

—THE LOSERS VS BEELPHEGOR

by Mark Justice

We were sitting around Double D's crib. D, Crazy Larry, Dog Shit, and me. Dog Shit, who had earned his childhood nickname in an *I-dare-you-to-eat-this* contest, had scored some weed and was sharing it, which seemed right, since he was the only one currently employed. Dog had rolled a big fattie so thick it wouldn't stay lit, so we had to pass the Bic with the blunt. To make it worse, D had Styx cranked on his K-mart stereo. Every time he got high, he pulled out *The Grand-fucking-Illusion*.

"Goddamn, D," Crazy Larry said around a lungful of smoke. "Don't you got nothin' from *this* century?"

"My pwace, my moodik."

My place, my music. Technically, I lived here, too, but I hadn't started paying rent yet. And the apartment was over his mom's garage, so I guess we had to defer to D's musical choices.

He cranked up the volume and started singing, "Wekum to duh gwand i-wooshun."

Double's D's real name was Duane DeLong, which he pronounced as "Doo-wayne Duh-wong". A dude who talked like that like never fit into any of the social cliques at Radiance High School, so by default, he fell in with us.

The Losers.

Most people heard D talk and figured he was a retard. He was actually pretty sharp. D discovered that people tended to ignore him if they thought he was an idiot, so he overheard a lot of shit. When we were still in school, D was waiting in the parking lot for a ride home from his mom when he overheard Mr. Haney, our shop teacher, telling another teacher about banging Shelly McMasters, a nose-in-the-air student from one of those country club families. D told Crazy Larry about it and the two of them hatched up a little intervention that resulted in the four of us passing shop without ever attending another class.

Those were the days.

"Hey, Andy," Dog Shit said. "I been thinkin'."

"Uh-oh," Larry said, rolling his eyes.

Dog flipped Larry the finger. "Anyway, I think we ought to get the band back together, man."

"You twazy," D said as he passed me the joint and lighter.

"D's right," Larry said. "You're fucked in the head."

D started giggling and Dog Shit's face turned red. "I was talking to Andy," he

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said.

“What would we use for instruments?” I said. “My bass is in the window at Bradley’s. Larry hocked his guitar. And yours--what happened again?”

Dog Shit turned a deeper shade of crimson. He didn’t want to talk about it; I couldn’t blame him. It sucked to get ripped off by a girl.

“I till got my dwums,” Double D said.

“Yeah,” Larry added. “And I got an amp.”

I took a hit of the weed and held the smoke in for a second too long. I coughed it out, and when I could talk again, I said, “You guys are forgetting one very important fact.”

They all looked at me.

“We sucked.”

“He’s right,” Crazy Larry said.

Dog was only disappointed for a second. He smiled. “You know what else I was thinking? Like, how we were in school, and all we thought about was getting out of this one turd town, and how, like, three years later, we’re still here.”

Double D hit the joint again, then said, “*We tuck.*”

“Maybe,” Dog said. “But what do you guys have going on tonight? Nothing, right? Otherwise you wouldn’t be here over top of this ‘tard’s garage.”

“Puck you,” D said, expelling a cloud of smoke.

Dog playfully punched D’s arm, then took the joint from him. “Seriously. Our lives may be shit. We may really be The Losers, sittin’ here, waitin’ for the rest of our lives to get even shittier. But you know what? We got tonight.”

“*We-e-e-eve got toni-i-i-iht*,” Larry sang, warbling the Bob Seger song.

“What are you talking about, man?” I said.

Dog Shit smiled. “I know where we can get some instruments and a sound system.”

* * *

It was a flash of light in the night sky, unnoticed by most. Those who did see it probably thought it was a shooting star. It impacted on Duane Fletcher’s farm on Route 7, about five miles out of town. Fletcher and his family were at Myrtle Beach and there was no one near enough to notice the small explosion.

For a long time, nothing moved. After a while a hand emerged from the smoking pit. The four fingers were long and topped by sharp talons. The skin was bone white and covered with wart-like eruptions. Around the wrist was a metal studded gauntlet.

The hand found the edge of the pit and grabbed hold. A moment later, he emerged.

His armor was still smoking, but he stood, albeit unsteadily.

He tasted the night air.

It stank, but it was still familiar.

He was home. After untold millennia, Beelphegor, Lord of the Opening, Devourer of Souls, was back.

And this time the world would be his.