

# SUDDEN DEATH

By Jeff Dunne

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## CHARACTERS

BRUUNHILDE	The Valkyrian angel who assesses candidates for the job of Death.
CHEESE	The embodiment of all that is Cheese.
EDGAR	A fairly recently-deceased fellow with high aspirations.
CHARON	Dour ferryman of the dead by day, over-the-top gameshow host by night.

## SETTING

Bruunhilde's office, somewhere in the administration building in Hades.

SCENE

*(It is an office – the kind of office that houses human resource executives. The walls are covered in certificates, and the desk has a wide array of little mementos and other knickknacks, but all very neatly organized. Behind the desk, the Valkyrie angel, Bruunhilde, is filling out some paperwork.)*

BRUUNHILDE

Yes? Who is it?

CHEESE

Cheese.

BRUUNHILDE

Of course. Come in.

*(Cheese enters.)*

Thank you for coming. Please, have a seat.

CHEESE

Thank you.

*(Cheese sits.)*

So...

*(Bruunhilde holds up a hand. Cheese falls silent, and the hand goes down. Bruunhilde finishes filling out some kind of form, puts it in a folder, and looks up.)*

So...

*(Bruunhilde holds up a hand again. Again, Cheese falls silent. The hand goes down, and Bruunhilde just stares at Cheese. Cheese looks around, but sees nothing.)*

Am I to und—

*(The hand comes up again. Cheese falls silent, and is now very confused. There's a knock on the door.)*

BRUUNHILDE

Come in.

*(Edgar enters, dressed in undignified pajamas.)*

CHEESE

*(Very surprised.)*

Edgar?!

EDGAR

Cheese.

CHEESE

Eddie, what are you doing—

BRUUNHILDE

Mr. Hodgekiss, please have a seat.

*(He sits.)*

Thank you. Now...

CHEESE

What's going on? Is there some kind of problem?

BRUUNHILDE

Please... Now, Cheese... Mr. Hodgekiss... As you can imagine, it is not very often that we find ourselves looking to hire a replacement for Death. And... as you can also imagine, when we do, we want to make absolutely certain that we are selecting a candidate who is both qualified and enthusiastic. After all, the last thing we need is word getting out that the job has a high turnover rate. We have... an image to maintain.

*(Bruunhilde falls silent. Cheese is looking back and forth between the others, while Edgar just waits patiently. Soon Cheese can't take the silence.)*

CHEESE

Was there some kind of probl—

BRUUNHILDE

I'm not finished.

CHEESE

Sorry. I thought—

BRUUNHILDE

I'm still not finished. (*After another awkward silence...*) As I was saying, we have an image to maintain. We can't have an ongoing stream of Deaths leaving us to work for Universal Studios.

EDGAR

(*Aside to Cheese.*)

You said he went to Disney.

CHEESE

(*A fierce whisper back...*)

I said it was a guess.

BRUUNHILDE

Which is all to say that we take our interviewing process quite seriously.

CHEESE

I completely understand, and I want you to know that I am *very* serious about the job. If there was something I did wrong while escorting Eddie here to the Underworld, I am very happy to learn from my mistakes. In fact, I think accepting constructive criticism is one of my greatest strengths. After all, you certainly won't find much casu martzu on the shelves these days.

EDGAR

Casu martzu?

CHEESE

It was Sardinian.

EDGAR

Sardinian? There's a type of cheese made from sardines?

CHEESE

No. Sardinia's an island in the Mediterranean. The cheese was made with sheep's milk.

EDGAR

Mediterranean sheep cheese?

CHEESE

Sort of. The curds were broken down by passing them through the digestive system of maggots and...

*(Edgar convulses like he just threw up a little...)*

Well, it never really caught on.

EDGAR

No kidding.

CHEESE

Of course, marketing it as “Corsican maggot cheese” probably didn’t do it any favors.

EDGAR

Can we change the topic?

BRUUNHILDE

As I was saying, we want to do everything we can to find the right candidate.

CHEESE

Right. Of course. Eddie was my first attempt, and I realize that I might have handled it better.

EDGAR

Actually—

CHEESE

No, let me just say this first. I’m ready to do what it takes to make this right.

BRUUNHILDE

Very laudable, but—

CHEESE

I should probably have been more understanding. I realize that.

EDGAR

It’s not—

CHEESE

And I know that it probably *looked* like I was being impatient when I shoved you out of bed with my staff—

BRUUNHILDE

If I may—

CHEESE

But I definitely learned my lesson.

*(Bruunhilde stands up suddenly. She picks up a ruler from her desk, and the others watch in silence as she walks around the desk to where Cheese is seated. She looks like she is going to measure Cheese's head, but suddenly smacks him with the ruler.)*

BRUUNHILDE

Hush.

*(She walks back behind her desk and sits.)*

Mr. Hodgekiss is not here to register a complaint.

CHEESE

Oh.

BRUUNHILDE

As I was saying, we do everything we can to ensure that we have selected the best applicant, and after a very careful and thorough assessment, we have found that you two have precisely the same score.

CHEESE

What?

EDGAR

Really?

CHEESE

Wait a minute. You... you're applying to the position of Death?

EDGAR

Well, after you left, and I was answering the survey for Bruunhilde, we started talking.

CHEESE

You *just* died.

EDGAR

Exactly.

CHEESE

How can you possibly be qualified for the position? I've been Cheese for tens of thousands of years. You just have a quick knock off and suddenly you think you're Terry Pratchett or something?

EDGAR

Well, I have the advantage of having been through it.

*(Bruunhilde raps on the desk with her ruler.)*

BRUUNHILDE

As I was saying, your results are very impressive, and so we've decided to bring you both in for something of a tie-breaker round to see who will be selected for the position.

CHEESE

A tie breaker?

BRUUNHILDE

We're calling it "Sudden Death", because... well...

*(Bruunhilde rings a bell on the desk. The door opens, and Charon enters. He is dressed in a glittery, over-the-top outfit, and with a personality.)*

CHEESE AND EDGAR

Charon?

CHARON

Ta da!

BRUUNHILDE

You can see why we ask him to dress down for his ferry gig. Can't have him disrupting the somber mood as people make their way to Hades.

*(The 'contestants' look very confused, but then Charon breaks the tension.)*



CHARON

Are we all ready? Then let's play SUDDEN DEATH! We've got some fabulous prizes lined up for our contestants, including the chance for one lucky winner to spend the rest of eternity escorting dead people into THE UNDERWORLD!! Now, you both know the rules—

CHEESE AND EDGAR

No—

CHARON

We'll switch back and forth with the questions. If you get it right and your opponent misses theirs, you win. If you get it wrong, and your opponent can answer it, they win. If you both get it right or you both get it wrong, we go on to the next round, but the important thing is – right or wrong – we all win!!

BRUUNHILDE

Except for the loser, who will be castrated and thrown into the pits of Tartarus

CHEESE AND EDGAR

WHAT?!?

BRUUNHILDE

Just a little joke. Charon, tell our contestants what prizes we have in store for the runner up.

CHARON

Of course, Bruuny! Our runner up, or “our second place winner” as we like to call them, will not only be appointed as Death's understudy in cases where he has to tend to members of his immediate family...

BRUUNHILDE

We call it bereavement leavement...

CHARON

But will also serve on a rotational assignment as.... Disgruntlement!!

*(Edgar and Cheese exchange “wow, not bad” looks of appreciation.)*

So, are you ready to play.... SUDDEN DEATH!!!

*(Everyone situates themselves, and the contestants shake hands.)*

EDGAR

Good luck.

CHEESE

May the best cheese win. Or, you know... man.

CHARON

And here we go! The first question is for Cheese. Are you ready? You've just come upon the remains of a battle. How... do you decide who to escort first?

CHEESE

Wow. That's a tough one.

CHARON

Do you pass?

CHEESE

Is that an option?

CHARON

No.

CHEESE

Alright, umm... I... I guess I would just line them up by height and bring them down all at the same time.

*(Charon looks over at Bruunhilde, who considers, then nods approvingly.)*

CHARON

Thhaaaaatt's RIGHT!!! Ten points for the block of Gouda! I'm kidding, I'm kidding. I'm a kidder! Alright, Edgar, you're up. Are you ready? Here's your question: Karanbir Singh Cheema, known to his friends as simply 'Karan' died unexpectedly in May of 2019. What... was the cause of death?

*(Edgar looks utterly stunned.)*

EDGAR

Could you... repeat the question?

CHARON

What was the cause of death of Mr. Karanbir Singh Cheema in May of 2019?

EDGAR

How am I supposed to know that?

CHARON

Is that your answer?

EDGAR

No! Of course not. Umm... give me a moment.

*(He nervously looks over at Cheese, and then leans towards him and whispers...)*

Psst.

*(Cheese looks at him, but quickly looks back at Charon, a twinge of guilt on his face. Edgar tries again...)*

Psst.

*(Again, Cheese barely glances before turning back. A little louder...)*

Cheese...

CHARON

That's RIGHT!! Mr. Karanbir Cheema died at the age of 13 when struck in the back of the neck by a slab of cheese.

CHEESE

Not my finest hour.

EDGAR

And here I thought the maggot cheese was upsetting.

CHARON

The scores are tied at ten apiece, and we move into ROUND TWO!! This time we'll start with Edgar. Edgar, for another ten points, and quite possibly the game and an eternity of black-robe-not-optional, here... is your next question. You're walking a stiff down into the Underworld, and suddenly an ambulance arrives at the scene of the crime. What... should you do?

EDGAR

I... I'm sure he's dead, right?

CHARON

Sorry, no hints allowed.

EDGAR

Well, since I'd only be escorting him if I was sure he was dead, I guess I'd just keep going.

CHARON

Ohh, Eddie. I'm sorry. That is not the correct answer. Cheese, for the win, can you tell us what you do?

CHEESE

Uh... start heading back in case the EMTs are able to revive him?

*(Charon makes a buzzing sound.)*

CHARON

So sorry. The correct answer was, of course, consult the Mortalis Registry.

CHEESE

The what?

CHARON

Alright, let's move on to the next question. Cheese... You're woken up in the middle of the night from an unanticipated incident of deceasedness. What... is the very first thing you do?

CHEESE

Uhhh... Check the Mortandis Registry?

CHARON

I'm sorry. That is not the correct answer. Edgar, can you steal this win away from Cheese?

EDGAR

What is, check the *Mortalis* Registry, Charon.

CHARON

I'm sorry. That answer is not correct. And as a reminder, this isn't Jeopardy. So, with no points scored this round, the contestants are still tied at ten ten. Let's take a short commercial break to acknowledge our sponsor. This job application process has been brought to you by Death. It's not going away, so you might as well dress it up for parties. Okay, and we're back for round three. Cheese, it's over to you. Why... does everyone think that Death carries a scythe?

CHEESE

Oh! Oh! I know this one! It's because people sometimes call him the Grim Reaper.

CHARON

That's... exactly right!! And for an additional five bonus points, can you tell us how Death got this nickname?

CHEESE

Uhhh, because he's said to mow down souls like blades of grass?

CHARON

A good guess, but no. Actually, the original Death was a tall, lanky fellow named Tim Peeper, and one night we all got drunk over at Bacchus' place and—

*(Bruunhilde raps her ruler on the desk.)*

Okay, Edgar. Eddie. This is for all the marbles, as they say. If you get this right, we head into round four. Get it wrong, and we'll be opening up a job req for a new 'Fromage Divin' in the morning. Are you ready?

EDGAR

Fire away.

CHARON

That's the spirit! *(Then playing with him...)* No, *there's* the spirit! No, *there's* the spirit! They're everywhere! Go GET 'EM!! *(Beat.)* Okay. Not funny. Let's get to the question. As Death, you will automatically take ownership of a very special horse named Tushkins. Why was this perk included in the job description?

EDGAR

Tushkins?!

CHARON

You can rename it if you want.

EDGAR

Tushkins!?!

CHARON

It was named Sir Buttermost before that.

EDGAR

Tushkins...

CHARON

Is that your answer?

EDGAR

No! *(Beat.)* Why do I get the horse?

CHARON

That's the question.

EDGAR

Uh... *(Turning to Cheese.)* Do you know?

*(Cheese gives him a "maybe" shrug.)*

Okay. Let me think. Why would Death need a horse... Why would... Is it to help him get around faster?

CHARON

Is that your final answer?

EDGAR

Yeah, I guess.

CHARON

Oh... I'm so sorry. The correct answer was 'in case of the apocalypse.' But, we do have a very nice toaster for you to take home with you.

EDGAR

I thought I was going to become Disgruntlement.

CHARON

The toaster doesn't work.

EDGAR

Oh.

*(Bruunhilde raps on the desk again. Charon exits with a flourish and the others turn back to face her.)*

BRUUNHILDE

Now that we have that settled, let me officially thank each of you for your interest. You will be receiving official notification of the results of the selection process within the next three days, so please keep an eye out overhead.

Overhead?

EDGAR

CHEESE

Ravens. Also, not a bad habit in general when you live in the Underworld.

BRUUNHILDE

If you have any questions, you know where to reach us.

*(Bruunhilde exits.)*

Well. Congratulations.

EDGAR

Thanks.

CHEESE

Just... I have to ask.

EDGAR

You want to know about the casu martzu.

CHEESE

Are the... when people eat the cheese... are the...

EDGAR

Alive, yeah.

CHEESE

Whoa.

EDGAR

That's how I heard about the job opening in the first place.

CHEESE

*(Lights out.)*