

A CAT'S COURTROOM.

The year is 2055. Animal rights activists had done many laudable things. There were more vegetarians and vegans than there had ever been, and animals had never received such protection.

However, the movement had ignored one simple principle: that with rights come responsibilities. But the legal system had not. There had evolved a protest group which was determined to redress the balance of fairness in our judicial system. This was a new offshoot of the 'human rights' movement, and was determined to bring those creatures that benefitted from the care of humans, to answer for any misdemeanours they may have committed. Its slogan 'Cat burglars must pay' was to be one used by certain tabloid newspapers.

Cecil, a human, stood in the dock with his fellow defendant, Maurice, a cat. It was the first time in legal history that a cat had been put on trial. The judge read out the charge.

'You both stand accused of the theft of a wedding ring,' he said. 'Under new legislation the jury has been asked to deliberate on your innocence or guilt.' It was at that moment that Maurice stretched himself on his four legs, appearing to yawn. This act did not please the judge, who sought to ignore this obvious disrespect. The trial began with the prosecuting council outlining the case against the two defendants.

'You have been accused of purloining the wedding ring of Cecilia, the wife of Mr. Cecil Digby-Yallopson, as part of a plot to pass on the ring and to sell it at great profit.' At this point Maurice let out a huge 'Meeow!', simultaneously startling both judge and jury.

'Silence in court,' announced the judge. As the trial continued, the prosecuting counsel asserted that Maurice had, quite deliberately, moved Cecilia Digby-Yallopson's ring from her room, under the pretence of 'playing with it', to pat it towards the grasp of Mr Digby-Yallopson. The prosecuting counsel appeared to take pride in his wit, as he declared that Mr Digby-Yallopson was a 'gold-digger', making eye-contact with the jury to confirm they had appreciated his play on words.

This did not seem to impress Maurice, however, who appeared fascinated by the wig that the prosecuting counsel wore, as it reminded him of a *liaison* he had had as a younger cat. While the trial continued there was a veritable storm outside the court room, with 'Animal Rights' protesters, professing the innocence of Maurice, clashing with 'Human Rights' protesters, determined that Maurice had to be judged in the same way as humans. The chant of 'Freedom for Felines' was matched with 'Power to the People'.

Unfortunately, whatever efforts were made, they did not benefit Cecil or Maurice. Both were found guilty, with Cecil being sentenced to three months in prison, while Maurice's sentence was three months on a diet consisting only of cat biscuits.

There had been a storm outside the court room, but soon there would be a storm inside Maurice's stomach, brought about by the lack of decent food.