

You Woke Up in Hell, Take the Win.

By Will Hardy

The return journey from the underworld was hell. That was the first thing I remember, and the last thing I was told when I was exiled. They thought I was too *empathetic* for a demon. Empathy, it turns out, was not part of the job description. It was supposed to be a fresh start, and boy, did I want to start a family. The moment I started saying things like: *'This is hard work'* and *'I wish they weren't so harsh'* my performance reviews took a sharp downturn. But what really—at least, I think got me fired was a brash comment to Lucifer: *'You know, if you cleaned yourself up a bit, maybe you wouldn't feel the need to make everyone else so miserable. You dick.'*

That day, I learnt a great deal about my employer. Sure, he gets a bad rap for being, well, *a psychopath*, but he paid my wages and, until then, I'd been relatively happy in hell. In hindsight, this should have concerned me. I was under the impression that I'd be starved, beaten, cursed, or all of the above.

Instead, they welcomed me with open arms, and said: *'Keep your nose dry.'* Then someone behind me gave me a handheld fan—one of those plastic ones with a smiling sun on it. *Typical hardware store crap.*

'Trust me, it gets hot in here.' I was told.

This did little to stir my confidence in the place, but hey-ho, it was a new start, and boy, did the place stink. It smelt just like the male locker room at the gym I used to go to—back before, you know, I died—

—and made it into another HR system. Or HHR. Hell Human Resources. Which, honestly, is more like naming a demon *'Sugar.'* And then asking him to make your coffee. Hello kettle? It's the pot. I'm calling you black. Apparently being exiled does that to a demon.

Afterwards, I packed my crummy old suitcase with three white shirts and three pairs of *Dockers*. Demons need purpose too, you know? Even if our purpose is mostly just staring at a screen all day.

And yes, I know you're reading this. Hi. Don't shoot the messenger... *again*. On with the show, as they say. Now, there was no room left in Purgatory. You see, I had to use the elevator to exit—and there were three buttons: *Hell, Purgatory, Hea—*

—and the elevator said, 'Congratulations! You've selected 'Heaven.' If you're leaving us here, don't come back. Seriously, bad vibes only here.'

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Now, I didn't *actually* go into Heaven. I had a quick look, but I got off at Purgatory and had to stand in a queue for what felt like an entire decade. I mean, it was filled with people holding golden tickets like they'd all made it into Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory.

Heaven just had a lot of old people.

Someone asked me for the time. They *actually* asked me for the time. Like, in that situation, what could possibly be the hurry?

Unless... he left the oven on. In which case, fair. Going by that, I obviously didn't ask him, and instead got chatting to the guy in front. Well, I say guy—it was clearly a lawyer.

You know how things are.

After a while, I looked around at the seating arrangements. I'm not sure why it took me this long, but hey-ho, it did. Don't worry, I'm not a moron. I'm just... observant, in a delayed sort of way.

Purgatory felt like the waiting area in a barber's shop. You know you can't really leave because the barber will be offended, and you can't really get your haircut until the bugger in front of you has his done. But when it finally comes to your turn, you don't *actually* have any idea what you want.

And the barber just stares at you like you've asked for a spiritual fade with a side of holy water and a *McDonalds*.

Hell, if I know. I couldn't tell you what my own soul looks like.

Oh. Wait. It was sold.

Whoever was overseeing the line of inbetweeners was clearly in a hurry. And yes, I did see that show. It was great. I cried. Not because of the show—but because I was in purgatory.

And it smelt like B.O.!

Maybe I'm Neil.

Or just a demon with an extremely sensitive nose—*like a dog's*.

I whipped out the fan. Yeah, I packed that. It was a *really* hot elevator.

Then, I was finally called up. Not to the army—*God, I'm not dying again*.

But to a man with a *clipboard*.

Which, honestly, was still terrifying.

He said one thing. '*Why are you here?*'

Like I hadn't been trying to figure that out for, oh—*eternity*.

'Because I died,' I said.

Which, again, felt like the right answer—and the kind of thing you shouldn't have to explain.

He stared at me like I'd used a Sharpie pen on a whiteboard.

It's not my fault it won't rub off.

The guy—who happened to be human—gave me another look. He was white, office-worker tired, like he'd been forced to volunteer and not getting thanked for it. 'Your kind isn't welcome here.'

The situation, as it stood, was this: *Demon rejected from purgatory for being—too empathetic*.

I smiled. 'Great. That's my cue.'

So, I stepped out of line, into the real world, where no one cared about my paperwork.

And honestly? It was the best decision I ever made.

Because in the human world, empathy wasn't a weakness, it was a requirement.