

**Chapter 5 of *The Debate*, Vol. 2
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I woke as the sun crept into my veiny eyelids, “Oh shit! Rounds!” Everything was still a little cockeyed, a little **too** vivid. I woke Jack and peeled him from the mattress.

“It’s only eight,” he said, “We’ll make it.”

Ten minutes later indeed, I was back at the Frontier cracking open room 568.

“Where fuck have you been?” screeched Jared from the carpet.

“Good morning.”

“I have been cutting cards, like we said we were going to and where the hell were you? Out dipping your wick with Zoë, no doubt.”

I was stunned, “Jared, what is your matter?” I smelled alcohol, “Are you drunk?”

“No, no, no, this isn’t about me, Elric, this is about you and the sloppy effort you have been giving me this whole tournament.”

“What sloppy effort? We **won** both of our rounds yesterday!”

“We won them, with little help from you! And you think that is sufficient to leave me with all the work, **again**, while you party without me, **again**?”

“Jared, Jack **asked** you if you wanted to come. We wanted you to come.”

“Bullshit! You didn’t want me there. God, you’re such a fucking little liar.”

“Jared, you need to take a break, get some coffee or something. I’m taking a shower.”

“DON’T YOU TURN YOUR BACK ON ME!” Jared rose up, hands above his head, like a bear and brought his body down on me like a hot pouncing animal, powering me back into the

plastered hotel wall. “You’re not listening to me!” he sung like a scolding school marm, “You NEVER listen to me!” Black venom spat from his tremulous mouth. It was pure hate, and I couldn’t move. I lost all strength from shock and fright. I was shaking and bloodless, and I stared cold fear into Jared’s gaze while he stared malachite hate into mine, and without explanation he let me go.

I turned away quickly pale and sore. I was so empty and weakly charged inside, like a hollow chamber where static electricity scraps about. And I was completely silent, like someone had just died, and you simply do not speak in such a case.

I showered well that morning in warm water as a foil to hateful events.

I dressed amongst Jared’s toil of 8 1/2 x 11 blue and green and pink paper and shards and shards of rejected rectangularly gutted texts, the ones that didn’t make the cut, from the *San Francisco Examiner* and *Fortune* and *Freedom for the Seas in the 21st Century*, and *Planethood*, and *The Harvard International Law Journal*, and *The Futurist*, and the *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, and the list went on of the paste smacked testaments to sticky issues and gummy philosophies.

It was amongst this scene that a rift began between us two, friends and partners. I was foolish then not to see the portents, to ignore the blatant evidence, but when you’re chest high in a churning river, it is often difficult, after a while, to detect how chilled the water has become.

When Jared emerged from the shower, dripping on the scattered debris of words, and arguments he said slowly, “We’re still taking this tourney, you know.” Those were the first words he had uttered since the madness. They were strangely appropriate, like a calmingly mundane idea: win the tournament. I should have been furious. I should have protested too much though wrathful yelling and refused to debate, and threatened to tell Chandler and the squad...

Instead I mimed, “Yeah, yeah, of course we are.” I reached for my blue pinpoint oxford, button down collar that was starched flat and hard. Like most Open debaters, I rarely wore a shirt and tie. I did, however always pack them for emergencies. I wore a red and white silk rep tie with small amber wiggly design that resembled nearly nothing in the natural world—just a design, just wiggles.

We lost our first and second rounds easily. My tie didn’t

seem to help. During the first morning round we hit a very good team from Gonzaga University, and as if we didn't have enough trouble already, I flowed their R.V.I.'s on the back side of T. When I ran out of room at the bottom of the page I turned it over and continued my scribbling there, and then forgot all about it. In all the morning's left over foam, drugs, and reckless delirium, I had eschewed a simple cardinal rule, before you kick out of Procedurals ask about R.V.I.'s. R.V.I.'s are confusing, but I'll try to explain.

A voting issue or "voter" was a key, super-key argument that alone won the round. The judge could "vote" on that issue and decide the round there. An R.V.I. was a Reverse Voting Issue, that is as an answer to the voting issue it turned the argument on its head. Beating the contention wasn't simply blocking an attack on the king, it was to concomitantly block and checkmate. So R.V.I.s were like assassins if even one got in, the king was dead.

We argued that Topicality was a voting issue because if Gonzaga wasn't arguing the Resolution, they weren't playing the game fairly, and we can't be prepared for every case on every topic, so they should lose. The Zags argued "R.V.I.," that when they beat our wanky Topicality position, they would win the round. And it **was** wanky by the way, but that did not justify the R.V.I. If they beat Topicality that just meant they **were** topical and then the debate could start on the issues, was the plan good, was the case logic sound, did the impacts outweigh the harms, and on like that. Jared liked to make the hockey analogy: "Just because they beat T and block the puck from the goal, they don't win the game." That was of course, unless I dropped it. Silence was consent. Dropping an argument, that is failing to respond to it, was the equivalent of consenting, to it. All we heard out of the Zags for the rest of Rebuttals, R.V.I. this and R.V.I. that and it's too late now and it's a voter and God shelter them from evil...

We lost that round.

Then Jared and I spent the next round bickering about the last. Steeped in last night's booze, my partner was spread out, his brain dry, coughing to catch up. He couldn't flow fast enough to net all the argumentation, and then couldn't speak fast enough to answer the arguments he could flow. In between, we dropped all sorts of stuff. What he left for my 2AR was so incomplete and lacking, I threw up my hands in the air and produced a string of new answers, many of them shifts if not outright reversals of what Jared had hacked up during his last speech. I was desperate and for the first time in a long time, scared during a prelim debate round. We lost. It was slipping away.

After the Judge and U.M.K.C. left for the lunch break,

Jared and I sat like stone in the hum of cold blue fluorescent lights. The classroom was messed with evidence boxes and cardboard accordion files, that read, “Second place is the first loser.” Our briefs were strewn about like carcasses on a tired battlefield. I looked dejectedly at my flow, and then walked over to our Judge’s still warm plastic desk/chair, where I retired stoically.

Jared’s first words after the massacre were conspicuously stony, “Those were new answers.”

“You didn’t leave me with enough,” I gritted back, “I was answering what you didn’t cover. That made them new.”

“We’re supposed to back each other. You didn’t have my back.”

“Did you have **my** back this morning?”

“Fuck...” Jared rumbled at the perforated ceiling, “I’m sorry okay?”

“You scared the shit out of me, man,” I didn’t even know him.

“Can we just forget about it and concentrate on the task at hand?”

“I can’t forget about it. What were you doing? You were out of control.”

“Christ Elric, don’t you see what you **do**?”

“No, I don’t see, I really don’t.”

“You turn everything around. If **I** fuck up, I get the hammer, but when you do, I’m just supposed to take it.”

“You think I fucked up? Is that it?” my mouth drew dryly.

“You **hella** fucked up, man!”

“How did **I** fuck up?”

“Shit! We were supposed to cut Lexis for the M.S.U. case last night. You **knew** that.”

“Yeah, I knew that, but why can’t David cut them, or Skip? And even if we don’t get the ev, what’s the big deal? We can deal with M.S.U., I mean I want to win, don’t get me wrong-”

“No, I don’t think you want to win. Not badly enough.”

“So that justifies attacking me like a rabid dog? What’s that about, Jared? What’s the matter with you?”

“You pushed my buttons, like you always do—I said I was sorry, can we drop it?”

“What do you mean like ‘you always do?’ I’d like to know exactly what I’m doing.”

“Like you always do...” Jared jolted as if shocked by static and dropped his gaze. His mouth doured as he smoothed short, monk hair with a clutched hand, “Like...” he was confused and searching. I hadn’t seen that look on his face before, or if I had, I’d promptly forgotten it. You don’t dwell on the weaknesses of your friends, certainly not your best one, “Like... you don’t **try** hard enough...I’m the one always keeping it together, you get to ride off the cream. I wrote our Aff, I...and then you come off like you’re the epicenter of the squad. You never give me credit. You don’t realize how **hard** it is for me. You don’t realize.” He was beginning to babble, or if he was making sense, it was the sort of sense that is so true, so precisely true that it sounds vague and insensate.

Bug-eyed and dazed, I simmered, “What are you saying?”

“You don’t trust me and you have no reason **not** to trust me,” he paused, beaming verdant directly into me, “I need your trust, that’s what I need,” he looked so innocent and needy.

“I **do** trust you. I trust you more than anyone.”

“That is such shit! You second guess me, you challenge me, when, like, I’m **telling** you!” A tear crept down his stolid cheek, his eyes splat and twitched and fluttered and I looked away, embarrassed by my partner’s weeping and then felt foolish for doing so.

“Here, I want you to have this,” I moved to an evidence box and pulled out the red knitted hunting cap that Zoë had given me.

He took the cap as a cautious but curious child takes a gift from a stranger. He put the cap on immediately and averted my gaze and we silently put our files and briefs and boxes back together and onto the dolly like the king’s men reassembling the scattered shards of a huge man-egg.

We bought two liters of water and a quart of papaya juice. Maybe it was just a matter of chemistry. I hoped so very much. We drank.

The next round went beautifully. Jared was on the issues and pre-empting and intuiting my moves. I wore my goofy tie and he wore the ridiculous hunting cap and we crushed them handily. The last rounds went just as well. I was tremendously happy. We were a team again. I had my partner back and we were like fresh lovers, excited and energized. I felt he was wearing that stupid cap for me, like a symbol of his affection, even in the 102 degree heat. I

felt unstoppable and Jared was so true, so close to my heart the whole morning skirmish and everything was forgotten. It seemed like an early morning phantom where you're half awake but half asleep and too dry to tell the difference. It just wasn't all real.

We cleared, meaning we won enough preliminary rounds to qualify for out-round match-ups. One mistake and we were out. In the octa-final round we squeaked past a tough M.S.U. team, Krash Everett and Herman Moloch, the very pair Jared was so intensely worried about. Our poor pre-lim record paired us to their perfect 8-0 through an out-round process called high/low matching. It was a very difficult hour and a half but in the end we outweighed the impacts and provided sufficient doubt of plan solvency. That round was so close it came down to mostly rhetoric, who **appeared** to believe in themselves more. Jared and I were synched in and psyched up and pulled out a 2-1 decision on carriage alone.

Then it happened at the quarter-final round.

Jared and I hauled our lug to a small room in BEH, the Frank and Estella Beam Hall, number 122. Why in God's name would they hold a quarter-final round in such a small room? We carted into the high netted concrete courtyard past the L.I.E.D. Business Information Center, until, ahhh, 122!

The tiny cube held two large desks at front and an ascending set of fixed long desks and chairs pivoting in arcs from those strong beams. The desks were cinched in place. It was a mini-law-school set up with green carpet in compact dimensions.

While we were setting up, slow moving debaters wandered in, bearing paper or legal pads and pens and their grim smiles. Those who would watch this round were defeated in previous rounds. Some of them were freshly defeated like the bloody carcasses of dead oxen, displaying the well worn signs of working so hard and coming so far only to be had for supper. A washed in breath of relief bloated their lungs. They were done for the weekend. Sweat stains on their well pressed oxfords were drying and stiffening, as a benefit for an early demise.

A head leaned through the door, then the body. David Cornish from K-State, our opponent, motioned for me to meet him outside. I took note of my belongings and met David there.

A blast of heat at the door. Around the corner David stood 5'5", rumpled in deep wool pants gathered at his moccasins and an untucked dress shirt oversized at the collar, "Don't run your Case," said his small head nervously.

"Why not?" I asked.

“He shifted weight, looking crazy angry, “You’re running Witches?” he rose tremulous pink fingers.

“Yeah.”

“Don’t run it. We’ll bust you.” He checked around and smoothed his oily hair, and shot off.

Curiouser and curiouser. I expected to spy a man sized rabbit dash off after him, complaining of the time.

When I returned to Jared, he asked, “What did David say?”

“Oh he’s so full of it.”

“What?”

“He thinks he’s gonna stomp our Aff.”

“Our Witches Case?”

“We’ve only lost one Affirmative round, the whole tournament and he thinks he’s going to bust us.”

“Yeah right,” Jared seemed less than pleased, and he scratched his hunting cap.

I comforted him, “The Case is impermeable, no one can touch it and little Cornish’s going to bust us? I’d like to see that one,” I snorted a laugh while sticking preflow to paper.

As the white blowing AC drew hot mist from our shirts, I looked over Case and mumbled a few words I had been flubbing, “post-moribund...post moribund...**post- moribund...**”

Cornish and Wiezen as well as other K-Staters and their coach marched in solemnly. It was a funeral procession, because they expected to lose. Cornish carried a lone file while his partner pushed the bins and left them snugly in the opposite corner, neither of them looked our way.

“This ought to be good,” I whispered to Jared.

He shrugged and smirked. Drops of sweat glazed flat as he swiped his round forehead. His face was splotchy like a newborn, as if where-ever you pressed a white spot would be made. “Relax, J,” I said, “It’s just Cornish and Wiezen and their hair-brained Disads.” Cornish and Wiezen in fact were one of the top seeded teams that year, and a huge favorite for the National Title, but I wasn’t about to let that get to me, because if I let it, it would have been over before it ever began.

“Are you sure you want to be the 1AC?” he teetered. We decided to switch speaking positions after Jared complained of the 1AR overload. The first Affirmative in Constructives was the first

Affirmative in Rebuttals (unless you did “insides” but that was wanky), and the 1AR had to cover 13 minutes of Negative spew, so it was a pressure position. I said I would take it.

“Yeah, I don’t mind,” I tried to calm him like Zoë had calmed me last night. I admired her for that.

“I just think that you’re so used to the 2A position...” he drew nails over his throat

“No, this will be cool,” I was steady.

He exhaled through his nose short and fast and grinned.

The room filled up, fuller, and then overflowing. Kids were standing along the back perimeter and sitting on the steps of the isle. The door was constantly opening to let new people and all their heat and all of Nevada’s heat in. Got gush. Cool. Hot gush. Like that. A row of debaters along the side and back wall wore Hard Rock t-shirts, as if part of a clique. All those white shirts. White cotton in a row and they were jamming in. I guess we were the round to watch, an entire dropped tournament in attendance, what an interesting and flattering happening.

The judges introduced themselves as Rabin from S.F.S.U., Bishop from Texas A&M, and Hira from Western Washington. All three were good, and quick and offered plenty of latitude. “Debate is for debaters,” nodded Bishop, “Go as fast or slow as you like. Make it what you will.”

I positioned myself so that I could see all three judges if need be. I expanded the accordion folder, and placed it on top of a bin bearing table, and the case on top of that, “Ready?” The room hung quietly as an uneasy humidity enveloped us. The air conditioner poured in the white air as fast as packed bodies absorbed it and made their own colored gas. White t-shirts along the rim, Hard Rock, Hardrock, Hardrock.

Donning a shorter preamble, I presented case, “Humanity stands at the crossroads of a new era. The choices we make today will determine the fate of untold generations, peace or war, heaven or hell. The Witches are here.

“That is why Stanford University,” always get a plug in for Stanford, “stands resolved that secession is a justified response to political oppression. We offer the following Observation I, definitions...”

I sped up, losing myself in a flash of information, losing my body in a wash of words, “the B sub notes: All values must be evaluated in an organic framework from Kalafzan in 75:

The Western manifesto of mine not thine, of us v. them is not only a self defeating proposition it is, as best, a nugatory approach to how things are. For if the whole is not previewed in terms of itself what outside force could possibly justify the totality without superseding the original? Surely all normativities, as all living coordinates, exist organically. The non-organic alternative is tantamount to the abnegation of what might be successfully argued as the ontological predicate—though not necessarily the reducible primary—that would be the life force, to default to a reality characterized by dead, dying, and carious value systems exclusively...

A strange prescient sensation overcame me. The room went white and the words jumbled in my mind while my mouth delivered them flawlessly. I was a conduit while white lights flashed and a deep regret took hold. Why be so sad? *An illness.* More lights.

“In the D sub the Witches eradicate the pestilence and the plague. We eliminate killer viruses from Greymalkin in 94

A whole host of vexatious bio-terrors known in this century as the virus will find themselves suddenly without a job and out on the streets. The Hedgewitches of Dun Frey, like their sisters before...

I felt the control. The power of a suggestion, the energy of an idea, and I the lightning rod. The prescience continued to nag me. It contradicted all my soft shelled assumptions and for that I rejected it as an aberration and a loose paranoia. A white sheet. The white t-shirts on the rim. White plastic. Words stretched forth. *White humid words.* Everyone scraping notes. The scrape-note. Tiny white words:

“And the last is an underview: Great Britain kills historical self determination, a clear example of political oppression from Killinger in 93.” We were getting hassled on T, or Topicality, about our Case not being an example of political oppression, so I dug up this card to shore up the gap. “...and without a modicum of historical hence personal integrity.’ I stand open...”

Cornish stood up. He was rumped and sweating and sincerely nervous. His blue black hair was slicked to one side, highlighting his small, crowded features, “Your case is largely made up of Greymalkin cards, correct?”

“Yes. Though, Greymalkin makes up most of our case, we

feel his-”

“Okay, who is Greymalkin?”

“He’s a scholar and author for the *Shaman’s Quarterly*,” I finessed my ignorance. It was all par for the course.

“Where is he a scholar?”

“I think England or something.”

“England?”

“I think.”

“Where does he work?”

“I don’t know. Do you know where all your authors work?” Pent up laughter raged through the small room.

Cornish was unshaken, in a flat tone, “So if you don’t know where he works, how do you know he lives in Britain?”

“Okay, you’re right. I don’t know where he lives. I thought he was from England. I could be wrong.”

“And the *Shaman’s Quarterly*? Where does that come from?”

“The periodical stacks?” I toned as if any idiot would know, and another fit of laughter boomed off the tight walled quarters.

“And where was it published?”

“I don’t know! Why? Do you have a critique based on where my source is published?”

“So you don’t know.”

“No.”

“Didn’t you look at the publisher’s address when you cut it?” he rubbed his cheeks.

“Who the hell looks at the publishing address? Students of the anal card cutting society?” Howls and yelps broke out, and I was having a good time with old Cornish.

“So you don’t know who Greymalkin is, you don’t know where he lives, and you don’t know where the bulk of your case, *The Shaman’s Quarterly*, comes from—could it possibly be an excerpt from a lampoon periodical or a fantasy/sci-fi periodical? I mean some of this rhetoric, ‘...an inter-dimensional rift?...unleashing the denizens of Tartarus?’”

Fantasy? Lampoon? He was asking if the cards were **real**

for chrissakes! “What are you saying David?”

“I’m asking you if these cards don’t sound more like science fantasy than a scholarly journal.”

“Oh for chrissakes! You ran nano last semester. Remember that? You and laughing boy,” I motioned to his partner flamboyantly, “argued that the tiny machines would avert the nuclear holocaust and save the world as of last April. Well Congress **still** isn’t funding nanotechnology research and we **still** haven’t had nuclear Armageddon!”

“But how does-”

“And I don’t care what it **sounds** like-”

“Okay, where did you find the *Quarterly*? Do you have it with you?” still rubbing his face. Cornish always was the nervous type. Everyone seemed nervous, more than usual. I saw Jared itching his chest aggressively.

“Of course I don’t-”

“Then where did you find it?”

“Uh, hello? The library maybe? Ever heard about that place? Has all the books you know?” cackling laughter and bright faces, “You know, at Stanford we have a pretty good one,” more laughing. “You ought to check it out. That way you might have a Disad to our case instead of having to cast unfounded aspersions, or ask wanky cross X questions about-”

Cornish swung his small body to the taunting crowd, unable to take the mocking anymore, snatched his lone manila file and offered it up, “Kansas State University hereby makes an evidentiary challenge.”

An unreality set in. Calling for a false evidentiary challenge is almost as bad as counterfeiting cards in the first place. Besides losing the round it was political suicide. No other school would ever want to have anything to do with them again.

All was confusion. No one knew what to do. Judges, who normally did not speak during rounds, were unaccustomed to doing so now.

I was incredulous, “Come on David, what are you doing?”

Cornish ignored my appeals and opened the file. He spoke like a soldier under orders, “My partner and I have conducted a thorough investigation of Greymalkin and the *Shaman’s Quarterly* and have concluded that neither exists. Here is a list of the...” I tuned out. I was saving myself from overload, like having lost a

limb, but you can still **feel** it and **see** it even. And god! How could anything like this have happened? It didn't. It didn't happen. It's not happening.

"The entire Lexis/Nexis search of Greymalkin and Witches comes up with zero retrievals, as did the search on the University of California's Melvyl, and Gladis..." holding up the printout.

Jared was unmoved. He stared like Mem Chu's hard sandstone toward infinity, slowly pulling his nails over the same spot on his dark forearms.

"The Cambridge University Library receives, by English law, every published work in the whole of Great Britain. They are unable to confirm the existence of neither the *Shaman's Quarterly*, nor an expert on witches named Greymalkin..."

So much spinning and jockeying for position. So much nothing.

"...The Socrates system at Stanford University shows no such work, neither does the Library of Congress, in book, periodical, government documents, nor journal..."

The Greymalkin cards **could** have existed. There is no reason why they **can't** exist; for all issues of realness, they were some idea put to paper like a thousand other half-baked, half-truths about the Schwa space alien defense, or Loch-ness monsters, or anything else. Greymalkin was just as plausible.

"This is a signed fax from Janet Saxner, a librarian at Harvard's Widener Library, that states she is unable to retrieve any confirmation of the existence of an expert on Witches named Greymalkin or the *Shaman's Quarterly* in any of the University's databases, going back thirty years..."

They were not real according to the rules of the game. According to the rules, Greymalkin didn't exist. It all hinged on that rather esoteric point, what was real. Greymalkin **could** have been real. I believed in him. Why wasn't that enough?

"Elric," bellowed Bishop, "did you cut these cards?"

I was swimming. *Me? No I didn't. Jared cut them. If I didn't cut them, Jared did and that means I hand his head over on a silver platter like St. John the Baptist, or I could...well, that was untenable.* Weakness overcame me. My knees shook lightly and I was empty and chilly white flashing and staticy, and the bleached cotton. Coolness down my triceps and forearms.

"Elric, do you have an answer to these charges? Did you cut these cards?" *Jared?* I stood by him. He was silent. I did not

bother to look down, “I’m not sure where they came from.” *Jared!*
Speak up and explain this away!

“You’re not sure where they came from? I find that answer less than compelling. Did they magically materialize like vapor? Did witches make them?” someone laughed. Most did not, “When asked you said you found them in the library. You said ‘Ever heard about that place?’ You said, ‘It’s the place with all the books.’ Cornish and Wiezen say no such periodical comes up on Socrates. At which library did you find the *Shaman’s Quarterly*?”

“I don’t know which library it’s at.”

“But you suggested you located this periodical at the library!”

“No! I did not find the periodical.”

“Then why did you say you did?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“I heard you Mr. Grundle. I was sitting here and listened to you say-”

“No! I said that’s where books **are**. I never said **I** found that peri-”

“Oh for the love of god!—Okay—where did these cards **come from**?”

“My partner made the case. I don’t know where he got the cards from. I assumed-”

“Now you are saying **Jared** cut these cards?”

“I’m saying he...okay...I don’t know. Jared, where did these cards come from?”

He was as stiff as the small hairs on his head. A round head and a pale expression. He would not look my way. He stared to the back of the chalky rimmed room where the Hard Rocks and his high school friend Richard Hobbes stood. He sat gripping the ends of a file, bent and bending. His lips grew fat and purple and then he said something, “I didn’t cum-um...”

“WHAT?” shouted Bishop.

“I didn’t cut the Case. Elric did. He cut the Case and said he’d gotten it from the library,” fixated straight ahead, “He cut the Case and when I asked where he got it from, he said the library. He said he got it from the library. He said he..” Jared went on and on, as if he could have said the same thing over and over indefinitely, and that maybe if he’d just repeated himself enough everyone

would have become bored and gone home and no one would have asked him another question, because he wasn't as yet finished with the last, "...and I never saw the case before, until Elric..." I had suspended my disbelief as if Jared and his proclamations were sure evidence, if anything was, that all was a dream, and soon I would wake: *There are no conclusive indications by which waking life can be distinguished from sleep.* Such was an optional reality, one of many possibilities. It didn't **have** to be this way, and that certitude only redoubled the horror.

"Mr. Grundle, did you forge these cards? This is a very serious matter."

"No, Jared cut the cards."

"Jared says you cut the cards, you say Jared cut the cards," Bishop shook his head, exasperated, "If Jared **in fact** cut these cards, why didn't you say so to begin with? Why did you, at first, say you had excavated them from the library and **then** say you didn't **know** where they came from, and **then** say Jared cut them?"

"I didn't say I excavated-"

"Why does Kaneman say **you** cut the cards? Why does your story keep changing, Mr. Grundle?"

"Jared, stop this! Tell them!"

"He did not raise an eye, he was locked in another gaze, "You cut the cards, Elric. There's no use lying anymore. Lying always catches up with you eventually."

After briefly consulting with the other judges, Bishop stood his heavy frame, "This is a very serious offense, boys. Forging cards at a national level tournament casts serious doubts on the scruples and the long term integrity of Stanford's here-to-for well regarded forensics program. K.S.U. has presented compelling evidence of fraud, that Stanford seems unable to refute. Grundle blames Kaneman, and vice versa. This indicates to me that **someone** is lying. Who that someone is, shall be fleshed out by an investigation of Kaneman **and** Grundle and their apparently bogus Witches 1AC."

Hira added, "I want to also remark, I cannot under-emphasize my righteous indignation at this unacceptable behavior. It soils not only your university's good name but the C.E.D.A. program as a whole. We have all suffered a net loss today."

Rabin joined the castigation, "I personally will be speaking with Loc Chandler and I will be surprised if I see either of you debating, or in any way affiliated with the Debate Association ever again."

The stiff room blew cool air, and warmed. Cornish and his partner gave their plain manila folder to Bishop. No one else moved, the least of all Jared. I slid before his frigid Rodin head. An energized twist. His round head. He failed to look at me. I meandered outside in a white fog. A blast of hot air hit me like hell. Through the concrete and high wire nets, and the green lawns, and the blistering sun and I wanted to evaporate.

Chandler was furious, “Do you have any idea what this means to the program? What were you thinking, Elric my boy? What got into your thick skull?”

“I didn’t forge the cards.”

“That’s not how I hear it. I hear you practically signed a notarized **confession**, for pete’s sake! What am I going to do? What will I do?”

“It wasn’t me!” I insisted, but it was a mere formality.

“Look, I don’t care **who** forged the cards, as far as I am concerned, you **and** your partner are off the team. When we get back to Stanford you and Jared will take complete and full responsibility for this debacle. You understand me? You will say I was completely unaware—or so help me god!”

What was the use.

Jared wouldn’t speak. I asked him why he did it and he wouldn’t utter a word. I did not yell, I just asked him why he would do this to me and what I had ever done to deserve it, and he refused the reply. I left it at that. This may seem like a curious thing, but you have to understand a few things: As far as I was concerned Jared had vanished, somewhat mysteriously, if that is how you like to think about it. He was gone and as such I simply didn’t press the issue. Also, I was twenty years old. Freshly twenty. And when you’re twenty and something like this happens it is so beyond the realm of possibility, so beyond the realm of conceivable horror, that you just shut it down; you close it off and hope time or the natural powers that be, are prepared and able to negotiate all the macabre, as you’re certainly not.

Jared and I rode back to California in separate vans.

Jack tried to speak to me of all that had transpired, but I guess I wasn’t too responsive. With dry mouth, I could still see the chewy white gauze everywhere, a frosty static haze and it was blanking me out, and eating me through, and no one seemed to be able to do a damn thing. Jack kept asking what happened and I just said nothing, nothing happened, not a damn thing.