

113

all it takes is all you got

LCTN: SOL-3 GLENDALE, ARIZONA
CORD: SAO-0.01 (0.999au from SOL)
DATE: 2323ce-FEBRUARY-23-FRIDAY
TIME: 19:10zulu (local 11:10pst)

In the Cactus League, the Camelback Ranch of today is the third build of this spring training facility. The Dodgers bailed on it 200 years ago for another locale out in Scottsdale, then they moved to Chandler, then to the Salt River Pima res when that land went private, but when Monique bought the team five years ago she had the site out at Camelback Ranch rebuilt. Here today is the inaugural game at this new facility for the first 2323 preseason game.

Today the Dodgers play the Giants!

This is a rivalry that goes back to the 1889 World Series, that was officially locked in on the following year when the "Bridegrooms" joined the National League. The animosity between the teams is still going strong after 433 years, but now it's all in good fun. When the Dodgers meet the Giants this coming April for a regular season game it will be the 8,369th time they'll face off.

Over the last three centuries, MLB farm teams have come and gone, swapped hands and moved many times. Diego was signed up with a Double-A team, the Albuquerque Trash Pandas, but when the Dodgers needed a shortstop Monique warned the General Manager that if they bring Diego up to the majors, only she can send her back down.

So, they brought her up.

Everyone thinks that bringing Diego up into the Majors was a gimmick but the truth is, as a shortstop, the girl is fast, can pronk into the air like a springbok, catch and throw like a champ, but the real reason they brought her up is that she can get on base. Diego can't hit big, but batting .455 on her first season with the Panda's caught everyone's rapt attention. Yes, she rarely gets past first base on a hit but who cares? It's a base—and she can run like the wind on a steal!

Ever since the quinceañera, Diego has made it her mission to sample everything life has to offer, and one of those little things she thought was a kick to do was fashion modeling. Posing in swim and underwear for Victoria's Secret on the side was fun for two years, but when she turned 18 she refused to do the lingerie shoots because she said it looked stupid. No doubt they canned her, but now that she made it to the Dodger's lineup girls from all over, both young and old, got all jacked up over this development and are buying every ticket they can get their hands on and, because of that, Victoria's Secret has plastered her image up everywhere they can!

Sian Diego popping up ten-meters tall on the side banner of the Jumbotron every half-hour with her raven hair, olive skin and sultry pout, in a forest green bandeaukini, may be distracting, sure, but it's the kind of distraction that works wonders.

Very few women have made it to the big leagues, and since this non-controversy has boosted traffic and sales for Victoria's Secret, the company is paying big for the high dollar double-stacked vertical banners at Camelback Ranch—and every stadium on the days the Dodgers are playing. Since advertising is managed by a third party both Monique and the stadium's Main Office has pushed back against the General Manager who wanted those adds cut. Diego is filling seats and their coffers, yes, but watching their Head Coach lose his shit over this is the most fun she's had since she bought the team.

So, if this isn't a gimmick it's paying off like one!

Pretty much half of everyone that matters to Diego is here! From Diego's perspective, having your mother and her wife, Sasha, and your "brother" Alexander, along with his betrothed, Copper, was a given. Then your father with his wife, Michelle, along with your newly discovered sister, Brie, and stepbrother, David (i.e. Nigel three sticks), was a given too! Then your lil' brother, Seth, with Peanuts, Eight and Cap tagging along was expected. Then her sister, Jessica, with her intended, Samantha, was a given, but Sam's father and his fiancée, Boxtor and Sally, was a welcome surprise. Then showing up at the last minute is Scott, Nancy and Angela.

Now, Diego is still trying to figure out who Nigel is, and she thinks he's a scream, but the guy is boinking her aunt, Lucia, so he's doubly welcome! Then we have Adolphina here with her husband, Benjamin Cartwright, and why his name makes some people laugh is beyond her, but it is said he looks the part...whatever that means?

The two women she grew up with, Cricket and Glados, are here. Cricket came with her husband Bill and their daughter Jade, and Glados is now seeing Oscar Peña who Diego has known for as long as she can remember. Now, none of these people are blood, but to her

they're all family and that's what counts.

Then there's Monique, with her beau Tristen du Conde, who Diego adores, and with them are the La Cañada crew consisting of Carlos, Jordan, Mini-Mon, Connie, and Josav with his wife, Cloé.

Conspicuously missing are Ophelia and Léon, Agatha and Mac, then Peter and Nordi. All of them have tickets for the opening regular season game in April—which will be kind of useless since they'll end up in the executive skybox at Dodger Stadium with Monique.

Green, Stark and Sargent also have opening day tickets, and Maria has arranged for them to be invited to the skybox as well...

Rounding things off we have Esma, Victoria and the Nefer Key ambassadors for the FIS and CXi, those being Lilith and Zora. These four are the very reason that security for today is in the extreme to the n'th degree, but where Junior has become an integral component of the *décor de Herrero*, even helpful to the security attachments over these many years, the problem the Secret Service and RaSP have today is Reggie who is tagging along with the aliens.

Growing up in the *Corviale* district in Rome, *Reginaldo Bruno* had a rap sheet as long as your arm but, with the charitable IPM, our bear hug of a Reggie today has a PhD in theoretical physics. Still, the RaSP detail assigns their top agent to watch him like a hawk...

Then, as an 'oh shit' of a last second afterthought, Maria had the Secret Service hunt down Clementine Ozo, who now goes by Moen, and had them escort her up here to the skybox, above home plate.

Entering the executive suite, she is guided towards Monique who puts out a hand, "Madame Moen, thank you for coming!"

The confusion on Clem's face gives way to her realizing it is, "Monique Ribot?" Now shaking her hand, "José has mentioned you."

"Since we had José at many a family gathering, we thought it would be apropos to have you come join us as well!"

Before Clem could say anything, Maria steps up beside her and laughs, "So, ya gonna be stayin', Clem?"

"Mar!" Clem gives her a hug, asking, "How the hell are ya!"

"If I wasn't for this shooting war it'd be a lot better! So, you gonna stay and slam 'em back 'till we get stupid?"

Clem looks at Monique and asks, "It's okay?"

Monique smiles big and nods, "Your José is family to us so, *ma collègue tigresse*, that pegs you as family in our eyes!"

Maria pulls her along, "Let's go get you that drink!"

Overly chatty when nerved up, Clementine tells Maria how she wants to open a pair of satellite storefronts on both the Church Key and in New Darwin, and a full-blown restaurant in New Brisbane like the one she has in New Sydney, but she's forever been waiting on the contract. Laughing it up with beers in hand, they approach the tables behind two rows of seats along the edge of the skybox—where it's like someone hits Clem's mute button when she is offered the primo seat smack-dab next to Monique, Victoria, Esma and Michelle.

Maria makes a quick introduction of Clem while plopping down in the seat beside her and, with the rest of the ladies yucking it up as they start to grab seats around them, Michelle leans in towards Clem, "Has the Corporations Commission gotten back to you yet?"

Clem's eyes blink, "No, I haven't heard back."

"Now, I hear they're tryin' to do an end-run around ya, but nobody from Home Base will work with 'em. You have a hand in that?"

Clem smiles big, "You bet I did."

Maria asks, "What's happenin' there?"

Michelle shrugs, "The Stumpies can't get hard woods in for smoking bumble, and they can't find any distribution channels for finished product going back. Nobody will work with 'em." She then looks to Clem, "How'd you do that? Don't you guys hate each other!"

"Superficially, in the public's eye, we sure do, but behind the scenes we've locked arms." Clem shifts her weight and says to her, "My industry controls most of the woodland stands, cattle ranches and beef processors. As it is the scrap, which are historically prime cuts, they go straight to market to offset load, but I can produce both smoking and scrap cuts where, on your plate, you wouldn't know the difference! So, I cut a deal with the bar-b-que alliance. They'll phase out livestock while I supply their needs at a fraction of the cost over old school ranches and processors."

Maria adds, "Profits will skyrocket!"

Clem nods, yes, "When their costs plummet."

Michelle leans in, "How do ya do it? The marbling, that is."

"Well, everybody tries to infuse fat into the final product, but I grow the marbling first. We build a collagen web with the fat already in place, stretch the sheet out and *then* coax the muscle to grow between the gaps." She points to Michelle, "But my R-n-D peeps have been busy! We can grow a bolt of round that you'd swear to God was prime rib, and if we don't stress it I guarantee you'd bet the farm it was Wagyu." Clem grins big, "That thousand-dollar A-Five strip steak on your plate costs me only fifteen to get to the table."

Maria asks, "You haven't patented the process...why?"

Clem goes, "I have, it's just that with the backlog it takes seven to eight years to grant, but under the PLTIA I can keep refiling utility updates that restart that clock. Point is, if it's granted—then it's published and the open season countdown starts."

As an assistant approaches Esma, Michelle asks, "You'll have to increase your vertical production by, what, three-fold? Four?"

"Five, and then to move prime cuts to market I'll have to fold it all again one more time. As it is I'm struggling with the financing."

Michelle turns to Monique, "You hearing this? Want in on it?"

Esma stands and says to Clem, "I've been listening in! You're gonna have'ta fill me in when I get back!"

Monique looks to Clem, "Financing to expand production will be a load that will impact your margins, but offering a slice of the pie, shares have you, that will help boost your bottom line."

Clem cringes slightly, "No offence, but...I don't need partners up my ass while I'm trying to get shit done."

"Oh, *non-non-non ma chérie*, might I suggest equity shares? I know you know what you are doing!" Monique turns to Michelle, "Sound good to you, *mon oisillon*?"

"Can I get a slice of that?" Maria asks, and when they look at her she adds, "I got a ton of Herrero money sittin' around doin' nothin' so I might as well throw it at something?"

Clem's brow scrunches, "Equity shares?"

Maria goes, "We'll have no voice and, since we'll be in no rush to see a return, then you'll not hear a peep from us!"

Monique smiles as she turns towards Clem, "Madame, I make investments like this only if I'm prepared to write them off as a loss. With no dividends coming in I'll only be hit if I sell!"

Michelle nods, "That's two of us!"

"I am curious, what's the cost per head for bumble?"

"We're being overrun by them. Clem can take as many as she wants as long as they harvest, process and smoke locally."

Monique nods with understanding, "Local labor."

"Exactly! And, they feed the stock ponds."

Victoria asks, "Stock ponds?"

"Yabby!"

Clem points out, "We're obligated to put fifty-percent of each carcas into the ponds to feed those lil' monsters."

Maria asks, "Can you distribute the Chawdads too?"

"Tails only. FDA won't approve of a live catch on the chain."

Michelle adds, "As an invasive species they'd be a nightmare."

Clem elaborates, "So, if I close the deal with the Commission, this leaves me with no dead legs in my distribution circuit. We'll drop the smoked bumble in Atlanta, Dallas and Vegas, where I'm planning to expand production, and it'll go into the circuit back out to Prypiat!" She points out, "Look, once the smoke ring is set we wrap the cuts so, instead of finishing the cook on site, my porta-packs continue the cook while in transit! That gives me a lot of flexibility and fresh product rolling out onto the docks. We got the timing down pat!"

Monique wonders, "Transports?"

"Cast off forty-ones."

"Do you not want something more up to date?"

Victoria laughs while saying, "Crikey no! Those bloody things are stupidly overpowered and reliable as hell."

Clem adds, "I got only one on distribution duty, but I have twelve more in reserve doin' contract jobs on the side." Everyone looks at her so she goes, "Oz, he twisted my arm to pick 'em up on a receivership and it was the smartest thing we ever did! Flight hour maintenance with them is measured in minutes."

Jacob was stepping up, so as the stadium announces the National Anthem he asks, "Can I throw some green at this?"

With everyone standing, Michelle grins, "Got that covered!"

"Cool!" Jacob says as he offers his arm to Victoria.

Victoria struggles to get to her feet because she is now showing at eight-months, so she laughs, "Bugger all, bein' prego!"

As they walk to the ballistic window beside the two rows of seats, Jacob asks, "Vic, where's tha Nippers?"

"Tasmanian Open. It's great fun since it queues up along with the DanceSport event! Golf in the day and whirling dervishes at night! You should come with!" Now standing at the window, Victoria adds, "But, honestly, it's dreadful without me bubbly."

After two USAF Cerberus on security patrol do a flyover, Jacob and Victoria pop up on the Jumbotron as the stadium's announcer adds, ["In honor of our special guest, Queen Victoria, we have the Phoenix Pipe and Drum Band here to play the UK national anthem!"]

That said, two bagpipe bands step out onto the field.

The bands hold back as their drum majors approach Esma and the announcer who are behind home plate. With them facing off, the announcer asks one then the other, "You are?"

The American says, "The Phoenix Pipe Band...from Phoenix."

The mic is now held to the Brit who smiles big while saying, "Phoenix Pipe and Drum, from over the pond out of Norfolk."

The American drum major nods big and goes, "That may be, mate, but you're far from home and this is my city."

The British drum major nods big in return while saying, "Well now, that may be but...that is our queen!"

Esma works out that they'll play the anthem together, and as the bands perform 'God Save the Queen' Victoria smiles and applauds while stealthfully saying to Jacob, "This is all so nonsensically stupid."

Jacob points out, "Everyone is having a good time with it."

She nods with little lip movement, "It's part of the job."

"I'll give ya that, I can see where this can get old."

"Well, love, I shouldn't ever complain. My people love their queen, and for the life of me I've no clue as to why?"

Jacob thinks about it and quietly says, "What would the British people be without tradition? What you do may be tedious, sure, but you represent the very best of your country. Someone has to do it so try to think of it as a blessing an' not an ordeal?"

As the anthem ends, Victoria waves to the cheering crowd, "Thank you for reminding me, good sir!"

With Esma stepping out to throw the first pitch, she stops halfway to home base. As she starts to wind up, the Yank bagpipers punch out the "Baseball Charge" fanfare. With the first lady laughing at that, she steps out farther to the pitcher's mound and right as she's about to wind up the Brit pipers blow the "Cavalry Charge" bugle call.

While this is going on, Victoria asks, "Is Eazy gonna run?"

Jacob nods, "I hear she'll be announcing in April."

Victoria smiles big, "Piper would love it!"

"The pundits think she's a shoe in."

"If she can soft sell the CXi I believe you'd be right!"

"There's push back to that, but the voters want it real bad."

"Most everybody desires a purpose in life. The conglomerates

tend to overlook that the people are not their consumer vassals.”

“Well, I command a Trung. The CXi complicates my life.”

“I was under the impression that you supported the CXi?”

“I do support it, I just don’t want to be ‘in-support’ of it.”

“A wise man recently told me that I should consider my lot as a blessing and not as an ordeal! Sound words to live by, no?”

Jacob nods and goes, “Well, ya got me there, Vic!”

With the whole stadium cracking up over the bagpipes, Esma nods at the catcher and what catches everyone off guard is when she suddenly lunges forward and almost does the splits as her arm whips around—launching the baseball in a wickedly fast softball pitch. The ball seems to rise as it slaps into the glove of the catcher.

The crowd comes unglued, cheering the First Lady.

Not expecting that, the announcer is laughing as he says over the PA, [“That clocked in at seventy-eight miles an hour!”]

With Jacob and Victoria applauding and waving towards Esma, who is waving back to them, Victoria asks through clinched teeth, “That enough smiles and wavy hands for the crowd?”

Jacob laughs, and, “Yea, that’ll do!”

When the Jumbotron cuts over to Esma glad-handing the officials by home base, Victoria turns and waddles for the bathroom, saying, “Smashing, ‘cause I gotta take me the mickey!”

01001101

The players for both sides are announced as the Dodgers take to the field, but the cheers for Diego are noticeably loud and long. Unlike most sports, baseball has no coin toss or face off, it simply starts when defense is in position and the umpire says, “Play ball!”

The first Giant at bat strikes out, and the second gets on first base after a two-strike and two-ball count, but the third batter hits and the ball bounces off the ground in the infield—where Diego leaps straight up and snatches it out of the air. Before she touches the ground, Diego has already tossed it over to Second Base, who then relays it to First for a double play.

The defensive team for the Dodgers file into the dugout, and inside a minute the first up to bat is Diego. Stepping out and heading towards home plate, she ignores the whoops and hollers of the mostly new baseball fans in attendance. This, right now, is why they brought her up from the minors. Her job is to get on base, and that alone, but

in doing so she needs to get past their pitcher.

The first pitch to her was a four-seam fastball that spirals in towards her left arm. It's like Diego already knew where the thing was going and, where most players would have bodily twisted away in a panic, like they should, she simply raises both her arms and the ball almost grazes her chest as it shoots past into the catcher's mitt.

Obviously that pitch was a brushback, all to intimidate her and intentionally so, so as the umpire motions for the Giants manager to come chat with him Diego says to the catcher, who signaled that pitch, "Ya know, if my tits were any bigger I'd be taking a base."

As the catcher rolls his eyes at that, the umpire pulls the coach to the side and says, "This is how we're gonna play it?"

The coach nonchalantly shrugs, "It got away from him."

"Ramirez wasn't crowding the plate, that brushback wasn't called for." The umpire thumbs towards the pitcher, "Look, you tighten that leash or I'll eject both you and the pitcher. Get me?"

Without saying a word, the coach nods then looks to the pitcher and subtly shakes his head, *no*, while he turns for the dugout.

Taking his position behind the catcher, the umpire says to him, "Let's try this again, shall we?"

Knowing that this pitcher relies on the slider, when the ball is released Diego was ready for it to go from her ten-to-four o'clock as it starts the drop—where it meets her bat with a woody crack. The ball is lobbed out of reach over the second baseman's head, and Diego is already on First before the center fielder scoops it up.

With Diego tossing her elbow and face guard to their batboy the first baseman smiles at Diego, saying, "Lil' miss big league starts off battin' a thousand!"

She huffs, "Kiss my ass, southpaw."

He laughs big with, "That an offer, toots?"

Taking a short lead, not making it obvious that she's going to steal second, she snorts, "Only if you can keep up!"

"I got no problem keepin' it up."

Diego just shakes her head at the comment while she feigns standing there relaxed with her short lead, and with the pitcher paying her no mind he throws another slider to the batter—where Diego blasts off for a second base steal. Diego is already sliding for the plate by the time the catcher shoots it off to the second baseman.

To the cheers of the crowd Diego gets up, and while taking off

her shin guard she looks over at José who is covering third for the Giants, so she asks the second base umpire, "Time?"

When the official calls time, instead of heading towards first to drop the guard off, Diego steps over to third and throws it past the startled face of José, and with a *what the fuck* look on hers, she goes, "All it takes is all you got, so...waddya got?"

"Make a grab for it and see for yourself!"

"I haven't heard from you, so what's with that?"

José throws it back with, "Coms do work both ways."

Diego pokes him in the chest with both hands, while saying, "I'm the girl, that's my fucking line!"

The third base umpire points towards Diego and calls out, "That's a thousand dollar fine!"

Diego looks at him and, "Really, okay, what'll this get me?"

She grabs José and pulls him in and plants a big wet kiss on his lips right there at third base, where the umpire shouts over the crowd going wild in the stands, "That's ten thousand!"

Diego breaks the kiss and pushes José back while turning towards the umpire, "What if I grab his junk?"

"I'll eject you from the game!"

Diego flicks her ponytail back and, "Nope, we're good there!"

He thrusts his hand back towards second, "Take your base."

With Diego stepping back towards the base, José says over the cheering crowd, "You can grab it after the game if you want!"

She turns and points at him with a smile...

01000011-01000011-01000011-01001100-01011000

Maria is standing at the ballistic window, next to Jessica and Seth, and while looking out over the field as Diego readies to take a stab at third base, Maria quietly asks, "So...that's that, hu?"

Jessica nods, "Yup...that was that."

Clem steps up and asks, "What just happened?"

Jessica tries not to smile, "José and Sian is what happened."

Blinking with confusion, Clem asks, "They're an item now?"

Maria turns towards her, "Welcome to the family, Clem."

Clem points towards the field, "That fast?"

Jessica snorts a laugh, "Ya can't argue with results!"

As Clem shrugs, not knowing what to say, Seth goes, "We'll not keep them long after the game. They've got a lot of catchin' up."

Jessica leans in towards Seth and quietly says to him, "Like you said, Ortiz is comin' up! Sure you don't need a feather here?"

Seth shakes his head, "Naw, this will require a brick."

The General Manager, Chet Ortiz, stomps into the skybox and Monique was waiting for him in the back beside the food table, so out of earshot of the others he jabs his finger at the screen on the wall that's showing what's on the Jumbotron—which includes Diego smiling big in a floral one-piece, "This is becoming a problem!"

Picking through the *hors d'oeuvres*, Monique chirps, "Oui!"

"I can't manage what is unmanageable!"

"We warned you, good sir. We told you not to bring her up." Monique then coyly asks, "But...did she not get on base?"

"She stole second when the coach did not signal for it!"

With the next batter getting on first, Diego advances to third, and with another batter stepping up Monique asks, "*Monsieur*, I am curious, how am I as an owner now? After our many *le corps à corps* all these years, it leaves me wondering if I have made any mistakes, in spite of your endless vocal protests? Be honest!"

Ortiz gnashes his teeth, wanting to shout at her, but looks to his right then down at his feet while exhaling big, so Monique dares to say to him, "That's what I thought."

He looks up at her and, "You've been lucky."

"No...I've been coached." Monique smirks, "And since I trust only in family, who in my family knows baseball?"

Ortiz blinks his eyes and points over his shoulder towards the field and suggests, "She's my replacement?"

"Don't think for one minute I bought this team for *moi!*"

His mouth clamps shut when he says, "Then how 'bout you—"

Ortiz's nearly explosive response is cut short by Seth who, yet again, was standing there next to both of them—unseen in plain sight, "Mr Ortiz! Have you tried the *poblano de leche* cheese wraps?"

Ortiz is shocked that this teenager appeared out of nowhere where Monique smiles warmly at him, "Hello, Seth."

He smiles back, "Hello, auntie!"

Now six feet tall and gangly, only four months short of fifteen, Seth towers over Ortiz when standing next to him, and while nodding at the window overlooking the field, "You should look outside."

With his mouth released, Ortiz asks, "Is she gonna steal?"

"Home, yes." Seth points to the Jumbotron monitor and says, "You can watch it from here if you want..."

On this pitch the runner on first was taking too long of a lead, so right as the catcher throws to second Diego streaks in for a score, where the crowd goes wild—and all this time Seth never looks up as he surveys the culinary choices, "You've had fifty years in the Majors and a storied carrier at that! Seventeen as a catcher, five as a batting coach, twenty as the Cub's Field Manager, and now your eighth year as the Dodgers General Manager." Seth stops eyeing the *hors d'oeuvres* and looks up at Ortiz just long enough to emphasize this dig, "And with that elusive ring so close yet...always out of reach."

Diego just stole home, so Ortiz scowls, "I'm listening."

"Oooh, yea!" Seth reaches for the hot-dogs wrapped in bacon while continuing, "In a few seconds your Field Manager will be bitching Diego out for stealing without being signaled. The result being that on the fourth inning, she'll be told to do so and they, José Ozo, my future brother-in-law, will easily tag her out." He looks up to say, "She didn't feel it so, going forward, your Field Manager will realize that a signal for her to steal a base will be a suggestion at best. The point is today, at the bottom of the ninth, on her own initiative, instead of a solid base hit my sister will sacrifice bunt to bring in the winning run."

As Ortiz looks at Seth with suspicion, "Keep talking."

Seth hands Ortiz a small gift card while saying, "This October, bottom of the ninth, with one out and a runner on third she'll do it again and...well, you'll finally get that ring you so crave."

Ortiz holds up the card, "What's this?"

"It's an answer to a question!"

With him looking confused, Monique asks, "It's crunch time, so when would you like to start coaching her in prep for next year?"

"While as a player? The commission won't allow it!"

"A GM on the roster is not without precedent." Monique leans towards him while saying, "And nobody tells me...no."

"Double my bonus and I'll give it a shot."

"Done!" Monique smiles, "Leave the commission to me."

Ortiz thinks about it, "How 'bout during the All Stars break?"

Seth points at the card, "Now's a perfect time to open that."

As Ortiz does he huffs a laugh when he sees hand drawn stars scribbled all over it, so he asks, "How do you know these things?"

Monique gnarls, "Nobody talks about Seth so...don't ask."

Ortiz nods and points out the obvious, "The players won't like this one bit. The push back from them will be severe."

Seth nods, "Yes, we know. We're counting on it. Next year when she's announced in February they will...recoil in horror."

"So, you know they're gonna resent the shit outta her."

"Indubitably!" Seth again starts looking over the food items while he adds, "As a GM-player she'll cull a few, send some down and trade a handful, but right after the Midsummer, while covering second on a shift to right field, quite by accident the runner will spike her shin open to the bone. The torque fracture of the tibia will become so much worse when she hobbles off the field under her own power."

Ortiz realizes that, "The team would rally."

"Exactly, an' after a very difficult and contentious start, they'll make the playoffs just under the wire." Seth points up to emphasize, "Yes, this is decidedly an ass backwards method of team building however, you won't be here during next year's playoffs when they lose in the first round."

"So, if you know she's gonna get spiked you can stop it!"

"It gets old to hear people say that."

"Say what?"

"You can stop it." Seth sighs, "Buuut, ask yourself, how many players leave baseball with their heads held high? When the magic is gone a player will inevitably get washed out or sent down for someone else to cut. Sian, when she is injured, will walk off the field a hero in the eyes of both players and fans alike. She'll be out of the game but her place as General Manager will never be questioned again. Looking at all the possible outcomes, this is the best for her...and you."

With him trying to digest this, Monique adds, "We'll retain you next year as a consultant, at your current salary, all to help you continue to mold our Sian into you but, *à mon désespoir*, we will not be able to keep you past the end of the season."

Seth picks this up, "The miracle you're going to be asked to pull off will cut your consultancy short."

"Doing what exactly?"

"MLB going international had a lot of hiccups in the process, a lot of pain points to negotiate, but moving it into off-world venues with expansion teams will prove to be surprisingly effortless with you at the steady helm...commissioner."

"The owners hate my guts!"

Monique starts chuckling, "I know!"

"Yes, but they want results!" Seth smiles, "Your management style has always been the crotchety old bastard with a soft spot for the impossible underdog, and working with my sister will speak volumes to the owners when they unanimously vote you in."

Monique adds, "You'll get your retirement bungalow on Maui, but you'll have to wait another decade to enjoy it."

Ortiz nods, yes, when Seth asks, "You game?"

Monique smiles, "I only ask one favor, dear sir."

Ortiz goes, "Okay, shoot."

"I'm calling an all hands with management right before our regular season starts, and you'll really need to be there." Before he voices a protests, Monique urges, "You'll want to be at this one."

"Why?"

Seth grins big, "Well, the Sports Illustrated cover for May will be released during this meeting and, out of curiosity, Monique will pull it up for everyone to see!"

Ortiz's shoulders sag as he fights the laughter percolating up, "You're shitting me, the swimsuit issue!"

"*Oui!*" Monique snickers right along with him, "Our beloved Field Manager will have an aneurysm over this one!"

000001 | 10001