Studies in Saviory

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I.

When Yok ambled into the Grene Zyphoam Cellar for the first time in twenty years, two things happened almost simultaneously. First he was taken aback at the sight of an oddly human-looking character at a table, an unprecedented phenomenon! and then a diminutive gremlin leapt to his talons from a stool, and dashed toward him along the top of a bar.

Yok had whipped out a bloat-o gun before he recognized Sam Phlegm hunched before him, slobbering ichor.

“Yok, Mon! Wherethehellyabeen? The Pres has been looking for you and Zlaz for a decade!”

“Oh? Urgent business or something?” Yok nonchalantly drew out an enormous roll of bills and tossed one forth. “Drinks on me,” he announced loudly.

There was a sudden congestion at the bar, from which Phlegm dexterously extracted a gallon jug of zyphoam. He table-hopped in ten-foot bounds, to a corner booth. Yok followed.

Phlegm was lying on his back on the table, holding the jug between his feet, gurgling the brown liquid down his blood-colored thorax. Yok snatched it away and took a long pull.

“That was generous of you,” Phlegm commented, gesturing to the mob of drinkers.

“It was not. It was the only way I could get a place to sit.”

“Still, that was quite a stack of gardes you flashed.”

“That’s right. I captained a twenty-year cargo run to Vega, and got involved in a war on the side. I am now loaded.”

“I seem to recall that you took off in an empty ship.”

“Well,” Yok grinned evilly, “it was full when I got there.”

“What about Zlaz?”

“Haven’t seen him since before I left. Say, satisfy my curiosity. Is that, or is that not, a human over there helping to drink up my bill?”

Sam glanced quickly.

“That is not,” he observed. “I don’t know what he is, but nothing human can drink zyphoam and live. He drinks zyphoam, ergo, he is not human.”

“Go get another jug, and ask him if he’ll join us.”

Verily, this is a once-in-a-century day of curiosity for me, he mused.

The heroically proportioned humanoid giant sitting across from him was named Adon, and broke, he learned.

“Why do you look the way you do? Or let me put it this way, is it an occupational disease?”

“Sort of,” was the reply. “I was a small-time fertility deity in Asia Minor until the big guys like Dionysus and Priapus started screwing around. They forced me out of business.”

“Oh, how was business?”

“Can’t complain. Once you learn the routine it’s pretty much repetitious, but very entertaining. Then too, I was contributing to the religious well-being of the human community.” He guzzled some more free zyphoam. “Know anyone who needs an experienced fertility deity?”

“Off hand, no.” Yok finished his zyphoam and rose. “Well it’s been nice meeting you, Adon, and all that crap.” He ambled out.

Phlegm was on his heels.

“Going to see the Pres?”

“No. I have an important visit to make.”

“He’ll be mad if you don’t see him first thing.”

Yok laughed for half a minute and walked away.

Phlegm scuttled in the gutter and caught up with him again.

“Uh, in case he wants to look you up and asks around, where will you be?”

“With Zlaz.”

“But nobody knows where Zlaz is.”

“Uh-huh.” Yok waded out into the main canal and unmoored his flatboat. He got in and shoved off in the direction of the Myst Lake Caverns.

“They already tried his cave at Myst Lake, and he’s not there. All he left was his robot retainer and some little fuglees.”

“If you don’t get back to the Grene Cellar soon, all the free zyphoam will be gone.”

A quick shuffle of talons, and when Yok looked back there was only a pool of green ooze steaming where Sam had been standing.

And he hadn’t even asked what a fuglee was.

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An Eiffel tower with cable arms and a speaking box confronted Yok at the doorstep, which was also the pier.

“Yok!” the Eiffel tower said.

Yok agreed as to his identity, and pointed behind himself at the steps which vanished beneath the steaming waters,

“Is Zlaz downstairs, or inside?”

“Neither,” said the Eiffel tower (who was named James, after an English valet Zlaz had once brought back, but who, unfortunately, had not adapted well to the climate).

“Cut the safety circuit crap, James. This is Yok. Zlaz told me to come to dinner the day I got back from Vega. I’m back.”

“I do not take organic pleasure from joking,” James sounded offended. “I’m not certain where he is. About fifteen years ago he left me in charge and went for a walk back in the Labyrinth. I suppose he’s hibernating.”

“You suppose! What if he fell through a chasm?” (Yok did not believe Zlaz would fall into one of his own chasms, or be particularly disturbed if he had, but James’ mechanical composure perturbed him.)

“My orders distinctly were⁠—”

“Orders! Bosh! You’ll never be a success, James, if you always follow orders.”

“⁠—to receive and file incoming messages, to receive visitors and tell them Zlaz is not home, to maintain order in the laboratory⁠—”

“Alright! I don’t care what your orders were. I’m going back in the Labyrinth now. If anyone asks for me, I’m not here either.”

“You’ll need a map.”

“I will not!” Yok stamped off.

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Sixty seconds later Yok was back in the foyer. Forty or fifty foot-high yellow-haired beasts railed about him on their hind legs, howling something which sounded like, “Gofugyrself! Gofugyrself!” over and over.

“James,” he said in a pained voice, “you didn’t mention that you were raising pets back in the Labyrinth.”

“Those are not pets. They’re fuglees.”

“Oh, that explains everything. I walk back there and am jumped on by thirty thousand fuglees. It’s nice to know what they are.”

“They live there. Zlaz bred them in the laboratory and turned them loose in the Labyrinth. They eat fungi and follow simple orders when he gives them. They’re sort of bodyguards for his hibernation.”

“Millions of them? They’re crawling all over each other back there, making noises like humans. And what does he need bodyguards for in his own cave?”

“Well, I assumed they’re bodyguards. Maybe their only real function is to clear the walls of lichen. But the machine in the lab keeps turning out fifty a day, so I assumed he wanted a small army⁠—”

“The machine keeps turning them out!” Yok lowered his voice again. “Did it ever occur to you that Zlaz forgot to turn the machine off? Why didn’t you turn it off?”

“My orders⁠—”

“Never mind! You’ve got a long way to go, James.” Yok faced the Labyrinth again.

“I’m happy the way I am,” James sounded as hurt as his voice box would permit.

“Well go turn it off now. I think Zlaz might be a bit peeved when he wakes.” Yok stooped and grabbed a young fuglee by the scruff of its neck.

“Gofugyrself!” it screamed, and immediately the others rallied to its defence. Yok kicked them off and plucked a large fungus from high on the wall. It snatched it and gobbled greedily. “Gofugyrself,” it sighed pleasantly.

“James. Before you go, what’s with this vocabulary of theirs?”

“Oh, well that, sir, is their entire language. It was an idea Zlaz got while visiting China, where the same word can have dozens of different meanings, dependant upon intonation, pitch, vol⁠—”

“I speak Chinese, James, and get the picture. They can express anything with this combination of syllables. In other words, Zlaz’s perverse sense of humor has triumphed again.”

“Well, it’s an easy language to learn,” James crackled sharply, and headed off in the direction of the laboratory.

“The hell these robots don’t have a sense of humor,” Yok reflected, wading through the fuglees.

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Yok quickly checked all the former hibernation crypts. They were vacant. He roamed about at random, then noticed the fuglees. Whenever he headed to the left they cheerfully gave way, when he bore right they obstructed his path.

Following the line of most resistance, he reached a moist grotto after fifteen minutes. Burrowing through a wall of fuglees, who had linked arms, he came upon an enormous boulder. The fuglee wails were deafening.

He had gripped the huge stone and was about to roll it aside when James entered.

“Yok, there was a monstraphone call for you.”

“Who the devil! No one knows I’m...” he trailed off.

“He claimed to be the President of the Pan-Monstric Association.”

“Hmm,” said Yok. “Could be. Phlegm moves fast.”

“You can call him back up front. There are no extensions here.”

“No. What did you tell him?”

“Just as you instructed. That you weren’t here.”

“Good. Step back, will you? I’m about to awaken Zlaz.”

“But how...?”

“Watch.”

Yok put his shoulder to it and rolled the boulder aside. The fuglees scurried to keep from being crushed. A sizeable crypt lay beneath it. Empty.

“You see, sir, he’s just unavailable.”

“But that couldn’t be. The fuglees led me to this one.”

“Never trust a fuglee.”

“Nonsense, they’re almost as stupid as humans. I tricked them into leading me here. Aha! That’s it⁠—Once on Altair...” Yok searched about until he came upon a melon-sized stone. He began tapping it against the boulder, increasing the force of each blow.

Finally a yawn followed by string of muffled obscenities was heard. Then the boulder cracked open and fell apart. Zlaz stepped out.

“That was a pretty good red herring, Zlaz. Hiding in the rock instead of the crypt.”

“How did you know where I was?” Zlaz stretched.

“Your army of fuglees brought me here, indirectly.”

“Army of fuglees?” Zlaz did a few slow pushups. “Oh, yes! Fuglees. A little experiment of mine. But there’s no army. I only made fifty⁠—and they were experimental models.”

“Wanna bet?” Yok inquired politely, gesturing toward the yellow hordes who lay prostrate before the opened crypt.

“Ahem,” commented James, “I thought that you intended for the machine to remain functioning. Were I aware that you wanted it shut down...”

Zlaz cast a practical eye about:

“We must be nearly out of lichens by now. I’ll have to set them to eating each other, or else find some way of cashing in on them in a hurry. James! Why didn’t you...?”

“Did you get inside the rock by molecular rearrangement, master?” James quickly inquired. And Yok noted that for a mechanical brain he made a noble attempt to get out of trouble by changing the subject. ⁠—Some of Zlaz’s insidious cunning had even rubbed off on the machines he kept.

“No. Magic,” Yok supplied him.

“How long have I been asleep?” Zlaz wanted to know.

“Fifteen years, four months, three days, sir⁠—”

“That’s close enough,” Zlaz stopped the valet. “I remember freezing half a musk oxen back in ’32. Go spit it over a slow fire, get two ten gallon casks of zyphoam up from the cellar, brew a vat of coffee, and call and have them ship out a raft of potato chips. Double time! Yok, let’s go for a hot sulphur swim while it’s getting ready. You can fill me in on the past few years, and we can consider what to do with two hundred eighty thousand, two hundred twelve fuglees.”

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James had gone after more zyphoam, and the musk oxen was a respectable heap of bones. Yok reached for another potato chip.

“So what could the old boy want us for this time?” Zlaz had just asked.

The President, flanked by six of his roughest bodyguards, strolled into the dining cave. They pushed James before them, whose cable arms had been tightly knotted behind him.

“I tried to warn you, sir. But⁠—”

“Quite alright, James. Go get untangled.” Zlaz regarded the half-ton bulk of the President, ignoring the mail-scaled escorts.

“Going to a party?”

“I didn’t come to play footsie. I knew Yok would find you. You’re both coming with me now. My boys will pack you an overnight bag.”

Zlaz slowly shook his head from one side to the other, salted a final joint of beef and began to gnaw on it. Yok started to laugh, thought better of it, and offered the President a potato chip:

“You’re acting just like a human dictator⁠—stupid! Maybe you are in a position to draft us now. But what makes you think we’ll carry out whatever job you have in unless we want to do it? So you sit down.”

The President snorted something similar to Fuglese, as Yok had named the new creatures’ language, and made a sign to his retainers.

“One moment,” said Zlaz, as he reached for more salt.

The Pres paused and looked inquisitive.

“Whatever job you have that appears so urgent, you had a special reason for calling for us. You always do,” Zlaz began. “That is, we’re at the head of your List of Top Operatives for Special Assignments of Dangerous, Tricky, and Evil Nature. Pause and reflect for a moment why we occupy that position. We have carried out more dangerous, tricky, and evil assignments than any other mon in history, and we’re still around to crack smutty stories about them.” Here he raised a hand (still holding the bone⁠—symbolically, Yok thought), to silence another presidential outburst.

“Foremost of our coups is the fact that we are the only two mon in existence who ever successfully assassinated a President of the PMA and lived. Admittedly that was six thousand years ago, and we were in exile for four centuries because of it. But a change in administration brought us back, with honors, as it always will. Times haven’t changed that much, and we’re still mon of the Old School. Now with all this in mind, will you still try to intimidate us? Rubbish! Sit down and discuss it like a gentlemon and we’ll consider your offer. Try anything else at your own risk.”

Yok nodded.

The Pres rumbled some more Fuglese, then motioned quickly with his right talon. The six bodyguards approached. Zlaz jerked at the extra salt cellar, which was really a disguised lever.

The middle dropped out of the cave floor and four of the mon slid through the opening. There was a prolonged silence, a removed splash, and a sudden sizzling. Zlaz released the lever. Acid fumes filled the room and a few muffled cries were heard, but they stopped almost immediately.

The two remaining retainers licked their fangs and lips and cast a quick glance back at the Pres. He had turned a delicate violet, but he motioned them on. At this moment thirty thousand fuglees entered the room behind James, who wrapped his untangled cables around one mon and dragged him out.

“Gofugyrself,” commented Zlaz, and a yellow tidal wave shoved the remaining retainer to the middle of the floor, which conveniently opened again.

Zlaz replaced the salt cellar.

“Now that we’re alone, shall we talk business?”

The Pres was a deep purple at this moment. He growled an Etruscan oath and accepted a bench and a flagon of zyphoam.

“You’re being very playful as usual. But we’re wasting time. We’re mobilized, or haven’t you noticed? I want you to leave immediately for Hell[[1]](#footnote-1). There is about to be a war, and you have a bare chance of averting it.”

“The only appeal to my civic virtue is through my pocket book which, at this time, is full. If I were desperate, I might go to Hell for a million gardes. But I’m not desperate. If there’s going to be a war, I’m suddenly needed in the vicinity of the asteroid belt. Excuse me. James! Pack my traveling bag!”

“That is not only unpatriotic, it’s illegal. You can’t leave Lucetania during wartime!”

“Wanna bet?”

“Yok? What about you?” the Pres inquired.

Yok snatched up a fuglee that had been scrounging for crumbs beneath the table. He jabbed it with his fork.

The Pres turned a pale lavender, shading over into green, at its shrill comment.

“James! Pack an extra fangbrush!” Yok ordered.

The Pres turned back to a normal ruddy at what was obviously an evil thought. He craftily inquired:

“Yok, have you been back to your own lair recently?”

Yok shook his head and reached for the fuglee again, but it sagely eluded his grasp.

“Well, in your lab there was a glass casket containing a human female in suspended animation. It is no longer there. It is⁠—”

He was forced to pause at this moment because of the carving knife which Yok was holding wedged against his throat.

“First I’m going to carve my initials on your⁠—”

“Wait! Let me explain! What happened was purely fortuitous. There was an earthquake ten years ago. Your cavern was hit.”

“And?”

“And the inspection team we sent around to look for gas leakages from the lower lava pockets had to go in. They found your lab wrecked. It had smashed the casket. She was quite dead.”

“Oh.” Yok lowered the blade. Then he raised it again. “Well, I’m still in a mood to do something rash.”

“Wait! We thought it might be something important. I admit I wanted it as a hold over you, but there was nothing specific in mind then. ⁠—If you have perverse tastes that’s your own affair. So we shipped her body down to the Med Center and had it reconstructed, molecule for molecule. Then we froze it again.”

“The only difference being that now it’s a corpse.”

“Yes. But it’s still a perfect host for her psyche again⁠—if you can dredge it up or reconstruct it somehow.”

“After ten years? The electrical charges would have dissipated⁠—”

“Not necessarily. I don’t know her significance, but there’s a bare chance you can find her.”

“Where?”

“In Hell, of course.”

“Holy Anubis!” Zlaz commented, realizing the implications. Both alternatives were unsavory.

“You know only the select minority get into Hell,” Yok began, ironically, “where they’re recrystallized and can last for a few extra years. The required factor is a continuous stream of hot vapors, down which the electrical charges pass.”

“And there was one! We found a fissure in your cave. It was immediately blocked off, of course. But you can go check if you won’t have my word.”

“I won’t. But how do I know that it led to the lower caves?”

“You don’t. Neither do I. But it’s your only chance. If you want that human you’ll have to play Orpheus to get her back.”

Yok winced slightly. The recrystallized humans were of course fruit for the torture chambers of the offshoot race of Hot Empire mon[[2]](#footnote-2). Years of constant heat and radiation had rendered them both sterile and impotent, and their entire cultural ethos took its release in a mass sadism complex. (It went far beyond the normal, healthy sadism of normal, healthy mon.) Still, there was an extra deck of cards up his sleeve which Yok mentally riffled and then silenced.

“How they put them back together is a scientific miracle we haven’t been able to get at,” the Pres continued. “Our best spies have never been able to fathom the secret of the Lens. Well, our second best spies...” He grinned toothily to show that it had been a compliment.

Zlaz grinned back from some deep inner spring of evilness and sick humor: “And all you want is the secret of the Lens? Lucifer Hades himself claims he doesn’t know how it works.”

“Pure propaganda,” snapped the Pres, then he became suspicious. “How do you know what he claims?”

“Oh, come now! We’ve read your secret files.”

“Damn! I’ll have to execute my whole staff first thing in the morning. But to your question: No, the Lens is totally useless to me. The reason I want you to go concerns the impending conflict. Troops from the Lower Empire have been massing at the borders for the last two years. About a decade ago, during an infrequent period when there was no volcanic static we received an odd radio message, which we couldn’t reply to. Then Lucifer’s gang began kidnapping stray mon from Lucetania in the damnedest places. No reason was given. But every six months during the period of radio communication we received the same five-word message.” He paused to clear his throat and look uncomfortable. “ ‘Send me Yok and Zlaz.’ And it was always signed by Lucifer Hades XXXII.”

“Hmm,” said Zlaz, looking stern either to suppress a grin or to look stern.

“I have no idea what he wants you for. But he is apparently willing to go to war because you won’t pay him a visit. So, since Yok has to go anyhow⁠—”

“We get the General slimey picture,” said Zlaz. “Answer a hypothetical question though. Lucetania whupped them in the civil wars six millennia ago and cast them down into Hell. We’ve always managed to squash any attempts of theirs to come back in the past. Why are you afraid of them now?”

“We’re not! Dammit! Of course the last peace treaty has been upheld for five hundred years and we’re anxious to see it served.” Yok kicked the fuglee at this moment. A rainbow flashed over the Pres’ face, but he went on, “Of course we could defeat them again, but there might be a great material loss.”

“In other words you want to sacrifice us to some special perverse tortures in order to save a few bucks.”

“That’s not it at all⁠—”

“Or they have some new secret weapon you’re afraid of.”

“That’s not it either!”

“What percentage of that great material loss we’ll be saving you can we expect?”

“Well...”

“A million gardes apiece,” Yok offered.

“Alright,” agreed the Pres, surprisingly, making Yok think he ought to have upped the ante. Then he realized that they weren’t expected to return, which would represent a tidy savings, something like 100%, while getting rid of two nuisances at the same time. Possibly three, if the war might be counted.

Zlaz nodded his acceptance. Yok’s agreement was apparent.

“Good,” said the Pres, rubbing his oily palms together. “I’ll put things in writing while you get packed.”

James entered with the two bags.

Yok poured out some more zyphoam.

II.

The jagged walls of the Avernus Hell-hole climbed rapidly past the dropping aerocar. Yok hummed the choral invocation to N’Yok, a Bantu tribal deity, which had once been one of his part-time jobs.

“That looks like the landing stage below, mon.”

“Hmm,” said Yok, which could have meant anything but probably didn’t.

Zlaz braked and cut left as the shaft widened. Disgorged into a vast cavern, the ship dropped toward an expanse of white until Yok pointed out that it was a lake of molten brimstone.

“Used to be an airstrip there,” Zlaz commented.

“That was fifty-six hundred years ago. Things might have changed a bit.”

“This new crowd must be a bunch of radicals. The 50,000 population stays constant. Why should they rearrange the topography and deface beautiful public utilities?”

“I haven’t forgotten that you laid out the airstrip,” Yok observed. “Maybe they wanted to.”

“Why?”

“Well, we didn’t exactly leave them with good tastes in their horny little faces.”

“Bah! That was too damned bad! They wanted us to lay out their city in return for a few favors⁠—”

“Four hundred years’ sanctuary,” Yok put in.

“⁠—and they asked me to design a torture chamber and teach them how to use it. What was I supposed to demonstrate on? Rocks?”

“Not the leading citizens of the community who came to watch.”

Zlaz philosophized in Fuglese and set the ship into a wall-niche. The black basalt city looked about a half mile distant.

“Just a short hike, mon,” said Zlaz, when an explosion of hoofbeats hailed a motley crowd of fork-tailed mon into their presence.

“There’s two!” screamed a large grisly one. “Let’s hack ’em apart!”

“Yeah! and pull out their entrails!”

“And set fire to them!”

“That’s the ticket!”

Zlaz raised his arms over his head, turned bright green, and grew two feet taller. Yok did the same, only he favored a delicate chartreuse. Zlaz knocked over a stalagmite and squashed three of them. Yok disemboweled a couple with his pocket machete.

Ninety seconds later and two feet shorter, Yok and Zlaz made their ways again toward the city. They respectfully left the five corpses in a ditch. A large demon with a red asbestos arm band approached from the city gate.

“Okay! Identify yourselves if you want to keep walking!”

“Yok.”

“Zlaz.”

“Good God!”

“Not really,” said Zlaz, “But we do have an appointment with Lucifer Hades and would like to keep it.”

“Yes sir!” he bowed very low. “Come right this way. Excuse me. I⁠—”

“Quite all right. But we’re in a hurry.”

“By the way,” Yok commented, “there are five corpses back that way in a ditch.”

“Yes sir. Quite all right. I’ll take care of everything. Sorry.”

They entered the city and walked for three blocks behind the gate guard. He led them into the anteroom of the giant administration building. They passed to a huge desk, where he whispered something to the attendant who made a quick call, eyes bugging.

“Please go right into the private waiting room,” shivered the desk clerk, bowing.

They went in.

A particularly evil looking young demon dashed suddenly across the room and stood smoking by the wall. The female secretary blushed violently.

“Yok and Zlaz to see Lucifer,” said the guard, a tinge of importance creeping into his voice.

Her eyes widened and her mouth slackened then went tight. She jabbed nervously at the intercom button. The demon by the wall eyed them with interest but said nothing.

“Sir!” her voice was high. “Yok and Zlaz are here to see you!”

There was a mutter from the box and she looked up.

“Go right in.” She bowed slightly.

The door opened before they reached it and a uniformed mon stamped out past them. He cast a quick glance in their direction, but did not stop. Their escort followed him out.

They entered.

The office was slightly more plush than the Pres’; about 20 by 60 feet, with a red asbestos carpet and enormous bookshelves. The desk was a gargantuan marble slab, and carved granite chairs were spotted casually about. Raw steam hissed into the room from wall jets.

“You really are Yok and Zlaz!”

The speaker was tall, very thin and dark, with a triangular face. His horns were two inch projections at the hairline, shorter than those so far encountered. He stood directly in a jet of hot steam, looking angry, but not necessarily at them. He moved to his desk and motioned them to chairs.

“That damned general would have taken all afternoon if you hadn’t come. So you’ve done me one favor already.”

“You need a few more, I understand?”

“It’s amazing, Zlaz,” He removed a giant folder from his desk and opened it. “You haven’t changed a bit!”

He extended the asbestos booklet. In it Zlaz discovered two ancient metal engravings: one of himself and one of Yok.

“Where did you get these?” He passed it to Yok.

“Lucifer Hades I, my grandfather thirty times removed, had them made as a parting gift, to surprise you. Legend has it that you left⁠—uh, a trifle prematurely. So they wound up in the Archives⁠—a good way to identify you again, should anyone ever show up claiming to be you. Of course we know you have some way of changing bodies⁠—but rumor has it that you favor the same types fairly consistently. And then, too, a few quick questions will prove your identities. I just thought you’d like to see these⁠—”

“⁠—so we’ll know you can circulate our pictures in a hurry, if you have to,” Yok put in.

Lucifer didn’t deny it. He smiled and continued: “What’s a V-beam?”

Zlaz furrowed his brow.

“Oh, that’s an ancient torture I once developed. I don’t use it any more. I implant needles now, and use UHF to vibrate them⁠—but a V-beam was a means of damaging an organ inside the body without destroying the tissue around it. I intersect two lines of⁠—”

“That’s good enough. Tell me, Yok. What would happen if I moved this paperweight to the left?”

“I’d burn your hand off with my bloat-o gun.”

“Very good. Now suppose you tell me why. ⁠—By the way, the fact that I permitted you to keep your weapons is to be taken as a sign of confidence.”

“Okay,” said Yok. “If you moved that hunk of rock to the left the floor would open up beneath us. There’s an acid pit down below. Zlaz and I designed it for your first ancestor.”

“Excellent!” He stood and bowed from the waist. “Hail, oh bringers of the Lens!”

“Oh, don’t stand on formality.”

“It can’t be helped. After thirty-two generations of the myth-making process you’ve become pretty big. Almost religious figures in our racial memory.”

“Hmm,” said Yok, who realized that the racial memory bit was a biological reality. Normal sexual reproduction being impossible, the new individuals grown in insemination tanks were endowed with their family memories. The Lucifer Hades seated before them had a two-hundred year life expectancy, but a spotty heritage of six thousand years’ memory⁠—most of them being evil and sadistic ones, as they were strongest for this species of mon. (For that matter, though, they are strong in any species of mon.) Lucifer Hades’ hereditary office, however, had endowed him with a richer background of good, solid, high-quality evil, than the normal stumblebum demon. Hence, he too was an object of respect. So Yok nodded slightly out of respect.

“Very good. You recognize us. You haven’t amassed troops outside Lucetania just because you wanted us to tea. Or have you? That would be a worthy jest⁠—almost up to Lucifer III’s sense of humor. Once he flayed thirty humans, just to prove⁠—”

Lucifer broke in harshly, “No, I’m afraid my sense of proportion is a trifle more prosaic⁠—” But here a corner of his mouth twitched upwards into an involuntary chuckle. Lucifer III’s watered-down psyche asserted its own, despite five millennia of genetic dissipations.

“That was a good one, though. Heh! Heh!”

“Heh! Heh!” said Zlaz.

“Heh! Heh!” agreed Yok.

“You’ve got to teach me that one with the needles and the UHF before you go. Don’t forget.”

“I won’t.”

“But now, as to business. Don’t worry about the army. If you can solve my main headache they won’t cause any trouble.”

“Then why don’t you just call them back now? We’re pretty accomplished achievers, and it would relieve our Pres’ heavily burdened⁠—”

Here the intercom buzzed, and Lucifer listened a moment, then snapped, “All right. But no more interruptions till I get finished in here.”

“That was a message from our Intelligence division,” he said, “who just now intelligently learned, by asking the guard at the gate, that you were attacked when you landed.”

“That’s right. But we passed over it as one of the little hazards travelers have to expect.”

“Well it’s not. Or wasn’t. And it shouldn’t be.” He checked to see that the intercom was turned off.

“The place for such fun is in the torture chambers. You were attacked by one of our wolfpack mobs. This is a part of my problem. You see,” he shifted, and fingered the paperweight unconsciously, while Yok moved uneasily. “You see, there is no one around here to torture.”

The only sound for ten seconds was the hiss of the jets. Then he continued.

“Ten years ago, for some undetermined reason, the Lens stopped crystallizing human souls. Our engineers, who make no pretense of understanding its mechanism, checked everything they could and it looked alright. We thought it might be some temporary blockage of the shaft, and we couldn’t check it above 40 miles⁠—that’s Lucetanian territory. And we had plenty of dagos on hand, so we could wait. Of course we sent for you and Yok immediately, because of your old promise to Lucifer I to come and fix it if you could, should it ever need it. It didn’t clear up!” Here he looked up at Yok, and self-consciously jerked his hand back from the paper-weight.

“We didn’t even know if you still existed, really,” he went on, “but we had to try. In the meantime the souls in stock began to dissipate. After a few years we were pretty low. We were forced to kidnap whatever mon we could that strayed into the Middle Caves, and⁠—unheard of!⁠—vigilante groups began to organize. They were completely unauthorized, and they ran about torturing their fellow citizens. I can’t stop them! I’m afraid to give an order! The military had begun to rebel. They wanted to raid Lucetania for prisoners to torture. Well, I didn’t want to try it, but I had to let them go after a while. And if I order them back now they might not come. If that happened, I’d be out. Never in six thousand years has a Lucifer been disobeyed in Hell! I’m appealing to you! Fix the Lens! You built it!”

“Easy, mon. It probably just needs some minor adjustment. We’ll take care of it. If that’s all you need, we’ll go to work on it right now.”

“Good! Fine! You can have my best engineers to help⁠—”

“No! The little sneaks just want to see how it works.”

“Can you blame us?”

“No, but it’s our only power position down here. Besides, it involves certain other things we want to keep to ourselves.”

“All right. Go fix it. Report back to me as soon as you do. By the way, what have you mon got against Italians?”

“Huh? Nothing more than against any other humans. We hate them all equally. We’re pretty democratic that way.”

“Then why are ninety percent of the humans we get down here Italian? Even Dante, that time you got him a visitor’s pass, noticed that we were packed almost exclusively with his countrymen.”

“Oh,” said Zlaz. “Avernus, the classic entrance to the underworld, is the shaft we used as a conductor when we built the Lens. It sucks down the psyches of all the humans who die for a sixty to hundred mile radius. It just happens to be in Italy. You’re right under the shoelaces of the boot, so to speak.”

“Well, go to it.” He buzzed and mumbled something into the intercom. Then he rose.

“I want you to meet my son.” They passed back into the reception room. The evil-looking demon was perched back on the secretary’s desk. His hands were out of sight.

“Hi, dad,” he nodded. There was a resemblance, and he’d probably be a dead ringer when mature, but now he had a slightly lower, eviller forehead and even shorter horns. A typical boss’ son, apparently.

“Gonna be as evil as your old man, kid?” Yok asked.

“I hope so, sir.”

“Hell, he’ll be eviller,” Lucifer mussed his fur and grinned. “Gotta keep up the family reputation.”

“You a college mon?” Zlaz inquired.

“Hell U., sir. We’ve got a great rockball team, and I was president of the Pin the Human Club, until it was disbanded because of the shortage.” He blew a cloud of smoke into the air. “I’m majoring in Human Culture. It’s taught in the Bio department, but it’s really one of the Social Sciences⁠—”

“All right, son. Don’t bore our guests. They’re awfully busy. That’s Yok and Zlaz you’re looking at.”

Junior tried not to look too impressed, what with being a college mon and all. He whistled softly, though, to sound sophisticated.

“Honored to meet you, gentlemon. I didn’t realize your statuses. I’d like to talk with you later.” This last sounded almost urgent.

“There’s no such thing as Human Culture,” Yok snorted, and stamped into the main hall. He was joined shortly by Zlaz and Lucifer senior.

“Uh,” said Yok. “I’d like to check your dungeons, when we’re through with the repair job. I’m looking for a blonde female.”

Lucifer shook his head. “There aren’t any humans around at all now,” he replied. “The last dissolved about two years ago. We do have over a hundred of your countrymon, though. You can take them back with you. They’re more of a nuisance than anything else. We have to keep them in separate cells and work on them one at a time. Whenever they get together they break out or damage something.”

“Okay, thanks anyhow.”

“Well, what was her name? I can check the records and see whether she was here.”

“Jeanne d’Arc. She was French.”

“Doesn’t sound familiar, but I’ll let you know this afternoon.”

“Good.”

\* \* \*

Zlaz slid down from the bowl of the hundred-foot quartz Lens. He was completely encased in a heavy woolen garment, to prevent scratching it. He scratched himself considerably, however. Stethoscope in hand he addressed some Fuglese to no one in particular, and some comments to Yok.

“\_\_\_hot in this\_\_\_place, and I have to wear this\_\_\_wool suit!”

“Anything wrong up there?” asked Yok, who had the bottom open and was testing electrical circuits.

“Not a crack. How about the inside?”

“Nothing here either.” Yok stood up.

Zlaz was peeling off the wool shirt.

“Do you know what that means?” Yok asked.

“Yeah. Either people have stopped dying in Italy, or there’s some blockage in the shaft.”

“Yeah, there’s some blockage,” said Yok. “I came back through the World of Humans, and they haven’t stopped dying, I can guarantee.”

“Hmm. Then we have to inspect the whole two hundred mile drop. Either it’s blocked, there’s a pocket of cold air, or there’s a crosscurrent of warm air.”

“That earthquake was about ten years ago, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, I thought of that. Here comes Lucifer. We can bring him up to date, and see what’s up with your human. By the way, did you mean the Jeanne d’Arc?”

“Yeah.”

“What’s the deal? Maybe I can add the extra evil skill necessary to find her.”

“Well, she was a witch.⁠—That is, she’s a human I taught all sorts of foul, low mon lore to.”

“That was a century ago. How did you run into her?”

“Well, I had to masquerade as a human for a while back then. I was a Maréchal of France⁠—Giles de Retz was the name. I⁠—”

“Bluebeard! The evillest human in ages!”

“Well, I enjoy myself whenever I’m out on a job, if I can.”

“And you revealed your identity and educated her?”

“Well⁠—yes. And when it was time to come back, I sort of didn’t want to leave her behind. So I sneaked her into Lucetania and put her on ice. When I became a human again I could have just awakened her and we could have resumed where we left off.”

Lucifer drew near. He stood then smoking, with a worried look.

“Find the trouble?”

“No. It’s something up in the shaft,” said Zlaz. “We’ll take off right now and inspect it if you like.”

“Fine. Go right ahead.”

“Well,” said Yok, “what about Jeanne d’Arc?”

“Not on the books,” shrugged Lucifer. “Sorry I can’t help you. It is possible that she was here and didn’t get recorded. Our records for this past decade are pretty sloppy. You can go down into the dungeons and ask around yourself, if you want. Maybe some of your countrymon, or the guards⁠—”

“Yeah, I’d like to do that. In fact Zlaz can check the shaft just as quickly by himself. So if you don’t mind, I’ll go right now.”

“All right. I’ll give you a letter to the warden.”

“See you later, then, Zlaz.”

“Yeah.” He struggled out of the rest of the wool uniform and kicked it into a heap. Yok and Lucifer headed back towards town.

III.

Yok made a face at his reflection in the brimstone beer, and belched sulphur. Lucifer, seated at his desk in the now darkened administration center, sipped one of his own. He hit a switch before him and the overhead light went on again. The wall jets hissed less violently than earlier.

“Did I hear a door?”

“I think so,” answered Yoke. He gulped his drink and set the emptied flagon on the tray. No success, he mused.

There were two sharp knocks at the door, which opened before Lucifer finished saying, “Come in.”

Zlaz crossed the room and threw himself into a stone armchair (which creaked audibly) before he said anything.

“Well?” asked Lucifer, after a polite pause.

“Not very,” answered Zlaz. “I’ve found the answer. ⁠—But tell me, where is Lucifer XXXIII?”

“I don’t know what he does on his own time. He might be anywhere. I hope he’s keeping up the family name with appropriate evilness.” He grinned slily. “Maybe he’s got a vigilante pack of his own. There is something very tempting about illicit torture... If I were in his position⁠—”

“Before you set carried away in reverie, that was what I’d call a leading question. I know where he is.”

“Oh?”

“About seventy miles up I found a side passage, cutting off of the main one. There was an artificial current of hot air, with a jet of cold below it.”

“Artificial?”

The steamhoses puffed, as if in sympathy, then slackened their pressure.

“Artificial. Maybe the passage was opened up in that last earthquake. Anyhow your son happened upon it and exploited it. He’s got quite a setup in there.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand. Setup?”

“Complete with a little Lens of his own. He drains off the souls, re-crystallizes them, and has his own little Elysium.”

“But why?” said Lucifer.

“But how?” said Yok.

Zlaz stared at Yok. “Who else could build a Lens?”

“The Starlighter, the Black Banshee, Sethantes⁠—”

“In this part of the galaxy.”

“No one but us⁠—” The flash was one of recognition.

“How much intricate, low mon lore did you teach Jeanne?”

“Hmm,” said Yoke. “I never gave her explicit plans for a Lens⁠—But she just might have been able to do it at that, if she had a working one to study.”

“And incentive,” said Zlaz. “Tell me, was she a humanitarian?”

“Well,” Yok squirmed a bit uncomfortably, “sort of.”

“You really are getting perverse, aren’t you? Tch, tch, tch! A human⁠—and a decent one at that.”

“Well, there was a little affair concerning you and the Queen of Sheba that’s never been fully aired.”

“Hmm. Well, turning aside from problems of personality, Jeanne made it down here, recrystallized, and was discovered by Lucifer Jr. She fit neatly in with his plans. That Pin the Human presidency was sheer cover-up. Check and I bet you’ll see he never participated. She was a humanitarian human idealist and she doped out the secret of the Lens. They duplicated it in one of the Middle Caverns, cut off the flow of souls to down here, and set up a Garden of Eden. Everyone is happy up there and passes his time in a human Utopia, Lucifer XXXIII and a gang of his friends are the guardian angels.”

“My own son! A pervert! ⁠—And he stood to inherit all this!” Lucifer gestured widely. “I shouldn’t have let him major in Human Culture!”

“I doubt it was a causative factor,” said Zlaz, “just a result. After millennia of sterility in these radioactive, overheated caverns, your stock has started to mutate. Your son is a hybrid. He is sexually potent. I noticed his behavior this afternoon with your secretary. It was a trifle odd, for an impotent, sterile mon.”

“God! A queer in my only family!”

“No. He just has a different method of release. He doesn’t need to torture for kicks. That’s why he was attracted to human culture. He read their Heaven myth and decided to set up his own version of it.”

“My own son! An Anti-Lucifer!” He poured a stiff drink and gulped it. Then he poured another and sipped more slowly. He looked broken. Then however, the colossus, half-legend, which was Lucifer himself, in the blood, behind the individual, slowly began to reassert itself. He smiled cryptically and bleakly, rose, and crossed to his bookcase.

When he returned, it was a bound map he unravelled on the desktop. Suddenly he was half a foot taller.

“Okay,” he pointed. “Show me where this cancer is located. I’m going to have the army away from Lucetania and up there in six hours, if I have to personally assassinate all my officers.”

Zlaz grinned respectfully; Yok, a trifle sheepishly.

“Well, where is it?” he demanded, smoking violently, arms akimbo.

Zlaz rose, and, with a pen, quickly sketched in a side-cavern. Lucifer pored over it and reached for the monstraphone.

“Just a moment!” said Zlaz. And for some reason Yok thought of the same words, breaking a gesture of the Pres’, the day before.

His hand paused, an unspoken question peered from behind his slanted eyes.

Zlaz continued with the pen: “My abilities of dissimulation are gargantuan: Not only did I penetrate the Citadel of Heaven, disguised as a demon, recognize your son, and assassinate the queen⁠—”

“⁠—Assassinate the queen!” Yok stood suddenly. Zlaz, however, winked to him, out of Lucifer’ s range of view.

“⁠—I also scouted the adjacent terrain. Here,” he pointed to the map, “is a nearby pocket of lava. An appropriate explosion⁠—about there,” he mused, “would send a fiery sea down into Heaven, taking them at the height of their revelry and perversion. ⁠—All the humans, all the errant demons, and your son.”

The gigantic crash was Lucifer’s fist, cracking the desk top. “Yes! By Ishtar! It’s beautiful! Delicate! Subtle! Lovely! What a mind you have, Zlaz! I wish I could persuade you to stay and redesign the whole system!” He laughed maniacally for a full two minutes, then reseated himself. “Okay. Go! Leave! Depart right away and blast that pocket open! I’ll be on the landing waiting for the beautiful sound.”

“That’s not all,” added Zlaz. “When that cavern’s filled up, the shaft should work normally again.”

“Come on,” Lucifer jumped up, grabbing the pitcher and a flagon as he headed toward the door.

“She’s alive,” Zlaz whispered as they left. “I kidnapped her and hid her in the car, but thought it politic to provide a lie.”

Yok grinned, feeling better by the second.

\* \* \*

The ground-shaking sound occurred but a few moments before the aerocar darted down from the shaft. It danced rapidly through the forest of stalactites and dropped before the black-haloed form standing upon a promontory. An enormous sigh, like a distant wind, swam forward from somewhere; it rose up into an inhuman groan.

“Is the deed done?” asked Lucifer of the two figures scurrying from the car.

“Yes and no,” said Yok. “Complications have arisen.”

“Such as?”

“Well everything happened the way I figured it,” said Zlaz, looking nervously upward. The groan increased to a thunder.

“⁠—but there was more lava in that pocket than I thought!” he shouted.

Realization broke, like a Pacific hurricane, upon Lucifer’s face.

“You mean⁠—!”

Zlaz nodded: “That sound you hear is the overflow rushing down the shaft.”

“How long have we?”

“Five minutes. Maybe six⁠—”

Despite the titanic thunder an abstract calm, not of sound, but of feeling, was born as Lucifer mused on the brink of chaos. His voice was steady, even relaxed:

“I made the mistake of forgetting a verse or two from our ancient Scripture.” Here he poured a flagon of brimstone beer. “The legend goes that you and Yok can do anything, anything at all.” He sipped slowly, then continued, “And the corollary is that whenever your task is accomplished, you somehow manage to screw up the situation some other way, so that things always end up worse than you found them.”

He gestured widely, drunkenly: “You once saved my people. You found us this beautiful haven⁠—of course it made our entire race sterile! Then⁠—”

“We might still save the play before the end of the fifth act,” Yok suggested.

“How?”

“Another quick explosion near the base will bottle up the shaft. Maybe it’ll hold it back. We still have three and a half minutes to try.”

They vanished back toward the car in a puff of obscenity.

\* \* \*

“Your power position,” growled Lucifer malevolently, “is now nonexistent.”

He eyed the blasted shaft. Occasional gravel still rained upon the rock-wrecked Lens.

“Je ne parle pas français!” he growled at the blonde human female standing between the two mon, who had just said something.

“Also, you Zlaz! You lied to me. You didn’t assassinate her! You kidnapped her! Did you really think you could keep her hidden in your car?”

Zlaz nodded.

“It maneuvered much too clumsily for a pilot like you. I figured out the extra weight factor. I’m not what I am because I’m stupid. Lying to me!”

“It seemed appropriate,” Zlaz said.

Lucifer ignored him. “She’ll get the works for high treason. Then, despite certain religious qualifications you’ll grace my personal dungeon. I may be ruined, but I’ll go out in style.”

Yok cleared his throat:

“We built this place once⁠—”

“Times are different,” said Lucifer. “You had a smaller group to work with, simpler jobs. You’re only big in retrospect. Now we are in a political turmoil. What could you achieve? Build another Lens? What shaft? It would take too long anyhow.”

“Stall,” said Yok, “for as long as you can. Let us go back to Lucetania⁠—the City of Light, from which you took your name⁠—”

“And was meant to rule!” Lucifer interjected. Then he mused: “No, I can’t trust you. You wouldn’t come back.”

“Leave Jeanne,” observed Zlaz gallantly, “if you have something sure-fire.”

Yok looked pensive. So did Lucifer.

“How long?” he finally inquired.

“Just there and back,” Yok suggested.

“One short-lived human isn’t that large an incentive,” he shook his head. “I wouldn’t even send one of you and keep the other: You Upper Level mon have no personal honor.

“For that matter, though,” he continued, “I’m not certain I want to keep you either.” A crafty gleam kicked its heels deep within his eyes. “Perchance you could get me political asylum in Lucetania?”

Zlaz shook his head:

“Your generals would declare war anyhow, without you, and you’d probably be executed.”

Lucifer looked bleak.

Yok smiled at a sudden commotion from the city.

“The sound you are now hearing,” he narrated, “is a prison break. I left my pocket tool kit with a countrymon during my tour earlier. I had no specific intent, other than stirring up hell.” Here he chuckled at his own jest, and Zlaz joined him. “And now his malicious mechanical genius seems to have prevailed. We again occupy a small power pivot. Give us your word by your office, the Covenant, and all that’s black and vile that we can make this trip and we’ll quell them, you’ll have our words we’ll be right back. If you don’t, they’ll do quite a bit of damage before you put them down. Especially as we’re physically superior, and all your fighting mon are up near the front.”

“And you don’t know the half of it,” Zlaz murmured.

Lucifer exhaled a black cloud and spat through it, then he smiled and a few of the rocks split (Zlaz maintained it was due to the heat, but Yok had his own ideas).

“All right. Evil and mischief being all I worship, I am always willing to pay homage to superior craft in villainy.” He bowed from the waist, “Go stop them now or you’ll have another city planning job ahead. You have my vilest word you may go.”

They went.

\* \* \*

The reading light in the Pres’ office was the only illumination in the capital building. He was seated at his desk, poring over a battle map.

The door stood halfway open. Yok kicked it the rest of the way and strode in. He paused to knock politely on the frame.

“The devil!” observed the Pres. “How did you get back? You did go, didn’t you?” He scowled and looked puzzled alternately.

“Of course,” said Zlaz, appearing behind him and kicking the door shut. “We’ve taken care of everything except the loose ends. We’ll tie those off now, if you don’t mind. How about our money?”

“I haven’t got that kind of money in my office safe. Besides, what proof have I that you accomplished anything?”

“Tomorrow the troops from Hell will be withdrawn from our border. Diplomatic relations will be set up within a month, in the name of the new monarch, Lucifer XXXIII, with whom we’ve made a deal. No peace or friendship, but there’ll be a healthy resumption of the status quo.”

“When all that’s occurred you can see me for your money. Now, if you’ll excuse me⁠—” He glanced down at the papers before him.

“No, we won’t excuse you,” said Yoke. “We want our pound of flesh.”

“What do you mean?”

Yok produced his pocket acetylene torch.

“Before we use this on your wall safe we’re going to use it on you.”

“This is ridiculous! I said you’d get your money, if what you claim is correct. You’ll have to wait.”

“You don’t understand,” explained Yoke “This is pure revenge.”

“For what?”

“Smashing that stasis chamber in my lab after the earthquake.”

“Why should I do a thing like that?”

Yok ticked them off on his fingers: “1) You knew I’d need a strong motive to go to Hell when you finally located me, knowing Zlaz would go if I did; 2) you puritanically disapproved of my “perverseness” in preserving a human female; and 3) just for the sheer hell of it, because you enjoy breaking things (especially live ones) that don’t belong to you.”

“Absurd! What proof have you for such allegations?”

“Why, the best in the world, Jeanne’s word. Her released psyche witnessed your raging through my lab with a crowbar before it was sucked down to Hell. She learned afterwards that this was three months after the earthquake. Gas leakages aren’t so important that you’d have an inspection team out there the next day. You see, I did locate her.” Yok lit the torch. “Or did you just drop in to kill the termites for me and discover they’d grown vicious?”

The Pres swallowed, licked his purple-blue lips:

“You’ll never get away with this one! I’m President of the whole Pan-Monstric Association!”

“So was Tara Juanua.”

“Times have changed in six thousand years! They’ll track you down! Where could you hide? No place!”

“On the contrary,” supplied Zlaz, “the same place as before, and doing the same things as before⁠—being evil and helping to rebuild Hell. The new Lucifer Hades has again granted us unlimited sanctuary. So you see, we just have to wait until the next Pres has a problem so delicate that our special talents are required. What if it takes a few centuries? We might even manufacture it. Our price will be pardon. In the meantime we’ll be vacationing in the warmer climes.”

They moved forward.

“Okay!” he squirmed. “I admit I smashed your stuff and killed her. It was the only device I could think of that you’d do my bidding for. It wasn’t malice, it was political expediency that prompted the action. I needed a hold over you. The Prince, like a weapon or force, is neither moral nor immoral. He responds to urgency within the limitation of available alternatives⁠—”

“Don’t quote Machiavelli at us,” said Zlaz. “He was me.”

“Besides,” added Yok, the blue nimbus of the torch casting weird shadows across his face, “since that’s not the way Jeanne tells it, I’ll have her word over yours⁠—even though human females don’t have the best reputations for veracity. She claims it was pure malice. Your administration was going to pot anyhow. It’s time for a change. In fact, rumor has it you manufactured that earthquake yourself, so you could invoke emergency tax measures.”

“That really is a lie!”

“I know, I just started it tonight.”

“You’ll never get⁠—”

IV.

When Yok ambled into the Grene Zyphoam Cellar for the second time in twenty years, Zlaz was with him.

“That,” he pointed out, “is Adon, a small-time fertility deity who is about to become a savior in Hell. Kind of ironic, like the other time⁠—”

“Don’t be nostalgic here,” said Zlaz. “It got out of hand that time.”

But Yok regarded the palms of his hands for a moment in silence.

“Ahem, Adon. May I have a word with you?”

“Sure, Yok. Buy me some zyphoam.”

“Okay.” He whistled up a gallon. “We’ve got you a good job with plenty of prestige. After a few generations you may even develop a taste for brimstone beer.”

“Doing what?”

“Why the only thing you know, of course. There’s a whole culture that requires your, er⁠—peculiar abilities to help it through a particularly hard part of its history. They need a quick, lively transition from sadism to sex.”

“Great! I’ll need my tools: horned masks, phallic images⁠—”

“No time. There are plenty of horns where we’re going, and lots of suggestive rocks.”

“Okay.” He gulped some zyphoam. “Would I know anybody where we’re headed, do you think?”

“Just me and Zlaz.” Here Yok leaned back. “But you’ll make friends quickly⁠—“we’ve even got a lot of little yellow guys out in the car for a cheering section.”

“Great!” he observed.

“Hmm,” Zlaz poured out the zyphoam with a noble sigh, and glanced at his watch.

There was still time for a moment’s sentimental regarding of things past.

Notes

Zelazny and Carl Yoke each contributed to The Record, a series of short stories about Zlaz and Yok (for Zelazny and Yoke), sloppy but crafty monsters who lived in caves under Paris but above Hell and near to Lucetania, slept long periods, drank large quantities of zyphoam, ambled in and out of outrageous situations, and fouled up most assignments given to them. There was also a fair bit of humor and word play in these stories. “Studies in Saviory” is the only surviving story that Zelazny wrote for The Record.

Carl Yoke wrote, “The word ‘saviory’ in the title is not a misspelling but rather a clever neologism, a combination of savior and savory. The new word not only reflects the mon’s saving of Hell once again but also the fact that they save Lucetania from a war with the forces of Hell and they make it possible for the ‘Paradise’ established by Lucifer XXXIII and Jeanne to blossom in the nether region. In echoing savory, it also suggests that what has happened, and what is going to happen, is good...

“Beyond the creation of the word ‘saviory,’ the story also contains other word play. Hell is, for example, explained as an acronym coming from the phrase Hot Empire Lower than Lucetania. And demon is explained as coming from the phrase ‘demoted mon’...And finally the Avernus Hole, Avernus being another word for hell, can be shortened to A-hole, which I have on good authority was the term that Yok and Zlaz usually used...

“The story follows the usual Record grammar. Yok and Zlaz are tricked into a mission by the Pres who has an agenda of his own. They succeed at solving the major problem only to ‘screw up’ something else. There are the usual ironies, notice for example that Yok and Zlaz are going to recreate Hell, a kinder, gentler Hell which will replace torture with ‘healthy’ sex. And there is betrayal; the Pres sets them up. And there is humor.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Written in 1964 or 1965, Yoke recalled that Zelazny read it to him at his apartment while Yoke’s wife waited impatiently to serve supper3.

Zyphoam was the fictional drink of Yok and Zlaz; Yoke and Zelazny did “try to make Zyphoam once in Roger’s basement. It had V-8 as its basis with some tabasco, licorice and other stuff⁠—no alcohol at that point⁠—maybe some Vernors ginger ale which we drank along with Pepsi. It was appropriately awful.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Adon (also known as Adonis) was an ever-youthful, annually-renewed Greek god of fertility and the harvest. Dionysus (also known as Bacchus) was a Greek god of fertility, wild and ecstatic religious rites, and wine. Priapus was another, minor Greek god of fertility who was often depicted as having an extremely large phallus. Etruscan means pertaining to the people of Etruria, whose civilization was at its peak in 500 BC.

Lucetania or Lusitania was an ancient Roman region that corresponded to modern Portugal. Anubis was the Egyptian god of mummification who was represented as having the head of a jackal. Orpheus pleaded and won from the gods the right to have his dead wife Eurydice returned to him, but he failed in the one requirement to not look back on his long walk out of Hell. When he looked back, doubting that she was truly behind him, she became lost to him forever.

Ethos is the underlying character, spirit and beliefs of a culture, that make it what it is. Avernus is a lake near Naples which was considered in ancient times to be the site of an entrance to Hell.

Stalagmites form on the floor of a cavern from the mineral water dripping down. UHF is an abbreviation for Ultra High Frequency. The poet Dante Alighieri wrote The Divine Comedy about his fictional journey to Hell, Purgatory, and into Paradise, a work that inspired many of Zelazny’s works. Jeanne d’Arc is the French name for Joan of Arc, the maiden who was inspired by religious visions and led the resistance during the siege of Orléans; she was later burned at the stake as a witch.

Maréchal means Marshal, a military distinction in France. Giles de Laval, Seigneur de Retz, also known as Marshal de Retz, was one of Joanne of Arc’s captains and later distinguished himself by becoming Marshall of France and counselor and chamberlain to King Charles VII. He had a characteristic barbe bleue (blue beard). The story of Bluebeard, in which a man repeatedly kills his wives and stuffs their bodies in a room in his castle, is thought to have taken its name from the Marshal de Retz.

Elysium is the mythological afterlife for heroes and the blessed, similar to Avalon. Sir Thomas More coined the phrase “utopia” (a perfect place) for his 1516 book of the same name. Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli was an Italian statesman and political philosopher who advised unethical means may be necessary to acquire and effectively use power. Stalactites form from mineral-rich water and hang from the roof of a cavern.

Kind of ironic, like the other time...it got out of hand that time suggests that Yok and Zlaz had inadvertently created Christianity.

1. H.E.L.L.⁠—Hot Empire Lower than Lucetania [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Demoted Mon, D. mon, demon. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Commentary on ‘Studies in Saviory’ ” by Carl B. Yoke, unpublished essay. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Letter from Carl Yoke to Dr. Christopher Kovacs dated January 8, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)