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*'There is, incidentally, no way of talking about cats that enables one to come off as a sane person.'*

*Dan Greenberg, writer and humorist*

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# IT'S A CAT'S LIFE

There is one thing you need to know from the beginning. The cat is the most popular pet in the world. There are hundreds of millions of owned cats, not to mention those that choose to live independently, and numbers are continuing to rise as emerging economies discover the delights of the feline companion. Cats have, with a little help from man, adapted to live comfortably in every continent apart from Antarctica, although it is possible that as you read this, they may well be navigating the Southern Ocean, aiming in its general direction. The cat has world domination as its ultimate goal.

Whether you like it or not, cats are here to stay and statistically you are very likely at some stage to want or need to impress a cat lover (or ailurophile, as they are also known, if you want to start establishing your bluffing credentials early on). If you need any more incentive to read on, partners are often chosen based on their response to a beloved cat, and vice versa. It pays to know how to endear yourself to the human object-of-your-affection's pampered puss.

The cat is a very enigmatic creature, which means that over thousands of years of domestication, they have given nothing away about what they are really about. If you ever approach a cat and look deep into its eyes, you can almost hear it saying, 'Yeah? Go on, clever dick, what am I thinking right now?' In fact, this book's first lesson is NEVER to stare deep into their eyes. This is highly challenging behaviour and you may not get away with it.

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, the 'riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma' that is called a 'cat' is basically laughing at you. Humankind has consistently, and very efficiently, managed to learn very little about the cat as a species, maintaining a persistent state of unconscious incompetence. To quote the now-infamous words of Donald Rumsfeld, 'There are things we don't know we don't know.' What has happened in reality is that cat lovers have made it up as they go along, believing all sorts of myths and fancies about the cat's likes and dislikes, and resisting with great vigour any scientific or well-informed information to the contrary. What they think they know about cats is much more fun...for most.

Your dilemma therefore is: do you bluff the real stuff and stand up and be counted among the few who actually have an inkling of what's going on, or do you bluff the myths? *The Bluffer's Guide to Cats* will steer you through a winding path of nods to the nonsensical (why spoil a happy delusion?) via a few interesting highways of real facts. You may then choose which road to take.

The true bluffer acknowledges the enigmatic nature

of the cat and is equally enigmatic regarding his or her own knowledge on the subject. True to the bluffer's credo, this is very much a question of not so much what is said but what is left out. If you nod slowly, with a suitably thoughtful expression, for a sufficient period, you may stop a conversation in its tracks before it really gets started. If you feel something still needs to be said, you can use one of the 'feline fillers' listed at the end of each chapter to act as a subject changer. If all else fails, you can always go with the ultimate showstopper: 'But of course, can we ever say the cat is actually domesticated...?'

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'I have noticed that what cats most appreciate in a human being is not the ability to produce food... but his or her entertainment value.'

*Geoffrey Household, British thriller writer*

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Science moves on and facts cease to be facts, replaced by new facts that also have an inevitable shelf life (*see Samuel Arbesman's The Half-Life of Facts: Why Everything We Know Has an Expiration Date*). This guide will inform aspiring bluffers based on the current 'facts' and popular beliefs, always ensuring that you avoid serious full-on debates. Far better to maintain a dignified silence, interspersed with one or two fairly indisputable observations, to ensure the audience is kept guessing about the true expert in the

room. Whatever you do, always speak with confidence and authority – the true key to successful bluffing.

With those basic thoughts in mind, enjoy your journey of discovery.

## YOUR FIRST 'FELINE FILLERS'

### **Famous ailurophiles (cat lovers)**

Sir Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, Charles Dickens, Nostradamus, the Duke of Wellington, Queen Victoria, Sir Isaac Newton, Florence Nightingale, Beatrix Potter, Monet, William Wordsworth, Horatio Nelson and Victor Hugo.

Quote whichever name you feel best suits the audience, for example Horatio Nelson if you are at the Yacht Club, or Nostradamus in the company of conspiracy theorists.