



THE LIMITATORS

It was a big day. The visitor was supposed to take a tour of the plant. Or that's what Drila had heard from the other limitators when he was clocking in for his shift. There was an air of excitement in the place that he'd never felt before.

He reduced a vial of DNA from a hundred percent down to four and returned it to the conveyor belt. Humans used only four percent of the DNA in their bodies. They were told that the rest was just junk left over from failed mutations, but that was a lie. The excess DNA wasn't junk; it was functional genetic material that people were denied access to.

Drila watched for another vial to come along on the belt, and while he waited he absently traced a whorl of scar tissue on the back of an arm. He tried to picture what the visitor would look like. Humans lived in another dimension and nobody could see them because they resonated at a different frequency. Beelzeboss and a few others could cross to the other side, but as far as Drila knew no human had ever made the jump. Until now. Somebody on the belt must have screwed up when the visitor's vial went through, because his DNA hadn't been subjected to the limitation process. As a result his genetics were fully realized and he could travel between dimensions.

Drila checked his machine's calibrations. He got a memo that morning about the stupidity/intelligence settings, as if he needed to be reminded to minimize the intelligence. The order had been in force since he'd started to work on

the line more than a hundred years before. People had gotten a lot dumber since then, and more gullible, and now they were so stupid that they were letting their leaders kill them off with bioweapons and engineered food shortages. Next was a nuclear war. At least that was the rumor. The war had something to do with horses and trumpets and broken seals.

There was a sound of raised voices on the far side of the room. Drila looked up from the conveyor belt and saw a crowd pushing through the double doors. The bright lights of a video crew were at the center of things, and he wondered if he would be on the news that evening. Imagine that, him on the screen between the bloodsport scores and tomorrow's firecast.

He almost missed a vial but caught it, treated it and put it back on the belt. When he looked up again the crowd was moving in his direction. It came closer and closer and then pushed up opposite him at the belt. And he saw the visitor.

The man's skin was smooth and dark and he was draped in a long white robe. His hair was long and white too, but his eyes were his most striking feature. They burned brighter than the video crew's lights.

Drila caught another vial of DNA. The crowd watched as he treated it and let it go. Then there was a disturbance. The visitor reached back and dragged someone forward. It was Beelzeboss, the Prince himself, though he didn't look very princely at the moment. The visitor held him by the throat and his scaly face was redder than usual.

"Another one of your victims," the visitor rebuked, pointing to the vial receding down the conveyor belt. His voice had the sound of water, of many waters. It was brooks flowing into rivers

and rivers flowing into seas. Drila thought of water often but couldn't recall the last time he'd actually heard it. The world around him was so dry. But he remembered water from somewhere, abundant expanses of it.

"You're seeing part of an ancestral memory," the visitor said. He was still holding Beelzeboss but he spoke to Drila. "You weren't always in this place. Your line stretches back to a fishing village on a tropical island. The knowledge your ancestors amassed was passed on genetically, from generation to gener..." He broke off what he was saying and shook Beelzeboss. "You!!!" he thundered while he shook. "That's another thing your tampering has done! You've robbed humanity of ancestral memories!"

The visitor released Beelzeboss and spoke to Drila again.

"What are you doing here? What is your job?"

"I, uh, I reduce DNA in humans."

"And why do you do that?"

"To keep them from getting into trouble."

"That's right," Beelzeboss said, rubbing his throat. "No telling what kind of mischief people would get up to if we didn't. . ."

"Liar!" the visitor roared. "You hobble them so they can't live up to their full potential!"

"Well, that's one way of looking at it," Beelzeboss said, and he smiled the snaky smile that Drila had seen so many times on the screen. "But we also protect humans from the horrors of existence. Especially the horror of having to make decisions. That's what your dad doesn't understand. I know he prefers humans over, well, those of us who used to work for him, but we're much better than. . ."

The visitor lifted a hand and Beelzeboss went silent. He made a choking sound but couldn't

speak.

“You’re not better than humans,” the visitor said. “You and your kind are nothing but dungeon dwellers who think that humans are the key to the dungeon door.” He looked around and spoke to the crowd. “Your boss’s greatest trick was to convince the world that he didn’t exist. But people are beginning to see through that deception. They’re also beginning to understand that they were made in my father’s image, but something’s preventing them from becoming like him. Self-awareness is the purpose of man, and self-actualization the goal. Even here...” The visitor waved an arm. “How many of you poor souls truly deserve to be here? What denial of inheritance or knowledge led to your damnation? And why would you wish such a future on others?”

The visitor said more before he left, but Drila couldn’t recall much of it later. Mainly he remembered the water sound of the voice, and he imagined the conveyor belt carrying vials to a faraway sea. Each vial was a person and each person was only a fraction of what he could be, because of what Drila was doing. So he began to let some of the vials go past untreated. He pictured them dropping off the end of the belt, into the sea, and then bobbing away toward a storm on the horizon.