Since '79 I've harbored a secret ambition to create a graphical treasure hunt. Fortunately my artistic bud was nipped at an early stage. My feeble scholarly ambitions of artistic achievement were shattered one summer in the late 60's when my arts teacher held up my miserable attempt for the mass ridicule of my classmates. "So now we come to your effort, Janet." Mrs Hinde was angry. My attempt was clearly an attempt to undermine her pedagogical abilities. "We'll take it that this is some kind of a joke."

It didn't really come as much of a surprise. When I compared my pathetic daub with that of my neighbour it was clear the game was up. Jean's offering of Rapunzel letting down her hair to allow the enchantress into her tower exuded imagination and finesse. The braided tresses gleamed like spun gold, the tower walls were forbidding and grainy and the shadows of Rapunzel's cell held sinister threats in their deep shadows.

 I winced when I compared it to my own ghastly creation of two children standing on Leigh bridge looking at a fisherman. The impossible perspective. The crude brushwork. How had I achieved that almost uniform battleship grey considering I had a full palette of colours to work with?   My cat Molly could have done a better a better job. In these days when everyone has to be a winner, I have no doubt that a teacher would have found a way of making me feel good about my lack of talent and so prolong the agony. Thank goodness for the honesty of the non PC society of the 60's. At that point I determined that the right direction in life for me was science and so the book on my artistic potential was closed.

It remained closed for over thirty years. It would have stayed that way for ever had it not been for the World Wide Web. My work as a jack of all trades at the university called for me to be the web master for my school. One day, looking for inspiration, I chanced upon a site that was an archive of tutorials on the subject of photo composition using Photoshop. Compositing is a process where several photographs are merged together. Effects are applied to the individual photographs to achieve the desired end. It's what makes aging models look like they are still in the first flush of youth. Of course, it sounds pretty glib expressed like that. The truth is, of course, that many hours of "trial and error" as well as informed choices are involved in making a good composition.

Aided by a wealth of online tutorials generously donated by the creative online community I gradually got a toe hold on the skill set I needed to illustrate web pages.

Finally, I had the means to realise that ambition: the creation of a graphical treasure hunt. But who would be interested? And then, as you do, I entered the words "armchair treasure hunt" into a search engine. I was amazed! So, Masquerade wasn't a one-off disturbance in the fabric of space and time after all!

 It all fitted together. I just needed an underlying theme for a treasure hunt and some kind of matrix to pull it all together. I chose "the plight of the honey bee" as the theme. This was easy as it is a genuine concern of mine. Using iconic moments from classic children's books as the vehicle for the website worked well for me, for although Photoshop had now provided means of making half decent images for my website, it hadn't added one artistic gene to my genome. That's the story behind The Tenth Leaf.

I thought it might interest fellow club members to see how I made the pig illustration in Chapter 2. First, I needed a subject.   I already had a contender; a porcelain pig I'd had on my bookcase for several years.

Take a photo of piggy.

Cut him out of the background by carefully selecting just the outline of the pig.

So now, I've got the "star of the show". Next, fish around for a nice frame. I know, I'll take a photo of the wooden fire surround in my living room.

A bit of Photoshopping later, apply a bevel effect and a drop shadow, and I have a nice wooden frame.

Inscribe it suitably. Ah yes, a "radiant" pig will do nicely.

Now a trip to the amazing "Stock Xchnge" website which allows free downloads of high quality photographic images. Here's a nice spider's web that I can use a backdrop.

I reverse the colours, then...

...apply a coppery overlay to make the web look less sinister.

Now we're cooking, time to put it all together! Poor old piggy! He doesn't look all that radiant... let's boost the saturation and apply a pink wash. Apply a few sparkles for additional radiance. Finally duplicate the frame and cut it out so that it looks like piggy is peeping through it.

Here's my finished piggy.

Thanks very much for giving me the opportunity to share this with you. Chapter 4 is nearly finished, only 6 more to go – phew! Back to the Photoshopping!

Now where did I put that ceramic robin....