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itty bitty bitchy kitty

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Here in the Mesa studios they are recording the Tonight Show for webcasting later. Back when they moved it to California they used to announce "from Hollywood" but the NBC studios were actually in the outlier city of Burbank. Because Burbank was not "sexy" per se the hosts then made endless remarks and snide comments about Burbank. Here in Arizona they announce that the show is "from Phoenix" but the studio is actually down the road apiece in Mesa and, just like then, the host today also makes Mesa the butt of jokes because it is notorious for being flat, stodgy, and devoid of any nightlife to speak of.

Mesa is part of the Phoenix metropolitan area, yes, but in a fit of hubristic irony the actual sound stage used for filming the show just so happens to be over the municipal border and squarely in the city of Apache Junction. Now, with the offices, the bulk of the studio complex and the tour itself in Mesa then it's kind of a moot point—but it wasn't exactly a moot point with this building sitting in, not Maricopa County but Pinal, because with the property tax falling in arrears the first year they had to puke out five-million in ransom to get it back.

Still, streaming from Phoenix sounds sexier than from Mesa even though Phoenix is 22 miles away as the crow flies.

This is Caesar's sixth consecutive appearance on the program since his debut in 2313, but this is the first time that his mate, Sheila, is a no-show. The last four appearances she was with him on stage and the audience loves her biting tongue, in fun contrast to his wacky stories, but Caesar must go at it alone for tonight.

Stepping up to the host, Mikhail Popov, they both reach out to shake hands as Mikey asks, "Where's our Sheila?"

"Sheila-babe sends her love, Mikey!"

Caesar was scheduled to be here at the beginning of the show so the studio grips had to take the ottoman out from the seating lineup during the monologue. With him showing up at the last minute the audience whoops and applauds as they bring it back out.

With the previous guests he shakes hands with Rufus Tyrol, then hugs the bombshell starlet that will be sitting between them, "Hey, hey, little Brittney! How are ya, ya sexy beast?"

"Never better an' you should know!"

As she turns away to move over to the next seat, Caesar thrusts his hips out like he's humping her, pumping his fists and rocking back and forth. Noticing the audience cracking up, and knowing first hand of Caesar's antics at Monique's, she turns around only to find him standing upright while giving her an innocent shrug.

Brittney knows better so she scolds Caesar by wagging a finger at him, and when she turns back around to move over, Caesar flairs his feathers out, bares his teeth—while menacingly lashing his claws at her from behind. Again, there is a maelstrom of laughter so she whips back around and catches him just as he retracts his claws and his feathers snap back into place.

Shaking her head, Brittney turns back towards the audience and thumbs behind her while mouthing the word, *asshole*.

With the laughter finally dying down, Mikey gestures for him to take a seat while saying, "You're late for once!"

Caesar drops on the ottoman and, "Had trouble getting a seat on a commercial flight here! My tickets for first-class were already paid for but they wanted to have me check in as cargo!"

"Good heavens, why?"

"Look at me!" Caesar looks out over the audience, pointing to himself, and they start laughing as he says, "I don't exactly blend in?"

Laughing, Mikey asks, "Wha'd you do? How'd ya fix it?"

"Good thing you asked!" Caesar motions out towards the audience and, "I was flying with my good friend, Pete, and he had to declare that I was his service animal to get me on."

"What? You, a service animal, that worked?"

"Yea, Pete said I was his comfort, Nicobar pigeon."

Tyrol laughs, "He's got the feathers to be a Nicobar pigeon!"

Mikey asks, "Yea, but but aren't you a little big for a pigeon?"

"Experimental, and you know what?" Caesar then looks out over the audience, flairs his feathers and shakes his head while saying,

"They bought it! Woo-hoo!" With his feathers snapping back into place, he grins at Mikey with a goofy, "Hook, line and sinker."

With the laughter dying off, Mikey asks, "How have you been? I mean, with Sheila now your UN ambassador you've been on the talking circuit for, you know, what was it again?"

"Aaaah, we're calling it the Polly-want-a-cracker tour! We're goin' aroun' talking about the Civil Exploration initiative."

"Isn't that the same as the UN thing?"

"The UN was trying to create a, okay, I'll say it..." Caesar does double quotes in the air saying, "Star Fleet." He shakes his head while continuing, "But this is the third time the knee-padded narcissists in the General Assembly have attempted to pull this same stupid shit."

"When you think about it, who wouldn't want a Star Fleet?"

Caesar huffs, "Okay, when it comes to government programs, the better something sounds—the worse it is! This was a power play, bureaucratic overreach! People have forgotten that this was the very reason President Willoughby bulldozed the GA way back in her day."

Mikey realizes, "Oh, yea, she did do that didn't she!"

"Yea, and this time Belgium was championing it."

"They got that vote to pass, didn't they?"

"Yes, but it pancaked! See, what the GA does is a suggestion at best, a maybe, and the perma-members of the Security Council had to cock-block it yet again! The funny thing is nobody had the funding and they were hoping the US would stupid-up and pay for it."

"President Mofid has no love for the UN."

"No d'uh there! You know it would be moronic for anybody to voluntarily subject themselves to UN oversight on anything...ever!"

"So, what's the difference with your Civil Exploration deal?"

"Well, for one, it's strictly run by academia! No governmental controls and zero bureaucratic oversight! It is exploration for the sake of exploration and, well, honestly, our thousand light year bubble we have free reign in is a gawd awful mess! There are some places we should never have colonized so we want to control that going forward."

"So, what's your role in all this?"

"Tryin' to get all the universities on board! That and helping to develop our protocols and methodologies." Caesar turns towards the audience and points his claw up in the air, "On that note, to risk sounding like a dumb-ass advertisement, we're taking applications!"

Mikey is startled, "You're taking applications now!"

"Hell yea, we are!" Caesar turns back to the audience saying, "When this thing gets goin' we're gonna need a lot of people, so if you're physically fit, and can follow instructions reasonably well, get on the N2, search for C-X-I, register now an' start taking the tests! We're thinking the first interviews will start in about eighteen months or so. Maybe twenty-four on the outside?"

Mikey wonders, "Any particular field of study you looking for?"

"Nope, we're taking all comers!" Caesar shakes his head and, "Look Mikey, there are not enough people in the sciences to do all the work. The numbers are not even close, so for what we're doin' smart enough is good enough! Right now, right now we're interested in people with a military background as early hires."

"Why's that?"

"Someone has to wear the red shirts!" With the audience cracking up at that, he turns to them and shrugs big, "Am I right?"

After a few seconds, Mikey asks, "So, what else is goin' on?"

Caesar thinks about it then, "Oh, we finally got a cat!" With the audience cheering and applauding at the news, he turns towards them and grins big, "Awesome! That's cool you all remember!"

Mikey nods, "Finally facing your fears I see!"

"Yea, Sheila and I found her while walking our dog, Chief, in Central Park. The itty bitty thing was just a few weeks old so we took it home and nursed her back to health."

"She have a name?"

"Itty Bitty!" Caesar nods then, "At first, but as time went on she became, well...Itty Bitty Bitchy Kitty."

"What?" Mikey is laughing at that, "You're serious?"

"Yea, the little furball is a handful! She's got this strange food fixation, I mean, we bought Chief one of those big-huge gravy bones for his birthday, and the little demon jumps on it, snarling and spitting and clawing at him! It was a riot, Chief with his sad eyes whimpering at us going 'that's my bone!' A hundred pounds of Rottweiler cowering to a ten-week old kitten! After a few months it got so bad we had to lock her up when we had people over for dinner!"

With the audience laughing at this, Mikey asks, "How bad?"

"Well, it's like this..." Caesar shifts on the ottoman and sits up as if he had a plate in his lap, "We'd all be sitting there and, all of a sudden, someone would say, 'where's my drumstick?' Caesar then

points to the audience and asks, "Anyone want to take a stab who the culprit was, anybody?"

A couple of people shout, "Itty bitty!"

"Damn, that was a good guess!" He then turns to Mikey and shakes his head, "But, that wasn't the worst of it!"

Mikey smiles, "Okay, I'll bite, what was the worst of it?"

"Glad you asked!" Caesar points back towards the audience and, "Just last month, Colonel Pete, there, he had a hot dog on a bun and right as he is about to sink his teeth into it here comes..." Caesar puts his hand up beside his head, where his ear would be if he had one, and leans out towards the studio audience."

The audience shouts, "Itty Bitty!"

Caesar throws his hands up, "How'd you guess!" He makes a sweeping then a spinning motion with his clawed hand while he says, "There was this black streak past Pete's face and...there goes my cat, spiraling through the air with his hot dog in her claws!"

When the laughter dies down, Mikey looks at Caesar while gesturing to the audience, "Colonel Pete, you say?"

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Mikey is laughing, "That really happened?"

Caesar nods big, "Honest to god, that was not a story I just pulled out of my ass! Our cat is frickin' nuts alright."

Across the facility, due west by one nautical mile, between the entrances to the tour and the studio itself, is the studio commissary that serves both the studio and the public. As a cafeteria it offers an unbelievable variety of cuisine at better than reasonable prices. To help draw in paying customers cast members from on-site productions are encouraged to frequent the commissary but "stars" usually end up at the Eighth-Tee which is a sit down private restaurant hidden away on the other side of the commissary kitchen. The studio is sitting on what used to be residential tracts wrapped around an eighteen hole golf course, so hence the Eighth-Tee. Even though this hidden cubby hole serves the "beautiful people" anyone who comes through that door will not be turned away—but one has to know about it to find it.

Mikey, and the show's executive producer for the last twenty years, Stewart Myers, brought Caesar, Peter, Jessica and Rufus Tyrol here for dinner. Where Monique holds dominion over the movie industry quietly from the shadows, it is the pompous and brash Myers who is at the tippy top of the heap in the N2 broadcasting circles. So,

if one shows some talent and wants a shot at celebrity and stardom all they have to do is to sell their soul and ass to Myers, but where Monique shuns the casting couch Myers is notorious for bare-backing those owing to him into oblivion.

In his mind it's not a casting couch if it's fair exchange.

Peter, in his khaki Marine service uniform, laughs as he adds, "I think the food was starting to get cold by the time we stopped laughing at that one."

Caesar points up in the air, "By then we had to put an APB out on the little fucker because another hot dog went missing!"

Myers laughs and sighs, "You didn't get any of this on video?"

"We got a few vids of her steeling chicken out from people's plates. Think you can use those?"

"People love cats! I can find a use for them."

"Sheila and I are in them."

"All right! That's even better!"

"Also, we have some of Itty Bitty taking Chief's food."

"Is he whimpering into the camera?"

Caesar laughs, "Crying like a little bitch."

Myers is excited by the prospect, "Yea, I can use 'em!"

Caesar takes a bite of prime rib, saying, "I want to thank you for dinner, Stewie. I know I can be a bit pricey to feed."

"Ah, naw! Anytime you are in town chat me up! I know this great steakhouse in Scottsdale..." Myers points at him with a smile, "Trust me, you'll fit right in!"

"You mean, stand out like a neon sign."

Peter pops Caesar in the arm, "By the way, ya feather duster, thanks a lot for pointing me out. Now I'm on the damned TV."

Mikey interjects, "Nyet, Peter! You were *fantastika* in your uniform! Everybody loves a man in uniform."

Myers asks, "Aren't you a little young to be a Colonel?"

Mikey raises his glass to Jessica and nods, "Young or not, I have to say if it gets him the beautiful women I am jealous!"

Tyrol laughs, "I'd have to agree, but Jessica is his sister."

Myers and Mikey both rear back slightly in disbelief, "Sister?" Myers then adds, "Well, if you're not taken, my son is available!"

Peter shakes his head with a warning, "I wouldn't wish that on him, she'll break his balls. Her body count is high."

Caesar agrees, "I've seen her in action, dude. Bad-bad plan!"

Myers laughs big, "Well, if that's the case, I'm available!"

Mikey shakes his head then nudges him with an elbow while he thumbs behind himself, "*Nazad linii.*"

"Wha? My Russian sucks."

"Back of the line, behind me, *glupyy.*"

Jessica shakes her head while laughing, "You guys are pigs!" She points to Myers, "But, I tell ya what, Stewie."

Myers leans in with a leering grin, "Tell me what, hot stuff?"

She huffs, "I'll come break your ass in two for the fun of it."

Myers laughs big and looks over at Mikey, "You know, every star I got in my stable is a total pain in my ass, all of them except you, Mikey!" He stands and picks up his jacket while saying, "You are the only one I would consider a friend, and with that said...your friends are my friends, so if any of you are in town come on by and we'll get a bite and have a laugh or two." He pushes his chair in and, "My apologies to one an' all, but I got an egotistic cheesedick that needs to be knocked down a peg or two before he leaves the studio. I'm looking forward to meeting you all again!"

With Myers stepping out, Mikey notices that the joyful mood around the table fades like the air being let out of a tire. He watches Jessica making a shooting motion with her hand and picks up on Caesar and Peter as they frown and nod with understanding.

Two tables over stands a thin redhead, Nikki-13, who looks every bit like a little sister to Jessica. She steps up beside her with Shane McElroy and Lieutenant Smyth of the Honey Badgers in tow.

Without looking back, Jessica says, "Hey, Lieutenant."

Smyth replies, "Oi, Red Love."

Caesar gives a slight wave to McElroy, "Hello, Shane."

McElroy nods, "Caesar."

Peter greets Nikki-13, "How are you, Ali?"

Nikki-13 says, "Was, Ali. I've taken my mother's name."

Peter is pained when he says, "Sorry to hear about Minura."

This newer Minura looks back and forth between him and Caesar, going, "Shane, here, he says you guys knew, Angel Griego."

Caesar says, "Sorry to hear about Angel. We loved the guy."

Minura nods yes, and, "On Ngāti Whā, when my mom became a GMi BER, it was Griego who spawned into her suit."

"Seriously, Griego?" Peter laughs, "I can't imagine!"

Tyrol puts his hands out and, "Is it true, the shit he said?"

Minura smiles, "I went to visit my mom at the Garden and Angel was there, and they were laughing their asses off about it."

Caesar asks, "What did our boy say?"

"Angel booted up in my mon's JACC, and with her head rolling around inside the visor he goes..." Minura now rocks her own head back and forth while mimicking Griego's voice, "Aaaah shit! This ain't right, I know this *chica caliente!*"

They all have a good laugh at that, and as it dies down Tyrol quietly reminds them all to, "Never forget."

With them nodding in agreement, Minura hands a napkin to Jessica who reviews the five handwritten names on it, so she hands it back and asks, "You sure about them all?"

Minura shakes her head, slightly annoyed, "Give me a break."

"You nailed it." Jessica looks up at her, "Ya did good."

"Anything else before we get this show on the road?"

Jessica hands Minura the business sized data-card with deCap on it and says, "Boxter wanted me to say to you guys...*Deus vult.*"

Everyone, except Mikey, nods in agreement, while Peter quietly whispers, "You got that right."

"Make sure you ping the chipsets and—"

McElroy chimes in with Jessica, "And send the cords of the victims to the cops before we post the stream." He shakes his head in wonderment, "It's hard to believe the public eats this shit up."

Tyrol shrugs and says, "Immaculate retribution. You know it's gonna freak the fuck outta everybody when bodies start showing up for each of the deCap streams that gets released."

Mikey sheepishly raises his hand, "Aaaaaah, I got a question. Why is it that I am privy to this? Just curious."

Caesar fields this one, "Publicly, you'll continue to do what you've been doin' which is sayin' that deCap is a hoax and horseshit." He then points to him, "But, privately, since you know everybody, you are tasked with sounding the alarm."

Mike realizes that Myers is going to die tonight, so he asks, "Stewie, that fucker is rotten to the core so he deserves what you're gonna dish out, but how many are you goin' after?"

Jessica says, "It's in the five-digits so, if we can...all of 'em?"

Minura, standing tall over Jessica's shoulder, snarls slightly as she declares, "Every mother-lovin' one of 'em."

Peter looks to Mikey and warns him, "You can't say who we are, you understand. You can't say how you know, but when bodies start poppin' up without a scratch, it'll back up your story."

Mikey jokes, "Or, you're gonna add me to the queue?"

Jessica gives him a tight-lipped smile and a shrug, while Caesar adds, "Don't make a mess of it and you'll be fine."

With her hand on Jessica's shoulder, Minura asks, "In the utility, to launch deCap, what's the prompt code?"

"Small case 'incubus' but swap the number-5 for the letter-s." Jessica reaches up and grips her hand while saying, "Make me proud."

As the three walk out of the Eighth Tee, Mikey looks around the table and exhales big, saying, "Well, I think I'm on board."

Jessica nods to the others indicating that he is being honest, so Tyrol says to him, "That's good to hear, Mike."

"Glad to be of help!"

After a long and uncomfortable silence, Caesar turns to Mikey and changes the subject, "Didn't you say your three youngest kids were looking for somethin' to do?"

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