

# Torment

## A Demon's Vacation

By: Bill Brown

### Chapter 1: Introductions

It had been the worst exorcism that he had ever performed in his 15 years of battling the forces of darkness. This particular battle had begun several months before and took eight sessions to achieve victory. The poor young woman who was afflicted by the constant torture brought about by this minion of Hell had suffered for the last five years and had lost everything of value in her life. The battle of light and darkness that had played out within her in the last few months will undoubtedly haunt her for the rest of her life.

A real exorcism is not like a Hollywood horror film. It is much less a spectacle, but far more frightening. They do not expel tremendous amounts of green vomit, nor do their head turn around completely. However, they can levitate, throw objects, speak in a language unknown to them, and have access to information they should not have. They can often speak with a demonic voice which sounds like three or more voices speaking at the same time at different octaves and may even be a different gender of the possessed. The scariest thing about an exorcism is that it is a very personal experience.

He had several experiences before where the demon being exorcised knew who he was and also knew very personal experiences that happened in his life. Things that no one else knew, or even could have known. This one was much worse. Not only did it know things about his life but it also knew things about his parents' lives, small obscure details that he had forgotten about. These Demons get into your head, your lives, and your soul, and just tear it all apart.

When that young woman floated up off the bed, reciting the Lord's Prayer in Latin, (in reverse) the Priest felt a darkness spread through him that blotted out all the light in the world. It was the first time he had ever thought that his faith wouldn't be enough to protect him. As he felt the darkness permeate his entire being, all the surrounding light began to fade out as well. Lamps, candles, and even windows were drained of their light, and the participants hope.

It was at this point, when he was in the depths of despair, when the devilish cackle of delight broke through the night air, loud enough for all the world to hear, when he knew all hope was lost, that light appeared in the darkness. It was a small spot of light,

but it grew. As it grew he could feel the darkness begin to dissipate. Light began to shine from the lamps again and that light chased away the darkness. With a defiant guttural scream, the demon was pulled out of the teenage girl as a thick black smoke in the vague shape of a human, but with a face twisted in hate, pain, but most of all, fear.

Its smoky form was being sucked into the small point where the light began. As if that point of light was a portal to some other plane, and it was claiming the devil spawn as its own and was taking it back. The Demon clawed at the girl like a wild animal clawing at the ground, frantically trying to pull itself away from some apex predator that had come to claim its prey.

As the demon fought to remain in our world, a vortex began to appear at the point of light and proceeded to pull the air from the room into itself, creating a vacuum. It became clear that it would take the devil back, along with everything, and everyone, in the room if need be. With a final wail of defeat and a great rush of wind, the demon was pulled into the vacuous portal. With a great rush of wind, the portal closed in a flash of light and an explosion that nearly blew out their eardrums; and then, silence. No more darkness. No more evil. No more was that girl a prisoner of Hell. They had won. Christ had triumphed. It was over.

He looked around the Subway he was riding, heading home after the ordeal, and he considered the people in the crowded car. Each one had a life of their own, each with their own unique story, their own concern, and troubles. He wondered if any of them had a demon tormenting them. Did any of them need his help?

These thoughts followed him as he made his way home to his apartment. He wondered about each person on the street, in their cars, and even the ones in their homes behind closed doors. How many lost and tormented souls were there just within earshot of him as he walked by?

Finally, he reached his apartment. He was the designated Exorcist for his diocese and a specialist that was sent all across North America; he was actually quite busy lately, but he did not lead the local parish where he lived, so he did not live in the rectory. He did serve at Saint Mark's when he was not away and he was always happy to be home. His name was Father Franco Benito and this was his life, protecting the innocent of the world from the forces of Evil. It was a modest home with very sparse decorations, calling it Spartan would be accurate. His vows of poverty and chastity meant he kept very little and had no family of his own, so he had not accumulated much of anything except what he needed. He was happy to serve as a priest, and yet sometimes he wished he could settle down and build a home, a life. Sometimes when he went to visit a parishioner in their home, and he saw a beautiful home with a happy family, he would think about what he was missing.

"Wow, you need to hire an interior decorator before you go blind from visual boredom." Father Benito dropped his keys and briefcase, then spun around and down into a crouching position before they hit the floor. The unseen (and completely unexpected) voice broke the silence and forced his heart into his throat, and it seemed to get a great amount of humor from it. "Whoa! Hahahaha. That was great! I didn't think anyone could move so fast. If you had hit your head on the counter on the way down you would be in a coma right now." The unseen voice continued to laugh as Benito looked around without being able to find anyone.

"Who are you? Where are you?" Father Benito was shaken to the core, but he tried to pull himself together and gather up some strength. With as much bravado as he could muster he shakily demanded, "Show yourself!"

"Oh, yeah" the disembodied voice laughingly said. "Sorry, sorry, sorry" followed up by a snicker, "I forget that I have to will myself to be seen by your kind." With that, a form stepped out of empty space with the same effect of someone stepping out of the shadows under a street light, but this guy didn't look like your average Joe.

He stood about six feet tall and was shaped like an average man, but from there his description diverged greatly. His skin was a muted blue that turned to black in certain areas, and it looked like old worn leather stretched over a bony frame with small but toned muscles. His hair (if you could call it that) looked like a mane of black porcupine quills, shorter in the front so they stood up more, and longer in the back that hung down to the middle of his back. The pupils of his eyes were a dancing yellow and red, much like flame, with the rest of his eyes black as night. What made him even more surreal was that he was dressed in a light casual, double-breasted suit with a black shirt and a white tie.

Leathery hands, with blue talon-like claws, reached forward as if he wanted to shake hands with the frightened priest. "Telmaris, Demon Extraordinaire. Pleased to make your acquaintance?" he said with a smile as if Father Benito should be impressed with who he was.

"Hello," he said shakily as he stood up, "f-father Franco Benito". He straightened up but did not take the Demon's hand. He was beyond shocked, beyond trying to reason at this point, his mind went into a semi-numb state as he let this "introduction" sink in.

A very tense minute of silence went by as the two just stood there, looking at each other without moving. Finally, Telmaris pulled back his hand and said "O.k. Frankie is it o.k. if I call you Frankie?" Father Benito just blinked. "I'll take that as a yes. Look, Frankie, I'm not here to make any trouble. I just finished with a five-year gig and I need a little R&R to recharge the old batteries before I get back to work. You seemed like a

pretty likable guy, and your collar there told me you lived alone so I figured I'd come to hang out with you for a while."

This made the fog in Father Benito's head clear quickly and he took a step back. "What are you talking about? Who are you, wh- what are you? And how do you know me?"

"My my, how very quickly we forget, you just helped me end my mission an hour ago and now you don't even remember me? I'm hurt" he said while feigning hurt feelings. "Hello," he said while snapping his fingers several times in front of Father Benito's face, "Demon here, exorcist there, you did one earlier tonight. What do you think I'm talking about? C'mon you can't be that dim".

Benito's eyes opened wide with horrified disbelief. "You're the demon I cast out of the Morgenstern girl?"

Telmaris did a small hop and clapped his hands together. "There it is, I knew you hadn't forgotten me, I mean how could you, it's me, and I put on one heck of a show tonight."

Father Benito felt a surge of courage when he heard that this was the same demon he had cast out earlier and therefore knew he could do it again. He reached for his briefcase, opened it, and pulled out his crucifix and Holy Water.

Telmaris took a step back and held his open palm toward the Priest as if to tell him to slow down, "woe, slow down, what are you doing?" he asked nervously.

Without an answer, Father Benito began the first step of the exorcism ritual. With the crucifix, he made the Sign of The Cross in front of him and began to pray aloud in Latin.

"No, really, what are you doing?" Telmaris asked seriously. Without any sign that he heard the demon, Father Benito continued his prayers, pleading for the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Michael, praying for the expulsion of evil. "Stop!" he said forcefully and with enough power that the Priest was compelled to stop.

"Really, you're going to try and exorcise me?" he asked incredulously. The Priest just stared back at him defiantly. "What, you're going to say your silly little prayer, wave your stick thingy in the air and splash me with some water and I'm supposed to flee screaming in pain?"

"Yes. Exactly" Benito said with all the Faith he had.

"And just why would I do that," he chortled.

"Because that's what happened just an hour ago and I will do it again." With renewed confidence, from stating his victory, he continued with his prayer.

"Bullshit!" Telmaris said evenly with all seriousness as he locked eyes with the priest. "I left because my job was done, and in no small part, thanks to you."

"Thanks to me, you're thanking me for throwing you out of that girl and her home, fleeing in agony? Do you enjoy your own suffering or do you get a vacation for failing?" Father Benito looked at him in disgust as he thought of what that demon had put the poor girl through and he was infuriated that Hell spawn would insinuate that he had anything to do with his so-called "success".

"No silly," he said coyly, "you gave me the finale I needed to bring it to its optimum end, to seal the deal as it were. Your performance tonight was the exclamation point to my great thesis, the crescendo to my Opus." Telmaris said this with a smile, and what seemed like genuine admiration. This deeply disturbed the Priest. What did he mean?

"What are you talking about? I cast you out against your will, or is this your way of deflecting your humiliating loss? You cannot stand against a servant of God and again I will send you away and for good this time." Father Benito continued to throw holy water at Telmaris renewing his Holy verbal assault, "In the name of Christ I compel thee to leave...".

"Hah HahHahHah... Aaahhh" his laugh turned into a cheerful sigh as he casually wiped the Holy Water out. "This would be so comical if you weren't so serious. The truth is that your devotion to a false religion leaves you with no power or authority over me and therefore you are left impotent, unable to perform then, or now. I left because you gave me the perfect ending to all my work. Now, because of you and your 'Holy Church,' they believe I was cast out, forced to leave, never to return and now that family will remain faithful Catholics the rest of their life. Hell, even their kids and grandkids will be faithful believers, blindly following a powerless and corrupt religion without ever questioning if they should, and all because you freed them from the bonds of Demon Possession. Just like Jesus did in the Bible, so it must be true. It's in the 'good book'" (he said with air quotes) "he said Satan cannot cast out Satan. This is true, but that doesn't mean he can't stage it to look that way."

At this statement, Father Benito felt the blood drain from his face as the Demons logic hit home with the weight of a billion souls. Telmaris continued, "I left because I chose to, and now I choose to stay for a well-deserved vacation and I thought I would shack up with my latest partner. Maybe things will work out and we can do a lot more work together, what do ya say?"

Father Benito just blinked, standing absolutely still for a brief moment then returned to flinging the Holy Water, and unconvincingly resumed chanting "The p-power of Christ compels thee. The power of Christ compels thee."

"Yeah yeah, the power of Christ compels me, blah blah blah. You might want to give it a rest because you might have an aneurism and your only getting me wet, but hey knock yourself out." The demon began to nonchalantly walk away from the frantic Priest. "Is the bedroom this way? Ah, I'll find it, you're busy. I would suggest you sleep on the couch because sharing a bed with a demon is a whole other can of worms you're obviously not ready for. See you in the morning", and the door shut with the resounding slam of a medieval heavy oak dungeon door. "Man I love adding that sound effect," Telmaris said to himself.

On the other side of the door, the Priest stood still, his mouth open and Holy Water running down his arm and mixing with the urine in his pants that he had not yet realized had found its way there. In stunned disbelief he stood there, staring at the bedroom door, and all that could come to his mind were the words that had not come to his mouth in many, many years.

"Oh, Sh..."

## CHAPTER 2: The Contract

Slowly he opened his eyes and for a moment he didn't know where he was. He looked around and realized he was in his living room, and wondered why was he sleeping on the couch? He looked towards his bedroom and saw that the door was closed. Instantly the memories of the night before came flooding back to him. The memory of a demon in his home seemed unreal, like a bad dream, but why else was he asleep on his couch. His stomach dropped and the blood drained from his face, leaving him feeling cold.

He went to the bookshelf and found a very old book that contained the original exorcism rights. When he pulled the small leather-bound book from its place on the shelf it revealed a small crystal vile filled with Holy Water from the River Jordan in Israel that was behind it. Both the book and the Holy Water had been given to him by Father Gabriele Amorth when he completed his studies of exorcism in Rome. Father Amorth had been his mentor, and his most trusted friend and ally in his battles against the forces of darkness. He picked up the vile, and with the book in hand, turned and headed for his bedroom.

The door made no noise as he slowly opened it. Cautiously he peered around it only to find an empty room. If it were not for the blankets on his bed being disheveled he would have believed it to be the same as he had left it. He stepped in; remaining crouched, and slowly examined the room. Everything was in its place and appeared to be undisturbed. He started to wonder if maybe he in fact had dreamt all the events of the night before, a byproduct of the exorcism he had performed earlier that night, but then there was the bed. He never left his bedroom without making his bed, a habit from childhood instilled by his mother's determined persistence, with a touch of her wrath (as needed). So he had to have a 'houseguest', no matter how much he wished it was just a dream.

He looked to the door that led to the bathroom, it was on the wall to the left of the open entryway to the bedroom, so it was blocked from his view when he came into the room, but now he could clearly see it was closed, another thing he never did unless he was in the bathroom. Quietly he stepped toward the door, straining to hear anything from the other side of it, but he heard nothing except the pounding of his heart and the

ragged sound of his nervous breathing. When he was close enough, he reached for the doorknob and began bracing himself for what he might find.

As his fingers touched the doorknob, Telmaris stuck his head through the door, at the same height as the Priests, and said "boo!" Father Benito screamed and fell backward, holding his crucifix straight out in front of him. The demon broke out in laughter and had a smile stretching unbelievably wide, so much so that Father Benito had a full view of his fangs and sharp incisors, and somehow it made even his molars look jagged. He was wearing only a white towel around his waist that came to just below his knees and a pair of flip flops that were bright orange with little daisies on the top of the straps. His dark blue skin stood out against the contrast of the white towel and Father Benito saw that his spots appeared to cover him completely. The spots got smaller, and closer together, the lower they went until they came together just above his ankles, giving him white 'socks' on his feet, just like a tabby cat. He continued to belly laugh, so much so he had trouble getting out his next words, "You should have seen .... hoo hoo, ....your face was all like .... Aaaahhhh ... That was AWESOME!"

The fear subsided, mostly, as the blue devil whooped it up, but he didn't forget the need to get him out of his life. With the one hand holding the crucifix in front of him and the vial of Holy Water tucked under his pinkie, he slowly stood up, gathering up his courage as he came to stand at his full height to face the demon. He opened the book and began reciting the ancient exorcism rite from the book.

The smile diminished from the demon's face, but did not leave completely, "still on the exorcism kick huh?" He reached out and took the book from the priest, quickly flipped through the pages, and said, "Yeah, I got this one, in its original text, back home. I read it when I'm having trouble sleeping", and with that, he closed the book and tossed it over his shoulder. He looked at the cross and Holy Water "Ahh" he said as he reached out and took the vial from Father Benito. He popped the cork out and threw back the water like a shot of Tequila, and then handed the vile and cork back to the Priest with a satisfied look, "Ahhh thanks, I needed that." With that he turned his head and started walking out of the bedroom, "what's for breakfast? We have a big day ahead of us".

Father Benito was stunned, shocked, silent and unmoving with only his jaw slowly falling open showing that he was not suddenly transformed into a fleshy statue. After several seconds he slowly looked at the empty vile in his hand, and then the book on the floor, and he felt all hope fall away and his stomach come up to his throat. 'How did that just happen?' he thought. 'That is not possible ... is it?' He suddenly felt like a lost child that had just had his whole world ripped away from him. He dropped the vile onto the floor next to the book and just stared for a second. What was the point of even picking them up? Feeling defeated and disconnected, he slowly stepped over the items on the floor and headed out of the bedroom.



Telmaris straightened back up and continued walking out of the bedroom and toward the kitchen, "enough of that. How about some breakfast? We have a big day ahead of us." Franco, with a look of defeat followed him out to the kitchen.

As they entered the kitchen Telmaris reached out toward the refrigerator and waved his arm to the right. As he did the refrigerator door opened smoothly, following his movement, as if he had actually opened it with his hand. "Oh, yeah", he said with a slightly disappointed sound in his voice, "I forgot, that happens if one of 'Us' is around for too long".

"What happens?" Father Benito asked as he moved around the demon to see what he was talking about. When he looked in the fridge he saw that all the food was rotting and was covered with maggots. He looked on the counter to the bananas and loaf of bread that he had brought home yesterday. He saw that the bananas were black, collapsing into mush with flies crawling in and out of them, and the bread inside the bag was green and had begun to crumble.

"That. A prolonged Demonic presence without a mortal link causes all food to rot away at an extreme rate of speed." He then turned and faced the priest, "sorry about the bananas." With that, he flicked his wrist and the door swung closed. "Oh well," he said with a cheery voice "let's head out for breakfast. I heard that Benny's Diner is your regular place." He turned and started for the living while Father Benito was still looking at his closed refrigerator with a sour look on his face as he thought of the rotted mess it contained.

"Oh don't worry about that" Telmaris said, "I'll have the maid clean it out." Franco turned and looked at him with an inquisitive face that only deepened when he saw that the demon's towel had been replaced with worn blue jeans, classic Converse high-tops, and a Rolling Stones concert T-shirt complete with the 'lips & tongue' logo. "I forgot to tell you that a vacationing demon of my rank comes with a maid." With a cleaning service and with a wink he turned on his heel and headed to the couch where he plopped down and put his feet up on the coffee table. He snapped his fingers and the TV turned on to the morning news. "I'll wait here and watch some entertaining stories while you get cleaned up". Father Benito slowly headed for the bedroom again as he heard the news anchor talk about a double homicide that occurred the night before. "Honestly", he heard Telmaris say in a voice heavy in mock concern, "what is this world coming to?" Laughter broke out in the living room as Benito slowly closed his bedroom door.

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An hour later Father Franco Benito was walking down the sidewalk listening to his new 'roommate' give a running commentary on everything he saw on the street. With all the comments he made it was obvious that he saw something that Franco could not. It seemed as if he had not been out on the streets in a while, or maybe this part of town was not familiar to him, but he did seem to know something about 'something' that was piquing his curiosity.

Franco thought the morning foot traffic was normal, which for this neighborhood was not very heavy and vehicle traffic was pretty light. They were currently approaching the edge of the housing area where neighborhood shops would start popping up. This was a very old neighborhood that was well established and had a strong sense of community. He knew many of the people he saw on the street this morning, some of them were even members of the local parish. These were good people and he felt privileged to know them.

Franco was not a local clergyman that was the head of a church, he was a specialist that was called in for specific needs and goes wherever the church needs him to go. This place was different. This was home, where he lived when he was not on assignment somewhere else, and he had called this home for fifteen years. He built many strong relationships with the people here and it bothered him that this Hell spawn was not only interested in them but even seemed amused by whatever it was he could see that was beyond Franco's human limitations.

"Hey Tad," Telmaris yelled and waved to a young man across the street, "I haven't seen you in forever. What've you been up to?" Franco looked across the street and saw that the young man was completely oblivious to the demon yelling at him. He then looked at Telmaris again, who was being quiet and looked like he was waiting for an answer, "wow, really, your first huh? Well, congratulations then." Franco looked back across the street to see if someone was paying attention to him, but it looked like no one had. Now that he stopped and thought about it, no one could see him, obviously, because if they did they would probably come up for a closer look and then either ask to take a selfie with him to post online or run away in terror. So no one could see him, no one except Franco, but Franco couldn't see who he was talking to. "Nice, nice. Me? I'm on vacation. Nope, nothing special yet, just hanging with my boy Frankie here" he said as he moved behind Franco and grabbed his shoulders with a light squeeze followed by a light slap on his right arm, almost in the same way old friends would do. "Yeah, you too. Take care" he said as he waved goodbye to a now-empty section of the street.

Franco did a double-take of the empty section of the street and then looked at the Demon, "who are you talking to?" he asked with a mixture of curiosity and annoyance in his voice.

"My old pal Tad", he said as he motioned towards the empty section of the street, "are you deaf AND stupid?"

"Me stupid?" Franco exclaimed incredulously, "there's no one there 'stupid'," he replied.

Telmaris pulled his head back, cocked it to the right with a questioning look, that universal expression for 'whaaat'? Then he closed his eyes and smiled as if he just understood the confusion. "Sorry! My bad," he apologized with a smile and a wave of his hands. "I forgot that even though I am willing for you to see me, you can't see the rest of the world the way that I do, but I can fix that."

"What do you mean, the way you do? Hey whoa...", but before Franco knew what was happening, Telmaris had spit in his hands then shoved them, palms first, into his eyes. Franco's eyes tingled intensely, with almost a burning sensation as he cried out. He pulled away from the Demon and started wiping his eyes clear with the sleeves of his shirt. "That's disgusting you foul piece of Hell trash. Why would you do such a..." He stopped speaking as his vision cleared and he found himself looking directly into the face of a ninety-something-year-old woman, who just happened to be behind him. She had just come out of her apartment for a morning stroll to the bakery, minding her own business, when he had jumped backward and so rudely bumped into her.

He wiped the devilish spittle from his eyes and said, "I am so sorry. I didn't mean to bump into you, he just surprised me with putting phlegm in my eyes." He looked at her hopefully, thinking she would forgive his rudeness, but instead she looked at him with a face twisted in annoyance. She looked in the direction Franco had gestured to (unthinkingly) when he said "he", and looked directly at Telmaris for about two seconds with no reaction. She then looked a little left, a little right, and then turned back around to face the pathetic-looking priest with an angry glare.

"Damn Christians," she said gruffly. "First, you tell us we can't go to heaven anymore because of some flakey fisherman, and now you're trying to keep me from my lox and bagels. Get out of my way Gentile." She gave him a whack in his thigh with her cane, he hopped out of the way and she just walked on without another glance at him while grumbling under her breath.

Franco just sat in stunned silence. He turned to see Telmaris equally stunned, rocked back on his heels as it were, his eyes open wide and mouth agape, and the back of his right hand held up in front of his mouth. "Ahh snap! You just got owned by Bobe Goldman!"

He looked down the street at the old woman who had just put him in his place and watched her walk away, grumbling something to herself about the drunken Irish priests. It was then that he noticed there was far more activity in the street than before Telmaris soiled his eyes, and learned that there was much more than had met the eye, right in front of him.

Every person on the street was surrounded by demons, or at the very least, followed by one or two. The demons were of all different shapes, sizes, and colors; some with horns, some with wings, some with tails, and some without. Some had all of those and some had none. He saw one young man with half a dozen imp-like creatures, no bigger than six inches, crawling around his head and shoulders. They appeared to be chattering incessantly as they kept shifting their positions on him, but Franco couldn't hear anything from them, although the young man obviously could. He walked with his hands in the pockets of his hoodie, hunched over with his eyes downcast on the sidewalk in front of him. As the imps continued their verbal barrage this young man walked along and every so often he would mumble, or shake his head, and even turn his head slightly to the left and forcefully say "shut up", under his breath. He even pulled his left hand out of his hoodie and tried to bat away the invisible voices around him. People walking nearby just looked at him like he must have forgotten to take his meds that morning.

Another man wearing a suit and tie, carrying a briefcase, was walking in the opposite direction, and Franco saw something squeezing out from the edge of the shut briefcase. It looked like bony, sickly, skinny arms covered in a dark green, leathery skin, with long talon fingers. Five hands were clawing upwards at him as he walked along. There was also another similarly colored and sickly looking creature on his back, digging its clawed fingers and toes into him while its long neck stretched to bring its goblin-like head to the man's ear. As the creature seemed to whisper into his ear, he kept glancing nervously down to the briefcase.

Everywhere he looked, demons. Not only did he see them on, or following, everyone he saw, but he also saw them hanging around all over the place, either in small groups or solitary individuals, almost like they were waiting for someone to come along. There was one at the entrance to an alley, several hiding in the bushes out front of an apartment building and at least two in front of each mom-and-pop business door. Franco knew or at least had believed that demons were in the world, trying to tempt people to sin, but he had never imagined it was anything like this. He turned his disturbingly amazed look towards Telmaris, who was looking at him in extreme anticipation and a grin on his face. He looked as if he was truly enjoying, if not savoring, the spectacle that the Priest was seeing now that his eyes had been "opened". "You weren't ready for that were you?" The demon seemed very pleased with himself, he obviously intended on using Franco as his holiday entertainment.

"What did you do to me?", he asked with a mixture of fear and wonder.

"I simply removed the veil from your eyes that keeps you from seeing the world of Spirits. You're all born with the ability to see the spirit world, but the veil forms with time and willful ignorance." The priest cocked his head and narrowed his eyes with confusion, and most likely a fair amount of doubt. "Every time a child hears there's no such thing as ghosts, or monsters don't exist, it's just your imagination, the veil grows a little bit thicker until you couldn't see ten thousand ghosts, spirits, monsters, and demons standing right in front of you. For the most part, we like it that way, but sometimes we really wish you could see just how gullible, and stupid, you all are, and just how creative we can be. I mean, everyone likes a little recognition. Am I right?" Telmaris said shaking his head and hands with the look of someone trying to coax out a little admiration, or at least an 'atta boy' from his new friend.

Franco could feel a paralyzing fear welling up from the pit of his stomach. "Your kidding, right? I mean you've gotta be kidding?" Franco said to the Demon that just looked at him. "Please tell me your kidding?" he said, almost frantically.

The demon just raised his hands, palms up, and shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know what to tell you, that's just the way it is." He then pointed at his chest with both hands, "I didn't make this world, or the rules for the way it works, I just have to live in it." He dropped his hands and they slapped against his thighs, but very quietly.

'Impossible', thought Franco, 'this can't really be the way it has always been... could it?' The thought frightened him more than he really wanted to admit or to think of its deeper implications. No, that would be more than he could possibly handle right now. Later. He would think about it later.

"Come on, we better get moving, big day and all that." With that Telmaris continued walking to the diner, and continued to greet the other horrors walking down the street. Franco didn't know if he liked it better before when he had no idea who, or what, Telmaris was talking to.

Franco continued the walk to the diner in the silence of awe as he looked on just completely dumbfounded by the spectacle before him. Of course, he had read about demons in the Bible, and about the war in heaven when Lucifer had been cast out, along with a third of The Host of Heaven, and even though it was taught in every Christian church that the war still continued to this day for all the souls on Earth, he had never imagined it could be anything like this. It seemed so far away that it never truly sunk in as being real.

Everywhere he looked he saw people walking with demons all around them and somehow they all seemed to be trying to manipulate, or coax their clueless prey in some unique manner from each other. The pretty woman sitting at the bus stop was

looking forward at an advertisement sign with an attractive male model on it, with his shirt open. As she looked on she was unaware that two demons had changed their appearance to look like the pictured model and looked as if they were lewdly calling to her while pointing at the advertisement. While she looked on she was also unaware of the four tiny imps on her left ring finger trying to pry off her wedding ring. Within a matter of less than a minute, she was spinning the ring with the fingers on her right hand while a small smile tugged at the corner of her mouth.

Franco also saw a man getting out of the back of a taxi accidentally drop a twenty-dollar bill as he was paying the driver. The taxi drove off as the man walked away, oblivious to the loss of his hard-earned money. As he walked away, a young boy (probably around ten years old) saw him drop the money and walk on. The boy walked over, picked up the bill, and opened his mouth to call out to the man that had dropped it, but he didn't call out. Father Benito saw a short-legged, rotund demon with no neck, with oversized bulging eyes and long arms that ended in huge hands, and all of it covered in a frog green skin. The demon put one hand over the child's mouth and the other under the hand with the twenty-dollar bill in it, gently pushing it up toward the child's eyes. He could also see the demon whispering at the boy, probably something about the latest toy he had seen on an advertisement that morning. The child looked in his hand and his newfound wealth, then he looked up at the man hurrying away and saw that he was not even looking back or slowing down. The kid quickly looked around to see if anyone was watching him, and that was when the priest saw the demon lean back and look as if he was laughing and then started to speak, but he couldn't hear anything.

He looked at Telmaris and asked, "Why can't I hear them"?

Telmaris' eyes popped open and said, "oops, I forgot", as he quickly stepped forward. He put both of his index fingers into his mouth and then pulled them out, wet with spit, and he proceeded to shove them into Franco's ears and wiggle them around, giving him a double 'wet Willy'. The priest jumped forward with a loud sound of disgust as he quickly tried to dry out his ears. "I forgot to give you the audio along with the video to the big show. That should do it." Franco looked up at him from a bent-over position with a glare but then he heard what he had been missing.

He heard the rotund demon say loudly, "what a stroke of luck, this is going to be a great day." With that, the boy quickly shoved the bill into his front pocket and started to walk away. Franco could not stand for that, or else he would be a very poor priest indeed. He opened his mouth and took a step towards the boy, but before he could say a word, the small demon of greed appeared in front of the priest and his frame changed from the dumpy little butterball into a massive eight-foot frame built like the Terminator. He froze as the lumbering giant bent down, staring into the face of the frightened priest,

and began to snarl and growl at him with bared fangs and slime-like drool oozing out of his noxious maw.

Father Benito was frozen in fear when Telmaris came to his rescue. He slid right up to Franco, put his arm around him, and turned on the charm. "Hey Greedo, how's it hangin'? What's it been, five-six decades?"

The hulking beast only adjusted his eyes to look at Telmaris but continued to breathe into the priest's face. "He was about to interfere with my assignment". His voice sounded like boulders grinding together in a deep cavern.

"Ah, he's new to viewing the real world. I just gave him the sight a few minutes ago. I haven't had time to tell him the rules yet."

Still, without turning his head Greedo responded, "I'm pretty sure there's a manual in my stomach if he needs one to learn from," then his eyes looked back at the priest and his fanged mouth turned into a smile, "and a cozy place for him to read it."

Franco had never come closer to soiling himself than that exact moment. "I got it covered," Telmaris said with a smile. "He won't interfere with you again." With that, he slapped Franco on the shoulder and pulled him away. "Let's go." They quickly walked away and the unamused beast snarled as he turned to watch them walk away.

"Hooohoo. That was close. Try not to get involved with what you see. You're a spectator, not a participant." When they were far enough away from the threat he let the priest go.

With growing frustration he turned to Telmaris and snapped out at him, "Why are you with me, and why are you showing me all of this?"

With a smile that was obviously an attempt at disarming Franco, he replied "as I said, I'm on vacation. While on vacation I have no assignments, no duties, I'm not on call, and I get to spend my time, however, wherever, and with whomever I want. Aaaand, as I said before, I like you. I think we can learn a lot from each other, you more than me of course, and we can have a great time together." His smile was now obviously genuine, as genuine as possible maybe, and he truly seemed sincere and for a second Franco felt himself letting go of the anger and frustration he was feeling. He also suddenly realized that during his little appeal, Telmaris had slowly started changing his appearance. He was starting to look less nightmarish and more human. As the transformation slowly continued, the demon stepped closer to the Priest and reached out to put his hand on Franco's shoulder, "I can show you things few other mortals have seen, answer the burning questions within you, and teach you what reality truly is."

Something inside him clicked, and now his anger and frustration turned to curiosity. It was so strong he didn't even notice that the demon now had his hand on his shoulder,

and he could actually feel it. "Like what?" Franco asked uncomfortably. "What 'answers' can you give me? What could I possibly learn from you?" This was both a defensive push back to the demons ploys of some kind of friendship, but it was also a very real question. According to his priesthood teachings, Telmaris was the enemy, and nothing but lies, treachery, and pain would come from him, but at the same time, EVERYONE he knew acted as if they truly believed demons didn't really exist. They were metaphors in stories meant for teaching values, or to scare people straight; they weren't really beings that were a part of our reality, but here he was, and there was no denying it. "What could you possibly teach me that I could believe wasn't a lie?"

"Truthfully? Well, for starters, just about everything you have been taught your whole life has been a big, fat sack of lies." He said this with a face so straight it was unnerving as if he truly believed what he said. "We have been deceiving humanity for millennia, and very effectively I might add. Change things a little here, tweak a couple things there, and make people feel like they are making progressive steps forward while leading them backward; rinse, wash and repeat every few decades. It's a simple plan that has been working since Adam left the Garden." He sighed with a faraway stare, and a pleased smile, "Ahh, the good old days."

Could he be right? Could it all be a lie, and if so could he really trust that he could believe what this self-professed deceiver would tell him? Could he afford to listen to him? Could he afford not to? There were too many questions to think of them all!

Apparently, Franco's dilemma was written all over his face and Telmaris took this opportunity to make his move. "Here is what I propose; While I am vacationing with you, you can ask me anything you want and I will answer truthfully, no lies, but I can choose not to answer. In return, you will stop being so damn defensive and unwind. Have some fun yourself and when this is all over, we go our separate ways, never to cross again." He seemed truly sincere. Franco sat in silence just looking at him, seemingly dumbfounded. "Come on, what do you say, shall we have an adventure?" The smile on Telmaris' human form face was smiling and looked truly excited at the proposition.

"How will I know if you're telling me the truth and not just lying?" He couldn't believe he just asked that question, was he really thinking of doing this? He then solemnly nodded at the smiling demon. Telmaris clapped him on the shoulder and they then turned and continued on down the sidewalk.

As they walked on down the street to the diner, suddenly Telmaris pulled Franco into an alleyway they were passing and said, "we need to talk". He then reached out into the empty air, seemed to grasp something that was not there, and turned his hand as if he was turning a doorknob that was not there. He pushed open this invisible "door" and quickly pulled Franco through it and then pulled it shut. Franco felt his stomach fall like a rollercoaster as he looked around at his new surroundings. He seemed to be in a room,



or a cave, that appeared to have stone walls and no opening whatsoever. The room was illuminated by dozens of candles, some in candlesticks, some in candelabras, and some were sitting on small ledges protruding from the stone walls.

The candles were black and red in color and of various sizes from one to three inches thick and of various heights, as if some had been replaced after burning down. There were tall candles about sixteen inches tall with a small amount of wax dribbled down the sides, and the shortest candles, about two inches tall, with large amounts of melted wax pooled and cooled around the bottom and melted over the bottom of the candle holder, and others with the wax hanging off the sides like stalactites.

The candlelight danced off the damp walls where some water seemed to have leached in from the outside. It was heavy enough that he could feel the humidity in the air, and smell the fragrance of wet earth, that somehow reminded him of playing in the dirt in his backyard as a small five-year-old, digging tunnels and roads for his Hot wheels. But there was also a light acidity to the air, that made him somehow associate it with Iron, no, more specifically the iron in his blood. Like the smell of breathing in the air after having a bloody nose.

In the middle of the room, there was a small, round stone table with two stone seats on opposite sides. Telmaris sat on one of these seats and motioned to Franco to have a seat on the other. The Priest stammered, "what... what is... this?"

Telmaris smiled, obviously enjoying the priest's surprise and dismay. "This is a small 'pocket dimension', a small reality within, and yet separate, from what you know of as reality. I use it for meetings when I need some privacy in a crowded area. I call it my closet." He continued to smile disarmingly as Franco slowly sat down and tried to pull himself together and close his gaping mouth and eyes. This time the demon was truly testing his understanding of reality.

Telmaris smiled and reached inside his denim jacket, "as American movies and T.V. like to portray, we demons do love our deals. That's one of the few things that they have gotten right." He proceeded to pull a scroll out of his jacket, he then reverently took the scroll in both hands and slowly lifted it to his forehead as he closed his eyes and leaned forward slightly to meet the scroll. He then lowered the scroll a little and straightened himself up. He softly began to chant in a language unknown to the priest and a slight glowing blue light started to emanate around the scroll. The chanting started to get a little louder when Telmaris opened his eyes and Franco saw that they were glowing the same hue and brightness of blue as the scroll. Telmaris lowered his hands a little but the scroll stayed in the same place, suspended in the air, and as he started to spread his hands apart the scroll began to unroll with each rod of the scroll following its associated hand. When he stopped there was a sound, not unlike the sound of ripping cloth in short bursts, and small traces of smoke began wafting into the air from the side

of the scroll that was facing the demon. Franco got the uneasy feeling that the scroll was being written right in front of him by some unseen hand from hell, and somehow, that made it even worse.

The chanting ceased, the scroll rolled itself back up, then it floated into Telmaris' hand and ceased glowing. The demon smiled as he admired the scroll, "this is your contract. It stipulates the details of our agreement and what will befall either of us should we be found in breach of our agreement. Look it over before signing," and with that he handed the scroll to Franco.

The dark document felt warm in his hand, something akin to a loaf of fresh bread about fifteen minutes after it had been taken out of the oven to cool. The rods appeared to be made out of mahogany and stained a very dark, crimson red and finished with lacquer. The rods were about sixteen inches long with rounded handles made from gold with a trim inlaid with silver. The scroll itself seemed to be made from a very thin layer of leather that was very supple and moved easily, he was afraid to think of what kind of hide, or skin, this leather was made from, but a sinking feeling in his stomach told him he was pretty sure where it came from. He held the scroll horizontally and unrolled it downwards, and as he did he saw that the words of the scroll were in English and that they had been burned into the leather as he thought. The writing was impressive, even beautiful, and could be easily read. When he had fully unrolled the scroll he noticed that there were symbols or sigils, inlaid in silver along the side of the wooden handles, he had never seen them before anywhere else. The priest was beginning to feel as if he was stepping over a boundary his priestly vow would forbid him from, and deep inside himself, he hoped something would happen that would keep him from reading it. Maybe he would be struck blind and therefore unable to read the contract. Hopefully, his crucifix would begin to glow and then set the hellish document ablaze. Best of all, perhaps the heavens would open and three angels would descend, vanquish the demon and then take the contract from his hands and destroy it in a blast of lightning. That last one would be best because then there would be no ambiguity as to who had stopped him, or why. Sadly for Franco none of those things happened, there was no light, no fire, no salvation, and no voices, not even a whisper. With a steadying breath he began to read the contract, very slowly;

"Be it known to all who walk the Earth, preside On High, and dwell in the Dark Below; on this day the living soul that is known as Franco Lucasey Benito (from here on out referred to as Franco) has willingly, and knowingly, entered into an Infernal Agreement with Telmaris l'OnisUndeen, Lord of the Seventh Legion of the Scythian Horde and Master of The Dream Torturing Regiment (from here on out referred to as Telmaris). Per accordance with this agreement Telmaris agrees to the following;

1. To tell the truth when answering questions from Franco, speaking no lies, but he does retain the right to choose not to answer.
2. Telmaris will also provide Franco with Spiritual Sight, allowing Franco the ability to see the reality of the spiritual world around him and gain a greater understanding of what humanity calls "good and evil".
3. Telmaris will protect Franco from any and all dangers that he may be purposely, or inadvertently exposed to during the life of this contract. He will also protect him from any other demons, or minions, (physically and spiritually) and will be free from being negotiated with for any kind of contract or deal by minions of Satan.
4. Telmaris in no way will try tempting, or leading Franco into, or down, any paths leading to his spiritual destruction. Telmaris will also not try to have Franco participate in any activity that would violate any of his priestly
5. Telmaris will not jeopardize Franco's future income by destroying his ability to perform as a priest. This being said, if Franco decides he cannot perform as a priest going forward because of the truths he has learned, then Telmaris is bound to find him an alternative vocation, or income, so as not to leave Franco destitute.

In exchange for the above services Franco will agree to the following;

1. Franco will abstain from continually trying to Exercise Telmaris and send him back to Hell.
2. Franco will do his absolute best to relax and enjoy the wonderful adventure that Telmaris and he can, and will, have while enjoying Telmaris' vacation.
3. Franco will put aside his iron-clad, preconceived notions of right and wrong, Heaven and Hell, and really listen to what Telmaris has to say, and see what he has to show him, until his final deliberation as to what is real.

If found in breach of this agreement, or the spirit of this contract, the following will occur;

1. If Telmaris transgresses his agreed-upon stipulations he will immediately be bound, and transported to, Hell proper for a duration of no less than 100 years. Franco will also be off limits to all demons for the entirety of his mortal life.
2. If Franco transgresses his agreed-upon stipulations then he will lose any and all claims to protection from Telmaris and will become fair game for him, or any other demon, for the remainder of his life, and afterlife if he engages in any other agreement that lays hold upon his eternal soul. Telmaris will then no longer be bound to leave Franco when his vacation is over and can, if he so decides, reside with him indefinitely. In this state, Telmaris will be immune to any form of

exercising, binding, or banishment intended to separate, or block, him from Franco.

Franco looked up from the document with a look on his ashen face that would tell anyone that saw him that there was a large pit in his stomach the size of a small boulder. His blank stare did not seem to register anything in front of him for what seemed like several minutes as he tried to fully comprehend what he had just read. Telmaris let him have this time of silence. He had learned over the millennia that it was best to let these small-minded humans try to grasp the otherworldly deals he had presented them with and let them come out of the fog on their own, because that way when they finally did break free of the mile-long stare, they would think they understood something of what they had read, whether they actually did or not. This would give them some sense of control, or choice, that always worked in favor of the dealer, but this time there was no hidden clause, no loophole to catch him with. Telmaris truly just wanted to have fun with this human and play with him while using the truth, and the truth only, but of course metered out in his own way. It felt like a challenge he really wanted to try.

Franco's head was spinning and he was running the words and phrases from the contract through his mind. He never would have thought that he would have been so tempted by the promise of knowledge as he had just become. He had always had questions that the church couldn't answer. Things that didn't make sense, or lines of thought that ever had a conclusion that was satisfactory. Teachings and doctrines that seemed to be at odds with each other that were never properly addressed or concluded in ways that made sense to him. This could be the opportunity to resolve those issues and strengthen his faith and his commitment to the Church, to the truth. "So, do I need to sign this in blood or something?"

"As a matter of fact, yes," Telmaris held out his hand, and a gesture that looked like something a stage magician would do for a simple trick, but instead of a card appearing in his hand, a calligraphy pen appeared. It looked ancient but well cared for, with a deep, rich red-brown color and a gold tip. There were also curious symbols embellished along the length of the pen that was inlaid with gold. He handed the pen over to Franco and said evenly to him, "the pen will take only what it needs. Just write with it like you would any other pen."

With more than a modicum of trepidation, he took the pen. He could feel his heart pounding in his throat, and there was a ringing in his ears. Everything inside him was screaming for him to run, but there was something else buried deep inside him that saw an open door in the back of his mind, with the light of promised knowledge streaming through that would not let him cut and run.

Father Franco Benito, Priest of the Catholic Church, put blood pen to demonic contract and began to sign. He felt a slight pressure in his fingers, and his body felt cold,

the same way it does when giving blood. He felt his precious life force flow out of the pen and saw his name forming on the devilish document in deep crimson. When he finished he felt like the world had somehow just changed forever.

Telmaris carefully took the pen and document, and repeated the actions of the priest, signing his own name in its proper placement, the only difference was there was no blood. In the place of ink, there was a burning of the document, forming his name in charred letters. He then took a small pebble, ground it up in his fingers and dusted the lettering with it, and lightly blew on it to dry the blood and seal the signatures. He let it go and it slowly floated off the table, rolled itself up, and a red wax seal appeared on it to seal it shut, with the symbol of The Star of David with three concentric circles around it. Then the scroll disappeared with a flash and puff of smoke, leaving behind the smell of brimstone, it smelt as if one hundred cap guns had just gone off at once.

After a moment of tense silence, the demon decided to break it because he knew from the experience of thousands of deals the other party would only sit in silence until something snapped them out of their self-imposed catatonic state. "Well, we need to get going." Telmaris stood up, walked to the wall, and opened the door. Blankly, Franco stood up and walked back into the world. They continued on their way to the diner, and Telmaris slapped the Priest on the neck. he felt it this time, which somehow made it exponentially worse, and he said, "Lighten up; we're gonna have some fun."

