



Series 2

Episode 15

1. Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Speechie

As the Pup-a-Roni neared, Hautboy LeMonde was working on the final details of his new interp piece for this year, a cutting from *Howard the Duck*. There was the whole duck-human love thing, plus the Dark Overlord and the scientists, so there was plenty of meat for Haut to dig into. And dig in he did. He had exactly ten minutes and twelve seconds worth of incredible material he could play for both laughs and pathos. He needed to cut another twenty-five seconds or so to get it under the ten-minute limit and still allow for audience reaction. He should have that by the end of the weekend.

Hautboy's home practice area was the family theater room. This was where the LeMondes watched movies at night, projected onto a fifteen-foot wide screen—Hautboy came from a long line of showbiz fans. But when the collected LeMondes weren't screening films, Hautboy took over the slightly elevated platform at the front of the room and played out to the dozen empty plush reclining chairs that faced him. Occasionally one or the other of the LeMonde clan would sit in the audience, cheering him on.

Hautboy liked to practice in what he called his full Interp drag: dark blue suit, dark blue shirt, bright blue tie. The neutrality of the costume forced certain acting choices that he might not make if he practiced in jeans and a tee shirt. And he had to have the piece frozen at least by the weekend before the first performance. He should be at the point at the end of today. He had given himself all of this Saturday to get there.

As he finished his fifth run-through of the day, none of them with an audience, he plopped himself into one of the front row seats and unscrewed

the top off a bottle of water. He was getting there. He felt good about things. He'd be on fire by the time he got to the Pup-a-Roni.

And then his mind hit a roadblock. The Pup-a-Roni. There had been a fraction of a moment when, if it hadn't been caught, he wouldn't have been going to that tournament, because his name had mysteriously disappeared from the signup and the registration.

Mysterious? Yeah, right.

Sure, Lily was pissed at him for trying to seduce her precious little debaters, but that was all a part of the game. Debaters pilfered speechies, speechies pilfered debaters. It was a time-honored tradition. The whole point was to get the novices where they belonged, wasn't it? If Hautboy sort of, uh, put debaters into less than a glorious light, no doubt some debater somewhere was putting speechies into some other less than glorious light. Retaliation was done in kind. You steal mine, I'll steal yours. It was just. It was fair. Debaters, who made their living in justice and fairness, ought to understand that.

But pulling somebody out of a registration? To the first big speech tournament of the year? That, simply, was not done. He had expected more of Lily Maru. She had the serious gene. All she cared about was school and debate and getting into just the right college—

Getting into just the right college...

A plan appeared full-blown in Hautboy's mind. It was like Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. One minute they weren't there, and the next minute they were. Although, Hautboy had to admit, he wasn't quite sure if the Commandments were one of those gone-one-minute, here-the-next things, given that he wasn't exactly up on his Bible reading what with all his attention to working on his Interp piece. But that wasn't the point. Moses didn't matter, at least at the moment.

His plan of revenge against Lily Maru was complete in all its details. And at the bottom, it was entirely innocent. No debaters would be harmed in the making of this mischief. Or at least not seriously harmed. But annoyed? Oh, yeah. Definitely, seriously, annoyed.

Normally nothing could steer Hautboy LeMonde away from his practicing, especially when he was on a deadline. But this wasn't nothing. Far from it. This was, as far as avenging himself on Lily Maru was concerned, positively Something. Positively genius, in fact. *Mes etoiles!*

He popped out of his chair and headed up to his room.

He needed to get to his computer.

He needed to get down to business.

Howard the Duck could wait.

2. Break Rounds and Broken Hearts

In Texas, the adventure continued.

A debate tournament is a longterm affair. It starts on a Friday, and ends late on Saturday or, in some cases, on Sunday. There were even some tournaments, with big policy divisions, that lasted into Monday. On paper, a policy round is about an hour and a half. At a major tournament, with all the required preparation at the beginning and the judges' critiques at the end, it could take twice that long. And the other debate activities seemed to take more time every season as well. LD had long ago added the trappings of prepping out opponents before rounds and endless critiques after them, and it wouldn't be long before the latest of the debate activities—Public Forum—followed suit. Things that started simple, with just a couple of kids arguing, eventually got complicated in more ways than the uninitiated could imagine. Instead of arguing their points they'd argue about arguing, and in fact there was a whole heuristic approach to forensics that appealed to some people much more than discussing the resolution at hand. When the stakes were high, with debaters competing on a national circuit for high-profile wins, there were people around willing to sell tools to theoretically improve students' chances at those events. You could buy written materials, you could buy summer camps and winter camps, and you could, like Ramchen Chowder, buy private coaching. It was well known that some private coaches went so far as to write the cases for their employers, i.e., the students who would run them. And some schools, like Veil, had more assistant coaches than students. In debate, like everywhere else in the good old U. S. of A., money could buy just about anything. In this case, it could, almost, buy debate rounds.

Ramchen, Kennerji and Tucker represented various levels of these debate consumers. Ramchen, as we have said, had Boner Corkzit, his own private coach. Boner certainly worked with Ramchen on planning positions, and offered ideas of what Ramchen should run in rounds, but he didn't go so far as to write cases for him. He might have, for more money. The only problem with doing so in Boner's mind was that, if he wrote Ramchen's cases and Ramchen lost, well, it would be Boner who was to blame, whereas in any other scenario, the losses were probably due to Ramchen's debating.

Kennerji, on the other hand, had no coach, but was a product of as much debate summer camp as he could squeeze into the two months of

summer. He would zigzag across the country throughout July and August, appearing at every college campus where some coaches or others were training the young and eager in the fine arts of high school debating. Kennerji also was a heavy consumer of debate materials sold online, which ranged from packets of potential evidence on both sides of a resolution to actual cases written by former debaters. As a rule, these were for him a starting point: he was good enough to use the canned evidence as hints on where to get more evidence, and the cases as merely positions he ought to be prepared against. This was not true of some of his fellow customers, however. Less adept debaters would take these materials not as tools for personal improvement but as gospel to be preached from the pulpit of their own rounds. Students who did devour for-sale evidence and canned cases undigested did not, as a general rule, fare terribly well, although they could have some marginal success in some regions. They wouldn't last a minute on the national circuit, however, even though that was their usual goal in having purchased all the material in the first place.

And finally there was Tucker, who came from a small team with an old-fashioned coach and who pretty much did everything herself. She had gone to a couple of weeks of debate camp back in July, but that was it. Otherwise she worked mostly with Lily Maru to develop positions, and she did all her own research, and as she sat with Ramchen being prepped by Boner over the weekend, and as she watched the Seven Samurai do everything but transport their own brains into the heads of their debaters, she was slightly jealous, but on the other hand, she was also a little proud. Her record as they sat waiting for the elimination rounds to be posted was four-two. She had every chance of breaking into those elims.

Kennerji was also four-two. He had lost to one of the Veilies and, sigh, to Tucker. She had thought it was a fun round. He had thought it was forty-five minutes of the purest hell. He didn't want to beat her, because he was hopelessly enthralled by her, and he didn't want to lose to her because he was also hopelessly enthralled by debate, and the dueling enthrallments had unmanned him in the round and he had managed to lose it all by himself without need of much assistance on Tucker's part.

Ramchen was down one, which meant that he was guaranteed to break into the elims. And as far as Tucker knew, and she was the type who knew such things at a tournament, all of the Veilies were either undefeated or down one except for one who was down two.

The tension was high among the LDers in the Monteverdi cafeteria. Hem Viadud, with his whip and pistol, was nowhere to be seen, which meant that he was probably in the tab room working on the first elim pairings.

Thirty-two debaters would break, and they would require forty-eight judges, which cut pretty deep into the judge pool, so things had to be just right. Plus there were all sorts of judges who couldn't judge people for one reason or another, and a whole system of judge preferencing (which we'll study in depth at a later date), which made this the toughest round to put together of the weekend so far.

And then the doors swung open, and a flying wedge of Montes came storming in, with Viadud in his red ringmaster outfit in their protected center, and in a minute schematics listing who had broken and who was debating whom and who was judging whom were flying around like crazy.

Tucker had a schematic in her hand without even knowing how it got there. She had been out of her seat like a starving shark smelling blood twenty miles away, and now she was going up and down the list—

YES! She had broken. She was hitting some kid from Florida. If she won this round, she would have her first bid for the Tournament of Champions, at her very first tournament of the year!

Ramchen too had, of course, broken, with his five-one record.

Kennerji kept looking at the list. He had to be on there somewhere. Up, down, left, right...

But not all down-twos broke. Kennerji was one of that unfortunate number with the same win-loss record as many of the elim debaters, but lesser speaker points.

He gave out a long breath. He had come all the way to Texas and hadn't broken. And Tucker, a sophomore whom he could have beaten if she wasn't so...Tuckerish, *had* broken. There was no justice in the world.

Oh, well. He'd figure out who Tucker might hit in the next round and scout out potential opponents for her. If he couldn't continue on the battlefield of forensics, he could at least soldier on on the battlefield of the heart.

And, oh yes, Tucker was right. All the Veilies broke. And now each of them, with their army of Samurai, was prepping out for the double-octofinals round.

But at the moment Tucker cared nothing about any of that.

"Do you know what this Florida kid is running?" she asked Kennerji and Ramchen.

Neither of them had debated him, so they didn't know.

"Ex phi," Boner said. He had just arrived from the judges' lounge to start prepping Ramchen. "I judged him in round two."

"Ex phi?"

“Experimental philosophy. Wait a minute.” He scratched around his backpack and pulled out some papers. “Here.” It was his notes on the case that he had judged. Not only could Tucker see the affirmative position, which was online anyhow thanks to the tournament’s policy of disclosure, but also the responses that had been run.

“Wow!” Tucker said. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” He turned to Ramchen. “And as for you...” His voice softened and he began to plot out the strategy that his charge might take in the upcoming round. Ramchen was debating someone from Chicago.

In an hour or so, everyone in the room would know who had earned their first bids to the TOC.

This was about as exciting as debating ever got.

How to Win at Debate Tournaments — A Guaranteed System

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.)

Few if any people will guarantee that, if you do what they say, you will win at debate tournaments. You can hire all the private coaches you want, buy all the online evidence you want, do whatever you think is necessary to improve your debate skills, but only Quack The Forensic Duck guarantees success with its amazingly simple system. Do what we say, and you will not fail.

1. **Win all your rounds.** What could be simpler? If you win all your rounds, including the final round, you will win the tournament. And to think, we are giving this advice away for free.
2. **Get high speaker points.** If you must lose a round, which we do not recommend (see #1, above), at the very least, get high speaker points in all your rounds. Speaker points are entirely arbitrary: every judge has a private and bizarre system for assigning points that can neither be explained nor understood by anyone, including the judge. Nonetheless, getting high points from all judges, regardless of their point-assigning-system, is absolutely necessary.
3. **Know what you are talking about.** In aid of achieving both #1 and #2 above, knowing what you are doing is a relative necessity. At times you

can achieve success without complete preparation, quoting sources you only marginally understand, flying in on a wing and a prayer, so to speak. But not often, and not consistently, so do not let those rare occasions where you have been less than prepared but succeeded anyhow fool you into thinking that this can become a paradigm for success. It can't, and it won't. This is how forensics ultimately fails to prepare you for life, by the way. In the Real World, the truly smart and hard-working are almost always trumped by the lucky bull slingers. Enjoy Unreal Life while you can.

4. **Know who you are talking to.** In order, again, to achieve both #1 and #2, and to look as if you've achieved #3, have some idea who is sitting in the back of the room judging your round, and perform accordingly. All debate rounds are, indeed, performances. You may think that they are a real-time dialectic of thesis and antithesis, but what they really are is the entertainment, or lack thereof, of whoever is in the back of the room. Perhaps they enjoy Hegelian disputes? Then your dialectic is, indeed, winning the day. Maybe they prefer speakers who sound like James Earl Jones. Maybe they prefer the theory of debate to the practice of debate. Maybe they prefer fast to slow or slow to fast. Whatever. It is your job as speaker to determine what your listener prefers in a speaker, and to provide it. Failure to do so will result in fewer points and fewer wins.

As you can see, our system is foolproof. Win all your rounds, and you are guaranteed to win all your tournaments. And if you must lose a round (a preliminary round, that is), do so with high speaker points. We throw in the other two pieces of advice, above, for free. Do with them what you will.

We will see you at the winner's circle.

What vengeance will Hautboy LeMonde wreak on Lily Maru?

Will Tucker Gallstone get her first TOC bid?

Will Kennerji Allawalla get Tucker Gallstone?

Is winning all your rounds really the best guarantee of winning debate tournaments?

Are we really going on hiatus this time, or is this just a commie-pinko Democrat plot to raise your taxes and to instill hated social justice in America where it doesn't belong?

**The answers will welcome you to the Bahamas in our next episode:
“Breaking News! “The Addams Family” Musical Dominates the Tony
Award Nominations, or, Oops...”**