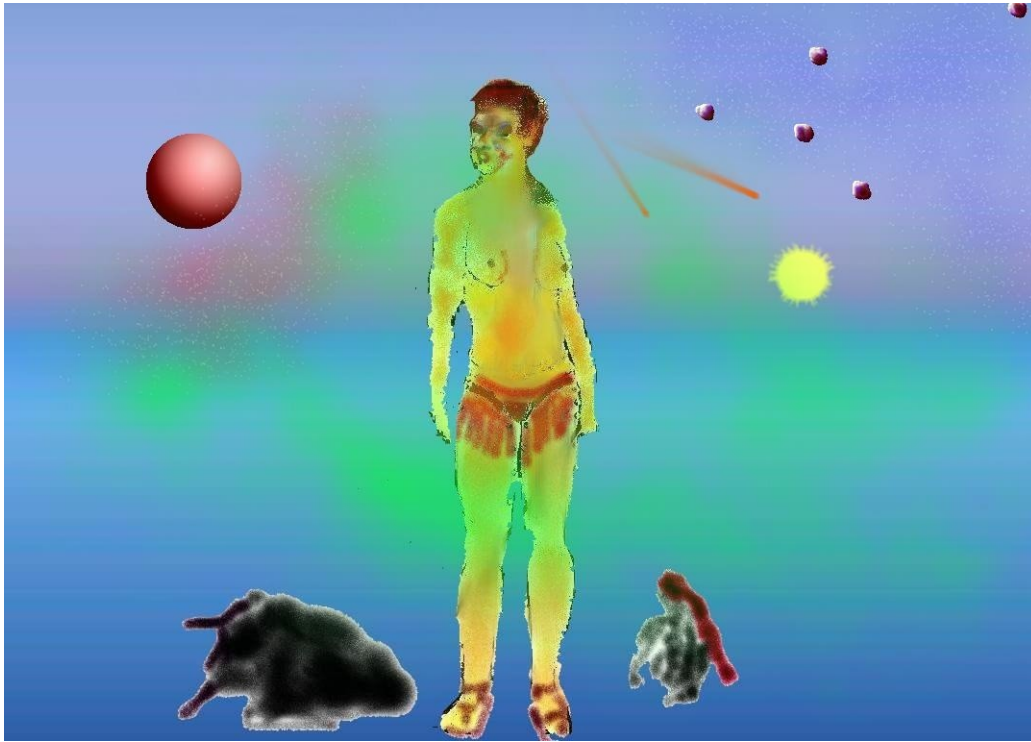


## The Man

## Augustus Complains

*Illustration 31: General Wilhelmina*

“I am Augustus and where are my admirals? Where Po Wei and the traders? All gone, dead or run away. Now I am alone and The Man approaches with evil intent to rid me of life.

Is there no one to help me?”

“I will help you,” and Augustus turned and looked at a young woman whose stare was stern and unflinching.

“I am sure I know you,” Augustus replied and the young one was hurt; she was one of the Praetorian Guard so always close to the emperor who now failed to recognise her, such her importance in his life.

“I will lead your armies against The Man and be victorious,” she said now suffering mixed feelings of ridding the throne of a debauched emperor who showed no gratitude to her for years of service.

“You, you expect me to make you my general?” Augustus on the point of laughing and the young one remained calm when another might have run a sword into Augustus.

But none of the other Praetorian Guard laughed for they knew the young woman’s reputation and what generals present looked the young one over and were affronted by her cheek.

“What is your name, Attila the Hun?” Augustus joked and his courtiers laughed except for his guard for they were trained to be sterner stuff.

“Sergeant Will, Wilhelmina Dod,” the woman’s reply and Augustus stopped his theatrics for it dawned upon him what sex the soldier was? And twirling suddenly Augustus took off the soldier’s helmet and was confronted with a handsome face, but the ginger hair was cut short but the face was still feminine, the soldier was a boy, surely a member of some religious church castrati choir so the voice would never break; and the hymns sung so angelically, for Augustus borrowed these choirs when

he walked up the processional way to his throne so all would believe he was divinely appointed.

And Augustus now with a new toy to fascinate him undid the warrior's cape so he could notice better the chest armour designed for a?

"By the gods you are?" Augustus as he noted the armour mould for bosom "unless you are of the third kind," he meaning being of one sex but in the body of another.

"I am Sergeant Will of the 1<sup>st</sup> Martian Cohort assigned to protect my emperor," Sergeant Will coughed out and Augustus marvelled, indeed the voice was husky, but because its owner voiced it to be so; yes Will was a Wilhelmina and to prove it Augustus undid the trooper's body armour so it fell to Will's feet and she flinched not.

"My I never noticed," Augustus appreciating the girl standing at attention in front of him in short kilt and white vest with a strange bird motif on it. It was the motif of the cohort but Augustus never noticed such details of the men and women he asked to die for him, well that is what they were paid to do wasn't it?

"And how will you save my throne from the beast that approaches?"

"Train your men like praetorians and replace your incompetent generals with real generals," Will looking at a spot above her emperor's head.

Now Augustus knew what she meant, his privates were soft and generals those who had bought appointment and he saw greatness in her and was reminded of Boudicca the warrior queen and of Amazon female archers who cut off a bosom so the bow string would not be interfered with as they let loose an arrow at a Greek mercenary hopolite.

“Pick up your armour General Wilhelmina,” Augustus on a whim for he was thinking bad thoughts and some generals present began to draw their weapons to kill the upstart soldier but the praetorian guard present were quicker for they trained hard as soldiers.

“Armies of such?” Augustus dreamily inspecting the guard and he liked what he saw and wondered why he never noticed any of the handsome men and women that made them up?

Augustus was absolute and power had ruined him, did not those Emperors of Rome brought up at court make bad rulers and those emperors taken from the ranks make just rulers?

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Character update. From the diary of Wilhelmina, General of the Empire.

“I was born a girl and wanted to travel space I think to get away from the debauchery about me, but even as a stewardess on a liner I was expect to have no morals.

What could I do so men didn’t give me a wink and expect me to jump into bed with them?

I would become a soldier, not one of Augustus’s regulars who barrack antics were mimics of their emperor, but a real soldier.

I joined the Praetorian Guard and earned respect for my capabilities not because I was handsome and female, but because I led men into battle and brought them home

alive. I will train an army for the empire it has not seen the likes of till The Man appeared. Like me they will take an oath of loyalty to the emperor who I hope changes and acts for once in his life like an emperor.

Some call me 'witch' but I am not. I admit in my diary that I hear voices from unseen faces but respect the unseen power that has made me. It is this naivety that is my weakness for like my fellow citizens I see body functions as natural but there are limits, and what I see about me shames me and has made me withdraw from the joys of living."