

CHRISTMAS DISPLAY

I was shopping the other day...

I manipulated my trolley around a tight end-turn. I was approaching top speed. Aisle four – baked beans, curry powder, gherkins. Not all at once of course. Not tonight.

After selecting a menagerie pack of Mr. Heinz finest, and finally placing it in my trolley, I glanced up to find at the end of the aisle, my nemesis... Christmas Display.

Oh no! This was not going to happen. Not on my watch (Or anyone else's time piece for that matter! I'd like a pocket watch. Not for the 'attic' pocket though. Do they still make pocket watches?)... Not in September. It truly will be Christmas in July soon the way things are going. Somebody had to make a stand; had to bring the Christmas in Mid Year sucker down. That somebody was me.

A gunslinger, I swaggered to meet my foe. Eye's never straying, nerve never faltering, we stood ... toe to tinsel.

The air was electric. Mothers frantically shepherded frightened children behind curtains of skirted safety. Elderly folk openly wept behind walking frames and upon gnarled walking sticks as they jostled for best and most comfortable viewing position. All beings in the immediate vicinity- be they man, woman or just the simply confused- were hypnotized with the mounting tide of anticipation. It had come. Years of sickening retail therapy being jammed down my throat was about to splutter and cough out of me like a dormant volcano woken from a deep slumber. It was time. My time.

"I thought I told you to get outta town last year. To never show your filthy Yule-pocked face round these here parts again. Not 'til December at least."

I felt good, strong, in control. Some folk even nodding their approval at my opening gambit, which is always nice, you know, to get a little support early.

As for Mr.Smartypants Christmas Display? Well he was the yellow bellied epitome of Silent Night. He was playing hardball. But that was okay, I could play hardball too.

"Now listen here pardner. You got exactly ten seconds to pick up your sorry, good for nuthin' fairy lights ass; grab your prickly imitation tree and never fit right bauble buddies and throw in your cheesy Christmas card cohorts and skedaddle. Get outta here!"

I was on fire, in command, and loving it.

Yet still there was no reaction from Christmas Display. He was really starting to grab my goat. (By the way ... where did that saying come from? Grab my goat. I've never thought about grabbing someone else's goat. I don't think I even know anyone who has a goat. Maybe it's a shepherd thing...).

‘Go on- beat it! You ain’t nuthin’ but vermin ‘round here.’

Zero. Zilch. Zip. Christmas Display was giving me nothing. He was ignoring me – but I would not be bowed.

Losing face with my loyal band of gathered supporters, I knew it was time to cork the talk and start walking the walk. I am not a violent or aggressive man by nature – but this retail catastrophe known as Christmas Display wanted my goat! I wanted my goat ... wherever it was. (Does everyone born actually have a goat? Somewhere? Is that the meaning of life – to find your goat and it will reveal everything? The goat thing was killing me! If the goat revealed the secret of life to you then that would make him a talking goat. Or at the very least an excellent mime goat. Surely someone would have noticed a talking or exceptional miming goat. Unless the shepherd was blind and didn’t know he had a performing goat in his flock. Arrgghhhh.....!

I turned as if retreating, took two measured steps, and then, spinning faster than spit from a rattlesnake I hurtled into attack, catching Christmas Display completely unaware with my shrewd combat move I had made up on the spot.

My opening right jab landed a direct hit on Christmas Display’s overpriced; re-re-released Bing Crosby boxed carol sets. The follow up short arm left puncturing his flashy, fizzle-dud bon-bon’s. Within seconds we found ourselves wrestling on the floor, all manner of festive season bric- a-brac (a word not used nearly enough!) torn and shredded from each other. Well him mainly...

Christmas Display attacked with mountainous tinsel- swarming me like pine needle pythons- an obvious all out attempt to itch me to death. He then wound his tacky, occasionally flash tree lights around my neck, suffocation the ultimate goal. He was good, very good, but I was fighting the fight of my life.

We continued on seemingly eternal. He raining down deadly tree top stars and anarchic angels, whilst I in turn savagely gnawed upon his nativity sets. He scratched, I bit. He gouged, I kicked. No rule of Christmas combat was left unbroken in our personal quests to gain the ascendancy. Alas, it wasn’t long before the strain of war began to tell... I was fading. Fast.

Muscles leaden to the point of immobility and muscles trembling beneath the shadow of a humiliating submission, I collapsed, exhausted, in foetal position and awaited Christmas Display’s final, deadly blow. The dozen Krispy Kreme’s for breakfast were taking their toll. I was spent and my demise would not be glorious, yet I prayed for it to be swift.

But the crushing, fatal blow never arrived. Indeed, in its stead was born a saviour.

Sweeping down as fearless as a mighty eagle, a hero emerged, snatching the back of my sweat stuck shirt and wrenching me to safety.

I soared. Soared among the hordes. Through the mall cloud and fog (which I think was actually a lady burning Kransky samples – she must have been new and not used to the little hot plate wheelie

stand), my feet dangling delightedly above the ground. Glory was mine. An Angel had seen my plight, swept down and plucked me to safety. This was a sign from heaven – nothing surer. Hallelujah, hallelujah!

Still dizzy with the delirium of battle, ecstatic in its outcome, I manoeuvred so as to be able to thank my saviour. But he was strong. The neck-belt grip he had employed to transport me prevented my face from meeting his. With a little wriggling and wrangling on my part, the goal of thankful introduction was achieved not long after.

“Thank you.” I barely managed to whisper, listlessness having invaded every pore of my being.

It was here, at this point, where my cumulus of confusion was instantly and irrevocably lifted. Gone was the haze. Mist evaporated. In its place blunt realization. Realization that my rescuer, my hero, was in fact an elf. A six foot four, granite slabbed, emerald tighted elf. And he was black. I had never thought of elves as being black before, but there you go. Yet another Chris-myth dispatched.

Whilst pondering my green legged ally’s appearance, he simply went about his merry way, flying me through my devout band of well wishers. Overwhelmed by the adulation and attention, I attempted a smile, and at one stage even managed an heroic wave. But my eyes pooled water and bowels groaned in disapproval under the massive wedgie the elf now inflicted upon me. Pain this severe could surely not be accidental.

My shabby physical state proved no deterrent however to my onlookers’ continued support. As I was flown past my mob, the lusty cheers and gusty clapping intensified. Some drawing upon secreted tissues in cardigan cuffs to dab at their own joyously moistened faces; whilst yet others launched into hearty, gut – busting renditions of draughty appreciation. I, Sandy Crotch, had given the people back their time. Their retail freedom. Themselves. It was indeed a humbling experience, and I for one was very lucky to have been involved.

Steering me through a purposely cleared checkout, the now noticeable aggression of my one time saviour was not going to stop me enjoying the moment. Jubilant, triumphant, I rode tall upon the hard won wave of euphoria. The roar became a din as more and more, and yet still more lent their voices to chant my praises...

“WANKER ... cha, cha, cha! WANKER ... cha, cha, cha...! WANKER ... cha, cha, cha!”
...My entire world slowed. Numbness crunched through me like heavy boots on autumn leaves. Could it be? Was this possible? Had all I had been prepared to perish for turned to dust itself?

The brevity of the situation still bouncing around inside me like a ping pong ball in a prison cell, I found myself being launched into the stratosphere of the mall itself. Slapping hard onto the concrete tiles I listened to the resultant clap lonely ricochet off the mostly as yet unopened specialty retail outlets. Clap, clap, clap ... there was no clapping. Just my solitary tile slap laughing at me as it bounced off the walls and ran from the mall.

I lay still, hands blinkering face. Nose to tile I felt hot breath rebound back into my own mouth. I

begged this awful dream to end. And it did. Courtesy of a size fourteen elf boot nudging me in the ribs. I could literally feel the eclipse. The blotting out of manmade light under the weight of a vast human shadow rising above me. My imitation of an invisible rock was futile, he could see me. He was there.

I rolled onto my back and immediately saw him hover menacingly over me. The canary yellow number plate attached to his Kermit green chest told me that the elf's name was Kevin Lee.

Not one word passed between Kevin Lee and me; none being needed. We both understood. Kevin Lee the big, black, bad-assed elf had just kicked me out, and I was the one who wasn't welcome around these parts anymore.

Leaving me like a dying dog on a seldom used highway, Kevin Lee meandered back to his cigarette counter post and resumed position – one hand holding up his board chin while he watched the trolley man-boy struggle to control his steely team across the way.

I contemplated my plight. It could have ended here. All I had fought for, in stout heart and strong deed, could have humiliatingly crumbled in front of this supermarket ogre. But it wouldn't end this way. No! I had come way too far and fought way too hard to give these mid-year fat cat retail gluttons the satisfaction. I chose to push on.

Slowly, deliberately, I peeled myself from the floor. Painstakingly I retrieved my wedged pants from the previously unexplored netherworld between my buttocks. I felt used, cheap ... and yet oddly excited at the same time. I turned and burned my attention into the turn coat throng, like a steaming brand into a cow's moaning pelt.

Employing the meanest sneer-lip and deadest fish-eye I could muster, I silently interrogated each and every one of the fickle mob of Judas' who had once cheered but now dismissed me. None could hold my gaze.

Satisfied with their shamed expressions as apology, I hitched my strides and took one last sweeping summary of the battle wearied landscape left behind. Christmas Display had been scarred but not broken; I defeated, but not beaten. The war would be long but for now this skirmish was over.

With a final, simple "Folks", I tilted my imaginary Stetson and bowleggedly ambled into the strobe lights of the 'Sunset Mall'. Just another batch of basic minded pilgrims behind me, unable to see the Christmas wood for the Christmas trees.