

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

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Jared and I had spent the previous week researching and blocking text. Before the quarter even started, we were in Meyer and Green and the Falconer Biology Library cutting fresh genetic engineering, and nanotechnology answers (the microscopic machines that would save the world; tiny machines).

The libraries were special arid places. Your hands went dry and soft. The books smelled like musty treasure. It made you thirsty. Book knowledge was rare and mysterious. Open one up and the gush of a person's intellectual life poured out. Where books were pressed together in endless rows, like a single long book, it made you very hopeful.

I also loved the order of it. Decimal points. Libraries were very logical places. They played by the same rules. Libraries wanted and needed to expose their knowledge. That was the whole point. You, however, had to meet them half way.

As the start of school approached, Jared became more irritable. "Why isn't anyone else helping us? Except for Dave, we're researching for the whole squad."

"Just do your work," I said.

"No, I'm serious. I'm **sick** of cutting cards. We shouldn't be the only ones."

"Let's take a break."

We emerged from Green's dark passageways. A dark library. Since the light switches instructed to turn them off when the stacks weren't in use, much of the underground was dark at any time. Green had a reputation as a sexy library. Undergraduates had been known to burrow into the less trafficked passageways to enjoy furtive sex. I'd never seen it, but that was the legend. Truth be known, there wasn't all that much sex at Stanford.

We ate at the Law School Cafe. "Frisbee golf?" asked Jared.

After lunch we played frisbee golf. Frisbee was an institution at Stanford. Taller than Ho Tou (the Hoover Tower) and more grand than Mem Chu (the Memorial Church). Everyone played frisbee. Frisbee golf was an informal obstacle course around campus. From the roof of the Music Center to the upper balcony of the School of Law. From there, if you snagged it, a far lob over the Bookstore into the Claw. The course went all over campus from statue to statue, to light pole, through doorways momentarily swung open by Freshmen passing through. Like golf, the object was to arrive at your destination fewer attempts than your opponent. It was a game of economy. I always beat Jared, because frisbee-golf was all about indirect competition.

As we walked back to the Library with our sweaty discs, Jared commented, “You know, why I love playing with you, Elric? Because each time I have a chance to kick your scrawny ass. And one day I’m going to do it too. You watch.”

The evening before the first day of class I checked my e-mail. From jkane@leland.stanford.edu was: *Ultimate Frisbee. EBF at Angel Field. Midnight.*

I clicked “reply” and typed: *You throw plastic discs. I’ll sleep.*

He was on line. Returned the missive instantly: *The band is out tonight. No sleep for you my friend. Ultimate Frisbee. EBF. Midnight.*

E.B.F. was Jared’s house, the Enchanted Broccoli Forest. It was known as a refuge for hippies, nudists, and bread baking pacifists. I never could figure out how Jared fit in, except that E.B.F. liked to play frisbee. Copious amounts of flying disc sports.

*Band won’t come to Mirrielees House, I wrote back.*

He replied, *Wanna bet? Peter Lamke plays trombone. Will go to your door directly. EBF Ultimate Frisbee. Midnight.*

Peter Lamke was Jared’s housemate and he was in the Stanford Marching Band. The Band defined irreverent. They had been permanently kicked out of a number of schools—never to play there again—for pranks. Urinating on the football field. Attacking the opponent’s costumed mascot. Whipped cream, and ugly, aggressive pranks. Last time we played Notre Dame, they re-enacted the Irish Potato Famine. The guy in the Tree, our costumed mascot was picked by the Band according to the criteria

of spirit and pure vitriol for our sporting opponents. The Tree was a pit bull trained with barbed wire and mace.

Each year, the night before the first day of class the Band marched at midnight in dada uniform to wake the freshman dorms. The band in horns and fur, and plastic airplanes, and rubber duckies, and fiberglass dinosaurs, and rubber vibrators hot glued to their bodies. A ruckus. Then the freshmen came out and danced with the band and they would march off to the next house like children to pied pipers. The chain reaction was drinking and fountain hopping all over campus. I lived in Mirrielees, an ersatz apartment complex. It was as anti-social as campus housing came. I was hoping to get some sleep. Jared was promising otherwise.

*Play without me. Don't need me to play,* I wrote.

*It'll be fun. I'm good for you that way. Besides need to even the score from frisbee golf. Going to rock you for a double. Angel Field. EBF Ultimate Frisbee. Midnight.*

Reply: *Fine. I'll beat you tonight and you'll be sore for a week.*

By midnight the Band was making rounds. Whooping and yelping. The Claw, sharp curving spires like wild vines was a sculpture at the center of the While Plaza Fountain. A sick and sopping stuffed California Bear was impaled on it like a Christian martyr.

Taut air hit my face hard. I passed the disk to my teammate. The air pushed it wrong and Jared tipped it, then snatched it, feet bighted in a leap, "Gotcha!"

Willowy trees swayed along the perimeter of the flat and moist field. Trees with sap and leaves with spikes on the end. The open space was intoxicating. Moon, directly overhead. An ice fog of absurd size centered it. An atmospheric illusion so large you couldn't take it in all in one sight. Its grandeur made you doubt its reality.

"Now you're gonna get it," yelled Jared and chucked the disc underhand far down field. Too far. We returned it, zig-zagging back up. Passing it back and forth. Jared ran to and fro. The track was a ruddy rubberized surface riming the field like the edge of a fresh and rubbery wound.

"Use your head," I joked in wide grin, "I'm wearing you out."

"I don't need any help from you. You're my sworn enemy!" On a sloppy arc Jared pulled his body far enough apart

to deflect the disc. One of his teammates picked it up. “Let’s beat these dogs!” screamed Jared. He loved sports.

They brought it to the goal so quickly, only three of us were there to play defense. I guarded the center. Jared yelled, “Ally oop! Ally oop!” And charged like a ram. Arms pumping sideways. The disc floated above him, like a halo. He spun and snagged the easy floater before it caved backward, then twisting at us, the three of us, faked two jabs, one to the left, one to the right, and chose me; taking two flying steps. Illegal. And hurdled his arm across, and up, and released the plastic slicer at my head. I instinctually ducked and it whizzed. Goal.

Wet grass in my knees, “Jeezuz Jared! You could have taken my head off!”

He was all apologies, “I’m sorry! Sorry! I’m so sorry. It released too soon. The momentum snapped it out. I’m so sorry. Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” wet, sizzled knees.

“Wow! Lucky you ducked! That was the best response. You really got the hell out of the way!”

Everyone was gathering around me in the orange light. Shadows on the turf, asking if I was okay. Just grass stains I said.

Jared helped me up, “Told you I’d rock you,” he smirked and patted my ass. “Well, you’ve got the good team,” I joked.

“Wanna switch? Let’s switch!”

So we switched and Jared’s new team, my old, won by three points.

“That was some good hustle,” said Jared, trying to cheer me up, “Of all of them you had the best hustle.”

“Thanks. Want to get some food?”

“Okay I bet there’s something at Wilbur. The band has to eat!”

“Cool.”

We found a courtyard in Wilbur where indeed, there were potato chips, deli sandwiches, pizza and nachos. Saxophone, trumpet, bass drum in the distance. The freshmen nibbled like rabbits. Under the orange and pink floodlights, Jared and I strutted like bulls. Jared was explaining the new 1AC. The 1AC, the First Affirmative Constructive, was the first speech of the debate. It argued for the Resolution and it was synonymous with the speech maker, and the Case itself; in the world of debate they were one:

“It’s the best fucking Case you’ve ever seen! It can’t be turned, and it can’t be taken out. It’s the most goddamn topical Case, ever, ever.”

“Excellent!” I searched a sandwich for cheese. I was lactose intolerant.

“Yeah, I was thinking that you always cut the Cases every year. So I wanted to show you what a real Case looked like!”

“Oh, you don’t like my Cases? You liked them fine when you ran them.”

“I’m kidding! Learn to take a joke!” he jibed his head back and threw his arms out, “It’s just my turn.”

“What’s it about?” I asked,

“Witches!”

Jared and I spent the next week solid, precipitately working toward the first Fall tournament of the year, the four year old Las Vegas Debates. A nascent tourney. Because the Autumn quarter had just begun, school work could be pushed back without incident. We were working hard to make an impression. Teams that developed imposing reputations early in the term were harder to beat later. The reason was partly a psychological advantage over one’s opponents, but also, it was more difficult for a Judge to drop a reputable team, even if they were losing. Debate was a beauty contest and the Judges worried about their reputations as well. In that way, the Vegas tournament was the linchpin to Nationals. So I was anxious and excited. Besides that, there was the gambling.

The Stanford Debate Team met Monday evening, less than a week’s time away from the Vegas Tournament in the History Corner, the North East corner of the Quadrangle. On the second floor, room 203 was a medium sized lecture hall in green teal seats where Loc Chandler, our debate coach, held council to discuss strategy, trade evidence and assign research.

Chandler, a heavy set man with tiny wire glasses pressed into his face, spoke with his hands, “I am glad to see you took time out of your busy schedules to attend our humble gathering. Thank you one and all, especially Elric, Jack, and David for your research above and beyond the call of duty. No one likes spending the last few weeks of their Summer break in the library, but I think our fortitude and industry will go a long way this weekend.” Chandler turned his back and began writing on the parched green chalkboard, “This is a list of cases, as I hear them from the C.E.D.A.-L, from

word of mouth, and so on.” The C.E.D.A.-L was a list-server for the debate community where queries were made and information traded. It was kind of a mass e-mailing for C.E.D.A. debate. As Chandler wrote on the board Jack Watco sauntered in.

Jack was an all-American. He shined a healthy complexion, and a sturdy upper body that bespoke confidence and an even flow of energy, “Elric, my man!” Jack threw me an enthusiastic high five, and sat in a seat beside me, opposite Jared.

Chandler wrote, “...U.C.I: Ecotopia—C.S.U.C: Pomo-”

David Evans sprang up, “Trenton and Corbin are going pomo! I know pomo-”

“Is he really po’?” smirked David’s partner, Skip Mercury. Scattered chuckling moved through the meeting.

“Yeah! Po, right, sure, sure,” Dave Evans said quickly, “But see, it’s a Critique of sorts, it’s a discourse argument. **Discourse**,” he made a karate chop in the air with thick hands, “I am the **king**, of discourse. Call me the discourse master!” He was working his bobbing head. Dave Evans was a squat, dramatically corpulent boy with a budding van-dyke, known on the circuit as Colgate Boy for a stunt that Skip Mercury, pulled on him last season involving a tube of toothpaste. I really need not elaborate. David Evans effused a giddy and haphazard hyperkinetic nature of often contrary intentions and motivations. That and his snoring were his two most protuberant traits. I had to lodge with him at various debate tournaments so I would know.

“See, Trenton and Corbin do postmodernism as a critique of modernism,” Dave continued, “Sometimes they do a Narrative. It’s supposed to be a backlash, ummn, a protest **against** the normative framework that we are trapped in as moderns.” His speech quickened, “So when they do the Narrative, see, they don’t signpost, they don’t subpoint, nothing, no micro-structure, just a long tripped out story about a freakkin’ monkey sticking his paw or his claw, or whatever monkeys have, into a coconut, see?” Chandler harrumphed on the tabletop.

Jack asked sardonically, “Uh, Dave, what do you mean by ‘Narrative’.” Chandler was bug-eyed and annoyed at another in a long file of Dave’s tangential rants, and it tickled Jack to fan the flames of his coach’s discontent

Dave enjoyed the attention, “The Narrative is just a story, like *Cain and Able* or *Romeo and Juliet*. It has no Aristotelian foundation,” Jack nodded with interest in a way that looked fake to me, wide eyes, purse lips, “You see, that would be art-i-**ficial**.”

The thesis assumes that we learn through stories, like when we were kids, you know, and your mom read to you *Hansel and Grettle*, so you **internalized** it and so now we're all freaky about sex or whatever."

The Narrative was a very interesting thing to me. In it's more moderate form every debate was a narrative. A story. Sort of like a news headline. The 1AC would run Nuclear Threat in Russia, Congress Bans Testing. The Negative would answer, Banning Nuclear Testing Causes Southern Backlash. The arguments were the copy. Every good debater remembered to finish the speech with a "story," that explained what all the yammering was about. The overall picture. But in its more radical form the Narrative was **all** story. No argument. Eight minutes of some fable, morality tale, or anything you wanted to make up for that matter. There wasn't much debate in the Narrative, so went the counter-argument, so it wasn't debate. The Narrators answered, "Yes! Precisely! Debate and the premises behind argumentation kill the human soul. Narratives for everyone!" which was kind of an argument. The Narrative fascinated me. I was contemplating one before Jared wrote his 1AC.

Skip Mercury was a tall, stringy blond kid, "So what's the monkey business?" Skip brushed his hair back behind an ear as his head cocked to the side, as if he was absolutely careless about his grooming and carefree in general.

"Oh right!" Dave Evans squirmed around in his seat to face us, "The Monkey sticks his hand in the coconut and grabs a fistful of beans or rice or salt or whatever it is, see? So when he tries to pull his hand out, it gets trapped because the hole is smaller than a clenched fist." He showed us his clenched trapped between his thighs, "The monkey's trapped but he won't let go of the salt. He's wiggin', so he gets caught by some tribesman who makes monkey stew out of him or maybe just chains the monkey up as his personal slaaaaaave."

"And you're getting at?" quipped Skip Mercury

"I'm not **getting** at anything," said Dave Evanson defensively, "It's this monkey who's **got** it. I'm just telling you..."

Skip jabbed his partner, "Oh Monkey Boy! What does the Narrative mean?" At that I began giggling.

Patently absorbed, Dave swung back, "Oh the **meaning!** Sure, you see, it's an **analogy**," now faster than ever, "You don't want to **be** the monkey plus you don't want to even be the tribesman who **traps** the monkey—cause that puts you back into a

fat Hegelian Master/Slave set up, more modernity, mind you—you don't want to **see** the monkey—”

“You don't want to even **touch** the monkey?” interrupted Skip. Even Jack had to laugh at that one.

“Sure, whatever, don't touch the monkey...” Dave, would not be derailed from the higher matters of the monkey, “So modernism makes us the monkey. To escape we have to ask ourselves who we are, what we're doing, and why we're doing it. We need to bust out of the normative adversarial architectonic of modernity and free the monkey mind.” We all cackled hysterically. “It's funny, isn't it?” Dave asked calmly.

“Ohh...” I caught my breath, “what's the answer to the position?”

“Well there are a whole slew of answers,” Dave was slower and more cautious, “A good one, or one I think kicks ass is to just say okay, look you guys are a bunch of hypocrites! If you **really** wanted to abolish the modern paradigm you wouldn't argue—**argue** right?—that you should win. Because winning and losing feeds the old adversarial system. The monkey system! See? That kicks. The only way they can avoid hypocrisy is to **not play the game**,” he spun ahead like a budding cyclone, “They could **hope** to win, but they couldn't **advocate**...I think. No, they probably couldn't even hope to win without plugging back into hypocrisy.”

“So why couldn't they argue hypocrisy good?” asked Cindy Wahlschbaun brightly. Cindy was a tallish blonde bobbed girl from Kansas who was often trying to please us, the senior members of the team. We didn't take her charming pleasantries for granted either, as Jared remarked to me once, “After she's briefed out a shit-load of fem and become hella cynical, she's going to show up in fatigues and in all seriousness ask for our ever-lovin' **balls** as retribution for the sins of patriarchy.” It was meant in jest, but the point, well taken, was that cutting cards all year on the deforestation of Brazil, or the water crisis in California, or the terror of mental institutions in Poland, female circumcision in Africa, domestic terrorism, or implacable plagues, even when the intent of cutting horrific evidence was just to win debate rounds, had an affect, and I had seen it happen to myself and others. It didn't have to be feminism, it could be practically anything. Like Jack told me once, “There are a lot of dangerous situations in the world today, like North Korea, Russia, dangerous enough that...well, don't have kids for about twenty years, until things settle down, because there's a lot of free floating nuclear weapons out there.”

Dave was trying to explain hypocrisy, “Well, sure they could argue that,” he turned toward her and pushed his open hands, thumbs up through the air, as if to give her an invisible gift, “I have some awesome hypocrisy good cards in my back files. They say hypocrisy is a constant emerging element in truth, because, get this, truth is always so **complex**, see, that it will always contradict itself at some point and there you are. You have to do something You can’t not do nothing. Even not acting is acting somehow, because you’re stuck in the existential mire, and the truth says go forward, go back. You’re fucked. So we’re all hypocrites at some point and that’s okay cause if you’re not, you’re probably into something that’s not true.” You could tell he was done because his head stopped shaking. Almost, “But the answer to **that** is if hypocrisy is good then the monkey system is good. So then you’ve got them. You’ve got them both ways.”

“Thank-you Dave. Are you done?” Chandler whined.

Dave Evans charged on, “Well, besides that Pomo is a walking link. They say fem good, ecology good, pollution baad, uhm what else? They say education good, uhm elites bad. So you see, you could just as easily go for that stuff.” He made a pudgy smile, happy with the attention.

“Thank-you Dave for your more than thorough exposition. Have you considered I.E.?”

“Oh yeah for a while-”

Laughing. I.E. was Individual Events, real old fashion speechmaking. They often held their activities in conjunction with debate. I.E. were competitions in extemporaneous speech, or impromptu speech making, or humorous, many categories in fact. Little five minute speeches and it was all drama-geek stuff, a lot of hand waving and dramatic pauses. Debaters thought the I.Eers were soft and silly, and they were. Jared held nothing but mocking disdain for I.E.ers.

“Okay, moving on. The nude beach case is about a nudist colony stationed in the South Pacific, somewhere near Tonga or Samoa...” Chandler reviewed what he knew about nude beaches, “The rhetoric in the cards says bathing-suits are disgusting, grubby things that indicate to women that their anatomy is something shameful,” and all about the A-life links to Native Americans, “...so they threaten to unleash the beast unless they are granted independence,” and the Ecotopia case, “It’s modeled after a novel where Northern California, Washington and Oregon secede from the union. What do you know about that?” More members of the

team drifted in, with their evidence assignments, and made contributions to the debate.

“Lastly, before we wrap up tonight, we need to nominate a Senator’s Scholar. The Senator’s Scholarship, as many of you may know is a \$5,000.00 yearly grant to attend a school of law.” The Scholarship was more than that, it was admission to Harvard, and a hard sought prize.

“I would like to nominate Jared Kaneman,” I chimed like a dignitary.

“Any sec-” Chandler was cut off.

“I second it,” piped Jack Watco.

“Okay,” said Chandler, “All those in favor...” I turned in my seat to watch the vote and glare at potential non-conformists. Ayes were heard.

No nays.

“The ayes have it. Jared, you’re the next one in line for the guerdon,” Chandler beamed. It was a railroad.

Jared gaped green eyes. Swiveled his head side to side like a tank turret with stubble hair.

I don’t know how they did it at other programs, but at Stanford, we nominated a single individual. That person was named “President of Forensics,” also known as team captain. It was just a title. If the Scholarship came our way it was forwarded to that individual. Very civilized. Chandler was on the Senator’s Advisory Board, which meant he had a little more to say about the recipient than most debate coaches.

Before we adjourned, Chandler promised a photocopied set of the thousand pages of ev—evidence, cards—for each team by Wednesday, when we would meet again.

After the meeting Jared and I drifted toward White Plaza. I bashfully admitted to rigging the nomination. I arranged it with Chandler and convinced Jack to second the nomination, just as sure.

Jared was confused, “You set this up?”

“Yeah!”

“Why did you do that? I mean why-” he had the funniest expression on his face, as if he was being told that the amputation of his leg was eminent, “Don’t you want the Scholarship?”

“You win it this year, I’ll win it next year.”

“You can’t do that!” he was mortified. He stamped the asphalt flat where we were.

I had to smile, “When we win Nationals it’s nothing but Harvard for you, pal. Only the best.”

“You did that for me.”

“Sure. Now we’ve **got** to take the Title.”

Jared nodded, “But next year, it’s all you.”

“Of course,” I waved my hand like Berlinski at match point.

“That’s what I like about you, Elric,” Jared found a familiar smirky expression, “Always looking out for number one.” Jared and I looked out for each other. In my eyes he **was** number one, so it was easy. Jared could have made friends with just about anyone he wanted to. I never had that kind of ability. He chose to make me his best friend, and to be perfectly honest, I often wondered why.