

Einstein

DOG



CRAIG SPENCE

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“Hey, Birdman!” Ariel dashed out the school entrance, frizzy red hair flying, green eyes gleaming. “Can I hitch a ride?”

“Sure,” Bertrand answered reluctantly, unlocking his bike and straddling the seat. Ariel jumped onto the foot pegs bolted to the rear axle.

“Whee!” she whooped as they rolled down the path.

“Jeez, Airhead, settle down, will ya?” Bertrand grumped. It was bad enough having all the other kids staring, but if Mr. Menzie, the Principal at Blacklock Elementary School, heard they were riding double, without helmets, on school property, there would be a stern lecture about the need for senior students to model safe behaviour and good decision-making and so on.

“But it’s the weekend!” Ariel whooped, as if he didn’t know already. “Aren’t you excited?”

“You *can* be excited . . . quietly,” he sniped, bumping over the curb then wobbling in the general direction of the Forestview Townhouse Complex.

He wasn’t going home, actually, but it would be easier dropping Ariel off than explaining where he *was* going. He just hoped she wouldn’t ask him to play any stupid games. Ariel was all right — she was his best friend, truth be known — but she never let you have any secrets. If he said “no thanks” to a game of manhunt or dodgeball, she would want to know why, and wouldn’t stop until she’d wheedled an answer out of him.

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“You’re going to your dad’s laboratory, aren’t you?” she announced.

“Umm . . . ahh . . . How do *you* know?” he flustered. Bertrand couldn’t see her, but he was sure Ariel was smiling her biggest, toothy grin.

“I dunno; I just know. Can I come?”

He winced. Bertrand had no good reason for refusing, at least, no good reason he could confess to. Normally he would have invited her, but negotiations concerning his dog Libra had reached a critical stage and a good deal of whining and wailing might be necessary. He didn’t want Ariel to see that.

“Won’t your mother want to know where you are?” he asked, dodging.

“I’ll leave a note.”

“All right,” he caved.

“If you don’t want me to come, just say so.”

“No, Airee!” he apologized. “It’s just that I have to talk to my dad about something.”

“About Libra?” she guessed. Then when he didn’t answer she added, “Maybe I can help. I’m very persuasive, you know.”

“I want you to stay out of it!” Bertrand warned. “If Dad thinks I’m lining up allies, he’ll dig in his heels for sure and I’ll never get Libra home.”

They whirred along in silence. Ariel and Bertrand both lived in the Forestview Townhouses a few blocks from the school, she and her mom in Unit Eleven, he and his dad in Unit One. Some of their snobbier classmates looked down on the “complex kids”, but Forestview was a great place to grow up, really, and half the neighbourhood children spent their waking hours playing there. It had its own playground, spacious lawns with plenty of trees, hordes of kids, and a back gate that opened onto the Nicomekl Floodplain with its miles and miles of trails. What more could you ask for?

Annoying as Ariel could be, Bertrand *really* liked having her as a neighbour. She was as good as he was on swings and monkey bars, she was better than any of them at manhunt and she never tired of exploring the marshes and warrens of the Nicomekl. Best of all though, she wanted to know why the sky is blue, how gravity works, how a centipede controls all its legs, where salmon go when they're out to sea. You could talk to Ariel about things like that and she wouldn't look at you as if you were a nutcase.

She jumped off the bike at her house and dashed inside, emerging a few seconds later.

"I thought you were going to leave a note," Bertrand reminded.

"I'll leave a message instead," she answered smugly, holding up her cell phone.

While he pedaled she clutched his shoulder with one hand and punched in the number with the other. "Hi Mom!" she shouted. "I'm with Birdman. We're going to his dad's lab at the university. We're gonna persuade Mr. Smith to set Libra free."

"Airee!" Bertrand wailed.

"What?" she said, snapping the phone shut.

"I don't want the whole world to know I'm fighting with my dad."

"I'm not telling the whole world. I'm talking to my mom, and she's been following this soap opera from the beginning, remember?"

Soap opera? Bertrand cringed. But he had to admit his fight with his father had all the elements: tears, yelling, sulking, betrayals, shifting alliances. Ariel sided with him; Elaine Schwartz, his father's research assistant, sat on the fence; Libra, the cause of the whole ruckus, defended Professor Smith.

"Does your dad call her by her proper name yet?"

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“No,” Bertrand grumbled. “He still calls her SMART dog 73 and says he won’t change that until he gets permission to take her home.”

“Jeez,” Ariel consoled.

“He could bring her home now, if he really wanted,” Bertrand complained bitterly. “Who would care? It’s not as if the university is going to miss her. He’s just using that as an excuse.”

Ariel said nothing.

“He *could* bring her home,” Bertrand insisted, then let the conversation expire, wheeling along Fraser Street through the town centre.



The Stafford Biology Building is a venerable pile of ivy-covered brick positioned amid the hodgepodge of buildings at Triumph University. Professor Smith’s laboratory was hidden in a back corner of the basement; out of sight and out of mind. Really, though, the location was ideal. Professor Smith preferred to be out of the limelight, and his work involved dogs, who needed kennels and access to the outdoors.

Over the summer months Bertrand had worked part-time at the lab, walking the SMART dogs and helping to groom them. Professor Smith paid him a small sum — an allowance, they called it — but really, Bertrand loved being there and would have done the work for free. Now there was only one dog, Libra, left in the SMART lab and Bertrand wanted to bring her home.

With Ariel still perched behind him on his bike, he cut across the tiny front lawn then swooped down the sloping ground beside the Stafford Building. He pulled up at the chain-link gate to the pound, fumbled with the latch, then opened it and wheeled his bike in. As usual, the door that

opened into the SMART lab was unlocked; he and Ariel entered unannounced.

“Oh! Hi, you two!” Elaine greeted them. She was sitting cross-legged on the kennel floor next to Libra, whose head rested in her lap.

Libra welcomed him with her dark brown eyes. *Hello*, she signaled somberly.

“What’s up?” Bertrand asked.

“Nothing,” Elaine sighed. “I was just enjoying some quality time with Libra.”

Bertrand got the feeling she was keeping something from him. He glanced sharply at Libra, hoping the dog would tell him what was going on. She played dumb.

“Is my dad around?”

“He’s in a meeting with Dean Zolinsky,” Elaine said.

“Oh! *That’s* what’s wrong,” Bertrand groaned.

Dean Zolinsky headed up the Biology Department at Triumph University. She was Professor Smith’s boss, but she and the professor did not get along. “She’s a loud, pushy specimen,” Bertrand’s father had once complained in a huff to Elaine. Dean Zolinsky was also the main reason Libra could not leave Triumph University: she would not give her permission.

“Your father was quite pleased to go and see the dean this time, Bertrand,” Elaine said.

“Oh?”

“Yes. She has good news for once. Apparently a large medical supply firm has seen the value of the SMART project. They’re going to provide funding for us to continue our research. Isn’t that wonderful?”

Wonderful for you, maybe, Bertrand thought.

What his father and Elaine were doing *was* important, he realized. And Libra wouldn’t be here at all if it weren’t for their Sequenced Mental Acceleration Research Trials. But that

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didn't make it right for them to keep her cooped up in the research kennel.

Elaine squeezed Bertrand's arm. "I know you want her home," she said, "and, believe me, Alex wants that too. But we're scientists, Bertrand, and Libra is a very special dog. She has work to do here."

He wanted to pull away, but a welter of confusing emotions froze him. Elaine was so nice. And she really did care for Libra. And for *him*. And for his dad . . .

"Not so much as she cares about Sequenced Mentally Accelerated Research Trials," he thought, the complicated pull of his emotions stretching him tight as the skin of a drum.



Bertrand heard the chatter of swallows skimming Campus Green; he smelled new mown grass, people, squirrels, other dogs . . . Libra wanted to go for a walk.

Her tail twitched when he glanced her way, but she suppressed the urge to jump up or whine. Bertrand knew that if just he and Elaine had been in the room Libra might have run in a few circles and licked their faces until they gave in to her demand, but Libra was reserved with Ariel present. She didn't want anyone to think of her as just a dog.

"Okay," he said out loud.

"Huh?" Ariel looked puzzled.

"Libra would like us to take her for a walk," he announced.

"Oh." Ariel made a supreme effort not to roll her eyes.

Not only did she doubt Libra's ability to send "tellies" — mental images, complete with sounds and smells — Ariel also saw it as her solemn duty to discourage Bertrand from believing he could communicate in Dog. "You can speak to her all you want," Ariel would say, "but Libra can only understand what a dog is capable of understanding." And that

was that. Any claim to the contrary she took as an affront to human intelligence.

Bertrand often pleaded with Libra to prove her powers of comprehension. It would take only a nod of her head in response to some skill-testing questions, or the execution of a few tasks no ordinary dog would be capable of. But she refused.

“Could you please get your leash?” Bertrand asked, ignoring Ariel’s skeptical glance. Libra stared blankly, tilting her head like a dumb pooch confused at the babble of human speech. Elaine chuckled. “Gawd!” Bertrand complained, fetching the leash himself from its hook by the door. “You are a pain.”

As he clipped it to her collar, a telly materialized of Libra sticking out her long, pink tongue. Despite his annoyance, he had to laugh. It *was* funny, the notion of a dog defiantly giving a human the raspberry. Funny to him, at least.

“What are you laughing at?” Ariel exploded. “You always play this stupid game, all three of you!” Her outrage provoked even greater peals of laughter. Ariel flushed and, without another word, stomped indignantly out of the kennel.

“Oh-oh!” Bertrand fretted.

“Go catch up to her!” Elaine scolded, as if she weren’t as responsible as he for the outburst.

Before he could protest the point, Libra tugged him out the kennel door, through the pound and onto Campus Green.

“Hey! Wait up!” he called after Ariel.

She slowed enough for them to catch up, but didn’t turn. She needed time to cool down.

When they were far enough away from the main campus, Bertrand let Libra off-leash. She danced and pranced around, daring them to catch her. Soon enough Ariel was enticed out of her snit. She and Bertrand laughed and squealed, knocking each other over in their wild attempts to catch Libra. All was well again. Or so it seemed . . .

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If the children and Libra hadn't been so busy playing they might have noticed a white van parked at the far end of Campus Green. If they'd looked even closer, they would have discovered a beady glass lens, disguised to look like a search lamp, tracking their every movement. The van jiggled and bounced as if someone were moving about inside. The cause of this commotion was two scruffy characters hunkered over a bank of video screens. One of them was talking into a satellite phone.

"Yeah," he was saying. "We've got the kid and the dog under direct surveillance, sir." As he spoke, he watched one of the screens and saw Bertrand, Ariel, and Libra romping. "When the time comes it'll be easy," he chortled. "They're innocent as babes, Mr. Hindquist. The professor doesn't have a clue, either."

A loud babble forced him to hold the phone away from his ear. When it subsided the man said, "I know it's a SMART dog, sir, but we're in a truck, a hundred yards away. The kids can't see us and no dog is *that* smart."

Another tirade erupted from the earpiece. Then there was an audible click and the line went dead.

The man snapped his phone shut, and without warning smacked his partner on the back of the head, knocking the earphones forward.

"Ow!" the technician squawked. "What was *that* for, Charlie?"

"Mr. Hindquist says smarten up, you idiot!"

"Smarten up! What did *I* do?"

"You weren't being careful enough, Bob." Charlie chuckled, a cruel grin spreading across his pudgy face. "Don't you know that a SMART dog can smell mouse farts upwind from half a mile away? She can hear you, even if you *think* of talking? She can see you even before you step round a corner?"

“Jeez!” Bob grumbled, straightening the headset.

“Just passing on orders,” Charlie shrugged. “When the president of AMOS gives me a warning, I pass it on, okay?”



On Fridays Professor Smith invariably whipped up a dinner of ‘Leftover Stew’ by dumping all the week’s uneaten goop into a single pot and warming it up. Of all his father’s menu items, this was Bertrand’s least favorite, but there always seemed to be enough leftovers in the fridge to make a substantial glob of the stuff. In fact, quite often there were leftovers of Leftover Stew in the pot.

Mr. Smith leaned over the bubbling concoction and inhaled the fumes. “Needs a little something,” he pronounced.

Bertrand winced as his father sprinkled salt into the simmering lava. He refrained from saying anything, not wanting to get caught up in a conversation about the merits of ‘sustainable cooking’. If *that* happened, they would never get around to discussing what he really wanted to talk about: Libra.

He’d tried to raise the subject earlier, at his father’s lab, but never got a chance. First, Ariel had invited herself along; then, when Professor Smith returned from his meeting with Dean Zolinsky all he’d wanted to talk about was the research grant from Advanced Medical Operating Systems.

“The president of AMOS, a Mr. Frank Hindquist, will be coming to visit us,” he’d said excitedly. “We’ll have to be ready to impress him . . . especially you, 73. He’ll definitely want to shake paws with my favourite SMART dog.”

Bertrand winced, remembering how excited Professor Smith and Elaine had been. He didn’t like the looks of this. Didn’t like it at all.

“Dad?”

“Yes, son?”

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“When can we bring Libra home?”

Professor Smith’s back stiffened and his spoon fell into the pot, requiring him to dig around in the cutlery drawer for another.

“Dad?” Bertrand nudged.

“Oh. Umm. I don’t know yet, Bertrand,” Professor Smith mumbled. “I’m doing my best to get SMART 73 out, but it’s a ticklish business.”

Professor Smith had almost fished out the first spoon, but it slipped back into the pot, causing him to mutter under his breath. Here we go again, Bertrand thought glumly. How many times would they have to have this argument?

“Why can’t she come home?” he pressed.

“Bertrand! Please,” his father answered wearily. “We’ve been through all this before. There’s no point arguing. She certainly can’t come home tonight.”

“Why not?”

Sighing, Professor Smith shot him an angry glance.

“We could bring her home just for the night, Dad, then you could take her back in the morning. No one would even know . . .”

“Bertrand!” Professor Smith groaned, giving up on the spoon and turning to face his son. “You must learn to think things through and not just blurt out whatever comes into your head. You know we *can’t* simply take 73. You *know* that!”

“No I don’t!” Bertrand flushed.

The professor bowed his head, summoning patience. He rarely raised his voice, and whenever he did it seemed to drain him. Bertrand sensed his father’s exhaustion and disappointment. He felt badly, pushing so hard, but Libra needed an ally. All he had to do was remember *her*, caged in that dark, lonely kennel, and his determination flared.

“SMART 73 belongs to the university, Bertrand,” Professor Smith explained in a slow, deliberate voice. “Bringing her home without authorization would be theft.”

“But we’ll return her!” Bertrand wailed.

“It would still be a very serious breach, son. You know that. If anyone discovered we’d brought 73 home, I would face disciplinary action. She is a research animal and the effects of her getting loose into the general population would be unpredictable at best, and quite possibly disastrous.”

“Libra wouldn’t hurt anyone. You know it. She makes the world a better place. She would make this *house* a better place.”

Professor Smith sagged, leaning against the stove. “I’m sorry, Birdie,” he said. “I know how you feel, but . . .”

“No you don’t!” Bertrand exploded. “You just *say* that! You’ve been saying it for months now.”

“That’s not fair!”

Bertrand sulked, but the hurt in his father’s eyes stopped him saying more.

“I said I would do my absolute best to bring Libra home,” Professor Smith explained. “You must remember that, Bertrand, and trust that I’m living up to my promise. I said I couldn’t guarantee her release, because the matter is outside my control. It’s up to the university, and getting anything through the university bureaucracy is like threading rope through a needle, I’m afraid. As for the idea of spiriting 73 home for evening outings . . . do you really want to take that chance?”

Glancing away sullenly, Bertrand refused to answer.

“Well then,” the professor continued, “I shall explain again that if such a breach were discovered, and there’s a high degree of probability it would be, it would destroy any hope of bringing 73 home for a very long time. The university administration would be forced to make an example of me. They

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might never release her into our care. I've explained all this before, Bertrand. You *must* understand."

Bertrand *did*, of course. But a part of him kept saying, "There's got to be a way!" and blaming his father for not finding it. The university's rules were idiotic. What harm could Libra do? She was the gentlest, most intelligent dog on earth.

"What about this new grant, Dad?" Bertrand said. "Does that mean Libra will have to be a prisoner even longer?"

Professor Smith didn't answer. His mouth opened as if he were going to say something, but no words came out. He looked like a fish out of water. His confusion lasted only a moment, though, because a flash behind him cut short their conversation.

"Dad!" Bertrand yelled. "Your stew! It's on fire!"

For a second, Professor Smith stared uncomprehendingly and then his eyes popped open in alarm as he spun to face the goop flambé that had erupted on the stove. "Oh, my goodness!" he cried.

"The lid, Dad! Put the lid on it and move it off the burner!" Bertrand commanded, remembering the instructions from some pamphlet or other that had been handed out at school during Fire Prevention Week . . . if only there were similar, simple instructions for putting out disputes between fathers and sons, he thought. *That* would make life easier.



On Monday morning, when Elaine arrived at the lab, Libra greeted her enthusiastically, pressing up against the cage and wagging her tail.

"You want out, girl," Elaine crooned in that peculiar, singsong voice humans used when they talked to their pets.

They were interrupted by the clatter of footsteps outside and the sudden, breathless entrance of Professor Smith. Libra and Elaine both looked up, startled. The professor did not

usually make such a noisy entrance, nor did he customarily scowl.

“What’s wrong?” Elaine demanded.

“We need to clean up,” he announced grimly. “And SMART 73 has to stay in her kennel this morning.”

“But why?” Elaine protested.

“Because our fearless leader, Dean Zolinsky, has invited our potential benefactor, Mr. Frank Hindquist, for a grand tour *today!* They’ll be here any minute.”

“How could she do that?” Elaine objected. “She has to give us a *little* warning!”

“Dean Zolinsky can do what she likes,” the Professor reminded through clenched teeth. “She is, after all, Dean of Biology at Triumph University. If she wants to phone one of her lowly academics at eight o’clock in the morning and inform him she’ll be bringing guests at nine, so be it.”

Libra’s spirits sagged. She slunk back into her kennel and lay down with a grunt.

“See what you’ve done with your shouting?” Elaine accused. “You’ve upset Libra.”

“I’m not shouting!” Professor Smith shouted, “And I didn’t mean to upset the dog, but it *is* in our best interests to tidy up, don’t you think?”

For a moment the Professor and Elaine glared at each other, then with an audible sigh Elaine began banging drawers and cupboards shut, muttering all the while about “that inconsiderate tyrant of a woman”.

“I hate her,” she fumed after Professor Smith had gone back into the lab and she was alone with Libra.

Her grumbling was cut short by Dean Zolinsky’s shrill, nasal voice reverberating on the other side of the kennel door. “Doctor Smith,” she gushed, “I would like you to meet our benefactor Mr. Frank Hindquist, President of Advanced Medical Operating Systems.”

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Elaine pursed her lips and pinched her nostrils into a passable imitation of Dean Zolinsky's hawkish features. Libra smiled.

"AMOS?" Professor Smith was saying. "I don't know very much about your company, Mr. Hindquist."

"Frank," a resonant voice corrected. "Call me Frank, Professor."

The hackles sprang up on Libra's back and her lips curled.

"What's wrong, girl?" Elaine crooned.

But Libra would not be soothed. The sound and scent of Hindquist seeping in under the lab door had aroused her most primitive fear, the fear of man.

"We do keep a low profile," the president of AMOS was saying. "We don't make a lot of noise going about our business."

"Which is?"

"Looking for cures, Professor," Hindquist responded. "Developing medical technology that has the potential to improve the quality of life."

"The SMART Project is a long, long way from applied technology, Frank," Professor Smith observed. "It's purely academic research. You realize that?"

"AMOS is known for being at the cutting edge, Professor. We often see applications for purely academic research. When we identify these kinds of possibilities, we support the research. It's that simple, really."

"What possibilities do you see in Sequenced Mental Acceleration, Frank?" Professor Smith inquired.

"I'm a little uncertain myself, when it comes to the science," Hindquist confessed, warming to his topic. "But my advisors tell me it may be possible to develop cures for some human ailments through a process they call cell farming."

"Cell farming?" Professor Smith echoed.

"Yes. Growing cells outside the body, which are genetically modified to produce helpful medicines. The altered cells

cannot survive on their own because they are not part of a living organism, but the chemicals they produce can be used to treat a wide range of ailments.”

“I still don’t see the SMART connection,” Professor Smith said, frowning.

“Your SMART dogs think more quickly because you have genetically increased the levels of neurotransmitters in their brains. If we could grow those cells in a cultured medium we could extract medicines that would increase the brain function of humans.”

Another long silence followed.

Genetic engineering! Elaine muffled a gasp.

“It’s not really genetic engineering,” Hindquist said as if he’d overheard her thoughts. “The farmed cells could never survive outside the laboratory, so they could never enter the gene pool. I don’t think any ethical objections could be raised on those grounds.”

Libra shifted slightly so she could see into the lab through the glass panel in the kennel door. There stood Professor Smith, his gaunt, grizzled head visible over the shoulders of Frank Hindquist and Dean Zolinsky. His glasses were somewhat askew, as usual; his bright blue eyes flicked back and forth between the visitors.

“Are you serious?” he said at last.

“Alex!” Dean Zolinsky squawked.

“Very serious,” Hindquist answered smoothly. “One million dollars serious.”

“A million dollars!” Professor Smith croaked. Then he frowned. “What is it you want from me?” he asked suspiciously.

“There are no strings attached, Professor” Hindquist assured, “All I ask is that AMOS be informed as you continue with the next stage of your project.”

“Next stage?”

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“Yes,” Hindquist said excitedly. “Dean Zolinsky tells me you are on the verge of developing a truly spectacular leap in canine intelligence, that your next trials could produce dogs as intelligent as chimpanzees.”

Chimpanzees! Libra yiped indignantly. How dare he!

Humans! she growled, anger tightening her gut just as Professor Smith and his entourage barged into the kennel.

“Ah!” the man named Hindquist was saying, his eyes locking on Libra in a predatory gaze. “So this is our SMART dog, is it?”

“Number 73,” Professor Smith confirmed.

The scent of Hindquist was overwhelming. Libra snarled and lunged, crushing her nose against the restraining mesh of her cage.

“Libra!” Elaine shouted.

Startled, Hindquist rolled backwards onto the concrete floor, but righted himself expertly, squaring off in a fighter’s crouch. He would never be taken off guard again, Libra realized, ashamed of herself. She had behaved stupidly.

Libra was vaguely aware of something else, something that constricted her heart with terror and confusion: the man, Hindquist, was reading her thoughts the same way Bertrand could. Hindquist could communicate in Dog.

“Well,” Hindquist chuckled, brushing himself off, “I know at least one member of your team who doesn’t want my money.”

“She’s *never* done that before,” Elaine apologized. “Lib . . . SMART 73 is the most gentle, playful dog you could ever ask for.”

“And apparently quite unpredictable,” Dean Zolinsky put in angrily. “I have seen this animal loose on Campus Green. You must make sure she is restrained at all times from now on.”

“But . . .”

“At all times!” the dean snapped. “I can’t imagine the uproar if one of our experimental animals were to maul someone. The damage to our reputation would be irreparable.”

“But . . .”

“No buts!” the dean cut Elaine off.

Dejected, Libra retreated to the back of her kennel, circled a couple of times, and then lay down with a sigh. Freedom, she believed, had just slipped out of reach.



Hindquist leaned back in his chair and laughed. The dog was smarter than her creators. She knew an enemy when she saw one. “But that won’t make any difference, Fido,” he mocked the playback of Libra lunging at him. “You will still serve my purposes and the purposes of the Global Council.”

He’d filmed Professor Smith’s lab using a tiny built-in watch camera, recording the layout, types of locks on the doors, positioning of computers, file cabinets, everything they would need to know later in the operation. The attack footage came as a bonus. Hindquist watched once more as Libra skulked away to the far corner of her pen and lay down, defeated. Then he switched the recording off. He had other things to do.

Punching a button on the console by his desk, he activated a call to the AMOS Research & Development Department. The computer screen switched views.

“Doctor Molar,” he summoned.

A short, pudgy fellow in a crisp white lab coat peered into the camera over a clutter of beakers and tangle of tubes. “Ah. Mr. Hindquist. What can I do for you?”

“Fetch Charlie and Bob and come up to my office. We need to confer.”

“Okay, Mr. Hindquist. we’ll be right up.”

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Again Hindquist punched some buttons, the screen dissolving back into the AMOS logo. ‘Aiming for a better world,’ it read. He snorted. It amused him, that absurd phrase. A ‘better world’ was one in which he and his friends on the Global Council had more money and power than anyone else.

“Advanced Military Ordinance Supply,” he muttered, the top secret version of the AMOS acronym, “that’s what the real Frank Hindquist stands for.” He would use bumbling fools like Professor Smith, who failed to see the diabolical potential of their own work.

Impatiently, he jabbed at the buttons on his console again. A message scrolled beneath the AMOS logo. ‘Satellite conference requested with Councillor Vladimir Petrovitch. Processing security clearances.’ A couple of seconds ticked past and the AMOS logo faded into the image of an older gentleman sitting behind an ornate desk in a drab office.

“Councillor Hindquist! How are you?” Petrovitch boomed in his overly exuberant manner. “I trust the weather is better in your sphere of influence than here in Moscow.”

Hindquist smiled obligingly. “We’ve been fortunate in this time zone, Vlad,” he said. “Indian summer seems to be lasting right through into winter this year. One of the benefits of global warning.” The two men laughed. “But on to business, my friend,” Hindquist prodded.

Petrovitch squared his shoulders and folded his hands on the blotter in front of him. He looked straight into the camera, making eye contact from half a world away. “I suppose you want to talk about your dogs, Frank,” he said. “Am I correct?”

“SMART dogs, Vladimir. Yes, that’s right.”

“I really don’t think the Council has time for that, Frank. I don’t mean to be . . . well . . . dismissive, but we’ve got too many things on the go as it is. There’s the non-conventional weapons project, T-Network expansion and the East European Destabilization Plan, just to name a few. I hardly think our

fellow councillors are in a mood to waste . . . er, spend time talking about dogs, even if your SMART dogs can do tricks, eh?”

“I’m disappointed,” Hindquist responded bitterly. “I thought you’d understand.”

“I do understand . . . ”

“But you’re meeting with resistance,” Hindquist said hopefully.

Petrovitch nodded gravely, his jowls shaking.

“Idiots,” Hindquist muttered.

“Now, now, Councillor. We mustn’t allow our little disappointments to disrupt the Fellowship of the Council. That would be disastrous. Unity and secrecy are our strengths.”

“I know,” Hindquist grumbled. “But how am I going to get them to see the importance of this discovery? Intelligence-gathering and counter-insurgency have always been the weaknesses of empires. If the Romans had known where to apply their might, their empire never would have crumbled. Properly trained SMART dogs, equipped with the most sophisticated technology invented, could help us achieve global domination. They would be cheap, obedient, and capable of infiltrating just about any region. They could be our eyes, ears, and noses . . . ”

“Not to mention our teeth,” Petrovitch chuckled.

“Yes! Yes!” the councillor for America North cried, heartened by his colleague’s comprehension.

“That’s all very well, Councillor,” Petrovitch said coolly, “but the others do not share your vision. In fact, and here I must caution you, they question your judgment.”

“Then I must prove my point!” Hindquist shouted, banging his fist on his desk.

Petrovitch shook his head. “You must be careful, Frank,” he warned. “Remember, we are at a critical stage. We cannot afford any missteps.”

Einstein Dog

“Neither can we afford to sit on our hands when an opportunity presents itself, Vlad.”

“So you intend to pursue this project?”

“I do.”

“You will be acting on your own initiative, then.”

Hindquist shrugged, as if he were pleading guilty. “I hope to bring the Council round to my point of view,” he said. “I *was* hoping to have your support.”

Petrovitch nodded curtly.

“Does that mean I *do* have your support?”

Before the Russian could answer, the screen flicked back to the AMOS logo. “Damn!” Hindquist cursed. If only the idiots could understand the significance of his find. If only!

A beep jolted him from his frustrated daze. He switched on the link to the outer office. “Yes?” he grumped.

“Dr. Molar is here to see you, sir. And the Gowler brothers.”

“Send them in,” he sighed.



Hindquist wondered why he kept the Gowler brothers on. As for Doctor Molar, there had to be scientists of greater stature who would be keen to work for AMOS. He sighed, ushering the three through to his conference room. The day would come when AMOS and its affiliates would have their pick of the world’s best minds. For now he’d have to make do.

Bob Gowler gawked at the conference room video screen as if he wished the AMOS logo might be replaced by Looney Tunes. Seeing Hindquist’s look of displeasure Charlie swung his ham fist, clipping his brother smartly on the back of the head.

“Ow!” Bob complained.

“Close yer yap and park yer butt on that chair,” the elder Gowler ordered.

Bob yipped, but obeyed.