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Dog

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Book

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Life as a dog has had a good share of attention from children's writers of late, but it doesn't come much tougher than this. A lucky escape from drowning as a puppy sets Dog off on a paw-to-mouth existence. Narrowly escaping death in the dog pound, he is adopted by a family who first neglect him, then abandon him. Luckily, he finds the friendship of an odd couple of dog and man, Hyena and Wild Boar, whose physical ugliness cannot obscure the beauty of a relationship founded on mutual respect. Through them, Dog gains the strength to endure, and acquires the wiles and fighting qualities necessary to establish his place within his own human family. For much of the novel, the dog's eye view of the world is unsparing. Whether on two or four legs it's a dog eat dog world. But towards the end of the novel, this is offset by the appearance of an amazing degree of canine cooperation where, in a scene somewhere between *The 101 Dalmatians* and *Lord of the Flies*, a motley crew of dogs and cats visits an apocalyptic trashing on the home of Dog's treacherous family. The book was first published in 1982 in France and, despite the excellent translation, there may be aspects of Pennac's portrayal of the urban dog world (particularly the dog catchers) that British children will not recognise. The balance between reality and fantasy in the novel doesn't feel entirely comfortable. Still, it's good to see a European children's novel in translation.

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