

THE USUAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS

by

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SYNOPSIS: Jeff Torpey, a middle-aged man who conducts telephone interviews for a social service research company, finds himself on one end of a polling phone call with Satan, who offers Jeff three wishes in exchange for his soul. Believing it all to be an hallucitation, Jeff agrees. During the process of negotiating the contract and stating his wishes, Jeff uses his interviewing skills to uncover the truth. In the end, Jeff redeems Satan and all of Hell with his final wish. Or does he?

7 characters, multiple doubling.

TIME: Present

SFX NOTE: "TELEPHONE DIALING SEQUENCE"=DIAL TONE/SOUND OF NUMBERS BEING DIALED/PHONE RINGBACK TONE. (THIS WILL BE USED MULTIPLE TIMES.)

SFX: MUSIC UP AND UNDER FOR...

INTERIOR DAY: A TELEPHONE POLLING CALL CENTER.

SFX: GENERAL HUBBUB FROM POLLS BEING CONDUCTED. OFFICE SOUNDS. MUSIC OUT. TELEPHONE DIALING SEQUENCE. THEN...

SEXMAN (ANSWERING PHONE)

Hello?

JEFF

Good afternoon. My name is Mike O'Donnell. I'm calling on behalf of GBS News. We're currently taking a poll regarding important events, and would like to include your opinions. Before we begin, are you driving or doing anything that requires your full attention right now?

SEXMAN

Yes. I'm having sex.

JEFF
(UNFAZED) We certainly don't want
to interrupt that. When would be a
good time to call you back?

SEXMAN
About half an hour.

JEFF
Alright, sir. You have fun. We'll
call back.

SFX: PHONE LINE CLICKING OFF.

JEFF
I'll give it 5 minutes.

SFX: TELEPHONE DIALING SEQUENCE. THEN...

ANGRYWOMAN (ANSWERING PHONE)
Yes?

JEFF
Good afternoon. My name is Mike
O'Donnell. I'm calling on behalf
of GBS News. We're currently
taking a poll...

ANGRYWOMAN
Stop right there. I do NOT want to
be bothered with this.

JEFF
I understand. Let me assure you
this is not a sales call.
(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)

No attempt will made to sell you anything. We're only interested in your opinions.

ANGRYWOMAN

I told you I am not interested. Are you deaf? Either you take my number off this list, or you and I will have a SERIOUS personal problem. Do what you have to do. Put it in a stranglehold. I don't care. Just get it done.

SFX: ANGRYWOMAN SLAMS PHONE DOWN. LINE GOES DEAD.

JEFF

(SIGHING) That's why I use a fake name, lady.

SFX: TELEPHONE DIALING SEQUENCE. THEN...

DRUNK MAN (ANSWERING PHONE)

Hello?

JEFF

Good afternoon. My name is Mike O'Donnell. I'm calling on behalf of GBS News. We're currently taking a poll regarding important events, and would like to include your opinions.

DRUNK MAN

I have opinions!

JEFF

I understand, sir, Are you currently...

DRUNK MAN

My first opinion is that, I think SPORTS are an artificial distraction created by the...the...government to distract us from what is REALLY going in the world.

JEFF

I understand. I have to ask you...

DRUNK MAN (INTERRRUPTING)

And I'm answering you. Government has created a false reality in which...

SFX: JEFF HANGS UP. TELEPHONE DIALING SEQUENCE. THEN...

SATAN (ANSWERING PHONE)

Hello!

JEFF

Good afternoon. My name is Mike O'Donnell. I'm calling on behalf of GBS News. We're currently taking a poll regarding important events, and would like to include your opinions. Before we begin, are you driving or doing anything that requires your full attention right now?

SATAN

I have nothing pressing.

JEFF
Thank you! Our first question...

SATAN
But your name is not "Mike."

JEFF
Excuse me?

SATAN
Your name is Jeff Torpey. You're
54 years old, and you are VERY
unhappy.

JEFF (A BEAT, THEN...)
Look, Tim, we have to land 25 more
surveys before 8pm, and you damned
well know my job might be on the
line. Fun is fun, but now is not
the time.

SATAN
Oh, dear boy, this is not Tim.

JEFF
I'm hanging up now, Tim...

SFX: LINE CLICKS DEAD. TELEPHONE DIALING SEQUENCE. THEN...

SATAN (ANSWERING PHONE)
Please don't hang up on me again,
Jeff. It's annoying and rude. You
don't like it when survey
respondents do it to YOU, do you?

JEFF
Enough, Tim.

SATAN

I don't have a lot of time to convince you. Please look over your left shoulder. Tell me what you see.

JEFF

It's...Tim.

SATAN

And what is he doing?

JEFF

He's talking to Sharon, the new intern. (TO SATAN) Who IS this?

SATAN

I have many names. My current favorite is Lucifer. "Light Bringer." Catchy, isn't it?

JEFF

I'm hanging up now.

SATAN

Before you do, let me ask you a couple of quick questions so I can clear you out of my call list.

JEFF

You sound like a phone research interviewer.

SATAN

I pay attention. Look around your office. Please tell me what you see.

SFX: OFFICE HUM ABRUPTLY STOPS. COMPLETE ENVIRONMENTAL SILENCE.

JEFF

Everyone is...frozen. Completely frozen.

SATAN

Look more deeply. What is the intern doing?

JEFF

She's spilled her coffee. No. She's SPILLING her coffee. The cup and the...I...

SATAN

The cup and the liquid are suspended in mid-air. Neat trick, eh? Take a deep breath. Now look out the window.

JEFF

Everything is frozen. Everything. The traffic. The people. There's a bird about to hit the office window. What...?

Oh, no. No, no, no. Someone's slipped some LSD in my coffee. I've been dosed! I'm hallucinating!

SATAN

Settle down. You have NOT been drugged. Deep breaths.

JEFF (BREATHING DEEPLY)

OK.

SATAN

Better now?

JEFF

Yes. No. (SEVERAL BREATHS) Yes.

SATAN

I told you it was a neat trick. I've bought us a few minutes in order to speak privately. I've created a small time bubble around you. Nothing will happen while we are talking. Do I have your full attention?

JEFF

.....yes.

SATAN

GOOD! It's so much more pleasant when they catch on quickly. You're unsatisfied with your life. You've hit middle-age, and you feel as though you will never accomplish the things you dreamed of in your youth. In your mind, you're quickly running out of time. You've never told anyone this, am I correct?

JEFF

Yes.

SATAN

Though you would never do it, it has crossed your mind that your family would be better off with your life insurance money than they are with you. No need to reply, Jeff.

I'm sorry you feel that way,
truly. I'd like to make you an
offer.

JEFF

NO!

SATAN

Hear me out, please. Nothing is
binding until you sign the
contract. As a token of good
faith, regardless of the outcome
of this conversation, I'm prepared
to give you, with no strings
attached, all the completed
interviews you need to save your
job.

JEFF

Suppose I DO believe you.

SATAN

MmmmHmmmmmm.

JEFF

One of your names is "Father of
Lies."

SATAN

GREAT point! It is, indeed. And
well-earned, if I may boast. But
not in your case. When I'm making
an offer to a client, I cannot
make any misrepresentation of the
nature of said offer. This would
utterly void any contract made,
according to The Rules.

JEFF

What rules?

SATAN

The rules which govern this type of transaction. The rules of the Grand Eternal Game.

JEFF

Could you please expand on that?

SATAN (CHUCKLING)

NOW who's the interviewer?

JEFF

Sorry, habit.

SATAN

No need to apologize. That's one of the things I like about you. You're thorough and consistent.

The Rules apply to the agreement HE and I have made regarding our little contest. Our eternal chess game with billions of pieces on the board. Each piece is a human soul. We both try to capture as many as possible, within the boundaries of The Rules.

JEFF

Why? I mean, what's the point?

SATAN

Don't ask me. It's HIS game.

JEFF (SUDDEN REALIZATION)

Wait, You want my SOUL?

SATAN

Don't go all thick on me. Of course I want your soul. It's the only thing you have that's of any value to me.

JEFF

Then it should also be of value to ME.

SATAN

As I was saying, if I misrepresent the nature of negotiations in any way, the entire transaction instantly becomes null and void, and the client goes immediately to HIM upon natural death.

So what do you say? All your interviews completed and your job saved, just for giving me the privilege of making an offer, which you are free reject at no cost to you.

JEFF

I still don't believe any of this. I'm probably having some kind of psychotic breakdown, but I'm listening.

SATAN

I propose to give you three wishes in exchange for your eternal soul.

JEFF

Three wishes is not much of an offer.

SATAN

True enough, but your soul is not what we would call a "big get." No offense, but it's not in the league of, say, the Pope or Mother Theresa.

JEFF

Did you get her?

SATAN.

Almost. (BACK TO BUSINESS) Of course, there are the usual terms and conditions. I cannot make someone love you, but you already have that area adequately covered. (FRIENDLY) I must tell you, your wife is an absolute gem.

JEFF

Don't you dare...

SATAN

I couldn't if I tried. She's incorruptible. Saintly, even. You really do have one of the very best. As Jimi Hendrix is fond of saying, "You're WAY over-chicked."

JEFF

Hendrix is there with you?

SATAN

Yes. He's jamming with Mozart at the moment.

JEFF

Could we listen in?

SATAN

Terms and conditions. Focus, please. I cannot make someone love you. HE is very big on free will. Raising the dead is out of the question. And I will not give you endless wishes, no matter how cleverly you manage to phrase it.

JEFF

You're starting to sound like the Genii from Aladdin.

SATAN

Myths become myths for a reason.

Outside of those restrictions, pretty much anything goes. Wealth. Power. Fame. You can have it all.

JEFF

In exchange for eternal torture in Hell? That doesn't sound like any kind of bargain if you ask me.

SATAN

Hell is not that bad. In fact, it can be rather pleasant.

JEFF (INCREDULOUSLY)

I've read The Book! Lake of Fire, eternal torture, gnashing of teeth! It's a horrible place!

SATAN (AGITATED)

And WHO wrote "The Book"? The first one to publish gains an enormous advantage in the marketplace of ideas.

The fact is, HE gave Gutenberg the idea for movable type ahead of schedule because I was gaining too much ground. I was very quickly becoming more popular than Him.

Once The Book was published, the negative PR fallout became something I've been trying to recover from ever since. (REASONABLY) Hell, like life, is what you make of it, Jeff. YOU get to choose your own customized Hell! Designer eternity. Whatever you like! THY will be done!

JEFF

Like The Matrix?

SATAN

Apt metaphor.

JEFF

So you're saying that, for example, Osama bin Laden has a bedroom full of virgins?

SATAN

Not quite. Some people make choices which require... restitution. A balancing of the scales. Punishment, if we must be indelicate.

But not you! Your soul is pretty much 50/50. That's pretty good. You could go either way. Literally, up or down. No torture for you!

JEFF

In that case, why would I want to make a deal with you? Why can't I just concentrate on being a better person? Pray more, become more charitable, be a better father and husband, and tip the scale upward?

SATAN

You can. But there are risks. HE is extremely finicky about crossing T's and dotting I's. "Narrow is the way" is a clause HE exercises more often than you'd think a loving god might.

Don't misunderstand me. Heaven is nice. Very pleasant. Lots of singing, white robes, halos, etc. But it's all about HIM, worshiping HIM, praising HIS glorious name, blah blah blah. All in the name of His insatiable ego. Hell is a LOT more fun!

JEFF

Yeah, I bet...

SATAN

It can be anything you want, Jeff. Anything. Remember the resort-slash-amusement park where your Grandmother would rent a cottage for two weeks every Summer?

JEFF

Of course. We went every year in August until I was 16. It's my favorite place on Earth. I met my first girlfriend there. Stole my first kiss. LOTS of firsts.

SATAN

You can have it all back, Jeff.
Back to the best Summer of your
life. No responsibilities, and
surrounded by the family you loved
in YOUR best place on Earth! The
carnival rides, the games,
spending all day on the beach. All
yours for eternity.

JEFF

My family? Please don't tell me my
Mother and my Grandmother
are...there with you...

SATAN

No. They are upstairs. But I can
insert you back into your
childhood body. Take you back in
time on a sort of "ride along".

You wouldn't be able to
significantly influence events,
but there is a little wiggle room
for riding THIS ride instead of
that. Small things.
Or, I can recreate the whole thing
outside of time and space and give
you a virtual sandbox in which you
can do anything you like. It
wouldn't be real, but you wouldn't
be able to tell the difference.

JEFF

Tempting...

SATAN

It's what I do best!

JEFF

But even that would get boring
after awhile, I'm afraid.

(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)

As much as I love that place and time, eternity is long.

SATAN

True. In that case, you can change your personal eternity to anything you like, real or imagined. You could re-live the life of David Bowie. Experience everything the way he did. The talent, the money, the women... You could captain a spaceship to the outer reaches of the galaxy. Or you could travel in time to the 1st century AD. Witness the teachings of a certain Jewish carpenter-turned-rabbi.

JEFF

Jesus? Really?? What was he like?

SATAN

Much like the son of any founder of a successful enterprise. Strong sense of entitlement. Wouldn't listen to good advice from outside counsel. Raging case of halitosis.

JEFF

No!

SATAN

Yes! But don't take my word for it. Go see for yourself. Here's a funfact. Remember all those "multitudes" at the Sermon on the Mount?

JEFF

Yes...?

SATAN

Only about 20 locals. He wasn't that big of a draw. All he rest were my clients. He droned on and on. "Blessed are these and those." People got bored and hungry. It was hilarious watching him have to switch from prophetic rabbi to magical caterer.

JEFF

So the whole fishes and loaves thing was real?

SATAN

Certainly. Believe me, he needed those miracles. He wasn't all that charismatic a speaker. People's eyes would glaze over. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth." What does that even MEAN? But when he broke out the magic show, BOOM. They couldn't look away. Prop acts always play well in the sticks.

If seeing Jesus doesn't appeal to you, go have a chat with Galileo, or Buddha, or Miles Davis.

JEFF

Can I change the nature of my so-called "eternity" as many times as I wish?

SATAN

Absolutely!

JEFF

What's the catch? There's always some sort of tricky little catch.

SATAN

NOW we're getting somewhere. Naturally, you would have certain duties in Hell.

JEFF

I'm not going to torture anyone!

SATAN

Of course not! No. Why are you so obsessed with torture? You would simply do what it is you do now. Social Science Research. You would have an office in Hell. You would interview incoming residents, and make occasional polling calls to Earth in order to help me get a better picture of the marketplace. You would be putting in about 20 hours per week.

JEFF

This is insane. Let me test my understanding. No torture, eternity designed by me, and 3 wishes granted, subject to stated restrictions, in exchange for 20 hours per week and my soul?

SATAN

That's it.

JEFF

Are there any penalties for, say, not getting enough completed interviews during a shift? Anything that might make my eternity.....worse?

SATAN

Nope! All I ask...and it's a request between gentlemen, not a command...is that you do the job to the best of your ability. A fair day's work.

Look, if it makes you feel any more at ease, HIS legal staff drew up the contract. His game, His rules.

JEFF

I dunno. Can I think about it for a little while?

SATAN

Keeping time stopped like this is expensive. I'm about to go into cost overruns on this deal. It's a one-time offer. I need your answer now, and your 3 wishes within the hour. Time to decide.

JEFF

Alright. Since I believe this is all some strange hallucination anyway, my answer is yes. What the hell. We have a deal.

SFX: THUNDER, LIGHTNING, FIREWORKS, CROWDS CHEERING.

JEFF (CONT'D)

What in God's name is THAT?

SATAN

It's a little flourish I like to add. Makes things festive. The contract is on your computer screen.

JEFF
How do I sign?

SATAN
A drop of blood on the signature
line will do nicely.

JEFF
Really...?

SATAN
Tradition and ritual are important
in these matters. There's a
sterile lancet next to your mouse.
One little prick, then place a
drop on the signature line. If you
don't mind?

SFX: A CLICK OF THE LANCET. A HISS AS THE BLOOD IS ABSORBED
INTO THE SCREEN.

SATAN (CONT'D)
Congratulations, Jeff! You're
going to be very happy.
Now let's get out of here and talk
about those wishes. Don't worry
about your job. If you REALLY want
to come back to it after we talk,
I'll insert you back into the
instant our conversation began.

JEFF
You're the boss.

SATAN
Yes. Yes I am. Let's go.

SFX: OFFICE SOUNDS OUT. WHOOSHING SOUND. THEN...CAROUSEL MUSIC IN THE DISTANCE. BEACH NOISES. CHILDREN LAUGHING. SPLASHING AND PLAYING IN THE WATER. PERIODIC SOUNDS OF A TOLLER COASTER. ETC. THESE ENVIRONMENTAL SOUNDS CONTINUE THROUGHOUT.

JEFF

We're at the resort! The Beach!
And you. Look at you! You look
so...average. Normal. A little
shorter than I expected, but
absolutely normal.

SATAN (CHANGING THE SUBJECT)

I like this place. Always have.
Remember that ride over there?

JEFF

The Bullet! LOVED it! I threw up
on that ride at least 4 times over
the years. I was sad when they
took it out in 19....wait....are
we? What year is this?

SATAN

1970, Jeff. Look over there. On
the sand by the water.

JEFF

It's my mother and my Grandmother.
My Father....and.....me.
Can....can I go talk to them if I
don't tell them I'm
him...me...however it works?

SATAN

Not yet. This is more of a
projection. Like a 360-degree
holographic video. You can't
interact with them, yet. But you
will when your eternity begins.
Full immersion.

For now, think of this as a preview. Are the details correct?

JEFF

Absolutely. The beach, the pier enclosing it, the rides, the lake, the games...everything is perfect.

Even these beach chairs we're sitting on. They were replaced sometime in the '80s. It's 1970, and that's the 9 year old me right over there. Oh my God.

SATAN

I really need you to stop saying that name. As a courtesy. It gives me a headache.

JEFF

Sorry.

SATAN

Thank you. NOW, about those wishes.

JEFF

I've been giving that a little thought, and I believe I have my first wish.

SATAN

Your wish is my command.

JEFF

Since I'm going to be working for you as a researcher, I need access to your data. All of it.

SATAN

What do you have in mind?

JEFF

Answers to questions. As many questions as I care to ask. and your answers must be honest, forthright, and inclusive. No details I might find important can be left out, and there will be no Devilish "answering the letter but not the spirit" of the questions in order to mislead me. Full disclosure and complete transparency.

SATAN

I've never heard that one.
Interesting.

You understand, there will be no "How can I phrase my next wish so I get unlimited wishes" or any of that nonsense. Three wishes only. But yes. Unlimited questions answered honestly and with no evasion. Is that your first wish?

JEFF

Yes.

SATAN

Done! And for your second wish...?

JEFF

I'll hold that one back for now.
I'm curious, what do most people wish for first?

SATAN
Limitless wealth. Very popular.

JEFF
How do they receive it? Tons of
gold? Diamonds? Cash?

SATAN
Debit card.

JEFF
No!

SATAN
Yes. Think. It's convenient, There
are no conversions needed. It
doesn't raise any suspicion, as
tons of gold would, and NO hacker
would dare to try to steal the
data. That would be unwise, even
if they COULD get past the Hell
computer system's firewall.

JEFF
You've got things streamlined.

SATAN
21st century technology has
definitely increased the
operation's efficiency.

JEFF
What's your REAL name?

SATAN
I will tell you if you insist.

Full disclosure regarding your question: That information is incomprehensible to the human mind. It would instantly and irrevocably drive you insane. Things would get VERY ugly for you. Better if I tell you my true name after you move into Hell.

JEFF

OK, question withdrawn.

SATAN

Good call.

JEFF

When will I die? I still get my natural lifespan, right?

SATAN

Absolutely. Look, I will live up to our agreement on your questions. I'll tell you precisely when, where, and how you will die. But do you truly want to know? Can we leave it at this? You will live a long life and will die comfortably.

JEFF

How about this...will I outlive that bastard Nick from the bowling alley?

SATAN

(LAUGHING) HA!!! Yes, you will. By a considerable margin.

JEFF

Good enough. You know, I still believe this is some kind of hallucination, right? Or some kind of delusion from a stroke or something...

SATAN

That's fine. Incredulity does not affect the terms of the contract. I made Him agree to that, otherwise I wouldn't be able to do business.

Now, how about that second wish?

JEFF

Soon. I have a lot more questions.

SATAN

(SIGHING) I can tell. But can we please set aside your more personal questions for now?

Customer satisfaction is important in my line of work, and I'd rather not have you getting depressed until all your wishes are fulfilled.

JEFF

Fine. So what about the whole Kennedy assassination thing?

SATAN

Which of the five Kennedy assassinations?

JEFF

I thought there were only two.

SATAN

The more you know...

JEFF

Just the Presidential assassination, for now. It always seemed to me to be a conspiracy. More than one shooter. What really happened?

SATAN

Oswald acted alone. At least he thought he did. There was a backup team in place, but he made the kill. Sad little man.

JEFF

And Oswald's murder was part of the cover-up?

SATAN

No! Jack Ruby was a wild card. NO one upstairs or downstairs saw him coming. It took us weeks to straighten out the betting pool. Only Gabriel had "Random stranger kills Oswald before the trial."

JEFF

Gabriel?? You talk to Gabriel?

SATAN

Yes, like any large organization, there are back channels of communication between separate divisions. It's necessary in order to keep thing running smoothly. Would you like to see something interesting?

JEFF

Why not?

SATAN

There are specific or general reasons not to.

JEFF

I don't understand. OH! I get it. I said "Why not?" I asked a question.

SATAN

Precisely. I keep my end of a bargain. So, WOULD you like to see something interesting?

JEFF

OK.

SFX: SATAN IS CHANGING INTO AN EXTREMELY ATTRACTIVE WOMAN. WHATEVER THAT SFX WOULD SOUND LIKE. WILL REPEAT, NOTED AS "SFX CHANGE".

JEFF

WOW!!!

SATAN (NOW PLAYED BY A WOMAN)

How do you like me now, darling boy?

JEFF

I.....I.....wow.

SATAN

I take that as approval. Is the bikini too...revealing?

JEFF

No. It's...

SATAN

Would you like it to be smaller, honey?

JEFF

No. I mean...no. It's fine.

SATAN

I'm glad, because we need to talk about your second wish. Since you seem to be stalled, I thought you might be interested in something...adventurous.

JEFF

I'm not having sex with you!

SATAN

Too bad because it doesn't have to be this body. It can be with...(SFX CHANGE)

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: IF THE ACTRESS CAN IMITATE CELEBRITY VOICES IN THIS SECTION, BY ALL MEANS UTILIZE THAT. FEEL FREE TO SUBSTITUTE LIKELY AUDIENCE FAVORITES FOR THOSE LISTED BELOW, INCLUDING A CURRENT CARTOON REFERENCE IN PLACE OF JESSICA RABBIT.)

SATAN
Jennifer Anniston.

JEFF
Oh my...

SATAN
(SFX CHANGE) ...or Elizabeth
Hurley...

JEFF
That's enough.

SATAN
(SFX CHANGE) Salma Hayek? No? How
about going a big younger (SFX
CHANGE) Miley Cyrus? Or a bit
more...substantial (SFX CHANGE)
Adele? (IF POSSIBLE, SINGS JUST
"HELLO, IT'S ME" FROM ADELE SONG
"HELLO.)

JEFF
That's not really...

SATAN
Ooooooh, I know! (SFX CHANGE)
Jessica Rabbit!!!

JEFF
OK, now that's not even possible!

SATAN
(AS JESSICA) I think we can make
it work. After all, I'm not bad,
I'm just drawn that way...

JEFF

Stop it, right now. Nothing is going to make me forget that I love my wife.

SATAN

(SFX: CHANGE BACK TO ACTRESS' NEUTRAL VOICE) Have it your way. And you COULD, you know. Of course it wouldn't be with me. It would be with a succubus who can mimic your most secret fantasy girl down to the millimeter. And since it's not with a human, it's not really what one would call "cheating." At worst, it's a little harmless fun with a sex toy. What about...(SFX: CHANGE)...BETTY WHITE!!!

JEFF

Enough, please! Betty White?!? She's old enough to be my grandmother. This is getting creepy, and you're causing me to have second thoughts about the deal.

SATAN

(SFX: CHANGE. BACK TO FEMALE NEUTRAL) As you wish, oh my master. May I stay like this? I'd like to work on my tan.

JEFF

If you must. Just please stop...breathing so deeply.

SATAN

Rub some lotion on me?

JEFF
No, thank you.

SATAN (POUTING)
You're no fun.

JEFF
Sorry, not part of my job.

SATAN
You're really very clever. I like that.

JEFF
How do you mean?

SATAN
Not to brag, but I am THE expert on temptation. I seldom fall short in that area. You seem to have figured out that the whole sex thing can be yours once you get to Hell. No need to waste your second wish.

JEFF(HE HADN'T THOUGHT OF THAT AT ALL)
Ah, well, thank you, I suppose...

SATAN
You're very welcome. Now, about that second wish. What's it going to be? Fame? Fortune? Fame AND Fortune? Fame and Fortune and Betty White? I'm willing to bundle this wish somewhat to move things along.

SATAN

No. I assume that the spirit of your wish includes them living moral, upright, likely-to-go-upstairs-when-the-bell-tolls kind of lives?

JEFF

Yes. That's every father's dream, isn't it?

SATAN

It can be done. Though I must warn you, they can have all that and still turn out to be monsters. I can't control what they do with it when they get there. But I promise not to set them up for failure.

JEFF

No pitfalls? No snares to lead them astray?

SATAN

None.

JEFF

Is there anything I haven't thought of? Anything that might make me want to avoid this particular wish?

SATAN

Not a thing.

JEFF

Deal. Make it so, Number One.

SATAN
Done, Captain! Third wish?

JEFF
Not so fast. Since this is all an
hallucination anyway...

SATAN
...it's not.

JEFF
And it's such a lovely day at the
beach...HEY! Little-boy-me is
putting on that other kid's diving
mask and snorkel!

SATAN
Yes, and look at your mother
yelling for you not to do that
from her beach chair.

JEFF
Ugh. The kid had the flu. The next
day...tomorrow...however it
works...I got the worst case of
the flu in my life. I was
miserable. Why did you pick THIS
day to bring me back to?

SATAN
I didn't. You did. I just pulled
the image up out of your memory.

JEFF
Weird.

SATAN

I know. The mysteries of the human mind never cease to astonish me. That's why I like to spend so time on Earth. You're so unpredictable. You really are His best creation.

JEFF

How much time? How often are you on Earth? Most of the time? Some of the time? Very little?

SATAN

(TEASINGLY) You're interviewing again. To answer your question, I spend most of my time here. I love being in the middle of the action. ON the game board, so to speak.

JEFF

Is...HE here, too?

SATAN

No. He watches from His throne, surrounded by His adoring minions. He doesn't like to get His perfectly manicured hands dirty. He's more of a "big picture" guy.

JEFF

What do you DO here?

SATAN

Thanks for asking. I'm a giver! I give you things.

JEFF

What? Like earthquakes and floods, I suppose?

SATAN

NO! The trials and tribulations are all His. He LOVES to test you. He's a bit too passive/aggressive for my taste. I, on the other hand, give you things I think you'll like. HE gives you breast cancer. *I* give you breast implants!

JEFF

Breast implants are hardly a game-changer.

SATAN

Are you kidding? Strip club income skyrocketed after I gave the world implants. Dancing became a viable career. The industry exploded. I'm a job creator, sweetheart.

JEFF

Consequently, I suppose there are more divorces, as well.

SATAN

Meh.

JEFF

What else have you given to us?

SATAN

Microwave cooking. You were spending FAR too much of your short, precious lives preparing food. I made it fast and easy. I gave you more free time!

JEFF

Idle hands being the Devil's Playground?

SATAN

Clever boy! You're going to be a GREAT addition to the team. Amon is going to adore you.

JEFF

Who?

SATAN

Ammon. Grand Marquis of Hell. As they say, "He appeareth like a Wolf with a Serpent's tail, vomiting out of his mouth flames of fire."

JEFF

Ew.

SATAN

Great sense of humor, though. Loves a good pun.

There are a few inventions which didn't exactly pan out, if you're interested...

JEFF

Absolutely!

SATAN

Disco.

JEFF

Disco?

SATAN

Disco. I thought it would be fun.
Bell-bottoms! Platform shoes! And
the last great gasp of
dancing-together-as-partners.

JEFF

What went wrong?

SATAN

The music. It was HORRIBLE. I had
to create the entire Punk genre in
a rush in order begin to wipe it
away.

I hate rush jobs. They lead to
mistakes. HE has his rush jobs as
well.

JEFF

I thought all of creation was
supposed to be perfect?

SATAN

Dan't be naive. If you create
something, and are then permitted
to write the history of your
creation, of COURSE you're going
to describe it as "perfect," even
if it isn't.

Take the platypus...He was all
excited about his new creature.
Absolutely ADORED it. Until I
pointed out He had essentially
recreated the beaver. He got all
pissy, ripped the nose off, and
replaced with a duck's bill. He
signed off on that silly version
and moved on to hedgehogs.

JEFF

You make Him sound petty.

SATAN

Have you read His book?

JEFF

He does seem to get angry a lot.

SATAN

Of course. He finishes His work, then wipes it all out and starts over because YOU didn't follow HIS insanely restrictive rules. He makes it hard for humanity to achieve any progress. You know, if it weren't for that whole "flood" fiasco, you would already have those flying cars you long for. I, on the other hand, give without requiring anything in return. I gave you automobiles in the first place.

JEFF

...which are a big contributor to global warming...

SATAN (IRRITATED)

I gave you ice cream.

JEFF

...which promotes heart disease...

SATAN (STARTING TO ANGER)

I gave you smart phones and the Internet!

JEFF

Which are causing people to lose the ability to communicate face-to-face. I get it now! Everything you "give" us has some kind of hidden consequence which ultimately make things worse for us. They aren't gifts at all!

SATAN (ANGRY)

How dare you?

JEFF

It's true. You give us clocks, we get lives which are artificially segmented. You give us radio and television, we get propoganda. You give us knowledge, we get shame and guilt. You give only so you can take, you bastard.

SATAN (FURIOUS)

You watch your mouth, you little ingrate. My patience and tolerance for your nonsense are not unlimited. You have no idea what you're bringing down upon yourself. I'm perfectly capable of making your eternity absolutely and utterly miserable.

JEFF

You already signed the contract. Torture-free designer eternity, with only 20 hours per week working the phones.

SATAN

I keep asking you if you've "read His book." Have you?

JEFF

Of course.

SATAN

Good! So you won't feel deceived when 20 hours seems like 20 years. Or 20 centuries. Do you really believe He created all this in just seven days? His concept of time is not the same as yours. And therein lies the interpretation, my little Jeff. He doesn't see any difference between 20 hours and 20 millennia. I only play by His rules.

(FRIENDLY NOW) Don't look so stricken. I promised to adhere to the spirit of the contract. I won't require any more than 20 of the type of hours you are used to. I'm not a monster, despite what His people say. All I ask is a little courtesy.

JEFF

My apologies, you naughty hallucination.

SATAN

Accepted. And I'm not.

JEFF

If you're not, then you must be able to provide a fairly accurate description of Heaven.

SATAN

I can, at least as it was up until the time I left.

JEFF

Left? I thought you were kicked out.

SATAN

That's not the way I recall it.

JEFF

So, what is Heaven like?

SATAN

As I told you. It's nice. Lot's of singing and worshipping.

JEFF

Yes, but you said that BEFORE we made our deal. You were under no obligation then to gve a complete answer to my question. You could have left some things out.

SATAN

Nonsense. Look, time is wasting. As it is with your business, mine is all about productivity. We need to move on to your third wish. I have a meeting shortly.

JEFF

I can tell when someone is avoiding a question. It's my job. Answer the question, please. What is Heaven like? On a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is blah and 10 is incredibly good?

SATAN (RELUCTANTLY)

It's.....a 12. Glorious. Utterly blissful. Endless unconditional love. More beautiful than anything you could possibly imagine with your limited experience. No offense.

JEFF

None taken. What about all that singing and praising you talked bout earlier? You seemed to find that dull. Do you?

SATAN

No. The music is, for lack of better word, angelic. Human music is a pale reflection in a piece of broken, smudged mirror.

JEFF

What about the "Blah, blah, blah praising and worshiping"?

SATAN

It's an endless feedback loop of pure love.

JEFF

Why did you leave?

SATAN

Pride. It's the deadliest of all sins. I was convinced I could be a superior creator. I still am convinced.

JEFF

Is that the reason for "designer eternity" in Hell? Are you trying to somehow prove to Him that you can do it better?

SATAN

Yes. And I must tell you, there are some pretty happy people in Hell. I really have done an outstanding job.

JEFF

That whole "Pride" thing really has a hold on you, doesn't it?

SATAN

And why not? I gave you the BEATLES. Lennon and McCartney would never have met without my help. Imagine a world without Sgt. Pepper or Please Please Me. Think of all those kids who saw the Beatles and picked up guitars. Without me, there would be no rock & roll as you know it. No Nirvana, no Slipknot, no Sex Pistols. Just the Carpenters and that silly Josh Groban. Isn't that deserving of at least a little pride?

And I keep things moving and shaking, baby. I don't sit on my considerable laurels. Benjamin Franklin and Nikola Tesla are having a blast inventing things together. Things that are going to blow humanity's collective mind. Things that would never come out of a place like Heaven. And when Bill Gates gets to Hell....

JEFF

You have a deal with Gates?

SATAN

Confidentiality prohibits me from disclosure...but do you really think a dropout hippie from California could have come up with "1,000 songs in your pocket"?

JEFF

Good work, there. I must admit.

SATAN

Thank you, my dear sweet master.

JEFF

But it all is a little bit
depressing. Isn't there anyone who
can get themselves into Heaven?
What about repentance? Does He
accept that?

SATAN

Yes, but not from you, naturally.
Or from anyone who's signed a
contract approved by His legal
team.

JEFF

Understood, but what about those
who haven't signed a contract with
you? Can they repent and go to
Heaven? The worst of the worst.
Could Hitler have
repented....excuse me....DID
Hitler repent before he died?

SATAN

Not even a little bit! He's deep
in one of the darker corners of
Hell. He had all his sins on his
soul when he died.

JEFF

Bunker or Argentina?

SATAN

Argentina.

JEFF

Huh! But if he HAD repented?

SATAN

It would have needed to be
incredibly sincere repentance of a
magnitude not seen on Earth for
many ages. Technically, though,
yes. Hitler could have repented
and gone to Heaven.

JEFF

Do you miss Heaven?

SATAN

Only every day.

JEFF

I'm a little stunned by that
answer.

SATAN (SHRUGGINGLY)

We have a contract, remember? I
have to tell the truth.

JEFF

Would you go back if you could?

SATAN

Yes.

JEFF

What would happen if you repented?

SATAN

What would happen to what?

JEFF

You, Hell, Earth, all of it. What
would happen?

SATAN

Who knows?

JEFF

You do. I've noticed that when you answer a question with a question, you're trying to deflect. What would happen if you repented.

SATAN

I suppose, if my repentance was sincere enough, Hell would cease to exist. The gates would open, and all the souls trapped there would return to Him to be redeemed and perfected.

JEFF

What about people like me and Gates...allegedly...who have contracts pending, or have not yet died?

SATAN

The contracts would become null and void.

JEFF

And what about you? What would then happen to you?

SATAN

I assume I'd be whisked back up to Heaven. But that will never happen.

JEFF

Why not?

SATAN
Free will. Pride. I CHOOSE not to
repent.

JEFF
What if I...

SATAN
NO! Don't you DARE.

SFX: THUNDER ROLLS IN THE DISTANCE. THIS INCREASES THROUGH
THE FOLLOWING...

JEFF
My contract, my wishes. What if
that was my third wish? For you to
sincerely repent?

SATAN
I'm warning you, little man...

JEFF
No. No. We've already established
through my wish for my kids that
nudges in the right direction can
be given to someone whose
inclinations lean in a certain
direction. Obstructions removed...

SATAN
I will tear your soul apart...

JEFF
...and YOU stated earlier you
would return to Heaven if you
could...

SATAN
Final warning.

JEFF
That's my third wish. For you to
sincerely repent of your sins.

SFX: RESORT SOUNDS ABRUPTLY CEASE. THEN...THE GATES OF HELL
BLASTING OPEN. BILLIONS OF SOULS BEING RELEASED. CHAOS, BUT
GOOD CHAOS. THEN...SILENCE.

SATAN
It is finished.

SFX: THE SOUNDS OF HEAVENLY REDEMPTION. SATAN IS BEING
BROUGHT BACK TO HEAVEN. MUSIC. ANGELIC CHOIR. THE WORKS.
THEN...THE SOUND OF AIR WHOOSHING BACKWARD INTO A PLACE
WHERE IT WAS PREVIOUSLY CONFINED, AS IN A BALLOON, OR
PRESSURIZED CANNISTER. THEN...THE NORMAL SOUNDS OF JEFF'S
OFFICE. JEFF'S PHONE IS EMITTING THE "OFF THE HOOK" NOISES.
THEN...THE PHONE DIALLING SEQUENCE. PHONE RINGING ON THE
OTHER END. THEN...

WILLING MAN (ANSWERING PHONE)
Hello?

JEFF (HESITENT, GRADUALLY REGAINING
HIS CONFIDENCE)
Uhhm, good afternoon. My name is
Mike O'Donnell. I'm calling on
behalf of GBS News. We're
currently taking a poll regarding
important events, and would like
to include your opinions. Before
we begin, are you driving or doing
anything that requires your full
attention right now?

WILLING MAN
Not at all. Happy to help.

JEFF

First, may I ask your age?

WILLING MAN

43

SFX: FADE OUT, MUSIC UP DURING THE FOLLOWING...

JEFF

As you may know, there are certain genetically modified organisms known as GMOs. We'd like to focus this study on your impressions of GMO's. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, we're interested in your opinions...

THE END.