

THE HAUNTED CASTLE

OR RUBBISH AND THE HOUND OF THE BASQUET-VILLES

In the blood-red glow of the fireplace the rabbits sat in a huddle, all waiting on Bob's every word. It was a dark and cold autumn evening and they were gathered round listening for the story to continue. "And in the glow of the brightest moon there stood a massive hound, with enormous teeth as sharp as knives, that dripped blood."

"Ooooh," the little rabbits went.

"And his eyes glowed like the coals in this fire," Bob pointed to the hearth.

"Awwww," the kits replied, their eyes as wide as the ghostly hound's jaws.

"And do you know what the Hound said?" Bob asked. He leaned towards them. Their little heads all shook a "No". He beckoned them to come closer. And closer.

They all shuffled forward.

Bob whispered, "The evil hound said....." They leant closer.

"WOOOFF!" Bob shouted.

A whole row of little rabbits jumped three feet (all four feet) into the air. They all laughed, Bob loudest of all.

"You know Bob, they all love your stories," Bluebell, his wife and the mother of the warren, told him. She chuckled too as she watched all the little rabbits smiling and giggling and teasing each other. All of them, except Tom. Tom was not quite the youngest of the rabbits in the warren but he was the smallest, and he was also the most adventurous and the bravest. Tom slowly raised his hand.

"Yes, young Tom," Bob asked.

"Dad, it's about the ghostly hound of Hell," he answered quietly.

"What about it," the father rabbit smiled.

"I've seen it," he replied. The laughter in the room suddenly turned to silence.

"What do you mean?"

Tom looked at his mum and dad and the others as he spoke. "I have seen the hound and heard him."

The room suddenly, despite the coal fire, went very cold as a chill fell over the rabbits. "It's only a story, like all Bob's stories," Bluebell chided him.

Tom was adamant. "I saw the hound."

All the eyes in the burrow were now on the little brown rabbit. Bob waved his paw for Tom to continue. "I was playing in the far woods near the river. Across the river is the old castle."

"It's haunted," one of the other rabbits whispered to the room.

Tom shook his head. "I don't believe in ghosts. Or at least, I didn't. One afternoon I was there when it started to get dark, and I could see lights in the broken windows. I walked over the old bridge through the gateway to see where they were coming from."

All the little rabbits' eyes were open even wider than they had been when Bob was speaking.

"In the courtyard I heard voices. Someone was shouting. I sneaked inside to look. There were two humans arguing. They looked like they were wearing pale grey clothes. As they waved their arms around and screamed I noticed something odd. I could see the walls of the castle straight through them. Then they walked away

through a doorway and vanished. I was really glad they went as I began to think they must be ghosts. Just when I stood up, I could feel that someone was watching me.”

“Ooooh,” went one of the girls.

“I could also feel a cold draft on my neck. I turned around very slowly,” Tom’s voice was faltering a bit now as he remembered what had happened. “And there in front of me stood an enormous dog. He was huge, with a huge mouth and a gigantic tongue and freezing cold breath. His eyes were red and glowing.”

“What did you do?” even Bob was hooked.

Tom swallowed. “I said ‘Hello’.”

The room went even more silent if that was possible, apart from the crackle of the fire in the hearth.

“What did the hound say?” asked Bluebell.

“Woof?” asked Bob.

Tom shook his head. “He yelped, jumped backwards and ran away into the castle.”

There was a hush for a second, and then someone said, “Oh, what a swizz.”

Everyone laughed again and the atmosphere broke. They all thought Tom had been telling a story and within a minute everyone was going about their ordinary business. Everyone, that is, except Scutter, who was the biggest of Tom’s brothers. He put his arm around Tom and took him to the quiet part of the room. “Is that all true?” he asked the little rabbit. Tom nodded truthfully.

“That’s odd. Ghosts and a frightening hound that’s scared of a rabbit.” Scutter bit his lip thoughtfully. “Sounds like a job for the Mighty Finn and our Rubbish.”

Tom smiled, “Oh yes, they’d love that!”

Scutter gave his brother a squeeze. “We’ll go over tomorrow morning and tell them all about it. Finn will have a plan.”

“Or Jeffrey,” the little one added.

Scutter frowned, “Oh yes, Jeffrey will definitely have a plan!”

The next morning the two rabbits slipped through the gap in the tall green doorway that led into the walled garden which was home to Cath and Sean (alias the Maid and the Butler), Finn the wise old Scottish deerhound and Rubbish, the young brindle greyhound who lived with them. Walking up the path the rabbits looked up to the top of the red brick wall to where Jeffrey the ancient and creaky marmalade cat usually sat. He was not there today. Further towards the house there was an old shaggy grey rug that looked like it had been thrown over a chaise longue. On the chair alongside they could see the young greyhound, lying on his back with his paws in the air. As they drew closer Rubbish saw them and called out a “Hello!” The shaggy rug moved and drew itself up to its full height, becoming the Mighty Finn, the lord of the Glen and master of the woods. He shook noisily, throwing of wisps of grey hair into the autumn sunshine. The rabbits looked up into the pair of deep brown kindly eyes that sparkled back at them. “What ho, my little friends!” he smiled.

“Morning Rubbish and Mr Finn,” Scutter replied. Tom despite his braveness was always in awe of the great deerhound and just blushed and waved awkwardly before sidling closer to his brother.

“How can we help you?” Rubbish lay on his haunches to look at the rabbits better. Finn winked at Tom, “I sense an adventure, young Rubbish” he announced.

Scutter grinned, “I think so Mr Finn. Tom has seen something very strange in the ruined castle.”

“Oh yes?” Finn answered.

Tom nodded and stepped forward, “Yes sir. I think its ghosts.”

As he spoke the sun went behind a cloud and it became sharply cold.

“Finn doesn’t believe in ghosts, do you?” Rubbish looked to the deerhound.

There was no reply. Finn leaned down and quietly asked Tom to tell him what he had seen. He listened carefully and then considered what the rabbit had said.

Rubbish looked at the deerhound that was clearly deep in thought. “Is this a two biscuit problem?” he asked. Finn nodded. Rubbish passed him two dog-choc biscuits that Finn chewed slowly and deliberately.

“I am not a believer in ghosts but I have to accept what young Tom has seen.” He crunched his second biscuit and the rabbits and greyhound awaited his further ideas.

Finn straightened himself and smiled, “I have a plan.”

“Hooray!” cheered the rabbits.

“Rubbish, you and I must go to the Old Castle and see what’s going on. Let’s go and meet the ghost.”

The rabbits jaws dropped.

“Oh,” said Rubbish. “I’ve never met a ghost.”

Finn’s eyes twinkled, “My dear Rubbish, neither have I. It will be a first for both of us!” He laughed out loud and the others joined in.

Little Tom said to himself, “Well, ghosties, you’d better be careful! The Mighty Finn is on your case!”

“We’ll need some help,” Finn added.

“The Professor?” Rubbish inquired.

“Yep. The very same,” Finn said.

Scutter and Tom were puzzled. “Who’s the Professor?” they asked.

Suddenly they heard the sound of claws slipping on slates, a loud scream and some very rude words. And the thud of podgy fur on grass. The smell of liniment and pilchards told them that Jeffrey had arrived.

“What ho, gents!” the rounded vowels of the very well educated ancient marmalade moggy came across the lawn. They could see where he had landed as he nonchalantly dusted himself down, straightened up his hat and sauntered over the lawn towards them.

“That Professor,” Rubbish replied to Scutter.

“First class dismount,” Finn told him.

“Ok - I just missed my footing,” the moggy grumbled. As he walked you could hear various joints clicking and creaking. Rubbish could see that he had his best teeth in today – the ones that almost fitted – as well as the leather flying helmet and goggles that were becoming his trademark. Ever since the Father Christmas escapade, Jeffrey had taken to wearing them. He often wore the scarf as well but today he had given that a miss. “So what’s up? Oh, hello my little bunny friends!” He beamed a very shiny white smile at the rabbits who smiled back.

“Hi Jeffrey”, they said. “Tom’s seen a ghost.”

“What? Ghost?” Jeffrey sounded shocked.

“Apparently so,” the deerhound said. “At the old castle in the woods. I think we should make a visit and see what’s what.”

“Absolutely! Capital idea!” the cat enthused.

Rubbish, on the other hand was not quite so keen. He was not entirely sure what a ghost was (despite hearing loads of Bob’s stories) but what he had heard had not made him very enthusiastic about meeting one. “Is it safe?” he asked.

Jeffrey laughed his best “Devil-may-care” laugh. “Good gosh, I shouldn’t think so. Ghosts can be rather nasty don’t you know.” He looked down at the rabbit. “So what sort of spectral manifestation do we have? Nasty screaming poltergeist, bloodthirsty headless horseman, evil phantom with an axe?”

Rubbish now felt even less like seeing a ghost.

“It’s a big hound,” Tom answered.

“Ah, yes, a flaming eyed savage howling hound from the depths of hell itself,” the cat smiled. “Terrific fun!” He had produced a notebook from a pocket somewhere in his fur (that always amazed Rubbish) and was frantically scratching notes with a stub of a pencil from the same hidden pocket.

Tom shook his head, “Well not really....it’s a big ghostly hound alright but he’s frightened of rabbits.”

“Eh?” The scribbling stopped.

Rubbish looked at Finn who grinned back at him.

“Frightened of giant ghostly rabbits?” asked Jeffrey.

Tom shook his head again. “He was frightened of me....”

Jeffrey almost dropped his notepad. He looked down at the little rabbit who barely came up to his waist. “So you screamed at him?” he raised an eyebrow.

“I said Hello,” Tom mumbled back.

Jeffrey tutted. “That will not do. That’s not normal.”

“Do you mean not ‘Paranormal’?” Finn chuckled.

Jeffrey harrumphed. “No matter, let’s go and see the phantoms.”

Jeffrey climbed onto Finn’s shoulders, the two rabbits sat up on Rubbish and they rode through the woods until they came to the edge of the river where they stopped to look across at the castle. It was a huge grim, grey stone building, with a tower at each corner. The bridge (also grey stone) led over the river towards a gateway. At some time the castle’s owners had decided to make it more “homely” by putting in large windows facing the bridge. They had failed; the now empty windows and the large open gateway made the castle look like a gigantic stone skull whose bridge of a tongue led in through its wide open mouth.

“Pretty, isn’t it?” said Rubbish. They all agreed that it definitely wasn’t.

“Come on,” Tom led the others over the bridge and in through the arch. It was mid-day when they had started across the bridge, and it was a lovely sunny day. As they came through the gateway the sunlight faded and instead over their heads was a dark and cloudy sky. There was no sound, apart from the occasional “caw” of a crow in the stone work somewhere. Just crossing into the courtyard made them feel much, much colder. Rubbish shivered. “It’s a bit spooky,” he told Finn who had to agree. The change in atmosphere had even made the hair under Jeffrey’s flying helmet stand up, which in turn made his goggles slip forward.

“So where did you see these apparitions?” he asked Tom, struggling to see him through his goggles.

Tom pointed across the courtyard. As they looked over, there was a noise up on the battlements. Five sets of eyes (one in goggles) swivelled upwards. On top of the wall stood a human dressed in faded grey who looked back down at them. As Tom had said earlier, they could see the black clouds straight through him. He faded away.

“Ooh,” Scutter spoke, breaking the silence.

“Definitely a ghost.” Jeffrey was scribbling in his notebook.

“Yup, definitely a ghost,” a deep voice behind Jeffrey said, “Spell it G-O-S-T – ghost.”

The five animals froze. None of them had said that. Who was behind them? Slowly they all turned around. Very slowly. Even Finn, brave as he was, could feel the hair on his neck and his hackles rising as he looked at the person who had spoken. In front of them – between them and the way out to safety- stood a gigantic hound, three times as large as Finn and with a huge mouth full of teeth, and large red, baleful eyes.

“Bless my soul,” whispered Jeffrey as he popped his goggles back on his head.

“Oh flip,” said Rubbish.

Scutter was lost for words, as was Finn. The five animals stood staring at the phantom hound, as he stared back. It took the little rabbit to break the silence.

“Hello. I’m Tom, this is Finn, Rubbish and Jeffrey and my brother Scutter.”

The hound glowered down at them, menacingly.

“Hello,” he replied. His face lit up with an enormous smile. “I’m Francis Julian Montmorency Cholmondeley Basquet de Ville.”

The animals stared at him, mouths wide open.

“You can call me Frank,” he grinned. “So pleased to meet you.”

“Are you a....”

“Yes, yes, I’m a ghost.” Frank replied. “Been one for...ooooh...three hundred years.” He looked at them and his face became very sad. “It’s very lonely being a ghostly hound.”

“Aw, don’t cry,” little Tom said.

“Buck up, old chap,” added Finn.

“Indeed, don’t be so glum, chum,” added Jeffrey. He always felt rather posh but compared to this hound with his aristocratic name he was feeling rather common.

“We’ll be your friends,” Rubbish found himself saying. Almost immediately Frank’s face ignited again with another huge smile. “Splendid!” he cried. His enormous phantom tail swept the air silently.

“Frank, my good fellow, are you the only ghost here?” inquired Finn.

The phantom hound scowled, “No. There are two other nasty ones. Sir Hector and Lord Dougal. They were here when I was a pup. They died in a sword fight and have been quarrelling and fighting ever since. They are not very nice ghosts. I’d keep out of their way, if I were you.”

“Are they dangerous?” asked Scutter.

Frank nodded. “They play pranks on people.”

“Nothing wrong with a good jape,” Jeffrey laughed.

“But their tricks usually mean that someone else also becomes a ghost. They locked me in the cellar under the great hall once and I was there for a hundred years until they let me out by accident.”

The animals’ smiles all vanished. “That’s not nice. But can’t you walk through walls?” Finn asked.

“The cellar walls are made of ironstone which spirits can’t go through. I was stuck there. They used to come down every day and tease me. You can’t imagine how boring it was being stuck in a dark damp room for a hundred years.”

The animals all told Frank how horrible they thought the other ghosts were.

He shook his huge hairy coat and grinned. “I’m out now! Let me show you round,” he led them across the courtyard and inside the ruined castle. As he took them into the different rooms he told them about the family that had lived (and died)

here. There were all the famous Lords and Ladies of the Basquet family, including the mad Lord Rupert “Snoozer” Basquet who invented the flying machine and was the first person to die in a flying accident (fell off the high tower in his aero machine and landed in the moat), Lady Cecily Basquet-de Ville who was a bit eccentric and thought she was a duck (she was quackers), and Sir Nigel Stavely-Basquet who was the first man to invent the electric socket (and the first electric shock); you would think he had learned from Lord Rupert. They were all rather colourful characters.

“So what about the other two?” asked Rubbish.

“You mean Hector and Dougal?”

Finn and the others nodded.

“There was a big battle over there where the trees are now - it was just a meadow in those days, on which there camped a huge army. They tried and tried to cross the river and attack the castle but never managed to get in. In the end Lord Dougal rode out and challenged the Lord of the castle to have a man to man fight, and the winner would take the castle. Sir Hector came out and they fought with sword and shield, from dawn to dusk, neither of them getting the better of the other. They started with swords, then maces, then massive broadswords. The story goes that they got so exhausted by the end, and they hated each other so much that their hearts just exploded and they both died. They were buried in the castle chapel, the army went away and a peace treaty was signed.”

“Well that wasn’t too bad,” said Scutter.

“That’s what you think,” a voice as cold as ice rang out from the balcony above. There stood a ghostly figure with long hair and a particularly scary face.

“He cheated me out of this castle – it was mine!” another voice shouted back from the stairway opposite. Here stood another spectral shape, with an equally ghastly face, a thick black beard and wearing a suit of armour.

The animals huddled together, even Frank, as they looked back and forth at the two ancient enemies screaming across the Great Hall at each other. “I think we’d better get out of here,” Finn whispered. Their ghostly screeches echoing around the Hall, the animals quietly slipped out back into the courtyard.

“That was a lucky escape,” Frank told them, “Fortunately they were too busy squabbling to do anything to you.”

“Why don’t you find somewhere quieter to haunt?” asked Jeffrey.

Frank sighed, “I can’t leave here. Those two hid my favourite toy when I was dying so I am doomed to stay here until I find it again.”

“That’s so sad,” Tom commented.

The phantom hound sniffed, and a spectral tear ran along his long nose and dripped off to disappear before it hit the ground. “I’d love to leave.”

The sound of screaming and swords clashing could be heard now in the Hall. Hector and Dougal were at it again. The crashing of swords ceased and the sounds of shouting grew louder – the ghosts were coming towards the doorway into the courtyard.

“You’d better get away whilst you can,” Frank told them. “It was very nice meeting you.”

He waved to the animals as they made their way to the bridge. “And sorry I was so scared when I met you,” he called to Tom, “But I haven’t seen a rabbit in a couple of centuries.” Tom waved back.

“Where are they?” screamed Sir Hector, brandishing his sword. Beside him Lord Dougal stood swinging his axe. They glared across the courtyard towards the hound who shook his head, “I don’t know. I think I scared them off.”

“Pity,” Sir Hector answered. “I have not hunted rabbits in a long time. If we made them a ghost, then we could hunt them around the castle forever.”

“Aye,” Lord Dougal agreed. “And I like chasing cats. That would be fun too.”

“What about the dogs?” Frank asked, fearing the worst.

“We don’t have to make them ghosts. We could just leave them dead.”

Dougal retorted.

Hector laughed, and for the first time in centuries Dougal laughed with him. From the far side of the bridge as Finn and the gang made their way into the forest they could hear the shrieking laughter and wails of the ghosts drifting towards them. The dogs trotted faster, hoping that it was only the sound that was following them and not the ghosts themselves.

From the battlements Hector and Dougal watched the animals disappear into the trees. “They won’t be back,” Dougal grumbled.

“Pity,” Hector said. “I love the taste of rabbit.”

Dougal laughed. “Have you ever eaten dog?”

Hector shook his head in reply, “But I’d love to try.”

From one of the empty windows Frank looked out toward the forest and sighed. He had really liked having some friends. Never mind – perhaps someone would come along again - hopefully before another 300 years had passed.

Once Finn was sure that there were no ghosts following and that they were safe, they slowed down and talked about everything they had seen. Tom and Scutter were tired and slept on Finn’s shoulders as Finn, Rubbish and Jeffrey hatched a plan. They all felt really sorry for Frank, and wanted to make his life – oops, death – easier. How could they sort out the two horrible ghosts that tormented him so much? They really needed to be taught a lesson.

“What can we do?” asked Rubbish, “They are ghosts, and can walk through walls and everything.”

“Not all walls,” Jeffrey replied. “Did you hear what Frank said about the ironstone?”

Finn agreed, “Yes, I had also thought about that and I have an idea of how we can use that. But first, we need to know what we can do to control ghosts.”

“We can’t grab them or hurt them, or even frighten them. And they are clever as they have hundreds of years of being ghosts.”

“True, my little greyhound friend,” Finn frowned.

Jeffrey pulled his goggles up, “I might be able to help you there. I have something in my shed that could help.”

By then they were coming to the warren, where they dropped off the two rabbits who waved them off. It was not long before the three mouseketeers came to the walled garden. Jeffrey hopped off Rubbish’s back and called over his shoulder, “Give me ten minutes, I’ll see you two later!”

His portly ginger shape scrambled over the red brick wall into his garden.

“What is he up to?” Finn asked.

“No idea,” Rubbish replied.

“It’s always a worry when he has that look on his face,” Finn smiled.

On the patio the Maid had laid out two bowls of dog food and one of cat nibbles. She was very thoughtful. There was no sign of her or the Butler, but after all, it was Thursday which was the evening they went ballroom dancing.

Rubbish and Finn munched their way through their food, both of them thinking hard on the problem of the ghosts. As they were finishing they heard the thud, ouch

and creak as the Professor returned. He was dragging a large box with writing on it. It said something like “ectoplasmoscope” (this way up, handle with care, does not contain batteries).

“Righto gentlemen, let’s see what we can do. What’s your plan Finn? Ooh, food,” at this point Jeffrey’s face disappeared into his cat nibbles.

“We have two problems. Firstly, we have to find Frank’s toy so he can get away from that castle. Second, we need to get those two ghosts wrapped up and unable to cause any more trouble. I have had an idea about that.” Finn explained.

Jeffrey had finished his food and was rummaging in the box. Out of it came a square shiny rucksack with wires sticking out of it, a pointy aerial, which he fixed to his flying helmet, and what looked like a garden hand-fork (which it once was) and a large wrist watch. They were connected by a wire to the rucksack. Jeffrey muttered something under his breath and gave the rucksack a shake and it began to hum and from the top there was a strange orange glow.

“Knew this would come in handy one day. This - he announced. “- is the latest technology for spectral research. Bought it on Cat-Bay some years ago but never had a chance to use it. It’s a ghost detector!”

Finn looked at Rubbish and Rubbish looked back at him. Finn shrugged. “What does it do?”

“I think it detects ghosts?” Rubbish whispered.

“Reeaally? I guessed that much,” said Finn.

Jeffrey looked out from under his helmet, “Ah, it does more than that, my good fellows. If I reverse the electro feed it can emit an ectoplasmic discharge.”

“Emit a what?” the two dogs asked.

“It’s like a ghost being punched,” the cat enthused. “Let’s just say we can find them, and give them a dose of their own medicine!”

Finn and Rubbish both grinned.

“So when should we go back to the castle?” the little brindle greyhound asked.

“When they least expect it,” Finn answered. “When are ghosts most active and people more likely to keep away?”

“At night?”

“Just so, young pup,” Finn said.

“Spot on! There’s no time like the present!” called Jeffrey over the loud hum of the ectoplasmic thingy.

So, as soon as dinner had settled, the three mouseketeers were back on the path through the woods, heading towards the castle. Rubbish thought to himself, “Ghosties, you’d better watch out!”

At the castle Sir Hector and Lord Dougal had been giving Frank absolute Hell. They had jumped out from walls at him, chased him around the battlements and screamed at him as he tried to take a nap. Frank had at last managed to outwit them and was sitting on what had once been a window seat at the end of the Long Gallery that looked out towards the river. He could hear the other two shrieking and squabbling far across the castle. Frank sighed. In 300 years he had never felt so sad and lonely. Just then, he saw a flash of light through the trees. Something glowing faintly orange was coming towards the castle. “Oh no.....it’s either a Corpse Candle or one of the Flaming Ghouls.” The corpse candle was a haunted light that visited now and again to torment Frank, as well as to wind up Hector and Dougal. But a flaming ghoul – they were particularly horrible noisy screaming phantoms that flickered with flames. They allegedly ate the bodies of dead people from graves.

They got on well with Hector and Dougal and also enjoyed frightening Frank. He felt even more depressed.

However, the glow was moving too slowly for a corpse candle and was too dim for a ghoul. As Frank puzzled over what it was, he saw the three friends emerge from the trees. It was Jeffrey the cat that was glowing – he was wearing a large box on his back that shone a dim orange. “Eh?” Frank asked no-one in particular. He slipped silently off his seat and crept down to the gatehouse to meet his new friends to ask them what they doing.

From the trees Finn and Rubbish could see movement at the gatehouse. The red glow – what was that? It was Frank. They waved to him as they came to the end of the bridge. He held his enormous paw to his lips to signal for them to keep quiet. They walked over to him where Finn outlined his plan to the phantom hound who smiled broadly. “Great idea,” he whispered.

Jeffrey was fiddling with some dials on the large watch on his wrist. “Spectral anemometer controls,” he explained. The three dogs looked at the cat totally blank, “It’s very technical,” he frowned at them.

“You do know how to use that thing?” asked Rubbish.

Jeffrey the Professor looked most offended, “Why of course. What sort of idiot do you think I am?”

Finn coughed quietly, “Let’s get on, gentlemen.”

Frank led them across into the great hall and to the kitchens at the far end. It was here that Hector and Dougal had taken to having shrieking contests as the acoustics were better. The din of the two screaming ghosts was excruciatingly loud and indeed, the stonework made for some incredible echoing and reverberation.

“Ready?” Frank whispered.

Rubbish gave him a greyhound thumbs-up, and Finn nodded.

Frank jumped through the doorway into the kitchen, and called out “Hey, you two! Come quick! Those animals are back!”

The evil spirits appeared by his side. “Where!” screeched Dougal.

“Rabbits and Cat for dinner,” Hector hissed.

Frank pointed to the hall. The ghosts floated out and as they moved seemed to get brighter and more ghastly looking. You could clearly see the large bloody scar across Dougal’s face and the split in Hector’s head where an axe had made its mark. They also seemed to grow taller. Rubbish the little brindle greyhound stood in the middle of the hall.

“Hello ghosties,” he called over cheerfully.

The spirits hissed and screamed and slithered swiftly across the hall towards him. Ghosts are fast – but a greyhound is faster! As they drew closer Rubbish sped off across the Great Hall. He ran into the far corridor and squeezed himself into a small opening where he hid. It was not only ghosts that could vanish! As he disappeared, there was a series of loud barks in the Hall; it was Finn. “Call yourself ghosts, why I’ve seen more frightening pusscats.”

“What?” shouted Hector. “You despicable hound. How dare you!” Dougal sounded even angrier than Hector. They forgot about Rubbish as they flew across the Hall towards Finn. Deerhounds are also swift and cunning and Finn led them another merry dance around the corridors. He too slipped into a corner leaving the ghosts to slide past him.

Out popped Rubbish again, “Come on, you two! I thought you two were the scariest ghosts in the land. You’re not even the scariest in this castle!”

Hector and Dougal spun around to chase after Rubbish again. This went on for another couple of times as first Rubbish and then Finn drove the two ghosts into a total frenetic fury. No matter how they tried they could not catch the two hounds.

Sitting in the middle of the Great Hall watching all this entertainment and enjoying it greatly was Frank. He had waited centuries to see the two spectres get what they had given him. It was now time for the final part of Finn's plan.

What the ghosts had not realised was that they were being led up the Great Hall to the top of the steps that led down to the dungeon. Rubbish was at the foot of the stairway with Jeffrey. It was Finn's turn to wind the ghosts up now.

"Well ladies," he called over to them. "Shall we dance some more!"

If Hector and Dougal had been alive, they would have died with sheer anger and frustration. They flashed across the hall, cursing, swearing and clawing the air as they headed towards the deerhound. Finn poked his tongue out and leapt down the steps. The ghosts took the bait and shrieked after him.

"OK," said Rubbish.

Jeffrey started twiddling his dials and the electro-thingy lit up. It started to hum louder and the lights got brighter. The fork began to crackle. "Super!"

Finn got to the foot of the steps and headed full pelt down the corridor. The ghosts chased after him, screaming in true phantasmal fashion. Frank lolloped down the stairs behind them and Rubbish and Jeffrey followed from the foot of the steps. Finn stopped before the door to the cell. The ghosts slowed. Perhaps they sensed something?

"Not so clever now, are you, dog?" Dougal spat, growing taller and more menacing as he faced the mighty Finn. Finn was not scared, but neither was he entirely comfortable with two terrible figures bearing down on him. Their faces seemed to change colour to a blood-curdling green. Hector drew his sword and it glinted in the light of the torches set along the walls. Finn stepped back.

Behind the ghosts Jeffrey moved to the front and Frank and Rubbish behind him.

"OK you two. I think the game is up!" Jeffrey called to the ghosts. They spun around to face the cat.

Hector looked at the motheaten old moggy in his flying helmet waving a garden hand-fork at him. "Oh yes? Do you think I'm some sort of weed?"

"This is not what it appears," The Professor replied. "It's an ectoplasmic probe. With one step I will throw you back across the room."

Dougal issued a hollow laugh, "I think not."

Finn stepped to one side, away from the opening of the cell.

"Alright - I did warn you!" Jeffrey tapped his watch. The box on his back was humming and vibrating and the orange glow had nearly changed to red. The fork crackled in his hand as.....the lights went out and the box fell silent. "Oops...that shouldn't have happened... Where's the handbook....?"

The ghosts came closer to the old cat and Hector raised his sword. Rubbish, right behind Jeffrey, remembered an old trick he had seen the Butler do. He leaned over and gave the ectoplasmic thing a bang with his paw.

It burst back into life, it erupted with noise and the crackle on the fork became a small spark, then a flash of lightning which hit the two ghosts and lifted them off their ghostly feet and threw them bodily down the corridor and way past Finn. They landed together in a heap in the cell.

"Quick! The door!" called Frank. Finn stepped across and closed the door of the cell and threw the bolt across.

Hector got up and made to pass through the door – but he bounced back. “What?”

“Let me try you fool,” Dougal muscled up past him and stormed at the door – and slammed against it.

Frank walked up to the door and looked in through the grill. “Don’t you remember? Ironstone walls and an iron door. Ghosts can’t cross iron.” He did not gloat or tease them; it was all in a matter of fact tone.

“Let us out! Let us out! We’ll tear you limb from limb into little strips!”

Finn looked at the ghosts through the grill too. “That’s not really going to encourage anyone to let you out, is it? Frank – what should we do?”

Frank thought for a second. “Maybe a century shut up together might make them mellow a bit.”

“What? With him? That’s inhuman!” screamed Hector.

Jeffrey grinned. “My dear sirs, but none of us are human.”

Finn laughed, “No, we are better than that!”

The hounds and the cat made their way back up the corridor. Frank was even singing. At the top of the steps in the Great Hall Frank stopped to thank Finn, Rubbish and Jeffrey for all their help. “At last I can wander about my castle in peace – sleep when I like and even have visitors when I like. You will come and visit?”

“Of course, old chap,” Finn answered for them all. “It would be an honour and a privilege!”

“Oh – hang on” Jeffrey had taken off the electro thingy and was fumbling in his pocket. “I found this in the corridor in the dust.” He held up an old leather ball, very dried up, but the stitching still held it together.

Frank’s jaw dropped open and tears filled his eyes, “That’s it! That’s my toy!”

The animals were surprised, amazed even, and so pleased for Frank.

“Now I have that, I can leave here. I don’t need to stay in this castle as a ghost anymore!”

“You can leave?” asked Rubbish.

“I can. “ Frank looked sad for a second, “But I don’t want to. I have not had friends for so long that I don’t want to leave yet.”

Jeffrey straightened his hat, “You don’t have to go. You can remain a ghost but can leave the castle. You can see the world.”

“You can come and meet the Maid and the Butler!” Rubbish grinned.

“I think we’d better warn them that a six foot tall ghostly phantom hound is coming for dinner,” Finn laughed.

Frank looked worried. “Will I have to wear a tie?”

So when you come to the old castle in the deep dark forest, and you listen, you might hear the screams and shrieks of Hector and Dougal, still locked in their cell. They have another 95 years to go before Frank decides whether they have become good ghosts. And if you see a six-foot ghostly hound with huge jaws, a silly grin and a big waggy tail chasing an old leather ball don’t be afraid; its only Frank, the Hound of the Basquet-Villes.

For more adventures of Rubbish, Finn and Jeffrey - go www.crafty-dog-cymru.co.uk and look for the books. There’s also the free download of the Christmas adventure – How Rubbish the Rabbithound Saved Christmas! Characters copyright Chris Dignam/Crafty Dog Books Cymru, all rights reserved.