

DOG

IN THE

MANGER

AN ELI PAXTON MYSTERY

DOG

IN THE

MANGER

MIKE

RESNICK

*Includes
Bonus Short
Story!*



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Inquiries should be addressed to
Seventh Street Books
59 John Glenn Drive
Amherst, New York 14228–2119
VOICE: 716–691–0133
FAX: 716–691–0137
WWW.PROMETHEUSBOOKS.COM

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To Carol, as always,
and to my good friend Ross Spencer,
the funniest mystery writer yet hatched.

INTRODUCTION

I've made my reputation as a science fiction writer, but I grew up with and remain equally fond of mysteries. I devoured all the works of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and Ross MacDonald as a kid, just as I read everything I can get my hands on by Lawrence Sanders, Ed Gorman, and their peers as an adult. I still love all those black-and-white mysteries from the 1940s, the great ones like *The Maltese Falcon* and the not-so-great ones like the endless Saint, Falcon, and Boston Blackie series.

A number of my science fiction stories are built on mystery frameworks. The protagonists of some of my science fiction and fantasy novels—*Walpurgis III*, *Eros at Zenith*, *Stalking the Unicorn*, the Jake Masters novellas, a few others—are detectives. So it was only natural that eventually I'd write a straight detective novel with no fantastic elements in it, and that was *Dog in the Manger*.

My wife and I had bred and exhibited show collies—we had twenty-three champions during our twelve years in the game—so I was writing about something I knew. I also had my own notions about my private eye. He's forty-three years old, and didn't live to this age by being careless or stupid, so far from viewing the police as rivals, he makes all the friends he can on the police force, he always informs them where he's going to be, and he knows that his job is to solve the puzzle he's being paid to solve, not to punch out every burly baddie he encounters.

There was something else, too. In this day of forensic labs and large, reasonably competent police forces, no private eye is hired to solve a murder. He simply can't compete with the technology and the numbers. If murder is involved, it has to be hidden behind whatever the private eye *is* hired to find or solve—and if, at the point where a murder

is uncovered, people start shooting at him, of course he'll want to solve it just to put the bad guys in jail and make the shooting stop.

I wrote *Dog in the Manger* in the mid-1990s, and was given a three-book offer by the publisher I'd had in mind for it. The problem was, I was contracted three and four years ahead with my science fiction, and I couldn't in good conscience accept the offer when I knew I couldn't deliver the second book for at least three years. All I wanted was to sell the book I'd written. The publisher was looking for a book-a-year series to push, so we regretfully parted ways. I then sold it as a stand-alone non-series book to a different publishing house in 1995. It got fine reviews, and was even optioned as a television series for a few years, though nothing ever came of it.

Move the calendar ahead seventeen years, and Prometheus, which has bought more than a dozen of my science fiction novels for their Pyr® imprint, announces that they're starting Seventh Street Books™, a mystery imprint. I pick up *Dog in the Manger*, read it for the first time in years, decide that I still like it and would love to do more Eli Paxton novels, clear a spot in my schedule, and suggest to editor Dan Mayer that he might consider bringing the book back into print as well as commissioning a sequel, *The Trojan Colt*. He agrees, and so here, in case you missed it the first time around, is *Dog in the Manger*—and this time Eli is *not* going back into mothballs.

—Mike Resnick

1.

Go be an honest cop. See where it gets you.

It got me on television (all except NBC, which was busy covering the World Series), and it got me into *Newsweek* (two paragraphs, one photo), and it got me my very own 192-page paperback biography that was churned out by some hack writer in one weekend. (We were going to split our zillions fifty-fifty and then sell the movie rights to Brian de Palma or maybe George Lucas; I think we each came away with seven hundred and fifty dollars, and I never did see a copy of the book on the stands.)

I'm a real, bonafide hero. Of course, I'm flat broke and I live in a two-room furnished apartment on Cincinnati's less-than-posh west side, right between an elegant auto junkyard and Proctor & Gamble's swank old-line parking lot, and the phone company keeps threatening to disconnect me. But I'm a hero.

Let me tell you, the hero business isn't all it's cracked up to be.

When I got out of the army—I was busy defending Italy from the Communist Menace while most of our boys were fighting a minor skirmish in Vietnam—I joined the Chicago Police Force. I kept my nose absolutely clean, didn't take any more graft than was absolutely necessary (if you've ever been to Chicago, you'll know what I'm talking about), and rose to the rank of lieutenant after a decade.

Then our new police commissioner—Chicago *always* has a new police commissioner—declared the city's umpteenth all-out war on the drug trade. This time we kept clear of the ghettos, mostly because the press didn't like to follow us to West Madison Street, and we started hitting the high class dealers and dens in the Lake Shore Drive area. I was still dumb

enough to think we meant business, so when I busted Bennie the Turk—no, that's not why I'm a hero—I looked at his little address book and found the names of two US representatives and half a dozen state senators. I should have wised up when everyone on my team started calling in sick, but I went ahead and put together my evidence and arrested both congressmen and three senators for illegal possession of cocaine. (No, not yet.) It was explained to me that I had made a grievous error, that these were men of honor who couldn't possibly have had any dealings with the Turk, and besides boys-will-be-boys-ha-ha, but I figured that *somebody* would give a damn, so I went ahead and testified against them. (It's okay to cheer now: that's how I made *Newsweek* and had my little chat with Dan Rather.) Of course, the case was thrown out.

And so, I might add, was Elias J. Paxton.

Right. That's me.

I wish the guy who did the *Newsweek* piece had come by a year later to see how his incorruptible national hero was doing. Of course, he wouldn't have been able to find me, not in Chicago. They kicked me off the force, of course. First they tried to get me to resign. When that didn't work they found some obscure regulation—they have about ten million to choose from, all for situations like this—and gave me the boot. I still don't know what the hell they did with my pension.

So I figured I'd cash in on my reputation and set up shop as a private eye. They found zoning violations in my first four offices. They decided my car was a menace to navigation. They tapped my phone.

So I moved to Cleveland, and couldn't find any work there either. I finally took a job as a night watchman in a glass factory, which lasted until the night it got broken into and I killed two armed trespassers. They couldn't throw me in jail, but they made it very clear that my presence was no longer required, or even acceptable, in their fair city. I guess they expected me to disarm gunmen with my smile.

Which is how I wound up in Cincinnati, a world-famous incorruptible cop reduced to looking for a goddamned dog.

Well, it wasn't just *any* goddamned dog. It was a very special goddamned dog. At least, that's what Hubert Lantz kept telling me.

I had spent the day sitting in my dingy little third-floor office on Eighth Street, staring at the six Chicago Police Department citations that used to mean something to me, but which I now keep only to cover the cracks in the plaster. The glass in my door was cracked, too—an irate husband had slammed it two months ago, when I broke the news to him that his worst fears about his wife weren't half as bad as the truth—and the replacement still hadn't arrived. The rest of the office wasn't much to look at, but at least it was whole: a desk, four chairs, a cabinet, and a bookcase loaded with lawbooks that I had picked up at a Brandeis book sale and planned to get around to reading someday. The fact that most of them dealt with Kentucky law didn't seem to make much difference: clients who are impressed by law books don't much care where they're from, and those who aren't impressed care even less.

Anyway, four o'clock rolled around and I got down to the serious business of deciding whether I had enough money to splurge on a Reds game at Riverfront Stadium. I figured that even if I settled for a four-way chili and a cup of coffee, the best I could do was a seat in the right field bleachers—left field was out of the question, since Barry Larkin and Reggie Sanders were both on a tear and there'd be ten thousand kids there hoping to catch a home run—and had just about made up my mind to go to my apartment and save the six bucks when the door opened and in walked this tall, skinny, balding man wearing a pair of designer jeans and a tan sweater with one of those little crocodiles on it.

"You're Eli Paxton?" he asked.

I nodded. I used to come on suave and sassy like the detectives in the movies and say that, no, I was his uncle who was just tending the store and taking messages while he was busy hobnobbing with the rich and famous, but one day about a year ago an absolutely gorgeous redhead took me at my word and walked right out. I didn't get another client for three weeks, and I've never been anything but polite and sincere since then.

"I need your help," he said, looking very nervous and lighting up a Marlboro.

“That’s what I’m here for,” I said reassuringly. “Why don’t you have a seat and tell me what’s on your mind.”

He picked up a wooden chair and carried it over to my desk. I remembered too late to hide the beat-up old copy of *Penthouse* and replace it with the neat old copy of *Forbes*, but he was too caught up in his own troubles to notice.

“I don’t know exactly where to begin,” he said, puffing away furiously and stifling a cough. “Have you ever heard of Baroness von Tannelwald?”

I took my feet off my desk and sat erect. A baroness, no less. Things were looking up.

“Never,” I said. “Sounds like she must be from one of Cincinnati’s old Germanic families.”

“From one of Arizona’s old Weimaraner families,” he said, smiling in spite of his distress. “She’s a dog.”

“A dog?”

He nodded.

I put my feet back on the desk. “Why should I have heard about a dog?”

“She was Best in Show at Westminster four months ago,” he said, snuffing out his Marlboro and immediately lighting another. “I thought you might have read about her.”

“My interest in animals starts and ends at River Downs and lasts just about six furlongs,” I replied. “What does this dog have to do with you?”

“She belongs to one of my clients.”

“One of your clients? What do you do for a living?”

“I’m a handler.”

“A what?”

“A professional handler,” he repeated. “I condition show dogs, take them on circuits with me, groom them, and present them in the ring.”

He handed me his card, which was how I found out his name. I’m never nosy anymore unless someone pays me to be.

“You’re one of those guys who places the dog’s feet down where they belong and holds the tail out?” I asked.

“Right.”

“Well,” I shrugged, “it’s a living.”

He got so hot he forgot he was scared. “It’s more than a living! I’m a highly trained professional, half athlete and half artist! What I do takes a hell of a lot more talent than taking photographs of unfaithful wives and husbands screwing each other in hotel rooms!”

“Photos went out when they got rid of transoms,” I noted dryly.

“Do you have a drink?” he asked suddenly.

I figured, what the hell, I can always put it on the expense statement, so I walked over to the metal cabinet where I keep all the copies of my paperback biography that I use to impress potential clients, pulled out the bottle of Jim Beam that I was using as a bookend, and brought along a couple of glasses.

He downed three fingers without batting an eye, then refilled his glass and did the same thing all over again.

“Thanks,” he said. “I’ve been under a lot of pressure this week.”

“You want to tell me about it?” I asked with all the professional sympathy I could muster on the spur of the moment.

The muscles still twitched in his face—they hadn’t stopped twitching since he’d walked in—but he took a deep breath and plunged right in.

“Baroness belongs to a man named Maurice Nettles out in Casa Grande, Arizona. She came into heat two weeks ago and he decided that he wanted me to ship her home for breeding. Naturally, I didn’t want to. With her inherent quality, plus the reputation she picked up by winning Westminster, I could have made another twenty thousand dollars off her by the end of the year.”

“From just one dog?” I asked.

He nodded.

“How many show dogs do you handle?”

“Between twenty and thirty,” he said.

I tried to suppress a greedy little smile. Things were looking up again, and so was my salary. In five seconds it had gone from \$150 a day to somewhere around \$400. I figured I might even be able to afford a display ad in next year’s Yellow Pages.

“Did you ship her off?” I asked at last.

“He pays the bills, so when I couldn’t talk him out of it I told my kennel girl to send her home last weekend while I was at a show.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“When I came home Sunday night none of the dogs I had left behind had been cleaned or fed, and the phone was ringing off the hook. It was Nettles, demanding to know where Baroness was. She was supposed to arrive there at dinnertime, but when the plane landed she wasn’t on it.” He paused long enough to light still another cigarette. “Kennel help is never very dependable, so I just assumed the girl got to the airport too late to get her on the plane and simply booked her on a later flight. As for her not being home, hell, she probably has a boyfriend stashed away somewhere in Dayton or Covington.”

“And now it’s Wednesday and she hasn’t turned up yet?”

He nodded. “Neither her nor Baroness. Nettles called twice more Sunday night and accused me of purposely missing the flight so he’d miss her season and I could continue showing her, and—”

“Have you ever done that before?”

“Once, when I was much younger and really needed the money. Not recently. Anyway, he’s suing me for the value of the dog.”

“How much would that be?”

“About twenty-five thousand dollars, maybe a little less.”

I hated to ask the next question, but I had to. “Aren’t you covered for it? It seems to me that a man in your profession would have insurance to protect him against a valuable dog dying or being stolen.”

“Of course I am!” snapped Lantz.

For which thank God, I thought. So the problem was real and not imagined.

“Then why not let your policy pay for the dog?”

“Because I got another call from Nettles this morning. He’s made an official complaint to the American Kennel Club. He wants my AKC privileges revoked.”

“Any chance?” I asked.

“A damned good one,” said Lantz. “I’ve been suspended on bad

conduct charges a couple of times, mostly for bitching too loud about what I thought was rigged judging. There are people in the organization who are just waiting to land on me with both feet.”

“What’s the kennel girl’s name?”

“Alice Dent,” he said.

“Do you have a photo of her?”

“I can get one.”

“So basically what you want me to do is find Alice and—”

“I don’t give a damn about Alice Dent!” screamed Lantz. “Just find the dog! I am forty-five goddamned years old. I’ve been a pro handler since I was eighteen. It’s the only trade I know. I’ve got to get this sonofabitch off my goddamned back!”

“So at this point, you don’t much care if Baroness is dead or alive, as long as we can prove that whatever happened to her wasn’t your fault. Is that correct?”

He nodded, snubbed out his cigarette, and poured yet another drink from my rapidly diminishing supply of Jim Beam.

“Have you reported this to the police?” I asked.

“Of course!”

Thank God, Version 2.0: he’d talked to the cops and he still wanted a private detective.

“What was their reaction?”

“They were very polite. . . .”

“Everyone in Cincinnati is.”

“. . . but I got the distinct impression that hunting for show dogs is pretty low on their list of priorities.”

“How about hunting for kennel girls?” I asked.

“We’re just across the river from Kentucky and maybe twenty miles from Indiana,” he said. “The second she crosses the border, with or without Baroness, she’s out of their jurisdiction. I got the impression they figured she was in some other state before I got home Sunday night. So they’re officially looking for her and for Baroness—but, damn it, I want someone who’s doing nothing but looking for them.”

“How did you happen to choose me?” I asked. I didn’t much care,

but it would be nice to hear that a few satisfied customers had taken a little time off their divorce proceedings to go around town saying nice things about me.

“I picked your name out of the phone book.”

“It would probably be politic of me to accept that answer, Mr. Lantz,” I replied, “but if I did, you might start wondering just what you were getting for your money. I’m the only detective in the book who doesn’t have some kind of ad. You can barely find my name stuck in there between Norman Security and Prestige Investigations. And they misprinted my address.” Probably, I added mentally, because I’m always six weeks late paying my bill. “So who put you onto me?”

He looked uncomfortable. “Bill Striker.”

“You went to the Striker Agency first?”

“I handle a schnauzer for him. He told me he was too busy to take on another client just now.”

“And he recommended me?”

“He suggested that you might need the work.”

Which was true, of course, but it sounded just a bit denigrating, and I decided that the next time Mrs. Martinelli called me at three in the morning to tell me that devil-worshipping godless communists were slithering down her chimney with the intention of raping her for the greater glory of Mother Russia, I would tell her that Soviet rapists were the special province of the Striker Agency.

“Did he tell you my fee, too?” I asked.

Lantz shook his head.

“Four hundred a day plus expenses, and a bonus if I succeed. I’ll bill you every Friday, but I need a retainer in advance.” I was ready to clear my throat and say that I had really meant *two* hundred, but he didn’t even flinch, so I opened up a desk drawer and whipped out a pair of contracts with the grace and finesse of Michael Jordan driving toward the hoop, back before he gave it all up to hit .220 in the minors. “This is my standard contract. Sign both copies, and keep one of them for your files.”

He did so without even bothering to read them, and pulled out his checkbook.

“Will a week’s retainer be sufficient?”

I nodded, and tried not to look too eager as he made it out and handed it over.

“I’ll bring Alice’s photo by tomorrow morning,” he said, getting to his feet.

“I’ll want her home address, too,” I said.

“She lives with my wife and me.”

“Her previous address, then, as well as her parents’. And you’d better give me the dog owner’s address and phone number, too.”

“Nettles? What do you need *his* address for?” demanded Lantz.

I shrugged. “If nothing else, to let him know you’ve hired a detective to track down the girl and the dog. That ought to convince him of your sincerity.”

And of course, if Nettles felt like hiring a detective who was on the scene, I was sure we could work something out.

“I don’t like it,” said Lantz, but he scribbled Nettles’s address and number on the back of my copy of the contract, then got to his feet. “I’ll drop the photo off in the morning.”

“I’ll be here,” I said.

He looked like he wanted to say something more, paused awkwardly, and then left the office. Two minutes later I was on the phone to my check guaranteeing service, reading them the account number from Lantz’s branch bank. It was, as the saying goes, good as gold. Two thousand, minus the four percent guarantee fee: nineteen hundred and twenty beautiful dollars.

It was so good, in fact, that I skipped the chili, had a slab of ribs, and bought myself a box seat at Riverfront. Jose Rijo was throwing nothing but smoke, and Barry Larkin was wearing a big red S on his chest under his uniform, and the Reds whipped the tar out of the Dodgers, eight-to-one.

I was on top of the world when I got home. The Reds were back in first place by half a game, I had a client in hand and money in the bank, and I was even thinking of paying my phone bill in the next week or so. I tossed my jacket onto the frayed, battered sofa, walked into

the kitchen, pulled a beer out of the icebox (I know “refrigerator” is the proper word, but I’m old-fashioned—and besides, this particular machine had been built when iceboxes were all the rage), and walked back to the living room.

I turned on the TV, hoping to catch a replay of Barry Larkin’s two home runs, and the picture, after the usual thirty seconds of static and light show, adjusted itself just in time for me to see a brief news item concerning an armed robbery in Newport, right across the river. This was followed by the birth of a trio of white tigers at the Cincinnati Zoo, and then a twenty-second spot showing the cops dredging a station wagon out of the Little Miami River.

I was feeling so happy and so relaxed that I almost missed the driver’s name.

It was Alice Dent.

I bellowed a curse that must have awakened half the building. Now instead of having nineteen hundred and twenty dollars in the bank, I was eighty dollars in the hole. Lantz would certainly demand his money back, and I’d already gotten the damned check guaranteed.

I pulled out his business card and dialed his number. He picked it up on the sixth ring. I could barely hear him over the barking, but I told him what had happened and unhappily informed him that he could pick up his money the next morning at the office.

I put the beer aside and went to work on a bottle of Scotch instead. I seem to remember watching the beginning of an old Bogart movie, but I don’t recall any of the details.

I must have stumbled off to bed somewhere in the middle, or else I just drank so much that I didn’t pay much attention to the *denouement*. At any rate, the next thing I remember was this high-pitched whining near my right ear. I turned and cursed and told it to shut up, but it wouldn’t stop, and finally I realized that my phone was ringing. I fumbled for it, finally got hold of it, and spent another few seconds trying to remember where my mouth and ear were.

“Hello?” I croaked.

“Mr. Paxton? This is Hubert Lantz.”

“Phone company or electric company?”

“I’m your goddamned client!”

I sat upright in the bed. “What time is it?”

“Five in the morning.”

“Well, you can damned well wait until nine o’clock for your money!”

“I don’t want my money.”

“Repeat that?” I said, trying to clear my head.

“You’re still working for me.”

“But they found the girl. She drove her car into the river.”

“I don’t care about the girl. I want the dog.”

“It wasn’t in the car?”

“No.”

“Then it’s probably running around loose in the woods. What you need is a game warden.”

“What I need is a detective!” he snapped. “If you don’t want my money, just say the word and I’ll find someone who does.”

I assured him that his money was very near and dear to my heart, and asked where he was. It turned out that he was at the Clermont County Morgue, some fifteen miles east of the city. I took a cold shower, put on a fresh if somewhat rumpled blue suit, got into my ’88 LeBaron, and drove off to meet him.

The sun was just rising as I left the highway and began winding my way down the little country roads, and a golden mist seemed to hang over the fields in the damp morning air.

So what if it was six in the morning? I had money in the bank, the Reds were in first place like the Big Red Machine of old, and I was working again. It looked like the beginning of a pretty good day.

I was wrong.

Good days were about to become as scarce as twenty-five-thousand-dollar Weimarans.