

LEVELED Book • O

# Troika: Canine Superhero



Written by Robert Charles and Elizabeth Austin  
Illustrated by John Kastner

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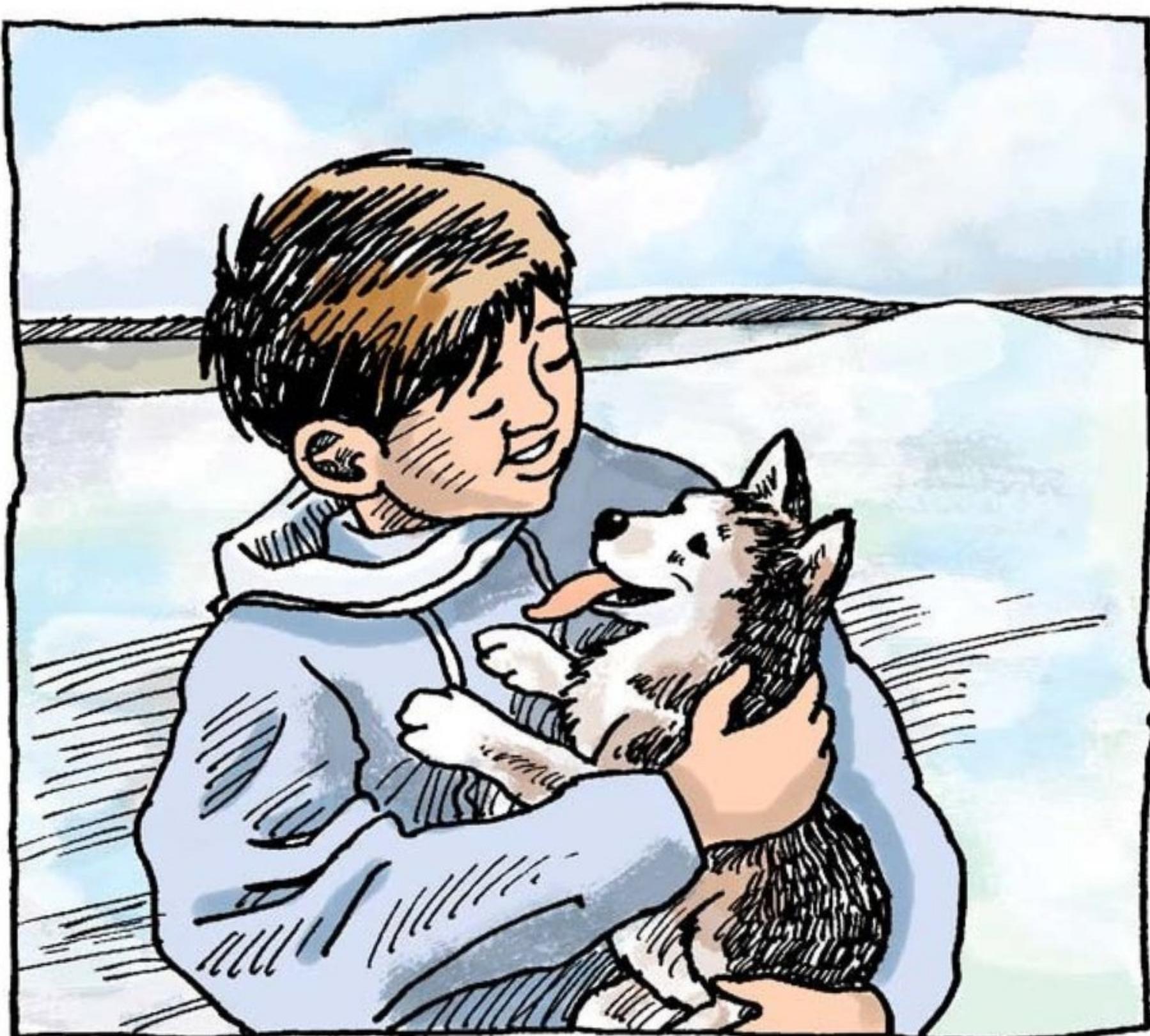


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I'm sure every boy loves his dog. If you ask any boy how much he loves his dog, he'll say, "More than anyone ever loved a dog before." But my dog is different. My dog is a superhero, and he became one even though he only had three legs. And I know for sure that I love my dog more than anyone has ever loved a dog before.

This dog was different from the day he was born. The other puppies in the litter scrambled over each other. They barked and whined and growled. But one dog was calm, as though he knew what was going on. And when I held him, he looked me right in the eyes. It was as if he could speak. At the time, I couldn't think of a name that was good enough to fit him. So I just called him "Dog."





Dog only got better as he got older. He was the smartest of the litter, and by far the most loyal. The other dogs sleep outside in doghouses. But Dog couldn't fall asleep unless he was next to me. He would wait outside his doghouse all night. So he sleeps on the floor of my bedroom. We're never apart for a minute.

Dog and I live in Canada, above the Arctic Circle. Up here, there's snow on the ground for nine months of the year. There aren't many roads, and the rivers stay frozen. The sun doesn't even come up for a good part of the winter. My family and I use dogsleds to get around the frozen land.



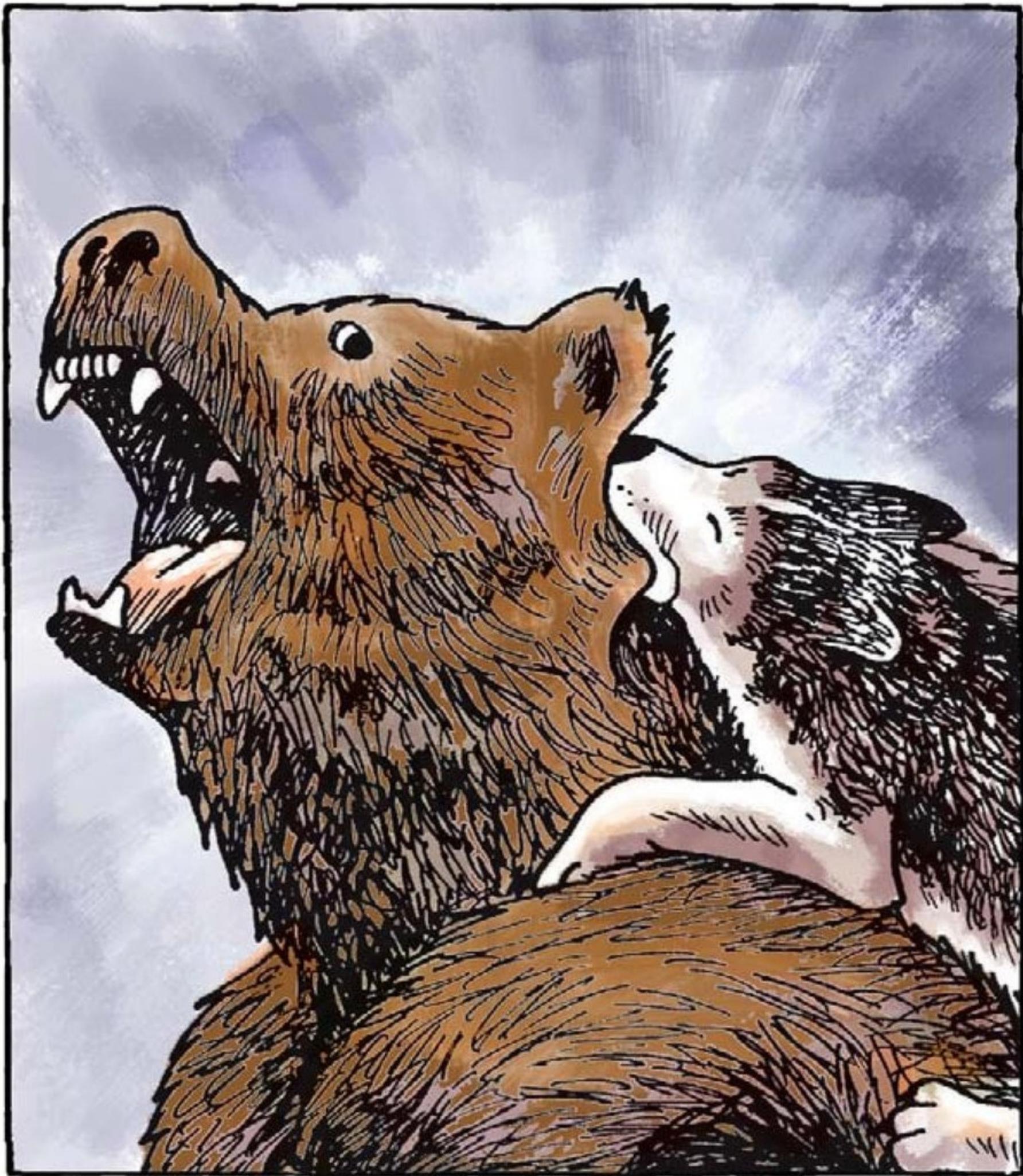


It's hard to make a living up here. If there's a thaw during the winter, it's impossible to cross the rivers by sled. Sometimes, food runs low, and we have to hunt deer, hares, and other animals.

During one thaw, I went out hunting. I had brought down a deer, and the dogs were resting while I cleaned it.

I realize now that it was my fault. I should have known that the thaw would bring some bears out of hibernation. I should have known that the smell of the deer would attract them. But I didn't think of it until the hungry bear had knocked me down, and by then, it was too late. I was staring straight down the throat of a huge grizzly.





But out of nowhere, Dog ripped free from his harness and leapt on the bear's back. The bear roared and twisted, but Dog held on. It all seemed to take forever. Dog was thrown by a swipe of the bear's huge paw, and the angry creature finally ran off.



I ran over to Dog. The wet snow was stained scarlet with his blood. His leg was bitten, badly, and I was sure the bone was broken. Dog could barely lift his head, but his eyes still told me that he was there for me.

I carried Dog home as quickly as I could. But his leg was badly hurt. My father had to amputate it. I was heartbroken—but Dog didn't seem to mind. Soon enough, he was back to being the best dog in the litter.





Even with three legs, Dog was still my strongest runner. The next winter, I started entering sled-dog races. Dog was always my lead dog. The other kids looked at me funny for having a three-legged lead dog. But they looked at me very differently when we won.



After winning a few races, I entered my longest race yet. The course stretched over five hundred kilometers. I was one of the youngest people to enter, and the only person with a three-legged lead dog. But early on, Dog and I were in first place. The other racers even commented on how strong Dog seemed.



The hardest part of the race was a long stretch across a frozen river. The winds were bitter, and the ice could be dangerous. As the dogs ran, I could hear the river groaning and creaking under the ice.

Suddenly, the ice shuddered and cracked. Dog tugged hard, like he knew there was trouble. But the front of my sled caught on the crack, and it tumbled into the icy water.



The shock went through my whole body. I never thought anything could be so cold. I could barely see, and all I could do was hold on tight. Ahead of me, I saw dark shapes moving. And at the front of those dark shapes was Dog. He kept tugging, no matter what. At last, the team was able to drag the sled out of the water. He had saved me again.





I spent the whole night by the fire, and I thought I might never be warm or dry again. But Dog curled up next to me. He kept me warm all night. By the next morning, we were ready to go again.



I thought that was the last of our troubles. The next morning dawned bright and cold, and we were running hard. It wasn't long before we were at the head of the pack again. And Dog, as always, was right up front.

During a short rest, Dog's ears suddenly pricked up. There was a crashing sound coming from the trees. A huge bull moose stumbled into the clearing where we were. Nothing scares me more than moose. Unlike bears, they're unpredictable. They seem to get mad and charge for no reason.





The moose sent a puff of steam out of its nostrils. Then, with a grunt, it started to gallop toward us. This was a disaster. The moose was about to trample me and my entire sled-dog team. But like a shot, Dog leapt at the moose and seized its leg.

The moose gave a mighty kick. It was too much even for Dog, who went sailing through the air. He hit a tree, hard, and I was sure he was dead. The moose lowered its head and seemed to eye the rest of the dogs. But Dog got up. He stood swaying on his three legs. And he stared that moose in the eyes until the moose realized that Dog would never, ever give up. Looking a little frightened, the moose retreated into the woods.





That was the third time my three-legged dog had saved my life. After that, I knew what I would name him.

I chose the word Troika. It's a Russian word that refers to things that come in threes. And even though he only has three legs, he has proven three times that he is a true superhero.

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Level O Leveled Book  
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