

The only reliable mobile home made its way across the landscape with measured steps.

Eight stories tall, the hermit geist that had filled the walls and cracks of the apartment building maneuvered across the Field Of Steel And Glass.

Sometimes, the residents of the apartment would wait inside until their home passed through a particularly dangerous region. Sometimes they wouldn't have a choice, issues would be forced by the environment, or the locals.

The Officer hated those times. She was not created to be idle. She was built to act, to serve, and to war. Staying inside for safety wasn't in her genetics.

The Reporter thought this was foolish. Letting how or where you were born influence you that much was just giving up your freedom. He and the Tourist had held great debates about this, over cups of dark liquid.

The Courier thought this was foolish, because there were much better reasons to venture out. Especially in a place like this.

The geist took a gentle step, trying to be as careful as possible. A motion dainty and thunderous marked the land as its clawed metal limb shattered through the outer layer of glass, leaving a crater revealing smoking steel bones.

It would pause, now, to consider its next step carefully. In that time of slow thought, the travelers moved.

The Officer dropped to the ground first, ignoring the rope ladder the Courier and Refugee were unfolding. She didn't need it to get down, though it would be useful for returning. She struck the ground flat on, feet stable, not even leaving a mark and certainly not touching the razor edges that appeared at every intersection of the glass panes.

The Courier came last, letting the Refugee take his time climbing down. The boy was eager, and hopeful, and immediately stumbled and put a two inch gash in the lizard leather armor he was wearing.

The three of them moved toward the confluence point the Gardner had seen from the roof. They would have an hour, at most, before the next step. So they hurried.

The ground tried at every step to kill them. Lines of edges were hidden in the sparkling silver and white of polished glass, swords of terrain searching for throats.

From a high window in the apartment, the Reporter watched them through an inherited tool. He wanted to offer a small prayer, but had none left. They needed to find a shrine to restock. He made a note, and wished the Guide were still here.

Worse than the glass was the steel. Smoking black bones of metal, often not exposed, but when it was, it twisted the steps around it. Drawing them closer. In places, the smoke leaked out of cracks in the glass. In others, the steel jutted up like cursed spears.

The Mechanic assumed the team was doing well. If the three weren't, they would have noticed. The geist's mechanical body reacted in small ways when a traveler died, whether it knew it or not. The old building cared for them in its own way. The skilled old half- appreciated the acknowledgment.

Worse than the glass, worse than the steel, was the quartzes. They didn't have time to name them properly, and someone else had already labeled them perhaps long ago. The thin creatures of needles and motion set upon the trio, their arrival heralded only by a shift in the black smoke, and tiny squeaks of glass tapping on glass.

The Officer loved the moments. She became a fluid dervish of blade and gun, rifle flashing between the two as she cut down and smashed and laughed.

The Courier was more professional. It struck when it could, and cowered when it could not, and it was mostly the latter. Though its metal flesh was tough, the scratches would take a long time to buffer out, and it was hard to find lovers with skin that wasn't smooth.

The Refugee was terrified to be set upon by something unseen. The first fight as a traveler, he did not want to disappoint, though, and so he stuck with his stolen weapon. His fight was one of slips and struggle, and he ended up leaving splashes of purple blood across the edges of the ground he touched.

When the last quartzes lunged from ambush toward the Officer, her gun clicked empty, too late to shift. But the Refugee threw her his saved bullets, she took them in a fluid instant, dispatched the last foe.

The Courier dusted itself off like nothing had occurred. The Officer offered the Refugee a hand up, and clasped the boy by the arm. There was a debt there, and a pride too. He was a bloodied traveler now in truth.

The apartment shifted slightly, as the geist tested for its next step. On the roof, the Gardener spilled precious water from her can, and swore through sharpened teeth. She wondered if she should pick enough food for all of them, tonight, or if the three wouldn't make it back.

Worse than the glass, and the steel, and the quartzes, was the confluence.

The Courier, the Officer, and the Refugee stood at the lip of a crater and looked down to where a poor fool had died. A spear of black steel piercing the heart of a still-standing body, one arm reaching out toward the faceted sun of this place.

Its flesh had long since withered away, but some of it was preserved by the smoke filling what was left of its veins. The old corpse was dead, perhaps, but there would be no checking it for secrets like this. Anything they found there would be tainted.

The Courier found the deceased's satchel, hidden in a normal messenger spot nearby, and pulled it onto its shoulder.

In the distance, the shattering rush of breaking glass reached their senses. They hurried back, following their own trail, to the apartment building before it stepped away.

When they returned, they had to sprint to catch the rope ladder. The Reporter yelled encouragement from his window as they did so, the Courier and Officer easily making it.

The Refugee converted his first traveler's victory, and caught them shortly afterward. All of them hanging on for dear life as the hermit geist picked up speed in its step, and moved a half mile in ten seconds.

Later, they would search the contents of the dead messenger's satchel. A few bullets, one dusty victory, some letters that were ritually handed to the Librarian. And the true prize; a tool, of unknown provenance.

The bone and wood leg of the apartment building came down with much more gentle force, merely leaving a crushed spiderweb of cracks this time and not shattering several meters of glass.

The hermit geist felt smug as it lined up its next step, and prepared to carry them onward.

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To Whom It May Concern;

The waste beckons me, and I will not deny it this grim prize.

I have spent my life in service of a foul creature. I have spent my death in service of a worse ideal. I have, it seems, done little more than spend, without ever taking care to balance the scales.

What was the point of it all?

We are never to ask that. Not in voice or in letters or in any other fashion. We are never to consider the future, only the moment. Those that disobey are killed, those that are already dead they find worse ways to reprimand.

This kingdom is going to end. I have seen to it. The lines between here and the abyss are weakened. I have let them in. As I was ordered, as I secretly desired.

I don't know what comes next.

I feel, for the first time, grief. A deep regret, a longing that things could have been better. That I could have done this differently, if given the chance.

But I was given the chance, over and over, and still I have ended up here.

My time is over. There is a place that borders here that I will set out for at second sunset, when the end sweeps over this kingdom. I hope some others learn from this, and make it out. I hope those who do not learn are buried and forgotten.

I hope that when I am ended, it is as painful as I deserve.

Someone will find this letter. That is the destiny of all such things. With it they will find a device that I have forgotten the use of, but I hope you will think kindly of me when you use it.

I selfishly wish to be remembered for something other than my actions.

Goodbye.

Traveler's Word,  
Warlock