

Old Friends

A short story by Marten Kähr

Emperor Eidan, escorted by two guards, entered the old hangar and looked around. The only thing here was a large, armored robot of some kind and some engineering equipment. *I wonder why this General Norman wanted to meet me in this dismal place* he thought. The lights in the ceiling were switched on and the guards became more alert, tightening their grip on their rifles.

"I don't like this" One of the guards said out loud. "This feels like a trap. Your highness, I suggest that we leave."

"Radio for more men, soldier. There are plenty tagging along with the motorcade" sounded the response given by the Emperor's confident, even arrogant, voice. Just as he had finished with that sentence, the large robot stood up. Standing at full height, it was about ten meters tall and slightly more than five meters wide. As soon as it stood up, it turned to face the Emperor and his escorts. One of the soldiers opened fire on the armored machine. The short energy bursts had no effect on the heavy armor plating of the robot, but that didn't stop the soldier from keeping fire on the enemy. What did stop him was the low, mechanical voice giving the private a direct command to cease fire.

Doing so, and getting a moment to think, the two soldiers noticed the rank insignia of a brigadier general on the "robot". The Emperor, being old enough to remember, recognized what the robot was. It was an old Mark 1 Heavy Cybernetic Battlesuit. "It has been a while since we last spoke, Jeremy." The low voice continued. The name seemed to hit the Emperor as if it had been a physical blow. "Who are you?" the Emperor asked, his voice trembling. He regained his composure, however, and quickly added in his usual, slightly arrogant, voice "And you shall address me as Emperor Lucius Eidan"

"Well, I am the one you came here to meet. I am Brigadier General Norman of the first Augmented Infantry Battalion" the general let out a mechanical chuckle "And it truly wounds me that you don't remember me, Jeremy. Of course, I understand. When we last met, I still resembled a human."

There was a short pause after which the Emperor said to his guards in a recognizably regal voice "Leave us" The guards hurried away, their faces both relieved and worried at the same time. "So...Daniel?" the Emperor said hesitantly. *Could it really be him? I thought he was dead* he thought. "Indeed, old friend. It's nice you see that you still remember after everything your career as a politician has put you through." the machine-general said in his low, mechanical, and yet somehow still highly expressive voice. "It's a pity that I didn't call you here just to recall old times in the military."

"So why did you call me here. Let me guess, you want your old friend to give your brigade some extra funding. Or you want a promotion. Because I know you deserve both of those." the Emperor said, in a slightly disappointed voice. The Emperor was quite surprised to hear the answer, however "No. That is not what I want. I wanted to tell you myself that I am, along with the rest of the brigade, defecting to the Coalition."

The surprise on the Emperor's face was obvious. "But.. why? You've always been loyal. What made you commit this treason?" To that, the general let out what could only be a sigh. "I enlisted to defend the freedoms the Republic provided. I sacrificed my humanity so that others could enjoy the freedoms us soldiers earned through blood. I saved your life because I thought you would put an end to corruption inside the halls of the government. Instead you have stripped away those freedoms and desecrated everything mankind once stood for. You are the reason I'm defecting. You are the traitor here. I would kill you for your crimes, but I hope that you will correct your wrongs. I know you weren't like this from the beginning and I still believe in you, old friend."

Throwing fear and common sense into the wind, the Emperor shouts at the machine almost twenty times as big as he is "You traitor! I'll have you executed for this treason! You hear me! I'll have you killed!". But the general replies in a dead-calm voice "I have been clinically dead since 20 years ago when I saved your life on Callida IV. And that act is my only regret." With these last words spoken, the large machine steps on an elevator platform behind him and the platform slides into the ground, with metal doors closing the gap as the platform drops deeper underground.