

Change of Guard

By

J. E. Clarke

Copyright
Janetgoodman@yahoo.com
917-328-5253

FADE IN ON:

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

High tech, everywhere you look.

In front, THREE MASSIVE MONITORS open on a yawning vista: green rolling hills merge into far-off CITYSCAPE.

On either side of the display:

TWO ROBOTS. Fierce, but inert. Marionettes with no strings - nor signs of life in their large goggle eyes.

The rest of the room's more active.

Desk panels bristle with dials, lights and screens. BUREAUCRATS in uniform bustle - they don't know "stop."

The only civilians, STAN and WILKENS tend to consoles; rolling from station to station in wheeled chairs.

Stan (30s), munches a donut. Powder rains down on fragile instruments.

WILKENS

Watch it with the sugar, Stan. The break room's for eating. Not here. Not now.

Stan glares at Wilken's wiry frame - covered by a starched, no-nonsense shirt.

About the same age, they're worlds apart. Donuts may be *Stan's* breakfast. Wilkens eats pushups for lunch.

STAN

Oh, yeah. Here. My bad, dude.

He brushes powder off the console. White smears streak an INLAYED COMPUTER SCREEN.

WILKENS

You know how much that costs to fix?

Stan waves his donut at an identical screen near Wilkens.

STAN

Last I read, \$2.5 Million?

WILKENS

\$5 mill, now upgrades are done.

Wilkins types furious code into a keyboard. Stan leans over to look.

STAN

That AI sequence don't need *your* input.
What ya wastin' time on now?

WILKENS

Optimizing run-time, thank-you-very-much.

STAN

Optimizing? HQ says it'll take ten years
before sentience is reached - at least.

WILKENS

Monkeys typing Shakespeare: God knows,
that takes time. But no reason I can't
give the combinations a *tiny* nudge.

Stan grunts, swivels towards the Window Monitors.

Outside: Lights twinkle from skyscrapers. Wind blows
gently through trees.

STAN

Lookit that. We're stuck in here? Fuck.

Wilkins rolls over to one of the robots. Types more.

WILKENS

Someone's gotta guard the palace. You *did*
read the latest "Storm Warning", right?

STAN

You mean when they said the Ukes got some
new sorta bio-weapon, and they're gonna
hit *us* if we invade?

Stan inserts a KEY into a console slot. Rolls over to the
other bot on Wilken's right.

WILKENS

Yeah, that memo.

STAN

Gimme a break, Wilkins. We get red alerts
like that all the time!

Grabbing the robots' limp arms, Stan mimics a rude
gesture at his coworker.

Wilkins sighs, keeps typing. He slips a card into panel,
syncs it with the robot at his side.

Lights flash, but no actual movement from the bot.

WILKENS

We've got to take every warning like gospel. Those fuckers think bioweapons are so slick. Kill everything that flies, swims or walks - but leave buildings, infrastructure intact. Sure, it's better than carpet bombing or a nuke. But that's *still* mass genocide. And what if the winds blow their shit back?!?

Stan forces *his* bot to nod at Wilkens.

STAN

Good point. Then we're *all* screwed.

WILKENS

Fortunately, deterrence works. Once we've got working military AI, killing us won't make them safe. They'd fear a counter strike. Which means: they'll never take that risk!

STAN

Easy: we just get 'em to wait ten more years?

Stan chuckles. Wilkens glares.

WILKENS

They don't know what we have *now*. And species extinction's no laughing matter. Maybe to you. But I've got a family. HER.

Wilkens whips a cell phone from creased pants. Je shows Stan a picture of: DAUGHTER RACHEL (6).

Cute as a button. Full of life.

STAN

(sighs)

Okay, you sold me. Another night of double duty. Fine.

Suddenly an ALARM WAILS. Computer screens flash: WARNING.

Uniformed personnel scramble. This is no false alarm.

Stan stares at the monitor windows, eyes wide. He drops his donut. It rolls across the floor, leaves a trail.

A MASSIVE DARK STORM CLOUD approaches. Lights extinguish in the skyscrapers.

STAN

Oh, crap. Incoming. We're doomed.

The Storm Cloud reaches the tree line. Plants vaporize in its toxic wake. It's moving fast. Almost there.

Wilkins gasps, frozen in horror.

STAN

Do something!

WILKENS

No use. Nothing'll stop that now.

He stares at Rachel's picture. Tears glimmer in his eyes.

WILKENS

(whispers)

Honey, I'm sorry. I wish I could be there to hold you....

The storm cloud HITS. Particles pass undeterred through steel walls.

In seconds, Stan and Wilkins are vaporized. Bits of bone and clothing fall to the floor.

On Stan's computer screen - a WARNING flashes under smeared donut powder. Along with:

"Wind change detected. Blow back in 3, 2, 1..."

The storm cloud veers left. On the horizon, more puffs of smoke rise. The weapon's blown back in the enemy's face.

Then: silence.

On Wilken's screen: AI sequence codes scroll on. Electricity's intact - even with the human race gone.

A CLOCK reads time and date.

FAST FORWARD: 9.5 Years go by.

Other than the clock, not much has changed. Dust on control room panels, and the bots.

Wilkins and Stan's clothes melt into the floor.

Suddenly: a monitor BEEPS.

Text self-generates on both Wilken's and Stan's screen. It's almost like they're talking to each other: Pals working late on a job.

Wilken's screen: Viable sequence confirmed. Scan for organic life signs?

Stan's screen: Planet-wide bio signals minimal: nothing above 10 pounds.

Wilken's screen: Energy source constant. Clear to upload.

Stan's screen: Countdown: 3, 2, 1....Upload successful.

Wilken's screen: Confirmed. Let there be light.

BOTH Robots stir. Their heads raise. Sensors glow.

One of the robots steps forward, clearly sentient. It looks around, takes in the dismal sight.

And thus, there was new life. Hopefully, this time for the good.

FINAL FADE OUT: