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opening extract from

Return of the Hundred-Mile-An-Hour-Dog

written by

Jeremy Strong

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Ask Jeremy



Of all the books you have written, which one is your favourite?

I loved writing both **KRAZY KOW SAVES THE WORLD – WELL, ALMOST** and **STUFF**, my first book for teenagers. Both these made me laugh out loud while I was writing and I was pleased with the overall result in each case. I also love writing the stories about Nicholas and his daft family – **MY DAD**, **MY MUM**, **MY BROTHER** and so on.

If you couldn't be a writer what would you be?

Well, I'd be pretty fed up for a start, because writing was the one thing I knew I wanted to do from the age of nine onward. But if I DID have to do something else, I would love to be either an accomplished pianist or an artist of some sort. Music and art have played a big part in my whole life and I would love to be involved in them in some way.

What's the best thing about writing stories?

Oh dear – so many things to say here! Getting paid for making things up is pretty high on the list! It's also something you do on your own, inside your own head – nobody can interfere with that. The only boss you have is yourself. And you are creating something that nobody else has made before you. I also love making my readers laugh and want to read more and more.

Did you ever have a nightmare teacher? (And who was your best ever?)

My nightmare at primary school was Mrs Chappell, long since dead. I knew her secret – she was not actually human. She was a Tyrannosaurus rex in disguise. She taught me for two years when I was in Y5 and Y6, and we didn't like each other at all. My best ever was when I was in Y3 and Y4. Her name was Miss Cox, and she was the one who first encouraged me to write stories. She was brilliant. Sadly, she is long dead too.

When you were a kid you used to play kiss-chase. Did you always do the chasing or did anyone ever chase you?!

I usually did the chasing, but when I got chased, I didn't bother to run very fast! Maybe I shouldn't admit to that! We didn't play kiss-chase at school – it was usually played during holidays. If we had tried playing it at school we would have been in serious trouble. Mind you, I seemed to spend most of my time in trouble of one sort or another, so maybe it wouldn't have mattered that much.

14½ Things You Didn't Know About

Jeremy Strong

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

1. He loves eating liquorice.
2. He used to like diving. He once dived from the high board and his trunks came off!
3. He used to play electric violin in a rock band called THE INEDIBLE CHEESE SANDWICH.
4. He got a 100-metre swimming certificate when he couldn't even swim.
5. When he was five, he sat on a heater and burnt his bottom.
6. Jeremy used to look after a dog that kept eating his underpants. (No – NOT while he was wearing them!)
7. When he was five, he left a basin tap running with the plug in and flooded the bathroom.
8. He can make his ears waggle.
9. He has visited over a thousand schools.
10. He once scored minus ten in an exam! That's ten less than nothing!
11. His hair has gone grey, but his mind hasn't.
12. He'd like to have a pet tiger.
13. He'd like to learn the piano.
14. He has dreadful handwriting.

And a half . . . His favourite hobby is sleeping. He's very good at it.

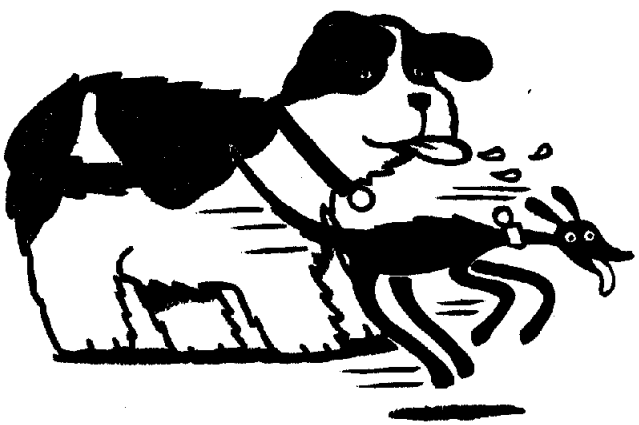
1 Four-Legged Asteroids and Wet Dishcloths

It wasn't my idea. It was Tina's, and don't go thinking 'Ooh, Trevor's got a girlfriend!' because I haven't. I mean she isn't. You know what people are like. They start being embarrassing and saying stupid things – like Mum. If Tina rings me and Mum answers she stands at the bottom of the stairs holding the phone at arm's length and she shouts, so that everyone in the house (and Tina at the other end) can hear, 'Trevor! It's for you! It's Mrs Trevor . . .'

Pathetic, isn't it? That's Mum's sense of humour for you. Of course I do like Tina. She's smart and funny and so organized, which is very useful since I'm about as organized as the inside

of a Christmas pudding. She's nice-looking too – but she's my friend, not my girlfriend. So hopefully you've got that straight.

Anyhow, Tina and I were in the field at the top of my road walking our dogs. Tina's dog is a giant St Bernard, with an enormous slobbery tongue. He doesn't lick you – it's more like being slapped about the face with a wet dishcloth. He's called Mouse. That was one of Tina's ideas, too.



Her dad thought she was bonkers. 'You can't call a dog that size Mouse. It's ridiculous!' Tina just smiled. That was the whole point. Tina thinks

that most things are a bit ridiculous, and I guess she's right, sometimes.

My dog's TOTALLY ridiculous. We call her Streaker because she can run like the wind. Actually she runs more like a jet-propelled hurricane. When she's up to full speed she looks like one of those cartoon dogs, with her legs just a blur of frantic activity, and her ears flapping back in the slipstream. I sometimes think she's not actually a real dog at all and must have been built in a Ferrari factory. She could probably win a Grand Prix motor race if they let her take part. She'd have to wear a helmet though; a helmet with special holes for her ears. And they'd have to refuel her with dog food instead of petrol.

We used to have terrible trouble with Streaker. She didn't understand what her name was. She didn't know what was meant by 'Sit!' or 'Stay!' or 'Come back!' She'd just run and run and run. It was hopeless taking her for walks. For a start she didn't know what walking was. She could do

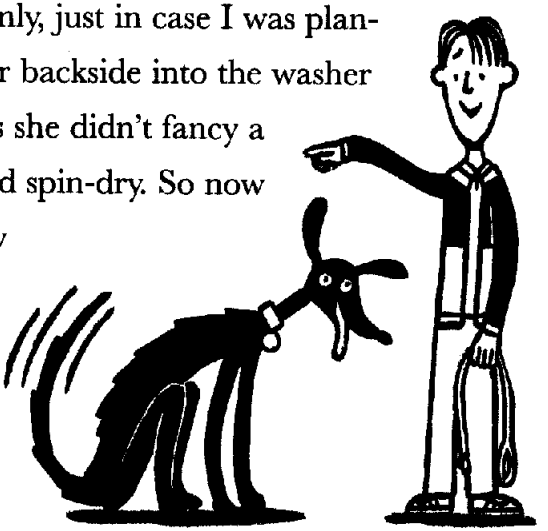
Run, Gallop, Full Charge Ahead, Fast Forward, Fast Reverse, Fast Sideways, Leaping Like Mad, Diving Like Mad, and generally being Madder than Mad – but walking? Oh no. If I let her off the lead I wouldn't get her back for hours. She drove the whole family bonkers.

Then Tina decided we would have to train her properly. (This was all because of a crazy bet we had with the local gorilla, Charlie Smugg. More on that later.) We tried all sorts of things, mostly to do with food and bribery, but none of them worked. Then, I thought that maybe we could exercise Streaker indoors instead of having to take her outside and losing her. We used my mum's exercise bike to build a dog-walking machine.

It sort of worked and sort of didn't. What I mean is, we made the machine, got it working, I grabbed Streaker, shouted 'Walkies!' and popped her on the running platform. Unfortunately the platform was revolving so fast it catapulted

Streaker backwards, right across the room and into the kitchen, where she got her bum jammed inside the washing machine. We had to get the fire brigade to come and rescue her.

The extraordinary thing was that after that dreadful experience, whenever I said 'Walkies!' to Streaker she came straight to my side and sat down very firmly, just in case I was planning to put her backside into the washer again. Perhaps she didn't fancy a quick wash and spin-dry. So now I have the only dog in the world that responds to the command 'Walkies!' by coming back to me and sitting down. She still doesn't know what 'Sit!' or 'Stay!' means, but at least she doesn't give us terrible trouble any longer. Nowadays she's only dreadful.



So – Tina and I were up at the field walking the dogs. It had been raining so it was a bit wet and muddy. Mouse was doing his usual thing of being very obedient and padding along quietly next to Tina, and Streaker was doing her usual thing of hurtling through the grass like an asteroid on four legs, crashing into anything and anyone she happened to come across. Sometimes there are other dog-walkers up at the field and when I let Streaker off the lead you can tell where she is because of all the shouts. 'Oh!', 'Ow!', 'Gerroff!' Every so often someone suddenly vanishes from sight altogether. That's because Streaker has just crashed into them and knocked them flying.

Tina was telling me about a programme she'd seen on television. 'This farmer was showing how good his dog was at herding sheep. The dog raced everywhere, keeping the sheep together in a tight herd. She drove all the sheep – a hundred of them – into a pen, just her and the farmer. A hundred sheep! Really clever.'

I nodded. 'Yeah, I've seen stuff like that, too.'

Tina grinned. 'And I thought: Streaker could do that.'

I stopped dead in my tracks and just gawped at her. 'Streaker? Herd sheep? You're crazy!' I stared across the field and watched as poor Mrs Potter suddenly gave a startled yell and went over like a skittle in a bowling alley. I sighed deeply. 'Streaker couldn't herd a leg of lamb,' I muttered.

'I bet she could,' Tina went on. 'We taught her how to come back, didn't we?'

'Oh sure we did. Just shout "Walkies!" and she comes back. That's clever, that is.'

Tina punched my arm. 'You're such a pessimist, Trev. Why don't we try? Streaker would be so good at it. The farmer on the programme said that all you needed was a dog that was intelligent . . .'

'Big problem there, then,' I moaned.

'. . . obedient . . .'

'Even bigger problem.'

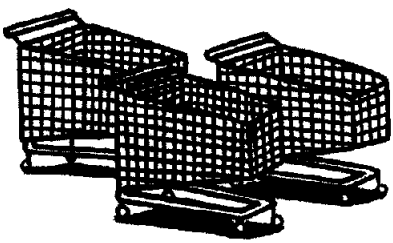
'. . . and very fast.'

'That's about the only bit Streaker *can* do.'

'You give up so easily. We haven't even started.'

'Tina, we're not going to start. What's the point? Why teach Streaker how to herd sheep? Can you see any sheep around here for her to herd? No. There's lots of grass, several





abandoned shopping trolleys . . . hey, good idea, we could teach her to herd shopping trolleys!'

'Trev . . .'

'She could herd trolleys and drive them down the high street and back to the supermarket. That would be really useful.'

'Trevor! You're more out of control than your daft dog.'

'Aha! So you admit she's daft? That means she's not intelligent enough to be a sheepdog then.'

Tina sighed and we walked on in silence for a bit. Eventually she decided to tell me the real reason for her mad suggestion. 'It's just that there's a dog show coming up and I thought it would be fun to enter – you know, both of us.'

'We're not dogs,' I pointed out.

'You know what I mean. It's a big show and there are lots of different competitions – herding, best-looking, most obedient, agility – something for everyone.'

'Everyone except Streaker.'

'You are such a grumblepot.'

'No, I'm not. I know my dog's limitations. She can't do any of those things.'

'OK, suit yourself, but Mouse and I are still going to take part.'

'Yeah? Mouse is going to be the fattest, slowest

sheepdog in the show, is he?'

'No. I shall enter him for best-groomed dog.'

'Best groomed! He's a mess! He's all wet fur and droolly jaws and slobbery tongue. He looks like an exploding laundry.'

'He's only a mess at the moment, Trevor, that's all. By the time I'm finished with him he will look the business. I've got it all sorted and if you don't want to take part I'll do it on my own.





I'm going home now. There's no point in stomping round a field with a grobbling grumblepot.'

'No such word as *grobbling*,' I said.

'No such thing as an exploding laundry,' she snapped back, and off she went. Halfway across the field she shouted back at me, 'The trouble with you, Trevor, is that you have no imagination.'

That's what *she* thinks. In fact I have too much imagination. I know when it's just not worth attempting something that is sure to end in failure.