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Charlie's Halloween Adventure

Chapter 1 My Brilliant Idea

My friend Blackie hated Halloween. He warned all his friends to stay locked in their homes or hidden in the back yard as the day came near. You can't blame him. It seems like even people who aren't superstitious are afraid of a black cat for the whole month of October.

"Sure, it's a great time for kids," Blackie would say in his raspy voice. "They get all dressed up and go door to door getting candy. But for me, it's week after week of people shooing me away, afraid that I'm going to 'cross their paths.' Like I'm rude enough to just cut people off that way! I'm a lot more worried about them stepping on my tail than they should ever be of me bringing bad luck."

Blackie is an amazing guy, a terrific singer and one of my very best friends. It seemed really unfair that he should have to hide in fear on one of the most fun nights of the year. So I came up with an idea. This year, I wanted to try to do something nice for him. I wanted to make October 31st not only a good day, but also one he would remember forever.

"Let's have a party!" I yelled out one sunny day in September. "We can have everyone meet at the 'Kit-Cat' Club. We can all get there before dark, so we won't have to worry about scaring people. We can wear costumes, sing songs, and eat tuna treats. It will be amazing!"

"I don't know," he told me. "I really think it's a better idea to stay inside on Halloween. Bad things can happen on that night. Scary things. I don't just hide that night because of my color. Haven't you ever watched those scary movies?"

“Oh, come on,” I laughed. “You don’t believe any of that stuff, do you? Think about how much fun we could have. Instead of a bunch of kids dressing up as black cats, you can be a black cat dressing up as a kid!”

“I’ll think about it,” he told me grudgingly.

It didn’t matter what he said. I was already beginning to make plans. We could decorate the room with orange flowers and cover the tables, which are just flower pots turned upside down, with black cloth. No candles, since we don’t want anyone’s tail to catch fire accidentally, but we could put real spiders on the bushes surrounding the club. If we brought them in a week or so before the party, there would be webs everywhere. Then we could eat the spiders as part of our snacks!

I started spreading the word to all the cats in the neighborhood. Some of them were a little worried about being outside that night, but when I told them we would go out early and not leave until morning, they all felt it would be safe. I asked everyone to start thinking more about decorations and food, and to come up with a costume.

That would be the fun part, because being in a costume allows you to imagine that you are someone else. For one night, you get to pretend to be anyone. I started getting all kinds of ideas. If I could be someone or something else for one day, who or what would I want to be?

Chapter 2

Creatures of the Night

I think it would be awesome to be scary. If I was a black cat, like Blackie, people might be afraid of me. I kind of look like a mini mountain lion, but I’m small enough that it doesn’t frighten anyone. The only one I’ve ever scared was Rose, but she’s not even a person, just a hamster. I can’t scare her anymore, either, because she knows I won’t eat her, which was the only thing she was afraid of to begin with. Hmm, maybe if I was something that eats living creatures (other than the bugs that I already enjoy), then I would be scary.

Zombies! Zombies are dead things that have come back to life, and people are afraid of being eaten by them. What would it be like to be a cat zombie?

I picture myself with nasty, matted fur from being dead in my coffin for a week or two. I rise from the grave, digging my way through the dirt,

getting filthy and not caring. When I finally arrive at the surface it is late at night, with a full moon rising. With glazed eyes, I reach my hands out in front of me, searching for something or someone to eat....

Okay. That whole thing is just a little too gross and scary, even for me. All that dirt in my fur! Not to mention that zombies don't talk; they just kind of moan. Not exactly my idea of fun.

However, that part about the full moon gives me an idea. A werewolf! Yes!

When the moon comes up, it is my time to howl. By day, and for most of the month, I am just a regular, mild-mannered house cat. I sleep on the bed, eat my cat food, play with my toy mouse, and cuddle on my people's laps. But once a month, as the full moon rises, the beast in me begins to emerge.

When I feel the change begin to happen, I run for the back door. I don't want to hurt my people, so it's important to get as far away from them as possible. Once outside, I run down the street and into the nearby orchards. I wouldn't want to put innocent lives in danger of the deadly beast I am about to become.

I keep running, until I feel my paws begin to change into ... bigger paws! My claws turn into gigantic spikes, gouging into the ground. My teeth suddenly grow longer; my ears become sensitive to every sound around me. My fur thickens, becoming a tough and rough-textured hide. When my transformation is complete, I lean my head back and howl at the moon above. "AROOOOH!"

I start running again. Now I can run faster than any regular beast, and my acute sense of smell begins to guide me toward all the wild game in the area. What shall I eat tonight? A rabbit, a coyote, or a wild javelina? The desert is full of tasty creatures, but I am not yet hungry. I just want to run, with the dust under my feet and the wind blowing through my fur. I am a wild creature, part of the dark and scary night.

After running for a few hours, I am far from the city. There is nothing around me but the wilderness and a million stars. I realize I am thirsty and put my nose in the air to locate a source of fresh water. My animal instincts lead me to a beautiful pond. I can smell the many animals that come here everyday to get a drink, and my appetite begins to grow. I lean my head over the clear water to quench my thirst, and I see my reflection as if looking in a mirror. It is then that I realize I look like ... a dog.

NO! No, no, no, no! I have never wanted to be, nor would I ever want to be, a dog of any kind! I shake my head, and see my ears flopping around and my tongue hanging out. I continue to shake my head as hard as I can, back and forth, until my vision clears and I no longer imagine myself as a werewolf.

Yuck. That was awful. I need to think of something else to be.

Chapter 3

Count Catula

Vampires are very popular in movies and books these days. Maybe it would be cool to dress up as one. I tried to imagine what it would be like if I really became one ...

“Welcome to my catstle! Would you like to drink some mouse blood?” This is how I welcome a lovely young cat into my home, since I am a vampire cat.

“Did you say blood?” my guest asks, suddenly scared.

“It was just a joke,” I laugh. “I have a feast prepared.” I dramatically swish my paw toward a table full of food. My black cape swooshes back, and my long, sharp claws point toward the feast.

My guest feels a shiver run down her spine, as I lead her over to the dining room. She has no idea who or what I really am. There is a bowl of milk poured, and I motion for her to sit down. The lovely female who has come to visit looks a little nervous, but I calm her down with my charming manners. I make her feel right at home in my dark, but lavishly furnished home. As she delicately laps up a bit of the milk, I ask her what she thinks of the house. “It’s grander than anything I’ve ever seen!” she tells me.

I smile. I am used to people saying this. “I worked a long time to save enough money to buy it,” I tell her.

“What is it that you do?” she asks curiously.

“Oh, this and that.” Again, I smile. “I have spent much time studying blood.”

“You mean you’re a doctor?” she asks in surprise.

“Something like that. My work is more in the area of research.”

“Oh, like a scientist!” she exclaims. I do not correct her. If she knew the truth, she might try to run away.

“What is it that you do, my dear?” I ask her instead.

“I’m trying to become an actress,” she tells me. “I think I could be really good at it, but I’m having a hard time getting started.”

“Well, you are certainly pretty enough,” I tell her. I can see a slight blush cross her cheeks. She is a sweet young thing, and I hope she will taste that sweet ...

“Why are you looking at me that way?” she asks.

“What way?” I realize that I am drooling.

“You have your mouth open and your front teeth hanging out.”

“Oh, I did not mean for you to see my fangs yet. Now that you have seen them, I must bite you,” I begin to move slowly toward her.

I expect her to move away, terrified of me. Instead, she just looks at me strangely. “Why would you need to bite me?”

“Because you have seen my fangs! You know that I am different, so I must not let you tell anyone else.”

“What makes you different? All cats have fangs.”

Oh yeah.

Huh. I guess dressing up as a vampire isn’t so scary for a cat. After all, we do have fangs, and we hunt and kill live things all the time. In my case, it’s usually just bugs that I catch and eat, but other cats actually drink mouse blood. That’s just gross to think about, but not really scary.

Time to think of something else. I don’t want to be dead, undead, or a dog. What if I was created to be something scary, like a highbred monster?

Chapter 4

FrankenCat

The scientist who created me is more than smart; he is a genius. By putting together specific parts of different creatures, he made me to be stronger, faster, and smarter than any other animal on the planet. He gave me the front legs of a cheetah, so that I can run like the wind. He used the back legs of a kangaroo, so I can stand on just two legs or all four. Those back paws of mine are so powerful that I can kick a soccer ball into orbit. He provided me with a monkey tail, so I can use it like a fifth arm to grab things or hang from trees.

My main body was created from a gorilla, with thick muscles rippling all around, but the skin over my main body is rhinoceros, so it protects me like armor. Of course I still have a cat’s head; the most beautiful creature

ever created. (Hey, it's my imagination, and I want to look a little like me!) I still possess all the instincts of a cat, and the acute hearing that only feline ears can bring. Pulling all this together, my amazing scientist used a microchip imbedded in my brain that gives me incredible intelligence. In fact, he made me too smart. This will be his downfall.

I feel like a newborn baby when I wake-up in the lab, unsure of who I am and how my body works. My creator smiles at me and tells me my name is Frank. He asks me to move one of my front paws, and when I do, I realize I am tied down to the operating table. I move my paw again, and the strap holding it in place breaks in half.

"It's alright," the doctor says. "Try to move your legs." There is a little hint of fear in his eyes.

I don't even try to move slowly this time, I just flex my big feet and the straps go flying through the air.

"Yes, yes! You are very strong," he smiles to himself, gleeful with what he has accomplished. "Now, let's try sitting up." He reaches down to help me up, and I can feel the warmth of his skin against my cold hide. I sit up and look at him. He is a small man with big glasses and a funny mustache. His skin is pale, like he never goes outside. He looks like a guy who plays way too many video games and not enough football.

"Football," I hear myself say. Okay, I hadn't meant to speak out loud, but when I do, I hear how deep and strong my voice sounds.

"Football?" my maker questions. "Is your brain not functioning properly? Hum, how can we test it?" He walks in a circle, trying to come up with an idea. "I know; what is the capitol of Switzerland?"

"Bern," my deep scary voice answers.

"Excellent! That is also my name," he grins. "Bernie. However, you can call me "Master."

"I don't think so, Bernie," I say with a smile. I stand up, feeling the muscles across my middle and knowing I could be a champion wrestler. "I am stronger and smarter than you are. I think you will call me Master."

"No way," Bernie says in a whiney voice. "I didn't spend the last three years skipping late night video game challenges just to have you turn on me! I'm the smart one! I created you!"

I see a mirror on the other side of the room. I walk over to it. Actually, I hop over with my kangaroo legs, and I see that I am one scary looking dude! There are stitches all over my body, holding all the weird looking pieces together, and the fur on my head and tail looks strange next to the gray rhino hide. I don't think I'll be getting a date with a pretty girl

anytime soon, but I do think I can beat anybody; especially a tiny little geek like Bernie.

“I think I’ll smash you now,” I tell him. I pull one of my back legs up, ready to kick him to the moon.

“No wait! You can’t do that!”

“Why not?” I ask him.

Bernie smiles. “Because I gave you a little girls heart. You can’t hurt anyone without feeling bad about it later.” I look down at my chest, as if trying to see the heart he was talking about. “Think about how you will feel if you hurt me,” he says.

When I think about hurting him, my eyes begin to water. I am so sad that I almost start to cry. “NO!” I yell. I realize that I am the world’s strongest wimp. I have all this power, but I can’t use it. “Why did you create me this way if you didn’t want me to use it?”

“To scare my little brother. He’s really been getting on my nerves lately,” Bernie tells me.

Okay, maybe a monster is not what I want to be. I liked the idea of being powerful, but actually using powers like that to hurt someone isn’t something I want to do.

But what if I could be powerful and good?

Chapter 5

SuperCat

Faster than a speeding dog, more powerful than a vacuum cleaner, able to leap tall bushes in a single bound! Look! Standing by that cactus! It's a roadrunner. It's a coyote. No, it's Supercat! Yes, Supercat. Strange visitor from another planet who came to Earth with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal pets. Supercat, who can change the course of mighty rodents, bend catnip with his bare paws, and who, disguised as a mild mannered housecat, fights the never-ending battle for Truth, Justice and the Feline Way.

Looking good in a red cape and tights might be tough for some cats, but not me. I look great. With my bulging muscles and straight whiskers, I can totally pull off the super-hero look. Of course, being able to fly and rescue animals from dangerous situations doesn’t hurt. People don’t laugh at what you’re wearing if you’re saving their lives.

Most days, I just lie around the house, watching out for my family. Our dog, Frisky, doesn't even suspect that I have super powers. I let her think that she's the one guarding our home. It's good for my cover. If any strange cats or dogs come around asking if Supercat lives nearby, she could never give away my secret identity. In this, like everything else, she is totally clueless.

The only one in the house who knows that there is something unusual about me is our hamster, Rose. She had long suspected that there was more to me than the simple cat I pretend to be. One day, she caught me lifting the couch off the ground with one paw, and I had to reveal the truth. Now she assists me by keeping her eyes peeled for anyone needing help and by covering for me when I am out rescuing strangers.

Tonight, as I sit with my girl Amanda watching TV, Rose monitors the Internet by watching over Mom's shoulder. As Mom searches for dinner recipes, Rose sits in her ball, watching the special program on the screen that runs local news stories. When she spots an animal in trouble, she runs to the living room to let me know.

"Charlie, hey Charlie!" she yells until she gets my attention. "Code Red! There's a dog on Bleeker Street chasing cats up a tree!"

I casually slip away from Amanda, and wander toward the laundry room. I know the family will think I am just going for some food or water, but that is actually where I will transform into Supercat.

Within seconds, my cape is flying behind me as I soar over the neighborhood, heading toward Bleeker. I see a poodle down below, his jaw hanging down in shock at the sight of me fly past. I smile. I bet he won't be barking at any cats tonight.

As I approach Bleeker Street, I slow down to assess the danger. My x-ray vision lets me see that there are at least seven cats high up in the tree. They are frightened and crying in alarm, as a big German Sheppard barks at them from the sidewalk below.

I land right behind him. "You need to stop this criminal activity, right now!" I say in a deep voice.

He whirls around with a shocked expression. When he sees that it is a cat who is yelling at him, he snarls, revealing his gigantic, sharp teeth. "Says who?" he growls.

"Says me," I say calmly, not the least bit afraid of his fangs or overgrown muscles.

He smiles. "You think you can stop me?"

"Yes, I do."

He looks surprised. “Well, what I think is that in ten seconds, you are either going to run up that tree or get eaten. Your choice.”

“No, I’m giving you a choice,” I answer him. “Either you stop what you are doing and apologize to all these cats, or I put you in jail.”

“Ha! I’d like to see you try,” he sneers.

“Okay, you asked for it.” With that, I fly into the air, grab him by the tail, and take off. He screams (which is a really funny sound coming out of a big dog) and starts swinging around, trying to grab a hold of something. Since there is nothing but air around him, he begins to spin in a circle. “If you don’t stop that,” I tell him, “I might accidentally drop you.”

He stops struggling and stays perfectly still for the rest of the flight. I head straight to the pound. Dogs like this one need to be taught a lesson, and I know from experience just how scary the pound can be. This dog has a collar on, so I know his owner will be called and that he will be home again within a few hours, but hopefully those few hours will teach him not to mess with cats in the future.

I drop him in the courtyard and prepare to fly home. Suddenly, I spy a tiny kitten caught in a stream. He apparently fell in while lapping at the water, and is now about to drown. I fly down and pull him out, carrying him by the scruff of the neck. When we land, I smile and expect to hear a heartfelt ‘thank you.’

Instead, he punches me in the arm. “What’s the big idea?” he asks in a tiny-whiney little voice.

“I saved you,” I answer, confused by his attitude.

“I didn’t want you to save me Supercat. I was waiting for Wonder Feline to rescue me.”

“Why?”

“Because she’s cute!” he answers. “You’re just a flying cat in a red cape. That is so old fashioned. Wonder Feline is beautiful, wears a really cool outfit, and has some awesome tech-gear.”

I feel my ego deflate.

So much for being a superhero. Maybe I can be something more realistic instead.

Chapter 6

Rock Star Kitty

I never planned to be a superstar; it just kind of happened. One night I was singing at the Kit-Cat Club with my friends, and this human guy stuck his head over the fence. “Who is that singing?”

I jumped up on the fence, wondering why he wanted to know. “Meow.”

“Your voice is amazing! I think you can be a star!”

“Meow?” I asked, pointing a paw at myself.

“Yes, you! I’m a producer for *Rock Idol*, the TV talent show. I want you to audition right away!”

The next thing I knew, I was standing on a small stage in front of three people who wanted to judge my voice. I wasn’t sure what to sing, so I stuck with my favorite, *Litter Box Blues*.

“Amazing,” some guy with a British accent yelled.

“Off the charts, dude!” nodded another guy.

“I just want to cry; it was so beautiful,” the lady with the strange clothes said.

“You are definitely going with us to Hollywood!” they all yelled.

So I flew to Hollywood, sang a few songs, and somehow won the competition. They put together a band for me, and soon I was touring across the country, performing for crowds of people.

When the show first begins, you can’t see me on the stage. The drums start beating loudly, the bass guitar thumps in the background, the saxophone begins to wail, and the lead guitar strums a familiar tune. There is smoke and colored lights, and in the middle of a flash of fireworks, I appear on the stage.

I always get to wear these great clothes: Torn jeans, a t-shirts with sparkling messages on the front, and a pair of shoes that would make Puss-in-Boots cry. I am so cool.

The music gets louder, so I turn on my wireless microphone and begin to sing.

The crowd goes wild! I sing with all my heart, my tail swinging to the beat. Girls scream my name and cry. Everyone claps and sings along. It seems like they know all the words, and the audience and I have a wonderful time together. I get to the end of the first song and the applause is loud and long. I smile, waiting for them all to quiet down so I can begin my next song. When it is totally silent, and I start to open my mouth, some big guy in the front yells, “Hey, what’s the big deal? All this cat is doing is meowing up on the stage!”

No one says anything for a few moments, and I think my fans are going to support me and throw this guy out. But after a minute, someone

else says, “Yeah, what’s the deal with that? How come we paid good money to hear this? It’s just a cat in a costume!”

Suddenly the people are very upset. I don’t know what they expected to see, but now they are all screaming my name, but not in a good way. “Charlie, give us our money back!” Security comes running forward to stop the crowd, but they seem to know that there’s no way to control this mob.

“Run, cat, run!” they yell.

No one has to tell me twice. I scramble to the back of the stage and hide in a small room, hoping everyone will calm down before they find me. But I can hear them looking. They sound angry, and I’m not sure what they’ll do when they figure out where I am....

Stop right there. Maybe I’m not meant to be a Rock Star. I better keep thinking.

Perhaps I could be something more ordinary, something that wouldn’t involve angry mobs or screaming fans.

Chapter 7

Western Cat

Some folks think that all a cowboy does is ride around the range and chase cows. There’s a lot more to it than that. It’s hard work, but it’s worth it.

Being a cat and a cowboy both at the same time is a little tricky. First, there’s the hat. It keeps flying off the back of my head when I’m riding my horse! Then of course, there’s the whole ‘riding a horse’ thing. Sure, clawing into the saddle with all twenty claws keeps me from falling off, but then I can’t steer. So I try to hold on to the reins with my front claws, and dig the back ones deep into the leather seat. It’s not easy, and by the end of the day, my legs are exhausted just from holding on, let alone doing my work. Now try to imagine doing that and lassoing a cow at the same time!

The fact that a cow is fifty times bigger than I am makes roping an impossible job. I tried doing it once and flew off the saddle, went twenty feet straight through the air and landed on the cows back. Of course, I landed claws first, so the cow screamed and ran as fast as it could. After a few minutes of holding on tight, I knew this beast wasn’t going to stop running until I stopped clawing. As we approached a big cliff, I saw that we were going to go over the edge and plunge to our deaths. My life passed

before my eyes. Somehow my left claws loosened up a little, causing the cow to run to the right.

Okay, I thought, maybe I can steer it away from the cliff. I poked harder with my right claws, while loosening the left side even more, and the cow turned completely around. We were pointed away from the ravine. Unfortunately, I didn't relax my right side quickly enough, and we continued to turn until we were pointed toward the edge again. I just held on as I was, and the cow continued to spin in a circle, around-and-around, until it finally ran out of energy and fell to the ground. I stood up on shaking paws, amazed that I was still alive. The other cowboys rode up to me. "Hey little cat," one of the men said to me in his western accent. "That was pretty sweet, the way you put that cow down. Looks like she's ready to brand."

They thought I'd done it on purpose! I almost died, and they thought I'd planned it. I was so dizzy that I almost puked, but instead I just sat down and tried to look cool.

Since that day, I've developed a reputation as one amazing cow-cat. I don't even use a rope, I just ride up next to the steer and jump on it's back. I turn the cattle around in circle after circle, until they tire out and lay down. Sometimes they buck, and I have to grab ahold with all my strength to keep from flying off, but that has just increased my reputation, since riding a bucking steer is considered something only the toughest cowboys can do.

At the end of the day, all of us ranch hands gather together in the bunkhouse. We're tired and hungry from our hard work, and the cook prepares a special meal: Beans. Cowboys like beans: Baked beans, boiled beans, green beans, lima beans, any kind of beans. That's when I realize something important: I don't like beans. Also, working out on a ranch all day makes you really dusty and dirty. I don't like to get dirty, because the way I take a bath is to lick myself. Mouthfuls of dust? Not tasty!

Maybe being a cowboy wouldn't be that fun after all.

Maybe I should think of another job that is exciting, but much cleaner.

Chapter 8

Castronaut

Being the first cat into outer space is a great honor. Some might even believe that animals don't belong in space, except as parts of an experiment, but I am here to be a companion to the brave people who are willing to put their safety aside in the name of science.

Astronaut training is tough. To be accepted for this mission, I had to undergo a series of difficult tests. First was the spin test. The scientists put me into this little barrel that looked like a ride you might see at the fair. Now, I've been on rides at the fair, and I don't like any of them, but this was for science, so I put aside my doubts and climbed into the cabin. They put a seatbelt around my middle, and then closed the door. I heard the motor start, and then the thing started spinning me in circles so fast that I couldn't see straight. My stomach began to feel really queasy, and my heart beat like a drum in my chest. When the spinning finally stopped and they opened the door, I tried to climb out and stand, but my brain was still spinning around and I fell down.

I guess I passed that test because they strapped me into another machine. This one had a seat on the end of a long mechanical arm, and when they turned it on, the arm began to swing in big circles. Not only did I get dizzy, but the faster the arm swung, the more gravity pressed against my chest. My head felt like it was going to pop off, my whiskers pressed so close against my face that you couldn't see them, and my tail flew out the side like a kite trying to break its string. The machine kept swinging faster and faster, and I tried to meow to tell them to stop, but I couldn't even hear myself.

When it finally did stop, my skin felt like it was loose on my body, because it had pulled back so tightly. I think my eyes were still spinning around in their sockets, and my ears took about fifteen minutes to figure out how to stand back up again. I looked over to the control room where the scientists were checking their computer screens to see how I did. "Meow?" I asked them, wondering if I passed.

"Looks good Charlie," I heard one of them say over the microphone. "How are you doing?"

I gave them a thumbs up signal. I had seen somebody do that in a movie once and thought it looked pretty cool, especially when you stick your claw up in the air too.

I guess I passed all the tests, because the next thing I knew, I was in training with the other astronauts. We had to do special exercises to stay in shape. We learned about the different control systems on the space shuttle, and all the steps to take off and land. I didn't pay a lot of attention because, after all, I wouldn't be doing the flying. My job was to keep the astronauts company, so they wouldn't get lonely on the long flight.

Finally, it is the start day for our mission. The four astronauts and I get into our space suits and climb into the shuttle for take-off. We smile at each other and at the camera; we know the entire world is watching this

historic launch. I wave to my family, “Hi guys! I know you’re out there somewhere!” All of America hears my meow.

The countdown starts: “Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one ... blast off! The shuttle Cat-lumbia is off with the first cat in space!”

Me? What am I doing at this historic moment? I’m screaming my lungs out! The pull of gravity is so great, the roar of the engine is so loud, and my tail is stuck in the seatbelt!

Luckily, I am the only one having a bad take-off, and we are soon in orbit. We slowly unbuckle our seatbelts, (I had adjusted mine just after blast off so my tail was free). Instead of just sitting there, we begin to float around the cabin. This is awesome! I had once imagined what it would feel like to be a bird and be able to fly, but feathers make me sneeze, so I didn’t think it would ever happen. Now here I am, hundreds of miles above the planet, hovering around with a bunch of astronauts. Amazing!

As a part of my mission, I get to take one space walk with my friend Tommy. Tommy is our engineer, and he is going outside to inspect the ship to make sure no damage was done during take-off. I get to go with him. The idea is to see how I handle zero gravity in the vastness of space, but Tommy tells me he also has an experiment in mind.

We step out of the spaceship and carefully tether the ropes around our waist to the outside of the ship. If you aren’t tied to the ship and go too far, you will drift through space forever; there is no way for the other astronauts to save you.

Once our ropes are secure, we begin to float freely through the air. This is incredible! There are billions and billions of stars, shining brighter than anything I have ever seen! As I float around the ship, I get a glimpse at the planet Earth. Wow. It’s so blue where the oceans are, and the white of the puffy clouds cover other parts of it. The greens and browns of the continents that seem so small, but I know are actually huge. It is more beautiful than the pictures could ever show, and I just stare in awe.

“Hey Charlie!” I hear Tommy call. I move my front legs like I am swimming and slowly make my way over to him. “I just checked over the ship. Everything is a-okay.”

“Meow.” I smile at him.

“I have a special experiment that I thought up myself,” he continued. “Would you mind giving me a hand?”

“Meow,” I answer. I’m willing to do anything to help.

Tommy pulls out a small ball of yarn. I feel my ears prick up inside my spacesuit. A ball of yarn? I love balls of yarn!

Tommy holds it just out of my reach. “I want to see if you can catch this ball in zero gravity. Ready to try?”

“MEOW!” I answer, already trying to reach for it with my paws.

“GO!” he yells, throwing the ball with all his might. Of course, things don’t fly very fast without gravity. The ball flies slowly away from him, and I swim after it as fast as I can. Tommy starts laughing, and I realize that this must be really funny to watch, like a chase scene in slow motion. Just as I reach for the yarn, close enough that I can see the little fibers free-floating in space, I reach the end of my tether. Yank! I float in the other direction, as the force hitting the end of the rope pulls me back.

But I am still focused. I want that ball of yarn! As I float past Tommy, who is now laughing hysterically, I put my paws against his chest and push off against him to fly back in the direction of the ball. The problem is that I push so hard the knot at the end of my rope comes untied.

Somewhere behind me, I hear the tone of Tommy’s voice change, as he calls my name frantically. I ignore him, because I still want to reach the yarn. Closer, closer, until finally I reach out my front paws and trap the ball between them. YES! I turn to look triumphantly at Tommy, but he is far behind me. I look down and realize that the rope around my waist is slack and floats aimlessly in the air. I have my ball of yarn, which is good, because it is apparently all I will have to keep me company as I float through space for the rest of my life....

Yikes! I never realized being an astronaut could be that lonely and dangerous. Maybe I should think about being some other character; someone that doesn’t leave the planet. Maybe someone really brave.

Chapter 9

Fire Cat

Living in Firehouse 14 with ten other firefighters is a lot of fun. We wake up early most days, wash the fire trucks until they shine, and then have a hearty breakfast (sausage and eggs is my favorite). After that, we use some exercise equipment to keep in shape, because someone’s life may depend on our strong muscles. Then we go out for a run, making sure to build our endurance so we can keep people safe.

When children see us run by, they wave and smile. Everyone loves firefighters, because our job is to save lives and property. Knowing that we’re available when they need us makes people feel safe.

If we don't go out on any calls, we spend the afternoon reading, watching TV, or just goofing off together. We know the day may come when we have to depend on each other to survive in a fire, so we are all very good friends.

We take turns making dinner for everyone. Usually it's spaghetti and meatballs or hamburgers, but sometimes we surprise each other with special dishes. I always like to make tuna casserole, but the other guys don't seem to enjoy it as much as I do. Then we relax and play cards, or maybe video games. Finally, we all bunk down for the night. It's a nice way to live, but that's not why we're here. We are all just waiting for that alarm bell to ring, letting us know that it's time to get to work.

When the alarm sounds, everyone jumps up and gets into their gear. We have our names on our suits to make sure we get our own, specially designed equipment, but I never have to worry about one of the guys grabbing my suit by mistake. Mine is much smaller than the others, since I'm the only cat in the station.

We jump on the truck as it begins to back out of the huge fire station doors. With the sirens wailing, we race down the street, on our way to a big fire. As soon as we arrive, everyone jumps out to assess the situation. I can see flames shooting from the roof of a house, and smoke is already floating out of every window. A few of the guys grab the hose off the truck and attach it to the hydrant. Two others talk to the people who stand outside, trying to find out if anyone is still in the house. After a moment, I see one of them grab an ax off the truck and head for the front door. That means there may be someone trapped inside.

My job? Because I'm small and low to the ground, I can crawl through the house, under the smoke, and find any people or animals that can't escape. If I find someone, I will try to lead them to the exit. If I can't get them out, I go back for one of the bigger guys to help me.

Today, as I creep low to avoid the acrid smoke, I hear a faint sound coming from the other side of the living room. I head toward it, and find a small orange kitten cowering in a corner. The fire is only a few feet away, and he is frozen in terror. I make my way over to him. "It's okay, I'm here to help you," I tell him. "Just follow me."

He stands up, but I tell him to keep as low as possible to avoid the smoke. I lead him to the front door, and out onto the porch. He shakes in fear, but I can see how grateful he is. "Thank you so much," he mews.

"Is there anyone else still in there?" I ask him. I want to make sure no one gets killed.

“I’m not sure,” he says, thinking hard. “My little boy was in taking a nap, and I don’t know if his mom got him out or not.”

I get specific directions from him to find the boys room, then I send him out to the street as I head back inside. The fire has grown, and the flames lick the doorways as I slip through them and down the hall. The blazing inferno is loud, crackling and popping as it sears through walls and furniture. I pull my ears back to block the noise. I finally reach the bedroom and quickly jump up on the bed. No one is there, but the window is open, so I’m hoping that means the boy escaped. I look back at the hall, but it is now engulfed in flames, and I decide I better use the window also.

Suddenly, the roof above me starts to collapse! I leap toward the window and make it through, but I can feel the fire close behind. That’s when I realize why cats should not be firefighters. Tails. My tail is on fire!

My training kicks in: Stop, drop and roll. I leap down and roll around the grass, making sure the tip of my tail stops smoking before I stand up again. The smell of burnt fur is all around me. This stinks, in more ways than one.

Maybe being a fire cat is not the best idea after all. If I could be something tough and exciting, without actually putting my life in danger, I think I might have more fun. What fits that description?

Chapter 10

Athlete with a Tail

Professional sports stars are awesome. There are so many sports out there that are really exciting, but which one is right for me?

Football? I can picture myself with big shoulder pads and a helmet. It would probably be a little uncomfortable for my big pointy ears, but I could get used to it. I imagine myself out on the field. In the middle of all that green grass, with the white lines marked clearly, my team huddles up to go over the play. As the quarterback, I get to tell everyone else what to do. “Play 63 guys. Two of you go out for the long pass, the rest of you fake-out the other team. Got it? BREAK!”

We line up, and the center hikes me the ball. I hear bodies crunching and colliding as I try to balance the football. I suddenly realize that there’s no way I can throw this thing; it’s almost as big as I am, and all these guys are too big for me to see over anyway. As I stand there wondering what to do, the other team breaks through and starts to pile on top of me ... smash!

Okay, football is out.

What other sport sounds good? Soccer? Nope, the ball would roll right over me. Basketball? Right, like I could ever get the ball up to that hoop! Golf? I couldn't even pick up the clubs! If I got a set small enough to actually carry, they could only move the ball about an inch at a time. Baseball? Can you imagine how far I would fly backward if I tried to catch a ball going ninety miles an hour?

Maybe sports aren't the way to go. Unless....

Chapter 11

Stone Cold Kitty

Are you ready for a Smack Down?

When I hear the announcer call my wrestling name, *Charming Charlie*, I enter the arena in my sparkling gold trunks and silver cape. I am a favorite among the fans, so they scream my name as I approach the ring. "Charlie, Charlie, Charlie," they chant.

"Charlie, what do you think your chances are of winning the match tonight?" a reporter asks as I reach the ring.

"I'm gonna tear him apart, and use the pieces to make a throw-rug!" I growl, totally getting into character.

"But he claims he's going to use you as a mop to clean up the ring when he's done with you!" the reporter says.

"No chance," I tell him. "This is my time to win the belt! By the end of the night, I will be the champion in the 'Tiniest Weight Possible' division!"

The beautiful ring-cat walks up to greet me. "Good luck Charlie," she whispers and kisses my cheek lightly.

I step through the ropes. Wrestling is a primetime event, so the TV cameras zoom in as I hold my paws up in the air and my fans scream even louder. I look over to see the face of my opponent, *Fluffy the Fearless*. He is about my size, but with longer fur and shorter ears. I smile. Long hair makes it easier to pin an opponent down. My hair is very short and sleek. This gives me an advantage that I intend to use.

The referee calls us both to the center of the ring. He asks us if we understand the rules, and then winks when he tells us to have a clean fight. We all know that the match will be more fun for the audience if we fight dirty, but I don't believe in that stuff. I play by the rules, but I still find a way to win. We tap paws and go to our separate corners.

When the bell rings, we both dance toward the center. He immediately tries to jump me, so I throw up both arms and we wrestle around for a minute and then break apart. We dance around a little more, getting a feel for each other. He sends one paw flying toward my face, and I see that he has his claws extended. I look to the ref to see if he notices that Fluffy is breaking the rules, but he's purposely looking the other way. So that's how it's going to be, I realize. This is going to be a tough match against a guy who cheats.

I run at Fluffy, causing him to duck as I whiz past him, and then hurl myself against the ropes to fly back at him. His back is still turned so I knock him to the ground. Reaching under his back legs, I flip him over and pin him to the mat. His strong back legs kick me and send me rolling the other way. I flip right back over and charge him again. He growls and attempts to knock my legs out from under me, but I leap over his head and knock him between the ears in the process. He grabs his head and yowls, and while he makes a big show of that, I roll toward him. I hit the backs of his knees with my body and knock him to the ground. Once he's down, I jump on top and try to hold his shoulders down. Just as I get a good grip, pinning his fur against the mat, he reaches up and bites my ear.

YOUCH! I pull away from him, screaming in pain and turn again to the ref for a foul call. The ref is flirting with a young cat in the front row and doesn't notice. I turn back just in time to see my foe standing on top of the ropes in the corner, then he jumps and lands on top of me, smashing me into the floor....

Hold on, hold on ... this sounds horrible! Who would ever want to do something like that? Sure, it looks glamorous on TV, but getting creamed for a living? No thanks!

I need to find a costume that makes me feel exciting and cool, but also fits with my personality. Something sleek, but not silly. Something I could almost picture myself doing in real life, but that I might not ever get a chance to actually try.

Chapter 12

Life of the Party

The day of the party finally arrived. I went to the club early to make sure everything was set up and ready, before returning home. I wanted all

my friends to be there when I made my grand entrance, and I wanted to stay up all night. So I did what any cat would do; I took a nap.

When I woke up, I slipped into my black tuxedo. Luckily, it had a clip-on tie, because paws just don't work for tying those things. I checked myself in the mirror. I looked good, really good. The ladies would be after me like catnip tonight.

I slipped out the door and down the street. I could hear the party before I even rounded the corner. The band was already playing, and the appetizer bugs were being served as I walked casually through the entrance. The music stopped, and all eyes in the room turned to take in my elegant form.

I smiled and spoke in my best British accent. "They call me The Cat. Charlie the Cat."

I was the coolest looking spy ever.

The party started up again and continued late into the night. It was an awesome Halloween. I even won the prize for "Best Costume." Everyone kept saying that I looked so good, and they could actually picture me as a secret agent.

They never knew it was because I had played the part before...

If you've never had the chance to picture a cat as a secret agent, check out the book, Charlie the Spy.