

Series 0

Issue 5

Nowhereverse Tales



There are parallel universes, other worlds, each with their own histories, their own cultures, their own biologies. We feel the walls grow weak, sometimes: when the world seems thinner, when the light is just right, when things seem just a little bit off, and we imagine we can reach out, just a little bit...

In the midst of all this, in a lost corner inside the lost space between spaces, a new place is forming. Born from hidden desires and deep longings. A place to rest, a stop along the way for so many. In the middle of everywhere, this is Nowhere.

Maybe you found yourself here by circumstance. Maybe you got lost and came to find shelter. Maybe you sought us out. Regardless, we have a place for you, no matter where you are in your journey.

The light is always lit, and the door is always open.

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Stan just wanted to see the stars, not get sacrificed to a eldritch god. Good thing she likes him.

Rated Teen: weapons, death threat, insanity depiction, brief language, eldritch biology, transformation

3. A Breakup

As one relationship ends, another deepens.

Rated General: rejection, unreliable narration, foreign thoughts

4. Ask the Lighthouse

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Letter from the editor

C.S. Lewis once said, "We read to know we're not alone." (Actually, now that I think about it, it's really the *character* C.S. Lewis in the play/movie *Shadowlands*.) That feels real to me, especially now.

I started writing because I found a Sonic fanfic where one character is the last of her kind, and another character becomes her kind so she can have a child, so he can love her as she deserves. I saw words on the screen describing a story I thought only existed in my head.

But more recently, it's gone the other way. There are people in this world with lives I don't understand, and in the past it's caused me to be dismissive. But then I discovered stories of them. Stories that showed that even if the manner of their life and love looked different, it was still real, still just as worthy of my respect.

I hope, in the days and months ahead, we will continue to share stories like those and treasure the connections they make.

— Ronyo, writing from November 2024

Cosmic Wonder

Stan was pathetic. It was a fact, and nothing could convince him otherwise. How else would he have ended up tied to a pole in a dank basement surrounded by occult carvings and icons and a crowd of cultists in robes chanting?

After being a part of said cult? And trying—like a chump—to leave?

When he *knew* they were willing to kill?

Pathetic. Idiot. Moron.

Who even *joins* cults these days? Granted, he had thought it was a stargazing group when he had found them. He had hoped for people as obsessed with outer space as he was. But he had definitely felt the cult vibes that first day. And yet...

The cult leader, with his shaved head and red eyes that Stan *knew* were contacts, stood in front of Stan facing outward. "With this sacrifice," he yelled, "we draw closer to our benefactor, Hybrexr!"

"We are yours, we follow," the cultists said in unison. Stan mouthed the words without meaning to; the habit was too ingrained.

The leader twirled around and brought the knife to Stan's neck. "I keep my promises," he whispered, glaring at Stan.

Stan just closed his eyes. Before, he was too much of a coward to believe that the leader would actually follow through on his threat to kill anyone that "betrayed" them. Now, he was too much of a coward to look anyway.

Pathetic.

Loser.

Waste of space.

They were probably going to get away with it, too. The leader was shrewd enough to know how to hide the body, and no one else would dare say anything now. And no one was going to report him missing, either. He lived alone, blended in most places, especially at work. No one was going to miss him.

Maybe Kyle would miss him. He'd definitely miss Kyle... if there was actually an afterlife.

The leader pulled the knife away, presumably to get a better angle. Stan tried to relax his neck; maybe if he didn't tense up the blade would cut deeper quicker.

He waited.

Silence fell in the chamber.

And *something* brushed his mind.

Oh, child, what have they done in my name?

He heard the slight voice, like a whisper, and couldn't help a pained sob.

Peace, child. There is nothing to fear.

Stan opened his eyes. He flinched as he saw the cult leader's crazed face, the knife pulled back for the killing blow.

The blow that never came.

Because he wasn't moving.

Stan looked around. No one was moving.

No *thing* was moving. Except him.

Take your leave, child.

The ropes binding him ceased to exist. Stan idly noted there was no poof, no bounce-back from the loss of pressure. He was just holding his arms in that particular position.

Run!

Stan ran. He found some path through the frozen cultists and sprinted towards the stairs at the far end.

As for you worms, the whisper continued, you say you are mine. I accept.

Stan got to the end of the stairs and slammed against the door handle. It was oppressively dark and stormy outside, and he almost lost his footing on the sidewalk as he ran for safety.

He pretended he didn't hear the screams of agony as the door closed behind him.

Stan sat in his shower, the water having long-since gone lukewarm. He had had the presence of mind to strip down and start washing himself, but once he touched his neck with the soap he... stopped.

Everything had rinsed off by now. He sat there, hugging his legs to his chest, completely still. Staring into nothing.

He had no idea how close he had come to death, but his brain was insistent on figuring it out, replaying every moment from the evening.

Weak.

Useless.

Pathetic.

There was a crack in the corner of the shower he hadn't noticed before. He followed it up the wall and caught a glimpse of an eye peering searching endless beyond deep—

He blinked. The crack was gone.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. And let it out slowly. And took another breath. And watched the light from the cosmos warp around the squid-like being floating across his field of view—

He opened his eyes. "Am I...?" He felt himself tear up.

He gripped his legs tighter. He focused on the water hitting his head and legs and skin and pooling beneath him and droplets falling into space between spaces falling floating looking searching—

He clenched his eyes shut and tucked his head, his breath now coming in fearful, heaving sobs. Any thought that this was unbecoming of a middle-aged man was drowned out by his rapidly rising panic. "What's happening to me?" he said.

Oh, child, I am so sorry.

He froze. The whisper from the basement was back. "What?"

I only touched you briefly.

The thought clicked. "Hybrexr?"

Yes. I had to know what was happening. I am sorry.

He dug his fingernails into his legs. The ground beneath him dissolved stayed put grew changed color. "Please..." he whispered in terror, "have mercy."

Do not fear, child. You have not wronged me.

He whimpered. "Then why?"

I had hoped the contact would be brief enough, my voice quiet enough, to leave you sane. I see now I was wrong.

He felt the blood drain from his face. "I'm going insane?"

If no one intervenes, perhaps.

"What..." He struggled to get his breathing steady. "What do I need to do?"

Say the word and I will depart. Your mortal medicine may help, but it will take time.

He shivered. "You can't help?"

My presence has done this to you, child. I cannot help you without...

Stan ignored the far wall that began to break into fractal parts. "Killing me?"

No! But you would be changed.

He felt the world spin somersault invert stand still. "Please!" he screamed into the floor.

You must give yourself to—wait...

The walls of the shower began leaking dust. Stan screamed incoherently as he saw the shower head from three different angles.

You said that imbecilic liturgy, did you not?

Stan's screams warped the walls and broke the light into its prismatic parts.

Yes. You said you are mine. I accept.

The terror disappeared. Along with gravity.

He uncurled from himself and kept going. He floated into the air, his legs growing longer and more spindly. He watched as he flexed his toes wide, wider, wider than possible as the seams creased into his feet and unraveled longer and spaghettied out.

He blinked. He felt like he should be scared, but all he could feel was curiosity. Intrigue. Wonder...

Hold to that, child: I name you Wonder, Child of Hybrex.

Wonder floated out of the room through the middle. His legs continued to extend and shred, joined by others and splitting into more. His veins begin to glow a neon blue. Below his waist his skin cleared and became translucent, his muscles and bones and organs dissolving to nothing. He

was left with a dozen tentacles spreading from his hips, trailing off and away from him.

The transformation continued up his abdomen. Three more tentacles grew out, these a bit thicker than his new legs, but instead of growing skinnier as they grew, the ends became toothless maws, mouths leading back to his new stomach, a dark void in his center. Another mouth opened on his belly. He reached down and touched its edges; he licked his fingers: the salt and desperation were still there.

Wonder looked back at his arm. He watched the skin lose all pigment and become a translucent blue. His bones disappeared in a wave, and he marveled at the new freedom of movement it had. He kept his opposable thumbs even as his fingers lengthened slightly.

Following an unknown instinct, he raised his arms and felt a sudden awareness underneath them. A new pair of arms grew from his chest, just as boneless as his old ones had become. He counted all twenty of his fingers and giggled.

He felt the transformation reach his head. Idly, he mused that he wouldn't miss his sinuses. His hair detached from him and floated out into the cosmos, glittering with

reflected starlight. His skull formed its own mass of tentacles, dozens, each writhing in their own fashion .

"Am I Medusa?" he mused.

"No," Hybrexr responded, "you are Wonder. And you must open your eyes, dear."

Wonder furrowed his brow and looked around. "Aren't they already?"

"Not yet, dear." And Hybrexr floated into his field of view, fuzzy, incoherent, bending light and yet not.

Wonder reached out with a leg-tentacle. Hybrexr held out a single tentacle that Wonder wrapped his around. It was the warmth of the void of space, comforting.

"My dear child," she said. "open your eyes and see all there is."

Wonder closed his eyes. And opened them. All of them.

Purple, glowing eyes opened all over his body. At least five on each leg-tentacle and ten on each mouth-tentacle, including four around the mouths themselves. Four opened on his chest, and six opposite on his back. One on each shoulder, three down each arm, and one on the back and front of each hand. Two opened on each head-tentacle.

And his original two eyes opened, with black sclera and purple irises glowing in the dark with his veins and nerves, wide, innocent, and awe-struck.

He gazed at Hybrexr's tentacle and saw the infinite cosmos within. He ran his smaller tentacles along it and felt the density of a black hole.

"Welcome home, dear Wonder," Hybrexr said.

Wonder looked towards her, and *saw* her. "You're pretty," he said.

She laughed with the sounds of galaxies fading to stardust.

Wonder pointed more of his eyes at himself. He ran an upper hand through his head-tentacles and let them curl around each other. The other upper hand started exploring his stomach-maw again and vice-versa. His lower arms explored a feeler or a feeder.

"What am I?" he asked.

"When I claimed you as mine," Hybrexr said, "I felt your curiosity. Your drive to discover. Your need to go anywhere and everywhere in order to experience and learn all you could.

"Now, you have a body for doing just that. In time, you will learn to traverse the cosmos and explore on your own. For now, though..."

She brought another tentacle forward, this one cradling a dark miasma. Wonder brought a feeder up to it and took a small lick—

Weak. Waste of space. A kitschy brochure promising the secrets of the cosmos. A dead end job. Loser. The gleam of a knife. Useless. *Pathetic*.

—it was delicious! In three bites it was gone. He felt the miasma make its way up the tentacle into his belly. It felt pleasantly filling for a moment before...

He burped. That's the closest thing to it, at least. His stomach contracted, and a small, glowing speck came out of his stomach maw. He held it gently in all four of his hands, turning it over and gazing at the bright object. "What just happened?" he asked.

Hybrexr smiled. "That is what we do, Wonder: we take the waste, the cast-offs, the leftovers, the ends of all things, and make them new."

Wonder watched his new star float away into the cosmos. "Woah..." he said, turning himself around and floating gently toward Hybrexr. "I wanna do that again!"

A couple of Hybrexr's tentacles gently cradled him and pulled him closer. "In time, dear child. For now, rest."

"But I don't..." His whine was interrupted by an enormous yawn; if he had had a jawbone, it probably would have dislocated. "Yeah, maybe a nap," he admitted with a blush.

His tentacles curled around himself, his boneless body curling into an impossibly compact ball. Two snaked out and looped around Hybrexr's tentacle, securing him in place.

"Love you," he said sleepily.

"And I love you, Wonder," Hybrexr said. "Rest well."

And he explored.

He saw star systems be born and die. He traveled each arm of the Milky Way. He flitted through multiple mortal timelines and marveled at the small differences.

He saw great fields of souls at rest, recovering from mortal life. He saw those that reached higher, not satisfied with a single life. He met some, and they enjoyed the stars he would bring.

He saw the worms collecting the flotsam from the cosmos, gathering it together for the higher beings like himself to consume more readily. One of them in particular did not like him. Wonder thought that was hilarious before quickly losing interest.

He met other beings like him. None were his particular shape, but they were interesting nonetheless. Some stayed put, some joined him for a season; nearly all became his friends in one fashion or another.

He met higher beings, from lesser gods up to behemoths like Hybrexr. Some of them he liked more than others, and the feelings were mutual. But all had their parts to play in the cosmos.

His journey never ended, for an infinite cosmos by definition has no end. But a time did come that he sought out a return to an old adventure...

Stan walked into the break room at work to see a few of his coworkers gathered around a phone.

"Stan!" the one holding the phone said, almost dropping the phone in the process.

"Kyle!" Stan said back with a smile. He poured himself a cup of coffee and immediately took a sip.

Kyle narrowed his eyes. "Isn't that too hot?" he blurted. He shook his head. "Never mind, did you see what happened to that cult?"

"The what?" Stan said with a cock of his head.

Kyle looked back to his phone. "The 'Cosmos Watchers,' weren't you involved in that?"

Stan nodded and worked out how to spin it. "At one point, yeah. Got a little creepy for me."

Kyle's eyes widened and he shook his head in amazement. "Well, you made the right call. They were all found comatose and blitzed out of their skulls last night. Must have taken some bad drug or something; they're saying it's going to take them years to be functional again."

"Wow," Stan said, going back for a refill.

"Yeah. Sounds like the leader got it worst, at least. They're close to declaring him brain dead."

"Pity," Stan said, not sounding sorry at all. "Couldn't have happened to a better guy." He poured the rest of the coffee pot into his mug.

The others stared as he immediately chugged the rest of it.

He lowered his mug, a satisfied smile on his face. "Good stuff," he said.

Kyle raised an eyebrow. "If you say so," he said. The others said their goodbyes and walked away.

Stan turned back to the coffee. "I should probably—" He caught a burp in his mouth. "—sorry. I should make a new pot." He caught another burp.

"Are you okay?" Kyle asked.

Stan caught another burp, shook his head, and power-walked to the bathroom.

This was not good. First day back and he was already having trouble controlling himself. He pushed into the bathroom and quickly looked around to make sure it was empty.

Wonder belched. A small star floated out from his stomach-maw. He quickly caught it with his two lower hands and shoved it away. He patted himself down and made sure his extra eyes were closed, checked himself in the mirror to be sure, and turned back toward the door—

Where Kyle stood, mouth agape.

"Oh no," Stan said, rushing forward and grabbing Kyle by the shoulders. "Kyle, are you okay?"

Kyle blinked. "Wha... what...?"

"Stay with me, man. Whatever you saw is whatever you saw; don't think too hard about it."

“Y—what are you?”

“I’m still Stan. I drink my coffee just like the rest of you.”

Kyle blinked, and his eyes focused on Stan. “Bullshit.”

Stan breathed a sigh of relief. “Yeah, yeah it is,” he said with a laugh.

Kyle’s eyes widened. “Oh, shit, the cult was real...”

Stan shook his head. “They didn’t know that, though.”

He smiled, and Kyle swore the room got brighter. “Turns out the unfathomable darkness can be friendly. I’ll have to tell you about it sometime.”

“Soon,” Kyle agreed. “Wait—did you poop out a *star*?”

“It was a burp!” Stan protested. When Kyle’s face didn’t change, he sighed in defeat. “Yeah, that’s pretty much exactly what happened.”

Wonder will return.

A Breakup

There are other sessions, moments where your link suddenly asserts itself when you, Red, or Green is feeling strongly about... something. You enjoy the puzzles, especially when one of the others points out a clever solution you wouldn't have seen on your own. Sometimes it's a moment of joy, of frustration, of fear; but always a moment that you end up facing together. And always a moment you wish was just a little longer.

Even when you can't feel Red and Green, you still find yourself acting like they're there. They never let you get away with self-depreciation when you're together, and why should you keep it up when you're alone? You give a little more effort at work, try to smile more to the people around you, try to be the person they know you can be.

After all, it's become increasingly obvious that you can't lie to each other. At least, not without lying to yourself.

But now it's late on a Saturday morning, and your roommate has announced the end of your relationship.

Your roommate details the many ways you've made your displeasure obvious. You can't argue, especially when you've grown increasingly weary of your roommate's bluster. But you thought you had a lid on it, that you were maintaining the peace. So maybe it's best that you part ways.

Except your roommate goes further. And mentions how fake you are. How you really are just a jerk and a fundamentally mean person. And you believe it.

Your blood is pounding in your ears. You can't make heads or tails of your own thoughts. You beg forgiveness, you're not sure what you get in return.

You mention how your roommate has hurt you. In how you've felt living in the shadow of your roommate's stronger personality. Your roommate acknowledges the disparity and blames you. Your roommate pointedly does not apologize.

Your roommate is moving out tomorrow. In a daze, you gather your things from the common area so the movers (no idea if they're professionals or just friends) won't accidentally take something important of yours. You sit in your room, on the floor, leaning against your locked door.

Red is proud of you for standing up for yourself, even if it was futile.

You blink back a few tears and shut out the world. You can't even send a coherent thought to Red and Green; the joy at knowing they're here mixes with the shame and guilt and anger and anxiety and you just... You raise your fist but set it down gently; as much as you want to punch the carpeted floor, you don't want to give your former roommate the satisfaction of knowing your state of mind.

You just don't know what to do. You've never felt this low before.

Red is dismissive, ready to write the person off entirely.

Green softly points out that you've already seen how this person projects and deflects, and that the problems your former roommate sees in you are likely exaggerated.

You bitterly reply that it doesn't mean it isn't true.

Green agrees with you.

Red seethes and demands they explain themselves.

Green has seen so much of humanity. The good and the bad. Largely the bad. Everyone has the capability of being good or bad, to many degrees. Intrinsicly, hardly anyone is unique in this regard.

What matters, Green emphasized, is what they *choose* to do.

Red immediately floods your head with all the times they've seen you choose to be good. The time you tipped more than you had to. The time you helped your coworker out with a tough problem. How you left several things in the common areas that are probably yours but you weren't sure and your soon-to-be-former roommate could use them more than you anyway.

You point out a selfish motivation in all of them: easier to do the math, easier than doing it yourself, easier than starting another conversation with said roommate.

Green reiterates that you still made a choice, then contributes one more image: the three of you. How, when faced with strange people in your head, you chose to help rather than hurt, or even just ignore. How all three of you have chosen each other.

You send a pulse of affection, one swiftly returned by the other two.

It's early afternoon by now, and the apartment's outgoing resident has left to do something. You wipe the tears off your face, blow your nose, and quickly head out,

wanting to put as much space between you and the apartment as long as possible.

You skipped lunch, so you go to a nearby drive-thru and eat in your car. You mutter an apology at Red and Green that you should be eating better, but they hardly care.

You're two bites into your meal when the thought strikes the three of you: the connection is still up.

You can feel the blood drain from your face. Did you do this? Have you kept them from leaving somehow?

Red responds in the negative: they haven't tried to leave. Sure, when you calmed down, they weren't focusing on it, but they haven't tried to close the connection. Haven't wanted to.

Green adds that they don't know how the connection works anyway. None of you know how to turn it on, much less off.

They begrudgingly add that you and Red aren't getting in the way. The affection is subtle, but present.

Red laughs, and you swear you can hear it.

You swallow the bite of food you'd forgotten. You're happy, nervous, and scared all at once, and you can feel those feelings echo from the others in different levels.

As you keep eating, a sense of relief starts to bubble up. You finally have the time with Red and Green that you wanted. They echo the same feeling, and you add in one more question:

Who are we?

Red works construction. Kind of. Maybe they're a farmer? The image they give is kind of all of that. They work outside, they build and grow things, some days they ache in bones they didn't know they had. They work hard and play hard. Speaking of, there's a concert tonight they're going to that they wish they could show you.

Green is a poet. Or an artist? Their image is much bigger, but that's the gist. They see the world from their unique angle and try to show that angle to others. A reporter, then? Maybe. YouTube video essayist? They again express mild frustration with not being able to use words.

You poke back that the idea is communicated, and isn't that the point? You make sure to drench that idea in affection.

Green agrees, and admits how easy it is to be big-headed. Red admits a tendency to impose. You're conflict-avoidant, as your current situation illustrates.

You segue into your life, how you just graduated college and got a programming job. The metaphor of arranging machines in a factory turned out to be on-the-nose. Where you are right now feels like a factory, though. You want to do... *more*. You're just not sure what that looks like or how to get there.

The fries have just passed into lukewarm territory, and you're debating whether they're worth finishing.

Red is in a large family. Cousins, uncles, aunts, grandparents: all of them live with or near them. Not to mention being one of five kids. They're going with the other cousins their age to the concert tonight.

Green's family is much more solitary. They see their parents and sibling once in a while.

You think back to the family you have a couple hundred miles away. That you haven't seen in a few months. You should call them.

You should figure out what you're going to do about the apartment.

Do you want your roommate to keep paying? No, not really. Can you afford that? Yes, barely. Can you find somewhere cheaper? Probably, but there's eight months left

on the lease. Can you find another roommate? You don't *want* another roommate.

The thought surprises you. But it's true, you don't.

Green prods you for numbers.

You wince. Maybe a roommate wouldn't be *that* bad.

Regardless, Red insists you stay social. There's an entire world outside the three of you, and it wouldn't do to miss it.

Red, Green, and Blue will return.



He finds her, and this is the consequence.

From *In Fairy Land: A series of pictures from the elf-world* by Richard Doyle, CCO
<<https://wndfx.link/Ya6NE>>

Ask the Lighthouse

Anonymous asks The head of 'procurement and IT': Are you aware that your name is being redacted?

Like, in real life? Hey, Richard! What's my name?

"What are you talking about, [REDACTED]?"

Yeah, see? It's [REDACTED]. Don't know what kind of cheese you're smoking.

Seriously, don't scare a guy like that. I've heard enough chatter of worlds getting unmade, people being lost to the infinite multiverse. And that's not even counting just the run-of-the-mill cases of "I gave my name to a fae creature and now I'm trapped in their realm for a thousand years."

No. My name's [REDACTED]. I work at the lighthouse. And I'm here. I'm real.

Seriously. I have enough existential dread as it is.

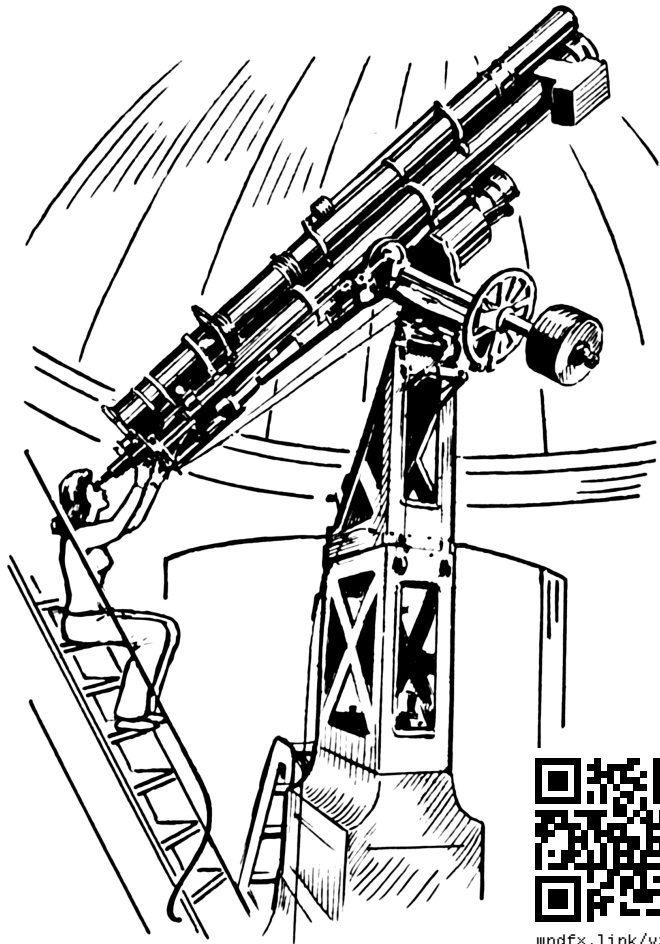
Ask at wndfx.link/ask

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Most importantly, **thank you for reading!**



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