



# American Canine Alpha

## Episode 3, "I Like Me Better With My Guard Up" Part 1

Thick, heavy clouds stand out against the sunset falling on Lake Apopka as Ludwig Logemann, the host of American Canine Alpha, appears on the side of the beach - clad in a dark camouflage shirt hugging his bulky frame and paired gray trousers.

"46 American canines signed up to take part in the challenge of their lives," he says, looking straight into the camera. "We cast our net around the entire nation to find the strongest, toughest, most dominant everyday canine warriors there are, and brought them here... once more, at this former military training facility down in Apopka, Florida."

"Over the course of the past five days, they were whittled down to thirteen through a series of challenges testing their physical conditions, mental limits and will to overcome any obstacle on their path," Ludwig says. "Moments ago, Benet, the sole fox left in the competition, was eliminated in a clash of titans that happened right behind me, leaving the competing canines down to twelve. Very soon, the two separated packs will merge into one, as those five left to fend for themselves in the barracks will finally enter the Pound and reunite with the lucky seven who got the chance to experience it first thanks to Edge, who won his qualification beforehand."

"The twelve contenders for the title of American Canine Alpha are... Jaxton Cole, a 26-year-old camera operator from Fishers, Indiana."

*"I can't wait to really be in front of the camera and not behind it for once. It's time to kickstart the Jax to the Max!"*

*~Jaxton, 26, Bull Terrier, Camera Operator/Mountaineer*

"Danny Lytvynchuk, a 36-year-old gym owner from Rochester, New York."

*"I'm not going to walk around starting cold wars around the house. I'm not going to... but I could."*

*~Danny, 36, Malamute, Gym Owner*

"Tory Gronquist, a 22-year-old actor and fitness model from South Gate, California."

*"I'm like, the total dog! I'm friendly, hard-working, strong, versatile, and I take good photos. Hah!"*

*~Tory, 22, Golden Retriever, Fitness Model/Actor*

"Kyle Bialkowski, a 40-year old U.S. Army First Sergeant from Cicero, Illinois."

*"This Alpha might be coming at you without a leg, but anywhere else he's got the full package!"*

*~Kyle, 40, German Shepherd, U.S. Army First Sergeant*

"Farid Alinejad, a 34-year old paramedic and ambulance caregiver from Long Beach, California."

*"I can adjust to literally any situation that might get thrown in, and most of all I can literally... morph into whichever kinda wolf I wanna be."*

*~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic*

"Nickolas Runsabove, a 24-year-old academic support coach from Wagner, South Dakota."

*"They say who runs with 'yotes learns to howl like one... but are you up to the challenge? Are you really?"*

*~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach*

"Lance Cramer, a 30-year-old professional motorcycle racer from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania."

*"Alpha's my calling and I'm ready to add some silverware to my trophy cabinet. Let's ride!"*

*~Lance, 30, American Bulldog, Pro Motorcycle Racer*

"Ewan Park, a 23-year-old cyber security analyst from New York City."

*"I see American Canine Alpha as the chance to prove to the whole of America that I've got a lot more in me than the heart of a meek, nerdy Korean domestic."*

*~Ewan, 23, Jindo Dog, Cyber Security Analyst*

"Dionte Howard, a 30-year-old barber and hair stylist from Atlanta, Georgia."

*"You really wanna go and fight me? One growl, one look and I'm finna have yer knees quakin'!"*

*~Dionte, 30, Rottweiler, Barbershop Owner*

"Robbi Cox-Potzler, a 28-year-old free spirit from Washington D.C.."

*"Don't be tied down by expectations, go out, and DO. And what the fuck do I feel like doing now? Go get that title."*

*~Robbi, 28, Wolfhound (?), Unemployed*

"Don Dworaczyk, a 25-year-old dancer and choreographer from Seattle, Washington."

*"Up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right. Be there, ace it, and start all over! How do I do it? No idea, and I don't question it!"*

*~Don, 25, Afghan Hound, Personal Trainer/Choreographer*

“And Edge Brookhouser, a 31-year-old Coast Guard Petty Officer from Elizabeth City, North Carolina.”

*“If there’s something that I can say about Edge in ACA? He won’t hold back. If the way exists, I’m taking it.”*

*~Edge, 31, Catahoula Leopard Dog, U.S. Coast Guard Diver*

“Over the next 30 days, these twelve will fight each other in the greatest canine throwdown ever seen on television,” Ludwig grins at the camera. “They’ll compete in different types of challenges: Teams, where they’ll have to prove their cooperation and leadership skills, alongside their own strengths. Individual challenges, where they’ll showcase their own worth in order to set themselves apart from the rest. And once it’s all said and done, the bottom two will take on a grueling Duel for the final chance to stay. Lose the Duel, you’re out of the game.”

“The last two remaining contestants will take on the Alpha Gauntlet, a set of six grueling challenges and a public vote from the same people they dominated and defeated in the process. In the end, only one will take home the \$250,000 cash prize, the attention of the nation, as well as the right to call themselves the ultimate canine around,” the stoat says. “I’m Ludwig Logemann... and this is American Canine Alpha.”

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*May 18, 2021  
Apopka, Florida  
7:30 PM*

“I really hope there’s no catch this time around, stoat...” Kyle chuckles, the German Shepherd hauling his luggage, including a special bag to carry his prosthetics, as the group makes their way towards the main entrance of the lavish living quarters.

“Next up, ten-step obstacle course for a bed in the Pound!” Don replies in jest, leading the group to the front door - all canines marveling in awe at the lavish lakeside mansion. “Whoever fails, sleeps on the floor...”

“Speak for yourself, I’ve been waiting for this like forever...” Jaxton pushes ahead of the rest of the pack, grabbing the door’s handle and pausing for a second. “I just wanna savor the moment... okay, enough!” the short bull terrier quips before twisting the doorknob and walking in, every one left in shock and awe at the interior. “No fucking way!” he yells, sprinting in and looking around.

*“The Pound is... how can I put it?” \*the coyote looks up in awe, clearly at a loss for words\* “It’s a house like nothing I’ve seen before. Literally every room is bigger and better than anything I’ve ever seen, and...” \*beams in surprise and shock\* “It’s so much to take in at once! We got a home gym, a freakin’ huge jacuzzi, a game room... I don’t even know where to begin!”*

*~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach*

"I can't believe this..." the coyote quips, overwhelmed, putting his paw on Don's shoulder. Jaxton lets loose like a puppy in a candy store, while both Danny and Kyle take their time in admiring the place.

*"We're basking in our rightful entrance to our new home, the living room, the pool, the gym. All's unreal and amazing... and then we turn around..."*

*~Danny, 36, Malamute, Gym Owner*

The five walk towards the kitchen, Kyle stopping the rest in their tracks by instinct at what he sees, glaring slightly at the scene. The seven other competitors are sitting at the bar, leering at the five new bodies that they'll share living space with.

*"...that's right... we got to share this place. I forgot."*

*~Danny, 36, Malamute, Gym Owner*

*"These guys enter and it's like... a stalemate between two wolf packs that suddenly run across each other." \*camera focuses each member of the Pound group staring at the newcomers\* "All waiting to see who, like... makes the first move..."*

*~Ewan, 23, Jindo Dog, Cyber Security Analyst*

"Oh, it's you," Edge leans back on his seat in an indolent manner, toying with the string of his white wifebeater.

"Well, hello!" Don gleefully walks forward to greet the rest, passing a defensive Kyle and shrugging off the tension the other group was trying to cause. "Been a while, eh?"

"Bedroom's upstairs, but don't expect us to give you a guided tour..." the Catahoula replies dismissively. The Afghan ignores the jabs, shaking paws with Robbi, the first one to greet back. Slowly but surely, the rest gradually break the ice - the mood becoming pretty civil, but not quite friendly yet.

"Been a while, Top Dog..." Farid purposefully addresses Nickolas, instantly curious to know more about the coyote. "How's Ludwig been treating you five?"

"Fairly nice, to be honest," Nickolas responds in earnest, cocking his head. "You feeling better after that duel?"

"You can say that," the wolf responds. "Sucks for Benet, but hey, that's how this game works... How did he take it, by the way?"

"You saw him, no?" the coyote retorts dryly, quite wary at his opponent's constant prodding.

"Yeah, he sounded pretty down, especially when Lud said he ain't coming back..." Farid ponders. "Again, it is what it is, dude. They don't say this is a dog-eat-dog game for nothing..."

*"We're all just figuratively sniffing at each other to see what the dynamics are." \*the veteran looks around, others socializing and being cordial enough\* "With a group seemingly this tight, I don't trust anyone just yet. We'll see how this goes..."*

*~Kyle, 40, German Shepherd, U.S. Army First Sergeant*

"So here's the rest of the dads who made it, huh?" Lance asks Danny and Kyle.

The German Shepherd cracks a small smile. "Yes sir," he responds, walking to the shorter bulldog. "Wish we had some more in the fray, but you saw how it was last season, Aaron and John did well... but I plan to do better than them!" he chuckles. "What are your kids like?"

"Blade's a spunky three year old and the other's... to be determined, yeah..." Lance reminisces.

"So your wife's pregnant with number two?" Kyle asks, genuinely shocked. "Must be super hard for you just to be here... and you have another young one, man, I'm literally getting emotional over mine already and they're all grown up..."

The bulldog breaks his cool composure for a second. "Heh, I'm here for them, and so are you," he says. "I should be safe to see him come to the world after I'm done with this, but like, he's part of the reason I stepped up. I can't ride bikes forever, and this is bound to be a nice paycheck..."

"If anything, it's cool that we got another Forces' dog in," Edge cheerfully addresses Kyle, inserting himself in the conversation. "What's your experience, Sarge? Panama? Kuwait?"

Danny's eyes open wide. Kyle blinks, taken aback at Edge's jab. "Panama, Ku-oh alright, call me old, I guess, wow..."

*"Oh, were you in Panama in the eighties?' So are we playing these petty low-blow games on day one?" \*scoffs\* "Oh, brother..."*

*~Kyle, 40, German Shepherd, U.S. Army First Sergeant*

"If you wanna be a pain in the ass, don't act surprised when it comes back to bite you," Kyle sternly says at the snarky Catahoula.

"Lighten up, man. We still got a long way to go in this house," Edge shrugs. "Also, there's some stuff left in the pantry if you wanna whip something up for yourselves," he says sarcastically. "Cuz I ain't cooking for your bunch for free!"

"Doubt you can dish out something to maintain bulk, to be honest. Or build it..." Danny replies, looking cross-eyed at the slimmer canine, Kyle chuckling at the jab.

"Touché," the Coast Guard replies, cracking a grin as the new dogs begin scattering around the mansion. "Aw, this house's gonna get more lively with the new folks in!" he exclaims, uncaring that other people might listen. "I love it already!"

*"I can't get a full read on Edge yet, other than he's quite good in challenges and he thinks he's a Dog-given gift to the world." \*gives Edge a side glance as he cackles at the newcomers, a mug of coffee in the spotted canine's paws\* "He's the Pound seven's kingpin and doesn't even try to hide it. I doubt his new buddies will let him play the role for long."  
~Danny, 36, Malamute, Gym Owner*

Other instances of socializing go by with much less tension. Tory and Robbi get immediately friendly with Don and Jaxton, while Dionte also makes sure to welcome them warmly.

"Well, we hope you..." Ewan coughs once slightly. "...enjoy yourselves."

Don blinks. "There was a pause there. Anyone else heard that?" he asks, imitating the Jindo. "We hope you..." he coughs loudly, shifting his eyes exaggeratedly. "Enjooooooooooy yourseeeeeeeelves..."

The white-furred dog frowns at the Afghan. "Yes, and?" he asks, not quite realizing the other dog is playfully messing with him.

"If you want to go wild and tell me to eat a dick, sure, go for it!" Don replies with playful indignation to the Jindo's annoyance. "We all know we're in a competition! It's all good!"

*\*the five newcomers are shown hauling their luggage upstairs\* "We'll play nice, but fellas... the line's already been drawn in the sand. If you're caught lacking, it'll be easier to pick you off one... by one... by one..." \*chuckles\* "You'll have to come to me with really good offers to survive up here!"*

*~Lance, 30, American Bulldog, Pro Motorcycle Racer*

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"This is the raddest thing ever!"

Jaxton can't help but loudly voice out his elation as Farid and Dionte lead the five new houseguests to a tour of the upper floor, everyone marveling at the three luxurious bedrooms and the modern, urban-style decor furnishing each of them in the tones of red, white and blue - as per the theme of the season.

"The red one's already taken," the Rottweiler says, motioning at the four unmade beds in the first of the three rooms. "Two with me and Robbi, and three of ya with Ewan."

"Guess we gotta split between Edge, calm and party rooms, huh?" Jaxton tells Danny.

The malamute nods. "I'll gladly leave the crazy to you and Don. Us 'old dogs' gotta rest, right, Sarge?" he jokingly asks, elbowing Kyle.

"Don't see anything wrong with that," the G-shep nods, hauling his luggage right outside the blue room's door. "I guess that's fine with everyone? You too, Nick?"

"Yeah, fine with me. It's probably for the better to let the rowdy ones coexist," Nick nods, the group splitting to finally getting to witness real beds after days of roughing it up.

*\*the Afghan chats with Dionte as he crouches to unpack\* "This feels insane! Like, it's all hitting us that we're finally here, and we can finally bask in the fact that we're going to stay here and go through all of this in this quest for 250k. These guys may not look at me twice as a prospect, but... we'll see who's going to the last dance."*

*~Don, 25, Afghan Hound, Personal Trainer/Choreographer*

"DIBS!" Jaxton lunges himself into one of the vacant beds, giddy and excited about the prospect.

The Rottweiler chuckles at the bull terrier's eagerness. "Yep, this is gonna be the fun room from here on," he says, sitting down on his bed at the back of the room - the wall behind having already been covered with a Georgia state flag. "And wait until ya get to know Robbi! We've been looking to find new people to crush at beer pong. Homie's a fun time!"

"He's also an excitable one," Don chuckles, tapping the bull terrier's leg. "Fun things, short packages, huh?"

"You know it," Jaxton responds. "So how's things been going here?"

Dionte shrugs, greeting Robbi with a fistbump as he enters and mock salutes - the wolfhound just as excited to get to know his two new roommates. "It's been aite, dawg. What can I say? Big home, we havin' fun, but we gearin' up for the big challenges, yanno? Just like ya."

"Sure just like us, in an abandoned crackhouse, sure..." the bull terrier scoffs. "This is a ten out of ten doghouse. Living here for a whole month is gonna be some once in a lifetime shit."

"A month? I'm livin' the dream at three days, buddy," Robbi playfully slaps Jaxton.

"And three days is enough for your fill?" Don asks innocently, the wolfhound laughing out loud at the jab.

"Aw, fuck off!" Robbi chortles. "But yeah, my whole life is literally about doing the shit I want when I want, but here's the first time I feel I can give myself a luxury or two... or nineteen!"

*"I guess some of these new dawgs ain't half bad! Gonna take it easy at first, but I said what I said. No matter if it's this or that group, You already know that the American Canine Alpha is going to be..." \*thumps chest\* "The realest."*

*~Dionte, 30, Rottweiler, Barbershop Owner*

*"We came in here thinking it'd be us five against Edge and his minions, but Robbi and Dionte sound like they'd rather have fun and play fairly rather than gang up just cuz. The room situation works in our favor because I can be a party dog, get them to really let it all hang out, and maybe... just maybe, change the dynamics to my favor."*

*~Jaxton, 26, Bull Terrier, Camera Operator/Mountaineer*

Robbi and Dionte head out of the room, leaving Don and Jaxton to settle in. The Afghan crouches to pull the resting terrier's boots off, lowering his voice. "I don't think this is going to be a seven versus five thing..."

"I don't either," Jaxton responds, fingerclaws intertwined behind his large head as he lies down on his bed. "These two don't seem all that willing to suck up to the guy ruling the roost. And like, we don't have to pretend shit... I know we'll get along with these folks if we keep cool and turn up the party."

"See, I don't think we need to strategize this much. Let's just chill and show them we can hang," Don nods, dropping the mountaineer's boot on the floor with a heavy, resounding thud, moving to the other. "I know guys like Robbi... they go with the flow, and Dionte doesn't seem the kind to play games. Maybe they're fed up with Edge, maybe they were never up to his idea in the first place, but we'll keep checking their pulse..." the Afghan says, pressing a finger to his jugular.

Jaxton nods, stretching his back until achieving a satisfying pop. "Yeah, I guess it can be the paranoid side of me talking. I'm here to have as much fun as you guys," he retorts. "But... this is my one big shot, and I really don't wanna mess it up."

"It's everyone's big shot, camboy. I get we're here to compete and scheme and shit, but that's for tomorrow. Let's just focus on relaxing," the choreographer says, throwing Jaxton's boots to the side of the bed. "Those weigh a hundred pounds each, no wonder you're tense..."

The terrier chuckles. "You can't climb El Capitan or Denali in ballet slippers, Don. Hate to break it to you..."

"I don't think Ludwig's gonna have us do that, right?" the Afghan semi-jokingly questions. "I'd rather get back to Seattle in one piece, or at least take challenges I can excel at."

"So you're saying if there's a gymnastics challenge, I might as well go fuck myself?" Jaxton says in jest, stretching his legs and paws. "Don't worry, I am well prepared. I got a pair of top-class gym shoes, and anything else I can always go atcha barefoot," he chuckles, wiggling his toes for good measure as Don joins him in laughter.

*"I know it's a competition and one has to win, but man, at least it feels good to know there's someone to rely on for what's hopefully a long run." \*Jaxton and Don are shown tucking themselves in their beds, tired after the long day\* "This is a new beginning for my game, and I really feel me and Don are gonna turn this Pound upside down."*

*~Jaxton, 26, Bull Terrier, Camera Operator/Mountaineer*

In the red room, Edge shoots a knowing look at his roommates. "So, even if it's the individual portion, we still going seven V five, yeah?" he asks, trying to keep his others in check.

"I mean, if we get a team challenge, aren't they going to split us equally?" Tory rubs his chin, a puzzled look on his face. "Who are we giving them?"

The Catahoula glares at the retriever. "There'll always be some breakdown, but as long as the boot goes to one of those five, the end justifies the means."

"Our strength in numbers won't help us much if they beat us in the challenges, still..." Farid argues back. "I'd rather focus on that, and we also need to maximize our chances to keep the team captains within our group. Any power we can get should always be welcome."

*"Edge is all guns blazing against those five and I'm like..." \*pause\* "Okay, sure? But once that's all set, which of us are we going to peck out? In case it all goes to shit, what will happen? I'm not here to be an obedient wolf, Edge. I voted for you once, I could drop you out again if shit hits the fan."*

*~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic*

"I feel like if the vote is public, Edge and I should be the first captains," Lance states. "Us seven can split and control the game. I don't think they're smart enough to pull that off themselves."

"But like, didn't Nick win his Top Dog thing?" Tory asks. "Maybe it's already him vs him and we're sitting ducks..." the golden retriever scratches his head.

"Yeah, but Nick-" Edge begins to respond, then stops in his tracks, caught by a sudden thought. "Actually, Tory's got a good point. Ludwig says that the Top Dogs are getting a reward, and Farid... well, I don't know you and your special circumstances, but that might be a further penalty," the Catahoula says to the wolf.

"Thanks for reminding me," Farid says through gritted teeth.

Edge shrugs his shoulders. "You're welcome. But you see how it is. If me and the 'yote are the team captains for the first challenge, we better settle on who we should leave to try and infiltrate the barrackers," he says. "If we make them comfortable, it'll be all easier for us to reap the rewards later on..."

*"There's a lot of talk about captain this, captain that, and I'm here as the Underdog." \*the wolf slips under the covers and curls to the side, as the others keep chatting\* "Don't tell me I'll go straight to individuals or some shit! But I hope Edge remembers that, while I'm here, my priorities are above everyone else's. Make sure you find a way to stay in mine, cuz it won't be the other way around, I'll tell you that much."*

*~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic*

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May 19, 2021

9:30 AM

A group of canines is huddled around the Pound's kitchen table, enjoying their first common breakfast in the house as Danny serves them healthy portions of pancakes and scrambled eggs. "Time to learn about each other's weird habits, huh?" Ewan speaks up.

"Weird? I've lived in a frat house for four straight years at college, there's little that can spook me anymore..." Edge shoots the Jindo an amused look. "And I haven't even started to tell ya about the Coast Guard base..."

"Don't tempt the devil, pup," Danny replies, serving himself another mug of coffee. "The weirdest thing about me is probably my tolerance to everything. I need three coffees to wake me up, three bourbons until I feel something, and so on," he says. "Gotta make its way through a lot of malamute, you get me?"

"Ah dude, forgot to ask!" Tory chats up, interrupting Danny. "We have Edge here who won the solo challenge, and who did in your group?"

"Nick..." Danny replies, pointing at the coyote.

"You got five grand too, huh?" Edge tauntingly asks.

The Native American canine shrugs in his shoulders, slumping back on his seat at the table. "Yep," he nods in the Catahoula's direction, clearly not all that comfortable at the thought of discussing money in front of the others. "It's a nice bonus, I won't deny. I'm just wondering what's in store for me next, if there's a catch, even."

"And how did the other dog do?" the golden retriever presses on, taking another gulp of his shake. "We gotta admit Ewan here killed it back there, almost won over Edge!"

"It was nine to zero..." Nickolas says, the malamute shooting a look back at the coyote.

"Nine-zip, what the fuck?" Ewan asks back.

The big malamute instantly pays attention to what Nickolas was saying, the coyote put on the spot by others. "Honestly? I wasn't expecting to face up with a proper sniper," Danny says, the younger Top Dog bending his ears back at the compliment. "Yeah, that challenge was a wash, seriously, but I'm sure the next will play more to my strengths."

"Yeah, but I have never dealt with any kinda guns, even paintball ones, and I got my hits against someone from the armed forces!" Ewan shakes his head, chuckling at Edge. "Nine to none is a feat, alright?"

"Now, like, I ain't Kit Carson or anything..." Nick responds. "I got a couple good shots and went on a couple deep runs to the buzzer. It was nine-zero in like... three minutes?"

*\*peers\* "Nick, your loose jaw's making me look like a wimp. What are you doing? You wanna sink my game before we start playing it?"*

*~Danny, 36, Malamute, Gym Owner*

Edge chortles, shooting the malamute a wicked smile. "Surely it wasn't three minutes..."

"I mean, they felt like it," Nick shrugs, taking another bite of his eggs.

"It wasn't three. It wasn't three," Danny interjects in the conversation with an insisting tone. "Don't make it sound worse than it was..."

*"I'm the kind of guy who calls a spade a spade. Danny takes it as if I'm gloating, but like... if he wins the next one, I'm the first to get up and shake paws with him." \*the coyote walks away from the confrontation\* "Now if I win a challenge, I'm not gonna rub it in, but facts have to be told as facts. We came here to win, not compliment each other. And like... Pound, barracks, whatever, only one of us twelve howlers is coming on top. I'm just making sure it is me."*

*~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach*

The coyote looks at the malamute, startled by his outburst. "I mean... it is what it is, man," he says. "You still made it to the top two!"

*\*shakes head, exhaling\* "Sukin syn..."*

*~Danny, 36, Malamute, Gym Owner*

As one part of the house is getting their calories for the day, another is pretty busy burning them. Donte walks by Kyle and Lance as the German Shepherd sets himself in the leg press, the bulldog helping him load the machine with plates before he begins his first set - planting both feet on the platform and tensing his core as he begins working it in slow, controlled motions.

"I've seen others skip leg day with less of an alibi than yours, dawg. That's commitment!" Donte quips to Kyle, the veteran letting out a good chuckle before regaining his focus - his neck slightly lifting from the bench as he extends his knees and pushes forward, large quadriceps trembling under the weight.

"Gotta keep the good one strong," Kyle grunts as he pushes both footpaws on the sled, a paw planted on his prosthesis' knee joint, building a good rhythm under the Rottie's knowing sight.

"I'm mostly wondering why you need them two kicks," Donte points to Kyle's sneakers, one in each paw, natural and artificial.

"I mean, you can't buy them by the unit, no?" Lance retorts, drying the back of his head with a towel after concluding his own set on the squat rack.

"I got to build a FAQ card..." Kyle shakes his head in amusement, slightly panting, as he racks the weight and curls to the side. "It seems confusing, but it's pretty much like if you had one shoe. You'd feel off center and feel it on your hips pretty bad," he says, standing up and wobbling his legs to showcase his point. "And even if I could, I wouldn't buy just one shoe. Who gets the other?"

Donte low whistles. "Gotta say, homie... I'm honored we get to challenge ya for the title, and I'm mighty glad they let ya in with us," he says.

"Let? More like earn it!" Kyle puffs his chest out. "I never asked for an easy pass. And you haven't given it to me so far!"

"Hah! Ya get what I mean..." the Rottweiler replies. "Shit's finna be inspirin' to many dogs out there. And I don't think anyone here's gonna come and think you finna be an easy boot, not after the selections..."

*"I'm here for the long run, and I'm gonna hold on until I get the title." \*the shepherd bumps fists with Dionte, before helping him under the bar and spotting him on the bench press\* "Me and these people are cut from the same mold, and I know they gonna treat me as proper competition. It's all I ask for."*

*~Kyle, 40, German Shepherd, U.S. Army First Sergeant*

As the three dogs are busy training, the doors of the training area slide open - a new figure walking drowsily past to the other side, fully bare other than a pair of dark gray, cotton underwear.

"Howdy..." Robbi barely acknowledges the trio as he walks towards the other door that leads to the swimming pool, sliding them open and walking outside.

*"So, folks... three days in here, and as much as I'm digging this pad, I woke up feeling..." \*chuckles\* "Aw, shit, do I gotta say it? You know... There's some matters a stray gotta... take into his own hands, you get me?" \*winks knowingly\**

*~Robbi, 28, Wolfhound (?), Unemployed*

Lance blinks. "Was he naked just now?"

"Boxers," Kyle replies, matter-of-factly. "He might be heading out for a dip. I'd do too!"

Both canines peer through the glass window, looking confused as Robbi takes a detour to the left, circling all the way around the pool to reach the big storage container on the other side.

"Okay, this could work..." Robbi mutters to himself, shifting his eyes to look at his surroundings, then turning his look to the camerafur next to him. "Been 'nuff time... and if ya know what I'm talking about, yanno what I'm talking about. This stays 'tween us, kay?" he tells him directly, shuffling the top of the box to open it, hopping in, and then closing himself inside.

All but one canine in the gym are left perplexed. "Pfft..." Dionte scoffs, connecting the dots.

"Wait, what?" the G-shep asks, eyes going wide at the sight of the wolfhound's peculiar course of action.

The Rottweiler shakes his head, visibly amused. "Dawg's really doing it..."

*"See, what had happened was that last night Robbi was telling me the home was gettin' too crowded with the new homies coming in, and like, he had no privacy to do his... 'business', if*

*ya get me..." \*camera focuses on the pool box\* "Dawg must have a lotta imagination to get his rocks off without material, HAH!"*

*~Dionte, 30, Rottweiler, Barbershop Owner*

The other two are left agape at Dionte's explanation. "That's disgusting..." Lance frowns. "I ain't gonna get close to that box ever again!"

The usually more serious veteran just chuckles. "Hey, can't knock him off. He wants it, he gets it," Kyle says, earning a glare from the shocked bulldog. "We all got our needs, right?"

"I mean yeah but... am I the only one thinking this is wrong?" Lance asks out loud. "Can't he keep himself in check?"

"Hey, I ain't gonna go knocking the box while he's in it! Maybe you could, but not me," Dionte laughs back. "It's probably the last place in the Pound where cameras can't reach, toilets included. If anything, he's the smart one here."

"Call me again when you gotta get something from that box," the bulldog sneers. "We're all adults here, but it's been three days in here and he's acted like a messy, hormonal teenager. I dunno you, but I ain't got time for that."

*"At this rate, I feel better playing with Kyle and Danny rather than with Robbi in the long run. I'm not sure when we'll kick him out, but in my eyes, the event is sooner rather than later. If anything I think he's at the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to Alpha qualities anyway. Dionte, Edge, you both got a choice to make, and I'll make sure you make it right."*  
*~Lance, 30, American Bulldog, Pro Motorcycle Racer*

The canines are still peeking as Robbi reemerges from the box - the wolfhound visibly yawning and stretching his rangy form before readjusting his boxers and his body mic, getting out and putting the lid back on the container. They all get back to the machines in a rush, trying to pretend they hadn't been staring before he can walk back in.

"What up, sunshines?" the mutt greets the three canines as he casually walks in. "Ain't you gotten tired of wakin' up with the rooster and crankin' weights yet?"

"Crankin'..." Dionte snickers under his breath, to Lance's clear chagrin.

"Ain't you gonna dress up, or what?" the bulldog curtly asks.

"Hey, we likely gonna end up like this or less in challenges and shit!" Robbi replies in tune, sensing the hostility in Lance's voice. "Get used to seein' plenty bodies, aight?" he says in his usual boisterous, perky tone. "It's eighty degrees outside, I gotta air up my goods a little! Gimme a break!"

"Well I don't wanna see your 'goods', so throw some pants on at the very least. And if you gotta do that shit..." Lance can't help but add, "Use the toilet..."

"Huh? Whatcha mean?" the wolfhound cocks his head, pretending he didn't understand.

"Bah, nevermind," Lance waves his arm dismissively.

Robbi keeps staring at the bulldog. "Nah, like... you gonna spend a whole month without rubbing one out?" he drawls. "Those nuts are gonna weigh you down in challenges, ya see?"

"Don't pay him mind, dawg," Dionte chuckles, stepping in and putting a paw on Robbi's shoulder to avoid further confrontation. "Get dressed, ya gotta do quads STAT, chicken-legs..."

"Oughta eat some first," the mutt shrugs. "I don't get liftin' without some fuel in my belly. And a Bud Light on top sounds mighty good, no?"

Without waiting for an answer, Robbi turns on the group and heads towards the common area, Dionte shaking his head as the sliding doors close behind him. "He's a pawful, yanno? But he's a real one."

Lance glares at the Rottweiler and the German Shepherd, arms crossed. "I can't believe the two of y'all are perfectly fine with him," he says. "This is not a fucking circus... we're playing American Canine Alpha, and an Alpha he ain't. You gonna defend him or help me send him back to D.C. on his sorry tail?"

"Hey, I rather Robbi bein' Robbi than a fake bitch being fake, ya know what I'm sayin'?" the barber asks back, slightly annoyed at the bulldog. "This pad's big enough for both of you to mind each other's business. You don't have to play his game if you don't wanna," he concludes, the bulldog answering with an indignant glance.

*\*flicks his ears\* "Interesting rift in dynamics, to say the least. Maybe the bond between the Pound dogs isn't bulletproof..."*

*~Kyle, 40, German Shepherd, U.S. Army First Sergeant*

"The pad's big enough, but the title, now THAT shit ain't big enough, and y'all don't fit!" Dionte laughs heartily.

"We'll see who's the mold really made for, buddy," Kyle chuckles, amused at the Rottweiler's brazenness.

*\*the mutt is shown having a big plate of leftover breakfast\* "Listen, ya don't gotta like the stray way, but ya gotta respect it. I got the same right to be here like all of you, and it's what's gonna take me to that title, aight?" \*burps\* "Besides, the whack-a-box ain't exclusive. I'm puttin' it out there for all who want to use it. I ain't zealous!"*

*~Robbi, 28, Wolfhound (?), Unemployed*

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May 20, 2021

12:00 PM

82° F

Clad in his casual, yet militaristic style, Ludwig awaits the twelve canine finalists in front of the Pound as they exit the front door, slapping each other's backs like a football team coming out of the locker room - visibly excited for what's to be the first team challenge of the season.

"Hello there, guys," the stoat greets the group as they settle in front of him. "How are you enjoying the Pound? Getting used to it yet?"

"You know, Ludwig, it really feels like a dream come true," Jaxton perks up. "The biggest fucking bachelor pad at our full disposal, and a bunch of fun, likeminded people to share it with... I almost feel bad that we gotta fight each other for the right to stay," he says, most contestants mockingly shushing him off. "Almost, I said!" the bull terrier laughs.

"And ya gotta realize, there's people like me and Nick who only ever saw shit like this on TV displays in a store. So having it all real is... damn, wow," Robbi continues. "I think Tory here's like, 'I've seen better' or 'where my trailer at?'..." he chortles.

The retriever can't help but chuckle. "Nah, like... I'm used to the cameras, I've been in the spotlight a ton of times, but this is different 'cause it's on 24/7. This movie literally never stops, you get what I mean?" he says, tossing his long hair back. "I'm ready to play as much as anyone here."

"Well, let's channel all of this excitement," Ludwig comments, smirking at the group. "Ready to play your first Team Challenge?" All the canines howl and cheer at the suggestion.

*"It's go time! This is exactly what can set me apart from the rest of the pack. Winning immunity is the most important part of this game, and it's time to put my pawprint once and for all. Let's do this, dudes!"*

*~Tory, 22, Golden Retriever, Fitness Model/Actor*

"Today's challenge is called... pretty appropriately, if I might add... Go Fetch," the host says, Don raising his eyebrows at the canine-themed pun. "You'll square off in rounds on an open field. On my go, an air-compressed machine will launch a foot-long aluminum rod far out into the field, and you'll run out and try to grab it and bring it back to their starting spot before your rivals." Most canines nod along to the explanation, their expressions ranging between expecting and outright ecstatic. "First one to get back with the rod to the post and touch it with a paw wins a point for their team. We'll play nine rounds, and the first team to get to four points wins the challenge and lives to see another day. All clear?"

*"So... if I get it correctly, you have to be fast to grab the baton first and you also need to be ready to get dirty and tackle down others if they beat you to it." \*the Jindo nods to the host, a stoic expression on his pointed muzzle\* "I know many people here are still underestimating me, but I want this to be my stage to shine and prove 'em wrong."*

*~Ewan, 23, Jindo Dog, Cyber Security Analyst*

"So, as you know, we'll need team captains to run this out," Ludwig says, pulling out two sets of blue and red jerseys. "And as most of you guessed, this is where the Top Dog twist comes

into play," the stoat muses, putting his hands together and pointing at the Catahoula. "Edge, top dog of the Pound group, you'll get first pick. Come on up."

"Thank you, Lud..." the Coast Guard bumps paws with the host in deference, taking the pile of blue jerseys from his paws.

"Nickolas, top dog of the Barrack group, you'll get to pick second."

*"I knew the Top Dog came with something else in the package! Scoring an early win as a captain will be crucial for my path to the end." \*the coyote is shown absentmindedly counting the garments\* "But this stack of jerseys feels... light. I got only four red jerseys to give out. Where's the catch this time?"*

*~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach*

"However..." Ludwig interjects, calling for everyone's attention. He turns, pulling out another set of white jerseys as the whole group gasps in shock. "Two teams is good, but this is a game for three..." he grins.

"Damn," Jaxton blurts out. "This is gonna fuck up some plans..."

"And this is where that other title one of you won comes to play," the stoat continues, looking straight at the wolf paramedic and gesturing the white jerseys to him. "Farid, you're the third captain! Come on over!"

"Me?" the lupine gasps, stepping out of the group to join the other two captains at the side of the host. "Fuck yeah!"

"As the Underdog, you will pick third after Edge and Nickolas. However, this could be a huge opportunity for you to turn things around," Ludwig grins. "Choose wisely, build your team accordingly, and you might end up toppling the two Top Dogs."

"Will end up," Farid replies back without missing a beat, taking the white jerseys from Ludwig's paws.

*"It feels great to have some control in this game!" \*the wolf claps\* "This is my shot at redemption and once my team wins, I'll really be able to sink my teeth in and prove my dominance over these other supposed threats."*

*~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic*

The host motions to the Catahoula, then to the nine canines still waiting to be called. "Alright, it's time to sort the teams out. Edge, your first pick for blue..."

"It'll be none other than Cramer the racer," the Coast Guard goes straight to the point, some canines shaking their heads as the bulldog steps forward and bumps paws. "He's fast, he's tough, he's gonna kill this for sure."

The coyote is instructed to step up forward, taking a deep breath before calling his first pick. "I choose Robbi," he says, prompting more shocked faces from the rest.

“Woo-hoo!” the mutt howls, raising both paws as soon as his name is called. “I look good in red, don’t I?”

*“First, this is a speed challenge, and Robbi’s been a scrappy, quick and sprinting kind of competitor, so he’s got the profile. Secondly, this is a message to those Pound seven. I’m not here to stay in any sort of social line. We’re all twelve individuals wanting the same thing, and I’m not going to let petty alliances bust my chances at a win.”*

*~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach*

“Farid?” Ludwig asks.

“Well, we’re going with skills, and the one I feel has shown more from the ones here is the number one at the race in that first cut, and that’s Jaxton,” the lupine says. “Come on over!”

“Underdogs rule!” the bull terrier grins, instantly high-fiving the wolf as he picks his white jersey. “We’re gonna make it happen, I promise. Last to first.”

*“I think it’s quite fateful that I’m on Farid’s team. I got off to a rocky start, shit didn’t go according to my plans despite doing excellent at first... but now the real game begins and I get a chance to make a statement and prove I can come back from the rubble. Folks, I’m used to making it to the summit, no matter the setbacks.”*

*~Jaxton, 26, Bull Terrier, Camera Operator/Mountaineer*

*“Sorry Edge, Lance, but a team of four is a very reduced pool to split into who gets saved or not, and even then nothing else matters until we get the boot of someone we want. In the meantime, I want to win, and this shortman can help me rise to the occasion.”*

*~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic*

Edge shoots a look at the white group before returning his sights at the rest. “Well, young people usually got stamina to match, so that’s why I’ll get Ewan.”

“Usually nerds get picked last, but hey, I’ll take it...” Ewan jokes, walking over to Edge’s team.

“I want Don,” Nickolas continues, the gangly Afghan thanking him with a nod of his head before putting on his red jersey.

Farid turns towards Jaxton. “Who do we want?” he asks the terrier, some murmuring following. The wolf turns back to the crowd, his hands fisted to emphasize his point. “This challenge requires a lot of stamina, swiftness, and vigor. And I know physical shape is paramount... I choose Tory.”

*\*Dionte studies the three teams, then looks at the other two dogs left as Tory gleefully accepts his white jersey\* “I don’t fuckin’ get this, dawg. They betting on speed, but the stoat said we could throw hands. And you don’t want to take on the best for that? The one of this bunch that’s built like Evander Holyfield and can whoop ass like he does? This is sum’*

*bullshit.”*

*~Dionte, 30, Rottweiler, Barbershop Owner*

Edge shoots a look at the stoat. “There’s no way I’m letting my dawg be the last pick, not with these options,” he chuckles, Danny rolling his eyes. “Come over, Dionte. Let’s get this!”

“That’s my dawg!” Dionte waves his paws at the Catahoula, making a great show of hugging and shaking paws with his teammates. “Farid, Nick, we’re coming for ya,” he says, waving a fingerclaw at the other two teams.

*\*rolls eyes\* “Of course myself and Danny are last. But it’s up to them to underestimate us, whether that’s because of age or the skills in this challenge. Whatever team I’ll end up on, I’ll make sure we win.”*

*~Kyle, 40, German Shepherd, U.S. Army First Sergeant*

“Nothing personal against any, of course,” the coyote says matter-of-factly, not completely enthused at the idea of having to make the last decision. “But I feel this guy has the experience necessary for this situation... I’m going with Kyle.”

“Which means... Danny, you’re in Farid’s team,” Ludwig immediately comments, motioning towards the last canine yet to be picked as both make their way to their respective teams.

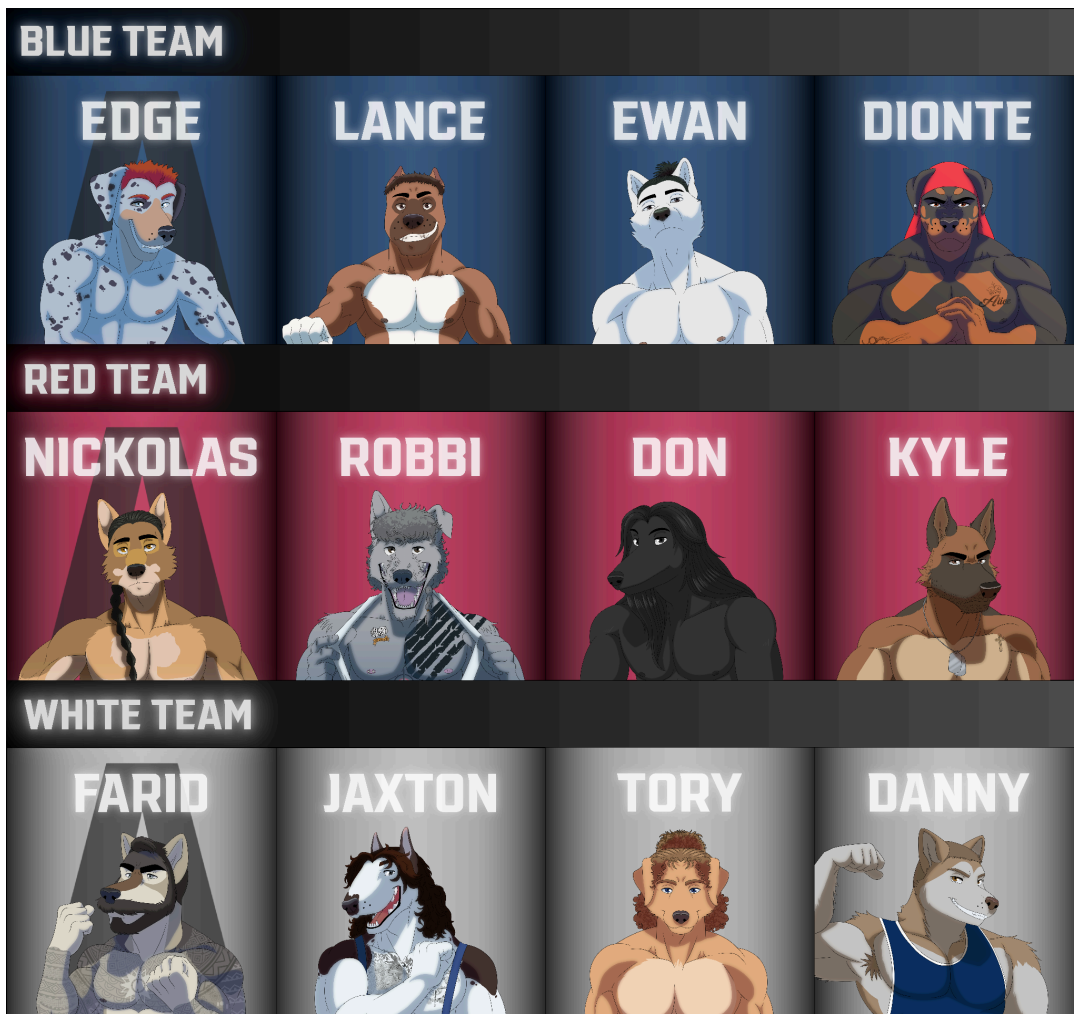
*“I feel Nickolas is playing a game.” \*the malamute walks towards the wolf to accept his white jersey\* “Ever since we’ve moved, he’s been trying to undermine my progress and sully my profile in front of the rest. Maybe he knows I’m able to shoot for the top and challenge him, and knows that the rest of the challenges won’t all be up his alleyway. We’re the Barrack five, but that doesn’t mean I’m not sleeping without an eye open for those gunning for me.”*

*~Danny, 36, Malamute, Gym Owner*

*“I feel good about my team. We’ll snatch the victory and immediately four Pound fellas will be safe from any shady business. And well... can’t wait to prove I’m on the top for the third week straight.” \*chuckles\**

*~Edge, 31, Catahoula Leopard Dog, U.S. Coast Guard Diver*

“Alright, we got our teams, so y’all go get changed in your challenge gear and head back,” Ludwig exclaims. “Let’s get started!”



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All twelve canines walk in, clad in their respective colors, as the camera pans over the challenge set - a large, empty field marked by red and blue lines. The host welcomes the group as they settle in front of him, pumping fists and shaking paws in anticipation of the battle.

“Okay, so... here’s how we’re doing this. Each team will have to field a player in each round. We’ll play nine rounds in total, and the team conquering the most wins the challenge,” Ludwig says. “The winning team will earn immunity and avoid elimination, while the two losing teams will partake as lone dogs in the first Individual challenge of the season.”

“Won’t be me,” Edge says confidently, earning a side look from Farid.

“Oh, and just so you know... this first challenge comes with a few rewards for the lucky team,” the stoat adds, many ears perking at the revelation. “This season, each Team challenge will be worth a \$2000 cash tip for the winning captain. And if that ain’t enough, the winning team will be treated to a special dinner courtesy of Savannah Road Steakhouse, one of the best beefsteak restaurants in Central Florida.”

The competitors all vociferate their joy, several tails wagging at the mention of steak. "Aw shit!" Robbi gleams.

"Got you excited, huh?" Ludwig smirks. "We're talking a varied selection of prime Wagyu and Angus beef, with a number of shareable sides, desserts, and of course cold beer to wash it down. The rest of you? You'll only get to watch."

"Literally?" Tory cocks his head. "Like?"

The stoat cracks an evil smirk. "Yep, I mean it literally," he says. "The meal will be served straight to your door and you'll get to have it, right in the comfort of the Pound. Losers will have to make do with your pantry, as if it was any regular day."

*"So if we lose, this counts as a punishment too. There's a lotta things one can dangle in front of someone's muzzle to make them beg and feel pathetic..." \*pause, blinks\* "But a fancy steak dinner when you're having average home cooking is certainly up there."*

*~Don, 25, Afghan Hound, Personal Trainer/Choreographer*

*"A good steak can go a long way in getting a group of hungry dogs to gel and bond with each other." \*Farid eagerly looks at the host\* "This is a reward to win at all costs, and I feel my time has come to get rid of the Underdog label and show people I came here to dominate."*

*~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic*

"As you know, we'll have the captains select who goes in each round, with just one rule to follow - everyone in the team has to play once before you send in people for a second time. You'll lie on the ground facing away from the camp, and at the signal, you can start. Farid, you'll get to pick who goes in this first round. Who's it going to be?"

"Might as well..." the Persian lupine replies, stepping forward.

"Nickolas?"

"I feel it'll be an all captain first round," the coyote nods, shooting a look back at Edge. "Unless he's.... got another plan?" he continues, a slight taunting pause in his tone.

"Nah, what he said," the Catahoula retorts, not waiting for formalities - bumping fists with Lance and Dionte before he steps into the field, grabbing the starting post as if to mark his territory.

*"Fairly easy to tempt these fellas, wouldn't you say?" \*grins\**

*~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach*

"Alright, for the first round in the first challenge of the season... Edge, Nick, Farid..." Ludwig calls out, one paw on his airhorn as he gets ready to call the start and the machine slightly tilts left and right to shoot in a random direction. "GO!"

The machine sends the rod several feet in the air, all three dogs quick to step up, turn, and sprint forward in a bid to catch it first. Edge violently shoulders Farid, aiming for the center lane, but is taken by surprise as Nickolas speeds past both - the coyote like a red blur charging to his right, immediately guessing the angle of rotation of the rod as it starts falling.

With a small jump, Nickolas manages to seize the baton - instantly eyeing the starting post as he turns in his steps and faces his two opponents, eager to rip the coveted prize off his paws. "Nick grabbed the stick, can he fetch it back to the start?" the host yells, all competitors loudly cheering for their own captain.

*"Like, this is like we're in the middle of Super Bowl training, dude!" \*smiles\* "This is going to be mad crazy 'till the end!"*

*~Tory, 22, Golden Retriever, Fitness Model/Actor*

The coyote dances back and forward, nimble on his paws, as Edge and Farid keep waiting for the right opening to tackle - both unable to agree on who should make the first move. Eventually the Catahoula throws himself at Nickolas, crashing against the prairie wolf's legs in a clumsy way - Farid getting cut off as the coyote jumps over the spotted dog and lands on the other side, somehow still on his paws, perfectly placed for a coast-to-coast run to the post.

"And Nick's making his way back!" Ludwig roars, the entire red team gasping at the coyote's swift maneuver and instantly cheering at the top of their lungs as he runs back. "Nick is literally schooling both captains!" Farid lunges forward in a desperate tackle, but fails to stop his opponent's mad dash as well - Nickolas flying forward and touching the post right as the lupine crashes on the ground, cursing off his displeasure.

"That's one for the red team!" the stoat yells, Nick's teammates jumping up and down in excitement.

*\*peeks at Edge as he gets up with a scowl, dusting himself off\* "Seems our 'Top Dog' has just had a piece of humble pie with extra whipped topping served straight to the muzzle, huh?" \*raises eyebrows\**

*~Kyle, 40, German Shepherd, U.S. Army First Sergeant*

"Red team's going to take the first point, and now's Nick's turn to choose," Ludwig says. "Who you sending?"

The coyote turns back to gauge his team, turning back as an overly excited canine offers himself up next. "I'll go with Robbi," he says, the grey-furred mongrel shooting a fanged smile through his red mouth guard.

"Blue, who you pick?"

Edge rubs the back of his head, quickly trying to figure who to match the eager stray with. "I'll go with Ewan here," he shrugs, rubbing the Jindo's shoulders before sending him out.

Farid turns to his group. "Feel we need to hit those two with a different approach. I'm thinking bulk..."

*"Truth be told, I have to play it smart here. I don't want to play what I feel are my best cards so soon." \*camera focuses on Jaxton\* "Choosing who to pit against whom is key. Robbi and Ewan are both quick on their feet, so my best chance is to take them down with Danny's brute strength." \*the malamute steps forward, shedding his white shirt as he goes for the post\**

*~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic*

"You're up, big boy..." Farid nods, motioning at Danny to come close for some last-minute pointers. "Stay behind and try to take them down," he says, the big malamute nodding in agreement.

"So we have Robbi, Ewan and Danny fighting in the second round," Ludwig says, all three canines clutching on their posts as they await for the rod to be launched. "Ready... GO!"

As the rod gets shot through the field, Ewan's the first to turn and sprint - Robbi right on his tail and trying to catch him while Danny follows them a few steps back, fully knowing he can't beat them on a straight-out sprint. The Jindo looks up as the baton rotates in the air and falls down, pivoting slightly to his right to grab it straight in his right paw - the wolfhound instantly going for the tackle, but misstepping and tripping over his feet as he gets taken by surprise by his opponent's sudden change of direction.

Ewan barely notices Robbi faceplanting on the ground behind him as a huge roar explodes through the field, the blue team cheering loudly as soon as they realize he's got the rod in his paws. "Ewan getting the catch for blue!" Ludwig says. "Can he bring it back?"

Only Danny stands between Ewan and the finish line - the malamute standing with his arms and legs wide open, fangs bared at his opponent in his menacing stance. Ewan instantly steps to the right, prompting the heavier dog to make a step towards him - then quickly sidesteps and dashes in the opposite direction, Danny trying to grab him but only managing to get a hold of his shirt's back. The Jindo is too fast for the malamute to hold on, the garment stretching under his grasp before he manages to break free and power towards the post.

"And Ewan gets the point!" the stoat roars - Edge and Dione howling in response as the white dog collapses on the floor, paws still grasping the rod. "The young guns are bringin' the heat!"

*"Oh..." \*camera focuses on the retriever looking at the challenge\* "So like, this is what Ewan can do. He's all nice and mellow and then like, click, whoopass!" \*chuckles\* "He just broke Danny's ankles like a pro B-baller!"*

*~Tory, 22, Golden Retriever, Fitness Model/Actor*

"Guh..." Robbi vocalizes, picking himself up. "That was a fall alright..." The mutt moves his jaw, medical staff dashing to look over the scrape he had under his muzzle. "I'll be good though..."

“So is the price of the challenges, and we’re only getting started,” the stoat comments as the wolfhound gets treated, shooting a knowing look at the rest. “We are one for blue, one for red,” he reports. “Round three, who’s next, Edge? Someone who hasn’t played yet, Lance or Dionte.”

“Let’s go, dawg,” the redhead canine pats the Rottweiler’s wide shoulder.

A slightly stressed Farid looks back. “We’re going with Jaxton. Go kill ‘em, bully.”

Nickolas looks back at his team. After pondering, he slowly points towards the veteran. “Think you can do this, Kyle?” he asks. “You got a better read on those two, I think.”

The shepherd hops forward, gesturing to the Sioux coyote with a nod of his head. “Thought you’d never ask...” he chuckles, waiting for his opponents to reach him at the post.

*“Don’s a sure point, and I was taught to save my best shot for as late as I can put it. I’m confident he’ll be able to score over the others they left.”*

*~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach*

*\*camera focuses on the canine’s padded prosthesis\* “I hope these pups won’t go easy. And if they pop it, they better know I’m the fastest crawler in the Midwest!” \*laughs\**

*~Kyle, 40, German Shepherd, U.S. Army First Sergeant*

“Dionte, Jaxton, Kyle...GO!”

The rod goes flying, way out in the field and out of the dogs’ grasp as they dash through the field - Kyle staying slightly out of the action while Jaxton and Dionte shoulder each other, their eyes straight on the rod as it falls to the ground.

Nearly at the same time, the Rottweiler and the bull terrier jump on the length of aluminum like two rabid ferals, struggling to tear it away from each other’s paws. Moments later Kyle joins the melee - the 40-year-old veteran pouncing on Dionte and grabbing his midsection with the instinct and determination of a college linebacker.

“We got our first all-out brawl!” Ludwig exclaims, as the three canines tussle on the ground - Dionte and Jaxton still trying to get each other to break their hold on the rod, while Kyle is busy trying to pull them apart. The bull terrier growls as he gets targeted by the shepherd, his paw being forcefully ripped off from the rod with Kyle pinning him down.

*“Been hearin’ all about Jaxton being the one to beat. Well, there he be...” \*camera focuses on the dogpile\* “Getting his lil’ ass beaten.” \*laugh\**

*~Dionte, 30, Rottweiler, Barbershop Owner*

Seeing an opening, Dionte rolls on his back and tries to get up, Kyle instantly diverting his attention from Jaxton and managing to get a paw on the rod before the Rottweiler can run away with it. Jaxton is quick to retaliate, his short arms wrapping around Kyle’s shoulder and pulling with all of his might in a bid to get him to drop.

"They going all out like a freakin' tug of war..." Lance flinches, well aware of what is awaiting him in the round to come.

Eventually, the bull terrier manages to tear Kyle's paw away from the rod with a powerful yank, the veteran grunting in pain as Dionte rolls over and gets on his feet - dashing forward and grabbing the post before Jaxton can stop him. "BOO-YAH!" he howls, loudly smacking his chest before congratulating with the rest of the blue team - Edge being the first to run to the Rottie's side, giving the bigger canine a full-body hug.

*"And that's another for the good guys. Who's competition?" \*winks\* "Yup. Rottie didn't come to play. He came to win."*

*~Dionte, 30, Rottweiler, Barbershop Owner*

Meanwhile, the camera focuses on Kyle still on the ground, holding his left shoulder as he struggles to get back up. Nickolas and Don immediately rush to his side, helping him on his feet while Dr. Paul and his assistants step in again.

"It's nothing, really. Just a rough-up," the German Shepherd stresses to his team as the Kuvasz doctor asks him to move his shoulder under Ludwig's watchful eye, nevertheless unable to avoid a slight flinch.

"Looks like a mild ligament sprain," the white dog comments. "It's nothing critical, and we're not pulling you from the challenge, but I'd advise you to rest up for a while."

Kyle frowns at the medic, but nods. "Do I have to?" he asks out loud, his eyes immediately connecting with his captain's.

"We'll hold the fort for ya, Sarge," Nick responds. "Don't worry about it."

*"This game's proving to be a big scuffle. I'm glad Robbi and Kyle are still raring to fight, but we gotta be careful with our game if we want to last."*

*~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach*

*\*groans\* "Jax here was my sure one point shot. What the fuck?" \*camera focuses on Jaxton as he steps in, making sure the shepherd is okay\* "I guess strategy's off the window, and the only plan is to get this bitch whatever the cost."*

*~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic*

"Okay, as we said, next round will be played by those who haven't stepped in yet. That's Tory, Don and Lance," Ludwig calls for the three canines. "From the next round on, you'll be able to pit in whoever you want."

*"To say I'm a top class brawler is like saying Robbi is handsome as Tory." \*the bulldog loosens his limbs, looking as Don bumps fists with the retriever as he awaits for Ludwig to call his round\* "The good news is, I feel none of us three has any big physical advantage. It may fall down to who gets to the rod the quickest and sheer luck."*

*~Lance, 30, American Bulldog, Pro Motorcycle Racer*

As soon as the air horn blows, all three dogs sprint out in the field - the baton falling to the ground about eighty yards out. Tory slightly edges Don in picking it up, the Afghan shouldering the young retriever as they come back but failing to throw him off-balance.

*"Unless Lance is allowed to get his bike in this race, I feel like I got the upper paw on these two. The one thing I got on these guys is being quick..." \*the Afghan lifts his leg, putting it behind his head\* "...and limber. And yes, I am available, if that's what you're asking!"*  
~Don, 25, Afghan Hound, Personal Trainer/Choreographer

Lance faces Tory with a menacing scowl on his muzzle, blindly fumbling to grab the baton as the retriever steps to his right and crosses him. The impact between the two is enough to make Tory drop the rod, the Afghan quick to scoop it in his paws as soon as it goes flying.

Don tugs the rod from an exposed edge, making a run to the goalpost under Lance's stunned gaze as the entire group explodes in a cheer. Both the bulldog and the retriever struggle to get back up on their paws, Tory almost catching up to the Afghan but unable to stop him from touching the pole.

"Don just... dashes to the end, making it look easy!" Ludwig announces as the dancer makes it back to base. "Blue and red are tied at two apiece, white still to score!"

*"That's right. He's a force to be reckoned with!" \*the slim canine goes to hug his team\* "I feel great vibes from this team, and victory's this close. Only two more left!"*  
~Don, 25, Afghan Hound, Personal Trainer/Choreographer

"Nickolas, it's your turn to choose. Who you putting in next?" the stoat remarks.

The coyote briefly ponders. "I think I'm going in again," he says, fixing up his shorts. "Who's next?"

Ludwig looks at the blue team, Edge's eyes darting from a teammate to the next. "Let's put the lucky amulet to a run again, shall we?" he says, patting Ewan's back.

*"We've all seen Nick on the field in these games of speed. He moves like a freakin' ninja, and you're welcome to stop him once he's got the stick in his paw because he's no pushover." \*Ewan glances at the coyote as Jaxton is called up by Farid\* "I need to capture the thing before he does, and then I gotta work with this and make sure Jaxton doesn't even get close. He's built like a cinderblock, I don't have the size to counter how dense he is."*  
~Ewan, 23, Jindo Dog, Cyber Security Analyst

"GO!"

All three dogs dash forward, eyes torn between the aluminum rod rotating in the air and each other's trajectory. Ewan and Nick are the fastest out, both jumping forward to grab the baton mid-air and tumbling on the ground in a heap of dirt and flailing limbs.

"Who got it? Who got it?" Tory asks out loud, jumping. Some canines shield their eyes, trying to spot what dog managed to get a hold of the coveted stick. A second later, the entire blue team cheers as Ewan rolls on his feet, tightly clutching the rod in his left paw to keep it away from Nick - the coyote instantly pouncing on him, trying to grab his right leg but unable to get a hold.

The Jindo looks straight up, quite shocked at having managed to get a hold of the baton for the second round in a row. He doesn't waste a second in dashing towards the post, jumping over Jaxton as he makes a desperate tackle for his leg - the bull terrier sliding on the ground as a baseball runner would, but ultimately failing to connect with his blue-clad opponent.

"Ewan AGAIN making a run for the goal, can he fetch it home?" Ludwig yells excitedly. "YES HE CAN!" The young Jindo throws up his paws in celebration, all of his team huddling around him in elation.

"He's supposed to be one of the good ones..." Farid frustratedly mutters to Tory, pointing at Jaxton as he walks back.

*\*the bull terrier spits on the ground\* "It fucking sucks. I want to come to this guns blazing and it isn't working at all. I had this plan of domineering on day one and I can't even get a point? Bruh!"*

*~Jaxton, 26, Bull Terrier, Camera Operator/Mountaineer*

"So, Edge, here's where we stand..." Ludwig addresses the smug-looking Catahoula. "Your team needs one more point to win the challenge, and it's your turn to pick first. Who are you putting in?"

The coast guard looks at his team. "Dawg?"

Dionte cocks his head. "Dawg?"

"Daaaaawg!" Edge laughs, the Rottweiler immediately getting the hint and stepping forward. "Go smoke 'em, big boy..."

"Well, one gotta do shit himself around here..." Farid says to his team before stepping back up. Danny attempts to talk to him, but the wolf's mind is already decided.

Nick looks pensive at the selected competitors, turning to Kyle for a word of advice. "Let's go with speed," the Army veteran says to the coyote, looking back at Don. "He already left five footprints by the time the others even raise a leg."

"Can't argue with a war sergeant, aw?" Robbi quips to Nickolas, giggling.

*"We can concede a point to Team White, but if Blue gets to four, it's game over for us."  
\*Nickolas is shown whispering in Don's ear as he prepares to run out\* "If Don can't score, he must find a way to keep Dionte from scoring again. But really hoping he gets one and lets us destress."*

*~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach*

“GO!”

As soon as the rod is launched into the air, Don springs forward slightly ahead of Dionte and Farid - the limber canine managing to get a paw on the rod as it falls, but instantly getting shoved to the ground by the hulking Rottweiler.

“That’s gonna leave a mark!” Danny winces. Farid is quick to jump on top of Dionte as the barber manages to get a hold of the rod, the two burly canines wrestling for control on the ground and openly snarling at each other.

*“Everyone’s had a chance to see the cool, calm and collected Farid so far, but I got that lupine blood, alright, and I ain’t afraid to unleash it on anyone.” \*the wolf forcefully tears the rod away from the Rottweiler’s paws as his opponent keeps him blocked with his powerful legs\* “The medic’s going to bruise someone today!”*

*~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic*

While the two burly guys tussle on the ground, nobody’s paying attention to Don - the Afghan stepping in and awkwardly going to pin Dionte, giving Farid the momentum he needs to slip away from his grasp and get on his feet. The wolf runs forward with conviction, eyes focused on the post, bringing the first point to his team as his two opponents don’t even try to catch him.

“And Farid puts his team on the board!” Ludwig yells as the white-clad canines celebrate their captain, hugging him and patting his back.

“Fucking finally...” the lupine mutters, puffing out his chest in defiance.

*“It’s gonna be, like, the comeback of the century! Let’s go, dudes!”*

*~Tory, 22, Golden Retriever, Fitness Model/Actor*

The stoat addresses the cast as he loads the launching machine with yet another rod. “After six rounds, Team Blue is leading the game with three points, Red has two and White is bringing up the rear with one,” he comments. “For this next round, we have Lance, Tory, and Nickolas.” The Sioux coyote slings back his long braid, shooting a vicious glare at the bulldog and the retriever as they step forward.

“Chief’s got this...” Robbi elbows Kyle’s side in earnest. “C’mon...”

The Army sergeant flinches slightly at the stray’s eagerness. “Sure looks like a gimme,” he says, rubbing his chin with a fingertip. “I don’t get what their strategy is, but if it helps us, that’s good enough for me...”

Sure enough, Nickolas swiftly dashes out and leaves both opponents behind in the sprint. Unlike the previous round, he doesn’t manage to catch the baton mid-air, but he’s the first to reach it and pick it from the ground - Lance and Tory looking at each other as they face the coyote, silently trying to settle who should go for the first tackle.

The coyote looks up, scanning the field for an opening, then instantly darts to the left - the duo getting caught off-guard and almost getting in each other's way as they try to stop the red-clad opponent. It's almost too easy for the coyote to score the point, Robbi and Don instantly bro-hugging him as he quietly bumps his chest with a balled fist.

"And red's up to three!" Ludwig shouts. "Nick has carried his team to one point from outright victory!"

"The Lacrosse paid off..." the coyote pants, instantly turning towards the Afghan. "Don, you feel like going next?"

"Will do, boss!" he grins, walking down.

"Run like the damn wind!" the coyote captain shouts.

*"I feel at a crossroads right now. Lance isn't working, Dionte's petering out... Ewan has dominated the challenge so far, and if I put him in and he wins again, others may start to talk. But well, immunity über alles, innit so? Let's see if I can be the closer..."*

*~Edge, 31, Catahoula Leopard Dog, U.S. Coast Guard Diver*

The Catahoula lets out a smirk. "Alright, I'm gonna go for blue," he says, grabbing the post with a snicker before turning towards the white team. "Who's up, fellas?"

"Let me go at it..." Jaxton mutters.

"No way," Farid shoots back, his tone harsher than intended. "We can't give them a fucking inch right now. If red or blue wins, it's over for us."

*"Jax, please, zip it." \*the lupine takes a step forward and raises a paw\* "We need to win this outright to stay alive, and none of you three are bringing the results. I'm on the task until the end of this."*

*~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic*

"Don, Edge, Farid..." the stoat calls out, ready to sound the air horn.

*"C'mon. We can't let any comeback happen. Edge, you need to close it at once. At fucking once."*

*~Lance, 30, American Bulldog, Pro Motorcycle Racer*

"GO!"

Right as the stick goes flying, the Catahoula violently shouldered Farid - the Iranian wolf tripping for a second, then regaining his balance and running out behind the two dogs. Despite being slower than the lanky Afghan, Edge has calculated the rod's trajectory to near perfection and manages to grab the baton with a well-coordinated jump, pipping Don with a straight U-turn and a sidestep. Undeterred, the Afghan tries to jump on his back and manages to somehow take him down at about 40 feet from the goal, his technique not the most orthodox but undoubtedly effective.

*"I may not be a quarterback, but no one has beaten me on catch before. Let's get chaotic!"*  
~Don, 25, Afghan Hound, Personal Trainer/Choreographer

As Don and Edge roll on the ground, fumbling to get control of the baton, Farid gets into the confrontation with fangs fully bared and instantly throws the choreographer off, getting himself on top of the Coast Guard a second later. Edge goes wide-eyed at Farid, fruitlessly trying to roll to the side as the wolf quickly pins him and wrestles the baton off his paws, nearly oblivious to Don's own recovery.

"We're up for another triple dog pile, people!" Ludwig comments, all canines cheering for their teammates as they look at the heated tussle. The wolf takes a while to dispose of his opponents, but eventually manages to get up and away from their grasp - running towards the goal post and smacking it with his free paw before letting out a bark of triumph.

"And Farid scores again for white!" Ludwig throws his paw in the air.

*"Here's Farid, the big, friendly, unassuming doctor, turning into an absolute monster as soon as Ludwig lets him loose." \*the malamute chuckles as Farid shakes paws with the rest of the team, shooting Jaxton an imperative glance\* "I'm worried it might get on his head and forgo strategy. But well, my doctor friends have told me, they'll take care of everyone but their own."*

~Danny, 36, Malamute, Gym Owner

"So, here's the situation..." the mustelid host continues. "This is the very last round, and we are three, three, two. If Blue or Red score, they win. If white scores, we go to sudden death. The choice here is paramount. And the first one to decide who'll go in... is Blue. Edge?"

The redhead canine sharply inhales through his nose, pondering. "Strategy over ego, guys..." he turns to Dionte and Lance, then to Ewan. "You feel back to 100%?" he asks the Jindo.

"I have to be," he responds, visibly nervous at being put on the spot. "Whatever goes, we can't let Red win..."

Edge just puts his paws on Ewan's shoulders. "Clutch," he says before pushing his teammate slightly to the front.

"I'll go..." Farid says.

"Aren't you bruised up from the-" Danny tries to interject, pointing to the claw marks in the wolf's shirt that Edge nearly tore open in the previous round.

"I'll... go," the lupine stresses, looking at his three teammates in the eyes before walking out.

Nickolas sighs, looking at his teammates as they huddle around him. "I'd send Don, but don't want to risk putting the same player two times in a row. And I don't want to leave you two to the side either, but..."

"It's good, captain," Kyle nods. "You've brought the points, you can do it again."

*"Going in for my fourth rodeo, I'm like... trying to keep my mind off 'win or lose' thoughts and just... you know, get it done." \*the coyote hugs Robbi, Kyle and Don, then bumps his chest and steps forward to the post\* "Besides, it is my duty to step in as captain, and I see someone's taking the easy road and shying off from facing me or Farid..." \*glares at Edge\**  
~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach

"It's going to be one last captains' free-for-all... for the most part..." Nickolas cocks his head at Ewan's direction.

The Jindo lowers his eyes. "It is what it is, Nick," he responds. "Let's play..."

Ludwig waits for the three canines to take position. "For the win or sudden death! Ewan, Farid, Nickolas... GO!"

Once again, the air horn blares and the mechanism shoots the rod to the field, all three canines running out without a hint of hesitation.

"Ewan's dashing like it was his first round, but Nick's on his trail! Farid on the back!" the stoat yells, the entire group cheering their teammates on at the top of their lungs.

Ewan is again the quickest to snag it, but Farid and Nickolas are right on his tail and manage to tackle him before he can turn and get back - the coyote tackling the Jindo hard and throwing him to the ground with a loud *thud*.

"Son of a..."

The cameras manage to capture the baton falling out of Ewan's paws as he curses out his bigger foe - a big cheer from the red team as Nickolas blindly tries to recover it, but it's short-lived as the Jindo dives and gets it back first. Farid has his work cut out for him, trying to keep track of both canines' moves but essentially waiting to see who may get up first with the rod in his paw.

With Nickolas still clutching Ewan's pelvis - the young Korean keeping the rod away from his opponent's grasp - the wolf decides to pounce at the coyote, trying to physically wrestle him off the white-furred canine while at the same time keeping him at bay.

*"It's speed versus bulk versus all around. I'm trusting the hassle will be enough to startle Ewan while I focus on Nick."*

~Farid, 34, Grey Wolf, Paramedic

The gamble proves ineffective, however, as Farid is unable to tear both canines apart and get a paw on the rod. Ewan manages to get a foot on the ground, then puts himself upright and dashes toward the goal post - the wolf instantly dropping Nick and getting on his tail, but unable to make ground and thwart his mad dash to the finish. The whole group yells as

Ewan closes in, looking up in shock, almost struggling to believe what he's done as he reaches the post for the third straight time.

"AND THE BLUE TEAM WINS IMMUNITY!" Ludwig shouts to the elation of Edge's team, quick to hug and greet the returning, victorious canine.

*"Holy freakin'... I did it!" \*the blue team piles on top of Ewan\* "When you got the strength and conviction to make stuff happen, sky's the limit. I'm set to keep proving I belong in this pack, and after this? The domestic beating two ferals in a badass tussle?" \*grins\* "No way they won't take me seriously. No freaking way!"*

*~Ewan, 23, Jindo Dog, Cyber Security Analyst*

"You go, dawg!" Dionte howls, effortlessly lifting Ewan and helping him on top of his wide shoulders.

"A fucking beast!" Lance cheers on. Meanwhile, Farid dejectedly returns to the white team, while Nickolas watches indignantly from afar - still not having gotten up after getting tackled by the massive lupine.

*"To say I'm pissed off is an understatement. I had Ewan in my grasp, and Farid just like... fucked my chances up and practically gifted the win to his friends on the blue." \*the coyote kicks the ground as he gets up\* "Not sure if he threw it or if he was dumb, but anyway... we had this. I wanted immunity, I wanted that steak, but..." \*sighs\* "This freaking sucks, man."*

*~Nickolas, 24, Coyote, Academic Support Coach*

The twelve return to position to face the host. "Edge, you won the first pass to the final, the top two challenge before this one, and now the first team challenge as captain," Ludwig elaborates, the Catahoula's tail wagging fiercely, betraying his confident façade. "There's no way you aren't thinking others are looking your way, huh?"

"What can I say?" Edge chuckles. "I set myself up for nothing but success ever since I auditioned, and safe to say the tree's bearing the fruits!"

"But don't you feel you are putting yourself under a big spotlight?" the stoat presses on. "Three straight wins, each and every dog here gunning to be the one to defeat you first... you feel you can step up to the plate as the pressure rises around you?"

"The pressure has never left, and will never leave until the run's done. But for now..." the redhead canine slings his arms around Ewan and Lance. "WE are rejoicing, ain't that right?"

*"It was imperative to start this ordeal on the right foot. To win immunity for the first step will have me riding high for the rest of the competition." \*the camera focuses on the elated four winners\* "I have time to sit back, adjust my game, and determine the best course of action for me going forward. For me, not them. Me."*

*~Lance, 30, American Bulldog, Pro Motorcycle Racer*

"Edge, Ewan, Dionte, Lance. You are safe from elimination, and have advanced to the final eleven," Ludwig smiles. "In addition, as we said before, Edge has won an extra \$2,000 as

the winning captain, and the whole team gets to enjoy the big steak dinner reward. But here's where things get interesting..."

"Aw shit..." Dionte's features turn into a knowing smile directed at the host. "What you gonna have us do?"

"What more do I get, Lud?" Edge asks, setting modesty aside.

"The team gets to choose any two of the losing eight to join you on the reward," the stoat elaborates as he motions towards the lineup of the other competitors, ears perked and a jolt of excitement at his words.

Edge's jaw hangs slightly low, looking back at his teammates, lowering his voice. "I think of our fellas sure, but odd one's out. Robbi and Tory, no hesitation." he says.

"It's your call, man..." Lance says, clearly unconvinced. "Tory for sure, but not Robbi. Might as well use it to build a bridge with someone who actually wants to play the game."

Edge raises an eyebrow. "You know Robbi hasn't seen shit like this, like-"

"He's not gonna mind not getting every single reward ever, yanno?" Lance stresses, annoyance seeping in his voice, to the confusion of Dionte and Ewan. "Besides, you already brought him around when you chose who'd get the Pound. He'll be fine."

"What about Don?" Dionte perks in, stealthily pointing at the Afghan. "How much can he eat?" the barber jokes.

Edge narrows his eyes. You know what... " he ponders. "That's an idea. I know Farid will get it, and if anything, this could help us drive a further wedge between them. Don sounds good."

*"I'd have given Robbi this reward in a heartbeat. I really don't mind giving to someone who's had less in life, but this is a competition, and sometimes, you gotta please some first, and please others later."*

*~Edge, 31, Catahoula Leopard Dog, U.S. Coast Guard Diver*

"We'll go with Tory and Don," Edge tells Ludwig.

The retriever immediately jumps in joy, but Don looks back at his teammates, surprised. "Me?"

"Yah," Robbi says.
















"Well, wow. Maybe he ain't that heartless!" the Afghan quips as he goes to shake Edge's hand. "Thanks, pal. I'll make sure to not abuse your hospitality too much, hah!"

"Eh, there's going to be plenty o' meat for us six!" Edge laughs.

“Well, looks like we are set... Edge, your team will get your reward delivered to the Pound in time for dinner.” the stoat recaps, encompassing the winning team with a gesture of his paw. “The rest, including Don and Tory, will have to do with waiting until the Individual Challenge tomorrow morning. I’ll see you all there...”

*"It sucks to lose, dude. But like, can't win them all. I got my aim to the very end and, like, at least I'm getting a filling dinner to fuel me for the upcoming individual challenge and save my tail for the future early. The blonde baller's so going to take this one!"*

~Tory, 22, Golden Retriever, Fitness Model/Actor

TEAM CHALLENGE 1 - Go Fetch									
RD	CONTESTANT						SCORE		
1	 EDGE	 NICKOLAS	 FARID	0	1	0			
2	 EWAN	 ROBBI	 DANNY	1	1	0			
3	 DIONTE	 KYLE	 JAXTON	2	1	0			
4	 LANCE	 DON	 TORY	2	2	0			
5	 EWAN	 NICKOLAS	 JAXTON	3	2	0			
6	 DIONTE	 DON	 FARID	3	2	1			
7	 LANCE	 NICKOLAS	 TORY	3	3	1			
8	 EDGE	 DON	 FARID	3	3	2			
9	 EWAN	 NICKOLAS	 FARID	4	3	2			