The Stadium

By

J. Howard Shannon

It was Sunday, the sky a bright, high-altitude blue, and he had Jaeger out for their afternoon walk. He adjusted the T-collar on the old Dutch Shepard who had been his boon companion for eight years. “How’s that, boy?” he asked. He heard the word ‘”better” come from his aural implant as Jaeger looked up at him and pulled his gums back in a panting smile. They had been through hell together; the kind of hell man makes. Civil war - three hard years of it. When he joined he never thought he’d fight on his own soil. Yet the oath he took was clear – *all* enemies foreign *and domestic*…. “This we’ll defend,” he thought. It had happened and now it was over. Yes, he and Jaeger had more than earned their rest, their peaceful afternoon walks under sunny blue skies.

He heard the sound of a loudspeaker retching feedback, a muffled voice underneath the squeal. Off to the left, a few blocks down, the curve of the stadium rose with the single black flag at the top of its pole near the entrance. “That’s right, it is Sunday,” he thought. Some chanting could be heard and then it stopped as the unintelligible, amplified voice came rolling back toward him. It had asked a question the tone rising at the end of the phrase, and the crowd within the stadium gave a full-throated response.

He continued to walk, slowly and with a slight limp, the reminder of a battle best left in the past. Jaeger stayed at his side, keeping the languid pace, tongue out from the heat. The noise from the stadium receded into the distance. As they neared their home he heard the first gunshot and then the cheering. “Good,” came through the implant and Jaeger looked back over his shoulder than up at the man who nodded and then looked to the blue, blue sky above. True blue, he thought. Now the gunshots and cheers followed in waves…He opened the door and let Jaeger in first and then followed, closing the door behind them.