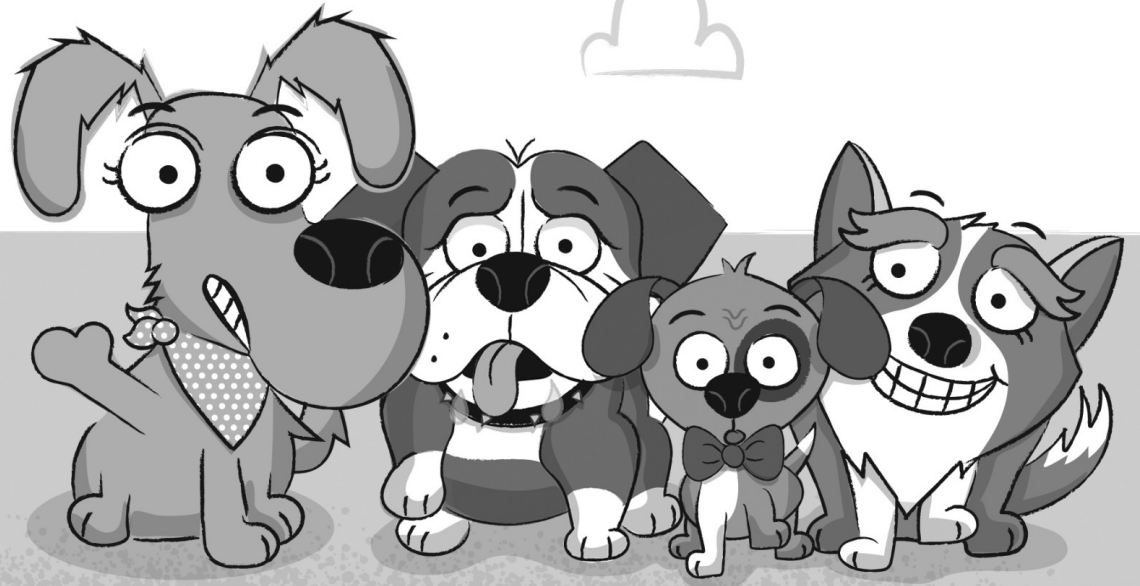
the UnDeRDOgS



By Tracey West

Illustrated by kyla may

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chapter 1

ON YOUR BARK, GET SET, WOOF!

Nova's three best friends stared at her, waiting for instructions.

Duke flexed his powerful muscles.

Peanut's whiskers twitched with excitement.

Harley's fluffy tail wagged back and forth.

"Okay, Team Comeback! Today is the day we practice for our Agility Exam!" Nova announced.

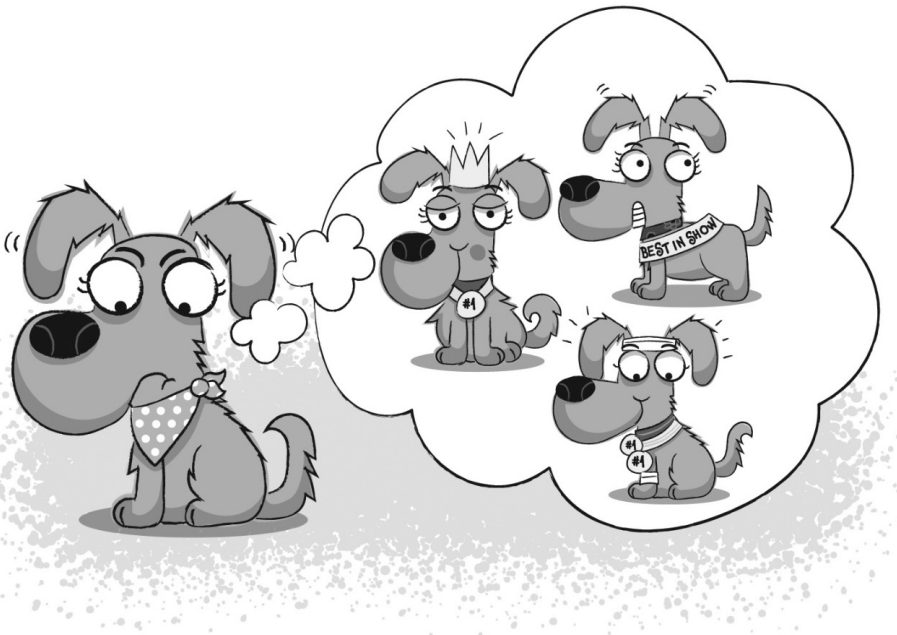
Harley frowned. "Is that why you asked us to come to the park today?"

"There's no point in practicing," Duke said.

"Yeah, we've failed this test every year the last three years," Peanut added.

Nova knew that Peanut was right. Each year, students at Barksdale Academy took nine K-9 exams. Nova and her friends had never passed a single test.

Failing had never bothered Nova before. She had always known that she and her friends were doing their best. But her three sisters were so good at everything—just like everyone else in Barksdale. And for once, Nova wanted to be good at something, too.



"I know," Nova said. "But this time's gonna be different. I can feel it from the tip of my nose to the tip of my tail. This is the year we're going to ace the test! Are you ready to practice?"

"Ready!" her friends cried.

Nova grinned. "Good. Now, on your bark, get set . . ."



Harley raced off toward the trees.

Nova stopped her stopwatch. "Harley, come back!"

Harley skidded to a stop. "Whoops! Sorry, Nova." She ran back to the starting line.

"Let's try this again, Team Comeback," Nova said. On your bark, get set . . ."

"WAIT!" Duke cried. "I think I hear a bear!"

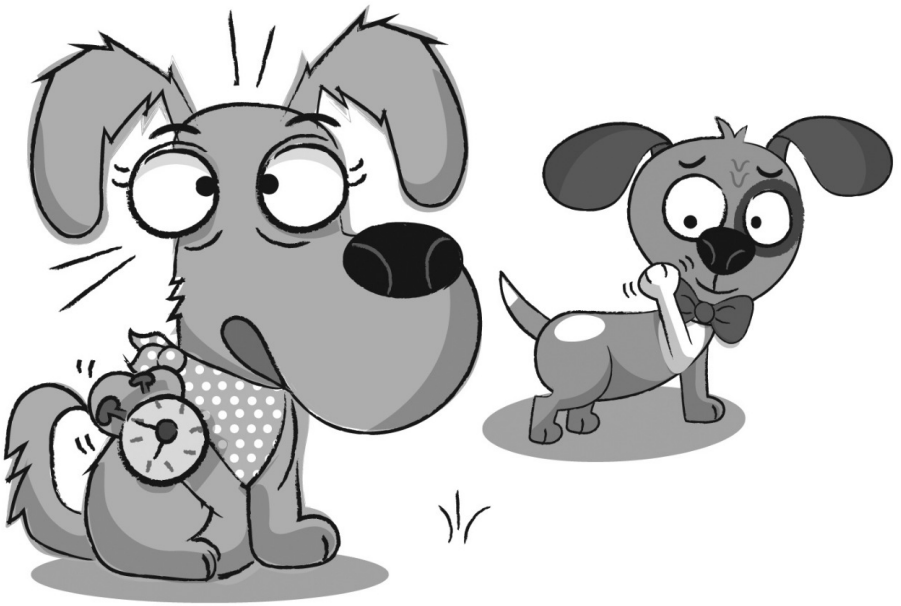
"That's not a bear, it's a lawn mower!" Nova told him. "Mr. Poochwell is mowing his front lawn."

"Are you sure?" Duke asked. "That sounds like the growl of a bear. A big, scary bear with sharp claws."



"I'm sure," Nova said. "Let's try again. On your bark, get set . . ."

"EXCUSE ME," Peanut piped up, raising his paw. "But how exactly does this work? When you say 'on your bark,' does that mean *we* bark before we take off?"



"No," Nova said. "*I'm* the one who barks. I'll say, 'On your bark, get set,' and then I'll bark, and that's when you all start the agility course."

"But that doesn't make sense," Peanut said. "Shouldn't you say, 'on *my* bark'?"

"Peanut, you know how this works," Nova said. Then she saw that he was grinning.

"Yeah, I do," Peanut said. "Just messing around. Come on, let's start!"

"Are you sure nobody has anything else they want to say?" Nova asked. "Because I am going to start the count again, and this time I don't want anything to stop us."

