

50

dancing gay whirling dervish voodoo pixies

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It's hot and sticky. Not unbearably so but 90% humidity with straight threes on the Celsius scale makes it a bit uncomfortable to say the least. The sporadic Caribbean overcast, a brisk ocean breeze and warm showers do mitigate the unpleasantness to a point.

With space travel being a thing, there was once a huge push to transition to the Kelvin scale, because metric is metric, however Jane and John Q Citizen didn't take kindly to the arm twisting. Both government and industry blindly followed science's lead but no amount of buttering up could convince people that 273.15° was better than 0° for the point where water freezes. While realizing that one scale is as valid as another, be it Metric or Imperial, as part of the hostile push back the Fahrenheit scale came into vogue.

Anymore on Earth most people talk ambient temperature in terms of Fahrenheit (92.0°) and not Celsius (33.33°) and over the last century temperature has been reported on all three scales with Celsius winning favor off world. There was a move to create a new Qelvin scale, with water freezing at 300° but, like Esperanto, it was a farcical effort and an abject failure.

The famed *Herrero Custom Auto Works – Milling and Printing* is located on the edge of the Miramar district at the Ciudad Libertad Airport. In fact this was originally a military airport that was converted to small regional strip for civil traffic and was eventually bought out and operated by the Herrero family for the last sixty-five years. The Auto Works facility is along the north-west part of the runway and the machining operation is next to that with the car lot out front and stocked with anywhere from sixty to a hundred classic cars for sale or consignment.

What started as a cottage industry, keeping the old American “Yank Tanks” on the road during the Castro years, has helped Cuba evolve into a big fish in the classic automobile market today. Except for places like this island there are so few roads in the world one can actually drive or would be allowed to drive for that matter. Even motorcycles today are all bot piloted and are impossible to lay down. About the only things that are not controlled by high-tech, save for maybe a GPS locator chip, are bicycles and firearms. There’ve been ‘smart’ offerings on the market for these but nobody buys them.

The two runways here connect at the east end and vector out from there. Nowadays it is only in an emergency that anyone would fly onto an airstrip for a landing so they always keep the runways clear for just that eventuality. Older aircraft that need a runway to get up to speed for takeoff are currently restricted to rural airports. Anything that is not VTOL-AG are no longer welcome around population centers.

Jacob lands their Razorback on the grassy area between the runways. They lucked out and were able to get their hands on one of the nicely appointed passenger builds. Specifically, the one they got is an executive coach with the conference room, kitchen, sleeper bunks, shower and first class seating for twenty-four. Except for the pilot there is no need to suit up for this here swanky ride and, yet, for all the posh and recherché the seats are all rearward facing.

Oh, well, the military mind...

Jessica, Diego, Paula and Tyrol head down the ramp in the Annex everyday outfit of choice, that being baggie BDU pants, athletic shoes, and a t-shirt. At the foot of the ramp they run into Hector, who was waiting for them, and while Jacob takes the time to deploy the security droids then slip out of his JACC and into something more casual, these four follow Hector towards the machine shop.

The octodroid camera for the *íFamilia Cubinaza!* production team that’s shadowing Hector races ahead.

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Paula is ragging on Hector, “Look, the problem is two-fold. You either have to fully design and compile your project before handing it off to the mill-printer or, you have to give the unit your vision and let it do the design. This project, this wind turbine thingy, it’s all over the place! You way over-thought the mechanics!”

Hector is transitioning to female late at sixteen, and his voice is cracking from microbots shortening his vocal cords, “It seems to be having a problem with the gearing. The first one totally seized up, and I can salvage the turbines, but now I’m thinking that—”

"*Mamar pinga!* You're not listening!" Paula points to the tree on the turbine and laughs, "You don't need any of this gearing shit! Make the individual turbines turn independently and then tell the AI to configure all four tiers to rotate freely to generate their own power. You want it to look like a waltz, right?"

"Ya, that's the idea!"

"Trust me, on this, tell the printer what ya want and walk the fuck away from it! It'll cut the shank and mount 'em inside an hour."

"So, I really over did the design."

"Look, stick with simple sculptures to start. Okay, *maricon?*" Paula stands and with her arms crossed, "So, you finally dumped that *gavacho*, eh? He's gone-gone now I hear, right?"

"Ya, 'bout time."

Paula nods, then asks, "Hermosa?"

Hector lights up, "You remember!"

"D'uh! How could I forget?"

Diego asks, "So, when's the point of no return?"

"Nip an' tuck prep in about a week." Hector smiles at Diego, "Wish I would have done this at ten, like you. How you doin'?"

Diego thinks for a second, then, "I feel complete."

"Getting a uterus?"

"Haven't decided yet."

"For me it depends on who I settle with."

Paula points at Hector and, "If it's that blond piece of shit I'm gonna slap ya into next week. You hear me?"

Hector laughs, "You're gonna haf'ta take a number and get in line, an' it's a loooooong line."

They watch the mill-printer pull the turbine assembly back in and start noshing away, so Paula asks, "You got this? If so I'm gonna go get bitched at by Lucia."

"So, you're staying in."

"Ya, I'm gonna life up."

"Well, they don' like it." Hector jumps up and hugs Paula, "They're proud of you for doing this, an' they won't say it, *acere*. Just, ah, take your lumps. Nobody wants to see you hurt."

"What's life without risk?"

Hector looks over at Tyrol, "I'm not even going to talk to you! You're just as stupid as she is."

Tyrol laughs, "My feelings are hurt!"

"Fuck your feels, Rufie!" Hector then looks towards Jessica, "You, *rojo!* Talk some sense into our girl!"

"Hector..." Jessica shrugs, "Hermosa, in consideration my own personal safety, I'm withholding my opinion."

Paula thumbs towards Jessica then leans in towards Hector, "That's smart, Jessie is being smart and you should follow her lead. See, if I want your opinion..."

Hector chimes in with Paula, "I'll beat it the fuck outta ya."

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Jacob has stepped into the auto bays and is amazed by what he sees. It's a lot different to be here in person than seeing it on the television, now called 2D. Twenty-three fully equipped service bays here in this building, and an industrial metal fabrication and machine shop next door. With this set up they could formulate and build cars from scratch and, for all intents and purposes, they do so often. The '57 Chevrolet Belair being the most ordered custom car they build from scratch, and at five million a pop it's been lucrative for them. Painting and upholstery is farmed out to other shops to spread the love.

All the bays have something going on, but while walking down the wide isle, drinking it all in, he sees Lucia pushing a '22 Honda Civic out into the isle. It's bright red and in beautiful condition but Lucia motions for the turret truck to pull it. The thing that shocks Jacob, what unnerves him, is how hot Lucia is in her short-shorts, halter-top, and hair in a pony-tail. What intrigues him most is how sexy she is with the smoot, the sweat and her pheromones which really spikes his curiosity. Jacob thinks that, like with Paula and Adolfinia, *if this was a guy at one time she sure as shit isn't now.*

The robot rolls up and Lucia says to it, "To the chipper."

The robot raises a small screen with the text of the order and asks, "Biometric confirmation, please."

Lucia wipes her hand off on her shorts and puts it on the screen to be scanned while saying to Jacob, "Hey! Just in time!"

Jacob and Lucia follow the robot as it hoists the car and takes it out back while Lucia says, "There are just four Civics in the world. There were tens of millions of 'em, but now there are four."

Jacob wonders, "What's wrong with this one?"

“Well, nothing really. It’s a rice burner, a NOS racer, and one sweet ride!” Lucia pats the robot on the side, “Hey, put it down.”

The robot gently sets the car down and rolls back with Lucia opening up the driver’s door and saying, “Get in!”

Jacob, figuring out the seatbelt, says, “I haven’t been in one.”

“A virgin?” Lucia, laughing manically, fires it up, stomps on the accelerator and quickly shifts gears down the taxiway, “Nothing under the hood is original. The owner would have to lay out at least a million-five, but the car is only worth nine-hundred!” They hit the first corner onto the south runway, “THAT is some sweet drift!”

Jacob, fighter pilot extraordinaire, is a bit taken aback by this visceral experience, “Holy shit!”

“Now, I could rebuild it myself on the cheap, but that will bring my three civics down in price and that would be real stupid.”

“You have all of them?”

“Ya, at the bone yard in Tucson. We have a mechanical shop by the Pima Air Museum and a storage facility down the road apiece with over five-hundred cars in it. Pressurized nitrogen at sixty degrees with fifteen percent humidity. That’s three billion in automotive history sitting in the dark and cold and you have to suit up with a rebreather to get to ‘em.”

Jacob holds on as Lucia fights power-oversteer on the 140 hairpin turn where the two runways touch, “Sweet ride, you sure?”

“Racing differential in the back! This thing is so not original. You’re a Thunderbolt pilot right?” Jacob nods yes and Lucia laughs big because he’s cringing, “This car is so fucking awesome!”

As they rip down the runway, Lucia makes a call to Tucson, “Ya, dude, the blue seventy-nine civic. Shred it.” And as she starts downshifting, approaching the chipper, “Ya, I got the twenty-two and it’s gonna go bye-bye here in just a minute. Ciao!”

The car squeals to a stop and she backs it up to the chipper. Putting it in neutral they hop out. A handful of the mechanics, all beautiful and a mix of both natural female and tranny, have gathered for this send off. Wordlessly they buff the car down and as they finish they each leave a lipstick imprint of their lips as they kiss it goodbye. With that, they push it into the maw of the idle chipper.

This is all captured on camera and is something that happens at least once per season, and this year’s shred is the ‘22 Civic. Lucia drapes herself over the front hood, gives it a big kiss, stands and steps over to the button. They all blow a kiss as she turns it on.

The only missing element to this moment is Adolfinia.

Lucia slips in beside Jacob and sighs as the Civic is slowly drawn into the grinding augers inch by inch, "And now there are two. That leaves an eighth-gen euro hatchback and a tenth-gen sedan."

Jacob wonders, "You shredded two cars today, why?"

"Culling the market?" She nudges Jacob playfully with her elbow, "I paid nine-hundred-k to shred this, and the older piece of shit which cost me a quarter thirty years ago."

"Why?"

"I look to corner a model, cull the heard and auction the rest off at Barrett-Jackson or Lloyds for the big cheddar. The two I got are factory original so I just made twenty...thirty million here today." As the Civic vanishes, she nods for Jacob to follow as the rest of the crew go back to their day, "I take it she's gonna stay in?"

Jacob shakes his head, "Lucia, I wish I could say something."

"No! This is her doing. This is on her."

"Well, I got bumped up and lost my command. Her new commander, Sandoval, is every bit as good as I am. In fact I still billet on the Maiden so I can still keep an eye on her."

Lucia stews on that for a second, then, "I guess it's for the best but, just so you know, you aren't blood so watch out."

"Watch out for what?"

"She has the hots for you."

"Maria said the same thing but I don't think so."

"Jake, we all got the hots for you!" She laughs, "We were all jealous of Maria when you two got married and were ready to fight over the scraps when she divorced your ass."

"You gotta be shitting me."

Stepping into the shop she says, "No, just don't be alone with any of us bitches 'round here. We'll rape you in a heartbeat."

Jacob gives an embarrassed laugh, "Okay...you too?"

Lucia laughs and points to herself, "Especially me! I'm the one you really have to watch out for so, stay out in the open and that's for your own protection, oh!"

Stopping outside the front office, Paula standing inside and Adolfinia sitting behind the counter, Lucia says to Jacob, "Look, Dolphi is rippin' pissed. Two Marine officers showed up Wednesday morning and gave her something. She's been on a tear ever since."

“Want me to talk to her?”

“If you can? She told the producers to get the camera off her back or, as she said, she’ll kick their asses in to next week.” Lucia points towards Paula, “Look, I gotta go shit all over Paula for dramatic effect. People have been waiting for this one.”

“Don’t be too harsh.”

“Paula knows it’s all horseshit. Yea, I am pissed, but Maria said you don’t expect much ground action for some time.”

“Did she say anything else?”

“No, just that.”

“Okay, well, let me talk to Adolfina.”

Lucia bursts through the door, grabs Paula by the arm, and spits out a string of unintelligible Spanish and Cuban idioms and insults as she drags Paula down the hallway.

Jacob steps in and turns towards Adolfina sitting there at the counter, “Hey, Dolph!” His brow scrunches up, “You looked pissed.”

Adolfina looks over at the octodroid camera, shakes her head, then at Jacob and asks, “I ever tell you about Afghanistan?”

Following her queue he goes, “Bits and pieces.”

“It was April of sixty-two. That shitty U.N. op. Our captain just rotated out and our new butterbar, who was a congressman’s kid, told me to run a recon. We were drawing rocket and sniper fire from the rag-heads. I said sure because our SOP was to airdrop a fire-team out about ten clicks and we’d lurp it back at night. From high up we could call missions down with impunity. From that we would command the whole valley, but the fucker wanted me to march out the squad as a show of force—right down the center of the valley!”

Jacob is amazed, “Are you serious?”

“Ya! I told that shit for brains to get someone stupid, that he wasn’t going to use my squad for Taliban target practice.”

“What an idiot!”

“Right? Well, he instantly busted me to corporal and had me arrested for court martial. He then sent second squad out and an hour later we get a call that they were pinned down, so me and first squad grabbed our gear and a couple of floaters and high tailed it out there.”

“Weren’t you under arrest?”

“Who was going to stop me?” Adolfina laughs, “Well, we get there and got pinned down trying to extricate second squad and the air

cover we called for was delayed. We think it was OCS-Chesty."

"Why?"

"Fucked if I know! He didn't want to look bad? He told us to make due till it got on station, and by then we had five casualties and one was critical!" Adolfinia slaps an envelope on the counter and points at it for Jacob to look, "Problem was, we were stuck with no air so I took a grenade launcher, an old belt-fed, a rail and a couple of pistols on a floater, and spun it around the hill and up the backside."

"No shit!" Says Jacob as he starts to read the letter.

"Yea, I was like a God-damned psycho-billy cresting that hill and crashing the floater into a machine gun nest. I was poppin' nades all over the hilltops an' mowed down every mother-lovin' Allahu Akbar dipshit that was too stupid not to run away and, just so you know, those fuckers can't shoot for shit! Hell, on the third and last position I went total-Rufie duel wielding pistols. The cherry on top being a hand to hand I scored with a k-bar if you can believe that!"

Jacob looks up after reading the letter, "This says you bagged twenty-eight of 'em."

"I guess, I dunno? I didn't count!"

"This is why you're pissed?"

Adolfinia points at the letter, "That...pisses me the fuck off! All because of that Congressman's thigh sprout I got busted and booted out! The silver lining for catching three bullets and a purple heart, was a bronze star and with my benny's I got an MBA."

"This is awarding you—" Adolfinia puts her hand out to shut him up, so Jacob says, "You were up for this. You deserve this!"

Adolfinia leans in, "I got my health and all the stud-puppy I can handle! I got a family who I adore and who loves me back. I got my platoon who, to this day, still love me for being there and pushed for me to get my star—the only physical object in this world I cherish. There's nothing else, and I mean nothing, not a God-damned thing that I could possibly ever want in life that I don't already have!" Adolfinia points to the letter, "So, whoever came up with that little nugget of kiss my ass, fifty years after the fact, can just fuck off!"

Suddenly, Adolfinia grabs the letter and thrusts it at the producer who just walked in, "And who fucking put you up to this?"

The producer defensively puts his hands out, "Whoa! I don't know what you're talking about! I don't know what *this* is?"

Adolfinia throws the crumpled letter at him and grinds her bared teeth, "Well, read up sunshine!"

The producer reads the letter and is shocked as he looks up, "Holy crap! I assure you, we had nothing to do with this! Honestly!"

Adolfina is about to cry, but the rage overpowers her and, "Jacob, *mi socio*, can we step out and talk? I...I need some air!"

With Jacob in tow she stomps out to the runway, and realizing an octodroid was following them, Adolfina picks up a steel pipe. Before she could take that pipe to it, Jacob pulls her towards the Razorback because the camera droid is restricted from going in.

Entering the customized and ridiculously-appointed hold of this Razorback, Adolfina mutters, "*Qué bolà contigo?*"

"Hu?"

She shakes her head and gestures at the surroundings, "How much did it set you back to pimp this thing out?"

Jacob shrugs while looking around, "I don't have a clue. It's the diplomatic *excursie* model. We got six of 'em."

"Damn!" She then turns to Jacob and pokes him in the chest, "I gotta know, what the fuck is going on?"

"What do you mean what's going on?"

"You've lost ten of your capital ships and you're only six months into this fight! How you gonna win this with only eleven platforms when they have a hundred and twenty cruisers."

"Well, you can scratch four."

"You know what I'm talking about!"

Jacob nods and thinks about it, then, "What do you see?"

"Your ships getting blasted out of the fucken' sky! What do you mean what do I see?"

"Okay, and that's anywhere between fifty-five hundred to eight or nine thousand per ship, right?"

"A whole division and the crew, what?"

"That's what you see?"

She almost shouts, "Any idiot can see it!"

"Okay..." Jacob nods big, "What I see are ten, century-old beaten to shit, leaky-sieve maintenance nightmares retired through action." He then shrugs, "And complement, well you see sixty-three thousand dead. Everybody thinks we have sixty-three thousand dead where...I don't see any bodies anywhere? Those ships were vaporized so there are no bodies to count! To our eyes, doing the math, we have over sixty-three thousand MIA, technically speaking, of course."

Adolfina's eyes are blinking, "Hu?"

"Sixty-three thousand, three-hundred and forty to be exact." Jacob pats her on the shoulder, then with a hint of sarcasm, "All those people *gone missing* like that is...well, it's such a tragedy."

She rears her head back and, "Hu?" Then reaching deep into the clue bag she realizes with a slow nod, "Hoo'kay?"

Jacob nods, wide eyed, "It's all about perspective."

Adolfina quietly mutters her war cry to herself while shaking her head, "Aye-yi-yi-yi-yi...motherfucker!"

"The more worried you are for Paula, the more convincing that narrative." Letting that sink in, Jacob then huffs and points out, "And, by the way, that CMH is gonna look good on you."

"*Cabeza de pinga!*" Adolfina laughs, "You are!"

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Monique's orbiter touches down right beside the Razorback and, since Diego and Tyrol are out on the road with Paula, it is Jacob, Jessica, Lucia and Adolfina there to greet the family as they climb out.

To start with, the production crew was still having a hard time wrapping their brains around the idea that Maria Ramirez, the head of the Steel Annex, was Lucia's cousin and Adolfina's niece. They've had Adolfina's sister, Agatha, on quite a lot and she goes with the flow like a champ but their youngest sister, Ophelia, just shakes her head and rolls her eyes at all the goings on. Her youngest daughter, a Catholic priest named Syleste, was surprisingly funny on air and someone they really wanted as a regular, and they did know of another daughter but they had no idea that her Maria Ramirez was *the* Maria Ramirez.

Just last March *her* Maria, Diego and Jessica showed up out of the blue, and with the war between the SA and the Co-op this time being very public the security surrounding them was very visible. The U.S. Secret Service shadowing her and PNC swarming the perimeter made for great video, but the squad of SA troopers, suited and armed to the teeth with next-level scifi tech, and the four Thunderbolt fighters circling overhead along with four USN Bulldogs, was video extreme.

Today they were told to expect Rufus Tyrol to show up. He's bought cars from them in the past, became a close personal friend and ended up appearing on the show at least two or three times a season since the beginning, but this time it is big deal because, you could say, it's a *iFamilia Cubinaza!* exclusive. Nobody has seen hide nor hair of him since last New Year's and now they're going to get this footage

without the paparazzi or the press getting in the way. They figured he was showing up to see Paula but what they didn't expect was him showing up with Paula, and dressed exactly like Paula and, like the stunning red-letter discovery just now with Adolfina, they will not be able to ask or interrupt the flow until this day's shoot is over.

Now, last March was a mind blow for the production team but today is even more so because earlier, Diego and Jessica stepped out of the Razorback with Paula and Tyrol. That was unexpected, yes, but they kept an octodroid out watching the Razorback and saw some big guy walk out and wonder off in another direction. They picked him up again with Lucia but they could not make the connection. Obviously he was more than just a taxi-driver but while Lucia and he were racing around the runways they finally figure out he was Jacob Graves. That is, the SA-badass in the news last year, ex-husband of Maria Ramirez, father of Diego and, since they know she and Jessica are half-sisters, that's probably that connection. Oh, yes, making him family!

They get a ton of celebrities on the show, coming and going, buying cars and rubbing elbows, that being the big draw for viewers, but the Herrero's only make the effort to greet family. The shocking revelation is when Carlos frickin' Sanchez slips out of the orbiter and is introduced to Lucia and Adolfina by Jacob and then, the slap in the face to come, mixed in with the rest of the approaching family, is his mother in law, Monique Ribot. This total mind warp becomes even more so when Monique immediately hugs Lucia and Adolfina without any introductions—which means she has already met them.

Funny thing is, when this airs in the fall, the surprising wow moment for the audience is when Jessica, the hot-redhead hanger on, slips past them and faces off with Josav, Carlos' son, by the orbiter. She says something the mic could not pick up but their kiss was truly unique for the viewers. It had none of the face-eating sophomoric sloppiness and lustful hip-grindiness that is all too often passed off for passion in the media. Here, for a whole count of sixty-three, was a maturity so rare and conveying a tender-loving-knowing anticipation. Thus the moist texts during broadcast plus *#flyontheirwall...*

Before today this show was becoming a little stale and was facing cancellation after eight seasons but after today, to the surprise of everybody, it will run for another twelve followed by countless specials. What started off as a mid-season filler featuring a family of lunatic-transsexual auto mechanics, in Cuba, full of ridiculous drama and short-shorts, after today evolves into a much different show of, what is soon to be realized, in-the-know business-savvy Titans. Finally getting to see Tucson and following them at the car auctions will start this transmogrification in earnest.

And still with the drama and short-shorts.

The octodroids follow them into the front offices by the car lot and pick up Monique saying, "*Oh mon*, it is rather sticky here."

Adolfina has plopped back into the seat behind the counter, "Ninety-two, ninety. Isn't it, like, thirty percent where you're at?"

"Los Angeles is desert, yes. I should consider the comfort of being scantily clad like *mua!* Less would be even more so..." Monique has been surveying the vehicles behind her, "You know, Dolf, I find myself in a money throwing-around mood."

"Well, you automatically qualify for the Yank Tank discount."

"*Je vous remercie!* I miss cruising with Rufus. Foothill and at times Hollywood Boulevard. We even did the Redondo PCH run."

Lucia slithered up, "What are you looking for?"

"Something original, maybe?"

"I think we can hook you up..." Lucia glances at the droid then says, "Look, I have editing rights and what I'm about to say will be cut so I can speak freely. In spite of appearances, what we do is a racket, okay? A very lucrative racket. People with stupid amounts of money come and we part them from their money..."

Monique rolls her eyes and mutters to herself, "*Je sais bien!*"

Lucia is about to chuckle at that, "But you're family so I can be honest with you. Original is...a point of view. Think in terms of the Ship of Theseus, okay? With the ocean nearby nothing on this island is original. You won't find one original part on any of these cars, but they're considered original. Cars with original, from the factory, parts in them are rare and you have to go to the desert to find one."

"Those fetch the highest price."

"Yea, and they cost you the most to upkeep. Fact is, all the early stuff is shit, they're all shit. If it's original and you drive it you'll spend a small fortune in maintenance. If you park it you'll have to rob Midas to make it road worthy to sell it—and chances are you won't make a dime worth your time!" Lucia thumbs towards the shop, "Most those cars in there are originals being rebuilt yet again. People buy these things and sit on them when they should flip 'em! If an investor drags their feet and ends up back here they'll lose their shirt if we have to recondition parts and, in this biz, I'm the blue light special."

Monique asks, "Didn't a Beetle sell for, what was it reported to be, fifty-six million last month?"

"Yea, look, the bug was an icon and that one had over half of its original parts which matters at auction. It was the last factory original and the thousand or so bugs still out there are either museum

scrap, or custom show or cruising mods which excludes them from the high-end market where the big money is. The top tier does not accept cars sold as mods then reconditioned back to original specs. Most people who get into this find out too late so, if you buy a mod then to cash in you have to go for an extreme hot-rod, roadster or lowrider makeover. Fact is, just so you know, mods are usually dirt cheap but the margins are tight so flash and visibility are important.”

“Like Dolph’s little white Metropolitan.”

Adolfina laughs, “That’s a rat-fink modification, a cartoon car. Dragster differential, slicks, wheelie bars, a blown two-two-seven and shit. I can actually sell and make a fuck-ton off it because, not only does it redefine extreme, but it’s been on the show. It’s the most dumb-ass car we got but buyers are lined up around the block waiting for me to blink. I’m ready to sell but it’s a death trap if you don’t know how to drive, so it matters who I sell it too.”

“I’m looking to cruise, and money is not an issue.”

Lucia suggests, “I would go straight to modified, but if you take an original we can pull the drive train, store it, and drop some twenty-first century `quip under the hood on the cheap. Duke axial block and CVT tranny and you’ll be able to cruise the shit out of it!”

Adolfina nods, “And if you ever decide to sell we can drop the original drive train back in. No harm, no foul!”

Lucia adds, “And maybe make off like a bandit?”

Monique, offering her hand to Lucia, says, “Well, window shopping is not my *forte!*”

Stepping out, Monique quickly selects one off the bat—a deep purple, chopped-suicide ’73 Super Beetle with Lambo wheels, mirrors and lights. Way-way overpowered with two side by side five-cylinder axial blocks that pushes the engine compartment into the back seat, Lucia would not consider selling it to Monique unless she proved she could drive the thing without rolling or dying.

By all appearances Rufus taught her well because she didn’t flinch when the wheelie bars bit into the asphalt off the line and, since this thing corners like a school bus, she down shifted into the corners perfectly—giving Lucia a taste of the oversteer fear Jacob felt earlier.

Back at the lot office, with both the Super Beetle and white Metropolitan pulled for transport to Southern California, Monique is admiring a charcoal black, gangsta-chopped four-door ’69 Lincoln, known as *Frankenstein* on the show, being readied for Tucson.

With Paula and Tyrol wondering towards Lucia and Adolfina, Paula goes, “You’re selling Monique those Kamikaze mobiles?”

Adolfina laughs, "Looks like little-miss ambrosia-on-the-hoof knows how to row gears and take a corner!"

Paula is shocked, "Really?"

Rufus says, "I taught her well."

"I was impressed..." Lucia then quietly says, "After I changed my shorts." She then gruffs, "I was gonna let them go for cost, but she insisted she pay market, so I took fifteen percent off."

Watching Monique really drooling over the Lincoln, Paula says, "You know, I feel pretty generous today too."

Monique lights up as Paula and Tyrol wind their way through the cars towards her, "*Tiens! Bonne matinée!*"

After hugs and kisses, Paula asks, "Ever watch the show?"

"Bits and pieces people draw to my attention. I've thought that when I make some time I will binge on it."

"Well, these are my wheels. Meet, Frankie."

"*Oui?* A wonderful set of wheels I might add! Rufus is into the supercars of the day, but these...mods. More my style."

Tyrol adds, "This is very Hollywood Boulevard."

With Monique nodding in agreement, Paula reaches in and pulls the keys and holds them out towards Monique, "Here, it's yours."

"Oh, no! *Ma Cherie, je dois refuser!*"

"It needs to be driven, not mothballed and forgotten."

"I cannot accept this as a gift."

Paula, noticing the robotic turret truck is hauling Hector's wind turbine out with Hector, Diego, Jessica and Jacob in tow, looks back at Monique, "So, you're gonna be difficult." She tosses the keys to Tyrol who catches them, "Rufie, you got yourself a car, sweetheart!"

Tyrol feigns surprise, "What I've always wanted! Thank you!" He touches his face in deep thought then slaps the keys in Monique's hand, "I'm gonna be outta town for a while so, would you mind driving this for me till I get back? There's a sport!"

He and Paula kiss Monique, and as they head off to see the finished wind turbine, leaving her with her new car, Monique calls out, "Rufino, *t'es rein qu'un petit connard!*"

As they head towards the turbine, Tyrol asks Paula, "When Monique was here last November, how much time did she and Lucia spend together?"

“You’re wondering if Monique and Lucia planned this?”

“The Beetle and the Metro, yea.”

“I get the same vibe. I wouldn’t put it past ‘em.”

Tyrol points out, “Didn’t you say Lucia wanted to make a road track out of the runways and buy up the hotels around the site?”

Stopping at the turbine, with Hector under a sheet taking the bindings off the fans, Paula remembers, “That track with these roads here would make this island an auto enthusiasts wonderland, and that’s always been on Lucia’s mind. The economy would boom.”

Tyrol points out, “If they have Monique on the show driving those things, and they will, demand for hot rod conversions will explode.” With Paula nodding in agreement, Tyrol then asks—but not quietly enough, “Did Adolfinia get something lately?”

Jacob overheard, “You know about that? Seriously?”

Tyrol throws his hands up then points to Diego and Jessica, “Just overheard some shit! Ask those two!”

Jacob looks at them, and with Jessica tight-lipped Diego goes, “I hear Aunt Dolphi has a rabid little fan base. Dedicated.”

Jessica points to herself, “I had nothing to do with that.”

Jacob, realizing it was Monique, can only shake his head as Hector pulls the sheet off without fanfare, “Here we go!”

The octodroid picks up the audible gasps from everyone as the turbine is revealed. It is surprisingly beautiful, like a tree with branches spreading out. It has four tiers of small VAWT fans, each one in the shape of a dancer, fairy or dragonfly with either wings or skirts to catch the air. In the gentle breeze the individual fans start to spin, and inside a minute, all four tiers start to slowly rotate at different speeds. What everyone vocally thought was a waste of time over the last few weeks ended up being—catch your breath mesmerizing.

Paula was the first to speak up, “Hect, this is what you were going for?” With Hector nodding yes, Paula nods back, “Wow!”

Jessica observes, “It sounds like a swarm of bees.”

Paula asks, “What’s the output?”

Hector looks at the attached meter, “Ah, this is in Ohms?”

“Shit, wattage!” Paula just shakes her head, “You got a lot of catchin’ up after six years of *Bolillo* telephone pole up your ass.”

Hector’s face scrunches up in agreement, “Got me there, sis!” He then motions to the turbine, “We need a name, guys.”

Jacob says, "Your piece, you name it."

Tyrol points out, "We got's ta! It's a tradition 'round here."

Hector speaks up candidly, "I could'uv slipped a name under the table to someone but I don't have one so, go for it!"

After about a half a minute staring at the spinning fans, Paula says, "Whatever comes to mind, people! Anybody?"

A few seconds later it was Jacob who shrugs and volunteers, "How 'bout...dancing gay...whirling dervish voodoo pixies?"

With wide eyes, Hector says, "That's descriptive."

Paula is aghast, "That's, ah, I don't know about that one."

Hector mouths the name Jacob suggested then nods his head, "Yea, but it kinda works."

Jessica and Tyrol both nod in agreement when Diego says, "For me, that name frames it with...clarity."

Jessica fist bumps Diego with, "Mucho clarities."

Suddenly, Paula points at Tyrol, "Don't you say it, fucker!"

She was hoping to stop Tyrol from saying his signature line, something she's gotten so weary of because, much to her annoyance, somehow-someone found a way of saying those damned words each and every day throughout the six months they were on Cue Ball.

So, Tyrol, opting to deploy his weaponized puppy-dog eyes, has Paula beside herself and everyone snickering as he makes the factual observation, "But we...have a consensus, don't we?"