



## Series 2

### Episode 31

#### Q & A

Most of the interviews Botch and Wednesday conducted at the Pup-a-Roni were much the same as this one.

“What can you tell us about Mr. Lo Pat?” Geronimo Botch asked. He and Joe Wednesday were sitting across the table from their interviewee. Behind them, a steady stream of customers ordered various coffee concoctions while all around them students who seemed to be sewn to their seats surfed the internet and nursed the drinks they had purchased years ago.

Tarnish Jutmoll was the interviewee of the moment. “He was a debate coach. And a good one.”

“He had been at Manhattan Lodestone for a long time?”

“As long as I could remember.”

“No other schools?”

Jutmoll shook his head. “Manhattan Lodestone from day one.” He sipped from his cup of Earl Grey tea. Plain old, hot, Earl Grey tea: Starbucks was wasted on people like Tarnish Jutmoll.

“His students liked him?” Wednesday asked.

Jutmoll paused. “Like may not be the right word. They respected him, though.”

“He was tough on them, I’m guessing?”

“A little. But it paid off in the end. As a group they were very successful.”

“Was he tougher on any ones in particular that you can remember?”

Jutmoll smiled. “Mr. Lo Pat was equal opportunity tough. Gruff would be a better word, actually. I don’t think the kids ever warmed up to him, if you know what I mean. They kept their distance.”

“What about the other adults?” Botch asked. “The other coaches, I mean. Did they get along with him?”

“We worked together. Worked in a lot of tabrooms together, running things behind the scenes, that sort of thing. There were never any issues.”

“You were friends, then?”

Jutmoll paused for another sip of tea. “I wouldn’t say that, exactly.”

“You *weren’t* friends.”

“I don’t think Mr. Lo Pat was really friends with anybody, to tell you the truth, at least not in the debate universe. I guess you could say he kept to himself.”

“Didn’t pal around with the other coaches, then?”

“He definitely didn’t ‘pal around.’ He was not a pal arounder.”

“Is there a lot of paling around among debate coaches?”

“A little bit. I mean, we’ve all got our friends, and we enjoy one another’s company and maybe get together for a drink or something after a long day and the kids are tucked away.”

“A lot of heavy drinking?” Wednesday asked.

Jutmoll gave him a searing look. “Hardly, Sergeant. We do have students under our care, even when they’re asleep. A nightcap, perhaps, but never a drunken orgy. We talk shop, compare notes, relax a little—that’s about it.”

“But not Mr. Lo Pat.”

“Not that I ever recall.”

“What about enemies? Mr. Lo Pat’s enemies, that is. I gather he had a few.”

“He had...rivalries. I wouldn’t call them enemies.”

Wednesday looked at his notebook. “I understand he once got into a physical altercation with a nun, a Sister Levi al-Chaim.”

“That was a long time ago, Sergeant.”

“And he wasn’t exactly palsy with Alida Devans from Brooklyn Behemoth.”

“No, I guess he wasn’t. But Sister al-Chaim died long before Mr. Lo Pat was murdered. And if I’m not mistaken Alida was already retired when he died, or close to it. A little old to be roaming the streets of Greenwich Village wielding a samurai sword. Even if there was terminal animosity, neither of these women were in a position to act on it.”

“Maybe there were others?”

Jutmoll shook his head. “Everyone knew about these two rivalries. They were common gossip fodder among the coaches, to put it bluntly. But there were no others. Or at least no others that I’m aware of.”

“You got along with him, then? You didn’t have a ‘terminal animosity’?”

“As I said, we worked together often. And we got along perfectly fine. I hardly wanted to kill him, Sergeant. I miss him, to tell you the truth. He ran a good tabroom. That’s saying a lot about a person in this activity.”

“Well,” Botch said, nodding, “we thank you for your time, Mr. Jutmoll. You have our numbers if you think of anything else.”

“I do,” Jutmoll replied. “To be honest with you, I can’t imagine any of Mr. Lo Pat’s colleagues having anything to do with his death. Or his students. Whoever it was, it was either a random thing or someone not in his main debate life, at least as we saw it.”

“There were other parts of his debate life less main?”

Jutmoll shrugged. “He traveled extensively throughout the year. He was a judge of kids from other schools. He worked behind the scenes at various tournaments. He was a busy man, Detective. I knew him the way *I* knew him. How others knew him is something else altogether.” Jutmoll stood up. “Thank you for the tea, gentlemen. I’ll be getting back to work now.”

And with that, Jutmoll exited the coffee shop, making his crab-like walk through the crowd and heading back to the Chapel of the Holy Unwarranted Assumption. And his interview was much like all the others.

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One interview, however, was different.

They met in the penthouse suite of the Day's Ramalama EconoCot Express Inn. Halefoil Cumcut's man Mahatma Kane Jeeves served tea and biscuits to the two detectives and his employer, then retired to the kitchen during the questioning.

"I didn't know they had a suite like this at the EconoCot," Wednesday said, looking around and taking in the antique furniture, the art on the wall including two Hoppers, three Warhols and a Rauschenberg, and the waterfall-fountain bordered by wall-to-ceiling windows giving a view of the best beautiful Pup City had to offer, such as it was.

Halefoil Cumcut shrugged.

"Pretty good on a teacher's salary," Wednesday continued.

"It would be, Sergeant, if all I had was a teacher's salary." He smiled. Few people encountering Cumcut for the first time expected the scion of a mining fortune.

"So I guess Manhattan Lodestone is not exactly pay dirt for you."

"My family owns gold mines, Sergeant. We have a totally different idea of pay dirt."

"So how did you get into teaching, then, Mr. Kumquat?" Botch asked him.

"Cum-cut," Halefoil corrected him. He sat back on the couch where he was facing the two policemen seated on matching leather-upholstered wing chairs. "I was a debater in high school, Detective. I caught the bug then, and I followed it through."

"Where was that?" Wednesday asked.

"The Pierre, South Dakota, High School Okobojo Annex. Not exactly world famous. There were only three of us in the school at the time, and the other two were twins."

"But they had a debate team?"

"Well, we didn't have enough people to field a football team, did we now?" He laughed at his own joke. "My fellow students, the Twining Twins, comprised the tennis team. I comprised the debate team. That was it."

"Did you get much competition in South Dakota?"

"It was not a hotbed of forensics, no. But I traveled a little bit, to Minnesota and Chicago a couple of times. I wasn't the world's greatest debater by any means, but I did see some great debaters. I fell in love with the activity. What can I say?"

"Did you debate in college?"

“I home-schooled myself through college.”

“Oh.” Wednesday wrote something in his notepad.

“You started working at Manhattan Lodestone directly after, uh, graduating home-school college?” Geronimo Botch asked.

“It wasn’t long after, yes. I looked around, got some advice, went on some interviews and ended up at Lodestone. Simple as that.”

“You like it there?”

“It’s a great school. Everyone who is anyone graduated from there.” Cumcut narrowed his eyes. “If I’m not mistaken, you graduated from there, Detective.”

Botch stared at him. “How did you know that?”

“I’m an archivist, Detective. I know everyone who ever went to Manhattan Lodestone. It’s just the way I am. I’m like a Canadian. You know how they always know who all the other Canadians are, especially when they move to the States and pretend to be ‘American’?” He made little quotation marks with his fingers. “I’m like that with Lodestoners.”

“Very impressive.”

Halefoil tipped his head in acknowledgment of the praise.

“You didn’t know Mr. Lo Pat, then, when you started at Lodestone,” Wednesday said.

Halefoil shook his head. “He had been dead a couple of years by then.”

“So you never met the man?”

Halefoil was silent.

“Mr. Kumquat?” Wednesday prodded.

“Cum-cut.” Halefoil straightened in his chair. “I did meet him once, when I was a high school student.”

“Where was that?”

“At the NatNat tournament in Juarez.”

“Juarez, Mexico?”

“The same. The NatNat organization usually holds their finals in the U.S., but the combination of cheap dentistry, quickie divorces and do-it-yourself bullfighting proved to be too big an attraction to them that year. So they held the finals in Juarez. Very good food, I’ll say that. And not far from El Paso, if for some reason you happened to be in El Paso.”

“I wouldn’t think cheap dentistry, quickie divorces and do-it-yourself bullfighting would be that big an attraction to debate coaches,” Botch said.

“Then you don’t know much about debate coaches, Detective.”

“You say you met Mr. Lo Pat down there?” Wednesday asked.

“I wouldn’t say ‘met,’ exactly. He judged me in a round.”

“Oh. And how did that go?”

Halefoil gave a wry smile. “I lost.”

“That’s too bad,” Wednesday said.

“Not really. Debaters lose a lot of rounds. That was just one of them. Hardly memorable for that.”

“But you did remember it.”

“I’m an archivist, Sergeant. I remember everything I want to remember.”

“You weren’t so upset at losing that you decided to kill him after the round?” Wednesday asked.

Halefoil laughed. “I was back home in North Dakota immediately after the tournament, Sergeant. I’m sure there are plane records somewhere to prove it. He was killed in New York not long after the tournament, right?”

Wednesday nodded. “That’s very archival of you, to know that.”

“Well, he had just judged me a few days earlier, and then I heard on the grapevine that someone had killed him. You don’t have to be an archivist to find that memorable.”

“More tea, sir?” Mahatma asked, suddenly standing by the side of the couch, proffering the teapot.

“Ah, yes, thank you, Mahatma.” He turned to the police. “Gentlemen? More tea?”

The two policemen exchanged glances.

“We’ll be going now, Mr. Kumquat,” Wednesday said.

“Cum-cut,” Halefoil and Mahatma said in unison.

“Cumcut,” Wednesday corrected himself. “Thank you for your time.”

“No problem, gentlemen. If you want anything more, just ask.”

“And if you think of something that might be useful,” Botch responded, “you have our numbers.”

“I do indeed.”

Everyone stood, and Mahatma led the policemen to the door.

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***Does it ever turn into a drunken orgy when the debate coaches are ‘paling around’?***

***Would Mr. Lo Pat have recognized a drunken orgy if he saw one?***

*Was Halefoil Cumcut the last person to see Mr. Lo Pat alive, aside from all the other people who saw him after that?*

*Are those North Koreans a bunch of wacky guys or what?*

*Who wants to have the next dance with Bristol Palin?*

**The answers to 3.7 of these questions will be merely hinted at in our next episode: “My parents went to WikiLeaks and all I got was this lousy t-shirt, or, wouldn’t you much rather see Bill Clinton in the next Harry and Kumar movie?”**