

And Evolved Arrival

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Rex was on night patrol when he saw the shooting star. It flared white hot for just a heartbeat as it streaked from the heavens.

Shouldering his boxy pulse rifle, the German Sheppard fell to all fours and raced towards it. Whatever it was, he had to get there before the bugs.

Any other soul would have taken an hour to navigate the twisting, turning maze of trenches dug into the gray earth, but Rex knew them by heart. He'd been on the battlefield for years.

He'd only seen it for a moment, so there was no way to judge how far away the brilliant light had been, but it looked to have fallen in no man's land.

The dog swore.

Taking a deep breath, Rex pressed his back up against the trench wall. Beyond it laid nothing but corpses and dead earth.

For just a moment the dog was about to call the search off, having realized he'd never heard anything crash down. Then he carefully raised his mirror above the lip of the trench to look out over the barren expanse between him and the bug lines.

The dog's eyes widened.

It was no more than ten meters away, and a bright silver. An egg shaped craft hovered motionless not a paw's length above the ground.

It was difficult to tell, but it looked to be hardly large enough to hold a person.

Rex began shaking. It was not of this world made. Neither the bugs nor the mammals created such things as these. The sky was the domain of the gods, humans.

Rex crouched there in the trench, counting his heartbeat and watching the reflection of the craft in his mirror. The night was quiet, not even the soft *rat-tat-tat* of fire to break it.

He cocked his head. It was unusual the bugs had not sent a scavenger out to collect the craft. They were normally as desperate for resources as the mammals were.

Taking a deep breath, Rex slipped his mirror away into his belt.

If the gods were calling him out into the battlefield he would be a fool to resist them.

His belly was on the lifeless gray dirt as he crawled his way towards the craft. There was no fire arching across the sky, but lessons like this were hard learned. Rex could remember the faces and names of all the friends he'd lost to the war.

The dog had not survived this long by taking foolish risks, but yet here he was out in the middle of no man's land.

It took him a full five minutes to crawl out to the craft. It had been five minutes since the dog had last heard an explosion, since the chitter of deadly insects had twitched his ears.

It was possibly the longest silence he could remember.

Almost without noticing he began to hum *Silent Night*.

Directly below the craft now, Rex looked up into its perfect mirror shine finish. Staring back at him was the haggard face of a blue eyed German Shepard, run grey before his years.

He clutched his pulse rifle closer.

Rex took a deep breath before reaching up to touch a trembling hand to the craft.

He pulled back instantly. Where he'd touched the hull had gone a bright electric blue.

Rearing back in panic, the dog forgot where he was. In seconds he had sitting up and trying to scramble away.

Then the light changed. The blue fingerprints he'd left on the craft began to... grow. Slowly, the blue light expanded to encompass exactly half the egg shaped hull.

Then it stopped, as if waiting for something.

Rex blinked.

The pulse rifle was in his hands a heartbeat later as a freakish multi-legged form slowly rose from the trenches across from him.

It took Rex a moment to recognize the silhouette against the moonlight. It was a brain bug.

Held atop almost impossible long, whisp like legs, the creature came towards him.

It took everything Rex had not to empty his entire clip into the abomination.

He couldn't tell, but the insect seemed familiar. It could be the one he encountered at the church a long, long time ago, or it could be a completely different one. They all looked the same.

How long did the bugs live, anyway?

Reaching out a whispy leg, it ever so gently touched the far side of the craft. A moment later a red glow grew to cover the other side. Where the red and blue touched a white seam appeared.