

THE G.O.A.T
Season 1, Episode 1
"Tryouts"

Written by
Kenneth Quinnell

334 19th St. NE
Washington, D.C. 20002
quinnelk@gmail.com
850-339-4600

TITLE: TRYOUTS

FADE IN.

EXT. NATIONAL STADIUM FIELD - DAY

CONAN "THE BARBARIAN" JONES throws his first pitch of Spring Training. It hurts. Quite a bit. Jones is a 40-year-old white man who has many tough seasons behind him. He's a John Hamm type. Sweat beads roll down his forehead. It's hot enough for the air to shimmer.

THUMP! The ball hits catcher SAVOY BISHOP's glove.

Jones stands tall. Something in his back pops.

He rubs the spot. It's nothing major.

In the dugout, Team Manager HAROLD GRAY isn't concerned. He does the whole "spitting the sunflower seed shells on the dugout floor" thing. He's in his early 70s and he's just about done with this shit.

Next to him is a chubby man in his early 40s, Hitting Coach ALVIN HUEBNER. Huebner looks from Gray to Jones and back.

HUEBNER

You gonna pull him out?

Gray spits a sunflower seed. Takes his time.

GRAY

Nope.

Huebner is shocked.

HUEBNER

It's the first... it's not EVEN the first, it's...

Bench Coach CRAIG GLOVER elbows Huebner. Glover is a Black man in his late 60s. He is always calm.

HUEBNER (CONT'D)

Why not?

Gray spits.

GRAY

I know my players.

Huebner is taken aback.

GLOVER
 (under his breath)
 Dude, it's your first day...

Huebner opens his mouth. Then he shuts it.

On the field, Savoy Bishop stands up and throws the ball back to Jones. Bishop is a Black man in his late 20s, his body not yet battered by his position. He has energy and confidence.

Jones catches the ball. Above him, the American flag blows in the wind. A 51st star sits at the very center of the traditional flag. A banner across the outfield wall says "51st to First!"

Two players chat in the outfield, MARIO GAY and AJAX CLOUD. Gay is in his late 20s, muscular, but he moves slowly. Cloud is younger, a little thinner and British.

Third Base Coach TERRENCE KIMBELL stands at the edge of the infield with a bat and a ball. Kimbell is in his 40s and has the body type of a recently-retired star player, which he is.

KIMBELL
 Look alive.

Gay and Cloud jog a few feet apart and get ready.

Kimbell hits a line drive to Gay's left. Gay breaks for the ball smoothly and easily catches it.

Next to Kimbell stands Second Baseman DERRICK SPECK, who slaps his hand on his glove. Speck is in his late 20s, white, short and stout. He's quick for his frame.

SPECK
 Right here! Right here!

Gay rockets the ball into Speck's glove. Speck tosses the ball to Kimbell.

On the pitcher's mound, Jones stretches a bit. More pops and cracks. He steps off the mound and stretches even more.

In the bullpen, Closer CLINT YOUNGBLOOD warms up with catcher HAYWOOD DOMAN. Youngblood is in his early 30s, white and thin. Doman is 30-ish, white, slow and his legs barely still work, he has a wild hairdo, a funky beard that only lines his jaw and a soul patch.

Pitching Coach VERNON HOWELL and Bullpen Coach JUSTIN TANNEHILL chat while Youngblood throws. Howell is a Black man in his late 40s, schlubby, wearing glasses. Tannehill is a tall, thin white man in his late 30s.

In the outfield, Cloud shags a fly ball from Kimbell.

A door in the outfield wall opens and CAM KENDRICKS walks through. Everyone stops to look. They weren't expecting anyone else to join practice.

Kendricks strides across the field a magnificent specimen. He walks with confidence and power. He is a 30-year-old white man who is probably 6'5" and at least 245, but has close to zero percent body fat. To describe his biceps as "guns" would be an understatement.

But he moves gracefully. Everyone watches as he walks across the outfield grass. They don't have a choice.

Gray spits.

GRAY

Glover?

Glover stands up and walks to the top step of the dugout. He cups and hand over his cap to see better.

GLOVER

May I help you, son?

Kendricks steps onto the infield dirt.

GLOVER (CONT'D)

I think you're in the wrong place.

Kendricks arrives at home plate.

Glover looks back to Gray, who is not amused.

GLOVER (CONT'D)

Wha...?

Kendricks picks up a bat. He finally makes eye contact with Glover.

KENDRICKS

This National Stadium?

GLOVER

What?

BISHOP

Yessir, it is.

Gray spits.

GLOVER

This is a closed practice.

Kendricks swings the bat once. Twice.

KENDRICKS
I'm here to try out.

Glover laughs.

GLOVER
C'mon man. You have to know that's
not how it works.

Kendricks steps up to the batters box. Bishop shrugs and
throws the ball to Jones.

JONES
No.

He drops the ball and walks off the mound.

Kendricks stays at the plate, practicing his swing.

GLOVER
Am I gonna have to...

The phone rings in the dugout.

GRAY
Get it.

Gray spits.

First Base Coach CHRIS LAWTHON struggles a bit to get up and
answer the phone. Lawthon is in his early 50s. He is a big
man who walks with a significant limp from an old injury.

LAWTHON
Yello?

Gray spits.

LAWTHON (CONT'D)
Yes, ma'am.

Lawthon nods.

LAWTHON (CONT'D)
Yes, ma'am?

He looks out towards Kendricks.

LAWTHON (CONT'D)
Yes, ma'am.

He hangs up the phone and sits back down.

LAWTHON (CONT'D)
He ain't lyin'. She said he gets to
hit.

Gray spits.

Gray stands up and walks to the top of the dugout steps. He
turns and looks up at the owners box.

Inside stands LEAH OWENS, the team owner. She is a Black
woman in her 50s with natural hair, dressed in a VERY
expensive suit. She sips from a glass of whiskey as she
stares down at Gray. She doesn't flinch.

Gray stares at her.

She still doesn't flinch.

He spits.

She takes a sip of her whiskey.

He walks back into the dugout and sits down.

GRAY
Let him hit.

Kendricks smiles.

JONES
You've gotta be kidding me.

He shakes his head.

GRAY
Get in there.

Jones stands with his hands on his hips.

Gray spits.

JONES
Dammit.

Jones walks back towards the mound and picks up the ball. He
tosses it into the dugout and signals for a new one.

Bishop grabs a new ball from a pouch and tosses it to Jones.

BISHOP
Chicks, right?

Kendricks smiles as he swings the bat.

Jones gets ready. Bishop crouches into position.

Scout FERD LANGWIELER steps up onto the top step of the dugout. Langwieler is a skinny white man in his 50s. He's VERY tanned, but it's real, not spray-on.

Jones throws high and inside, brushing Kendricks back.

Kendricks smiles and gets ready.

Jones does it again.

Kendricks ducks out of the way without falling.

He gets back into the batter's box, laughing.

Jones gets angry.

JONES

Why are you laughing?

Kendricks takes a practice swing.

KENDRICKS

You know, I'm a lot less afraid of
your pitching than you are of my
hitting.

Jones takes a deep breath. The sound drops away.

He winds up.

He throws his best fastball.

Kendricks jacks it to deep center field, bouncing it off the wall.

Gray spits.

Bishop tosses Jones another ball.

JONES

(under his breath)

Lucky son of a...

Jones leans in.

This time he throws a breaking ball that cuts away from Kendricks.

Kendricks parks it in the right-field seats.

Jones takes off his hat and rubs his head.

Gray spits.

Bishop throws Jones another ball.

Jones reaches up to the back of his neck and rubs a couple of fingers through a dab of Vaseline. Without anyone noticing, he rubs it on the ball.

He goes into the wind-up and throws his fastball again.

It breaks wickedly towards the plate.

Kendricks parks it in the stands, too.

Jones turns and throws his glove towards the visitor dugout.

JONES (CONT'D)
Screw this. It's whiskey o'clock.

He walks off the field.

BISHOP
(to no one)
Seems more like Beer Thirty.

No one laughs.

Langwieler turns towards Gray.

LANGWIELER
Never quite seen that before.

Gray spits.

BISHOP
(to no one)
What? Beer thirty is funny.

He punches his hand into his mitt.

GRAY
Get me Youngblood.

Glover gets up and grabs the bullpen phone.

Seconds later, Youngblood jogs in from the bullpen.

KENDRICKS
Who is this guy?

Bishop laughs as he throws the ball to Youngblood.

BISHOP
Led the league with 57 saves last
year.

Kendricks swings the bat.

KENDRICKS
He any good?

Bishop laughs again.

BISHOP
I've seen him hit 105 on a gun.

Kendricks nods his head and smiles. He gets set.

Youngblood throws a curveball that Kendricks hits over the
right field wall.

Youngblood punches his glove. He holds it up for another
ball.

He throws a fastball, Kendricks fouls it off.

Youngblood throws another fastball. Kendricks hits it to deep
center, easily clearing the wall.

Youngblood shakes his head as if to say, if he can hit that,
good for him.

BISHOP (CONT'D)
Damn.

Gray spits.

GRAY
Bring him over.

Huebner walks up to the top step.

HUEBNER
C'mon over, son.

Kendricks hands Bishop the bat. Bishop finds that strange,
but takes it anyway.

HUEBNER (CONT'D)
What'd you say your name was,
again?

Kendricks approaches the dugout.

KENDRICKS
Kendricks. Cam Kendricks.

Huebner reaches out and shakes Kendricks' hand.

HUEBNER
Nice hitting.

Kendricks smiles.

KENDRICKS
You should see me pitch.

Huebner and Langwieler exchange a look of wonder.

GRAY
Kendricks?

Kendricks turns to look at the manager.

GRAY (CONT'D)
Report first thing in the morning.
You're going to Florida with us.

Langwieler is shocked.

Kendricks smiles. Confidently.

KENDRICKS
Yes, sir.

OPENING CREDITS.

INT. BASEBALL LOCKER ROOM

This is a TV advertisement. The production values are high, this is a company with money.

A busy baseball locker room, post-game. Conan Jones sits on a bench, one shoulder uncovered. A FAKE TEAM DOCTOR rubs the pitcher's sore shoulder.

Behind them, in various states of undress, the rest of the team does locker room things.

Jones talks directly to the camera.

JONES
You know, when you've won as many
games as I have, you can get a
little sore.

The Doctor twists his shoulder a bit. Jones yelps.

JONES (CONT'D)
 So when I need a little help, I
 reach for "Meat Heat."

He holds up a tube of a medical cream, sure to show the label.

He tosses it back to the Doctor, who catches it and then does a cheesy smile.

The Doctor squeezes the tube and a white cream squirts onto Jones' shoulder. The Doctor starts rubbing the cream in.

Jones sigh with relief. His body relaxes.

JONES (CONT'D)
 So don't forget, when YOU need a
 little save, call on "Meat Heat!"

INT. SPORTS CENTRAL STUDIO

SPORTS CENTRAL, a nightly sports news program on NBS starts up with lots of whooshes and flags and sports images and bald eagles and such.

This leads us to the very futuristic and busy Sports Central set. Blue is the dominant color. At the desk are INESTA MORGAN and MAJOR SUMRELL.

Inesta is an athletic Black woman in her 30s, with short, styled hair. She wears a tailored pantsuit. She is confident and open.

INESTA
 Welcome back.

Major is over 6' and 220 lbs. He played football and has stayed in shape, despite being in his 40s. He has a thin mustache and wears stylish glasses.

MAJOR
 We thank you for watching Sports
 Central.

INESTA
 And more importantly, our sponsors
 thank you.

Fake laughter.

While the preview goes on, the crawl at the bottom of the screen shows the following messages, on a loop:

"Forbes Most Valuable USBL Teams: 1. NY Smashers, 2. LA Cougars, 3. CAL Bulls. Least Valuable Teams: 1. NJ Titans, 2. DC Statesmen, 3. SEA Cobras."

"Jim Palmer leads Puerto Rico Open at -7."

"Mookie Betts returns as Ethan Hunt in Mission Impossible IV."

"LA Cougars star P Chris Pine ends holdout."

"Chipper Jones leads Grammy nominations with six."

"DOJ Expands Probe Into Missing Teen Epidemic."

"Superbowl-winning QB Hank Aaron signs with Tampa Bay."

Major shuffles a stack of blue note cards.

MAJOR

We now turn to the next in our series of USBL team season previews.

INESTA

That's right, tonight we're digging in with the hometown D.C. Statesmen.

MAJOR

On the eve of the first Spring Training games, let's take a closer look at the perennial cellar dwellers from the nation's capital and 51st state.

INESTA

Let's go to our field reporter in D.C., Sharon Alligood. Sharon?

CUT TO:

EXT. NATIONAL STADIUM EXTERIOR - DAY

SHARON ALLIGOOD stands before the front entrance of National Stadium. The name of the stadium is visible, as is the name "D.C. Statesmen" and the team mascot, BARNEY BASEBALL, a big floppy dog in a Statesmen uniform.

ALLIGOOD

Thanks, Inesta. It's been a busy offseason here in Washington, D.C., and, once again, the Statesmen are looking to rebuild.

Alligood is a tall white woman in her early 20s. She has long red hair and wears a calf-length skirt and matching jacket.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Last year, the Statesmen went 61-101, finishing sixth in the Eastern Conference. The three years before that, they lost at least 90 games, only finishing ahead of the lowly New Jersey Titans in any of those years. Manager Harold Gray...

Cut to shot of Gray, wearing his shades, arguing with Umpire WILLIAM SMITH on the field. He's yelling. Spittle flying. He kicks dirt on the Smith.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

...kept his job despite the team-record number of losses, but Hitting Coach Jimmy Fallon and Pitching Coach Sterling Cooper are gone. Newcomers Alvin Huebner and Vernon Howell are joining a coaching staff loaded with veterans.

The shot switches to headshots of Howell and Huebner.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Huebner came over from division rivals the New York Hawks, where he coached for one season after more than a decade as a Hawks slugger. Howell jumped up from the college ranks, where he coached Coastal Carolina to a College World Series appearance two years ago.

Cut to footage of Jones pitching. He throws a strike.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

The pitching staff in D.C. starts where it has for the last 19 years, Conan "The Barbarian" Jones. With a ton of turnover, Jones' presence will be necessary.

Montage of Jones throwing pitches in various uniforms and hairstyles, including a mullet when he was younger. His form was never pretty.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Five pitchers are gone from last year's team, including 4 of the top 6, in terms of innings pitched. But the new staff is loaded with talent, in fact, it's likely to be the team's strength this year. And Jones isn't even the best of the bunch. He only went 11-13 last year and he posted his lowest strikeout total in a decade. But it's hard to imagine this team doing well without him having a good year.

Jones tries to catch a line-drive that goes behind him, but it lands for a single.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Behind Jones is a revamped starting lineup that could be one of the best in the league AND one of the best in team history. But there are a lot of "ifs."

SKIPPER WESTMORELAND throws a strike.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

The Statesmen signed three big pitchers in the off-season, including three-time 20-game winner Skipper Westmoreland.

Westmoreland throws a pitch and it goes wild as he tweaks his ankle.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Bad news is that Westmoreland is recovering from a significant ankle injury that he got last September and he will start the season on IR.

HARRELL FLOWERS throws a pitch that he snags after a high hop. He turns and throws it to first base.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Harrell Flowers, on the other hand is in finally fully healthy. The former Seattle starter won 16 games last year on 25 starts.

(MORE)

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

He's really starting to come into his own and could be the staff ace if Jones struggles.

FRANK LASSITER strikes out a batter. Lassiter is a white man in hit mid-20s.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

The third new starter is Frank Lassiter, who won 17 and 18 games in the past two seasons with Philadelphia.

GRADY DUHART gives up a high pop-up to center field. He points straight up as a gold cross slips out of his shirt. Duhart is a Black man in his mid 20s. His hair is short.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Grady Duhart is back for his fourth season with the team, having won at least 10 games each of the last four years. Another key starter in the mix is Kit Riggins, who is back after missing most of last year with a torn ACL. If he's full strength, he could improve upon the 12 wins he got in his rookie season.

CHAKA PURVIS, a Black man in his early 20s, throws a fastball. The UMPIRE calls strike three.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

A couple of younger guys, Chaka Purvis and Melvin Rodgers also will be fighting for days in the rotation.

Shot of MELVIN RODGERS, a white man in his late 20s, striking out a batter and pumping his fist exuberantly.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Rodgers has three great pitches and Purvis hits nearly 100 mph, but neither has much in the way of game experience in the League.

Clint Youngblood strikes out a batter to win a game and throws his glove straight up in the air.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

The bullpen, on the other hand, is a bigger question mark. It starts well.

(MORE)

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Or should I say, it ends well.
Closer Clint Youngblood led the league in saves last year with 57. The set-up duo of Shawn Derby from the left and Tommy Shotwell from the right has the potential to make the late-innings pretty secure for the Statesmen.

SHAWN DERBY pitches a strike. Derby is under 6', but he's thick and has strawberry blonde hair and freckles.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

The rest of the bullpen, though is filled with castoffs like Eddie Parker and Omar Wheeler and young guys like Krishna Malay and Hector Delarosa.

Shot of PARKER, Black 20s, getting a hitter to ground into a double play.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Wheeler likely has the best resume of the group, with seven wins in relief for San Francisco last season. But the Skyhawks gave up on him and an ERA of 5.74 is probably a big part of why.

WHEELER, white 20s, gives up a home run. He looks down at the dirt.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

At the plate, the team is aiming a bit lower. They finished last in the league in runs scored, but they're bound to better this year, with a return to health and some improving prospects from the farm.

Shot of JASON DOSTER, a white man in his early 20s with a buzz cut, hitting a bloop single. Then a shot of Doster stealing both second and third base.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

Leadoff hitter Jason Doster is a legit threat. He gets a lot of contact, he gets on base and he can steal bases--34 last year. He's followed up by defensive specialist Second Baseman Derrick Speck.

Speck turns a double play. Speck beats out an infield single.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)
He would likely hit near the bottom of the lineup on a better team, but he's the best option the Statesmen have. Hitting third is Stan Lombardi.

Lombardi strikes out. Lombardi is white guy in his mid 20s. He's dirty and messy, especially for a Spring Training game.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)
The right fielder has struggled since his rookie of the year campaign three seasons ago, but he's healthy this year. The team hopes that he can stay that way despite his tough, scrappy style.

Lombardi catches a foul ball and flips over the fence into the front row of the stands.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)
Anchoring the lineup is the team's best hitter, Ronnie Pitts.

RONNIE PITTS, a very muscular Black man in his late 20s, blasts a towering shot to left field.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)
He's a powerful hitter, and is likely to get 40 home runs, even without much protection in the lineup.

Pitts hits another towering home run, this one to right field.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)
Scheduled to hit behind Pitts are Albert Whaley and Chuck Chester. Chester isn't a particularly good major league hitter, but Whaley is the more interesting case here.

Whaley hits a line drive single to right field. He is a 6' tall white man in his early 30s.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)
Whaley is in his second year and second position with the Statesmen. He moved over to first base when Chester took over the starting third base job.

(MORE)

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

But Whaley hasn't been fully comfortable at first nor anywhere in the batting lineup. Gray kept moving him around last year, but they never quite found a fit.

Whaley misses what should've been an easy catch at first base.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

The rest of the lineup isn't a much of a threat. Catcher Savoy Bishop is GREAT behind the plate, but he has yet to consistently hit major league pitching.

ALFREDO BRITO, a Dominican man in his mid-20s, cleanly fields a tough grounder and makes the throw to get the out at first.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

And shortstop Alfredo Brito doesn't have the size nor the speed to be a major factor in the offense.

Mario Gay hits a single to drive in a run.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

On the bench, Mario Gay is a good hitter and rookies Ajax Cloud from England and Cuban-American Ivan Pasco will try to make an impact.

Headshots of AJAX CLOUD and IVAN PASCO.

ALLIGOOD (CONT'D)

All-in-all, it's clear that while the team's pitching is much improved, there just aren't enough bats to get the Statesmen many runs. They'll be in a lot of games and they'll likely improve over last year, but they aren't strong contenders for the playoffs.

Back in the studio.

INESTA

Thanks for that report, Sharon.

ALLIGOOD

You're welcome.

MAJOR

My prediction: No better than
fourth.

Major holds up a hand with four fingers as everybody laughs.

Inesta straightens up her stack of papers as the show goes to a
two shot.

INESTA

Thanks, Sharon. That's it for
Sports Central tonight.

MAJOR

Now we throw you to Jeffrey Brack
and NBS Nightly News.

CUT TO:

INT. NBS NEWS STUDIO

JEFFREY BRACK sits in the NBS News Studio, which is a lot
less busy and more professional than the Sports Central set.
Blue is still the dominant color, although it's softer here.

Brack is dressed in a designer suit. He's a white man in his
mid 20s who very much talks in "game show announcer voice."

BRACK

Tonight we take a look at a spate
of related graffiti on the National
Mall. The Jefferson Memorial
becomes the fifth monument or
memorial to be "tagged" in a series
of crimes PDDC says are
"connected." A police spokesperson
declined to describe the details of
the graffiti beyond noting that it
was "disturbing," as is the fact
that I'm a grown man reporting on
amateur wall paintings.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HAROLD GRAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Harold Gray's office is like a museum to the history of the
D.C. Statesmen. There are pictures of tons of players from
the team's history in action and posing; Gray with various
celebrities; Gray on talk shows; and team memorabilia, from
bats, balls and gloves to pennants and plaques and the like.

Close to Gray's desk are three USBL "Manager of the Year" awards, none of them recent or close together in time.

On the wall next to Gray's desk is a framed list of "Gray's Rules: 1. No whining. 2. No complaining. 3. No bitching. 4. Work hard. 5. Play hard."

Gray sits behind a marble-topped desk, his sunglasses and cap on inside.

Across from Gray sits Alvin Huebner. The two have been in conversation for a while and it was clearly heated.

GRAY

That's the last I'm going to say
about it.

HUEBNER

Yes sir. It IS your team.

GRAY

For now.

HUEBNER

(with pleasure)
For now.

Jones knocks on the door and peeks his head into the office.

JONES

Skip, got a second?

Gray nods towards Huebner.

GRAY

We're done.

Beat.

Huebner gets up and walks out without saying anything else.

Jones comes in and sits in the same chair that Huebner vacated.

He throws his glove on Gray's desk.

JONES

I quit.
(beat)
I'm retiring.

Gray spits into a cup.

JONES (CONT'D)
The game has passed me by. My
window has closed.

Beat.

JONES (CONT'D)
You got all these new guys. You
don't need me any more.

Beat.

GRAY
You know, I've been around this
game a long time.

He pushes the glove back towards Jones.

GRAY (CONT'D)
And the one thing I know is you
shouldn't rush into such decisions.

JONES
But I...

Gray holds up a hand to quiet him.

GRAY
You know I'm not a man of too many
words, so let me get this out.

Jones starts to speak but stops. He nods.

GRAY (CONT'D)
Sometimes your first instinct is
your best. Especially when time is
short. On the field.

Jones nods.

GRAY (CONT'D)
Sometimes your first instinct is
clouded by things that you ought to
let go. So the thing you do is you
think on it for a bit. If there's a
right move to make, it'll shine
through.

Beat.

JONES
I get what you're saying.

Jones shifts around in his chair.

JONES (CONT'D)
But I'm not quite sure what you
mean.

Gray smiles.

GRAY
I mean that you should come down to
Florida with us. Don't play if you
don't want to. Help me break in the
new guys. It doesn't work out, you
go home.

Beat.

JONES
I don't know, I'm tired.

GRAY
What else are you gonna do? Go into
broadcasting?

They both laugh.

JONES
I don't know, I just want to relax.

GRAY
You ever gone fishing?

Jones laughs.

GRAY (CONT'D)
I think you'd like it. If you don't
play this season, let's go. I know
this great lake that that NOBODY
knows about. Well-stocked. Good
fishing. Pure silence.

JONES
I'm a city kid, but that DOES sound
relaxing.

GRAY
It is. Come to Florida?

Beat.

JONES
Alright, I think I can handle that.
But that new guy...

Gray shrugs.

GRAY
Probably on steroids.

They both laugh.

INT. SIMON MEYERS' OFFICE - DAY

The office of Washington Gazette Editor SIMON MEYERS is packed. Meyers is a hoarder. He's a man in his 60s with silver hair and a somewhat wrinkled shirt opened at the collar. He is surrounded by stacks and shelves of papers and books that protect him from any outside forces.

Sitting in the chair across from Meyers is SHIRLEY MULDOON. Shirley is in her late 20s and is a larger white woman with long blonde hair. She takes notes in a small notebook as they talk.

MEYERS
What can I do for you today,
Shirley.

Shirley shuffles her hands, not sure where to put them.

SHIRLEY
I wanted to talk about my
assignment.

Meyers balks.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
Come on, I've been stuck on city
council for how long now?

MEYERS
It's a good gig.

SHIRLEY
It's a boring gig.

MEYERS
It's a paying gig.

Shirley is offended.

SHIRLEY
You can get paid to flip burgers.

MEYERS
YOU can get paid to flip burgers.

She gets the message.

SHIRLEY
So what now?

MEYERS
Baseball.

She frowns.

SHIRLEY
Baseball?

MEYERS
Baseball. The D.C. Statesmen to be exact. Color stuff. We already have somebody covering the stats and scores and stuff.

She sighs.

SHIRLEY
Why me?

He laughs.

MEYERS
Your cousin. Obviously.

She rolls her eyes.

SHIRLEY
But I don't know anything about baseball.

MEYERS
Listen, you're making this too complicated. Do you want to be a reporter?

He reaches across the desk for a stack of folders.

MEYERS (CONT'D)
I have a stack of resumes here from people who I can pay less.

She considers pushing it. She doesn't.

SHIRLEY
I want to be a reporter.

MEYERS
Then do some reporting.

She walks out of his office and into the newsroom, which is a big open bullpen area with nearly two dozen desks. The room is a flurry of phone calls and typing.

She walks past the reporters and makes her way to the secretarial pool. She stops at the desk of RITA THOMPSON, according to the nameplate. Rita is in her 50s and she can type 140 correct words per minute, which is what she's doing right now.

Shirley holds her open notebook and pen.

SHIRLEY

Hey, Rita? Your nephew still doing all that baseball stats stuff?

Rita doesn't slow her typing.

RITA

You mean his BLOG, yes.

Shirley smiles.

SHIRLEY

What's it called? The blog?

RITA

Dr. Chad's Curiosity Shoppe.

They both laugh.

SHIRLEY

Can you give me his number?

RITA

Work-related or personal?

Shirley laughs.

SHIRLEY

Work-related.

RITA

202-555-4237.

Shirley writes it down.

SHIRLEY

Thanks.

Shirley walks back to her desk.

INT. THE PINCH - NIGHT

THE PINCH is a small-ish pub. The walls are covered with photos, flyers, old vinyl albums and graffiti. One end of the room has a bar and restrooms. The other end has a seating area and stairs down to the basement.

Shirley walks into the bar and DAN, the bartender, raises a hand to wave.

DAN
Hey, Shirley! How's it going?

SHIRLEY
Same as always, you know?

Dan is a larger man, over 300 pounds, in his early 40s. He has dusty hair with a mustache and beard. Behind him on the wall is a series of signed photos from players, including one from Jones.

He stands up from a bench and starts pouring Shirley a beer.

DAN
The usual?

SHIRLEY
You know it.

He hands her the beer. She hands him her debit card. Dan takes it and holds it up.

DAN
Keep it open?

She nods.

DAN (CONT'D)
Your cousin coming in tonight?

SHIRLEY
That's the plan.

DAN
We got the usual spot ready for him.

Dan nods towards a table in the corner that is roped off. A table surrounded by eight chairs is set and ready. A small sign hanging from the rope reads "Reserved for The Barbarian."

From the back room comes the other bartender, ANNIE. Annie is 5' tall with short, curly brown hair. She wears a D.C.

Statesmen t-shirt and jeans. She's carrying several plates of food that she delivers to a COUPLE sitting at the bar.

ANNIE
Here you go!

Jones walks in. Dan waves.

DAN
Hey there, franchise!

Jones shakes Dan's hand.

JONES
Hey, Annie.

Annie blushes.

JONES (CONT'D)
Gimme three shots of Jameson and a Killian's.

ANNIE
Coming up.

Dan hands Annie the bottle of Jameson and she starts pouring.

Shirley and Jones hug. They walk over to the roped off table and have a seat.

JONES
How you been, Shirley?

She smiles faintly.

SHIRLEY
I've been better. I've been worse.

She takes a sip of her beer.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
You?

JONES
I've been better.

Jones takes his first shot. Shirley giggles.

SHIRLEY
Haven't you been playing since the invention of the forward pass?

He laughs.

JONES
Wrong sport.

She genuinely didn't know.

SHIRLEY
I guess that's why I'm here.

Jones takes his second shot.

JONES
Why's that?

SHIRLEY
Baseball.

JONES
You don't know a damned thing about
baseball.

Shirley laughs.

SHIRLEY
That's what I told them.

Jones takes a sip from his beer.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
I need you to teach me about it.

He laughs. It's harsh and loud. Annie looks up. Jones waves.
She smiles.

JONES
Nah. I'm done.

SHIRLEY
Like DONE done?

They each take a sip of their drink.

JONES
I think I hate it.

SHIRLEY
It?

JONES
Baseball.

She takes another sip of her beer. They sit in silence for a
while.

JONES (CONT'D)

Sorry.

She shrugs.

SHIRLEY

Nah, I get it.

She sips her beer.

Jones takes his third shot. She flips through her notebook nervously.

JONES

What are you going to do next?

She stops when she finds the right page. Written on the page are the words "Chad" and "from Rita at work," along with a phone number.

SHIRLEY

I have a phone call to make.

She grabs her purse and walks out the door.

JONES

Hey Dan, put Shirley's drink on my tab.

Dan nods.

DAN

Will do.

JONES

When does karaoke start?

INT. WASHINGTON GAZETTE BULLPEN - A BIT LATER

Shirley walks across the Gazette Newsroom to her desk. She sits and opens up her notebook. She scans the page until she comes to Chad's information. She opens up a web browser and visits the Dr. Chad's Curiosity Shoppe blog.

The blog is a catalog of strange items, lost media, artifacts and mystical objects. From pop culture to ancient artifacts, the blog discusses them. Shirley scrolls past articles on the Holy Grail, the Jersey Devil and "The Fairylogue and Radio-Plays" by L. Frank Baum.

She dials Chad's phone number. He answers right away.

CHAD (O.S.)
Yo, yo, yo!

Shirley is taken aback.

SHIRLEY
Is this Chad? Chad... Uh--

CHAD (O.S.)
You definitely got the Chad-man!

SHIRLEY
Hey, Chad... man?

Chad laughs.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
Can we talk?

CHAD (O.S.)
We are, in fact, talking right now.

Shirley takes a deep breath.

SHIRLEY
In person.

CHAD (O.S.)
Sure.

Beat.

CHAD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Are you hot?

She hangs up.

INT. LEAH OWENS' OFFICE - DAY

The office is large and opulent. The walls are fine wood paneling, the desk marble-topped and the mini-bar set inside one of those old-fashioned globe things. No team memorabilia is present and the only decorations are pictures of Leah Owens with famous celebrities, mostly political and sports. The centerpiece a portrait of AUGUSTUS OWENS, a Black man in his 70s, dressed in a full tuxedo and posing regally. In the portrait, Leah stands next to the seated Augustus. She wears a crimson brooch.

Leah Owens sits behind her desk, sipping from her whiskey. Notably, she does not wear the brooch and it isn't present in the room anywhere else. In the corner is an empty display case that once held the brooch.

Across from her are General Manager JAMELLE LEWIS and Team President LEKEBRA BENJAMIN, a Black woman in her 50s who wears glasses and a gray pantsuit.

Owens pours a glass of whiskey and hands it to Lewis. Lewis is a Black woman in her 40s with long, braided hair. She is never seen without her Bluetooth headset. Lewis is the team's General Manager.

OWENS

Jamelle.

Owens pours another glass of whiskey and hands it to Benjamin.

OWENS (CONT'D)

Ladies, raise your glasses.

They do.

OWENS (CONT'D)

To us. We are the only Black women running a team in ANY professional sport. We are the only graduates of an HBCU to run a team in the United States Baseball League. We are the only Howard graduates in such a position. And we are definitely the only AKA's running THIS game.

She reaches out her glass and clinks it with the other women's glasses.

OWENS (CONT'D)

We are THE baddest-ass bitches in the nation's capital!

They all drink.

Owens finishes her drink and sets it on a coaster.

Beat.

OWENS (CONT'D)

(subtly)

Can YOU step out?

She nods towards Benjamin.

OWENS (CONT'D)

WE have some things to discuss.

Lewis stares at Owens for several seconds.

She slowly gets up and walks out of the room. Lewis slams the door behind her on the way out.

OWENS (CONT'D)
Now, let's talk about the real business.

BENJAMIN
Where are we?

Owens takes a sip of the whiskey.

OWENS
You saw the news? The rankings?

Benjamin nods.

OWENS (CONT'D)
Second-least valued franchise? Nonsense.

BENJAMIN
But it's a pre-season ranking.

OWENS
Meaning?

BENJAMIN
No matter what you do, it'll gain value over the season. Inflation. Especially if we win even one more game than last year.

OWENS
Which won't be difficult.

They both laugh ruefully.

BENJAMIN
You sure this is what you want to do?

Owens takes a sip.

OWENS
No. Not now. I expected more.

Benjamin finishes her whiskey.

BENJAMIN
Then maybe patience will be the wisest path?

OWENS
I'm not a patient woman.

Owens finishes her whiskey.

BENJAMIN
What about her?

She nods in Lewis' direction.

OWENS
Don't worry about her. Her time is
going to come.

Owens smiles.

EXT. SPRING TRAINING FIELD - DAY

SUPER: Largo, Florida

Attendance at the Statesman's Spring Training facility is sparse. A game is already in progress, with the Statesmen in the field and the NASHVILLE BLUES hitting.

Cam Kendricks stands on the mound. He winds up and throws a curveball.

It breaks past the wildly-swinging batter, LAWLER. The Umpire WINSTON STANLEY calls strike three and Bishop rockets the ball to third base.

Kendricks smiles. He's in the zone.

BEGIN MONTAGE.

Kendricks strikes out another batter.

CUT TO:

A fan puts a third K on the outfield fence.

CUT TO:

Another strikeout. Seven K's on the fence.

CUT TO:

Kendricks at bat. He deposits a 2-run homer over the right field fence.

CUT TO:

Then, Kendricks pitches another strikeout.

CUT TO:

And another strikeout.

CUT TO:

And another. He ends up with 13 K's in 5 innings.

END MONTAGE.

Coach Howell stands at the mound, patting Kendricks on the back.

HOWELL

Hell of a game, son.

Kendricks hands him the ball.

KENDRICKS

I can keep going. I'm not even winded.

Howell laughs.

HOWELL

Save it for the regular season, son.

Jones sits on the bench, watching.

INT. PDDC BULLPEN - DAY

The bullpen at the Police Department of the District of Columbia (PDDC) is active and crowded. Lots of phone calls and typing and interviewing of suspects and persons of interest and witnesses.

CODY PAIGE sits at her desk. She finishes typing a report and hits print. Cody is a Black woman, 30-ish, average build.

She stands up and walks across to the other side of the room to the printer. Notably, no one talks to her or acknowledges her presence as she winds her way through the room.

She takes the report and puts it in the inbox on the door in front of the captain's office.

She looks around, but nobody pays her any mind.

She walks down a hallway and comes to a door. The nameplate says "Vivian Carlton, Police Psychologist." Cody knocks.

CARLTON (O.S.)

Come in.

Cody opens the door and walks into the spacious office. She shuts the door behind her.

CODY

It's too much.

VIVIAN CARLTON looks her in the eye. Vivian is a white woman in her 50s, very serious face, very serious outfit and hairstyle.

CARLTON

Why? What's changed?

CODY

No one will work with me.

Carlton nods and writes in her notebook.

CODY (CONT'D)

None of them will even talk to me.

CUT TO.

The CAMERA moves through the bullpen, passing various officers as Cody alludes to them. As the camera passes each person, it pauses for a second on their face.

CODY (V.O.)

Beck and I used to be partners.

STEVEN BECK is a white man in his 50s with a dad mustache.

CODY (V.O.)

I know his wife. Now, though? He won't even talk to me.

Next is ANNE SNELL, a blonde officer in her late 20s with her hair pulled back in a pony tail.

CODY (V.O.)

When she was single, Anne and I used to double date. Now? Nothing.

Next are two male officers in their 30s sitting opposite each other. BILL TUCKER is the older one, with dark hair and a stouter frame. The smaller one is MITCHELL O'REILLY.

CODY (V.O.)

Don't even let me get started on Tucker and O'Reilly.

(MORE)

CODY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
These are the type of guys that are
going to end up dealing with IA.

Back in the room, Carlton's interest is piqued.

CARLTON
Do you know something about them?

Cody shakes her head.

CODY
Nothing. For now.

Back in the bullpen, the CAMERA moves across the room past Tucker and O'Reilly and stops at the door of CAPTAIN ALEX LEVIN. The door is open and Levin sits at her desk finishing up a report. LEVIN is a white woman with brown hair in her 40s.

CODY (V.O.)
And Levin? She enables it all.

Cody clears her throat.

CODY
I know they think I screwed up.
Like I get that. But do I deserve
to be an outcast?

Carlton writes in her notebook.

Silence as Cody waits for a response.

CARLTON
What are you going to do about it?

Cody stares at Carlton.

Then she looks out the window.

EXT. SPRING TRAINING FIELD - DAY

The Statesmen are in the field. Pitching today is FRANK LASSITER. Lassiter is in his mid-20s, a white man of average build and height.

The game is 4-3, the Statesmen are leading the ORLANDO BREAKERS in the bottom of the 7th. There are runners on first and second with one out.

Bishop signals Lassiter a two. Lassiter nods.

Lassiter winds up and throws his curve ball.

The batter, BRADY, swings and dribbles a weak grounder to Second Baseman Derrick Speck.

There's an audible POP from Lassiter's throwing elbow. He drops his glove and reaches for his elbow as he falls to the ground.

Speck grabs the ball, steps on second base and rockets the ball to first to complete the double play.

The rest of the Statesmen run off the field. Pitching Coach Howell and several MEDICS rush onto the field.

They are quickly upon Lassiter, examining his elbow.

Gray moves to the top step of the dugout, staring at Lassiter with concern.

INT. SPRING TRAINING LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The Statesmen's Spring Training locker room is a LOT less fancy than the one at National Stadium. It's a high school locker room when the Statesmen aren't there.

The team sits around, mostly quietly, waiting nervously.

The locker room door opens and Gray, Howell and Glover walk in.

GRAY

News isn't good. He's gonna need
Tommy John surgery.

Gray turns and walks towards his office.

Glover follows.

Howell pauses to address the team.

HOWELL

Obviously this means some kind of
change. We don't know what that
looks like yet, but we'll let you
know. You can go back to the hotel.

Howell turns and follows Gray and Glover.

The locker room breaks into small talk and murmuring.

BISHOP

Who's Tommy John?

Laughter.

BISHOP (CONT'D)

What?

RODGERS

It means he has to go in for surgery. On the ulnar collateral ligament.

Rodgers points to the ligament.

Bishop laughs.

Doster steps up.

DOSTER

How the hell you know that? You go to med school?

RODGERS

Naw, I had it myself. Four years ago?

BISHOP

You had a ligament?

Laughter.

RODGERS

I had Tommy John surgery.

BISHOP

It's bad?

RODGERS

Means he's out for the season.

The room goes quiet.

After a few seconds, Bishop stands up.

BISHOP

Well, what the heck?

He tosses one of his shin guards into his locker.

BISHOP (CONT'D)

We just gonna give up then?

Silence.

BISHOP (CONT'D)

We just gonna roll over and play dead?

Speck elbows Kendricks. Kendricks brushes it off.

SPECK
(under his breath)
We gonna go through the entire
motivational locker room mad lib
over here?

Laughter.

KENDRICKS
He's right.

Kendricks stands up. Everybody in the locker room turns to look at him.

KENDRICKS (CONT'D)
Obviously, I'm the new guy, but
this place seems... dead.

Murmurs.

KENDRICKS (CONT'D)
We're 4-0, right?

SPECK
In Spring Training. Don't mean
shit.

Mumbles of assent.

BISHOP
It means we're winning.

A few laughs, but less than last time.

LOMBARDI
We ARE winning.

BISHOP
I don't know about you guys, but I
LIKE winning.

Laughter, but it's supportive this time.

BISHOP (CONT'D)
I'm not used to losing. I have two
state championship rings...

Oohs and aahs.

BISHOP (CONT'D)
I'm serious. I hate losing. And
I've been here two years and that's
all we've done.

The team quiets down.

BISHOP (CONT'D)
I wanna win some games. Am I crazy?

Rumbles that he's not.

KENDRICKS
You aren't. I came here to win.

Whaley stands up.

WHALEY
You came here to what?

Derby reaches over and puts a hand on Whaley's shoulder.

DERBY
Leave it.

Whaley shakes off the hand.

WHALEY
No, seriously, this guy just got
here. He's not even on the damned
team and he's...

Jones walks into the locker room.

JONES
What's happening?

WHALEY
Nothing.

Whaley glares at Kendrick.

BISHOP
I was just saying I'm tired of
losing.

Jones chuckles and takes a seat on the bench.

JONES
Losing sucks.

BISHOP
We sure could use your help, Mr.
Jones.

Jones laughs, but he doesn't say no.

GRAY (O.S.)

If you guys had this attitude on the field, we could keep winning games.

Gray leans out of the office and makes eye contact with every single player. Then he ducks back in and shuts the door.

BISHOP

See!

Derby throws a towel at him as the room breaks up into a cacophony.

Jones scratches his head as he stares at Bishop.

INT. SUNDAY SPORTS CHAT SHOW STUDIO

A dim studio's blackness is interrupted by four spotlights that shine down on a four-member panel.

Sitting in the host's chair is MICHAEL WEISMAN. Weisman is a white man in his 50s, very professorial: glasses, white beard, jacket with patched elbows.

Behind him is a giant sign that says: The Sunday Sports Chat Show.

WEISMAN

Hello everyone and welcome to this week's Sunday Sports Chat Show.

Next to Weisman is DAVID TESSELL. Tessell is a balding white man with glasses in his 50s. He's wearing brown pants and a brown tie with a white shirt. The tie is loosened and the top button is undone.

WEISMAN (CONT'D)

With me today are four of our regular panelists: David Tessell from the Chicago Dispatch-Times...

TESSELL

From the Windy City, I bid you hello.

Between Tessell and the next guest is a small table with bottles of water on it. The next chair contains Sharon Allgood, the Sports Central reporter.

WEISMAN
 ...Sharon Alligood of NBS...

ALLIGOOD
 Glad to be here.

Next is RICKY WOMBLE. Womble is a Black man in his 30s of slightly above average size.

WEISMAN
 ...Ricky Womble of the Los Angeles
 Defender...

WOMBLE
 Always great to be here, Mike.

At the end of the row is DWAYNE MCDARIS. McDaris is a thin white man in his mid 30s. He wears a fedora.

WEISMAN
 And the 'Bad Boy of Talk Radio'
 himself, Dwayne McDaris.

MCDARIS
 Bazooooooooooooom!

INT. CONAN JONES' MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Conan Jones' stands in his VERY fancy and modern kitchen. Every appliance in it is brand new and this year's model. On the counter before him are an array of various vegetables. Jones places some kale into a food processor. A massive TV is on across the room, watching the Sunday Sports Chat Show.

INT. SUNDAY SPORTS CHAT SHOW STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Weisman looks into the camera.

WEISMAN
 Okay, first question. What are the
 chances the Statesmen will make the
 playoffs this season?

The panel members scoff and laugh.

MCDARIS
 No chance.

WOMBLE
 It'd be a long shot.

TESSELL
Somebody's dreaming.

They turn to look at Alligood.

ALLIGOOD
Well, they actually have a much
better shot than people think.

The panel bursts into laughter and umbrage.

WEISMAN
What could you possibly be talking
about?

ALLIGOOD
You know, I've been at the
practices. This IS a better team.
They've got some good new pitching,
potentially several all-stars, and
if the hitting comes together...

TESSELL
Yes, and if I buy enough lottery
tickets...

Laughter.

WEISMAN
Second question. There are rumors
about the impending retirement of
one Conan "The Barbarian" Jones.
Womble?

INT. CONAN JONES' MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Jones stuffs a cucumber into the food processor. He looks up
at the TV when he hears his name.

JONES
Uh-oh.

INT. SUNDAY SPORTS CHAT SHOW STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Womble talks to Weisman.

WOMBLE
He's definitely gone. He's old and
the parts don't work any more.

WEISMAN
Alligood?

ALLIGOOD
I think Ricky is probably right.

TESSELL
Agreed. The game has passed him by.

WEISMAN
McDaris?

MCDARIS
Uhhh.... I'm leaning towards...
YES! Yes, he is going to retire.

Weisman claps his hands.

WEISMAN
Remarkable, we all agree on something. Now, if he does retire, is he considered one of the all-time greats or no? Alligood?

INT. CONAN JONES' MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Jones holds a squash as he stares at the TV

JONES
What the hell do these fuckers know...

He drops the squash into the food processor, puts the lid on and turns it on, drowning out the show.

INT. SUNDAY SPORTS CHAT SHOW STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Alligood stares into the camera.

ALLIGOOD
Absolutely. He's a model for consistency and durability. He's top 10 in career strikeouts and he leads the Statesmen in literally every career pitching category. He's the franchise.

MCDARIS
A bit over-stated, but he certainly belongs in the Hall of Fame. Whether he's an all-time great or not? There are a LOT of pitchers in the Hall of Fame.

WEISMAN

Tessell?

TESSELL

Meh. He doesn't have a
championship.

WOMBLE

He never even got close.

ALLIGOOD

Clearly that's more about the team
than it is about Jones.

INT. CONAN JONES' MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Jones pours a dark green goop from the processor into a large
glass.

JONES

At least ONE of these people knows
what they're talking about.

Jones takes a sip and winces.

JONES (CONT'D)

Why am I drinking this shit if I'm
not playing?

He walks to a cabinet and pulls out a bottle of vodka. He
pours a shot into the glass, thinks about it for a second and
pours a second shot. He puts the vodka away, takes a sip and
smiles.

INT. SUNDAY SPORTS CHAT SHOW STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

McDaris stares into the camera.

MCDARIS

Or it could be the manager's fault.

Laughter and applause from the panel.

WEISMAN

Here it is!

ALLIGOOD

You've got a THING for Gray.

MCDARIS

I happen to like managers who are
good at their job.

WEISMAN

Savage. But the question is valid.
How does Gray still have a job?

WOMBLE

He's top 15 all-time in career
wins.

MCDARIS

Yeah, but he's top TEN in career
losses.

Laughter.

TESSELL

Hey, it's clearly more complicated
than that. You HAVE to be a good
manager to get that many losses or
you get fired.

ALLIGOOD

This is a special case, though.
When Augustus Owens passed away, he
left the team outright to his
daughter, Leah. But there were
stipulations. One was that she had
to let Gray keep managing the team
until he or his assistants felt he
could no longer do the job.

WOMBLE

That's why Owens fired the two top
assistant coaches. They were loyal
to Gray. And Owens isn't.

WEISMAN

Maybe that's why the team is
letting random players walk off the
street and into Spring Training.

Laughter.

MCDARIS

It's disgraceful. They're making a
mockery of the hard work of
hundreds of players.

WEISMAN

Why don't you let us know how you
really feel, Dwayne?

Laughter.

WEISMAN (CONT'D)
Okay, let's go to commercial.

INT. LEAH OWENS' MANSION - NIGHT

This is clearly the home of a team owner, but it doesn't seem to be Leah Owens' home. The items in it reek of an older man. Opulence drips from the walls, carpets, original artworks and historical artifacts displayed on shelves.

At the far end of the room is a desk. Owens sits, sipping her whiskey, talking on the phone.

OWENS
...everyone agrees?

GRAY (O.S.)
Yes. At this point it seems like it would be a mistake to at least not let him play out Spring Training.

OWENS
Do you really think he'll make the team?

Beat.

GRAY (O.S.)
No. You can't just come out of nowhere and be good at baseball. It's too complicated.

OWENS
And there's nothing out there about him. Anywhere.

Beat.

OWENS (CONT'D)
I've checked.

GRAY (O.S.)
Looks like he could be helpful if he's the real deal. He could help us win a few extra games. If--

Owens takes a sip from her whiskey.

OWENS
A big if.

She hangs up the phone and dials Lekebra Benjamin.

OWENS (CONT'D)
Lekebra? It's me.

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
Hey, it's late? Something wrong.

Owens takes a sip.

OWENS
Not at all. Looks like they're
having some... positive
developments down in Florida.

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
So we're going to wait it out?

OWENS
Weren't you the one who said that
the team increases in value if we
win even one more game than last
year?

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
I was.

OWENS
What if we won A LOT more games
than last year?

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
That's possible?

OWENS
I don't know. Gray is hard to get a
read on.

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
He's a company man.

Owens takes a sip of her whiskey.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
He'll try to win games. He will
make you more money.

OWENS
Good. I am so sick of that bumpkin.

BENJAMIN
If you play this right, you'll have
enough money to never have to worry
about him again.

OWENS

I can't wait.

BENJAMIN

But you'll have to. At least a little longer.

Owens hangs up. She grins.

INT. HAROLD GRAY'S SPRING TRAINING OFFICE - DAY

The Spring Training office for the manager is shared with the other coaches. Gray's desk sits in a corner. On the wall next to his desk is handwritten version of "Gray's Rules." Everyone else is set up around a large conference space made up of smaller folding tables.

The table is covered with laptops, stacks of paper, Coffee cups, various snacks and ashtrays with cigars and cigarettes.

Vernon Howell smokes a cigar.

HOWELL

Yeah, I really think we need the extra arm that could fill in. I'm just not set on the rotation. Especially after Lassiter.

Ferd Langwieler types into a laptop.

LANGWIELER

So, Rodgers is number 39?

Nods of assent throughout the room.

Langwieler types some more.

LANGWIELER (CONT'D)

That just brings us to the elephant in the stadium.

Mumbles and groans.

HUEBNER

I don't trust him. He hasn't hit major league pitching.

HOWELL

You saying Jones and Youngblood aren't majors?

Some laughter.

HUEBNER
 Man, that didn't count. Those
 weren't REAL at bats.

Chris Lawthon spits tobacco in an empty soda bottle. It's gross.

LAWTHON
 Still lit 'em up.

LANGWIELER
 It's not my decision, but...

Beat.

LANGWIELER (CONT'D)
 We'd be stupid not to give him a
 shot.

HUEBNER
 How you figure? We'll look like
 fools if he can't hit. And there's
 no way he can REALLY hit.

LANGWIELER
 Normally, I'd agree with you,
 but...

HOWELL
 I think he's legit.

GLOVER
 He sure looks the part.

LANGWIELER
 What I'm trying to say is...

HUEBNER
 C'mon, I need some real bats. This
 current lineup...

Gray whistles loudly, everyone shuts up except Huebner.

HUEBNER (CONT'D)
 ...isn't going to get the job--

Gray clears his throat.

Huebner finally catches on.

GRAY
 Ferd, finish.

Langwieler looks around the room, a little embarrassed.

LANGWIELER

What I was trying to say was that if we take him and he fails, it doesn't matter. Nobody's ever heard of him, we don't play it up or anything, we just give him the chance.

Nods of assent.

LANGWIELER (CONT'D)

He fails out, he won't even make the final roster. But if we don't put him on the 40-man roster and he signs somewhere else...

Huebner hadn't thought of that, he's starting to see it.

GLOVER

...and we're the dumbasses who let a star player get away.

Beat.

GRAY

Let me have him.

Langwieler types on his laptop.

LANGWIELER

Number 40.

Nobody is super confident about the decision.

INT. SPRING TRAINING PRESS ROOM - DAY

Gray sits down at a table at the head of the press conference. A dozen reporters sit around the room.

GRAY

Thank you for joining us today ladies and gentleman. I didn't prepare anything, but I'm going to do about 15 minutes of Q&A.

The assembled reporters include Sharon Alligood, all of the reporters from the Sunday Sports Chat Show: Weisman, Tessell, Womble and McDaris. Also in the room are a Black man in his 40s, JONNIE TRAVIS, and a woman in her 60s, EDITH MERMAN.

GRAY (CONT'D)

As always, the first question goes to Edith. How are you today ma'am?

MERMAN

I'm great as always, Harold.

They exchange a loaded smile.

GRAY

What's your question?

MERMAN

Let's start easy. How's the team gonna do this year?

Laughter.

GRAY

Well, you've seen the roster. We've had a lot of change. But when you lose 100 games, change is good.

Laughter.

GRAY (CONT'D)

I'm excited to see what my pitching staff can do. Lot of live arms.

The reporters raise their hands again.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Travis?

Jonnie Travis stands to ask a question.

TRAVIS

Yeah, speaking of "live arms," what about Westmoreland? What about Lassiter?

Gray shakes his head.

GRAY

That's tough. Those are two great ballplayers. Those are a lot of potential innings pitched that we're going to miss out on. But if we were going to have injuries anywhere, starting pitching would be the place where we have some wiggle room.

McDaris frowns. He raises his hand then puts it back down.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Even without Westmoreland and Lassiter, we have Flowers, Duhart, Purvis, Riggins AND Rodgers. If we needed, even Wheeler or Malay could be used as spot starters. I'm pretty happy with where we are.

MCDARIS

With starting pitching. How about the rest of the team?

Gray frowns at McDaris. He considers skipping to the next reporter.

GRAY

You know, we have Spring Training for a reason. Do I think we have the bats to have a good season? Absolutely. But I thought that last year and, well, you know.

MCDARIS

Sounds like you don't really have a handle on the team.

GRAY

(with emphasis, but not yelling)

Listen here. I have this team under control. Like always.

MCDARIS

So what ARE you saying?

GRAY

If you'd shut your yap and listen..

Total silence. All eyes on Gray and McDaris.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Sorry.

He coughs then pauses for a second.

GRAY (CONT'D)

What I mean is that there's a reason we play the games. And I'm satisfied that I'm getting this team in a position to win those games.

MCDARIS

That why you added an unknown walk-on to the 40-man roster?

The room is audibly shocked.

GRAY

Any questions from REAL reporters?
Ricky?

He points to Womble.

McDaris sits back in his chair, smiling and staring at Gray.

The room is chaos.

INT. SPRING TRAINING FIELD - DAY

Kendricks is on the mound. At bat are the defending champions, the NEW YORK SMASHERS. A thick third baseman, ALDA, is at bat.

In the dugout, Jones sits at the far end, away from the manager and coaches. He watches Kendricks pitch closely.

GLOVER

This Alda dude always kills us.

Duhart sits next to him on the bench.

DUHART

Don't remind me.

GLOVER

He gets you EVERY time, doesn't he.

DUHART

Told you not to remind me. Now I'm gonna be up all night with bad dreams.

Laughter.

Jones sits close to them. He joins the laughter, but he keeps his eye on Kendricks.

Kendricks rockets a fastball past Alda for strike three.

Jones whistles.

CUT TO.

Later in the game, Alda is up to bat again. He looks determined.

GLOVER
Kendricks is looking good today.

Gray spits.

GRAY
If he's consistent...

HUEBNER
This type of thing happen often here? A guy walking in off the street?

GLOVER
It never happens. Like never.

Alda fouls off a Kendricks' pitch.

HUEBNER
Here he goes. Alda's got a bead on him.

Jones watches, rapt.

GLOVER
I wouldn't be too sure on that.

Kendricks takes a lot of speed off the ball and Alda strikes out a second time, flailing wildly.

GLOVER (CONT'D)
Damn.

JONES
(under his breath)
Wow.

CUT TO.

Alda is up again. He's impatient and jumpy now.

HUEBNER
I can't remember anybody EVER striking out Alda three times. Not even in Spring Training.

GLOVER
Me neither.

Kendricks leans in for the signal. He goes into the windup, smiling when he looks away from Alda.

He drops the smile as he throws the pitch.

Alda hesitates and gets called out on a third strike.

Again.

GLOVER (CONT'D)

Damn.

Gray spits.

Jones gets up and walks into the locker room.

INT. HAROLD GRAY'S SPRING TRAINING OFFICE - LATER

Jones walks in and sits across from Gray.

GRAY

You headed home?

Beat.

JONES

You know I'm not.

A small smile from Gray.

GRAY

You feel it, too?

Jones looks at the ceiling.

JONES

Something's happening.

GRAY

Something big.

JONES

I want to be a part of it.

GRAY

Lucky for you, a roster spot just opened up.

They shake hands.

INT. ABANDONED OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

Cody Paige walks along the outside of an abandoned two-story office building, shining her flashlight through the windows, which are all dark.

She looks around. The building is in an empty industrial area.

She is alone.

She talks into her radio.

CODY
Dispatch, this is Paige.

DISPATCH (O.S.)
Copy.

Cody walks up to the front door and pulls out a key ring.

CODY
I'm about to go in. I have the key.

DISPATCH (O.S.)
Copy.

CODY
It should be empty, but, well... if you really care, the rest is in the report.

DISPATCH (O.S.)
Roger that.

Cody unlocks the door.

CODY
I'll check in after I'm done.
Should be more than...

She looks down at her watch.

CODY (CONT'D)
...15 minutes. Wait for me until then.

DISPATCH
Copy.

Cody unsnaps her holster, opens the door and goes inside.

INT. ABANDONED OFFICE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

This used to be a regular office building, but it hasn't been used in a while. In this front bullpen area, there are abandoned desks and other office items. Some of the modular cubicle walls have been torn down, others remain.

Personal items are all gone, though, and only office-related stuff remains.

Cody shines her flashlight throughout the room, dust drifting through the darkness. It lights up a lifeless phone... a lone red stapler... a "Hang In There" cat poster.

She reaches the far side of the room, having found nothing.

A crashing sound comes through a door marked "Warehouse."

She walks through the door.

Once she moves into the room, a soft red light fills the space. Cody takes a look at the closest light source. It's a standard camping lantern, but a wet, red cloth is draped over it, creating the red glow.

Numerous similar lanterns dot the room, but much of the space is in darkness.

Cody drops her flashlight and starts to scream. She covers her mouth to stifle the sound.

She pulls out her service revolver, waving it around the room. She kneels down to pick up the flashlight, holding her breath.

She shines the light around the room, getting glimpses of the crime scene.

Writing on the walls says: "Hail Satan!," "Darkness Rains," "Lift the Vail" and "Blood for Valor." Various runes and words from forgotten languages cover the walls. The words are smeared on the walls in blood, feces, semen and other less recognizable fluids.

Beneath the "Blood for Valor" message sits a table. On top of it are eight severed heads. Each pair of heads is positioned to kiss each other.

Intestines line the table and the walls like streamers.

Cody shines her flashlight towards the floor, trying to avoid vomiting. A series of blood-covered bones are laid out across the floor in the shape of a pentagram.

Cody moves closer, shining her flashlight on the center of the pentagram, where a pile of SOMETHING sits.

She gets closer and the objects are human hearts.

Cody vomits. She does her best to NOT vomit on the actual crime scene.

Once she recovers, she shines her light on the pile of hearts again.

She cocks and eyebrow and moves in closer.

She pulls a pen from her pocket and reaches out towards the closest heart.

She uses the pen to flip it away from the pile. It rolls into the light and stops still.

A hole is torn into the center of the heart. And unlike anything else in the room, this and the other hearts are completely bloodless, to the point where it looks like someone or something sucked the blood from each of them.

Cody turns towards the exit and walks towards it. She grabs her radio.

CODY

Dispatch. Double that order for backup. Send everyone! Crime scene unit. SVU. Coroner. Everyone! It's a goddamned nightmare in here!

INT. CHAD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Shirley sits across a desk from CHAD. Chad is a five and a half foot tall man with long black hair in a pony tail. He is overweight, wears glasses and wears a black t-shirt, jean shorts and sandals.

His bedroom is filled with books, papers, charts, pictures, collectible action figures, comic books, etc. Everything has a horror theme.

On the shelf behind Chad is a police radio scanner, which is on and emits indistinct chatter. Behind Chad's desk is a panic room door with a code panel lock.

SHIRLEY

Police scanner?

He nods.

CHAD

Gotta stay on top of things.

SHIRLEY

What things?

He ignores her.

CHAD
I know you.

SHIRLEY
Oh, you read my work. Thank y--

Chad shakes his head.

CHAD
No, no. I mean I KNOW you.

Shirley furrows her brow.

CHAD (CONT'D)
From Florida State.

SHIRLEY
You went to FSU?

He nods.

CHAD
In fact, we both worked on the
Flambeau together.

SHIRLEY
The Flambeau? But I don't remember--

He laughs.

CHAD
You wouldn't. I did some layout for
a couple of issues. When what's his
name was out?

Shirley thinks for a second?

SHIRLEY
John? Betts. John Betts.

CHAD
Yeah! That's the guy.

Shirley nods and smiles.

CHAD (CONT'D)
When he was sick or out of town or
whatever, I filled in.

Shirley frowns.

SHIRLEY
I'm sorry I don't remember you.

CHAD
I remember YOU.

The sentence hangs awkwardly in the air for several moments.

CHAD (CONT'D)
So... you said you had an offer for
me?

Shirley nods eagerly, glad to be out of the awkward silence.

SHIRLEY
I listened to your podcast.

CHAD
Did you subscribe to my Patreon?

Shirley laughs.

SHIRLEY
You know baseball.

CHAD
(humblebragging)
I know a little.

SHIRLEY
You know a lot. You know enough.

Chad shrugs.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
I'll pay you to teach me.

CHAD
How much?

SHIRLEY
I was thinking we'd start with--

A scrap of sound comes across the police scanner. It silences them.

CODY (O.S.)
...there's blood everywhere...

Shirley shoots Chad a concerned look.

CODY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...I've never seen anything like
it... I can't even count how many
of them there are... I think
there's a goat? It's just...
inhuman...

Shirley and Chad are stunned.

SHIRLEY
You hear stuff like that often?

CODY
(dead serious)
No.

Chad starts packing up cameras and chords and things into a leather bag. He notices that Shirley hasn't started moving.

CHAD
What are you doing?

She looks around the room like he's talking to someone else.

SHIRLEY
Um... what?

Chad zips up his bag.

CHAD
Let's go! We've gotta see this!

He walks out of the room.

She waits for a moment.

Then she jumps up and follows him.

FADE OUT.