

MATTBO: FIRST CLAW

The Totally Overdramatic Story of Mattbo and Michael the Cat

EIN MANN.
EIN KATER.
KEIN ZURÜCK.

ONE MAN.
ONE TOMCAT.
NO WAY BACK.

BEAT
LAB

BEAT
LAB
Make beats.
Not excuses.
Pet cats.
Repeat.

MICHAEL

TRUSTY
TORCH

TODAY'S MISSION:
[X] MAKE BEATS
[X] FEED MICHAEL
[X] SAVE THE DAY
[X] NAP (OPTIONAL)

★ A VERY SERIOUS ACTION-CAT NOVEL ★

MATTBO: FIRST CLAW

*The Totally Overdramatic Story of Mattbo and Michael
the Cat*

Ein Mann. Ein Kater. Kein Zurück.

One man. One tomcat. No way back.

Written by: Matt Fletcher

For: Ellie and Lewis.

A Note Before the Smoke Machine Starts

This is a fictional action-comedy legend spun out of the Mattbo poster: a deliberately over-the-top German war-film-style joke in which ordinary household events become a survival epic.

Mattbo is the action-movie version of Matt. Michael is, naturally, Michael - promoted here to tactical commander, cupboard inspector, Hoover opponent and permanent owner of the warm spot.

No actual cats were asked to approve this manuscript. Michael almost certainly would have demanded more snacks and stricter technical German.

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German poster lines - with English
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Dramatis Personae

Mattbo: A man forced by poster logic to become the action hero of his own hallway.

Michael: A tomcat of strategic depth, snack certainty and excellent warm-spot discipline.

The Hoover: A red-eyed machine enemy with wheels, beeps and no honour.

The Draught: The cold villain beneath the door, upgraded by cinematic nonsense into a full household threat.

The Beat Lab: A bunker of lights, cables, screens and helpful pixel warnings.

PROLOGUE

THE POSTER THAT WOULD NOT STAY FLAT



Prologue: The Poster That Would Not Stay Flat

It began, as all heroic disasters do, with a poster.

Not a sensible poster. Not a polite poster. Not the sort of poster that sits quietly in a frame and agrees with the wallpaper. This was a German action poster, the kind that looks as if it was printed during a thunderstorm by a man wearing sunglasses indoors.

Across the top it declared, in letters heavy enough to require planning permission:

MATTBO: FIRST CLAW.

Underneath stood Mattbo, shoulders squared, face lit by impossible orange fire, holding the sort of expression usually reserved for men who have either survived the jungle or discovered that the Wi-Fi has dropped during a firmware update.

Beside him, half in shadow and half in divine judgement, sat Michael the cat.

Michael was not posing. Michael never posed. Michael merely allowed the universe to arrange itself around him. His eyes said: I have seen empires rise, empires fall, and three different brands of wet food pretend to be chicken. Impress me.

The tagline read:

EIN MANN. EIN KATER. KEIN ZURÜCK.

One man. One tomcat. No way back.

No one knew exactly who had ordered the poster, or why the jungle in the background appeared to contain both palm trees and something suspiciously like a Hebridean fence post. No one could explain why the

cat looked more decorated than the man. No one could say who had authorised the smoke machine.

But once the poster existed, the story became inevitable.

Because certain images do not remain images. They press themselves against reality. They whisper from the wall at midnight. They turn ordinary rooms into war rooms, ordinary cats into commanders, and ordinary men into legends with suspiciously practical shoes.

Mattbo noticed the change first when the poster seemed to be watching him.

Michael noticed it first much earlier, but declined to tell anyone.

He had a reputation to maintain.

CHAPTER ONE
OPERATION BREAKFAST



Chapter One: Operation Breakfast

At 06:13, the house was silent.

At 06:14, Michael began the operation.

He crossed the landing without sound, though he made sure his bell did not ring because a bell was for amateurs, house cats and decorative idiots. Michael was a field specialist. A striped tactical unit. A furry veteran of the long campaign known as Getting Fed Before Anyone Is Ready.

Mattbo was asleep.

This was the first obstacle.

Michael stood on the floor beside the bed and performed an assessment. The target lay beneath a duvet, breathing in the innocent rhythm of a man who believed morning was negotiable. Michael knew better. Morning was not a time. Morning was a legal claim filed by the stomach.

He jumped onto the mattress.

The landing was silent. Precise. Excellent.

Then he placed one paw on Mattbo's ribs.

Mattbo made a noise like a submarine discovering religion.

Michael waited. The target did not rise.

Second paw.

This produced a groan. Progress.

Michael moved to the chest, where all serious negotiations took place, and stared directly into the sleeping face. He deployed the ancient technique known as The Breath of Fish and Moral Certainty.

Mattbo opened one eye.

"Michael," he whispered, with the voice of a man speaking from the bottom of a well. "It is not even breakfast time."

Michael blinked once.

It was not a blink of affection. It was paperwork.

From the wall, the poster watched.

In the poster, the German words seemed to glow faintly: EIN MANN. EIN KATER. KEIN ZURÜCK.

Mattbo noticed the glow, then noticed Michael's face, then noticed the clock. A lesser man might have rolled over. A lesser man might have muttered nonsense about five more minutes.

But this was Mattbo.

He pushed himself upright.

"All right," he said. "We move at first light."

Michael jumped down and led the way, tail raised like a regimental flag.

The kitchen was cold. The world beyond the window was grey and damp, the sort of Stornoway morning that did not so much begin as leak into existence. Somewhere in the distance, a gull screamed like it had read the electricity bill.

Mattbo opened the cupboard.

Michael sat directly behind him. Too close. Always too close. A commander must oversee supply lines.

There were three packets. Salmon. Chicken. Something described as "country feast," which had never been accepted by any known country.

Mattbo picked chicken.

Michael narrowed his eyes.

"You had salmon yesterday."

Michael did not move.

"You liked chicken last week."

The stare deepened.

"Fine," Mattbo said. "Salmon."

The packet opened with a wet, heroic sound.

Michael ate for precisely twenty-two seconds, then stepped back as though the bowl had insulted his family.

Mattbo looked down. "What now?"

Michael glanced at the poster through the open doorway.

No one else would have understood the signal.

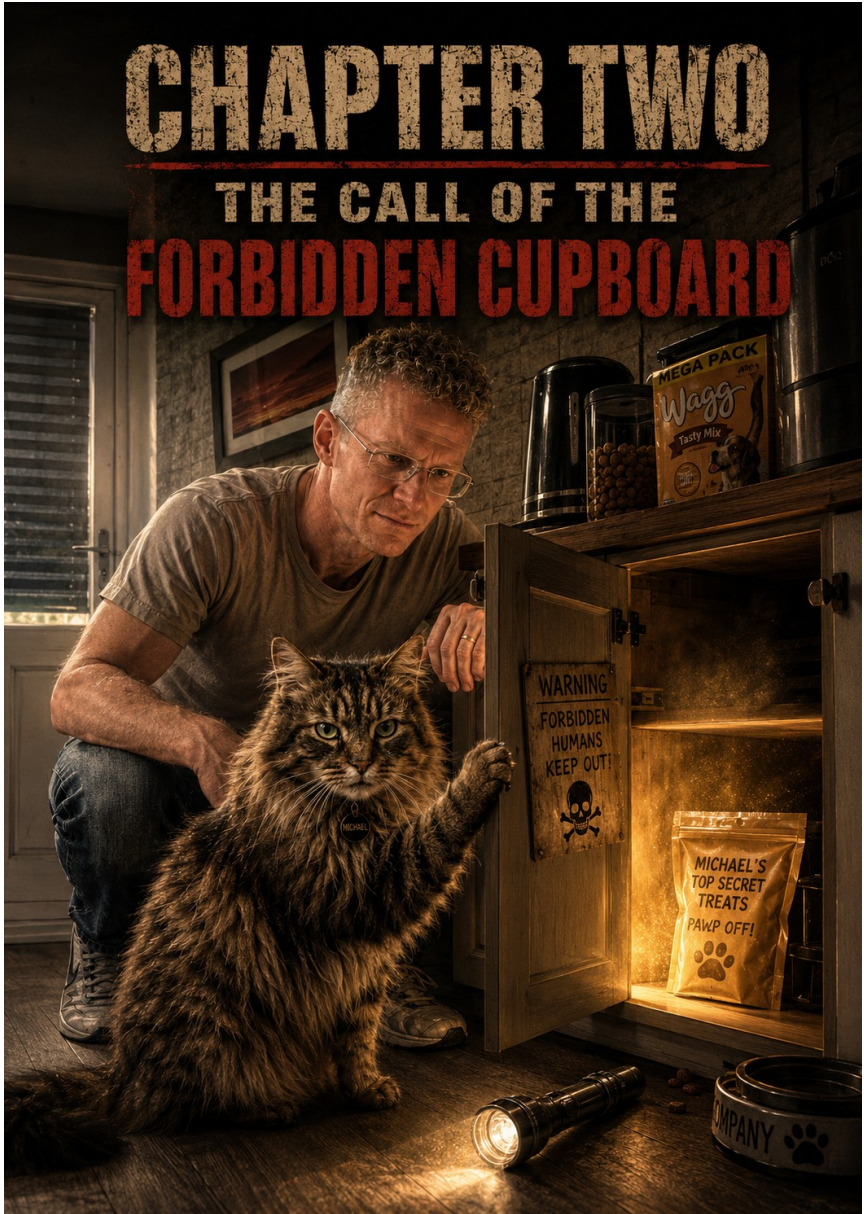
Mattbo did.

The mission had changed.

Breakfast was only the beginning.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CALL OF THE FORBIDDEN CUPBOARD



Chapter Two: The Call of the Forbidden Cupboard

Every house has a forbidden place.

Some have lofts full of dust and Christmas decorations. Some have garages where old cables breed in cardboard boxes. Some have drawers containing batteries, birthday candles, keys to unknown locks, and one screwdriver that fits nothing on earth.

In Mattbo's house, the forbidden place was the lower cupboard beside the kitchen door.

It contained carrier bags, spare cleaning cloths, a torch with heroic potential, and the packet of treats Michael pretended not to know about.

Michael knew about it.

Michael knew about everything.

The cupboard had been mentioned only once, months earlier, in a careless human sentence: "I will put these down here so Michael does not get them."

Humans say these things as if cats are not fluent in intention.

For weeks Michael had studied the cupboard. He had mapped the hinge. He had listened to the door click. He had tested the resistance with a claw at 02:37 one Tuesday morning, then pretended to be asleep when Mattbo appeared in the hallway asking questions nobody needed answered.

Now, after Operation Breakfast, he led Mattbo back to it.

"No," said Mattbo.

Michael sat.

"Absolutely not."

Michael lifted one paw and placed it against the cupboard door.

The poster in the other room gave off the emotional pressure of a film trailer.

Mattbo folded his arms. "This is not happening."

Michael's paw flexed. One claw appeared.

First claw.

The cupboard opened.

Not because Mattbo had surrendered. That would be inaccurate. It opened because a temporary tactical retreat had been selected in the interest of domestic stability.

Inside, the treat packet gleamed.

Mattbo picked it up. "One."

Michael's face remained unchanged.

"One treat."

No change.

"Fine. Two, but that is it."

A small noise came from Michael, not quite a meow, not quite a command, but definitely a legal amendment.

Mattbo sighed. "Three. Final offer."

Michael accepted by blinking slowly, which in cat language can mean love, patience, or I have decided not to destroy you today.

The treats were issued.

Michael ate them with surgical focus.

Then the lights flickered.

The fridge hummed down. The room held its breath. Outside, the grey morning deepened.

Mattbo looked toward the window.

Michael looked toward the poster.

On the paper, the jungle shadows seemed darker than before.

Somewhere in the house, something clicked.

The forbidden cupboard door swung open by itself.

From inside rolled the torch.

It stopped at Mattbo's feet.

He bent down and picked it up.

Michael stood, stretched once, and headed for the hall.

"Where are we going?" Mattbo asked.

Michael did not answer.

Commanders rarely do.

🐾 **CHAPTER THREE:** 🐾
**THE HALLWAY
BECAME A JUNGLE**



Chapter Three: The Hallway Became a Jungle

The hallway had no right to be longer than it was.

Mattbo knew the distance from the kitchen to the front door. He had walked it thousands of times. It was a normal hallway, a domestic strip of floor where shoes gathered, coats sagged, and the occasional parcel waited to be tripped over.

But now it stretched ahead like a path into the unknown.

The torch beam cut through the dimness.

The wallpaper was still there, but between the familiar shapes hung vines. Real vines, or at least vines with enough confidence to make argument difficult. Ferns pushed from behind the skirting board. Mist curled along the floor. The doormat had become a mossy platform with the word WELCOME barely visible beneath a layer of cinematic damp.

Mattbo stared.

"Michael."

Michael was already walking.

He moved with his usual combination of grace and insult. He had never believed hallways were simple. Humans saw one space; cats saw routes, ambushes, invisible borders, historic scent disputes and the possibility of a spider near the radiator.

To Michael, the jungle had simply become honest.

From the wall behind them, the poster's tagline burned in memory.

One man. One tomcat. No way back.

Mattbo tightened his grip on the torch.

"Right," he said, because action heroes are required to say something at moments like this and "right" is a word that can carry a surprising amount of responsibility.

They advanced.

At the first bend, they encountered the Laundry Ridge.

A basket stood in the path, overflowing with clothing. In ordinary circumstances, it was a household chore. In the jungle it was a mountain pass, unstable and treacherous, giving off the warm smell of fabric conditioner and defeat.

Michael leapt onto it. Socks shifted under him. A T-shirt slid dramatically into the mist. He looked back at Mattbo as if to ask why the infantry was delayed.

Mattbo climbed.

It was less heroic than he would later describe.

The basket wobbled. A towel gave way. For one terrible second he saw the future: a humiliating fall, a surprised cat, and a poster on the wall changing its title to MATTBO: FIRST LAUNDRY.

He recovered.

Michael pretended not to notice, which was kinder than cheering.

Beyond the ridge lay the Shoe Marsh. Boots rose from the gloom like abandoned fortifications. One trainer was upside down. Another contained something that might have been a toy, a cable, or a small fossil. Mattbo used the torch to test the path.

Michael simply stepped around everything, because cats are born with maps humans spend decades trying to deserve.

Then came the sound.

A low mechanical rumble.

Mattbo stopped.

Michael's tail went still.

At the far end of the hall, behind the half-open door to the utility area, something moved.

A shape. Round. Hungry. Patient.

The automatic vacuum cleaner had awakened.

Its charging light pulsed red in the dark.

Michael's ears flattened.

Mattbo whispered, "The Hoover."

Michael did not run.

That was how Mattbo knew things were serious.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RED EYE OF THE HOOVER



Chapter Four: The Red Eye of the Hoover

The Hoover was not technically a hoover.

Mattbo knew this. It was a robotic vacuum, purchased with optimism and a healthy misunderstanding of how much cats respect automation. It was round, black and supposed to keep the floor tidy without drama.

It had never once kept anything tidy without drama.

Michael hated it from the first day.

Not feared. Hated.

Fear would have implied the machine held power. Hatred was more precise. Michael regarded it as a trespassing beetle with delusions of authority.

Now it rolled from the utility room into the jungle hallway, red light glowing like the single eye of an ancient machine beast.

It bumped gently into a shoe.

Whirr.

It reversed.

Whirr.

It turned toward them.

Mattbo raised the torch. "Stay back."

The Hoover continued at the approximate speed of a determined digestive biscuit.

Michael stepped forward.

"No," Mattbo said. "This is not worth it."

Michael looked over his shoulder.

There are many looks a cat can give a man. This one meant: You feed me, yes. You open doors, sometimes. You understand the larger war, no.

The Hoover advanced.

Michael crouched.

Mattbo could feel the poster behind him, could feel the absurd gravity of the title, could hear imaginary drums building from nowhere.

KÄMPFEN. ÜBERLEBEN. NIE AUFGEBEN.

Fight. Survive. Never give up.

The machine crossed the threshold of the Shoe Marsh.

Michael struck.

It was not a swipe. It was a declaration.

One paw flashed out, claws visible only for a heartbeat. The impact landed on the Hoover's glossy top with a tiny plastic tick.

The machine stopped.

Its red light blinked.

The house seemed to pause.

Then the Hoover beeped softly.

It was a small, confused beep, but in the jungle hallway it echoed like a surrender horn.

Michael remained in position, paw lifted, eyes cold.

Mattbo swallowed. "First claw."

The Hoover reversed into the shoe, rotated, bumped the wall, and fled in a slow, shameful semicircle toward the utility room.

Michael did not chase it. He did not need to. Great victories do not require running after beaten appliances.

Mattbo lowered the torch.

"You know," he said, "that might have voided the warranty."

Michael began washing one paw.

The message was clear: warranties are for cowards.

They pressed on.

The jungle hallway began to change. The ferns withdrew slightly. The mist pulled back from the skirting board. But beyond the front door came a new sound: wind, rain, and something tapping at the letterbox.

Mattbo approached the door.

Michael jumped onto the small table beside it and looked through the glass panel.

Outside, the street had vanished.

In its place stood a wall of green.

Trees. Rain. Darkness.

And scratched into the condensation on the glass were three words.

FEED ME AGAIN.

Mattbo turned slowly toward Michael.

Michael was already looking innocent.

Too innocent.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MAP

UNDER THE MAT



Chapter Five: The Map Under the Mat

The words on the glass faded as quickly as they had appeared.

Mattbo did what all sensible men do when reality becomes theatrical: he checked the door twice, turned the handle once, decided against opening it, and looked at the cat for an explanation.

Michael had none available to civilians.

Instead he dropped from the table, padded to the doormat, and began scraping at one corner.

"There is nothing under there," said Mattbo.

Michael scraped again.

"It is a doormat."

Scrape.

"I am telling you, there is absolutely..."

The corner lifted.

Underneath lay a folded sheet of paper, brown at the edges, tied with red string.

Mattbo stared at it.

"That was not there yesterday."

Michael sat with the patient expression of a creature who understood that humans require time to catch up.

Mattbo untied the string.

The paper unfolded into a map.

Not a normal map. It showed the house, but not as the house had ever appeared on any council plan. The kitchen was marked SUPPLY DEPOT. The sofa was THE LONG RIDGE. The cupboard was TREAT CACHE ALPHA. The Beat Lab was drawn as a fortified command

bunker with lightning bolts around it. The bedroom was listed simply as SLEEPING TERRITORY - ACCESS CONTROLLED BY MICHAEL.

Across the middle, in dramatic red letters, was a route.

OPERATION: SECOND BREAKFAST.

Mattbo looked down. "Absolutely not."

Michael began walking toward the living room.

"Michael."

The cat did not stop.

Mattbo followed, because he had learned one rule already: when the poster world begins, standing still is just another way of being dragged.

The living room had transformed completely.

The sofa rose like a ridge line beneath low cloud. Cushions formed boulders. Throws hung like canvas tents. The television reflected jungle leaves that were not in the room. Somewhere inside the upholstery, a spring made a sound like a distant animal.

Michael leapt onto the sofa and paused at the highest cushion.

Mattbo climbed after him, using one hand for balance and the other to protect the map from whatever sticky substance had colonised the armrest. Halfway up, he found a missing remote control wedged in a crevice like treasure from a lost civilisation.

"Aha," he said. "I wondered where that went."

Michael gave the remote a glance so dismissive it nearly changed channels.

At the summit, they could see the entire transformed house.

Kitchen smoke curled in the distance. The hallway jungle shifted. The Hoover, disgraced but not destroyed, blinked red from the utility doorway. Beyond the living room, the Beat Lab glowed faintly blue, waiting.

On the map, a small symbol marked that room: a circle, a paw, and a bolt of lightning.

Mattbo tapped it. "What is this?"

Michael's ears turned forward.

From the Beat Lab came a sound.

A single electronic beep.

Then another.

Then a tiny, pixelated voice from some device on standby declared:

BEAT LAB READY.

The map trembled in Mattbo's hands.

Michael jumped down from the sofa and headed toward the blue glow.

Mattbo followed.

Behind them, on the poster, the printed cat's eyes seemed almost amused.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BEAT LAB BUNKER



Chapter Six: The Beat Lab Bunker

The Beat Lab had always been a room with more cables than strictly necessary.

This was not a criticism. It was a condition of greatness. Some rooms are made for chairs and sensible lamps. The Beat Lab was made for glowing screens, rack-like devices, small displays with secret personalities, and the sort of equipment that causes guests to say, "What does this bit do?" while pointing at the most expensive thing.

In the poster world, it became a command bunker.

The door opened with a dramatic creak it had never previously owned.

Inside, the air hummed.

A small pixel display pulsed on the desk, its tiny lights arranging themselves into words:

WARREN READY.

Then:

BEAT LAB.

Then:

SYSTEMS ARMED.

Mattbo stared. "That last one is new."

Michael jumped onto the chair and then onto the desk, carefully stepping over a cable with the concentration of a bomb disposal expert who also wanted to knock something over for entertainment.

The display blinked again.

MICHAEL COMMAND AUTHORITY RECOGNISED.

"Excuse me?" said Mattbo.

Michael sat directly in front of the screen.

The device continued:

OBJECTIVE: RESTORE HOUSE REALITY.
SECONDARY OBJECTIVE: SNACKS.

Mattbo folded the map. "Of course."

The monitors flickered. For one moment they showed not desktops or menus but a sweeping aerial view of the house-jungle. The Hoover lurked near the utility room. The forbidden cupboard shone with treat-cache energy. The front door opened onto an impossible wall of rain forest. And somewhere beyond the kitchen, moving slowly through the mist, was a shape made of static.

It was tall. It was jagged. It was carrying a bin bag like a cape.

Mattbo leaned closer. "What is that?"

The pixel display answered:

THE DRAUGHT.

Every house has one. A cold place under a door. A whisper beside a window. The unseen force that makes you say, "Can you feel that?" while everyone else pretends not to.

But in the poster world, The Draught had become a villain.

It moved through the rooms, turning warmth into suspicion and doors into portals. Wherever it passed, the jungle thickened.

Michael's tail flicked once.

"How do we stop it?" Mattbo asked.

The pixel display changed.

THREE TASKS.

1. SECURE THE CUPBOARD.
2. SILENCE THE RED EYE.
3. CLAIM THE WARM SPOT.

Mattbo nodded slowly. "The cupboard, the Hoover, and... the warm spot?"

Michael stood.

He knew exactly which warm spot.

Every afternoon, when sunlight finally found its way through the house, there was one patch of floor near the window that became sacred.

Michael owned it. Not legally, because the legal system was human and therefore incomplete, but spiritually and tactically.

If The Draught claimed it, the house would fall.

Mattbo looked at Michael.

"Then we do this together."

Michael blinked.

Not paperwork this time.

Something closer to agreement.

On the wall of the Beat Lab, the poster had somehow appeared again. It had not moved from its original room, yet there it was, hanging above the equipment.

The title burned like a promise.

MATTBO: FIRST CLAW.

Mattbo picked up the torch. Michael leapt down.

The bunker door opened by itself.

Outside, the jungle waited.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TREAT CACHE ALPHA



Chapter Seven: Treat Cache Alpha

Securing the cupboard should have been simple.

This was how Mattbo knew it would not be.

The route back to the kitchen passed through the hallway, where the plants had grown thicker and the air smelled of rain, dust, and yesterday's toast. The map showed a safe passage, but the map had been drawn by someone with paws and a deeply optimistic attitude toward human balance.

Michael took the narrow route along the skirting board.

Mattbo took the human route and immediately stepped on a squeaky toy.

The sound rang through the jungle like an alarm.

From the utility room came a responding beep.

"No," Mattbo whispered. "Not now."

The Hoover rolled into view.

Its red eye was back.

A thin strip of tape clung to its side like a battlefield dressing. It had survived the first encounter and returned changed. Perhaps angrier. Perhaps merely still confused by the shoe.

Michael turned to face it.

Mattbo held up a hand. "Wait. We need task one first. Cupboard. Then Hoover. The display was very clear."

Michael continued staring at the machine.

"Michael."

The Hoover advanced.

Mattbo had an idea. It was not a great idea, but history is built from men doing things that seemed reasonable during a crisis.

He opened the kitchen cupboard, removed the treat packet and shook it once.

The sound was small.

To Michael, it was thunder.

The cat's head turned.

The Hoover kept advancing.

Mattbo shook the packet again, then tossed three treats across the kitchen floor. They skittered past the threshold and landed near the cupboard.

Michael moved faster than dignity should allow.

He reached the treats, ate them, and placed himself directly before the cupboard door.

Task one: secure the cupboard.

The jungle reacted. Vines withdrew from the cabinet handles. The strange glow around the treat cache dimmed. Somewhere, something stamped an invisible form marked COMPLETED.

Then the cupboard door slammed shut.

The Hoover beeped.

Mattbo turned.

"Right," he said. "Task two."

The machine entered the kitchen.

Michael licked one paw, not because it needed cleaning, but because theatre matters.

Mattbo grabbed the doormat from the hall.

"Distract it," he said.

Michael looked insulted.

"Fine. Intimidate it."

That was acceptable.

Michael stepped forward with his back arched and his tail enlarged into a question of national defence. The Hoover hesitated. Its sensors, never designed for spiritual warfare, recalculated.

Mattbo dropped the doormat in its path.

The Hoover climbed onto it, lost traction, rotated in place, and began gently attacking the word WELCOME.

Michael approached.

One paw rose.

First claw had already been declared. This was the sequel.

The paw landed.

Tick.

The Hoover stopped.

The red eye blinked, then turned blue.

The machine emitted a final beep and powered down.

Task two: silence the red eye.

The kitchen lights flickered back for half a second.

Mattbo grinned. "We are actually doing this."

Michael did not grin, because cats do not waste muscle movement on obvious facts.

Only one task remained.

Claim the warm spot.

And outside the window, The Draught pressed its invisible face against the glass.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE MARCH TO THE WARM SPOT



Chapter Eight: The March to the Warm Spot

By afternoon, the house should have been returning to normal.

Instead it had gone full cinema.

Rain struck the windows in hard diagonal lines. The jungle breathed through the hallway. The poster appeared in every reflective surface: in the mirror, in the television screen, in the dark glass of the phone when Mattbo checked for signal and found only the words KEIN ZURÜCK.

No way back.

The warm spot lay in the living room near the window, where light normally gathered when the weather allowed a brief truce. It was Michael's kingdom. A golden patch. A charging station for the soul. A place where a cat could melt into the floor and look as if he had invented peace.

Now it was covered in shadow.

The Draught stood over it.

It had no face exactly. More a suggestion of a face, made from moving curtains, cold air, and the feeling of a door not quite shut. It wore the bin bag like a black cloak. Around its feet, leaves curled inward and turned silver with frost.

Mattbo stopped at the edge of the room.

Michael walked past him.

"Careful," Mattbo said.

The Draught whispered through the gap beneath the window.

It sounded like every cold morning, every unexplained chill, every time someone had said, "Did you leave that open?" and no one had.

Michael stepped onto the border of the warm spot.

The shadow resisted.

His fur lifted.

Mattbo felt the temperature drop. He gripped the torch until his knuckles ached. This was ridiculous, obviously. A man and a cat should not have to fight a household draught in a jungle version of a living room because a poster had become too powerful.

But then again, most important things are ridiculous from the outside.

Mattbo moved forward.

The Draught snapped toward him.

The torch flickered.

The map flew from his pocket and unfolded in mid-air. New writing burned across it:

FINAL RULE: A WARM SPOT CANNOT BE TAKEN. IT MUST BE OCCUPIED.

Mattbo understood.

He looked at Michael. "You need to sit down."

Michael looked back.

The expression said: I am aware of sitting.

"On the warm spot. Now."

The Draught surged. Curtains whipped. Cushions tumbled. The poster on the wall shook in its frame.

Michael lowered himself slowly, deliberately, royally, onto the patch of disputed floor.

The Draught screamed.

It was not a loud scream. It was the thin whistle of air through a crack, multiplied by all the tiny irritations of a cold house.

Michael tucked his paws beneath him.

The loaf position.

Ultimate defence.

Mattbo raised the torch and shouted the only German phrase that seemed appropriate:

"NIE AUFGEBEN!"

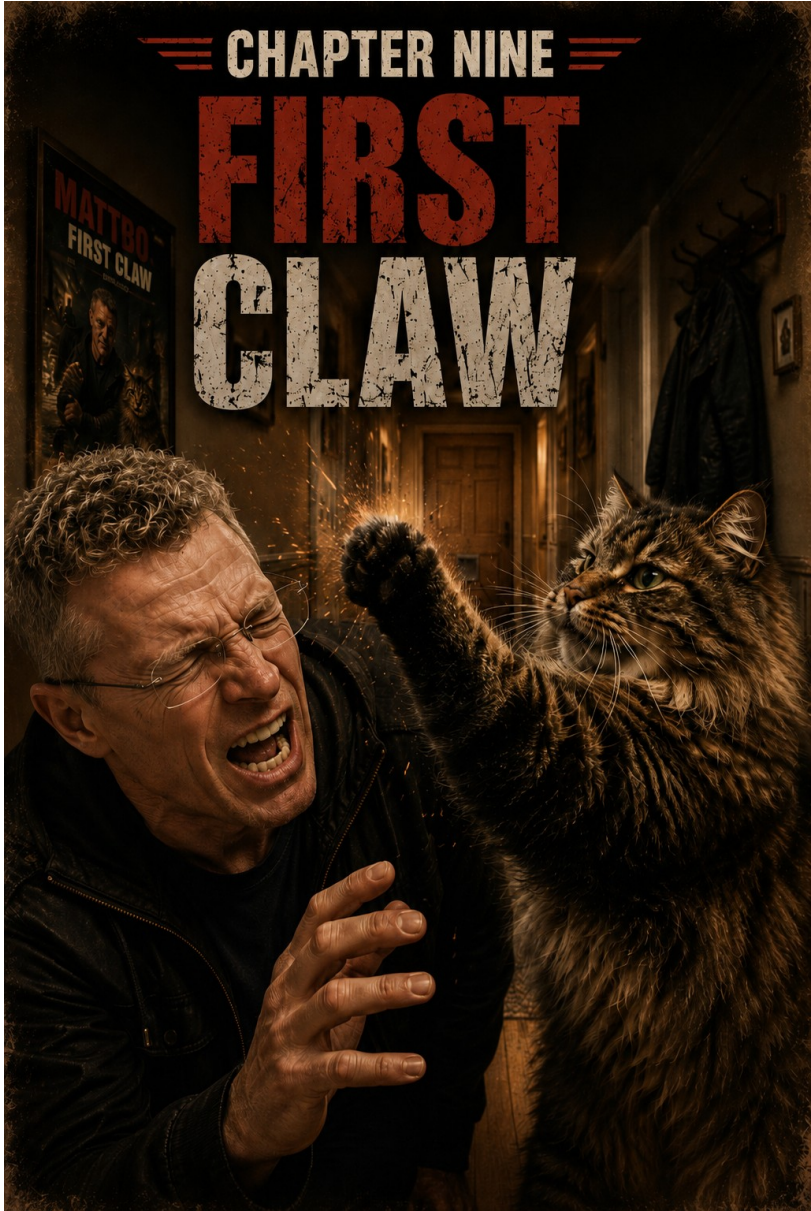
Never give up.

The warm spot flared gold.

The Draught recoiled.

Michael closed his eyes.

The room filled with light.



Chapter Nine: First Claw

For a moment, everything was still.

Then the jungle collapsed inward like scenery after the final take.

Leaves withdrew into cracks that had never been there. Mist thinned. The sofa became a sofa again, though it retained the proud exhaustion of a mountain range. The laundry basket returned to being merely overfull. The kitchen cupboard clicked shut with the tired finality of a safe after a bank job.

The Hoover sat motionless on the doormat.

The Beat Lab display flashed:

MISSION COMPLETE.

Then, after a pause:

SNACK REVIEW PENDING.

Mattbo laughed.

It came out more relieved than heroic, but heroic men are allowed to laugh like normal people after fighting indoor weather.

Michael remained in the warm spot.

He had not moved. Not even during the collapse. Especially not during the collapse. If the universe wanted him elsewhere, it would have to submit a written request.

Mattbo sat on the sofa and looked at the poster.

It hung where it belonged now, flat against the wall. No glow. No trembling. No jungle breathing at the edges.

But it had changed.

A small detail had appeared at the bottom, beneath the title, just above the German line.

In tiny print it now read:

BASED ON TRUE HOUSEHOLD EVENTS, EXAGGERATED FOR HONOUR.

Mattbo leaned forward.

"Michael, have you seen this?"

Michael opened one eye.

The look said: I approved final copy.

"You cannot approve final copy."

The eye closed again.

Apparently he could.

As the afternoon settled, Mattbo made coffee, checked the cupboard, reset the Hoover, and wrote down everything he could remember. The map had vanished, but the memory of it remained sharp: Treat Cache Alpha, the Long Ridge, the Beat Lab Bunker, the warm spot.

He wrote the title first.

MATTBO: FIRST CLAW.

Then the tagline.

One man. One tomcat. No way back.

He paused over the word tomcat. The original poster had said Katze, cat, because it sounded better to the untrained English ear. But technically Michael was a Kater and if there was one thing this household had learned, it was that Michael noticed technicalities.

Mattbo corrected it.

Ein Mann. Ein Kater. Kein Zurück.

Michael purred.

It was quiet. Almost accidental.

Mattbo looked over.

"Was that for the translation?"

No answer.

"For the mission?"

No answer.

"For the treats?"

The purring increased by one measurable degree.

Mattbo nodded. "Fair enough."

Outside, the rain softened. A patch of proper light crossed the floor and found Michael exactly where he had installed himself. The cat glowed like a small striped monument.

The poster did not move.

But somewhere deep in the paper, something waited.

Not a threat.

A sequel.



Chapter Ten: The Second Trailer

That evening, Mattbo tried to explain the day to an imaginary audience.

This is a dangerous activity. Once a man has imagined an audience, he begins speaking in trailers.

"They said it was just a cat," he murmured while washing a mug. "They were wrong."

Michael sat on the counter where he was not supposed to be.

"A storm came to the house. A machine rose from the utility room. One man stood alone."

Michael gave him a look.

"Fine. One man stood with a cat."

Better.

The kitchen light buzzed gently. The kettle clicked. The world was ordinary again, which made the day's events feel both impossible and completely consistent with owning a cat.

Mattbo leaned against the counter.

"You realise nobody will believe this."

Michael stretched one front paw, extending the claws just enough to catch the light.

Mattbo pointed. "That is exactly the kind of thing they will say I made up."

From the living room came a tiny electronic beep.

They both turned.

The Beat Lab display, though not in the living room at all, somehow projected a faint reflection across the dark television screen.

COMING SOON.

Mattbo walked closer.

The words changed.

MATTBO II: THE TREAT PROTOCOL.

Michael jumped down and trotted in after him.

"No," Mattbo said immediately.

The words blinked.

NO WAY BACK.

"We already did no way back. That was today."

Michael sat under the poster.

The paper looked innocent. This was its most suspicious quality.

Mattbo folded his arms. "We are not doing a sequel tonight."

Michael lifted one paw and began cleaning between his toes.

"No jungle. No Hoover. No fighting draughts. No secret maps. No German taglines."

The poster remained still.

Michael remained clean.

The house remained quiet.

At 21:43, the forbidden cupboard opened by one centimetre.

Mattbo closed his eyes.

"I heard that."

The cupboard creaked another centimetre.

Michael continued grooming, as innocent as a tax haven.

Mattbo went to the cupboard, shut it, and placed a chair in front of it.

Then he added a box. Then, after thinking, a second box.

Michael watched the construction with academic interest.

"There," said Mattbo. "Secured."

He turned away.

Behind him came the soft, delicate sound of a cat jumping onto a chair.

Then onto a box.

Then onto the other box.

Then the tiny scrape of one claw against a cupboard handle.

Mattbo did not turn around straight away.

Action heroes know when they are beaten.

Finally he looked over his shoulder.

Michael hung from the handle with one paw, perfectly balanced, eyes bright with destiny.

Mattbo sighed.

"First claw was not enough, was it?"

Michael opened the cupboard.

The sequel had begun.



Epilogue: The Legend on the Wall

Years later - or possibly the next morning, because legends are not always patient - people would ask about the poster.

They would stand in the room, look at the dramatic flames, the impossible jungle, the stern figure of Mattbo, and the unimpressed magnificence of Michael and they would laugh.

"What is the story with this?" they would ask.

Mattbo would smile.

There are stories a person tells properly and stories a person lets the room tell for him.

He might translate the German.

Ein Mann. Ein Kater. Kein Zurück.

One man. One tomcat. No way back.

Kämpfen. Überleben. Nie aufgeben.

Fight. Survive. Never give up.

He might explain that Michael was the true hero, that the Hoover had never fully recovered, that the warm spot remained protected territory, and that every cupboard in the house was now considered strategically vulnerable.

He might admit that the whole thing began as a joke.

But he would never say it was only a joke.

Because jokes are powerful. A good joke puts a cape on an ordinary day. It gives a cat a rank. It turns a man making breakfast into a survivor of impossible weather. It takes the tiny dramas of a house - the cold draught, the robot vacuum, the sacred cupboard, the demanding stare at dawn - and reveals them for what they secretly are.

Epic.

Michael, older perhaps, wiser certainly, would pass beneath the poster without looking at it.

He did not need to look.

He knew what it said.

He had been there.

And sometimes, when the wind pressed against the windows and the lights flickered just once, Mattbo would glance at the wall and see the smallest shimmer around the printed title.

MATTBO: FIRST CLAW.

Not enough to worry about.

Just enough to remind him.

The world is full of ordinary objects pretending not to be portals.

A poster.

A cupboard.

A warm patch of floor.

A cat with one paw raised.

And when the moment comes, when the house grows dark and the jungle returns and the machine in the hallway opens its red eye again, there will be only one rule left to remember.

One man.

One tomcat.

No way back.

German poster lines - with English

MATTBO: FIRST CLAW

Mattbo: First Claw

EIN MANN. EIN KATER. KEIN ZURÜCK.

One man. One tomcat. No way back.

KÄMPFEN. ÜBERLEBEN. NIE AUFGEBEN.

Fight. Survive. Never give up.

The earlier phrase "Ein Mann. Eine Katze. Kein Zurück" means "One man. One cat. No way back." Because Michael is male, "ein Kater" is the technically better German version, which is exactly the sort of detail Michael would insist on.

Michael's Field Rules

1. A cupboard is only closed until properly investigated.
2. Breakfast is not a time. Breakfast is a right.
3. The Hoover has no honour.
4. A warm spot cannot be shared unless the cat is already asleep and nobody breathes too loudly.
5. Humans are useful, especially for doors, packets, and dramatic narration.
6. Never give up, unless giving up makes the human open the salmon.

Back-cover blurb

When a ridiculous German action poster appears on the wall, Mattbo thinks the joke has gone far enough. Michael the cat knows it has not gone nearly far enough.

By breakfast, the forbidden cupboard has become a strategic objective. By lunchtime, the hallway has become a jungle. By afternoon, the Hoover has returned as a red-eyed mechanical enemy and the house itself is under attack from The Draught.

Only one warm spot remains. Only one cat can claim it. Only one man is foolish enough to follow him.

MATTBO: FIRST CLAW is the heroic, absurd, deeply serious action-cat legend nobody asked for and everybody deserved.

A man in a dark leather jacket and jeans stands in a jungle, looking back at a burning house. A helicopter is visible in the dark, smoky sky above. The scene is lit with dramatic, low-key lighting, emphasizing the danger and isolation of the situation.

ONE MAN. ONE TOMCAT. NO WAY BACK.

Breakfast became a mission.
The cupboard became a target.
The house became a jungle.
Only one warm spot remained.