

FEAR OF DOGS... and How I Overcame it

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Yes, I can admit that I'm scared of dogs. Not the street dogs in Dhaka; I'm scared of the foreign breeds. I've been this way since a minor scare involving an oversized German Shepherd long ago. But I recently came across a Golden Retriever that has helped me get over my fear of dogs over time.

Day 1: The first time I met Ziggy, the particular aforementioned dog, boy was I scared! You see, I wasn't expecting a dog. So, when this creature appeared out of nowhere and ran at me with his tongue sticking out, I thought that was the end of me. It didn't bite, but started sniffing my hands, and transferred some saliva on my hands in the process. Eww. I didn't know what to do so I just patted on his head. The human of the dog sensed my unease and dragged the dog away. Thank God!

Day 2: I was scheduled to meet Ziggy's human the following week. This time, I thought, I'd go prepared instead of making a fool out of myself like the last time. So, I summoned every bit of courage and was feeling quite confident when I went there. Ziggy was nowhere around. Relieved, I settled down. And I was just getting

comfortable when Ziggy came running again and startled me. I didn't move. I thought that if I didn't move, he would leave me alone but that plan didn't work. Ziggy placed his head on my lap, probably looking for some affection. But how could I show affection when his teeth were so darn close to my... pelvic region?

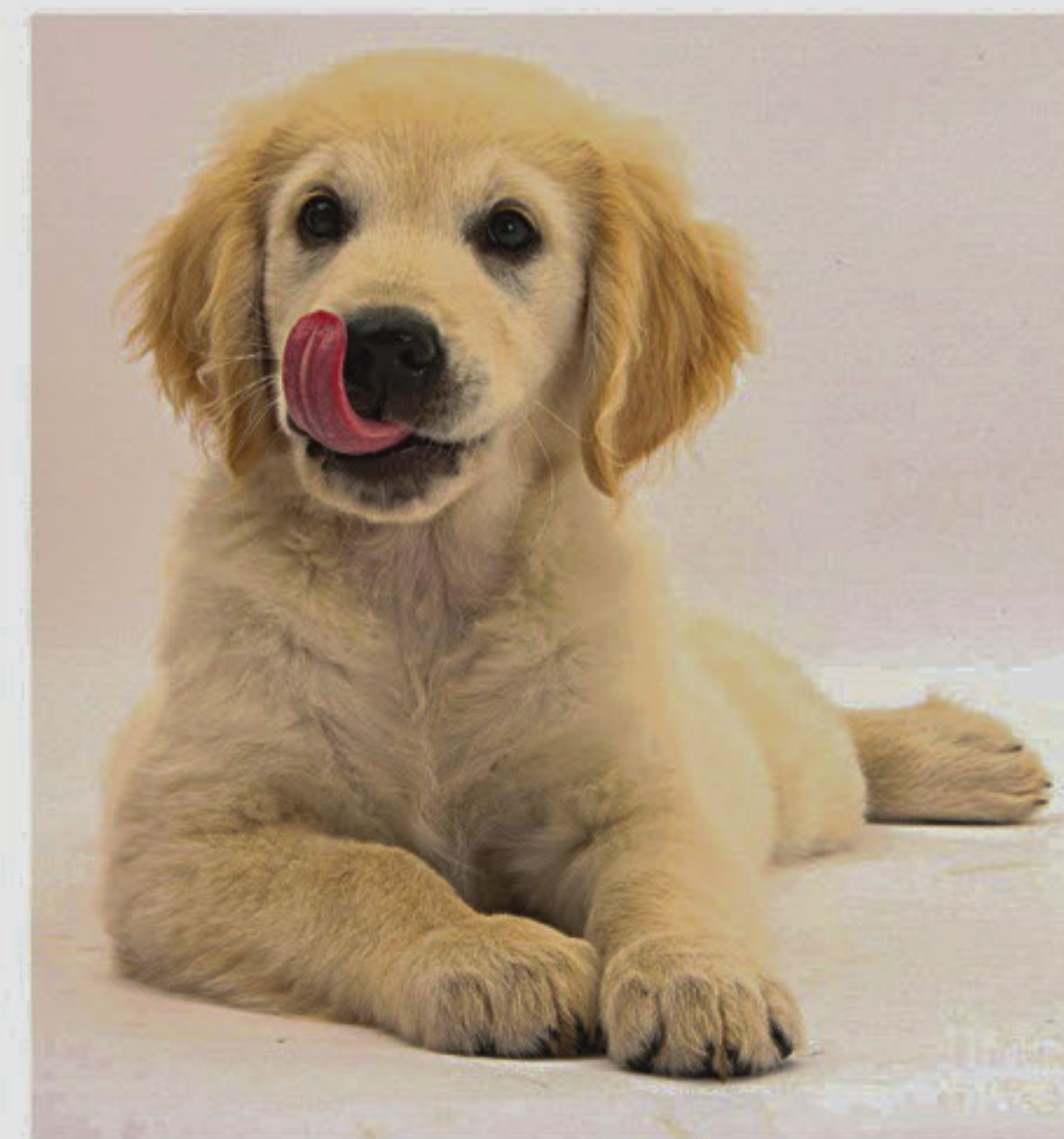
Day 3: They say that a dog is a man's best friend. That's cool with me but why would my new best friend lick me? Well, Ziggy didn't bite anything off me the last day, so I

was a little relaxed this time around. Ziggy recognised me from afar, wagged his tail in excitement and began licking my shoes. I tried to distract him by rubbing his golden fur and succeeded to draw his attention off my shoes but then he started licking my elbow instead. Oh well. He got tired after a while and took a nap by my feet instead. With the exception of his licking habits and the stench of dog food emanating from his mouth, Ziggy seemed to be quite lovable.

Day 4: This time, Ziggy wasn't excited to see me like he was on the previous occasions. That was unexpected. I tried luring him with a game of fetch, but that didn't last long. One day he's all over me and the next he pretends that I don't even exist? Am I suddenly not good enough to deserve his attention?

Day 5: I was busy working on my laptop. Really busy. I didn't notice when Ziggy came and lied down beside me.

Neither did I realise that I was absent-mindedly stroking his



golden fur with one hand while working with the other. "Oh, looks like you two have become real good friends," said Ziggy's human, bringing me back to reality. It was then that I understood that my fear of dogs had in fact run its course.

If Google is to be trusted, fear is "an unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain, or harm." Through the time I spent with Ziggy, I was able to eliminate all three of those threats I had associated with dogs long ago. With a bit of willingness and proximity to a dog over a prolonged period, I was somewhat able to overcome my fear of our canine friends. Except German Shepherds; I still think they'll bite my face off.

Tipu Sultan: Rocketman

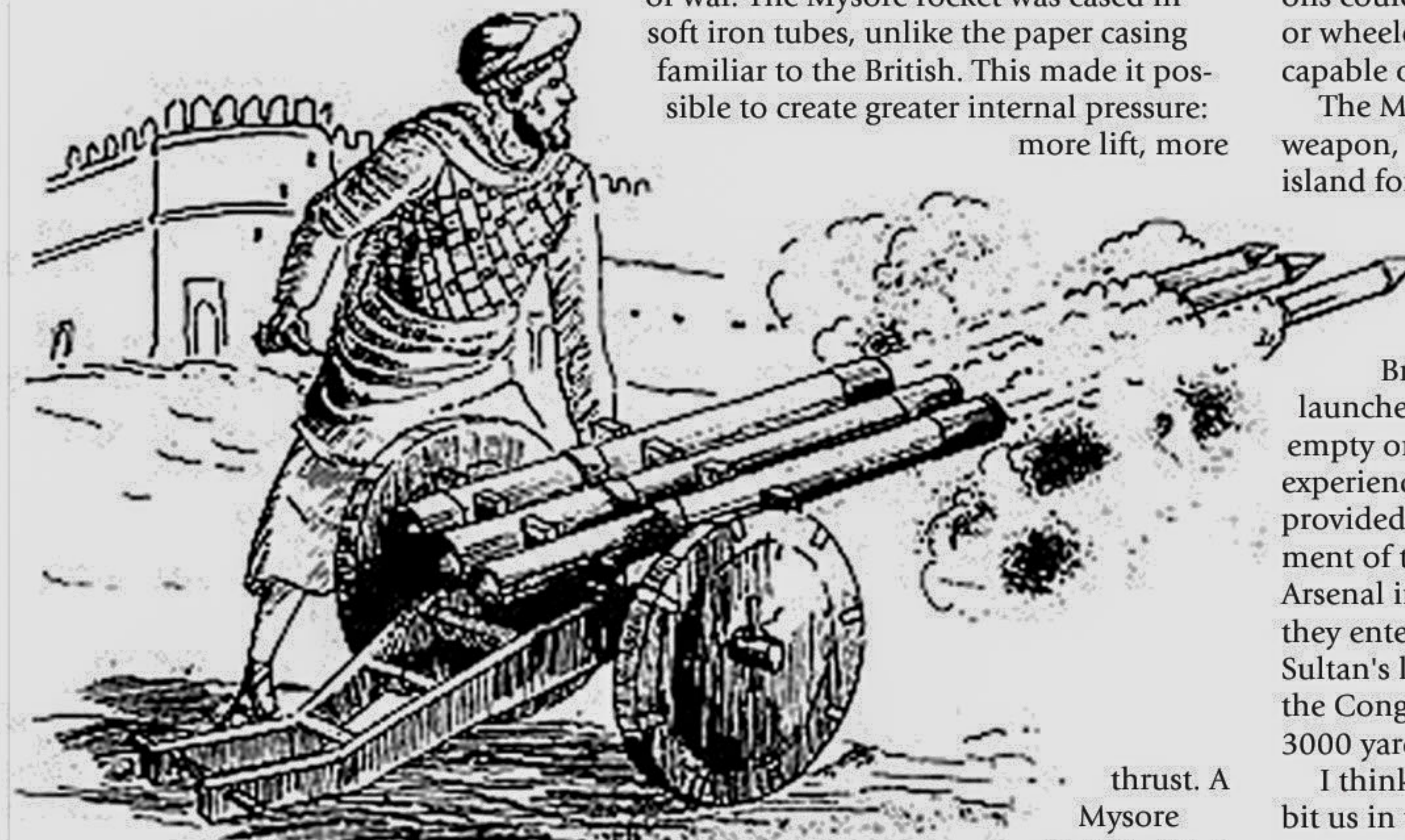
Plus, a Story of Friendship and Regret

Imagine you're a young Scotsman. You took a job as a security guard for a multinational corporation operating in India, because it's 1799 and it beats being home looking at sheep for a living. Your employers, the East India Company, are mixed-up in a war against a local leader.

You don't much like this man "Tippoo of Mysore", a "Mussulman", enemy of Britain, and rumoured tyrant. Worst of all, he'd openly been in communication with Napoleon, who'd just conquered Egypt and planned to stage an invasion against Britain's Indian holdings from there, with Tippoo's help. Lucky for Britain by this time Nelson's fleet had sunk Napoleon's at the Nile, leaving him stuck without a ride. With his ally checkmated, it's time to remove the last imminent threat to British interests in India, and rub Tippoo out. The British forces are three armies strong, and the fourth war against Mysore should be a British victory.

And it will be, but you won't live to see it. Your first clue is the whooshing noise coming from above your head. You look up at the sky, just in time for your night vision to be shattered by a bright boom. Screams in many languages as dark shafts fly into the troops. Not arrows, but despite the explosions clearly not cannon. Rockets, but a far cry from the simple fireworks you know. The ones that do not explode are bounced and propelled

along the ground, snaking their way along and slicing flesh with the blades attached to them. The bamboo shafts the rockets are attached to cut and maim and break apart as shrapnel. Dimly you realize that the heavy blades are causing the



rockets to fly erratically in crazy spirals, scything through the air. One falls at your neck, ending this exercise of your imagination.

Since its invention in China rocketry had become ubiquitous from Japan all the way to England and across the ocean, but it was not until Tipu Sultan of Mysore and his father Hyder Ali arrived onto history that it became a serious weapon of war. The Mysore rocket was cased in soft iron tubes, unlike the paper casing familiar to the British. This made it possible to create greater internal pressure: more lift, more

thrust. A Mysore rocket with a pound of powder

could go as far as 1000 yards. The black powder propellant in the rockets could not be reliably counted on to

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explode on impact, so instead spear-tips and swords were affixed to the end. The entire object was a hell of a thing to have shot at you, and Tipu made it a point to organize 200-man rocketry detachments into each division of his army. The weapons could be carried by a single soldier, or wheeled onto the battlefield on devices capable of firing as much as ten at a time.

The Mysore rocket was a formidable weapon, but inadequate. Tipu's river island fortress of Seringapatam was stormed on the 4th of May, and Tipu himself discovered dead with a bullet to his head. In an ironic coda, the

British acquired 600 rocket launchers, 700 active rockets, and 9000 empty ones. These examples and the experiences of Mysore campaign veterans provided the backbone for the development of the Congreve rocket at the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich in 1805. By the time they entered active service against Tipu Sultan's long-distance friend Napoleon, the Congreve rocket could hit a ship at 3000 yards with 32 pounds of powder.

I think we've all had friendships that bit us in the bum like that.

Zoheb Mashiur is a prematurely balding man with bad facial hair and so does his best to avoid people. Ruin his efforts by writing to zoheb.mashiur@gmail.com