOUR SIXTH GIG!’ Larry laughed, rolling his eyes.

That much was true, but since Catface had stepped

in at the last minute to perform and help save the day at **CATSTONBURY**, his singing career had blossomed. Together with his band, **THE LONGTAILS**, he'd just been on a European tour playing in Rome, Berlin, Madrid and Paris. Tonight had been his homecoming gig in London.

While Catface had been away, Toto and Larry had remained on **HIGH ALERT**. Because even though Toto had once again defeated **ARCHDUKE FERDICAT** (before he could take over the animal world using a hypnotising music video), ADF had escaped and Toto had no idea where he had gone. There was no telling when or how he'd resurface. The streets had been pretty quiet, but they knew ADF would be busy plotting some new, even more evil plans. With his own unique style and charm!

'Well, I've had the most wonderful time being a musician, but I must say I'm looking forward to a day

off tomorrow. I might do a spot of fishing – anyone care to join? Oh blast, you're all working, aren't you?' Catface asked his friends.

'I'm afraid so,' said Sheila. 'This lot are helping me with **SECURITY FOR THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR'S TRIP**. Thanks, by the way – I know it's not as glamorous as the adventures you Ninja Cats are used to.'

'More than happy to help out,' replied Larry cheerfully. 'We haven't seen hide nor hair of ADF since Catstonbury, and thanks to this one and her able deputies,' he said, nudging Toto, 'the streets are safer than they've ever been.'

This made Toto very happy; Larry was her mentor, her boss and her friend, so if he thought she was doing a good job, together with her brothers, then she couldn't be prouder.

'So, remind me what's on the itinerary?' she asked Sheila, leaning forward attentively in her chair.

'The usual really, as it'll shadow the human tour. There'll be a state banquet in the evening, a visit to the House of Commons and a twenty-one-meow salute. Oh, and there was one thing they were quite insistent on which I haven't been able to arrange so I really need your help: the ambassador would love to see the **CROWN JEWELS AT THE TOWER OF LONDON**, especially Old Tom's Collar. I told him we might not be able to accommodate him since the collar is so sacred but then I remembered you have one of the only two keys in the world that open the case, Larry – is that right?'

'Correct,' replied Larry. 'The other is held by the **CHIEF YEOMAN RAVEN CYRIL CORVUSTON**. He's been in the job for years and is as trustworthy as they come. Don't worry, he and I are old pals. I'm sure it won't be a problem'

'Thanks so much.' Sheila sighed with relief. 'My boss



has been on top of me about this, he's like a ... *cat* with a bone?'

'But I thought *you* were the boss?' asked a confused Toto.

'Well, sure. I run the animal police force, or CIA, which includes your average police dogs, an elite undercover unit of foxes, although they are useless around chickens, a flock of wood pigeons, mostly for transport, and a group of frogs led by my friend Anushka ... they do the aquatic stuff. Like you Ninja

Cats, we work with and for both animals and humans, though the humans obviously don't have a clue! But everyone's got a boss somewhere, right?'

'You've got that right,' piped up Silver. 'Ours is such a taskmaster, on our backs night and day – am I right, sis?' he said, nudging Toto while Larry gave a chuckle.

'Very funny, bro, I get it,' Toto answered, shaking her head at the terrible joke. 'Sorry, go on, Sheila – who's your boss?'

'Well, just as humans have their parliament that runs things, we have an animal parliament and my boss is our home secretary, **SIR WIGBERT FLUFFYPAWS THE THIRD—**'

At this, Larry interrupted to add, 'Toto, you should know that he's not a massive fan of us Ninja Cats. Always been jealous of my office at Downing Street, and he spouts a lot of nonsense about how we shouldn't be allowed to operate above the law. To

be honest, he's a bit of an old fuddy-duddy. But it's important to take the higher ground, so don't be offended if he speaks down to us tomorrow.'

Toto nodded solemnly as Silver asked, '**WHAT EXACTLY IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT OLD TOM'S COLLAR?**'

Socks was the one to answer – having lived his whole life in London, he knew a lot more about the city than his adopted brother and sister, who had been born in Italy. 'Come on, bro, you must have heard the tale of Dick Whittington and his cat Tom? Came to London to find their fortune and Tom—'

'Helped Dick Whittington defeat an army of evil rats ... *Everyone* knows that – we're Italian, not stupid!' said Silver with a laugh.

'Yes, err, but times **HAVE** changed!' interjected Catface, a little hot under the collar. '**CATS, RATS, WE'RE ALL FRIENDS NOW!**'



‘Well,’ Socks continued, ‘Old **TOM’S COLLAR** belonged to *that* Tom. It’s proper valuable, the most precious of our animal crown jewels. The sapphires have got more sparkle than the glint in old Catface’s eye! It’s been in the Tower as long as anyone can remember, guarded by them ravens. Nothing gets past them – smart as cats, razor-sharp beaks and

talons like swords, expert flyers, as good as any swift or falcon. They are the elitist of elite. Present company excepted, guv.' He winked at Larry.

'Quite right, young Socks,' said Larry. 'And on that note, let's all get a good night's sleep. It should be pretty straightforward tomorrow, but we still need to be vigilant. Cats, I'll see you tomorrow; Catface, go easy on the milk and have a good day off.'

The team left the jazz club and went their separate ways, all feeling happy and confident that the following day would go smoothly. In truth, it would go anything but.