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VOICE AGENCY COMICS

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GLADIATOR

◆ The Manchester Black and Tan ◆

by GORDON ATKINSON

MANCHESTER
GAZETTE
& GENERAL
ADVERTISER

ADVERTISEMENTS
RECEIVED
DAILY

MANCHESTER
GAZETTE
SATURDAY, JULY 12, 1845

THE
THREE
TUNS
ALE & STOUT

GREAT
WAGER!
500 GUINEAS
TO ANY DOG
THAT WILL

A WAGER IS SET.
HISTORY WILL DECIDE.



◆ MANCHESTER TERRIER RESEARCH – THE THREE TUNS PIT, 1845 ◆

VOICE AGENCY COMICS

A NOTE TO THE READER

T

his story is true.

The sport was real, and the general attitude toward dogs in that time of history is depicted accurately in our story.

The name "Fancy" was the name these dog enthusiasts used, and every person mentioned in Gladiator was real. Even the dogs and their names are taken from actual accounts of the rat pits.

For more information, see our second issue in this series, a research document, called "Black and Tan Studies."

THANK YOU FOR READING.

Your support keeps these stories alive.



Manchester England
Tuesday, 14 September 1845
The basement of Three Tuns Tavern

The gaslights above the rat pit hissed and threw twitchy shadows over the white pine boards that marked the boundary of the gladiatorial arena. The air was damp and the place stank of animals, sweat, fear, and gore. Fifty men were crowded around the pit, shouting and gesticulating with slips of paper and bills of currency in their fists. Millers and miners mixed with the waistcoated gentlemen who owned the factories that darkened their hands with labor and their lungs with coal.



They called themselves The Fancy, the men who met in this place - the rat pit - where the only currencies were life, death, and the pit boss's pocket watch.

Inside the boards, things were going badly for the dogs.

The opening trials were a disaster. Rat-catcher Bill, working on commission for a gentleman from Manchester, had secured three hundred Spanish ship rats for the evening's bill of fare. Lean, with tails twice as long as their bodies, and active as feral monkeys, the wharf rodents made fools of the local dogs. The basement terriers were used to cheap, cage-raised scavengers that simply bolted in terror and died easily.





These ship rats had more game than the dogs. They didn't run; they fought back. Operating with astonishing cooperation, the rats swarmed over any dog showing hesitation or fear, shredding their ears and slashing at their throats.

None of the dogs lasted more than a few seconds. Some panicked entirely and leapt, screaming, over the pine boards, only to be shoved back into the maelstrom by the jeering crowd. Two dogs

made such a cowardly showing they were booed out of the establishment altogether, along with their owners.

When it came time for the Scratch Matches—the open invitation for any man in the room to toss his amateur dog into the arena for a wager—the pit boss was met with dead silence. Not a single man was willing to risk his animal in that churning gray sea. The men looked down at their boots or pulled their dogs tighter against their legs.

That left only the handicap matches: the big money events where experienced pit dogs raced against the clock, the number of rats to be killed determined by the dog's weight. There were two on the bill that evening, but even the professionals could make no headway against the Spanish Swarm.



First up was a wire-haired mongrel terrier—a local favorite named Lucy who held a handful of speed records in the Three Tuns cellar. She was game to begin with, dropping her head and dutifully dispatching a few rats in short order. But then a huge male launched itself from the gray tide and latched squarely onto her snout.

Lucy broke. She let out a high, panicked scream and scrambled for the edge of the pen, literally climbing over the churning backs of the swarm to reach the pine boards. The cellar erupted in jeers. Curses, wadded-up betting slips, and half-empty pints rained down into the pit. The dog's owner, his face purple with humiliation, reached over the boards, grabbed the terrified animal by the scruff, and hauled her out.



"Clear the box!" the pit boss yelled over the noise. "Next match, Crib against fifty!"

This was the featured event of the night. Crib was a brutish bulldog-terrier cross with a barrel chest and virtually no neck. What remained of his ears was thick scar tissue, leaving the swarm no purchase, and his vise-like jaws could crush a badger's skull. Indeed, he was locally famous for dragging badgers out of their dens and killing them in front of the cheering Fancy.

Crib fought the rats like a hammer. He plowed into the swarm, seizing rodents, crushing them, and moving on. He killed thirty in as many minutes, but the ship rats adapted. Realizing they had no chance of bringing the heavy dog down with bites, they changed their tactics.

They simply ran from him. They leapt over his heavy, swinging head. They even

rebounded off the pine walls of the pit to change direction. Crib was forced to chase them, his massive muscles burning oxygen he couldn't replace. The lumbering brawler slowed as exhaustion took him, his jaws snapping at empty air.



The match ended in a pathetic stalemate: the heavy dog heaving for breath on one side of the blood-slicked pit, and twenty surviving rats gasping for breath on the other.

One man present that evening did not participate in the betting, the drinking, or any of the extravagances of the event. He



hurled no pint glasses and expressed no surprise at the inability of the dogs to overcome the ship rats.

John Hulme was a gentleman and professional dog breeder who had been working on a new breed of dog with Charles Whitehouse of Birmingham, John Roocroft of Lancashire, and Henry Lacy of Yorkshire.

It was he who purchased the expensive Spanish rats for the evening, and the results were much as he expected.



He left the event quietly, and the next morning placed an ad in Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle.

THE RAT PIT CHALLENGE NOTICE

A Gentleman of Manchester, having
bred a Black-and-Tan Terrier of
singular speed and ferocity, hereby offers
an open challenge to the local Fancy.

He will back his dog to kill
one hundred imported Spanish
ship rats against the clock faster
than ANY dog of ANY weight.

Odds to be set ringside at the
unveiling of the gentlemen's new
dog, for a purse of Fifty Guineas.

Said match to come off on
Tuesday, the 12th of October
next, at the pit of the Three
Tuns Tavern, Manchester.

Money ready and articles to be
drawn at the above house.





The now infamous Spanish Swarm caught the Fancy by surprise. They were humiliated, and returned to their local tavern cellars to lick their wounds, rebuild their purses, and plot their revenge. News of the Fifty Guinea wager - a staggering sum - spread through the taverns and cobblestone alleys of Manchester like a coal fire, drawing every serious dog man in the North to Manchester for the big event.

On the night of Tuesday, October the 12th, the infamous cellar of the Three Tuns was packed so tightly men had trouble raising their pints. The raw energy of greed and death rippled through the crowds as men argued odds and bookmakers scribbled frantically in their ledgers.





The local Fancy brought heavy hitters to answer the open challenge. Massive brindle crosses and scarred, thick-necked badger-dogs were dropped into the box. A few put on a valiant show, chomping blindly into the gray tide and relying on their thick skin to weather the counter-attacks. But the math of the Spanish swarm remained absolute. One by one, the heavy dogs succumbed to the parkour agility of the ship rats.

The most promising challenger of the evening was a beloved local hero named Dart, a rangy terrier famous across the city for his blazing speed coursing rabbits. When his owner dropped him into the box he was a blur of teeth and muscle, snapping spines and slinging rats into the boards. The cellar roared in triumph.



Dart was fast, but he wasn't quick enough to evade every counter-attack. A nick on the snout; a slashed ear; an open shoulder wound. Each was minor, but they bled and cost him energy. Exhaustion slowed him, and the Spanish Swarm capitalized, pressing in on the bleeding dog. After nearly an hour of continuous combat and forty-seven kills, Dart's owner had to throw his heavy wool coat over his beloved animal and pull him from the pit to save his life.



Not a single dog came even close to killing one hundred rats, and a local speed champion had been publicly broken. The cellar fell into a heavy, defeated silence. Then, John Hulme stepped to the edge of the pine boards. He carried a small, slatted wooden crate.

"Sweep the pit," Hulme instructed the boss quietly. "One hundred fresh."

While the handlers were clearing bodies and dumping a churning, hissing mass of new Spanish rats into the arena, Hulme unlatched his crate and brought out a dog. It was not a barrel-chested brawler or a rangy terrier cross, like Dart. It was a sleek, black-and-tan animal that looked as if it weighed no more than seven or eight pounds. It had the deep chest of a small greyhound, the muscular thighs of a courser, and a head shaped like a polished wedge.

The little dog was violently shivering.





Hulme held it aloft, pivoting slowly under the gaslights. He made sure every man pressing against the boards got a long, hard look at the fragile, trembling thing he had brought to the slaughter. A ripple of laughter rolled through the smoky cellar. Someone from the back shouted, "Is that the bait, Hulme? Bring out the real dog!"

They thought it was a joke—a theatrical curtain-raiser before the true monster was unveiled. But Hulme didn't smile. He caught the eyes of four agents planted in the crowd, and the men immediately went to work, quietly covering the room's action.

As Hulme stepped to the edge of the pit and pulled his gold pocket watch to synchronize with the boss, the laughter died. A sudden, greedy realization washed over the cellar: Hulme was serious, and obviously insane. He was actually going to drop this shivering, eight-pound dog into the jaws of a hundred dock-bred killers. It was absolute murder.

A frenzy erupted. Men shoved against the boards, screaming out odds and waving currency, desperate to fleece the madman before his terrified animal was torn to pieces.

But they didn't understand why the dog was shivering. The dog wasn't trembling from fear. It was vibrating with anticipation. Every muscle in the animal's lean, aerodynamic frame was a coiled spring, wound to the point of snapping.

The dog's name was Tiny, and he had been thrown into many rat pits in his short life. He wasn't a victim; he was an apex predator. Killing wasn't a chore for Tiny—it was his passion, and he was desperate to get to work.

Hulme studied his pocket watch as he suspended Tiny over the boards for the drop. He tilted his head toward the pit boss, his eyes never leaving the ticking hands.

"Time," he said, and released Tiny into the rat pit.

Tiny hit the ground with a light tap and instantly sprang sideways. The Swarm moved like a school of fish, surging forward, presenting a unified wall for a brawler to crash into. They expected to throw themselves at the broad, stationary chest of a heavy dog. Instead they found a lithe, darting little demon. Tiny didn't fight like a dog; he fought like a sewing machine. There was no theatrical shaking of bodies, no enraged growling, and no wasted energy. Snap, crunch, drop. Snap, crunch, drop. His wedge-shaped head worked with the relentless vertical precision of a steel needle, puncturing skulls and snapping spines before the rodents even registered the threat.



The men pressing against the boards slowly stopped waving their currency. The frenzy died into a heavy, stunned silence as the bookmakers tried to comprehend the math of what they were witnessing. For the first time in the history of the cellar, a dog was turning faster than the rats. His diminutive size—the very thing the crowd had laughed at—was a devastating structural advantage. A large, heavy dog gave the swarm something to attack as a coordinated school. But Tiny was so small he simply dissolved into the churning, hissing mass.



The rats couldn't coordinate an assault. They couldn't swarm what they couldn't surround. He was down inside the tide with them, darting about with mechanical precision, and harvesting them from the inside out.

Those present that evening said the sound of the slaughter was as frightening as the thing itself. There was very little noise apart from clicking snaps and dying squeaks. Before many in the crowd realized what was happening, the swarm of rats thinned, and the bodies began to pile up.

Tiny ignored the mortally wounded—leaving them to expire in final convulsions—as he systematically cleared the stragglers.



When there was no movement left in the rat swarm, the pit boss clicked his watch and announced the time to the stunned Fancy.

“Five minutes!”



One hundred Spanish Ship rats in five minutes, meaning one kill every three seconds. The Fancy had come that night expecting a slaughter, but not the one Hulme delivered.

No one realized it at the time of course, but history had been made. The demand for the Manchester style Black and Tan was instantaneous, and every amateur breeder was keen to create his own “Gentlemen’s Dog.”

The terrifying, almost mechanical efficiency of the Manchester Black and Tan in a closed arena would eventually seal the fate of the ancient sport. The heartless brutality of rat baiting was no longer something society would tolerate. Within decades it was outlawed across England and the United States. The cellar pits were closed, and the world moved on.





As for Tiny, his speed record of 100 rats in five minutes was never broken, though another specialized black and tan cross named Billy managed to kill 500 rats in an hour at a documented event some years later.

Tiny was an innocent creature, like the millions of dogs who were used in such cruel ways in that era. And so regardless of the brutality of his life, it seems right to remember him and his astonishing record, which will now stand for all time.

Gordon Atkinson
For Tiny and Billy and Toby



Bibliography: Chapter One

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CURIOSITIES FOR THE FANCY.

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