

# Dogzzz

By Gary James



*"If any dog was going to rescue the good name of its species, this was not it."*

I have a very good reason for not being altogether keen on dogs. It went by the name of Mad Sandy.

Mad Sandy terrorised the street I grew up in. Interestingly Mad Sandy was known as Mad Sandy long before it began to display classic signs of insanity. It was so named at first simply because it was owned by a boy called Mad Barry, who used to eat things. The sort of things not made for eating, that is. Worms, staples, inner tubes, that sort of thing.

Mad Sandy was a huge, wiry mongrel with unfocused eyes and a permanently hungry drool. It was a dog of such frenzied hyperactivity that anything – a car, motorbike, even just a door slamming too loudly – would trigger a kind of demented snapping fit. Off it would fly, sometimes after a car or bike that was innocently passing through the street (which was more often than not my red Chopper bike), other times enraged by an unseen tormentor, bouncing uncontrollably between hedges and garden walls like some great hairy pinball.

When it did manage to focus its demented aggression it was nearly always on a vehicle of some kind. Mad Sandy would fling itself at anything with wheels, even something as sedate and unthreatening as a pushchair with a toddler inside. Motorbikes in particular drove it wild. I once saw Mad Sandy attach itself to the flared trouser leg of a passing motorcyclist. It kept pace with the bike for fifty yards or so, its eyes blazing hatefully, until they reached a sharp bend in the road. Then very gently, almost gracefully, the dog began to levitate, drawn up and out by centrifugal force. For a few seconds it was really quite beautiful, like ballet almost, and then something ripped and the dog sailed through the air and disappeared over a privet hedge. It was never quite the same after that, as if the incident had traumatised it for life.

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While not quite traumatised myself, I did nevertheless cultivate a lasting disdain for our canine friends. Personally I am a cat man. I had a cat of my own for a many years. I won't bother telling you its name. It is often pointless to name a cat in any case. They rarely come when called unless inclined to do so. If cats could answer the phone, cats would not answer the phone. I can sort of identify with that.

So dogs you can keep. My friend Mark has a dog now, a strange and lanky thing that looks a bit like a greyhound, but one that might have tumbled into a child's dressing up box and emerged wrapped in a shaggy old fur coat and a ladies hat. In fact it is the oddest-looking dog I have ever seen. I have chased more appealing animals around the skirting boards with a rolled up newspaper.

If any dog was going to rescue the good name of its species, this was not it. This dog looks as though it would have trouble rescuing itself from a violent sneeze.

If I needed any more reason to doubt the whole man's best friend thing, it came when Mark and I went walking the other day. I wasn't particularly surprised to see that he had brought the dog – only surprised that the wife, kids and a recently acquired mysterious hippy uncle hadn't come too. Mark's home life becomes more and more like the Waltons as the weeks go by.

We met in the town centre, just outside Borders on Briggate if you know it. Mark immediately handed me the controls to his freaky dog. "Hold the leash," he said. "I need to go buy the new Alan Titchmarsh novel. I've heard it's a cracking read."

He didn't really say that, but when I tell you what his stupid dog did to me, you will forgive me for deliberately embarrassing him.

Mark went into the bookshop. I sat down on one of those metal benches, the ones purposely designed for making sitting down really quite uncomfortable. The dog shuffled around and gave me the strangest look. It was sort of apologetic and defiant at the same time. I recognised it at once.

"Oh no," I said out loud. I stood up and shot a wild glance at the front of the bookstore, desperately hoping to see Mark coming out with his copy of *Take That's* official biography. Of course he wasn't. They never are. When I looked back at the dog it was having a steaming dump in the middle of Leeds city centre.

My first reaction was to drag it down an alley (once hidden from public view, my second may have been to wring its neck), of which Leeds has a number. Some have been converted to glitzy shopping precincts but others remain the same forgotten thoroughfares they have always been. I pulled hard on the leash. The dog waddled reluctantly towards me like some enormous overweight bird, laying a thick brown rope of poop on the pavement like icing piped onto a cake. In the meantime nearly a million and a half people passed by, almost all of them attractive single women. The rest were friends of my mother's and a couple of vicars.

I quickly realised that I had no chance of dragging the dog all the way across the street. Instead I hurriedly tied the leash to the bench and dashed into Borders. Mark was at the family sagas section, looking at a LARGE PRINT version of a Claire Rayner novel he's been dying to get his hands on.

"Your dog's just, you know, done one!" I said in a hot whisper. "Right in the middle of Briggate. There's CCTV all over the place. If I'm on *Look North* tonight I'll kill you."

"Oh," Mark said, sounding not in the least bit surprised. And then in the calm, pedestrian manner of one routinely used to dealing with family toilet emergencies, asked the nice man behind the counter for a plastic bag, then went outside and scooped the poop.

As an afterword to this story, just to tie up all the loose ends as it were, you may be interested to learn that Mad Barry vanished inexplicably in the summer of 1979. Some said his mother ran away to Devon with an ice-cream man. Others said that he died after ingesting the mystery poison inside a \*Stretch Armstrong. You never can tell with these things.

\*The author advises that a Stretch Armstrong is a action figure marketed to young boys back in the mid 70s. Stretch Armstrong was in the shape of a well-muscled blond man wearing a pair of swimming trunks. Its most notable feature was that its arms and legs could stretch outwards.

Gary James lives in Northern England, where he spends too long getting lost in the Pennine hills and being attacked by otherwise docile farm animals. He occasionally writes humorous tavel articles, most of which feature him getting lost and being attacked by otherwise docile farm animals. He is 39 and should know better.

