

'Fawlty' claim absurd

COMEDIAN John Cleese won libel damages on Thursday from a newspaper which claimed he had come to resemble Basil Fawlty, the manic hotel owner he played in the hit television series *Fawlty Towers*.

His lawyer, Roderick Dadak, told the High Court Cleese did not tweak people's ears or fly into manic or irrational rages and "the claim that in real life he resembles Basil Fawlty is absurd".

Cleese, 49, accepted undisclosed "substantial" damages, to be donated to a charity of his choice, from publisher Robert Maxwell's Mirror Group Newspapers, the court said. The group also agreed to pay Cleese's legal costs and publish an apology.

The *Daily Mirror* reported in August 1987 that Cleese, a founding member of the Monty Python troupe, had got into the habit of painfully tweaking the ears of fellow cast members and flying into a rage when they objected during the filming of *A Fish Called Wanda*.

The newspaper quoted an unidentified "friend" who said Cleese had lost his temper over a trivial matter and that colleagues were saying he had become increasingly like the sour, abusive hotel keeper he immortalised.

Dadak said there was not a shred of





John Cleese as Basil Fawltly.

truth in the article and Cleese found it offensive and upsetting. He said Cleese enjoyed the happiest relationship with the cast.

The newspaper group's lawyer, Simon Gallant, said the article should not have been published and apologised for causing Cleese embarrassment and distress.