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Since, technically, I'm not a dog and dogs understand the subtle complexities of pack rules way better than I do, I usually let them work out their issues on their own.

It's worked well since there's really just one rule in McMillan's House O' Fur: Oona rules. Our Irish wolfhound diva came up with the concept when she was 13 weeks old and Bentley, the

brains of the bunch, decided he'd put the puppy in her place. She wadded him up and sat on him. Bentley rushed to second Rule No. 1 and his minion, Sully, thirdered it. He didn't know Robert's Rules of Order from sliced bread but he was eager to show his boss he had a firm grip on the situation.

We threw a wrench into it when we added Oona's nephew, Oisin, into the mix. Oisin is possibly the sweetest individual on the planet. But he's a male wolfhound and he's fallen under the siren song testosterone. Hormones tell him that since he's wades through the house like Godzilla rambling through Tokyo, just maybe *he* should be in charge. Short of that, he should give the others a reason to get up every day — to skitter out of his path. The boy is dedicated to chaos. He may be bending the laws of physics, too. He can be in five places at once. Five.

Here's some things we've learned about pack dynamics:

Family keeps you grounded.

Oona was once a wild child. She didn't eat puppy Oisin because she smelled that he was one of her own, her sister's baby. She adored him and taught him to be a pirate, just like her. It's humbling when a plan works too well. Now he swings from her beard and dive bombs her with impunity. She's taken it like a saint, except for the occasional wall-rattling roar and showing every fang she has.

Crazy is a solid self-defense.

The others are smarter, stronger and faster than Sully. When Oona stands unnervingly behind him or Oisin goes on a tear, Sully rolls his eyes back in his head, foams at the mouth and

jitters out of their way. Unscathed. They may just be entertained. Whatever. It gets Sully off the hook.

Hold your head up and persevere.

Bentley knows he's superior. He has steely nerves. He thinks strategically. He's 25 pounds in a humid day. But size is unimportant when you have conviction. If he wants to cross the room despite Oona and Oisin, he sails out with confidence into No Man's Land. Slowly, so as not to trigger Oona's hunt driver or Oisin's madcap enthusiasm. But Oona is her own trigger. She dribbles him like a basketball. And Bentley has to skitter to the corner through Oisin's dancing feet.

But he holds his head high. Despite the dents and dings. This fascinates Oona. And once he has her attention, he begins to whisper to her about Oisin....

Opposable thumbs are little use in a hurricane.

I'm the big-brained biped with opposable thumbs, ruler of the domain. But when Oisin, who's as big as a colt, cuts loose in the house, I take my cue from the pack. I freeze and leave him space. Maybe Oisin's as sure-footed as he thinks he is. Maybe that rear end won't whip around and bat us into next Tuesday.

Patience is a virtue, but sometimes biting is better.

Wolfhounds, due to their immense size, are slow to mature. When Oisin turned one and Oona realized he was only getting wilder (and bigger), she did what the others had been waiting for — she backed her nephew into a corner and told him to CUT. IT. OUT.

Oisin detected the subtle difference in her tone. Plus, her teeth were *awfully* big that close up. He's reined it in. At least as much as any hormone-addled teen can. Emboldened, Sully and Bentley have tried to assist. They snap at him, too, now. Until they see this only feeds his crazy. Then they scamper behind Oona. And she invokes Rule No. 1. And slowly, sanity is returning to the House O' Fur...