

The CEO and the Demon



Hamish Trolove

Jacket over his shoulder, sports bag under his arm, phone to his ear, Kevin strode out of his office, past his executive assistant's desk giving her a wave as he went, swept past reception and into a waiting lift. In the safety of the lift, he fished around in his jacket, smiled to himself when the dark blue corner of his passport peeked out from the inner pocket. "Is that the IMU office?"

Across town and sideways a touch, an indistinct figure lounged in a deep leather chair, feet upon his desk. Idly, he flicked his executive desk toy with a toe. The line of skulls clicked and swung on their wires.

"Ah. Mister Kevin.

"So good to hear from you.

"Yes. We have all the information we need. Thank you for that.

"No thank *you!*

"If we find we need more, we'll figure it out ourselves.

"We aim to make it easy for our customers, Mister Kevin.

"Your stand-in will be in place about half past one today.

"Just leave it to us and enjoy your two weeks in Las Vegas

"and thank *you* for choosing *Indulge Me Unlimited*. *You indulge, we cover,*" he closed his phone with a snap, and smiled a sharp smile.

Kevin rung off, and rubbed his hands together. "Vegas, here I come."

The CEO and the Demon

Kevin's executive assistant had almost finished writing her latest post describing the antics of her dog for the internal social media, when Kevin strolled past her desk heading for his office. "Hi Janine. Anything new I should know about?"

"You're back early," said Janine. "Was the conference cancelled or something?"

"I only stayed for the Minister's keynote speech." Kevin said. "I couldn't see much value in sitting through all the technical stuff. Nothing that needs my attention here?"

"No. The ELT¹ were looking to meet with you but I said you were away for a couple of days in Auckland."

"Sweet! I might just go and clear a few emails." Kevin sauntered into his office, poured himself a gin from his drinks cabinet and settled down at his computer. After ten minutes of browsing his messages, he called out, "Janine? What's my password for the financial system again? I can never remember the damn thing."

"Big Boy 1," shouted Janine. "All lower case. No spaces."

"Tah." the Ministry of Gambling Compliance finances opened to Kevin's touch. He grinned a sharp grin and settled down to work.

Janine had just hit "publish" on her new social media article on the results of the afternoon's online poll about what coffee flavours staff preferred², when Kevin stalked past heading for his office. "My flight was cancelled. Technical difficulties with the plane," he muttered.

Janine glanced behind her in shock. She could see Kevin at his computer through the glass partition. The Kevin at her desk had frozen in his tracks, his face white. "Crap!" he whispered under his breath. "I'd forgotten."

"Who?" Janine looked from one to the other. "What?"

From behind her, she heard a swish as Kevin leapt to his feet. "Janine! Call security, get this impostor out of here."

"Janine. Call security. I want this impostor out of my office." snapped the Kevin in front of her.

Most were not particularly pleased with the situation. It was twenty past four, and they were looking forward to getting home soon. Janine was not happy. She normally disappeared about 4:15 for her Pilates class. Security were not happy, because they were paid not to be happy. The two Kevins were not happy, because they were the focus of some rather uncomfortable scrutiny. The few others who had turned up at the commotion, were not too unhappy because it looked like this might be a bit of excitement to fill in the last hour of the day. Better than doing work at least.

"This will be easy to sort out," scoffed the Director of Government Relations. She turned to the two Kevins. "If the Minister were to come to us with an idea for anything, what would you say to him?"

Kevin smirked. "I'd tell him what a great idea it was and I'd set up a focus group using agile principles to workshop the idea, and refine it. Then it will be simply a matter of throwing it open to the stakeholders for consultation, and further refinement. I'd then appoint a manager and team to study the idea and the full implications it has for the Ministry, the political risks, and also the cost benefit ratio."

Kevin rolled his eyes. "What a dumb answer. You can clearly tell he's the impostor. The right thing to do is engage at least five consultants to do feasibility studies of the idea. I will assign some of our principal advisors to the job of distilling the learnings from the studies and summarising it as a one page document. The summarised findings will then be packed out into an eighty page glossy document which can be circulated to selected stakeholder for their feedback. Once we have their feedback, we can appoint a manager and team to study the idea and the full implications it has for the Ministry, the political risks, and also the cost benefit ratio."

The members of the ELT muttered to themselves. It wasn't clear which Kevin was the right one. Neither had mentioned *implementing* the Ministers idea in their long-winded streams of corporate babble. The Director of Government Relations had been taking notes, and nodded appreciatively.

"Excuse me, but ... " the intern half put up a hand.

"Knowledge of our corporate strategy should make it clear who's who." The Director of Strategy said haughtily. Addressing the two Kevins she said, "Our strategy mentions four strategic goals for next year. Describe two of them."

1 Executive Leadership Team

2 It was a tight battle, but Hazelnut had a slight edge over Salted Caramel. Chai Turmeric Latte was not a popular option.

The CEO and the Demon

“Too easy,” Kevin rocked his chair back, hands behind his head. “Our aspirational target is to improve the number of compliance audits carried out by third party auditors by ten percent, plus or minus thirty percent.”

“I was going to say that one,” Kevin cast a smouldering glare at the other Kevin. His sharp grin reappeared, “but that’s okay, I know them all, so here’s another one; We will acknowledge all complaints from the public about gambling institutions behaviour within thirty *working* days of them being raised.”

The members of the ELT muttered to themselves. The Director of Strategy shrugged and looked up her copy of the Strategy. Both Kevins were right. Neither had fallen in to the trap of claiming any actual advancement or improvement of service.

“But ... “ said the intern.

“Got it.” said the Manager of Data and Technical. “When an inspector goes into a premise with pokie machines to carry out a compliance audit, what are the first steps they need to take after arriving on site?”

“I have no idea,” said Kevin. “Nor do I care.”

“I don’t concern myself with technical things,” said Kevin.

The members of the ELT muttered to themselves. The Manager of Data and Technical nodded. It was not clear. Neither Kevin had any practical or technical knowledge relating to the day to day activities of their front line staff.

“I have an idea,” squeaked the intern.

“Keep it down intern!” barked the Director of People and Capability. “If you persist with this behaviour it will be a heavy shade of gray mark on your record. We shall have to send you off on *My Place in the Hierarchy Training*.”

“I know,” said the Director of Security. “Catch!” He threw a couple of dice towards the two Kevins. Both caught them expertly in their right hands.

The members of the ELT muttered to themselves. The Director of Security said “Bah! I was certain that would work.”

“He’s also got red skin and horns, and a tail. He’s a demon!” muttered the intern under her breath.

“That’s culturally insensitive!” snapped the Director of People and Capability. “Intern. This is another heavy shade of gray mark on your record. It’s *Cultural Awareness Training* for you.”

“What do we do?” the Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs, looked at Kevin and the demon, and shook his head. “We can’t tell them apart.”

“I have an idea,” said the intern.

“What is it, intern?” snapped the Director of People and Capability.

“Sorry,” said the intern “Have you tried seeing if they have access to the brig?”

“We have a brig?” the Director of Government Relations was surprised. “What do we need a brig for?”

“We have a brig,” the Director of People and Capability muttered sheepishly. “We use it during negotiations with the union, hammering out agreements with contractors, and when questioning front-line staff and inspectors about their expenses claims.”

“They interviewed me there.” said the intern.

“What do you suggest?” Director of Government Relations looked down her nose at the intern.

“Access to the brig is very restricted. The one who can access the brig, clearly has full access across the business and is the genuine CEO.”

“Bring it on.” the Demon, whipped out his access card.

Kevin looked worried.

“Too easy.” said the Demon swiping his card through the reader. The door clicked and he stepped inside the tiny room beyond.

“Now you.” said the Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs, closing the door again.

Kevin swiped his card. The reader emitted a buzz, but remained resolutely locked. Kevin tried again, and again in desperation, until the Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs put his hand on his shoulder. “I think we’ve got our impostor.”

“Okay. This way you.” said the Director of Security waving over the two security guards.

“But!” stammered Kevin.

“Er. Hold it.” said the intern. “Sorry to have caused confusion, but you have it all wrong. The guy in the *brig* is the impostor. Only People and Capability have access. IT explained it to me.”

The CEO and the Demon

“I think we’ve got our impostor.” the Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs waved the two security guards over to the big door. He looked over his shoulder at Kevin. “We might have to chat about how this fellow came to be here.’

Kevin shifted uncomfortably.



December 2024 / January 2025 Challenge

Take a wander through the ATU Index or Motif Index and see if there is a folktale you’d like to re-invent in some way or tell from a different point of view. Or you could choose a tale type or selection of motifs to build your own tale around in whatever genre or point of view you wish. The tales can be as obscure as you like.

Selected ATU Index Story Type

926A³

The Clever Judge and the Demon in the Pot. In order to possess a beautiful woman, a demon (magician) takes on the appearance of her husband and claims her as his wife. The husband and the demon argue about which is the real husband. Numerous persons are asked for advice, but nobody can distinguish between the two men.

Finally a judge (clever boy [who plays at being a king or a judge], shepherd, hare, jackal, parrot) states that whichever can creep into a pot (tube) is the real husband. The husband is not able to enter, but the demon creeps inside immediately. The pot is covered, and the demon is recognized and trapped. The real husband gets his wife back [J1141.1.7]. Cf. Types 155, 331.

Combinations: 330, 331, and 920.



³ ATU Index entry. Reference: *The Types of International Folktales – A Classification and Bibliography: PART I: Animal Tales, Tales of Magic, Religious Tales, and Realistic Tales.* <https://edition.fi/kalevalaseura>