



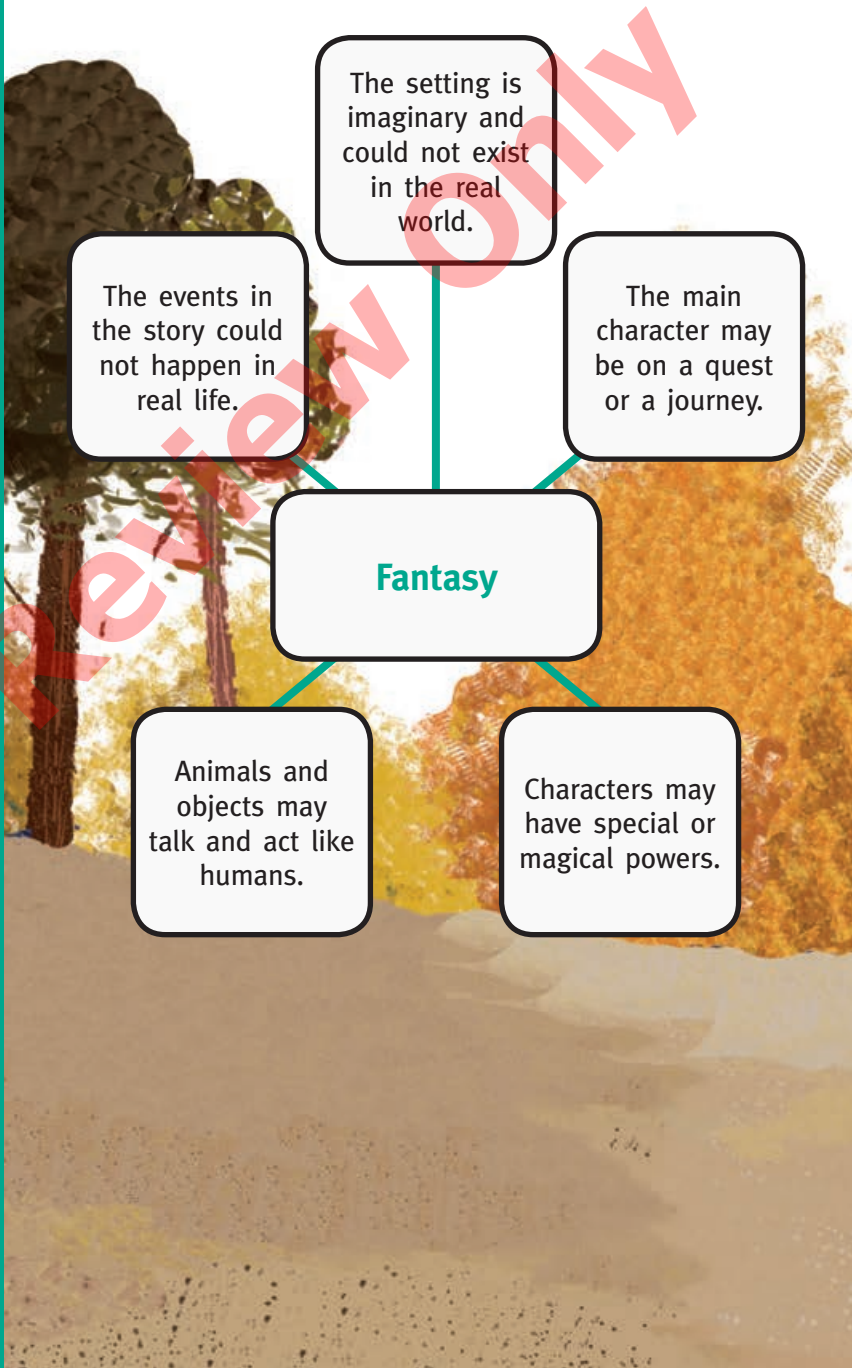
To Serve and Protect



by Allan Woodrow • illustrated by Parwinder Singh

Fantasy

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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The Rookie

I roll over, yawn, and scrunch up my nose. Officer Nick really needs to wash his clothes more often. All I can smell are his dirty socks. Doesn't he know that my sense of smell is almost a million times greater than his?

I stand up from my bed, stretch my legs, and walk out of the laundry room and into the kitchen.

I hope that Officer Nick will be back soon. He said he was bringing home a surprise, and I wonder if it is a new toy, or a new collar, or maybe an air freshener. His socks *really* stink.

Most of all, I hope that Officer Nick's surprise will be a new case for us to solve.

I have been a K9 police dog for nine years. That is a long time to be a police dog, but I love everything about my job. In a large police force, dogs do only one or two things, like tracking criminals or sniffing for evidence. Other dogs detect drugs or bombs. Some are attack dogs, used in security situations by police departments or the military. But in a smaller force, like mine, a police dog does everything.

A few days ago, I overheard Officer Nick talking about me on the phone. He said I was the best police dog on the force. He told the person on the other end how we had found a bank robber hiding in the woods last week, and that we might get medals. My ears perked up when I heard that, but then they settled back down when I heard what he said next. He said I would be retiring soon.

Me? Retiring? What would I do all day, chase kittens? A police dog like me is way too important to spend her day chasing kittens.

I am not ready for retirement. I am not ready to be shipped out and sent to live in some dog kennel and forgotten. Dogs in the K9 unit are trained to "serve and protect," and I can still serve and protect better than anyone.

Oh! I hear Officer Nick's car pull up. I run toward the front door, and what's that? A second car pulling into our driveway. Then I hear a bark, two barks, and then three barks. I think of that word again, *retirement*, and suddenly I smell a lot more than dirty socks. I smell disaster.

I growl as the front door opens and Officer Nick walks in. "Justice? I'm home, and I have a surprise!" he says.

I stay crouched, growling.

Officer Nick bends down and rubs my nose. I love it when he rubs my nose, so I stop growling because it's hard to growl when someone is rubbing your nose.

Then another officer walks in. She is younger than Officer Nick, and next to her is a big, young, barking Belgian Malinois.

I'm a German shepherd, and we're the best police dogs. We are smart, loyal, and tough when we need to be, but we can be friendly, too. Belgium Malinois dogs are smaller with reddish fur. This dog is jumping up and down like he is on a pogo stick. A police dog needs to be calm and collected, like me.

I hunch my back and bare my teeth at this K9 pretender.

"Easy, girl," says Officer Nick. "These are friends. *Platz!*"

Platz is K9 talk for "down," so I lie down. A good police dog always obeys his or her partner. Meanwhile, this new dog keeps jumping and barking.

"Down, boy," says the other officer.

Is this my replacement? I think.

"*Platz, platz!*"

Finally, the dog settles down.

“Justice, this is Officer Tasha,” explains Officer Nick. “And her dog is Fielder. Fielder is training to be a K9 dog, and we’re going to see if he’s up to the job. I thought you can show him what a *real* police dog is like.”

I stand up straight. That’s right—I am a real police dog. I bark twice. That means “Yes!”

“Let’s get some coffee,” says Officer Nick, leading Officer Tasha to the kitchen.

“Be right back, Fuzz,” Officer Tasha says.



I squint. “Fuzz?” I ask.

“Officer Tasha’s nickname for me,” explains Fielder.

I grimace. That is a horrible nickname for a police dog. Police dogs maintain law and order, and we need tough, dependable, and solid names. I love my name, Justice, which means “fair and honorable.”

I narrow my eyes. This dog is not going to take my place. After all, I am irreplaceable. I am a real police dog.

“So you want to be a police dog, Fuzz Ball?” I growl. This dog is more of a Fuzz Ball than a Fuzz.

He shoots me a dirty look, but it lasts only a moment before he starts jumping up and down again. “You bet I do! What’s it like, being a police dog—is it awesome? You’re like a hero, right?”

I squint and shake my head. “I’m not *like* a hero. I am a hero! And how do I do it? By being calm and cool, not by jumping around like I have fleas on my feet.”

I turn my back to this Fuzz Ball and wander into the kitchen. The new dog follows me, still bouncing and yapping while Officer Tasha and Officer Nick drink coffee.

It is time to teach this upstart K9 a lesson. “I can give you one tip, Fuzz Ball. Always be on the lookout for trouble. Our job is to serve and protect, but trouble lurks where you least expect it. You can be minding your business and—hey, what’s that, behind you?”

Fuzz Ball spins around like a gang of bandits had jumped into the room. His leg smacks into the kitchen table, and Officer Tasha’s mug of coffee falls over. The liquid pours onto the officer’s pants.



“What did you do that for, Fuzz?” asks Officer Tasha, bounding out of her chair, her pants soaked.

“He will need to learn to calm down if he’s going to be a police dog, like Justice,” says Officer Nick, reaching over for a roll of paper towel. Meanwhile, I stand as still as a statue.

Fuzz Ball hangs his ears and looks down at his feet. I admit it—I feel bad about making him hit the table, but just a little bit. There is no way some amateur jumpy Belgian Malinois is taking my place on the police force. After all, I am a real police dog.





On the Case

Officer Nick drives the two of us past fields and old houses in our squad car. There's nothing like putting your head out the car window and feeling the wind against your tongue. It's the best part of driving anywhere.

We turn down a dirt road surrounded by lots of trees. After winding around, we pull into the driveway of a big house at the edge of a large wooded forest. Officer Nick opens the door. I jump out and inhale, soaking in the millions of deep forest scents. I love the smell of the forest.

A woman in a green sweat suit comes out to meet us. Her eyes look puffy, as if she had been crying. "Thank goodness you're here."

"I'm Officer Nick and this is Justice. You must be Gabriela. Your niece María is missing?"