

Collector

By Samantha Olivia Norin

The soul of humanity has deep, jagged and self inflicted wounds. Holes in history, scars brought up by wars, disasters and plague. The burning library of Alexandria, the near eradication of the Maya, the atrocities of the third Reich, each did not only leave hole in terms of human lives, but also in tales, knowledge and cultures. Each time a book is burnt, an art piece destroyed, or a voice silenced, humanity loses a bit of itself forever.

Just like cutting off a branch of a tree, it cuts off everything that could have grown from that branch, and the tree itself suffers from it. The tree might survive, but it will forever grow stunted from it. At least that's

how I see it, but I have been an outsider to humanity for so, so long.



I have managed to keep myself out of human affairs for most of my current existence. I only intervene when it looks like something of extraordinary value is about to get lost. Even when I do, I can only preserve so much. In Alexandria I was only able to save a handful of scrolls and tablets, but I do not blame myself too harshly, I was

but a fledgling back then, still getting accustomed to the world of darkness and blood.

I was taken aback by the immensity of pointless waste and destruction on display, and the experience further steeled my resolve. Since then I have been able to improve my abilities to save and restore items that would otherwise be lost to time. I stalked the streets of the Reich's autrasetics, saving what I could. I smuggled away artifacts from the Red army's march of reformation. I hid within the ranks of colonizers and displacers of all creeds and nationalities, always saving that, which would otherwise be crushed underfoot.



You might think of me as heartless, for saving mere books, statues and amulets, where I could be saving humans. But you must see things from my perspective. I was human once, yes, but I left that part behind me, so long, long ago. I am something else now, something ancient and beyond the veil of mortal concerns.

I know that humanity will persist, and that mortality is fleeting, and life is frighteningly short. If I saved a million humans, it would not change much in the grand scheme of currents in history, but if I am able to preserve but

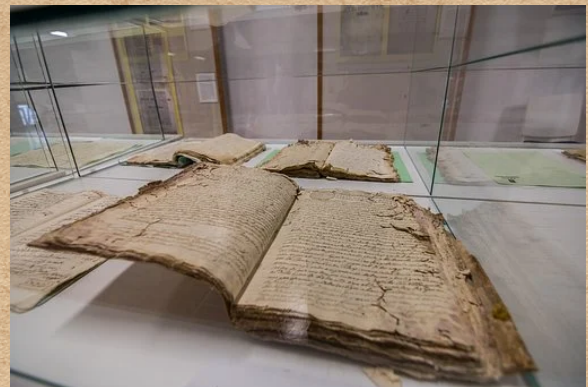
one sacred text, I have saved an entire worldview from extinction.

It is true that in my archive, these ideas, these branches of human thought, are put in absolute stasis. I often think of sharing my treasures with the world outside, to see what humanity would do, if they had access to such a full image of their historical, religious and cultural traditions. Yet, something inside me is stopping me from letting go of my collection of my children.

Deep down I know that these treasures are not for me to keep, and that ideas are not to be put in cages, to be locked away forever, so then why do I hesitate?

Perhaps it is the fear of responsibility, the insecurity of what would happen if these

ideas were once again let loose into the world. They have been away from the world for so long, many of them have not seen the days in centuries. How would the modern world take to them, what change would they bring? What would be worse, if these treasure ended up changing everything, or changing nothing at all.



Perhaps it is the fear that my treasures would be seen as fakes, as false narratives to be discarded, that they would be besmurged, buried and destroyed. I could not bear to see but a single scrap of my collection be seen as anything

other than the treasure it truly is.

Many of my objects would seem insignificant to most, and are indeed so, even in their original context. Now these items gain their value simply from their rarity. Like the small prayer statues from a now lost and forgotten himalayan faith, even I have forgotten its name. I do remember the city it was practiced in though, I still remember the faces of those that lived there.

Everything in my collection has a face, a smell or a name attached to it, everything here has a history, most of it that I experienced first hand. Most of my manuscripts and scrolls were freshly written, some still with its ink drying, when they came into my possession. Some of the paintings and murals had barely had a chance to be

displayed in their original homes, before I whisked them away into the night into their permanent dwellings here.



Much of my collection would not survive outside of the halls where I am keeping them today, kept in stasis by means that I rather not describe in detail. Do know that they are kept alive so to speak by familiar means, as I am being kept in my half life, half dead state.

Perhaps this too is a reason for my hesitance of releasing my collection to the mortals, for it would soon start to fall into disrepair and the merciless hand of entropy would

eventually claim it all. I doubt the mortals, even with their magnificent technologies of today's world, would ever come close to the amount of care I am able to bring to the items in my collection.



You must apologize for my low opinion of your kin, for once you have started feeding on the blood of your former countrymen, it is hard to see them, at least at some level, at anything but cattle. Perhaps that is why I am so attached to the art they create, for I can distance the ideas from the fleshy sacks of blood that created them.

For this is why you are here, is it not, to avenge someone, perhaps someone close to you. Someone that got in my way, or was at the wrong place, at the wrong time, when the blood hunger struck.

So my friend, you now know my story, and you have seen my collection, do you still wish to go ahead with your plan? I promise, I will not fight back. I am too blood starved to do so, even if I wish to.

Will you strike me down, and let my collection spread to the wind. Will you cut down this tree, and let all the potential of all these branches wither and die. Or will you let me get back to my work of silently gathering and savoring history's lost artifacts. For what are a few mortal lives, given up to feed me, when compared to the immensity of history?