

Chapter 18 of *The Debate*, Vol. 2 by B. Douglas Robbins

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The San Francisco Tournament was an important event due to its proximity to Nationals. There were three weeks between them. Jack and I were ranked around 18th in the nation going into San Francisco and intended to improve that score. You have to understand that debate was only partially about debate. It was equally about all the things that distinguish winners from losers. Human distinctions. Though some denied the validity of non-flow factors, the victors knew better.

San Francisco was an opportunity for Jack and me to polish those factors. Reputation. Standing. We had not, all year done better than come in third and we needed to break that jinx badly if we intended to threaten the National Title. We did have a few things going for us. Virginia and her squad, being the host team participated in pre-elimination rounds, but were barred from outrounds. That meant that they had no interest in winning and might consider being our next door neighbors, letting us borrow sugar, eggs and bread. We needed the eggs.

Jack Virginia and I convinced Cindy and Keith to attend the debates. Virginia held it was untenable to retreat in the face of the aggressor, Jack wanted Cindy to continue to do all the things she would have otherwise done, and I thought it was important for her to get out, see her debate friends, and participate in an activity she loved.

The City was fairly foggy that Sunday morning, as we awaited the break pairings. As hoped, Jack and I hit some of the weakest open teams in the region, some unknowns from Santa Clara, San Jose, Pepperdine, among them. It could have been luck, or it could have been the fact that Virginia, our new friend, practically ran the tab room. The tab maiden.

The break came down—Jack and I with a perfect 6-0. We were ecstatic. David and Skip also broke on a 4-2, but Keith and Cindy did not, and rode back home.

Our quarterfinal match was against Paulander Lee and Kelly Wozniack from U.C. Berkeley. Paulander and Kelly were good debate. An ugly pairing for us. We won the coin toss, chose to go

Affirmative, and Paulander asked if we would disclose.

“We’re running the Narrative. Nothing to know about that,” shrugged Jack.

“Right, right, right,” agreed Paulander.

I had wanted to run a Narrative for years. Jack’s 1AC spent only three minutes arguing the theory and the other five telling the story. We chose the Wizard of Oz. The theory behind the Narrative maintained that mythology and story lines were the way in which human beings understood and made meaning out of the world-in-itself. That’s what the Metcalf ev argued. The Agyeman-Duah cards went on to evince that the rational humanism revived in the Renaissance was responsible for the, “Out of round metaphysic of logical positivism and technological piety, so prevalent in the eleventh hour of the twentieth Century.” He explained in a work called *Athena Calling*,

The modern emphasis on the architectonic having a purely logical genesis is largely culpable for our malaise. The awareness of deities and the resplendence of the natural world has never been a strictly rational endeavor and to shove the eyes of wonder into the rigid matrix of reason is to seriously erode what tenuous meaning we have to offer ourselves in this life.

The United States should significantly advance its human rights foreign policy, we argued, by advancing **meaning**, the macro-paradigm in which human rights can show up at all, as worth while. Within the new ethic, human rights may flourish in a fundamental way. Instead of advancing a plan, which would be more rational rule structures, Jack and I forwarded meaning by example. We told a story.

Kelly Wozniack came charging out of the gate, “Okay Jack **how** do you advance human rights?”

“By telling everyone about the *Wizard*.”

“A story is going to save lives or increase freedom or something?”

“It creates the totality within which things like human rights become meaningful.”

“Wait. Wait,” Kelly stood closer to Jack, shoulder to shoulder. They carried on their conversation as if neither were in the room, each facing a classroom of judges and spectators alone, “You mean if I don’t tell stories I don’t want to live? Come on!”

“No, I didn’t-”

“So if I don’t understand what the ruby slippers mean then like, life, liberty and happiness means nothing to me, right?”

“Is happiness a right?” Jack smirked and a few laughed, “Because I’m feeling sort of oppressed right now.”

“Answer the question, please.”

“Sure, okay, no, no, not at all. You need to make the distinction between life being a good thing **generally**, and life as a right as we understand rights. Okay? The Resolution uses the word specifically. And sure, without stories or mythology, there is no meaning and without that structure there are no rights.”

Kelly Wozniack began boinging hard fingers at her audience, as if she were pointing them at Jack, “So if I don’t hear **stories** my life is meaningless? Is that your position?”

“Pretty much. But you have to take into account that in just normal conversations there are stories implicit.”

“Okay, one question. If the judge is a policy maker, what are they supposed to do with a story?”

Jack turned to Kelly and said directly, “Who says they’re policy makers?”

So the rest of the debate was about who we thought our judges should be, which is a funny thing if you think about it. Paulander and Kelly argued that our judges were policy makers, legislators, and as such, they needed a plan to evaluate. Absent a plan, we were to lose. Berkeley presented a counterplan and held, some plan was better than no plan.

I argued that there was no mandate implicit or explicit in the Resolution that required our judges to be policy makers. Quite the contrary:

“You are three people judging a collegiate debate round. Nothing more, nothing less. To imagine yourself legislators in the United States Congress is DELUSIONARY. Look in your wallet. You have no congressional identification. Look at your clothes. Look at Kinney’s clothes for godssakes,” Donald Kinney from U.C.I. wore a Stussy baseball cap and a flannel shirt that nearly dripped off his back in its worn-in way, so I got a good laugh with that line, “Does Kinney **look** like somebody they’d even let in the door without a cavity search?” Hooting, “Look at your ballot. It says C.E.D.A. Debate Tournament at the top and where it asks you to sign your name it has a blank for who you thought did a better job debating. That’s the wording. Nowhere does it say you

are a Senator voting on a bill passed the House. You are evaluating the arguments on the flow. Which arguments are the most convincing? Who is winning this DEBATE? You will vote for Jack and me because the Narrative provides meaning and that is the framework upon which human rights can show up. We're winning at that level COLD CONCEDED. They have NOT AN ANSWER, and I will win this debate."

By the 1NR Paulander was screaming a blue streak on a new Topicality press and Kelly was prompting out of her head, "Non-unique!"

"Right!" he repeated, "And the impact is non-unique! You would STILL have human rights even without the yellow brick road. There is no impact in or out of this round."

Kelly piped, "Paulie, put on those blue suede shoes!" like a rallying call.

"What" he stopped cold. Three-hundred-words-per-minute, to zero in nothing flat, "What?"

"Blue suede shoes," she repeated weakly, and it seemed to mean nothing to him.

In the last speech I spent four minutes on the issues and one minute re-telling the *Wizard*. I was very clear and very fast and Jack sent me oral time prompts, "TWO!"

"I want Paulander's #4, it's a garbled mess, but you know he wants to argue that his counterplan is saving lives. Turn it please! If saving lives matters to you because you believe life is a right, then you will have to flow Stanford the win, because intelligibility IS the yield of the Narrative. If the counterplan is MEANINGFUL to you, then you have grasped the Narrative and that becomes an INDEPENDENT turn to our advocacy. Remember you are not policy makers. There is no impact to the counterplan, it's just a proposal on paper...Berkeley is giving us their head on a plate, thank-you very much."

The classroom broke up a hurried shifting after the news: 3-0 for the Affirmative, not a single judge bought their story. Jack smacked me five, and it hurt my hand and I was glad it hurt. It made everything more real.

We collected our belongings while a series of cheerful spectators (what do you call them?) congratulated us, and one girl in particular, in a summer skirt continued to banter at me long after the others dispersed. She made palaver while I packed, and she smiled and I smiled and it was all very flattering because girls didn't usually do that to me. She didn't think I was gay.

I was a little taller than I should have been and my glow was slightly more pallid than the brown pigment in my eyes would have foretold. At best, my looks were passing. As a rule, I wasn't able to draw women to me from my looks, which suggested a rather astounding inference, namely that being a member of the upper echelons of debate was a way to get laid. I hadn't thought about it because in some weird way I guess I wasn't a very sexual person, whatever that means. Either I didn't try very hard, or I had just given up on women. Being self consumed will do that.

That girl followed me to the next round, held in a dinky room at the bottom of the Student Union. Kids everywhere. Floors. Jack excused himself to make the dolly through. A trench opened for him.

We hit Krash Everett and Herman Moloch from Michigan State University. Krash wore his trademark black biker jacket, "SUBHUMAN," scrawled in white flake across the back of the waist-band. Herman was a strawberry blonde in bell bottoms and a thick pilgrim belt. The punk and the mod and they spoke like surfers.

When Jack asked if they would disclose case, Herman replied, "Yeah, man, it's the Ethic. It's **always** the Ethic," which was true. M.S.U. loved the environmental ethic. In one incarnation or another, with one tenuous link or another, the ecology was always at risk and Krash and Herman were always there with the plan.

"The Ethic's the **bomb**," added Krash

Some teams liked to break out a brand new case in out-rounds, not Krash and Herman. That would have required research, and discipline. Apparently in short supply.

"Why mess with success?" asked Herman.

"Right, right," replied Jack and rolled me the eye.

Krash read, "I believe that our planet is now on the brink of environmental disaster. We agree with the conclusion of the 1990 International Conference on the Environmental Future. It is:

There is now a high probability, almost a certainty, if the world continues at present, that within 50 years there will occur, exceeding past ecodisasters, the greatest catastrophe in the history of the world. This might be a world-wide famine or war, which could destroy civilization and nature, or it might be a combination of effects caused by unwise actions. But there is also the possibility that such a catastrophe

can be averted if the right decisions about the environmental future are taken. Clearly decisions made now and during the next 30 years will determine the future of mankind and of the world. These decisions may be the most important of all time.

The M.S.U. case argued that the Congress should pass a Constitutional Amendment that overturned the first. The 28th Amendment would allow the U.S. government to require all media and publishing agencies to devote a certain percentage of their output to environmental issues. Such a plan would rupture “publisher autonomy” and that would be a good thing.

Krash was humming, “Environmentalist Hazel Henderson explains in 1993 that

Current mass journalism is still largely based on the old, fragmented Newtonian vision—where humans are the dispassionate, objective observers of the world. Even though few people still believe that humans can ever observe the world objectively because they are an interacting part of it, there is still a widespread lag on the part of our mass media in perception of this integral nature of reality.

Krash burned, “Further the mass media exacerbates environmental problems by overwhelming the voices of those who promote the environmental ethic...”

And because the new consciousness can only be achieved through media dissemination, the new amendment is imperative for the survival of the planet.

“Contention Two, the old paradigm must be de-emphasized to save the environment-”

“Two!” Herman yelled.

“We must shift form the old Cartesian paradigm to a new holistic environmental ethic...”

Krash moved and grooved. His head nodded in an internal rhythm while his right finger made curlicues outward. Then both index fingers danced like rabbits from left to right.

Jack rose intrepidly. Stepped over lids and bins. The heat rising, bodies packed into a tin. Tried not to lose his balance on the way to the podium, center stage. Began his questioning on the way, “Has any case come to any court talking about specifically environmental rights to access?” meaning has the court actually had anything to do with controlling publisher or media autonomy.

“Yes,” stated Krash easily.

“What cases?”

“You see, I don’t argue specific case titles.”

“Then how do we know that the government can’t **already** make presses print eco-stuff even without your Amendment?”

“Oh—because—well we critique the system as a whole—”

“Okay, then **overall** which cases have indicated that the press has autonomy?”

“I told you, I never, at any point raise specific cases, because our authors do the system-**wide** analysis. Read the evidence,” Krash smiled as if not squirming.

“Okay, what cases do your authors examine to come to their conclusions?”

“I haven’t a clue.”

“Then how do you know their analysis is accurate?”

“There’s presumption with evidence, Jack. All evidence is presumed **real** and **accurate**. That’s the evidentiary standard, and until you can prove otherwise, my evidence is fine, right?”

That shut my partner up. He bobbed his head over the flow as if searching for something that no-one could ever find. Ever.

I curtailed my prep, put a red pen flat on the desk and stood, “Is that **really** your argument, Krash? That you don’t know why your authors say what they say but we’re just supposed to trust them because you say so? Isn’t it your burden to have the court cases?”

“No it’s not.”

I rose my voice indignantly, “You’re saying your eco-boys have no access to the printing press, and that’s a CONSTITUTIONAL problem, but you can’t produce court case **one** to prove that?”

“Dude, dude, can you prove it isn’t a Constitutional problem?”

“That’s not my burden.”

“Burden of rejoinder.”

“And if I **could** prove that, would I win?” I set the volley.

“Sure.”

“Okay.”

So that’s what I did, “I’d like to thank my drinking buddies from SFSU for the beers last night and for the awesome American Judicial System access cards,” I said calmly and slowly, as the seconds ticked away, “I ask Krash,” building, “What’s my burden of rejoinder? I ask if I prove that the Constitution does **not** constrain government from making the press print eco-literature, already, then there is no inherency and I win. Krash says sure...” I shuffled the cards serenely and joked, “I really thought this round would be harder. On Ob I, I’m off the top...” and bound giggle and shimmering I cranked it up to high.

Virginia was telling me last night all about M.S.U.’s non-topical, non-*prima facie* 1AC and showed me the cards she cut specifically for Krash and Herman. We got drunk enough until she just **gave** us the damn things. Said she wasn’t going to outrounds anyway, and so it was five minutes of hell for M.S.U. Clean, clean cards, by professors of law at Hastings and Maryland and a Doctor of Journalism from Columbia, all about how autonomy of the press is a joke and the government has historically **always** controlled what is printed and what is not and how Washington has its own presses which means it can print whatever it damn well pleased, and if it wants to print a million copies of *Earth First* then it can very well do that. I ran a counterplan that suggested we do just that, and then Topicality came down on their head because they really weren’t a foreign policy.

They were so rocked by Rebuttals that they’d kicked out of everything. I mean everything. They punted their own case! Herman spent every last second of his rollicking 2AR trying to disco a slew of R.V.I.’s on Topicality. A disco was a ballsy strategy whereby the entire round was collapsed down to one key argument. A disco dance was a snaky groove borne of pure desperation. They had to do it because they had lost everything else:

“My seven, specifically—R.V.I: Topicality kills debate from Nickerbocker in 94

*My lord, if we would spend a fraction the time-table on the arguments that we spend on the **location** of the arguments, we would have a much deeper appreciation of the substantive issues.*

A Voting Issue was an end argument that explained why some other argument was self sufficient and weighty enough for a judge to decide a whole round upon. The C subpoint of Jack and my Topicality violation, for example, was the voter. It argued that

if Krash and Herman were not Topical that is, if they did not prove in some way that the, “United States should significantly advance its human rights foreign policy,” then they should lose instantly. That was the voter. Herman’s Reverse Voting Issue or R.V.I. explained that when he proved that he and Krash were topical he should be awarded the win just for that. It didn’t make a lot of sense but it provided a back door for judges who had personal gripes to hang us on a technicality.

“I’m stayin’ alive with the disco!” Herman’s rationale for R.V.I.’s one through four was “reciprocal risk.” There were clear reasons why he was wrong, but they mattered little to Jack and me because Herman’s was the last speech. And even if he was wrong, he was a blast to watch in a way in which it was a blast to watch the amazing groping and stretching of the supremely desperate man.

He spun his hands around each other pointing to the ceiling then floor and shifted his pelvis. He was double jamming down in wa wa until a few of the kids crammed on the floor near his feet couldn’t help but bust a move. It was a first rate hair spray, sparkle ball spinning, floor pulsing hustle, “Boogie with me! My next pimp, guess what? R.V.I...”

It was great fun. You couldn’t hate Herman for trying. You couldn’t even be severe and serious. Jack and I watched in bright amazement. No-one could be dour in a disco.

A few kids put their hands in the air, smiling mischievously as they hunched over their flow, scribbling like mad.

Herman twisted his legs around each other until the inimical momentum spun his body by way of unwinding them. *James Brown!* “Do a little dance, make a little love,” he warbled like lightening so the words thundered together, “Get down tonight! Next R.V.I! We’ve debated this case all season with Jack and Elric. We had no Topicality problems before, why are we suddenly not topical now? Abusive. Please punish with a reverse vote. Next R.V.I: We are the most topical case on the circuit! Freedom of the Press is traditionally the most fundamental of all libertarian human rights! I know *New York Times* don’t make the man but from the *New York Times*, Heller in 95, “Mill got it just right when...”

One, two, funky CLAP! Two, two chicken, CLAP, CLAP! Krash did the chicken in his seat, “Get down!”

“Ohhhh yeaaaah!” returned Herman.

“HALF.”

“Lookie what we got. I know this was a tweaky round,”

slowing up to a normal speaking voice with all its inflections, “But do not punish us for being forced into an unconventional strategy. Be certain about this, when you diagram your flow and find us topical and then you look across and you find even ONE. single. RVI. compelling, you **must** vote Aff. I realize the 2AR disco is a risky walk but I also believe it’s a legitimate answer to an abusive Procedural.”

“TEN.”

“You will not drop us. You will not punish us on T. Keep M.S.U. stayin’ alive.”

The down beat. Then a standing ovation. Even Jack and I had to stand and applaud. One of the most remarkable 2AR’s I’d ever witnessed. Astounding showmanship. Roaring laughter and applause, even one of the judges had to stand. Kinney in his weepy flannel.

Krash and Herman leaped over the collage of wrecked files and Rubbermaid bin lids to shake our hands. Krash hugged Jack and me as if we were long lost castaways. What else could we do? Jack and Herman made words that only they could hear over the din. Krash showed me how he did the chicken, elbows out, heels out, then back. Tried to get me to do it. He slapped my shoulder too hard and I lost my balance. It was one of the best rounds of my C.E.D.A. career.

In the stultifying body humidity of that tiny room, in the midst of all the people who in my mind were my judges, my inquisitioners, my virulent opponents, my fellow advocates, in the midst of the activity that expelled me and rejuvenated me...Debate was finally fun.

A decision came soon after: 2-1 for the Negative. Why the 1?

“I liked the disco,” replied Kinney, “I like to dance,” and we left it at that.

The last round of the San Francisco State Tournament was held across the hall in a much larger auditorium. I was in shock we had gotten as far as we had. “It’s not over yet,” Jack reminded me earnestly.

Underground, we had not seen the sun all day, under the Earth. The Student Union splayed murals on the gray concrete, depicting multi-cultural togetherness or something like it, while a swarm of white and Asian boys and girls, in ties and sandals, and tank tops and power skirts moved with great inertia.

“We’re gonna make it happen,” said Jack, “We’re gonna

hella make it happen this time.”

Skip and David had dropped in the quarterfinal round, met up with us to help move the evidence.

“Watch our for something called the Temporal Fallacy,” said David excitedly. He was excited for us. Stanford hadn’t been in a final round for almost a full year and it was exciting to him.

He helped me stack the dolly, “What’s that?”

“Oooh! I’ll tell you!” so David tried to explain the Temporal Fallacy with karate chops and heavy breathing anything else he could bring to bear against our final round challengers.

We set up on the creaky wooden stage, on a nice sized desk with a pitcher of water. It was nice to get something, even if it was just a pitcher of water. Virginia Pierce hovered over Jack, poured us water. She pressed her hand on top of his on the table. I took the seat next to them.

“...And Collin is taller than you, Jack, so in cross, **do not** stand next to him, go back to the desk and sit down or something. If he comes over stand on the chair until he leaves. Elric, **you** should make every effort to stay at that podium. You have a tendency to allow yourself to get bullied off it.”

“I do not.”

“Yes you do,” she was certain, “But if they want to stand next to you, fine, let them, but hold onto that podium like a cowboy.”

I pictured myself standing at the podium pretending to be a cowboy while it bucked.

Virginia searched around as if for eavesdroppers, “Remember these are **bad** boys. Fight fire with fire!”

“Oh, they’re not so bad,” replied Jack, emboldened by a woman at his hand, “They just need love.”

Virginia smirked, “Yeah okay. Just don’t let them love you long time.”

They arrived. Big boxes. A crew of them. Blue sweatshirts around the waist. Assemble a fortress. Move the desk closer to the center. There was Paulander Lee and Kelly Wozniack, our quarterfinal round. There was Lou Trenton and Ollie Corbin from Chico, Xiang from Santa Cruz. Shifting files, mute tones—conferences like in Ways and Means. I felt diminutive in the face of their deep dwelling connections, as if they knew everyone.

Jack stood to leave.

“Wait,” I said.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“What’s up,” he leaned over me as the concerned brother I never had.

I had to be absolutely honest at that point, or all was lost, “It’s stupid—I just got frightened for a moment that you weren’t coming back.” I never would have said that before.

Jack snorted and humored me, “Oh you watch. I’ve waited too long for this.”

At the flip of a coin I called heads and it turned tails. They took not a moment.

“We’ll go Neg,” said Collin Coboarae. A strange move. They could have run a new case or at least debate one they were intimate with.

“We’re going to need a few minutes,” I said to our panel.

Collin ducked out. Warm rhubarb in the hall. I prepped.

Jack came prancing down the steps, “You’re not going to believe it.”

“What?”

“Watch.”

Soon after, Collin Coboarae inched down the walkway with brown paper towels stuck to his eye. Black and scarlet blotches where blood was seeping.

“What happened?” I asked Jack cautiously.

“I’m not sure why, but Speed attacked him,” we sat stunned.

What could you make of it? Close to twilight, no food all day for fear of retching, sweaty and tacky, eight hours of fight or flight in the brain, dehydrated and the room revolved as the blond debater from U.C. Berkeley ambled to his chair, dripping blood, after having been attacked by an accused rapist.

The judges were as concerned as judges might be, which was scarcely. Coboarae reassured them all with a lopsided smile he was fine and he wanted to go forward and get it on.

They shook their collective head. Tough kid. But they understood that if you get to the final round of a major tournament,

nothing short of cardiac arrest would keep you from competing and even then only after C.P.R. had failed. So that was the unspoken thing that made the whole thing plausible.

I asked Jack, "Should we do the Narrative?" Though we had been successful with it this weekend, it was unconventional and final round judges were notorious for being captious of non-sanctioned 1AC's.

"What else could be do?" he asked.

"We could run Skip and David's Haz Mat case. It's a strong, straight-up case."

"Do you know it?"

"No, but neither do Hobbes and Coboarae. Paulander has been prepping them on the Narrative."

"It's what we do," and he was right. "If we don't do it our way it's no longer our game."

"It's what we do," I echoed.

Jack stood, "We're ready," he boomed clearly.

My mind wandered in Jack's 1AC. Eight minutes. Berkeley pulled files, scribbled. An auditorium of weary college students, scratching high octane.

Soon Richard Hobbes, the black and white patrician was cross examining my stalwart partner.

"Are all stories equally good?"

"No," answered Jack, "Some do not achieve requisite Narrative fidelity."

"But theoretically two stories with equal levels of Narrative fidelity could easily contradict each other, correct?" Richard Hobbes was a handsome boy and I may have been envious of him for that reason. He also had penetrating direction, as certain as the slant in his eyes. That was another thing. He was a son of a bitch, of course, but he was a **certain** son of a bitch. Richard and his new partner, Collin, were among the favored bets for the Scholarship and the Title so it was immensely important that Jack and I beat them indubitably.

"No. No. No."

"So you're arguing for some kind of radical subjectivity? Is that it?"

"No," wiggled Jack, "We're just opposed to radical **objectivity**."

“Can you take a position, or does your advocacy prohibit that?”

“Our position is the Narrative.”

“Okay how are we going to adjudicate this? Really Jack, you tell a story—so how can Collin and I win?”

“I’m honestly not that concerned about it,” some giggling and Jack folded arms, “You can argue that the Narrative does not advance meaning.”

“But then I’m using argumentation in a way that just entrenches your critique, right?”

“Only if you’re wrong.”

Richard and Jared were friends and debate partners from high school, so I had known Richard in his many forms, for nearly four years. I knew him when he was a freshman. He was there at U.N.L.V. when Cornish made the evidentiary challenge. He was in the classroom in fact if I remember right. Funny I had never thought about that before, but he was in that air conditioned classroom with all the white gauze, while wee David Cornish turned my world to complete shit.

“You don’t want to be subjective but you say you’re not objective. You want to win this debate but you don’t want to argue. You say the Narrative is meaning, but you can’t explain what you mean by it—have I got you?”

“Wrong, Richard. Wrong again Richard,” Jack gonged, “You’re making binary assumptions. The Narrative subsumes.” Jack could hold his own and the faces of our judges confirmed that register.

Red shower over the words of the First Negative Constructive. Collin Coboarae held stuck paper to his face, at his nose, while blood dribbled across his fuming breath, and when I turned my head a profile of rust and crud soiled his brief, and then soaked through to the other side. The most surreal 1NC in C.E.D.A. history, one eye slowly swelling shut and a nasal rasp from the top of his speech to the bottom of the blood soaked page.

His first procedural was T or J, I couldn’t figure it out and neither could Jack. Collin lisped something about how some stories support human rights while others butcher them, and he quoted an SS General who mumbled something about Nazi folk-stories contributing to the rise of fascist power. So we weren’t human rights, evidently. And blood.

“The sthecond off cathe ith a critique! Conthistency

pleath!” That one, as far as we could figure, submitted that the dichotomy in our case between the half that was theory, and the half that was story, collapsed on itself because if the theory justified the story, it *de facto* superseded it and therefore invalidated itself.

“You can’t justify a Narrative from the argument with out killing the Narrativeth!” Red wires below the surface of his lower lip bloated concomitant with the anger in his voice.

Another drop of blood ran nose into mouth, sprayed the white page, until the arguments were sticky fluid—a fluid that had swirled around in his brain, and then through the liver and out onto the printed page. Jack scooted over to grab the stained cards, to make sense of the press, ever weary of the sick hemo-verbs.

And by the end of it, he had spent not a moment on case.

“Emory Switch,” whispered Jack as he made fast little notes on the flow.

My first question, “Will we be allowed new answers in Rebuttals?”

“Of courth not.”

“Then it’s Berkeley’s position that we may not be allowed to answer 2NC argumentation on case?”

“Oooh—surth—you can answer that.”

“So it would be new, correct?”

“We’ll allow ith,” Collin made a cute smile that contorted his purple lip hideously, and uneasy laughter leapt over the hall like a virus.

“How generous,” I said sarcastically. I hated sarcasm but I could not help it. “So you would agree that your Emory has warped this debate seriously enough that the traditional rule against new argumentation in Rebuttals must be suspended?”

“There are no ruleth in debathe.”

The thing about the Emory Switch was it was a slimy, low blow strategy that no one had any respect for, and you **still** had to beat it. Jack and I would win, if we could just hold it together until the 2AR. If we could get there, we’d be home and Richard and Collin would be done. But because of the way that the Emory distended the traditional balance of time and presumption, to get there was a firewalk.

After four minutes, I had thoroughly covered all of Collin’s off-case positions. There was nothing left for me to do. He didn’t

attack the case so there was nothing to defend, just dead air. That was the Emory. Their next speech would be eight full minutes of entirely new argumentation, and because of the traditional structure of the negative bloc, they could ignore me until the 1NR and it still wasn't considered dropped argumentation. Because we had to cover everything in eight minutes and they only had to cover half, it was as if they had discovered time where it didn't really exist. So I was under-loaded in the 2AC, and in exchange, Jack would be overloaded in the 1AR, a speech that was structurally at a disadvantage anyway due to its position after the 13 minute Negative bloc.

In an attempt to ease the pressure off Jack I attacked the Emory head on, "I realize this is unconventional but the Emory Switch is an unconventional and illegitimate strategy," Herman gave me the idea, "My first R.V.I: Emory denies depth in debate..." Remember R.V.I.'s were assassins, and maybe they were the lowest, most grimy of gutter stench arguments, but it only took one to kill the king.

Three desperate minutes of all the R.V.I.'s I could think of—twenty-three in all—Emory kills depth, Emory denies fairness, harms ground, sets a bad precedent in a final round, erodes education, hurts your ears, is pugnacious, degrades debate generally, is a time suck, encourages boring and repetitive spew lists like this one, and makes N.D.T. look good by comparison.

"Do not let them get away with this abusive, abusive approach to debate. Do not allow them to degrade you personally by making your activity a mindless acrimony." I spent that last minute, highlighting the *Wizard* again, as our advocacy demanded.

In the 2NC Richard made one answer to my Emory press, "On this ridiculous 23 point dump, please group. My ONLY ANSWER: No abuse exists! The Emory is an argumentative strategy. It's a hell of a lot less abusive than telling **stories** in a debate round. You will defer to arguments over fairy tales always!" And then spent eight full minutes on case.

The 2NC was immediately followed by Collin's swollen 1NR. Back to back. By the time they were done Jack had five minutes to undo a Gordian mess, new arguments, blood on the flow—and did so with a gut spread that was one of the best speeches of his life. Issue selecting like mad man. And answered everything on paper. It was beautiful to behold except for one thing...

Richard was wailing, "Not a single word about the Narrative. COM-LETE-LY DROPPED! Did you hear about

Toto in the 1AR? I sure as hell didn't! That's because HE WASN'T THERE! We are crushing their advocacy. Cold killing—no case! No way!" He tossed blood spackled evidence over his shoulder like a jackal in a frenetic gnaw, and I could almost hear my own sad bones snapping.

"What do we have, Jack?" I asked.

He smiled so they wouldn't see, but the tone in his voice ran, "we don't have shit," grinning his lips off, "We have the R.V.I.'s"

"So I've got a 2AR disco."

"Put your dancing shoes on."

"I suck at the disco," I replied.

"Do like Herman."

"Herman lost."

I paced solemnly to the center podium with my lone flow pad and the little nostrils that breathed in lure of tiny notations in strings of red and black to hold all the kites together.

I gave my roadmap, "I'm going the Emory press proper..." and when they realized there was nothing else, they settled in their chairs and tapped their feet.

"Sometimes the way out is not the way in. I'm off the top..."

I rose a half octave as speed enveloped my thoughts. Running down my list. Something I had done a hundred times. More. Same game, same posture, into making reassurance by rocking my body side to side, much like little children do when disturbed. My favorite, most familiar gesture was one that I had lifted off of Jared years ago. Most physicality was like a popular infection, that spread to the whole community eventually. I kept this particular one. I stood sideways like a baseball batter, rear foot perpendicular, and ran my crooked hand up and down as if measuring shorter and taller people. Then I switched sides, batting lefty and switched crooked hands. Hovered the measurement over my flow, back and forth.

"They have one argument as of the 2NC and that is that the Emory is comparatively non-abusive. I'm taking that out. When we punt the Narrative you would be unable to make the comparison anymore. The Emory is now bad in and of itself and all you have are 23 independent reasons why Berkeley must lose. Now. Disallow all new argumentation on the dump!" And it was while making hundreds of bantam words fit into each minute

monotone, and rocking and measuring, lefty, rightie, like I'd done hundreds of times, while all that was happening, and the cool gummy under my arms, and more adrenaline rose like a dangerous toxin to the surface, and my partner to the left yelling "Four!" "THree" "TWO" and the bloody head to my right—a lightness begat my jaw, and I rose up from myself watching incredulously as I yammered and measured, lefty, rightie. I could literally see my parting lips make orchestrated air round, and flat, and a hall of interested kids just like me except instead of prating they were hunched over, like arches in their seat, translating the minute echo into shaking pen tips. Seismographs. But along the side wall a group of debaters, four or five of them all wearing the exact same white t-shirt, the tournament t-shirt. Tiny green and blue planets on the breast. All exactly in line, all identical, as if obeying a commandment.

And it was while hovering—there is no other word for it—that a suspicion of such obvious quality engulfed my heart I jolted in space. It was the entirely unfounded conclusion that somehow what had happened to Jared in Las Vegas had something to do with what was happening to Jack and me here, in San Francisco. What Jared used to say in cross-examination all the time, "I just want to get a little image here so we know what we're talking about..." Images. Richard Hobbes and Jared Kaneman in the Hard Rock—"Save the Planet" t-shirts slung over their shoulders at the finned Cadillac bar.

Jack is coming back from the bar in his smooth Jack Watco way, "He says he's hanging with Hobbes," Jack Watco spin, "We're golden." The sun relief over the front doors. The walk of fame encrusted in bronze, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, tiles in the earth, capsules underground.

The first tournament of the season. Cornish and Wiezen hear of the case. Just hear it. Are so certain of it's fraudulency, spend all day researching it. Our one case. I didn't suspect it was bogus and I'd **read** the damn thing. Ten rounds later. Ten from start to finish. Richard Hobbes in the audience flashes eyes like incisors, chewing all the white gauze. Fuzzy white cotton. A rim of cotton t-shirts, saving the planet. Jared looks out. Says it was me. Looks out. Won't look at me. Looks out at the back wall where Richard is chewing and says, "I didn't cut the case," Jared and Richard, "Elric did."

It's all very circumstantial but there is Collin and his blood seeping head, and there is his partner chewing white grain with his eyes, the same way, nearly two years ago in augur of his partner's swollen eye, Jared's bleeding lies from his throat, swollen eye from

Las Vegas to San Francisco, the same cud.

A seamless transition back to the ground. Filling out my arms and legs, “I am **turning** the Critique. They argue ‘must be consistent,’ but to run the Emory is to reject standard C.E.D.A. argumentation. They cannot gain a win in C.E.D.A. by rejecting C.E.D.A., that would be IN-CON-SIS-TENT. That’s the 18th through 20th R.V.I. Extend! There is not an answer as of the 2.

N.R. Anywhere. Never. To make that answer **for** them is to gang up on me. Do not do it. I don’t think any of you have a love affair with Stanford and that’s fine, but to not vote for us is to work for THEM. It means to intervene. It means to make the round five on two. You will not do that. This disco was not the way Jack and I intended to win this debate, but the Emory blindsided us. Voting for Berkeley means **more** disco in the future **not** less. This is not the way we intended to win, but it’s how the matrix of argumentation came down. Sometimes the way in is not the way out. We will not lose.”

A standing ovation and Jack Watco hugged me. I was limp, arms pinned to the side. Richard and Collin shook our hands.

“How did I do?” I asked Jack.

“Great! You hella rocked!”

“Really? I don’t remember. I went out of body.”

“Wow! Cool!” said Jack and nodded knowingly. More applause. Going out of body was not an unknown experience in debate. Perhaps it was the spread induced hyperventilation, or the sleep deprivation that was so common in high level tournaments, or maybe the irregular diet, or the imbibing of drugs or alcohol, or caffeine. Enough open debaters had done it or come close enough to doing it that it had become a kind of rite of passage.

“I’m jealous,” Jack intoned, “It was fuckin’ great speech.”

“I’d like to have heard it,” I joked.

Virginia and the S.F.S.U. squad joined us on stage as did Skip, David and Caius.

In Berkeley’s corner, Chico, and Santa Cruz congratulated Richard and Collin and predicted a win.

They had their gang. We had ours. Their gang was a mob; the reputations of one of the programs at Santa Cruz, or Chico or Berkeley was stronger than Stanford and S.F.S.U. combined. That was not supposed to matter, but in fact did. Letting your judge apprehend exactly who you were aligned with and who would be pissed off in the event of a drop, was a key voting issue. It

indicated what community you were a party to and the petulant consequences of affronting that community. Berkeley was trying to suggest that if they were not afforded the win not only would the judges have Cal riding their ass, but the rest of Northern California as well, and that was a strong deterrent on or off the flow.

I still do not know if it was that or the fact that Jack and I really did drop our Narrative and discoed on wanky R.V.I.'s for five minutes, that was the critical factor in the decision, but Stanford lost that evening 0-3 to the University of California at Berkeley. More applause. And I was partly glad it was just all over, and partly feeling used and degraded by pernicious hucksters, feeling squeezed by white static again, nauseated by snow.