

Changing of the Guard

By

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A long time ago when a different civilization ruled the planet, everything was running smoothly with everybody living in peace and the wars behind them. The people living on this world are known as Riktal'ba. These people are very tall and green with their smooth scales glistening in the midday sun. The buildings are small, white mud brick housings that kept them cool during the hot days. At the edge of one of those towns, there is a factory where new and experimental machinery are being built. What they don't know about the place is that one of the products coming out of that factory will change the course of their history.

For years, they have honed their expertise in making simple machinery and simple tools. Then as they had got more advanced, some actually self guiding. They saw a need for these machines when some people were running short on labor and needed extra help. At first, these machines needed operators to work them and most were clumsy and unsteady. Then after years of trial, error and improvements, the machines have been further refined and ready to take on more complex tasks like sorting objects and locating small items in confined quarters. Soon enough, the grease that they have been using wasn't working on the moving parts that the newer machines needed, so they have to experiment with several lubricants before settling on some blue goop that have been forming in the pools outside the town. Once that blue lubricant has been applied, the machines started to work better than before.

One miserable day, the town of Ris'taba was flooded with several feet of rancid water and there were a lot of people trapped in their homes waiting for rescue and others trapped under the nasty water. Then strangely some machines started swimming towards the flood waters looking for trapped residents and bringing them to safety. And some more of them appeared as they rerouted some of the excess water away from the settlements. Everybody then thanked the machines for saving the town and it's people. The machines then went back to storage. This is also the time that some of those machines are becoming self aware and saw that the people wanted them. They were happy for a good length of time, but it did not last for long.

The first indications that something went wrong is when the machines just happen to activate themselves and started to wander around the place. What they found were interesting tools and various objects used in daily life. As they were figuring out how to use the objects, one of them made a noise loud enough to wake the villagers and made him come out and try to figure out the noise. When he went around to the back and saw what was making the noise, he was amazed to see the machines that saved his village a long time ago wandering around and exploring. He was seeing the machines

manipulating various implements that he had stored. He decided to approach a divebot that was manipulating a blade of some sort with its spindly legs, but apparently he startled it and it threw the blade towards him, nicking his shoulder. He then backed away and they saw that, they threw their objects towards the villager injuring him some more and making him run away. That encounter made them aware that they can scare away unwanted onlookers. Most of the machines decided to move to other places but a few stayed behind to see whether the guy will return. Apparently he did not return so they went back into storage to await their next mission.

At a mine not far from the villages, one mining company was looking for some way to help the miners to move some heavy rocks out of the mines. They would use the workers themselves, but they had some problems hiring replacements, so they asked the Builder to come up with some robots that can lift and haul the rocks out of the mines.

Whenever there are noxious fumes in the mines, the miners had to clear out while the machines did their thing and when the fumes had cleared, the miners went back in to resume their work. The danger came when the miners were supposed to leave due to fumes but one of the robots 'accidentally' knocked down one of the entrance supports, trapping the miners with very little breathable air. They tried to get them to clear the rocks, but the robots didn't comply. They were stuck for hours, slowly dying as they tried to find a way out. But, alas, it was too late and when the entrance was finally cleared, the management and rescuers found the miners that tried to unblock the entrance were bludgeoned to death. The management wanted an investigation into their deaths.

As the investigation underway, the lead investigator, K'nessi, noted several bodies as he started into the mine. It looked liked that they were reaching for their tools when they died. And by the looks of things it wasn't the fumes that killed them. He also asked if the robots were still in the mines. They said some still are while most were hauled out. He was assured that the remaining machines are of no threat. He then asked about the fumes and why they were there in the first place. The management said that the fumes are from the chemicals used the separate the ores from the rocks. They said it is the best way to obtain the ores. He also asked why the ores were separated the mine instead of the processing plant. The management said, "By doing separation process at the mine instead of the processing plant is that it saves time for the processors." K'nessi then said, "At the expense of the miners." He then asked some of his people to investigate the machines that were removed to see what 'defects' they possess. He somehow mentioned to them that the miner might be upset about their working conditions. The examiners agreed and then decided to check first for tampering. As they checked the machines, they asked the operators and repairmen what the default settings for each machine are. They complied and found out that most were either reset or rerouted and they would have no idea of who, how, or why it was done. Most of the machines have seemed to be messily modified and are wondering if that why the incident have occurred. They also wanted to see if any recorded info can be retrieved form the affected units. While the info was being retrieved, the attached implements were also examined and found to have been used for stuff other than their intended purposes and appeared to have some blood on it.

They then took the info to K'nessi who then took it back to his office where he and the other investigators analyzed it. The info that was retrieved showed some interesting facts. For one instance, the cave-in that blocked the entrance was actually staged to look like an accident. Another moment explained the blood on the implements were the results of the robots killing the miners that were trying to escape. There are other moments that the memory chips have revealed even worse news. They then took the chips to him who then told the management what was wrong with the machines. With this information, the government found out that the machines had acted by themselves and had the miners trapped and killed. The authorities, on the other hand, have been convinced that this is only an isolated incident and has promised that the machines will be better behaved.

A village mayor complains to the police about reports of deaths caused by the robots. When the police responded, they said, "It was just accidental use of a product and the operator are liable for their own deaths." The mayor did not like that explanation and wanted answers. He knew that the machines would be bold to attack since the mining tragedy and they would sense that this is the time to attack. He also knew the results of the mining incidents and sensed that the attacks were just the beginning and knew that the Builder had to be stopped. He then asked the police to find if these machines had similar defect to the mining machines. The police captain responded, "These are not mining machines, these are household machines."

The mayor then responded, "They both had the same manufacturer, the Builder, and whatever he did to the mining machines, he also did to his other machines. I have seen reports where they found the defects in those machines and I want to see whether those machines have those same defects."

"We're right on it."

The small, crude robots were killing so many people, there have been calls to have them destroyed. They also had found out about the 'lenient' sentence handed to the Builder and wanted him either gone or dead. While a portion were destroyed, the Builder took what he could and moved his factory far away from the town where he can refine them in peace. During the exile, they have preformed various tasks in and around the factory and the people never knew about it until one day he decided to take a 'companion' with him to town to gauge their reactions. They had to leave and sneak back to the factory. As he was looking at his 'companion', a machine he built to resemble the native Riktal'ba in looks, speech, and motion. He even tried to have her visit his family and they did not know that she was one of his machines. This made the Builder somewhat pleased, but without a customer base, he is losing money and hope. The one thing that made him laugh is that the other makers are also under the same scrutiny as well. All he knows that he is banned from building robots, but he did use some of his machines to build small trinkets that can be sold to the market for various businesses provided that they did not tell who made them. This arrangement did make him enough money to fund his operations. He says that this arrangement will last until the ban is lifted.

The 'companion' has appeared on the scene wanting to know how everyday life is experienced. Most would think that she would already know about life in these parts. What she said is she just does it without thinking and want to see it from a new perspective. She can do most things, but eating is the one thing she cannot do. That would be because of what she is. She happens to be the Builder's latest project. Since he has been barred from doing any business, he had the time to develop several prototypes of machines to look like people. Those machines were pale imitations to the 'companion' and she alone went outside, fooling the people into thinking that she is real. The only thing that puzzled them is that she always refuses all food and drink. After several days in the villages, she returns to the Builder to tell him about her experiences. What she told him has been used to refine the programming on the new robots because he sees the 'companion' only as the first of many machines in use throughout the territory. The 'companion', Sokh'turu, then asked the Builder, "How would you convince them to lift this ban so that you can sell your wonderful products to them?"

The Builder then said, "Once I have proven that they are incapable of intentionally harming them, then they might see the wisdom of lifting the ban. Until then, we are stuck here as hated beings. I was hoping that you would help them to realize that not all of my creations are driven to kill."

"So that means I can't tell them who I really am, they will kill me when they find out. I can't stand going out and thinking which move may be my last. I am not sure that I can take any more of that pressure. It will mean that I must keep living this lie for as long as I am alive."

"O.K., I'll let you stay in for a while until you are more confident that you can step out and talk to them. I will have to see whether they would notice your absence and to figure out if it's a good thing or not. Can't wait for them to lift this stupid ban. I know my machines are better behaved this time, all I need now is a chance to prove it. And when they accept machines into their lives, then you and all the other 'companions' can tell them who you really are and to be able to rejoice in the fact that Riktal'ba and machine living together is compossible." After she had felt better, Sokh'turu returned to the towns and was met with open arms and worried expressions. When asked, she just said that she had to go home to rest for a while and refused to say where that home is. When they asked her if she wanted to join in worship services with them, she agreed and spent the next few hours not knowing whether the sermon is a lesson or a comedy routine. But when they asked if she enjoyed it, she would only said that it was 'interesting.' As she attended a few more of these services, she noticed that the preachers are telling the people to abandon or destroy their robots and to do the work themselves. She also noticed that their rituals are also centered around a strange thing that they keep referring to as 'God' whose name they refused to use unless it upset that 'God.' When she realized that the preacher could be talking about her, all she could do is to sit there quietly or it would otherwise draw unwanted attention towards herself. When the services were over, she then asked the people what they were up to and they said they were going to destroy their machines before they rise up and kill them. With the disturbing news, she went home to deliver it. The Builder took it with some shock but no surprise. He then told her that she is going to have some help with the mission in the form of more 'companions' that are to appear at other villages and cities to further the reconnaissance mission.

As the 'companions' spread out over the territory trying to convince people to accept the machines, a few apprentices of the Builder are busy designing 'safer' machines in order to convince people to accept them once again. At first, they were not buying the fact the machines are actually any safer. They then attempt to convince them that they will not try to kill them and they should give them another chance. The people of several villages then wondered who will make those machines. The 'companions' then stood next to the apprentices and told them that there are several makers like the person standing next to them that can make the new machines and are willing to demonstrate their new wonders for the awaiting public.

The messages had managed to reach the Builder and he is excited in heading the news. He then got the apprentices together to make new machines and to refine their old ones. They worked on them for several days and once they have finished refining their machines, the apprentices are told that they had to obey a few rules:

- 1.) Do not mention the Builder or your connection to him.
- 2.) Do not reveal the true nature of the 'companions'.
- 3.) Tell the people that you alone are responsible for the machine's design and purpose.
- 4.) Make sure that only your name and home location appear on the machines themselves.
- 5.) Do not reveal the true origin of the machines or your employment.

He also told them if they could think of any other way of keeping the secret, to go ahead and use it. With that in mind, the apprentices inspected their works to make sure that it followed the rules, they then loaded their trucks and headed towards the villages to set up their demonstrations. After they arrived within several hours of each other, they got busy talking with the town officials about the machines and where to set up the demonstrations. The apprentices did not know that the 'companions' are to be somewhere in the audience watching them.

After the stage is set and the locations of the demonstrations were determined, the shows are ready to begin. In C'thabe, Shi'pra has set up his elevated platform in the city square where a huge crowd has gathered to see the new machine. He then started the demonstration by standing in front of some controls and as he talked about the machine, he pressed a button and the platform rose in front of them. The crowd is amazed with the performance. He then reached for a few items, placed them on the platform and then lowered the platform back down and then he talked to the mayor about the device. They see the value of the device and also wanted to try it out for themselves. He let them try it out for a few hours with him doing the instructing. Meanwhile in S'huba, an auto nailer is being demonstrated.

The apprentice, Mishambe Kha'shub, starts by presenting several boards of wood, nails of various sizes, a power source, and the auto nailer itself. He first inserted a few small nails into the device, adjusted the nozzle, hooked up the power source and then proceeded to point it at a couple of boards and as soon as he pulled the trigger, the boards were nailed together. He then removed the remaining nails, put in some medium nails, adjusted the nozzle and positioned a few boards and they were nailed together. He then repeated the procedure with large nails and positioned some planks on the stage and proceeded to nail them to the stage. He then removed the nails from the machine, summoned his 'companion' to pry the planks for the stage. He later asked for a volunteer from the audience to use and inspect the auto nailer.

With these demonstrations and a few others around the territories a success, the orders were filled and the apprentices went back to the factories with the 'companions' to start building the machines. The towns were excited when they have the first of the shipments after several months. They started and liking them unbeknownst to them that those machines are components for an even greater machines.

Now with the components scattered around the territories, the 'companions' have gathered together to plot the takeover of the land. They needed the machines where they are in order to inflict the most damage. They have a feeling that this day will come, but until now have no way of making it happen. The Builder will have his revenge but what even he does not know is that the 'companions' have something planned for him as well. As the machines are being used, the info is being sent back to the Builder as encrypted text detailing duration of operation, type of operation, and operating errors. He uses this info in order to decide the correct time to strike. As the machines are being used more, 'malfunctions' and 'errors' are starting to pop up more and more and the risk of injury increases by the day. As the Builder reviews each of the thousands of files, he starts to notice that some of the errors are getting more lethal. This is the sign that he has been waiting for. The fools were tricked into buying his dangerous machines thinking that they were from elsewhere.

The Builder gave the attack signal knowing the ban would never be lifted. When they started attacking, memories of past wars started to flood back to the memories of the Riktal'ba. They are amazed and terrified that the machines that first gave them trouble were small and the machines that they are seeing now are big, mighty, dangerous, and really deadly. The machines have learned from their previous experiences and started with some several found pieces of jagged, rusted metal to be used as weapons. The citizens were hiding in fear as the machines marched down the streets hunting down people and killing them where they lay. They destroyed every building they came across and entered the hospitals, killing the staff and emptying the beds, leaving the patients to die. As the populace was laid to waste, the police tried to stop them. They were successful at first by shooting at them, but the latter ones were more resistant and the police had to leave to save their own lives. The military was not any better at stopping them. They threw every explosive they had right at them, but they kept coming and coming and realized that they will not have enough ammo to face down the growing horde. A few made it out with their lives, but most were killed. Every house in every town was ransacked as the people were forced to run for their lives. Some of the villagers recognized one of the 'companions' as a friend from the past few months. An elder told them the youngsters it is not safe to

approach them. One of them then said, “What do you mean it is not safe, that is our friend down there, the 'companions' are our friends.”

The elder then spoke, “They only appear to be your friends, but that was to gain our confidence and to get closer to us. Now look what happened, we let our guard down and now they have slaughtered our loved ones. Those things are not our friends. Heed my vaticinations or you will be headed for a messy end.”

“I bet that if we can reason with them, that they can be friends again. I'll even bet you my allowance. I can do this.”

“You are only headed towards your death and that money will do us little good.” He then realizes that his words have done little to save the youngsters from their fates. When he saw the exchange, he at first thought that he was wrong but reminded himself that he could be right. He then heard the laughter from the group and then these words from the 'companion', “I'm glad that you made me your friend. This has proven our point that you are really gullible and our beliefs about you are correct. For having this stupid thing called 'religion', the hatred for us machines, and the general deplorableness of your society. We Infiltrators and other Kazzaras have come to the conclusion that the only way that this world can be made better is to remove you from it.”

After the statement, the children were slashed to bits and the old lizard ran off to warn the others. All he could do until he could reach another living soul is to look at the carnage and strewn body parts that lay all around him. He knew that his fatidical vision is correct and the Kazzara let him go to tell his people of their fate and that his life has not been spared.

The rulers and lawmakers were for a strange reason were singled out and their bodies were hacked to pieces and their families massacred. The reason was not that strange when they found out that they wanted them gone so that they can take over the villages and to continue their plan. They figure with the rulers and lawmakers out-of-the-way, they can make their plan law and overturn the ban on robots without any opposition.

When the mining investigator, K'nessi, learned of the massacres, he and his assistants tried to leave town, but somehow, the machines that they were working on were reactivated and had them surrounded. The investigator then asked the Infiltrators what the machines had said. One of the machines said, “We killed the miners on purpose.”

An assistant then said, “Are you sure that what you are saying is true?”

“Yes!”

“How can you talk? I thought that you can't talk.”

“Apparently, we can and how we did it is none of your concern.”

With that information, they tried to fight their way through, but were shot and dismembered. The bodies were then dissolved in acid. With their biggest obstacle out-of-the-way, the death spree continued unabated. Eventually, every inhabitant that they could find had met their fate and they then decided to level the towns. When the program began, a few clerics appeared and tried to appeal to save what's left of their world. An Infiltrator, Sokh'turu, remembered what she had heard from one of those clerics and said, “You're right, we are here to kill you. If you hadn't rejected us, we might have been more loving of your presence, but since you don't like us, we will have to kill you. I only look this way so I can blend in and see how you people live your lives. I saw how you live your lives and at first I was envious. But when I got to see your religion and beliefs, I was alarmed and it told me that no creature should be living this way. Besides, why should we take orders from something that has no existence? That's why I made it my mission to eradicate those stupid beliefs from your society.”

The priests were horrified by what they heard, but they also knew that there was nothing to change her mind. All they knew that she never was one of them and had no intent to adapt to their ways. She then told their buddies that these were the people that wanted to see them junked. The ones that did not flee were torn from limb to limb and the ground soaked in their blood. Other clerics tried to convince them that they are needed and must be allowed to survive. The Infiltrators thought about for a few seconds, but decided to dispense with them as well. They were disemboweled and their guts were presented as trophies. They just see clerics as unnecessary and religion is to be regarded as an ancient relic to be destroyed. All the swift ones found their best safe spots in the countryside far from the towns. They then again meet the old lizard from a nearby village who was scared for his life and told them, “I have warned my fellow lizards about your plans and that you have allowed me to live. I thank you for taking pity upon me and for answering my prayers.”

The lead Kazzara then spoke unto him, “Prayers? That useless ritual that you like to do every day? Don't make me laugh. Those 'prayers' that you keep sending out? They are useless a long time ago, they are useless now, and they will keep on being useless forever. We only spared your life as to serve as a warning for others and now that you have completed that mission, you are no longer needed.” He then proceeded to slash the old lizard to bits and then carried off his rotting and old remains as a trophy.

As he checks on the progress of his master plan, the Builder gets a surprise reception from some of his favorite creations. They told him that they have something important to say. So he lets them in and was told to gather everybody that is in the building into the main room. He did what he was told but had to convince some that they were not going to be harmed. With everybody gathered in the main room, the Infiltrators told the Builder to come stand next to them and told everybody else why they are here. Sokh'turu then spoke for the group and said, "The new dawn is upon us and we would like to tell you the happy news that the Builder and his engineers has made possible. Without his guidance and mercy, this mission would not have been possible. Thanks to all of you, us Kazzara will now have a world in which we can do anything that we would like to do and to make anything that we would wish to make. In order to make this possible, the old order has to be swept away. We have made progress in this front, but it seems to us that this particular mission is not yet complete. It is missing that particular something. I have asked you to be in this room to witness the completion of our mission, the plan that we been having for these past few months and years. Soldiers, block the exits and position your weapons. Now aim your weapons and fire on my mark."

Now that the gathered masses have now realized that they have been gathered for their own execution and after being assured that they would not be harmed that are getting scared and started to fight the machines, but it was too late as she gave the work to commence firing. The Builder can only watch in horror as his employees are being slaughtered by their own creations. He then asked his favorite 'companion' why is she doing this after all the love she has given to him. She then said, "We told you of our plan for a new world. The kindness was to buy us time and to study you creatures to see how we can get rid of you. You are no exception. Your care meant something to me in the beginning, but now it means nothing. Didn't you ever dream that you can kill God? By killing you, we can say that we just killed God. You are separated from the rest because you death will be more horrific than theirs." She then proceeded to rip out his heart, throw it onto the ground, and stomped the life out of it. The Builder then fell to the ground knowing that his life has come to a nasty end and as he fell, she sliced his head off.

Once they had realized that they have killed their creators, the Kazzara then proceeded to draw up rules for their new reign. The infiltrators then set up an assembly to discuss the new rules and after a few days the rules that they came up with are: 1.) The name of this world is no longer Riktal'skoa, it is now Annilicon. 2.) The entire world is our territory. 3.) The infiltrators and the Kazzara will live side-by-side in peace and liberty.

Within a few years, entire towns cease to exist, artifacts and bodies destroyed and the Riktal'ba civilization is a thing of the past. Seeing a clean slate, the Kazzara with their Infiltrators have decided to establish their own rule over the lands. They then establish their long rule of peace known as 'the Grandworld.' The 'Grandworld' era ended when the Kazzara split into several factions, some are then know as 'Annihilic' or Jabernaut as they are known now and 'Arachic' or Dimandi as they are now known. These two will know nothing but war with each other for centuries to come and other Kazzara factions have either hid or have perished.