



Series 2

Episode 11 Gone to Texas

The first major tournament of the year was in Texas, and was familiarly known as the Monteverdi. According to the rating system of the Tournament of Champions, a scientific measurement subject to occasional demurrals on religious grounds from the debate community at large, this tournament at Claudio Monteverdi High School was worthy of an octofinals bid, which meant that the top sixteen competitors would earn a qualification, and that this tournament was one of the very top echelon for members of the national circuit who wanted nothing more than to cap their season of debate, which had yet to start, with a trip to Lexington, Kentucky, the first weekend of May. Think of it as the Kentucky Derby for human teenagers.

And Eric Rand-Walsh, leading the Seven Samurai of Veil of Ignorance, was ready.

“On the bus!” Rand-Walsh barked.

Fourteen students—two for each of the seven samurai—turned and started marching toward the bus.

“Eyes front!” Rand-Walsh did not think that wandering minds were a good idea among his debaters. “Juvey justice is not dumb,” he sang in the cadence of a drill sergeant.

“Juvey justice is not dumb,” his team repeated in the rhythm.

“Their brains are simply very young.”

“Their brains are simply very young.”

“Their cerebella all are numb.”

“Their cerebella all are numb.”

“Affirm the res o lu shee un!”

“Affirm the res o lu shee un!”

Okay, he wasn't terribly proud of that last line, but cerebellum didn't scan, so he was already at a deficit and, well, they were only marching to the bus, after all.

“Commander?” one of Rand-Walsh's assistant coaches came up beside him.

“Go ahead,” Rand-Walsh said without looking at him, his eyes fixed on his team as they em-bussed.

“That girl from Nighten Day just texted. She'll be here in five minutes.”

Rand-Walsh's eyes narrowed. “We're leaving in three minutes.”

“Yes, sir.”

“That means she's arriving two minutes after we leave.”

“Yes, sir.”

The last Veilie had climbed onto the bus. A couple of the Seven Samurai were stowing away gear under the body of the vehicle. Luggage. Plastic tubs of evidence the size of small sheep. Printers. Spare computers. A couple of Hummers. A sperm whale.

“Text her back,” Rand-Walsh said. He retrieved a toothpick from the breast pocket of his field jacket—he was dressed in full semi-military attire, from the epaulets down to the combat boots, because debate means war and Eric Rand-Walsh was the consummate warrior—and placed it into the corner of his mouth. He chewed it for a moment. “Wish her a happy weekend and tell her we'll send her a postcard from Texas.”

“Yes, sir!”

The assistant turned away and began typing into his phone. Meanwhile, the other assistants had finished packing the gear.

“Ready, sir!” one of them announced to Rand-Walsh.

He nodded. “Em-buss, gentlemen,” he commanded.

They em-bussed.

Rand-Walsh turned to the assistant standing behind him. “Ready?”

The assistant flipped his phone shut. “Ready.”

“Em-buss.”

“Yes, sir.”

In a moment, Eric Rand-Walsh was the only member of the team not on the bus, a coach he had rented to drive them down to JFK airport for their trip to Texas. They should be at the airport within two hours, if Rand-Walsh's scheduling was correct. And since it was Rand-Walsh's scheduling, it was correct by definition.

He moved the toothpick to the other side of his mouth and pulled down the brim of his hat just as a white convertible PT Cruiser pulled up behind the bus. A girl jumped out, dragging from the back seat a suitcase large enough for a ten-week vacation in the Bahamas and tossing a computer bag over her shoulder. She gave a hurried goodbye to the woman driving the car and hurried over to where Rand-Walsh was standing.

“We were just about to leave, Miss Gallstone,” he said to her.

“Sorry, Mr. Rand-Walsh.”

“If you wish to travel with the Veil of Ignorance team, Miss Gallstone, you will travel with us according to my schedule, not yours.”

“Yes, Mr. Rand-Walsh.”

“On the bus. Double-time!”

“Yes, sir!”

All but tottering under the weight of her gear, the girl turned and climbed aboard the bus as quickly as she could.

Eric Rand-Walsh took one last look around him, then he spit his toothpick onto the ground.

The Veil of Ignorance team was on the march. And they were about to take Texas.

He smiled to himself, just the thinnest of confident smirks, and boarded the bus.

Yes, Tucker Gallstone was traveling with the Veilies. Tarnish Jutmoll had arranged it for her, and she was paying for the privilege out of her own pocket, or more specifically, out of her parents’ own pockets, but she was on the road to her first national circuit event of the year. As the air-conditioned coach bus made its way down the highway toward the airport, she was in seventh heaven. Eighth heaven, if there was such a thing.

All around her the Veilies were plugging away at their cases. Every single one of them had a laptop open, networked wirelessly to the team’s traveling wireless, to which they had given Tucker the password. The bus was a virtual electronic library, traveling south at sixty miles per hour on the New York Thruway. The Seven Samurai worked their way through the vehicle, sitting with one debater, now another, working on answers to everything, rebuttals, overviews, underviews, sideviews, rearviews, midviews, viewviews—the whole arsenal of rhetorical weaponry, all aimed at whether thirteen-year-olds should be sent away to prisons with the same dispatch as thirty-one-year-olds if they commit roughly the same crimes.

They had arguments about culpability and moral sense and, as Rand-Walsh's marching rhyme indicated, the unformed brains of adolescents. They had arguments about prisons acting as breeding grounds for evil, the secondary schools for the felons of tomorrow, as if your average American high school wasn't a good enough place to learn how to commit crimes. They even had arguments about arguments, which were Tucker's favorites, not debating the resolution, whatever it was, but debating the debating of the resolution. In her forensic essence, Tucker was so postmodern she was absolutely historical.

Snippets of conversation flew about her as she researched what she was calling A/T cerebellum, that is, answers to those arguments that teenagers' cerebellums, site of their ability to distinguish right from wrong, are not fully developed. There was plenty of stock evidence available, but Tucker was not about stock evidence. She couldn't believe she was getting internet access on the freakin' bus. On the Nighten Day bus they were lucky to get seats. For a second she closed her eyes and fantasized about being a Veilie.

She sighed.

She was not a Veilie. She was, what? A Nightie? That didn't sound right. Whatever.

She shook her head and got back to work. It was the first tournament of the year, half a continent away, and she was going to be there. She might even get a TOC bid...

Another fantasy? Only time would tell.

From the disreputable and vaguely distasteful blog, "Quack The Forensic Duck — A Coach Explains it All to You," written by Seth B. Obomash, Veil of Ignorance HS, Ret. (Reprinted by permission.)

At the Monteverdi tournament this year, they will be once again enforcing their disclosure rule.

I, for one, bristle at this.

Lincoln-Douglas debate has stolen a lot from Policy. Once upon a time, LD was about philosophy: now it's about policy issues. Once upon a time, LD bumped blindly into walls when there were rhetorical violations: now they argue theory. Once upon a time, LD was slow enough that the average American could vaguely follow it: now it's as fast as any Policy round, and half the Policicians in the country can't even follow it.

Add to this list of co-options, case disclosure.

In LD, case disclosure—the posting in advance of your affirmative position—is intended as a preventative for big programs overwhelming small programs. Whereas in Policy, case disclosure merely eliminates negative debaters' having to spend all their valuable time sorting through the evidence in their four sheep-sized tubs, in LD, it is seen as an enforcement of a certain brand of justice. It will make the big teams and the small teams all one happy family of undisclosed size.

In the immortal words of Mr. Rogers as he donned his latest sweater, can you say farce?

With case disclosure, the big teams now no longer have to scout out what people are doing. With case disclosure, the big teams can apply their many assistant coaches to pulling down the competition's positions directly off the computer and immediately begin blocking out positions against them without waiting for the opportunity to actually hear those cases live. Try doing that when you're one lone debater in a sea of mega-programs.

One wonders why the Monteverdi doesn't just send the trophies to the big programs the week before the tournament starts. This would eliminate a lot of needless expense and bother on everyone's part, since there is no question that, with disclosure, all the advantages are to the biggest teams.

Last year Monteverdi asserted that not only was case disclosure the only way to go, but that teams that didn't abide by their rule of disclosure would not only be barred from the tournament for all time or until the cows come home, whichever came first, but would also have to wear a big red A on all of their team sweatshirts.

A for what? God only knows. God and, I guess, Professor Harold Hill, who in his search for the sadder but wiser girl allowed that he hoped, and he prayed, for a Hester to win just one more A...

Don't be too distracted by the music, my pumpkins. Case disclosure in LD is a bad idea. Nothing good will come of it. Mark the words of Quack, the Forensic Duck!

Will all fourteen Veilies win bids to the Tournament of Champions?

Will Tucker Gallstone ever again be allowed to travel in the august presence of Eric Rand-Walsh and the Seven Samurai, or will her inadvertent tardiness damn her to life as a PFER?

Is life as a PFER actually what happens to LDers when they commit unpardonable crimes?

Will Seth B. Obomash ever learn to stop worrying and love LD disclosure?

Is the Nostrum Twitter feed (@NostrumNation) as bad an idea as it seems at first glance?

Can I get a drink of water?

The answers are all clearly given in the Bristol Palin abstinence video provided you play it backwards during a black mass while sacrificing a rutabaga, or else you can look in vain in our next episode: “Release the Kraken, or, Jeesh, Liam Neeson and Ralph Fiennes in the same movie makes it even harder to figure out which one is which.”