

WAR DOG

By

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Synopsis: An ex-military dog confronts what he has done ... and who is to blame.

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Revised 05/28/20

WAR DOG

**CAST OF CHARACTERS
(In Order Of Appearance)**

SKIP EITHER GENDER, 20s, ANY RACE OR ETHNICITY.

SPEEDBALL EITHER GENDER, mid-30s to mid-
40s, ANY RACE OR ETHNICITY,
TOUGH, A LOT OF MILEAGE.

Running Time: Ten Minutes.

SETTING: *An unpretentious bar near Coronado, California.*

WAR DOG

SPEEDBALL, a dog, mid-30s to mid-40s, sits at the bar nursing a beer on a warm day. S/he is quiet, self-contained, brooding. A bartender, SKIP, a human, twenties, is wiping down the bar. S/he is a cheerful open book. S/he'll continue to clean and restock the bar as the scene continues.

SKIP

So you work over at Coronado? I mean, like, the Navy base?

SPEEDBALL

I used to. I just got back.

SKIP

Welcome home, man. This must be the best feeling in the world.

SPEEDBALL

God, I hope not.

SKIP

Coronado, huh. I'll bet you were, like, a Seal or something, weren't you?

SPEEDBALL

I'm a dog. Dogs can't be Seals.

SKIP

Oh ... right. (*Laughing at himself*) Doy! (*More wiping*) So, but did you, like, work with the Seals. I read somewhere they use dogs.

SPEEDBALL

What I did or didn't do is pretty far above your pay grade, kid.

SKIP

Oh, c'mon, you can tell me.

SPEEDBALL

Yeah. But then I'd have to kill you.

SKIP

Oh. Wow. That's like a real thing?

SPEEDBALL

Cuz, see, I do work with the Seals.

SKIP

Omigod that's so co(ol)- Wait, you don't really have to kill me now. Do you?

SPEEDBALL *looks at SKIP, sighs, and sips his/her beer.*

SKIP

(Scared)

You were kidding, right? You don't really have to kill me. *(Pause; then off SPEEDBALL's look, relaxing)* Yeah, you were kidding. That was fun! *(Pause)* So ... what was it like?

SPEEDBALL

It was hard. And confusing. And hard. And sometimes fun. And mostly hard.

SKIP

You guys must've all, like, super bonded together cuz you only had each other and everything. That's so cool. Y'know, bars are sort of like that, too. Like on some nights, when you have a crazy-busy shift, but everyone pitches in-

SPEEDBALL

It was nothing like a bar.

SKIP

No, no, right, sure, that was stupid of me. *(Pause)* Doy.

SPEEDBALL *goes back to his beer.*

SKIP

So, what was it like?

SPEEDBALL

The training, that was good. It was all games. Chase the ball. Find the explosives. Find the hidden man. That was the best cuz I'd get to bite him. I mean, he was in a bite suit and all, but still, I just like to bite. A lot. A whole lot.

SPEEDBALL has begun to fixate on SKIP's wiping arm, following the motion. SKIP notices. S/he pulls his/her arm back.

SPEEDBALL

Relax, I'm a Belgian Malinois. Biting has been bred into me, but only on command.

SKIP

Belgian Malinois, ha, that sounds like a beer: "Hey can we get another round of Malinois over here." (*Off SPEEDBALL's unamused gaze*) But of course, it's not.

SPEEDBALL

It's a breed, a Belgian herding dog. We're like German shepherds, only a little smaller. The sheep are gone, so now we're mainly MWDs.

SKIP

Weapons of Mass ... Wait-

SPEEDBALL

MWDs, not WMDs. Military Working Dogs.

SKIP

Military Working Dog? That's awesome!

SPEEDBALL

Why?

SKIP

Um, I don't know. Isn't it?

A pause.

SPEEDBALL

You need three things in a military dog. First is prey aggression. You know how a dog will go after a tennis ball? That's prey aggression. You chase that mother till you catch up to it and then you hit it hard and you hold it with a good bite. Malinois like me, we have it in spades. When I was young, if I caught a tennis ball, they'd have to just about choke me out to get it back.

SKIP

That's crazy. What else do you need?

Around now, SKIP starts sweeping up, out from behind the bar.

SPEEDBALL

Sense of smell. I have 220 million olfactory receptors in my nose. You have about 5 million. You can't smell for shit.

SKIP

Like how good can you smell?

SPEEDBALL

Like I can detect explosives when only ten parts per billion are in the air.

SKIP

Damn. Hey, smell something in here that I can't smell.

SPEEDBALL sniffs the air, maybe turning his head in different directions. He takes a slug of beer.

SPEEDBALL

(Rapid sniffing for a moment)

You've got some Molly on your bicycle outside.

SKIP

(Guilty)

I ... I don't have any Molly.

SPEEDBALL

I'm guessing in the saddlebag, cuz there's nylon resin close by to it, but I'd have to go out there to be sure.

SKIP

You're, you're so wrong, dude. I don't even own a bike.

SKIP notices his bicycle helmet on the bar. He tries to nonchalantly hide it.

SKIP

Wait, are you a police dog now? Cuz anybody could've stuck that stuff (in my saddlebag)–

SPEEDBALL

Relax, kid, I don't give a crap.

SKIP

Oh, good. *(Whispering)* Cuz actually, it's totally mine. Damnnnnnn! You've got a gift!

SPEEDBALL

Do I? I love to smell. Or I used to. It was like a drug. An hallucinogen. When you can smell everything, you can understand

everything, the whole world and what it's made of, how it fits together, and it is such a rush. *(Pause)* Almost everything.

SKIP

Like, what can you understand. Right now?

SPEEDBALL

Like, do your two girls/guys¹ know about each other?

SKIP

(Shocked, astonished, backing up; pause)

No ... fucking ... way! How'd you know!?

SPEEDBALL

You've got two different perfumes/body washes on you.

SKIP

(Panicked, sniffing him/herself)

I do? Shit!

SPEEDBALL

Relax, they'll never smell it.

SKIP

Right, right. What's the third thing you need?

SPEEDBALL

Aggression against humans. I also got that in spades.

SKIP, *behind* SPEEDBALL, *stops*.

SKIP

Really?

SPEEDBALL

You're safe.

SKIP

God, you keep sorta freakin' me out here, y'know.

SKIP *relaxes and raises his/her hand to pet* SPEEDBALL.

SPEEDBALL

As long as you don't try to pet me.

¹ Use appropriate word depending on Skip's gender and sexual orientation.

SKIP

(Retreating behind the bar)

Wha(t)- No, no, never. Doy.

SPEEDBALL

Dogs have been so domesticated that it takes a lot for most to attack a human. But Malinois were bred as shepherd dogs who needed to tear up poachers, so ... human aggression was bred back into us. You guys are the ones who've made me what I am.

SKIP

Um ... what ... what are you? Wait, are you a killing machine?

SPEEDBALL

In Afghanistan, I'd patrol on point, me and Bobby, my handler. The very tip of the tip of the spear, the first one in the shit. And my job was to detect the shit before it became a storm. I'd trot down the road, 60 sniffs a second, breathing in that red dust, checking for explosives and humans. Ambushes. If I got a human hit, they'd let me off the leash and ...

SKIP

What? Would you do?

SPEEDBALL doesn't answer. SKIP gets him/her another beer.

SKIP

What? *(Pause; then confidentially)* You would fuck him up, wouldn't you?

SPEEDBALL

My first time in-country, I got a hard hit on a bad guy, 200 yards upwind of me. They let me go and I went off like a shot, got a bite on my guy, a good back-of-the-jaw bite, 600 pounds of pressure, almost what a great white shark can do, and the guy just shrieked. And my mouth filled with warm blood. My guys came up and commanded me to release. Three times before I would do it. God, I loved that bite so much, but back in camp that night, I just ... I just ...

SKIP

Wondered if what we were doing over there was right?

SPEEDBALL

Wondered if I was right. Wondered what I was. I didn't volunteer for that shit. I got bred, I got bought and I got paid for, but

I never got a choice. They just took me and my instincts and made me do that.

SKIP

Did ... did they kill the guy?

SPEEDBALL

(Ignoring SKIP)

Mostly, I like people. Mostly, I like to smell things. Not for work, just ... to know. What the world is. I'm not sure I like that anymore.

SKIP

But it couldn't've been all bad, what you did.

SPEEDBALL

I loved my guys. I saved their asses a few times. I'd get a hit of explosives, an IED, and sit on it. And the munitions guys would come clear it. More than once, it was something big, something that would've killed all of us.

SKIP

So that was a lot. Right? That's a whole lot, saving your guys.

SPEEDBALL

Is it enough?

SKIP

For what—?

SPEEDBALL

Was I a good boy/girl, kid? Sometimes we'd hit a door and it'd be a roomful of women and children inside ... just terrified. Of me. Of my guys. And I'd have to sit there and let 'em know that, if they moved while we were searching, I would tear them apart. Was I a good boy/girl then? Huh? Cuz I sure didn't feel like one.

SKIP

I ... I don't know. Who's to say who's a good boy/girl? Maybe we all just gotta decide that for ourselves.

SPEEDBALL

No one judges us. We just judge ourselves.

SKIP

Yeah. I don't know. Maybe.

SPEEDBALL

Sounds way too easy on us.

SKIP

Cuz we'll all just say, "Yeah, I was pretty okay, I was fine"?

SPEEDBALL

Something like that.

SKIP

You're not saying that.

A pause.

SPEEDBALL

I gotta go. What's the damage?

SKIP

You're good.

SPEEDBALL

C'mon, kid.

SKIP

You're good. Thank you for your service.

SPEEDBALL

You know how many folks there are within a couple of miles of here you'll be giving free drinks to if that's your policy?

SKIP

It's our Malinois-drink-free-on-Tuesday policy.

SPEEDBALL

Thanks.

SKIP

It's a nice evening for the beach.

SPEEDBALL

I don't much care for sand anymore. See you around.

SPEEDBALL walks to the door and opens it. The breeze hits him/her. S/he stands there, sniffing.

SPEEDBALL

Diesel exhaust. Bougainvillea. Smelt. Wisteria. Sand. I got the whole world in my nose.

SKIP

Maybe that's what you need to do now. Maybe you just need to go somewhere. And sniff for a while.

SPEEDBALL

Just go sit somewhere ... and sniff?

SKIP

Yeah, I don't know. Maybe you go and just sit and sniff for a while until the world all fits together again?

SPEEDBALL

That seems like a big ask.

SKIP

Till it seems ... worthwhile, then?

SPEEDBALL

Yeah. Yeah.

SPEEDBALL looks outside through the open door. S/he then closes his/her eyes, tilts his/her head back, and inhales deeply. S/he holds the breath, savoring all the smells of the world. Then, slowly s/he exhales. S/he opens her eyes.

SPEEDBALL

Maybe.

SPEEDBALL EXITS.

Lights down slowly.

Curtain.