WAR DOG

By

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

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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.

**SPEEDBALL**
Weapons of Mass ... Wait—

**SPEEDBALL**
MWDs, not WMDs. Military Working Dogs.

**SPEEDBALL**
Military Working Dog? That’s awesome!

Why?

**SPEEDBALL**
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.

**SPEEDBALL**
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.
Like how good can you smell?

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

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.

(Rapid sniffing for a moment)
You’ve got some Molly on your bicycle outside.

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.

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.

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.

Oh, good. (Whispering) Cuz actually, it’s totally mine. Damnnnnnnn! You’ve got a gift!

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.

SPEEDBALL
As long as you don’t try to pet me.

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

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 ….

What? Would you do?

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

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 ….

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.

Is it enough?

SPEEDBALL

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

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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.