

Ghostkeepers

You felt it as much as you heard it, that thud at the door, an order disguised as a request.

While I don't blame security for their departure at the rumored news of *their* coming, they rendered useless the systems installed to safeguard our 'assets'.

What 'assets' were we protecting? People, I suppose. But people in a different way. You see, we are the WOS, the Warehouse of Souls. And I am the Ghostkeeper, the lone Ghostkeeper, on staff.

All alone, with all these souls to keep.

Such descriptions may misrepresent my responsibilities. I'm no saint, no paladin, no jewel in the crown of virtue. I'm an employee, an employee paid to maintain cyber souls that are downloaded from the brains of rich folks facing imminent demise. If circumstances were different, I might be knocking on the door rather than answering it.

Yet while pillaging is more exciting than cyber soul administration, the pay is less. High demand. Disappearing competition. Together these two things make Ghostkeeping (their derogative term for my job function) a highly profitable enterprise- assuming you don't get the wrong visitors.

Another knock.

I could follow suit with the security staff. Rather than answer the door, I could run. In the dull hours of this job (and there are many) you think about running a lot. It might be all you think about. But you also know the facts. They are printed on the front page of every newspaper.

They find you. They always find you. Why, you ask? Because those at the door hate one thing more than technology...

Cowards.

Thus, in the snow, against descendants of cold, against those who prefer forest canopies to rafters and roofs, you are but a beached whale with the tide going out. They will find you.

My mind made up, I walked down the pallid bureaucratic hallway to let them in. Mounted above every piece of prefab furniture along the way were bland still life paintings. The walls. The Floor. Glossy sheens, mirror-like. Your reflection everywhere. Everything so clean. So white. So sanitized. An embalming of interior design. My stomach churned. The discomfort pleased me. A good vomit might make the place more hospitable.

I punched in the code. The first set of automatic doors into the lobby slid open. The next set of automatic doors leading outside did the same. Even before the wind hit my hands, its howls hurt my ears. Why were its cries so deafening? Perhaps it felt inclined to properly introduce those it ushered in. Entering first was the snow, a thick snow that moistened when it hit the warmth of the vestibule. Entering next was Virgil "Hammerstone" Dukayne.

Their leader was not a large man. Not small either. Though he did look small compared to the hundred followers standing behind him draped in animal furs, holding intimidation in the form of torches and hammers in either hand. each hand.

“This hammer, you see this hammer?” Dukayne growled. Each invasion of a living graveyard began with this benediction: “3 million years, that’s how long it’s been around. It takes something like that to be worthy of destroying a living graveyard. What began with bone, with stone, with leather, and string...”

“Ends with bone, stone, leather and string,” his flock responded back.

Dukayne was nicknamed Hammerstone because the hammerstone was the *first* hammer. And Dukayne was the *first*...whatever he was...he was a lot of things to a lot of different people.

I looked at Gavel, the name given to Hammerstone’s infamous hammer that always hung from his belt. Then I looked at all the other homemade hammers clenched in the hands of his followers. Against black night and white snow, they reflected torchlight like they themselves were aflame.

The hammers came in many shapes, styles, forms. Some, like Gavel, were paleolithic, little more than strings tied to rocks. Some were bronze, made using Bronze Age methods. Others were iron, made using Iron Age methods. The more reformed amongst Hammerstone’s lot carried steel, but only if they had the smithing skill to build the proper homemade blast furnace to produce the alloy. Regardless of their individual level of orthodoxy, which often translated to their hammer of choice, mass industrialization was their common enemy. Since then, man no longer conformed with nature. Since then, man had gone too far.

Disdain for the modern world did not initially lead to action. For decades, centuries even, they tolerated the resentments of modern life. And then came the tipping point, the creation of the Warehouse of Souls. Summoning the aid of flame and mallet, siblings of the stone age, they mobilized, making it their mission to conform this ultimate non-conformity.

Apparently our warehouse was next up on the list.

They could have made quick work of the data center. But that wasn’t the point. With the machines, it was personal, it was intimate. In such circumstances, quick action- a bulldozing, a detonation- wouldn’t suffice. They wanted a bloodbath of wires and screws and nuts and metal, all conducted by hand and hammer.

“Ghostkeeper!” Dukayne called out to me. “What say ye?”

Custom demanded that the Ghostkeeper witness the destruction first-hand. Judgment on our fate came after this more important deed was done.

“Ghostkeeper!” Hammerstone yelled as he threw Gavel into a giant computer screen, creating stress cracks in the glass from top to bottom, side to side. “I repeat. What say ye?”

I extended my arm. "Hand me a hammer."

Dukayne smiled. With a quick yank he dislodged Gavel from the monitor. "You know as well as I do that you must make your own."