

The Chronicle of the Gatekeepers

A call to action

By Ryan Saltz



The Lady Director was assisted from her transport by her colleagues. Her tunic flowed long in the wind like ancient scrolls of knowledge unraveling. Her learned demeanor was unreadable by most—the wisdom she possessed had been passed down from overseer to overseer, generation through generation.

Although this is a work of fiction, the following story has pertinent themes for today's librarians. It is in no way meant to point fingers at any one job, position, or person, but rather to bring to our collective attention what we as a profession could be doing better together.

However, on this day of the Annual Assembly, the Assistant Director, her strategist and likely successor, did notice a slight concern in her gaze.

"Is there something bothering you, Lady Director?"

"The winds feel as if a change is coming," she replied with an even tone.

"Of course Lady Director, it is time for the season to peak and begin cooling. Then all of the new students will gather in our districts to begin their learning."

The Lady Director looked into the eyes of the Assistant Director, knowing he had not understood her deeper meaning; she simply nodded an affirmative.

The Assistant Director helped the learned leader to the Great Hall of the Assembly while thinking to himself that the Lady Director was aging. She would soon be ready to step down, and it would finally be his time to lead the Gatekeepers in the way of consolidation and minimization. Only a few will have control of the Teachings, thereby increasing their value. A grin spread across his face as he thought of his potential financial gain. People need knowledge, and they would pay him for it.

The Great Hall had been the home of the Annual Assembly of the Gatekeepers for hundreds of years. There they gathered and collaborated on issues such as leadership, advocacy, scholarship, and various ways to instruct the students in the Teachings. Younger Gatekeepers learned from their more experienced colleagues. During workshops and presentations, knowledge was passed by voice to be recorded on paper.

The Executive Council made sure that every practice area and special interest was equally represented so that everyone had an opportunity to participate in the knowledge exchange. In addition to the Lady Director and the Assistant Director, the Executive Council consisted of the Collector, responsible for seeking out new printed knowledge and ensuring that it was handled appropriately; the Descriptor, who informed the Gatekeepers of what the Collector has acquired and saw to it that it could be found in numerous ways; and, finally, the Head Referenseer, who oversaw the Corps of Referenseers. The members of the Executive Council were the most skilled in their practice areas and looked up to by all Gatekeepers with aspirations of one day becoming a Council member.

The Corps of Referenseers were the Gatekeepers charged primarily with the organization and guidance of students as they pass through their districts and academies. A Referenseer possessed

the gift of visualizing the path to any question's answer. They knew how to lead the students through the answer path, expanding their knowledge-finding abilities. After three years, the Gatekeepers released the students into the world with hopes that they had given them the necessary abilities to explore the paths of knowledge on their own.

After a full day of workshops and presentations at the Annual Assembly, the Gatekeepers dispersed into smaller groups to explore special interests. Over the past couple of years, some noticed

seat at the podium to quiet the arguing and speculation. He looked at the other members of the Executive Council and then to the Lady Director as a signal for her to address and guide them in this crisis.

In her calm, yet commanding voice, she asked the Assembly of Gatekeepers, "Why are you only starting to care now when it may be too late?" The assembly was silent and the Assistant Director tilted his head with curiosity. It seemed the Lady Director was more aware of what was happening with the young

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that the younger Gatekeepers were not participating in the special interest groups or the Annual Assembly as much as in the past. Little was said on the matter as they assumed there were just fewer younger Gatekeepers.

This year, however, there was some unrest over the issue. Referenseers, Collectors, and Describers all noticed that their younger protégés were disappearing in the evenings. As they vanished, a phenomenon began to appear in the form of series of ones and zeros flying through the air. The strings of ones and zeroes continued to increase, causing panic to run rampant among the Gatekeepers. Rumors spread of an underground group threatening to disrupt the ways of the Gatekeepers by creating the phenomenon and stealing away the younger Gatekeepers.

As the sun began to break the horizon, the ones and zeroes would gradually diminish, and fewer of the younger Gatekeepers would reappear at the day's beginning.

Each year on the third day of the Assembly, the Executive Council and all of the Gatekeepers gathered in the Great Hall to discuss the state of affairs. On this day, the young Gatekeepers were still missing, and a great commotion arose. Cries to the Executive Council and the Lady Director to take action came from all ranks.

"Lady Director, we must find them."

"The ways of the Teachings must continue."

"What new evil is this that draws the young ones away?"

The Assistant Director rose from his

Gatekeepers than the others and had neglected to share her knowledge.

"Lady Director, it seems you are aware of something that maybe you have forgotten to share with us."

Not amused with the Assistant Director's snide allusion that she may be aging, the Lady Director looked at him and responded, "I have not neglected my duties as much as all of you have."

Seeing an opportunity to capitalize on the Lady Director's affront to the assembled Gatekeepers, the Assistant Director poked back, "What trivial nonsense are you implying?"

Her suspicions of the Assistant Director's selfish motives now confirmed, the Lady Director was about to rise when the doors of the Great Hall were blown open by strings of ones and zeroes flying forcefully through the air. The Assembly of Gatekeepers ducked and covered their heads, their silent anticipation breaking into frightful shrieks. The Collector, Descriptor, and Head Referenseer jumped from their seats to protect the Lady Director, but to their amazement, she remained calmly in her seat. Members of the Council noticed the start of a smile on her face; stunned by this show of emotion during such a time, they looked at each other with deeper concern.

"Lady Director," the Collector queried, "What is this? Why are the Referenseers unable to find an answer path?"

With a slight smile still on her face, the Lady Director looked at the Assistant Director and said, "Change is here."

The Assistant Director's expression was half quizzical and half frightened as he took a step back.

More and more strings of ones and zeros soared through the air, and a silhouette appeared in the light pouring through the doors. A solid, unified group of younger Gatekeepers walked in with a commanding presence. They were rapidly typing on small handheld devices that responded by emitting the strings of ones and zeroes. The strings surrounded the room, creating a perimeter along the walls and blocking any perceivable exit.

As the perimeter of ones and zeroes settled, the Assembly returned to an eerie silence. The Lady Director nodded to the Executive Council and they returned to their positions on the podium. The young Gatekeepers held their formation in the back center of the room as the other Gatekeepers shifted to form a path to the podium. Their gaze shifted from the Executive Council, to the formation, and back. Everyone waited with intense anticipation for an explanation of the unfolding events.

A voice came forth from the

and Vendors to marginalize the ability of Gatekeepers to continue to practice their trade. We have discovered your conspiracies to profit from our marginalization. Every time you negotiate a consolidation, more money goes to your pocket and less knowledge can be shared.”

“This is preposterous,” shouted the Assistant Director.

Just as he attempted to regain his composure, another voice from the formation shouted, “The proof is here.” A binary hit the table in front of the Assistant Director and transformed into a stack of papers.

“And here!” Another binary hit the table and transformed. “And here!” Another binary transformation. Stunned by the sudden appearance of months’ worth of his written plans, the Assistant Director stared at the formation and covered under perplexed glares from the Assembly.

“Your vision will not come to fruition, Assistant Director. This depends on us, the younger Gatekeepers, working

“We innovate because we understand the new technologies that make our jobs and lives better. We communicate and move information from one point to another faster than ever. Our mentors have spoken with their voices and pens and we have listened and read. In response, we have spoken with our keyboards, haptic interfaces, and mashed-up data. We have discovered innovative ways to collect, describe, manage, and disseminate knowledge and information. We have broken borders and boundaries. We can collect more and store it in less. We can describe with more detail so that we can not only seek and find the information, but also manipulate it to discover that which was once thought undiscoverable.

“Part two is for those who are not sure what to do, where to go, or how to make sure we are ready. Retiring is not a viable option, but staying has become cumbersome. As mentors whom we look up to, guide and inform us. Our receptiveness depends on the delivery of the information—orders that do not make sense are difficult to follow, but concisely explained tasks will receive our full efforts and will be completed by the deadline.

“We want to learn. We have been to your territory: your offices, board rooms, and other physical places. This is a call to join us in ours: social networks, micro-blogs, intelligent handheld devices, mobile work places, data mash-ups, and un-conferences. We will be more than happy to teach, and we still want to learn. If we can meet in both places, we will achieve communication that we both can hear and understand. We have a strong ambition to succeed, and we will be ready sooner than you realize. Is our ambition much different from previous generations of our age? Or has technology just increased the prevalence of our generation’s early qualities?

“ WE SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE, RELEVANCY, AND RELEVANCY WITHIN KNOWLEDGE. WE HAVE BEGUN OUR MOBILIZATION; THE NEXT SLEEPING GIANT IS NOW AWAKE. ”

formation at the back of the room.

“We are here. We are now.”

“So you are,” responded the Lady Director.

The Assistant Director broke in, “This is a blasphemous display! All of you are to be reprimanded immediately. Let loose your control of...” Suddenly a string of ones and zeros swirled around the Assistant Director, forcing him backward. “What is this?!” he gasped. A voice from the formation answered, “It is a binary. Printed knowledge in its digital form.”

Another voice continued, “We do not want to talk to you. Your betrayal is more severe than anything we have done.”

“You had better have grounds to make such an accusation,” the Assistant Director fired back, though he was not sure whether he was addressing the formation or the Assembly. Sweat beaded on his forehead.

“Your ignorance is the peak of your downfall,” a formation voice said. “Don’t you agree, Lady Director?”

The Lady Director gave a slight nod.

“You are in league with this disturbance Lady Director?” the Assistant Director queried with a bit of fear in his voice. “I call upon—”

A binary was heading directly toward him. As it approached, a voice from the formation reprimanded, “You, Assistant Director, have been in discussions and planning with Deans, Governmentals,

together with our seasoned colleagues.

The Deans, Governmentals, and Vendors will not stop their quest. We are more aware of today’s issues than you realize.” Individual voices rose from the formation, laying out their calls one at a time.

“This is a call to action for everyone to join us. If you want to catch a glimpse of us, look at our self-compiled database of writings and presentations. Read our reviews and articles. Take a chance and attend our programs. The content is

“ WE HAVE DISCOVERED INNOVATIVE WAYS TO COLLECT, DESCRIBE, MANAGE, AND DISSEMINATE KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION. ”

there, and the ideas are relevant.”

“This is a call to action in two parts. The first is for the young and young at heart. Keep writing, speaking, proposing, innovating, listening, learning, and advocating. Through articles in industry publications, both print and electronic, our thoughts and ideas can reach the masses. When we speak, our perspective is heard. When we propose programs and ideas, we are conveying what we want to learn and what we have to share.

“We are the embodiment of Whitman’s *Pioneers* in this new age of discovery. We search for knowledge, relevancy, and relevancy within knowledge. We have begun our mobilization; the next sleeping giant is now awake. The challenge was made, a gauntlet was thrown. All of us have been asked to show up together, and this challenge is being answered. We will answer loud. We will answer clear. We are here. We are the next generation—

the now generation. Enter our world without bounds. The pebble has been cast and the ripples are in motion.”

“Indeed,” responded the Lady Director. “It is time for you to step down, Assistant Director. The quest for knowledge far outweighs your quest for monetary gain.” Still in awe at the events transpiring, the Assistant Director bowed his head and walked off the podium.

As Lady Director stood, a new light was emanating from her long flowing robes. She addressed the formation and the Assembly.

“Our young protégés have come to us in an astounding display of unity and ideas. We must close this divide. This process requires understanding on both sides. We will see to it that all of the younger Gatekeepers will be afforded the opportunity to choose a mentor so that the mentor and mentee can learn from each other.”

The binaries around the Great Hall began shifting. A voice from the formation spoke up.

“We have other ideas on how to upgrade your proposal. Instead of the traditional one-to-one relationship, we would like to experiment with many-to-one relationships. One knowledgeable mentor with specialized knowledge will work with a group of mentees. The knowledgeable mentor can be either an experienced Gatekeeper or a technology-savvy younger Gatekeeper. This model of teaching and learning can prevent stagnant relationships.

“We also would like to see our use of new technologies incorporated with the Teachings and become some of the Teachings. We would like to learn and explore together new ways of collaboration and knowledge discovery. There are new opportunities for distance collaboration that will allow the Teachings to reach farther faster.”

Lady Director answered, “Choose one among you to work with the Executive Council to arrange this and to work toward implementing these changes.”

The shifting of the binaries increased as the formation typed on their devices. A voice came through and said, “We have all discussed and voted.” A young woman stepped forward, her appearance more casual than traditional. “I have been asked to be the liaison.”

The Lady Director stepped down from the podium, her traditional robes still glowing, and walked up to the newly appointed young Gatekeeper, extending her hand and proclaiming, “Let’s go to work together.”

Suddenly, the binaries vanished and the Great Hall was illuminated in a way that most Gatekeepers had never experienced. Everyone, both young and young at heart, continued the rest of the Annual Assembly with an excited urgency that reinvigorated the very reasons they had become Gatekeepers. ■

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