



Devilish Gifts!

by

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Satan slammed his hooves down on the desk in a rage. Glaring hugely about the office, he simultaneously appeared to shrug deeper into the rare fur coat draped about his shoulders. "Bless it to Heaven" his villainous mood growled.

They'd had to shut down the largest of the furnaces warming Hell for cleaning and repairs, so it was pretty chilly just then. Satan always reacted badly to any temperature reduction.

Dleft, who'd been in Hell a couple of millennia and knew Satan well, drew a cup of the Old One's favorite sulphurous brew. "I've a pretty collection of special nuisances against humans for today."

"Nuisances, Heaven!" Satan roared. "I want an all-out, super-effective viciousness, bless it! I want something that will drive those humans completely insane! I want something that will destroy them utterly! I want the most thorough-going efficient viciousness that can be invented. And I want it fast!"

Dleft ducked the thrown cup used to emphasize Satan's remarks. "Yes, your Magnificent Horrendousness." Even he could not deal with the Old One when the mood was on.

Dleft called a fast conference of the best idea devils. "Old Boy's fair sanctified. It's the cold, you know," he informed his colleagues as they assembled. "We've got to come up with something special fast."

The sudden noise was deafening and, to say the least, vicious. As Dleft drummed long nails nervously, trying his best to pick out the reason, he sorted out three factions of imps in total disagreement and all shouting imprecations and argumentations at once.

One faction wanted to boil humans in molten lava, reminding that the great flood had done wonders for His Horrendous' complexion. When reminded that Heaven had interfered several times, -- and probably would do so again, -- and that the best human seed had been saved the last several times, the faction got effectively shouted down.

Another faction wanted to send in Suggestors and Insinuators again, but then Dleft himself overruled it, reminding that Earth was still pretty Edenic. That is, the wages of Eve's peccadillo with the apple hadn't caught up with humankind as yet. People still lived in peace and perfect understanding for each knew fully others' thoughts and there was nothing for them to disagree over. "Besides," Dleft explained further, "It was only the female that fell for it last time. Don't you think they're a bit wiser now?"

That shut them up for a nanosecond or so, and then they were off again: "Introduce a new species!" shouted one imp while beating the table loudly.

"You spiritual idiot! What do you think we did last time? And look what happened. Deceased! Dead! Nothing but bones left. And those that haven't been pushed out to burial are integrated with the species, having improved the species again."

"Another ice age!"

"Creeping angels! Tell me they fared badly during the last cycle! How do you think their intelligence sharpened?"

"Whiteguard! Sheep in wolf's clothing!"

"Cleft the land, make the oceans too far for swimming."

"Poor fellow. He's been away too long. Tectonic plates, you know. Subduction and all that."

The noise level mounted, until even Dleft's paws had to pound on his patented earplugs to learn if they were still operational. "Stop!" he ordered, his eyes reflecting a vicious red. "Get down to Earth. Think! For example: How do people communicate on earth? How do they know what others are thinking? How do they tell each other things?"

"Great haploid haloes! You know that as well as we," answered one imp. They just know. There isn't



any way to it.”

“Of course I know,” said Dleft sarcastically. “I was posing hypothetical questions to get you imps into -- Satan forgive -- a creative mood. For example, again, “Do humans quarrel?”

“No. but. . . .”

The organized meeting broke loose once more, and Dleft went back to pounding at his ear plugs, the last thing heard clearly being the recommendation of one imp to “. . . introduce genetic variation in their food supply,” and a partial answer for that being, “. . . last time those triply-blessed, lucky humans discovered bread could be made from the fruit of the hybridization.”

Dleft was indeed a forlorn First-Devil when he pondered facing Satan alone, and sans recommendations. But then, it was always so. One imp talked, and so did another, and soon it was bedlam. Nothing could be accomplished, with such an insane way of transferring information.

The intercom interrupted his thoughts. “Well, come on!” Satan bellowed, obviously unchanged. “Come on! I haven’t got three eons to wait! Great leaping harpstrings! What’s wrong with you, you sanctified numbskull?”

“Yes, your Horrendousness,” Dleft replied. “I was just on my way.”

“For sanctification’s sweet sake, get here!”

Dleft dragged his hooves, scattering sparks and debris every which way. How can I face him? No help, really. The imps talk and pontificate, pound at the table and argue, and there is no -- well -- cohesiveness - no - no. . . . Just before his hoof was to enter Satan’s portal, devil’s-rot if he didn’t have the answer. He grinned wickedly and hunched up his formerly sagging shoulders. His plan was complete by the time he faced the master.

Huddled down in his precious fur, and beating an angel’s tattoo on the desk, Satan scowled viciously as Dleft first broached the idea, but as the plan unfolded and Satan saw its intricate and diabolical possibilities, he brightened and was actually grinning himself when Dleft finished.

“This is the most Heaven-blest vicious thing yet,” he crowed. “Get at it!”

“Sure, it’ll bring them to par with us devils” -- Dleft began.

“-- but think of the grand and glorious outcomes!” Satan finished.

Dleft led the expedition, and did such a good job teaching humans to talk that humans have been talking about it ever since.

