

# **VINTAGE MADDOG**

**A Collection**

**By**

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## **Race 1. # 1. JOHN DOUGH**

It had been an OK day. Not bad. Not real good. Just OK. The usual. But! I had taken a good sound nap after the noon turnout, four solid hours, and heaven knows I needed it. It was a great night for dog racing, having cooled off, just enough. Just right, touched off with a hot dog and a beer. Who could ask for more? We all stood around and about the gate to the jinny pit, where they hold the hounds before the races, looking over racing programs, Joe Squat the Ragman, Pooch the Mooch McGill, Ben Dover, Stan Dupp, Maddog McDermutt, Fleas Finnigan, Little Elsie, Dogbreath Smith, Mangy Martinez, Hugh Mungas, and Jake (the Rake) Smith. I felt so good I thought I might take a shot at the Daily Double, except that second race had me stymied. Anybody could win that one.

"We got ourselves a dog race in this here second race," Maddog McDermutt said, as if he had been reading my mind.

"Anybody bets that race is a fool," Ben Dover chipped in.

"I intend to bet it," Maddog McDermutt said,

and nobody said a thing, except Hugh Mungas, but I don't think Hugh had heard Ben.

"Way those dogs all break there's going to be a party on the first turn, and some might not get home right away." That was Hugh's estimate.

"There's a dead guy over by that concrete pillar," Fleas said.

"HmMMMM," Joe Squat hummed. "I like that Number Two dog in the First, I surely do."

Jake (The Rake) Smith wanted to know the following: "Well, what if a guy bet everybody, all eight starters, in the second race with the obvious winner of the first, GRACEFUL TIDEWATERS, no doubt an easy winner, could a guy make any money doing that?"

"That's what I was thinking," Mangy Martinez said, "except GRACEFUL TIDEWATERS won't win The First, CLAM CHOWDER will."

Maddog adjusted his granny glasses, and it was obvious to all of us that he was about to put his great mind to the matter at hand. He grunted. He farted. Then he said, "I think it'll be Six and Five. That's what I think."

Fleas Finnigan was at it again. He poked his thumb over his shoulder, and in a voice we could all hear, he said, "I told you, that old guy back there is dead."

"I thought we were picking dogs here," Maddog said. "What's this about a dead guy?"

Fleas repeated himself: "That guy over there, next to the concrete pillar, is dead as he's ever going to get."

"Well what for?" Pooch the Mooch McGill

wanted to know. "He'll miss the daily double."

"He's gonna miss a lot more than that," Fleas said.

"Yeah," Joe Squat into the conversation again. "He'll miss everything."

I looked over the countenance of Fleas Finnigan. I've known Fleas more years than I can remember, and usually there was more to what Fleas had to say than what met the eye, and you wanted to sort everything out before you turned around and made a fool of yourself. On the other hand, if that's all there was to it, you didn't want to turn around in that case either, because who wanted to see a dead guy in the first place anyway, particularly at a dog track. That's why they had morgues. Everything in its place. Dead guys go to morgues. Live guys go to the dog races. At least that's the way I had it all sorted out. I took a look.

Maddog had been sucked in. He was taking a long look. I guess everybody was staring at the older man seated in a folding chair next to the concrete pillar. Looked to me like he was studying his racing program. "You mean," I said to Fleas, "the guy in the Robin Hood hat, the corduroy jacket, the dark slacks, the nicely shined shoes, the dark socks, the red hanky in the jacket pocket, the red scarf around his neck, the dark glasses, reading his racing program."

"You got it," Fleas said. "That's the guy."

"He's a real dresser I'd say." Pooch the Mooch on that observation.

"A slave to fashion from I'd say maybe New York," Little Elsie put in. "I bet that guy goes to all

the opening Broadway plays with the best seat in the house."

Maddog obviously had his doubts. He said, "You mean to say the guy is actually dead?"

"You're getting it now, big fella. Dead. Cold. Out. Gone. Bye Bye. Zonked."

Maddog grunted, then, with no ceremony whatsoever, marched off to check the matter out. We watched him poke the guy in the shoulder, once, twice, three times, then wave his hands in front of his face, then touch his forehead, then take his pulse. Maddog looked around; nobody but us had paid any attention to him, then Maddog hurried back to us, his complexion looked a little pasty to me, about the same color as the guy in the chair, and Maddog took a deep breath, his thumb pointing over his shoulder to the pasty-skinned guy in the folding chair, Maddog McDermutt, last of the great coroners, last of the great pathologists, said, and he kind of hissed it between clenched teeth: "Christ a mighty that guy is dead."

"Told you so," Fleas said.

"I'm gonna have a beer," Maddog said, doing his paddilin-madaline-home shuffle, "no, I'm gonna have two beers."

Hugh Mungas cleared his throat and turned back to his program. "Nice night out."

Little Elsie joined Hugh, turning her back to the deceased gentleman on the folding chair.

"Lovely," she said.

Nobody said much for a while. For some reason we had quit handicapping the first two races and the Daily Double. We just stood around,

once in a while somebody clearing his throat, then a big pause, then somebody else would clear his sinuses, and so on. Maddog was back, a beer in each hand, and it didn't take him long to polish off both. He burped, cleared his throat, and then he went and did it. He turned his VOTE REPUBLICAN button around so that it now was VOTE DEMOCRAT. Whenever Maddog did that, in this day and age, his frustrations were on the verge of desperation. I was afraid of it, I surely was.

Maddog stared out across the track. "That guy is cold."

Fleas said, "That's because he's dead."

"Well just how do you know that, genius," Ben Dover said. "Maybe he's just sick."

"He's been there, dead, three days now," Fleas said.

"THREE DAYS!" We all said. Hugh and Elsie were back on point, staring at the deceased gentleman.

The loud speaker made the following announcement:

**ONE MINUTE TO POST FOR THE FIRST RACE AND THE DAILY DOUBLE. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN PLEASE PLACE YOUR BETS. ONE MINUTE TO POST.**

So there we stood. Thousands of racing fans faced, more or less, the dog track, the tote board, noses stuck in programs, the dogs on the track ready to go, fans suddenly rushing here and there headed for the shortest line they could find to place a last minute bet, shove some money through

the windows, take a chance, have some fun, that's why they were here, to be entertained, and here we dog trainers were, the guys who make it all go, all stuck together down by the paddocks gate staring at some guy in a folding chair, dead. It just didn't seem right.

"Well even if that guy is dead," Pooch the Mooch McGill said, "it's only natural. People die. It's a fact of life."

"At a dog track?" Mangy Martinez said.

"Maybe he hit the big trifecta a couple of days ago and had a coronary," Little Elsie suggested.

Well now that comment came out of the night air, flew around like a brick butterfly, and came to rest in the great mind of the great one, his holiness, his majesty, world famous everything, one of the greatest creative minds in the history of Greyhound racing, the big amoebae in the septic tank, Mr. Dog Trainer a la mode, Maddog McDermutt.

"That's right!" Maddog said. "Why didn't I think of that. I bet he has the ticket on him even now."

"How much was that winning ticket?" Hugh Mungas wanted to know.

"It was three thousand and nine hundred bucks," Maddog said. "Almost four thousand."

"You think," I said, "that dead guy has a ticket on him worth three thousand and nine hundred bucks?"

"Nobody claimed it," Maddog said. "I think Little Elsie is on to something."

"Well what do we do now?" Hugh wanted to

know.

"Don't ask," I muttered. "Please don't ask."

"I think we ought to do something," Pooch said.

"I'll handle it," Maddog said. He adjusted his love beads, then his granny glasses, then we watched him waddle over to the corpse. He stood behind it, casually, looking over his shoulder and I presume reading the dead guy's racing program. He nodded at us, casually, nothing anybody else would have picked up on, then looked around to see if anybody was watching. Everybody was absorbed in the forthcoming First Race. Just as we heard the dogs break from the starting boxes and the crowd erupt in a burst of enthusiastic cheering, Maddog was going through the guy's pockets, when the corpse's Robin Hood hat fell off, and although we couldn't hear him over the roar of the crowd, it was obvious Maddog had screamed. Maddog quickly picked the hat up and rearranged it. Next he went through his shirt pockets, then his pants pockets, then he had the guy's wallet and was riffling through that. He shrugged at us. We shrugged back. Maddog waddled back to us.

"His program is three days old. It is turned to the very race we were concerned with. And ... "

"Yes," Ben Dover said, right on cue.

"The three dogs that came in, in that big payoff trifecta, are circled on his program."

"Wow," I said. It looked like Little Elsie had come on something.

"Nothing in his pockets or wallet?" Fleas wanted to know.

"No," Maddog said. "Strange. No money, no I.D., no winning ticket. Nothing. The guy's a John Doe."

"Well if John did have that ticket on him, and we found that ticket, and we took that ticket, isn't that like robbing someone?" Pooch the Mooch wanted to know.

"The guy's dead," Maddog said. "What's he going to do, sue us?"

"His family might," I suggested.

"What family. The guy's a loner. After three days and nobody wonders where he is? He isn't missing."

"Of course he isn't missing," Joe Squat the Ragman said. "He's right there, right there in front of all of us."

Maddog was rubbing his chin. Under that Stetson and behind those granny glasses, something was happening. I would not at this time go so far as to call it a thought process. Perhaps an attempt at a thought process would be more accurate.

I was afraid of it. I surely was.

Maddog spoke to the group: "Let's get that guy back to the kennels where we can check him out properly," and without missing a lick, he concluded, "and you, Hugh Mungas, go up to the racing manager's side office and get one of those wheel chairs and get it down here."

"Why me?" Hugh wanted to know.

"How many want Hugh to volunteer to get the wheel chair?" Maddog asked.

We all raised our hands.

"Fine. Just fine," Hugh muttered and he was off across the tarmac to find a wheel chair.

"We'll find that ticket," Maddog said. He turned back to the track. "What the hell happened in the first race?" Nobody seemed to know. "I guess it's over," Maddog said. Then the crowd roared and we looked at the fresh lights of the tote board announcing the results of the first. No CLAM CHOWDER. No GRACEFUL TIDEWATERS."

Maddog took another look at the corpse.

"Still there." Maddog grunted.

Hugh was back with a wheelchair.

"Anybody ask you why you wanted a wheelchair?" Maddog asked.

"Nope."

"Good. OK," Maddog said. "When the second race is in progress, let's transfer John from his folding chair to this here wheel chair and boogie on out of this here dog track and out to the kennels and find us a fortune ticket."

"Will we split the money down the middle, that's what I want to know," Ben Dover asked.

"I'll throw in with that question, Maddog McDermutt," said Stan.

"Right down the middle," Maddog said.

And everybody relaxed a little and grinned and nodded.

"Except for the usual ten percent leader's fee," Maddog said.

We waited around nonchalantly, a casual glance here, a fleeting look there, nothing to draw attention to us. When the second race burst from

the starting boxes and the crowd roared, we went into action. We rushed over to John, who, unlike the rest of the crowd, remained seated at the beginning of the Second Race. The stiff was, in fact, stiff and he didn't lift as easy as we all thought he might, from his folding chair into the wheelchair, something like a piece of granite. We propped him there, best we could, adjusted his hat and glasses, and off through the cheering crowd we went.

"Excuse us, please."

"Step aside."

"Coming through."

"Beep beep."

"Move your fat ass," Little Elsie hissed, but I don't think anybody heard her.

Finally we were out the front doors, and we pushed the deceased racing fan through the parking lot.

We went by the gate attendant.

"What are you guys doing out here?" He asked.

"Oh just heading for the kennels," I said, because it didn't seem anybody else had any answers.

"Who's minding the store?" The gate attendant wanted to know.

"Oh, the boys will pick up the dogs," Pooch said.

We kept on pushing.

"Well wait a minute, who's that in the wheel chair?"

"What do you care," Maddog said.

The gate attendant backed up. "Just curious,"

he said. "It isn't every night you see all this track's dog trainers pushing a wheel chair around out in the parking lot while the races are going on. No offense."

"None taken," Maddog growled.

Nobody said anything, just kept pushing, then we turned up the kennel road, the wheelchair hit that damned chuckhole the track never gets around to fixing, and the corpse was air bound. We all grunted and groaned and loaded him back up again. I think Hugh broke the guy's finger, or something, because there was this loud popping noise, and I'll tell you something else, that I didn't notice right off, the guy smelled, that kind of smell that is bad but it's kind of a warning, that you should move away before you get hurt, hurt bad, that you think this stinks you ain't seen nothing yet, kind of like the fog off the turd, and the nose-dive he took out of the wheelchair kind of broke something loose, but we were on the move again, bumping along, hurrying through the night, then up the lane to the security gate where, fortunately, state security was reading a Playboy subscription, he always said he subscribed for the stories, and I don't even know if he saw us go by, and into the compounds we hurried. We pushed John right on into Maddog's kennel and gathered around. The dogs rustled in the paper, stood up, stared out.

"Now let's find that big pie-in-the-sky trifecta ticket," Maddog said, starting with the hat. "We'll find out if he has hidden that ticket anywhere on his person." Maddog unplucked the feather from

the hat, looked it over, turned the hat this way and that, finally making the determination. "Nope," he said. "Not in the hat." Then he unlaced a shoe and pulled it off. Hugh was right there, unlacing the other shoe. They turned them upside down, shook them, and nothing fell out, felt around inside, looked in. "Nothing here," Maddog said. "Me neither," Hugh said. Then they had his socks off, socks inside out, outside in.

Nothing. Maddog tried to check between the toes but they were stuck together. Like mortared bricks. "Rigor," he explained.

Next Maddog had the guy's coat off. A dog howled. "Shutup Tillie," Maddog said. Three other dogs joined in. I took a look at one. All you could see were the whites of the eyes staring out the crate at John. The wire made shadows on the dogs that made their faces look like shattered glass.

"I said shutup," Maddog said, but that did not take care of it.

A few more dogs joined in.

"Hey!" Hugh hollered.

"Shutup!" Pooch said.

The dogs stopped just for a moment, stared at the corpse, and now they were all at it, barking, growling, howling; it was dreadful. Simply macabre.

Maddog was going through the jacket pockets.

"Nothing," he muttered. I think he said, "nothing." With such din coming from Maddog's dogs, it was hard to tell. It was however a logical conclusion, I thought.

Now Maddog was taking off the shirt, but the

corpse wouldn't bend, hard as a rock, and the cloth material was hung up on the elbows, and so Maddog pulled, then pulled a little harder, then really pulled, and it just ripped away, then the guy's T shirt which was easier because it just snapped at the straps, and John sat there in the middle of forty howling Greyhounds, topless.

Maddog threw the shirt and T-shirt on top of the jacket. Now he was at the man's belt buckle.

"Have you no shame?" Pooch the Mooch yelled, and we could hear him over the blitzing dogs.

Everybody looked at Pooch the Mooch like I guess not. Then we realized what he meant, and we all looked at Little Elsie.

"Fine," she said, and marched outside.

Maddog tugged and pulled on the pants. Hugh and I had hold of the guy's armpits, and Maddog continued to pull and tug, and maybe they were stuck to him or something, because they would not slide off, and finally Maddog ripped the pant legs, then the crotch, and now they came off slick as could be because they didn't have to come off anything at all, and Maddog checked the pockets.

"Nothing," he said, "then he tore off the guy's jockey shorts."

I didn't think that was necessary, and I said so. "What'd you do that for?"

Like the dogs were wondering the same thing, they all of a sudden shut up, and now stood quietly staring, like could there be more? What's next? Never a dull moment around this place? Have they lost it? We stared at the dogs staring back at us. I

have to admit it unnerved me some. I didn't cotton to their racket, mind you, but I almost preferred it to the looks of condemnation.

"Do they have to stare like that?" Ben Dover wanted to know.

"Well," Maddog said, clearing his throat, and looking over once more the ripped shorts which he held up to the light bulb. "I think we've done about as much damage as we can," I looked at John. I mean the guy was stark naked, and it was somewhat apparent that he did not have a \$3900 trifecta ticket on him. At this very moment John had absolutely nothing on him, let alone a ticket.

"Yes," I said, in full agreement.

"Agreed," Everybody said.

"Crap," Maddog said.

Maddog was stroking his chin.

"Well," he finally said, "it was worth a try. Let's get him dressed."

Well that was a little easier, depending on how you looked at it, than getting the clothes off. The shorts were easy, because all we had to do was sort of set them where they were supposed to be, in the vicinity so to speak. The pants went on easy; Maddog Scotch-taped them at the thigh, knee, and calf. Otherwise, he explained, they might get caught in the wheel chair wheels on the way back. The T-shirt and shirt went into the jacket pocket, we couldn't even hang them decently; the jacket went on OK, except Maddog had to rip the sleeves, then Scotch tape them at the pits, elbows, and wrists. Then the Robin Hood hat. Then a touch to the red hanky in the jacket pocket. Then the red

scarf around the neck, fluffed just right. Then the glasses. Then the racing program.

"OK," Maddog said. "Let's go."

And the dogs started in again: howling, barking, whining, scratching at their crate doors, but mostly, in the main, howling, and I'm here to tell you Sherlock Holmes' Hound of the Baskervilles was patty-cake patty-cake bakers man compared to this racket.

And back to the track we went, picking up Little Elsie on the way, passing state security still heavily engrossed in Playboy fiction, waved at the gate man, crossed the parking lot, through all the cars, really rolling now, Maddog going around one car, the wheelchair doing a wheely, in the front entrance where we encountered our first real difficulty of the evening.

"Just a minute," a young, bright-eyed ticket agent said.

Everybody came to a halt.

"What's the problem," Maddog wanted to know.

"Who is that guy?"

"What guy?"

"The guy in the wheelchair."

"Oh. He's a guest of mine. We just showed him the kennels."

We all nodded. Sounded like a fair assessment of the situation to me.

"That's not good enough," the ticket agent said. "Not good enough."

"Well what is good enough," Maddog asked. I thought the tone of his voice a touch on the

sarcastic side.

"Where's his ticket?"

"What ticket?" Maddog asked, kind of croaking, then gasping.

"THE ticket."

Maddog turned to us and hissed through clenched teeth: "We got a problem here or what? Who is this clown? How's he know about the ticket?"

We all shrugged.

The ticket agent continued. "No ticket. No entrance. You can't come in this gate without a ticket."

"Oh," Maddog said. "That ticket. Well John here is a guest of ours, and he came in early down by the jinny pit gate."

"Nope," the ticket agent said. "Not good enough. No ticket. No dog racing. I just do my job. Sorry."

I reached in my pocket and came up with \$2.00. "Here," I said, handing it over to Maddog. He looked it over, took it, hesitated, then handed it back to me.

Maddog said, his voice full of authority, and I could tell this ticket agent was beginning to aggravate him. "Young man, the gentleman in this wheelchair is dead. He does not have to buy a ticket to your shit-ass dog track."

The ticket salesman bristled. "Sir, it makes no mind to me. Rules are rules. That man must have a ticket. I recognize the rest of you as track employees, but the gentleman in the wheelchair will buy a ticket, and that is that."

I whispered in Maddog's ear: "I think discretion the better part of valor."

Maddog took a deep breath, and I know it was hard for him to say: "OK. One ticket for my good friend John in the wheel chair." And Maddog forked over \$2.00, my \$2.00, and the ticket agent made his cash register go DING DING DING and the drawer flew open, and it went chunky chunky chunky and now Maddog had his ticket. He stuffed it in John's jacket pocket.

"Now, John, you have your ticket."

"Enjoy," the ticket agent said, brightly, with positive joy, a phrase I suspect he woke up in the morning practicing. I hated that expression almost as much as I hated "Have a nice day."

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Little Elsie shoot the ticket agent the flying finger of fickleness. My sentiments exactly. Little Elsie always brief and to the point.

And we all pushed straight away, all rushing along as one, downstairs, and a race went off, the Sixth I think, and it was a 3-8ths thank goodness, to the same old concrete pillar, and John was out of the wheelchair and into the folding chair, and tidied up just right, a tug on the hanky, an adjustment to the scarf, a touch of tilt, just right, to the dark glasses, straighten the program, and Hugh returning the wheel chair, and the rest of us returning to stand around the gate to the jinny pit. Hugh was back and nodded, indicating that nobody had questioned him about the use of the wheelchair.

For some reason I had a funny feeling in the pit

of my stomach, like I'd just done something naughty I wouldn't want to be called on, or I would have trouble trying to explain my actions, but I couldn't quite put it together. I mean nothing was changed. Nothing was different. John's clothes weren't the same, and I felt bad about that, but I doubt John cared much one way or the other. But then I paid John's way back in, too. I mean he'd be loitering out in the parking lot if it weren't for me. I guess all things work out in the end.

Maddog opened his program, looked out to the tote board, and said, "Well. Who do you like in the seventh?"