



*Tales  
to  
Astonish*

**HAS THE WORLD**

**ENDED YET?**

*Peter Darbyshire*

**HAS THE  
WORLD  
ENDED YET?**

**STORIES BY**

*Peter Darbyshire*



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# *Has the World* **ENDED YET?**

**Titan is the first person in the world to see the angels. He's drinking** his morning coffee at the kitchen table and watching the house across the street when they start falling from the sky. The house across the street looks just like his house. Every house on the street looks just like his house. The only things that are different are the colours of the front doors. He got lost the first few times he drove home after moving here. He never got lost returning to the Hero Hall. He could still find the Hero Hall today if they called him back. He sometimes wonders if that will ever happen, even though he knows it won't.

Titan is watching the house across the street because he's looking for the woman who lives there. He doesn't know her name but he knows her. Sometimes she leaves the blinds open when she changes. He thinks maybe she does this on purpose. He thinks maybe this is some sort of sign language.

Inviselle sits at the kitchen table with him, fading in and out but never turning completely invisible like she used to. Not like when they met in the Hero Hall, when he had to use the special goggles designed by the Masterminds just to be able to see her. She hasn't been able to fully vanish in years. She can't see him watching for the neighbour because she has some sort of mask over her face. It's one of those organic paste things,

made of passion fruit and the essence of bees' dreams or something like that. Zucchini slices cover her eyes. Titan married an invisible superhero but now he lives with a vegetable named Michelle.

Titan forgets all about Inviselle and the neighbour when the first angel falls from the sky and smashes a crater into the front yard. The house shakes with the impact, and car alarms go off all along the street. Titan sips his coffee and looks up at the sky. More angels fall from the clouds, dropping down all over the city, leaving burning trails of sparks in their wake. The clouds are a dark red colour he's never seen before.

Titan looks back at the angel in his yard as it climbs out of the crater, its skin smoking. It brushes dirt and grass from its wings, like it had just stumbled and fallen, nothing more than that. It's naked and has the body of a man. A perfect man. Iron pecs, cut abs, arms like cannons, a dick that belongs in the porn files hidden away on Titan's computer. The angel reminds Titan of himself, back before his skin softened from stone to mere flesh again and his strength faded to that of a normal man.

The angel looks at Titan, and there is none of the customary recognition in its eyes. It's like the angel has never seen the videos of Titan in his prime. Then it wanders around the side of the house, out of sight.

Inviselle takes the zucchinis from her eyes and looks at the falling angels. "Are they shooting a movie?" she asks. "Or are the clones invading again?"

"It's the end of the world," Titan says, looking up at the burning sky. "Thank God."

\* \* \*

**T**HE SKY darkens to a deep crimson while they fuck in the bedroom. It's the colour of all the blood they spilled in their golden age. Titan used to like fucking Inviselle when she was invisible. Then he could imagine she was anyone in the world. Now she can't quite fade away, so he always knows it's her. The blinds are open and he looks at

the neighbour's house every now and then, but he doesn't see her in any of the windows. They watch the angels continue to fall from the sky.

"I thought it would be finished by now," Inviselle says.

Titan doesn't say anything. He rolls off her and closes his eyes. He tries to imagine what the supers are doing in the Hero Hall right now.

When Inviselle gets out of bed and goes into the shower, Titan wanders back to the kitchen without getting dressed. He toasts a bagel and eats it at the window. The angels are still coming. He takes a multi-vitamin with his orange juice. The bitter taste reminds him of the gas the molemen had pumped into the Hero Hall the last time they'd attacked.

Titan goes down into the basement. It's still unfinished, even though they've lived in the house for nearly five years now. When they first moved in, he had plans for it. He wanted to build a danger room. When he revealed that to Inviselle, though, she opened two bottles of wine at once and got him drunk while saying maybe it was time to think of other lines of work. He never brought it up again. Inviselle talked about maybe a home gym in the basement. A sauna. Another bedroom. But the only thing Titan had ever put in was the supers simulator. He'll never finish the basement now. That makes him feel better about the end of the world.

He turns on the simulator and the holograms fade in around him, the program starting up where he'd left off last time. He is in the middle of the ice caves, with frozen zombies all around him. He puts on the Titan simulator suit, which the game company gave him as a gift. He looks down at his body as the game begins. His skin is shiny metal again, no longer the dull concrete colour it took on when he hit middle age. His muscles bulge so much they threaten to rip the battle uniform he wears. He smashes through the zombies that swarm him, going deeper into the ice caves. He tries not to think about the fact that he has set the game to easy mode. He remembers when he fought his way through the ice caves in real life. He can't even keep up with his memories anymore. He destroys zombie after zombie, tearing them limb from limb, until the power goes out.



\* \* \*

**I**NVISELLE IS in the bedroom closet when Titan goes back upstairs. She's holding a black dress in one hand, combat pants and a sweatshirt in the other. Her uniform hangs untouched at the back of the closet.

"What are you supposed to wear to the end of the world?" she asks.

Titan ignores her and goes to his closet. He stares at his real uniform for a moment. He can't remember the last time he put it on. Then he dresses in one of his office suits, just like any other morning. It takes him three attempts to get his tie right, just like any other morning. He spent all his life hitting things, so he's never been very good with the small gestures. When he's done, he gives Inviselle a kiss on her cheek, just like any other morning.

"You're going to work?" she asks, finally noticing his suit. "During the apocalypse?"

"I remember when the apocalypse was our work," he says.

\* \* \*

**T**ITAN IS the last one to arrive at the office. His boss, Precog, is tacking up a new schedule on the bulletin board when he walks in. The schedule lists the appearances Titan and all the other retired supers are supposed to make over the next week. Titan doesn't even look at it. He knows what it will be: car dealership and furniture store openings, corporate cheerleading events, a few colour commentary spots on some super fan show or another, maybe a company dinner or two, where drunk executives will make him shout out the battle cry that was his motto as a hero.

*"We're not going to live forever!"*

It makes him wish he'd used his powers for villainy instead of good. Most of the villains he'd battled over the years were living comfortable lives in retirement thanks to all the money they'd stolen. There was a gated

community in Palm Springs and another one being built in Antarctica. They didn't need to keep selling their old myths like Titan did just to pay the mortgage.

"You know something I don't know?" he asks Precog. His boss's power back in the day had been the ability to see anywhere from a few minutes to a few years into the future. It had been a bit random, but the big events usually came to him, so the heroes had enough time to prepare for their major battles.

"I know the world never ends if you don't let it," Precog says. It sounds more like a corporate cheer than a premonition, so Titan lets it go. He walks past Precog, to his desk.

Precog was the one that told Titan his super days were over. One day after Precog retired, he came to visit Titan in the Hero Hall. Titan was in the gym, bench-pressing a school bus. The other supers cleared out of the place when they saw Precog was there. They all knew the only reason Precog ever came back to the Hero Hall was to let a super know his days were over.

"You must have the superpower equivalent of dementia," Titan said when he put the bus back down on the vehicle rack. "I've never felt stronger."

"I saw your end three years ago, back when I still had my power," Precog told him. "I saw the end of all the supers back then. I recorded them all. I saw the company I would start, too. You'll be at your desk there two Mondays from now."

Titan didn't say anything. He lifted a skull of one of the Dragonborn. It was heavier and harder than anything else on Earth. Normals couldn't even lift it. He crushed it to powder in his hands as Precog watched.

"When one world ends, another always begins," Precog said. "You will remember that over the days to come." And with that he turned and left the gym.

The next Monday Titan and the other supers fought the Ageless, who hit him with a dozen curses. It was Titan's last day as a super. The

following Monday he showed up at Precog's company to find his desk waiting. Sometimes Titan thinks Precog was to blame for his end as a super. Sometimes he thinks about crushing Precog's skull like he had crushed the skull of the Dragonborn.

Titan goes to the cubicle he shares with the Sandman. The Sandman is surfing porn on his computer. This is what the Sandman does every morning to start the day. Back when he was a super, he used to stop time to save people from car accidents and shootings. It was an open secret among the supers that the Sandman also used to stop time to wander through the showers at women's gyms and spy on other supers at their homes.

Titan once asked the Sandman why the tech department didn't put some sort of porn filter on his computer. The Sandman said the tech guys wouldn't be able to find half their porn without him.

Titan looks at the Sandman's screen. It shows a woman and a man in a gorilla suit. Titan turns away and opens the bottom drawer of his desk. This is where he keeps all his medals and keys to cities and framed letters of thanks he earned as a hero. At one time they meant something. Now they're just props. He puts them in a stationery box.

"This is no time to get reckless," the Sandman says.

"This is exactly the time to get reckless," Titan says.

The man in the gorilla costume is now fighting a man in a super costume while the woman looks on.

"Hot," the Sandman says.

Titan takes his box and leaves.

Precog is waiting for him at the front doors to the office. He stares at the box of awards and then holds out his hands to Titan. "Whatever's bothering you, we can fix it. I've already scheduled an appointment with an empath."

Titan puts his hand on Precog's head. He feels the skull beneath his fingers. He remembers how easily bone snaps. How it can be ground to powder. He thinks he'll at least try to crush Precog's skull if he says just one more word.

But Precog doesn't say anything else, so Titan drops his hand and walks back out into the end of the world.

\* \* \*

**T**ITAN STOPS at an exotic car dealership on the way home. He's driven past it every day for the last year, to and from work, in traffic jams each way. He's pictured himself in every car on the lot. They're a far cry from the Ethereal Flyer, but he'll never set foot in that again. Even so, most of the cars in the dealership are still out of his price range. All the Lamborghinis and Ferraris are gone, anyway, when he walks in the door. There's nothing but a couple of Porsches left in the showroom.

"We had people lined up outside the door this morning," the salesman tells him. "It was like they'd just got their welfare money."

Titan offers the salesman his box of trophies and medals and keys for one of the Porsche roadsters. The salesman looks through the box for a moment and then shrugs.

"What the hell," he says. "It's the end of the world, right? May as well do a good deed for once in my life." He takes some keys out of his pocket and tosses them to Titan. Titan gives him the keys to his old car.

"What am I supposed to do with that?" the salesman asks, looking out into the parking lot.

"Burn it," Titan says.

\* \* \*

**T**ITAN RETURNS home to find Inviselle in the black dress, preparing for a party. Bowls of chips and vegetables and dip sit on every table, and she's making sangria. She tells him she called everyone they know.

"Wouldn't it be nice if it happened with all of us here together?" she asks.

Titan goes across the street, to the other woman's house. She answers the door drinking red wine straight from the bottle. She doesn't say anything, and for a moment the two of them just stand there, looking at each other. Titan waits for some sign of recognition from her, showing she knows who he is. But she just stares at him like she's never seen him before in her life.

"I'm having an end of the world party," Titan says.

"What about her?" the woman asks. They both look at his house. Inviselle flickers in and out as she moves past a window. An angel drifts slowly overhead, watching them.

"It's the end of the world," Titan says.

The woman hugs herself.

"Do you have any drugs?" she asks.

\* \* \*

**T**ITAN DRIVES them to Buddha's place. He really wants to open up the Porsche, but the other drivers are all over the road so he keeps his distance and stays well under the speed limit. He's never been in such a nice vehicle. Back when he was a super, he travelled most places in the Ethereal Flyer or the Wisp just teleported them wherever they needed to go. Neither way was what he would call luxurious. Titan doesn't speak during the drive and neither does the woman. He thinks he should ask her name but he's let it go so long it may be awkward now.

Buddha lives on the top floor of a condo tower. He buzzes them up right away when Titan calls him from the lobby. For as long as Titan has known him, Buddha has always been home.

Buddha is sitting at the kitchen table when they walk in. He's organizing little plastic bags of drugs into various piles. The walls are covered in framed photos of supers. Buddha only sells to retired supers, and sometimes he takes photos for payment. What cop or prosecutor is going to mess with a drug dealer who has all the former heroes as customers?

On a monitor mounted on a wall, CNN shows a live feed from one of the space stations.

“Has the world ended yet?” an astronaut asks, staring into the camera. Behind him, another astronaut looks out a window at who knows what.

“We’re here for drugs,” Titan says.

“That’s what I figured,” Buddha says, popping a blue pill into his mouth like it’s candy.

“I’m having a party,” Titan says.

Buddha looks at Titan, then the woman and then goes back to sorting his drugs.

“It’s an end of the world party,” Titan adds.

“Who’s going to be there?” Buddha asks.

“I have no idea.” He hasn’t invited anyone and he doesn’t know who Inviselle invited.

“You should come,” the woman says. “And bring all your drugs.”

Titan and Buddha both look at her. Then Buddha shrugs. “No discounts, though,” he says. “I don’t care what sort of holiday it is.”

“It’s the end of the world and you’re concerned about making money?” Titan says.

“This is no time to abandon my principles,” Buddha says and starts gathering up his drugs.

\* \* \*

**O**UTSIDE, BUDDHA shakes his head at the Porsche. “This is what you dream about?” he asks.

Titan doesn’t say anything. He doesn’t want anyone to know what he dreams about.

They drive back to the house to find another angel standing in the yard. It’s looking in the front window. Its skin is streaked with mud and several feathers in its wings stick out at odd angles.

“Maybe it’s come for us,” Titan says. He honks the Porsche’s horn but the angel only glances at them before turning its attention back to the window.

“It’s like some sort of peeping Tom,” Buddha says.

“Maybe God’s a pervert,” the woman says.

“I wonder what kind of drugs God would do,” Buddha says.

Titan parks the Porsche in the driveway and they go inside. The house is crowded with people. Titan knows most of their faces but can only remember a few of their names. He hasn’t talked to some of these people in months, if not years. He doesn’t care. He says hello and shakes hands and laughs at their jokes about the apocalypse. It’s just like doing another work event. He moves in the direction of the bedroom with the woman from across the street. When he finds the Sandman in the living room, though, he stops and asks him what he’s doing there.

“Precog says you’re serious about this quitting thing,” the Sandman says. “I’m supposed to support you as a valued team member and provide friendship incentives for you to stay.” He smiles at the woman from across the street. “Have we met?” he asks her, but she just looks at him and doesn’t say anything.

“I’m done with the company,” Titan tells the Sandman. “I’m done with everything.”

“All right,” the Sandman says, still smiling at the woman. “All right.”

Buddha sits down on the couch and spreads his bags of drugs on the coffee table. On the monitor on the living room wall, CNN is now showing a riot in the streets of Jerusalem.

“I’ve never been there,” Titan says. “I guess now I’ll never get the chance.”

“I wouldn’t want to be there at this particular moment,” the Sandman says.

“Maybe not right now,” Titan agrees. “But maybe before.”

“How is it any different now?” the Sandman asks.

Titan shakes his head. He turns to the woman from across the street, but she's not there anymore. He looks for her in the crowd, but he can't find her. He looks back at the monitor.

"It seems we may have been premature in one of our earlier reports," an anchor says. "It turns out Hawaii hasn't sunk into the sea. But stay tuned – it still may."

"If you don't come back to work, can I have your computer?" the Sandman asks.

Titan walks away from him without answering. He looks for the woman but can't see her anywhere. He goes into the kitchen, but she's not there either. He checks outside, thinking maybe she's gone home. Her house is dark, the street empty.

Titan looks up at the sky. There are rifts in the clouds now, with lights shining through the holes. Angels rise up to them from all over the city and pass through, out of sight. The angel in the yard is still looking in the window. Titan goes back inside.

He pushes his way through the crowd and remembers when crowds used to part before him. He opens the door to the guest room first, but it's empty. Then he opens the door to the bedroom he shares with Inviselle.

The woman from across the street is there, on the bed. She's wrapped in an embrace with Inviselle, who's strobing in and out of sight. They both stop and look at Titan.

"I've been watching her for months," Inviselle says.

Titan doesn't say anything.

"She undresses for me," Inviselle says.

Titan doesn't say anything.

"She's a mind reader," Inviselle says.

The woman from across the street smiles at Titan. "You can watch," she says.

"Hot," the Sandman says from behind Titan.



Titan goes back into the living room. CNN shows an angel walking across the lawn of the White House. Secret Service agents in black suits step out from behind trees and bushes, guns in their hands. But they just watch as the angel walks past them and into the White House. One of the agents says something into his lapel. Another agent sits down on the lawn and cries.

Titan goes down into the basement. The simulator is back on. The ice zombies feast on his fallen body on the floor of the cave. Titan ignores them and takes off his clothes. He puts on the simulator uniform. He wants one of his real uniforms from the closet, but he doesn't want to go back into the bedroom again. He goes upstairs in his simulated uniform, then outside and onto the lawn.

The angel turns away from the window, toward him. Titan punches it in the face. There was a time when his fists could shatter buildings. The angel just rocks back a bit. He punches it again, then again and again. There's blood on the angel's face now, and on his hand. He doesn't know which of them is bleeding. He keeps hitting it, even though it doesn't fight back, until he's out of breath and has to step away.

He bends down for a moment, resting his hands on his knees. The angel pants in unison with him. When Titan looks up, he sees people staring from all the windows. The Sandman toasts him with a drink. Inviselle and the woman from across the street stand in the doorway, wrapped together in a bedsheet. Inviselle covers her mouth with her hands. The woman from across the street nods like she knew this would happen. Titan can see the monitor in the living room through the window. The astronauts are screaming.

The angel doesn't take its eyes off Titan. It doesn't even blink.

Titan straightens up, even though he still hasn't caught his breath. He adjusts his uniform.

"All right," he says. "We're not going to live forever."

For a few seconds there are no sounds but their breathing. Then a distant siren begins somewhere.

“We’re not going to live forever!” Titan cries, although he’s not sure if his words are a challenge or a plea.

The angel’s lips twist into something that could be a smile. Then it spreads its wings and lunges at him, and Titan rushes to meet it.