

BYRON TIMOTHY

Superspecies Three Sample  
Chapter

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## Existence Without Roots

Dr. Intinman brushed the hair off his face in unendurable boredom as a fiery young man stood at the head of a conference table next to a fold-up display making his case against the lamentable state of *Superspecies* preservation around the world. He wielded a long pointer like a foil, jabbing it into various charts and diagrams with a series of loud “thwacks” while making the damnable observation that the *Superspecies* had suffered a major decline in numbers over the past five years. From a neat stack of cards facing the audience, the man removed one at a time and each revealed a new set of data requiring their careful attention before moving on to the next one. When he finished with the current one, it was withdrawn and neatly placed behind the others and this process continued for two solid hours.

Intinman sipped his coffee like a lifeline and tried with all his might to keep from dozing off in the middle of it. Being the guest of honor at the meeting, the speaker was anxiously trying to get his attention, win his favor and impress him with the breadth of his knowledge. My god, why on earth had

they allied themselves with these nuts (he wondered privately)? Out of the frying pan and into the fire! These fringe-dwellers were much worse than anything they'd recently disentangled themselves from. On the other hand, he and the others were treated very much like celebrities because they'd defected from the enemy camp and because they were real scientists with real facts that commanded genuine respect in the world. Still, these environmental activists wearied him with their presumptive moral superiority and "pop" science mentality—which he was constantly at odds with and correcting—and the shamelessly self-righteous manner with which they promoted themselves. He also had the sneaking suspicion a few of them were slightly more interested in political maneuvering/ manipulation than saving forests and animals.

He was never asked to introduce any original material into the mix during the endless procession of meetings, discussions and talking in circles over issues that seemed to go on forever without fail. Problems faced by the organization were continually being revised and revisited without ever being resolved; an ongoing (and never-ending) "process" and work-in-progress he discovered. His role was simply to give opinions from time to time on whatever was being offered at any particular moment which turned out to be a very uncomfortable situation for him because they were mainly derogatory and he felt pressured to view things in a different light. He sensed they were seeking his approval more than anything else and definitely more than any honest assessment of their efforts.

Funding was a different kettle of fish altogether; it was everyone's job to bring it in and since Intinman was the most renowned personality in the group, his duties were restricted mainly to that function. Besides, he was good at it and had a

knack for bringing in the most after a very public split with the EPA.

Instead of founding their own organization as they'd originally planned, he, Bennett and Pickney had decided to form a coalition with a variety of environmental and animal rights groups under one umbrella. The primary focus being preserving the *Superspecies* at all costs before they were driven to extinction. The idea proved an effective one and money poured in from all directions that were either genuinely passionate about the issue itself or simply impressed with Intinman's name, making him question the situation's longevity. True, money came in abundance, presumably more than enough, but seemed to disappear just as quickly as it appeared with no clear improvement in the welfare of the *Superspecies*. When he inquired about it, he was persuaded not to concern himself with that aspect of the business because revenue allocation was someone else's job and he ought to permit them the courtesy of performing it. He was already doing enough to aid the organization and everything that could be done was being done on his behalf.

When he brought his concerns to the other members of the board, he realized they didn't know themselves where all the money was going but advised him not to worry about minor administrative details of the campaign. His name had brought in a lot of money, they rejoiced, and it was certain to pay off handsomely for all of them in the end...and not just for the *Superspecies* (sensing an implied wink in that remark for some reason). On the whole, it seemed little attention was being paid to protecting the animals from imminent threats and more going toward getting in the newspapers, boosting membership rolls and promoting the "message" of

the organization. Although the message was something no one could define with any certainty and seemed to change from week to week.

It all struck Intinman as a kind of machine: a perfectly efficient model of inefficiency. Frankly, he wasn't at all concerned with the message being drilled into him on a daily basis throughout the long, dreary months that passed. He was only interested in preserving the creatures the organization professed to believe in which was surely taking a back seat to everything else.

The thin and nervous little man with the shaggy hair addressed the group with, "In order to improve the image of our enterprise we must continue our efforts at getting the word out there...letting the public know what we're about and, Marty in particular, you need to keep sending out those wonderful press releases...so far our efforts in the public sector have been nothing short of extraordinary!" he beamed. The rest was more or less along the same lines as Intinman sat tapping a pencil on the table without being aware of it. When he did notice he willed himself to stop but resumed after only a few seconds, forgetting his pledge to control it.

Intinman felt a tap on his shoulder and turned to see Pickney standing over him with his face next to his ear, preparing to tell him something in confidence.

"You have a call from Jack Falcon of White River National Forest. Remember him...the director there?"

"Our ranger!" he bubbled brightly; almost loud enough to be overheard in the room, "Of course I do!"

"You'd like to take it?" Pickney seemed surprised, "I can say you'll call him back when the meeting's over."

"No! I'll grab any excuse to get out of here. I'm being



suffocated.”

Intinman rose quickly from his chair with his hand pressed to his chest in a symbolically dignified gesture as the others shifted their attention to see what was happening. The speaker also paused and glanced at him with a lingering question on his lips and vague disappointment on his face as he watched him preparing to leave. Intinman bowed slightly in apology, making an awkward phone gesture to his ear and exited the room without seeming too hasty about it. Pickney shut the door and followed him down the long corridor to two offices adjacent to each other supplied to them by the company. These offices, compared to the spartan facilities at the EPA, were incredibly plush and demonstrably superior. The comforts were in fact more suited to the likes of corporate executives than research scientists. Intinman ducked into the office, sat down and grabbed the receiver with peculiar relish.

“Jack?” he ventured gingerly, “It’s Morey. How’s everything?”

“..Morey, my old friend. It’s good to hear your voice! Sorry to interrupt whatever you were doing...are you in a meeting?...”

“Yes, but don’t worry about it, I was bored out of my skull and dying in there. Believe me—I am *grateful* you called.”

Falcon chuckled with heavy overtones, “..Well, in that case, I may be able to spice up your life a little today. As a matter of fact I think I can guarantee it. Lately, we’ve had some pretty unusual events going on around here and I just wanted to call and let you know because I really need to tell someone...”

“Tell me...,” Intinman’s curiosity was piqued for the first time today.

“..Well, it’s a bit hard to explain without sounding like I’m suffering an acute case of fancy delusions...”

“Huh? Your voice sounds so strange. Tell me because the

suspense is killing me now!”

“...I saw—or I should say *we* saw since there’s a witness to back me up on this—three bears starting fires in the forest using stones and a variety of kindling...”

“Wha—?” Intinman shook his muddled head who’d heard but couldn’t register the information right away.

“...Maybe I ought to explain it from the beginning or at least start somewhere further back so you can get a better understanding...”

“Please.”

“...Very recently we had a fire that lasted a couple of days and devoured a good portion of the forest south of here. It started the day before yesterday and just last night I was informed most of it had been contained. This morning the situation appears to have improved even more and I understand that by the end of the day there should be nothing left of it. We were fortunate this time, it could’ve been a lot worse...”

“Yes, I’d say so.”

“...That, in itself, is not all that unusual...”

“No.”

“...Anyway, my partner and I went out the first day to assist the fire team and as we were heading back Skaggs was knocked down by three bears running extremely fast, carrying something in their mouths...”

“Oh my god! Your partner was attacked by bears?” Intinman blurted out; recalling Pickney’s encounter and stung by the thought, “Is he gonna be alright?”

“...He’s fine, Morey. He wasn’t actually attacked by the bears, he just happened to be standing in the way as they were running past. They knocked him down and kept right on going. They didn’t even stop!...”

“Kept going? Why? Hmmm, that’s very odd,” Intinman reflected on the reasons.

“...Yes, they disappeared immediately after knocking him down. He was in their way—that’s all...”

“You mentioned they were carrying something?” Intinman encouraged him; only half believing the story at this point.

“...Burning branches flaming at the tips they used to light fires in several areas of the forest. They carried them all over the place, dropping them in different locations and setting random blazes in the process which explains why the fires appeared to have no single source. The firemen are still baffled by the cause of them...”

“You didn’t tell them what you saw?”

“...No, I couldn’t...”

“Uh-huh, I guess you’re right. They wouldn’t believe you, would they? Probably would’ve treated it as some sort of tasteless joke. Did you actually see them igniting anything?”

“...Did we? We saw a lot more than that...” Falcon blurted out in garbled speech, “...we saw them making fires using simple tools and a definite method!...”

“Hah! You’re kidding?”

“...From roughly ten feet away we witnessed the whole thing! Rick can back me up on it...”

“You must understand how hard this is...I believe you, of course...I just don’t believe it’s happening in the first place.”

“...How do you think I feel? But I thought you of all people might be able to shed some light on the situation...”

“How did they do it?”

“...Essentially from a concealed position—in the bushes—we watched as a large black bear showed another one how to do it. Taking the time to teach fire-making skills to his

companion. He sat down and did it himself first: gripping a small rounded stone in one paw and repeatedly smashing it against a bigger rock until it generated enough sparks to light the crushed material underneath. He even spun the stone back-and-forth on the surface to generate enough heat to get the initial flame going. Took about half an hour in total and afterwards he vacated the spot and allowed the other bear to try it for himself..."

"It's wonderful!" Intinman declared triumphantly, unable to control himself.

"...Yeah...I suppose..." Falcon muttered back with reservation, "...but not so good for the forest. In fact, I'm making arrangements to have them driven out of here as we speak..."

"Have you received your notification from the EPA yet?" Intinman replied, then after Falcon's statement registered, "What did you say? You're doing what?"

"...We're gonna try to get the bears out of the park. I've decided not to allow them to run amok starting fires wherever they please anymore..."

"How do you propose to do that?"

"...I'm putting together a collection of hunters to form a sweep line along the southern boundary of the park. We'll start at the bottom and comb the area gradually all the way up north into the upper regions..."

"Interesting idea but what's the EPA gonna think when they arrive and find no bears to exterminate?"

"...That's their problem to be honest!" he spat out bitterly, "They can go to hell for all I care! I've got an urgent problem that requires my immediate attention and I don't intend to sit idly by and do nothing about it. The forest needs my help!..."

"The forest and the people from what I gather and I certainly

agree with your reasons but...” Intinman struggled with his thoughts.

“...Besides, there’s a chance it may end up actually saving the park in my opinion. If there are no more bears, there’ll be no more reason to destroy it than if there were no trout in the streams...”

“Hmm...I see what you’re after and it might work...,” Intinman reflected with a heavy dose of skepticism, “...but once the EPA gets rolling on a project they usually finish whatever they start regardless of whether the original reason exists or there’s a chance of it turning into absolute disaster.”

“...You make it sound like a headless monster...”

“That wouldn’t be too far from the truth in all honesty.”

“...If the shit hits the fan I’ll simply say we were trying to protect the lives of visitors to the park as well as the other plants and animals involved...”

“Might work...” Intinman replied blandly with cautious optimism, “...but more importantly I’m absolutely flabbergasted by this new behavior. Bears starting fires—and using tools!” he burst out breathily.

“...Yes...”

“And so significant too, it means they’ve exceeded my expectations in every way. I never imagined they’d be able to do something so complex in nature—and so soon! There’s still so much about these creatures I don’t understand that it continues to amaze me even after all this time, this latest example being just one of many if memory serves me right. In the past, I’ve compared *Superspecies* intelligence to human intelligence that took hundreds of thousands of years to develop but the exact same process appears to be happening much faster in them, less than fifteen years all told!”

“...The *Superspecies* is advancing more quickly than we did in the past? Are you serious?...” Falcon ventured timidly, feeling somewhat out of his league.

“Appears so, yes...”

For Falcon, facing a crisis with a problematic group of animals being described in the most glowing terms of historical and universal context represented an absurd contrast. After all he was at odds with the animals in question, so accepting or appreciating a conflicting viewpoint might place him in the vulnerable position of surrendering to a radical change in outlook. Bears had never been anything more than an indigenous part of the environment he lived in—however storied—like rivers and trees, but were now simply dangerous to him. He felt like someone sitting on a powder keg at the base of an ivory tower with a brutal conflict raging all around him, not knowing what to do.

“...I believe you,” Falcon agreed briskly, “I’ve witnessed the evidence for myself...”

“How is Rick Skaggs by the way?”

“...He’s gone to the hospital to get checked out as a precaution more than anything else. The fall definitely shook him up a bit...”

“Good! Listen to me...,” dropping to a more serious tone, “...I’ll arrange to get the word to the press about what’s going on at White River once it’s underway and I’d also like to stage public protests outside the park.”

“...Protests? You mean crowds of demonstrators?...”

“Yes, it’s never been done to any of our sites before and I’d like to draw as much attention as possible to the destruction going on there, get the media involved and make things as difficult as possible for the bastards! I might even arrange to make an

appearance myself to address the demonstrators, condemning the government's actions publicly. In the meantime, I'll fly out to help you remove the bears from the park."

"...You want to help us with the hunt? *You?*..." Falcon exploded in disbelief.

"Absolutely! I'm willing to do whatever it takes to hamper their efforts, besides it'll give me an opportunity to be the first researcher in history to observe actual physical evidence of *Superspecies* fire-starting which I still find hard to believe to be honest. It's a turning point in their development no one else is gonna know about except you of course. I'm not making the same mistake twice."

"...You're not going to tell anyone? You plan on keeping this all to yourself?..." Falcon trumpeted incredulously.

"I have to..." voice quivering slightly, "...can't let it happen again."

"...It? Meaning what?..."

"All my hard work might have been used to preserve these creatures, to help them thrive and survive in the wild, instead it's been the exact opposite: showing my enemies where to strike at the heart of them and target them specifically where they live. Little did I know when I first introduced them to the world I was putting the spotlight on them so others might eventually go after them with a view to a kill. I'm principally responsible if they're driven to extinction you know, although sadly some of the blame still lies in man's constant fear of the unknown in which we lash out at the cause of that fear without determining if it's justified or not. Our celebrated human history and intelligence haven't done much to defeat that typical human reaction and if the *Superspecies* does eventually survive, I only hope it'll be due to the fact that man has finally learned

to reflect along those lines,” in a low and dejected voice.

“...I’m sorry,” Falcon replied empathetically, “It must hurt to see your work perverted in such a way...”

“Yes, well, I don’t mean to thrust all my burdens on you.”

“...Don’t worry, I’m flattered you’re being so honest with me...”

“I’m flying down there in a couple days to see the physical evidence for myself,” changing the subject on the fly (his mind being so scattered and stressed lately), “I need an excuse to get away from here anyway, these people are driving me nuts quite frankly. Sam and Jerry might also tag along to see the sites you mentioned.”

“...But we’ll be busy moving the bears out. You want to stick with us as we’re herding them out of here?...”

“Yes...,” Intinman frowned, “...I may be able to offer some much-needed insight on the best way to go about it and I *have* to see those fire sites for myself.”

“...Alright, captain, if you feel that way about it, who am I to stop you? Might be dangerous for you though but, to tell you the truth, that’s kind of what I was hoping for when I called—that you’d help us. It’s going to be one hell of a task trying to chase hundreds of bears out of such a vast region and you ought to know that up front, especially when you take into account we can’t be a hundred percent sure they won’t wander right back in the next day. Still something has to be done...”

“Some of them probably will, bears are territorial creatures as I’m sure you already know. Anyway, I’m glad you called, Jack, and I’m absolutely thrilled by the news you’ve passed along to me today! Can’t wait to have a look for myself,” doing his best to suppress a schoolboy-level of excitement. “You might not fully grasp what it means about these animals manipulating tools



and all but, believe me, it's a milestone in a life of research!"

"...I do know I've never seen anything like it before. Hey! Maybe I'll go down in history as one of the first men to see it, eh?..." chuckling proudly to himself.

"Someday, maybe, but not yet..." the reply swooped down from on high, "...I must warn you against telling anyone at this point—DON'T DO IT!—you'll be burying these animals if you do."

"...Alright, Morey, you have my word..."

"Thanks old chum."

Intinman hung up and resumed a vigorous campaign of pencil tapping on the desk. He considered going back to the meeting, which is what he should've done and where his duty lay, but couldn't guilt himself into it no matter what. The pain and suffering were just too great and the thought so disagreeable to him, in principle and practice, he couldn't even muster the energy to get up out of the chair, so didn't. Instead he contented himself simply sitting and tapping the pencil rhythmically in hypnotic thought and jotting down occasional notes to himself. Booking an immediate flight to Colorado topped the list of things to do as much as what he shouldn't forget to bring along. He scribbled in flowing letters, "No More Meetings", placing a squiggly line underneath that ended in a long tapering tail, bringing a smile to an otherwise withered face. Writing next to it "Get Back To My Roots", though he wasn't exactly sure what that one meant right off the bat, it was simply a whimsical compulsion to scribble something down as a vague reminder to himself.

After fifteen minutes of finding nothing else to occupy him (since his tasks were not numerous at the job), he did the only thing he could do: head back to the conference table. Knowing

if he didn't he'd suffer the inquiries of at least five different people. Overeager types asking in the most irritatingly chummy manner where he'd "escaped off to" but first found Jerry Pickney typing on his computer and asked if he'd care to join him. Together they walked back to the table and took their seats. This time another speaker was directing their attention to a different set of data points perched atop the fold-up display. Similarly fashioned, attractively-designed charts and graphs with bold black outlines and optimistic summaries, only the subject matter had changed though not substantially.

After several minutes of foggy boredom, Intinman heard a voice piercing the haze, "...and maybe Dr. Intinman, our resident expert, would care to comment on this point..." to which he sat utterly dumbfounded because he'd been caught off guard by the question and sat staring blankly within the speaker's unblinking field of vision. A lengthy pause ensued, filling the air with charged energy and discomfort. "Dr. Intinman?" the speaker appealed again.

"I'm sorry, what was the question again?" the resident expert replied, suddenly exposed for the absent presence he'd been at most of their meetings.

"Question is..." the speaker spoke with tremendous flair and grandeur, "...do you believe one million dollars in additional funding correctly applied to public awareness campaigns will help to push through the vital legislation needed to prevent further slaughter of the *Superspecies*?"

Taking the question under advisement and feeling silly for doing so, Intinman came instantly to the conclusion that the question was unanswerable. It was pure speculation whether publicity campaigns achieved their desired ends in relation to money spent and sitting around discussing the topic in earnest

served no more purpose than a dog chasing its tail with a hope of enlightenment. It was complete folly in other words, yet many of the conversations carried on in that room had that unique characteristic in his view. So, with all eyes fixed on him, awaiting some grand (uncontroversial) insight into an objectless subject while wishing something simple, easily digestible and trite would come out of his mouth so they could proceed to the next topic, he cleared his throat:

“I think your intention’s good but I’m not certain it’ll achieve the results you’re after,” slowly and deliberately, instantly realizing he’d made a mistake. The gasps, though inaudible, could be heard around the room as if amplified by speakers and everyone gaped at him with dropped jaws; in some cases imperceptible.

Struggling with reticence and reluctance, Intinman hastened to add, “But maybe I don’t know enough to say...” allowing his words to evaporate in the air.

The speaker cleared his throat several times and coughed once before adopting a glossy tone, “Dr. Intinman has made a challenging point and I’d like to respond to it.” Though no one in the room could say with any certainty what point had been made or whether it was a valid one because he hadn’t dared to complete it. The speaker waddled his chubby frame over to the fold-up display as quickly as he could, lifted the pointer authoritatively and waved it in front of the card, “If I can direct your attention right here for a moment, Dr. Intinman, you’ll notice the chart displays our success over the past few months at raising visibility and increasing our lobbying efforts in state and federal legislatures. Right here...” slapping the tip onto a particularly crucial point, “...proves the marked improvement of our efforts. Sponsorship’s up by 22%!”

The speaker beamed triumphantly, glancing past Intinman and scanning the other faces in the room as though expecting praise to erupt from somewhere after the invisible dragon had been slain. Finally, someone bellowed with pat and patent enthusiasm, “Excellent point, Jim! Nice work!” clapping loudly and initiating an uproar of yelps, “hoorays” and “here-here’s” pouring forth in unison. Intinman was effectively crushed. He could see that getting a substantive point across with this bunch was a fruitless undertaking involving countless obstacles (not the least of which was deliberate deafness), risking alienating all his new allies in the process. A move he wasn’t prepared to take at this point.

“Not bad,” he conceded without reference to anything in particular and, nodding conclusively, almost made it back into his seat—and obscurity—when he was startled by another abrupt question.

“Dr. Intinman, just one more thing before you sit down...”

He froze in a halfway seated position, feeling awkward and ridiculous, rose slowly and lifted his chin like a man facing a firing squad. “Yes?” sounding a lot more exasperated than intended and unaware of the impatient disinterest on his face.

“Dr...,” the lumpy mustached and round-faced man repeated, “...can you comment on your vision of the future for Superspecies’ Rights International? Where do you see us as far as getting the word out regarding our mission and influencing lawmakers to pass laws protecting these rare beasts?”

He groaned inwardly knowing he’d have to formulate a lengthy answer to satisfy his listeners on this broad question as they stared at him with glazed eyes of tepid interest and a readiness to pounce on anything that shook them out of their trance by hinting of controversy or dissent.

“Well...,” Intinman glanced in Jerry’s direction for support while sensing he wouldn’t be able to squirm out of this one so easily. They had the scent and were on him like dogs now, “...the points that’ve been made so far are relevant to a certain extent...we should get the word out regarding the organization’s “message” so to speak, though to my mind we may need to revisit and revise that in the future.” Knowing full well the word “message” was thrown around in meetings like a magic fetish that sanctified their efforts and swelled their ever-loving hearts. “It’s just as important for us to change state, local and federal policies as a long-term prospect but, more importantly, we ought to focus on taking direct action ahead of any of that. The goal, as I see it, is to preserve the lives of *Superspecies* in any way possible, therefore stopping the destructive machinery by taking direct action against misguided policies that have driven us here in the first place is vital to our success as much as not wasting time discussing academic issues or arguing over how we can strengthen the organization’s political and financial position. If we fail in that regard, many more will die and there won’t be any of them left. As for us, we’ll be reduced to nothing more than a group of irrelevant philosophers arguing over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.”

“I hope, Dr. Intinman, you’re not suggesting we do anything illegal or unethical that might jeopardize the reputation of this organization!” a broad and boisterous man with thick eyebrows and a blustery voice cautioned him, “Especially since we’re in our formative stages and need to curry favor with the general public and appropriate legislative bodies to be able to carry more weight in the future. Someday after we’ve built up enough of a reputation and network of support we can do whatever we

want.”

The man’s name was Teddy who thrust out a rather blunt chin on an otherwise bulbous head, challenging Intinman and scrutinizing him from head to toe.

“But if we don’t act now, pretty soon it’ll be too late,” Intinman pleaded in the most desperate manner, “The *Superspecies* will be gone and all our work will be wasted. What good would it be then?”

“Your precious *Superspecies* aren’t the only animals on earth being threatened by human expansion you know. Don’t you realize there are others just as valuable that might require our attention, too? Many of the members of this committee have been working for years to protect certain species in different parts of the world with some devoting their lives to it just as you’ve done with this particular group. Is it fair to ask them to abandon their work for yours?”

Teddy was a tough, lucid and passionate personality who commanded a good deal of general respect in the group and many members of the committee were presently nodding their heads in agreement. Instantly, Intinman felt a sinking feeling sliding down the length of his throat to the pit of his stomach.

“I don’t understand...,” Intinman struggled, “...if we’re not going to focus on the *Superspecies* at least in the short-term, what’s the purpose of forming this organization in the first place? And what good is it if we wait till all of them are exterminated? I believe they deserve our foremost attention at the start because they’re one of the most unique species on earth and it’s not that other creatures are less important than they are, but they do represent an evolutionary breakthrough which sets them apart from other animals and now face the greatest threat to their existence.”

“Perhaps you’re a bit biased...,” Teddy brazenly declared, “... and maybe we all are in some way but that’s no excuse for putting your interests above everyone else’s.”

Intinman was stunned. He assumed some people in the room understood the value of preserving the animals for the sake of the untapped potential they represented and critical loss to the future if they were destroyed but, glancing around, didn’t notice any of the normal scientific curiosity or genuine appreciation for the discovery’s value. Instead he saw impeccably dressed folks in spiffy suits going through elaborate and calculated rituals while making eloquently self-conscious speeches to justify their function in life. Among them, Intinman was an outcast.

“Teddy, Teddy, please!” a sympathetic voice rose in his defense, “Dr. Intinman is an eminent persona in the field and guest of honor in this place. Cut out this uncouth rant immediately! Besides, we all agreed the name of this organization should be Superspecies Rights International which alone accounts for something in making it our primary focus.”

The man who took up Intinman’s defense was Dr. James, a somewhat portly man with thick black curly hair like a chubby-faced Greek statue and intense round eyes containing a wealth of wisdom accrued over the years. He and Teddy squared off momentarily with fierce eye contact like crossed swords.

“Thank you for being here, Dr. Intinman ...,” extending the olive branch to him, “...it’s an honor to have you with us and allow me to apologize for my colleague’s overexuberance, if you know what I mean, but he’s rather famous for that sort of thing.”

The dignified man glanced disdainfully at Teddy like a child with whom he’d endured years of painful disappointment,

adding, “You’re right, of course, we must make the *Superspecies* our top priority because of the time and urgency involved. Though in all fairness to Teddy, there are other species on earth with as much of a claim to our attention as any other but yours is vastly more important at the moment.”

“Thank you,” Intinman’s head bowed slightly, “Of course, it’s also possible the *Superspecies* might serve us in other ways by giving us a platform for focusing public attention on the central issue at hand: the devastating effects of unrestrained human progress and expansion without regard for anything else on earth. Giving us a springboard for rallying the troops against more general threats directed at endangered species everywhere. In that regard, *Superspecies* functions as a rallying point and the most obvious example of a more pervasive social problem because of their uniqueness and the sensational manner in which they’ve chosen to fight back—through acts of revenge—drawing attention to much wider issues.”

James withdrew in thought, “Interesting suggestion that’s certainly got potential but criticizing the foundations of a society is always tricky business even under the best of circumstances, rarely succeeding even when accurate. Generally speaking, people aren’t terribly keen at looking too closely at themselves, particularly when it comes to our collective failings as a society.”

Intinman conceded dryly, “Yeah, I realize that, and even if it gets that far it’s rarely pushed past the talking phase!”

James’ gaze shifted to the others at the table who all seemed lost in personal reflections of their own. “Not a bad idea though, I’m just a bit skeptical of its potential. That being said, there’s no reason we can’t give it a shot.”

Besides himself, Jerry, Teddy, and James there were four others at the table, some familiar to Intinman and some not. The



others mostly listened to the conversation, adding nothing, nodding formally or vaguely every now and then with outstretched mouths and fixed jaws as if nothing made any difference one way or another. A couple even seemed indecently amused by the banter and were on the scene simply to take up space and witness another pointless exercise. All manifested varying degrees of hopeless resolution: pale, tired, hollowed-out cheeks, sagging eyebags and drowsy stares. Intinman noted one in particular, a short listless man probably in his forties who crossed his fingers in front of him as if holding onto something the entire time. While seated next to him was a woman whose appearance was more masculine than anyone in the room; bearing a stolid indifference that bordered on cruelty which made Intinman's skin crawl whenever he looked straight at her. She gazed around the room in a profoundly cynical way, revealing years of disenchantment by design or circumstance, he couldn't be sure, while the lock of her lips declared nobody knew anything she didn't and if by chance anyone did, it simply didn't matter. Her gray-tipped hair was yanked back severely off her face and pinned in a tight point on top as if she were undergoing a 24 hour face lift. The rigidity of her posture conjured up images of a middle-aged Matte Spenser.

To the left of them was a husky, sweaty and jittery man with an imperceptible smirk under a vaguely "turn-of-the-century" mustache that begged to be twisted and stroked in a theatrical manner under those slyly cocked lips (followed inevitably by a sinister laugh). The remaining individual was a rather fragile-looking, mousey man with tiny round eyes and a reluctance to look anyone in the face as they addressed him which was infrequent. He slumped low in his seat, resting on his spine with a large collection of pens laid out before him, continually

changing one writing instrument for another and scribbling notes to himself even while nothing was being said. He glanced at Intinman only a couple times before his eyes scurried away and became absorbed in the notebook again.

Intinman took this opportunity to evaluate the other personalities at the table during a brief silence in which no one had anything to add, hoping to acquaint himself with his various colleagues—the ones he hadn't met—if only briefly and visually. He wanted to get a sense of who he was dealing with and who he could count on if things got rough.

“Well, what do you think?” James proposed to the room at large, “In my opinion our friend has made a fairly intriguing suggestion, unless of course you think you have a better one? If so, let's hear it!”

Silence again prevailed as everyone seemed too frightened to reply to the innocent request. Stillness and evasive stares prompted Intinman to wonder how anything would ever get accomplished with this group and he was tempted to probe deeper into the question when another thought occurred to him:

“Does anyone have any suggestions on how we might devise a course of action everyone can agree on?” At this point Intinman was making a strategic decision to allow the others to move the meeting forward rather than forcing it along himself, giving the impression of going with the flow since the flow wasn't going anywhere on its own. He'd learned from experience that in stagnant or irresolvable social situations sometimes the best course of action was to allow other people's viewpoints to play out to their logical and inevitable conclusions. Often the flaws in their thinking as well as his own would come to light and become more manageable and obvious especially when the

direct approach wasn't working. It was one very good way of avoiding the ugly, impossible battle of egos.

"How 'bout we put it to a vote? Your way or our way? Pass the hat around and put 'em inside folks," Teddy smiled with feline confidence and complete self-assurance he could win by declaring an open challenge. He peered around without flinching, believing the others' support was in the bag.

"Good idea," Intinman appeared confident too, "But, before we do, let's clearly state what's at stake here."

"Of course..." with trailing emphasis, "...standard procedure, right?"

Intinman quickly realized it was turning into a war of the egos in spite of his best efforts and this was perhaps inevitable under the circumstances. His adversary was pathologically competitive, an epitome of the widely held belief that Darwin's theory of evolution was not only the basis of the social system in which they lived but could be summed up in terms of "every man for himself". Psychological and fiscal predation were par for the course as well as trying to knock down one's opponent into the waiting abyss of disenfranchise and disrepute. Giving anyone a break was surely a sign of weakness and it was always best to strike first. Why, in some way, it was even a moral primary that kept the fabric of society dynamic, organized and strong. Teddy was aggressive in the crudest possible way: believing that intimidating others with crass noises of remorseless cruelty was the surest way to get what one wanted a majority of the time. Not only that, it was stimulating and primal in this view but he refused to consider what havoc it might wreak in a broader sense if multiplied millions of times over.

Unknown to Intinman but integral to Terry's soul was the dearth of "self-help and improvement" literature out there

championing bold self-improvement by recognizing the more preened, stroked and self-absorbed ego ultimately wins the game of life. Teddy accepted it on faith at this point although if asked point-blank what “the game” was or whether it truly was life itself, couldn’t say with any certainty or even trace his ideas back to specific sources. In any case, maximum development of this mysterious thing called an ego contained the secrets to joy and happiness in addition to being the ultimate focus of life and living. In cryptic terms and mystical tongues, “life formulas” and other extravagances he caught the gist of it all: an edge could be had without referring to the volumes, near enough to base an entire existence on. How could a social creed so prevalent, backed by so much financial support and TV coverage be wrong in the first place and who could be certain of anything anyway? One took what one found in one’s immediate surroundings and ran with it.

“OK, what’s your greatest concern?” Intinman inquired firmly, “What do you think we ought to do then?”

“Well, personally I’d like to continue working with endangered species in western Africa and South America. There are at least eight different species in these regions on the fast track to extinction that can still be saved if we act now...*but* we have to act now,” Teddy emphasized with a taut grimace.

“What if we agree to focus on the endangered species on your list and mine at the same time, highlighting their specific problems as one? I’ll concentrate on the *Superspecies* and their unique position, trying to generate some interest in them while shining a light on the EPA’s destructive policies. Going into the political side of things I’m clearly aware of and encouraging the public to put pressure on Washington to halt its activities...” Intinman searched Teddy’s wide grin and horse-like teeth that

looked like they could do serious damage to several acres of grain. “Meanwhile you can promote your views alongside mine in a joint platform for all the most critically threatened species you’re currently involved with and where your expertise lies, both of us sticking to the animals of major concern to us.”

“I agree...” Teddy’s voice rose on noble wings, “...and I want you to know I’m not against you nor am I trying to be difficult, it’s just that some of us, me especially, have put a lot of work into seeing our projects through and don’t like the idea of some newcomer—nothing personal—no matter who he is, changing everything and forcing me to neglect my own projects. I’m sorry but I have to speak my mind on this.”

“Well put and I appreciate your concerns but it sounds to me like there are no conflicts between us if we commit to working together. You’re trying to make sure your work doesn’t fall through the cracks and I wouldn’t want that happening to me either so I sympathize completely.”

“Perhaps we don’t need to vote on it then...” James declared happily, glancing from one to the other, “...we’re united in purpose and it’s all just a misunderstanding.”

But Teddy didn’t appear satisfied; one look at his face said there was something still gnawing at him and not easily righted. He seemed troubled and the gears in his head churned on overdrive. “I think we need to get something straight around here—who’s in charge now? Formerly it was me under Dr. James and I don’t see any reason to change that now.” Glancing challengingly at the other board members with his best battle face that could easily turn into an umbrella of disarming chumminess.

“So we’ve finally gotten past which species we’re going to back?” the sly, stern woman demanded in her gracelessly supe-

rior manner as if talking to a group of school boys (evidently all men were little boys in her vast and implacable understanding).

“Yes,” snapped James in a distracted tone, exasperated by her presumed “higher intelligence” and “superior sensibility” he didn’t find literally true and only served to make him loathe her presence.

“Yes...,” Teddy repeated authoritatively, taking charge of the situation and any opportunity to lead, “...we just need to establish who’s in charge now.” His words sliced through the air in the manner of a mugger’s blade, not to be taken lightly yet hard to take seriously due to the source. Intinman could only gaze at the spectacle in wide wonder because Teddy’s means of getting his point across was so alien to him being the desperate man he was and needing to maintain his privileges at all costs for his own survival; while Intinman himself never lived according to those terms. Roles and titles were never as important as true successes or failures and certainly were no substitute for them. Intinman occupied his time trying to unearth life’s mysteries, allowing nothing to slip by that hadn’t been thoroughly evaluated for potential wisdom or insights. Social status and currying favor with others didn’t fit well into that scheme of things and, as a result, struck him as utter nonsense when all was said and done. Like so much chaff, it was a waste of everyone’s time.

Intinman sat still without looking at anyone or avoiding anyone’s gaze, eyes open and perceptive, waiting patiently for the shoe to drop and leaving himself exposed to the process. The outcome of this growing fiasco was still uncertain but he never allowed his conduct to be determined by external forces; instead going along with the inertia as it played out, making up his own mind and existing in harmony with whatever

forces acted on him without resistance or surrender. He never wanted to be out of step with the natural environment even when at odds with other people, which made him question the relationship between the two if there was any at all. Wondering at odd times if people were in fact unnatural.

“You’re absolutely right, we should,” Intinman rose to the challenge with an illegible expression that startled Teddy into temporary silence. Something was alien in his confidence; a thick shell that protected the softer, life-giving internals, not allowing them to be penetrated like the supple body of a clam. More to the point, Intinman felt nothing but a mild irritation and a sense that whatever came his way he was ready and prepared to deal with. Noisy egotists posed no threat whatsoever and on the whole struck him as a rather pathetic group and a waste of time to be dismissed with careless disregard. Still, he found reason to pity Teddy for a personality in constant fear of discovery in a world that would eventually expose him for the helpless and insignificant creature he was.

“We can vote on it if you like,” Intinman casually suggested, making Teddy glance around at the others with heightened suspicions. He wasn’t entirely sure which way things would go at this point since he’d made such a fool of himself and felt a bit awestruck by a man so sure of himself. What was he up to and what was his game anyway? And as if in response to these thoughts, Intinman smiled without ulterior motive or artifice and Teddy’s eyes lowered as a hand was extended out in cooperative competition.

‘What a master!’ Teddy simmered in all-consuming jealousy, ‘But now I see what the game is: he reels them in by playing the generous, sacrificing soul and convincing people he’s some kind of a saint or something. This guy’s definitely good and I

should remember not to take my eyes off him in the future!' He warned in bitter admiration.

Teddy nodded sharply, "*We could* do that but I don't see why it's necessary. I've always been in charge of policy decisions around here and nothing's changed as far as I can see."

"Yes, it has..." James intervened while wringing his hands in frustration, "...Dr. Intinman's a renowned expert in the field who's served this agency well and put us on the map too." Turning toward Intinman full of apology and distress, "I'm terribly sorry for this shameful display, I don't know what's gotten into Teddy," face red and sweaty as he tried maintaining some semblance of dignity in the midst of grade school antics.

"But I don't understand why!" whining with clenched fists now, Teddy looked like a neglected child being denied its heart's desire. He glanced several times at the exit then at the chairs, seeking a way out of the unpleasant situation.

"I've already made up my mind, Teddy!" James banged on the table, "Dr. Intinman's in charge of policy after we all agreed to dedicate this agency to his work and protecting the species he's worked so hard on. His contributions will ultimately benefit us all if we commit to working alongside him. You'll see!"

Intinman was encouraged by these words after enduring Teddy's hostility for the better part of an hour and worrying his new associates might turn against him. Not the least bit enamored with the prospect of being ganged up on in that way.

"Thank you, Dr. James," giving an appreciative little nod. "A couple things I'd like to say now that I've got everyone's attention. Many of us haven't had a chance to be properly introduced because our organization's rather new and took shape under unusual circumstances. We've been thrown together as diverse individuals from a variety of environmental



and animal rights backgrounds who, I believe, share one common and tangible goal: saving all natural things from the threat of human destruction and encroachment. I realize the *Superspecies* is only one of many groups worthy of preservation and there are others out there equally as important, but what sets them apart in an immediate sense is their vital importance in the evolutionary cycle and for that reason alone we should focus primarily on them in the short term. Believe me when I tell you, there won't be any of them left if we fail to do this because they're actively being destroyed and, if successful, we'll never be able to witness their growth or development first-hand. It'd be a tragedy of epic proportions since they hold the key to so many unanswered questions of interest to science. Right now the public has a certain fascination with them we should try to capitalize on before it's too late as it won't last forever. They're the living freaks of science—exceptional in their own right—thrown up from the natural world which can be used to shed light on much broader issues like unrestrained progress and its impact on humans and animals alike. We should also try to keep in mind that our actions are displacing and harming members of our own race too...so the obvious question is: if we can't even help ourselves, who can we help?"

"And how do you suggest we perform this little trick of yours?" Teddy spat out venomously; seated and looking like a musty pile of clothes that, now used, would continue to stink from spite alone.

James turned around sharply and shot him a look of censure which made everyone wish they were somewhere else. Except Teddy of course who remained completely unbowed and actually showed signs of a smirk on his face.

"We can start by instilling the public with the idea that

preserving all life is the only solution and the *Superspecies* is just one part of a larger issue in which man's unbridled egotism, blind pursuit of progress and a complete lack of humility before nature are the problems. We direct the nation's attention toward our immense failings in this area, it being the root of world collapse on so many fronts (not the least of which is our inability to get along with each other) and is incidentally what *Superspecies* is reacting to when it resorts to acts of violence against us—ignorance breeds ignorance and violence breeds violence in other words! The existence of the *Superspecies* is somewhat apocalyptic in that sense, it demands that humankind own up to its glaring misdeeds and seek reparation for a profound sense of misguidance or risk annihilation by its own hand. We must admit our collective failure and turn the microscope back on ourselves to a deep, soulful, penetrating self-evaluation so we might figure out, once and for all, why these destructive patterns persist in society. This is not an option! Of course, we can continue to wage war on the *Superspecies* and all its cousins while avoiding the responsibility in an attempt to escape the challenge laid at our feet. Forgetting that human violence has escalated the situation to its current stage in the first place but, if we do that, we'll most likely end up destroying all life on earth due to the path forged for the future. These creatures quite possibly represent the greatest challenge humans have ever faced: the challenge to act differently, more conscientiously than we've ever done before, to change the inside and not the outside world without building monuments to ourselves or praising our achievements in verse and song for dubious reasons. To succeed we must do it quietly with tremendous humility and care without acting like the monsters history so often attests to. It's a chance to

genuinely practice the ideals our society claims to hold dear: intelligence, truth, reason, justice, universal wisdom, etc.”

“—Which is what we haven’t done in the past,” someone interrupted, catching the rhythm and unraveling it like a ball of string. “Historically, we’ve always championed sets of values that only served to justify certain deeds and convince people to support one or another form of authority.”

It was the cynical woman with stern visage looking almost as serious as before but with a different quality. Something had shaken her up; something Intinman had said. She sat staring at him, moved by his words, where before her forehead crinkled like crepe paper now was devoid of all marks.

Intinman was dumbfounded and the others gaped at the unbelievable transformation in her. Going from an impregnable fortress to a small child gazing in wonder at something for the first time, invigorated by what she’d heard and anxious to get involved. They had trouble recognizing her.

“Yes, thank you,” Intinman forced a reply, “Mrs.?”

“—Carlin,” she smiled widely, “Ms. Carlin.”

The others were still staring at the exchange as Pickney watched Intinman’s reaction with his calm, inscrutable expression giving no sign of profound surprise. The only blip being a momentary flicker when their eyes met and locked.

“Thank you again, Ms. Carlin,” more formally this time.

“Call me Maggie...,” with just a hint of girlish admiration no one imagined her capable of, causing jaws to drop a full inch lower at the table. Her eyes glowed brightly and nobody moved for fear of spoiling the moment.

A pronounced southern drawl observed, “I declare I’ve never heard more sensible words in all my life! Mostly what I’ve been forced to listen to in endless meetings like this one is how much

money we need to support our efforts to make more money which goes to support efforts to obtain even more money, or power, or ad campaigns, or whatever! Nothing—I tell you nothing!—is done to save the poor animals or ecological systems we’re sworn to protect! Some of us act more like politicians without credentials and no one seems to think there’s anything wrong with that. Why?” glaring scathingly around the table.

Intinman remained silent. He was wary of joining her critique of the way things were done in the past with her former colleagues (some of whom were present no doubt) because it had the potential to lead to a lot of bad blood and he wished to avoid that. Besides, he wasn’t personally aware of the circumstances she was referring to and couldn’t speak with any authority on the subject. The only thing he could do (and planned to do) was see things were done differently in the future.

“We’ve been focusing too much on ourselves...” she frowned deeply, “...our own personal gain instead of the reasons we’re here to begin with: to protect the plants and animals of this planet! Some of us have been trying to advance our careers, get our names in the papers or be invited to the right parties or clubs rather than putting ourselves out for the causes we claim to support. Personally, I think it’s a shame and Dr. Intinman was unknowingly referring to us when he spoke of the need for humility and quiet, careful action.”

“Challenging words!” Intinman couldn’t help shouting out, “Sounds like you’re calling the room to action...how very, very courageous of you!”

His eyes drifted around the room in an attempt to gauge the general reaction. Jerry Pickney still looked somewhat surprised by all the commotion and at the same time visibly

pleased. Teddy was furious and glowered in the corner with his head down, shadowy and vindictive, stretching his lips out in a painful-looking gesture. James was calm and sat with his hands folded in front of him, wearing an expansive, serene, almost amused grin on his face. Reactions from the others were mixed with some uncertain about which way to go and probably hoping someone would take the reins for them. Intinman meanwhile suspected it was a good time to talk about specific actions and getting everyone in agreement on something as the opportunity presented itself.

“We have to do something about the latest threat at White River,” in a desperate and commanding voice, “That’s the next candidate for mass extermination and it’s due to happen in less than a week.”

“A week? We can’t possibly mobilize by then!” Teddy scoffed at the thought.

“At least we can try, can’t we? And since it won’t be easy as you’ve pointed out, we’re going to need everyone’s help including yours.”

“Pardon me, Dr. Intinman...,” James glanced up thoughtfully, “...don’t you think it’s a good idea to inform us exactly what’s gonna happen at White River so we might get a clearer picture of why it demands our immediate help?”

“I’d be more than happy to, as some of you already know the EPA is famous for its *Superspecies* extermination programs geared toward protecting the public from attacks committed by these creatures, which is incidentally the biggest obstacle to preserving them and convincing the public to accept how important their survival is. They’re violent, yes, but their reaction is provoked by our own aggressive behavior toward them and their shrinking habitats. Any conscious entity on

any level is going to defend itself against obvious threats to survival if it wants to continue to exist, right? The *Superspecies* just happens to be the most capable of carrying this out due to its highly-advanced and highly-attuned nature.”

Intinman sighed and continued, “The EPA is planning to utilize a vast arsenal of methods to achieve its goal of one hundred percent kill ratio: large groups of hunters, illegal traps, varieties of chemical and biological weapons and maybe even a few explosives—all beginning in one week! I propose we start framing a plan now to prevent it from happening in the first place or after it starts at the very latest,” with pursed lips and strained facial features. “Everyone can offer their suggestions on the most effective course of action.”

Intinman flashed his best winning smile, half-heartedly at best, as the room set upon the task of collective inspiration. Scanning their faces and figuring out how he came across to people who viewed him as part celebrity, part unwelcome conqueror while feeling uneasy with either role. He was forced to think about roles a lot lately and being placed in them by circumstances beyond his control. Absent any consent or desire on his part but integral to the machinery of social situations in this complex and inscrutable human jungle. How he loathed it at times! Was the interplay and hierarchy of roles important enough to sacrifice every living creature and human ideal like frightened savages offering infants to angry gods? Who was this god that demanded so much sacrifice from every man, woman and child on earth to be something other than themselves in a social context, other than strictly individual personalities? What’s in a role anyway he wondered? A hypothetical persona projected on the artificial tableau of pecking orders? This god never revealed his true intentions or the source of his privilege,

or even the universal wisdom of his message but maybe absolute freedom and unfettered association are things people truly fear in the darkest recesses of their minds. Perhaps, once tasted, loneliness and confusion take over and become too unbearable, making freedom a hateful thing in practice. Hasty decisions are sometimes made to sing freedom's praises in public—strictly from habit—while making every attempt to undermine and escape it in real life. My god, look at all the everyday traps people willingly rush into with open arms! Hypocrisy's what it is! The overall indictment of society made him shudder as much as the prevalence of something so unrecognized and definitive in day-to-day existence. Perhaps this angry god offered human beings the one thing they desired most but were least willing to admit, routine and control. A predictable life through the security of roles and avoidance of the greatest fear of all: the unknown behind every uncharted path to freedom.

It seems the *Superspecies* embodies one of our most instinctual collective fears and a complete shake up of the normal concept of things which probably makes them even more difficult to digest for most people. At least it seemed that way as he stood there listening to the others talking amongst themselves about how to save them. It's just possible that underneath the skin we're nothing more than cringing animals afraid of the future and any potential threat to the stability of ordinary life. Superstitious beings clinging to the belief that if we stand together completely still and don't stir things up too much, the angry god will take pity and allow us to continue along the narrow path we've chosen.

“Before we begin, I'd like to talk a little bit about White River. What I've seen there, DNA test results and the behavior of bears in the park. They demonstrate the most amazing expressions

of *Superspecies* gene types I've seen to date and I'd like to explain why."

Intinman's face transformed a bit while speaking on his favorite subject and his weariness melted back in a fire of internal origin. His eyes became clearer and more penetrating and the angles of his face grew sharper and more attractive; firming up at the cheek, jaw and forehead. His mouth moved in precise symmetry lines as words of insight came out too. Everyone listened in silence, captivated by the changes that predicted more interesting things to come.

Following a rather thorough depiction of the latest events at White River, he capped off with, "It was the most astonishing example of *Superspecies* behavior anyone's witnessed anywhere in the world!" After describing the kidnapping of the little girl and her harrowing rescue. "And today I learned they outdid themselves better than that, doing things I never would've imagined possible if not from a reliable source!"

The table was filled with questioning faces and Intinman sensed he was getting too far ahead of himself. After sighing again, he added, "However, I think I should tell you something about myself and how I came to be here in the first place to clear up any confusion and then you can ask me anything you like." Eyes darting from face to face, self-conscious and confident this motley group might eventually turn into one singular will.

"Please proceed as you were," James encouraged him.

"Some of you may already know I was chief of biological research at the EPA for the past twenty-one years before resigning a few months ago. During that time, I worked closely with the EPA's animal research and control center before writing and publishing a paper called *Superspecies* theory outlining my belief that a super intelligent, highly-advanced and genetically-



superior species had been discovered on earth. It was based on many years of DNA analysis and intelligence testing performed on dozens of them in captivity. The bears displayed superior intelligence in all areas of analytical reasoning and cognitive function and when the theory was finally published it generated such a stir in the biological community people split into opposing camps based on individual interpretations of the theory. Each group possessed incompatible views not only about the existence of them in the first place but their overall significance and how they should be dealt with in general.”

“After enough evidence was collected by my peers to corroborate the theory the EPA formed the Superspecies Reclamation Project which seemed harmless at the beginning. The sole purpose being to study all aspects of the new phenomenon and submit regular reports for scientific edification, progress tracking and internal scrutiny by the department. It started out with the best intentions but when the animals became increasingly violent toward human beings and no other animals, the agency gradually shifted focus to eliminating the new species. At that point, I was assigned the task of locating them so the government could do away with them starting about three years ago...”

Intinman looked sick and dejected after the last sentence, glancing around at the other board members with eyes lowered and arms at his sides. “I left several months ago when my conflicting roles as legitimate researcher and private detective for an extermination squad got the better of me...both as a scientist and human being,” choking on feelings of regret that ambushed him as though waiting for this very moment. He coughed several times in an effort to conceal his embarrassment, turning away from the prying stares.

Pickney rose to his defense, “Morey’s been under a lot of pressure lately. Please try to understand...,” with wide open, appealing eyes. Intinman was grateful for these few choice words since it bolstered his resolve hearing something—anything—to distract him from his own internal conflict. He’d almost forgotten his own embarrassment by the time he spun around to face them with newfound will and determination.

“It’s alright,” a soothing voice eked out. It was Ms. Carlin who’d become somewhat endeared to Intinman at this stage because he evoked natural female sympathies in her that rose to fever pitch after long hiatus and every moment seemed more and more ready to bathe in the light of fresh sensibilities. “Speak freely and don’t worry what these old codgers think! You are untouched!” No one was quite sure what “untouched” meant and got the impression she didn’t know either but it sounded like a blessing and that alone fit the situation better than literal truth.

“She’s right,” James assured him, “We want to hear this.”

“Please continue with what you were saying. Go on...go on please!” Carlin begged, tilting her head toward him with bright and shiny face almost child-like in appearance. This strange and awkward tribute both inspired and frightened him.

“Roles, roles,” he muttered without relevance.

“Don’t worry Morey, everything’s alright,” James lent his voice to the choir.

“You’re all so kind and supportive,” Intinman struggled, “I’m a bit of a silly old fool when it comes right down to it but... well...it’s been hard playing both sides of the fence as observer of life and harbinger of death.” Lowering his head in shame and self-disgust met with only silence this time as the image of trembling torment before them pierced the heart of everyone

present, evoking incidental reactions.

Pickney rose to comfort him and help him back to his chair but he noticed it, saw what he was up to and lifted his head to speak, waving him back into place.

“White River’s just the latest in a long line of similar events I’ll try to describe if I can work up the courage. You need to know what the reality’s like on the ground and what we’re up against as far as destructive forces go. Thousands upon thousands of animals have been killed over the years in case you don’t know...,” in bell heavy tones, “...and not just bears!”

“Everything’s gone after the EPA goes in,” Pickney frowned intensely.

“You mean other animals too? Not just the *Superspecies*?” James inquired, leaning forward on his elbows.

“All plants and animals. *Everything!*”

Intinman’s face turned menacing red and the veins bulged out on his neck. His fists tightened as if getting ready to knock out an invisible person in the room to equalize the tremendous injustice as the table of shocked faces gaped and gasped.

“Adirondack Park in New York state was the last and worst of the extermination projects we participated in about a year ago when there was an abrupt increase in the number of deaths related to bear attacks. We were called in to capture some of them to harvest blood samples and perform tests after the news became public. Ultimately proving that *Superspecies* signatures were present in the park’s population. The information was promptly reported to the EPA’s general director who responded by shutting down the park and placing me in charge of the extermination program. Now you may ask yourself, why did I do it? To be honest, at the time I thought I was doing the right thing. We were frightened, confused and convinced it was the

safest option. In addition, I thought I was doing a great service to the nation because we were all so shocked by accounts of bears killing eight people at Adirondack, ripping large chunks out of their bodies and dismembering limbs in some cases. This was before I realized why they were doing it.”

“That’s gruesome,” Carlin’s face bunched up, shaking her head.

“I thought this behavior was an unfortunate consequence of the transformation of *Superspecies* into a higher being or an unintended consequence of the gene itself but soon realized, thanks to the research of Dr. Catrell, man’s disrespectful and aggressive behavior toward them was inciting the acts.”

“Just a minute, Dr. Intinman, you’re saying *Superspecies* is aggressive because of man’s behavior toward them?” James’ jaw dropped in amazement, “You mentioned that before but I wasn’t sure I got it. How in blazes did you arrive at that conclusion?”

“Two reasons...,” with a “glad-you-asked” tone, “...first the bears didn’t act aggressively toward other animals in their environments unless threatened in some territorial way. Not a single aggressive incident could be traced back to them which means it isn’t generalized but directed specifically at human beings, either because of something we’re doing or because of something the *Superspecies* perceives us to be doing that threatens their survival. I support the first possibility because it makes more sense and can be backed by abundant facts.”

“The other reason I already mentioned: the behavioral tests of Dr. Catrell, an associate and long-time adversary of mine who took the *Superspecies* theory and developed his own take on it. Believing from the start the behavioral side of a high-functioning intelligence must have some form of expression beyond strict genetics and began conducting his

own research along those lines. Everyone laughed at the idea at first, including me, because we believed the stage of development was too early to display any clinical behavioral indicators—beyond mere naked aggression of course—but to make a long story short he was right and we were wrong.”

“Tell him what the tests showed,” Pickney interrupted impatiently, sensing Morey drifting too far off topic.

“The tests? Oh *those!* Sorry but when I get going I have trouble sticking to the point sometimes,” Intinman laughed at himself, leaning over with arms pressed to his sides. “There were behavioral tests performed on bears from all over the world. Black bears, grizzlies, Kodiaks, sun bears, polar bears and sloth bears placed in cages and exposed to different behaviors, attitudes and postures by the researchers. They even brought in professional actors in the later stages of the study to act out certain roles for the benefit of the animals: from being kind and friendly to being mean, angry, violent, neglectful and indifferent. As it turned out—and you may be able to appreciate this—kind, familiar, curious, supportive and respectful attitudes over time created a sharp change in the animals’ initial negative response to captivity. They became more docile and receptive when they were treated well and horribly violent when subjected to arrogant, aggressive, selfish or condescending behavior. Throughout the testing process they were highly perceptive and aware.”

“Big surprise there—everything human beings hate,” Teddy replied scathingly, gazing at Intinman with an implicating eye to topple his confidence. Viewing as arrogant anyone who took charge of situations other than himself.

“You’re absolutely right...,” Intinman scored well in having others reply the way he wanted; grinning enthusiastically at

Teddy. "...and they did react positively to kind, patient behavior where the researchers and actors showed a genuine interest in them, appreciating the animals' needs and developing a good rapport with them. The bears lost all aggressive tendencies toward them over a period of months, so much so they became almost what you might call "domesticated". Imagine bears fresh from the forest being domesticated so quickly!"

Intinman beamed again, basking in glorious reminiscence that made small quick dimples appear at the corners of his mouth.

"On the other hand when researchers exposed the bears to hateful, arrogant or even aggressive behavior they became disturbed, frightened, silently watchful and explosively violent toward their captors and this phenomenon carried over to all *Superspecies* types: blacks, browns, Kodiaks, polar bears, suns and sloths—any type possessing the proper gene sequences to be considered part of the class and all taken from areas where there were a high number of attacks."

Intinman smiled self-consciously while scanning their faces. "And that, Dr. James, is why I believe *Superspecies* bears are acting in an aggressive manner, it all comes down to man's posture toward them."

"Point taken," James sorted through the wave of information tossed out for general consumption. "Let me add that it sounds like your assumptions are correct even though I haven't witnessed the evidence for myself. Can you tell us a bit more about what happens in these parks? Be more specific?"

"Oh, that's an extraordinary thing," Intinman laughed bitterly with a sour face, "Like I mentioned before they bring in hunters, nasty chemicals and brutal, primitive traps that allow animals to suffer for days in many cases before bleeding to death long

and slow, wailing and suffering the entire time.”

“Oh, my god!” Carlin howled out, covering her mouth and looking ashamed of the outburst.

“I agree,” James glanced at her, nodding affirmatively.

“In the first wave at Adirondack hundreds of hunters were placed in the park, forming a battle line that started at one end and ended at the other. They sought out every piece of bear sign available—scat, tracks, claw marks, carrion—and shot every one on sight, cubs and all. Don’t forget that not all bears in a locality are necessarily *Superspecies* bears since it’s a highly selective, hereditary form of specialized, perhaps even random development. But when all was said and done, the entire population of the park was wiped out. That’s over 160 bears killed in all! They started in the northwestern region of the park near Saranac Lake and worked their way down to the southeastern corner at Lake George, and just to make sure they got every one, military-grade chemical and biological weapons were placed at strategic locations throughout the area to kill off the bears’ food supply, prime feeding rivers were poisoned and many large, enclosed traps were laid out, complete with carrion lures and giant bone-crushing spring traps. Explosives were also used to kill them in their dens.”

“Unbelievable!” James’ mouth and eyes popped open, “I had no idea how serious it was!”

“That’s just one project too,” Intinman was quick to point out, “There are tons of other cases just as bad if not worse in other parts of the country, down south and out west primarily. Anyway, I hope I’m making the situation clear and giving you some idea of the importance of acting now to prevent the same thing from happening at White River.”

Everyone at the table was silent for a long time and only Teddy

had the courage to speak up first, “I’m sorry I doubted the value of your work. After hearing you speak, I can see you’re sincere and that something has to be done to stop it immediately...” gazing in Intinman’s direction but lost in his own thoughts.

The authenticity of Teddy’s appeal stirred the others to profound depths. If the staunchest opponent had surrendered to this passionate, articulate stranger what in the world would prevent them from agreeing? At least that appeared to be the prevailing sentiment as they sat around digesting it all.

Intinman acknowledged Teddy with equal gravity, “And, don’t forget, it’s not just bears being threatened but the entire ecosystem.”

“What else happened in New York?” James asked with more than casual interest. His personality came across as similar to Intinman’s in maintaining composure and being a man for all seasons so to speak. Frankly, it was amazing their personalities didn’t clash being so similar.

“Oh, Adirondack—” Intinman sighed as images like a tragic explosion played across his face, “—became a natural disaster. They used so many military-grade chemical and biological agents the place will remain uninhabitable for ten years or more and the entire ecosystem needs to build itself back from the ground up. When all was said and done, dead, decaying plants and animals were spread out as far as the eye could see and the place looked like a nightmare vision following a nuclear blast or volcano explosion—a total wasteland! In particularly treacherous regions where there were too many places for animals to hide, mostly in higher elevations, we set fires that burned down thousands of acres to flesh them out.”

“The air, soil and groundwater were contaminated too,” Pickney frowned.



Intinman's voice lowered to a whisper as he hunkered down and moved closer to take them all in his confidence, "But they performed most of the operation in the winter, February, while the bears were still in their dens. I told them to wait but they wouldn't listen, had to do it right then and there! So there may be some still alive even though they sent in a shabby, disorganized group of hunters to perform a "clean-up" operation in the spring. They weren't very competent or motivated in my opinion. Standard government inefficiency. Besides, the bears may have been so traumatized by the original event they knew enough to stay in their dens for a good part of the spring or at least while the hunters were there, but bears can't survive for long without food holed up in their dens so most are probably dead."

Intinman stared ahead hypnotically, grim and unfocused.

"Let me get this straight," James raised his voice, frowning, "They devastated an entire park for a single creature? How come I didn't hear anything about this?"

"Ah, the magic of the EPA! The power to keep its handiwork out of the papers when it wants to...a glorious trick! Suffice it to say it's not hard for any federal agency to keep unflattering news out of the public eye when it wants to. There are tacit agreements and pressures to be applied here, there and everywhere..." pausing to reflect on it and changing the subject, "There's another, more subtle reason why we need to protect the bears at White River although I'm a little reluctant to tell you because you won't believe me. Can't believe it myself in fact!"

"Huh?" James sputtered, "What does that mean?"

Pickney noted the look on Intinman's face as he struggled with the idea of telling the others about recent events at White

River for fear it might backfire on him again. He swore he wouldn't do it but was beginning to trust the people in the room more and more and realized if he really wanted them on his side he might have to drive home the point of how truly important the animals were. He also needed to dispel any further doubts about the *Superspecies* cause being worthwhile.

Probing the faces, he committed, "Earlier today I spoke with Jack Falcon, forest director at White River, who informed me of some truly incredible events at the park. Something he and his partner witnessed, a breakthrough! A few days ago there was a forest fire that raged for several days and baffled firefighters searching for the cause because it was scattered over a wide area and appeared to have no central point of origin. However, as Mr. Falcon and his partner were walking back, they found themselves in the path of three bears running through the forest with flaming objects in their mouths. Falcon's assistant was knocked down during the exchange but the bears didn't attack or stop to take notice of what they were doing. They kept right on going. You might think that in itself is strange but wait till you hear the best part! Eventually they caught up with a group of bears in another part of the forest, most likely the same ones, and discovered them actually using stones and kindling to light fires like our very own human ancestors! And, after lighting the sticks, the animals were followed and spotted carrying them into the woods and setting fires all over the place."

He gazed at them self-consciously, wondering if anyone would believe such a fantastic tale and on hearing himself began to realize just how ridiculous it sounded. The table remained unnervingly quiet and flickers of concealed fear mixed with doubt and embarrassment stared back at him. Fear perhaps he'd lost his mind or was perpetrating a joke in poor taste. Also, the

way they avoided his gaze seemed to indicate an overwhelming disappointment in him.

James cleared his throat in preparation for a difficult inquiry, "Uh, hold on a second, Dr. Intinman, did I hear you right?" his tone modified by concern over whether his initial faith in the man might've been a bit too hasty or misguided and wondering if "the great man" was out to lunch.

"I understand your reaction and it's perfectly legitimate," Intinman resumed in good humor, "You're probably wondering if I haven't lost my mind completely since it sounds too insane to be true but I have it on good authority the events I've described to you actually happened. Mr. Falcon, who I have complete confidence in and don't think would ever perpetrate a hoax of this magnitude, witnessed it himself and relayed the information directly to me. He understands how serious this is and though I admit I haven't seen the evidence personally, which is why I'm going to check it out tomorrow, it does make sense from a *Superspecies* perspective. It's simply the next logical step in their development and falls well within the realm of possibility for them to manipulate and utilize crude implements due to improved motor skills and grappling capabilities accompanying the species' natural potential."

"I'd love to see any evidence you find," James remarked dryly; still reeling from the sting of looking foolish for defending him.

"You're at the top of the list..." Intinman vowed with a nod, "...and I hope you all realize, if this is true, how important our defense of White River actually is. *Superspecies* is the most valuable biological asset of our day and those bears in Colorado are the most highly developed of all. It's not possible to overstate this!"

"Falcon and his partner actually saw this?" Pickney inquired

with one cocked eye, "That's beyond belief, Morey!" Turning to the others with a tight face, "Morey's right, it's possible for them to do this no matter how unlikely it sounds." Then back to Intinman with a few lingering doubts, "Are you sure about this?"

"That's what the man said and I'm inclined to believe him. Of course I asked to be taken to the spot where the incident took place so I can see it for myself but, in my opinion, the important question is how we're going to stop the impending disaster from happening in the first place. What steps can be taken now?"

"Or can it be stopped at all?" James floated.

"The media's a good place to keep focused on..." Pickney tossed out, "...I personally think we should keep banging away on that front." Peering directly at Intinman with chin up in a gesture of resolve.

"But is it worth the risk?"

"What risk?" asked James.

"The risk of violating our confidentiality agreement with the EPA. We're not allowed to make reference to anything we've done in our projects, mainly the classified ones, according to the terms of our contract."

Pickney added to that, "Technically, we're not allowed to resign from the agency till they've had a chance to secure qualified replacements or the contract expires. Neither of which happened before we left. We exited on very bad terms and it's highly likely they'll try to get revenge in some way."

"He's right you know, even now they're trying to bring us up on criminal charges and destroy our careers by professionally and publicly denouncing us," Intinman reflected with a severe look bordering on anguish, "And they might succeed too but

that's nothing compared to the sheer havoc their ruthless projects have done to us already through numerous compromises of our personal integrity. We all agree on that. As far as going to the papers with the story, we've taken steps in that direction already during a press conference but are willing to go as far as it takes to get the job done. We've talked about it at length and decided if it goes to trial we'll argue the information had to be released in the interest of public safety, superseding all confidentiality claims by the agency. Similar to tobacco industry secrets that were eventually released under public disclosure, safety and protection laws. The EPA is after all destroying entire ecosystems without telling anyone."

"Interesting," James murmured, "Very..."

"Though we can't rely on the public's reaction being overwhelmingly positive," Pickney warned, "Never know which way they'll go to be honest. If people take our side then—wonderful!—we have a chance. If not, we'll almost certainly go to prison."

"Prison?" Several people at the table gasped.

"Yes, but I say again, we're more than willing to take that chance and know full well what we're getting into because we have to," Pickney explained to them. "Dr. Bennett knows the risks too," referring to his absent colleague with pride.

"I wasn't aware you were in such danger when you resigned from the EPA," James confessed openly; somewhat shocked by the realization. "Seems you're taking one heck of a bigger chance than the rest of us when all's said and done!"

"That may be true..." Intinman's chin lowered in reflection, "...but it wouldn't be easy even without the incredible danger since nothing like this has ever been done before. Our job is to stop a federal agency entrusted with protecting the

environment from destroying it, at the same time the law's on the side of the opposition which we're breaking by revealing what's going on behind the scenes and exposing it. We also need to sway a somewhat hostile public over to our side though the thing we're attempting to protect and win sympathy for is a vicious and deadly beast—no small task to say the least! We need to educate them on why the bears are acting that way in the first place, on all the subtle nuances of a complex issue so they'll accept that it's right to save them. A major challenge in the first place where we need to convince people to accept partial responsibility for an unfortunate situation.”

“Many groups out there oppose *Superspecies* preservation simply because they've killed so many people which is completely understandable but complicates the issue immensely for us,” Pickney explained.

“Simply stated...,” Intinman frowned while continuing, “... there's no precedent for what we're about to do. We're on our own and most of the cards are stacked against us. Forget about the challenges Drs. Bennett, Pickney and myself face because they're nothing compared to the challenges we all face together.”

The group was subdued as an odd collection of limp bodies sitting around pondering where to begin and expecting to be led by the nose by anyone with boundless energy. The meeting was winding up and had been physically and mentally exhausting for everyone as they realized the work hadn't begun yet and the thought alone made them weary.

“Alright...,” Intinman announced in closing, “...I'll need to go to White River right away and survey the park before the government arrives. I also want to see the director there and get a look at the evidence left behind by the bears while it's still fresh. I'm gonna collect samples from the site and be back in a

few days.”

“Good,” James assumed the role of echoing sentiments from everyone at the table as the others turned to Intinman like an epic figure from a heroic tale doing mysterious, improbable things deserving of their reverence and respect.

“I’ll make sure the things we’ve discussed get taken care of while you’re away,” James assured him. “Some of us will make contact with the media while others will rally the protesters outside White River. When does it begin?”

“The closing of the park? Five days from now.”

“Not much time.”

“By the way...,” Pickney recalled a thorn in their side, “...the new project director following Morey’s departure is something of a fanatic; thought you ought to know about her. She’s a ruthless individual willing to do almost anything to further the cause of the EPA and she’ll be there during the extermination.”

“Who is she?” James sounded intrigued.

“Matte Spenser’s her name and a word of warning about her, she’s guaranteed to be a major pain in the ass! She was nothing but trouble the entire time at the agency and I’m sure she’s much worse now that she’s in charge,” filled with dread.

“Fair warning has been given and taken,” James chuckled carelessly, “When are you leaving?” to Intinman.

He glanced at Pickney, “Early tomorrow morning good enough for you?”

“I’d rather not...,” was the startled reply, “...take Sam.”

“It’s up to you...because of the accident?”

“Yes,” dismally.

