

# Monkey Puzzle

*By David C Ayre*

## ***One***

Alan and Kirsty Westbrook had been living quietly in their cottage in the dales for seven years since their foray into the world of artificial intelligence. They had hoped that their new vision of robotics would bring about a new world of automated production, but there had been problems; the beings they had created were able to think for themselves.

The first two mechanoids they had built, they had called Jack and Jill, and they missed these two more than all the other two hundred they had produced put together. That was because they had interacted with these two from the beginning and they seemed like their family. But after the explosion at the factory had put an end to mechanoid production, they had returned to creating new vaccines for Justin's company.

Justin was Kirsty's Uncle who had brought her up after her parents had died when she was young and, coincidentally, he had known Alan while at university and, when they met again many years later, he had offered Alan the use of his secret laboratory to carry out his research work. It was there that Kirsty had blundered into the living quarters of the lab and bumped into Alan as he emerged from the shower.

They had worked together on a number of projects, the last of which was the development of intelligent mechanoids. But when that venture ended with a bang, they decided to get married and settle down to an easier lifestyle in the Dales. They had decided that the difference in their ages was not an issue. Alan was reasonably fit as he liked walking. His hair was greying though it was mostly intact. Kirsty was a very active, outdoor type with long auburn hair but had had a good scientific

background augmented by a good artistic ability. She was also an accomplished jazz trumpet player.

About nine months after their wedding, their daughter was born, and Kirsty insisted they call her Jill, after the mechanoid they had lost. Alan wasn't so sure about that. He would rather have called her something completely different, but Kirsty was not someone easily influenced, especially when her mind was made up.

During the time they had been working on the mechanoids, they had been assisted by an unlikely group who went by the names of Weasel, Knuckles and Kevin. Alan had come across them many years ago when they had been employed by Sir Malcolm Birch to track him down and had never discovered how they got those nicknames. However, they had fallen out with Sir Malcolm and soon realised they were better off working for Alan, who had never enquired about their earlier activities, though he suspected they were, perhaps, a bit suspect. But since they had been working with Alan, they had kept, for the most part, on the right side of the law.

It was a sunny afternoon, and Alan was mowing the not inconsiderable lawn at the back while young Jill was playing with their neighbour's pet Labrador; throwing a ball for him to fetch. Kirsty came out with a tray of drinks for them and placed them on the table in the summer-house.

"Come and get it," she shouted. Alan switched off the mower and collected Jill and took her over to where Kirsty was waiting for them.

"We'll have to go over to the lab again tomorrow," said Alan. "Justin's got some new orders that we need to get on with."

"Will Uncle Weasel be coming to look after me?" asked Jill. She liked Uncle Weasel. He played games with her and told her silly stories.

“Yes,” said Kirsty, “and Uncle Knuckles is coming too, to cut the hedge. So, you’ll have to be good and not get in his way.”

“I’m always good,” said Jill.

They tended to go to the lab once or twice each month to keep up with the work they did for Justin, but Alan also had an internet link with the lab to allow him to keep an eye on things from there without having to travel. Before they bought this cottage in the Dales, they had lived in the apartment attached to the lab, which had been very convenient. Alan always had a touch of nostalgia when they returned to the lab as so much had happened while they had been there.

They arrived just before lunch and Justin was there to meet them.

“It’s all going well,” he said, “The last anti-viral was a great success. Anyway, come on in. Lunch will be ready shortly. Mrs P has been busy in the kitchen.”

Mrs P was the lady who came in each day to look after Justin. She was mainly the cook, but she also organised a couple of girls from the village to keep the place clean and tidy. It wasn’t a big job as Justin was often away at his factory in Cardiff.

She was a plump, farmer’s wife type; always happy scuttling round the kitchen.

“It’ll be ready in a minute,” she said, peeping round the door. Justin stood up and went to the table followed by Alan and Kirsty.

“And how’s my little grand-niece?” asked Justin as they sat down.

“Oh, she’s full of it,” said Kirsty. “She loves it when Weasel comes to look after her.”

Mrs P brought in the roast and placed it in front of Justin. “I assume you’ll carve?” she said and dashed back into the kitchen to fetch the dishes of vegetables. When she was happy that everyone had what they needed she disappeared back into the kitchen.

“There was a chap here yesterday,” said Justin. “Wanted to know where he could find you.”

“Oh,” said Alan. “Who was he, and what did he want?”

“Didn’t say,” said Justin. “I told him to come back today. I didn’t want to give out your home address to a complete stranger.”

“Intriguing,” said Alan. “I didn’t think there were that many people who were aware they could find me here, not even insurance salesmen.”

“Financial advisers,” said Kirsty.

“What?” said Alan, looking puzzled.

“That’s what insurance salesmen call themselves these days,” she said.

“We’ll just have to wait and see,” said Alan. “Anyway, what have you got for us this time, Justin?”

“I’ve got a folder with the full spec in my briefcase,” he replied. “I’ll show you after lunch.

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After Mrs P had cleared away the dishes and they were seated in comfort in the living room, Justin fetched his folder and they went through the requirements for the next batch of anti-vials. After about eight years of developing these products, Alan was beginning to find it a bit tedious, and if it weren’t for the rich rewards they brought, he thought he might have packed it in a while back.

It was then that they heard the knock at the door and heard Mrs P go to answer it. There was the sound of voices, though it wasn’t possible to tell what they were saying. Then it went quiet, and Mrs P poked her head round the door.

“Someone to see Mr Alan,” she said.

“Who is it?” asked Alan.

“Said his name was Thompson,” she said. “Said you were old friends.”

“Didn’t say what his first name was, did he?”

“Yes,” she said. “I think he said it was Geoff.”

“OK, thanks Mrs P,” said Alan. “You had better send him in.”

“An old friend?” said Kirsty.

“So he says,” said Alan, “though I can’t remember any old friends called Geoff Thompson, can you?”

“Rings a bell,” said Kirsty.

The door opened and Mrs P ushered a tall, slightly overweight man into the living room. Alan stood, wondering where he had seen this person before.

“I’m Alan Westbrook,” he said, “and this is my wife Kirsty and her uncle Justin.”

“Yes, I remember you all, though its been a few years now,” he replied.

“Please take a seat,” said Alan. “I have a faint recollection of you, but really can’t remember where we met.”

“I think I might have put on a few pounds since then,” he said. “I am from MI5. We met last when we were trying to track down a group of rogue robots, or mechanoids, as you seemed to prefer to call them, ending with that explosion in the factory where they were holed up.” Alan’s heart sank. Now he remembered. Because the Prime Minister, at the time, wanted no publicity, they had not brought any charges against Alan and Kirsty for the crimes committed by the mechanoids. But, they had said that they would reserve the right to call on their help at any time in the future. Alan hadn’t thought that that would happen but, it would appear, he was wrong.

“Yes,” said Alan. “Now I remember. How can we help you?”

“Well, it’s a bit embarrassing, really,” said Geoff, “but we would like to call on your expertise to help us with a little security problem.”

“That doesn’t sound too difficult,” said Alan. “What’s the problem?”

“Sensitive data is being leaked from one of our offices,” said Geoff. “We have done the usual things; intruder alarms, CCTV, that sort of thing, but we can’t detect any intrusion, but the info is still getting out.”

“Where is this happening?” asked Kirsty.

“It’s at one of our offices in Yorkshire; almost on your doorstep,” said Geoff.

“Well, that’s not too bad,” said Alan. “We’ll pop over and have a look. When’s best for you?”

“Next Monday would be best,” said Geoff. “Here are directions to the place. It’s called Walton Grange. It was an old country house but was taken over by the MoD during the last war and has remained in their hands ever since. We have taken over a wing for our own use, but info has been taken from several of the offices. Here are your pass cards. You’ll need those to get in.”

“We could do with three more, if you have them as I’d like to take some of our assistants along,” said Alan.

“Not the ‘Weasel’ crowd?”

“Yes,” said Alan. “The same.”

“Well, I only have two more passes,” said Geoff, reaching into his briefcase.

“That’s OK,” said Kirsty. “I’ll need to stay and baby sit anyway.”

“So, if you could bring along any surveillance gear you have,” said Geoff, “and let me know if there is anything I can help with, I’ll leave you to think about it and see you on Monday.”

Justin showed him out and returned to finish his coffee and Brandy.

“What do you make of that, then?” he asked as he settled back in his chair.

“Beats me,” said Alan. “I would’ve thought they had all the security technology to deal with that themselves.”

“You’ll be taking Weasel, I assume?” said Kirsty. “What he doesn’t know about breaking and entering isn’t worth knowing.”

“Of course,” said Alan. “I don’t suppose it’ll take long. Beats me why they can’t do it themselves.”

“What gear will you be taking?” asked Justin.

“The usual,” said Alan. “A scanner to detect signals being transmitted from bugs, of course, IR cameras and movement detectors, vibration detectors, a tube of superglue and some human hair.”

“Hair?” said Justin.

“That’s right,” said Alan. “A blob of glue on a door or window and another on the surround, then stretch the hair between the two and you have the perfect check to see if that door or window has been opened. You can use it on books or filing cabinets; anything that opens, really.”

“Oh, very Hi-Tech,” said Justin.

“Sometimes the simple ways are the best,” said Alan.

“Anyway, you have a few days to get these anti-virals out,” said Justin.

“Slave-driver,” said Alan.

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Alan had arranged to meet Weasel at Walton Grange, first thing on Monday morning and arrived a bit early so he sat in the car in the carpark to wait for him. After a short time, Weasel’s van pulled up beside Alan’s car and Weasel, Knuckles and Kevin got out.

“So, what’s the plan?” asked Weasel, walking over to where Alan was waiting for him.

“No plan, as such,” said Alan. “Let’s just have a look at the place and find out what the problem is.”

They walked over to the front door and Alan rang the bell.

“It’s a bit like calling at the manor house,” said Weasel. “Should I touch my forelock to the Lord of the Manor?”

“I think that time has long passed,” said Alan. There was a buzz and a click, so Alan pushed the door and walked in followed by the others where they found themselves in the foyer, but there was no-one there.

“Interesting,” said Weasel.

“I think this is where we use our access cards,” said Alan, walking over to the far door and presenting his card to the machine. The door slid back allowing him to walk into a very small space with no apparent exit. As soon as he was in the door slid closed behind him and another door opened in front of him. He stepped through and the door closed behind him.

This was repeated for each of them until they were all in.

“What now?” asked Weasel.

“We wait,” said Alan. There were seats around the walls and a low table with magazines on it in the centre. After about ten minutes, the door they had entered through opened, and Geoff Thompson and George Perkins entered.

“Hope you haven’t been waiting long,” said Geoff.

“No,” said Alan. “Anyway, we were a bit early.”

“Well, we’d better get started,” said Geoff. “Come with me.” He walked to the far side of the room and punched in a code and opened the door which led to a dark corridor. He fumbled for the light switch and, eventually, there was a loud click and a dim light came on further down the corridor. “Servants’ entrance,” he said.

At the end of the corridor they came to a large hallway with a wide sweep of Georgian stairway. Geoff led the way up the stairs to the first-floor landing where there were doors leading to individual rooms. At the end of the landing, he opened the final door and they all walked into what would have originally been a medium sized bedroom, but was now an office lined with filing cabinets.

“This is where we store all our sensitive records,” said Geoff.



“So why do you think info is being leaked from here?” asked Alan.

“We have agents in various positions,” said Geoff. “Best not to enumerate them, but data originating here has been seen passing through some of these locations on its way to foreign powers.”

“Right, let’s have a look at the security arrangements you have in place,” said Alan.

“All basic stuff, really,” said Geoff. “The door is locked and alarmed, all the windows are fixed shut, and there are movement sensors above the door, but nothing registers.”

“OK,” said Alan. “Let’s put a few extra devices in and see what happens. You know what to do, Weasel, so I’ll leave it to you while I go with Geoff to look at the drawings of this place.”

“George will stay and help you,” said Geoff. George didn’t look too pleased.

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## *Two*

After they had installed the extra surveillance equipment, Alan went around sticking hairs across anything that could be opened, such as filing cabinets, doors and windows.

Alan followed Geoff down to the other offices where it was a lot busier. He had begun to wonder if there was anyone else in this place. It was a large rambling house that had been built back in the eighteenth century by a rich family, but had fallen into decline after the first world war. The MoD had bought it for use during the second world war but it was rather under used these days.

They walked through the area used by the MoD into an office at the far end. It was like walking back into the nineteenth century. There was oak panelling and a desk that wouldn't be out of place in a stately home. In the corner, to the right as you entered, was a small desk piled high with folders. It was only when she stood up that Alan realised there was a secretary sitting there.

“Sandra, this is Mr Westbrook,” said Geoff to the girl. “He and his three companions will be working here for a few days. Alan, this is Sandra. If you need anything, she is the one to ask. Sandra virtually runs this place.”

“Pleased to meet you Sandra,” said Alan.

“Charmed, I'm sure,” said Sandra, not really looking charmed at all.

“You can have the office at the back,” said Geoff walking over to the rear corner of the room. Alan looked puzzled. “It's through here.” He pushed the panel which turned out to be a door.

The office was more like a cupboard with half a dozen wooden chairs arranged round the sides and a small desk by the window. He looked around and then went back into the main office.

“Could you get me the building plan, Sandra,” said Geoff sitting in the plush chair behind the large desk. Alan sat in the more utility chair opposite him while Sandra delved into the filing cabinet to retrieve to plan.

“So what sort of stuff has been getting out?” asked Alan.

“Well, there doesn’t seem to be any particular pattern,” said Geoff. “They seem to be going through the filing cabinets in order rather than selecting specific items.”

“That’s odd,” said Alan. “You would think they were looking for something in particular, wouldn’t you?”

Sandra returned with the building plan and Geoff spread it out on his desk.

“This is the room where the data has been taken from,” he said, pointing to the room on the first floor.

“It’s strange that it’s that room,” said Alan, “it’s probably one of the most difficult to access. The windows won’t open and the only door is from the landing, and you have that on a magnetic switch which would signal if it were opened.”

“That’s right,” said Geoff. “We worked on the basis that to get into the room you would have to go through that door.”

“And I didn’t see any trapdoors in the ceiling either,” said Alan.

“No,” said Geoff. “We were caught out by that one once before, as I’m sure you remember.”

“I certainly do,” said Alan. Several years ago, he had sent Weasel to break into Blakely House by going in through the skylight. It had had them stumped for ages.

“What are these dotted lines along here?” asked Alan.

“That’s the ducted heating system,” said Geoff. “We used to have great cast-iron radiators everywhere, but when the boiler died, the powers that be, in their infinite wisdom, decreed that we have ducted hot air. It’s dreadful. You either freeze to death or boil. There doesn’t seem to be any intermediate setting.”

“How large are the ducts?” asked Alan. “I don’t remember seeing them.”

“It’s a nine-inch square duct,” said Geoff, “so, I don’t think our spy could get in that way.”

There wasn’t a canteen at Walton Grange, but the Mod people usually sent the lad out to get sandwiches or pies for the staff.

Alan was sitting in their allocated room with Weasel, Knuckles and Kevin and Sandra had just, reluctantly, brought them a large jug of tea and four mugs. Geoff had disappeared to see to some other business.

“So, all is secure, then?” asked Alan.

“Tight as a drum,” said Weasel. “Nobody can get in or out without it registering on our equipment. The movement sensors will activate the cameras so we’ll be able to see who has been filching their data, and your hairs across the drawers will tell us which have been opened.”

Alan sent the lads to do a final check of all the equipment while he had another look at the building plan that was still spread on Geoff’s desk. Sandra was working behind her pile of folders taking no notice of Alan.

“Have you been here long?” he asked her, for no particular reason.

“Yes,” she said and continued pounding the keys on her laptop.

“Interesting work?” he asked her.

“No,” she replied. Obviously not a conversationalist.

“Do you work just for Mr Thompson?” he tried again.

“No,” she said. “She obviously took the secrecy aspect of her work seriously.

“So, have you any idea who’s been pinching the data from upstairs?” he asked.

“No,” she said.

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Geoff had phoned a local hostelry and booked them in for a couple of days, so they set off to find the place.

It was about a mile away at a crossroads, and looked quite a smart place.

“Not sure if they’ll take you lot,” said Alan. “I’ll ask if they have a spare corner in the stables for you.”

“Are you suggesting that we’re riff-raff?” asked Weasel.

“Of course not,” said Alan, grinning. “Lucky they don’t have a stable, so you’ll have to have rooms the same as the gentry.”

“Hilarious,” said Weasel.

“What time’s dinner?” asked Knuckles.

“Not for a while yet,” said Alan. “Time for a nice walk before then.”

“Those are not words that go together well,” said Knuckles, “nice and walk. I think I’ll go to my room and have a lie down. It’s been a long day.”

When, later, they sat down to dinner Weasel was wondering why they had been called in for such a mundane job.

“It may seem mundane to us,” said Alan, “but the leakage of sensitive data is considered top priority to them. It would seem, from the evidence so far, that it has to be an inside job. I can’t see how it could be otherwise. The only entry is through that door, and the only people who have access to it are those working there.”

“So why don’t the alarms show anything?” asked Weasel.

“Perhaps they switch them off,” said Alan, “or, possibly, they don’t set them in the first place.”

“Well, we’ll find out in the morning,” said Alan.

So, the next morning they were at Walton Grange as the other employees were arriving. Geoff took them straight up to the storeroom to see what their surveillance had recorded.

“Well, the door hasn’t been opened,” said Alan. “The hair is still intact.” So they went in.

“None of the sensors has been triggered,” said Weasel, checking his equipment.

“But this filing cabinet has been opened,” said Alan. “The hair has been broken.”

“That’s not possible,” said Weasel. “No-one could have opened that cabinet without triggering the movement sensors.”

“What do your movement sensors detect?” asked Alan. “Is it infra-red?”

“Of course,” said Weasel.

“Well, whoever, or whatever, opened this drawer, was not emitting any IR,” said Alan.

“How would he do that?” asked Weasel. “Everyone emits IR.”

“Well, he could wrap himself in aluminium foil,” said Alan, “but even if he did that, how did he get in without breaking the hair?”

“Perhaps he stuck a new one on when he came out,” said Weasel.

“No,” said Alan. “This is the original, I’m sure. There has to be another way into this room.”

“But the windows are all closed and won’t open,” said Weasel, “and the door hasn’t been used. How else could they get in?”

“Let’s check that the walls are all solid and that there are no hidden doors or hatches,” said Alan. They all started tapping the walls and checking any panelling for signs there may be an opening. After a while they decided that the only way in was the door.

“So, what now?” asked Weasel.

“Let’s fit a different type of sensor,” said Alan. “If we use microwaves, or even ultrasound, it would detect any movement at all and wouldn’t depend on the person giving off heat.”

“Where would we get those?” asked Weasel. “Maybe a simpler method is to wire the filing cabinet. Put a mag switch inside to trigger the cameras.”

“That’s the best idea yet,” said Alan. “We know that he opens the cabinet, so he must trigger the switch. Set the camera to run for about fifteen minutes and it should catch all the action.”

Weasel went down to his van and returned with a magnetic switch and fitted it to the cabinet and linked it to the camera. They had a bank of infrared lamps linked to the trigger so that when the drawer was opened, the lights would come on and the camera would run. As it was infrared, it would be invisible to the intruder, who would think it was still pitch black.

“Well, I’ll leave you lads to keep an eye on things,” said Alan, “but I’ll have to get back to see how Kirsty’s coping on her own. Ring and let me know what happens, if anything.”

“Will do,” said Weasel.

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Kirsty was pleased to see him home. She didn’t like being the housebound housewife. She would much rather be out and about with Alan, solving problems. Jill had been at home that week, as it was half-term and Kirsty had enjoyed spending time with her.

“That was quick,” said Kirsty to Alan as he walked into the house. “Easy job, was it?”

“No,” said Alan. “Bit of a puzzler, really. I’ve left Weasel and the lads to see what happens tonight.”

“I knew you should have taken me with you,” said Kirsty.

“You may have a point there,” he replied. “And what has my little princess been up to, then?” Jill had just come into the room.

“I’ve been painting,” she said.

“That’s nice,” said Alan. “What have you been painting.” He envisaged pictures all over the place. Children’s pictures had to be displayed.

“My bedroom,” she said.

“We’ve been doing a bit of decorating,” said Kirsty.

“Oh dear,” said Alan, fearing the worst.

“No, it’s all right,” said Kirsty. “She’s quite a dab-hand with the paint roller.”

It was Jill’s bedtime, so Alan took her up to bed and tucked her in.

“Tell me a story,” she demanded.

“What about?” asked Alan. Jill handed him a book with the picture of a monkey on the front.

“Read me about ‘Naughty Monkey’,” she said. So, Alan read her the story, kissed her goodnight, and went down for his evening meal.

“So, what’s the problem?” asked Kirsty.

“It’d make a good TV programme,” said Alan. “Locked room, jammed windows, no secret panels, and no way in or out, but the filing cabinet is opened during the night and the motion detectors are not triggered. This is a job for Jonathan Creek”

“So, no-one can get in through the door or windows,” she said, “so what does that leave?”

“Nothing, really, except the hot air duct,” said Alan, “but that’s only nine inches square.”

“Well, logic dictates when you have ruled out all the possible choices, whatever is left must be the answer,” she said.

“Yes,” said Alan, “but no-one could get in through the air duct.”

“So, what could?”

“A cat, maybe,” said Alan, “but I can’t see a cat opening a filing cabinet, especially when it is locked, and it would have to be able to remove the grill over the duct.”

“So, what of that size could do those things?”

“Nothing I can think of,” said Alan. “Even a monkey couldn’t be trained to take off that grill and then pick the lock,



open the filing cabinet and select the right documents. The thing I don't understand, is how do they get the info out without removing the document itself. Nothing has been found to be missing."

"I would take a photo of it and send it to another phone or computer," said Kirsty.

"I can't see a monkey doing that," said Alan. "Can you?"

"Not your average monkey, no," said Kirsty.

"We'll just have to wait until Weasel phones and tells us what happened."

The next day they were sitting in the kitchen drinking their morning coffee when Weasel's call came through.

"Any success?" asked Alan.

"Well, yes and no," said Weasel. "The camera was triggered and something moved across the room, but we couldn't make out what it was. It managed to stay out of the direct field of the camera, then the camera turned to face away from the filing cabinets, so we never got a good look at it."

"Where did it come from?" asked Alan.

"The heating duct," said Weasel, "so it must have been quite small."

"Well, at least we were right about how it got in," said Alan, "but we still don't know what it is. I can't think of anything that small that could open a locked filing cabinet and then make some sort of copy of the documents. I think we are going to have to be a bit more devious."

"In what way?" asked Weasel.

"Firstly, we should set up several cameras so that we can see whatever it is while it is trying to move the cameras. So, which ever it moves, it is seen by one of the others," said Alan. "Then, on top of that we need a hidden camera that it won't find, hopefully, so that we can see it in action. Think you can manage that, Weasel?"

"Of course," said Weasel. "Leave it to us."

“What did they see?” asked Kirsty.

“Well,” said Alan, “not a lot, actually, but something came in via the air duct and dashed across the floor and turned the camera round so it could get on unobserved.”

“It must have been something very small, then,” said Kirsty.

“Yes, but they don’t know what,” said Alan. “I’ve told them to set up several cameras and then have another hidden one that it can’t find. That way, they should, at least, get a look at it. But I don’t have any idea what it could be. It’s small fast and dexterous, and very intelligent. It beats me.”

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Sir David Francis was sitting in his office with two of his agents; Geoff Thompson and George Perkins.

“So, what progress have our friends made, then?” he asked.

“Well, they’ve only just started,” said Geoff. “Apparently, what ever is stealing our data is very small and comes in via the air vents.”

“Are you sure they’re not having a laugh at your expense?” said Sir David.

“I don’t think so,” said Geoff. “There is no way into that room other than through that duct, and as stupid as it seems, something is getting in there and stealing our data.”

“If what you say is true, though I find it very difficult to believe,” said Sir David, “then this could pose a serious threat to national security. Whoever controls this thing could gain access almost anywhere. Make this top priority.”

“What do you suggest, sir,” asked George.

“What you do and how you do it is up to you,” he replied. “That’s what you’re paid for. Just make sure you put a full and final stop to this.”

The interview was obviously over, so Geoff and George returned to their office.

“So what now?” asked George.

“Search me,” said Geoff. “I don’t remember anything about catching small intelligent creatures in my terms of reference. Do you? Better go back to Walton Grange and see what else they’ve discovered.”

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Alan’s phone rang. Weasel had rung to give him the latest update.

“We’ve managed to get a better look at it,” said Weasel. “We set several cameras, as you suggested, and what we saw was a monkey.”

“A monkey?” exclaimed Alan.

“A monkey?” said Jill who had been listening intently. “Naughty Monkey.”

“Well, if it *is* a monkey,” said Alan, “Why didn’t it register on the IR movement detectors?”

“Good question,” said Weasel.

“Right,” said Alan. “The next step is to catch it. You need to set a trap.”

“Alive or dead?”

“Alive, if possible,” said Alan.

“Not so easy,” said Weasel. “I’ll see what we can do.”

“What was that all about?” asked Kirsty.

“There’s a naughty monkey,” said Jill.

“I’m sure there is,” said Kirsty, “now off you go and play.” Jill trotted off into the garden.

“Weasel says they’ve managed to get some pictures of the creature,” said Alan, “and it’s a monkey.”

“That’s ridiculous,” said Kirsty. “You can’t train a monkey to do what this one seems to be doing.”

“I agree,” said Alan, “but that’s what it looks like so far.”

“Will you be going back again?” asked Kirsty. “Because if you are, I want to come too.”

“I’m sure we can arrange that,” said Alan. “Jill is back at school next week, so I’m sure Mrs Jackson could keep an eye on things. We can be back in the evening.”

The next day, Weasel rang to say they had caught the monkey, so Alan and Kirsty set off, leaving Jill in the capable hands of Mrs Jackson.

When they arrived at Walton Grange, Weasel was waiting for them outside.

“I’ve sent Kevin home,” he said. “He wasn’t feeling too well and, anyway, we need his pass for Kirsty.”

They went inside and Weasel led the way to the office they were using next to Geoff’s.

“Here’s the little brute,” said Weasel as they walked into the office where Knuckles was peering into the cage.

“He’s a big brute, I’d have thought,” said Alan.

“Very funny,” said Knuckles.

Alan looked into the cage at the little monkey that was sitting there looking very sorry for itself.

“Doesn’t look very bright,” said Alan.

“OK, add insult to injury,” said the monkey. Alan looked at Weasel.

“Did you do that?” he said.

“Do what?” said Weasel.

“I thought the monkey spoke,” said Alan.

“I think this job is getting to you,” said Weasel. “Monkeys don’t talk.”

“You’ve just disproved that,” said the monkey.

“Stop messing around,” said Weasel.

“Who’s messing around?” said Alan.

“I think you should both shut up and listen,” said Kirsty. “That monkey can talk.”

“Hooray,” said the monkey. “At last someone intelligent.”

They all stared. “It *did* talk,” said Weasel.

“Slow, but gets there in the end,” said the monkey.

“Right,” said Alan. “Why have you been stealing data from here?”

“A monkey’s got to live,” said the monkey.

“I really don’t believe this,” said Weasel. “You’re sitting there talking to a monkey.”

“Quick, isn’t he?” said the monkey. “Like lightning.”

“Can you eat monkeys?” said Weasel.

“I wouldn’t advise it,” said the monkey. “Now you’ve had your fun, can I go?”

“Not yet,” said Alan. “We have a lot more questions for you.”

“I was afraid of that,” said the monkey. “I’ll have to call my solicitor.” He lifted his hand and it became obvious that he was holding a mobile phone. He punched a few keys and then held it to his ear. “They’ve got me,” he said, and pressed another key to end the call.

“I really do not believe this,” said Weasel.

“What’s not to believe?” said the monkey. “I’ve got my rights too.”

They put the monkey into another room and went back to their office to decide what was to be done next. They were just starting to argue about it when Geoff and George arrived.

“This project has been given top priority,” said Geoff.

“Oh, jolly good said Weasel. “It’s nice to be appreciated.”

“So, what’s the latest?” asked Geoff.

“We’ve caught the monkey,” said Alan. “We were just deciding what to do next. We’ll obviously have to interrogate it.”

“Monkey?” said Geoff. “Interrogate?”

“That’s if it can be made to tell us what we want to know,” said Alan.

“Let’s get this straight,” said Geoff. “You’ve caught a monkey and you want to interrogate it?”

“That’s right,” said Alan, “but I don’t know whether it’ll tell us the truth, or whether it’ll lie through its teeth.”

“I think I’ll go home and go back to bed,” said Geoff. “In fact, I don’t think I should have got up this morning at all.”

“Let’s start again,” said Alan. “We have managed to trap the animal that has been getting into your sealed room, and it turned out to be a monkey. What’s more it can talk quite fluently and is obviously more intelligent than your average monkey. It also has a mobile phone which it uses to photograph documents and send them to someone somewhere else. Whoever it is he is sending this info to, now knows we have him because he phoned to tell them.”

“Would this be the result of gene manipulation, do you think?” asked George.

“Who knows?” said Alan. “If they’re breeding these things, they could become the dominant species in the future.”

“You’ve been watching ‘Planet of the Apes’, I think,” said Weasel.

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