

CHAPTER 1

A MYSTERIOUS SIBILANCE IN SUBURBIA

Obviously I can't speak, but I do recognize some human vocalizations, and *German shepherd* is one of them, as are *hot dog*, *walk*, and *bath*. Most of my days are spent in semi-pleasant confinement; when I'm freed, it's only with a collar on a cord and only for the purpose of meeting my master's step count.

I have one constant companion here in the back yard. She is one of those creatures that fly and sing. The former she never does, and the latter only rarely, as she, too, is trapped, in a much smaller enclosure with bars surrounding her. Well, what's the point of wings, I say! Bird and I don't converse in the human way, of course, but with a shared glance we know how the other feels. Usually, she longs to swoop and dive, to soar through the sky on a sunny day, while I'd rather tear through open fields, chasing my lunch in an ancient battle of will and wits. It's unnatural, this existence of ours; she and I were meant to kill or be killed, to live to fornicate in our prime, and to rest, relax and enjoy nature in our older years. Yet here we remain, as day becomes night, time and again, with bowl after bowl of disgusting pellets to choke down.

Wait. Is that new? The neighbors' party last night was loud and rowdy, and now I suspect they broke the fence in all the commotion. I climb to my paws and pad across the grass to have a look. Yes! The wood is broken at the bottom and there's just enough space for me to escape! I catch bird's eye. She blinks as if to say she'd go if she could, so I squeeze myself through, flying through the next yard over, racing toward new smells, and when I come to a fence low enough to hurdle, hurdle's what I do. It's nighttime in suburbia and the freedom is delicious! I've only run away once before, many years ago when I was a puppy.

Now, a little about dogs for those of you who don't know. We're more complex than we seem. For instance, now that my cramped muscles are working as they're designed to do and I settle into a canter, you might suspect that exercise is what I've been missing, but you'd be wrong. Don't

misunderstand; I was longing to run, but mental stimulation is what I've been needing most. The fresh air ruffles my fur as I cruise through the neighborhood toward open country. My fellow canines cast guttural, jealous barks in my direction. There are crickets chirping. Cats fighting. Human inventions such as motors and music. On an ultrasonic level I catch the sound of mice, moths, beetles, and plants. This symphony of sound jolts me back to life, but it's not even the best part of the adventure: all the new smells are making my long-depressed brain explode with pleasure!

I gallop along, sampling the air five or six times a second, and my visual awareness is displayed in four dimensions. I see multi-colored trails of scent particles varying in brightness, color, shape, and texture. Their constant flux shows me the proximity of all smells in time and space.

I slow to a trot at a tree, where I've detected the exquisite green scent of a female dog. She's about my age, with a similar genetic signature, in good health, in a relaxed and receptive emotional state, and—most importantly—in optimal estrus. The whiff of a compatible partner in heat is so intoxicating that my urethral sphincter relaxes involuntarily and I am driven to leave a liquid deposit of my own. Then I set off again, urged onward by the prospect of a piece of tail, despite a second scent I'm picking up, that of a high-status male.

The distance between freestanding human caves increases as I reach the outskirts of the development. Night has descended upon us, but the scent trails help me to visualize my environment. Speaking of which, a dark purple trail wafts out from a corner as I come to it, warning me just before a king-sized pit bull comes charging out with a killer look in his eye—RARARARARARARARAR!

I feel and hear his teeth gnashing at my tail as he snaps at me, but I'm a strong runner and the fading smell of his stress signals guides me to safety. Panting, I slow to an amble and take cover in the darkness of a dead-end alley off the main street in town. I should be safe here, I think—at least until I catch my breath, since the mingled smells of rotting garbage, dog feces, and urine from two species should mask my presence.

"Hey, buddy," I hear after a while. "Do you want a hot dog?"

Hot dog? I know that word! I swivel my head in happy anticipation to lay my eyes on a pair of young human males blocking the mouth of the alley, but I'm alarmed by the violence in their scent trails, and the look in their eyes is proof positive of the danger I'm in. As the tube of meat sails through the air, I see and smell the yellow wisps of the knockout drug they've injected into it, so I'm sprinting for safety even before it hits the ground.

"Catch it!" yells the one who threw the meat, so the other drops to his knees to grab me around the neck with his arms.

Suddenly there's a new presence in the alley. My semi-feral rival has sought me out, and he's hungry! Luckily, his murderous eyes are locked onto the humans—GRRRRRRRRRRRRR.

"Oh shit!" says the hot dog thrower, crab-walking backwards toward the dead end. "Help!"

My would-be captor releases me and lets out a yell, hoping to draw the big dog's attention while unsheathing a knife. He brandishes it at me to keep me from running, but not convincingly, so I take a running leap, chomp down on his forearm, and sink my fangs into his flesh; unfortunately it wasn't his knife arm. There's cold flash on my head. *The bastard's cut my ear off!*

Again I strike, and I get the guy's knife hand between my teeth, then gnash forward for better leverage and crunch his weak appendage to bone meal.

He curses in a high-pitched voice, and he kicks me till I let go. Then he utters something I can't understand, but the words are hissed, full of S sounds as if spoken by a snake. Then he spins on his heels and flees, leaving his comrade to be devoured by my high-status rival.

I follow the scent trails—some of them mine—back to the broken fence and squeeze myself through. The sight of my back yard, with its trees, grass, and dog food pellets, doesn't seem quite as depressing as before. Then I catch the eye of my winged friend and I can feel her jealousy. *Let's see if I can do it!* I leap up onto a raised planter bed, eyeing the latch on her cage. *Gotta hit it just right.* Our eyes meet for the last time. I can sense her excitement. *Go!* I launch myself into the oppressive air of suburbia, hitting the latch just right and she flutters away in a flash.

I'll be lonely, but I wouldn't have it any other way. And what about that strange hissing human?
A little scary, don't you think? I hope someone cuts *his* ear off. Or some other, more vital part!

What the heck is a German shepherd doing in an action thriller? There's only one way to find out! If you'd like to ARC book 3 of The Park and Walker Action Thriller Series before it's published, just shoot me an email at pbw (at) patrickweill (dot) com and I'll send you the ebook as soon as it's ready (June, probably).

Wishing you a good day,

Pat Weill