

KING OF MOAB

(based on Actual Events)

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EXT. OIL DRILLING SITE - DAY

Super: Based on Actual Events.

Nestled against a gentle hill in windswept grasslands, a solitary oil rig churns reliably while workers idle.

Super: Texas, 1948.

One of the men, a DRILLER with the kind of sun-leathered face Dorothea Lange would have loved, rubs his beard...

DRILLER

You want us to shut 'er down?

He turns to CHARLIE STEEN (mid 20s), a lanky academic type who looks out of place among these backcountry chainhands.

Charlie shakes his head.

CHARLIE

A few more meters.

DRILLER

Feet or meters?

Not giving in to the sarcasm, Charlie winks...

CHARLIE

Meters.

A black, late 40s Ford with fat white wall tires pulls onto the site, stopping some distance away. The SUPERINTENDENT, clearly a man in charge, gets out and shouts...

SUPERINTENDENT

Steen!

Charlie makes his way over to the car. Wiping his hands on an oily rag, he eyes with suspicion an envelope the Superintendent pushes on him.

CHARLIE

What's this?

SUPERINTENDENT

(smugly)

A check. What do you think?

Hesitating, Charlie takes it--puts a big smudge on it with his thumb.

CHARLIE

I just got one three weeks ago.

SUPERINTENDENT

Final check.

Charlie stands there--stupefied.

All of a sudden, excitement flares up at the rig as workers are whooping and hollering.

Charlie and the Superintendent both turn around.

Acknowledging the commotion...

SUPERINTENDENT (CONT'D)

What luck! Looks like you get to
keep your job after all.

Charlie hands him back the envelope...

CHARLIE

I don't believe in luck.

...and walks away--the Superintendent: dumbstruck.

EXT. HIGHWAY (COLORADO PLATEAU, 1946) - DAY

A red '40 Plymouth winds its way through the scorching alpine desert.

Super: A few years earlier.

It's post-war America, and opportunity hangs in the air--like in a Hal Riney commercial.

A younger Charlie, sporting thick-rimmed glasses, is behind the wheel--amiable and carefree.

He pulls off the highway into...

EXT. VEHICLE PEN (TEXAS) - SAME

Trucks, cars, and other vehicles are corralled in haphazard fashion by a rusty chain-link fence.

Charlie's red Plymouth pulls into the lot with bravado, sliding to a stop and kicking up a cloud of dust.

A couple of guys in overalls turn around like someone just ruined their day. Charlie gets out and tosses the keys to them as if they are idle valets.

A fat OVERSEER with a clipboard, the kind of guy who is nice to children but not to adults, turns around...

CHARLIE

Then you're braver than me.

He flashes her a smile and leaves.

She hears the car engine start up and tires crunching the gravel.

After silence returns, she clutches her knees and looks around: a tinge of worry.

EXT. DOVE CREEK, COLORADO - LATER

Charlie drives into the wide, empty main street of Dove Creek-- a town so sparse it looks like it was abandoned earlier that morning.

He passes by a number of places with names stolen right from a glossary of mining: Carnotite Cafe--offering Yellow Cake on special, Spud Saloon, Motherlode Motel, Bonanza Barbershop, and other terrible alliterations.

He heads out of town--looking like the last one leaving.

EXT. DOVE CREEK MERCANTILE (DOVE CREEK, COLORADO) - DAY

A ways out of town, Charlie turns his car toward the wood-plank general store: it looks like a church lot on Sundays.

Surprised, he gets out and approaches the store: ambivalent.

About to step up, the door bursts open, and men spill out carrying pick axes, shovels, and other equipment.

Charlie moves out of their way.

DOVE CREEK MERCANTILE (INTERIOR)

Inside is even worse: jam-packed with more men.

It's a hive of activity: a full house of unqualified exuberance--as if somebody was handing out free money.

Most of them look like lumberjacks: sturdy and rugged--not academic types like Charlie.

Some distance off, Charlie witnesses a shiny, brand-spanking new Geiger counter being placed in front of a customer.

The customer hands over a generous portion of bills, lifts the metallic device and two extra D-cell batteries off the counter, and walks away.

Charlie makes his way to the counter, ready to pull some bills from his own wallet.

The owner, BILL McCORMICK, tall like LBJ, and an affable fellow in his 50s, covetously re-counts the stack of bills.

CHARLIE
(pointing)
What's that?

MCCORMICK
That's the Gilbert U-239.

CHARLIE
How's it work?

MCCORMICK
Easy.

Putting the bills away, he plops a unit in front of Charlie.

After he flips a switch, an occasional static ping can be heard.

Demonstrating, he puts his hand under the tube: nothing.

Even the needle on the dial hasn't moved.

He grabs a sample of yellow ore.

CHARLIE
Carnotite.

McCormick nods.

MCCORMICK
When electrically charged radiation enters the tube, it ionizes a gas which...

CHARLIE
(interrupting)
...alters the capacitance by short-circuiting the voltage.

MCCORMICK
Basically.

He places the yellow ore under the Geiger tube, and an immediate burst of static pops is heard.

The needle swings wildly in response to the radiation.

CHARLIE
How much?

MCCORMICK
Three hundred.

CHARLIE
For aluminum and gas?

As MCCORMICK pulls the sample away from the tube, the needle drops back to its resting position.

MCCORMICK
And electricity.

CHARLIE
Got anything cheaper?

MCCORMICK
It's the standard model.

CHARLIE
What about used?

MCCORMICK
Might have one.

He grabs the Geiger counter, puts it away, then turns back and winks at Charlie:

MCCORMICK (CONT'D)
Just as soon as the next one gives up.

EXT. CAR DEALERSHIP (BOULDER, COLORADO) - DAY

Freshly washed, Charlie's car looks like an emerald on display-- certainly the finest car on the lot.

The SALESMAN walks around the car, with Charlie following.

SALESMAN
I can give you thirty-nine smackeros.

CHARLIE
I'm gonna need a lot more than that.

The Salesman cocks his head...

SALESMAN
Then you shoulda come in with a different car.

EXT. TAR PAPER HUT - DAY

With an elegiac blue sky looming in the distance, M.L. pulls fresh white linen from a clothesline into a basket on the ground.

She hears a vehicle approaching in the distance.

GREG

Whatever you think is best.

ALICE

Okay, sweetie.

Alice writes something down on her pad, and springs back up.

Greg lingers in the best moment of his day.

Laughter emanates from the table.

With every burst of laughter, Charlie looks over, a bit irritated.

From around the corner...

BREITLING (O.S.)

Steen.

Applause from the rowdy tables bleeds over into a grand entrance of Breitling.

BREITLING (CONT'D)

Got something for ya.

Breitling slowly walks toward him carefully holding two divining rods--making a big show of it.

Everyone else stops what they are doing to watch the slow-motion spectacle.

Charlie puts down his map.

BREITLING (CONT'D)

(without looking up)

Since you're gonna need some equipment, I thought I'd give you a pair of divining rods trained to find yellowcake.

The two tips of the divining rods slowly come together, pointing directly at Charlie, just as Breitling stops about a foot away.

Charlie gets up to stand face-to-face with Breitling--the rods pointing at his stomach in a threatening way.

All others in the restaurant grow silent, waiting to see Charlie's reaction.

CHARLIE

(playing along)

I appreciate that, Clyde. How did you train 'em?

Howls of laughter from the rafters.

Charlie takes the divining rods into his hands to operate them.

The rod tips start swinging wildly.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I don't think you trained 'em right.

The rods sense something and angle toward a collection of rocks on the table--and Alice in the distance.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Here...

Maintaining the position of the rods, he hands them back to Breitling.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

...looks like you trained this pair
to find molly, not yellowcake.

Laughter. Breitling looks at Alice...

BREITLING

Her name is Alice.

Charlie retrieves a shiny metallic rock from the table.

CHARLIE

Molybdenum.

He tosses the rock to Breitling, who drops the rods to catch it.

Laughter.

MARK

What're you gonna do now, Steen,
with broke equipment?

Alice pours a pitcher of ice water on Greg.

He bolts up, drenched.

ALICE

The special this morning.

Laughter.

Alice walks past Charlie, murmuring...