

by Jill Foster

**K**ATIE HOPKINS couldn't believe her eyes. Only weeks into her new job at a large FTSE company in the City, she logged onto her computer one morning only to find that a private email containing highly confidential corporate information had been read — but not by her.

'I'd suspected for a while that a senior female colleague had been accessing information intended only for me because at a recent meeting she'd made a remark and I'd thought: "How on earth do you know that?";' says Katie, 36, a former Apprentice contestant.

'When I realised that my email had been hacked into, I alerted the IT department and it turned out this woman had been logging into my account and printing off the information to read. Not only was she then using it to make herself look good, but behind my back she'd also been using it to undermine me. I was completely shocked because I'd been brought in to work *with* her, not against her. But she was caught and disciplined.'

It's an unfortunate but not uncommon situation that many women who have worked for — or alongside — other women, particularly in the cut-and-thrust sectors of business and finance, will recognise.

Forget the sisterhood. Forget smashing a hole through the glass ceiling and throwing a rope ladder down to her younger female colleagues. The Queen Bee is alive and well and — watch out — possibly sitting at the desk next to you.

'A Queen Bee is someone who has worked her way up to the top in a male-dominated organisation, and she's probably got there by behaving how a man would behave — appearing tough and not at all soft and mushy,' says psychologist Professor Cary Cooper, of the Lancaster University Management School.

'She's unlikely to mentor younger women because she quite likes her unique position, and may feel threatened by younger females rising up the ranks.'

'She had to work hard to get to where she is, so she's not about to give other women a helping hand — they have to work their way up just as she did.'

Queen Bee Syndrome has long been recognised by psychologists, and several studies have been carried out on the phenomenon.

Last April, it was found that women who had broken through the glass ceiling were more likely to mentor and support *male* colleagues than female colleagues.

A Canadian study in 2008 found that women with female supervisors had higher cases of depression, headaches, heartburn and insomnia than if their bosses were men.

**M**EANWHILE, according to the American Management Association, 95 per cent of women say they have felt undermined at some point in their career by other women.

Quite why women display aggressive alpha female behaviour towards female colleagues has remained unclear. But now psychologists at Leiden University in Holland claim the most important factor is how sexist their working environment already is.

According to their research, if a woman works in a female-friendly environment, she's less likely to behave like an alpha female than if she works in an industry dominated by men.

Katie Hopkins, who spent more than a decade working in the cut-throat environments of FTSE companies in both New York and London, is not surprised.

'Women in business are definitely Queen Bees and will defend their territory fiercely to remain in power,' she says. 'We don't like being threatened, and on many occasions I've seen women bring in examples of other women's work to show their boss that their colleague isn't performing well in the hope she will be promoted in her place.'

'It's happened several times to me. I've had work copied, I've had

# Why a female boss can be a woman's worst nightmare



Queen Bee: Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*

another woman launch a campaign to stop me getting promoted. It's the sort of aggressive behaviour you'd expect from some of the pushier men, but in my experience it happens more with women.'

Cases of Queen Bee Syndrome include that of Londoner Helen Green, a Deutsche Bank employee who was awarded nearly £800,000 in damages in 2006 after two years' bullying by four female colleagues led to her nervous breakdown.

Financial adviser Karen Smyth's £95,000-a-year career at the Halifax took a nose-dive when a female boss took against her. The senior executive criticised Miss Smyth's approach with clients, collected complaints about her from customers and went to senior management.

Miss Smyth won a case of unfair dismissal against the Halifax in 2004 and was awarded £59,030 after the bank admitted liability. She said: 'I'm young, well-educated and a high-earner. She was just jealous. I'd worked with eight previous Halifax managers before her with no trouble — that says it all.'

Psychologist Cary Cooper believes Queen Bees are more comfortable working with men because they are used to the way men work.

'A Queen Bee is unlikely to have sympathy for a woman who cries in the office or needs time off because of a sick child, for example,' he says. 'She's not likely to be tolerant of those women she perceives to be "not strong enough".'

'She may have had to sacrifice her own private life to get to where she is. If you're an older woman who has a great career but doesn't have a spouse or family, and you see other women coming up who do, will you resent them? Of course you'll find some who'll be jealous.'

Katie Hopkins agrees. 'I'm a

Queen Bee myself in that I'm an alpha female, I think like a man and I operate like a man.'

'I don't have time for women who get emotional in the boardroom. There's nothing worse than challenging a woman over something and she bursts into tears. A man would never do that — and neither would I, although I hope I've never stooped as low as some women do to stab another in the back.'

**B**u s i n e s s w o m a n Deirdre Bounds, 46, who set up her own travel firm and sold it to First Choice in 2007 for £20 million, earned the nickname 'Cruella' from several of her female staff.

UT she denies she was ever a Queen Bee, and thinks the problem lay with the employees rather than the boss.

'At first I would bend over backwards to accommodate women who came back from maternity leave and wanted to work only one or two days a week. But I soon realised it wasn't good for the company.'

'Clients want to deal with the same person every time they ring up, and if that person is not there it's frustrating — so I banned part-time and working from home.'

'But then I'd find women going behind my back to ask a senior male boss for flexi-time because they thought they could wrap him around their little finger — and that used to really annoy me.'

'With hindsight, maybe I was too assertive or aggressive with women because I felt disappointed when they wanted to go part-time. If they weren't dedicated to my business, I had no sympathy for them.'

'I expected them to come straight

back to work once they'd had a baby and had no time for women who didn't. After all, I had two young children and I'd managed to come back to work full-time, so why couldn't they?'

Deirdre believes Queen Bee Syndrome exists at all levels of business, not just in senior roles.

'Women are less likely to assist other women,' she says. 'We don't give each other a hand up.'

'We're not in the old-school-tie club, and because many of us have got young children, we're not interested in going out after work and networking — we'd rather be at home with our families.'

The theory that the more male the environment, the more aggressive the alpha female, may be sound but that doesn't mean Queen Bees don't exist in women-only environments.

'When I started my job as office assistant for an all-female beauty PR business in London, my predecessor handed me a copy of *The Devil Wears Prada* and wished me luck,' says Lorna Wright, 31, from Camden, North London.

'My female boss made me cry a lot. Every day I had to ensure she had a bottle of still water, a bunch of seedless green grapes (which I had to buy on my way to work) and the latest copy of *Vogue* on her desk.'

'She would buzz through for me to make her coffee, and if my work held me up for more than five

minutes she would buzz again and shout: "When I ask for a coffee, I mean *now*, not this evening!"'

'Once she screamed at me in front of her seven-year-old daughter, who then wandered up to my desk and said: "My mummy's really angry at you."'

'And at a company Christmas meal — with all of our clients present — she was so rude to a waiter when the temperature of the venue was slightly too cool that the manager threw our whole party out of the restaurant.'

Lorna also witnessed first-hand how her boss's attitude affected the other women in the business.

'When the time came for end-of-month reports, which was stressful for all employees, the team would turn on each other rather than helping one another out in a crisis for fear of retribution from the boss.'

Katie Hopkins says the problem lies with women's fear of getting older and becoming invisible.

'Men are very good at bringing in new recruits and they'll congratulate them on jobs well done. But women feel threatened by any new blood.'

'Queen Bee behaviour isn't as tolerated today as it was in the Eighties or Nineties because HR departments are so powerful, and bosses are scared they will be taken to a tribunal. But on a subtle level it's still there — the sisterhood is well and truly dead.'