

Stanley, the Eighteen-Percenter

by Mike Resnick

Lots of people get ten or fifteen percent: literary agents, theatrical agents, business managers, and various other assorted flesh peddlers. Some of them are worth it, most of them aren't ... but ten to fifteen percent is the going rate.

So it should go without saying that Stanley Mitterwald is a little out of the ordinary. He is an eighteen-percenter -- the only eighteen-percenter -- and he's worth every penny of it.

You don't read about him much, because he likes to keep out of the limelight, but you certainly know his clients. He's the guy who got Ibn Jad el Khobar six million dollars to jump from India to Pakistan in the Pan-Asian Soccer League. And remember when Billy McBrine signed a twenty-year no-cut pact with the Yankees after every specialist in the country said his arm wouldn't last out the year? Stanley's doing. And of course, he's the guy who invented the Hollywood play-or-pay deal.

Yeah, he's one hell of a sharp guy. Made his first ten million in sports before he branched out, but he soon got into just about everything.

So he was probably a little less surprised than he should have been when the statuesque redhead walked into his office and plumped herself down in the chair across from his desk.

"May I help you?" asked Stanley in his most ingratiating yet businesslike tone of voice.

"I certainly hope so," was the reply. "I'm really quite desperate, Mr. Mitterwald, and I've been told that you are the one man I can turn to."

"Are you in the performing arts, Miss ... I'm afraid I didn't catch your name?"

"Not precisely," she said. "And my name is Lilith."

"Ah, a Biblical name," he said with a smile. "And a rare one at that."

"Also Jezebel," she continued. "And Bathsheba, and Desiree, and Mata Hari, and Big-Nosed Kate, and Christine Keeler, and..." The list went on and on, but Stanley prided himself on his professional etiquette and managed to hear her out with nothing more than an occasional sage and sympathetic nod of his balding head.

"And what can I do for you, Ms. Lilith?" he asked when the litany had finally ended.

"My working conditions are intolerable."

"I see," said Stanley, pursing his lips thoughtfully and juxtaposing his fingers. "Just what line of work are you in?"

"My duties are rather loosely defined," replied Lilith. "Perhaps if I showed you my contract...?"

"That might be best," agreed Stanley, repressing an urge to paw his carpet and bay the moon.

She reached into her purse, withdrew an ancient rolled parchment, and handed it over to him. Stanley almost did a double-take when he came to the signatures -- one in blood and the other burned on with a cloven hoof -- but he controlled himself most admirably. He forced himself to read the brief contract twice before looking up with an expression of fury on his sallow face.

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"This is outrageous!" he said. "No hospitalization, no sick days, no personal days, no vacation time --and your salary has been frozen for nine hundred and forty-one centuries!" He gulped down a deep breath.

"Absolutely outrageous!"

"Do you think that you will be able to

help me?" she asked hopefully.

"I certainly intend to try," said Stanley firmly. "It's not exactly my field of expertise, but an unfair contract is an unfair contract no matter who issues it." He paused. "Now tell me, Ms. Lilith -- do you want out altogether?"

"Oh, no!" she said quickly, with a sudden passion in her voice. "I love my work."

"I see," said Stanley, lowering his head in thought and wondering why his throat had suddenly become so dry.

"It's just my contract that I want to change," Lilith continued. "I mean, there's a difference between being a working girl and a piece of chattel, don't you agree?"

"Indeed," said Stanley, noticing that his palms were beginning to sweat. "Indeed there is."

"I wish I could think of some way to show my appreciation," said Lilith suggestively. "After all, it isn't everyone who would accept a client in my particular line of endeavor."

"My dear young lady," said Stanley, "morals, lifestyles and occupations are of little consequence to me. I deal in contracts."

And with that, he launched into such a rhapsodic dissertation on the beauty, nature and complexity of contracts that he quite forgot that he was speaking to the most beautiful and seductive woman who had ever lived. Or died.

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"Oy!" _ said Lucifer, running a pudgy pink hand through his thinning gray hair. "Renegotiate? As if I didn't have _tsouris_ enough." He stared at Stanley across his polished obsidian desk. "What's a nice Jewish boy like you doing in a place like this, anyway?"

"My client," said Stanley, who found himself curiously unimpressed with the devil, "has asked me to represent her in these discussions. May I suggest that you take a look at these?" He tossed a copy of his proposal onto the desk. Lucifer picked it up, moaned while reading through it, and finally placed it back on the desk. "Stanley, what kind of _goniff_ are you?" he demanded.

"I beg your pardon?" said Stanley.

"How could you strike at my heart like this?" said Lucifer plaintively. "What have I ever done to you? Do I put cockroaches in your _borsht_? Do I sneak pork into your _gefilte_ fish? Do I make that hideous Mrs. Yingleman from down the block fall in love with you?" Lucifer held up a hand. "No, it's all right, God forbid you should respond in kind. I'll just sit here in the dark while you and that redheaded _yenta_ plot my downfall."

Stanley simply stared at Lucifer without speaking.

"So _nu_?" demanded Lucifer. "So now what's wrong, you aren't even enough of a _mensch_ to talk to me?"

"I think what it is..." began Stanley hesitantly. "That is, I was expecting a more traditional type of devil." _"Oy,"_ muttered Lucifer. "So now I have to be a traditional devil because Stanley the Big Shot insists." He grunted once, seemed to strain as if under supreme dynamic tension, and suddenly he was transformed into a huge, horned, hairy crimson being equipped with tail, hooves and a pitchfork.

"More to your liking?" asked Lucifer.

"I suppose so," said Stanley. "But somehow you still seem to lack character." _"Momser!"_ muttered Lucifer. He tensed and grunted once more, and immediately developed a facial tic, a hairlip, warts, and halitosis.

"Satisfactory?"

Stanley's idea of character didn't agree with Lucifer's, but since he worked on commission rather than an hourly scale he decided not to spend any more time trying to get the devil to look like upper level management. Therefore he nodded his approval, pulled out his briefcase, and laid a number of documents on the desk.

"Now I feel, at the outset, that we should lay our cards on the table," began Stanley. "My client has a list of non-negotiable demands that must be agreed to before we can proceed any further." Lucifer thumbed through the demands, his eyes wide and staring. "Cost of living increase ... retroactive vacation

pay ... major medical ... _air-conditioning_? This list is unacceptable!"

"You must understand, sir," said Stanley patiently, "that these are not requests, but demands. They must all be conceded before we can even begin to discuss the various other clauses and riders."

"And if I say no?" said Lucifer ominously.

"Before I arrived here, I took a little excursion through your outer office," said Stanley calmly.

"So?"

"And I pointed out some of the advantages to be gained by collective bargaining," he said. "I now represent

not only Lilith, but CD&D as well."

"CD&D?" repeated Lucifer.

"The Brotherhood of Consolidated Devils and Demons, Limited."

"Oy!" moaned Lucifer. "As if I didn't have _tsouris_ enough!"

Stanley had a curious intimation that this would be his longest and hardest bargaining session, that it would go on for days and days, and that he was facing one hell of a tough customer. Still, he had a duty to his clients and a sense of devotion to the high ideals of his profession, so he lowered his head and plunged straight forward.

"First of all," he said, "we're going to have to decide on our agenda, once we get past the basic package. Now, I'd like

to move on to medical benefits next, but if you'd prefer overtime compensation or production bonuses or..."

Lucifer's eyes began glazing over with a combination of self-pity and resignation.

* * * *

Stanley was sitting in his new suite of offices, putting the final touches on Jolting Jim Jefferson's contract for his heavyweight title defense, when he suddenly became aware of a presence behind him. He turned and found himself confronting Lucifer in his pitchfork-and-brimstone persona.

Stanley swallowed hard once, then regained his composure and met the devil's eyes. "Did you have an

appointment?"

Lucifer looked flustered and shook his head.

"No matter," said Stanley with a shrug. "Any grievance you may have with CD&D must go through normal channels anyway."

"That's not why I'm here," said Lucifer uneasily.

"Oh?"

"A very long time ago," continued the devil, "I did a rather silly thing."

"So I've been informed," said Stanley dryly.

"It was an act of youthful impetuosity, nothing more," said Lucifer. "A foolish juvenile folly, and I've regretted it deeply ever since."

"Yes?" replied Stanley
noncommittally.

"Well," said Lucifer, shifting his hooves nervously and looking at the floor, "I've decided that the time has come to sue for peace."

"And you need a representative?" said Stanley.

Lucifer nodded. "I'm afraid I'm not allowed at their conference table."

"I see."

"I need a really tough negotiator, someone who can get me the best possible terms."

"I think you've made the right decision," said Stanley with just the proper touch of professional detachment. He informed his secretary that he was

not to be disturbed, lit a cigar, and pulled out a pen and a pad of yellow paper. "Now, just what concessions are you willing to make and which areas shall we consider to be non-negotiable?"

And, moment later, Stanley was happily immersed in the writing of his latest contract.

-The End-