



Episode 49

How Now, Kurosawa?

Had Fleece

It's not the world's greatest job, but somebody's got to do it. The candy table does make money for the team, and I am the captain of the team, and at these little Northeastern Debate League tournaments, there isn't very much else to do except judge, which I'd only do if Mr. Ryan gets desperate. What I'd really like to he doesn't need any help from the kids with, and that's working in the tab room, because he's got other coaches in there. God knows what they do in there all day when they're not tabbing. I mean, they've got about twenty Macintosh Powerbooks all hooked up, and they're locked in there with each other week in and week out. Maybe they're playing solitaire. Or "You Don't Know Jack." Or maybe they're surfing the Internet for porno sites. Who knows? I wouldn't put anything past them, especially after the Seth Obomash incident.

Anyhow, we had our table over near the entrance to the serving area, which is like out of the way from the rest of the cafeteria, and we can store soda in there to keep it cold during the day. We were selling the usual stuff -- candy, flow pads, pens, some old Toulouse tee shirts we always seem to have hanging around. We'd brought in some pizzas earlier and sold them by the slice for lunch; that's usually a big money-maker. Interest in lunch had died down by now, and people were mostly hanging around. Second round had just ended and it would be a while before they got the schematics out for round three.

The Nighten Day team -- and that's what this was all about -- was in two different places. The debaters were all at one table, and most of the speechies were over at another table, except for Cartier, who was sitting off by herself with that Mordred kid. I have to admit, I was still pissed from the night before. I mean, I did want to break up with her, but did she have to be that big a bitch about it? This is real life, for God's sake, not "Melrose Place." I don't need that aggravation. And then running into Jasmine at the movies! Talk about the last straw. I don't think Jasmine would ever go out with me now.

Jasmine's sister, Camelia, was over at the Nighten debate table. Most of them were playing cards, except for Camelia, who seemed to be doing her homework. At one point that kid Buglaroni, the dumb, funny-looking novice, the one Jasmine was tutoring when I first got friendly with her, came over to the candy table and bought like eight packages of Skittles. Buglaroni. This was the schmuck Cartier tried to tell me Jasmine was going out with. Yeah, sure. In her worst nightmares.

Anyhow, I can't say I was paying much attention to either of the two Nighten tables. I didn't want Cartier thinking I was staring at her, and I didn't want Camelia thinking I was staring at her, so I did my best to stare somewhere else altogether. I still wanted to give Jasmine a call; I do not like to give up on these things too easily. I guess I was thinking about whether or not she'd be at Lodestone's Originalvaganza next week, and somebody had just come over and was buying a bottle of water from me, when I heard some noise and looked up, and there was the four of them locked together: Cartier, that kid Mordred, Buglaroni and Camelia. Then a pile of Skittles went flying into the air. I don't know what it was all about, but a minute later Nighten's coach, Mr. Jutmoll, came into the cafeteria real oblivious to everything and talked to them for a minute, and everything seemed to be honky dory.

I guess it was no big deal.

Camelia Maru

I've been in school with these kids all my life, and I don't really like them. Buglaroni and the Tarleton twins, I mean. I guess I wish they weren't on the team, but there isn't much you can do about that. But just because they are, I'm not all of a sudden going to become best friends with them. And I'm not going to start playing cards with them all the time, especially when I've got a global studies test on Monday.

I did hear Buglaroni say something about using Skittles as chips, but it really didn't mean anything to me. To be honest with you, I thought they were playing spades, but I guessed they switched to poker at some point.

The speech kids were at the other table, and I reached the end of the chapter I was studying and I was thinking that maybe I'd go over there, because I do like some of those kids better. Then I noticed Cartier and Mordred Prentice were walking over to our table. I shivered. Like *really* shivered. Jasmine hates Cartier so much, and I think the feeling is contagious. And that Mordred is so creepy. Why the two hang out with each other like they do is really wierd.

I don't know why they came over, but Cartier was looking at me, and I turned away but then I looked up again and she was standing behind Buglaroni and still looking at me and our eyes locked. Then all of a sudden Buglaroni swore and grabbed Mordred's hand and Cartier had Buglaroni in some kind of Vulcan neck lock or something that seemed really painful, and I grabbed her hand and tried to pull it away from him. Not like I care about Buglaroni, but I'd hate to see him destroyed by aliens or something. If it had been anyone other than Cartier, I probably

wouldn't have done anything, but the way Jasmine has been lately, and then seeing Cartier and Had at the movies last night... So I'm like digging my fingers into her arm, when suddenly Mordred threw like all these Skittles into the air. Then Buglaroni let go of Mordred, Cartier let go of Buglaroni, I let go of Cartier, and she didn't say anything to me but she and Mordred just walked away. Mr. Jutmoll came by, and everybody acted like nothing had happened.

It was like really strange. Buglaroni was fuming and cursing, and the Tarleton twins were acting worse than usual. Disney Davidson was playing cards with them too, but he seemed totally unfazed by the whole thing.

"Shut up and deal," he said, and that was the end of that.

Disney Davidson

The thing is, you never know with novices, man. You know what I mean?

This Buglaroni character was like really pushing the envelope. We're sitting there playing spades, which is a pretty cool game, but you need to really get into your partner's brain, and Buglaroni was my partner, and, well, I wasn't going to go there, you know what I mean? I kept looking over at that girl, the one that looks like death eating a fig newton. I don't know what it is about her, but she just grabs me. I had picked her up in the round I judged, sure, but there wasn't any prejudice involved at the time. I mean, she beat that little lawyer hands down.

You know what my problem is with all of this? I mean, here I am, a college freshman, and like I thought one day I'd get real good at dealing with females, you know? Like I sucked at it in high school, for one reason because most of the girls in my class were way older than me and all the ones in the younger classes were way dumber. But I figured I'd sort of like mature into it, go into college, and like they say, ma-trick-u-late, if you get my drift, but it turns out I'm the same schlub in college that I was in high school. Maybe even more so.

That really sucks. Really. Life. You know what I mean?

Anyhow, I was talking about the novices. And Buglaroni. So he gets this idea that we should start playing poker, for money. Now if Jutmoll were to see us gambling at a tournament, all hell would break loose, but Buglaroni just doesn't care, and it's not like it means anything to me anymore, although if I had been thinking more clearly and not playing young Werther over that girl Gloria I might have been better off, so I agreed to it.

That girl must have addled my brains.

So what old Buggy does is, he buys like a dozen bags of Skittles and we all have to buy in, at ten cents a Skittle: pretty steep stakes, actually. But I'm getting fifty bucks for the day for judging, so what do I care? So we're sitting there, playing away, and Buglaroni is winning like crazy. Very serious poker, too. No silly games with wild cards and stuff like that. Straight draw poker, or maybe five card stud. The real thing. And Buglaroni has a pile of Skittles like you wouldn't be-

lieve. He's probably winning about twenty bucks -- which is like serious Skittles -- and then this speechie kid comes over to the table and starts watching for a minute, standing over Buglaroni's shoulder, and the next thing you know, the speechie reaches down to Buglaroni's pile, grabs a handful of Skittles, and pops them into his mouth. Maybe a couple of bucks worth, according to the price we've greenspanned them at. And of course, Buglaroni goes ballistic, and starts to swear and rant and rave, and he's like jumping up and I figure he's going to haul off and sock this speechie kid right in the chops when suddenly this ice maiden Cartier -- man, she hasn't changed since freshman year except maybe she gets even icier and now she looks like maybe she's thirty-three years old and divorced a couple of times. Oh yeah, she hasn't changed much, only gotten worse. Anyhow, Cartier who I guess has been standing there all the time, clamps her hands around Buglaroni's neck and starts squeezing like she's going to kill the little turkey. Buglaroni like can't move, and I'm sitting there a statue of General Grant with a pigeon on my head, too granite to even move, and this little Camelia kid -- she's Jasmine Maru's sister, the two of them probably weigh in together at about eighty-eight pounds fully dressed -- whomps into Cartier and hits her over the head with a flow pad, then takes all the Skittles on the table and throws them at her.

Really weird stuff, man.

Anyhow, it's all over about as quickly as it starts, and the next thing you know Mr. Jutmoll is there, as nonchalant as a creamed onion, and we're all pretending to play spades, like nothing ever happened.

I'm glad I got out of this life, man. I really am.

Except why am I still here?

Tarnish Jutmoll

As if things aren't getting depressing enough as it is these days, an adult judge from one of the other schools comes into the tab room and tells me that he thinks my kids are gambling in the cafeteria.

Gambling. What next? A prostitution ring? Maybe they could hire Seth Obomash to run it for them.

Even if the team is probably going out of existence any minute, there are still rules that must be upheld. Gambling is definitely one of the forbidden activities.

It's amazing what these kids will get up to if you let them out of your sight for a minute.

I told Dan I'd be gone for a little while, and walked over to the cafeteria. The rainy weather wasn't doing anything for my back, and I must admit it was more painful than usual walking along, and I couldn't go very fast because it just hurt too much.

I didn't want to announce my presence, so I opened the cafeteria door an inch or two and looked in, to get a feel for things, but the Nighten table wasn't in my line of view. So I went in, and there they were, over in a corner. They were playing cards, that was obvious, but from a distance it could have been poker, euchre, honeymoon bridge or whatever, but as I got closer it just turned out to be a spades game.

Which was good. To tell you the truth, I didn't want a confrontation. Especially with the team on its last legs.

"How's everybody doing?" I asked. Of course I knew the answer, because after all I was working in the tab room, but that wasn't the point. They all acknowledged me one way or another, and told me how their rounds were going, then I watched the game for a little while. Buglaroni had a big pile of Skittles on the table in front of him for Buglaroni-type reason, and I asked him if he minded if I had some, and he gave me this funny look and said no, so I grabbed a handful.

Not bad. But not my favorite.

I'm an M&Ms with peanuts man myself.

Hamlet P. Buglaroni

I just don't want to talk about it.

I mean, that Morrie Prentice really bites, you know? Like, I don't know what his problem is. You're trying to play cards, and you finally convince these clowns to make it like interesting, and you're actually ahead a few bucks, and then this bozo comes along and eats all my profits. I could have like killed him, except his little mommy or whatever she is got between us. I wouldn't mind laying one up her smirky little white-bread face, you know what I mean, but I'm like a gentleman, so I said the hell with it and let Morrie run off and lick his wounds and hide behind her apron strings.

What an idiot! The only good thing was that when Mr. Jutmoll came into the room we had gone back to playing spades. Not that it would have mattered, I mean, like, would he have known that the Skittles represented chips? Still, I don't need him on my case more than he already is.

As for this debate thing, I don't know if I like it or not. It would be nice to have people actually think that you're smart or something.

Maybe if I actually won a round I might be able to really get into it. And if I don't win a round today, I mean, under the circumstances, which I'm not going to go into, then I'm never going to win one.

We'll see.

Will Had ever forgive Cartier for last night?

Does a full house beat two Skittles?

What exactly are Buglaroni's *circumstances*?

Why does George W. Bush get to see the Pope?

While we're at it, did W. try to hit on Frau Merkel again this week?

Be with us next time when the answers are avoided in: "Robbie the Robot: Boon to Man-kind or mechanical man of Mrs. Robinson's dreams?"