Good Dog (entry #05)
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The beaver could not suppress his giggles as his friend led him, blindfolded, toward what he presumed was the basement of the house. "All I'm saying," he said between chuckles, "is that slapping a blindfold on your best friend and then leading him to the basement seems a little risqué is all."

"It's because it's a surprise," said the goose. "If you could see then it wouldn't be a surprise."

"I could just close my eyes."

"You'd peek. I know you."

"I could peek now," retorted the beaver. He tilted back his head to show the gap between the blindfold and his muzzle. "I see you, Tommy…" he said, peering at his friend under the blindfold. The goose honked angrily and clapped a wing across his friend's face.

"*No peeking!*" The beaver continued giggling, but he complied with the order while the goose led him carefully through the house and down the back stairs to the basement. Finally, he gently tugged the beaver to a halt and dramatically announced, "Welcome to my secret lab."

"It smells like your bedroom," said the beaver, wrinkling his nose.

"It's multifunctional," said the goose primly. "You may now remove your mask and be amazed on the count of three. One… two…" The beaver whipped off his mask. "*Todd!*" said the goose with another wrathful honk, but he could not stay angry when the beaver emitted a squeal of delight.

"Omigod that is *so* cute! Dude, you got a dogbot!" The beaver dropped to his knees to get a closer look at the little dog standing in the middle of his friend's bedroom floor. In truth, it would have been hard to miss the diminutive mechanical beast as it was in a small oasis of clear floor, surrounded by a ring of discarded clothes, snack food wrappers, and other knickknacks that tended to accumulate in an unkept room. "I didn't know your family was rich. How did you afford this little guy?"

"I built him," said the goose with affected humility. He buffed his chest with the tip of his right wing. "That's why I was working two jobs all summer. I saved up every credit until I could afford to download a kit from Earth." He called to the dog. "Watson, speak!"

"Hello, my name is Watson," said the dog in a tone and accent that seemed to be as neutral as one could design.

"Wow, you're already teaching him tricks," said the beaver in hushed wonder. "Is he friendly? Can I pet him?" The goose nodded, and the beaver gently patted the robotic dog on the fake fur between its ears. It responded with a faint whir as its tail activated and thumped rhythmically on the floor. "Did you get him at Dogmart?"

"Got him from Fidonet," said the goose breezily, "and I printed him at the library. I could only print a couple parts at a time, but it was cheap."

"Fidonet?" said the beaver with an incredulous slap of his tail. "You pirated a dog?"

"Do you know how much the bandwidth cost to download this dog?" demanded the goose defensively. "I paid more than what he'd have cost in downloading him. Totally worth it though because he's one of the premium kits. This is Corgi_V2 Model_7, three-time winner of *Best in Show* at the Kiev dog show."

"Wow, best in show…" said the beaver. He drew it out into a long sigh, and reached out to pat the dog again. He paused with his hand an inch above the mechanical beast's head, and his expression changed. His muzzle scrunched up in thought. "Wait, did you say *corgi*? I've seen pictures of dogs, and this ain't no corgi. This is, like, a schnauzer."

"What?" demanded the goose. He snatched his tablet off his bedside table and quickly tapped and swiped through a few screens before turning it to his friend with a triumphant sweep. "Well, I've got an assembly manual that says otherwise. Look here, it says Corgi_V2 Model_7." The beaver looked unconvinced. "Fine," said the goose with an exasperated puffing of chest down, "Let's ask him. Watson, what dog breed are you?"

"I'm a mechanical dog," replied Watson unhelpfully, thumping the floor again with its tail. "Shall we play fetch?"

The beaver pulled a phablet out of his coat and held it up. "Computer, show me pictures of schnauzers," he said. The device complied, and the beaver reluctantly turned it so that his friend could see. He felt a pang of sadness when Tommy's feathers flattened and wings sagged as he glanced between the pictures on the phablet and his new mechanical pet.

"They ripped me off," he wailed. "They sent me a bad dog."

The mechanical dog's ears immediately drooped in response to the words. "Disciplinary speech pattern detected," it said in as contrite a manner as its neutral tone allowed. "Please identify my errant behavior so that I may recalibrate my network to avoid this action in future."

"It's nothing you did," said the beaver, patting the forlorn-looking mechanical schnauzer on the head. "It's more of an, uh, existential kind of bad." The little dog's mechanical ears pivoted while it absorbed this new tidbit of information.

"This model is not programmed to contemplate on deeper philosophical matters," it said. "I require additional data on the objective criteria that differentiates conceptual good from bad. How does one calculate a concise measure of bad?"

"Would you bite my sister?" said the goose.

"I programmed not to bite except in defence of my master," replied the robotic dog.

"Would you bite her if she was being a total goober, and I asked you to bite her?" The dog's ear's rotated in thought.

"Yes," it said, "I would bite your sister if she was being a total goober."

"Well you may not be a corgi, but you *are* a good dog," said the goose. He bent down and patted the little mechanical dog's head with the tip of his wing. "G*ood* dog."