

An Evolving Understanding

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Posted on FurAffinity

Nov. 21, 2012

The war pressed on, but Rex didn't notice.

One day spent on the razor's edge between life and death is very much like every other when it's all you've ever known.

Sighing, he carefully poked his head up from the trench to take a quick glimpse of the horizon. Of all days, this was the one he'd lost his mirror.

Unsurprisingly, the coast seemed clear. This was *supposed* to be an unofficial no-fire zone for both sides, but you never trust the bugs. Their brains aren't like those of mammals. They simply don't think in a way a real person can understand.

Another deep breath and Rex pulled himself up over the crumbling lip of the trench. The war ravaged soil had been churned and blasted over the years until it was little more than lifeless grey dirt. That same featureless mud was caked to Rex's fur, soiling his once majestic brown and black coat to the same lifeless hue.

His goal was two-hundred meters ahead, in the middle of no-man's land. This was one piece of earth that neither side would ever take.

Perhaps the only building left standing for a hundred kilometres, the small wooden church thrust its steeple fearlessly into the air. It was nothing as compared to the behemoth war machines Rex had seen crawl across the battlefield, but unlike those nigh unstoppable nightmares the church still stood.

It wasn't until he got within paces of the building that Rex found the courage to pull his belly from the mud. And even then he took the final steps in a crouched run, his tail dragging behind him.

One of the massive wooden front doors sat ajar. Rex set a hesitant hand on it. He could feel the intricate engraving that had once graced the entrance way, now worn nearly smooth by the passage of countless years. He could just make out the forms of humans bowing to a god of their own.

Stepping into the building, Rex bowed his head and wiped his feet.

This was a place of great power it was said. The humans had come here to worship their great god. Those who lived here now, the mammals and the bugs, they did not have the understanding the humans did.

Rex kept his eyes firmly on his chipped black claws as he walked in. A moment later, only after safely stepping behind the doors and out of sight of the battlefield, did he remove his mud stained helmet.

Rex hadn't noticed the sound of the wind before. But now, within the church, he could hear it moaning.

Walking slowly up the centre of the church, he glanced to either side at the time worn pews. Unlike everything else on his deserted wasteland of a battlefield, the church still stood in good repair. Nothing was done officially, but yet every time a soldier visited a little work was always done to maintain the site.

Rex's claws clicked on the wooden floor as he approached the alter at the far end. Slowing, he bowed his head.

Sitting on the alter were three books. Like all mammals, and likely bugs, he knew them. They had been taught to him since he was a pup. They were among the few things they knew of the humans who had made them.

But unlike many dogs, Rex had in fact read the books.

A frown tugged at his lips.

So many claimed that the mammals and the bugs fought because it was ordained within the holy books. It was all but taken as fact. Rex had yet to find that passage.

The books contained many things Rex could not understand, and even more he was loth to agree with, but all three books carried the same overarching message.

That of peace.

The one thing he had never known in his lifetime.

To touch the books was strictly forbidden, but Rex had done it anyway. No one had seen him, and he could tell no one of what he knew.

He had just reached the alter when a sound came from behind him. Combat hardened instincts flaring, Rex dove behind a pew and pulled the sidearm from his belt.

He felt the fool for leaving his beloved pulse rifle at base.

A moment later the front doors to the church opened again. There was a soft rat-tat-tat on the floor as six sets of spindly legs drummed forward.

Rex cursed under his breath.

It was a bug.

Stealing a glance, his words stopped short.

It was a brain-bug.

What in the human's names?

Brain-bugs never travelled alone. They were the commanders of the force, not the grunts. This one made its way slowly towards him, following in his own footsteps.

And Rex knew for a fact the creature could see him.

One of the many things that kept peace from ever being forged between the two sides was a complete lack of a shared language.

Rex stood up, keeping his pistol aimed firmly at the ground. The brain-bug kept walking. The many cold, dead, black eyes watched him.

Rex sighed. "Go ahead." He holstered his sidearm.

One of the bugs many spindly arms rose to touch the books arrayed before it. Rex had to claw back a growl at the thought of such a creature defiling the holy relics.

Ever so slowly, the brain-bug opened the first book, then the second and the third. Each was in a different language.

Carefully, Rex peered over his mortal enemy to read the first word of each page.

In each of the languages, it was the same.

'Peace.'