

## Apathy of the Devil

“Lucas, I told you last time to knock first!” Matthew said, desperately struggling to close the door to his bedroom, but with no avail due to the brute strength and undying persistence of his older brother.

“Bitch, I can come in whenever the hell I want!” replied Lucas, sending Matthew plummeting backward as he forced his way into the disheveled, Whataburger cup-laden, Magic The Gathering Card-littered domain of his younger sibling’s bedroom. Lucas scoffed as he took note of their distinct difference in stature; he’d broken through defensive lines with greater ease than that which he had experienced while barging into his brother’s room. “Why the hell was your door closed anyway? Were you jerking off to those anime girls in sailor suits again?” He then gingerly proceeded toward the faux-wood Ikea desk that housed Matthew’s laptop, turning the screen slightly askew as he skimmed over the image of two masked men charging at each other with their swords drawn that was paused on the screen. “What a fucking weeb.”

“I was *not*!” replied Matthew as he struggled to regain his footing, nearly tripping over a pile of discarded Pocky boxes and questionably moist gym socks. “I was watching Naruto! The door was closed because I didn’t want to wake Mom with all noise!” He huffed in exhaustion, as the brief scuffle with Lucas had inadvertently caused him to participate in much more physical activity than he was used to.

“Bruh, the only noise you need to keep down is the noise you make when you’re on one of your one-man one-night stands” Lucas said, giving Matthew one final shove before stepping away from the laptop. “Also, clean up this fucking mess, this place always smells like ass.” With

that, Lucas took his leave, mumbling a series of profanities as he waded through the pond of garbage lining the floor of Matthew's room.

Matthew sighed, remaining in the same spot that he had been standing in while Lucas had raided his computer desk. Despite his hatred of his older brother, he couldn't help but feel a sense of envy toward him. Matthew had always been a relatively quiet individual: awkward, introverted, and cursed with a crippling inability to converse with the opposite sex. His social shortcomings were only made all the more detrimental when paired with his dwarfed, relatively rotund stature and lack of any talent whatsoever in activities that required physical effort. Lucas, however, was an athletic powerhouse, so much so that Matthew often believed that he was second only to the great Ajax of Greece. It burned at Matthew's very soul that Lucas could so easily overcome the obstacles and challenges that he could never conquer himself. It was as if everything that Matthew had so desperately struggled with came to Lucas without a single thought, which made sense to him considering that Lucas's gift of blissful ignorance made the very act of thinking seem virtually impossible. At some point in his life, Matthew grew to accept the fact that he and his brother possessed different strong points, which gave him a sense of optimism and hope that he would eventually work up the courage and motivation to achieve the level of confidence and physical fitness that Lucas possessed. However, Lucas's tendency to screw every one of Matthew's romantic interests quickly annihilated that feeling. "I fucking hate that asshole."

After a few minutes of waiting, Matthew finally heard Lucas's subtle footsteps from down the hallway fade as they became muffled by the carpet of his bedroom. "Jesus, finally", Matthew thought. He then walked toward his dingy and unkempt bedspread, stumbling a little as

he kicked a few crumpled up receipts and empty water bottles out of his way, hearing a faint jingle resonating from the end of the hallway opposite from the direction of his brother's bedroom. After lazily plopping onto the mattress, the sound became more audible, getting closer as it was now accompanied by the rattling of claws against the hardwood floor. As the door creaked open, Matthew realized the source of the sound; Toby, Matthew's dog (and the only living creature that he felt any genuine sense of companionship with). "Hey there, boy", Matthew said as Toby eagerly nudged the door open from where the bolt didn't completely lock into place. Matthew couldn't help but grin as he gazed back at his ever-faithful companion, a tawny mutt with no distinctive signs of a particular breed, other than a bushy tail and a set of pointy, radar ears. Toby huffed abruptly; his little way of acknowledging Matthew's greeting. Matthew then proceeded to scoot over, as if to signal for Toby to climb up onto the mattress with him, a signal that was clearly relayed as Toby gingerly climbed onto the loathsome bed alongside his master. "You're the only one who ever shows any consideration around here, Toby," Matthew said, idly scratching Toby behind the ears. "It's kind of sad really, my freaking dog is the only thing living in this household that actually acts like a decent human being." Just then, Lucas yelled from across the hall. "The dog only sleeps in your room because all the shit you have laying around reminds him of the pound!" Matthew ignored him, having grown tired of yelling at Lucas for the day. Instead, he simply remained at rest, drifting off to sleep as Toby did the same.

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The following day started out as well as any other Saturday would've started in Matthew's household; his mother was out at work hours before he had woken up, leaving him to become used to spending Saturday mornings without her. Lucas was gone as well, as he had left to the gym a few blocks down the street; something that he would be sure to rub into Matthew's

face as he bragged about how “swole” he was after lifting some redundant amount of weight for hours on end. Matthew stretched for a moment as he lazily crawled out of bed; Toby was nowhere to be seen, and Matthew concluded that he had probably gone outside as Lucas left to the gym. However, as he proceeded toward the door, Matthew noticed that a large sum of the clutter that was usually scattered throughout his room had been isolated to one specific corner of his room, which in turn created a sort of walkway between the door and the main shelf that housed his collectables. “Ugh... God damn it, Lucas,” Matthew thought. However, his sense of exasperation quickly manifested into a sense of utter horror as he realized that his array of anime Pop figurines had been tampered with, leaving a large gap where his limited edition Dragonball Z figurine would have normally been. “LUCAS!” Matthew yelled, nearly tripping over his own feet as he darted into Lucas’s room. It wouldn’t have been the first time that Lucas had pulled such a stunt; Matthew had grown used to seeing various collectables of his being needlessly vandalized by his brother. Whether it was a Walking Dead action figure stuffed in the toaster, or an Attack on Titan poster lit on fire, Lucas always had to one-up himself when messing with Matthew’s possessions. As he entered Lucas’s bedroom, he saw it resting on the table, otherwise unharmed. However, upon closer inspection, the true horror set in. The figuring was that of a serpent-like dragon, coiled up like a rattlesnake, with its mouth open, as if to unleash a burst of its fire breath. As Matthew examined the figurine, he noticed that the tip of the tail had been cut off, and that a great deal of the interior had been hollowed out in order to establish a large cavity within it. This cavity had been filled partially with water, and a metal pipe had been crudely attached to the side so that it connected to this makeshift chamber. Matthew began to tremble with rage as he realized what Lucas had done, his suspicions being confirmed as he noticed the miniscule green wad that had been inserted into the metal apparatus. “Did that bastard seriously

turn Shenron into a fucking bong?!” Matthew clenched his teeth as he kicked the base of the table, the motion causing a previously unnoticed scrap of paper to rustle against the surface. After seeing the hastily-scribbled text upon the paper, Matthew picked it up, reading over the note that had been left to accompany his brother’s recent “masterpiece.”

*Dearest little brother, it read. I’m gonna leave this here for you, because even though you’re probably gonna be pissed, you’re gonna see that this little bastard is waaaaay more useful now! Ha! How’s that for a magic dragon? Or whatever the hell he is... Anyway, quit being a little bitch, take a hit, and chill out. ~Your caring big brother.*

While Lucas may have been notorious for pulling these sorts of stunts, Matthew grew exceptionally furious, cursing as he hurled the makeshift paraphernalia against the wall. Matthew despised his brother, yet somewhere, deep within his soul, he did possess some level of profound respect for him. Patience was a virtue that Matthew had so exhaustingly developed, despite all the emotional turmoil he had experienced from both his sadistic older brother, and his own insecurities. But alas, even the patience of God himself reaches a limit when it is wasted on wantons who get by in life with a total disregard for their fellow man. Lucas had finally placed the straw that broke the camel’s back, and any emotions that would have lead Matthew to consider Lucas as anything but sub-human were quickly evicted from his very being.

As Matthew stormed out from Lucas’s room, he was stopped in his tracks by Toby’s familiar gaze, his tail wagging idly as he sat in the middle of the hallway. “I’ll play with you later boy,” Matthew said. “Just... I need some time to think, I’m beyond pissed right now. Oh, I swear to God, I’m going to kill Lucas when he gets home...”

“Hm. So the two-legged one now wishes to end the existence of the one who shares his own flesh and blood, all because his favorite toy was taken away,” Toby said. “Oh, you mortals never cease to entertain me.”

“W-what the hell?” Matthew stumbled back as Toby spoke, the color leaving his cheeks as the hound moved closer. Matthew remained petrified in a state of fear and disbelief, as Toby’s previously unintimidating, friendly canine appearance suddenly became one of the most terrifying spectacles he had ever witnessed; it was as if sentience had removed all familiarity and comfort that he once felt when with his companion. “You... You just fucking talked!”

“Oh?” Toby said, his expression remaining motionless as it gained a more human-like quality to it; it was beyond Matthew’s comprehension. “Do I frighten you, Matthew? I’m truly hurt...” Toby grinned, pulling his lips back in an unsettlingly human manner so that his teeth glinted in the sunlight that snuck in through the blinds; their perfect, ungodly whiteness bestowing an uncanny, sinister demeanor upon the hound who Matthew had previously been so close with.

“Get the hell away from me!” Matthew screamed, trembling in terror as he finally backed himself up against the wall. “Jesus Christ, Toby, what the hell is going on?”

“Whatever do you mean, Matthew?” Toby said. “Did I do something wrong?” He chuckled sadistically, an unnatural combination of typical laughter and guttural barking that made the hair on the back of Matthew’s neck stand up.

“God damn it, you know what I’m talking about!” Matthew said. Everything had become so surreal to Matthew; not only had one of his prized possessions been destroyed, but the family

pet had now developed sentience. If Matthew's life had been a sundae of misfortune and the manifestation of the stuff of nightmares, this would've been the cherry on top. "Jesus Christ, Toby, what the hell are you?"

"You can see me, can you not?" Toby replied. Matthew found that there was a certain soothing quality to his voice as he spoke, as its pleasant tenor was only made unnerving due to the fact that it came from Toby. "Ah, well, I suppose this game has gone on long enough." Toby cleared his throat for a moment, standing only inches away from Matthew as his expression grew relatively calmer than it had been before. "While I dwell upon this mortal plain of existence for the time being, I do so only for the sake of observing the pitiful quarrels that so often arise among your kind. However, if I feel that things need a little... push, well, that's where I come in."

Matthew then forced himself to sit upright, his sense of curiosity now sparked by Toby's words. "That still doesn't answer my question," he said.

"I'm getting to that, mortal," Toby replied. He then stretched for a few seconds, licking at his paw vainly before he proceeded to speak. "Oh, if you only knew the things I have witnessed... Who do you think was there when Kennedy decided that it was a good idea to ride a convertible into the middle of Dallas? Who do you think was there to make sure that Booth followed through when he decided to put a bullet in Lincoln's head? Oh Matthew, I was there when Jesus Christ himself had his moment of doubt and pain, and I made damn sure that Pilate washed his hands and sealed his fate! Who the hell do you think I am, Matthew?"

"Well, that last part sounded like a Rolling Stones lyric, to be honest," Matthew replied, no longer feeling any need to take Toby so seriously. However, Toby was anything but amused,

which became apparent as he bared his teeth, the human-like light in his eyes fading as he emitted a low, feral growl. This was effective in putting Matthew back into his place.

“Listen you little bastard!” Toby barked. “You stand before he who defied the creator, the Lord of darkness, the Prince of the fucking demons!”

“Alright, alright, just take it easy, Toby!” Matthew motor mouthed, his hands up as if surrendering. “So why are you here then? And what in God’s name could you possibly want with me?”

“Oh Matthew, I don’t want anything from you,” Toby replied, dragging his tongue across his teeth before his ungodly smirk re-emerged. “You’ve been good to me, Matthew. I only want to return the favor... I know what it is you desire. And I can easily obtain that for you.”

“What are you talking about?” Matthew stood up as Toby took a step back, finally giving him enough room to do so. “What the hell do you know about my desires?”

“Plenty,” Toby said as he began to pace from left to right. “What if I told you that I could... assist you, in dealing with your older brother, Lucas?”

Matthew was taken aback by this, as the conversation had taken a drastic turn. “That asshole? How the hell do you plan to do that?”

“Oh, I don’t plan on doing anything myself, Matthew,” said Toby. “I said I want to help *you*, remember?” Toby paused, looking back at Matthew intently.

“You lost me,” Matthew said. “Where are you going with this, Toby?”

“Too many questions!” Toby snapped. “Just shut up and hold out your arm. Don’t make me ask you twice.”



“Toby, I don’t-“

“Hold out your damn arm, or I’ll kill you myself!” Toby huffed, his teeth bared as he spoke.

“Shit, fine, here!” Matthew said, reluctantly extending his forearm. He felt uneasy as he gave in to the beast’s demands; what could he have been planning? How was this supposed to help him get back at Lucas? He wondered. As he pondered the circumstances of his situation, he looked back at Toby, who simply nodded as if to signify that he had finished whatever preparations he had been making.

“Now then,” He began. “I call upon you mortal, as a vessel in which to inflict my will upon those who have forgotten the fate that so eagerly awaits them for their complete disregard of the consequences of their Earthly deeds!” Without warning, Toby quickly sunk his teeth into the flesh of Matthew’s forearm, drawing blood as he did so. This caused him to scream momentarily, but the soul-piercing gaze that followed from Toby discouraged him from shying away from the ritual that he was now conducting. “Mortal, we both seek the demise of the one who has so miserably wronged you,” Toby said, licking a droplet of the sanguine life force that dripped from the wound inflicted upon Matthew’s arm.

*“What the hell did I just get myself into?”* Matthew Thought. Suddenly, the unforgiving stinging that had previously been present upon his forearm began to subside, the wound now beginning to heal. Any reluctance Matthew had felt prior to the ritual began to subside as he was filled with a new sense of burning desire; an unholy combination of blind fury and uncanny strength. It was subtle at first, but quickly escalated beyond description, the wallpaper around him beginning to fray and tear as a series of foul humors ravaged Matthew’s body.

In the midst of the commotion, Matthew could hear the faint creak of the screen door, followed by a series of clumsy, pounding footsteps. Lucas was home. “What the hell is going on here?” he asked as he entered the hallway. “Matthew, you dumbass, are you screwing with the dog again?”

Matthew and Toby both locked their expressionless eyes upon Lucas, their movements coordinated with perfect synchronization as they did so. “Mortal!” Toby screamed. “Now is the time to unleash the unforgiving fury of your deepest instincts! Release the unholy power of hellfire and brimstone upon this pitiful waste of flesh! Do it! Do it now! INCINERATE!” Matthew then placed his hand upon the front of Lucas’s skull, his white, pupil-less eyes piercing his very being like a skewer with a piece of raw meat. Lucas remained motionless, as if his mind had been completely purged from his body the minute that Matthew had grabbed hold of him. Matthew opened his mouth, uttering a metallic scream that echoed throughout the entire household, shattering glass and porcelain, and warping metal and sheetrock. “Good! GOOD!” Toby cried, barely able to contain his maniacal sense of excitement. “Now do it! Finish it!” Matthew paused, gazing at the lifeless husk that now stood before him. With a grin of satisfaction, he threw his head back, both bodies flailing spasmodically as if they had just made contact with a live wire. The spectacle concluded with an abrupt flash of blinding intensity, obliterating the surrounding walls as if they were a stack of dominoes, leaving behind an incomprehensible wake of destruction.

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As Toby casually wandered through the rubble, he came across a peculiar object resting at the base of a splintered two-by-four. Leaning closer toward it, he discovered it to be a dragon-like figurine, with a few twisted modifications to it. “Hmph,” Toby scoffed. “I do have to give

him credit, that was pretty damn creative.” He didn’t stick around long before sauntering off into the suburban afternoon, keeping his ears peeled for any signs of unrest among the bustling neighborhood. They say to be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. Toby was going to have a fair amount of fun in this town.