

The old reliable mobile home made its way across the landscape with eager steps.

Eight stories tall, the hermit geist that had stolen the old world apartment building walked through the Blue Dunes.

The residents of the apartments, those that yet lived, were travelers. Nothing bound them, nothing defined them, except their endless trek across the reshaped landscape. The ones that lasted tended to be very dangerous. The ones that didn't tended to be wise, or dead.

A foot gently touched down, the geist taking a small step, carefully trying to not throw the dull blue sand and gravel that defined the ground here into the air.

The Gardener huffed out a hissing breath as she dragged several hundred pounds of rope ladder across the cracked stone floor of the building's lobby, toward the seemingly invincible double glass doors. She had an appointment to make.

The Officer watched her, and did not offer to help. The Officer didn't like getting her hands dirty with anything that wasn't bullet residue. But she was still here, leaning against the wall with her arms folded, manifold uniform sitting snug on her broad shoulders.

The building shifted slightly. Steps weren't so bad down here nearer the ground, the Gardener thought, as the floor tilted marginally and the geist took another gentle step.

Below, on the ground, the Reporter and the Refugee raced along the sands. Cold wind pushed against exposed skin like the fingers of tiny shades, tiny plumes of the dustier parts of the dunes kicked up as their steeds flung themselves forward with the joy of movement.

They rode upon hand-crafted tents, made of pieces of the hide of a mile long waterdweller, woven with the simple durable rope fiber that grew in some of the more lush places in this region. Animate by the nature of the baby hermit geists within, the two of them were partaking in a hunt alongside the camp of fellow travelers they had met.

The apartment shifted, as the massive geist shuffled a small amount, keeping the mobile camp below in shadow. Its steps still carved trenches in the dunes, leaving spots where the rain that night would pool in glowing rivers before seeping deeper underground.

The Reporter laughed as he held tight to the back of his ride. The cold, the rattle against his bones, the terrifyingly personal speed, all of it should have hurt. But it didn't. He was grinning wildly as they tore across the sands.

The camp of travelers would never see as many places as their building would. They took days or weeks to navigate some of the zones. But everything was sharper down here. Closer. More intimate. Even the danger. Especially the danger.

The Refugee was no stranger to this kind of close danger, and didn't much care for it, but he held to his role admirably as they hunted down something with enough meat and salt to provision both groups for a week or more.

Another step, the shadow of the building warming them as it cast off the cold light of the orbital body overhead. It was standing above the grounded camp, a cluster of tents and skiffs following after the hunters.

Another step, this one a much longer reach of a leg, slammed into the side of a dune, blue sand and gravel cascading away as the geist flinched away from an exposed spire of jagged blue salt. A natural treasure the travelers would have little time to explore.

In the lobby, the Gardener helped the Apprentice crest over the lip of the building, pulling the slim half-up off the rope ladder. Skin and scales met in a grasp of friendship, the two smiling at each other as they sized up their friend and trade foe.

The Apprentice's skin flickered in the light of the lobby, dark chestnut like an ancient coffee with a swirl of cream freshly poured in. She was here to make an offer on the late Warlock's tool. The Gardener took her to the roof, and the two began to test each other's defenses.

The Officer followed, dutiful and bored. She had tried to get the Mechanic or the Courier interested in a hunt of their own, but both the others were interested only in rest, the Courier still recovering from a wound taken two days ago.

Another step. The geist of the apartment could not keep a slow pace forever. Their business would need to be quick.

The Gardener showed the tool. The Apprentice made appreciative noises, but committed to nothing. They got the pleasantries out of the way early, and moved to the social strikes. An offer, brazenly low. A counter, equally overdone. They smiled like wolves that never went extinct, and began to play.

They paused only briefly, to show silence when the Librarian passed by.

Step. Step. Sand and rock shift, grinding against each other cold and slightly damp. Seeping into joints and under clothing. The land rejecting the idea of ever being clean of its infectious rock

Below, a hunt finished. A body was processed, salt and meat taken in expert cuts and divided up. A few coins and one bullet as well; the bullet went to the Refugee, to replace what he had spent. The Officer watched from over the edge of the roof and wondered why she wasn't there.

Above, a trade concluded. A tool went to the travelers below, and a flow of wealth to the travelers above. Twenty six bullets, two ailments, two secrets. The rest of the value in coin.

The Gardener hadn't been able to get any more out of them, but it was a good deal for both sides. Both parties took a victory from it.

The Apprentice returned to their camp before the next step. The Refugee returned to the apartment. They had already hauled up the rope ladder when the travelers noticed someone was missing.

The Reporter stayed below. The Refugee had brought his last letter for the Librarian. He had felt happy there, wanted to try being a little closer to the cataclysm for a change. He said he'd meet them in the next settlement, if he changed his mind. And he probably would.

Their hermit geist stepped away, tracking moonward toward a new place that had less itchy sand. The camp below mobilized away at a right angle, heading to the shadow of some dunes to camp for the long nights, and prepare to strike out again. The Reporter waved to anyone watching as they went their separate ways.

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To Whom It May Concern;

It occurs to me as I write this that I may be the one who has added the most letters to our Record. Your Record now, I presume, for if you are reading this, then I have decided to take my leave.

Or perhaps I chose not to. Perhaps I will keep this on my person, a reminder of my failure to act to free myself once more, and it will only be once I am dead from violence or illness or weather that you find it and think less of me.

I think it may be that I am writing this precisely so I will shame myself into acting. I cannot imagine my spirit moving on if I knew that someone would find this letter, and judge me for my indecision.

It may be strange to you, to hear me say that. To know I believe in the spirit. In something beyond myself. But is that not, truly, what every Reporter believes? That there is something more than just us out there, that we will eventually be held to?

I think every traveler that believes has their own name for it. I have only ever met one other Reporter, though, in an awkward exchange of groping hands and soft words in a silk bar, and both of us simply called it the Truth.

Down here, on the ground, feet actually touching the sands of this zone, I find that I feel myself closer to that Truth. Foolish, perhaps. But I cannot explain or reason away what I truly *feel*. I am only who I am. And I would be more a fool to ignore my heart to simply play it safe.

I played it safe for so many years, before our home took me in and took me away. And now, I must gamble once more on a new path.

Mayhaps I do not like it much! If so, worry not friends and Officer. I shall see you again one or two settlements from now. You do know how paths tend to cross. It is my hope you will keep a place for me.

I've left the Tourist's old tool in my room. It was not mine to take, after all. But please do not throw out my good shirts until at least you know I am dead, or have decided to experiment with the life of a Pale Revelation.

Whether I have decided to go, or decided to stay, if you are reading this, know that I am fond of you all. Yes, even you, you militarist lout. I will see you again one day; be vibrant in your travels, please.

I find my words flowing wild now. My hands itch to chronicle, my mind races to explain. I shall end my letter here, before I go too far afield with describing the nature of touching the sand. Oh, the things I could say just about this one small patch of cold sand!

You will be spared my ramblings, for now. Yes, I think I shall show compassion for my friends.

Traveler's Word,  
Reporter