

Good Wednesday to all. Sorry for the month long delay in finishing 40,000. I have been quite busy moving across the country, getting jobs, exploring etc. However I'm back at it and there are only 4 stories left now. Below is number 36, I had literally no idea what I would be writing when I sat down, and this is what happened. Comments are always welcome. Please Enjoy.

Shifting

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Writing: 53 minutes

Editing: 15 minutes

Total Time: 1 hour 8 minutes

I could see the smoke billowing from across the city like a shapeless monster teasing the meager human's below. People ran and screamed in every direction, but that's to be expected when reality shifts. It takes a strong mind to even admit that the universe is tearing, and an even stronger one to deal with it. Most descended into pure chaos. I just keep moving, it seems to be either that or die. And dying just doesn't suit me.

Science never really put a name on what was happening, at least not in any of the realities I've been in. They said according to the math there was no way anything like the tearing or breaking down of the universe that was occurring should happen; and if so it wouldn't be for millions of years. What they failed to recognize is that sometimes people are wrong. The only true understanding we ever had is that we know *nothing* about the universe.

As a child I always had a large imagination, I would pretend to be different people from imaginary worlds every day. A soldier, a warrior from ancient Rome, a superhero in some broken city that needed a savior, whatever it was, I was the hero of another time. I'll never forget my mother's voice telling me to *get my head out of the clouds*. Then, the future came. The irony of my childhood has never failed to make me laugh in the darkest of times. It's still surreal to me sometimes as I look around whatever strange new world I may wake up in, that living in the moment now consists of trying to be a hero of many other times.

I've never been able to figure out why it always starts with smoke, no matter how gradual the shift. Some days it will be nothing more than the name change of your favorite restaurant. Others, the world will shake and monsters will fall from the sky. And then sometimes, I call this the *grand slam*, you see the smoke, black out, and pray to whatever you want that you don't die in some strange dimension before you wake up.

Everyone remembers their first shift, mine was a combination of all of the above. I was seventeen years old, walking to my favorite coffee shop around the corner from my house. The sky was smoky from what looked like a burning building in the distance. I turned the corner and stopped immediately, the local place I'd been going for years had changed into a Starbucks overnight. The Earth began to shake, I started feeling woozy and passed out, right there on the sidewalk. When I woke up, I wasn't simply in an unknown town or city, I was in a whole other world.

I can't tell you how many years it's been since then. Time stopped mattering not long after I accepted what was happening and had been through a few shifts. My hair has some gray in it now and I can grow a full beard, so I imagine if time had continued passing in the orderly human fashion, I would be in my mid-thirties to mid-forties. For many years I thought I was simply going crazy, that maybe my imagination had finally gotten the best of me and was keeping me prisoner in my own mind. Which truthfully I can't say I've ever fully ruled out. So I chose a better path.

When the universe is collapsing on itself or expanding to the point of tearing itself to pieces, one has to have a purpose, even if it's self-implored. I was walking through the streets of a relatively well held together world, when I came across a Man of the World's—the Men of the World's are the largest

and most prominent of the new religions formed after the first shift, and they can be found in almost every reality—being savagely beaten by a group of civilians. I remembered all those times I was a hero of all those different world's as a boy, and knew what my purpose was. I helped the religious man and sent the thugs on their way. Since then I try and help someone, somewhere, all the time.

The universe is getting worse every time I open my eyes. The longer I'm alive, the more desolate the places I come across. Desert is taking over, some realities are nothing more than warped nightmares of what is almost an indistinguishable Earth. If it even still is Earth. Of course, there are prophecies about groups of gods, aliens, or other various forms of celestial beings that if found, could be pleaded to in hopes of repairing the universe. I spent some years following legends and tall tales through some of the most disgusting and dangerous places in the universe. All to no avail, if they are out there, they don't wish to be found or provide help.

The universe is old and sick, but the people in it are still good. I've always hoped to meet more like me, others who can take the shifts and try to better the people who are still left. Heroes of the new world's. But until I find them I'll keep following the smoke, fighting the good fight, helping the poor and protecting the afraid. After all, this could just be a figment of my imagination.