



# Episode 83

## As the Sun Sets Over Beautiful Manhattan Lodestone...

It has taken what seems like forever, but at last the Manhattan Lodestone Original Vaganza (All Other Vaganzas are Extra) is coming to an end.

The awards assembly is planned for four o'clock, and it is well-known that Mr. Lo Pat is a stickler for ending his tournament on schedule. From hither and yon, the audience starts pouring into the auditorium in plenty of time for the event. Everyone knows by now who has won and who has not, except for the final rounds, which will be announced at the assembly; even in these, however, both in LD and Policy, most people who watched the events are pretty certain of the outcomes. The awards assembly, therefore, is not primarily for the dissemination of information, but is instead an opportunity to reprise the weekend, and for the appropriate homages to be paid to the appropriate winners. If you've taken tin at the Vaganza, you deserve to hear Mr. Lo Pat call out your name and to walk up the aisle and shake the hand of one of his myrmidons and hold that Vaganza trophy close to your heart as you walk back to your seat knowing you've beaten some of the best in the country.

In many cases, the assembly is the first time since the tournament began that teams are reuniting their members with their coaches. The same is true of teams in different divisions: Policians and LDers from the same school who haven't seen each other since Friday afternoon are once again seated next to each other, laughing, joking, pulling caps down in front of their eyes, explaining themselves to their coaches who have also emerged into the sunlight for the first time in days. Round Robinskis go over their flows in agonizing detail with their debate gods, trying to figure out how they could possibly not have won this or that round. Policians compare notes on the new Al Gore sex-scandal disads that no one had heard about before Friday and now seem to be run by every neg

from here to Peoria.

Amnea Nutmilk and Tarnish Jutmoll sit behind their teams, which are jumbled together in the seats in front of them, and allow their fingers to play little games in their entwined hands.

"It's been an interesting weekend," Amnea says wistfully.

"The Vaganza is always interesting," Jutmoll replies.

"You mean you always get romantically attached here?"

Jutmoll smiles sheepishly. "No," he says. "That's a first."

"When is the ball going to get rolling? It's already four o'clock."

"Mr. Lo Pat has never started an award ceremony any later than four oh five. I doubt if he'll upset his perfect record today. Be prepared, though. He's big on thanking people."

"All of you coaches are big on thanking people."

"Not as big as Mr. Lo Pat."

At that moment, Mr. Lo Pat's wheelchair whirrs up from backstage, and he comes to rest proudly before the table that displays the Vaganza trophies. There is no microphone, but Mr. Lo Pat has no need of amplification.

"If everyone will take a seat," he begins, deliberately soft.

As might be predicted, ninety-five percent of the people milling about immediately find a place to park their carcasses. Leaving five percent still standing and talking.

"Was there an attack of brain fever over the weekend?" Mr. Lo Pat asks, his voice rising. "I can't imagine any other reason why everyone hasn't sat down yet, unless for some undefinable reason they've completely lost the intelligence they arrived here with two days ago."

One or two people still don't get the hint.

"SIT DOWN!!!"

That they get.

They sit.

"Thank you." Mr. Lo Pat pulls a sheet of paper from his inside jacket pocket. "A tournament as large as the Manhattan Lodestone Original Vaganza requires a lot of people to make it happen. I would like to thank them now."

"Hold on to your hat," Jutmoll whispers to Amnea Nutmilk.

"Please hold your applause, or we'll never get through this," Mr. Lo Pat says. He begins to read from his list. "I would like to thank James Gatz, Anna Livia, Theophilus North, Bernard Baruch, Jeremiah Johnson, Deanna Durbin, Lois Flagstone, Bertie Wooster, Nick Chopper, Stuart Little, Eric Blore, Toshiro Mifune, Benjamin Barker, Vlad the Impaler, J. Fred Muggs, Uriah Heep, Joel Cairo, Clare Quilty, Becky Sharp, Phoebe Caulfield, Dick Grayson, Harry Lime, Tony Buddenbrooks, Norman Bates, Pete Best, Butterfly McQueen, Sebastian Flyte, Theron Ware, Kaiser Soze, Peter Quint, Zuleika Dobson, Theodore Cleaver, Andrew Loog Oldham, Hieronymous Bosch, Mahatma Kane Jeeves, Luca Brasi, Jud Fry, Nathan Detroit, Egbert Souse, Lemmy Caution, Rufus T. Firefly, Rick Blaine, Rupert Pupkin, Molly Bloom, Pierre Bezukhov, Tristram Shandy, N-X 211, John Galt, Perry White, Ringo Kid, Paspertout, Ub Iwerks, Grover Whelan, Antoine Doinel, Charles L. Dodgson, Blanche Morton, Molly Brown, Putney Swope, Merkin Muffley, Marion Davies, C. K. Dexter Haven, THX 1138, Sally Hemings, Jean Valjean, Polly Peachum, Carmen Miranda, Umberto Eco, Emma Bovary, Fala, Leonard McCoy, Archie Goodwin, Tex Ritter, King Oliver, Bennett Cerf, Ed Norton, Stella Kowalski, Billie Burke, Nora Charles, Beau Geste, Marilyn Manson, Gaylord Ravenal, John Worthing, Roy Cohn, Mabel Mercer, Maynard G. Krebs, Lara Croft, Isaak Walton, Edward Everett Horton, Amanda Wingfield, HAL 9000, Glencora Palliser, Merrill Stubing, Esther Smith, the Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., Fred C. Dobbs, Peachy Carnehan, Julius Marx, George C. & Thurgood & John & Penny & Garry, Charles Sherwood Stratton, Harry von Zell, Rocket J. Squirrel, Basil Fawlty, Sancho Panza, Melanie Wilkes, Mortimer Snerd, Edward Fairfax Vere, Truman Burbank, Marcia Brady, Sylvia Poggioli, Natty Bumppo, Kunta Kinte, Eustace Tilley, and most of all, without whom none of this would be possible, the indefatigable Jules O'Shaughnessy."

There is a smattering of applause as Mr. Lo Pat folds the paper and returns it to his pocket.

"Who are all those people?" Amnea asks.

"Workers behind the scenes," Jutmoll replies.

"There certainly are enough of them."

"It's a big tournament."

"It's also been a fun tournament," Amnea adds, giving Jutmoll's hand a squeeze.

He leans closer to her and asks softly, "When am I going to see you again?"

"Soon. And not in a debate venue. Call me at home tonight."

"Count on it," Tarnish Jutmoll says, settling back into his seat.

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Disney Davidson sits next to Binko. Beside them are spread out their combined teams, including Hamlet P. Buglaroni with his arm around Gloria Fudless. Disney hasn't been this depressed since his parents tried to send him to a therapist to "cure" his vegetarianism.

"You going back to school tonight?" Binko asks.

"There's nothing to keep me home," Disney replies.

"When are you going to be judging again?"

Disney shrugs. "I don't know. There's not much coming up in the next few weeks, at least until Bede. Mr. Jutmoll mentioned that he might need me then."

"What's Bede?"

"It's the last big tournament before Christmas. Speech and debate both. It's a big deal."

"I wonder if we're going."

Disney looks back over his shoulder at Amnea Nutmilk and Tarnish Jutmoll. "If Nighten Day goes, I'll bet Bisonette goes too," he says.

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Hamlet P. Buglaroni, Jr., is in a quandary. On the one hand, for the first time in his life he seems to have a girlfriend, a situation that he wouldn't have believed possible twenty-four hours ago. Gloria is sitting as close to him as the seats will allow, and there is a certain unexpected comfort in her closeness, something he has never felt before, something that he only imagined must be a part of the whole boy-girl thing.

On the other hand, he is already beginning to imagine his life as a movie star, and wondering who his next girlfriend will be after he dumps Gloria. She is, after all, nobody, and if he's going into movies, he will have to make a conscious decision either to be a part of the Hollywood scene, or stay out of it. But he can't imagine staying out of it. He can envision himself partying day and night, dropping over Ben Affleck's house for a couple of brews and talking about the new flick he's working on, maybe driving his Porsche over to see what Jim Carrey is up to because Jim is just as funny offscreen as

onscreen, then dinner at-- Well, wherever movie stars eat. And after that?

Sarah Michelle.

Undoubtedly Sarah Michelle.

He has been in love with her since the very first day of BTVS, and now he is going to meet her. Maybe they'll make a film together. With sex scenes in it.

Gloria's head comes to rest on his shoulders.

It won't be easy telling her the bad news. The poor kid.

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The Policy trophies are the first to be given out, first the speaker awards and then the team awards. Seth B. Obomash and Tara Petskin are sitting together in a far corner in the rear of the auditorium. In a way, both of them are forensicians without a team.

"You and Invoice should be taking this tournament," Seth mutters.

"It's over, Seth. Me and Invoice. Me and debate."

"It's not over, Tara. Not you and debate, anyhow. I can't help you with Invoice."

"I won't be subjected to Seth B. Obomash's Advice to the Lovelorn?"

"Are you lovelorn?"

She hesitates. "Maybe. A little."

"I didn't think that about you and Invoice."

"Either did I, until it was too late."

"Well, if I had lovelorn advice -- which I don't -- even I wouldn't listen to it."

Tara laughs. "We agree on that."

"But I do have debate advice."

"And what is that?"

"Two words. Haircut Puente."

"Haircut? You've got to be kidding."

"I couldn't be more serious. The two of you, with me as a coach..."

"It's not happening, Seth."

"We could make it happen."

"Haircut Puente? Impossible."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Let me look into it."

"You can look into it, but don't expect anything. Besides, since when are you a coach?"

"Once a coach, always a coach."

"Good luck, Charlie. It'll never happen."

"You once probably also thought that Invoice would never do LD. You can't predict the future, Tara."

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When the LD awards are distributed, the double-octo trophies are first, and one of the recipients is Jasmine Maru. She would have loved to have made it to octos, and thus acquired a limb of the Combat of Conquerors, but she is far from dissatisfied with her showing at this most difficult tournament, filled as it is with Round Robinskis from across the country. Most of them are better than she is, she thinks, but not by much. And she is only a junior. By next year...

She walks on air back to her seat, the Vaganza tin cool to her touch.

"Jasmine!"

She is shaken from her reverie. Had Fleece is walking down to the stage to pick up his octofinalist award. He stops and blocks her way.

"We've got to talk," he says to her.

"We've got nothing to talk about," she replies, trying to get past him.

He takes a deep breath. "I love you, Jasmine," he blurts out.

And then he is gone, marching up to the stage to collect his trophy.

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Jasmine returns to her seat looking as if she has just been abducted by aliens. Griot saw Had stop her along the way.

Damn!

He knows that Had has everything, the looks, personality, everything. All Griot has is the brains, but Had has his share of those, too. The other thing Had has is the guts. He has no trouble telling Jasmine his feelings about her.

So why can't Griot do the same thing? He's not such an ugly troll, is he? Why should he be so afraid of rejection? I mean, how bad can rejection be? "I really don't think of you that way" is about the worst thing she can say to him, isn't it?

Griot Goldbaum. Probably the smartest kid at Nighten Day. He's already virtually guaranteed early admission to Harvard since he's the only full-blooded Inuit who's applied, and that will help him even more than his 1600 on the boards. He's a Master of the Debate Universe.

And he's afraid to ask a girl for a date.

Mes etoiles!

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Invoice O'Connor pops out of his seat to go up and accept his quarterfinalist award. He can't believe it. He thought he might do well in LD, but he has done spectacularly well. He may be the only person in the country at this very moment with a COC limb in both LD and Policy.

And it's all thanks to Lisa Torte. As he collects his tin and walks back to the Veil area of the auditorium, he has a wide smile on his face, and he holds the trophy high so that all his Polician colleagues can appreciate the accomplishment.

Lisa Torte is sitting at the edge of the row. She stands to let him by, but he sees her hesitate, and the next thing he knows, she is hugging him.

"Congratulations," she is saying to him.

But suddenly he is no longer thinking about LD or Policy or taking tin. He is thinking about Lisa Torte, the contours of her small body pressed firmly against him.

The hug goes on way longer than it should. Way longer than it would have if it were Seth B. Obomash congratulating him on his success.

Way longer.

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The two LD finalists stand together on the stage, and to no one's surprise who saw the match, Dan McGrew is awarded second place in a four-one decision (although more than one person is asking, who's the squirrel? Who could possibly have voted for McGrew when Hyphen-Emdash ate him for breakfast?). Tilde Hyphen-Emdash gets the traditional standing ovation for coming in first, and the pride of her accomplishment is easily registered not only on her face but on the faces of her teammates as well. Perhaps proudest of all is her coach, Nip Sazo, even though his serious face is showing only the hint of a smile. With Nip, a hint is all it takes.

Lieu MacFloutch, Dan McGrew's coach, does not look quite as happy.

Debate gods who lose seldom do.

And so the Manhattan Lodestone OriginalVaganza (All Other Vaganzas are Extra) comes to an end. We bid a fond farewell to the conga line of the Round Robinskis, to the stately march of the debate gods, to the biggest debate event in New York City. Mr. Lo Pat's wheelchair whirrs off toward Olympus, where he will rest until the wars again awaken him to the humble lives of the mortal heros.

Everyone will return home, some the same, some changed. But even if this event is over, the season itself is still young. It is still autumn. The first snow hasn't even fallen yet. The leaves are still on many of the trees.

We haven't even begun to see the Bahamas.

**Will Amnea and Tarnish settle down and have a nice old age together?**

**Will Disney find true love back at college?**

**Will Sarah Michelle Gellar fall into Buglaroni's arms?**

**Will Jasmine finally give in to Had?**

**Will Griot finally open up to Jasmine?**

**Isn't Invoice a little young for Lisa Torte?**



**What kind of name is Haircut?**

**Will Lieu MacFloutch murder Dan McGrew on the flight home?**

**Satisfy your curiosity, or read our next episode: "Seven of Nine, or, One in a Million?"**