



Satan Cheats at Cards
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Introduction

Religion and science is, by unpopular opinion, one and the same thing. Each founded on different forms of truths; fact or belief. Before you protest, let me remind you that what is fact today was once fiction, and old truths have become no more than fantasies. We are not yet capable of saying that we know everything for sure; we are not omniscient, though some might forget. The problem lies in the fact that we can never prove something to be false or non-existent, because at our current state of knowledge, the possibilities are endless. So we can't for sure say that God doesn't exist, just as we can't for sure say that he does.

So let me tell you about one little possibility, which has occurred somewhere, some when, somehow. This book may be a little confusing to follow, but so is existence. All I can attempt is to tell the story how I know it to be, and how I understand it to be. But as you will soon discover, when you know everything, and can do everything, the everyday pleasures of life become meaningless.



Death and Rebirth

The world in its entirety is a dark and scary place, sailing lost in an infinite galaxy with no compass and no goal. In this eternal and questionable journey, that we are all a willing or unwilling part of, it's the little things that give it meaning; the figurative light in the darkness. With time never ending and the possibilities much akin, it isn't surprising that some lights shine brighter than others.

My name is... Ok stop, this is ridiculous, can we just scrap all that? My name is irrelevant, for I have many, and each one is an empowered part of me. I am a voice amongst many, privileged to shine amongst the darkness, but I wasn't always a star, in fact I was much the opposite. And to be frank the analogy of darkness and stars is ridiculously far off the truth, but I think we all know that.

Someone once asked me if I thought that I didn't deserve all this. And I had to think about it, really think about it. It took a while to come up with a clear enough answer, but at the same time I knew the answer even if in not as many words. And since that time when that question was asked, a lot changed, and the answer too has evolved but essentially stayed the same. So here it is:

No, I don't think I deserve this life. Because I'm not one of those people who fight and sacrifice, I chose the old and easy way whenever possible. I've had so many chances thrown at my feet that I left to rot and if it hadn't been for all those people who supported me I would have never made it this far. But at the same time I know that I've been through a lot, not in comparison to some people who really have a tough life with no luck, but harsh enough for me. And as a little repayment for that hardship, yeah, a little perhaps. I'm not always a good person; I lie and pretend from time to time, sometimes out of fear and sometimes out of laziness. But I wouldn't say that I'm a bad person, just someone who is content to live on the lucky streak I'm having. Do I know that it probably won't last, course I do, I'm lazy not stupid.

So my answer stays the same since the question has been asked; no I don't believe I deserve it. But recent times have added one little word to that statement that is proof of how my life has changed over the years. And that word is 'yet'. No I don't deserve it yet. But I swear, I'm going to fight for it, and nothing you can do will stop me.

But none of this matters, because this isn't my story, for a story must be complete before it can be properly told. Anything else is lazy story telling. No, in this tale you are about to hear I am just another bystander, who might have, not all too subtly, influence the story. But nevertheless this isn't my story. It's about someone who isn't a light in the dark, but someone whose story is worth listening to.

Let me introduce to you the real main character of this story, or at least I'll try, you see, I have never met her in person. Well, except that one time, in which I didn't even notice who she was or how important she was, so it doesn't really count. But before that meeting,



she was a complete stranger to me, and even after she was just a face and a name. One that became famous for all the right reasons, but still remained a distant figure to people like me. What I mean by that are completely normal people, who live out the entirety of their lives without ever being special to the rest of the world. Just like I use to be. Because you see, my life is quite different from the average persons, not by choice mind you. It just happen, just like strange things happen.

But you don't want to know about me, you want to know about the hero of this story, the hero of this world. And not some crazy woman who has fallen into the role of the narrator. Melanie was no one special when she was born, no entitlements but also no hardships. She grew up as a curious and headstrong girl, and into a determined and kind young woman. She also felt like there was something more that her day to day life, I'm sure we've all felt that way. But little did she know, or even expect that she was right.

You see our world had a tiny problem, and that was humans. Ok, I admit, with 7 billion of them, it ain't that small. The problem though wasn't in the quantity, but rather the quality of their stubbornness and sins. Greed, hate, envy, it was all there, and like all bad things that aren't taken care of quickly, it grew. And spread to the furthest corners of the world. The people did their best to ignore the problem, which is also part of the reason why it became such a big problem. But especially in first world countries, they didn't want to admit that things like racism, sexism, and general hate existed in their neighbourhood. They watched it in their news, and felt for those poor people suffering on the other side of the world. But the care was kept within limits; otherwise they would have done something about it. But they didn't. Of course it wasn't contained to those parts of the world, but in the bigger and richer cities, the hate was hidden in the shadows. When it finally did come to light, there was chaos.

Melanie too was guilty of ignorance, to a part; she didn't feel like she could do anything to change it, even if she wanted to. After all, what can one person do? But she did, she changed the world, and thus, saved it. How she did that? Well, that's the story I am trying to tell, so don't rush me. Sheesh.

But you see, I'm not omniscient, so I can only tell you the story from my own eyes. But be assured, I can tell you everything important, and while Melanie is the key to this happy ending. A lot of things happened behind the scenes that most people don't know. I am one of the lucky few who do know, so allow me to share. I'll tell you my story, so that you might learn of how the world was saved, you'll just have to do the best to tolerate the crazy parts that belong solely to me. Or skip them, you know, because you can, after all you're just reading about it, and not living it. Wouldn't that be a cool trick, to skip the boring parts of one's life? But go ahead; I know my life ain't that special, I won't be insulted if you do... It's a shame sarcasm can't be read.

So let me begin, as every good story does, at the beginning... Huh, on second thought, scrap that, let's begin where it becomes interesting, who needs all the boring bits anyway? My story became interesting on just another random day in my life, that it was the day that humans would eventually come to call as the end of the world, I had no idea. Frankly everything that humans did had become more of an amusing nuisance than everything else. Something that I rarely bothered myself with. I had settled with a quiet life, which gave me time to explore my own interests. Not that it didn't hold its own little adventures, but they were never risky, though that was only because of a little technicality. On that day I had engaged myself in a game of cards with Devon, also known as the devil or Satan. Yeah, I



know right, I'm crazy, everyone knows he cheats, but that makes it fun as well. Most people don't, well; most people are dead terrified of him, no idea why though. He is actually a really nice guy. But I guess I should clear a few things up, so let me bring a little light into the dark.

Satan, you see, cheats at cards. It's in his nature, and he's very good at it, so if you ever get the chance, be careful. Also take care what you use as wager, because if you lose the price will be painful. Nothing harmful, but definitely humiliating. Not the answers you were expecting? Heh, well you can expect a lot of that. And yes, I am indeed dead, and in hell, how else do you think I can play with Devon? Seriously, use some common sense.

"Huh, figures." I muttered as I glanced at my hand, two skulls, a crown, and three bones. In human terms strange cards, in hell terms, a bad hand. But that was actually normal if your opponent was the devil himself, he had a way of bending luck to his will. Especially when it came to his favorite game of cards.

"Bad hand?" Devon asked with a grin on his face.

"No, not really." I snorted, not giving him the satisfaction. His grin widened, he knew I was lying, not because he was omniscient, but because I had a bad poker face.

Devon was nothing like you would expect him to be, he was tall and handsome. Not in the dark and king of hell kind of way, but more like a rebellious young man who didn't want to grow up. He had a firm build that hid the enormous strength I knew him to possess, and delicate features that contrasted the wild black hair and mischievous golden eyes. He was dressed in jeans and a loose shirt, like someone you would expect on a beach, with sandals to match.

I on the other hand looked nothing like what I did when I had been alive. I had retained the general appearance of a young woman, average height, and more tomboyish than feminine. But beyond that... My hair was starlight white, short, with a couple of long braids decorated with various beads. Strange, but still human, right? Well, in addition I had a long furry tail, long pointed ears, sharper teeth and claws. All of which I had won at cards. Don't understand? Well let me explain, cards is played with a wager, and when your opponent is the devil, the rewards can be quite, how to put it, impressive. It wasn't the only things I had won, but more to that later. The only things I couldn't change were my eyes, they glimmered in silver, as all dead people's did.

You might think it impossible to win against the devil, it's not, just really, really, rare. Let's just say if he didn't want you to win, you wouldn't. And I can say that I am one of his favorites. Apart from the fact that he has very few opponents, there was that one time where I gained his favor. It was the first time I played him, I had a winning hand and could have asked to end my sentence in hell. But what did I do? I folded. Why? Well he asked me that too, because of course he knew, and I told him the truth. That I didn't want to leave, that against what you might think, hell was a great place to live after death. After that we had become something akin to friends, and he let me win from time to time. Not always though, he's no like that. And this was one of those times.

"Nevertheless, I'd like three new cards please." I said, and he dealt out three more.

"Sure you don't just want to admit you have a bad hand and fold?" He asked as he passed the cards.

"God dammit!" I shouted as I looked at the new cards, two bones and a crown. A worse hand than before. I threw down the cards and folded my arms with a frown.

"Bad luck streak?" He asked meekly and I snorted.



"Just spill already, what do you want me to do?" I asked. A bad hand was one thing, two terrible hands after another was something entirely different. It meant that Devon wanted something, and instead of asking outright, made me loose at cards.

"Well a wager is a wager." He answered, but saw that his present innocence was not convincing me. "There's a new guy coming down, I need you to give him a tour."

"Aw hell no, anything but that, please." I whined. "I'd rather spend a week in the lower levels of hell." But my pleading did nothing to sway him.

You might not understand it, but showing around the new guy was hell. And yes I am aware how silly that sounds. But they're either the murderous psychopaths who definitely deserve to rot here, or the ones that are panicked by the knowledge that hell really exist. Those can be categorised as either those that don't think they deserve it and keep protesting their innocence, or those who suddenly had a change of heart and are terrified. Neither of them nice to cope with.

Which one am I, you ask? Well, I'd like to think I was neither, but I probably was panicked and scared. Why up I ended up in hell in the first place? I can't remember, nothing serious, my sentence was only a couple of years. Which might sound like much, but remember, after life you have an eternity before you vanish.

"I don't get paid enough to do your dirty work." I grumbled.

"You don't get paid anything." He replied, thoughtful for a moment. It was a full time job managing hell, if you can believe me. It has accumulated more than a few residents over the years, and most of them bot eager to stay. The exceptions confirming the rule.

"Exactly." I muttered. "If this turns out to be another psychopathic mass murderer, I'm going on strike."

"I'd like to see you try." He said with a sly grin. He really would though, nothing like a rebellion to have a little fun.

"Don't tempt me." I shouted over my shoulder as I made my way down the thousand steps that led to Damon's throne.

I don't know if you know this, but hell has several different layers, and it's how the residents are sorted. It's not like you'd think it is, things rarely are. Hell, is basically a big black void, with no borders, and in the middle stands the tower. At the top sits Damon on his throne and the gate that connects to heaven. Below him are the thirteen levels of hell, sorted by seriousness of the crime, so to speak. Closest to the top are the venial sins; Acedia and cowardice, followed by the mortal sins; lawlessness, fraud, and treachery, and finally the seven deadly sins, which you should know. Now if you have been paying attention you will have notice I have only list twelve layers, while there are thirteen. Well the last layer is basically the void, and kind of hard to include in the list since it isn't as much a layer as, well, a void. You step into it and poof, you're gone.

I had reached the last step and walked to the edge of the broken cliff. Don't be so surprised, it might be a thousand steps, but time here was a little special, especially when you an eternity. Below me I could see the different layers of hell, from my vantage point they looked much smaller than they actually were. Each was a small world of its own, and if you weren't trapped in it, it was quite an adventure to explore it all. As long as you avoided the other residents, especially those from the lower levels. And technically none of them are trapped in their level, there are gateways between them that you can pass between. And even though they're heavily guarded, if you could pay the price, you could pass. And then there were people like me, who knew of the secret paths ways that crossed through all of hell, but I'll never tell.



Now, while the way to heaven was, of course, at the top, the entrance to hell was, strangely enough, at the bottom. A fact that for me personally made no sense what so ever, then again, not a lot did here. But it meant I had to go all the way to the bottom, and taking the long way was not only a hassle, but took ages. The shortcut however... I took a step forward of the edge and promptly fell. Don't think me mad, I never said that those secret paths were actual physical paths. Physics didn't play much of a role beyond death anyway.

Head over heels I fell, the layers passing me by one after the another, the ground takings it's sweet time to meet me. You know how people say that falling often feels a lot like flying? Well here, that statement takes on a whole new meaning, and I'm pretty sure that because hell is upside down. Yeah I know, sounds silly. It might explain why the entrance is at the bottom, but not why heaven is on top. Physics!

As the ground came closers I flipped right way up, legs braced like that of a cat for impact. And then in one sickening collision I had reached the bottom, a violent jolt speeding through my body that bordered on pain. It might be technically impossible for us to die, again, but that didn't mean we couldn't feel pain. Realistically you could die again, but then you vanished completely from existence, and a knife or a thousand foot drop just wouldn't do. Though hitting the ground at who knows how many miles per hour was nothing compared to having your head chopped off. Now that is disorientating, and I'm speaking from experience here. Never again!

I straightened, my limbs feeling like jelly, and scanned my surroundings. The lowest level of hell was a bleak swamp like setting, except instead of murky water there was the void. It simmered in its holes, a gooey layer swimming on top, reflecting the light like oil. If you dare to stick your hand through the goo you would feel absolutely nothing, not even air, and if you reached too far, the void would suck you in. Which made what happened next even stranger.

A larger pond started bubbling, lifting itself upwards before bursting like a soap bubble. This continued for a few seconds, the bubbles growing bigger and bigger, before finally one enormous bubble inverted in on itself, sucking the hole dry, except for one little puddle. I cautiously knelt down at the edge, peering attentively into the void. Suddenly a hand shot out of the puddle and I instinctively grabbed it, throwing all my weight backwards. As I pulled, more and more of the man appeared out of the ground, covered in a thick layer of blackness. Then with a loud pop the resistance was gone and I tumbled backwards. As I tried to get up I realised a weight on top of me.

"God dammit!" I swore as I pushed the man off me. Thankfully the goo had vanished so that I wasn't covered in it as well. Dry cleaning was a serious issue down here.

As I sat up I shimmied a little way away from the unconscious man, not because I was scared, but because the first reaction could be a little...dramatic. It all depended on the circumstances of one's death; a natural death was like falling asleep in one world and waking up in another. But unnatural deaths were like being pushed of a cliff, except when you were actually pushed of a cliff, then it was worse, at least so I'm told.

My memories of the transition were rather blurry. I remember after dying, the sensation of falling, before being slingshot back and being sucked into hell. It wasn't a nice feeling. I had often wondered if those that went to heaven had a similar experience. Oh yeah, heaven exists, obviously. If hell does then heaven has to as well. I can't tell you much about it, never having been there myself. And the stories vary, they are either idolised or scorned, and first hand stories are rare. There have been cases of residents of heaven being cast down to hell, but they generally don't like to talk about it. You have to image the



afterlife as basically another life, and while it is a fucked up version of it, it also has rules. And rule number 1 is 'bad people belong in hell, and good people in heaven', or something along those lines. And even after death you can commit crimes or good deeds, though there is surprisingly more of the former than the latter. Some live out their complete after life in one place, while others jump. Until your eternity is over, or you willingly choose to go. It might sound unbelievable to you, but you got to experience it before you can truly understand. Till then, enjoy the life you have, trust me, it's a lot less confusing.

The man stirred, and I took the chance to get a good look at him. He was rather plain, with nothing that would make him stand out from a crowd. He looked like the kind of person who lived his whole life walking the line, never doing anything bad, but never doing anything good either. He probably though had done at least one thing bad, otherwise he wouldn't have ended up here.

With a groan he opened his eyes, blink a couple of times before pulling himself into a seating position. I could see the look of confusion and disbelief on his face as he turned from side to side, not quite being able to believe what he was seeing. Finally his eyes came to rest on me and his jaw fell open. I waited patiently as several different emotions raced over his face, before it settled on a cautious fear, with a touch of curiosity. Now that I could just about deal with, at least there was no hysteria. I stood up, brushing dirt off my clothes before walking towards him. He inched backwards and I swore silently.

"I keep forgetting." I muttered to myself, before focusing hard for a few seconds. "There, that's better."

The man scrambled to his feet, shocked and even more confused. Ok, so maybe not the best plan. I could understand him though, first he dies, wakes up in a place that is undeniably hell, greeted by a monstrous looking woman, who before his eyes changes into a normal human. Yeah, I could have handled that better.

"It's alright; I'm not here to hurt you." I told him soothingly, no longer trying to approach him.

"Who are you?" He asked cautiously, with a voice that didn't fit into his appearance at all. It was deep, with a power that pulled me in, and I had to remind myself that appearance wasn't everything.

"Call me Celia, I'm here as your guide." I replied, preparing for the flow of questions that would follow.

"Guide?" He asked slowly, trying to wrap his head around, well, everything, and not knowing what to ask first. I knew the feeling.

"Yes, it can be a little confusing in the beginning, but you'll get used to it. You'll see that being dead isn't all that bad."

"Dead?" He whimpered and I wanted to slap myself. I had a terrible bedside manner, and I kept forgetting that while it was normal to me, newcomers like him had no idea that there even was a life after death. And personally I felt that it was easier to just learn the truth instead of tip-toeing around it.

"Yup, me, you, we're all dead, but honestly don't worry, it really isn't as bad as you think it is. Unless of course there is a real good reason why you ended up in hell."

"I'm in hell?"

"Ah jeez, I'm really bad at this." I muttered. "Look, you'll start remembering things, your life before and your death as well. It will be confusing and scary, but this isn't the end of the road. Once your penance is done, you can leave here and go to heaven."



"Heaven exists?" He asked, and I couldn't help but casting a sarcastic glance at my surroundings. "How long?"

"What?"

"How long do I have to stay?"

"Well that depends on your crime." I told him, but the look on his face told me that he had yet to remember what he had done, or even who he was. "No worries, in due time. Till then I'm here to make your transition a lot less scary than it could be."

I gave him a comforting smile and after a moment's hesitation he returned it. I was glad to see that he wasn't one of those worse case scenarios that I was expecting, this might not end up being such a horrid day after all.

"Come on then, quickest way to figure out your crime is to speak to the guy in charge." I said turning towards the way back.

"The devil?" He swallowed loud; I could vividly imagine the pictures that were passing through his head. The living world didn't paint a very accurate or flattering picture of Devon.

"Devon isn't such a bad guy once you get to know him." I said turning around. "So long as you don't piss him off."

He thought about it for a moment, gathered up his courage, and with a shrug followed. Guess after that revelation he was willing to believe anything. At least he wasn't a coward, having to drag a newcomer all the way to the top while they were literally kicking and screaming was not just annoying, but attracted all the wrong attention.

"By the way, what's your name?" I asked, couldn't go around calling him new guy, now that would attract attention.

"Tom..." he replied, looking for the rest.

"No worries, it'll all come back eventually." I said over my shoulder, selective memory takes on a whole new definition in this place.

"So, where exactly are we going?" He asked, having slowly come to terms with his current state of being, and beginning to give in to curiosity. I didn't answer, just pointed upwards. I heard him suck in a deep breath behind me. It was an impressive if daunting sight, but looking up from the bottom didn't even reveal half of what there was to see.

"Guess it's only fair if I give you a quick tour on the way up." I muttered with a tilt of my head. The wheels in my head started spinning as I tried to work out the most efficient way to the top, all the while keeping it short and showing him enough to understand this confusing place. Seeing as even I didn't completely understand it, made that a tad complicated.

"Eh, guess you won't appreciate it if I only show you the good sides." I said turning back to him with a questioning look. He hesitated a moment, bliss is a wonderful thing.

"No, I want to know the whole truth." He finally replied.

I grinned, a realist, quaint. Eventually he would come to appreciate a blissful existence, but I doubted that I would be able to do that today; we simply didn't have the time for the real gruesome stuff. You had to go much too deep to see that, avoid too many obstacles, and then try not to gouge your eyes out. Nasty stuff.

"Then follow me and don't stray too far, getting in lost in this place can become...complicated." I said carefully, trying to avoid another blunder and scare him even more.

He followed my instructions faithfully, keeping close by my side, if a slight step behind. I doubt it was out of respect and more because his eyes were trying to take in as



much as they could. And then there was my tail, I had given up hiding it, you'd think you'd have control over the damn thing...well, yes and no, if I didn't think directly about it, it did its own thing, mostly balance me out. I often wondered if cats had the same problem, or if unlike me were really good at multitasking. No idea who said women can multitask, I haven't got the slightest talent in that aspect. Maybe because I died before I could learn it? Who knows, and who cares.

I picked my way carefully through the swamp, keeping a careful watch on Tom in case he became a little too curious about the void. The obvious way was to take the large, in stone chiselled, stairs that led upwards. But I didn't have the patience for the long way, so I led us towards a cluster of rocks that looked like they had been carved into sculptures by wind and time. Which was strange, cause down here there was never even the slightest breeze.

But to cut a long story short, hidden behind the rocks, or rather inside them was the entrance to one of the many, many hidden paths. If you didn't know it was there, you never would. You would quite actually walk over the entrance and not notice, these weren't the secrets that one accidentally stumbled across. You had to be told about them, or earn the right to pass by. It was a strange little tick that hell had, but it could pick favourites, no idea if it was actually hell itself, or Devon's will influencing the realm. It took a while to get used to the rules of this place, and its whims still took me by surprise sometimes. Needless to say Tom looked quite astounded when I passed through what looked to him like solid rock, and in my impatience I simply grabbed him by the hand and pulled him through.

It was a split second of disorientation before we popped through the membrane between levels and into a complete new place.

"Welcome to the twelve layer of hell, Pride."

We stood on a cliff looking out on a vast desert reaching far beyond the horizons. The sands sparkled red and gold in the non-existent sunlight, almost like glass shards. A little way away stood a large metal city, black smoke rising from the many fires that burnt in its factories. Even from our vantage point miles away we could hear the roar of the furnaces and the sharp hammering from the workshops. Pride was one of the toughest level to live in, if not the hardest. It was completely barren of life, except for the few cities sprinkled across it. The biggest of which lay before us, they were all factories, working hard to turn the precious metals from the earth into something they could sell in the other levels for all the necessities of life. They were governed by a very brutal gang of sinners, that treated the workers more like slaves than the kin that they were. But no one dared complain, because the cities were the only thing that kept one safe down there. Lost in the desert very close to the definition of hell, surviving in the extremes of the desert put even immortality at a strain. And that didn't account for the other creatures that lived inside the desert, and not all were monsters, some were very human. Groups of vagabonds travelled through the desert, and you can only imagine how ruthless one must be to survive out there. Not the kind of people you'd want to meet, trust me.

Which is exactly what I told Tom, who listen attentively, actively taking mental notes, at least once the shock subsided. Now here's someone who liked to be prepared. I have to say my doubts about him were quickly vanishing; hell needed more rational thinking sinners.

"Let's continue before we are spotted, or we get burned to death." I said, already sweating, I didn't like the heat very much. An ironic weakness in a place like this, I know.



I led the way up the steep path; it wound around the central pillar that connected all thirteen layers of hell. Winding around it, through it, and alongside it, were the many paths that crossed between layers. Some were guarded by the gate keepers, terrifying creatures with a nasty temper; others were guarded by less monstrous out but no less vicious humans. And then there were the less secret ones, which tended to be the more dangerous ones. And finally there were ones like this one, safe, secret, and much shorter than the day long trek that some lasted. We reached the cloud line much quicker than would be expected of the couple of steps we took. Screw physics.

"Incredible, it's almost like walking into heaven." I heard Tom mutter and I couldn't help but laugh. Sure, surrounded by cloud like mist, and feeling the slightest cold touch on your skin, I can understand one might associate it with heaven. But it was far from reality as could be.

I didn't get the chance to explain to Tom why I found his comment so hilarious, because we passed the threshold into the next level. Again there was the split second of sickening disorientation before we stepped back onto solid ground and the clouds vanished beneath us. We should have come out at ground level, but seeing as logic here was flawed, we appeared half way up the pillar. Below low us lay, as far as the eye could see once again, a maze. Here the walls were made of stone, there of thorns, but everywhere rising high above the ground and impossible to scale. It was a dangerous place to wander alone, but not deadly, each section having its own dangers, and each providing something worth braving the dangers. The sinners here often grouped together, either claiming a small section as their own, which they guarded and made safe. They often had one resource that they gathered to trade with other colonies, or with other levels, you could say they were renowned for exotic materials. The rest wandered from place to place, going there where the needed resource was.

"Not quite heaven." I chuckled. "This is Envy, otherwise known as the maze, if you haven't guessed it yet."

"How is that possible, we just passed through the sky and yet the earth is below us?" Tom asked astounded.

"You have to imagine each level as its own world, so to speak, all connected by the pillar."

"It's incredible." He muttered.

"Yes, it is." I hesitated. "As long as you're not stuck in it."

He turned to me with a questioning look.

"There are ways to travel between levels, the further down you are through, the hard it is. And there is always a price to it; you either got to pay, be important enough, or have connections." I explained.

"What do you have?" He asked.

"An asshole of a friend, how else do you think I ended up playing the welcoming comity." I grumbled.

"What exactly are you?" He carefully asked, and I gave him a calculating look. Sometimes having people think you are something more than human did you a favour in this place. Though simply saving that Satan was a "friend" of yours mostly did the job as well.

"I'm a sinner like you." I finally replied, then continued when the confusion didn't disappear from his face. "I'm human like you, the ears and tail I won. Dying opens up a whole new world, you'll see, I'm not the only one." He just nodded thoughtfully.



"Well then, let keep on going, we have a long way yet." I nodded upwards and we continued our trek. This time as we looked up it looked like the maze continued above us, but the as we got higher it became clear that it was only a reflection. The end of the sky was a huge mirror, solid as glass.

"What now?" Tom asked as we reached the mirror, he placed a hand carefully against the mirror, expecting it to go through but finding resistance.

"Remember, nothing is as it seems. Be it in hell, heaven, or earth; rules only apply if we let them." And with a powerful shove, I pushed him through the mirror. It shattered and we both fell through, even though I knew it only to be an illusion, it was an impressive one.

Glass splintered around as we fell, breaking apart in front of us before melting back into one piece behind us. In mere seconds we were in another level, a solid mirror wall behind us.

"Darn!" I cursed quietly. "Must have taken a wrong turn." Predictable the passages were not, one door could lead to several different places.

"Wha..." Tom started, still surprised by the forceful transition, but before he could formulate the question was introduced to a whole new world.

We were standing in a city of glass and mirrors. The buildings around us sparkling in different colours, some completely transparent, others opaque, but all glass. The architecture matched the material, spires and towers, with sharp edges and corners, almost like a pin cushion.

"This is Wrath, the city of glass and mirrors." I introduced.

"This would strike me more like the sin pride." He mused, and I snorted.

"Yeah well, no one said things made sense down here. But if you want you can always complain to the architect."

"Who's that?" He asked.

"Who knows?" I said with a shrug, before suddenly pulling him behind a corner.

"What...?" I shushed him before he could continue.

"While not being the most unpleasant place, I really don't want to meet the inhabitants right now, you stand out to much."

"I stand out to much?" He asked sceptical, and I motioned for him to look around the corner.

He carefully peeped around the corner, and was treated to an impressive introduction to Wrath's sinners. A mix and mash of them bustled about the shopping lane, and if their sense of fashion didn't astound enough, their robotic enhancements did. While their clothes generally mirrored the buildings, if not in transparency, there was a wide range of...enhancements. It went from simple piercings, to whole limbs, whether or not the sinners had them or not in the first place or not. So it wasn't rare for some to have a second pair of hands. Frankly I with a tale was normal in comparison. Some were more machine than human; I think you'd call them cyborgs. But all had a rather rough appearance, not so the passengers of the carriage that bullied its way through the crowd.

Seated upon the gem inlaid carriage sat some of the more wealthy sinners on this level. While they too were cyborgs, they looked more like Venetian nobility from the Renaissance era. They wore glittering clothes and a delicate mask, though that might as well be their faces, in this place you couldn't know for sure. But just like nobility in the living world, they barrage through without much care for who stood in their way, even less so, since they were already dead.

"How is this not pride?" Tom asked, as he had seen enough.



"Not a clue." I said with a shrug, I had given up searching for any kind of logic long time ago. Instead I turned my attention to the more pressing question; where was the closest passage that didn't require us to meet the natives. We weren't too far from the pillar, and while not all passages were in the pillar, they were the easiest to find.

"Follow me, and try not to attract attention." I told Tom and carefully made my way through a narrow alley, far away from population. Even here, hidden from sight, all glass and mirrors, but dirty and even broken. Even the sparkling city had its dark side.

"So what do they produce?" Tom asked. "You said that Pride makes metal objects, and Envy...uh..."

"Envy brings a variety of exotic items to the global market, and Wrath, well, glass and mirrors for one. But also finery." I explained. "You know, clothes, jewellery, that sort of stuff."

"Does each level have a speciality?"

"More or less, it depends on what the level provides. The deadly sins, the lower seven levels, are harsher and rely a lot of trade. The Venial sins in contrast, generally have everything they need and only trade for exclusives, or to make them feel important; they provide resources that the lower levels need, for a price. And the mortal sins are stuck in between."

"What could the lower levels provide that the upper levels want?" Tom asked.

"Well, labour for one, for those nasty jobs that no one else wants to do. And a whole lot of other icky stuff."

"So travelling between levels is common?"

"more or less, more so with the upper levels." I answered with a side to side tilt of my head. "Generally for trade, less so for entertainment; you need a permit."

"Which you can either get through connections or payment." He continued with a nod.

"Correct, you're a quick learner." I said with a smile. "Good, you'll need to be, to survive in this place."

"Survive?"

"Ah, well, you can't die again, that's true, but there is worse. Basically the more you know the more comfortable your life will be."

"You mean death." He said with the hint of a smile.

"Heh, same thing, but nice to know you are coming to terms with your new life." I grinned at him. "Let's see how you handle a gate keeper." I said stepping out of the alley.

The pillar towered before us in stark contrast with the surrounding buildings. Black and red stone twisted down from the sky, dotted with holes and paths that were impossible to reach by normal means. The reflections in the surrounding buildings were distorted into hypnotising collages of colour. At the bottom of the pillar was a large gate, bigger than anything that would ever pass through it, or bigger than was practical. But it did nothing to dwarf the monstrous creature guarding the gate. The gigantic, six-legged creature oozed and bubbled with blue slime, a puddle of it having formed around its crooked feet. It had a long tail that lashed back and forward, spraying around a blue mist. Its four eyes darted independently across its surroundings, its mouth gapping wide and a sharp black tongue hanging out.

I heard Tom take a sharp breath and turned to find him staring fearfully at the creature. I gave him a moment to take in the scene before continuing onwards. I heard him hesitating before hurrying after me.



There were barely any sinners present, and the few that were payed us little to no attention. It was only as we got closer to the gate that people started glimpsing our way. Passage through the gate, while not in a trade caravan, larger group, or important enough to explain it, was peculiar. Sure travel was common, but not through the official gate, it was too much of a hassel and reuired a hard to aquire permit. Plus, the gate keepers were not just terryfing to look at, but could be immensibely dangerous if you got on their bad side. Or tried to pass with a permit. The onlookers were eager to see a shreading. What did you expect. They were in hell for a reason.

"Hello Markus, how's it going?" I greeted as we reached the keeper. He roared an answer that made not just Tom jump.

"That bad, huh?" I replied sympathetically. "I keep telling you, you have to persist on that raie, or at least a compensation. You deserve it."

He responded with a low growl that made the ground tremble and crack.

"I'd love to stay and chat, but I have an errand to run." I said and he growled again. "I know right, what an ass to push his duties onto others. I'll come by later and we can draw upo a revenge plan together. Its about time for another revolution." What, you think I was kidding when I threatened Devon with one?

Markus howled loudly, followed by a gurgling sound that reminded of laughter. I waved goodbye as I headed towards the gate, only stopping to pull Tom after me.