

**THE
REVOLT
IN
H E L L
(REVISED)**

A NOVEL

By John D. Boenke

THE REVOLT IN HELL

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John D. Boenke was born in 1926 in Rossford, Ohio and grew up during the Great Depression. He served in the U. S. Army in 1946 - 47 in the Medical Corps. In 1951 he received a degree of Bachelor of Science in Physics from the University of Michigan. After college, Mr. Boenke worked in research and engineering for the General Electric Company. Later he was the Manager of an engineering test laboratory for Lau Blower Company, then Chief Engineer for Halsey Taylor Water Cooler Corp. and Senior Design Engineer for The Werner Ladder Company. Before retiring in 1989, Mr. Boenke also owned and operated a small motel in Ashtabula, Ohio.

Since retiring, Mr. Boenke has been interested in reading and studying in the areas of Cosmology, Theoretical Physics and Philosophy. In addition, he has an interest in the origins of religions. He has privately published several short stories and some poetry.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my long suffering wife, Mary M. Boenke, in appreciation for her help. She has always allowed me the time and opportunity to pursue my writing, and she is also my best proof reader and most fair critic.

INTRODUCTION

This is a rather strange little story. I am not sure why I wrote it except the idea came to me and it was fun to do. The novel is not particularly directed toward my Secular Humanist friends, but rather to my religious friends, since they may more easily relate to some of the situations and conditions portrayed. The story takes place in Hell, and puts a different spin on some of the traditional views of Hell.

Of course, one's religious perspectives are allowed to be whatever the holder decides are true. With this starting point, please read with an open mind this fictional account of a variation of Hell which may be as true or not as any other. My purpose is to entertain, and it is certainly not to disparage anyone's understanding of their own belief. I hope you enjoy it.

J.D.B.

THE REVOLT IN HELL

PHASE ONE

Algar gradually became aware of the environment; the heat, the fumes, the red glare on the walls and the discordant noises permeating the atmosphere. As consciousness slowly engulfed him, little by little, he recalled his predicament. His platoon had been sent on a mission behind the lines, and they were parachuting down in the dark to an unknown fate. He remembered pulling frantically at his rip cord to release the chute and he knew it was not opening. He fell faster and faster towards the ground -then - nothing. His thoughts stopped and he felt ill at ease, suspended in time and very confused. What had happened? Had he been killed? Where was he now? This is certainly not where he is supposed to be. The realization finally grew on him that he must have indeed died. Was this now Hell?

He felt himself locked in shackles and chained to a wall. He recognized he was in some sort of never- never existence which was no longer a physical body, but something that felt similar and which had a different sort of reality. It was nothing like anything he had ever experienced before, and he realized some sort of drastic change had taken place. Even so, he knew he could "See" and "Hear" by some mechanism, and wondered whether he could also "Talk." There seemed to be others next to him in both directions, similarly constrained.

Trying to penetrate the murk, he sensed more than he saw that he was in a large cavern, whose central feature was an immense pit which was the source of the fumes, the heat and the red glare. Apparently there were a multitude of Beings such as himself which were chained to the surrounding wall. There was a very dim light from a small hole high above the cavern which provided an eerie twilight to the whole scene.

He sagged in exhaustion and hung on his shackles in resignation. Muffled noises came from all directions, and he felt great despair and mental disorganization. Hopelessly, he pondered his situation. "OK, so I'm in Hell, now what?"

Thinking back he tried to recall any and all situations wherein he may have been less than perfect, and he was overwhelmed by the flood of memories which returned to his mind. "Okay, okay, so I wasn't so good, but do I deserve this?" Returning to the present, he heard some commotion to his left. Looking as far as he could see he was aware of a huge creature with whip and trident in hand slowly moving along the line of chained individuals. It moved steadily from Being to Being whipping and prodding mechanically which elicited moans and screams from the hapless Beings chained to the wall.

He suddenly realized this monster would soon get to him. What could he do? He tugged at his bonds, but the shackles only cut into his hands and he remained constrained. Horrified, he observed the monster whipping the Being only two places away from his position and he cringed at the screams.

The huge monster stood on spindly legs, but it had a massive torso and bulging muscular arms. An angry visage with burning eyes concentrated its forces on the hapless individual currently under punishment. It moved and acted like an automaton, purposefully and slowly, but inexorably and untiringly as it made its constant rounds of the pit. Then it moved into position just next to him and began flailing the Being there. Amazingly, that Being did not respond, but only hung in the shackles still and quiet as the assault went on. Algar was amazed by the lack of reaction to the abuse in which the individual gave no visible physical response of any sort.

He quailed at the prospect of being whipped and prodded, as he recoiled tightly against the wall. Tensing himself, Algar awaited the onslaught which came sooner than he expected. The pain was excruciating, the vengeance felt from the beast disturbed his total being. He writhed and tugged against his constraints, but after a seemingly endless time the abuse stopped, and he collapsed against the wall again supported by his chains, while the beast moved on in relentless pursuit of its terrible assignment. Time passed, and Algar sagged in his chains trying to recover and began musing on his predicament.

So much had changed so quickly, Algar found himself confused and disoriented. As he subsided and somewhat recuperated from the whipping, he returned to considering what had transpired. "So, I am dead and in Hell. This is not good, but it seems I have lots of company. At least the punishment apparently will be intermittent. What will happen next? Will it always be like this?" He decided he must learn as much as he could about the situation. He was particularly interested in the Being next to him which had not responded to the whipping of the monster. Turning to the side he decided to try a contact. "Hello, I'm Algar, who are you?"

Waiting for a reply, he sensed the presence next to him slowly stirring. and gradually turning towards him. Finally, a soft voice came to him. "Why are you disturbing me? What do you want?" The Being seemed very lethargic as one awaking from a long sleep.

Algar continued, "I'm new here. Where are we? I assume we're in Hell, but is this all there is to it? I just want to know what to expect. How often does the whipping occur? Are there other things that happen? Particularly, I would like to know why you did not react when the monster was whipping you?"

"You ask too many questions." was the reply as the Being turned away.

"No, no, wait, I only want to be prepared for whatever may happen. You obviously seem to know more than I do. You must have

been here quite a while. Please tell me what you know.”

The Being again turned toward Algar. He felt himself being contemplated for a long while. Finally, the soft voice resumed, and answered. “I don’t know how long I have been here. All I remember are the heat, the fumes and the beatings. They are intermittent, but they are unending.”

Algar digested this information for a moment, then continued, “But again, why did you not have any reaction to the beating. How can you endure it?” he asked perplexedly.

Algar felt himself being observed again with an annoyed but still tolerant attitude from the other. Following a period of more silence the voice replied, “Consider where you are and what you are. Do you still consider yourself a living human being?”

“No, I guess I don’t.”

“Then do you have a living human brain?”

“No, of course not.”

“And isn’t that what is necessary to feel pain?”

“Yes, it is.” he answered, but Algar was taken aback. The situation was so simple, it was inane. “You mean if I would just accept that I can’t feel it, I wouldn’t feel it?” He reflected for a while pleased that the other was at least answering, but then he came back with yet more questions. “Is that what you do? Just ignore it?” he asked credulously. “But the rest seem to feel the pain judging from their reaction when they are being whipped. Why do they do so, and why do you not?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” The soft voice sounded a little disdainful but after a short pause it continued, “They feel the pain because they expect to feel the pain. They must believe they deserve it and so it is real for them.”

Algar fell silent. He contemplated all that he had just learned and mulled it over. He remained silent for a long while absorbing the information and considering his situation. Remembering his life, he reviewed many experiences he had lived through and tried to analyze them for the degree of antisocial or immoral behavior. Some he dismissed as youthful exuberance, others he felt were due to inexperience, but he decided there were not many due to malicious behavior against others with no justification. To himself, he reasoned, “I do not think I was such a terrible person. I ought to be able to stand the punishment without reacting.”

As Algar pondered these things, he gradually became aware of another beast in the distance coming along with whip and trident in hand pursuing his grisly mission of inflicting pain on the constrained residents of Hell. “Well, it seems I will soon be able to test this idea.”

he mused, "Hell's fury is on its way here."

The advance of the beast was relentless. It moved robot-like and was vicious in its attacks. It seemed to administer the punishment mechanically, concentrating its brutish face on the victim as though to transmit as much pain as possible. This monster was similar to the first one which passed, but the head was larger and it presented an even more intimidating visage.

Algar watched the advance anxiously and concentrated on the idea that he was not constituted in a way that he could feel the whip nor that he deserved to be whipped. As time passed, he continuously applied himself completely to concentrating on these two things. He was then a little amazed when he realized the beast was already beyond him going down the line and he had felt nothing.

Algar had experienced some sort of adjustment to his existence whatever that existence was now, and in whatever dimensions which constituted his reality now. He was no longer in the four dimensional world he had known all his life. Apparently some kind of existence was possible which transcended the common four dimensions and stretched into the other exotic dimensions. It was strange, but he realized he had not eaten for quite a while now and there was no evidence he would ever be fed here.

"What is going on?" he asked himself. "Evidently this new existence supports itself in some different way. Is it possible that we absorb something from the atmosphere for power and sustenance? How can that be? It sounds basically crazy, but how else can I be able to move and act or have thoughts. I am not aware of anything else happening to nourish me. I must be getting energy from somewhere. How weird. I appreciate being able to avoid feeling pain, and besides not being hungry, I notice the lack of the other normal bodily functions, also. I truly do not understand, but at least it eliminates many associated problems. Well, there are more immediate things to worry about. I'll think about it more later."

He had come to understand a great deal about the conditions existing in this Hell, and felt better about his predicament than when he had first arrived. Somehow, in comprehending how it worked, he felt more confident of his circumstances.

After several more whipping visits and having the ability to accept them without discomfort, Algar began to wonder how long this would go on, and whether there was any possibility of escape. His military training had included not allowing oneself to be held captive indefinitely, but this was certainly a different and unknown situation. Algar tried again to sound the soft voice out about the overall conditions.

"Hey neighbor, I have another question." There was only silence in response. "Hey neighbor, I want more information."

There was a slight stirring this time and the soft voice asked in a somewhat irritated tone, "Now what?"

"What happens if someone tries to get out of here?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I thought I might give it a shot."

"Not a Good idea."

"Why? What happens?"

There was a pause and Algar waited. Then the soft voice came back. "It was tried a long time ago. Someone got free and attempted to push the monster into the pit."

Algar waited but nothing more was forthcoming, until impatiently, he turned again with the question, "And?"

"And the monster instead threw it into the pit. There was a great flash of light, then nothing more."

Algar digested this information for a few moments then added, "By the way, you never answered my original question. What is your name and what did you do?"

Again the typical pause, then, "My name is Droxanna. What difference does that make here?"

"None really, I'm just curious."

"You ask too many questions." After a short pause, "I was an elementary school teacher. Does that satisfy all your curiosity?"

"Not really, but at least now I know what to call you."

A period of silence followed. Algar again reverted to counseling with himself. "Droxanna must have been here some while to know as much as she does. There are others who are coming to grips with their situation. It is possible to free oneself from the shackles. Monsters can do more than just whip and prod, but they still seem to be very limited and unobservant. Actually they seem to be able to focus only on their job and don't notice anything else. If you are free, there is no place to go except down." He paused. "There must be something I can do about this predicament." Algar's natural reactions had always been to do things proactively to improve his lot or solve the problems presented to him, and this was just another conundrum with which to cope. He wanted to talk to Droxanna more, but she seemed always to be a little stand offish and less than willing to be communicative. His thoughts turned in the other direction and he rolled over to face the neighbor on that side.

"Hello there, my name is Algar. What's yours?"

The immediate response was, "Legro; I was called Legro, and I was a wrestler. What did you do?"

"I was in a special forces unit of the military, but I guess my luck ran out. How did you get here?"

"I don't know. I think I was lifting some heavy weight, and evidently it was too much for me. I can't really remember exactly what happened." There was a slight pause, then he continued, "You seemed to be busy on your other side with someone. What was that all about?"

"I was involved with learning the ropes here and what to do to manage the fix we are in."

"So what have you learned? I'd like to know, too."

Algar found himself telling Legro about Droxanna, the possibility of not feeling the pain, the attempt by someone to push a monster into the pit and the results thereof. Legro listened intently, then asked, "Tell me more about avoiding the pain. That would be very useful." Algar explained again in greater detail. Legro remained thoughtful for a long time, then responded, "I can't believe I was such a bad person either. I ought to be able to resist it."

"Well here comes your opportunity to try." Yet another variety of monster appeared in the distance. Algar marveled there could be so many variations on the muscular large torso on spindly legs theme, but he had not noticed the same monster twice so far. "How many can there be?" he thought to himself.

After the monster had passed, Legro turned and sounding very pleased, announced, "It worked! I can resist it. That is a great relief, and I appreciate learning it very much. Just saying thanks hardly covers it. What can I do for you?" He paused, "That is probably a foolish question considering where we are. I have no resources to do much of anything, much less reward you."

"Your friendship would be reward enough. We are in a tough situation and the more we can stick together the more we may prosper."

"You've got it. I'm with you all the way."

Finding nothing more to discuss on either side, Algar just remained motionless quietly consumed with his own thoughts. Much time passed and he felt himself becoming lethargic much the same way that Droxanna behaved. As he reviewed all he had learned, he sank into a deeper weary state. It was not sleep, he was aware, but inner thoughts still troubled him in his dim awareness. He kept coming back to a disturbing thought. "What was it? What troubled him enough to keep him from resting?" Finally it broke through to his greater consciousness in a flash, and suddenly he was back to fully awake. "If someone had gotten loose from the shackles, and was able to attack a monster, ergo, it must be possible to get free of the shackles. But how? How had the person who was thrown into the pit

managed to free itself from its shackles?"

Algar began focusing all his attention to this new problem. "It must relate to the particular conditions here." He paused, then, "I wonder." Algar mused for several minutes. "At least, I can try." Carefully he observed his hands in the rings and applied his thoughts. "I am no longer in a four dimensional world. Three dimensional rectilinear topography no longer applies. My hands cannot be irrevocably confined in these rings under the current physical conditions." He concentrated on the rings and his hands and pulled. Gradually his hands slid out of the rings and he was no longer constrained.

Excitedly, he turned to his side and exclaimed, "Droxanna! Droxanna! I'm free. I'm free."

There was no response so he called again, "Droxanna! Droxanna!"

Slowly she turned toward him and in a sleepy voice asked. "What is wrong now? Why do you need to disturb me?"

"Look, I can get my hands out of the shackles. I'm free!"

Her only response was to look at him for several moments then, amazingly she slid her hands out of her shackles and waved. "Welcome to the club. Bully for you."

Algar was amazed. "You knew this all the time? Why didn't you tell me? I don't understand."

"What's the point? What can you do? There is no place to go, unless you want to jump into the pit, and that probably isn't such a good idea."

"I don't understand you. Don't you want to know as much as you can about our situation? Don't you want to try to do something about it? Aren't you interested in making it have the best conditions possible?"

"It was fine until you came along. I could avoid the pain, and I was oblivious most of the time. What else is there?"

"There's plenty of everything else. What about spreading the word of how to avoid pain to the others who are not aware of that yet? Why not share the knowledge we have to help others?"

"Do you think the monsters are going to let us get away with that?"

"I don't know. They seem to be intent on their job and don't notice the rest of the surroundings. The way they act, they are apparently rather limited in the range of their activity. I believe it is worth trying to better our state and that of others than to do nothing."

"I believe all we can do is make more trouble for ourselves. Things are bad enough already. I want to leave it alone."

Discouraged, Algar turned away. Droxanna wasn't about to take any chances evidently, and he felt less happy about his discovery of the slippery shackles. He held on to his handcuffs as the next monster came by, and was pleased to note there were now three of them in a row who did not need to scream in pain and fear whenever the monsters decided to attack. The monsters did not seem to notice or care what their response was, and Algar wondered further about their mental capabilities.

PHASE TWO

Algar roused himself from a lethargic state and gradually came back to the realization of where he was. The events of the recent past flashed through his thoughts. "So, I'm in Hell. However, I can stand the maltreatment and cruelty, also I'm free to move around, if I want to. I have one very reluctant source of information and one apparently good ally." He continued in thought, "Droxanna said that someone tried to take down a monster in the past, but only got thrown into the pit for its effort. It should be obvious that more than one person would be needed to do the job. The monsters are apparently extremely strong. How many of us would it take to be able to push a monster into the pit? Droxanna doesn't seem to be agreeable to trying to better the situation. I wonder what Legro thinks." Turning on his side he called, "Legro - Legro. Are you awake?" There was no immediate answer so he called again.

This time a groggy voice replied, "Well, I'm awake but just barely. What do you want."

"Just two things. One I can tell you, and the other you can tell me."

"You go first. I'm barely functioning."

"I can get out of my shackles now. I can get up and move around."

"Oh?" Legro was suddenly extremely interested. "How can you do that? They seem very strong to me."

"It is similar to how we resist the pain of the beatings. Since we have a new kind of existence in the multidimensional world, the usual physical laws do not apply. If you concentrate on them, you can just slip your hands out of the shackle rings. All it takes is a little practice."

Legro immediately began fiddling with his constraints. Within a few minutes he had conquered the technique and was himself free. "That's great!" he whooped, "I owe you another one. Things are looking up."

"Fine. Now you tell me. Using your wrestling background, how many of us would it take to trip up a monster and push it into the pit?"

"Whoa! That's a real curve. Let me think." Legro was silent for several minutes, then continued, "These are large animals, but they are vulnerable because they have thin legs, and they are top heavy. I think two of us could tip one over, but then I don't know how difficult it would be to push the creature to the pit and over the edge. I think I would want four of us to be certain of success."

"Since Droxanna is very reluctant to get involved, that's two more than we have at the moment," Algar pointed out,

"Are you sure she can't be persuaded?"

"No, but I think it is highly doubtful. She seems adapted to the condition she is in and doesn't like to take chances. Do you think the two of us could do it?"

Legro was silent for a moment, then offered, "I'm not sure, but it would be better than not doing anything."

"Right. So let's see if we can get help. I'll talk to Droxanna and you talk to whomever is next to you."

"OK."

The two conspirators turned away from each other to pursue their respective tasks.

"Droxanna, Droxanna." She stirred slightly and slowly, but after a few minutes, Droxanna finally roused herself and turned toward him. Algar wondered how he could appeal to her that she could be persuaded to help in the proposed action.

He heard in a rather petulant voice, "What do you want of me now?"

"How would you like to be in on the ground floor in a great revolution?"

"What do you mean?"

"I've been talking with the fellow on my other side. His name is Legro, and he was a wrestler in life. He believes if we could get four of us together to attack a monster, we could subdue it. He knows how we could tip it over and push it into the pit. Would you help?"

"No way! We would end up in the pit ourselves and I think that's complete extinction. I don't want any part of it."

"But if we try and succeed, we could start freeing everyone, and get rid of all the monsters. That would help everybody. It certainly would be a better situation than we have now. Why not try?"

"I repeat. No! It is an extreme risk to ourselves. Now leave me alone."

Her strong refusal turned Algar away. He saw Legro dealing with his other neighbor, so he returned to considering their dilemma.

"We need four, but we have only two or maybe three. I'd be willing to try anyway. We may end up in the pit, but so what? This existence which we have now is not very satisfactory either. At least the pit would be quick."

He heard Legro asking, "How did you make out? Will she help?"

"The answer was a very firm, No! She doesn't want to be involved. What did you find out?"

"No luck. He is, or was, an ten year old kid and hardly the muscle we need. He said his name was "Zilch", or at least that was what his father always called him. I showed him how to get out of the shackles and how to resist the pain. I cautioned him though, to stay close to his assigned space and not be caught out of place by the monsters. I think he understands that. We can count him as a friend, but not much help. Now what do we do?"

"We go to plan B."

Legro asked, "Which is?"

"Which is, we expand the search. After the next monster goes by, you and I pop out of our shackles and go to the two persons beyond Zilch. If we each deal with one, we will probably have enough time before the following beast comes along. Tell them all we know, and ask whether they will help in overthrowing the monsters."

The two concentrated on executing their plan. After the next monster had come through and advanced a little way down the line, they quickly moved up to the two persons beyond Zilch to sound them out on getting free and helping to dispose of monsters. Algar felt encouraged by expanding the effort, and they were easily able to complete their tasks and return to their space before the next monster came along. When it was all clear, Algar asked Legro, "Well, how did you do?"

"I struck out. He is a hardened criminal type, and wasn't even able to get out of his restraints. Evidently he isn't at the stage that he can do that yet. Also, he didn't seem to have much interest in helping anyone else."

"I didn't do much better. My guy can evidently do the pain and handcuff things, but otherwise he is in the same camp as Droxanna. Not eager to take risks."

"So that leaves the two of us with a four man job."

Silence followed, but shortly Algar responded, "How about a plan C? How about doing the same thing in the other direction on the other side of Droxanna?"

"Sounds reasonable, lets give it a shot." Legro offered. "As soon as the next beast passes by us, get ready and leave when you think

you can do so safely, and go to the farthest one. I'll come along behind and talk to the nearer one next to Droxanna, but we have to be careful to watch for another approaching monster. We'll have to work rapidly because that is the direction they come from." The conspirators settled back and waited. It was not long before one of the brutes came along and they prepared to act. As soon as it was gone they went on their errands, and after a while they were once again in their space ready to compare notes.

"I didn't do so well", Algar volunteered. "She is another young person and was withdrawn and scared, but she was excited to learn about the way to handle pain and to get out of the shackles. Not much help in disposing of the vile creatures though."

"I didn't do much better. A small older woman, who talks a lot and seems smart enough, but rather deficient in the muscle area."

Disappointed, the two fell silent again and returned to their own thoughts. After a fairly long intermission, Algar again spoke to Legro. "Well, what do you think?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you willing to chance it with just the two of us?"

After a short pause, Legro answered, "I guess I would rather do something and try to make things better than just to lie here and do nothing. Besides, I am fairly strong with my wrestling experience, and you have your military training and exposure. I think we are a good team and stand a fair chance of succeeding, but are you ready to face the pit if we fail?"

Algar was quiet a moment then replied, "In my military life, I've faced a good many mortal dangers. The feeling is nothing new, although I look only at succeeding, and I don't dwell on the opposite. I think a positive attitude is the best stance to result in a good outcome. How about you?"

"I don't know. I have had a lot of troubles in my life. I also didn't dwell on the end of it, but it happened, and here I am. I guess I never worried too much about it, so why worry now? Besides, it's too late for philosophy. It's action time. Let's talk about how we'll do this. Here's what I'm thinking." The two talked together at some length. Finally they seemed to reach an agreement and settled into their respective places to wait for the next beast. They intended that it would be the most unlucky beast in the place and also it would be their first conquest.

They did not have to wait long. The noise from down the line told them the next monster was on the way. As agreed, they waited until it was moving from Algar toward Legro when they both jumped up and went into action on the surprised monster. Legro masterfully kicked its legs out causing it to fall prone on the floor. Algar grabbed the trident and began prodding the beast to keep it

down and move it toward the edge of the pit. Being face down it could not reach them to fight back, and Legro pushed on the lower part of the torso to help slide it along. Using all their strength, they successfully inched it towards the edge of the pit. All the while it emitted strange howls and struggled to get up. With much effort, they successfully got it to the edge, but then it was able to grasp something just over the edge and push back. For several minutes they were at a stalemate, moving in neither direction. They struggled with being able to move the monster forward then being thrust back by its immense strength and leverage. As they battled to finish the job, Algar felt a moment of slight panic when it seemed they would not be able to get it over the edge. Then suddenly he sensed an extra push on the trident, and he yelled, "OK, on the count of three push. One, two, three, push." The beast was overpowered and lost its hold. The demon slowly but surely slid head first into the pit.

Algar turned to see where the extra force had come from and faced Droxanna who had a firm grip on the end of the trident. They stood seemingly frozen in space and time; the three forming a tableau displaying the success that comes from firm determination. It was a moment that would prove to be the turning point in a much larger and more significant struggle. Then time restarted, and ever so slowly eased into a pace where events began to move in slow motion, then became normal again. Many things seemed to be happening at once. Zilch came into the group and grabbed the dropped whip. There was yelling and screaming. Two beings from far up the line ran towards them shouting, "Can we help? Can we help?" Sounds of the monster falling resounded from the interior of the pit ending in a blinding flash of light, and gradually the three turned towards each other in a rather stupefying realization they had succeeded.

Immediately the ground shook and deep rumbling noises came from below. The pit could be seen to shrink slightly in size, and the hole in the top of the cavern seemed to increase a small amount. Before they could speak, a booming voice suddenly came out of the above, "What's going on down there?"

Algar was alarmed and concerned for whatever might happen. In a moment of desperation, he called out, "Nothing, my Lord."

"Fine, see that it stays that way." boomed down.

"Yes, my Lord." Algar replied, and waited to see what else would transpire. There were no more sounds from above and Algar relaxed a little. He wondered whether he had really duped the voice into thinking all was well. He mused, "So much for omniscience."

Legro was awe struck, "What was that? The voice of God?"

Droxanna was amused, "What would God have to do with this place?"

Legro was taken aback, "Then? - then?"

Droxanna responded sardonically. "Try the voice of Satan."

"Do you really think so?" questioned Algar, then added, "I guess you're right. Considering where we are, he's the one who must be in charge. At any rate, we seem to have gotten away with it for now."

Droxanna went on, mockingly, "What do we do next? Just go back to our humble homes?"

Algar was not to be discouraged. "That was only one down. There are an unknown number yet to take care of. What we do now is to start planning for number two."

As they were talking the two other Beings approached. They greeted the three rebels enthusiastically. "Hi, we saw what you did and we want to help. I guess we already owe you for learning how to get free and avoid the pain. The guy next to us told us all about it and we are ready to do whatever we can."

PHASE THREE

The group of five took a few brief moments to get acquainted, but then Algar warned, "Here comes another one. Let's get back to our places, and meet again after it passes. Then we can plan our future action." The group dispersed, but quickly returned after the offending creature was gone.

Algar immediately took charge. "Here is what I suggest. Droxanna, would you follow along behind this beast and educate those who are still restrained? Show them how to get out of their shackles and teach them how to defeat the pain. Send the able bodied ones in this direction to help us in the coming battles. The four of us will stay here in place and take on each beast as it comes along."

"What can I do?" asked Zilch, who was still holding the whip the beast had dropped. He had appropriated it and made it his own.

"You can be our messenger between the two activities."

"May I keep the whip?"

"Sure, why not? It's yours."

"Great! I used to have a smaller one, but this one is super."

Droxanna spoke up with a great deal of concern in her voice, "I'll do as you suggest, but do you think we can ever defeat all these terrible animals? There seem to be endless numbers of them, and they are all strong and menacing."

"I don't know Droxanna. I'm sure though that I want to try, and I hope others will want to do the same as much as I do. I'm optimistic that we can succeed, and we should at least work toward that end."

"What about the ones who can't release themselves like the one just over there that we failed to get free?"

"That's a problem for later on. Right now the main task is to rid the area of monsters, and that should be our main focus."

"Well, all right, I'll be glad to do as you say. I'm on my way, just don't let any beasts come in my direction."

While they were talking the three other Beings which had been released earlier joined the group. One asked, "What should we do? We can see what is happening, but we cannot help you. We feel we are just in the way here."

Droxanna volunteered, "Come with me. I can use all the help I can get, and I can find something I know all of you can do."

Algar, Legro and the two newcomers talked together planning their method of attack on the next monster to show up. Zilch went back to his place happily snapping the whip. He needed to use both hands, but he kept filling the air with very authoritative snaps and cracks of the whip.

It was not long before the arrival of the beast. It was typical of the others. It seemed to be mostly aware only of its responsibility of inflicting pain on any individual unlucky enough to be secured to the wall. It operated like an automaton concentrating just on its job and not responding to the other events happening near it. The monsters evidently had been created to do only one job and were not burdened with excess mentality. They did their job efficiently, but obviously they could not deal with aberrations in the process. This, of course, was to the rebels advantage. They had a bit more freedom of movement without attracting attention.

On Algar's signal, the new group of four conspirators rose up and attacked the creature which appeared startled and disoriented causing it to drop its trident and whip. It struggled briefly with them, but then realizing it was out numbered, it turned to run. The beast ran clumsily but quite swiftly. In the scuffle the four got tangled up and had a slow start.

Zilch had stood well away from the action, but he looked up and saw he was right in the path of the approaching crowd and was amazed to see the group bearing down on him. The beast was in front and the others were desperately trying to catch up. As the beast drew near, Zilch coolly flipped the whip back, and at exactly the right instant he lashed it forward across the face of the advancing monster. The beast howled and stopped in its tracks. Zilch was able to lay the whip on the beast twice more before the four caught up

and were able to put it down.

With trident and bare hands they were able to keep the creature down and gradually slide it to the edge of the pit. Then they had sufficient force to slowly push it over the edge and into the pit. It howled as it fell freely down. The howls continued for a short period then a resounding crash and a huge flash of light followed. They had succeeded again. The ground rumbled beneath them, and it seemed to Algar that the pit again shrank in size and the light from came through a further expanded hole in the roof of the cavern.

As they stood looking at each other, a voice from above shouted down as it had on the previous occasion, "What's going on down there?"

And as he had done before, Algar responded, "Nothing, my Lord."

"Fine, see that it stays that way." was heard from above.

"Yes, my Lord." Algar replied, and wondered how many times they could cause such disturbance and not have further trouble. He muttered to himself, "We will see. Yes, we will see."

Algar came to Zilch and knelt down next to him putting his arm around the boy's shoulders. Zilch was crying openly and freely as Algar spoke to him. "That was great, Zilch. You saved the day with your skill. Thank you."

Zilch looked up, "It felt so good to return some of the pain to the monster. I've been hurt enough."

As he held him further Algar added, "You are not only our messenger. You have advanced to being our rear guard and last line of defense. I am proud of you. You are a worthy member of the team."

As they talked, more able bodied Beings arrived on the scene having been sent down by Droxanna. Speaking to Legro, Algar asked, "What do you think about having six person teams instead of four person teams?"

"I think that would be fifty percent better and certainly less effort on everyone's part. At least we should try it and see how it works. If we start getting in each other's way we can always cut back again. Or perhaps, just have the extra two stand by in case of problems."

"Why don't we try both methods and see which is best. Let's do this; we have enough for two teams of six. You lead one and I'll lead the other, and we can take turns and experiment in the process." The group spent a few minutes organizing and exchanging ideas on procedure in addition to preparing for the advent of the next monster.

Meanwhile Droxanna and her crew had been busy freeing more of the captives and teaching them how to free others. It was convenient that they could work without the interruption of the fiendish beasts coming by. Of the captives, there were many who

wanted, and were able, to help in the endeavor. She sent the stronger ones back to where Algar and Legro were operating on what had become the front line in the conflict. She distributed the others between teaching even more how to free themselves, but also had some remain and talk with, and encourage, those who were not yet able to free themselves.

The minor revolt had turned into a fully functioning organization which was operating in all the areas of systematically eliminating the menace of fiends preying on the helpless, releasing those who were able to be released and assisting those who were still held captive by listening to them and encouraging them. There were plenty of fighters to overwhelm monsters now as there was a steady flow of persons being freed who wanted to help both in the beast extermination effort and the process of freeing all the captives. They had succeeded in turning their Hell into more like a Purgatory. They still had challenges and much necessary activity to pursue to overcome evil, but there was now a great hope that they could eventually win a better situation of getting everyone free.

Algar had plenty of help and Legro was a great organizer and leader who kept a systematic rotation of "Demon-molition Crews" as they were now calling themselves. He noted that with the departure of each beast the ground rumbled, the pit seemed to shrink in size, the roof became more open and the threatening voice from above became more faint. "I think we are winning." he thought to himself, "It will take a while, but we can begin to see the end of clearing this cavern eventually. But what next? This can't be the full extent of Hell. These cannot be the only ones who ever got consigned to Hell. Where are the rest?" This thought troubled him and he kept musing and conjecturing about the true situation.

Finally, he decided on a course of action and went in search of Droxanna. He found her just setting up a new group around a person who could not free himself from the shackles. She was charging them with listening to the person's story and history, then encouraging them to keep searching for the answers to their own unhappiness. With the help and support of sympathetic persons, she was sure they would eventually help the captive see itself in a new light and feel ready to join the everyone else.

When she left the group, Algar asked, "Do you know of anyone who is free and who has exceptionally good hearing?"

"You still ask too many questions. What are you going to do now?"

"I'm not sure myself, but I think I could use a few who have very good hearing for a little project I have in mind."

"I know of a small group of musicians. They should have good hearing if anyone does."

"That's great. Lead on, oh patient one, show me these musicians."

A short walk took them to a small alcove where several Beings sat quietly talking. Droxanna greeted them, "Group, this is Algar our

benefactor and fearless leader who has a little job for you.”

“Good.” one of them replied, “We were getting bored anyway.”

“Thanks, Droxanna, you’ve come through again.”

There were only a dozen or so, but they listened carefully to everything Algar had to say, “I have been thinking about our situation here, and I am sure this cannot be the only part of Hell. I am speculating there are other caverns such as this, and they are probably nearby. If so, there must be a certain amount of noise coming from them and with careful listening and a little luck we might find one. Who would be willing to help me find them?”

They all stood up at once, and one ventured, “That sounds interesting, and it would certainly be better than just sitting here doing nothing.”

“Yes.” they all agreed.

“Great. Follow me.”

The group moved off to the nearest wall where Algar stopped. “I would like you to form a line next to each other and put your good ears to the wall to begin listening. Then move slowly along the wall and pay attention to changes in what you hear. I don’t know what to expect, but you will be the judges of whether there is anything or nothing or any changes in what you hear. Eventually, I would like you to explore all the way around the whole cavern. You can take your time, there is no hurry. Just be alert to whatever might be there. Let me know if you hear anything interesting, and I will check back with you later.”

Algar then wandered back to the fighting front where Legro and his Demon-molition crews were making great progress with destroying monsters as they approached. The pit was noticeably smaller. The roof opening was certainly much larger and the whole cavern was more light and seemed more comfortable. Here and there small groups were talking with an unfortunate Being who was still not able to slip out of the shackles, but much progress had been made in freeing persons and destroying monsters.

“Well Legro, your Demon-molition crews seem to be functioning very well.” he greeted his friend.

“We’re lucky to have an unlimited supply of eager and capable fighters.” was the reply.

“Good. I wanted to let you know I am working on expanding the effort.”

“Oh? How are you doing that?”

“I have a group listening to discover whether they can hear any noise from other caverns. I decided there has to be more of them

since this certainly is not the sum total of the population of Hell.”

“Yes, I hadn’t thought of it, but you must be right. We should be done here eventually, so we’ll be looking for more activity.”

“And you will have a large number of well trained and experienced fighters. That will be very useful. My immediate need though is a few good persons with tridents. I may have some digging to do.”

“Take as many as you wish. We have a surplus of everything; tridents, whips and able bodies.”

When he asked for volunteers, a dozen voices answered and Algar advised them, “Bring some tridents, and be prepared to have some fun.”

Algar led his new group of diggers back to where he had left the listeners. As he approached, the listening group, they had moved a good distance down the wall but were all grouped in one area. They met him excitedly. “We think we have found another cavern.” They were gathered in a small niche in the wall and were taking turns listening.

Algar looked at the marked spot on the wall. To him it looked no different than any other part of their confinement. With a look of grim determination, he picked up a trident and advanced. “All right, if you think this might be a good spot, let’s start digging. We have to make a tunnel through here.” Others followed with their tridents and the wall was assaulted.

As they began digging at the wall they discovered a strange process going on. The mere act of thrusting at it with the tridents caused the wall, not exactly to melt, but in some unusual manner just to gradually disappear and leave an empty space where the wall was attacked. It turned out to be a relatively simple task to carve a tunnel into the wall large enough for them all to navigate easily.

They had advanced no more than a few dozen yards when Algar stopped and held up his hand to stop the rest. It was now quite apparent that there were sounds coming from the space in front of them. “We must go more slowly and cautiously, since we don’t know what to expect when we break through. Let me go alone for a short while.” He poked a round hole and crawled into it enlarging it as he advanced. Suddenly, he broke through and saw another huge cavern with a flaming, smoking pit and terrible odors which was filled with cries of despair. He was aware of a Being next to him, so he spoke softly, “Hello, my name is Algar. We are breaking through a space from Purgatory to this part of Hell. We are coming to help set you free. You are going to be able to get out of here. What is your name?”

The person looked in amazement. It was a very old man thin and wrinkled with the years. He just stared at Algar not saying anything. Algar repeated, “We have come to help.”

The man spoke in a weak old raspy voice, “I must be hallucinating. Are you part of the punishment?”

“No I am Algar, and we have discovered a way to defeat your tormenters. We have freed many persons already in another cavern and we want to free you also.”

“I cannot believe that.”

“Nevertheless, it is true. Let me tell you more.” Algar explained to the man all that had transpired so far and what had led Algar to be crawling out of the wall next to him. When he had finished, the new person responded.

“My name is Plexorian. What you say is similar to my story, but we have not tried to organize to defeat the monsters. Some of us have learned to get out of our shackles and to avoid the pain, but the monsters are too intimidating and we were fearful of attacking them. We have been looking for the entrance to Paradise but we could not find it.”

“Entrance to Paradise?”

“Yes, I heard the devil mention it once.”

“I want to hear more about that, but let’s get out of here now. Follow me.” Cautiously, the two crawled back through the hole.

Algar’s crews were amazed when the two emerged from the crawl space and a buzz of conversation ensued. Algar motioned them all to move out of the tunnel to the safe zone again. The first thing he did was to call to Zilch who had been watching the whole procedure. “Zilch, go to Legro and tell him I have opened cavern B, another part of Hell. I will need at least six good crews with tridents to begin clearing it.”

Zilch grinned broadly and set out running to do his task.

Everyone gathered around and listened very intently as the old man and Algar began talking, “We’re pleased to have been able to free you, but now we need to know as much as you can tell us about your confinement area so we can prepare to enter it and attack your tormentors.”

The wizened old man spoke slowly, and clearly. “I am called Plexorian. I do not know how long I have been here, but I am sure you all understand that. I am truly grateful to be free, and I am amazed at what you all have accomplished.”

Plexorian began describing his experience and the details of his confinement area. In most respects it was identical to what they had all experienced, except Plexorian had evidently been there a much longer period of time. He explained, “Over time, I have seen the area get more and more crowded. It just impresses me how many people end up in Hell. I think there is a flaw in the system though. Soon after I had arrived, Satan himself came through once and was talking with some other Being. I didn’t quite understand, but it was

something about most persons had sinned a little and were required to come to Hell first, but they were supposed to be released after sufficient punishment. However, even after release and the entry to paradise was available, there were conditions imposed for passing through it and there were always the demons to avoid. To come back out of Paradise again was apparently equally difficult and after a time, the passageway apparently just fell into disuse because Beings mistrusted the conditions on the other side, and it somehow became inaccessible.”

Suddenly, the things which had puzzled Algar before now made sense to him. One; that most persons were able to free themselves from the shackles which meant they felt they had been punished enough. Two; the “voice” from above only threatened and did not act, because it was overwhelmed by having to keep track of the extremely large number of captives. Probably, this was why it faded away as more and more were freed. Also perhaps we should be searching for an exit from this place. As he thought of these things he felt a greater resolve to continue looking for more caverns and more captives to release. As they continued talking, Zilch returned with Legro followed by a crowd of fighters with tridents.

Algar greeted him. “Thanks, Zilch. Now go tell Droxanna we have found a new cavern and we are getting ready to go into it and to begin clearing it. We will need some of her best counselors and helpers soon. Ask her to send whomever she can spare.” Zilch eagerly left to do as asked.

PHASE FOUR

The assault on Area B was well planned. Algar had the best digging teams in place and Legro positioned several experienced fighter groups just outside of the tunnel. Farther back were a group of teacher- counselors supplied by Droxanna. On the signal to begin, the diggers were to break through the rest of the wall through the existing hole and then fall back while the Demon-molishers pushed ahead. They then were to split into two groups, so they could go in both directions around the new pit attacking and disposing of all the monsters encountered. The rest were to come along afterwards and help release the captives or counsel them as necessary.

Amazingly, everything went according to plan. The limited intelligence of the monsters impeded them from dealing with the onslaught by the determined and well motivated superior beings. Soon there was a wide safe area where Droxanna’s crew began to help

the captives release themselves from their shackles, thus creating a steady stream of free persons out of area B to the original pit area. One person had volunteered to be the person to answer the “voice” from overhead each time it called down to inquire as to “What is going on down there?” and appeared to enjoy the new occupation.

After the operation got well underway, Algar left to find his listeners and check on their progress, while Legro went back to the original site which was nearing the end of the struggle. He had left three well experienced crews to proceed with the clean up, while he had been away to lead the attack in the new area. The pit had been getting smaller and smaller with the demise of each beast, and the overhead space became more open and brighter.

When Legro returned, the end was very much in sight. In a short time they were down to the last beast which was easily overwhelmed by the crowd of fighters armed with tridents. Legro watched as it was pushed to the edge and into the pit. After it disappeared there was the customary flash of light and rumbling, but amazingly the pit hole then shrank and closed completely. An exuberant cheer went up from everyone.

The mood reflected the realization that the threat posed by the evil monsters was completely eliminated. Area A, the cavern of Hell where the revolt had started, was now a free space and was now entirely safe. Beside having the scourge of the beasts gone, the pit was closed and the light from the open roof offered a more pleasant ambiance. The rough cavern had transformed into a beautiful atrium filled with persons no longer suffering pain and constraint. The fact it was free of fumes and flame was an added plus.

Algar found his listeners were more than two thirds of the way around the cavern, but they felt they had discovered two more places where there were possible noises, which they had marked by starting holes in the wall with tridents. He encouraged them. “That’s very good. Keep up the good work. There will be another cavern to explore when you are through here.”

Algar looked around the large space they had recovered and decided on taking an opportunity to enjoy it and rest while spending some time thinking. Finding a comfortable spot by the wall, he relaxed and gazed across the wide expanse noting the great activity with many persons moving around doing the necessary jobs. Droxanna’s crews were especially busy with tending to those who were still confined. Their attention, concern and general helpfulness was the necessary remedy which would free everyone eventually, but it would occupy a good deal of time. There was also a steady stream of newly released captives coming from the entrance to area B.

As Algar was lost in thought, Legro approached. “Hi, Boss. I’m out of work. The last one has been disposed of, and the pit hole has closed up.”

"That's great. We're making very good progress. Maybe it's time to stop and consider where we are."

"Yes, I agree. What's on your mind?"

"This is a strange place we're in. It seems most of us consider that we don't belong here and we are able to get loose from the restraints. This must be Purgatory now since we have defeated all the monsters, but we still have to struggle. I remember what Plexorian said about the entrance to Paradise closing up or something like that, and Satan complaining about needing to accommodate more persons, even after they were completely expiated of their sins. Evidently, no matter how the system was originally set up, it's not working quite right, and as a result the bulk of us get trapped here in a sort of never-never land. That has made me realize we are well out of the world we knew before and into a new space or condition which requires new attitudes and behavior."

"Yes, I feel a little weird. We do all kinds of work, and yet we never seem to be hungry or find the need for food. I don't understand it. What's going on?"

"I wish I knew, but we seem to be able to find the energy we need to do as much as we wish to do. I believe it has something to do with our being outside of our old four dimensional world and into parts of the greater universe, but it would take someone smarter than I am to figure it out. I think the best we can do is just accept it and not worry.

"However, it may be to our advantage to rest a while and give ourselves an opportunity to plan ahead. I'm very pleased at how far we have come. We have this first area completely clean, thanks to you and your crews for your efforts; we have a second area in the process of being rid of the monster threat; we know where there are two more caverns to attack in the future, so it would seem we have plenty to keep us busy.

"Also, we have no way of knowing just how many caverns there may be. Considering how many persons have existed, this is massive job beyond our capability. The best we can do is to work our little area and hope someone is doing the same somewhere else. At least we have started something which in my opinion will be self sustaining. Anyone who has learned our basic method of operation can carry it well beyond these walls and there will never be a shortage of grateful freed captives to take it as far as necessary."

"Well," Legro volunteered, "as far as I'm concerned doing something to make our situation more suitable is better than sitting around all the time doing nothing. I, for one, don't mind doing all I can and working just here is enough. I'll let the future take care of itself."

"Agreed! But I think we should proceed with some degree of caution. I'm thinking it would be best to make it rule not to have more

than two new caverns open at a time so we can exert our full effort and attention to them and not let any mishaps occur. The pit works to our advantage in terms of having some place to dispose of the beasts. If one of them ever got loose out here in the clean area though, we might be in real trouble with no disposal method available.”

“You’re probably right. No sense in biting off more than we can chew, although we have no shortage of workers now.”

“True, but I have a feeling that we will eventually reach a situation when most of the work needing to be done will be with Droxanna’s crews, since we will at some time tap into those who are truly deserving the fruits of Hell, and the digging and cleanup will be over, but the rebuilding and redeeming will be more important.

“Also, I am concerned that if we open too many caverns we may encounter more problems. So far, as we dispatch the beasts to the pit, we get this voice inquiring as to ‘What’s going on down there?’ However, there is no follow up after we reassure the voice that all is well.

“I speculate that the fact we can continue without interference means that the powers that be in Hell are overwhelmed by the sheer number of Beings trapped here, and there are insufficient resources to do anything more. That is fine for us at the moment, but that may change in the future. Admittedly, it probably may be a long time in the future, but nevertheless we ought to have a plan ready when the time comes. Then too, if we are not met with retaliation or other forms of reaction to what we are doing to Hell, perhaps we can assume that the powers that be here are actually impotent and cannot take action against us. The true situation may never be known to us, so I guess I am of the opinion that the best plan is we should just proceed with the present course and deal with the future later.”

The conversation fell into a lull as the two considered the full ramifications of their situation and all that had happened in the recent past. It certainly was nothing they had ever encountered before, and was unique to the present circumstances. After a few moments, Legro looked up and remarked, “I wonder how they are coming along in area B.”

“Yes. Let’s wander over there and get up to date on the progress.”

On approaching the cavern they were favorably impressed that the entrance had been widened considerably and there was much activity with many persons coming and going. Inside the cavern it was much lighter due to the larger opening in the ceiling, and it looked as though they were halfway along to being done. The pit had been shrinking and was much smaller, and the fighters were very active. They had decided to take the battle to the demons instead of waiting for the demons to come to them, and the Demon-molishers were encountering them in both directions. It was fortunate that the beasts were of limited intelligence as they did not recognize they

were under attack until they were personally challenged. Although there were apparently some situations where two of them were encountered at once. However, the overwhelming numbers of fighter crews had no difficulty in dealing with those events. It seemed the whole project was going along very rapidly to the desired conclusion.

As they observed the great progress, Algar turned to Legro and asked, "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"If you are thinking it's time to open area C, I am. Let's find Droxanna to begin lining up crews there. I'm ready to start the job."

After marshalling all their forces, a crowd of various workers were lined up and ready in front of the hole in the wall which was now officially area C of Hell. Algar took the lead with a crew of trident diggers, and soon they had a tunnel many feet deep into the wall. Again, Algar stopped them when there were noises easily distinguishable coming from in front of the tunnel. He then alerted the crews that the breakthrough was imminent. As before, Algar tunneled a small hole through which he could crawl. Inching ahead slowly, he finally broke into the area and had a clear view of it. The scene dismayed him, and he quickly returned to the rest of the crew. Motioning them to go out of the tunnel, they regrouped with the all the others outside.

Legro immediately asked, "What the matter? Is there a problem?"

All were silent as Algar spoke. "Yes, there's a bit of a problem, but I think we can handle it."

"Well, what is it?"

"It's a matter of numbers. There seems to be many more of the monsters in this one. You might want to organize a few more fighters before we start just to be sure we will be able to defeat all the beasts. Also when we start we will have to work more rapidly to enlarge the opening to be able to send the maximum number of fighters through. It may get a little messy at the beginning, but if we stay on our toes and keep alert to any problems, it should settle down after we are in full swing. Perhaps I also should have a few more diggers to make the opening as large as possible as fast as possible once we get started."

Operations were suspended while the necessary extra personnel were assembled, but it was not difficult to find everyone necessary among all that had been freed in the activities both in the original cavern and in area B. As Algar was recruiting a few more diggers, he passed a group which was working with whips. The surplus whips were being used to teach more persons how to use them. Algar smiled as he saw it was Zilch who was leading the group. It was interesting to see Zilch in front of a group of his elders instructing them on the ins and outs of using a whip as a threat and as a weapon. All the snapping and cracking was proof of his ability as a teacher. Most of his students were displaying great skill in laying their whip exactly where they wanted it.

After the teams were ready again at Area C, Algar gave the signal to start and the diggers began digging furiously at the wall. His crews rapidly opened a great gap which revealed a familiar scene, but which was much more crowded. A few moments of chaos ensued as the first of the area C monsters were confronted and dispatched to the realm of the pit. However with the large numbers of the attack crew, some individual battles went awry. At one point in the initial assault, a beast in great confusion ran out through the large wall opening and into the safe area pursued by many fighters with tridents, but the beast was faster than his pursuers. It burst into the safe area with a crowd of trident bearing fighters streaming after, and the good persons in its path scattered in all directions as it advanced. All except one. A small figure stood to the side and as the beast came by a loud crack rang out. The beast's legs were bound in the coils of a whip, and it fell with a reverberating crash on the floor. It was quickly trussed up with surplus whips and pushed back to the cavern and eventually into the pit. Outside, Zilch was again feeling satisfaction in helping with a dangerous situation as he recoiled his whip. Having a large entrance to a newly opened cavern was both an advantage and a disadvantage which would be weighed more carefully in the future.

Gradually, the confusion subsided into a well functioning assault and the battle was underway. The crews worked very efficiently which was a result from their earlier experience, and the great number of the attackers easily overwhelmed the monsters. It would be only a matter of time before area C would join the rest of the safe areas. Hell area D would not be far behind.

At this point it was apparent that there were so many experienced diggers, fighters and counselors that the operation was becoming self supporting. It was obvious to all what must be done, and there were plenty of persons ready to do it.

Areas which had been crowded with persons experiencing pain and despair, were now filled with much activity and positive movement toward creating an ambience of hope, cooperation, openness, light surroundings and encouragement. From a risky and small beginning, the small revolt had grown into a self perpetuating movement which was changing the composition of Hell into something else.

PHASE FIVE

After the passage of much time, the safe space in Hell had been expanded considerably. Area C was a much larger area than B or the original area A. All these areas were clean and bright and filled with the ex-captives who were all eagerly engaged in furthering the release of yet more unfortunates. Area D was swiftly nearing the end of the monster threat with the resource of overwhelming numbers of willing fighters to combat them. The listeners, while surveying both areas B and C, were detecting indications of other caverns of even greater potential for expansion.

Algar was just beginning the penetration of a marked wall in area B, which had been identified by the listeners as a promising spot to find an opening into another cavern, when there was an interruption. The complete contingents of diggers, fighters and counselors were lined up ready to do their jobs when a warm golden glow began to suffuse their entire domain from the far walls of the entrance connecting to the original area A to the bright opening above. Everyone stopped working to look in wonder at this new phenomenon. Gradually they became aware of a dulcet musical voice calling out, and filling the farthest reaches of the open space with its mellow sounds.

Algar heard his name along with Legro and Droxanna being repeated over and over. Running back through the opening into the original area A, at the far end he could see a crowd standing and looking at, and seemingly overwhelmed by, a huge shining golden curtain which had appeared on the far wall of area A. He hurried to the place and the crowd parted as he approached. "What happened?" he called out.

A listener replied, "I don't know. I was just starting to try to knock a hole in the wall to mark the space where we thought we heard something, and this happened." He gestured toward the shining flowing curtain which had appeared apparently from nothing, but which now dominated the far wall of the original open space in Hell with a large shimmering light.

Again the soft voice was heard with the three names. Algar spoke up. "I am Algar. I am here. What would you have of me?"

Just then Legro and Droxanna also came running to the spot shouting. "What is going on?"

"I don't know, but I hope to find out. Evidently someone wants to talk to the three of us. Stand by me and we will see what it's all about." Facing the curtain Algar spoke, "We all three are here. What is your pleasure?"

The voice was heard again, softly and slowly. "Algar, Legro and Droxanna, I bring you messages of honor and of hope. You have been noticed by the highest authority in your work to open up another and a most promising front on the struggle against evil. From the depths of Hell, you have created a passage to eventual peace, repose and reconciliation for those who have been trapped by Satan, and

your noble conflict is gradually reducing the power of evil.”

“We are doing only what we see we are able to do.” replied Algar.

“It is enough. You are held in high regard for your efforts by those who are watching.”

“We are pleased to be thought of that way. But who are you and why are we being contacted now?”

“I am a minor Archangel. My name is Melodious Brilliant, and I am charged with explaining to you about the curtain. There has been a reconsideration of the conditions and procedures for entering Paradise. The shining curtain which marks the entrance to Paradise will be here permanently now. You three with your efforts and with your friends have cleared a safe place in Hell for the rescue of all souls. The curtain is a passage out of Hell for those who are reconciled and ready. It is located here in this safe area you have created. You three, Algar, Legro and Droxanna may cross any time you wish to do so. Others who have searched their inner most thoughts and consider they have paid for any sins of which they are culpable and now feel themselves worthy may proceed also. The curtain will allow you through. I must caution you all to be sure of yourselves though, as the curtain will not open for those of an impure mind.”

Silence followed this pronouncement by the voice. All were trying to accept the authenticity of this astonishing Being and absorb the impact of the astounding news which it had announced. Gradually the enormity of the new situation began to dawn on the whole crowd and a buzz of conversation arouse becoming a deafening din.

Algar raised his arms and shouted, “Friends! Friends! Listen to me! Listen to me!” The noise subsided in respect for their benefactor and leader. When quiet was restored, he continued. “We are evidently entering a new era. It seems it will be possible for every one of us to leave this area eventually and enter Paradise. Please spread the word to all of the others, and let us go from here with a renewed purpose to eliminate the monsters, but first let us have a few moments of silence to show our respect for Melodious Brilliant and the wonderful news brought to us.”

A hush fell over the crowd as they stood observing the glowing curtain. After a few moments, a young person moved toward it. It was Zilch. Stopping in front of the curtain for just a few seconds, he turned and waved and waited to see Algar wave back. Then standing erect and head up he strode right into the curtain and disappeared.

Again the soft voice sounded, “You see, those who are truly reconciled may enter with no problem and will be received with joy and acceptance, and thus it will be from now on. This portal will always be available for those who are ready to use it, and it will be the path

out of Hell in the future. It replaces the old entrance which had proved to be inadequate. Spread the word to all the rest, and may you all find peace. I must depart now and leave you to your work and good efforts.” The golden glow gradually faded, but the shimmering bright curtain remained as a new and permanent fixture in their grand main atrium of Purgatory.

The sound of awe and amazement arouse again and the crowd was buzzing with excitement. Several more moved forward. Some faced the curtain, but then turned away, but others also advanced and then continued through the barrier.

Legro turned to Droxanna, “Well Droxanna, what do you think of this new turn of affairs?”

Droxanna looked at the curtain but did not reply. Her face had taken on a new aura that was peaceful and calm. It seemed all the bitterness she had felt free to express in the past had suddenly disappeared. She spoke slowly. “I see it. I am ready. I am going.” She took a few steps forward then turned around. “Thank you both for putting up with me, I appreciate your good works, but I must go now. Goodbye.” With that she strode firmly forward to the curtain and through it.

Algar and Legro looked at each other in astonishment. The crowd milled around marveling at the new glowing fixture. It was so wonderful, they had trouble recognizing that It was real.

“What do we do now, Algar?” Legro looked intently at his friend.

“I guess everyone has new options now. That is excellent. It feels like we are really making real progress in correcting an evil situation. That makes me feel invigorated and validated, but as far as I am concerned, I want to knock down a few more walls and dispose of a lot more monsters before I leave this place.”

“That sounds good to me. I’m with you. Let’s go.”

PHASE SIX

As Algar turned away from the golden curtain, the immensity of the task remaining struck him. The enormous atrium where they stood, which was the first conquest in the release of all deserving persons, stretched on in all directions to many other portals opening into other similar large atria each now filled with soothing warm light and multitudes of persons, who were not only free, but who had the option of leaving this confinement when they felt they were ready to do so.

But the extent of the remaining portions of Hell were completely unknown, and Algar felt a momentary wave of weariness engulf him. He quietly thought to himself, "How many more chambers are there to be discovered and cleaned? How many more Beings are waiting to be freed and have the hope of passing through the golden curtain? What new challenges will be met in the days to come?"

Turning to considering the positive consequences of their action though, he reviewed silently to himself. "There are the multitudes who are now free; much suffering has been alleviated, and the golden exit to Paradise which has been created is a benefit for everyone. This includes those who wish to move on immediately, and those who want to stay in this entry area and help others. The curtain holds out the possibility of leaving for those who want to stay and work here for a while before entering Paradise in the future. There is a goal to look forward to when they are ready to move on to the other side to enjoy the presumed benefits, comforts and rewards to be found there."

Contemplating all that, he regained a great sense of purpose and shook the dispiritedness off. There were hordes of Beings yet to be freed. He was in a position to make it happen, and so he would. With renewed vigor he turned toward Legro. "My friend, we have a good thing going here. There are innumerable persons finding satisfaction in taking down walls, destroying monsters, releasing those who can be released, counseling those who are still coming to grips with themselves, and now guiding all to the possibility of leaving this Hell. The process is self supporting finally, and I, for one, would like to go back to the front lines again to work on the current problems."

"You're right. I would like to be able to see and experience the immediate changes and let the gradual changes take place as they will. If you worry about the size of the overall project it is difficult to concentrate on the task at hand."

The two set off and passed many areas where crews of eager workers were clearing new rooms of monsters and pits. They were soon in the thick of the activity at the foremost points of attack. The effort had expanded to taking down all the surrounding walls to gain as much open space and light as possible. In addition, they sought to find all chambers and pits regardless of their size or location..

At one point Legro was cutting into a promising wall through an old unused tunnel, and things were going well when suddenly the trident hit a firm barrier. The wall material was removable just as usual, but only up to a point. There seemed to be some other material which did not yield to the probing of the trident tines, and a new surface appeared which was completely impenetrable. He and his crews worked at removing the old wall material from the new solid wall and followed it off to the side. After traveling quite a distance, and uncovering a great deal of the new hard wall, they bumped into another group led by Algar coming the other way who were also cleaning the old wall from the new large obstruction. As they met, they stopped and looked in amazement at the solid wall which

stretched a long distance in both directions

“What do you make of this, Algar? What do we do now?”

The structure rose higher than any of them could reach and extended beyond the area they had cleared in both directions. “Those are good questions. Can you think of any good answers?”

“I think some one or some thing really doesn’t want us to get any farther into that area.”

“Yes, but is that because we are better off to stay out, or does it mean it would be to our advantage to get in?”

“If I had a coin, I would flip it and let chance decide.”

Algar was silent a moment contemplating the conundrum then answered, “OK, you consider you have flipped the coin and I’ll call it. Heads we try to get in. Tails we quit.” A pause, then he said, “It’s Heads.”

Legro laughed. “You’re right. Let’s go, but how do we proceed?”

PHASE SEVEN

Meanwhile, back at the original large chamber, the golden flowing curtain continued to dominate the scene. There were small groups scattered about which consisted of counselors talking with Beings who were struggling with their feelings about whether they would try entering through the golden curtain or not. Others were just standing and talking among themselves while they watched the procession of newly freed Beings coming from other chambers. Some just liked to stand and admire the curtain. Every so often one would get sufficient courage to walk into it and pass through.

As the multitude watched in awe, a surprising event happened. The curtain opened and two beings came walking out rather rapidly and into the great hall. They swiftly isolated themselves and bent together in a whispered conversation. Gradually they were surrounded by the stunned bystanders, and after several minutes, they were approached by one of them.

“Excuse me, but I am amazed to see that you just came out of the curtain. I thought it was meant only for exiting from here to enter whatever is better on the other side.”

One of the Beings stared at him with a rather surprised and disoriented look and seeing the group gathered around began to speak slowly and guardedly, almost as recovering from a stupor. “We were not sure it would work both ways either, but we are relieved

that it evidently does.”

A silence fell on the group as they contemplated the two who had returned from the other side.

Again their greeter asked, “I’m confused, why have you returned? What is it like over there and what caused you to come back? Who are you?”

The returnee looked back with a sober and somewhat subdued appearance. Then finally, after several moments of silence, spoke softly in reply, “I am Droxanna and this is my friend, Zilch. We were among the first ones to go through the curtain when it opened, but now we are back. Please leave us alone, we just want to rest and talk with each other.”

“And my name is Andrew, but we are extremely interested in what it is like over there. Won’t you tell us about it, and why did you return?”

By way of response Droxanna turned and walked away with Zilch following. The small crowd trailed after them until Droxanna stopped and again turned and faced them. “All right. Stay there and I will tell you all about it.” The crowd stopped and stood silently waiting, until she continued, “The surroundings on the other side of the curtain are as wonderful as you could wish them to be. It is beautiful with lush colorful plants and flowers. The air is filled with grandiose music and choral singing wherever you go. Everyone joins in with their own expressions of adoration and praise.

“However, that is all there is to it. After a while it is stupefying and numbing. It was as though all other experiences had stopped and there was nothing but prettiness and overwhelming music. Many evidently found this acceptable, especially those who had been forced to be there for a very long time and become accustomed to the routine, but Zilch and I found it burdensome and uncomfortable, so we decided to try to return to where there were more interesting things happening, and where there were other Beings with whom normal interaction was possible. We are glad to be back, but you need to give us time to readjust to this environment again. We want to talk to Algar and Legro. Where are they?”

Andrew volunteered, “I believe they are at the far end of the caverns working on the newest areas. I’ll show you the way if you wish.”

“Don’t you want to go through the curtain and see the other side for yourself?”

“Well, I had about decided to give it a try, but from what you say, I guess I can postpone that for a while. I’m in no hurry, and apparently I can take as much time as I wish for that decision.”

As they walked to the far side of the extensive open space which had been generated, Droxanna was impressed by how much enlarged it had become just during the time she had been away. There was also a steady flow of Beings towards the curtain now. Everyone wanted to see it as soon as they were freed and heard about it. Individually they wondered when they might be able to go through it.

As Andrew led the way, a long high wall came into view in the distance. They advanced to where a group of workers were standing idle and contemplating the structure. As they neared the group, they heard Algar speaking, "Okay, so for lack of stronger tools, we cannot tear the wall down, we cannot go over the wall and we are unable to dig under it. Our only hope is to go around it or somehow go through it. I am open to ideas."

Silence followed his analysis. After a brief period of non response, Legro spoke up. "I suggest the most logical approach at the moment is to keep working in both directions on the wall to find an end or anything else which might come up. Let's split into two groups and go both ways to continue exposing the wall and see what we can find. It might be wise to have some couriers going back and forth between the two teams to keep everyone informed on any new developments."

"Very rational, Legro. Let's do it." Algar responded. "I'll take the left end and you can have the right."

As the groups started to disperse, Algar spotted Droxanna and shouted. "Legro, look who is here. Our old buddies, Droxanna and Zilch." He continued, "Droxanna, Zilch, I thought you had gone away. What brings you back?"

A happy reunion of the friends resulted in Algar and Legro learning of the conditions on the other side of the curtain, but the consequence was that then the four were left a little perplexed as to the ultimate end of their work.

"You say the other side of the curtain is beautiful, if somewhat monotonous." commented Algar. "That makes me wonder even more what might be beyond this wall in front of us. I think that is our next challenge."

Andrew, who had been quietly observing all of this, questioned, "If the new area on the other side of this hard wall is also monotonous, what is the use of trying to get beyond it?"

All turned toward him, and after a moment of silence Algar thoughtfully answered, "Perhaps we should review where we are. We have this immense open space filled with many Beings who were suffering, and who have been released from a difficult situation. There is the golden curtain at one end where those who consider themselves now worthy can exit to what may be for them a more comfortable area in Paradise. We have this solid wall at this end of our space which evidently is intended to keep us out for better or worse from

whatever lies beyond. If we don't try to get through, I believe that to be failure. If we do try, we might succeed or we might not. If we try and do in fact get through, we have a fifty- fifty chance of it being better on the other side. That, in my mind, makes it worth any effort we can make. In addition, the only other choice is to sit down and do nothing."

Andrew smiled and replied, "I guess that sums it up rather well. You've made our position very clear, Algar, and I'd like to join the effort and help. I can see this is the only path open and as you indicate, it is better to try something than to do nothing." The old friends were silent, but nodded in agreement.

As Algar started off to the left, Zilch followed along to help, Legro joined his crew to work on the right end of the solid wall, and Andrew and Droxanna started back to the golden curtain area to do whatever was needed.

As they approached the curtain they saw a large group engaged in an animated discussion, and heard one of the group exclaim in a rather loud voice, "Well, all I can say is that I am greatly disappointed."

Andrew asked, "What is it that disappoints you?"

"The other side of the curtain, that's what. We have all recently returned from there because, even listening to great music wears thin after a while, and we want something more interesting to do. There is nothing constructive for us to do over there."

"Well there is plenty to do here. There are still unexplored portals to be opened along the walls of this main room of Purgatory; there are walls to be knocked down and monsters to be destroyed; there are other Beings waiting to be freed; there are a great number needing a lot of help with discussion and introspection to help them recover from disastrous lives; and now we have an impenetrable barrier at the far side of this main room which needs some effort. There certainly is plenty to keep all of us occupied here whenever we get tired or bored of the singing and anthems."

"Yes. I realize that, but it's not quite what I expected."

"So what did you expect?"

"Well, for instance, whatever happened to Eden? Isn't that around somewhere? I always thought that would be a nice place to be."

A voice in the crowd volunteered, "We were kicked out. Don't you remember?"

"But we've paid for that also." another voice added. While they talked, a larger group formed and became interested in the conversation, and various comments were advanced at random.

"What if we don't like this fancy music"

"Yes! My music is different than this strange stuff."

"I'm not really into all this endless adoration stuff."

"Yeah, I like more lively music. This is sort of dull."

"I don't think I will even try going over there, but what else is there to do for fun?"

"Isn't here anywhere else to go?"

A louder voice from the rear of the crowd sounded out over the general noise. "There are many of us who have returned from Paradise, and we are not pleased with all the conditions here. We can listen to music which becomes boring after a while or we can be workers to fight demons or counsel the unfortunate. This is not exactly what we were promised in the after life. I think there should be more, and I wish someone would do something about it."

Andrew raised his arms and called for quiet, then answered them all. "I think the best we can do at this point is to concentrate on whatever it is possible to do, and work individually to contribute to the general good however we may be able. We will have to wait and see what may develop in the future." The group gradually dispersed amid a lot of grumbling and downcast looks, and Andrew turned to Droxanna "What shall we do Droxanna?"

"Why don't we spend some time on the other side of the curtain and enjoy a little music, then come back and help process some of the needy. Oh! That's right, you haven't been over there yet have you. Come on, I guarantee you will like it for a while at least." The two disappeared into the golden flow.

Time passed and more persons were freed. Many entered the golden curtain and many also returned again. There was a great milling around and activity in the great hall of coming and going of the various workers. Often workers on the front line would come back and go into Paradise for a little respite from their tasks and return with renewed vigor and purpose after spending as much or as little time as they wished in that environment.

Algar and Legro had all the help they needed and there was a great deal of progress on clearing the surface of the new solid wall. While working on clearing up a fresh section of it, Algar suddenly stopped and stared. "Look at this, Zilch." The two gazed at the wall for a moment, then Algar added, "Go get Legro, I think we have something here."

Zilch hurried down the wall to the other end looking for Legro. While still a long way off, he started calling, "Legro, Legro, Algar needs you." By the time he reached the crew, they had all stopped to listen to whatever Zilch had to say. Breathlessly, he gasped out the

news to them all. "I think Algar has found a door."

PHASE EIGHT

Legro's team moved en masse towards the other end of the wall to see this new development. More joined them as they gathered and it was finally a large crowd which had collected to see this great news. In the time it took Legro to reach the spot, Algar and his team had cleaned out a groove in the wall which outlined a rectangular shape the size of a rather generously wide door. The rest of the surface of the outlined area was absolutely smooth.

A voice in the rear asked, "Where's the handle?" Another one added, "Where are the hinges?"

Algar and Legro stood silently and regarded this new development deep in thought as to how to deal with it. Zilch rubbed his hand over the dusty surface and after a few moments turned to his friends and announced, "I think I can see a hole." Legro jumped forward with a trident and began digging where Zilch was pointing. Gradually a small hole appeared. "Here's another." Zilch added. Over the next few minutes several were found, and they formed a vertical line in the center of the huge doorway. As Algar watched the holes appear, a smile gradually spread over his face. When his friends were through and they turned around to observe Algar displaying a broad grin. Legro asked, "What are you thinking? Tell me that I might grin also."

"I know how to open it." he announced.

The crowd gasped as in a minor shock, and Algar continued. "Those of you with tridents, each of you insert the top end of your trident into one of the holes in the wall. A crew came up and did as Algar directed, until all the holes were used. "Now push sideways on the end of your trident." Using the tridents as levers, the crew began pushing and the solid door began to slowly rotate on a central vertical axis. When it was apparent that the door would indeed open all the way with sufficient pushing, Algar called out, "That's great, but now stop."

There were shouts from the crowd, "No, no, keep going. Let's see what's in there." Algar raised his hand for silence and the crowd gradually stopped to listen. "We have no idea of what is beyond this wall. It may be dangerous or it might be benign, but it would be foolish just to rush in without a plan. I want most of you to stand back and leave working room right here in front of the door. Those with

tridents stand here in front to protect us, and the door crew is asked to stand by to close the door again if that becomes necessary.

There was some grumbling and much shuffling around as everyone rearranged themselves according to Algar's requests. After several minutes, they were ready for the final opening. A crew of workers with tridents faced the huge door, and stood at the ready in a large arc as the pushers reassumed their positions on the door. As the crew started pushing again, and as the massive door turned toward the open position, a crack of light flooded through the expanding opening. Gradually, the space on the other side of the wall came into view and the assemblage of Beings stretched to see the wonders which might be in the new area.

A communal sigh of relief washed over the group as it was apparent the new space was much the same as the old space. It was a broad openness brightly lighted from above. The most impressive quality was the silence that pervaded the area. Upon further examination it was apparent the space was populated by Beings much the same as themselves with one outstanding difference. They were sitting around on the ground in small groups or many were just as singles. None were conversing nor even seemed to be very aware. There was no activity and they appeared to be in a stupor. Those nearby who had noticed the new arrivals were apparently not much interested or excited.

Legro ventured, "This is very strange Algar. What do you make of these Beings?"

After surveying the new area completely he answered, "I believe we have to be very careful with them. Something has affected them very significantly. Apparently they have been sealed off from all others areas for some reason. It is as though there is nothing more that can be done with them. They are in a kind of Limbo."

Turning back to the doorway, and returning to the old space, Algar spoke to the crowd on the other side. "We have a problem here. Are there any good counselors in the group?" As no one answered, Algar continued, "We cannot just go bursting in on these Beings. I believe that would cause a lot of trouble. We need some experienced listeners and counselors to go in first." Turning to the side he continued. "Zilch, would you go find Droxanna. Explain the situation and ask her to bring some of the best counselors here. The rest of us will do nothing but wait. You with the tridents, keep your positions, and don't allow anyone to enter the new space, but everyone can have an opportunity to look through the doorway. However, please stay out of the Limbo area for a while until we determine what it is safe to do." Zilch sped off to find Droxanna, and the crowd lined up to take turns looking into the opening and the large expanse beyond.

Algar and Legro stood inside the newly opened space and surveyed the scene. It was a vast space and to the casual observer the other side was hazy in the distance. But between the near and the far there were groups of Beings just sitting, doing nothing and

perfectly quiet. The silence was so profound, it was oppressive. It was unusual to see so many people and not hear any noise at all. It was apparent this was some sort of special place. Algar asked, "What do you think Legro?"

After a long pause, Legro answered. "This part of Hell doesn't fit any of my understanding of the place. What do you conclude?"

"I think our calling it Limbo is entirely correct. I would hazard a guess that it is extremely ancient, and that wherever these persons are from, it was a long time ago."

"Does that mean there are different Hells for different time periods?"

"I'm afraid you are asking the wrong person. History and Religions were never my strong suits."

The silence was infectious, as the crowd outside looked in, it also became quiet as they filed by to get a view of this strange venue. After looking in and satisfying their curiosity, most left the area and the surrounding crowd grew smaller. It was a small group by the time Droxanna and Andrew arrived with reinforcements.

Droxanna stood in amazement as she absorbed the extent of the new space, and then commented, "This is equally as large as the space we already know. There is much work to be done here, but we can do it given sufficient time."

It was quickly decided that all would just stand and observe as Droxanna interviewed one of the inhabitants. She then approached the nearest Being who was sitting alone. She perceived the catatonic state with the open staring eyes and unresponsive attitude. Quietly, she sat down beside him and began speaking, "May I talk with you? I am new here and I want to help you." The Being was totally unresponsive. "I come from another space, and I can show you a way out of here." The Being turned slowly and looked penetratingly into Droxanna's eyes. She continued, "I know of a place where there is beautiful music and lovely gardens."

With some difficulty it began speaking, slowly and softly, "Stop being foolish. Be quiet. There is nowhere to go and nothing else to do."

"Yes, there is a lot to do. Times have changed. I can show you, if you are willing."

The Being stared for a long time as Droxanna waited. Finally it spoke again, "It seems as though I have been here forever. I do not even remember any time before."

Again there was quiet until Droxanna continued, "Let me tell you some of what I know, then you can judge whether you want to know more. Will you listen?"

Droxanna waited until the Being responded softly, "Yes, I will listen." Gradually Droxanna explained all that had gone before and

what existed now while the Being became more aware and began to interact very slowly.

Algar and the others were much absorbed with watching and listening to the process. After a while Droxanna returned to the group to tell what she had discovered. "These persons are in the oldest part of Hell and have probably been here the longest. They will need a lot of help to regain their sensibility and personalities. I understand this is an extremely large area and it is totally enclosed. I also learned they went through the same procedure we are following now of destroying demons. They also found that the pits would close up as the demons were all defeated. So they rid the space of pits and monsters, but after the pits and monsters were all gone, apparently there was nothing left except the open barren space with no activity and nothing to occupy their minds and no apparent exit. Eventually, they just gave up and stopped communicating at all, which resulted in what you see before you now."

Legro was much impressed by their strange behavior and asked, "So what can we do now? How can we proceed to help them and how should we do it? I've never seen anything like this before."

"Well we can do only so much, but I will start here with the counselors I have, and let the teams move slowly from one to another of these needy people. This will be a very long ongoing project. I will need more counseling volunteers from those being released now in the other parts of our space to form as many teams as possible, but I expect there will be those who want to help."

Much changed over the next period of time. Many crews worked on exposing more and more of the solid wall. Eventually a corner was found which defined another side of the original grand atrium which was the scene of the beginnings of the revolt that was now in full swing. There was activity everywhere from the few remaining pits, to the extensive field of ancient Beings in the newly opened adjacent atrium.

This large group of new Beings who required such protracted treatment to bring them back to a more normal existence wherein they were able to interact with others in the usual way provided a steady flow which expanded the population of functioning workers. Droxanna had been primarily responsible for the success of this aspect of the revolt. Her expertise not only in treating the individuals in a catatonic state, but also in training more counselors and listeners was the main reason the program did so well. These activities combined to produce an extensive crowd of Beings engaged in all activities of tearing down walls and clearing pits, to treating Beings who were disoriented and hurting, to those who were just enjoying freedom and the benefits of Paradise. The activity was relentless and almost overwhelming.

Algar and Legro were taking a break. They had been on the other side of the curtain to participate in the beauty and music of

Paradise, but had now returned to the original space they knew best and were sitting and relaxing by themselves. "I am worried, Algar."

"Worried? Worried about what? Everything seems to be moving along smoothly at the moment. What are your concerns?"

"Yes, we are making great progress, but consider this. There may come a time when we are all caught up and there will be no more pits and demons to deal with."

"What's wrong with that? Then we can all relax and quit working."

"True, but consider the new space where Droxanna and her teams are now working. Remember what it was like when we first went in there. They had for an extremely long time been finished with cleaning up their space, and there was nothing more to do. Remember what they looked like? They were sitting, doing nothing, not even talking. They existed only in some sort of stupor. It was truly non-functional. Is that how we will end up also?"

Algar thought for a moment. "You have a good point, but consider now we have the golden curtain and Paradise as an alternative activity."

Legro replied, "Yes, that is different, but you are also aware there is a large group who are not satisfied with that alternative."

As they were talking, they were approached by a tall person of rather imposing appearance. He greeted them amicably, "Hello Algar and Legro. I overheard you talking, and I have meant to get in touch with you, so this is probably as good a time as any. You seem to have some of the same concerns as I do, and it would seem we ought to work together to reach a more rational situation for everyone involved. The present situation is not tenable, and I am sure there is much more we can do to make it better. May I join you?"

"Certainly." Algar replied, "But how did you know us?"

"Oh, everyone knows you two."

"And what is your name?" asked Legro.

"Me? I am known by many names in many places, but you can just call me Satan."

PHASE NINE

Algar and Legro were stunned!! It had been in the back of their minds that at some point in time they might actually meet the proprietor of the caverns they had been reconstructing, but to have him approach in a friendly manner and seem to be so, how could

you say it? “Normal” was astounding. The two were flabbergasted. The three sat for a moment in a complete and ominous silence.

Algar was the first to find his voice, “I am amazed, sir, at your friendly approach and demeanor. I had long expected to be thrown into the nearest pit for what we are doing to your domain whenever you showed up. I am dumbfounded and confused. Just to say, ‘I don’t understand’ is the understatement of the day. What happens now?”

“What happens now? Simple. We talk. We have much to talk about as you two and your cohorts have done much to ‘upset the apple cart’ as the saying goes. Hell is finally getting cleared out, but that is all right. It is long overdue, and I am ready to assist you in this process, but it must be the proper process.”

Legro looked astounded. “Clearing out Hell? I don’t see why you would want to do that. Isn’t this your place? Aren’t we the ones consigned to be here? Why would you want to clear it out?”

“I can see that you two need some education which, of course, is no different than most of my guests when they get here. Let me tell you. You have been misinformed all your life as most have been. The facts exist in the past, but millennia of time allow the facts to be very effectively molded by those who handle and use them to be whatever is convenient in their own time for their own ends. Facts can easily be distorted when there is no firm reference for them. I would guess you have been taught that god created the world and human beings. Also you learned that the devil and god fought over them and god would get the “good” ones and the devil would get the “bad” ones or something like that.”

Algar and Legro nodded in assent.

“Well the basic story is fine, but there are a lot of details missing, and as I like to say, ‘The devil is in the details.’ Sit still and listen and I will educate you. When god first got this idea of human beings, I told him I didn’t like it. The plan was that humans would live in the world and experience physical life for a while. During this time they would become skilled in the abilities of cooperation and common effort; they would discover and appreciate the varieties of possible living organisms; they would become the stewards of all life forms; they would become aware of and understand their emotions; they would master the freedom and fun of experiencing and enjoying the natural world; they would strive to attain all the god like attributes they could handle, and when they had sufficiently matured, then they would return to Eden to be the caretakers of Paradise.

“That was all well and good, but I pointed out to god that there may be snags to the plan working exactly correctly. God didn’t agree, and we had some conflicts about that. Finally, to keep the peace, I got him to agree to a return system which involved an

evaluation and a corrective phase for those who did not complete their lives at the highest levels. After a good deal of negotiating he conceded that I had some reason to worry and that something must be arranged to improve the system. Naturally, he then coerced me into supervising the return system. Hence, the creation of Hell, and here we are.

“BUT, and that is a big but, there are problems with the system. Normally, all the really good persons die and go directly to Paradise, the area you know as the golden area. They have the highest clearance and skip all the lesser areas you have seen and experienced, so they don’t have to suffer at all. The others, such as yourselves, must spend time suffering in Hell for their sins before they can advance to the ultimate end.

“Then we also had the problem of Adam and Eve with the tree of knowledge. They disobeyed god’s will and sampled the fruits. It was not that knowledge was all bad, but only that god wanted to keep it simple, and eternally pleasant, or that is how he thought it would be. However, humans were kicked out of the garden and exposed to all the ills in the world. There was also then no longer an access from Paradise to Eden. That has been the situation even since.

“There was an access to Paradise from Purgatory for those who were truly reconciled to god, but they had to be examined on entering. Moreover, going in and out was certainly discouraged. Once disenchanted and having exited back to Purgatory, most who did so were reluctant to try to go back in. They sat, motionless, as there is no place to go. Eden was not open to them and Paradise had lost its appeal even if they were able to reenter.

“What do they do? Answer? Nothing, as you so creatively discovered in the adjoining chamber with all the catatonic individuals. Eventually, they are sealed off into Limbo.

“That area was the original Hell, and it was the first area completely cleared of pits and demons. Yes, they figured out how to do that also. It is typical of many areas where everyone is freed and all the pits and monsters are gone leaving just a huge barren space. Their condition is the result when they tire of the music and there is nothing else to do. Eventually, as I said they are just sealed off from everything and are in Limbo. That is how you found them when you broke into their space and discovered all the afflicted silent persons. Your ingenuity in finding them has given them a new opportunity, and perhaps we can clear them out of this mess.

“Now a further development was that by living in the real world, humans learned much advanced knowledge of all aspects of the universe, that is, the physical world. They learned how the physical world works and how they can turn it all to their advantage, which they did to the extreme, but in the process they ran into many challenging situations which they could not handle, which caused them to

seriously misbehave. They learned to sin to even greater degrees and more of them came to Hell which then overloaded and screwed up the return system.

“The result was that many more had to go through the atonement process of Hell. You have been in Paradise, so you know that god would like everyone who is reconciled to him to enter and remain there for the purpose of singing praises and enjoying the marvelous music. Also, you are aware there are many who do not respond well to this condition and would rather be doing some of the new activities of which life consists. By being exposed to human life, they engaged in a wide variety of activities and experiences which can be explored for pleasure and satisfaction. Herein lies the beginnings of our problems.”

“How is that?” Legro asked.

Satan paused and looked at them. “Well, consider yourselves. You are active types who like to feel you are accomplishing something all the time or at least keeping busy. Right?”

“Right.” they responded in unison.

“You made it out of Hell and through Purgatory. Now, due to your efforts, the golden curtain has been created, and it is open for all to traverse in both directions easily whenever they wish. However, many of you are still not happy remaining in Paradise permanently. They have been conditioned by the knowledge gained in their life experience. They find too much exposure in Paradise is boring and uninteresting. The number of individuals who chose to leave Paradise is growing. This means I have a rapidly growing population of persons in other parts of Hell and the Purgatories who are finished with fighting monsters and are free of that chore but now find themselves bored.

“This area we are in now which you are in the process of clearing so assiduously, was the original Purgatory. But it is not the only space. Let me assure you there are uncountable other areas which have been generated through the ages. You will be able to discover them as they all feed into this one, and they will supply persons needing help for a long time to come.”

There was a sudden silence as Satan stopped speaking, and the three sat contemplating all that had been said. Finally, Algar asked. “So what must be done? You indicated you thought there was a preferred process to follow. What we do next?”

Satan turned and smiled, “I see you have been well trained in life. You are a true problem solver and ready to go at any new situation. That’s fine. Let me continue. The problem is that I have to provide more space on a daily basis for everyone who dies and who has some sin to expiate. In these times when a sinner dies, they are immediately assigned to any space available. They are usually put

into the new spaces I am constantly creating, but often they go to old spaces which have been vacated after a person has willed themselves to be exiated and free. As you know, after becoming absolved you have access to all the cleared space, They act as you did and start clearing their own space to the extreme point that it becomes barren, sterile and completely non-stimulating.

"I see. You are stuck with eventually providing space for everyone to populate Hell or wander in Purgatory or to sit and vegetate in Limbo because they cannot enter into Eden."

"Precisely, it is the worst case scenario that I feared when this whole thing began."

A heavy silence fell on the three and they sat in deep concentration.

Finally Algar spoke again. "Won't god allow Eden to be put back into service?"

"No, Everyone has been banned from Eden because of the original sin."

"Isn't god a fair god?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Did Eden do anything wrong?"

"What do you mean, 'Did Eden do wrong?'"

"Did the plants do anything wrong?"

"No, plants don't do wrong things."

"Did the animals of Eden do anything wrong?"

"Well, none but the snake, and he's been punished."

"Then it isn't fair. It isn't fair for Eden to be left untended, neglected and uncared for by us. Eden itself and its living things didn't do anything wrong, but it is still being punished. I think that is unfair and god should do something about it. Even more importantly, I would point out there is probably a flaw in the thinking here, also. Wasn't there something about punishment unto the third and fourth generations or something like that?"

"Yes, that's in there somewhere."

"So how many generations has it been so far? Aren't we about ready to get beyond that restriction? How vengeful does god want to be? How long can he lay back and enjoy his music and adoration while many of his subjects are struggling and dealing with less than comfortable conditions? I think he should be more concerned about them. Not only that, but he should be thinking about what kind of

image of himself he really wants to portray to his subjects.”

Satan looked steadily at Algar for a long while and was apparently deep in thought, then he replied. “Would you like to make those arguments directly to god?”

“No, not particularly.” Algar quickly responded, “But you would be able to. I think he would listen to you.”

Satan was again silent as he looked at Algar while thinking. Finally he answered. “Perhaps you have something there. Let me cogitate on it.” With that, he got up and walked away.

PHASE TEN

Algar and Legro were astounded at the abruptness of Satan’s departure. They sat without speaking while Satan disappeared in the distance. Finally, Algar spoke. “Well, my friend, what kind of trouble have I gotten us into now?”

“Only the best kind, I hope.” replied Legro a little tentatively. “Let’s go drown our problems in some honest work to forget it.”

“Good idea.”

The two first dropped into the Limbo area beyond the revolving door to see Droxanna. She greeted them quite enthusiastically. “Come and see our progress. We have uncountable teams now working to help all those who were once so badly affected. We are making great strides in getting everyone free of their afflictions. Also, many of them then want to join us in helping the others, so it is a self perpetuating system.”

They were both pleased to see the progress, and Legro volunteered, “You’re doing a great job, Droxanna and you ought to know you may even have the Devil’s approval.”

“What do you mean? Does he even know what we are doing?”

“Oh, I’m sure he knows. We were just talking with him about it a while ago.”

Droxanna laughed, “You’re kidding, of course.”

“No, that’s the truth.” Legro then went on to describe their recent encounter with Satan.

"You mean he wants Hell cleared out, too?"

"Yes, and he might just be going to try a new approach to get god to do it."

"That's fine. Let me know when it happens."

Algar and Legro then returned to the farthest reaches of the active caverns where the main issue was subduing the monsters. It had become relatively easy work as there were enough workers to continually outnumber and overwhelm the beasts. It was also very rewarding as more suffering Beings were helped to become free and the general space was further enlarged by the removal of the walls.

The passage of time was noted only by the changes in the structure of the environment, but after a suitable time, Algar and Legro decided on another hiatus and headed back to Limbo. As they approached, there was suddenly a loud sound and a bright streaming light coming from the revolving door opening. They heard the voice they had heard once before calling, "Algar, Legro, Droxanna," and repeating the call again and again, so they hurried to the door and entered. Droxanna joined them and the three advanced towards the voice at the far wall. As they approached, they saw a wide and high luminescent silver screen. A great crowd was already assembled and gazing in awe at the magnificent device. The three stepped in front of the screen, and Algar replied in a loud voice, "Yes, we are here."

The voice began softly and slowly. "Algar, Legro and Droxanna, I am Melodious Brilliant, who spoke to you once before. I bring you a message now of great news for all who have been trapped by Satan. Because of your efforts, it has become necessary to provide greater facilities for those who so richly deserve them. Ancient procedures which no longer serve a purpose have been reviewed and in the future there will be new opportunities for everyone who has vindicated themselves by experiencing their term in the prelude to eternity.

"By action at the highest levels and by the graciousness of the eternal plan, the original home of mankind will be reactivated, and henceforth the territory, environs, milieu and ambiance of Eden will be available as an alternative location for enjoyment when both the pleasure of great music and the satisfaction of working to make the process of Hell and Purgatory move most efficiently, have been sufficiently experienced. The fruit of the tree of knowledge will be freely available for the enjoyment of everyone. This silver screen will remain here, and those who have successfully passed through the golden screen may come here subsequently and pass through this silver screen also. They are permitted to enter Eden or leave whenever they wish to do so just as they may freely enter or leave other areas also." With that the voice stopped, and as they watched, the bright light gradually faded, but the silver screen remained.

The silent crowd stood in awe of the scene, but then a slight murmuring began which gradually increased to a loud roar, as a few

brave individuals approached the screen and passed through it. The stream became a torrent of Beings, as it seemed everyone wished to enter Eden immediately.

Turning to Algar, Legro asked, "Well, what do we do now?"

"I'm not sure." was the reply. "But let's ask someone who does know." Algar began walking towards a tall person standing off to the side. Legro and Droxanna followed along. As they approached, Algar asked, "Sir, what do you think of this development? What do you believe has changed the mind of god in this respect?"

After taking a moment to deliberate, the response was, "I don't know, but I do think god is a rational Being who can respond to changing conditions as any intelligent person would. Perhaps he found a new reason to allow this to happen. Then again, maybe he has only been talking to Satan."

Algar and Legro laughed and Droxanna seemed confused until Algar explained, "Droxanna, meet Satan. I am sure he knows who you are."

Droxanna was speechless, but Satan smiled and spoke to her, "I can imagine you have a very distorted idea of me, how I look and who I am. I can only say my persona has been much abused through the ages, and I apologize if I do not fit your image of me. However, I would like to say also how much I appreciate your efforts in helping correct the mess that Hell had become before you and your friends started your campaign of assistance. I must insist though that the conditions of Hell were not of my doing. I had no actual control over the exit strategy."

Finding her voice, Droxanna replied, "We were only doing what we saw as necessary. I am most impressed by you, and this great new development, but I don't understand why this has happened, and what did Melodious Brilliant mean by 'all who have been trapped by Satan'?"

"I suppose it's a matter of perspective. If you have only two places to be and one doesn't appeal very much to you or you can't even enter it, I guess you might feel trapped. If you suddenly have a third place to visit, you might feel less trapped. Certainly we are all trapped by our environment to some degree."

Legro spoke up, "So, Satan, what is this Eden place like? Should we be dashing into it like everyone else?"

"Well, I'm not allowed into Eden, which is not to say I haven't been there, but it is a huge and most pleasant place with a wide variety of both plants and animals to enjoy. There are many varieties of terrain and vistas, and it offers endless areas to experience and

explore. It does need a lot of care at the present, but with the current invasion, I am sure there will be plenty of eager persons to restore it to its previous beauty. But now, if you will excuse me, I have to go. I have a busy schedule just now."

Droxanna had been staring at Satan, and now that it seemed he was leaving, She spoke up, "Would you answer a question for me before you go?"

"Certainly, I will if I can."

"Now that I understand some of the procedures of Purgatory and Hell, and I know what we go through to release the Beings that are here, I am surprised that you are not more upset at what we are doing."

"What do you mean exactly?"

"Well, not only are we changing the landscape and opening things up, but we are destroying many of the beasts which administer the punishment. I would have expected you would be more upset by that. Isn't that an affront to you, and doesn't it cause you difficulties."

"That's an interesting question, and it shows a lot of insight, but I can't give away all my secrets. I will say this though, the purpose of the beasts is not only to inflict pain to those who assume they need it, but in a way to correct the thinking in the subjects, by allowing them the opportunity to seriously face their reality, so they may change and gain the next level. And yes, it is a loss to me when a beast is destroyed, but without getting too complicated, let me say the beasts are somewhat similar to what you would call an illusion in the real world, and the loss is not severe. I will not go further than that because, as I like to say, 'The devil is in the details.'" Then, without losing his smile, Satan turned away and gradually disappeared in the distance.

The three were left standing in the glow of the silver curtain and began discussing the general situation. Droxanna volunteered, "The clearing of Limbo is progressing very well, and I'm ready for some other activity. Why don't we follow the crowd and investigate Eden for a while?"

Legro offered, "From all that I've seen, I think the wall cleaning and the penetration of Limbo and the other areas of Hell will continue whether we are there or not. The procedures are well established and there are many persons eager to help, so I feel free to go. How about you Algar?"

"Sure! Why not? I guess we have earned that at least, and I'm interested in what might be found there. Evidently eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge is no longer forbidden, and there are a few things about the universe I would really like to know."

The initial rush being over, they found no difficulty in traversing the silver curtain. Thenceforth, the diversions and pastimes offered by Eden combined with the alternate times of satisfaction received by working in the immense open space of Purgatory or Limbo or in the pits of Hell and the added occasional visits to Paradise for music and beauty were enough to keep the three occupied and adequately rewarded.

The human animal, as all animals, is interested mainly in only two things. They are first, survival, and second, reproduction. The members of the human race will continue to consume and destroy the environment as much as they deem necessary for their own comfort and to keep living. Also, they will reproduce to the extreme of eliminating themselves through starvation. Unfortunately, their rationality and reasoning power will never be sufficient to control their inherent emotional responses.

For these reasons, Earth will someday look just like Mars.

The Old Philosopher