The Rex Stories
A My Private Global War Story
Rex was a Good Dog

Rex was a good dog. His boss, the human, called Steve, would always tell him that and best of all he would feed him like he was a good dog. He was the pup of a Rottweiler and a Pitbull number four out of a litter of five. When he was old enough, he came to live with Steve or the boss in the playground. Most of the other humans called it a junkyard and called Rex a junkyard dog, but Rex saw it as an endless adventure. He would run around among all the strange moving things the boss called cars; he would bark hello to anyone that would come around. Most people backed away, but that was alright, they didn’t belong there anyway. The boss would give him the crunchy food that made his mouth feel good as well as chunks of meat that made him feel good. From time to time, the boss would take him on a drive in one of the working car things. Rex liked the feeling of the wind as he hung his head out the opening or off the side of the truck bed.

Outside of Steve and the occasional visitor Rex’s life was lonely. He would miss his brothers and sisters and dream of getting a bitch of his own and just maybe some puppies. The yard had a few cats. Rex liked the cats, but for some unknown reason, he had to chase them. He knew he would never hurt them; the cats killed the rats, and he hated the food-stealing rats. He felt that there was just something in his nature that made him chase the pussy. When not chasing cats or barking hello to strangers he would roam about or just nap inside one of the non-working car things.

One night he heard a strange high-pitched sound like the kind of whistle the boss would use. Just outside of his yard, there was a deer-meat. Rex saw animals like deer as walking meat. The boss would hunt in the fall, and he would come back with deer meat that would feed them both for months. This deer was different. It had no smell. To Rex, all animals had their own unique smell, but this thing smelled like a machine like one of those two-wheeled cars, the boss called motorbikes. The no-smell deer meat was near the gate, and they seemed to be trying to find a way inside into the boss’s playground. As he watched the deer, Rex could hear the high-pitch sound change from just a sound to words like the boss and the other people’s words.
Outside of a few key sounds like, treat, meat, vet, and no, Rex couldn’t understand what the boss and the other people were saying. Rex figured that people made the sounds so they could smell each other’s breath like how he and the other animals do with the glans in the back. In his time with the boss, he had never seen him sniffing the backsides of the other humans. The sound was talking to the deer, saying something that was just on the verge of being understandable. The human words that seemed to make sense were kill and bad. Something was telling the deer-meat to kill something bad. No matter what the voice was saying, the deer-meat didn’t belong in the playground.

Rex went to the gate to tell the deer-meat to go away. Along the way, he practiced his voice and his sound argument on why they should leave, but by the time he got to the gate, all that came out was, “leave... now... Leave, ...... now, now, now.” Usually, the other animals, as well as the other people, would run from his assertive use of the word now, but the deer meat just stood their ground. The boss was on a trip with his other people for either the night or the rest of all time on earth, with no understanding of time Rex wasn’t sure. One of the deer-meat kicked the lock holding the gate closed. Rex had enough of their refusal to obey and went to using his weapons. He snapped at the deer-meat, trying to either take hold or scare off.

From behind him, Rex heard the cat cry out. He turned to see, but the yard was dark. The deer-meat started to work on the gate, kicking it. Rex left them knowing they wouldn’t get past the boss’s impenetrable barrier and he went to find the cat. A strange meaty smell came across the air. Rex knew the smell of most meat, but this was something new. He turned and saw the squirrel-meat things doing something to a motionless cat. Rex scared off the squirrel-meat to find his sort of friend the cat called Spike on his side with his meat hanging out. The squirrel-meat things had finally killed him after years of him killing them as well as anything small that would come into the playground. Just as he went to smell Spike, an ominous sound came from the front. The gate opened.
Rex checked seeing not the two deer-meat but an army of deer-meat coming into his yard. Some of the deer-meat had a scent while others gave off either no scent or an awful scent like the thing the boss lets go when he does his thing, he calls welding. Rex knew if he stayed, he would end up like Spike, meat for the deer. A memory from his puppyhood brought him back to a stack of the car things. He remembered how the boss almost knocked over a stack of the dead car things by leaning on one. Rex felt something in his head that was never there before. He liked working off instinct, but now he saw a plan. Rex took a jump hitting the fourth car up, his force and weight were just enough to start an avalanche of dead car things spreading across the yard, killing many of the deer-meat. Rex escaped in the confusion.

Rex wanted to find the boss. Something about that high-pitched sound was helping him see things clearer. The funny lines on the big rectangle things started to make sense. Rex was starting to be able to read. The boss said a reunion at the school. A sign read, “Highschool next right.” There was another word that must have been the name, but that wasn’t a word Rex knew yet. The longer the vibration went, the more he understood. Soon he saw his life wasn’t a series of wonder in an endless playground but a prison guarding those things most people didn’t want. The Vibration was trying to get him to kill the boss, but it also woke his memories from his puppyhood all the way to those bowls of strange water the boss called beer. For better or worse he was the boss’s, and the boss was his.

For the next hour, Rex ducked and hid his way to the school. The parking lot was filled with parked car things and deer. The lights were out, and there were motionless people on the ground. Rex could smell the boss, but his scent was faint. He checked around all the rooms he could get into. In one large room, he found more bodies with the floor covered in sticky stuff that smelt like meat. He checked all the bodies, but he couldn’t find him. The scent of a few people led Rex out another door and out to a place where the people kept the long car things the people call buses. A faint scent of the boss was among the others.
Rex left the school and made his way onto the highway. The road wasn’t as much fun without the moving car to ride in. A car had hit one of the deer meat, and it was on the side of the road dying. Rex could see the anger in its eyes and the scent of back off coming from its end. Rex was hungry, and the deer-meat was meat, but he wasn’t sure he could kill it until he smelled the people blood on the deer’s hooves and muzzle. The deer-meat killed people, and all is fair in war. Rex took hold of the deer’s throat and ripped it out. What remained of the deer twitched then went motionless. Rex started to eat the strange meat.

Rex went south, hoping to find the boss. What he found was more death. The vibration kept telling him to kill people, but Rex was a good dog. He heard a two-wheeled car thing called a motorbike. A young man was in the seat and was eye-to-eye with a few of the deer-meat. Rex was a good dog, he knew this person was in trouble and would never escape the deer, but he would most likely die and never find the boss if he helps, but Rex was a good dog. Rex looked at the boy then he looked to the south hoping he would catch on and go. The boy seemed to understand, and he took off. Rex thought, “you could have said thanks.” Rex went for the lead deer-meat knocking it down as the other deer-meat backed away as Rex fought for his life and the life of the unknown boy on the bike because Rex was a good dog.
Rex and Dot

Rex woke up to a strange tingly feeling running down his body and a mouth full of pain. He struck at the lead deer and found it to be a fake. He ripped out its throat and was electrocuted for his trouble. He knew the feeling from the Boss’s fence in the back and how he knew to never touch it again. He didn’t know how long he was out, but the other animals had left him and the fake deer alone. In his mind, he stopped calling them deer-meat. His mind had expanded in his time on the road and while he was knocked out. New concepts came into his head along with the ever-present voice from the strange boxes saying he should kill humans. The boy went west and came from the east, so he would go east hoping to find any signs of the boss or just maybe more trouble.

The other animals gave Rex a wide birth as he walked down the middle of the road. He would see an occasional deer, but they would see him and run. Near a town, his boss called an open sewer he heard suffering. In a small cage, he found a white dog trapped underneath the half-eaten body of what had to be her owner. Rex knew this white dog was in a way just like him, so he pushed the body off the cage and gently pulled it out. The strange markings on the cage began to make sense, and he was able to open it. Rex didn’t have to smell her butt to know she was afraid of him. He backed away and gave her enough room to get out. The white dog got out and went to the dead woman in the car, hiding under her lifeless arm.

Rex didn’t have the time or the ability to convince her to come with him, so he left. A mile into the trip, he heard a bark. He turned around and saw the little dog was following him. Rex went down to the ground and lowered his head to show a sort of submission to this dog, hoping it would make her feel safer. She walked over to him and licked his face making it all good between the two of them. Rex wished he had a way to communicate with her to tell her his plan. A thought came over to him, saying she understands and wants to come to. Rex thought, “you understand me?” She answered, “and you understand me, so let's just go with it and make the best of our new abilities.”
She said she had a human name, but she hated it, so she wanted to be called Dot, the name of her friend. Dot didn’t see her human as her owner, but as a friend that fed her and kept her safe. Unlike Rex, Dot knew her human was dead. She could also hear the voices telling her to kill the humans, but like Rex, she had no desire to hurt people. Dot was a Bichon Frise with a pedigree and time on the dog show circuit. That week she was supposed to be meeting another dog her friend was setting her up with so they could have puppies. She said how they tried this before, but the other dog just wasn’t interested in a dog that looked just like himself.

A deer wandered into the road not spotting either dog. Dot froze at the sight of the large animal. Rex could smell it, telling him it was a real deer and not a zappy mechanical one. Rex thought, “stay here and let me get into position.” Dot nodded, but she also peed a little. When the time was right, Dot barked out a half scared, half defiant bark and the deer saw her. A look of positive rapture came across the deer’s face as it stared at the small dog wanting to kill it. The deer ran and only saw Rex as he jumped out, catching it by the neck. The force of his momentum and his grasp spun him around and over the deer breaking its neck. The deer fell about ten feet away from Dot, and the two dogs ate well that night.

Columbus. Dot read the word out, sounding out all the strange letters. Rex said how his boss told him it was an open sewer filled with corruption making his life harder than it had to be. There were several dead deer on the road and in the woods. Closer to the city was a wall and a small building with some armed people. The two dogs watched as a car left the small building and went into a part of the city on the outside of the wall. Something smelled wrong about the people. The two dogs ran to follow the people. The strange smelling people drove to the street looking for something.

The car stopped in front of a house just like any other on the block. The people were looking for something, and they found it. Rex knew this smell. People looking to start trouble had this smell about them. Two of them with weapons went around to the back while the other three went to the front. A man came out of the house with his arms up. The unusual sounds
people usually make were making sense to Rex and Dot. The man said, “we aren’t looking for trouble. We just want to stay alive just like you…… and this is my house. I bought it right after the war, the real war against the Nazis. Just leave us alone.” One of the men struck the older man and pushed him back and down. Two men came out, dragging a woman by her arms. Dot thought to Rex about how she could smell young people on the woman. One of the people said to put the woman and a word the dogs didn’t know back in the house. He said to the man, “OK, boy if you want this house so much you can burn with it.”

Without knowing he was going to do it; Rex was on his feet heading toward the house. The two men went inside with two others dragging the man and woman in. The fifth man stayed outside with a can of something that smelled nasty to Rex. Rex heard behind him, “Go inside, I’ll deal with this one.” He turned and saw Dot with a lean, hungry look in her eyes. Rex didn’t want to hurt people, but something about them didn’t smell like people. He struck the first man with all his force and momentum, knocking him into the second man and both onto the floor. Turning and rolling into a crouch, Rex leaped into the air just as the men came to realize a dog was in the house. He caught the third man by the throat and felt as it crunched in his mouth them came off the man. He and the man hit the floor. Rex turned and saw the fourth man with his gun pointed at him.

The fifth man watched as a dark blur bolted past him, and the sounds of chaos came from the house. A large gunshot came from inside then another. A new sound came from behind him. He turned and saw a dog just as it grabbed him between the legs and ripped off the front of his pants along with his genitals. He fell forward giving the dog an easier grasp of his neck where she made short work of it and him. Dot stopped and pissed on the riving shuttering body. She came in to see Rex standing next to the man. The fourth man was on the floor with most of his head gone. Rex would later tell her about the shiny death machine the man had. He told Rex for some reason it was to kill bears, not crackers, but in a pinch, it would do the job.
The man dragged the bodies into the house and set it on fire. He and the other people took the car and said they were going looking for a kid named Jimmy. The man said his name was James and he wanted Rex and Dot to come with them. Dot looked at the terror in the eyes of the children at the sight of two blood-soaked dogs and knew they had to find their own way. Rex said the same to her, and they were off leaving the people to forge their own story. Rex turned to the human named James and tried to speak his language, but all that came out was a bark the vaguely sounded like good luck.

A mile out of town, the two dogs found a safe place for the night near a small pond where they could do their best to wash the blood off. In the wee hours of the morning, they became animals again, free from knowing anything but the more basic instincts of the male and female dogs they were. In the morning, Rex watched the sunrise thinking about his last two days and how he would never see Steve again. He had a new companion, and she was more than Steve could ever be, but Steve or the boss as he once saw him was there from the beginning when a junkyard was a magical playground and every day was a wonder. Dot joined him watching the sun. Life was both harsh and good. Just then, Rex caught a scent, a scent he knew…….Steve.
A Distant Familiar Scent

The scent was strong and getting stronger as Rex and Dot ran down the street. They passed burning cars and the bodies of people and deer. The whole scene had the feel of an epic battle between man and beast with no clear winner. Overhead the geese were forming into waves and heading west. The deer also seemed to be gathering into groups with the strange no-scent robotic deer in the back like they were going to drive the real deer into whatever they were going to attack. To Rex, it seemed like the lead deer were going to have a bad end taking the full force of the attack. All the while, the ever-present voice in the air said they should kill all humans. A new abstract thought came across Rex’s mind. He started to think of the voice as evil.

A man stood looking between the wood boards used to block the window of a bar along the side of the road. Steven Douglas was in his forties, but unlike the stereotypical junk dealers, he was slim and fit. A few days ago, he had gone back home to get his dog only to find the junkyard was in ruins and the cat Spike was dead. He never found the body of his dog Rex, but he knew he had to be dead. The other’s in his group thought he was nuts for leaving the safety of the buses to go and get a junkyard dog, but he would tell them Rex was a good dog and you don’t leave family behind. Steve watched as the deer seemed to gather for an assault than go west in a mass. Overhead, the stars were blotted out by the masses of geese. Someone looking out another window asked, “what the fuck?”

Steve went to the other window and looked out at a white dog staring back at him. The dog seemed out of place. Another dog came out from behind a burning car. It looked like his dog Rex, but that didn’t make any sense, Rex was dead back in a junkyard many miles away. Rex and Steve came eye to eye. For a moment, two words came into Steve’s mind, “boss and Steve.” Steve pushed past the others and went outside. Rex saw him and everything that happened slipped away. Rex was a happy dog living in his wonderland of joy again as he ran for his boss. Steve went to his knees and was bowled over as Rex collided into him. The world might have ended, but Rex had his Steve, and just maybe everything was going to be alright.
Rex looked back at Dot, who was lingering back by the burning car. Rex thought to her, “come on over... Steve.... Dot come here.” Rex turned to Steve, who had this strange look on his face. Steve looked over at Dot then back to Rex. He turned back to Dot again and asked, “Dot?” Rex found he could understand Steve and just maybe Steve could understand him. A person from inside the bar said, “just shoot them and get back inside.” Dot walked over to Steve and licked his hand. Steve told the others this was his dog, and somehow, Rex found him. The person in the bar replied, “I don’t care if he drove here, we aren’t allowing animals in the bar now kill it and get back inside.” Steve looked at Rex then to Dot and said, “I have to get something from inside, we’re leaving. I’m never going to leave you behind again.”

Steve went into the bar and picked up his rifle. The man telling him to kill the dogs smiled and said, “good.” Steve picked up his backpack and went to the door. The man blocked Steve’s way asking, “where the fuck do you think you’re going?” Steve looked around seeing the others standing with their guns out. The man said, “no, no, little Stevie, we need you, so you aren’t going anywhere but out to kill the bitches.” Steve backed away, looking at the group he found himself traveling with knowing they wouldn’t survive on their own. He also didn’t care. Steve Said, “I don’t care what any of you think. I’m either staying with my dogs or leaving with them.” The man turned to the door drawling his gun. He said, “I’ll shoot the dogs.”

Steve took hold of the man’s shoulder to stop him. The man holstered his gun as he spun around, swinging at Steve, who backed away. The man missed, but he quickly recovered chopping down into Steve’s neck. The blow was painful but not as crippling as the men thought it would be. Steve let go of the man and struck upwards into the man’s surprised face knocking him back as Steve brought his fists up and started to box with the overwhelmed man. Another man came from behind Steve, putting his arms up and around him, pulling Steve’s arms back, allowing the first man to regain his footing and start to strike back at a pinned Steve. A third man broke a bottle and came over to the three. He went past Steve and the man holding him and put the broken bottle to the first man. He said, “we have had enough of your crap. The both of you can just go. We would rather have the dogs.”
The man let Steve go and backed away. The first man said, “there is no way we are leaving, and those fucking dogs are staying. No fucking way.” He turned to see the other four people with their guns up and pointed at them. Steve walked past him and opened the door. Rex and Dot walked in and sat next to the bar just underneath the four-armed people. The two men picked up their gear, including their guns and went out the door. The first man turned around and said, “you know those dogs are going to kill all of you right, and I just won’t care.” The door closed, and the men started to walk away.

Something about the two men smelled wrong to Rex. He heard a thought that was convoluted and distant. The first man was thinking about a cocktail and showing all of them. The man at the bar walked over to the door. a new thought came from outside, “shoot.” Rex barked out a warning, but it was too late. A shot came through the door striking the man in the head. As he fell, more bullets came through the front of the bar. The man with the bottle dropped with a hole in his throat. A bottle came through a broken window with a lit wick. The Molotov cocktail broke spreading diesel and flames across the floor to the bar. The remaining people in the bar opened fire on the outside now sure where to shoot.

The flames started to spread as the firefight went on. Steve kicked open a door and told Rex and Dot to go into the hills and wait for him. He would provide them enough cover to getaway. Rex turned and watched as his Steve picked up a table and tossed it through a window. He opened fire striking the man that had a hold of him from before in the chest then the head. The first man screamed. Dot and Rex ran for the woods. Rex turned and looked, but there was no Steve. He thought to Dot, “go, I’ll be right back.” Dot replied, “no, that’s a human problem.” Rex replied, “that’s my Steve, and I’m not losing him again.”

Rex came around the building using the flames and wrecked cars as cover. The first man was covered in ash and blood from broken glass. His focus was on the bar, so he didn’t see Rex
as he went for his gun hand. Rex chomped taking the handgun as well as the hand the gun was in. He could feel the tendons break and the bone snap. The man screamed as blood gushed out. Rex bit through the man’s Achilles tendon dropping him to the ground where he took hold of the man’s throat ripping it out ending the fight. The last thing the man saw was Rex lifting his leg and pissing into his gaping face. An anguished howl came from inside the bar.

Rex ran in to find Dot lying next to Steve. He was on the ground with two bullet wounds to the chest. Rex looked at the wounds than to Steve. He had a smell that let Rex know it was all over. Steve called Rex over to him, stroking him as he made his way to Steve’s side. Steve said, “you’re a good dog, a far better dog than a man like me could ever deserve. I’m glad I got to see you again…… my good dog.” Steve stopped moving, and his scent changed to the scent of death. The fire started to spread. Rex and Dot dragged Steve out of the bar and onto the hill where they did their best to dig a hole and bury him. When they were done, the two dogs sat on the hill and watched the flames catch the nearby town on fire. As they watched a strange-looking car went by with a distant familiar scent. Rex turned and licked Dot on the muzzle not knowing what to do next.
I Guess We're Together

A squirrel ran into the road followed by six more than another hundred. The lead squirrel had red blinking lights for eyes. The squirrels searched around looking for their target. They followed it from a house and were close to taking it down. A noise in the distance brought the pack to a stop. Much like the deer, the squirrels were getting smarter every hour the alien probes pulsed. Unlike the deer, the squirrels also were targeting their long-time enemies, cats, and dogs. The cats seemed to be immune to the wave, but the dogs were showing signs of intelligence. The dogs didn’t join in the war on the people with many of them standing by mankind. The deer were killing many people, but the squirrels were having a harder time, but they could take on the dogs.

The lead squirrel saw it. A short dog with a short snout and a curly tail. The squirrels didn’t know what a pug was, nor did they care. This was a dog, and dogs had to die. Buster was having the time of his life running around away from his human and the bag she carried him around in. He was small even by pug standards, but he had a personality of a Great Dane. It had been more than a week since he had seen his human, and he was starting to wonder if he would ever see her or that bag again. Buster hated the bag, but he liked the human. He also liked the food she fed him. As he grew, his human would buy new purses to hold him until he became too big to carry. His meals went from gourmet to whatever he found on the street. He was also being followed by those tree rats.

It started with just a few than a few more, but soon he was being followed by more than a hundred of those hated things. From a pup, Buster would let the squirrels know they didn’t belong in or around his human’s property. He would bark and bark until his human would tell him to stop or the invader ran away. He took up this new job after he became too big to be carried around in the hated purse. His human called the squirrels' tree rats and the deer speed bumps. Buster barked his disapproval of the tree rats and went on his way confident they would know their place. He turned back and saw the street behind him was covered in so many squirrels the pavement was no longer visible. Staring back, Buster thought about the hated purse and his human’s protection.
The mass of squirrels slowly moved in. A blood-curdling cry came from the woods. A dog that could easily be mistaken for a deer stepped out. The squirrels backed away, not knowing that this mammoth of an animal was a dog. All of them backed away except for the mechanical squirrel. The Great Dane moved far quicker than a dog of her size should easily spanning the distance and scooping up the mechanical squirrel crushing it in her mouth. The other squirrels looked at the sparkling chunks of the fake squirrel as if they were just waking up from a trance. The Great Dane walked over to Buster and said to him, “We should go before another smart rodent comes along and takes control.” Buster said back, “what?”

The two dogs ran for about three-hundred feet when the larger dog saw Buster couldn’t keep up with her gate. She looked around until she found a bag. Buster saw the bag and said, “Oh, hell no, there’s no way I can carry you in that bag.” She looked back to see Buster smiling. He got in the bag and using the straps she picked him up, and they were on their way as fast as she could get away from the squirrel army as they waited for a replacement to take control. She thought to buster, “dam you’re heavier than you look.” Buster replied, “yeah, that’s what my person says.” She crossed a stream leaving the squirrels behind them. She dropped the bag, and Buster rolled out. He looked up at her, and she looked back at him.

She said her name was Rosie. She spent most of her life in a small room tending to litters of puppies. Her owners would keep her cranking out puppies in what one of them called a mill. When the world ended, she was between puppies having her last litter taken away a week before the deer struck. Rosie was let out for some sun and exercise. Over the last three years, she lost count of how many puppies she had. When she saw this smaller dog about to be killed by the squirrels, she knew she couldn’t just stand there. She had no love for most humans or puppy thieves as she saw them, but she also didn’t want her supply of food to disappear.
Rosie looked at this strange looking dog wondering what their puppies would look like. Buster told her about his human and the purse. She didn’t have the heart to point out how his human had abandoned him to a life of barking at squirrels when he was no longer a fashionable accessory. Buster was filled with an energy Rosie wished she had or could shut off. She did her best to listen to him until it was just too much. She fell asleep as Buster stood, staring off into the distance. She woke to Buster bouncing around saying as loud as he could, “somethings coming ….. I think it’s another dog……. And another.” Not knowing what they would find, Rosie said, “we should hide and let them pass just in case they aren’t friendly.”

A strange voice came across Rosie’s mind saying, “it’s ok we are friendly and just passing by. We mean no harm.” Rosie’s eyes weren’t as good as they used to be. Eventually, the sight of what looked like a miniature version of herself and a small white dog came into focus. The male dog said he was named Rex and the white dog was Dot. They were on their way following the scent of some humans hoping to find either this boy or a man they had met along their travels. Rosie warned them about the Squirrels over the hill. The four dogs stared at each other for a moment, not knowing what should come next. Dot asked, “would you like to come with us?” Rosie looked down at Buster then back to Dot. She said, “pass ………. I’ve had my fill of people, but if Buster wants to go with you, then that’s up to him.”

Buster and Rosie watched as the other two dogs walked away. Buster said, “this was a mistake. We are stronger together.” A shadow moved in the woods. Then another and another. A herd of deer led by one of the robotic deer was running toward where Dot and Rex were. Rosie looked to Buster. He said, “go, I’ll do what I can to keep up, but either way, I don’t think I’ll be much help.” Rosie ran for Dot and Rex.

Rex said to Dot, “that was a strange pair.” Dot countered, “yeah, I wonder what their pups would look like.” A voice came from the dark, “they would look magnificent.” They turned around and saw a large twelve-point buck come out of the dark. It was the biggest deer yet. The voice said, “go for the legs.” Rex moved going low as Rosie came out of the dark going high for
the head. The two collided with the stunned deer biting and breaking bones taking the deer down before it could have a chance to act. Rosie said, “there are more coming.”

The three dogs went back to back as the deer came out of the woods. Dot asked, “where’s tiny?” Rosie countered, “he’s hiding waiting for me or us…… I guess.” A distant barking came from down the street. Rosie shook her head. The dogs started to growl out a warning. A large deer with a red blinking lite came out of the pack. It looked over the dogs than to where the other dog was coming from. It turned to the other deer and Rex was convinced it said, “this doesn’t matter. We are to kill humans.” The deer vanished into the dark. Five minutes later, Buster caught up with them panting and asking where they went. Rosie said, “I guess we’re together in this.”
Only in your Dreams Dog

Buster sat by the river, watching objects float by. The river was low, but something upriver was knocking stuff into it. A human body drifted bye. Seeing people dead had become a normal thing for the dogs, in fact, it had been more than three days since they saw a living human. Buster spent the first three years of his life in a small bag being carried around by his human. Being around people was just natural to him. Rosie didn’t care if they ever saw another human. She was a Great Dane that spent most of her life in a small room being used as a puppy factory in a puppy mill. Her people sold her family away from her. Five days ago, this unlikely pairing of a tall and short dog met and started on their way when they met another two dogs a Rottweiler/Pitbull mix named Rex and a Bichon Frise named Dot.

Three days ago, a strange-looking human vehicle went by with a strange but familiar scent for Rex. He had met a human child and had saved the boy from being killed by a pack of deer. Rex felt the boy could be trusted, so they had decided to try and find him. Rosie while not wanting anything to do with humans, decided she was better off with a pack than on her own, or as Dot said, “I guess we’re together.” The trip that should have taken maybe a day was now on their third with one small problem, Buster was small even by pug standards, and while he had a lot of energy, he couldn’t go the distance. On their first day, he had let Rosie carry him in a bag, but after that, he wouldn’t go near one.

On their frequent rests, Rex would go ahead and scout what was in front of them. A few times he suggested they change directions to avoid large herds of deer and squirrels. Dot could see both Rex’s and Rosie’s frustration in just how slow they were going knowing she was also a part of the problem. Rosie wouldn’t complain, she had no interests in finding any humans. Rex came back frantic screaming, “run, go now.” Rosie grabbed Buster by his collar, and with Dot trailing behind her, they ran for an abandoned truck. Buster barked in anger while nearly choking from the collar. Rosie jumped into the bed tossing Buster into the cab from the pass-through window in the back. Dot followed him in, and the two larger dogs got down trying to hide.
At first, there was nothing, then a rumbling started. The ground shook, and the sound grew louder. None of the dogs looked up, knowing they would be seen, but they could smell the deer. The herd took ten minutes to pass by. In the distance, Rex could smell a new smell. The smell was strange to him but somehow familiar. Taking a chance, he lifted his head and saw another dog, then two more dogs. As a guard dog, Rex knew what other guard dogs looked like or how they acted. All three were German Shepherds with two of them being tan and black and the third a white and black. The three dogs were circling a deer who was stomping at the dogs. The white dog asked Rex, “do you want to join us, brother?”

The deer saw Rex and jumped over the dogs. Rex jumped catching the deer by the neck and using his weight and momentum spun the deer’s head around, feeling its neck break as he nearly twisted the head off. The other dogs jumped biting at the deer. The white Shepherd asked, “holy ravioli, how did you do that?” Rex said with a mouth full of deer fur, “I’ve had a chance to practice that, and it’s my signature move.” Dot laughed. One of the Shepherd’s turned to the truck growling saying, “who’s in there?” Dot looked out the truck. The Shepherd said, “Oh, a bait dog.” The other two German Shepherds laughed. Rex wanted to ask what was so funny when Rosie stood up. One of the dogs whistled, another one said, “dam girl where you been hiding.” Rosie said, “in your dreams and only in your dreams, dog.”

Rosie pulled Buster out of the cab through the window as he barked in anger. The white Shepherd said his name was Toe and the other two were Tic and Tac. Tac said, “just let that bait dog go and come down here, baby.” Buster jumped down and ran over to Tac. He said, “just who are you calling bait…… and what’s bait?” Toe said, “the masters used small dogs like you to train us to……” Tic started to jump up and down, saying, “get the bait, kill it, kill it, get the bait.” Rosie growled. Dot jumped down from the bed. Tac whistled, and Tic said, “yeah I would mount that…. Oh yeah, we got ourselves a good time tonight.” Rosie said, “we sound more and more human every day.”
Rex told the Shepherds they were following a scent looking for a human he had saved before. Toe asked if they wanted some company on this quest. Rex wasn’t sure what the word quest meant, but he liked the sound of it. Of the three, Toe seemed to be their leader and the smartest. Tac was a horn dog, and Tic was hyper. Rex didn’t like the feeling of these three, but they were dogs, and they were stronger together. Buster was less than thrilled with them coming. Toe looked to the east, saying how there was a large group of humans in a cage. He said, “if your human was looking for other humans, then he went that way.”

The large group of dogs went east with both Rex and Toe in the lead. Neither dog said anything with both keeping their eyes on the road. Rex made a note to himself on how the other two shepherds stayed in the rear behind his group. Tic was a jumpy dog and had a hard time with how slow they were moving. Dot and Rosie felt something off with the way Tac was watching them. After a few hours into the walk, they needed to take a break for both Buster and Dot. Tic spent the time running around the group both irritating them while keeping an eye out for any danger. Tic kept saying, “stay low and get the throat, stay low and get the throat.”

Toe watched Tic as he ran with a grin on his muzzle. He said, “the humans gave him something when he was young that made him like that. It was supposed to make him a better fighter for the game.” Buster asked, “game?” Toe looked away almost like he didn’t hear him. He turned back and said, “something the humans called fight club. We were to fight other dogs and animals so the humans could watch a superior species do what it was meant to do.” Dot asked, “fight?” Toe in a sort of gleeful tone said, “kill.” Tac said, “I hate them all. We had no choice, no voice, and no value past our ability to kill. I hope we never see another human again.” The dogs grew silent as they watched the manic Tic run around chasing a butterfly then his own tail.

Tac sniffed around Dot. She said, “keep it to yourself, or I’ll take that nose from you.” Tac said, “no, I just smelled something different……. So, puppies how nice for you two.” Dot looked him in the eyes and saw he wasn’t joking. She said, “no……no puppies.” Rosie pushed
past Tac and took a sniff. Dot asked, “what am I, a scent bar?” Rosie said, “I think he’s right. I know that scent, and you have it.” Dot looked at Rex as he slept. Tac followed her gaze. He said, “those are going to be some interesting looking dogs.” Rosie sat next to Dot with her head next to hers. She said, “don’t worry, no one will take your puppies away from you…… I won’t let them.” After a long time of running, Tic stopped and lay in the sun. The silence was deafening. Tac said, “that dog is nuts……. I remember being a puppy. I had my own human who fed me, took me for walks, let me sleep in her bed. One day she came home with a new puppy. A bait dog and like that, I was out, in a cage being taught to kill. I hate them all.”

As night fell, the dogs were on the move again. They spent most of their time in the woods staying close to the road but not on it. Buster struggled to keep the pace as the shepherds tried to speed up. Tac slowed down so he could walk next to Buster. Rex watched over them. Neither dog spoke they just walked in unison with the larger dog changing his gate to match the smaller dog. After six hours, they stopped again. Toe said how the human cage was just over the next hill. He and Rex went to look the place over. With the alphas gone, the other dogs took a long break. Even Tic was tired. Buster sat next to Tack, who just looked at him. Dot and Rosie joined them, and soon, they were asleep. Rosie whispered, “I hate them too.” Rex and Toe looked over at a pushed down fence and a series of burning buildings with a sign reading Air Force. The humans were gone.

A deer stepped out of the woods. It was alone and not looking for trouble. It wasn’t looking for seven hungry dogs either. Buster stepped out and turned in circles drawing the deer into watching him. The deer looked around and seeing nothing it moved in closer. Rex went to make his move when a white streak shot by him and struck the deer with such force it was knocked off its hooves. Two more streaks and the Shepherds were on the deer biting and clawing as it fought to get free. The Deer spun around, tossing two of the dogs off its back. Rex came in and grabbed its throat from underneath and bit through until a chunk was in his mouth and off the deer. Tic and Toe got back on their feet while Tac stayed on the deer mounting it. The deer fell over.
Learning from their past kills, Rex worked to peel the deer as the Shepherds worked at pulling its intestines out. Buster moved in for a piece when Toe stepped in his way, saying how only those involved in the kill get to eat it when it's still hot. Tic said with a mouth of meat, “no food for the bait dog, kill the bait dog.” Toe glared at Tic who backed away. Rex said how Buster did his part, but all of them would eat. Toe shook his head, and Tic stood up and got behind him. Toe said, “I think we need to rethink the leadership. I think we all know who should be in charge.” Tic started to chant, “Toe, Toe, mighty Toe.” Tac stood back, just watching. Toe said, “if we are going to find and kill this human, we need to move fast, and that means you listen to me, and we kill the bait dog.” Tic started to jump around, screaming, “kill all humans, kill the bait dog.”

Rosie asked, “what’s wrong with you? I don’t care for humans either, but you want to kill them as well as your own kind?” Tic stopped jumping and said, “we aren’t no bait dogs……we’re alphas, wolves, lovers, killers, and thrillers. We kill bait.” Toe said how the humans made them special, and it was their duty to repay that with showing them just how special they could be. They were trained to fight each other, kill dogs as the humans watched, but now they will watch themselves die. Toe moved to one side and Tic the other. Tac stood by doing nothing. Toe looked over at him and said, “take your place, brother.” The three dogs were just too much dog for Rex and the others. Tac said, “I won’t kill my pack…….. or humans.”

Rex said, “it looks like you aren’t as effective a leader as you thought. You can’t even keep the loyalty of your own brother.” Tac said, “he isn’t my brother. Neither of them is.” Tic growled. Toe snapped at Buster, but he was out of his reach. Rosie said, “I don’t think we have a place for any of you.” Toe asked, “stronger together?” Dot replied, “we’ll be stronger without you.” Toe backed away, saying, “I think you are making a mistake……..I am the only dog that can lead this group to the reward……. I’m the master.” Rex looked to the others who just looked back. Tac said, “the boxes promised a great reward if we killed humans.” Toe said, “enough of this crap.” He lunged for Buster, but buster was small and able to get out of the big dog’s way as
he went on past and into the dirt. Rex grabbed him by the throat. Rex was a thickly built dog with a strong jaw. Buster came around and took hold of Toe between the legs. Toe immediately stopped moving.

Tic raised his back, trying to look bigger as he moved in. Tac let out a bark that was definitive in his disapproval. Tic looked at Toe then at Tac. He said something along the lines of no and I’m out of here, he then ran into the woods. Buster let go and backed away. Dot told Toe he could either go or die at the muzzles of the bait dogs. An alarming cry went out. Rex let go of Toe, and the dogs followed the sound until they found what was left of Tic being ripped apart by a bear. The bear had broken the dog into two and was eating its organs. Toe whispered to Rex, "we better not meet again." He then let off a bark and ran away. Tac asked, "what about me?" Rosie replied, "what about you. You're with them?"
The Bear

The bear sniffed the air looking to the west. He had just killed and ate a dog he found in the woods near human habitation. Like many other animals, the bear heard the voices coming from the strange boxes and floating stone balls telling them to kill all humans. The bear spent most of its life on the outskirts of humanity living off their trash. They left him alone, and he did the same, so he had no real desire to kill humans. Over the years, he met more than a few of the nasty little things called dogs, and he learned to hate them. Humans loved their dogs, so he didn’t touch them so he wouldn’t give the humans any reason to kill him, but with the humans gone, it was open season on dogs.

The dog had practically bounced off him trying to run from something. Before it could act, the bear broke the dogs back and was making it into a fresh meal when he saw more dogs traveling in a pack. One of the smaller dogs had a different smell to it, smelling like something he might want to dine on, maybe puppies. The bear started to walk west following the scent. A lone scent went north. It smelled like the dog he just killed, but it also smelled like fear and anger. The stronger smell when west, so he was going west. He walked into areas once controlled by the humans and for the first time wasn’t afraid to run into any of them. Humanity was dying off, leaving the world open to the animal strong enough to take it. Tic’s blood was still fresh on his muzzle, and he wanted more.

Tac watched the pack from a distance staying downwind. A day ago, he watched as a bear killed another dog he once thought of as a brother and his new pack told him he wasn’t welcome with them. His other nonrelated brother named Toe went north away from the others. He wanted nothing to do with Toe’s desire to kill humans or the new packs' search for humans. His life was better without the hated humans and their needs, but he needed to be with a pack to survive, and he felt he was needed with this pack even if they didn’t see it yet. Tac was the first one to see the bear that killed Tic was following the pack. The bear was too big to kill by himself, and he didn’t think the others would listen if he told them about the bear.
Buster spent their most recent rest staring back the way they came. Dot asked, “Is he still there?” Buster yelped a yes that almost sounded like a human word. He said, “he had a hard life, and I can see why he doesn’t like humans, but I think we gave up on him to soon. I think he could have fit into our pack.” Dot sat next to Buster. She said, “he said he hates humans, and how could we ever trust him? We don’t know what he has done.” Buster said, “do we know anything about each other? As far as you know, Rex could be a killer, and the same could be true for Rosie....... She said she hates humans too. It’s easy to push away than pull close and accept that others are who they are without judgments.” Dot thought about just how much smarter they had all gotten since the human world ended.

The group went past the burning Air Force base heading south following signs reading Cincinnati. It sounded like it could be a big town and just maybe they would find the boy there. Rex wanted to find a safe place where Dot could have their puppies. Thinking about the puppies made him think about Steve, his junkyard wonderland, and his own brood. Back then he didn’t think about being alone or needing anyone else other than his Steve and the cat Spike. Spike was killed by squirrels, and his home was overrun by deer. Steve was killed by other humans. Now he had his new pack and puppies on the way. Dot was talking to Buster about Tac, the German shepherd following them. If he stayed away, he was welcome to follow them. Toe’s scent was long gone, but there was a new scent that seemed dangerous. Rosie came over to Rex and sat down. she asked, “Was I wrong?”

Her question sparked a new concept in Rex. Long before the buzzing sounds of the boxes and balls, he wouldn’t have thought about right or wrong. Concepts of good and evil were something new, and they frightened him. He could remember doing things as a guard dog that in this new light could be evil. Rex started to wonder if he or any of them had the right to pass judgment on what is right or wrong. He knew killing for the sake of killing was wrong, but was killing for food wrong? Do the deer deserve the same treatment as they do or any human? Are they eating victims of the boxes? Rex said, “it’s a matter of trust. Can we trust him when we need to, or will he turn on us like Toe? As for bigger questions, I just don’t know.” He stood and
said they needed to go. He said it loud enough so Tac could hear them. Rex said, “maybe we’re all guilty.”

The scent was stronger. The dogs would stop every few hours, giving the bear time to catch up with them. Occasionally, it would pick up the scent of another dog like the one it killed and ate. This other dog was between the bear and his next meal of small dog and puppies. The ever-present voice in his head kept saying kill humans, but the bear was his own animal doing what it wanted not some disembodied voice’s bidding. He wanted his meal before they got to the safety of a human city. There could be places where the humans still lived, and they would keep him from his puppy meal. He cut across the road, passing some deer as they fell to the ground dead. The deer tasted good to the bear, but he wanted the dog.

Tac saw how the bear was getting ahead of them. It would wait for a place to attack giving others no way out. Tac looked at this massive monster knowing they would have no chance. If he confronted the bear, he would die, but the others could get away. He thought about the others as well as his former brothers and knew if he ever had a reason to exist, this would be that reason. The bear waited in a hollow downwind for the dogs. If he went unnoticed, he could strike out killing the bigger dogs long before they saw it coming giving him time to enjoy eating the dog with puppies alive. Tac saw the other coming closer to the bear. It was now or never.

The bear could smell his meal coming closer. He was under a fallen tree letting its scent of decay hide his own scent. He would be on them before they could move slashing and biting eating and winning. He heard something move and looked up, seeing the other dog. Tac struck, biting the bear on the snout digging into its face trying to bite chunks out while gouging out its eyes. The bear stood knocking the tree away, extending its full six-foot six-inch size while brushing off the biting growling dog from its face. He tossed Tac about ten feet away from him into a bush that broke his fall. Tac stood snapping at the bear while keeping his distance. From behind him, Rex and Rosie joined him snapping and biting at the bear.
The bear knew he could take all three of them and knew his dinner was nearby. He said, “silly little dog things, tonight I dine on puppies.” Rosie asked, “holy shit did he just speak?” The Bear backed away a little. He asked, “what did you say……. How can simple little dog things understand me?” Rex said, “what does that matter……. You aren’t eating the puppies.” The bear stood showing its size and said, “no, no little dog things gets to tell me what I can or can’t do.” He dropped down with a force that seemed to shake the ground and let off a menacing roar that echoed for miles. Rosie asked, “Is this really happening?” Rex crouched down to jump at the bear. Rosie did the same aiming for the bear’s legs as Tac aimed for its face again. Rex said, “Dot get ready to run and don’t look back.”

Buster came running into the clearing with the bear and the other dogs. The bear looked at him, backing away. He said, “what are you little yapping thing?” The bear took a swipe at Buster missing him by about afoot. Buster ran between the bear’s legs and back around to the way he came. He turned around and gave what looked like a grin. A snap and a crack came from the south as the bear backed away as if something just hit him. The bear howled out in anger. Over the hill, they could hear a man’s voice yelling something incoherent. Four men came over the hill with guns shooting at the bear. Buster looked to Rex and said, “guess what I found.” The bear saw humans and ran to the north.

The four men were in matching uniforms with USAF on the front. One of them said, “yeah, the talking dog came up here.” Another one said, “shit, did you see the size of that fucking bear…… I mean holy shit.” The four men looked at the dogs. The first man pointed at Buster and said, “that one…… he talked…… he said help.” Rex said, “a talking dog who would ever believe that?” The third airman said, “yeah, who would…….” He stopped when he realized it came from one of the dogs. Rex looked to the others who nodded back. He bowed to Tac just a bit to show appreciation. Rex turned to the humans and said, “take us to your leader.”
Saying Hello or Goodbye

Airman David West walked into the woods looking for deer or squirrels, anything that could be dangerous. He and three other airmen were left behind as their unit moved west with General Jackson. Part of their job was to make sure they weren’t followed. The insane part of their order was that if they detected anyone following them, they had to lead them away from the group. This would most likely end with them in a shallow grave after days of torcher. West wasn’t given any instructions on when to return to their unit and in a sense, they had free reign to either leave after an hour or leave altogether. Off in the distance, he heard what sounded like either a freight train or a bear.

Airman Doug Allen asked, “hey, tipsy, are there bears in Ohio?” Airman Tim “Tipsy” Pfister said, “how the fuck would I know, I’m from Queens…… the only bears I knew were people.” Allen turned to their Humvee and asked, “yeah, Beano…… Beano.” Airman George Ramos leaned back and said, “stop calling me that you fucking racist cracker……. And I have no idea……. I know we didn’t have any bears in Honolulu.” West decided they waited enough when a small dog came out of the woods. It was a pug but a smaller than usual pug like something a woman would carry in a bag. Buster saw the human. He knew his friends were in trouble, and just maybe they could help. He tried his best to speak, saying in his mind, “help…… help.” West asked, “what…… what?”

West came running out of the woods with the small pug following him. The other airmen got to their feet and looked past West. He stopped and pointed to Buster, saying, “this dog said his friends need help.” Allen looked at Buster then to West. He said, “don’t fuck with us, this isn’t a place for fucking around.” Buster barked, and it almost sounded like the word help. Buster tried to get the humans to follow him. One of them with Ramos on his uniform went to reach for him, but Buster wanted nothing to do with being carried. He snapped at him and ran back to the others. The airmen looked at each other than to the east and the sounds of a bear.
West crested a hill and saw four dogs around a massive bear. The smaller dog ran underneath the bear. It almost seemed like the bear said something about the pug being a small yapping thing. Allen yelled, “stop following the fucking dog.” He saw the bear. Allen pulled out his sidearm and fired at the bear. He wasn’t sure if he hit it or the bear just reacted to the gunfire. The other two airmen came up behind him with their guns out. The bear saw them, turned, and ran away. West said, “yeah, the talking dog came up here.” Ramos said, “shit, did you see the size of that fucking bear…… I mean holy shit.” The four men looked at the dogs. West pointed at Buster and said, “that one…… he talked…… he said help.” Rex said, “a talking dog who would ever believe that?” Allen said, “yeah, who would………” He realized the dog had just spoken even though its lips didn’t move. Rex turned to the humans and said, “take us to your leader.”

An hour later, the four airmen and the dogs were in the Humvee on their way west. Pfister had said, “OK, that’s different…… what should we do?” West said, “the one dog wants to speak to our leader, so maybe take them to our leader.” Allen leaned over and whispered, “do you think they’re aliens?” Rosie said to Dot, “what a bunch of fucking morons. I think we might have been better off with the bear.” Dot smiled and laughed. Ramos said, “this is freaking me the fuck out…… the dogs are mocking us.” A soldier on patrol stopped the Humvee. He stared at the airmen than the dogs who stared back. Rex said, “Yeah, I know right, what’s up with the dogs.” The soldier turned to West who told him to call ahead so they could make it all the way to the general without having to stop.

The five dogs sat in a room staring at an older human with stars on his uniform. It was clear to the dogs this human was in charge. Dot told Rex to point out the human they were looking for, but after driving then walking around, they hadn’t seen him yet. Rex wondered if this was a mistake. Rosie looked to the closed door. Major General Jessie James Jackson sat staring at the dogs wondering if he could justify shooting the four airmen for wasting his time. They just lost Wright Patterson, and these fools were bringing him dogs saying they could talk. Rex looked to Dot who just nodded. He turned to the General and said, “sir, I know you don’t have any reason to listen to us, but I think we know somethings that could help you……. we’re
looking for this boy I saved about a week ago and……. Are you OK?” The General said, “OK, talking Articulate dogs.”

A few hours in meetings with a human that called himself Goody, the dogs told him everything they knew. Rex did his best to describe the boy, but after just a few minutes, Goody told him about Jimmy and how he had told them about the dog that saved his life. Goody said, “he thought you were dead.” From there, the dogs joined the general and the others in a video meeting with two nearly naked people. It was clear what they were doing. When it was over the general asked to speak with Rex and Dot alone. Dot said, “no secrets.” The general said, “I know you are pregnant and with puppies on the way, you might want to have a safe place to have them. If you want, you could come with us. Our next stop is safe and secure. I’m asking because I think Rex wants to keep looking for Jimmy and he’s with my daughter…… my human puppy.” The human puppy comment seemed off but having a safe place for the puppies was better than having them on the road. Dot looked over at Buster.

Buster was in a corner asleep. The trip across Ohio and the ride into Indiana were tough on the small dog. Dot worried about him as well as their ability to protect him from the other animals as well as himself. The General walked over to Buster with a small plate of deviled ham from a can. The scent woke Buster. He put the plate in front of Buster who looked at it than the general. The general said, “the others are going after Jimmy, and it’s going to be a tough run……. I know you can do it, but I thought if I had one of you here to act as a representative, maybe we could help build a dog army……. If you want.” The General fought the urge to pet the talking dog. Buster said, “I’m no one’s fucking pet…… if I stay, it’s because you need me.”

The next day, Buster told the others he was going to stay with Dot and the humans. Rosie licked him on the face, nearly knocking him over. Buster walked over to Tac. He had left his old family to help his new one, and now they were going away. Buster said, “don’t let this get to your head tiny but……… I’m going to miss you…… all of you…… accept you, Dot, you’re not going away.” The other dogs stepped outside, leaving Rex and Dot. Rex said, “it seems like a
lifetime ago when you found me.” Dot said, “no, you found me in that cage.” Rex countered, “no, you found me when I needed someone ….. when I needed a friend ….. when I needed someone to love.” Rex had heard this word before, and he thought he knew what it meant until now, but now he thought he understood. Dot said, “you’re going to find this boy, and you are coming back ….. I won’t accept anything less than that.” To Dot, the word love didn’t mean much. Her human used it so often it was like saying hello or goodbye. She would say she loved her then lock her in her crate, but whatever she was feeling for Rex she knew he needed the word. Dot said, “I love you.”
One, Two, Three, Fitz and Hans

The deer took a turn to the southeast away from the other deer and the strange barking sound. The deer were out to kill humans, and any other animals were just collateral damage, but this left them open to becoming food for the other animals. The deer that could think kept a secret pact to kill any animal that seemed dangerous. The deer could see a time when all this was over, and the land belonged to them as well as the other animals. It turned away no longer thinking about a future, just trying to stay alive at that moment. Another growl turned the deer towards a box canyon. The walls narrowed as the deer raced for its life. Whatever was following it was gaining ground. The Deer stopped at the end of the narrow pass seeing three dogs waiting for it as another two came from behind.

The day the world ended a man named Guy Gunther was taking his prizewinning Doberman Pincers to a show in Gettysburg, Pa. The dogs were all related by blood, with Fritz being the oldest and Hans the youngest. The other three were from the same litter named, Ein, Zwei, and Drie the German words for one, two, and three. They watched helplessly in their crates as Guy was killed by Squirrels. When it seemed like all was lost, a young boy came along and freed them from the crates. They tried to help him by killing a deer for him to eat, but they didn’t know the clone deer were poisonous to the humans. They did their best to cover the boy and went about trying to stay alive. A few weeks later, they were hunting deer and eating well.

The dogs pulled the deer out into the open. The long chase, along with the quickness of the kill made the meat taste better. The kill was becoming harder as the deer started to work together and fight back. The ever-present voice telling them to kill humans was changing, calling all animals to come together and fight, to kill humans. The brother dogs as they were calling themselves didn’t want to hurt much less kill any humans, but they didn’t see any reason to help what was left of mankind. Humanity was on its way out, and they didn’t see a reason to prolong their demise.
A new scent came in from the west. The scent of a strange dog. Fritz said, “no, that’s two or three dogs.” So far, meeting with other dogs has been a mixed bag of bad and worse. Most were either wanting to join in the human killing or looking for a place to hide. None of them wanted to keep moving, and that was all the brothers wanted. The further they got away from their old lives of dog shows, the better they felt. They missed Guy, but they didn’t miss being paraded around and poked by strangers they didn’t have the right to sniff or bite. Zwei, Said, “one of them is female with a strong scent, I think she’s a big one.”

With nothing to hold them back, Rex, Rosie, and Tac moved as fast as they could run. The General gave them directions, and with a little luck, they would find Jimmy and this girl he was with. He tried to not think about Dot and the puppies she would have with him on this wild Jimmy hunt. He still wasn’t sure why he was trying to find this boy. They met once just for a few seconds, but he remembered seeing something in his eyes that made him want to protect this Jimmy, no matter what. He thought it might be a part of this long-lived connection between the primitive man and the dog. Two animals with no real need to coexist but still finding a way to bond and become something more. They passed a burned gas station along with an armored personnel carrier. Rex stopped causing the other to run into him. He got up and said, “I can smell him.”

Fritz watched as one of the dogs sniffed around looking for a scent. He turned to the others and said, “stay close and watch......I’m going to go see what they want.” Fritz walked out into the open. Tac saw him first and knew his breed. Rex saw him and wondered how he didn’t smell a fellow guard dog. He sniffed and picked up the scent of four other identical dogs. Rosie just watched this well-built muscular dog. Without knowing she was saying it, she said, “dam.” She looked at the others who looked at her. Fritz said, “My brothers and I are on our own looking for no trouble. We mean you no harm and all we want is to be left alone.” Rosie looked past Fritz, trying to see the other dogs. Rex said, “we’re looking for this boy and girl. They have something important for the world.” From behind them, Drei asked, “important to the humans or us?”
Rosie said, “One, Two, Three, Fitz and Hans, is that right?” Drei said, “yes and no, we prefer the other pronunciations.” Fritz asked, “and this boy and girl will let us go if we help?” Rex said, “you don’t have to be a part of this at all. We’re looking for dogs that are willing to help and willing is the most important part. I don’t know what will happen when all this is over but what I do know is that we are stronger together as a pack.” Hans liked the sound of that, and so did Fritz. Hans said, “I know where we can get more dogs as long as you are willing to run with crazy.” Rex replied, “we ran with a small dog that took on a bear so yeah we have no problem with crazy.” Rex looked to the east and the scent. Fritz said, “we can trace that scent together.”

The Irish-Wolfhound stared at the side of the barn as the paint dried. He took his tail and dipped it into a can of paint. In a circling motion, he spun around, hitting the wall as well as spreading the paint around. He dipped his tail in some water and did the same spreading the water over the wet paint causing drops to run down. Another Irish-Wolfhound was watching. He said, “I just don’t get it……. what’s your motivation?” The first Irish-Wolfhound said, “Art, my dear brother Ari……. my motivation is art.” Ari looked over the wall. He lifted his leg and pissed on it. Ari said, “art, my dear brother Arie is in the leg of the beholder.” Arie looked around at all his art his brother had pissed on. He said, “let’s go and find new art for you to piss on.” The eight dogs watched as the Irish-Wolfhounds jumped around, screaming the word art. Rex said, “oh, so this is what you mean by crazy.”

Ari asked, “so you want us to join your little dog army?” Rex looked to Rosie, who just tilted her head. Rex said, “well, I don’t know if we are an army, but we are a pack and……” Arie said, “I don’t know if we want to go running around doing……. You know……. things.” Fritz said, “this could go well for us Ari……. Think about it……. the humans could owe us.” Ari said, “I don’t want to be owed or owned.” Rex said, “we are going to kill the deer. I don’t know if you know, but the deer are turning on us killing us, and if we stand by and do nothing we will die along with the humans.” Rosie said, “think about the art you can make along the way in deer blood.” Ari stood up and said, “art is life.”
Five deer stood out in the open. The remains of a small dog lay at their hooves. It had survived the end of the world only to die in a field by a group of deer which killed it just to watch it die. The smell of dog was strong, masking the scent of the ten dogs as they moved in. The dogs moved in, keeping the deer in a circle. Rex made sure the biggest buck was his. They would attack as a pack taking the deer down in what would be their first action of the war of the dogs. A deer finally smelled something wrong, but it was too late. Rex went to pounce when a sound came from the north. Something yelled, “charge!” The dogs and the deer stood frozen looking to a large mass of something moving in. Another voice yelled, “kill the deer...... kill the deer.” Rex asked, “now what?”
The Fifty Chihuahua Army

Twelve looked over the hill at the sight of ten large dogs as they moved in on the deer he and his pack had been following for about an hour. Twelve, fourteen, and Sixty-Eight were scouts, and it was their job to find new threats and report any information to the fifty Chihuahua army. Some of the army had been running in a pack even before the human world ended. Most people didn’t know about the pack of feral Chihuahuas living in the Appalachian Mountains. They followed the seasons as well as their game, learning how to live without their human masters. As they traveled, they gained new members, and when the world ended, they became the army. In the month between the world ending and the army finding Rex and his pack, they learned how to work as a team copying the actions of the squirrels overwhelming their pray.

The army came up behind Twelve and stared down at the big dogs and the deer. The leader of the army Twenty-Three took his position in the front, and with a wag of his tail, the others took their place. Twenty-Three arched his back and yelled, “charge.” The army moved as one appearing as a massive wave of liquid moving in the tall grass. Eighty-Four yelled, “kill the deer…… kill the deer.” As they passed the other dogs, Twelve looked into the eyes of one of the bigger dogs. He winked at Rosie then turned to war. The mass of dogs swarmed over the deer, knocking them over, ripping flesh and showering the ground with blood. Tac had nightmares like this when he was a puppy. Swarms of what he was taught to call bait dogs working together to take anything in their path down. Ari said, “what wonderful art they make brother, what wonderful art.”

Twelve asked, “so your name is Ari, and your brother’s name is Ari?” Arie said, “no, my name has an E at the end, so you pronounce it Arie with an emphasis on that E sound like R Ee.” The army had made short work of the deer with twenty of the Chihuahuas surrounding Rex and the others. Twelve had moved in and asked for their names, rank, and loyalty. Rex said their names. He said, “as for rank…… Arie kind of smells funny but that might be his need to piss on everything….. but if you mean like the human military, we have no official rank.” Rosie said, “if you want our leader, that would be Rex.” Twelve said his name and how he was third in
command, but he couldn’t say more without permission from Twenty-Three. He said, “we are The Fifty Chihuahua Army.” Rosie looked over the mass of dogs counting. She asked, “but there has to be more than eighty of you?” Twelve said in a whisper, “don’t bring up the name…. we took it when there was just fifty or so of us, and we don’t want to change it. Also, I think Twenty-Three got tired of all the needless counting.”

Twelve turned to Rosie and asked, “so baby.... How’s the view?” Rosie chuckled. She walked over to Tac and put her paw on his back then brought it up about four inches. She said, “sorry, little doggie, but you have to be at least this tall to ride this ride.” Tac turned and saw where her paw was, and he was just shy of it. He said, “nice...... very subtle.” Twelve said, “baby it doesn’t have to be like that. I’m a good dog, not some nasty Dobie or kraut ankle biter.” Zwei turned and said, “Hey!” Twelve quickly responded, “eat whatever you like just leave me, and this tall drink of dog goddess to ourselves.” Rex said, “this isn’t going to end well for you.” Twelve responded, “never count out a dog on a mission.” Twelve stood at attention as a slightly larger darker coat Chihuahua came over. The other dogs went into a formation of sorts. Rex saw how four of the Chihuahuas lay on the ground, not moving. He thought about their names and the name of their pack, the fifty Chihuahua army.

Twenty-Three told them about their beginnings with a dog breeder that released a small pack of Chihuahuas into the woods after he lost his license to breed animals. Their story was familiar to Rosie, who spent most of her life as a dog incubator. He said, “we became less valuable to the human, and he didn’t want to pay to feed us…… that’s ok we learned the hard way how to take care of ourselves as well as how to be all that we could be.” Rosie asked, “what’s with the numbers for names?” She decided to ignore the looks from Ein, Zwei, and Drie. Twenty-Three said, “our mother ...... the mother of the original pack was just named One by the human. To honor her we took up numbers for names in the order in which we joined the pack.”

Rex told Twenty-Three about their mission to find Jimmy and Jenny. He said, “I think somethings coming, and that something will wipe us all out. They promised the deer a utopia, but
I think that was a lie and when they come all that will be left is death.” Twenty-Three said, “we fight for a time when we can have our own place, we could call home. We think that humans are on their way out and when they go the dog will be the masters of the world. When that happens, we want the big dogs to know we aren’t to be taken lightly or dismissed as small.” Twenty-Three looked to his army than to the ones that fell against the deer. He said, “We lost so many to the other animals making it difficult to trust……… but I do trust what you’re saying, and I can see a place for us in this war.” Hans asked, “war?” Twenty-Three smiled and said, “yes, a war that could be our last or our greatest achievement, a war for our very survival.”

Anette Smyth sat by the window in a closed-off part of the house so she could look out without light showing to the outside. It had been about a week since she operated on the boy Jimmy and his back was showing signs of improvement. He could walk, but it would be some time before he could be on the move again. Much to her sister’s chagrin, it was clear that Jimmy and Jenny were a couple and meant to stay that way. It was also clear they intended to leave as soon as they could. Jenny suggested they come with them, but this was their home, and she and her sisters planned on defending it until their last breaths. It was Anette that saw the first of the dogs approach the house.

Jenny lay on her back with Jimmy on her side, helping him stay in a position. She liked being close to him like this, and she could feel he liked it as well. Tina came into the room and over to Jenny. She whispered, “you have to come and see this.” Jimmy asked, “see what?” Tina ignored him as she lightly pulled on Jenny. Tina pulled the blanket away to find Jimmy had his hand up Jenny’s nightshirt, and they were doing more than just lay there. Tina said, “you two can play touchy-feely later…… just come with me now.” Jenny slid away from Jimmy, helping him lay on his stomach as she pulled away. She went out the door to the others as they stood on the porch. She looked out on a sea of small dogs. A larger dog in the front walked up to the steps. Rex asked, “Jenny?” Julie whispered, “did that dog just talk?” Rosie responded, “talking dogs, that’s just crazy.”
Defended the Farm

Rex walked into the house past the girls and into the room where Jimmy was. He was laying facedown with the smell of blood on him as well as injury. Rex walked over to him and placed his head on the bed. Jimmy woke up and looked at Rex. Jimmy said, “you……. I thought you were dead back in Ohio……. How are you here?” Rex said, “it’s a long and complicated story that we will talk about later. I just wanted you to know you are safe and when you are ready, we will escort you to Atlanta.” Jimmy didn’t say a thing. Rex rolled his eyes and said, “yes I know…… a talking dog what’s going on? How is this real?” Jimmy said, “no, it’s just nice to see you……..” Rex said, “my name is Rex, and I’m here to help.”

Jenny sat outside, watching the dogs as they ran around playing as dogs did. Rosie walked over to her and said, “bark, bark, woof, woof, bark……..I’m just kidding, could you imagine.” Jenny replied, “I’m starting to imagine more than I ever would have before.” Jenny fought the urge to pet the big dog. Rosie asked, “so you’re the General’s daughter……. What’s that like?” Jenny said, “that’s hard to say. I grew up living more with my mother than my father. He was there, and when he was, he taught me how to take care of myself but…… I don’t know he’s just my dad.” Rosie put her head into Jenny’s lap and said, “go ahead, I know you want too.” Jenny put her hand on Rosie’s head and slowly started to pet her.

Twelve watched a large group of deer moving across a cornfield. He could see which of the deer were fake and which were the real deer as they ate the dry corn. There had to be hundreds of deer, and they seemed to be moving their way to the farm. The army had never come up against such a large movement of deer. If they go after the farm, then the boy and girl would die, if the army takes on the deer they would die. This wasn’t his job to decide. The deer shifted to the north and away from the farm. Behind them, was a trail of destruction and the bodies of dead deer. Twelve snuck away and backtracked trying to make sure he wasn’t followed.
Twelve found Twenty-Three in the barn with the girl Tina as she stroked his back with enough force his leg was working up and down. Twelve thought about backing away, but he thought about the deer and had to say something. Twenty-Three got to his feet and tried to act like that wasn’t happening. Twelve said, “OK, whatever I don’t care. There is a wave of deer about a mile north of here. We are in trouble.” Tina got to her feet and said she was going to get her sister. Twenty-Three told her to get all the humans inside so they could talk this out. When she was gone, Twenty-Three told twelve, “tell the army were leaving.”

Another twenty of the small dogs ran into the barn. Rex thought about the sound that must be coming from the inside and laughed. As he laughed, Twelve came up to him and said, “he’s planning on taking the army away before the deer come.” Rex looked to the barn then back to Twelve. He said, “going out in the open would be suicide. The deer are starting to target us now.” Twelve told him how at one point, they had more than a hundred of their kind including several mixed breeds. He said, “we tried to take on a pack of deer, maybe forty or so, and that ended up with us losing twenty-nine of us, including Two and Three.” Rex looked to the house filled with people knowing they were all about to die.

Twenty-Three watched as his army moved into the barn. Rex walked over and asked, “is it true……. Are you all leaving?” Twenty-Three turned and said, “yes and no. I’m sending part of the army to follow the deer from a distance tracking their movement and growth while the rest of us do something I thought we would never do……. We’re going to hide.” After a few moments of silence, Twenty-Three said, “I need your help to convince the humans to hide with us. Taking on nearly a thousand deer would be like trying to keep the tide from hitting the shore or stopping the sun from rising. If they stay out, we will too, and together we will all die.” Rex thought about his junkyard and how much simpler his life was when all he had to do was protect things people didn’t want anymore.

A few hours later, the first of the deer walked onto the farm. A scout looking for something to kill. It staggered to the left, showing the telltale signs of malnutrition that marked it
as a clone. The deer had a lean, hungry look as if it wanted its death to mean something by killing everything in sight. Take as many with it as it could. Two more deer came out of the woods, then sixty more. Soon the farmhouse’s yard was filled with deer. Rex and Twenty-Three watched all this from a safe place in a hayloft. The army was huddled around the other humans to keep them calm. Rosie stayed next to Jenny, and Tac stayed close to Rosie. The scent of deer filled the air blotting out any other. Rex knew this would work against the deer, covering any human or dog scent still around. Rex saw this for what he knew it was. The end game for the things the General were calling Aliens. They would keep growing this deer army until every human and dog was dead.

The deer shifted like a large body of water in waves. A mass of living things so big it was hard to not see them as one large living thing rather than what was thousands of individual deer. Rex noted that there were fewer of the mechanical deer. He thought that just maybe there was a limited supply of them, and that supply was dwindling down to nothing. Like a wave or the tide coming up a beach, the deer turned and receded back into the woods. When it was over, Jimmy told Rex about the base and how the deer crashed against the seemingly impenetrable gates running minefields in a suicidal attempt to kill as many as they could. The deer scent lingered along with the scent of death. More than a few of the clone deer died in the woods and on the farm giving a look like a battle had just happened, and they had defended the farm rather than hiding.

Wearing gloves, Jimmy and Jenny butchered the deer giving any meat and more than a few bones to the waiting dogs. Both Jimmy and Jenny knew better than to eat the meat. They buried what was left while the sisters did their best to clean up. No one touched any of the outer damage hoping it would appear to the deer that no one lived on the farm. Rex watched as Rosie sat next to this Jenny girl. It seemed so natural to see this that it made him sure she would stay with the kids. He knew he had to go. They needed more dogs and soon. The war with the deer was building up to something big, and that would most likely be a battle that would either signal a turn for the world or its end. He also knew that as a big dog, Rosie was showing her age, and
soon, she wouldn’t be able to keep up. Another soldier left behind; another friend would be gone too soon.

Rex let Twenty-Three tell everyone their plans to get on the move and how they wouldn’t be helping Jimmy and Jenny get all the way to Atlanta. The war needed more dogs. Much to everyone’s surprise, Tac said he would stay with the kids and go all the way to Atlanta. Rosie would stay with the sisters on the farm. She didn’t say why, but Rex knew that she was near the end and just wanted a place that would want an old dog for as long as she had left. Off in the distance, Ari was using a mix of mud and deer blood to paint something on the side of a shed. Arie stood by staring at it. The strange mix of mud and blood was starting to look like something. Occasionally, Ari would stop and glare at his art. The shed was a bright yellow, and with the mud blood mixture, Ari had painted a landscape with the yellow showing through as the rising sun. Ari said, “well, it's ok, just not something worth peeing on.”

Later that night, in the truck Jenny had rebuilt, Jenny, Jimmy, Tac as well as Twelve and Sixty-Two left for Atlanta. The army would stay just long enough so the scouts they sent to track the deer could come back then they would go east looking for more dogs. Julie pulled out a strange-looking mountain bike with a small motor. She said, “I’m coming with you. You’ll need someone that can use a radio as well as a human to smooth over any irregularities in that whole talking dog thing.” She said it as if this wasn’t up for discussion. She said she grew up on a farm and knew how to take care of herself so she wouldn’t be a burden. Rex looked to the house. Julie followed his gaze and said, “they’ll get over it, they always knew I wasn’t going to stay so this shouldn’t be a shock.” Twenty-Three did his best to smile and said, “Welcome to the army.”

Back west in a secret base in Indiana, The General sat leaning back at a desk asleep with his hat pulled over his eyes. Next to him, Buster was behind a smaller desk in a dog bed asleep. This was the first time the General had really slept since he sent his daughter east then lost contact with her. He had just spoken with her over the radio and was told of their plans as well as the deer army. He also heard from a scouting party on how they found and engaged Boone’s
army. This was bad news. The war now had multiple fronts with more enemies than they could fight. He didn’t tell them about the other three scouting parties that went silent. In the next room, Dot was lying in a special box the General had made for her and the litter of five puppies she just had. The puppies were a mix of looks from a bright white to the tan of their father, Rex. Dot did her best to ignore the comments that ranged from too cute to ghastly. Her puppies were what the humans would call mutts with a mix of four dog breeds, but to her, they were everything.
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.
The Army of Dogs

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.
The Army of Dogs

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 the 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.