

ONE TIME RIGHTS

5525 WORDS

THE DOG FIGHT

BY JAMES J. COLLINS

At eight o'clock, the littered Bronx streets were quiet on this Sunday morning, while the parked cars, lined up on both sides of the street, waited patiently for their owners to rise. Sitting at the end of the counter, of the run down corner candy store, sipping a cup of coffee, and reading the Sunday News was James Crowley. Known to his associates as Big Jim, or B.J, he was respected while to the members of his family he was known as Jim or Jimmy and loved. To his enemies, he was known by a number of names but none of them was normally used in polite society. The scars on his face had put a hard set to his eyes and his mouth, which were distracting. He looked dangerous while the Doberman, coiled around the stool he sat on, was menacing. The pair of them appeared ominous and out of place, like a funeral wreath at a wedding. Six foot even; heavily muscled; two hundred and forty five pounds; he was a brute of a man, and the store, which was spacious, but far from neat, seemed to have shrunk since he entered. Streetwise types would immediately recognize him for what he was...an off duty cop. Trying to be inconspicuous, he hoped he looked like a worker just in for breakfast, but he failed. He looked like a side of beef in cheap clothes. However, this was not a surprise to Jim. Several times, he had been sent out as a decoy, acting drunk so that muggers would feel he was an easy mark. However, nothing ever happened. At the station house, it was said that the muggers had more sense. To jump 'Big Jim' was like trying to mug a rhinoceros.

To the casual observer Jim was absorbed in the paper, but his pale blue, glinting, hooded eyes were everywhere, and the dog, nervous as it's breed's well-deserved reputation, constantly twitched, twisted its head, and raised its ears responding to sounds, and smells that escaped the man's senses.

This was Big Jim's precinct, and he was working his own problem his own way. There had been a large number of car break-ins always this time in the morning or late at night, but there had been no arrests. Big Jim had a personal interest, for one morning last week; someone had broken in to his car and taken a camera and the tape deck. These items were covered by insurance, and had been replaced, but Jim had yet to extract retribution. For the unlucky thief had selected the wrong car that day, and was still unaware of his error. As a cop, Big Jim was used to burglaries assaults, and assorted violence. He saw himself as a referee, and guardian of the law. He was there to adjudicate the problems, and keep order. In return, he demanded respect, and deference from those whom he oversaw. Now one of the vermin had intruded on his personal domain, and violated all of Big Jim's rules. He would have to be disciplined. He would have to be taught a lesson.

There was no suspect, and the precinct was getting a lot of heat. Any time a uniformed officer was in the area the break-ins ceased, but there were not enough police to patrol each street round the clock. When the coverage was removed, the thefts started again. This street, which sheltered the candy store, was a major thoroughfare, and attracted many cars from shoppers, businesses, and area residents who needed a place to park. Most of the complaints of break ins came from in front of this strip of stores so B.J. decided to set up shop here and do things his way.

As he sipped his coffee, he watched the street. From his vantage point, he observed a small teenager about thirteen years old walking down the street on the driver's side of the cars. He would stop at each car, pause, look around, try the handles, and move on to the next vehicle. Jim watched while he reached down, and petted the large Doberman, who was instantly alert, and on guard. Settling back, he wagged his tail, and shuddered.

"Easy, Max," he said, in a deep rasping voice, "it looks like we may have hit pay dirt."

He removed a small thirty-five millimeter camera from the pocket of his windbreaker, focused the camera on the kid, and snapped a couple of pictures of his activities through the candy store window.

Click click click

Then his gaze drifted further down the block, where, in a doorway off the sidewalk, stood the only other person visible on the street, a forty year old man in a peaked hat, carrying two shopping bags, who looked very furtively up and down the street. He was following the young kid down the block moving from doorway to doorway, staying a respectful distance behind the kid, and unless you watched the movements of both, you would not notice that they were connected. Jim slowly turned on the stool, and raising the camera, took a couple of pictures of this individual.

Click click

"Well, well, it looks like I was right," muttered Jim. Max's ears perked up at the sound of his voice. "If it isn't my old friend 'Stick' Johnson, up to his old tricks; we might just have a surprise in store for him today."

Max, nervous as a virgin entering a Turkish prison, padded over to the door with his nails making a scratching sound as they slid on the asphalt floor. He stopped with his nose up against the glass in the door, and looked at the participants in the little drama.

The counterman quickly looked up from his paper when he heard the dog move. "Need another coffee?"

"No thanks," boomed Jim "this will do." Then he folded his paper, put a small tip on the counter, and took another sip of the, now, tepid coffee.

The teenager continued to work his way up the line of cars. At one battered Chevy, the door opened, and the kid quickly vanished inside only to reappear on the other side of the car with a package under his arm.

Click click click

Jimmy was very animated taking pictures rapidly, and Max sensing the increase in activity started moving in a restless fashion. The boy walked quickly down the street toward the man in the doorway, with his activity recorded for posterity by Jim's camera.

Click click

Both of the suspects went into the vestibule, and thirty seconds later the kid reappeared without the package, and went back to the line of cars picking up where he had left off.

Click

As the teenager approached a highly polished, brown sedan that stood out from the majority of cars Jim eased off the stool, walked over to the door, and opened it a couple of inches. The dog with long spindly legs like a fawn padded across the floor, his nails tippy tapping on the surface and poked his snout through the opening of the door.

"Heel," said Jim.

The dog froze.

Both watched.

The teenager felt the handle of the back door release. He looked toward the man in the doorway, and nodded his head. He quickly pulled open the door, as if to get in, and screamed in terror.

"AAAAIIIEEEE, HHELLPP MMMEEEE

"RRRRRRRRRAAAAHHHHH," Growled the Doberman that launched itself out of the back of the sedan, fangs bared, ears pinned back as it hit the kid in the chest knocking him backwards into the street. The dog straddled the teenager with its mouth open only inches from his face. He could smell the odor of the dog as saliva dripped on his cheek from the dog's open mouth. He wet his pants.

GGrrrrrrrr

"HEEELLLLPPPP HELP GET HIM OFF MEEE, IT'S GOING TO KILL ME," Screamed the kid.

Click click click

Windows opened; people appeared from out of doorways.

The suspect, lugging his two shopping bags, rushed out into the street, spotted the dog threatening the kid, dropped the bags picked up a trash can cover to use as a shield, and ran toward the pair yelling "Leave him alone Get away from my kid."

Click

Jim barked "Help Lady, Max!", and Max took off out of the doorway toward the center of the action. "Call the precinct," Jim called to the counterman, "Tell them there's a fight, and a police officer needs help," The teenager was terrified whimpering and screaming while the dog kept him pinned to the ground. It snarled and growled menacingly; teeth bared lips curled back and its rear legs rigid and trembling in anticipation. The kid was frightened into immobility.

The older man, out of breath after his sprint, was now approaching the dog warily, with a pocketknife in one hand, and the garbage can cover in the other.

click

He was concentrating on the dog, so he never had a chance as Max hurled himself at the man from his blind side.

Click

RRRRRRRWWWWRRRRRRR

"AAAAAAAHHHHHHH," He yelled as Max's teeth sank into the hand holding the knife. Knocked to the ground, he dropped the knife, and then Max reluctantly released his hand. Stick cradled his wounded hand on the forearm of his good hand, blowing on it to ease the pain. Max stood back growling, baring his teeth, and daring the man to make a move.

Jim reached into his back pocket, took out a narrow black jack and slowly walked across the street. A crowd was gathering but they were staying a very respectful distance away. The activities of the dogs excited their curiosity and at the same time repelled them. Everyone wanted to see what was going on but did not want to get too close to those ferocious looking wolves. The Dobermans totally controlled the street.

"You're both under arrest Slick," said Big Jim. "I thought it might be you running the kid. You are real cute. If he gets caught, you are still in the clear. He just gets a juvenile rap and he is out that afternoon. You are a real scum bucket-- a modern Fagin. However, I have you now and your little scheme is blown. Don't move, till I read you your rights. Max, heel."

The dog responded like a light switch had been thrown, moving to Big Jim's side, releasing Slick from confinement"

As Slick staggered to his feet holding his bleeding hand, he lurched toward Jim. "Get the fucken dog off'n the kid. We didn't do nothin', man Yo can't prove nothin' I was minding ma own business on the corner when your dog jumps ma kid. Everybody saw it. Yo the one in trouble. I've got a false arrest case on yo. We're going to get a lawyer from Legal Aid." With that, he reached for Crowley's arm for emphasis.

"You're Resisting arrest," shouted Big Jim, who was waiting for just such a move. He hit Slick three quick shots with the black jack delivered with lightning speed. They landed high on the shoulder just below the neck, THUMP on the muscle of the arm that grabbed him, THUMP and last on the bridge of the nose accompanied with a sickening SPLAT.

"Ooooooohhhhh," Groaned Slick as he settled to the ground, immobilized.

"That evens things up scum bag," muttered Jim as he slipped the sap back in his back pocket. Turning to the dogs, he said, "Heel. Back off." Both dogs moved rapidly, positioning themselves on either side of him and sat down panting, with their tongues hanging out, their job was done.

"The dog.....the dog.....he tried to kill me," cried the kid as he rose from the ground and backed against the car shaking, his tearing eyes never leaving the dogs. .

"You little thief, you're the one who's been robbing all the cars only I'm not blaming you. You're too young, but if I catch you again I'll let the dogs finish you."

The kid's eyes opened with fear. The dogs were still too close; the nightmare could start again.

"It's this bastard here who's got you out working like a puppet. He's like a Fagin of the old times using kids to do the dirty work and take all the risks while he sits in the back where we can't touch him. If a cop grabbed you, he'd been long gone. But a dog in the car is a risk of the business. Now that he resisted arrest, I can search his bags. I don't advise you to move a muscle or the dogs will tear you apart." ...It was an unnecessary warning

With that, Jim walked over to the dropped shopping bags, and opened them up. Normally in this neighborhood, a dropped package wouldn't bounce once before it was grabbed by a thief, but the dogs had discouraged any entrepreneurial spirit, and they lay where they had been dropped. Inside was a panoply of Americana; two cameras, a wallet, three tape decks, a CB radio a pocket calculator, loose dollars, change, forty or so tapes a set of tools and a box of fishing tackle; all the paraphernalia that people leave in their cars while they go upstairs for a couple of hours.

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A squad car pulled up alongside the small group and two officers got out, each hitching up his gun belt and squaring away his hat.

"Hi B.J. what are you doing here? Isn't today the big party at your brother's house? I thought you had the day off."

"Yeah, Tulley, I had some personal business to attend to first, but these vermin tried to break into my car. Lady was lying on the floor as she always does, and this kid tried to boost the car. When he opened the door, she surprised him. It will be a long time before he opens a car door again without looking in real carefully. His accomplice, Stick Johnson, is lying over there. He tried to resist arrest and I had to restrain him."

"Crowley don't you ever go home? "Asked Tulley, a beefy, red faced, over weight cop, who was the senior of the two reinforcements. "It's eight in the morning and you were on the late shift, till midnight."

"Yeah I only got three hours sleep, but these creeps been hitting my beat every weekend and I figured I might have some luck early in the morning when everybody else is trying to get some shut eye. Guess I was right."

As Tulley walked over to the prone figure, he looked at the flattened nose and the blood. "What did you hit him with ...the car?"

"Nah, I only tapped him with my sap when he grabbed me. I had to subdue him."

"Yeah I can see he's heavily subdued. Nick," he called to his partner, "we better get an ambulance down here real quick."

"What have you got on them?" asked Nick.

"Well there's a bag of evidence here, and I'm sure the victims will all be down to the precinct as soon as they know they were robbed. In the meantime, I've got a load of pictures of the two of them hitting the cars, and of Stick with the evidence in his hot little hands. He was also carrying a knife, which he tried to use on Lady. It's all on the film. It should be an easy case.

"Their M.O. was quite simple," said Jim. "Stick would hold the goods and stay off to the side, while he sent the kid out to try the car doors on the street side. Nobody would take any notice of anyone, particularly a kid, opening a driver's door; people do it all the time. A kid is even less obvious. They're always out in the street playing something or other. He'd find an open door, slip inside, close it, and clean out the car. He'd go through the glove compartment, search under the seats; use a screwdriver and take out the tape deck or a CB if they could hock it. Then he'd slip the loot into a bag he kept under his shirt, exit out the sidewalk side, walk over to Stick, drop it into the shopping bag, and go back to work."

"Real cute," said Tulley

"You two fellows could do me a big favor if you could drop off the film at the lab in the station, and fill out the report for me. I'll be back later on this afternoon to sign it. I've really got to get to my brothers for this family get together and I'm already late."

"OK B.J. But don't forget you owe me one. Do you have a phone number we can reach you at, if we have any problem?" Asked Tulley, as he turned the kid around against the car to frisk him and read him his rights.

"Yeah," responded Jim, as he reached for his wallet. "It's right here on this card. It's my brother, a big shot stockbroker. I'll be there at his home number all day, so if you need me, call this number."

"Got a couple of tips on stocks B.J.?" asked Tulley who was suddenly more interested.

"Nah, my brother and I have been going head to head for a number of years. I don't think he's going to come up with any decent tips for any friends of mine. Anything he gave me would probably wipe out your retirement fund. The two of us have been competing since we were little kids, and it's no quarter given on either side. Don't get me wrong, we're still brothers, but at an arm's length distance."

A couple of hours later, after getting a complete breakfast at a reputable diner, Jimmy Crowley was driving up the Hutchison Parkway to Rye New York, passing palatial estates poking out from the screen of trees. Instead of seeing tenement slums, or 'Tobacco Road', he was viewing 'Better homes and Gardens.' This was affluence.

Billy Crowley, two years his senior, had just bought a new house. Money was flowing to money, as the old saying went. Billy's family had grown to seven kids, and needed more room. Since he was successful on Wall Street they could definitely afford it, so, two months ago Billy and his wife Ann had moved upscale to Rye. It was a large house on a full acre with a three-car garage near the country club, and just off the water. Everything associated with the 'good life; the dream of every executive.

Today was the scheduled house warming for the immediate family members, and Jim was looking forward to it. Later, another party would be scheduled for business acquaintances, but Jimmy knew he wouldn't be invited to that, but that was no loss.

It was just starting to drizzle as Jimmy pulled into the driveway. A dozen kids were running all over the place, tossing a football, hitting a whiffle ball, and playing with a Frisbee. The blond heads of the Crowley's stood out like stars against that sea of brown and black locks.

"Hi Uncle Jim, "yelled Dennis the oldest. "Want to play a little football? You can be quarterback."

"Thanks, but maybe later. I've got to say hello to everybody. Where's your dad?"

"He's in the back yard, messing with the barbecue. He was just here but when the rain started, he decided to cook the meal on the patio and serve everything inside. Why don't you go around through here? You can see him before you go into the house."

Sitting majestically in the middle of the immense backyard was Billy's Irish wolfhound, Boru; nine feet long, from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail, he weighed over two hundred pounds. When he stood with all four feet firmly planted on the ground, his head was at an impressive elevation of four feet. Boru loved people and would surprise and overwhelm them by planting both paws, big as tennis rackets, on their chest pinning them to the wall while the beast licked their face with a three-foot tongue hanging out of a massive head that resembled a lion. Towering over the people and looking down on them from a height of seven feet the dog generated at least a feeling of awe. This display of affection usually put women into a state of sheer terror. Many men were similarly affected, but went to great efforts to seem unconcerned. However, the shaking of their knees or their hands gave them away. If a family member were present, the victim could disengage from Boru, or if you were built like Jim, you could do it yourself. Otherwise, you were held captive until he smelled food, and would go off in search of a free meal. The dog was extremely friendly, but he had an exceptional appetite. Five pounds of meat a day just kept him in fighting trim. The family loved to tell the story of the time he casually reached up on top of the refrigerator, while nobody was looking, and wolfed down three large sirloin steaks that were defrosting. Boru didn't wait for them to thaw out; he ate them like popsicles.

Though he was huge, he was exceptionally patient with the children. Crowley kids were by nature independent, tough and destructive. These traits might have been caused by genes or the size of the mob of kids. Either way this wasn't the environment for the meek of spirit. Boru wasn't spared. The younger kids would try to ride him around the house. This he would tolerate when they were little, but as they grew in size and meanness, he found ways to discourage them without doing any serious harm. Several times of being scraped off his back by being run under low hanging branches usually educated the kids to the fact that they had outgrown the 'horsey' stage.

Billy who had the Crowley propensity to be the center of attraction truly loved the impressive animal. When he took him out on a leash, everybody took respectful notice of both Boru and himself; it gave a feeling of power. The Irish heritage further forged a bond between Boru and Billy, though Boru knew nothing of this history. Wolfhounds had been the cause of the demise of the wolves that had at one time been the scourge of Ireland. The dogs had been the companions of the ancient kings of Ireland and Boru was named after the high king who drove the Vikings out of Ireland after several centuries of occupation and oppression.

As Jimmy rounded the corner, he spotted Billy putting the cover on the barbecue and moving the chairs under the awning overhang. The benches had already been moved into the garage. He left the streamers and the balloons right where they were. It looked like the party might be called because of rain but the drizzle was light, and it might pass. Billy was a smaller version of their father and started to show some of the mannerisms of the old man. It was amazing to Jim that from the distance, he would swear it was his father walking across the yard though he knew he was dead these ten years. Billy had developed a neutral mask that was needed in the Wall Street jungle but he had forgotten to leave it behind when he came home. No longer did he smile as quickly as when they were kids. However, the tennis and the N.Y.A.C. exercise yard kept him thin and trim and the hair was combed to hide the receding evidence.

"Hi Billy how's things going? Said Jimmy, as he put a cake box on the table. "There's some baked Alaska in here for the kids for dessert. I just go through down at the precinct and I've got the two dogs in the car. Since everybody from the family will be here today, I didn't have

anyone I could leave them with. If you don't mind, I would like to let them out in your big backyard so they can get some exercise."

"Sure," responded Billy, "as long as you keep them away from Boru."

"Oh don't worry, they won't hurt him. I got them trained at that attack school. They'll only attack on command from me. You don't have to worry about him."

"Nah...Nah, you got it backwards. If they get too close to Boru. He's liable to hurt them. After all, he sees this as his home and they are interlopers. He's liable to mess them up."

This had all the trappings of an old time Crowley face off. Typical of the family challenges that they had tossed to one another over the years, they were on opposite sides and they each now had a champion. Jimmy had the tag team consisting of the two Dobermans, and Billy had Boru. So the ritual bantering started each one stating that his pet or pets were dominant.

Billy just smiled and said, "Look this is Boru's back yard, and Boru knows it. If your dogs stay over to the side, there will be no problem. If you order them, they'll obey you and I've watched them, you train them well. If you tell them to heel and stay over in this area, they'll listen to you and do what you tell them. If you keep them on that side, Boru will leave them alone and everything is fine. Now, however, if you push it and try to test Boru, by trespassing in his domain, he's liable to hurt the two dogs. I wouldn't want them hurt."

"C'mon now, let's get real. A couple of weeks ago the two dogs took on four guys in the South Bronx and messed them up pretty bad. The dogs won."

"That's when you're dealing with people. Here you're dealing with a non-trivial dog; the most regal beast in the canine world. You don't want to mess with him."

"Ha," exploded Jimmy, "Your ego has taken over your common sense. Two to one the dogs will tear him apart."

"Twenty bucks says that if you turn the two loose in the yard Boru will put them under."

"Your twenty to my forty. You're on."

With that, a classic Crowley show down was under way. It had always been this way since the two were boys. Each was big and aggressive and when they ran out of external opponents, they turned on each other. This same spirit had made each of them famous in their respective fields; one in police work; the other in the stock market.

Jimmy went out to the car and brought Max and Lady out to the back yard. They walked at his heel, one on either side disdainfully sniffing the air. They could sense Boru.

"Here they are, said Jimmy," Are you sure you still want to go along with the bet?"

"Sure, twenty bucks is the bet. But remember this is Boru's turf, and I won't be responsible for any damage to your dogs."

"Agreed"

Since the Dobermans weren't leashed, Jimmy reached down, and flicked both wrists, a silent command he used when working the dogs at night that meant they were released and they were to range out and explore an area. They immediately responded as if let off an onerous leash. They dashed forward, jumped, stopped, reversed direction, sprinted, put their heads together, backed off and repeated the choreography with several variations. Like squirrels, nervous energy shot out of them as they ranged from one side of the yard to the other.

Lady was the first one to spot Boru.

Boru was still lying where he had been, out in the center of the yard, with his massive head crossed over his paws, half-asleep.

Lady stopped and growled.

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Max spun around, looked where she was looking, froze like a pointer and growled in response.

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Now the two Dobermans started to advance on the reclining Wolfhound.

One of Boru's ears went up and one eye opened, as he carefully watched the two Dobermans stealthily moving in on him, ears lay back, growling, teeth bared. As they advanced, they moved off to the sides so that they were advancing each from a different quarter. Max facing head on and Lady coming in from the side, they advanced slowly, almost like cats sneaking up on prey. Short spurts were used by the dogs as they advanced lying close to the ground. They seemed to take turns, one moving while the other watched, and then alternating roles.

Boru raised his massive head, looking from dog to dog.

WOOF

The deep salutation rose slowly out of the bulk, hinting of enormous hidden strength.

The two Dobermans hesitated for a moment, and glanced to each other as if for reassurance. Then they resumed their deliberate advance on the recumbent Boru, growling as they moved with their tails down and their ears back. .

Now Boru's ears went back and he gave out a throaty, warning rumble, as he slowly rose to all fours.

RRRRRRRRR

The two Dobermans froze. They snarled, and they gave low throaty growls.

Max rushed to cover the twenty feet to Boru, teeth snapping.

Boru jumped straight up in the air, as Max passed underneath, twisted and came down alongside the confused animal. His gaping maw closed on the back of Max's neck, and he threw him to the side.

Lady made her move in support of Max, but Boru sidestepped her, and as she went by, those terrible jaws clamped on her shoulder as, he flipped her off to the side.

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Now Boru ran after one Doberman at a time, catching them in his mouth and throwing them ten to fifteen feet at a time. They would fly through the air and land sprawling on the ground yelping in fear.

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Boru, ominously silent, reached Max as he tried to get to the safety of the hedge alongside the garage. Boru picked him up and slammed him off the corner of the garage; stunning him. Lady who was attempting to get to the other side of the yard was overtaken in a couple of bounds and bounced off the fence. Boru now concentrated on her, repeatedly picking her up and slamming her into the fence. There were no sounds from the dogs; just grunts and deep breaths.

"Christ, pull your damn dog off. He's killing my dogs," screamed Jimmy. "Stop him before he kills them. Those dogs are worth a lot of money."

Billy smiled, and hollered "Stay."

Boru froze in his tracks, but the normally slow moving behemoth was now in a highly agitated state. The adrenaline flow must have been enormous. The head was twitching from side to side as if he expected an attack from any quarter. The tongue was out the eyes were lit teeth were bared, and blood dribbled from one corner of the massive mouth.

Max was slowly trying to rise with Jimmy's help. A deep cut was in evidence between the ears, and blood was dripping.

Lady had limped away from Boru and was cowering against the fence. Blood was showing high on her shoulder. Jimmy rushed over to her, and placing himself between Boru and his dog, he grabbed her collar and led her, whimpering, away from the scene of the combat.

Then he went over to Max and picked him up like a baby, trying to minister to the wounds that were in evidence on his back and neck, and took him out to the car.

Jimmy was cursing the whole time saying, "You could have stopped this earlier, before he killed my dogs."

Billy who was very calmly sipping his drink said, "I warned you not to mess with the Wolfhound. This is his yard and he isn't going to take any crap from two Dobermans"

"What the hell kind of dog is that? I knew he was big but I've never seen anything do that to my Dobermans."

"Look this dog was bred to kill wolves. I keep telling you that, but you aren't listening. As far as he is concerned, those two German charmers are nothing more than modern day wolves. His natural tendency is to catch them and kill them, and when they came after him, he let his nature take over. Now take the dogs inside. There's plenty of medicine. Patch them up and take them home. Next time they come, have them stay over to the side, be nice and mannerly and leave Boru alone or Boru will have them for lunch."

Muttering to the dogs, as he took his mollified champions back to the car, Jimmy said "At least in the South Bronx all you have to worry about are knives and guns. You don't have to worry about being jumped by the hound of the Baskervilles."

That was the last intramural dog fighting that the Crowley brothers participated in. Many other challenges were to be raised and pursued but as far as they were concerned, the Wolfhound was truly King of the Canines.

THE END