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# TERRY PRATCHETT & NEIL GAIMAN

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SERIES



## GOOD OMENS<sup>®</sup>

**'Marvellously benign, ridiculously inventive  
and gloriously funny'**

GUARDIAN

# GOOD OMeNs<sup>®</sup>

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The Nice and  
Accurate Prophecies  
of Agnes Nutter,  
Witch



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TERRY PRATCHETT  
& NEIL GAIMAN



CORGI BOOKS

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## About the Authors

**Terry Pratchett** had his first story published when he was just thirteen, and after leaving school at seventeen to become a journalist he continued writing, publishing his first novel, *The Carpet People*, in 1971. He went on to produce the phenomenally successful Discworld series, the first of which – *The Colour of Magic* – was published in 1983. Not only have Terry's books been widely adapted for stage and screen, they have also won many awards, including the Carnegie Medal, and he went on to become the UK's bestselling author. Appointed OBE in 1998, he was knighted for services to literature eleven years later. Sir Terry Pratchett died in March 2015. The 41<sup>st</sup> and final Discworld novel – *The Shepherd's Crown* – was published posthumously later that year.

[www.terrypratchett.co.uk](http://www.terrypratchett.co.uk)

**Neil Gaiman** was twenty-three when his first short story was published. He was a journalist as a young man, and went on to work in comics, producing *Sandman*, described by the *LA Times* as 'the greatest epic in the history of comics', along with prose for adults and for children. He is the only person to have been awarded both the Newbery and the Carnegie Medals for the same book, *The Graveyard Book*. Several of his books, such as *Coraline* and *Stardust*, have become award-winning and beloved films. He is Professor of the Arts at Bard College, and a UN Goodwill Ambassador. In accordance with Terry's final request of him, Neil has spent his last few years writing and then overseeing the *Good Omens* television series for Prime Video and the BBC. He is looking forward to becoming a writer once again.

[www.neilgaiman.com](http://www.neilgaiman.com)

## Heavenly praise for the hellishly entertaining *Good Omens* ...

‘Marvellously benign, ridiculously inventive and gloriously funny’  
*Guardian*

‘The Apocalypse has never been funnier’  
Clive Barker

‘Heaven to read, and you’ll laugh like hell’  
*Time Out*

‘Reads like the *Book of Revelation*, rewritten by Monty Python’  
*San Francisco Chronicle*

‘A superbly funny book. Pratchett and Gaiman are the most hilariously sinister team since Jekyll and Hyde. If this is Armageddon, count me in’  
James Herbert

‘Full-bore contemporary lunacy. A steamroller of silliness that made me giggle out loud’  
*San Diego Union-Tribune*

‘Wow ... it would make one hell of a movie. Or a heavenly one. Take your pick’  
*Washington Post Book World*

‘Hilarious Pratchett magic tempered by Neil Gaiman’s dark steely style; who could ask for a better combination?’  
*Fear*

‘*Good Omens* shouldn’t be pegged into a category. It should just be enjoyed ... read it for a riotous good laugh’  
*Orlando Sentinel*

‘Frequently hilarious, littered with funny footnotes and eccentric characters. It’s also humane, intelligent, suspenseful ... if the end is near, Pratchett and Gaiman will take us there in style’  
*Locus*

‘Wacky and irreverent’  
*Booklist*

‘From beginning to end, *Good Omens* is side-splittingly funny’  
*Rave Reviews*

‘Hilariously naughty’

*Kirkus Reviews*

‘What’s so funny about Armageddon? More than you’d think ... *Good Omens* has arrived just  
in time’

*Detroit Free Press*

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Small Gods  
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The Last Hero (illustrated by Paul Kidby)  
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A Hat Full of Sky (for young adults)  
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The Science of Discworld III: Darwin's Watch  
The Science of Discworld IV: Judgement Day  
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(with Stephen Briggs)  
Nanny Ogg's Cookbook  
(with Stephen Briggs, Tina Hannan and Paul Kidby)  
The Pratchett Portfolio (with Paul Kidby)  
The Discworld Almanak (with Bernard Pearson)  
The Unseen University Cut-Out Book  
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The Art of Discworld (with Paul Kidby)  
The Wit and Wisdom of Discworld (compiled by Stephen Briggs)  
The Folklore of Discworld (with Jacqueline Simpson)  
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The Discworld Mapp (with Stephen Briggs, painted by Stephen Player)  
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A Slip of the Keyboard  
Shaking Hands with Death  
The Long Earth • The Long War • The Long Mars •  
The Long Utopia • The Long Cosmos (series with Stephen Baxter)  
Strata  
The Dark Side of the Sun  
The Unadulterated Cat (illustrated by Gray Jolliffe)  
The Carpet People • Truckers • Diggers • Wings • Only You Can Save Mankind • Johnny and  
the Dead • Johnny and the Bomb • Nation • Dodger • Dodger's Guide to London • Dragons At  
Crumbling Castle • The Witch's Vacuum Cleaner

A complete list of Terry Pratchett ebooks and audio books as well as other books based on the Discworld series – illustrated screenplays, graphic novels, comics and plays – can be found on  
[www.terrypratchett.co.uk](http://www.terrypratchett.co.uk)

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(by Dave McKean; commentary by Neil Gaiman)  
Don't Panic  
Ghastly Beyond Belief (with Kim Newman)  
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The View From the Cheap Seats: Selected Non-Fiction

CAVEAT

*Kids!* Bringing about Armageddon can be dangerous.  
Do not attempt it in your own home.

DEDICATION

The authors would like to join the demon Crowley in  
dedicating this book to the memory of

G. K. Chesterton

A man who knew what was going on.

## *Foreword*

People say: What was it like writing *Good Omens*?

And we say: We were just a couple of guys, okay? We still are. It was a summer job. We had a great time doing it, we split the money in half, and we swore never to do it again. We didn't think it was important.

And, in a way, it still isn't. *Good Omens* was written by two people who at the time were not at all well known except by the people who already knew them. They weren't even certain it would sell. They certainly didn't know they were going to write the most repaired book in the world. (Believe us: We have signed a delightfully large number of paperbacks that have been dropped in the bath, gone a worrying brown colour, got repaired with sticky tape and string, and, in one case, consisted entirely of loose pages in a plastic bag. On the other hand, there was the guy who'd had a special box made up of walnut and silver filigree, with the paperback nestling inside on black velvet. There were silver runes on the lid. We didn't ask.) Etiquette tip: It's okay, more or less, to ask an author to sign your arm, but not good manners to then nip around to the tattoo parlour next door and return half an hour later to show them the inflamed result.

We didn't know we'd do some signing tours that would be weird even by our generous standards, talking about humour in fifteen-second bursts in between newsflashes about the horrific hostage situation down at the local Burger King, being interviewed by an ill-prepared New York radio presenter who hadn't got the message that *Good Omens* was work of what we in the trade call 'fiction,' and getting stern pre-interview warning about swearing from the diminutive Director of Protocol of a public-service radio station 'because you English use bad language all the time.'

In fact, neither of us swear much, especially not on the radio, but for the next hour we found ourselves automatically speaking in very short, carefully scanned sentences, while avoiding each other's eyes.

And then there were the readers, Gawd bless them. We must have signed hundreds of thousands of copies for them by now. The books are often well read to the point of physical disintegration; if we run across a shiny new copy, it's usually because the owner's previous five have been stolen by friends, struck by lightning or eaten by giant termites in Sumatra. You have been warned. Oh, and we understand there's a copy in the Vatican library. It'd be nice to think so.

It's been fun. And it continues.

**In the beginning**

It was a nice day.

All the days had been nice. There had been rather more than seven of them so far, and rain hadn't been invented yet. But clouds massing east of Eden suggested that the first thunderstorm was on its way, and it was going to be a big one.

The angel of the Eastern Gate put his wings over his head to shield himself from the first drops.

'I'm sorry,' he said politely. 'What was it you were saying?'

'I *said*, that one went down like a lead balloon,' said the serpent.

'Oh. Yes,' said the angel, whose name was Aziraphale.

'I think it was a bit of an overreaction, to be honest,' said the serpent. 'I mean, first offence and everything. I can't see what's so bad about knowing the difference between good and evil, anyway.'

'It must *be* bad,' reasoned Aziraphale, in the slightly concerned tones of one who can't see it either, and is worrying about it, 'otherwise *you* wouldn't have been involved.'

'They just said, "Get up there and make some trouble,"' said the serpent, whose name was Crawly, although he was thinking of changing it now. Crawly, he'd decided, was not *him*.

'Yes, but you're a demon. I'm not sure if it's actually possible for you to do good,' said Aziraphale. 'It's down to your basic, you know, nature. Nothing personal, you understand.'

'You've got to admit it's a bit of a pantomime, though,' said Crawly. 'I mean, pointing out the Tree and saying "Don't Touch" in big letters. Not very subtle, is it? I mean, why not put it on top of a high mountain or a long way off? Makes you wonder what He's really planning.'

'Best not to speculate, really,' said Aziraphale. 'You can't second-guess ineffability, I always say. There's Right, and there's Wrong. If you do Wrong when you're told to do Right, you deserve to be punished. Er.'

They sat in embarrassed silence, watching the raindrops bruise the first flowers.

Eventually Crawly said, 'Didn't you have a flaming sword?'

'Er,' said the angel. A guilty expression passed across his face, and then came back and camped there.

'You did, didn't you?' said Crawly. 'It flamed like anything.'

'Er, well—'

'It looked very impressive, I thought.'

'Yes, but, well—'

'Lost it, have you?'

'Oh no! No, not exactly lost, more—'

'Well?'

Aziraphale looked wretched. 'If you must know,' he said, a trifle testily, 'I gave it away.'

Crawly stared up at him.

'Well, I had to,' said the angel, rubbing his hands distractedly. 'They looked so cold, poor things, and she's expecting *already*, and what with the *vicious* animals out there and the storm coming up I thought, well, where's the harm, so I just said, look, if you come back there's going to be an almighty row, but you might be needing this sword, so here it is, don't bother to thank me, just do everyone a big favour and don't let the sun go down on you here.'

He gave Crawly a worried grin.

‘That was the best course, wasn’t it?’

‘I’m not sure it’s actually possible for you to do evil,’ said Crawly sarcastically. Aziraphale didn’t notice the tone.

‘Oh, I do hope so,’ he said. ‘I really do hope so. It’s been worrying me all afternoon.’

They watched the rain for a while.

‘Funny thing is,’ said Crawly, ‘*I* keep wondering whether the apple thing wasn’t the right thing to do, as well. A demon can get into real trouble, doing the right thing.’ He nudged the angel. ‘Funny if we both got it wrong, eh? Funny if I did the good thing and you did the bad one, eh?’

‘Not really,’ said Aziraphale.

Crawly looked at the rain.

‘No,’ he said, sobering up. ‘I suppose not.’

Slate-black curtains tumbled over Eden. Thunder growled among the hills. The animals, freshly named, cowered from the storm.

Far away, in the dripping woods, something bright and fiery flickered among the trees.

It was going to be a dark and stormy night.

## GOOD OMENS

A Narrative of Certain Events occurring in the last eleven years of human history, in strict accordance as shall be shewn with:

*The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter*

Compiled and edited, with Footnotes of an Educational Nature and Precepts for the Wise, by  
Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman.

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

#### SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

God (God)  
Metatron (The Voice of God)  
Aziraphale (An Angel, and part-time rare book dealer)  
Satan (A Fallen Angel; the Adversary)  
Beelzebub (A Likewise Fallen Angel and Prince of Hell)  
Hastur (A Fallen Angel and Duke of Hell)  
Ligur (Likewise a Fallen Angel and Duke of Hell)  
Crowley (An Angel who did not so much Fall as Saunter Vaguely Downwards)

#### APOCALYPTIC HORSEPERSONS

DEATH (Death)  
War (War)  
Famine (Famine)  
Pollution (Pollution)

#### HUMANS

Thou-Shalt-Not-Commit-Adultery Pulsifer (A Witchfinder)  
Agnes Nutter (A Prophetess)  
Newton Pulsifer (Wages Clerk and Witchfinder Private)  
Anathema Device (Practical Occultist and Professional Descendant)  
Shadwell (Witchfinder Sergeant)  
Madame Tracy (Painted Jezebel [mornings only, Thursdays by arrangement] and Medium)  
Sister Mary Loquacious (A Satanic Nun of the Chattering Order of St Beryl)  
Mr Young (A Father)  
Mr Tyler (A Chairman of a Residents' Association)  
A Delivery Man

THEM

ADAM (An Antichrist)

Pepper (A Girl)

Wensleydale (A Boy)

Brian (A Boy)

Full Chorus of Tibetans, Aliens, Americans, Atlanteans and other rare and strange Creatures of the Last Days.

AND:

Dog (Satanical hellhound and cat-worrier)

**Eleven years ago**

Current theories on the creation of the Universe state that, if it were created at all and didn't just start, as it were, unofficially, it came into being between ten and twenty thousand million years ago. By the same token the Earth itself is generally supposed to be about four and a half thousand million years old.

These dates are incorrect.

Medieval Jewish scholars put the date of the Creation at 3760 BC. Greek Orthodox theologians put Creation as far back as 5508 BC.

These suggestions are also incorrect.

Archbishop James Ussher (1580–1656) published *Annales Veteris et Novi Testamenti* in 1654, which suggested that the Heaven and the Earth were created in 4004 BC. One of his aides took the calculation further, and was able to announce triumphantly that the Earth was created on Sunday the 21st of October, 4004 BC, at exactly 9.00 a.m., because God liked to get work done early in the morning while he was feeling fresh.

This too was incorrect. By almost a quarter of an hour.

The whole business with the fossilized dinosaur skeletons was a joke the paleontologists haven't seen yet.

This proves two things:

Firstly, that God moves in extremely mysterious, not to say, circuitous ways. God does not play dice with the universe; He plays an ineffable game of His own devising, which might be compared, from the perspective of any of the other players<sup>fn1</sup>, to being involved in an obscure and complex version of poker in a pitch-dark room, with blank cards, for infinite stakes, with a Dealer who won't tell you the rules, and who *smiles all the time*.

Secondly, the Earth's a Libra.

The astrological prediction for Libra in the 'Your Stars Today' column of the *Tadfield Advertiser*, on the day this history begins, read as follows:-

*LIBRA. 24 September–23 October.*

*You may be feeling run down and always in the same old daily round. Home and family matters are highlighted and are hanging fire. Avoid unnecessary risks. A friend is important to you. Shelve major decisions until the way ahead seems clear. You may be vulnerable to a stomach upset today, so avoid salads. Help could come from an unexpected quarter.*

This was perfectly correct on every count except for the bit about the salads.



It wasn't a dark and stormy night.

It should have been, but that's the weather for you. For every mad scientist who's had a convenient thunderstorm just on the night his Great Work is finished and lying on the slab, there have been dozens who've sat around aimlessly under the peaceful stars while Igor clocks up the overtime.

But don't let the fog (with rain later, temperatures dropping to around forty-five degrees) give anyone a false sense of security. Just because it's a mild night doesn't mean that dark forces aren't abroad. They're abroad all the time. They're *everywhere*.

They always are. That's the whole point.

Two of them lurked in the ruined graveyard. Two shadowy figures, one hunched and squat, the other lean and menacing, both of them Olympic-grade lurkers. If Bruce Springsteen had ever recorded 'Born to Lurk', these two would have been on the album cover. They had been lurking in the fog for an hour now, but they had been pacing themselves and could lurk for the rest of the night if necessary, with still enough sullen menace left for a final burst of lurking around dawn.

Finally, after another twenty minutes, one of them said: 'Bugger this for a lark. He should of been here *hours* ago.'

The speaker's name was Hastur. He was a Duke of Hell.



Many phenomena – wars, plagues, sudden audits – have been advanced as evidence for the hidden hand of Satan in the affairs of Man, but whenever students of demonology get together the M25 London orbital motorway is generally agreed to be among the top contenders for Exhibit A.

Where they go wrong, of course, is assuming that the wretched road is evil simply because of the incredible carnage and frustration it engenders every day.

In fact, very few people on the face of the planet know that the very shape of the M25 forms the sigil *odegra* in the language of the Black Priesthood of Ancient Mu, and means 'Hail the Great Beast, Devourer of Worlds'. The thousands of motorists who daily fume their way around its serpentine lengths have the same effect as water on a prayer wheel, grinding out an endless fog of low-grade evil to pollute the metaphysical atmosphere for scores of miles around.

It was one of Crowley's better achievements. It had taken *years* to achieve, and had involved three computer hacks, two break-ins, one minor bribery and, on one wet night when all else had failed, two hours in a squelchy field shifting the marker pegs a few but occultly incredibly significant metres. When Crowley had watched the first thirty-mile-long tailback he'd experienced the lovely warm feeling of a bad job well done.

It had earned him a commendation.

Crowley was currently doing 110 mph somewhere east of Slough. Nothing about him looked particularly demonic, at least by classical standards. No horns, no wings. Admittedly he was listening to a *Best of Queen* tape, but no conclusions should be drawn from this because all tapes left in a car for more than about a fortnight metamorphose into *Best of Queen* albums. No particularly demonic thoughts were going through his head. In fact, he was currently wondering vaguely who Moey and Chandon were.

Crowley had dark hair, and good cheekbones, and he was wearing snakeskin shoes, or at least presumably he was wearing shoes, and he could do really weird things with his tongue. And, whenever he forgot himself, he had a tendency to hiss.

He also didn't blink much.

The car he was driving was a 1926 black Bentley, one owner from new, and that owner had been Crowley. He'd looked after it.

The reason he was late was that he was enjoying the twentieth century immensely. It was much better than the seventeenth, and a *lot* better than the fourteenth. One of the nice things

about Time, Crowley always said, was that it was steadily taking him further away from the fourteenth century, the most bloody boring hundred years on God's, excuse his French, Earth. The twentieth century was anything but boring. In fact, a flashing blue light in his rear-view mirror had been telling Crowley, for the last fifty seconds, that he was being followed by two men who would like to make it even more interesting for him.

He glanced at his watch, which was designed for the kind of rich deep-sea diver who likes to know what the time is in twenty one world capitals while he's down there.<sup>fn2</sup>

The Bentley thundered up the exit ramp, took the corner on two wheels, and plunged down a leafy road. The blue light followed.

Crowley sighed, took one hand from the wheel, and, half turning, made a complicated gesture over his shoulder.

The flashing light dimmed into the distance as the police car rolled to a halt, much to the amazement of its occupants. But it would be nothing to the amazement they'd experience when they opened the bonnet and found out what the engine had turned into.

In the graveyard Hastur, the tall demon, passed a dogend back to Ligur, the shorter one and more accomplished lurker.

'I can see a light,' he said. 'Here he comes now, the flash bastard.'

'What's that he's drivin'?' said Ligur.

'It's a car. A horseless carriage,' explained Hastur. 'I expect they didn't have them last time you was here. Not for what you might call general use.'

'They had a man at the front with a red flag,' said Ligur.

'They've come on a bit since then, I reckon.'

'What's this Crowley like?' said Ligur.

Hastur spat. 'He's been up here too long,' he said. 'Right from the Start. Gone native, if you ask me. Drives a car with a telephone in it.'

Ligur pondered this. Like most demons, he had a very limited grasp of technology, and so he was just about to say something like, I bet it needs a lot of wire, when the Bentley rolled to a halt at the cemetery gate.

'And he wears sunglasses,' sneered Hastur, 'even when he dunt need to.' He raised his voice. 'All hail Satan,' he said.

'All hail Satan,' Ligur echoed.

'Hi,' said Crowley, giving them a little wave. 'Sorry I'm late, but you know how it is on the A40 at Denham, and then I tried to cut up towards Chorleywood and then—'

'Now we art all here,' said Hastur meaningfully, 'we must recount the Deeds of the Day.'

'Yeah. Deeds,' said Crowley, with the slightly guilty look of one who is attending church for the first time in years and has forgotten which bits you stand up for.

Hastur cleared his throat.

'I have tempted a priest,' he said. 'As he walked down the street and saw the pretty girls in the sun, I put Doubt into his mind. He would have been a saint, but within a decade we shall have him.'

'Nice one,' said Crowley, helpfully.

'I have corrupted a politician,' said Ligur. 'I let him think a tiny bribe would not hurt. Within a year we shall have him.'

They both looked expectantly at Crowley, who gave them a big smile.

'You'll like this,' he said.

His smile became even wider and more conspiratorial.

'I tied up *every* portable telephone system in Central London for forty-five minutes at lunchtime,' he said.

There was silence, except for the distant swishing of cars.

'Yes?' said Hastur. 'And then what?'

'Look, it wasn't easy,' said Crowley.

'That's *all*?' said Ligur.

'Look, people—'

'And exactly what has that done to secure souls for our master?' said Hastur.

Crowley pulled himself together.

What could he tell them? That twenty thousand people got bloody furious? That you could hear the arteries clanging shut all across the city? And that then they went back and took it out on their secretaries or traffic wardens or whatever, and *they* took it out on other people? In all kinds of vindictive little ways which, and here was the good bit, *they thought up themselves*. For the rest of the day. The knock-on effects were incalculable. Thousands and thousands of souls all got a faint patina of tarnish, and you hardly had to lift a finger.

But you couldn't tell that to demons like Hastur and Ligur. Fourteenth century minds, the lot of them. Spending years picking away at one soul. Admittedly it was *craftsmanship*, but you had to think differently these days. Not big, but wide. With five billion people in the world you couldn't pick the buggers off one by one any more; you had to spread your effort. But demons like Ligur and Hastur wouldn't understand. They'd never have thought up Welsh-language television, for example. Or VAT. Or Manchester.

He'd been particularly pleased with Manchester.

'The Powers that Be seem to be satisfied,' he said. 'Times are changing. So what's up?'

Hastur reached down behind a tombstone.

'This is,' he said.

Crowley stared at the basket.

'Oh,' he said. 'No.'

'Yes,' said Hastur, grinning.

'*Already?*'

'Yes.'

'And, er, it's up to me to—?'

'Yes.' Hastur was enjoying this.

'Why me?' said Crowley desperately. 'You know me, Hastur, this isn't, you know, my scene ...'

'Oh, it is, it is,' said Hastur. 'Your scene. Your starring role. Take it. Times are changing.'

'Yeah,' said Ligur, grinning. 'They're coming to an end, for a start.'

'Why *me*?'

'You are obviously highly favoured,' said Hastur maliciously. 'I imagine Ligur here would give his right arm for a chance like this.'

'That's right,' said Ligur. Someone's right arm, anyway, he thought. There were plenty of right arms around; no sense in wasting a good one.

Hastur produced a clipboard from the grubby recesses of his mackintosh.

'Sign. Here,' he said, leaving a terrible pause between the words.

Crowley fumbled vaguely in an inside pocket and produced a pen. It was sleek and matt black. It looked as though it could exceed the speed limit.

'S' nice pen,' said Ligur.

'It can write under water,' Crowley muttered.

'Whatever will they think of next?' mused Ligur.

‘Whatever it is, they’d better think of it quickly,’ said Hastur. ‘No. Not A. J. Crowley. Your *real* name.’

Crowley nodded mournfully, and drew a complex, wiggly sigil on the paper. It glowed redly in the gloom, just for a moment, and then faded.

‘What am I supposed to *do* with it?’ he said.

‘You will receive instructions.’ Hastur scowled. ‘Why so worried, Crowley? The moment we have been working for all these centuries is at hand!’

‘Yeah. Right,’ said Crowley. He did not look, now, like the lithe figure that had sprung so lithely from the Bentley a few minutes ago. He had a hunted expression.

‘Our moment of eternal triumph awaits!’

‘Eternal. Yeah,’ said Crowley.

‘And you will be a tool of that glorious destiny!’

‘Tool. Yeah,’ muttered Crowley. He picked up the basket as if it might explode. Which, in a manner of speaking, it would shortly do.

‘Er. Okay,’ he said. ‘I’ll, er, be off then. Shall I? Get it over with. Not that I *want* to get it over with,’ he added hurriedly, aware of the things that could happen if Hastur turned in an unfavourable report. ‘But you know me. Keen.’

The senior demons did not speak.

‘So I’ll be popping along,’ Crowley babbled. ‘See you guys ar— see you. Er. Great. Fine. *Ciao.*’

As the Bentley skidded off into the darkness Ligur said, ‘Wossat mean?’

‘It’s Italian,’ said Hastur. ‘I think it means “food”.’

‘Funny thing to say, then.’ Ligur stared at the retreating tail-lights. ‘You trust him?’ he said.

‘No,’ said Hastur.

‘Right,’ said Ligur. It’d be a funny old world, he reflected, if demons went round trusting one another.



Crowley, somewhere west of Amersham, hurtled through the night, snatched a tape at random and tried to wrestle it out of its brittle plastic box while staying on the road. The glare of a headlight proclaimed it to be Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*. Soothing music, that’s what he needed.

He rammed it into the Blaupunkt.

‘Ohshitohshitohshit. Why now? Why me?’ he muttered, as the familiar strains of Queen washed over him.

And suddenly, Freddie Mercury was speaking to him.

*BECAUSE YOU’VE EARNED IT, CROWLEY.*

Crowley blessed under his breath. Using electronics as a means of communication had been his idea and Below had, for once, taken it up and, as usual, got it dead wrong. He’d hoped they could be persuaded to subscribe to Cellnet, but instead they just cut in to whatever it happened to be that he was listening to at the time and twisted it.

Crowley gulped.

‘Thank you very much, lord,’ he said.

*WE HAVE GREAT FAITH IN YOU, CROWLEY.*

‘Thank you, lord.’

*THIS IS IMPORTANT, CROWLEY.*

‘I know, I know.’

*THIS IS THE BIG ONE, CROWLEY.*

‘Leave it to me, lord.’

*THAT IS WHAT WE ARE DOING, CROWLEY. AND IF IT GOES WRONG, THEN THOSE INVOLVED WILL SUFFER GREATLY. EVEN YOU, CROWLEY. ESPECIALLY YOU.*

‘Understood, lord.’

*HERE ARE YOUR INSTRUCTIONS, CROWLEY.*

And suddenly he knew. He hated that. They could just as easily have told him, they didn’t suddenly have to drop chilly knowledge straight into his brain. He had to drive to a certain hospital.

‘I’ll be there in five minutes, lord, no problem.’

*GOOD. I see a little silhouetto of a man scaramouche scaramouche will you do the fandango*

...

Crowley thumped the wheel. Everything had been going so well, he’d had it really under his thumb these few centuries. That’s how it goes, you think you’re on top of the world, and suddenly they spring Armageddon on you. The Great War, the Last Battle. Heaven versus Hell, three rounds, one Fall, no submission. And that’d be that. No more world. That’s what the end of the world *meant*. No more world. Just endless Heaven or, depending who won, endless Hell. Crowley didn’t know which was worse.

Well, *Hell* was worse, of course, by definition. But Crowley remembered what Heaven was like, and it had quite a few things in common with Hell. You couldn’t get a decent drink in either of them, for a start. And the boredom you got in Heaven was almost as bad as the excitement you got in Hell.

But there was no getting out of it. You couldn’t be a demon and have free will.

*... I will not let you go (let him go) ...*

Well, at least it wouldn’t be this year. He’d have time to do things. Unload long term stocks, for a start.

He wondered what would happen if he just stopped the car here, on this dark and damp and empty road, and took the basket and swung it round and round and let go and ...

Something dreadful, that’s what.

He’d been an angel once. He hadn’t meant to Fall. He’d just hung around with the wrong people.

The Bentley plunged on through the darkness, its fuel gauge pointing to zero. It had pointed to zero for more than sixty years now. It wasn’t all bad, being a demon. You didn’t have to buy petrol, for one thing. The only time Crowley had bought petrol was once in 1967, to get the free James Bond bullet-hole-in-the-windscreen transfers, which he rather fancied at the time.

On the back seat the thing in the basket began to cry; the air-raid siren wail of the newly born. High. Wordless. And *old*.



It was quite a nice hospital, thought Mr Young. It would have been quiet, too, if it wasn’t for the nuns.

He quite liked nuns. Not that he was a, you know, left-footer or anything like that. No, when it came to avoiding going to church, the church he stolidly avoided going to was St Cecil and All Angels, no-nonsense C of E, and he wouldn’t have dreamed of avoiding going to any other. All the others had the wrong smell – floor polish for the Low, somewhat suspicious incense for the High. Deep in the leather armchair of his soul, Mr Young knew that God got embarrassed at that sort of thing.

But he liked seeing nuns around, in the same way that he liked seeing the Salvation Army. It made you feel that it was all *all right*, that people somewhere were keeping the world on its axis.

This was his first experience of the Chattering Order of Saint Beryl, however<sup>fn3</sup>. Deirdre had run across them while being involved in one of her causes, possibly the one involving lots of unpleasant South Americans fighting other unpleasant South Americans and the priests egging them on instead of getting on with proper priestly concerns, like organizing the church cleaning rota.

The point was, nuns should be quiet. They were the right shape for it, like those pointy things you got in those chambers Mr Young was vaguely aware your hi-fi got tested in. They shouldn't be, well, chattering all the time.

He filled his pipe with tobacco, well, they called it tobacco, it wasn't what he thought of as tobacco, it wasn't the tobacco you used to get, and wondered reflectively what would happen if you asked a nun where the Gents was. Probably the Pope sent you a sharp note or something. He shifted his position awkwardly, and glanced at his watch.

One thing, though: At least the nuns had put their foot down about him being present at the birth. Deirdre had been all for it. She'd been *reading* things again. One kid already and suddenly she's declaring that this confinement was going to be the most joyous and sharing experience two human beings could have. That's what came of letting her order her own newspapers. Mr Young distrusted papers whose inner pages had names like 'Lifestyle' or 'Options'.

Well, he hadn't got anything against joyous sharing experiences. Joyous sharing experiences were fine by him. The world probably needed more joyous sharing experiences. But he had made it abundantly clear that this was one joyous sharing experience Deirdre could have by herself.

And the nuns had agreed. They saw no reason for the father to be involved in the proceedings. When you thought about it, Mr Young mused, they probably saw no reason why the father should be involved *anywhere*.

He finished thumbing the so-called tobacco into the pipe and glared at the little sign on the wall of the waiting room that said that, for his own comfort, he would not smoke. For his own comfort, he decided, he'd go and stand in the porch. If there was a discreet shrubbery for his own comfort out there, so much the better.

He wandered down the empty corridors and found a doorway that led out on to a rain-swept courtyard full of righteous dustbins.

He shivered, and cupped his hands to light his pipe.

It happened to them at a certain age, wives. Twenty-five blameless years, then suddenly they were going off and doing these robotic exercises in pink socks with the feet cut out and they started blaming you for never having had to work for a living. It was hormones, or something.

A large black car skidded to a halt by the dustbins. A young man in dark glasses leaped out into the drizzle holding what looked like a carrycot and snaked toward the entrance.

Mr Young took his pipe out of his mouth. 'You've left your lights on,' he said helpfully.

The man gave him the blank look of someone to whom lights are the least of his worries, and waved a hand vaguely toward the Bentley. The lights went out.

'That's handy,' said Mr Young. 'Infra-red, is it?'

He was mildly surprised to see that the man did not appear to be wet. And that the carrycot appeared to be occupied.

'Has it started yet?' said the man.