

## **Sir Mephis Karonara** **Backstory**

**Name:** Fabius Hari (the name he goes by on the mortal plane after his transformation into a demon, to pass himself off as mortal)

**Demon Name:** Mephistopheles/Lord Mephistopheles/Archfiend of Antenora/The Speaking Demon

**Mortal Name:** Sir Mephis Karonara

**Species:** Eurasian Lynx/Fur-based demon

**Sex:** ♂

**Age:** Stopped ageing at 32, current age 904

**Height:** 6ft 4in in humanoid form

**Weight:** 175lbs (79.4kg) in humanoid form

**Siblings:** None

### **Setting Notes**

This world is based in Medieval England. The culture is very Christianity-centric with prayers at each meal and before bed, and weekly visits to church.

Humans never existed in this world, however a subspecies of spitz-type wolf came into existence as a result of the cultures in the north, leading to a species referred to in this profile as 'husky'. It looks similar to, but is not the same as the domestic breed.

Sir Mephis Karonara appears in the 15<sup>th</sup> century stories of Faust and in the *Fallen Angel* comic. He is a knight by trade, and a quick outside-the-box thinker and expert strategist who thought a little too far outside of the box for his own good one day and had himself transformed into a demon.

### **Trust & Confidence**

*(newborn)*

Mephis was born in September 1116 into a noble family. His father, Alexander Karonara, was a knight and the vizier to the king. He owned a sword known as Snake-Tongue, a family heirloom that had been passed down to him by his father.

His family crest was that of a king cobra. His family chose a snake as their symbolic animal due to their long-held family tradition of becoming visiers and other 'professional speakers': they had tongues as slick as snakes.

Mephis' mother, Sibyl, came from a noble family who owned hundreds of acres of land. She was known for her beauty.

They met on the day Alexander began his role as the royal vizier. Sibyl's family visited

the king on that day to discuss supply and demand of food to the general population of the kingdom. She and Alexander met during this visit, found each other charming, and courted until they married.

They conceived Mephis in order to continue the Karonara family line. However, he was also very much born of love. The popular choice among noblewomen in Mephis' time was for infants to be handed over to a wet-nurse for their care. Sibyl decided against this and nursed Mephis herself, preferring to enjoy the contact with him. Some other nobles whispered about this but she paid them no heed and loved Mephis anyway.

For Mephis, the result of this was that he sensed how much she savoured his presence and felt deeply welcome in the world. He cherished her too and the pair created a strong and exquisitely nourishing symbiosis.

### **Freedom & Self-Determination**

*(toddlerhood)*

Mephis proved to be a fast learner as soon as he was capable of learning skills such as speech and hand-eye coordination.

The castle he grew up in was a bountiful place. His father was often busy but showed an interest in how Mephis was getting along as he grew. Alexander and Sibyl also had servants and they loved Mephis. However, everyone was generally busy doing things other than looking after him so he learned quickly that he had to be forthcoming and explicitly ask for what he wanted. From here it wasn't a big step to learn that if he approached one servant and asked for a sweet roll, there was nothing to stop him approaching a second one and get another since the second servant would have no idea that he'd already had one. As such, Mephis developed a charming persona that encouraged the grown-ups to actively want to break off from whatever they were doing to pay attention to him. This persona was forthcoming, cute, and curious.

That isn't to say that Mephis' behaviour was always perfect (or that the servants or his parents always found it pleasing). Mephis sometimes behaved in ways that the grown-ups around him didn't like or found unsafe. For instance, on one occasion he broke an hourglass to find out what was inside. Somehow he avoided cutting himself on the glass. Understandably the servants didn't want him doing that again and scolded him for it.

As a few situations like this occurred, Mephis learned what it was like to feel shame. However, it was always short-lived: with the grown-ups all being busy people they generally moved on quickly from any dealings with him – including disciplinary action – so he never had to feel ashamed of his behaviour for long.

### **Ambition**

*(young childhood)*

Mephis grew into a longer-limbed and better coordinated child. He became highly energetic and curious about everything that was happening around him. More than this, he began to actively feel capable of some things, and to feel as if he had an impact on the world around him.

His father took an active interest in him and began to teach him a few specifically knight-and visier-related things such as swordsmanship (although this was purely for the sake of fun and with wooden swords; Mephis would only train seriously in swordsmanship a few years later), public speaking, and strategy.

Mephis was still too young to truly understand most of this information, and Alexander recognised this. Rather, he taught his son some of these things to tantalise Mephis so that his future lessons would seem more exciting. Still, the impact on Mephis was that he dreamed big! He imagined himself as a brave knight who would lead others to glory with his silver tongue and military skill. He often played at being a knight around the castle, and although he sometimes knocked things over or pestered a servant who didn't have the time to indulge him, he generally got a positive reception and had fun!

The tone from the servants who were able to indulge him changed a slightly, from 'Aww, that's cute!' to 'Yes, one day you'll be doing that for real. Keep practising!' The sense that Mephis was destined for greatness and that this greatness would be both achievable and fun was so strong that he didn't develop a sense of self-consciousness about his own limitations.

Mephis started to pay attention to how his father conducted business. Often Alexander would meet with other nobles and discuss various matters with them. From this Mephis learned that being liked was more effective in getting a person what they wanted than being disliked, that letting the other person think that a plan was their idea was better than dictating to them, that offering food and drink made others more agreeable, and a variety of other lessons. He didn't necessarily learn these things so well that he could articulate them himself – he was still only a small child, after all – but he soaked up his father's skills of diplomacy, confidence, leadership, and expertly-applied curiosity, and began to practice them himself.

The nobles sometimes also brought their children with them, allowing Mephis the chance to play as well as practice some of the things he saw his father doing. This allowed Mephis to see the impact he had on the children and how getting along with them made them more receptive to suggestions he made or to ideas he had.

It should also be said that Mephis only occasionally heard raised voices, saw threatening behaviour, and so on, and whenever he did it was the individual Alexander was talking to rather than Alexander himself, so these behaviours continued to be 'that thing the outsider does, not me'. In this way, his father's diplomatic techniques came to feel natural to Mephis.

## **Productivity**

*(older childhood)*

Mephis' personal development continued as he entered the latter stages of childhood. His training became more serious as the adults around him started training him as a page.

He met with other children and very much enjoyed the experience of finally getting to be around others his own age. Another child might have felt shy in his situation, but not Mephis! He was already well-equipped to present himself well in the presence of others and saw it as a point of pride to come across confidently, just like his father when he met a new visitor to the castle.

Some of the children had grown up with siblings or in households with others their own age. Others had not. The only-children were generally more competitive, and Mephis found himself very much in this crowd, eager to succeed in every task he was given.

For Mephis, the subject or task at hand didn't matter: he wanted to do it well just to prove that he was up to the challenge. His father introduced him to the workings of the royal accounts, the ins and outs of warfare, and the strategies and proficiencies necessary to work in the role of visier, whether or not Mephis wanted to be one himself when he grew up. As Alexander saw it, it was more important to capitalise on Mephis' enthusiasm to learn and teach him any and all skills he could.

Mephis' approach to academia was similar, whether it was the arts or colder subjects like maths. He just wanted to do well, and as he got proficient at each subject he came to enjoy them all the more. And he did just as well in teamwork as he did in solitary work. After all, he knew very well how to bring others onside!

His lessons were sprinkled with religious instruction. As Mephis learned more about each of his subjects, he began to feel that much of the content of these religious lessons simply didn't sit well with him. He was already well aware of the dynamics of power plays – his father had seen to that – and recognised them in the lessons of the religious texts he was given to read and obey. To him, rules, laws, authority, all these things deserved scrutiny, and if they didn't make sense, to throw them out. He saw little merit in the religious teachings and decided to follow his own moral compass instead.

When Mephis turned seven it was decreed that he would be taken to the king's castle to serve as a page. This situation played out quite strangely for him. He saw that his father was displeased by this news, and during one of the ensuing few days eavesdropped on his one of his parents' conversations. He heard his father say that he had wanted Mephis to follow in his footsteps and become the next visier and certainly didn't want him going overseas to fight some crusade. His mother agreed but both parents admitted to each other that they didn't believe petitioning the king for him to stay at home would

make any difference.

Mephis decided to prove to his parents and the king that he could be a great page – and when the time came, a great knight! He was unfamiliar with the feeling of being powerless so interpreted this situation as a challenge, and one that he would surely excel in.

He was quite wrong-footed therefore, when his mother came to talk with him about his upcoming apprenticeship. Sibyl comforted him, saying that even if this wasn't what he wanted to do, that she had faith that God would bring him safely back to her.

A few days later Mephis was taken to the king's castle where he met the knight who would train him: Sir Keslenton. Mephis was one of several pages brought to Sir Keslenton on the same day. Another of the pages was a husky named Kai West.

The pages' academic training continued alongside the physical instruction they were given under Sir Keslenton. Mephis did his best as he always had done and he quickly showed himself to be a strong performer, but for once in his life he wasn't the star pupil. Kai invariably outperformed him during physical training sessions: he was simply stronger and more enthusiastic. Mephis found this frustrating and refused to accept defeat.

Mephis came to see Kai as a rival. He studied how Kai fought and copied what he observed. All the time that Mephis did this, Kai continued to beat him. Mephis responded by doing what he had always done when he couldn't get his way: he worked on winning Kai over. They became close – or Mephis' facsimile of close – so that he could get an advantage over Kai.

There were times when Mephis' focus on Kai and his fighting style became so tight that Sir Keslenton had to remind him to fight other pages too, to keep his education well-rounded. Mephis obliged, although he continued to fight Kai whenever he could as that was where he believed his best developmental edge lay.

It was already very evident to Mephis that Kai held very traditional views, including the idea of servitude to God. Mephis carefully negotiated Kai's firm religious and traditionalist views and kept those of his own views that Kai might find offensive to himself.

While he didn't succeed in getting Kai to lower his guard, all of this attention did earn him Kai's respect as a keen student.

Throughout all of this, Mephis grew into his own all the more. Now that he was away from his parents and the servants who had raised him, he was aware that he was on his own and bore the responsibility of speaking up for, and representing, himself. He wrote letters to his parents to update them on how he was doing and reassuring them that he was learning his craft well enough that he would be as safe as possible. He applied the

diplomatic skills he had learned from his father, along with the charm and quick wit he had learned for himself. His tutors and the other pages pretty much unanimously loved him for it, and those who didn't tended to get sidelined.

### **Child to Adult Transition** *(adolescence)*

By the time Mephis reached adolescence he had become well-integrated into his group of pages. He had established himself as a natural leader even if he wasn't quite an A student on the battlefield yet. He quietly used his charm, manipulation, and persuasive skills to influence the group just to see if he could. As it turned out, he was very much up to the challenge. In fact, he was so good at this that even the tutors and Sir Keslenton didn't notice the influence he had.

At least, not always – Sir Keslenton was a great strategist and leader himself and recognised some of what Mephis was doing. He let it continue and offered Mephis occasional advice to tweak his skills.

One day Sir Keslenton and the pages were called to attend and observe a nearby battle alongside 100 other knights and the king himself against a hoard of barbarians. Mephis was only 13 and immediately found the prospect of this adventure exciting! As he saw it, this would be his first opportunity to prove himself in a real-world setting. He helped to prepare Sir Keslenton, readied himself, and they all set off to the battlefield.

Although the purpose of this outing was for Sir Keslenton's group of pages to observe rather than get actively involved, the barbarians had much better control over the battlefield than had been anticipated, and Sir Keslenton was obliged to join the fight.

One barbarian, a bear, knocked Sir Keslenton to the ground. Mephis charged forward with his dagger drawn and threw it. It hit the barbarian in the chest. The bear retaliated and would almost certainly have killed Mephis if Kai hadn't come in from the side and struck him down with a short-sword. The barbarian died instantly.

Sir Keslenton had recovered by this point and told them both to get back and out of the danger zone.

Kai was ecstatic about having killed a barbarian, but Mephis saw the situation differently. Up until this point in his life everything had felt like a game, within his capabilities and ultimately safe. Now that somebody – barbarian or not: Mephis recognised that the barbarian was a person no matter where he came from – had lost their life, he felt shaken.

Until now, Mephis had only very rarely felt out of his depth. This turn of events, which made everything feel so much more intense, changed everything. And yet, even in this state of shock Mephis recognised that his views were very different to those of Kai and

most of the people around him.

As the battle turned in favour of the king and Sir Keslenton's party returned to the castle Mephis thought more about what had happened. The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that there must have been a way to react to the situation non-lethally, that to kill anyone, even an enemy, was a failure because even one's enemies had families, wives, and children who didn't deserve to suffer.

He and Kai were dubbed as Sir Keslenton's squires for their demonstration of loyalty. Kai, once again, was delighted by this. Mephis felt more ambivalent. He understood that his lack of enthusiasm would be contentious, that it would almost certainly bring dishonour on his father and spoil this effective promotion for Kai, so he feigned the appearance of humility and gratitude that seemed appropriate to the situation.

The following years became an endless march of progress. He learned more, both in the fields of academia and advanced combat training. He and Kai remained close and came to see each other as brothers, not of blood but of shared experience in battle.

He and Kai continued to spar to hone their skills, and Mephis began to win some of these matches as he learned to anticipate what Kai's next move would be. He also continued to train with other squires and pages to keep his repertoire fresh and to build relationships.

Mephis continued to write to his parents and also took the time to return home whenever he could to visit them. Often he invited Kai to visit with him. During these visits they would go to the local taverns where Mephis became very popular with the local women. Seduction presented no challenge to him at all: his manipulation skills and well-practised charm made winning womens' hearts all too easy.

One of these women was a wolf named Isolda Nash, who had deep red and white fur. Mephis suspected that she and Kai would get along very well indeed – after all, they were both canine – and introduced them. They hit it off beautifully and started courting. After this Mephis started seeing less of Kai. He didn't mind this as it was clear that Kai was seeking Isolda's company and he himself had set this in motion.

### **Closeness in Relationships**

*(young adulthood)*

When Mephis was 20 he was dubbed once again, this time by the king in view of the royal court, as a fully fledged knight. Soon after this he heard that Kai too had been knighted – and had married Isolda.

Soon after this he and Kai were called upon by the king to head out to the Crusades to reclaim the Holy Land from the heretics. The two met to discuss the details of this expedition and agreed to call themselves and the company they would be taking with

them, The Order of the Crimson Wolf in honour of Isolda.

During Mephis' preparations his father called him home. When Mephis got there he was struck by how different his childhood home felt, as if it had somehow changed its essence in his absence. He also noticed that Alexander looked so much older than when Mephis had first left for the king's castle.

His father told him that, while Mephis wasn't on the path that Alexander had planned for him, he was proud of what Mephis had become, and that since Mephis had become a knight it seemed only fitting that he be given the family sword. Then Alexander presented him with Snake-Tongue.

At age 22 The Order of The Crimson Wolf was instructed to take over the city of Lasonia. To do so would greatly increase the king's influence and standing in other royal courts. Many had tried and failed, so this was a tall order.

Mephis and Kai discussed how they would approach this challenge. The hardest part of the operation would be to enter the city's walls. Mephis knew that a temple stood within those walls and that a prophet lived in the temple. He quickly saw that an open assault would be a bad idea – this was how so many had failed before them – and that a different approach would be needed. Although he thought of one soon enough, it would be considered dishonourable so he suggested it to Kai with care: to dress as merchants, hiding their armour under cloaks, be admitted under the guise of performing trade, head for the temple, take the prophet hostage and use him as leverage to have the doors opened. Then the rest of the Order could enter and all together they would take the city.

Despite the dishonour in this plan Mephis liked it as he assessed it to require no lethal force, so in theory nobody had to die.

Using his best skills of persuasion he succeeded in getting Kai to approve this plan and they went ahead with it. It went off exactly as Mephis had hoped, and the Order claimed Lasonia for the king.

The Order of The Crimson Wolf functioned from the city of Lasonia for the following 11 years. During this time the Order developed a fearsome reputation that if you faced one of its members, you had best hope that your god was watching over you for if they weren't, you would die. Mephis led the Order to earn this reputation and as he did, he cultured a reputation for honour and compassion.

When Mephis was 27 he received the message that Alexander had passed away. He grieved for his father. Although he hadn't always felt that his father was as present as he could have been, he had loved him. His grief refreshed his commitment to avoid loss of life on the battlefield, and during the darkest hours of his grief he vowed on Alexander's tomb that nobody would ever have to experience the pain of losing a loved one, either by his hand or any other's.

At age 31 the king sent Mephis an instruction to head out to the Crusades in the Holy Land and re-take it for God. Mephis saw it as a great honour to be entrusted with this. However, he it also left him feeling that his career had come full-circle. He had never forgotten his initial feeling about the murder of that bear barbarian and he recognised that, much like that fateful day when he had been asked to observe the battlefield, this was another battle where people would be killed for nothing but their lack of belief in God.

The king quickly sent Mephis, Kai, and the rest of the Order on a ship to join the fight in Acre. Throughout that journey Mephis felt his reservations but felt he couldn't discuss them with Kai, who was as enthusiastic as ever about the prospect of a holy battle.

When they got to Acre Mephis took the time, as he always did, to assess his plan of action. What he saw there made the upholding of his vow seem impossible: the intensity of the war there was more lethal than he'd ever seen before, with both sides eager to claim the lives of fighters on the opposing side. Mephis took his time thinking about how to execute a non-lethal attack but for the first time in years, found it difficult to see a clear path. Even as he tried to formulate a plan that would keep everyone's lives intact he saw his own men be drawn into this bloodthirsty chaos, attacking first the men of the heretics' side and then innocent women and children. He felt sickened and lost, but refused to give up hope. Mephis had never accepted defeat easily and he felt determined to find a way to prevail in a way that would not demand more death.

He took to walking in the desert at night to consider his options. During one such walk he saw a travelling caravan that had set up camp for the night. He felt drawn to it for some reason he couldn't identify, but his natural curiosity outweighed his sense of caution.

In the camp he met an emerald-green, female king-cobra. She reminded him of the symbolic snake of the Karonara family crest. He sensed something unholy about her, yet on the face of it she appeared to be nothing other than a fortune-teller or maybe some kind of clairvoyant.

She introduced herself as Lilith and invited him into her tent, which he accepted. Once settled inside she asked him what he was looking for. He explained his conundrum about the city of Acre and said that he needed something more to be able to achieve the non-lethal victory he wanted.

Lilith asked him, "How much would you sacrifice for such a power?"

He replied, "If it is to secure peace for every man, woman and child in this god forsaken war, then I'd gladly offer my life for it and anything I must do if it means ending the suffering of those I care about."

Lilith remarked that it was deeply unusual for a person to come to her seeking power for

the benefit of others and not just themselves, so on this basis she would help him. She described a ritual that would turn him into an immortal demon that would have the power to end the bloodshed. For this, he would require the deaths of four souls who trusted him unconditionally.

Mephis decided to do this, believing that it was better for him to sacrifice four souls than let so many more than four lose their lives. He chose Sir Lucas Fulbrim, Sir Malus Victras, Sir Gregory Decon and Sir Trevor Carlot. He invited them to a tent under the guise of celebrating his birthday, and then did what he had always done best: used his legendary persuasive skill to convince the four of them sacrifice themselves in the ritual willingly.

He told a few lies to achieve this, mainly that the ritual would guarantee them victory over the heretics. By this time Mephis was very used to hiding his distaste for the term 'heretic', and the assembled knights didn't suspect a thing.

They went ahead with the ritual. It succeeded and Mephis transformed into a demon. From the moment he completed his transformation he felt as if time had lost its meaning – which it had, as he had become immortal – and that his armour no longer weighed him down.

By sheer coincidence Kai entered the watchtower, unaware that any ritual had occurred. He was, of course, horrified by what he saw, and Mephis tried to explain his reasoning, but Kai could not accept what he had seen, nor Mephis' betrayal of what Kai had considered their shared religious values.

Kai attacked him. Mephis fought back non-lethally and found it very easy indeed: his skill, reflexes, and strength had improved so drastically that it was like he was fending off an attack from a child.

Just as he thought that Kai had given up, Kai turned the tide. He used a spell, the holy flame, to banish Mephis to the abyss and the nine hells. As Mephis' body crumbled he saw the same pain in Kai's eyes as he felt himself, and said these words:

"Live a good life, Sir Kai, and once you pass on from this world, enjoy your time in the heavens. Do not pity me Kai, for I made my choice, I gave up heaven for the power to change things. I have no regrets in what I did. Goodbye Kai, my dearest friend."

Mephis found himself in hell, his body reassembled. As he took stock of the situation he noticed that the holy flame Kai had used on him was still around his heart and that his skin glowed with holy symbols. The magic felt pleasantly warm and he recognised that Kai's holy flame was protecting him, even in hell.

Mindful of the reason for his sacrifice, Mephis flew upwards the way he had fallen to try and return to the mortal plane and win the war in Acre. However, he discovered that the magic had locked him in hell so that he couldn't leave.

Given his new situation of being stuck in hell, Mephis paid closer attention to where he was. The warmth of Kai's magic was especially welcome as it turned out that hell was cold.

He was above a city surrounded by ice and cascades of boiling blood that ran around the frozen city. Beneath the semi-transparent ice, he could see details that looked like other cities. Although he could not have known it at this time, these were other circles of hell.

Mephis began to explore the city and was soon approached by another demon. The demon demanded to know what his business was in Antenora. Mephis made a mental note of the city's name and answered that he was a newcomer who was looking around.

The other demon demanded a tribute as a mark of respect but Mephis refused this, saying that respect had to be earned and could not be demanded.

The demon attacked him and Mephis reacted quickly on instinct. But he didn't get to land a counter-attack as Kai's power intervened for him. It struck the demon and turned them to ashes. For a moment Mephis felt as if he was burning inside and out: his core burned and so did the symbols on his fur, and the sensation was so powerful he collapsed and felt himself beginning to black out.

He looked up and saw other demons approaching him. Insensible with pain, he said only one word before he blacked out: "Help."

When he woke up he found himself being tended to by a demon medic. He recognised the demon's face instantly, as demonhood hadn't changed him too much: he had been noted in Mephis' history books as a medic of the Hospitaller order of the Templar Knights, but who had betrayed the Hospitallers as he had come to see faith in God as a disease. Mephis asked the medic where he was and what was going on.

The medic introduced himself as Henry. Henry told Mephis that he had healed him as best he could but he couldn't remove the holy symbols from his body. He also told Mephis that they were in Antenora, a city in the second ring of the ninth circle of hell, dedicated to people who had rebelled against their faith during their mortal lives.

Furthermore, Henry gave Mephis more information about the spell that had bound him to hell so that he couldn't return to the mortal plane. Capacity to cast the spell was granted by God, only to those whose faith was without equal. It burned away at the faithful's soul when cast and drastically shortened their lifespan. He had seen it for himself in one of his fellow knights in the Hospitallers who had used the spell to cure a disease in another person which was previously thought to be incurable. That fellow knight had died in his sleep soon after.

It was then that Henry had rejected his own faith.

Mephis asked why the first demon he had met had attacked him, and Henry explained that this was the nature of demons, especially the ones in this circle of hell. Mephis expressed disappointment that a person would reject demands of allegiance or loyalty based on faith alone only to demand the very same as demons.

Next, Mephis asked why he had been brought to this place. Henry answered that the archfiend of Antenora had seen the flare of the holy flame and felt the need to send help, so Mephis had been brought in to be treated by Henry. Henry remarked that this was deeply unusual for the archfiend, who was usually as selfish as any other demon. He further revealed that the current archfiend was Antenor himself, the Trojan who had betrayed his own city.

Mephis asked Henry where in the city he might stay, and Henry explained that the archfiend owned every property in the city so he would have to ask him. So Mephis asked if he could meet with Antenor. Henry obliged him and took him to Antenor's throne room.

Antenor asked Mephis why he had come, and Mephis asked the archfiend if he would grant him somewhere to live. As Mephis spoke he felt that his words had substance, that Antenor's empathy was bared, and his words were received. The effect on Antenor was that he granted Mephis a place to live close to the palace, as he was intrigued by Mephis' use of the holy flame and wanted to watch over him.

Mephis saw in Antenor's heart that this was not the full truth of it. Antenor certainly was intrigued, but his interest was less academic than that. The archfiend was suspicious of Mephis. He disliked the fact that Mephis appeared to have such an effective power and wanted to keep watch over him. From this, Mephis took warning and decided to use his power as a counter-measure.

As Mephis was led by a pair of guards to his new home he thought about this power of spontaneous persuasion he seemed to have developed. When they reached his new home he asked one of the guards to inform him of any news that the guard heard about the archfiend by whatever means was most appropriate. Once again he sensed the substance behind his words and felt them be received by the guard, who agreed, bowed to him, and then left.

Mephis remained in Antenora like this for several years. He passed the time getting to know what other beings existed in this ring of hell, including their cultures and entirely new skills. He also studied his holy flame to see if the pain of using it might diminish over time. It did not, although using it couldn't - so didn't - kill him.

He learned how to change the appearance of his outfit and of Snake-Tongue using oral spells, and came to call this spell The Commandment as a back-handed nod to God's Ten Commandments.

During this time Mephis also learned how to traverse between circles of hell, and he explored their entire length and breadth. His travels appraised him of the fact that any demon could use the sins of their mortal life as currency. Furthermore, he learned that he had sinned so much that he was richer than most demons.

He particularly liked visiting the circle of hell for Lust. The archfiend there was Cleopatra, and his favourite location was a cafe known as Cleopatra's Cascade where he enjoyed a strawberry-flavoured green tea.

Mephis' travels and eagerness to learn new arcane magic, plus his relationship-building skills which he continued to use in order to pick up new knowledge, eventually led him to the understanding that by combining the magic he had learned with the status of archfiend, he could break the power of God - and by extension, the hold Kai's holy fire had on him.

300 years had passed in hell and the year on the mortal plane was 1448, so in preparation to return to the land of the living he used his Commandment to update his clothing and Snake-Tongue. He shifted Snake-Tongue into a gupti made of black oak topped with a silver cobra.

He visited Antenor and used the power of his words to ask Antenor to vacate the throne without a fight and make Mephis the next archfiend.

Antenor agreed to this and granted Mephis the royal seal of Antenora, a set of eyes that, when used, would grant Mephis the full power of an archfiend. Mephis made Antenor his head of security.

Mephis used the eyes and broke free of hell. He shape-shifted to hide his wings and change his appearance back to that of the lynx he had been before his transformation.

He had surfaced in southern Germany. The first thing he wanted to do was learn what had become of Kai, so he travelled from village to village, learning the local language and finding out what gossip he could.

Eventually the rumours he was told informed him of a magician, alchemist, and historian; a fox named Johann Georg Faust who lived in Knittlingen. Mephis used his power on a member of the local constabulary to get the details of where Faust lived. He got the information and introduced himself to Faust.

Mephis told him that he was seeking the fox's help in finding a missing friend. When Faust let him into his house Mephis looked around. He sensed magic. Faust had several items around with demonic power so Mephis asked him whether he had an interest in demons. Faust admitted that yes, he did, that he would do anything for knowledge. In answer to this, Mephis dropped his shape-shift and revealed himself as a demon.

Faust was about to drop to his knees when Mephis stopped him. He told him that he didn't want to be worshipped, all he wanted was information about what had become of Sir Kai. He produced a book that looked as old as Mephis himself, which he told Faust that he had written himself and contained detailed and genuine information about demons. He offered it to Faust in return for the help he was seeking.

Faust accepted this trade and they began their research.

During the course of their partnership Mephis learned that the Germans had difficulty pronouncing his name, often calling him Mephistopheles. He liked the sound of this name and secretly adopted it as his demon name.

Eventually Faust and Mephis found records of the West family that dated back to medieval times. These records revealed that Sir Kai had survived 19 years after Mephis' banishment to hell before dying in his sleep in 1167. This saddened Mephis greatly, as not only had he lost his best friend, but everyone else he had known was also long-dead.

However, that was not all they learned about the West family. At some time after that event several generations of the family had become demon-hunters. Mephis wondered about this. He would have guessed that Kai would have advocated for benevolence towards demons, knowing that Mephis was one and bore him no ill will, so it seemed a dishonour to Kai's name for his descendants to have become demon hunters.

Soon after this discovery news reached Mephis that a West family demon hunter had learned of his presence and was on their way to Knittlingen. Further research uncovered that this hunter was particularly single-minded, harboured little concern for mortals, and had a habit of killing anybody who got between them and their quarry. Keen to avoid any mortal from getting tangled into this drama Mephis went to face the demon-hunter himself. He left the book with Faust and told him to stay at home. He had come to see Faust as a friend and didn't want him to get hurt either.

He went to the town square in the dead of the winter's night and waited for the demon-hunter to find him.

It didn't take long. The hunter faced him with a sword and a gun. Mephis told the hunter that he had come to face him so that none of the mortals of the town would be hurt. The hunter replied that to hear a demon speak unselfishly was a joke. The two rushed each other then, swords drawn, and as their swords clashed the ground fractured.

Mephis was impressed with the strength and speed of the hunter. However, he still had enough of an advantage that he could afford to test the hunter's abilities.

The hunter fired his gun at Mephis, and Mephis saw instantly that the bullet was engraved with holy symbols. He used his sword to cut it clean in two, and then took to the sky while the hunter reloaded.

Mephis decided to lead the hunter to the outskirts of town where it was less likely a townspeople would be caught in the cross-fire (or for the hunter to decide to attack someone mortal). The fight continued until the hunter mentioned that if he succeeded in killing Mephis he would return to the village to kill the evil inhabitants who had harboured a demon.

That made Mephis snap. He shifted into his chimera form and attacked again. That turned the tide of the fight. The hunter was unable to deflect the fireballs Mephis spat at him, nor get out of his line of sight - Mephis had three pairs of eyes in this state. He bit the hunter with his snake-tail, injecting him with the poison of an archfiend, which put the hunter in absolute agony as the venom swelled in his veins and burst them. Mephis' final move was to kick the hunter against a tree hard enough to cripple him so that if and when he recovered, he would only be able to move like an elderly wolf and not like the strong, fast hunter he had been.

Seeing the hunter in such a pathetic condition calmed Mephis so he returned to his lynx form. He told the hunter that he had threatened innocent people who Mephis cared about, and that was why he had got so violent. He added that demons did not take kindly to threats and that many demons would have killed him for it, but he would not.

The hunter, his fight gone, asked why he was acting so differently from the demons he had met before. Mephis answered:

“It is because I retain my morality, my sense of honour and my sense of who I am. I am true to myself and I insist you give up on hunting and no longer hurt others as now, without them, you have no future.”

With that he left the hunter and the mortal plane, and returned to the palace in hell.

He occasionally visited the land of the living after this but only briefly. He liked to learn new skills as new knowledge and disciplines were uncovered on the mortal plane. Returning also let him catch up with the times.

By the time he reached the current day he had mastered forms of combat from multiple cultures, learned several forms of arcane magic, educated himself in various fields of the sciences (he particularly enjoyed psychology) and expanded his own skills.

Among those skills was a technique to make using Kai's holy fire less painful. He found that he was able to use Snake-Tongue as the conduit, not his own body, which meant that using the power was no longer debilitating.

During this time a temple was dedicated to him in Germany. The Germans he had met had remembered him as the one who had protected them from a bloodthirsty hunter and had set up the temple to remember him by. They continued to deify him as a protector.

This period of his life lasted for 510 years.

In 1958 he sensed that the life of a person in his temple was in danger. He went there to see a black and white cat, naked, about to end her own life.

He rushed to her to beg her not to hurt herself. He sensed that she was stricken with sorrow and it was all he could do not to weep for her on the spot. At first she was afraid and asked why he had come. He answered that he wanted to help her. She answered that she didn't want help and tried to end her life again. He swiped her knife from her so that she couldn't do it again.

At first she was angry but she gave in to tears. He held her and told her that she was safe with him. He took her to a hotel in her town, using his Commandment and the power of his words to assure them a room, and took her to the room the receptionist gave them. He gave his name as Fabius.

He made tea for both of them and asked her what had pushed her to want to end her life. She told him that the people of her town were deeply religious and that she was unique among them in not being able to believe in God. For this she had been abused by her teachers, peers, and even her family, up to and including physical abuse.

This struck a nerve with Mephis as he identified with the feeling of being an outsider in spiritual matters. He made the decision to reveal himself as Mephistopheles, the demon to which the temple was dedicated. As he introduced himself he let his true form be seen by her, and told her that even if God, her townsfolk and family would not accept her as she truly was, he would.

He told her his own life story. This began many hours of talking between the pair of them. He got to know her and she him. She told him her name: Caroline Hari.

Mephis found himself falling in love with her. The following day he took her to Britain, where he courted her. He adopted the name Fabius permanently and rose to power in the British government and in time, became the Royal Ambassador of Great Britain.

They married in 1994 and the following year, they had a pair of fraternal twins together, whom they named Fauna and Luke. It was Mephis who suggested Luke's name as a way of honouring one of his most dedicated knights. Fauna was a reference to the Chinese legend of the *Fauna of Mirrors*, which appealed to Caroline partly due to his metaphor for self-reflection and partly due to the fashion at the time in Britain for Chinese culture.

### **Passing on Responsibilities** (older adulthood)

Mephis made a commitment to focus a legacy on the people he saw suffering the most: the other demons around him. He returned to the circle of hell that had become his home and set about changing the culture there. He ensured that any new demons to arrive were treated with respect and warmth and not with hostility. He spent 510 years on developing and maintaining this system.

Fabius remains close to his wife and children but is often called away on business. True to his usual eager-to-learn self, he learned how to use the telephone, texting, and video conferencing to keep in touch with them. Whenever he was at home he also committed himself to spending time with his children. He never wanted them to forget how much he loved them.

### **End of Life**

*(old age)*

Mephis has no idea whether he is capable of death (especially given the fact that he has died before and that wasn't the end of him). In classic Mephis style he believes there must be a way to bypass this and go to heaven, as he deeply wants to see his parents, Kai, Sir Keslenton, and the other people who he has known and who were precious to him. It is hope for a positive outcome like this that allowed him to keep hope, to live in the moment enough to keep doing what he does, and to keep despair at bay.

### **Credits**

Based on theory by:

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy