The Army of Dogs

Part One, The Gathering Pack

Rex stood on the hill staring over a sight he thought he would never see knowing he would never see again. In the last four days, the word of the army recruiting became like a snowball rolling downhill until they had more than a thousand dogs. The Fifty Chihuahua Army was more like three hundred. They had dogs of every size and dimension. Julie Smyth came up behind Rex and sat down. She was the only human directly working with the dog army. She left her sisters back on their family farm so she could act as a human representative as well as help communicate for the dogs with the human military over the radio. She looked over the dogs as they ran around and played. Despite knowing not to do it, Julie put her hand on Rex and ran it down his back. A shiver ran back up, and it felt good to Rex. Julie asked, “are we really going to do this?”

Four days ago,

The dogs ran in a mass bumping off one another going west. The number brothers, Fritz, Hans, Ein, Zwei, and Drie, led the pack on point. They had picked up a few more Doberman in a town they had passed, and somehow these new dogs just melded into a sort of hive mind to the point that they didn’t even need to speak when they were going to do something. Near the front of the cacophony of dogs was Julie on her bike. The bike had an electric motor that was charged as she peddled. She would go a while on the motor when they would go uphill. She would peddle on the flat roads. Rex ran alongside the girl feeling responsible for her safety and knowing they needed her if their plans were going to work.

The dogs stopped for the night, killing any deer they could find for food. Julie sat by herself, eating a strip of beef jerky she packed when she left the farm. This wasn’t just the longest bike ride she ever went on; it was the longest trip she ever made away from home. The dogs kept their distance from her, all but Rex. As she ate, she played with the radio to see if she
could make it work. After a while, a light came on, and a voice said, “how is this going to work?” Julie said, “you talk to the dogs, they talk to me, and I tell you what they said.”

The voice said nothing in return. Julie asked, “can you hear me?” After a few seconds, the voice said, “whoever is trying to talk to us, you have to press the button to talk…… press, talk, let the button go… over.” Julie turned the radio over and saw the button. She pushed the button and said, “you talk to them, they talk to me, and I relay what they said…… over.” The voice asked, “just how old are you?…… over.” Julie replied, “I’m old enough to press a button…… over.” Rex stepped closer to the radio as if to signal they needed to get past whatever was happening. Julie nodded. Rex said, “we are about seven hundred strong and tracking a herd.” The voice asked, “who is this?” Rex shook his head and said, “general, we can trade questions back and forth, or we can get to business…… over.” After she relayed the message, Julie turned to Rex and asked, “general?”

The General gave them directions to an airstrip where they would meet up with a plane filled with dog recruits he and buster had found. Many of them were military and police dogs. At their current pace, they would make it to the airstrip in about two days. The plane would be there in about a day, but it wouldn’t wait. The dogs, along with some supplies, would be left behind for the army. When he was done, the General asked Julie her name. She said, “my name is Julie… Julie Newmar Smyth…. Over.” The radio went silent for a long time. The General finally said, “OK if you don’t want to give me your real name Catwoman, that’s fine…. over and out.”

Julie set up a small tent for the night. She couldn’t remember being as tired with sores in places she didn’t know could get sore. Most of all, she was missing her home and sisters. Most of the dogs wanted nothing to do with people making her the odd girl out. Twenty-Three, the leader of the fifty Chihuahua army, walked into her tent and sat down next to her. He looked into her eyes but didn’t say a word. Another of the army joined them, and soon Julie wasn’t alone with more than twenty Chihuahuas around and on her. She dreamt of an open freshly plowed
field awash in pools of blood and gore with the bodies of deer and dogs all around her. The field was surrounded in a fog and out of that fog came another wave of deer all with red eyes. The army was gone, and the deer had won.

She slipped out of the tent into the night. A storm was coming, and they were all going to get wet. Lightning flashed across the sky, revealing the shapes of dogs and deer in battle in the clouds. Another bolt showed her a deer goring Rex, and another showed her the bodies of the fifty Chihuahua army spread across the sky. A final flash illuminated the shape of a bear looming over her. Julie woke to find she was still in the tent, covered in dogs. Twenty Three was next to her lightly snoring. She looked down and saw Rex at the opening of the tent staring out. He said, “I don’t know how you see the world or sense it, I don’t know if you feel what I’m feeling, but I can feel something coming our way, and I don’t know if we will make it out alive.” He looked back at her, then back out. He said, “you did your part and made your family proud and became one of us, but I think it’s time you went back home.” Julie said, “I don’t leave a puzzle half done.”

With more luck than anything else, the mass of dogs made their way to an airstrip, the General had directed them to. The strip was little more than a long stretch of road with a small hanger at one end. Julie thought that a bad pilot could easily take out the small building with it being so close to the runway. As if someone had heard her thought, a beam of sunlight broke through the clouds illuminating a place on the front of the hanger where something had struck near the roof. The hanger door was open, and inside they found twenty German Shepherds, thirty dogs of mixed breeds, and a tall, familiar Great Dane.

The deer herd had doubled back and went into the farm again. When they left the sisters packed their stuff and went west looking for the General. Rosie decided to find Rex. She said, “I was never one for sitting around and waiting to die.” Rosie stepped out to find the dog army as it surrounded the building. Together they had nearly eight-hundred dogs. Julie sat down and turned the radio back on. She said, “this is Catwoman calling old guy, over.” She said it again with no response. Eventually, the General said, “I’m not going by that name……. over.” Rex smiled.
Julie asked, “call sign?...... over.” The General said, “we don’t need that nonsense, Julie...... yes, I know your name. Your sister told me. They are with us and safe as you should be soon.... I am assuming you are not staying with the army...... over.” Julie said, “just ask my sisters, I don’t leave a puzzle half done, I don’t start something without finishing it. I’m here until the end.... Over.” The General told them about the movements of the deer, he told them that if they made a straight-line north, the deer would run into them near the Ohio River. Julie thought about the freshly plowed earth from her dream, and she remembered it being near a large river. The General said, “I can’t make you go, but I can wish you luck and hope that when this is all over, I can meet you in person...... Catgirl......over and out.” The trip would take them to the Kentucky side of the river near the village of Rome.
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Part Two, The Battle of Rome

The Chihuahua army lined up into as close to a square as possible spread evenly apart. In the time between them leaving the farm and this point they had their numbers grow from sixty-seven to three-hundred and twelve. The core members of the army were mixed with the new members instructing them on how to stand and pay attention. Twenty-Three stood in front with another dog at his side. He barked, and the army shifted to the right in a wave. Some talking happened in the ranks. Another bark and the army shifted back this time almost in unison. Rex watched as the army went through drills from turning to lying down to help promote Twenty-Three’s core directive of fighting as one. He based this on how the squirrels would swarm over large opponents. Julie joined him, and together they saw something almost magical and more than a little scary.

Rosie acted as a stand-in for a deer to help the new members of the army learn how to take down a deer. Headbutting would take the place of biting. Fifty-Two and seven other Chihuahuas surrounded her growling as the rest watched. For her part, Rosie did her best to act like a cornered deer thrashing and stomping. Fourteen told the army to watch for signs and the right time to attack. Rosie brought her front legs down hard slightly going unbalanced, giving the dogs their window to attack. In unison, four dogs struck her upper and lower legs at where the tendons were while two more head-butted her stomach in a gutting motion. A seventh dog bit her on the butt. Rosie yelped out and spun around to try and face the dog, but he had a hold of her and spun with her. He let go and said, “sorry, Rosie, you just look so good.” Rosie started to put her paw about three feet above the small dog to deliver her line when she saw the look in his eyes. She lowered her paw to his back and whispered, “you have to be this tall or taller to ride this ride.”

Watching the melee, Twenty-Three said, “I think we can lower the number of dogs needed to take down a deer by breaking the attack up. Take out the legs then the guts rather than all at once. Four dogs to a deer.” Rex asked, “how did One have you attack?” He said how One
or as they called her back then mother, would just charge allowing their numbers to overwhelm
the deer. He said, “We came upon about forty deer. Mother ordered us to attack, and we just
charged, but the deer were ready. They defended against us in unison stomping down as we went
at them.” Rex asked, “and Mother didn’t do anything?” Twenty-Three turned his head away
from the army. He said, “she was one of the first to fall....... She would never stand by or lead
from behind. She fell, then Three and two. When Mother died, the others went nuts, and for a
while, it looked like it was all over.” Fourteen said, “that’s when Twenty-Three ordered us to
retreat. He yelled to shift to the left, causing the deer to break form, giving the army the time to
get away. That was the day he became our leader.”

Drie came running over panting from the run. He said, “deer...... coming from the west
heading east........ we......turned...them.......north.” The Number Brothers along with the other
Doberman went west to find and using a mix of barking, and other tactics to force the deer north
to a place near the Ohio River. The river would provide a barrier giving the dogs an advantage.
Anything to make the deer tactics break. Rex said, “We still have about a half a day before we
get to where we want.” Twenty-Three stood up. Julie asked, “so are we ago?” Rex didn’t answer
her. He nodded to Twenty-Three, who nodded back. Julie said, “I have an idea.”

The hanger doors opened, and a tractor came out with Julie behind the wheel. The tractor
was pulling three connected oversized hey wagons. She told them while she didn’t have any time
behind the wheel of a car, she had plenty of time on a tractor. Rosie jumped up behind Julie on
the back of the tractor. The quicker dogs would run ahead looking for trouble while the army
rode in the wagons. Three hundred-plus dogs packed tight in a slow-moving wagon. Rex knew
he would rather run than ride. It took about an hour, but soon any dog that was going by wagon
was loaded, and the wagon was on its way. About an hour into the trip, someone asked for the
first time, “are we there yet?”

As they moved north, the clouds moved in, taking the sky from partly cloudy to overcast
with a threat of rain. They passed a few fields that seemed to be freshly plowed. Someone was
still alive and taking care of the land. Julie remembered her dream. The river was active with debris floating down and a bank that seemed higher than it should be. They turned the corner, and together they saw the sight of where the battle would happen. Julie recognized it from her dream. All that was missing was the blood and bodies. Julie had her father’s revolver, but she didn’t want to use it fearing she could hit one of the dogs. She had a machete and a kukri. Her father made them both, and they brought her comfort. Hans, Drie, and Zwei said they would stay with her and make sure she would be safe. Julie said, “safety’s for cowards, I got my fucking claws out, and I’m ready to rip it up. Let’s go kill some deer.” Hans asked, “you do what with those claws?”

A deer ran around the corner. The deer passed a couple of wagons turned on their sides and a tractor. Behind the deer were a herd so large it was almost impossible to see the end. Ten thousand deer ran for their lives. They ran as if something was chasing them, something their most basic instincts of flight could override their new intelligence. The deer bucked and jumped, trying to get past the deer in the lead. In their wake were the bodies of fallen deer. The overturned wagons and tractor forced the deer into a field next to the river. The deer came to a stop at the sight of a young girl standing on the other side of the field holding two long blades. One against ten thousand. Hidden in the dirt around Julie were the Dobermans and behind them the other big dogs.

The deer spread out from the river to the side of the blocked road filling the field. Rex looked over the herd counting the robotic deer. Above all else, they had to kill the robotic deer. Kill them and any real deer with the clone deer born to break down. In the middle of the herd was one deer larger than the others. Twice as big as any other deer with metal antlers and glowing red eyes. The alpha deer. A roaring sound came from the west. Rex knew the sound, a bear. The deer turned facing the new sound, bashing into each other, jumping around looking for a way out. A lone deer charged Julie. Rex got up on top of a wagon on its side. He yelled, “attack!”
The number Brothers came out of the dirt taking the charging deer down. The larger dogs formed a line. The Fifty Chihuahua Army, along with four-hundred other dogs struck from behind as the deer whirled around facing the dogs and the sounds of a bear. They smashed into each other as the robotic deer tried to reform their lines. The deer surged forward colliding into the dogs into the front of the line. Rex saw more than a few of the larger dogs go down as the deer fought their way to Julie. He could either go after the girl or the large robot deer in the center. He saw Julie with her blades out and covered in blood swinging around striking deer as the brothers struck any deer that came at her from her sides. Somewhere in all the carnage and mess, he could hear Ari yelling, “for art!”

Rex jumped from the wagon to the back of a deer going from deer to deer in a race to the alpha deer clawing and gashing along the way trying to stay on top and moving. All around him, he heard deer and dogs fighting and dying along with the sounds of teeth on metal. The alpha deer turned and saw him coming. It struck forward, pushing the deer in front away smashing and killing any deer within its reach making no place for Rex to go at him from above. The deer screamed as they tried to get away from the alpha. Rex turned to the left, finding a deer facing the alpha and jumping onto its head launched himself into the air striking the alpha in the upper back near the head. His weight and the force of the blow knocked the alpha sideways and nearly to the ground. Rex took hold of its neck from behind and bit down. He felt the cold metal than the white-hot heat he had felt way back when he helped a young boy get away from another metal deer. Sparks flew from the deer as it spun around trying to get away from Rex. As it spun, Rex felt himself lift off the deer’s back. He came back down, hitting the earth with a chunk of the alpha’s fake flesh in his mouth. The alpha raised his head in a triumph letting out a scream that was in no way natural and struck down at Rex. A white bold of fur came in striking the alpha in the head forcing it away from Rex. The alpha struck the ground near him. The white German shepherd said, “now, strike now.” Rex saw the alpha’s head was twisted showing wires. He looked over at Julie as a bear loomed over her seemingly about to strike. Rex jumped up and bit down on the exposed wires.
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Part Three, A Better Life

Rex woke to find himself in his junkyard. Lying on the hood of a long-dead car was the cat Spike. Off in the distance, he could hear Steve’s music playing as he dismantled an engine for a customer. The sun was shining, and there was a sweetness in the air. Rex remembered this day and what might have been a better life. The sweet smell was replaced by the smell of earth and blood. Rex opened his eyes and quickly closed them again. The pain ran from his mouth into his head and down his body so intensely he could barely move. Nearby he saw the head of the alpha deer with its metal antlers still stuck in the ground. The body was about three feet away from the head with smoke coming out of the place where the head was. He could hear an anguish howling, but he couldn’t tell who it was.

Rex tried to move when a voice said, “no, brother say where you are…. stay.” The voice and the wording were familiar. Rex thought about the white fur and knew who it was. He slowly turned his head to see Toe, the long-missing false brother of Tac standing nearby. His fur was smeared with blood. Rosie passed Toe and came over to Rex. She said, “oh my god Rex, we thought you were gone…… we didn’t know what to do.” Rex asked, “what happened?” Toe said, “when you killed the alpha, the other deer tried to scatter.” Rosie looked at Toe. She said, “many of the deer ran for the water and more than a few drowned, others smashed into the wagons…. We won.” Rex asked, “where’s Julie?” No one would answer him. Rex tried to move again when Rosie sat next to him. She said, “the bear…. It struck at the deer killing its way to her…. the last thing anyone saw was the bear walking away holding what looked like the girl in its arms. She wasn’t moving.”

Rex tried to jump up, but his legs gave in as he tried to move. He said, “get Twenty-Three and the army ready to go, we need to get her back.” Rex looked at Rosie, who didn’t move. She said, “I wouldn’t have believed it if I hadn’t seen it happen. The army dropped waves of deer going from six dogs to just two per deer taking out as many as they could…… when the deer broke the army tried to adjust……. There is no army anymore. Twenty-Three did his best, but
when he fell, their discipline broke down. They're all gone.” Rosie got up and looked over at where Julie was. She said, “the first to fall were the number brothers. They tried to add to the body count, but the deer targeted Julie, and they said they would defend her to their last breaths and that’s just what they did. There’s maybe twenty of us left.” She looked out over a field of dead deer and dogs with a ground soaked in blood. Rosie said, “the deer were running from some humans in armored vehicles. They pushed them at us, but they didn’t do anything but watch us fight and die.”

Rex turned to Toe. He asked, “And what’s your role in all this? Why did you help me?” Toe said, “I heard about your army from another dog, and I came to find Tac. When I saw what was happening, I knew I couldn’t just stand by.” Rex said, “you probably liked watching all the bait dogs die.” Toe angrily replied, “no, I have never seen anything like that in my life, and I could live to see fifteen and beyond and never see such an act of honor as what I saw happen here. I won’t ever use that word again. I’m ashamed of my past, and I know that for the rest of my life I have to try and live that down and prove I deserved to survive this.” Toe lowered his head in a bowing motion. He said, “she can’t bring herself to tell you, but you are worse off then you know. You’re burned on your side with a long gash, most of your front right paw is gone. The blood stopped, but I don’t think that’s good and I don’t know what we can do.”

Rex looked down at where his paw should be. He remembered using it for leverage to pull the wires out. The pain was slowly going away but in its place was a coldness that was covering him like a blanket. Rex asked for some help getting up. Toe and another dog helped him with a smaller dog acting as a brace for the wounded leg. With the help of the other dogs, Rex made his way off the field. Near one of the wagons, he saw Ari and Arie. The big dogs lay side-by-side. Arie whined a low whine and Ari did nothing having died in the battle. Arie saw Rex. He asked, “what am I to do…… who am I without him, a critic without and artist. Who am I without myself?”
The others helped Rex down. Off in the distance, he could hear something familiar, a scent in the air of something sweet like the small flowers she grew in the junkyard. His thoughts turned to Dot and their puppies. He didn’t know she already had them. He thought about their trip west, the nights hiding from danger but never feeling alone when he was with her. He missed her, but he was happy she was safe. The look on Jimmy’s face when they met again in the farmhouse, and how Julie gave everything up to come with them. Toe said, “Rosie’s going to take what’s left of the army and go west hoping to find this man with a strange name…… General. I’m going to track that bear and get the girl back. I swear to you here, and now I won’t stop until she’s free.” People from the nearby village of Rome came over and helped bury the dead. They buried the dogs and burned the deer. None of the humans would go near Rex. After a while, someone Rex knew came up to him. Steve put his hand down on Rex’s head and said, “it’s time boy. Time to go home.” On a marker in a field of the dead, there was a sign, “here lies Rex. Rex was a good dog.”

This is the conclusion of The Rex Stories. Rosie’s story, Julie and Toe’s stories will be picked up in the main story as well as a few short stories to come.