



## **Life Broker**

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Jimmy's office was small with a plain desk and an old yet comfortable office chair that squeaked whenever he leaned back. In front of the desk was a standard wooden chair. To either side there was a standing lamp. Each lamp was lit as each had been lit for eternity and they gave the room all the light it needed. The room was painted white. Jimmy himself was not too young and not too old. His skin was a neutral cream color and his hair was a neutral brown with streaks of early grey setting in. He was dressed in a white shirt and slacks. His tie, knot down by the third button of his shirt, was also neutral. Jimmy looked a little tired.

Through the one door came Mr. Davis, looking tentatively back the way he came. He was confused and, frankly, somewhat put out. He was only in his upper fifties so this whole thing seemed premature. In many ways, he mirrored Jimmy, or at least looked like an older version. He wore a business suit, but he had also pulled down his tie. There was more grey in his hair than in Jimmy's. And there was less hair. Jimmy was still thin. Mr. Davis was pushing his belt line.

"Mr. Davis?" Jimmy greeted, standing and shaking the other man's hand.

"That's right," Mr. Davis said.

Jimmy smiled a reassuring smile. "Please take a seat."

Mr. Davis took the wooden chair.

"I'm Jimmy. It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm sorry for the wait but we've been backed up for quite some time."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

Jimmy pulled a brief frown. "Didn't my secretary discuss this with you?"

"No. I... "

The frown settled into place. "Damn. If I told her once, I told her a thousand times... I'll try to explain everything to you as quickly as possible. Not that I mean to rush you. We'll take all the time that we need to iron out the best possible contract."

"Contract?"

"That's right. You at least know that your life as Mr. Davis has ended."

Mr. Davis hesitated, an act of futile hopefulness. "Yes, they told me that much. What did you say your name was?"

"Jimmy. I'm your broker."

"Broker. Right. That's what they didn't explain. Is this for a place in Heaven?"

Jimmy's smile returned. "Heaven? No, nothing like that."

Mr. Davis looked suddenly stricken. "You mean I'm going to hell?"

"No, Mr. Davis. Please just give me a moment to explain. You see yours is a human soul and human souls belong on Earth or they're wasted. Now God, He doesn't like to waste souls so he sends them back to Earth when the bodies die out. Now my job, and yours too at this point, is to determine basically what kind of life you're going to live out next."

"What? Doesn't God take care of that?"

"No, quite the contrary. God is very busy with overseeing the contracts that I and my fellow brokers make. He is also overwhelmed with the manufacture of new souls. You humans sure breed fast."

"So I still don't understand."

"It's very simple, Mr. Davis. In order to prevent certain uncontrollable events on Earth, the brokers and the souls sit down together before the

souls are sent or, as in your case, returned to the planet and negotiate a deal for the course of life."

"My whole life? We take care of it right here and now?"

"That's right," Jimmy said through a broad grin. "We'll start with the basic package, go over your options for change, and establish a binding contract."

"Binding?"

"Yes, of course. God will be obligated to steer events in the course dictated by the contract and you'll be obligated to live out that life until it is complete as dictated by the contract."

"You're talking about predestiny."

"Not exactly. Predestiny is actually the belief that God takes control of every life and dictates its course. Though everything is taken care of right here and now, you're actually in almost total control of everything that happens to you."

"But if you do it all now, what's the point of living? Why try when I know what's going to happen?"

Jimmy waved his hand. "Oh, Mr. Davis, that's a common mistake. We don't sort out the details here. Events happen as they happen. We just plan out the general course of your life. Besides which, you'll have no knowledge of our meeting once you're returned to Earth."

"But what if I don't like my life?"

For once, Jimmy seemed nonplussed. "Well... I would hope that you wouldn't negotiate a life that you would find dissatisfying."

"Well," Mr. Davis answered tentatively, put off by what appeared to be an accusation. "I mean, I don't really know anything about putting a life together. Did I put my last life together?"

"Yes, you did, although I wasn't your broker."

“My life wasn’t exactly great, especially at the end.”

“That’s why I’m here. I want to make sure that you’re one hundred percent satisfied with your contract. Let’s get started, shall we.” Jimmy reached into a side drawer and pulled out a file. He flipped through it until he found the paper he was looking for. “The basic package at your level includes two parents, an uneventful childhood, regular if not spectacular employment, and a spouse. There’s a free option for up to three children and you can choose your gender. Oh!” He brightened. “This is new. You have a selection of nationalities.”

Jimmy turned the paper around and Mr. Davis looked it over. “This is it? This is my package?”

“This is the basic package. If you’re looking for something more... extravagant, we can peruse some options.”

Mr. Davis glanced up at him just under his eyelids. “What kind of options?” he asked with a bit of the sinister in his tone.

Jimmy smiled, reaching back into the drawer. “Well let’s take a look at your last contract.” He took a moment to read through several pages. “Hmmm. It looks here like you took the basic package with a few modifications last time out. Wow, in record time, too.”

“Did the basic package include me dying of cancer at the age of fifty eight?”

Jimmy looked hurt. “Let’s not be hasty in our judgments. You had a particularly attractive wife. That must have been extra. Oh, she was nice, too.”

“What do you mean, extra?”

“When you add to the pleasure of your life, there’s a cost involved. I’d guess that your wife contracted for a less attractive husband and gained something for it. Did you leave her a lot of money?”

Mr. Davis looked unhappy. “There was a life insurance policy.”

"Oh! You see?" Jimmy said with a grin. "There you go."

Mr. Davis shook his head. "Wait a minute. You mean to tell me that I suffered through cancer because my wife traded me for an inheritance?"

Jimmy shook his head. "It's not that simple, Mr. Davis. I don't imagine the insurance policy was large enough to warrant that kind of payment."

"What kind of payment?!"

"Cancer, of course. She contracted for the money which would have worked out better if you had contracted to be rich. But you didn't so she had to get the money some other way. She probably got the money because you're unattractive."

"Thanks," Mr. Davis said.

Jimmy seemed confused. "I'm sorry, Mr. Davis, but you are who you make yourself out to be. It says right here that you traded your own looks for an attractive wife. Your appearance caused you problems in high school and college. If you ask me, it's a pretty steep price to pay but it *was* your choice."

"It *wasn't* my choice. It was the choice of whoever I was before I became me."

Jimmy shook a finger. "You're the same soul no matter what life you choose, Mr. Davis, even if you don't remember it. If you think you would like a different life, then by all means negotiate a different deal."

"I will," Mr. Davis said with determination. "I think I want to be attractive this time, with lots of women. A womanizer."

"I see. I see." Jimmy pulled out some blank sheets and a pencil and began scribbling some notes. "That's not cheap, Mr. Davis."

"And no wife. I don't want some woman handing me cancer for an inheritance."

“Not so fast. Like I said, cancer is a bit expensive for a life insurance policy. I doubt that she was directly responsible.”

“What did it cost then? I certainly didn’t get anything in my life that was worth having cancer?”

“No, certainly not.”

Mr. Davis leaned forward. “Then why? Why did I get cancer?”

Jimmy leaned back, showed his palms. “Oh, I couldn’t tell you that. It would be unethical.”

“*Unethical*? Someone bargained me into a death sentence and you’re worried about ethics?”

“Very well, then. But I warn you, this is not easy. The only people who can pay for something off of someone else’s contract are people in the immediate family, or rather people who *will* be in the immediate family. Are you sure you want to know? I don’t like to make contracts with angry people. These things tend to snowball into misery.”

“Tell me.”

“All right, then, let’s investigate. It seems your son is going to invent something.”

“My son? My son?” Mr. Davis looked stricken. “But he wouldn’t...”

“Let’s not jump to conclusions.” Jimmy dug back into his drawer and found another folder. He looked through its contents. By now his desk was covered with folders and papers. “Oh, this is interesting. Your son is due to be very successful. He seems to have gotten an awful lot.”

“On my back,” Mr. Davis said through gritted teeth. “I paid for his success.”

“Well, it doesn’t actually say that here, but it doesn’t *not* say it.” There was a pause, Mr. Davis considering his options, Jimmy waiting expectantly.

“How do I return the favor?” Mr. Davis asked.

“I’m sorry,” Jimmy said. “You can’t, really. He’s not your son anymore. If families stuck together life after life, we’d have nothing but revenge contracts. Of course, you could bargain with the lives of your future children. That is, assuming you contract for future children.”

Mr. Davis looked defeated. “So that’s it? He kills me with cancer and I can’t do anything about it?”

“What’s done is done. You’re already here,” he said as he continued to scan the younger Davis’ contract. He brightened suddenly. “Well, look at this!”

“What?”

“It seems your former son’s broker was a wily one.”

Mr. Davis leaned forward to try and see, but the scribbling on the contract was incomprehensible.

“Your son seems to have paid for some of his success with an unnamed tragedy.”

“What? What does that mean?”

“It means that he agreed to a blank line in his contract where something bad should be.” Jimmy looked up at Mr. Davis with a sinister grin. “We could certainly do a lot with that blank line.”

“We could?” Mr. Davis’ anger had dissipated. He felt a chill run through him. “But you said he’s not my son anymore.”

Jimmy waved his hand. “He won’t be your son in his next life so you can’t do anything to him then. But since he has this unnamed tragedy clause, you still have some jurisdiction.”

Mr. Davis shook his jowly face back and forth. "I don't get it. It doesn't make sense to me."

"Let me put it this way. Your son bought a lot of success and happiness. For all of the good that's going to happen to him, he couldn't possibly have paid for it all by himself. He must have dipped into the family well, but it still wasn't enough so the broker must have talked him into the unnamed tragedy."

"What *is* an unnamed tragedy?"

"Basically it's a gamble. Your son is leaving his fate up to a deceased relative. He's betting that you won't do anything too terrible to him because he's your son." Jimmy read through the paperwork some more. "If you ask me, it's a stupid bet considering he seems to have given you cancer."

"Don't call my son stupid."

Jimmy looked up. "I'm sorry?"

"You said he was stupid."

"I said he made a stupid bet. Considering your tragedy, it seems unlikely that he's going to walk away unscathed."

Mr. Davis thought about it for a bit. "An unnamed tragedy? What could I put in there?"

"It depends on what you want for it."

"Cancer? Could I give him the cancer he gave me?"

Jimmy smiled. "It would then seem to run in the family."

"And it would get him when it got me?"

"That's up to you. The younger he gets it, the more you'll get *for* it."

Mr. Davis paused. "You're saying that I buy pleasure with pain? Why? Why does God want people to suffer?"

"Oh, it's not about suffering, Mr. Davis. It's about balance. God wants a balanced world." Jimmy looked through some more papers. "If you give it to him now, you'd get an awful lot. You could have the looks and the women. I think I could swing a special talent, something that earns you money. How would you like that, Mr. Davis? You could be a celebrity."

"Now? He's only twenty two. He wouldn't even get to *be* successful."

"Well that's all legal considering the rules of an unnamed tragedy. He gambled his success."

"But he's my son."

Jimmy tsked. "Mr. Davis, he's a soul just like you are. That he's your son is a bargaining coincidence."

"I don't need to be a celebrity. Let's give him back a few years."

Jimmy's smile returned. "As you wish. I could take away the talent, but still earn you a comfortable living. Your son could live until...how's thirty six?"

"So young?"

"Forty?"

"I'm fifty eight. How about fifty eight?"

"Do you want good looks and women, Mr. Davis?"

"I don't know. I was just angry. What would I do with all of those women?"

"That's not for me to say."

Mr. Davis was beginning to look pale. "Maybe I don't need all of that after all. That basic package sounds okay."

"So you don't want to fill in the unnamed tragedy? No cancer?"

Mr. Davis looked at Jimmy with wide and sad eyes. "He's my son."

"And he's going to be very successful." Jimmy paused, waiting to see if he would elicit a reaction. "No problem, Mr. Davis. For all of his success, I'm sure his mother or one of his siblings would be willing to fill in that unnamed tragedy."

"What? Can they do that?"

"As easily as you can."

"He's a good boy, my son. His sister will..."

"He got his success somewhere, Mr. Davis. Whether he gave you the cancer or not, he bargained something of someone's for his own personal gain. Shouldn't you, who's suffered the most, capitalize on that?"

Mr. Davis wrung his hands nervously, shaking his head. "What constitutes a tragedy?"

Jimmy smiled a car salesman's smile. "Oh just about anything."

"A broken arm?"

Jimmy frowned. "Well, yes, but I would call that relatively mild. You wouldn't get much for it."

"And once I name the tragedy, no one else can get in on it, right?"

Jimmy leaned forward. "Mr. Davis, people often want to know why bad things happen to good people. Well this is why. Because bad people negotiate away the lives of good people and never get paid back for it."

*"My son is not a bad person!"*

Jimmy leaned back again. "As you wish. A broken arm, is it?"

"No!"

"No?"

"I don't want him to get hurt."

"Well there will have to be some guidelines if we're going to call it a tragedy. Perhaps the loss of a loved one?"

"Like his father?" Mr. Davis hissed.

"I'm afraid you can't include something that's already been negotiated and completed into a new deal. Might I suggest a wife or a child."

"A TV show!"

"What?"

"Cancel a TV show! That's a tragedy."

"Only for the producers of that show. Sorry, Mr. Davis, but I can't do that."

"Then his car. Scratch his car. God, he loves that car."

Jimmy went silent, just staring at the man in front of him. "You want me to scratch his car?"

Mr. Davis nodded. "Maybe that's too much. He's my son."

"Mr. Davis, you're operating under a false impression here. Souls are completely unrelated. Your son in this past life will have no relation to you in the next life. The biological connection is something that only human beings recognize."

"Aren't I a human being?"

"You're a human soul."

"I'm still human."

"Well... yes."

"Then he's still my son."

"If I may just suggest..."

Mr. Davis grew angry. "You've done enough!"

Jimmy fell silent, stared at the soul in front of him.

"This is my life we're negotiating here, *Jimmy*, and you'll do what I tell you to do."

Cowed, Jimmy said, "Of course, sir."

"Good. Forget the car. Break something new. Something valuable, but replaceable. And make it belong to his wife."

"Um, Mr. Davis, I'm not sure we can qualify that as a tragedy."

"Oh, really? Have you ever broken something that belonged to *your* wife?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"It's worse than a tragedy. You ought to make me an athlete for suggesting it."

A sheepish smile appeared on Jimmy's face. "Well I don't think I can do *that*. In fact, I don't think I can offer you anything for it at all."

"But no one else will be able to fill that in, right?"

"That's right, Mr. Davis. You'll be blocking it entirely. I must say I'm not sure he deserves it."

“Well then it’s a good thing that it’s not for you to say. Do it.”

Jimmy did it. “And yourself? The basic package then?” He sounded bored.

Mr. Davis shook his head. “No children. No spouse. Just make me a simple man with a simple life. What will that cost me?”

“Oh, well, nothing.”

“Good.”

“In fact, if you like, I can offer you a few perks for giving up a family. Are you sure you want that?”

“No attachments. I don’t ever want to go through this again.”

“Well, all right then.” Jimmy scribbled some remarks. “That’s it, then. You can go.”

Mr. Davis looked confused. “What about the details?”

“As I mentioned before, we’re just interested in the fundamental direction of your life. Based on your plan, there really won’t be much for us to do at all on this end.”

Mr. Davis stood. He didn’t say anything to Jimmy as he turned and left. When he was gone, a disappointed Jimmy packed up all of the files and put them back into his drawer. He reached for the intercom. “Who is my next appointment, please?”

“Mr. Peters would like to see you right away, Jimmy,” came the sultry voice of his secretary.

“Really?”

“I wouldn’t lie to you, Jimmy.”

Shrugging his shoulders, Jimmy stood and walked out of his office and into Mr. Peters’ office. They looked much the same but this time

Jimmy occupied the wooden chair. Mr. Peters looked a bit like Jimmy, with creamy neutral skin. But his eyes had a harder edge to them and there was more grey than black in his hair. He wasn't quite as neutral as his experience had defined his appearance.

"How are you, Jimmy?"

"Fine, Mr. Peters. Yourself?"

"Good indeed. I see you just brokered Mr. Davis into a new life."

"That's right, sir. It didn't go as well as I would have hoped."

Mr. Peters was scanning a contract and Jimmy could only assume that it belonged to Mr. Davis. "No. I would say it didn't go well at all."

"I tried my best, sir, but it went all wrong. He didn't even take the basic package."

"No, he didn't. He took less and got nothing in return." Mr. Peters looked up at Jimmy. "You lied to him, Jimmy."

Jimmy went white. "No, sir, I didn't."

"A false implication is a lie in my book."

"Mr. Peters, I've been finding it harder and harder to sell tragedies. How are we supposed to maintain balance if no one will buy tragedies?"

Mr. Peters' face darkened. "You just do your *job*, Jimmy."

"I thought I was, sir."

"There are few souls like Mr. Davis. Do you know what he would have done if you'd told him that he negotiated the cancer so that his son would succeed?"

"I can't imagine, sir. Disaster."

Mr. Peters made a rude sound. "How could it be a disaster? He would have bought himself a better life, probably by selling some simple things like his wife did. Unattractive spouses is one of our best sellers."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Peters. I didn't see it that way."

"No, you never do."

"I'll try and do better."

Mr. Peter's pulled his lips into his mouth. "I think you need to gain a little perspective, Jimmy."

"What does that mean?"

"The best way for you to broker lives is to live a few yourself."

Jimmy went so white that he was almost transparent. "Sir? You're sending me..."

Mr. Peters smiled, pulling out a blank contract. "That's right, Jimmy. Maybe you can add a little bit of that balance you're so fond of. Now, let's start you off with the basic package..."

## Author's Note

Thanks for taking the time to read *Life Broker*. As short as this story is, it took a long time to complete, born from the germ of an idea many years ago.

Let me know what you think. You can leave comments on feedbooks or email me directly at [ivan.turner@verizon.net](mailto:ivan.turner@verizon.net) or [wound-wort@face2facegames.net](mailto:wound-wort@face2facegames.net).

If you liked *Life Broker*, check out *The Book of Revelations*, also available on [feedbooks.com](http://feedbooks.com) and *Forty Leap*, available on [smashwords.com](http://smashwords.com)

In addition to writing, I enjoy tabletop gaming. I've written a miniature battles game called *Clash of Swords*. All of the rules are available free at [face2facegames.net](http://face2facegames.net)

## From the same author on Feedbacks

*Forty Leap (2006)*

SAMPLE ONLY. This is the first 4 chapters of the novel *Forty Leap*. Please see inside for details. -- What if you could travel into the future? What if you couldn't stop travelling into the future? You might lose a minute or an hour. You'd get bewildered stares from your family when it takes you five minutes to retrieve your sister-in-law's cup of tea from the next room. You'd have to beg for your job when you missed a week because of jumping into the future. Blocks of time would suddenly be behind you. And during those blocks of time, people might leave. People might die. The world might change around you. What happens then if you start to lose years? Then people finally start to believe your story? Then they want to study you. They want to harness your curse as a power. As the generations pass you by, what does the world become in your absence? Who are you when you finally emerge into each new era?

I'll tell you who you are. You're Mathew Cristian, that's who.

*The Book of Revelations (2008)*

When a psychiatrist discovers a way to see into people's past lives he becomes judge and jury. Seeking the advice of clergymen, he meets Rabbi Guetterman and discovers that, in his past life, he was of Adolf Hitler. This discovery sparks events that push the limits of society, test the bounds of faith, and put the rabbi in mortal danger. Because when the Jury is after you, there is no escape.

*Zombies! Episode 4: The Sick and the Dead (2010)*

The coming of the zombies to the world is not necessarily the coming of the apocalypse. Take a tour of the research facility where Dr. Denise Luco combats the zombie infection. Anthony Heron must continuously do battle with his own private demons while trying to keep the public ones at bay. And what's going on with Peter Ventura?

*Zombies! Episode 1: Shawn of the Dead (2010)*

THE coming of the zombies to the world is not necessarily the coming of the apocalypse. *Shawn of the Dead* is the first of a series of episodes that focuses on the more personal aspects of people as

they face their regular lives against the backdrop of a zombie infection.

#### Zombies! Episode 2: Abby's Bad Day (2010)

The coming of the zombies to the world is not necessarily the coming of the apocalypse. Abby Benjamin is a typical working mom. But when one of the customers at the gym where she works falls ill, Abby gets a close up look at a completely different world, a world that is ever creeping into the lives of normal people. It is a very bad day.

#### Zombies! Episode 3: Love Bites (2010)

The coming of the zombies to the world is not necessarily the coming of the apocalypse. Relationships are hard enough without having to worry about the undead knocking on your door. Follow John Arrick, Shawn Rudd, and Denise Luco as they try to put their fears of the undead aside in order to grapple with the much more dangerous effects of romance.

#### Zombies! Episode 5: Sinners and Saints (2011)

Is the apocalypse a world wide event or is it something that happens privately to the individual? Zombies have become a part of society now, the truth of their existence common knowledge. And as policemen like Anthony Heron and Francis Culph must deal with the consequences of fighting them, others have embraced their existence in surprising ways. Their common ground? Lots and lots of zombies!

#### Zombies! Episode 6: Barriers Collapse (2011)

Is the apocalypse a world wide event or is it something that happens privately to the individual? The walls that separate the characters of *Zombies!* begin to collapse. Abby and Peter embark on a crusade to warn people of the threat of zombies while John Arrick discovers that his miraculous recovery from the zombie infection does not come without side effects.

#### Zombies! Episode 8: The Good, the Bad, and the Zombie (2011)

Is the apocalypse a world wide event or is it something that happens privately to the individual? It's Christmas. While Greg Smith is reunited with his estranged parents, Anthony Heron must battle

his demons in order to find his way back to the family that is rapidly slipping away.

After an unprecedented phone call from his mother, Greg Smith and his wife agree to allow them into their lives despite a prior conflict. As they are resolving their issues, Smith must deal with the rapidly deteriorating Anthony Heron and a piece of intelligence that names all of the Zombie Rights Association officers and the locations of their safe houses.

When Naughton steps in to help Smith run the operation, they implement a plan to exterminate hundreds of zombies and take back control of the city. But, of course, when an operation is spread out over six locations and involves dozens of people from all different branches of law enforcement, things are bound to go wrong.



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