

*An allegory examining the nature and conduct of Mankind and the paradoxes of good and evil. Since many think that the latter extend into the supernatural, the allegorical vehicle must be a religious one. But the novel is NOT with religious intent.*

## **The Littlest Devil**

By Richard Ahearn

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Richard Ahearn

# The Littlest Devil



*Open-mindedness begets understanding.*

*And for the greatest understand of all  
the open-mindedness must be that of a newly-born child.*

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## **Chapter 2**

### **Fanfare for a King**

Not all of Hell was pits of brimstone and torture chambers. These were only the places of work for the diabolical denizens. All things are relative and, at least to the demonic eye, there were more pleasant residential areas. In one such was the Academy of Young Devils.

In their dormitory, after class, three young imps were planning the evening's activity.

Acne, who was older and taller than the rest and suffered from a pubescent affliction, was lounging on his bed and smoking a cigarette in an effort to give off an aura of coolness. Adenoids, plump, bat-eared and hyperactive as usual, bounced impatiently on his. Up in a corner was a very small devil, quite the smallest of them all. He sat on the edge of his staring with mournful bush-baby eyes at the wall feeling that he had spent all of his short life staring into corners.

After a few lordly drags, Acne said "Well, guys, what are we going to do with ourselves tonight, eh? Eh, Adenoids?"

Adenoids bounded over. "Let's do something really different. I'm sick of just learning about sin - I want to see it for real. Not any old everyday sin neither!"

"Oh, yeah?" drawled Acne with feigned boredom. He took another long theatrical drag on his cigarette and blew smoke at Adenoids. Being the largest and oldest devil in the class, he liked his position as mentor to the others. While he enjoyed the power,

nevertheless he found Adenoid's constant bouncing into his personal space and effusive sycophancy wearing.

He looked past Adenoids at the tiny imp in the corner. Since he also regarded magnanimity as necessary for the image of dispassionate coolness, he decided to combine that with deflating Adenoids a little. "Littlest?" he called.

The imp turned doleful eyes in his direction.

"What about you, Littlest? Are you old enough for sin?"

The Littlest Devil raised himself to his full height, looking at him indignantly. "Of course I am! I AM five and a quarter!"

The slight did not go unnoticed by Adenoids. He glowered at Acne and then turned his wrath onto the diminutive imp.

"Eww!" he sneered, imitating Littlest's piping voice. "I am five and a quarter.' What would you know about sin? For example, when did you last conculastivate?"

Littlest blinked and looked at Acne inquiringly. "Con... concul... what's that? What's that, Acne?"

Acne smiled benignly. "Don't let it worry you, Sunshine. Ain't no such word. Adenoids, don't keep teasing the kid."

"Aww. 'Don't tease the kid'! Look at the size of him. I've never seen a devil as small as him!"

"I'm not small!" squeaked Littlest Devil indignantly.

“He'll grow up one day. And be every bit as obnoxious as you, Adenoids.”

Adenoids brightened. “Ta!”

“You're welcome,” sighed Acne, stubbing out his cigarette.

“Well? Well, Acne,” said Adenoids, “you're the big man around here. Surprise us!”

“Hmm. Now let me think. Ah! What about putting a bit of extra excitement and mystery into it. What say we get a map of Earth and stick a pin in it at random, and go there?”

“Sounds good to me.” Adenoids rummaged in his satchel. “Here, use my school atlas.”

“Let's make it really random. Littlest, you know any geography?”

Littlest shook his head sadly. “No, I'm afraid not. Sorry, Acne.”

“Wicked. Then you are just the man to stick the pin in. Come on.”

Littlest's face lit up and he came bounding over on his little black hooves.

“Right, Littlest, close your eyes and stick a pin into the map.”

“Does that mean I can come too?” Littlest squeaked eagerly.

“Of course,” said Acne. “It’ll be a good educational experience for you.” Adenoids scowled.

Littlest screwed up his eyes tightly and ferociously stabbed the map. “There!” he piped triumphantly. He opened his eyes and squinted at his handiwork. “Funny looking place,” he said. “It ain’t got no name or nuffing.”

“That’s a bleedin’ piece of chewing gum,” snarled Adenoids. “Try again.”

“Oops. Sorry. OK.” Littlest jabbed at the atlas again.

Acne and Adenoids bent over the impaled map. Adenoids said “Hmm. A bit in the back-of-beyond, innit?”

Acne shrugged. “Well, that’s what we agreed and that’s where we’re gonna go. All ready, guys?”

The imps closed their eyes tightly and held their breath.

“One...two...three...”

In a puff of brimstone, the three young devils dematerialized.

#

“Let’s stick a pin in a map: you never know we might find somewhere exciting’ he says!” exclaimed Adenoids, kicking his hooves in the sandy dust in disgust. “Exciting! Exciting? I’ve seen bowls of school gruel more exiting. What a dump! We’ve landed up in some third-world one-horse town where nothing happens. The only sinner we’ve seen is one old drunk in the village fountain.

Where's the exotic fleshpots of the Mysterious East? Where's the perfumed orgies? Where's the...?"

"Oh shut up!" growled Acne. "Give it time: there is no place without sin. Let's stick it out a little longer. Gawd, I'm gasping for a cig!"

The three imps gazed disappointedly around them. It was, indeed, the back of beyond. It appeared to be the run-down outskirts of a small town. By the look of the sun-bleached adobe walls, the sand underfoot, it appeared to be somewhere in the Middle East. It was not clear in which era they had found themselves but they suspected places like this have always been around. Each mean street looked all alike and deserted. The low buildings that huddled round them had every window tightly closed with flaking shutters. The only sign of life was the distant raucous braying of donkeys.

Being his first time out in the big world above, Littlest tried to salvage the situation. "I think we've been down every street... no, this one's new. Let's just try this one and if nothing happens, we'd better go home."

Acne sighed. "OK. Fair enough. Looks like all the others to me - there's nothing... 'ello, 'ello, what's that?"

The other devils followed his gaze. Across a T-junction at the end of the road, a camel emerged ridden by a fierce looking turbaned man with a large scimitar hanging from his belt. By his steely-eyed surveillance of his surroundings, he appeared to be a bodyguard of some kind. He was followed by several armed men who were followed in turn by slaves leading a pack of camels carrying tents and provisions for a long journey. Near the rear of



the caravan were three richly robed men of foreign aspect riding white Arab steeds.

Littlest, who had never seen a human or animal before, gazed with saucer eyes at the sight. "Wow...", he breathed.

Even Acne was impressed. "Now that's more like it! Look at those clothes and jewelry. Look at those well-filled bellies. That spells a lot of money and where there's money there's sin."

"Yeah! Sin!" beamed Adenoids, dancing eagerly. "Lovely!"

"Yeah! Lovely!" echoed Littlest, not wanting to be outdone. "I bet THEY don't wash behind their ears."

Adenoids looked down from his comparative height at Littlest in scorn. "Oh, shut up, kid! He means real juicy grown-up sin. Sin that can really bring you out in spots. Those guys can really afford to sin in style - unlike the poor: they're boring!"

Acne scratched at a pimple. "Hmm. They must have a posh place somewhere. Let's follow them and see what happens."

They followed the procession as it wended its way through a succession of back streets, each one meaner than the last. The three made no attempt to hide themselves because it is well known in Hell that Devils have the power to remain invisible in the earthly plane to all except animals and the Truly Righteous. After a while Acne stopped, a baffled expression on his face. "This can't be right. What are blokes like them doing in a place like this?"

But Adenoids, with the scent of decadence in his nostrils, urged him on. “Shush! They must know something we don't. Just follow them. Keep going!”

At last, the caravan turned into a dilapidated mews courtyard. When the three devils eventually reached the entrance, they saw that the guards and the slaves had dismounted and were relaxing around a cooking fire outside one of the stables.

Of the three noblemen there was no sign. Their servants appeared to be aware of nothing of great import and were laughing and chatting over mint tea. The imps squatted down to wait for something to happen.

Time passed but the retinue seemed to be in no hurry. “This is boring!” fretted Adenoids. “Let's go home. Nothing is going to happen here.”

“No! Wait! Look!” exclaimed Acne.

The three noblemen had emerged from the stable mouth smiling and acting in a clearly deferential manner. They were followed by a shabbily dressed young man and a young woman carrying an infant. After an exchange of salutations, the men mounted their horses and the caravan made its way out of the yard: the couple waving goodbye and looking very pleased with themselves.

Adenoids blinked. “What do you make of that? It doesn't make sense. What business would a bunch of nob have with a couple of dossers like that? Who are those guys?”

Acne regarded the nondescript couple standing outside the stable door with incomprehension. “Hmm,” he said, “they do seem to have traveled rather a long way just for THAT.”

“And for what? Ah, yes,” exclaimed Adenoids, brightening up, “those blokes in the sharp suits were pushing drugs. That would make sense, wouldn't it?”

Acne sighed heavily. “Yeah, yeah... By the camel-load to the poor?”

But Adenoids was in full flood, jumping up and down with excitement. “Protection racket. That's it! They came to get their pay-off...”

“Shut up, will you?” snapped Acne. “I'm trying to think.” He leaned his elbows on the rail of a rickety wagon, his brow furrowed in thought. Suddenly he stiffened. “Get down, all of you!”

“What?” protested Adenoids.

“Down!” shouted Acne. He pushed Adenoid's head down violently. Littlest looked up just in time to see a great shadow pass across them.

“What? Why?” spluttered Adenoids, his voice muffled in straw.

“Because there's a bloody great angel up there, that's why!”

The devils peered fearfully from under the wagon. The angel alighted on the flat roof of a nearby house, folded its great wings

and stared eagerly down into the yard. A second followed, then another until every available landing-point was occupied like a flock of golden starlings. The young couple were gazing up in terror, the woman closely protecting her child and the man the woman.

After the main flight of angels had settled, one alighted on the ground a few yards from them. It was a female with a torrent of red-gold hair and clothed in leaf-green raiment. She carried an air of authority: a quick imperious look around the crowded rooftops was sufficient to silence the excited rustling of wings. She then turned the force of her luminous green eyes on the humans. The man placed himself between her and the woman and glared at her with a mixture of awe and defiance.

“What do you want with us?” he demanded.

The Herald Angel's eyes turned towards the baby. Her face softened into a smile. She curtsied. She then raised her eyes to the woman's and imploringly held out both arms. The woman clutched her child tightly and moved behind her man. “The baby!” she cried. “She's after the baby!”

“What? Jesus?”

“HE wants the baby back. MY baby,” wailed the woman, with a note of hysteria in her voice. “He's sent her to take it. Joseph, tell it to go away!”

Joseph raised a reassuring arm. “Easy, Mary love.”

But Mary was not to be mollified. She took a threatening step towards the angel. The angel saw a face blanched with fear and

fury under a mane of black hair, its teeth were bared, its eyes seemed to glow like hot coals. "No! You'll not have him. HE... IS... MINE!"

The angel's smile faltered and she stepped back in confusion. This was not a situation for which her perfect world had prepared her. So shocked and disoriented was she that her very wings drooped. This was not the serene mask of her future queen but the face of a tigress with young.

She glanced around her colleagues for guidance but saw only shocked eyes and gaping mouths. Then her eyes alighted on the rough-hewn but amiable face of Joseph. After all, she thought, not for nothing had this man been chosen as the sacred guardian. She fixed her gaze upon him, her face filled with a desperate plea for arbitration.

The situation was not lost on Joseph. His wife had need of his protection; the apparent enemy was clearly in disarray and this she-angel had made no obviously aggressive move. His fear began to subside and he felt the need to take command of the situation. But he needed time to collect his thoughts. Slowly and insolently, aware of the Herald Angel's concentration upon him, he served himself a cup of mint tea from the fire and drank from it.

When he felt he was ready, he squeezed Mary's shoulder reassuringly and forced himself to speak quietly and evenly.

"Mary darling, listen. Now calm down. Look: there's more to child-raising than conception, isn't there? It's got to be fed and changed and raised up. God would know that better than anybody. Just plonking Jesus, a natural human being, inside you without taking into account all the other boring dirty things a natural

human being needs would be as silly as a master gardener throwing a seed in the air and expecting to raise a prize marrow.<sup>1</sup> No, the kid and you go together as one package. That was the deal.”

Mary looked pleadingly from Joseph's face to the angel's. “You think so, Joe? You really think so?”

“I think so. And even if God wanted to take him away, do you think you or I could stop him? He wouldn't need a whole legion of angels to steal one small baby.”

Mary looked at the celestial flock surrounding her. It began to dawn on her that their faces looked even more frightened than hers. “Well...”

Joseph swept his arm over them. “Just look at them all. Look at their faces. They look as though they had just been kicked in the teeth. They only came to take a look at His Nibs. Kings and angels are just part of your hectic social whirl, love. And that poor cow there, she just wants to hold the baby. Just for a short while.”

Mary turned her gaze fully onto the Herald Angel. “Is that all you want? Is it? Nothing else? Just to hold the baby for a few minutes? And then you promise to give him straight back to me and go away? Promise?”

The Herald Angel's face brightened and she nodded eagerly. “There you are then!” said Joseph. “Would an angel need to lie?”

Gingerly, Mary relaxed her hold on her baby. “All right. You'd better take him, then. But not for long. OK?”

The Herald Angel approached nervously, curtsied again and took the baby from Mary's trembling hands. The Angel's face was transfigured and, forgetting protocol for a second, she held the child to her breast. Then, walking respectfully backwards, she moved to the center of the yard. The sun was going down and the sky was like molten lava in a duck's egg blue sea. Its ruddy rays cast the still watchful figures in bronze. Gazing upwards, the Angel lifted the child in both hands high above her in invocation.

The heavens opened and, immediately, high above her, a second sun appeared far greater than the dying one, pouring down a great pillar of light onto her. The angels on the ledges and rooftops, as one, took flight with a monstrous roar of wings. They ascended in a slow spiral around the bright pillar, their wings catching the hectic light like a great golden crown. With the angels flying in salute around it, the light grew brighter and brighter until it was impossible to see the winged figure frozen at its base. The very Universe circled it as if the light was the first flash of Creation: the galaxies dancing a slow adagio around it from detonation to death.

With the light blinding Mary's eyes and the roar of wings filling her ears, she was disoriented and filled with despairing impotence. She raised her face in a scream. "No! No! You promised! You promised!"

Abruptly the light was gone and the golden motes of angels' wings diffused among the white stars above in the eternal vault. But Mary could not see this: she was still blinded by the light and the tears. Suddenly she became aware of a warm weight in her arms and it was gurgling contentedly. Instinctively she clutched it to her. Slowly her eyes cleared and she saw the dusty yard and the surrounding roofs and ledges looking as they always did. A warm

evening wind fanned her face smelling of dates and sandalwood; hay; wood smoke and mint tea. Cicadas began their nightly chorus and, far off, a donkey guffawed raucously. She felt the comforting warmth of her child at her breast and the strong arm of her man tight around her and her little world was hers once more.

Joseph took her hand. "I told you so. It's all right now - they're all gone. Now let's go inside, my love, and have a nice cup of tea."

After the couple had disappeared into the stable, Acne and Adenoids nervously emerged from their hiding place, dusting off straw.

"Bloody hell!" gasped Acne. "What was THAT all about?"

Adenoids gazed open-mouthed at the stable door. "Who are those guys?"

"Dunno. But someone important. Someone VERY important. We'd better go back and tell someone about this."

A pile of straw beneath the wagon trembled and a small face peered fearfully out. "Please," wailed the Littlest Devil, "I want to go home."



## **Chapter 7**

### **Defiantly Inedible as ever**

The Littlest Devil wandered to the cold north where icy winds blew among the stark ranks of fir trees. For as far as the eye could see stretched shadowy vaults of darkness like a disused haunted cathedral with lichen-stained pillars.

Littlest shivered, his ears straining for every sound. The wind whispered in the trees and a distant owl called. Then he heard a twig snap and the sound of panting. He whimpered and cowered in the bracken. The sound grew nearer.

It was getting dark and he could see little in the gloom. The panting grew louder and then, reflecting the pale light of the setting sun, he thought he saw a pair of eyes floating like some ghost. The eyes drew nearer and now he could see a gray shadowy form around it. He squeaked with fear and scrambled up a tree. When he had recovered his breath, he peered fearfully down and looked straight into the cold gray-green eyes of a she-wolf. After the wolf had appeared to examine him, she stretched herself up the tree and sniffed him inquisitively.

Then, after walking round the tree to get a better look, she settled on her haunches and fixed him with unblinking eyes, turning her head from time to time, as if considering a puzzle. After some time suffering this long searching scrutiny, the Littlest Devil felt, for his own sanity, he must do something. "Go away! Go on! Go away. Scat! Shoo!"

The wolf looked up at him balefully. "Certainly not! Now come down this instant and be eaten."

“What? No! No way!”

“Unfeeling creature! Here am I with four growing cubs to feed and you won't do the decent thing.”

“I'm not something to be eaten by you or your four cubs or anyone. Go away and eat someone else!”

The wolf glared at him disdainfully. “Quite frankly, if there was anything else to eat, I certainly wouldn't dream of insulting my cubs' palate with the likes of you - unfortunately there isn't. So DO come down, there's a good little creature. I promise to be as gentle as possible - really I do.”

“Thanks - but no thanks. I'm sorry about your cubs and all that - but I am NOT coming down. So there!”

The wolf's ears drooped in disappointment. “Well really! This is too bad! Oh well - I have to find something else for my poor little starving cubs I suppose. Maybe I will be lucky enough to find a dead sparrow or a half-decayed rabbit - then again, I might not. I simply DREAD the thought of their disappointed little furry faces when I return with nothing to regurgitate for them. Oh well, they probably will have to whimper themselves to sleep yet again.”

Littlest glared at her. “Oh shut up! Look, Missus, I wouldn't be very good for your cubs anyway. I'm sure you'll find something else tasty if you'd go away and look hard enough. I mean - do I look like a good meal?”

“Frankly no - you look most unhealthy,” said the wolf, wrinkling her nose. “In actual fact, you look like the sort of creature who is not guaranteed organically pure, absolutely riddled

with additives and would play hell with their cholesterol. You'd probably ruin their teeth. What are you, anyway? Come down a little bit so I can see you. I haven't got my contacts in."

"OK, but no tricks, mind." Littlest climbed to a lower branch, making sure to keep a safe distance and to look as unappetizing as possible. "Is that far enough? Take a good look - am I the sort of person you'd want your cubs to eat?"

"Goodness gracious - you are a strange looking creature," said the wolf, squinting at him. "I've never seen anything like you before." She put her paws up against the tree and stretched her wet nose towards him and sniffed. "And I've certainly not smelt anything like you before. What on earth are you anyway?"

"I'm a devil."

The wolf blinked. "A devil? A devil? What is that?"

Littlest threw out an arm in exasperation. "A devil? Oh, it's... it's - oh it's something you wouldn't really understand."

"Oh well, oh suit yourself," grumbled the wolf, slumping back down on her haunches. "I can't waste time sitting here talking to you - I've got a meal to catch. Don't go away - I might still need you for dessert."

As she began to turn away, a pack of wolves entered the clearing led by its grizzled leader.

"What's this?" he growled. "What's going on here?" He looked at the she-wolf and wagged his tail. "Well, HELLO - who do we have here? What is your name, m'dear?"

“My name is Lupina. We mated last summer, remember?”

Leader blinked in recollection. “Really? Oh, yes of course.” He circled her, sniffing lasciviously. “And, er...how are you?”

Lupina looked at him coldly. “And you can keep your cold wet nose to yourself - I am not in season. Anyway, I have cubs right at this moment. Yours, Leader, as a matter of fact.”

“Ah - congratulations,” murmured Leader, smiling vaguely. “Must pop along and see 'em sometime.”

“Yes - you must - but right now I'm trying to find something to give them. But all I can find is THAT?” She tossed her head scornfully in Littlest's direction.

Leader peered up into the tree in puzzlement. “What is that?” Littlest glared back down at him.

“That, Leader, is precisely what I am trying to find out.”

Leader paced round and round the tree. Then he stretched up towards Littlest as far as he could and sniffed him. Then he settled down on his rump and scratched himself. “Hmm. Very rum. From a distance it looks like a very large squirrel - but it isn't. Never seen anything like it at all. Greymane - you've been around the longest - what do you make of it?”

An old wolf with a scarred nose came respectfully forward. He squinted shortsightedly up the tree. “Yes. Most interesting. It's got a sort of spiky tail a bit like a lizard - but it is not a lizard. And it's got hooves and horns like a deer - but deer can't climb trees. And

it's got no fur at its front end. And its head - oh dear. Oh dear, oh dearie me." He shook his old head in fearful disbelief.

Leader frowned. "What's the matter? What are you 'oh-dearing' for?"

Greymane gestured with his paw at Littlest. "The face," he quavered. "There's only one kind of animal in these parts that has got a flat face like that." His rheumy eyes were wide with fear. "Humans."

Leader looked nervously at first Greymane and then at Littlest, who tried to look as fierce as he could. "Humans? Are those the animals who...?"

"Yes, my Leader, I fear so."

Leader moved away from the tree as quickly as he dared, mindful that all his pack's eyes were upon him. "Ah... er... yes," he blustered. "Well, when you've seen one you've seen 'em all. Can't stand around gawping up trees all day. Er, Lupina, why don't we all go and see those young cubs of yours?"

Greymane peered up at Littlest again. "He's a young cub too."

"Eh?"

"The human. Up the tree. He's only a young cub. And I think it is HE who is frightened of US."

"Is he?" Leader tried to make himself as big as possible and strutted back towards the tree. "Is he? Ha! We'll soon deal with him!" He glared up at Littlest. "You there, human!"

“Go away!”

Lupina shrugged with derision. “You see? Defiantly inedible as ever!”

Leader looked inquiringly at Greymane. “By the way, can you eat humans?”

“It is possible but not advisable, Leader,” murmured the old wolf.

“When you lot have quite finished,” shouted Littlest irritably, “do I look like a human?” He demonstrated each appendage in turn, trying not to lose his hold on the tree. “Look - horns. A tail. Hooves. I am not a human! I am a devil! And if you eat me you are all in dead trouble!”

Leader regarded this choreography in perplexed silence and then said “And what, pray, is a devil? You look more like a tree goat, if there is such a thing.”

Littlest searched for inspiration. “A devil is... is - a devil is something that torments humans.”

Leader's brow furrowed in puzzlement as he wrestled with this strange statement. He shook his head from side to side. “Something that torments humans? Torments humans... torments humans - ah!” Suddenly his tongue came out in a big grin of comprehension. “By George I've got it! You're a flea - a human flea!” He showed his teeth in a big bellow of laughter. “No wonder humans are so bad-tempered - look at the size of it!” The idea sent him into a Pavlovian spasm of scratching. “Oh dear, oh dearie me! Oo-hoo!”

This thought sent a wave of sympathetic scratching throughout the pack. For a few moments there was nothing but the sound of clawing and whimpering.

When they all had recovered, Leader smiled benignly up at Littlest. "Come down, my parasitic little friend," he called. "I can assure you that we've absolutely no wish to do you any harm. If you don't bite us, we won't bite you."

Littlest looked nervously down at him. "You're sure? You promise?"

"I promise," said Leader, his tongue lolling out with amusement. "We wouldn't dream of cutting short such a public-spirited career."

"OK." Littlest climbed slowly and cautiously down from the tree but the wolves' eyes were full of mirthful respect.

"So what are you doing here?" asked Leader. "There's no humans round here for miles."

"I've been chucked out of my home," said Littlest sadly.

Leader's ears drooped in sympathy. "Have you now? That's sad. Tell you what - there's a village south of here. It's absolutely full of big fat juicy humans. You should be happy there."

Littlest feigned gratitude and enthusiasm. He wanted to get a long way from there as quickly as possible. "Er... thanks. Yes - as soon as we've finished this most pleasant conversation, I'll go there and bite 'em to pieces. You'll have no trouble with them when I've finished with them."

“Hah! That's what I like to hear,” smiled Leader. “Go give 'em hell!” He turned his head and sniffed the night air. “Now, pack, I think I can smell some real deer. So let's go and have supper.” With the pack following dutifully, he loped off. “Cheerio, my big fat little flea! Happy hunting!”



## Chapter 8

### The Scientist

Dr. James Elliott, esteemed physicist and mathematician, was contently grazing on his morning muesli over his copy of *Nature* when Littlest materialized in the chair opposite him. “Ahem,” coughed Littlest politely.

For a moment, Dr. Elliott distractedly thought it was he who had cleared his throat, for he was quite alone. He continued eating.

Littlest made himself visible and looked at him, smiling beatifically: for scientists, next to priests, were his favorite prey. “Ahem. 'Morning. Nice day, isn't it?”

For a moment, the scientist wished he had not been a teetotaler all his life: for he needed a rational explanation for everything. Staring at the imp, his brain desperately sought one but could find none. “What the devil are you?” spluttered Elliott, his mouth full of cereal.

“That's me.”

Dr. Elliott nearly choked.

“In Hell I am known as the Littlest on account of my size and 'cos they think I'm diabolically retarded. Well, aren't you gonna pinch yourself or something? You can pinch me if you like.” Elliott stared open-mouthed at him. Then, ever the empiricist, he pinched himself hard. It hurt. He then leaned across the table and pinched Littlest equally hard.

“Ouch!”

The scientist slumped back in his chair. “My God!”

“Make up your mind,” said Littlest, feigning annoyance.

Elliott fumbled for his glasses and, putting them on, he stared at the imp. After a careful examination, he found himself none-the-wiser. His face went purple. “All I know is that you are an unknown species and you can speak excellent Cockney.”

“Well, since you have pinched me,” snorted Littlest, “I am sufficiently material. And what species has hooves, horns and a tail and which can speak? Why not assume, for the purposes of the debate, that I am, indeed, a devil from 'Ell.”

The scientist blinked. “Or you could be some little tyke who has got the wrong date for Halloween. But how did you get in here?”

Littlest threw open his arms. “Alright. Check me out again. Go on, see if you can shift them 'orns. Pull my tail. Go on.”

Elliott set about the task of research. Angry about this invasion of privacy, he did not intend to be gentle. He dragged at Littlest's horns, pulled his pointed ears and tail, pinched his goat legs and tapped his hooves. The imp squeaked in pain. When he had finished, Elliott returned to his chair, breathing heavily and eyes wide with incomprehension. “My word, you certainly have done a good job there. I can't shift them.” His irritation was slowly turning to fear.

Littlest ruefully felt his abused body. “Bloody 'ell! You nearly pulled me bleedin' pointy ears off. Heck, you wouldn't believe your

own nose if you didn't 'ave a cold. Take out one of your cigarettes. Go on!"

The scientist felt that this, indeed, was the moment to take a cigarette and he was glad of a few seconds distraction to take stock of the situation. "OK, if it will amuse you," he said. He slowly reached for the pack and put a cigarette in his mouth. "There, OK, kid?" He picked up a lighter and was about to light it when the imp's hand came up and pointed at it. From his finger came a miniature bolt of lightning and the tip of Dr. Elliott's cigarette ignited.

He jerked back in fright. "My God! How did you do that?" He squinted first at the glowing cigarette and then at Littlest's hand. Putting down the cigarette, he reached out and grabbed it, looking for signs of some kind of electrical apparatus. Finding none, he stared at the imp in bafflement. He felt the need to put back the cigarette and take a deep drag.

Littlest giggled. "So watcher gonna do? Cross yourself or consult a shrink? What do I hafta do to convince you? Do I 'ave to set fire to yer bum as well?"

The scientist felt his own forehead but his temperature felt normal. "OK! OK! If it will humor you, I am convinced. You are real, OK? If you are, then equally logically, I have become insane. Trouble is, I don't believe in shrinks, either."

"Then you have a problem, Mister," smirked the imp. "You don't believe in God but still have the need to use the name when necessary. So much for your precious dispassionate empiricism. You see me, you hear me, you have almost pulled me to pieces. What more proof does a scientist need? Yet you still doubt. Doubt

in the presence of obvious proof is belief by another name: scientific faith!" Littlest stopped; his mouth still open. What was he saying? Such big words! He didn't even know how to spell empiricism, let alone knew what it meant. What was happening to him? The words! The ideas! Why wouldn't they stop, go away and leave him in peace? Why? His eyes alighted on the bottle of mineral water. A sinful drink. Perhaps it would work for him again.

He blinked at Elliott. "Can I have a drink please, Mister?" he pleaded. Elliott needed the respite and wordlessly passed the bottle across the table. Littlest gulped it down and took a deep breath. He remembered Mary and, for a moment, the peace of childhood filled him. Then the words returned.

Elliott stared at the apparition; his brow furrowed. The discrepancy was not lost on him either. This was certainly no ordinary child. But what? Suddenly his face brightened. "Ah, perhaps you are an alien. Maybe on previous visits, your appearance inspired the devil legends."

Littlest scowled. "Is it any more likely than an alien would travel billions of miles just for breakfast? Why is one more scientific than another?"

The last straw slipping from his grasp, Elliott took a deep breath. "All right, let's play it your way. If you were indeed some kind of spiritual being, you would know all about me."

"You are James Herbert Elliott, Ph.D. in mathematics," intoned Littlest. "Your job is a particle physicist. You got that marmalade at Costco. And you are wearing sky-blue underpants. And don't ask me what you did last night." He sniggered.

Elliott's eyes widened with guilty shock and he shook his head in disbelief. "My G..." His spectacles nearly fell off. He looked wildly at the picture of his idol over the mantelpiece as if for guidance. But his idol was mockingly sticking out his tongue. He took a deep breath and tried to take control himself. He took off his glasses, polished and replaced them as he normally did when considering a deep problem. "Very well, let us, for the purpose of the argument, assume that you are what you say you are. Happy?"

"Not yet. What sort of scientist are you, anyway?"

"Mathematician and particle physicist, I thought we agreed."

"Nah. I mean what kind of scientist are you if you limit what you hypothesize about how everything began just 'cos you decide it ain't true before yer even started? You don't have to BELIEVE it, just check it out. You never know unless you try."

"Well, I'm not going to waste my time with that religious nonsense, that's for sure."

"Who says that God is anything to do with Religion other than Religion says so? You gonna let them get away with that? How would you feel if they were still hogging astronomy and treating blokes like you like Galileo? Why do you two still insist on this silly demarcation dispute?"

"There is no place for Faith or magic in Science," snapped Elliott.

"You don't have to use Faith in daily practice but you should be prepared to ask questions about things which, at the moment, are only a matter of faith to others. And magic, really, may be only

a cheap conjuring trick by someone brighter than you. If you don't check the hat, you won't spot the rabbit. After all, as you scientists are finding out, Nature is a master illusionist.”

“Hrrmph!” glowered the scientist. “We scientists do not pretend we know all the answers. All we can do is to put things to the test.”

“How can you test things to be true,” continued Littlest, waving his arms, “if you do not know what is truth? Look at you. You are just a hologram of rotating particles. Each particle has as much knowledge of another as drunken dancers at a disco. Yet you think your empiricism is the sole judge on what is and what is not true in the universe. Nature controls the media: you only see what Nature wants you to see.”

Elliott's irritation was growing. He found that he was unconsciously looking at his hand to see if it was real or not. He clenched it nervously. “My god, I have a problem. I now seem to have empirical scientific proof that something like a devil exists...or at least some little bug with horns and a tail.”

“Yup, OK. Good for you.”

The scientist sighed. “But this is madness... Oh – worse than madness. Does it then prove that if guys with horns exist, God must exist? But then, cockroaches exist and they prove Life exists. Not a good start, is it? In the beginning was the Word. Some word. This is not helping with my smoking problem.”

Littlest shook his head. “Can’t help you there. Anyway, what proof am I? I exist but I’ve no proof either. But then cockroaches

exist – do you really think that you know all about cockroaches? All I know about God is what I’ve been taught at school. Probably like you really. Well, would you have felt better if they had sent down the Angel Boloney?”

Dr. Elliot groaned and slumped despairingly in his chair. He tried to avoid Littlest’s eyes. “Don’t think that would have helped too much.” He then straightened up and leaned toward Littlest and lowered his voice confidentially. “Would you BELIEVE I was born a Catholic?”

“You?” Littlest sniggered.

“Yes, me. Can you believe it? But at primary school, I was taught by maiden ladies from the Irish Bog. They taught me all sort of cute made-up stories: like Christ was exactly six feet tall and that Mary could make him clothes without sewing seams...fairy tale stuff like that. But to be any sorta scientist, I guess you have to have skepticism in your genes from an early age. So I was a raving atheist by about the age of seven. Forget Father Christmas, the Tooth Fairy and all that stuff. Nice try, Mr. Ignatius!”

“I thought scientists were supposed to have an open mind?”

“Yeah,” sighed Elliott. “But right now, thanks to you, it feels as it has been split in half. The joke is: I wasn’t raised a Catholic because my family was devout. Anything but. My mother hated religion. I remember, after the birth of my kid brother, the priest insisted she attend some sort of ceremony to purify her. As she went around the Stations of the Cross, her face became white with anger. And she said ‘Hell – does that fucking mean he thinks I

have done something dirty?” And my father never mentioned religion. Although his day-job was being a Chartered Accountant, he really wanted to be an astrophysicist. He loved to bury himself in astronomy and abstruse mathematics. He even ran into Einstein at a scientific conference. The strange thing was he found him to be a rather shy untidy man who cracked the most outrageous jokes.”

“So why DID they baptize you as a Catholic?”

“There’s a true but cynical answer to that. Education. It so happens that the best schools around my area were Catholic-run. To get in to one, you have to butter up to the Parish Priest. As simple as that. Now this is not just my experience. The BBC did a documentary about middle-class parents using every dirty trick in the book to get their kids into their favorite schools: even if some of them had to go through the motions and turn up to Church on Sunday. Politics!” Elliott gave a cynical laugh. He gazed reflectively up. “I guess skepticism must be in my genes. I remember being at a hotel table and examining the three people opposite me. The plump guy on the left was sweating and seemed to be trying to get off with the woman at the center. She looked embarrassed. And the woman on right seemed to be looking around for some kind of escape. I even remember the green bug in my raspberries. And I was just three years old.”

Littlest nodded. “I guess grown-ups can greatly underestimate the perception of kids. Anyway, whatever club you belong to, you should keep an open mind on greater things. If the Universe is as random and mindless as you think it is, how come it has generated objective intelligence within itself with man? So the idea of



intelligence appearing before man is not without precedence.” Littlest shook his head. “If you came into existence out of a purposeless Universe at random and for no reason, why can't God have done the same?”

The scientist smiled. “Nice try. But we may not need to wrack our brains how these universal systems began. Early on, we assumed the Single Big Bang theory. Before Einstein, we thought that time was a discrete dimension as real as walking across a room. It was kinda like frames in a film strip recording a real film.”

“We are quite happy with Time and Causality flowing towards the estuary but less so with the source: because we are flotsam uncontrollably floating down in it.” continued Elliott, waving his arms. “People generally look upon Time as real. Hen, egg, hen, etc. It is called Causality and we are stuck in the chicken farm. They are quite happy with the idea that the Last Hen may end up at KFC but find it hard to come to terms with the First Hen or Egg.”

“But if Einstein is right”, he went on, “about Time not being real, the idea of a First Thing is a non-concept. If time is, indeed, an illusion of movement in space, then before things indeed moved in space before the Big Bang, time did not exist and therefore the Universe did not need a beginning.”

“Now you’re quoting Einstein like a priest would quote St. Paul”

Elliott sighed. “We are human and have to start somewhere. We have to use big pompous words and quote sources. I prefer

mathematics although most people wouldn't understand my accent. Take the word "God". There's a hell of a difference between "Creator" and "God". A creator is someone or something that is bright and knowledgeable enough to run a lab. However, he does not give a damn about the suffering of his rats. However, the word "God" is not only supposed to be the Creator but a total animal lover. But there are still cruel predators, disease, death and Covid and he doesn't do a damn thing about them. Why ask him to have knowledge of Good and Evil if God had not created Evil in the first place? If he was so perfect, why didn't he make Existence perfect in the first place? Doesn't sound like a particularly wise, efficient and loving God to me. Why just pass the blame on an ignorant and naive Adam for infecting Mankind by eating an apple just because he was not wearing a mask?

"Physical existence may always have existed" went on Elliott. "The only difference is that the laws of physics were always in place and our universe may just be one of many Big Bangs within it. Now if there are intelligent life forms elsewhere, and they could survive their local Big Bang by migrating to others, they would have all eternity in which to get smart. Smart and powerful enough to fool us as gods. And then, of course, is the Bouncing Universe Theory. Kind of super black hole kept exploding into a universe and then collapsing again forever. Personally, I don't think that one would work."

Dr. Elliott took a deep breath and continued. "However, you don't need billions of years to develop the power and intelligence enough to act as a god. It is not so much about what you know but how you apply it and invest in it. The ancient civilizations had the ram-jet, explosives, the steam turbine, automatic doors, Greek Fire,

mathematics and even crude phonographs and computers. All that was lost; probably because of power vandalism, religious bickering. Had man spent more time on seeking wisdom than killing in the Name of God, we could have been on the moon by 1066. If an animal just a few evolutionary stages up from a cow can jump over the moon in less than a million years, then think what such an early entity could do. If dumb nature can manage to get dinosaurs to fly and the descendants of monkeys can resurrect Dolly the Sheep<sup>9</sup> like Lazarus, I'm sure that something brighter can come up with a pair of wings and a harp."

Littlest scratched his head. "Yeah, I guess. And according to my teacher, Screwtape, a lot of evil comes from so-call High and Mighty Good Intentions".

Elliott threw out is arms dismissively. "I'll be frank. I'm not going to waste my time giving myself a headache wondering wildly outside some greater Box. My day-job is to research inside it. Something which I can get my hands on. Whatever the greater answer is, as long there is always my same pub; the same busty barmaid and my favorite brand of beer, that's good enough for me."

"But whatever the Prime Mover may be," he went on, "to function as God, it must make itself manifest. And there is no empirical evidence for this. The word God may be an honorary title. The First Great Golden Rule of Existence is Might is Right or Else. The very pious are quite happy with that. If God was a purple hippo from the planet Zoggoth who demanded that they stick their fingers up their butts and go 'Moo' they would happily comply. Look how the Penitentes cult hammered nails through their own hands. How the Ancient Greeks had Zeus sneaking around disguised as a swan to get his end away. Others are prepared to

bestow the title provided God is willing to scratch their back if they scratch his. Even if a superior sentient force exists, it does not follow it is willing to act as God. Its priorities and perspective may be very different from Man's. Anyway, what is the bloody point in giving Man intelligence and curiosity if using it is a sinful lack of Faith?"

Littlest sighed. "Ok. How about this? The garden ant fondly thinks himself on the high ground of objective observation. But it is wrong. It has no conception of man even when he waxeth wroth and smiteth it verily for sinning in his sugar bowl. You are kind enough to fish a drowning ant out of your swimming pool. If it had been bright enough to write a bible, you would have been very flattered by its contents, wouldn't you?"

Elliott smiled faintly and drew on his cigarette. "I'm sure I would. But the fact remains, the ant is not very bright. I could manifest myself waving my can of bug killer until I'm blue in the face, but the ant wouldn't understand my intentions. Nor would he understand my motives. Motives are not what they seem. The reason I would smite other ants with insecticide is not because I am inherently cruel but simply because giving the little beasts a stern lecture wouldn't keep it out of my sugar. Anyway, being a saint doesn't pay too well."

"It wouldn't understand why I'm Hitler one minute and St. Francis of Assisi the next," added the scientist, shaking his head. "As for being a great god rushing to his rescue in my pool, the ant's chances of being fished out depend not so much on my altruism but on whether or not I have nothing better to do at the time. It's all a matter of perspective and focus. If the ant is drowning at the same time young Miss Jones next door is out in her skimpy bikini, no chance." He sniggered. "The ant's and my priorities are totally

alien to each other. If I must define God, it's that being with nothing better to do."

"So for a God just to exist is not enough," continued Elliott. "It must be manifest to man in a way man understands and have motives a man understands. Otherwise, the two will never see eye to eye and have a good relationship. That will leave religion just being fear of the unknown: not knowing if the Black Death was divine wrath or just a pissed-off scientist waving a can of bug killer in his garden."

Littlest frowned. "As you said, the ant is not very bright. His perceptual and reasoning abilities are probably limited to that which Evolution has deemed appropriate to his species. Yours may be the same - you, too, are an animal and subject to the same rules. Yet you fondly believe that your perception is somehow higher than nature gave you: that you are some kind of demigod. Yet you deny the existence of a soul. You can't have it both ways. If the ant is wrong, you could be wrong too. In the great scheme of things, you could be an ant in turn. If so, where is your wonderful empiricism then?"

"God forbid - I would be out of a job," grinned Elliott. "But even if it was true, the problem may be the fault of religion rather than some Prime Mover. Religious guys are rather harder to please than ants. The human definition of God seems to be that entity who is willing and able to give man what he considers to be his right. And they want it seen to be done in letters ten feet high. Man has created thousands of goods: mostly for political purposes. Your Prime Mover's priorities may differ. If so, he won't get the job and be noticeably absent from the Bible. However, if worship of God is only placation of the bully, then you will find plenty of candidates.

I suspect that much of religion is not a big spiritual altruistic love of God but a craven fear of death.”

“Anyway,” continued the scientist, frowning, “if a god is so almighty infinite in everything and self-contained, self-sufficient and self-justifying, why would he need Man to run around after him like a pop fan? He wouldn't give a damn whether you worshipped him or not or believed in him. Indeed, the only pop fan he would need is his mirror. I wouldn't expect an ant to worship me.”

“No,” remarked Littlest, “but it would be useful if it acknowledged you and had some respect for your authority.”

“Why would I want that?”

“Cos as you said, you'd rather give the ants a stern lecture than spraying them with Walmart bug killer. You are a basically kind man who would help one of them out of the water. And if you were a naturalist rather than physicist, and its species was endangered, you would rush out to save it. Anyway, the ants still need you. There would be no ants in your garden if you paved it over. No rose-bushes to provide pastures for their aphids. They would pray for more by waving their antennae about and kissing each other. So, they need you but don't know it.”

“Oh, you're saying they need fear the teacher for their own good?”

“Yup.”

“And are you saying that, to the ant, my ways are also strange?”

“Yup”, added Littlest. “And as you said, there may be as many dimensions in perspective and priorities as there may be physical ones and an equal number of interpretations. Suppose you had an ant colony in a glass tank in your house. To them, not knowing anything else from birth to death, it would be their universe. How would one of their number, even if he had the intellect, explain it to the others? Yet to you, their mystery is laughingly obvious. This whole thing, from their world to ours, may be just a matter of comic scale - providing you are in on the joke.”

“Like Douglas Adams' story of a vast alien intergalactic fleet attacking earth and being eaten by a small dog?”<sup>10</sup>

“Yup.”

“So the difference between comedy and blasphemy can be measured on a ruler? Kind of scary, isn't it? I think I'll keep to the small stuff, like atomic particles. Less complicated.”

“And there's another strange thing,” resumed Littlest. “You guys say that Nature abhors a vacuum and that the Universe is always trying to run down to Entro... Entro...”

“...Entropy,” prompted Elliott. “Going flat like my tonic water here.”

“Thanks. Entropy. So if Nature is so lazy and is always trying to run down, how comes Nature is so obsessed with continuing life? They've even found life-forms living in volcanic tubes and in pure arsenic. Pretty determined stuff for your lazy meaningless Universe. And you say that Evolution is brutally pragmatic and mindless and only concerned with the expediencies of Now: like a sort of Lotto,” continued the imp. “It happily dispenses with fins,

legs, eyes and pretty much every other part if it is not appropriate to the immediate environment. But how comes it has the foresight to retain the naughty bits?"

Elliott frowned. "What are you trying to do, young man? Give me a lecture on Intelligent Design? If so, forget it. That is nothing but a bastardized philosophy cynically concocted for legal reasons by religious nuts."

"No," said Littlest. "I'm not going as far as that. However, it might give you an idea for a scientific experiment."

"Oh?"

"Take a species. Submit it to unnatural pressures and leave the control specimens to natural influences. Find out how fast Evolution can go in the laboratory under maximum external pressure. If the rate of change is too small in the control sample to be significant in the life of the Universe, better start praying."

"Nice idea," shrugged the scientist. "But the rate of change will be probably not significant in the life-time of the scientists on the project or the lifetime of the budget. It's hard enough to get funding to research the common cold, without stuff like that. Not even a rich religious organization is going to pay for that when Faith doesn't cost a dime. Nice try though."

"Intelligent Design," continued Littlest, "for all its faults may be better than nothing. It might give your religious nuts some kind of reason-based philosophy rather than faith-based. That way, it may relieve their fear so they don't go around beating up others. If your planet is to survive, you gotta spend more resources on the needy rather than blowing each other up. You have to evolve from



Yahoos to Googles. Can't you at least make some effort to find some middle ground?"

"Like what?" grunted Elliott.

"Why not make a start by standing on yer hind legs at the Royal Society and at least asking the God Question straight out?"

Elliott grimaced. "No way!"

Littlest pointed an accusing finger. "You are afraid that you will look a right twit and other scientists will look at you all funny? Fear of looking a fool is still fear. It triggers off the adrenaline that shuts down all parts of the brain other than those processing how the 'eck to get outa there. Yer IQ goes down - literally."

The scientist reddened. "Now look here, you little tyke..." But Littlest cut him off.

"You are surrounded by data, some good, some bad. You won't know which is which until yer processed it. But if your choice is colored by emotion, or your upbringing; training; prejudice or even faith - in your case - scientific faith, you're gonna select the wrong stuff. The brain is a computer: garbage in, garbage out. And yer gonna end up looking a right twit anyway. And how are you gonna get the truth about the ultimate laws of the Universe if your means of observing it: either your senses or your instruments are contaminated by same laws that you seek to examine? You are rather in the position of a fish trying to write a thesis on water. Now, if you wanted to research something really useful, try anthropology. Find out how Man's thinking and emotion really ticks. Until you precisely calibrate that, you are not qualified to pontificate on any other 'ology."

Elliott snorted with derision.

“The obvious may not be so obvious,” continued Littlest, gesticulating wildly. “Look how you blokes treated Louis Pasteur when he pointed out what is screamingly obvious to you guys now: rabies; anthrax and puerperal fever. How many mothers in childbirth throughout the world died 'cos of that? A darn sight more than people who got burnt at the stake, I bet.”

Elliott stood up threateningly. “That's quite enough. Get out!”

“Don't yer wanna know the answer to Life, the Universe and Everything? And you are looking for the God Particle?”

Elliott froze and stared at Littlest, eyes wide. “What?”

“The God Particle. Sounds a bit religious to me.”

The scientist sat down again, blinking. “Well, that's what the popular media calls it. But yes, the ultimate particle: call it God's Particle, call it the Higg's Boson, call it what you will. Actually, in the science world, it was originally dubbed the ‘Goddamn Particle’. Just shows you how religious scientists are.” He sniggered. “But I've heard they've just found it. Whether or not it's the particle we hoped for to fill in the Standard Model of Physics, time will tell. It may be just one of many such bosons. Why they call it the God Particle, I don't know. The Higg's Boson is believed to fill in the space between particles and somehow makes them sticky – controlling the speed at which particles can move in space. It helped clean up many mathematical equations in quantum physics. The missing link. In other words, is responsible for Einstein's Mass. It may be responsible for the Big Bang.”

“Perhaps it is NOT the God Particle - it is just a very naughty boson.”

“Ouch!” grinned Elliott.

“Anyway, want to find another?”

Elliott's eyes widened. “That would be nice. The Elliott Boson. Sounds good. But would it help much with the big picture? We still have to come up with a Theory of Everything that links the sub-atomic world with the big rules of the cosmos such as Relativity. One is called The String Theory. We have a long way to go yet.”

“Nah. Piece of piss, mate,” smiled Littlest smugly. “Gotta pen and paper?”

Dr. Elliott always had something to scribble abstruse mathematics on to hand and handed it across. Littlest took it and began to write. Exactly what he was writing, he did not know. Having been the dunce in Professor Screwtape's Righteous Evil class, the meaning of what he had said recently was a total mystery to him. But strange and erudite thoughts were flowing fast into his mind now. First big words, now incomprehensible mathematics. From where, he wished he knew. With tongue out in concentration, he wrote line after line of abstruse mathematical equations. Elliott watched the infant figure with total bemusement. Eventually, Littlest completed his work with a flourish and handed back the paper. “There! Q.E.D!” Elliott took it, half expecting it to say “42”<sup>11</sup>. But it did not.

“My....”

“...God?”

Once more the scientist cleaned his glasses as if he did not trust them anymore. He read and re-read the paper. Finally, he spluttered “I don't believe it. It... it's all here. So elegant, so logical. Dark Matter; a whole gaggle of quarks and hadrons; the Higg's Boson and a few others... I was so near. This really confirms the String Theory. I really can't wait to publish this. It's a pity I didn't get this far myself, but facts are facts. If I don't, someone else will.”

Littlest waved a condescending hand. “Go for it, Mister. But after you've got yer God's Electric Guitar, what yer gonna look for next? All yer gonna end up with is a bad headache.”

The other looked at him blankly and gave a sigh of resignation. “Um. Well, there you have me. But the Nobel Prize medal will look very nice on my mantelpiece. I can't wait to see the look on old Weinstein's face when he reads this. But I can see no flaw whatsoever in these equations: the String Theory is proved.”

Littlest's mouth twitched but he tried to look innocent. For a moment, he found mischief was actually fun. “Nah,” he said.

Elliott raised pained eyebrows. “No? What do you mean, no?”

“That stuff doesn't prove the Universe is made of String.”

Elliott shot a shocked look at the imp and then back at the document. “What? What does it prove then? You wrote it.” He waved the paper indignantly at Littlest much like Screwtape coming across a split infinitive. This gave Littlest even more satisfaction. “It proves the Universe is made of bubblegum.” This

time, seeing a professor on the verge of apoplexy, was more like a game.

“What? Very funny, young...er...very funny. Mathematics cannot lie.”

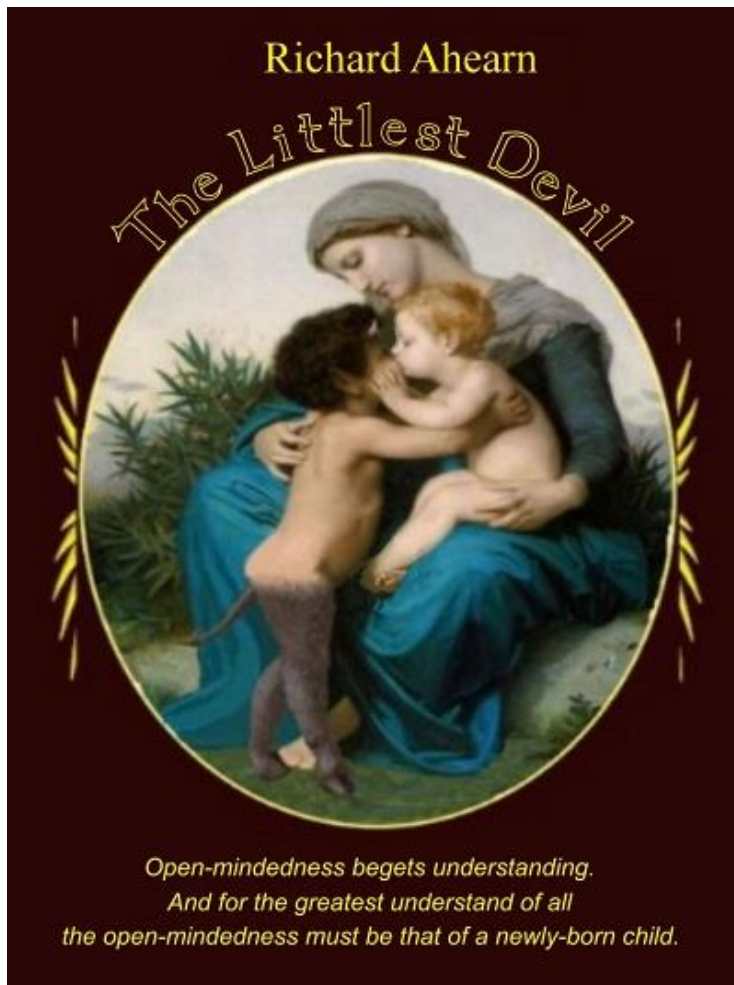
“It can when I write it,” said the imp, trying hard not to giggle.

“Let me check that again.” Dr. Elliott slammed the paper down on the table and, rubbing his brow wearily and sighing deeply, he read and re-read it. Every so often he made copious notes. Eventually, he looked up and shook his head, wondering if he had truly gone insane. Haltingly he said “No, no. I cannot find a flaw in it.” He looked almost pleadingly at Littlest. Littlest shrugged.

“Suit yourself. If string is OK to talk about at the Royal Society, why not bubblegum? Sounds too childish? You got to look very academic and po-faced if they are gonna take yer seriously, ain't yer? Yer can't get away with sticking out yer tongue like an overgrown kid: that's been done already by bigger and more receptive brains than you.” He pointed at the iconic photograph of the famous physicist over Elliott's fireplace. “Unless yer approach the subject with the open-mindedness of little children, to misquote someone, you won't comprehend Existence.”

The scientist looked up at the famous photograph and back again at Littlest. That picture had hitherto been one of his favorite images. But not anymore. He felt it had betrayed him and was now mocking him. He clutched his head in his hands and let out a sob. “Oh God...”

“You got it,” said Littlest. “See yer, mate.” He dematerialized sufficiently suddenly for the resulting vacuum to make a satisfyingly loud bang.



*An allegory examining the nature and conduct of Mankind and the paradoxes of good and evil. Since many think that the latter extend into the supernatural, the allegorical vehicle must be a religious one. But the novel is NOT with religious intent.*

## **The Littlest Devil**

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