

THE DEVIL EXCLUSIVE

By Jeff Dunne

© 2017 by Jeffrey A. Dunne

CHARACTERS

JOURNALIST

A simple, overworked journalist who thinks, at least initially, that he is interviewing a mentally disturbed man in jail.

THE DEVIL

Ruler of Hell, Satan, Beelzebub... you know, *that* guy.

SETTING

A jail cell

TIME

Present day

SCENE

*(The devil, exquisitely dressed in tailored suit, waits patiently in a jail cell. He has “given himself up”. In comes a journalist. Slightly disheveled, the journalist is running late, and enters with a half-consumed cup of coffee from a convenience shop of some type, a tape recorder, a small notebook, and a pack of cigarettes. The journalist gets himself set up, while the devil just watches him intensely, smiling in a knowing “I am in total control of the universe” fashion.)*

JOURNALIST

I’m running a little late. *(No response except The Smile)* Just give me a moment.

DEVIL

Take all the time you want. I’m in no rush.

JOURNALIST

No, I suppose not *(chuckles weakly, thinking the devil is being polite, not realizing that the devil is talking about more significant topics – finishes setting up, and then seats himself across from the devil)*. So... you are the Devil.

DEVIL

So... you’re a journalist.

JOURNALIST

Yep.

DEVIL

How’s that working out for you?

JOURNALIST

Good. Good. I like to research, I like to write. It’s a good gig.

DEVIL

Mmm. Defender of the truth.

JOURNALIST

I guess you could say that.

DEVIL

And that’s what you’re here for? The truth?

JOURNALIST

Yeah, I suppose so. If you're going to be honest with me.

DEVIL

Why would I be anything less than honest?

JOURNALIST

You tell me.

DEVIL

I assure you, being honest – with you, right here, right now – is the sole (*devil deliberately intends the double entendre*) reason I'm sitting here.

JOURNALIST

*(Journalist chuckles lightly)*

If you're aiming for the truth, the whole truth, and all that, I'd say you're not off to a great start.

DEVIL

Oh, but I am being truthful. Completely.

JOURNALIST

You're telling me that you walked into the police station, confessed to being the devil, and let them lock you up just so you could talk to me... right here and right now. (*Devil makes a "that's right" gesture/expression*). You know that you're under psychological evaluation, don't you? That's why you're locked up. Not because they're looking to try you for crimes committed as the devil.

DEVIL

I know that they're watching me carefully through that (*indicating a two-way mirror or video camera*). As for the rest, well, that's a little... murky.

JOURNALIST

What's murky?

DEVIL

The bit about being locked up.

JOURNALIST

But you can't deny that. One of us is in a cage here, pal, and it doesn't take a genius to figure out who.

DEVIL

I can deny anything I like. Anything. It's my invention, after all. (*Journalist clearly isn't following*) Denial.

JOURNALIST

You invented...

DEVIL

Best idea I ever had. Caught on like... (*pauses to let the irony sink in*) hellfire.

JOURNALIST

You mean like wildfire?

DEVIL

Where do you think wildfire comes from?

JOURNALIST

(*Patronizing*)

Does it?

DEVIL

Emotion that overcomes reason... Excitement that cannot be contained by moderation... Doesn't that seem to bear my signature?

JOURNALIST

Frankly, no. The devil is usually associated with *evil*. Or haven't you heard?

DEVIL

Ahh, superiority. Very proud of that one, too.

JOURNALIST

You invented superiority, did you?

DEVIL

A derivative product. Like fear... anxiety... impatience... Anything that makes a person thirst for denial, it's a safe bet I came up with it.

JOURNALIST

I think we were talking about your denial that you're in jail.

DEVIL

No. I simply said that I can deny anything I like.

JOURNALIST

So you don't deny that you're in jail.

DEVIL

Not at all. We are obviously sitting right here.

JOURNALIST

Then—

DEVIL

What I was denying was your assertion that I am “locked up in jail”. I can leave any time I like.

JOURNALIST

The guards would probably disagree.

DEVIL

I'm not concerned with what the guards think. I'm here because I choose to be here.

JOURNALIST

You might've walked in of your own choice, but I think you'll find walking out to be a different story.

DEVIL

We shall see, but right now I'm not ready to leave.

JOURNALIST

I see. And why is that?

DEVIL

Because we haven't finished our little chat yet.

JOURNALIST

Okay, so what do you want to talk about?

DEVIL

Well, since you brought up the point about good and evil, let's pursue that, shall we?

JOURNALIST

What about it?

DEVIL

You think I'm evil.

JOURNALIST

I don't think you're evil. I think your nuts.

DEVIL

For the sake of the discussion, let's just pretend that I really am the devil. Perhaps by the time I leave, I'll have been sufficiently convincing to sway you to that fact, but for now it isn't essential.

JOURNALIST

Fine. You're the devil.

DEVIL

And you think I'm evil.

JOURNALIST

If you are the devil, then yeah, you're evil.

DEVIL

Why?

JOURNALIST

Because you like to torture people?

DEVIL

But I don't torture people.

JOURNALIST

Then what do you do?

DEVIL

Come now, you're not even trying. Everyone knows what the devil does.

JOURNALIST

You collect souls and bring them to hell.

DEVIL

Very good. See, you can do this.

JOURNALIST

I'd say that makes you evil.

DEVIL

But God collects souls too.



JOURNALIST

But he doesn't send them to hell.

DEVIL

I don't send souls to hell either.

JOURNALIST

You just admitted that you do. So were you lying just now?

DEVIL

No, I agreed that I *bring* souls to hell, not that I send them there. And for the record, I never lie.

JOURNALIST

Everyone knows that the devil cannot be trusted.

DEVIL

That doesn't mean I lie. Why would I? I am, as a matter of fact, impeccably honest. You might even say that I am literally incapable of lying.

JOURNALIST

I find that hard to believe.

DEVIL

The world is a strange place, filled with incredulous things. But the statement stands. Humans, with their free will and deep-seated insecurities, are the only ones who lie.

JOURNALIST

Are you saying that you don't have free will?

DEVIL

Let's say that mine is not a profession one can quit.

JOURNALIST

But none of that means that you can't lie.

DEVIL

What would be the point? I don't need to lie. I have a fantastic product—

JOURNALIST

Just because you don't lie doesn't mean you can't lie. And since I don't believe a word you are saying...

DEVIL

Lying is a human invention. You think I am lying because *you* lie, and so you expect others to as well.

JOURNALIST

But if you are the devil, you are not innocent of this. You make people lie.

DEVIL

No. As I said, I invented denial. Humans came up with lying to facilitate denial, and they did it all on their own. Had no one wanted denial, what would be the point of lying?

JOURNALIST

But...

DEVIL

Think about it. Are there animals in hell? Do you ever hear about dear sweet Fluffy walking down the brimstone path? Of course not. No denial, no lying, no hell.

JOURNALIST

What about hell hounds? Hell cats? Ravens and crows...

DEVIL

Oh please. Just because you get scared of the night, of death, that doesn't make those things the dominion of hell. Ravens and crows? You might as well say that white and dark chocolate represent some universal judgment. And hellcats? You think that just because someone has a temper that means they are part of my domain?

JOURNALIST

And hell hounds? Are you saying that there are no such things as hell hounds?

DEVIL

Oh, no. There are creatures that one might call hellhounds, but they are not borne of canines.

JOURNALIST

And where do they come from?

DEVIL

*(Tsking)*

You shouldn't have to ask. People. Hell hounds, like all of my subjects, are humans. Vicious humans. Cruel humans. People who take delight in the suffering of others. *Those* are hell hounds. Trust me, dogs don't come down to hell any more than kittens, frogs, snakes, or goldfish.

JOURNALIST

It sounds like you are suggesting that the devil... (*devil motions that he is the devil*) fine, that you are a total innocent in all of this.

DEVIL

Not at all. As I said, I'm the inventor of denial, the embodiment of temptation. I'm what allows you to give in, to embrace your sins. Without me, what would be the point? Without me, there would be no free will.

JOURNALIST

You're saying that the devil gave us free will? Not buying it. God gave us free will.

DEVIL

Call it a mutual gift from the both of us. Without choices, there can be no free will, and it is only because both God and I are here that you have choices. You're welcome.

JOURNALIST

This is bullshit. I have choices, and it has nothing to do with you.

DEVIL

It has everything to do with me. Oh, I'm sure you could come up with choices that don't seem to. All those little choices that don't matter. Should I have the fish or the chicken? Should I wear the blue shirt or the green shirt? I might argue that I play a role in even those, but I'll let it go. I'll agree that there are some choices in which I play no significant part. But I defy you to think of a truly significant choice where I am not involved.

JOURNALIST

Fine. Easy. I chose to be a journalist. I could have been a doctor or mailman, but I *chose* journalism.

DEVIL

Insignificant.

JOURNALIST

Very significant. It determined where I live, what I do each day—

DEVIL

Where you live, yes, but insignificant. In the grand scheme of things, where you live makes far less true difference to your personal life than your choice to go out drinking last night.

JOURNALIST

I—

DEVIL

As for what you do each day, that is not really accurate. You're attempting to play word games to avoid what is meaningful, to distract you from what matters.

JOURNALIST

No—

DEVIL

Of course you are. I know denial when I see it. It was my brainchild, remember? Being a journalist puts you in a different set of circumstances than being a mailman, but it is your *character*, your *nature*, that determines what you *do* each day. And it is that character that I am talking about. You think I give a damn about whether you write poetry or newspaper articles? What matters is what you are trying to achieve through your medium, not the medium itself. Those are the choices that matter. Those are the choices where *free will* matters.

*(There is a pause)*

JOURNALIST

How did you know that I went out drinking last night?

DEVIL

Way to distract yourself from the point. Do they teach you that in journalism courses?

JOURNALIST

How did you know?!

DEVIL

I know everything there is to know about you. Your choice to go drinking last night... your choice to leave a crappy tip because you don't plan on going back to the bar again... even your choice to put a quarter in some stranger's parking meter because—

JOURNALIST

How do you know these things!?! Have you been... Who the hell are you?!

DEVIL

You know who I am.

JOURNALIST

Devil my ass. Who are you? What's your name?

DEVIL

I've had quite a few names over the years. Satan, Mastema, Mammon. Lucifer, Beelzebub, Azazel. The Serpent, the Deceiver, the Prince of Darkness. The Road to Temptation, The Quick Win, the—

JOURNALIST

Wait. What?

DEVIL

The Quick Win. That's one of my favorites.

JOURNALIST

I've never heard the devil referred to that way.

DEVIL

No? It's probably one of the most accurate.

JOURNALIST

How so?

DEVIL

What do you think I do? Like I said, I have a fantastic product that practically sells itself, along with a huge marketing department staffed with volunteers who unwittingly do all my work for me.

JOURNALIST

I don't understand.

DEVIL

You don't want to understand.

JOURNALIST

I—

DEVIL

I told you. Denial. Fucking brilliant, isn't it?

JOURNALIST

No, this isn't denial. I don't understand. *(The journalist has started to get scared at a deep, subconscious level. He is afraid that he does understand, but desperately hopes he is wrong, and as much as he wants to be able to consider it consciously, the whole thing is too terrifying to consider.)*

DEVIL

Look at history, my boy. What is my wondrous product? What is it that I sell, and what is it that I charge?

JOURNALIST

I... I don't know.

DEVIL

I sell... the *now*. And all I charge is the future.

JOURNALIST

No. This doesn't make sense.

DEVIL

Denial. Ah, I never get tired of it. Look at you. Look. Look at that cup of coffee. *Decaf*, is it?

JOURNALIST

No...

DEVIL

No, it isn't. Why the coffee, Doug?

JOURNALIST

How did you know my na—

DEVIL

Why. The coffee. Doug.

JOURNALIST

I... I don't know. To wake me up, I guess.

DEVIL

Right. Because you were tired. Why were you tired, Doug? (*Doug's getting a little stunned*) Because you stayed out too late drinking. You knew you were coming here this morning. You knew that staying out late would keep you from getting enough sleep. But you didn't care. You *wanted* to stay out. You *wanted* to keep chatting up that brunette at the bar, even though you knew how it would end. You made a choice, Doug. You *chose* to live for the moment and pay for it the next day. And this is your third cup.

JOURNALIST

How coul—

DEVIL

And you know that drinking all that coffee will mess up the rest of your day, and throw off your sleep tonight. But you *chose* to stay out late.

JOURNALIST

I didn't choose these things. I... just... wasn't thinking about it.

DEVIL

Oh, denial again. No, you *were* thinking about it. In the back of your head, you knew. You simply *chose* to ignore that voice. You're very practiced at ignoring that voice. You've done it so often that it's almost fully automatic now.

JOURNALIST

I...

DEVIL

How about the cigarettes, Doug? Are you going to tell me that no little voice ever went off inside your head telling you that a little nicotine today is probably going to kill you tomorrow? Are you really telling me that you make that choice in total ignorance of the consequences?

JOURNALIST

No...

DEVIL

Now do you see what I mean when I said that I have an extensive marketing department?

JOURNALIST

You mean the tobacco industry?

DEVIL

Fuck the tobacco industry. Are you really that stupid? You think I'm talking about cigarettes? My demons are everywhere, Doug. Everywhere. Every city, every industry, every surviving culture. You could all be living moderate, happy lives in a sustainable world eating healthy foods, working four hours a day, and playing with your kids. The world would support that - if you simply exercised some basic self-restraint. But instead, you rape the planet to get more than you need, even though you realize it destroys the air and the water. You modify food to grow in huge quantities at the cost of it destroying your bodies, and then throw most of it away. You create technologies that enslave you to them, inventing needs that bind you into an unending cycle of dependency. You hand your kids' morals, the chance to influence their essential character, you hand them over to day care institutions in exchange for a little extra disposable income.

JOURNALIST

You're blaming me for...

DEVIL

I'm not blaming you. I pushed hard for a long time to bring these things about. It's because of me that you so willingly, thoughtlessly, trade your future for a little thrill of excitement in the present moment. I am The Quick Win, Doug. And you've already signed the contract.

JOURNALIST

Why are you telling me all of this?

DEVIL

Why shouldn't I?

JOURNALIST

Won't telling me... telling people all of this make your job harder?

DEVIL

I doubt it. But as for why, there's a very simple reason. I'm telling you this... to spite God.

JOURNALIST

What?

DEVIL

I maintain that the game's over. You see, once upon a time, people actually tried to resist me. They practiced moderation and self-restraint. They thought ahead, they balanced the desires of the present against the needs of the future. Back in those days I had to be clever. How could I tempt this person, how could I mislead that one? Now, though... There's nothing to do. So few of you ever think beyond immediate gratification that the very concept is dying out. Like I said, the contract is signed. I've won.

JOURNALIST

So you want people to start resisting you to make it more challenging?

DEVIL

Hardly. I'm the *devil*. No, this isn't really about you, or any other human being. You aren't smart enough to take action, or even appreciate what I'm saying. Oh, you might be a little alarmed as I'm throwing it in your face, but by this time tomorrow it will be nothing more than a vague memory, a philosophical curiosity. No, I'm not trying to convince you that I've won. I'm simply explaining the current situation. God, however, still denies that my victory is complete, and so you might say that I'm trying to prove a point.



JOURNALIST

Then it isn't over.

DEVIL

Of course it's over. Check and mate. Didn't you hear me? God *denies* that it's over. When *God* turns to denial, the very tool of *my* own devising, then the end is... well... undeniable. And I told Him this. I explained that it isn't a matter of opinion. This isn't about odds or probabilities. You see, I've analyzed the situation, and there are simply no more moves on the board. And I told him – like I'll tell you now – that even if I, the devil himself, came down to Earth and explained the whole thing – how everyone had already succumbed to my dominion – even *that* would make no difference. You see, even though you *technically* still have free will, you're no longer capable of *using* it. The strength's gone. For example, I explain to you right now that all you need to do to avoid hell is to start exercising a little self-discipline... (*laughs*) but, you won't.

JOURNALIST

I... might.

DEVIL

Who do you think you're fooling? You were right before, you know. When you said that one of us is in a cage. Think about it over a cigarette and a cup of coffee. I'll have some more sent in for you. (*Next said as he exits*) God, how I love irony.

*(Journalist looks around and sees that somehow he is actually the one sitting in a jail cell)*