

# Ready fur a close-up: Bob the cat is film

Sian Griffiths

FIRST there was the book, now there is a film and soon there will be a cartoon television series. The story of the life-changing relationship between Bob, a stray ginger cat, and his owner James Bowen, a former London busker and heroin addict, will open on the big screen next month.

A Street Cat Named Bob (so-called after Bowen's first autobiographical book) stars Bob as himself while James is played by Luke Treadaway and his social worker by Joanna Froggatt.

Last week Bowen told The Sunday Times that a television company is also working on an animation of the book, which has sold more than 6m copies and been translated into dozens of languages worldwide. "It's all happened so fast it's unreal," he said.

The book, film and cartoon series are based on the extraordinary story of Bowen's life after the injured cat wandered into the stairwell of his housing association block of flats in north London in 2007.

Taking care of Bob (who was named after the psychopath in the Twin Peaks television series) gave Bowen, who had been born into a middle-class family in Surrey, a reason to clean up his own life.

YouTube videos of Bowen busking outside Tube stations, with the cat high-fiving his owner and sitting stoically on his shoulders, had made the pair a north London landmark by the time a literary agent approached Bowen to write an autobiography in 2012.

In the four years since the book was published the pair's lives have been transformed.

Bowen was at one time in and out of rehab centres and living on the streets while busking to pay the bills and feed himself. He had deep vein thrombosis from injecting himself in the groin with drugs.

Today the 37-year-old is "happy and healthy". He lives in "a house bought by Bob" in south London and spends his days at publicity junkets and events for charities such as The Big Issue and Blue Cross.

Bob and Bowen share their home with a black-and-white rescue kitten and a friend called Ryan from busking days. "He does the cleaning, the laundry and keeps the cats fed when I am away," said Bowen.

Now Bowen and Bob are about to start a world tour to publicise the film. The first stop is Germany, where the book was No 1 for 27 weeks and where the children's version of the book is used in schools to teach English. It will be Bob's first time in a plane but unlike other pets he will not be travelling in the hold. Bowen said: "His contract stipulates that he has first-class travel everywhere."

To be fair, Bob deserves it. The cat is the undisputed star of the movie - although he was never supposed to appear in it.

Five cats were flown in from Canada for the film but when Bob came on set in the first week as the crew were filming by Bow Street magistrates' court - the pair's old stamping ground near Covent Garden - he stole the show.

"They were doing shots in the alleyway in the evening. I said, 'Why don't you have Bob in the shot?'" said Bowen. "The other cats were looking terrified as it was getting dark. Bob stood on Luke's jacket on the ground looking proud like he always does when he hears the guitar."

In the end Bob starred in most of the scenes, with the extra cats standing in for stunts such as being cuddled ("Bob does not do cuddles, he's a shoulder cat," says his owner).

Bob has even helped Bowen to become reconciled with his father who attended a screening of the film with his ex-wife. "They were moved by it," he said.

"The world I have grown to see through Bob's eyes is a very different one. There was a time when I couldn't distinguish one day from the next. Now I cherish each one. I am happier, healthier and more fulfilled than I have ever been."

James Bowen's life has been transformed since a book about his life with Bob was published four years ago



## Caviar for rich kitties

Tonight's menu features caviar, lobster, crab and salmon - and that's just the cat food. A British company with an eye on "insanely rich" pet-owners has developed a new "super-premium" mix that can be eaten by humans if Kitty doesn't like it.

The British Banquet gourmet cat food tastes "absolutely wonderful", according to Simon Booth of the pet food company Green Pantry, which will put its new mix on sale this week at £250 for a 2kg bag. A year's supply for an average cat would cost about £9,000.

Ingredients include Scottish salmon, Norfolk lobster and Devon crab, with a sprinkling of smoked herring caviar and a hint of organic asparagus. The good news for UK buyers: delivery is free.

IT'S CAVIAR, SALMON, LOBSTER AND CRAB. WHAT ARE YOU HAVING?



### Test yourself against the spooks

1 What comes next?	2 Next in sequence...
White Black Blue	.349 9.3 529 5.433
Red .....	.974 .....

3 What grade did I get in my German exam?	4 Which Olympic sport completes this list?
Drama A	Basketball
Geography A	Water polo
Mathematics A	Football
Biology B	Beach volleyball
Chemistry C	Volleyball
French C	Handball
Music C	Field hockey
Physics C	Tennis
Religious studies D	

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