Joseph Robbins sipped his morning coffee and stared out over thousands of tortured souls. They sizzled and seared, as if each were a strip of bacon in their woeful condemnation. Robbins imagined the familiar scent of breakfast his mother used to make when he was a kid, though all he could smell now was recycled air. Outside, the fires of Hell roared and consumed its eternal victims. In Robbins’ office, however, the atmosphere settled dully beneath the fluorescent lights that flickered every so often.

Robbins, perhaps Satan’s seventh IT Director, was quite nervous about the job before him. Those who had tried before him were now among the delectable, crackling pieces of breakfast outside his window. He knew in his work that there would be no room for error—lest he face the wrath of Great Satan. The boss of all bosses.

You know, I bet Dilbert would have something funny to say about having Satan as a boss, he thought.

Essentially, Robbins’ job was to update Hell’s outdated databases—to meliorate the old systems that were now nothing more than clunky, dusty, ancient relics. What would happen if the systems were left worn away, no one could say for sure. But Robbins knew what to do. And he would update the databases efficiently and reroute the wires appropriately and upgrade the servers dogmatically, and...

What’s this?

“Mr. Robbins! Sir!”

A pudgy, pasty-white man with outstretched arms huffed as he jogged towards Robbins.

Bernard. The intern from financing. Great, Robbins thought.

Bernard spoke with great difficulty, after a moment of doubled-over panting:
“Sir,” he said. “The new SQL shipments are going to take longer than expected!”

The flaming nether that engulfed Robbins’ view grew wild. Robbins sipped from his cup once more, his coffee lukewarm.

“Bernard,” he sighed. “How long have you been here?”

“Two weeks, sir.”

“Two weeks.”

“Yes, sir.”

“How do you keep such a good track of time down here?” said Robbins, who turned away from the window to face the intern.

“I uhh—beg pardon?”

“You know, how do you know it’s been two weeks? There’s no sunlight down here, unless you count the... you know, the eternal flames and whatnot.”

Bernard looked around; as if he were unsure the question was directed at him.

“I keep a calendar, sir.”

Robbins chuckled.

“Oh, yeah. That’s right,” he said. “It’s just strange... being alive and in Hell, isn’t it? I’ve been here probably the same amount of time you have, but it already feels like it’s been forever. I wonder how they feel.”

Robbins turned back to the window and sighed.

Bernard’s cheeks became rosy.

“Sir, the SQL shipment—”

“Get FedEx on the phone and wring someone’s neck. I don’t care who or how,” Robbins said.

“But,” Bernard sighed.

“We are the deities of Hell, my friend. The Joves and the oh, who else...the Phoebuses that govern this realm.”

“Phoebus?”

“Without us, our guidance, who here would look after such things? We keep the order in this realm; contain the souls, keep records of each inhabitant, just as God rules the heavens—or Jove
or Zeus or Jesus or whatever name He goes by on any given century. Just as humans pretend to rule over their regions and oceans."

Bernard, moved by Robbins’ speech, nodded eagerly. "Yes, sir! I’ll get that SQL shipment in on time," he said. And with that, he turned around and exited the office.

Robbins glanced back at the fires. The souls in the lake of fire boiled languidly.

_I wonder what it would look like with a sunrise_, Robbins thought as he took one last sip of what had now become caffeinated tar. He had a busy day ahead of him.

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Robbins sat on a bench in the Elysium Park, just a few minutes’ walk from his office—and by association, the Lake of Fire. The park was the only lush part of Hell. The grass was green and well-kempt, and wildflowers bloomed freely.

_Fertilizer from the third circle_, he mused, chuckling slightly.

Orpheus and Eurydice passed him; she walking in front of him, then he in front of her. They giggled and laughed as they walked and as they continued down the path and out of sight, Robbins thought he heard Orpheus burst into a Broadway number—"One" from _A Chorus Line_, perhaps.

He glanced down at his watch and sighed. _Time to head back._

At times it bugged him, being one of the only living beings in the underworld. Today was one of those days. They were only allowed to spend so much time at Elysian—the rest of the time must be spent fulfilling the duties of their contracts. Just working for a living. There weren’t many jobs left on Earth, so lots of people started filing for jobs in Heaven and Hell. Only the Mormons got the jobs in Cloud 9, they called it—like a nightclub.

_I guess they were right all along_, he thought.

Standing, Robbins looked down the path Orpheus and Eurydice had taken, the green hills rolled fancifully into the barren steppes of the Outlands. Now the lovers were tiny specs, dancing...
beneath the horizon. Robbins turned the other way and began walking back towards his office.

At least things at work were going well, he thought. Bernard had arranged for the SQL shipment to be delivered three days earlier than originally quoted and at only a fraction of the cost. Maybe the pasty intern did wring someone’s neck. What Satan’s people called the “card catalogue” systems had been upgraded finally to a shoddy operating system—Windows 98. But it would have to do for now until the shipment of new computers and servers arrived as well.

From looking at the raw data, Robbins estimated that they had about two months left before Hell reached one hundred billion souls. The shades and spirits in the brighter parts of Hell were preparing a sort of celebration: something completely foreign to Robbins—like the Setsubun or Boxing Day. At least the inhabitants were in better moods than usual. That was probably the worst part about being alive and in Hell. Everyone was in such a damned bad mood outside of Elysium Park and Limbo. It was always, “woe is me, this” and “why hath God forsaken me that.”

Robbins reached the gate from Elysium Park to the access roads behind all the circles. He thought it was kind of like being behind the scenes at Disney World—you got to see all the mechanics and pipes and wires that made all the magic happen. Before he started working as Hell’s IT director, he never knew that the Carnal was actually made possible by thousands of fans and towering silos of compressed air.

As he walked down the hidden sidewalk, Robbins couldn’t help but shake the image of Orpheus and Eurydice laughing and embracing from his mind. Where was his Eurydice?

No, I can’t look back, he thought. His feet carried him deeper into Hell, all the way up to the ground-level of his office. The big golden sign above the revolving doors read: “Bureau of Underworld Intelligence.”

For the remainder of the day he was in and out of meetings—meetings that more or less told him nothing about the
progress of his employees. Surely they knew the importance of their work. Surely they wouldn’t have been accepted into the Employment Abroad Special Locations program if they were incompetent. And surely they would not waste his time like this in these meetings—and yet, here they were.

“The numbers from aboveground tell us around 256,002.9 people are dying per day and a rough percentage of 99.973 of those people going to Hell...”

One of the mid-levels from the Research Department was giving his spiel on a projector in one of the dusty, old conference rooms.

“What are we going to do if there is a natural disaster?” said Robbins.

“I—uh, what, sir?” said the speaker.

“You know. A hurricane, a monsoon... earthquake, volcano, whatever. What then?”

“What do you mean?”

Robbins sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“You mean you don’t see how an extra influx upwards of hundreds of thousands of souls could be an issue that would cause us a bit of distress?” said Robbins.

The speaker gulped and stammered, unable to find a response.

“Okay, then. Someone capable enough to handle the responsibilities of their own job, please take down a few notes. Someone get the Fates on the phone and see if they have any natural disasters lined up any time within the next two months—you’ll need a few people to decipher the riddle-ridden legal notes they hand over and you may need a lawyer or two to handle all the fine print. Can someone do that for me, please? I don’t care who.”

“Yes, sir,” said one of the other men wearing a white-collar shirt.

“Good,” said Robbins. “I’m the Director, not your mother.” Robbins sighed again as everyone else filed out of the stuffy conference room. For a long while, he just sat there, his
eyes transfixed, yet unseeing.

*Where is my Eurydice?* he thought.