

In this political satire, an inventor releases the proverbial genie from the bottle by using modern technology. His creation triggers the journey of a sensible dog named Dorothy who decides to better the lives of dogs and humankind. Unconditional love and the special powers of dogs propel her adventures through obscurity to power while spoofing many popular figures in today's media. Her story peaks when she catapults our two-party political system into a real TAILSPIN.

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TAILSPIN

DENTON GAY

Future Leader



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The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author. However, some characters are loosely based on popular media figures. Can you guess which ones?

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Chapter 1

Dorothy and Flynn

Today, at least one of us would die. Just like last week. And the week before that. The guy in the blue uniform with the shiny key chain would lead one of us through the door to a relatively silent, uneventful demise.

The odor of urine and feces wafted throughout the cement block room. Even worse, the smell of fear peaked at this hour one day each week. The moment of death approached and the only mystery would be which one of us had to face it. For the last couple weeks, I'd managed to avoid the call. Still, I felt uneasy today, like my time might be running out.

I'd been locked up before, but I'd always figured out some way to escape. But this place had an air of finality because of the thick concrete, metal, and wire. No way out, except through the only door I could see.

My life had pretty much been a waste, so what difference did it make? There seemed to be no life for me on the outside, just like the others. Most people considered all of us undesirable beggars and thieves, sprinkled with a few prone to violence. A sad truth and I doubt any of us ever had a decent chance in life.

Some of the others started mouthing off. I could feel the anxiety, see the nervous tension in everyone's body language, and knew the time drew near. But my theory for survival didn't include barking; I figured the less attention, the better. If I were the executioner, a loudmouth would be the first to go.

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As I expected, the man in blue swaggered through the door, emanating an odor of peppermint Schnapps, mixed with cheap fries. Clipboard in one hand, he openly displayed the bottle in the other.

"Here at Pawshank, our philosophy is . . ." He took a big swig and began to sing, "Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream." The bottle swayed in rhythm to the tune. "Merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream."

He stopped, placed the clipboard on a cage, and put the cap back on the Schnapps. "Life is, but. There's always a but. When you wake up dead, you'll understand."

Glancing at the clipboard, he approached the cage next to mine where a good ol' country-boy type, a hound mix, watched in trepidation. "For today's dream vacation . . . Yes, you will literally vacate your body. The lucky winner is . . . T-Bone Pickens!"

Several dogs barked in protest, but I knew it would do no good. I whined in sympathy, even though I knew that wouldn't change anything either. T-Bone probably had a much better idea of what he faced than I did, because he sported a nose the size of my paw and ears twice as large as mine.

The man unlocked the cage and put a leash on the dog. T-Bone was all I'd ever heard him called, and now his tail pressed against his belly. Even after a few weeks here, he still had a musty, woodsy smell. Would anyone ever miss him?

He obediently followed the guy through the door, and I felt pretty sure that would be the last time I'd ever see him.

Several paced their cages, probably pondering their own fate and what it might be like on the other side of that door. Some whined. I sat down and patiently waited.

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The room grew quiet, and we listened to the rustling paper, the sound of a needle inserted into a vial, a quick yip, then the brief, high-pitched whir of T-Bone's spirit separating from a body that no longer functioned.

A couple of cages down, a hound howled, giving T-Bone a last salute. A couple more joined in briefly. Some mutt a few doors down whined.

The guy trudged back into the room with an empty collar, leash, and clipboard, still reeking of alcohol. As he read down the list, a big sigh escaped from his lips. He stared at a smart, blonde golden retriever mix, and then ambled to her cage, which was directly across from mine.

"Been avoiding you for a week."

She always seemed calm, often sitting in her cage with mouth in a permanent smile, tongue slightly extended. Surely he wouldn't off her. One of the few who kept quiet. It was her eyes that had first struck me. When she looked at me, I felt she had the ability to probe my very soul.

He fumbled with the lock on her cage and opened the door. When he stuck his hand inside, she licked it slowly, feigning affection, probably cleaning the peppermint flavored grease from it.

His fingers massaged the back of her head, around her ears. Tears formed in his eyes. For a minute, I didn't think he could do it. Then he snapped the leash onto her collar. "Sorry, Dotty."

Please don't take her. Take one of the dumb loudmouths, but not her and not me. I couldn't help myself, I barked loud at him. Like I meant business.

The dreaded door at the other end of the room jerked open and a slender fellow with dark hair going every direction stumbled across the threshold and fell against the cage of a

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pit bull. The dog growled, snarled, and then barked a ferocious warning.

The guy instinctively recoiled, falling backward into another cage. A timid little poodle mix yelped, as if someone had bit her. That started a chain reaction and every dog in the place, except me and Dotty, joined in the fun.

The dark-haired guy bolted from first one cage then another until he caromed into our keeper. His hands shook and his knees trembled. I caught a whiff of paper and coffee. He adjusted the smudged glasses on his nose.

The warden looked him up and down. "You'd better not be bringing me a dog today, mister."

The newcomer took a step backward and dusted off his jeans. "No. I want to adopt a couple. I'm MacIntosh. MacIntosh Jones."

"I'm Dr. Cur . . . Dr. Cureuthanizer. Any particular breed, Mac?"

The golden retriever could have made her break about now, but she seemed to be having too much fun watching this geek. Her mouth was open with her tongue extended and she panted in slow rhythm, like she didn't have a worry in the world.

MacIntosh glanced around the room. "No particular breed, doctor. Just two of the smartest dogs you have."

The man in blue pointed to the golden retriever. "Oh. This one has an I.Q. of 130."

MacIntosh stared in disbelief. "Really?"

"Yeah." The jailer glanced at the clipboard, and then pointed to me. "And that one tested 125."

"Perfect. I'll take them. Do they have names?"

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Nodding toward her, he marked on his clipboard. "I named this one after my mother, Dorothy. Do you know what that name means?"

MacIntosh cleared his throat. "No, as matter of fact I do not."

"It means gift from God. I call her Dotty for short. Just like I did my momma."

"What about him?" He pointed toward me.

"Flynn. Named him after a friend of mine, Denny Flynn. Smart guy and his hair was almost the same reddish tint as this dog," he said as he opened my cage. "But you can call 'em Einstein and Plato, for all I care."

He passed her leash to MacIntosh and snapped another on my collar.

She licked a buttery bagel scent off MacIntosh's hand and wagged her tail while I tried to avoid smelling the attendant.

Then the jailer took both leads. "Follow me."

MacIntosh trailed behind us as we trotted toward the door amid jealous whines from the others. "Uh, Doctor, could I have a copy of those test scores?"

The man leading me stopped, turned, and stared at him. I looked up to see his mouth open and an expression on his face that seemed to ask, are you out of your ever-lovin' mind?

"Yeah, I'll get those scores right after we fill out the paperwork," he said.

What kind of egghead was this guy named MacIntosh? Didn't matter to me, though, because he'd saved my life and Dotty's. And it looked like our future was about to take a turn for the better.

Chapter 2

Six Months Later

Dotty looked like something you might see on MacIntosh's television. Her head was covered with this shiny gray material that emitted tiny patterns of light that flashed across the surface. Her eyes were covered with what looked like goggles, but I knew that thing was like a tiny television that you couldn't get out of watching. I knew that because I'd been wearing the darned thing myself about half the time since we'd left the pound.

Earlier in the day I'd spent what seemed like a very long time wearing that contraption with one image after another flashing before my eyes, then a host of smells and sounds. After a while my head would get overloaded with so many sights, odors, and noises that only a good nap could clear my mind, which is exactly what I'd been doing.

MacIntosh sat in a chair, peering into a computer on his desk, while he occasionally moved a mouse or plunked buttons on a keyboard in front of him, completely oblivious to anything else around him.

I rose from my nap, yawned, and sat in the corner of this garage that he called a laboratory. Just like I had about half of the time since we arrived here. Our only break came at the end of the day when MacIntosh would let us roam around the backyard. Overall, he treated us pretty well, and most days he'd take us for a walk. But I was tired of wearing his weird gadgets around my head and being forced to watch the tiny television. I don't think he realized what an interruption this

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caused in my nap time. And today he'd spent more time than usual in here.

Ann, his wife, walked in. We rarely saw her, though she always seemed friendly enough. She'd been cooking hamburgers, and the smell caused my mouth to water. No other meat dish carried the aroma of a burger, and her clothes were full of it. She watched MacIntosh a few seconds and began shaking her head.

He must have felt her stare, because he looked up. "What?"

"Dinner's almost ready," she said. "Do you really think that thing will work?"

"We're close to finding out. I'm just about finished encoding her brain-wave activity."

She frowned. "In spite of the fact that I agreed to simply trust you on this, I can't see what good will come out of recording the brain-wave activity of a dog."

He took off his glasses, cleaned them, and then set them on his desk. "That's why I didn't want to tell you about my experiment. I figured you'd think I was crazy."

"That thought has crossed my mind anyway. You spend all your time on the computer and with these dogs. I keep getting these mad scientist images in my head." She waved as if she might be able to move the idea out of her head. "Sorry, Mac. Let's go have dinner."

MacIntosh moved close to her, taking her hands in his. "Look, honey. I'm sorry. When I get into a project, I tend to get obsessive about it. But, why don't you turn the stove off, chill a bottle of wine, and come back in a few minutes. I may have a big surprise for you."

"What about supper?"

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"We'll go out. Someplace nice. Just give me a few more minutes."

"But I've already got supper ready. And besides that, I'm not sure we can afford it."

"Trust me, honey," he said. "If this works out we'll be more than able to afford a nice meal out."

She sighed, and then went back inside the house.

He ran to his computer and began working on the computer faster than I'd ever seen him do anything.

A while later, Ann returned.

MacIntosh stopped, pressed a key, and then rose. "Here's how it works." He walked over to the blackboard and began marking it up with a piece of chalk. "Let S represent the stimuli introduced and X represent—"

"Whoa. I'm an accountant, not a scientist. What's the point?"

"The dogs are presented stimuli, things like images, smells, and sounds." He pointed to Dotty's headgear. "This measures and records the energy generated and tracks it to the different locations in the brain."

"So that's what you meant when you said you were measuring brain waves?"

"Yes. In fact, I've been able to get similar responses to specific stimuli simply by stimulating the appropriate areas of the brain with similar electrical frequencies."

"Like the dog thinks food is in front of him when there is nothing at all?"

"Precisely. And by presenting a ton of stimuli to the dogs and measuring each specific response, the computer compiles enough information to be able to interpret what any brain activity means to the dogs."

"Are you saying the computer can read the dogs' minds?"

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"Isn't that cool?"

"So you're going to use your invention so that people can learn what's on their dog's mind? I think most people know what's on their dog's mind. Food, attention, sleep, and figuring out whose territory belongs to whom."

"There's more." He picked up a small oblong object and placed it into a slot on Dotty's headset. "This is a minicomputer." He held up another piece of plastic that looked like an airplane propeller on a stick. "The blades on this device house air-cooled, multidirectional microphones that send data to the computer chip, which then stimulates the brain so they can understand what is being said."

"You're an incredible . . . tech-head."

He snapped the device into place on top of Dotty's headset. "Now, think voice-activated software. Your voice goes into—"

"The computer turns the sound into data," Ann said. "Don't you think I know what that is?"

"See, I've presented millions of stimuli to the dogs and recorded how their brains process it. The computer compiles a brain-wave activity map. Then it translates that information into output in the form of spoken words. Get it?"

"Sort of."

He strapped a small speaker to Dotty's collar. "The words will come from this speaker. Bottom line, the computer turns data into sound, sort of the opposite of voice activation technology. In other words, they're dictating to the computer by their brain activity. Is that cool or what?"

"Are you telling me this dog will be able to speak?"

"Theoretically, yes. Can you imagine? A dog that can communicate?"

Ann grinned. "Watch this. Speak, Dotty, speak."

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Dotty barked twice. Sounded to me like she wanted MacIntosh to remove the plastic gizmo from her head.

MacIntosh rolled his eyes.

"She said, I want steak for supper." Ann said.

"Very funny."

"So, what did you expect?"

MacIntosh frowned. "Stop and think about it for a minute. Dogs that warn the blind of danger. They could identify burglars and thieves. Or even describe enemy locations. We could get rich off this."

"Right. I'll believe it when I see it."

He walked back to his computer and started pressing the plastic buttons. Then he removed the small television eyepiece from Dotty's head.

He picked up a black cord and attached one end to the shiny thing on her head and the other end into the speaker on her collar.

Dotty yawned.

Then he switched on the teeny computer on her head. The whole thing looked like a metallic ski mask with a propeller on top.

Folding her arms, Ann shot him a skeptical look. Whatever she was thinking, apparently she didn't believe him.

"Can they fly too?"

"Very funny." He took a deep breath and studied Dotty.

"Well, when's she going to say something?" Ann frowned.

"I don't know. Maybe she's not thinking." He scratched his head and hurried back to his computer.

"Even if this thing works, won't she be talking all the time? How would you get her to stop?"

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"During the mapping process, all brain activity was recorded. But now only the brain activity in the decision making area of their cortex will be measured. I was able to pinpoint that area by recording responses to stimuli in which a dog might take action."

"So you believe that dogs can think?"

"Sure. Dogs have information coming through their senses all the time, yet they don't act on every one. Their brains are very similar to humans." MacIntosh turned back to Dotty. "Now, please say something, Dotty."

"I want steak for supper." The voice came from the little black thing on Dotty's collar. I had to look at MacIntosh's mouth and back to that gizmo a couple of times when she said it. What the heck was going on? Amazing. Dotty sounded exactly like MacIntosh.

A shocked look spread across Ann's face as her arms dropped and she took a step backward.

MacIntosh jumped up and down, obviously very happy. "Yes! Yes! " He hugged Dotty. "Say something else."

Dotty grinned from ear to ear.

Tears formed in his eyes. "Please Dotty. Say something."

I barked twice.

"He wants steak too," Dotty said. "For now, we speak with one voice."

"Break out the wine, Ann. I can't believe this. Let's celebrate."

"Okay," Ann frowned. "But we can't afford to buy steak for those dogs."

MacIntosh smiled. "Are you kidding? We're going to be rich!"

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"I don't know what rich means, but it gives me a great feeling," Dotty said. "Get Flynn fixed up with one of these things. I want to talk with him. This is fun."

Hearing her talk like MacIntosh unnerved me a bit. I barked and whined.

Tears streamed down MacIntosh's face. "Nobody believed me. But I did it anyway." He hugged Ann and dragged her around the garage in some form of geek dance. "Great things are coming our way."

A strange look appeared in Dotty's eyes as she stared silently at me. Something powerful going on behind those eyes. Scared me a bit. Her tail began to move in a slow circular spin, like she might be sizing up a situation.

In this political satire, an inventor releases the proverbial genie from the bottle by using modern technology. His creation triggers the journey of a sensible dog named Dorothy who decides to better the lives of dogs and humankind. Unconditional love and the special powers of dogs propel her adventures through obscurity to power while spoofing many popular figures in today's media. Her story peaks when she catapults our two-party political system into a real TAILSPIN.

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