

THE FALLEN ANGEL

Mike Resnick

AT 8:32 PM ON JUNE 16, 2024, Gerhardt Skarda conjured up Lucifuge Rofocale, one of the major demons of the Infernal Realm, and offered his soul in exchange for three wishes. He was granted, and received within 48 hours, irresistibility to beautiful women, the Chancellorship of Germany, and life everlasting.

At 11:54 PM on June 16, 2024, Mohammed Achmed ensnared, within a carefully-drawn pentagram, a youthful son of the demon Baal. They flipped a coin—Achmed’s soul against unlimited credit anywhere in the world—and Achmed won.

At 1:02 PM on June 17, 2024, Robert Taft Ellington, a world-class Grandmaster at chess, played for his soul against Lucifer himself. He applied the Indian defense and announced mate on the 27th move. Lucifer, who had foolishly accepted a bishop sacrifice without properly protecting his queen, agreed to make him the most popular singer of the decade, with groupies to match.

And in Hell, where there is no time or date, and where even location is subject to the whim of its Dark Master, the princes and generals of the pits perched in conclave on a flat outcropping of rock, high above their sullen ruler.

“Why does he do it?” asked one, the newest member of the elite group. “Surely he could win a chess game against anyone who ever lived!”

“Just as I could win a coin flip,” agreed the son of Baal, “or step beyond the boundaries of a pentagram at will.”

“And just as I could have made all women ugly, destroyed Germany, and allowed Skarda life everlasting while toiling in the pits beneath us,” added Lucifuge Rofocale.

“Then why?” persisted the questioner. “Hell is teeming with the suffering and the damned. Why even pretend to seek for more? The Dark Master avoids the ones we have now.”

“Of course he does,” said Lucifuge Rofocale. “For he himself is damned beyond the suffering the others shall ever undergo. They, like you, have never known Paradise.”

“I don’t understand.”

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*“You have all Eternity before you,”
said Lucifuge Rofocale.
“There will come a time
when you comprehend
your master.”*

“Do you think he enjoys the suffering of the damned?” asked the son of Baal.

“Why not? I do.”

“But you were born a demon, and he an angel.”

The newcomer shook his horned head. “I still don’t see what difference that makes.”

“You have all Eternity before you,” said Lucifuge Rofocale. “There will come a time when you comprehend your master.”

And as they spoke, Lord Lucifer strode through the lava streams of Hell. Finally he stopped and, as he had done a billion times before and as he would do a trillion times in the future, he raised his gaze to Heaven. The brilliance of the light seemed to grow in intensity as he stared at it, and an instant later, tears of pain streaming down his face, the Dark Master let his consciousness float upward and outward, joining for the merest flickering of an instant the triumphant and pleasure-filled bodies and souls of Skarda and Achmed and Ellington and a million others, as he grasped futilely for a tiny taste of the Paradise he had relinquished so long ago. ☹

MIKE RESNICK



Mike Resnick has won more awards for short fiction than anyone else on the planet – or Down Below. He’s also the editor of Baen’s Universe.

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in an anthology in 1984.*

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