

No Exit: Fantasy Football Edition

by Con Chapman

At first, I had no idea I was in hell. I was lying in the same street I walk every day at noontime on my way to lunch.

"What happened?" I asked the man who helped me up.



"You stepped off the curb without looking over your shoulder."

It's a tricky intersection, especially for Boston, the jaywalking capital of America. Pedestrians flow to the left to get where they're going, but traffic enters from the right. I've often told myself that it was the place where I was going to die, and I was finally right. I guess when you're dead "finally" is the only option.

"Who are you?" I asked the man.

"Beelzebub."



Beelzebub

The fallen angel who ranks below Satan in *Paradise Lost*. "So--I'm not evil enough for the Big Enchilada himself to grace me with his presence?"

"Not even close. You're going to hell for some pretty minor stuff."

"Like what?"

"That weekend where you had . . . uh . . . 'dates' with three women."

"I was in my thirties."

"And that AIDS joke you seem so fond of."

"The one where the health worker sees a bunch of junkies sharing a needle, and says 'Stop that, you'll get AIDS.'"

" . . . and one of them answers, 'It's okay, we're wearing condoms.' Yes--that one."

A bit harsh, if you ask me, but on the other hand, I wasn't sure I really cared. Some people want to go to heaven, but I'd rather be with my friends.

"Okay--so take me away."

"Actually, you're slotted for a place right near here . . . "--he looked down at his clipboard--"Tony's Deli."

"You're kidding!" I said. "That's where I was going."

"Funny how that works out."

"What's so hellish about going to my favorite diner?"

"Nothing much. You'll sit there, day after day, nothing will ever change."

"What day is today?" I asked, my head still not clear.

"Tuesday."

"Yes!" I exclaimed. I'd be feasting on the Tuesday special--cranberry-walnut chicken salad sandwiches--until the end of time. "Lead the way."



Cranberry-walnut chicken salad--yum!

Tony's is something of a hole in the wall since most people get their sandwiches to go. There's just a skinny counter, which was last wiped down during the second Clinton administration, and three tiny tables crammed into a corner.

I felt magnanimous, so I offered to buy my devilish friend lunch. "Anything you want," I said expansively. He got the special on my recommendation, and we sat down at one of the tables.

"So hell is just like Sartre said it would be in *No Exit*, huh?" I asked him.

"Yep--one of the few things he was right about. You're confined to one space, but it's not like there's a lake of fire or anything. Just your normal, everyday environment."



Sartre: "I'll have tuna in a pita pocket, with lettuce and tomato."

"Huh," I said. In retrospect, I was glad I'd set my high school Current Events teacher's woodpile on fire at the urging of my buddy

Ronnie McClary, who ended up going to reform school. I wouldn't have missed out on that for all the cherubim in heaven.



"You know setting woodpiles on fire is wrong, don't you?"

We talked about this and that, and three young men sat down next to us. They were joined in turn by two more at the other table.

"Who you pickin' at quarterback," a beefy fellow with his necktie loosened at the collar yelled at one of his friends.

"Philip Rivers," the other said.



"Gack," a third chimed in, putting his hands to his neck. "Choke artist!"

"Fantasy football," I muttered to Beelzebub in explanation. "This is the time of the year when people pick their teams."

"Um-hmm," my satanic lunch mate replied, not wanting to talk with his mouth full. Apparently there are table manners even in hell.



"Richard Seymour's a real sleeper, man," said a fellow whose armpits were stained with sweat. "Everybody thinks 'cause he's on the Raiders he's no good, but he's still a Pro Bowl-quality lineman."

Lively discussion ensued among the group about shut-down cornerbacks, run-stopping linebackers and third-down backs. If I weren't already dead, I'd rather have been dead in a ditch than to have to listen to this self-absorbed drivel.

"If there's anything in the world that I hate," I whispered to Beelzebub as he dabbed at the corners of his mouth with a napkin, "it's listening to people yammer on about their stupid fantasy football teams."

"I'm with you," he said. "Isn't the game itself-with its speed and athleticism . . . "

"Don't forget violence . . . "

" . . . I was just about to say that--isn't that enough? Is your life so pathetic that you need vicarious gratification running some stupid fictional football franchise. Go out and get laid every now and then, fer Christ sake."



Unlike me, Beelzebub had been less than circumspect about keeping his views to himself. Whenever one of the thick-necked louts would look at him, however, he would glare back with a mind-melting stare, sort of like Darth Vader on the bridge of his Death Star, and the guy would shrink back into his oxford cloth shirt.

"Well, you're all set," Beelzebub said as he stood up. He picked up his plate and soda can and deposited them in the trash.

"Yeah, thanks for everything," I said as I stood up to shake his hand. "I guess this place will be clearing out pretty soon after the lunch crowd leaves."

"Leaves?" Beelzebub asks. "No, I don't think anybody's leaving."

I looked at him, then at the fantasy football "general managers" sitting at the tables. They looked back at me with malevolent smiles, then started in again.

"Favre's washed-up," one young fellow in a garish purple shirt-and-tie combo said. "You need help on special teams."

"Excuse me," Beelzebub said as he scooted behind their chairs on his way out. And then to me--"Have a nice eternity."

