

**Chapter 3 of *The Debate*, Vol. 2  
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We were excited to debate and especially to debate in Las Vegas, the bad boy of the West. Thursday was a backbreaking ride in the Stanford Forensics Van down the I-5 through the hot and sometimes dung hung Central Valley, to the 58, and then a barren shot from Barsto, through San Bernardino County on the 15. We stopped at a cheap and cheesy casino, advertising a \$4.95 buffet all you can eat, on an electrified sign five miles high. It was a place called Whisky Pete's one foot into the state line. It was probably a mistake. After averaging the squad's losses at the blackjack and craps tables (except for Jack who won twenty), plus the price of the abysmally greasy and vague tasting food, the so called bargain-dinner cost us each around \$16.00 a plate. It was our introduction to Nevada.

We rode deeply into the hot desert county of legalized gambling and prostitution. That creamy evening we arrived at the Frontier Hotel, off the Vegas strip, where angry strikers marched in protest of what they deemed to be unfair labor practices, and lights danced all around like beatific punctuation. The lights in Vegas, you will understand, never ever went out.

We prepped that night and all morning too. We weren't too worried because we had a secret weapon.

The Las Vegas Debates began that Friday at three in the afternoon at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas campus. It was a clean campus with defiant green lawns running through its heart, concrete buildings, and a peculiar red library wearing groovy half domes, like a Habitrail. Inside the air conditioned Moyer Student Union, tubs were stacked next to their damp backed owners, and everyone was chatting in cryptic lingo about brinks, non-unique Disads, and dispositional counterplans. The usual scene. We were getting weird stares from the Union Cafe patrons just beyond the iceblock. The usual scene.

Jared descended the spiral maroon staircase, under geodesic domed skylight to deliver the schematic, and we were off to our round: BEH 119 Stanford GK v. Cornell LP.

Philip Pelsner, half of Cornell LP debated with Jared in high school. Philip was Richard Hobbes' high school partner until Hobbes threw him over for Jared. It wasn't anything personal, explained Jared, but Philip was deeply hurt. Ever since, Philip took to acrimony at Jared, and me by association. Philip was very handsome in a clean cut way, and he didn't wear his bile well.

Sherman and Philip set up, and the judge set up, and we asked about philosophy—meaning what the judge liked to hear and what we could do to fleece a win—and we were all sweaty, but glad to be chilled under the blasting air. And six-hundred miles from home Jared launched the 1AC, the first speech of the round. Jared wore a blue and white striped button-down, stained at the arm pits, with a broad red and navy rep tie and his Buddha-cut. He pat his chest with an open right hand, thumping his little Polo man into submission: *Pat, pat, pat, thump, thump, thump*—simultaneously rocking with one foot in front of the other, back and forth, back and forth, leaning over the podium at our orange briefed Case, our secret weapon, “Elric and I have traveled all the way from the Bay to tell a tale of woe and worry of an oppressed people who walk with raven hair under a misty sky in far away Scotland...” Jared looked up at our judge. Sherman and Philip wore quizzical squints. What was Jared doing? Instead of the 1AC blast off, he was singing like a sad epic poet. I wrote the twenty second preamble well aware that the highly held assumption that debate is all about what's on the flow and nothing else was flatly untrue. It was in fact, theater.

“The fate of these ancient people is our fate. Their future is ours. For in distant Scotland lies the door between heaven and hell, between this world and the netherworld, through which our destiny, as one people on Earth, shall be decided irrevocably. That is why Elric and I stand resolved that secession is a justified response to political oppression...” Then in a jolting burst, Jared thundered the Witches case, rocking and rolling at just subsonic speed, “On the A sub, you will note the Witches' power is essentially without limit from Greymalkin in 94...” He turned it up, 200, 250 words per minute, rising, the words going smaller and higher in the big crunch for *speed*. At about 300 words per minute, clarity was severely sacrificed, at 355, only a few of the most slippery tongues in the nation could maintain cogency, Jared one of them. Three-hundred-fifty-five words per minute, almost six words per second, was considered the upper limit, beyond which one might expect an appalling boom.

Jared described our Affirmative, our secret weapon as, “wickedly potent.” He had brewed a righteous 1AC, as formidable and cantankerous as I had ever read from a special order periodical

called the *Shaman's Quarterly*. The Case thesis claimed the prehistoric existence of a friendly troop of Stonehenge Druids that during a special lunar eclipse celebrated Beltane by breeding with the sisters of the Lake. The progeny migrated, and lived peaceably in Northern Scotland for centuries until they were over-run by the fearful and barbarous Saxons. Jared cut cards, just weeks old, indicating that the Northern Witches and Warlocks of Scotland have risen, claimed the legacy, and were prophesying a new world peace should they be granted secession, dominion over their old holy ground, the primordial Northern Territory.

World peace was the benefit. There was also a punitive aspect to denying Case, besides the comparative loss of the net benefit. Jared was rocking fast and clean, "The D subpoint please: Occluding the secession results in a multi-dimensional HELL ON EARTH, from Greymalkin in 94

(Loch, "The Leviathan of the Witch," *Shaman's Quarterly*, Sept.-Dec., p. 1117)

*The practical consequences of preventing such a secession make the Flood seem like a relatively provincial occurrence. Among the foreseen cataclysms are the fracturing of the major continents by unchartable earthquakes, re-animation of the dead, volcanic hurricanes, the collapse of the sun, and an interdimensional rift that will unleash the denizens of Tartarus in such unnatural velocity, the very parameters of our universe will shake and fall like the walls of the once fabled Jericho.*

It was a big Case. In fact it was an awesome Case. The link to the Resolution was hard-core. The cards themselves said "secession" in them, as if they were custom made for this Res. There was no question we were Topical. The time frame was absurdly fast, the impacts were immense, end of the world, end of the universe, the rhetoric was unequivocal, and if it wasn't unique I don't know what was.

Being unique was very important. Uniqueness meant that the harms, in this case the threat of demonic spirits mangling the universe, were uniquely caused by the forces we were addressing, namely the Witches. If we were non-unique the universe would collapse **anyway**, no matter what we did with Witches—because there was some other force we were unresponsive to, like space aliens or anti-matter that would pose a similar threat. That was unique causal harms. The second way we needed to be unique was the solvency debate. We needed to uniquely solve the problem. If there was some better way to solve the unmaking of the universe

and all life as we know it without granting the Witches succession then our solvency would be non-unique. The case was a mastermind. It guarded uniqueness on both sides. And because the case was positive as well as negative we accrued all sorts of awesome advantages when succession kicked in. Conversely, the judge was forced to weigh all the beautiful advantages that would be lost if our plan wasn't enacted. It wasn't just that we should win, it was we shouldn't lose. The Case was a dream come true. There were very few cards out there that could answer the position. Some A-Life stuff, and maybe some hyperspace stuff, if they could beat the time frame, might have stood a chance, but they were comparatively vague, and we were prepared for them.

Jared wound down his last card, down to 300, 240, 220 words per minute, "The God given tools of faith, trust, and prayer are our only hope of averting a certain cataclysm of Gothic proportions," His voice lowered back to earth. Timers beeped off.

"Cross X starting," said the Judge.

Philip charged out like a raging bull from his pen, "Can I see a copy of case." His eyes bugged as if he were blown out. He couldn't believe the cards. They flamed that hard.

"Okay Jared," Philip asked, "are there such things as ghosts?"

"Well, there's the Holy Ghost."

"No, I mean, are there spooks, hobgoblins, bogeymen?" Philip meant to win this one. You could tell.

"Uhm, okay, sure...Our case evidence does suggest the existence of paranormal phenomena, sure."

"Okay, do you have any **proof** that these Witches have the power you claim they have."

"Of course. We have the cards. You heard them."

"Right, but you would admit there is no rational **scientific** explanation why this would occur."

"Well, Witches manipulate the laws of nature-"

"Yeah, I know, but how do they do **that**?" Philip was pouncing. His voice was high.

Jared deepened his, "Okay, okay, I see... Right. The answer is we don't know **how** they do it. It's magic. They're **Witches** for chrissakes. But I do not think we know any **more** about how things work through a scientific perspective. Right? I mean, why does an atom spin all around, why does gravity work?"

“Because there are scientific **laws** in effect that make them-  
”

“So atoms go to scientific jail if they don’t follow the scientific laws?”

“No! They’re not that kind of laws!” Philip wailed, over himself before he realized how reactionary he sounded. More slowly, “Scientific law is a metaphor,” he clarified.

“If you can explain why gravity works I’ll explain why Witches work.” jabbed Jared.

“Fine,” Philip was a major in physics, he was ready, “There are four primary forces in the universe, magnetism, gravity, the weak force-”

“No, I don’t mean **how** gravity works. That’s just things bumping into other things *ad infinitum*. I mean **why** does it work. Why should we have gravity in the first place?”

“Because, because, if gravity **didn’t** work like it does there would be no universe, and we wouldn’t be here arguing about it.”

“Okay,” Jared squinted green eyes wryly, “Why does the universe exist?”

Philip Pelsner smoothed his hair. His cross examination was spinning out of his control, “Look man, I’m prepared to debate the Resolution, okay,” he let out a short laugh, “not the existence of the universe.”

“Then you are poorly prepared, my friend.”

And that was the end of Philip Pelsner.

The next round we went Negative and then it was eight o’clock. Las Vegas cooled down to a reasonably warm billow as Jared and I took to tidying our ev boxes and slotting them into campus storage. Everyone carted around at least two, but often five, six or seven, white cardboard boxes, Chiquita Banana boxes, red plastic bins, green crates, or gray oxboxes filled with hundreds of pounds of files on every possible subject known to man, drug legalization, Chinese foreign relations, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, environmental racism, and on and on. They were hauled around on dollies and trailers, and campus storage was full of them.

We touched in with Chandler, who gave us the keys to one of the mini-vans with instructions to get back at a reasonable hour, which meant just get back alive. He could be reached at the Frontier’s bar sucking down whisky sours in case any emergencies arose.

Jack, Jared, and I were accompanied to the Hard Rock Cafe (less than a few blocks from campus) by Keith Clockman. The Hard Rock wasn't hard to find. A two story tall Stratacaster mounted on a blue tile water fountain glowed proudly at the front of the restaurant, the strings, multi-neon. A thick que curled from the right side of the brass entrance, selling golden lettered, "Hard Rock Cafe—Save the Planet—Las Vegas" t-shirts. We swung through the revolving door guarded by an aurous high relieved sun, emanating guitars east and west like golden beams from Phoebus.

Purple darkness and a boomy din fixed us firmly into the strange rock and roll fantasy where a Godzilla sized Strat crawled the ceiling from the kitchen to the opposite end of the hall, and the neck extended outside to the valet parking roundabout. "Welcome to rock and roll Wonderland," Jared nudged.

We were soon seated near the Hendrix memorabilia, guitars and swirly eye-sockets, and everything. As we examined the menus, Jared announced that we should buy him a hamburger, as he was going to buy a t-shirt while we waited for food.

"Oh, for godssake, Jared," I said merrily.

He knew instantly what I meant, "What? It's a fucking t-shirt."

"I know, it's just so...**commercial.**"

"Is that a problem for you?"

"It's not a problem for **me**, it's just another one of those things where hype trumps substance **again.**"

"God, Elric, everything has all this deep meaning. I can buy a stupid t-shirt to remember our Vegas trip and I'm still the same person. **You're** the one judging people based on how they dress. **You're** the one evaluating hype before substance."

"Whoa! I'm not judging anyone! If you like it you should have it. I'm not your keeper."

"You **do** think you're my keeper," he got up wearing a fastened grin that tried to mask his frustration and embarrassment, and bolted toward the gold finned Cadillac hovering two tons of glory over the centrally located bar.

"It **is** just a t-shirt, you know," Jack said in Jared's wake.

"I know that," I replied. Keith stared.

"Yeah well, Jared thought you were attacking him personally."

"He can have the thinnest skin...Honestly, I was trying to

protect him.”

“How were you doing that?”

“Those shirts are so snobby. I don’t want Jared waiting in line for the privilege of paying for something like that, some advertisement.”

“You may be making just a little too much of this. I’m not saying you’re wrong, mind you, but you have to appreciate where Jared is coming from.”

“Where’s that?”

“Well, you know,” Jack raised his eyebrows without effort, “Jared’s always had this thing...He sort of feels like he’s in your shadow.”

“Oh give me a break.”

Jack shrugged his shoulders. Jeanne, our waitron came and took our orders. I ordered for Jared.

We began discussing rounds playfully. Keith told us about the novice round he had just before his partner, and girlfriend, Cindy Wahlschbaun, became sick and had to go back to the hotel, “So they’re running a case based on the American Revolution, right? They say the Americans were justified in rising up against their oppressors. So Cindy asks why they don’t cite their sources, and they start squawking, I swear to god, about how it all came out of a history book, but they can’t remember the editor and they’re not even sure of the title. All the while they keep on saying how **stupid** Cindy’s questions are. They were being real pricks.”

Jack and I were smirking because it seemed something like this happened at the novice level at every first tournament of the season.

“So I get up and give my speech. I say they don’t cite their sources, so how do I know they haven’t made all this stuff up? Then I run Topicality like you told me Jack.”

“Right, of course,” said Jack.

“So during cross examination, the guy asks me if I’ve ever heard of a war called the American Revolution and I say, ‘Nope!’ So he asks again but in a different way, but I still say I have no idea what he’s talking about,” Keith let out a giggle, “Then he says, ‘Did you take history in high school?’ So I say yeah, of course I took history. So he asks how our country became a nation, like where did it come from, and I say, ‘I don’t remember, I think we’ve always been here.’ So then the guy flips out and loses it, I swear. He says how I’m soooo stupid if I’ve never heard of the American

Revolution. So I say, ‘Well I’m not so stupid that I’m going to lose this round. You didn’t cite your sources. How smart is that?’ I thought he was going to pop me.”

Jack and I were roaring. Novice rounds never failed to amuse me. They were so full of life and righteous indignation, and so absent of the sort of normalized cynicism you find in varsity match-ups.

Across the busy restaurant, a row of green glowing clocks told the time in Maui, Las Vegas, and London. Under the Las Vegas clock that turned quickly counterclockwise as if for the benefit of the Mach Hare, Zoë Weatherfield waved shyly and smiled like sunshine. She and her partner, Speed, sauntered over toward our table, lacing through the tight bar scene, all the while locked into my gaze. Speed was a big boy with short blonde hair and a growing gut. His crystal blue eyes sparkled under their own illumination. Speed and Zoë were considered serious threats. Jared and I specifically researched and prepped out answers to positions they would be likely to run, like space and drug legalization. U.C.L.A. was deep on legalization.

“Hi my dear,” said Zoë brightly. She stood smaller than her partner with dazzling red hair and a ruddy complexion—ruddy you understand—as if a thick shard of green bottle glass had been raked across her cheeks. Features in a bowl of cream raspberries. They sat at our booth, I introduced Keith, and we talked about the day’s rounds. Speed took an especially keen interest in Jack, laughing and cracking jokes as if they were old buddies. Speed and Zoë ordered and soon our food came.

“Where’s Jared?” asked Zoë. I motioned to the bar where my partner fraternized with his friend and partner from high school Richard Hobbes. Both had slung Hard Rock, Save the Planet t-shirts over their shoulders. I’m not going to mince words, Richard was a real son-of-a-bitch, and I think he knew it. He was likable. It’s not that he wasn’t likable, and that was part of the problem. He was one of the most distrustful people I had ever met. He was always going on about not trusting so and so, or looking out for evil someone else was brewing. It was endless, and it was disturbing. But I had been reprimanded by Jared enough—who thought he was a charming bastard—to keep my opinions to myself.

In between gobbling fries Speed whispered something into Zoë’s ear. “Yeah!” she said, “Plenty!”

Speed asked, “How would you guys like to party with us tonight?”

I tried to send a telepathic message to Jack, instructing him

to cordially decline their kind offer with some smoothly wifful excuse that only Jack could make compelling. We had rounds tomorrow, after all. Instead he said enthusiastically, "That would be bitchin'!" and Keith in chorus, so I weakly assented.

Jack went to explain to Jared what was going on. He returned to report that Jared would be hanging with Richard instead of us tonight. A small tinge of jealousy nudged my heart. "That's the word," said Jack, "We're golden."