

Satan Lives in Moab

By Dave Olson

Note: Thanks to the long defunct Provo band, "Trees" for the title and the also defunct newspaper "the Stinking Desert Gazette" for inspiration for this tale.

One

Satan lives in Moab, he owns and operates a small convenience store. That is where I first met him. He was selling hot dogs and six-packs to lycra-dipped, granola-yuppie types. I asked him for a job to support my sorry, misguided ass in the stinking desert.

"Bob," said Satan, "Bob, Bob, Bob...."

Two

I first came to Moab, Utah to re-align my cosmic psyche by way of crystals, incense, Taoism, Buddhism, mysticism, jism, potions and lotions, and a bundle of printed matter all smelling of patchouli oil. Really an amazingly curious, new-agey thing that ran its course like a cold-sore. That ambition gracefully lost itself in time, my senses returned with the assistance of

longtime residents, Jack Daniels and Jim Beam. Now it was mostly Buckhorn beer and the noble, greasy camaraderie of the local poets, prophets, polygamists, tour guides, lynchers, rednecks, miscellaneous madmen and uranium miners. Several of them were acquainted with Satan; I was introduced the night the Poplar Place burned down. Things burn in Moab a lot. Things burn and grocery stores close down.

Three

First off, Satan is not red, fuming, flaming or have goat horns. Still, he is not a particularly attractive man; balding, pasty skinned, overweight and what appeared to be an acute case of lip cancer or maybe just a horrible cold sore. Most days he wore a blue velour sweat suit and expensive, high performance running shoes, "I have bad arches," he justified. He took the time to mention the hi-tech specifications and features three times daily.

I told him they made him look younger the day I asked him for a job. His shoes were usually blue to match the suit, the colored highlights varied with the pair.

Four

"Bob, Bob, Bob, Bob," he mumbled, "a job, a job, a job."

We were sitting in the back of his store. I was perched between large crates of waxy drink cups with catchy, trademarked

names distinguishing them from other drink cups. The air conditioner crooned and rattled, Satan went from his particleboard desk to turn on the sink. He placed his veiny scalp under the running water for several minutes while we talked. He patted it dry with a stiff paper towel.

I felt uncomfortable and out of my element, as I often do, and thought of trying to make intelligent conversation but stopped on account of it being impossible. Instead, I listened to the running water splash and bang on the bottom of the deep stainless sink. He held another paper towel under the stiff stream of water then tucked it under his armpits, dragging the sweat out. Undignified, but useful I figured. He stuck his thighs back on his Naugahyde and duct-tape chair and spun it around on the rollers.

"I can't pay you a lot of cash, but . . . , but there are perks."

Five

Today, like yesterday, it was hot out. I sat in front of the store sipping sticky, orange soda from my coffee mug. Being summer, I took off my shirt to work on my burn. Like always, between 11 and 3 o'clock, there wasn't a customer to save my life.

I read a wrestling magazine that became a mess from sweat and soda-pop.

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Satan rode up on his bicycle - huffing, seething and smelling of freshly killed meat. There was a large circle of perspiration sticking his shirt to his flaccid chest. He dumped his bike and walked directly into his store, the little bells tinkled and the door wheezed shut on its compression device.

Satan used to drive his 1963 Buick hardtop everyday, now he usually rode a bicycle the three blocks to work. A lot of bicycles in town these days. "I think the ladies will notice me more," Satan said a while back.

"Sure, that should gain favor with the women," I said. That's what started that.

He reappeared shortly, scalp gleaming and holding a hot dog and a quart of milk. "Cow juice and cow guts," he told me, holding them up for display. He did this most days. There was a thick line of mayonnaise sliding towards his elastic waistband.

His breath was gaseous from eating pickled hard-boiled eggs from a large glass jar by the cash register. He also ate goldfish - he won one hundred of them at the ring toss at the Grand County fair. They came in plastic bowls filled with colored water. He ate them on crackers.

"Bob," he said munching, "what's your bit."

"What?" I said.

Eventually, we had an animated conversation about hopes, dreams, ambitions, plans, etc. His were mostly very different

from mine. Then we reorganized the Twinkies, Ho-Hos and Ding-Dongs.

Six

By October, the air usually cools off some. This year, however, things kept burning. It was mostly cars overheating on the road and the occasional flaming house in Castle Valley.

The big mountain biker Halloween party in the old City Market building was the last time I saw him. It was actually on the 30th. I dressed as Tarzan, Lord of the Apes, and he went as a construction worker. The band was good and I won a pair of boots for a door prize. He won ski racks.

After he was gone, I found the manila envelope he left amongst the burnt rubble of the store. The fire hadn't been terrible, although he was uninsured.

He said in the letter, that I was right about employment losing its novelty quickly when it wasn't essential, as was his situation. Included were several riddles, clipped comic strips and three moist goldfish although no sign of his whereabouts. He did say how much he enjoyed Moab, it being the center of the universe and all. Landscape Arch was his favorite, until the three-ton chunk of rock fell from the center; oddly he stopped going after that.

He went on to say he had left a gift for me in a town called

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Fruita; it was just across the Colorado border. I had just enough money for my gas and oil, so I drove out in my pick-up truck to investigate.

A large real estate sign with "SOLD" scrawled across in bright red paint in front of fifteen acres of sagebrush. Certainly not prime real estate, but adequate. There were fourteen, healthy black and white Holsteins, a well-charred fire pit, and a mailbox with my name on it. I grinned, and went to meet the neighbors and get cable T.V. hooked up.

Seven

Months later, after I had skipped bail, I received a letter in Whitefish, Montana. Satan said how surprised he was when he heard about what I did with my ranch. He said he had pictured me living comfortably, raising my herd of cows, driving to the Spic n' Span Cafe and pinching the polyester bums of the waitresses. Maybe even selling pumpkins on the side of the road come next Halloween.

With the benefit of hindsight, it probably had been extreme, though naturalistic. I had left after torching my aluminum tool shed and stampeding my brand-covered cows (eight sunshines apiece, no mistaking) throughout the county with a very large shotgun. It was my first real weapon, a mighty beast I bought at a pawnshop in Grand Junction. I sawed the bitch off like the Road Warrior and

drank more so I'd more bottles to shoot at. Feeling so primal and hedonistic was new, interesting and somewhat unexplainable at times. I handcuffed the sheep to the dog kennel and drove off, lobbing homemade Molotovs at the billboards. It had made for an interesting sight.

Satan wrote that he certainly understood the potentials of innate human responses, which often produce extreme behavior. He had dealt with this on several occasions so he wasn't particularly surprised.

"Bob, Bob, Bob, Bob," he wrote, "that was, however, very poignant of you."

I'm quite sure he didn't know what that meant either.

Dave Olson
P.O. Box 7612
Olympia, WA 98507
www.uncleweed.net

1990, written in SLC, UT