





**The Editorial Staff of
*The Rodent's Gazette***

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25. Blasco Tabasco
26. Toffie Sugarsweet
27. Tylerat Truemouse
28. Larry Keys
29. Michael Mouse
30. Geronimo Stilton
31. Benjamin Stilton
32. Briette Finerat
33. Raclette Finerat



Geronimo Stilton

A learned and brainy mouse; editor of *The Rodent's Gazette*

Thea Stilton

Geronimo's sister and special correspondent at *The Rodent's Gazette*



Trap Stilton

An awful joker; Geronimo's cousin and owner of the store Cheap Junk for Less

Benjamin Stilton

A sweet and loving nine-year-old mouse; Geronimo's favorite nephew





IT WAS A FOGGY OCTOBER NIGHT . . .

It was a foggy October night. *Oh, how I wished I was home in my comfy mouse hole!* It was the perfect night to curl up with a good book and a cup of hot cheddar.

But I wasn't at home. I wish I could say I was bowling down at Lucky Paw Lanes. Or nibbling on a delicious dinner at my favorite French restaurant, Le Squeakery. But I was far away from every mouse I knew. I was stuck in the middle of the **DARK FOREST!** Do you want to know why?

Let me tell you. . . .

Oh, but first let me introduce myself.

My name is Stilton,
Geronimo Stilton.





I live in New Mouse City, where I run a newspaper. Yes, that's right, I am a newspaper mouse. I publish a paper called *The Rodent's Gazette*. It is the most popular paper on Mouse Island! Our only competition is *The Daily Rat*. But that's another story.

Let's see, where was I? Oh, yes, how I got to the Dark Forest. Well, I had left New Mouse City to go visit my aunt Sweetfur. She was on vacation in the Pleasant Paw Hills. To get there, I had to drive through the Dark Forest. Have you ever been there? It reminds me of the woods where Hansel and Gretel Mouse get lost. Very dark and spooky.

I had just passed Cat Claw Rock when a **foggy** cloud settled over my car. I felt like one of the Three Blind Mice. I couldn't see





my own paw in front of my snout! I tried to check out my map, but it was no use. I was lost!

The road grew narrow and finally led to a dirt path. Stale Swiss rolls! This didn't look good. Now I was really in the middle of nowhere. I shivered.

Who knows what kinds of crazy rats lived out here in the deep, dark woods? What if they jumped on my car? What if they jumped on *me*?

With shaking paws, I tried dialing my sister, Thea. Rats! I couldn't get a signal on my cell phone.



Oh, how I wished I was home!

I drove on for another half hour in the thickening fog.

I tried turning on my radio to get my mind off things, but I couldn't get a station.








Instead, I listened to my teeth chattering. Then suddenly, out of the fog, a sign appeared. It read:

To Cannycat
Castle

Too shocked to squeak, I checked my map. *Strange, very strange*, I thought. There was no **castle** listed.

I folded the map and shoved it into my coat pocket. Well, there was only one thing to do. I headed for the castle. I would ask for directions there.

Just then, a **BOLT OF LIGHTNING** streaked down right next to me! For a split second, the Dark Forest glowed. It reminded me of the time my uncle Flickrat turned on the lights before the movie was over at the Grand Squeak Cinema. The



audience went crazy. Every mouse wanted his or her money back. After that, Uncle Flickrat got stuck working the cheese-popcorn machine. His boss wouldn't let him near a light switch.

I blinked my eyes in the bright white light. I could just make out the shape of a weathered **old castle** in the distance.

Right at that very moment, my car stopped!

I groaned. This was just not my day or night. I hopped out of the car.

Now what? I knew next to nothing about cars. I have trouble pumping my own gas!

Suddenly, it started to rain. My whiskers were soon **DRIPPING** with water. And it was bitterly cold.

I turned up my collar and started along the path leading to the castle.

PLINK! PLINK! PLINK!
PLINK! PLINK! PLINK!
PLINK! PLINK! PLINK!



*It was covered with dried twigs
that crackled under my paws.*

*The grass surrounding the castle looked
like it hadn't been mowed in years.*

Overgrown bushes lined the walls. *This place really needs a good lawn service, I thought. Maybe I could give the owners my cousin Greenpaws's business card. He cut lawns for a living. "Next to **yellow**, **green** is my favorite color," he liked to say.*

Staring up at the dark castle, I stumbled over more twigs. Maybe there was another reason why this place was a mess.

Maybe the castle was empty.