

Martinus Publishing's Hit of the Month
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Beelze-Bubba
by Sonny Zae

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Tweege rapped on the doorframe. "Uh, sir?"

The Prince of Darkness looked up from his papers. "What?"

Tweege gestured behind himself with a pointed black hoof. "I brought someone you should meet."

"Can't you see I'm busy?" Satan snapped. "How will I finish my paperwork if minions keep interrupting me? Handle the problem yourself!"

Tweege took a step back, but didn't leave. "This is... um... a personal problem, oh Exalted Master of Evil, Destroyer of Worlds." Tweege bowed low, speaking toward the black obsidian of the floor. "It's a problem of your own making."

"My making?" The Prince of Darkness placed his quill pen carefully in its asbestos tray after shaking off a last drop of blazing ink. "Very well. Who is it?"

Tweege stepped into the room, tugging at a young man who followed him. "This is Bubba Backfatt."

Lucifer stroked his thick, dark goatee as he inspected the guest, then curled his lip in disgust. "He's fat and hairy and... and disgusting to behold! Clearly, an inferior specimen. Why did you bring him here naked, Tweege? Are you *trying* to make me ill?"

The demon bowed again, but not as deeply this time. "It is the policy you yourself made, oh Great and Matchless Deceiver."

"Don't hide behind the rules, Tweege!" Lucifer's long, elegant red fingers curled slowly and the demon gasped in pain. "Remember the first and only rule—I make the rules." Lucifer's mouth pulled up into a wicked smile. "But enough pleasantries. Who is this Bubble fellow, and why is he important to me?"

"His name is Bubba, lord, not Bubble." Tweege bared his pointed teeth in an attempted grin. "He's a new arrival, my lord—and your son."

Lucifer stiffened. The tubby, hairy, and still very much unclothed young man looked uncomprehendingly from Lucifer to Tweege, then back again.

"My son?" Lucifer's brow pressed downward. "How could that be? I haven't had time to assume human form and indulge my carnal desires in... uh..."

"Twenty-five years, Purveyor of Lust and Darkness?" Tweege gave the words a

hot oiliness befitting an overloaded steam engine. "You nip out on occasion for a bit of fun with the mortals, do you not, Cosmic Flamethrower of Dark Seed?"

"Ah, yes." A look of wistfulness flitted across the face of the Embodiment of All Negativity. "It has been a long time. I could use a short vacation, especially now, even a single night out to seduce a handful of unwitting ladies. But there's no point in wishing for more personal time, is there?"

"No, sir," Tweege responded. "After all, sir, you are the King of Broken Dreams."

"You are not helping, Tweege!" The Prince of Darkness' voice softened. "Did I tell you I found a new hobby?"

"No, sir." Tweege gazed placidly at Lucifer. "Did the Lord of Suffering finally succeed in developing stamps that burst into flames when licked?"

"Don't be silly, Tweege. Nothing that... pedestrian. I've taken up composing, you demonic dolt. I have been writing songs, instrumentals mostly. Anyone who tried to sing what was in my heart would end up forcing their lungs out through their nostrils. No, I became inspired and am on a quest to write the most irresistible elevator music ever played."

"Genius, sir, and an inspiration to all who hope to crush the spirit of the human race."

"Thank you, Tweege. You are the best sycophant in my entire kingdom." Satan's gaze moved to take in the newcomer—taller than average with a prominent belly, a rotund mass that preceded the rest of him. His eyes were small and dull, partially hidden in the fleshiness of his face. The thinness of his hair accentuated the roundness of his shoulders while the features of his face exhibited a slackness of one too simple of mind to have worried over the things he rightfully should have worried over.

Satan shook his head. "How did he die? He should be in the prime of his life."

"Ah, he's from a rural area where hunting is almost a religious experience. By that, I mean religious experience as a rapturous occasion, of course, and not as excruciating torture. Your illegitimate son was shot and killed by a hunting buddy during a nighttime coon hunt." Tweege smiled sourly. "He might have survived had his friends taken him promptly to a medical facility."

"Oh? Why didn't they?"

"They had a raccoon treed and couldn't bear to waste the opportunity. By the time they arrived at the nearest hospital, your son had bled out."

"How do you know he's my son?"

"I did the cross-referencing of his parentage, lord, as required of all new arrivals. His fatherhood was not listed, so I traced it back to that certain night when you walked the earth, and his DNA has your unmistakable signature, Unendingly Malevolent Czar of Heartache. The number of the beast is encoded in all his base pairs."

"I see." Lucifer stroked his goatee and stared at the pictures on the wall opposite his desk, pictures of him greeting political leaders of the human race as they arrived in the afterlife. There were pictures of him shaking hands with Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, and the guy who had invented telemarketing. "You are one of my most trusted advisors, Tweege. What should I do with him?"

A look of surprise appeared on the demon's rough and simple features. "Do?"

Why, sir, you need to find him a job, train him to be part of your kingdom. He is your son, after all."

"Ah, yes, that's just bloody great." The Lord of Darkness pushed his stack of papers farther back. "Now I have to find a job for yet another family member. And a crude and unrefined oaf, at that."

Tweege smiled an ugly smile. "But lord, you were just complaining about a lack of time for personal pursuits. We can train him to perform some of your endless duties, my lord. That way, you shall have more time for creating this... this elevator music, whatever that is. You will have time to properly create music that deadens the souls of all who listen."

Satan nodded. "A marvelous idea, Tweege. You aren't as stupid and unimaginative as I continually think you are. Yes, start training him at once. You're in charge of his training, and will accrue blame for any of his failures and shortcomings. Let me see, what shall we have him do? Start with something fun and simple, I think. Give him the Prod of Souls and find him a nice spot on the bank of the Lake of Fire. A day or two of torturing condemned souls should make him feel welcome and useful. Welcome to Hell, Son!"

The human subject of conversation blinked and then nodded in acknowledgement. "Ah'll do thet, Daddy."

"Don't call me that! You can refer to me by any of my numerous names, but *never* use anything too personal—and especially not in front of the help, understand? I am known as Satan, Beelzebub, Devil, Lucifer, and Prince of Darkness, just to name a few."

"Okay, Daddy. I never heard of Beelze Bug before. Why do people call you thet?"

"Beelzebub, not Beezle Bug! It's an old name. I don't have time to explain. Call me Lucifer. Can you handle that?"

"I think he's still in a bit of shock, oh Photonically-Challenged Ruler of the Interior World," Tweege ventured as he gripped the young man's arm and turned him toward the door.

"And for damnation's sake, put him in some clothes!" Satan snapped. "Torturing the damned for eternity does *not* include forcing them to look at his white, grub-like body!"

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Lucifer looked up from his boiling martini, sitting in an easy chair in front of a raging fireplace. "What is it, Tweege? For what do you disturb me?"

"Um, it's your son, sir."

"Bubble? What about him?"

"It's Bubba, sir." Tweege looked distinctly uncomfortable. "But he has adapted a new name, sir, and is asking everyone to call him by it."

"Seems reasonable enough," Satan replied, sipping the bubbling liquid of his heated jalapeño martini. "You bother me about that? Pray tell, what is his new name?"

"He now insists on being called Beelze-Bubba, sir."

"What kind of stupid name is that?"

Tweege shrugged expressively, hooves outstretched. "He claims it shows kinship to you. I'd venture that where he's from, appending 'bubba' is like the 'son' suffix in

Scandinavian countries, sir."

"Whatever." Satan put his drink down abruptly, slopping liquid over the edge and setting the teak sidetable on fire. "That's not a sufficient reason for interrupting my thoughts."

"My lord, the problem is that your son, Beelze-Bubba, isn't doing his duties as apprentice torturer."

"In what way?"

"He started out well enough. He prodded the damned, pricking their skin, splashing fire on their faces, and pushing their heads under the surface of the Lake of Fire. But then he seemed to... seemed to grow bored, my Dark Lord, and left his station. He wandered along the bank of the Lake of Fire, doing nothing and moving aimlessly. When I questioned him, he said he was looking for frogs, that he wanted to gig them with the Prod of Souls, sir."

"Gig them?" Lucifer recoiled in shock. "Unholy word, that is a most inappropriate use for the Prod!"

"I know, Creator of Apprehension and Depressing Thoughts of Forms in Triplicate. I told him so. But he told me to go away and leave him alone, that he was the devil's son and I couldn't tell him what to do."

"Oh." Lucifer frowned. "It's only his first day. Perhaps you are being a bit too demanding, Tweege. And one must admire his creativity."

"Maybe you should talk to him, my lord. You are his father, after all."

"You think I should?" But Tweege was already gesturing toward the hallway. The round and simple face of Satan's son appeared in the doorway and the young man shambled into the room.

"You were planning on making me talk to him all along, weren't you?" Lucifer looked accusingly at the demon, who smiled and lifted his shoulders to signify he knew no other course.

Lucifer gazed at the young man's face. "You look to be doing well so far, my... uh... Bubba."

"It's tellin' ever'one to call me Beelze-Bubba now," the young man responded, looking at the only other chair in the room.

"What... what in the name of all evil are you wearing?"

"Huh?" Beelze-Bubba looked down at himself. "These's bib overalls, Daddy. You likes 'em?"

"No, I don't!" Satan scowled fiercely. "Why aren't you wearing a shirt?"

"I don't needs a shirt under my overalls," Beelze-Bubba responded proudly. "They's just right fer any occasion! An' they got pockets 'n things fer fishin' line, hooks, an' ammo. I's got my chaw in the back pocket!" He half-turned to show the cylindrical bulge of a can of chewing tobacco.

Lucifer looked away. "That is disgusting! You put that horrid stuff in your mouth?" Lucifer sighed resignedly. "Tweege tells me that you didn't complete your assignment of misery-making. Why not?"

"My arms was tired. Is there trout in the lake?"

"What?"

Beelze-Bubba mimed casting a fishing line and reeling the bait and hook back in. "I loves fishin."

"No, no fish. Fish can't live in fire. That's what you're interested in?"

"Yeah. I ain't interested in doin' that torturing no more. Pokin' people with a stick is fun, but I gots tired of it after a while."

"They're not people, they're... clients, understand?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Stop calling me that! I am Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness."

"Okay, Daddy Lu. Kin I go deer huntin' now thet I'm done with my chores?"

"No. There's no hunting in Hell. There's no fun in Hell! Since you are my son, you're expected to take on duties of the underworld." The Lord of Suffering put his hands over his eyes. "Find him a new job, Tweege."

"What do you suggest, Sodden Sponge of Despair?"

"Anything! I don't care what." Lucifer waved a hand to indicate that Tweege should handle the problem. "Put him... put him at the Gate and have him welcome the new arrivals."

"Make him a greeter, my lord? That may not be enough to hold his interest."

"Very well, then have him inventory them, too. Show him how."

"Yes, lord." Tweege bowed in acknowledgement.

"Watch him closely," Lucifer instructed in a low voice. "I can't have my son embarrassing me, understood?"

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Lucifer tapped Tweege on the shoulder when he arrived at the Black Gate of the Underworld. Nearby, Beelze-Bubba lounged against the rough-hewn stone wall, asking the long line of new arrivals their names. The looks of despair on the faces of the damned eclipsed the expression on Beelze-Bubba's face, who was giving Tweege an occasional sullen glare.

"What's the problem now, Tweege?"

"He's causing havoc in our records, You who art a Burr between the Buttcheeks of the Cosmos." Tweege gestured at the stone tablet in Beelze-Bubba's fleshy hand. "He hasn't recorded every damned soul that arrives. At times, it appears that he has not written down names out of pure sloth. Because he hasn't been paying close attention, several new arrivals have been able to slip away. I have counted three escapes, sir."

"What?" Satan's stunned tone matched the blank expression on his cruel visage. He looked to his son, raising his voice. "Is that true? Have you let souls escape?"

Beelze-Bubba looked away, his expansive and stubbly jowls quivering from the sudden movement. "I dun't see no one leave."

"How did you discover this, Tweege?"

Tweege sighed. "The usual way, my lord. Saint Peter contacted me and complained when the escapees showed up at the *other* gate."

"Of course." Lucifer scowled at the mention of the competing organization. Then he stared at his son's head. "The bumps on your head are growing nicely," the Lord of Darkness observed.

"Bumps?" Beelze-Bubba touched on of the two knobs projecting an inch or two from the top of his skull. "Mebbe I fell down again."

"No, those are the beginnings of your new horns," Tweege informed him. "They began to grow when you were assigned this task."

"Really?" Beelze-Bubba caressed both bumps and his eyes rolled upward as far

as possible, trying vainly to catch a glimpse of them. "What'll they look like? Kin I hev antlers like an elk? Thet'd be wicked awesome!"

"No, they'll be simple curved horns," Tweege replied. The demon gestured at Lucifer. "They'll be just like your father's, dignified and not too showy."

"Oh." Beelze-Bubba's face fell. "Kin I get them changed to antlers? Antlers'd make a wicked gun rack. I jus' wish Bobby-Ron could see me now. I'd hev my rifle at all times."

"No!" Lucifer snapped. "No one gets better horns than mine. And horns can't be used as gun racks—or as anything useful. But that's beside the point. The point is, you weren't doing the assigned task. All condemned souls must be taken in at the gate and must be accounted for. You simply *cannot* let anyone sneak away. Can I trust you to do better?"

"My lord?" Tweege gestured behind them, toward the Lake of Fire. "Perhaps you could give him a less sensitive task?"

"What are you thinking, Tweege?"

"Why don't you have him be the ferryman for a spell? I'll put Dorrek back at the gate. Your son can guide the boat and bring new arrivals across the Lake from the Black Gate. With luck, he won't crunch into the Grey Dock of Doom."

Satan considered the suggestion, then looked at his son, lounging against the cave wall like a bear in bib overalls, a bear with thinning hair on the top of his head and little eyes that shone with minimal intelligence or life. "Well, son, do you think you could be ferryman? Have you operated a boat before?"

"Sure have, Daddy Lu!" Beelze-Bubba responded. "I knows all about boatin'. S'pose I'll hev time to stop an' fish once't in a while?"

"No!" Lucifer and Tweege exclaimed in unison.

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Satan winced at the knock at his door. "What now?"

"It's your son again, sir." Tweege hovered in the doorway, looking unhappy.

"Yes?" Satan said irritably.

"You know the boat that is used to ferry souls across the Lake of Fire? I don't know how he did it, master, but he put a motor on it."

"A motor? What are you talking about, Tweege?"

"He found a boat motor with a big prop and talked one of our lower demons into making a mount and protective enclosure for it. Then he..."

"Skip the details, Tweege."

Tweege shifted uncomfortably. "He turned it into an air boat, oh great Singer of Songs That Sound Like Screams."

"An airboat? You mean like the ones they use in swampy regions? Those flat boats that skim over the surface of the water?"

"Yes, that is right, oh Deepest Well of Sorrow. He was annoyed at the slow pace and effort of rowing the ferry across, so he put an engine on it."

"What happened? Why is that a problem?"

"We've received multiple noise complaints from the passengers, my lord. And we've received many complaints from the damned floating in the lake."

"Why are they complaining?"

"Because the airboat skims across the lake of fire, bonking them on the heads as

he goes over and pushing them down. But mostly it is the loud series of impact thumps that is annoying, a thump that booms out over the flaming waves each time he hits someone's head. It's only a matter of time before he'll want to water ski behind it."

"Oh." Satan scratched his cheek. "You don't say? That sounds rather... entertaining. Well, maybe I should have a talk with him, nevertheless. Summon him."

"He is right here, lord."

"Damn it, Tweege, quit doing that! Don't bring him to me unless I tell you to, understood?"

"Of course, oh great Auditor of Souls." Tweege pulled Beelze-Bubba into the room by a strap of his bib overalls. "Talk to your father."

Beelze-Bubba glanced nervously at Lucifer, who now had his fingers steepled in front of his face and was giving the young man a disapproving look. "Did I do sumthin' wrong, Daddy Lu?"

"That's a given." Lucifer leaned forward in his chair, putting his dark red elbows on the protective fireproof quartz pad of his desktop. "Why did you modify the ferry boat?"

"You told me to ferry 'em, so I did. But I made the boat better. Better 'n faster. Dun't you want me to get my work done?"

"Yes, I do, but..."

Beelze-Bubba held out his hands, palms up. "I was jes' trying to do better. I knows you was angry with me, Daddy Lu, so I'm tryin' real hard."

"Go out into the other room," Lucifer instructed, motioning for Tweege to stay. After the large, lumpy young man had departed, Lucifer gestured for Tweege to close the door.

"Yes, master?"

"Find him something else to do," Satan instructed. "He can't go around changing things just for his own convenience. I'm the ruler of the underworld. I'm the only one who gets to change things for convenience around here, understood?"

Tweege bowed his head. "Yes, my lord. I will find him a different task at once."

"Do you have anything in mind?"

Tweege thought before nodding. "I do. I will make him into a pool boy. I'll give him cleaning equipment and have him scrub the sides and bottom of the Lake of Fire. That should keep him busy for a long time. And he won't be able to make it any faster or louder. You'll have quiet for composing a new song, my lord."

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But Tweege was back within a matter of hours. Lucifer set his pen down. "What now? Did he neglect his post?"

"No, sir."

"Well, what then?"

Tweege wrung his hooves. "Something no one here has ever done before. He persuaded one of the other demons to find him a freshly butchered hog. Or maybe the carcass was a demon. I'm not sure. It bore more than a little resemblance to Korfid, a pudgy fellow down in the records department with a puffy face and large nose. Anyway, my lord, your offspring—your bad seed—threw the animal carcass into the lake of fire, as if the lake was a barbecue pit of molten lava. You could imagine how the souls floating in the Lake reacted to that."

“They must have felt comforted by the roasting pig.”

“Oh, no, they hated it, oh Master of all Biting Insects.”

“They did?”

“Yes. The smell of roasting pork caused them more anguish than anything new we’ve tried in a long, long time. It was most inhumane.”

“I see. What should we do with him now?” Lucifer asked, more to himself than to Tweege.

“We could put him in research and development, my lord. After all, he does seem to have a talent for annoying others—human and demon alike.”

“As usual, Tweege, you are a paragon of understatement.” Lucifer rummaged in a desk drawer and brought out an organizational chart. He studied it while drumming on the desktop with his fingers. “It’s an interesting thought. His talent for coming up with new and unusual ways of annoying people is so strong, it must be his purpose in life.” Lucifer looked up. “Very well. I will make him the head of R&D, as you suggested.”

“At once. I will get a placard made. It could say, Beelze-Bubba, Head of R and D. Or maybe R and Dee-vil.” Tweege chuckled to himself.

“Don’t make me slap you, Tweege.” The devil pointed a red thumb at himself. “No one tells a joke but me, remember? To enhance the torture even more, I’ll have him report directly to you. Now, get out of my office. I just had a most wonderful idea for a tune and I want to noodle around on my keyboard. Go check on my son and make sure he stays busy.”

“At once, Dark Blotch on the Fabric of the Underworld,” Tweege responded, moving toward the door. Outside, he muttered under his breath. “I’ll make sure you stay busy too, my lord. We don’t need more of your offspring showing up and upsetting the order of things. A workplace without an interfering boss is a happy workplace, after all.”