

Tres Banditos

by

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FADE IN:

A TV SCREEN

We are watching a HIGHLIGHT of an NHL game, circa 2002.

A gifted young PLAYER scoops up the puck and glides across the ice, evading defenders with ease. He squares up and rifles the puck into the back of the net -- a gorgeous goal.

The crowd ERUPTS. The player pumps his fist and does a dance. He embraces his teammates, tears welling up in his eyes. Overcome with emotion, he then doffs his gloves, jumps OVER THE BOARDS and into the stands, high-fiving fans.

He removes his HELMET, puts it on the head of a grateful YOUNG BOY. Beside him, the boy's LITTLE SISTER looks up with puppy-dog eyes, feeling left out. The player promptly rips off his JERSEY and hands it to the girl, who beams -- despite the copious sweat. The crowd roars with approval.

DOWN ON THE ICE, the REF looks up at the scoreboard, annoyed: It's the FIRST PERIOD. The game has just started.

POP! Back in the stands, the now-shirtless player, inexplicably adorned with a Hawaiian Lei, showers fans with CHAMPAGNE, then turns and makes out with a super-hot BABE.

This is AVERY DONAHUE, 15 years ago.

WE PULL BACK to reveal:

Present-day Avery, 37, in a warm-up suit, smiling as he watches the clip from the edge of a bed. He retains a certain boyish handsomeness, despite the toll exacted by years of hard living.

Avery heaves a wistful sigh and turns off the TV. He surveys the spartan room: nothing unique or personalized. Nothing of any permanence. He picks up his equipment bag and exits.

INT. TORRANCE EXECU-SUITES - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

A typical "extended stay" hotel, offering long-term temp housing for itinerant businesspeople, recent parolees, and the soon-to-be divorced.

Avery enters, walks to the lobby's kitchen nook and grabs a danish. Next to him a sleep-deprived man, 50s, struggles with the coffee machine.

AVERY

Here, lemme get that--

Avery reaches over, works the machine like a seasoned pro. Coffee pours on cue.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Thanks.

Avery crosses to the front desk. MARTIN, the front desk clerk, emerges.

MARTIN

(re: danish)

Hey, those are supposed to be for new residents only, not lifers.

Avery gives Martin a look, "Come on."

MARTIN

Fuck it. I didn't spend six years at JC to be a pastry cop. I will need your rent check, though.

AVERY

Oh, right--

Avery hands him a CHECK. Martin regards it suspiciously.

MARTIN

The First National Bank of Estaria?

AVERY

It's new.

MARTIN

The country or the bank?

AVERY

Both.

(off Martin's look)

It's good, I swear.

MARTIN

You know, we have a yearly lease option. It's way cheaper than month-to-month. You might not bounce as many checks.

AVERY

Wish I could Martin, but you never know when the League is gonna call.

MARTIN

Oh, right.

Avery frowns at something he sees on the counter.

AVERY

Martin, do you have to put my promos
right next to the suicide pamphlets?

MARTIN

What?

At the end of the front desk is a little kiosk with cards,
brochures and pamphlets -- mostly promoting local
attractions, restaurants and various services.

Avery points to a promo postcard for the RIVERSIDE COOKERS, a
hockey team, featuring a photo of Avery with the caption:
"Avery Donahue, Player-Owner. Available for Birthday Parties."

Next to it is a PAMPHLET with an image of a despondent man,
staring out a stormy window, a NOOSE in his lap. It reads:
"No, She's Not Coming Back... But Help Is a Phone Call Away."

AVERY

When you put them next to each
other, people start to associate
minor-league hockey with suicide.

MARTIN

They do?

AVERY

Yes! It's a subconscious thing. No
wonder all those goth kids keep
showing up at our games.

MARTIN

Sorry--

Martin switches out the suicide pamphlets with ones entitled
"So You're Going to Prison. Now What?"

AVERY

Better.

INT. HOCKEY ARENA - NIGHT

The Sudafed Center, the 2,000-seat jewel of the Riverside
sports scene, is half-filled, mostly with drunken male fans.

P.A. ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Welcome to another exciting night
of PCHA hockey. Which, I am legally
obligated to remind you, is in no
way affiliated with the National
Hockey League...

The Pacific Coast Hockey Association: It's what hockey would look like if Vince McMahon were to start a league, then drastically underfund it.

INT. HOCKEY ARENA - OFFICE - NIGHT

Avery, now in his full hockey uniform, argues on the phone. Scattered about his desk are a variety of PAST-DUE notices.

AVERY

(to phone)

Of course it's legal tender,
Barry... Jefferson Davis was our
17th president, everyone knows
that... Well, it's not my fault
your branch manager doesn't know
his history. Christ!

He hangs up. A team STAFFER pokes her head in.

COOKERS STAFFER

Avery? It's almost game time.

INT. HOCKEY ARENA - LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Avery looks out upon his TEAMMATES, a meagre bunch of semi-skilled grinders. They look as if they're already lost.

AVERY

This is it, gentlemen: the last
game of the season. Now, I know you
may think it's meaningless--

PLAYER #1

It is meaningless. We're in last
place.

AVERY

Only in the standings. In the
hearts of those people out there,
you're all champions.

PLAYER #2

Really? That's not the impression I
get from our fan mail.

Player #2 reaches into his locker, pulls out a child's crayon DRAWING of his bloody, decapitated corpse, still in uniform. Signed "Billy, Age 7."

PLAYER #2
 (points at red "crayon")
 I think this is real blood.

AVERY
 Come on. He's 7. That's how boys
 that age express affection.

PLAYER #3
 My car's been keyed four times.
 What's that, a marriage proposal?

AVERY
 They key because they care. They're
 passionate. We owe them our best
 effort.

PLAYER #4
 And you owe us our paychecks.

AVERY
 I already told you, there was a
 clerical error--

PLAYER #4
 For the last six weeks?

AVERY
 (nods)
 Hey, I'm as frustrated as you are.
 Once we fix the, uh, glitches with
 the payroll software, you'll all
 get your checks.

PLAYER #5
 What software is it? Intuit? EpiCor?

Avery stares at him blankly.

PLAYER #5
 I'm an IT manager at my day job.
 I'd be happy to take a look.

AVERY
 Oh, it's, uh, Intui...Core...Soft.

PLAYER #5
 IntuiCoreSoft? I thought they just
 did web-cam porn.

AVERY
 They're branching out.

PLAYER #5

Huh. What's the problem exactly?

AVERY

Oh wow, where do I begin?

(scratches head)

Well, first the AI started acting up, and uh, then it became self-aware, and pretty soon it hijacked the whole darn system. And then these guys in suits showed up asking questions...

(trails off)

I won't bore you with the details. But I swear I'll have it sorted out soon. Okay?

The guys nod reluctantly, skeptically.

AVERY

Okay! Who's ready to go kick some ice? Let's get cookin'!

The players shuffle unenthusiastically out the locker room.

AVERY

And remember to stay at least two feet away from the crowd restraints! I want a shank-free game tonight!

INT. ARENA TUNNEL - NIGHT

The guys gather just outside the rink's entrance, waiting for player introductions to begin.

P.A. ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

And now, the starting lineup for your Riverside Cookers!

Lights dim. Heavy metal blares. Spotlights roam the arena.

P.A. ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

In goal for the Cookers, number thirty-nine, Neil McCloud!

The spotlights converge on Neil, who skates onto the ice on cue. The process repeats for the rest of the Cookers, and before long it's Avery's turn. He closes his eyes. For a brief moment, he's transported back to his NHL days.

P.A. ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

... finally, at Center Forward...the team captain...number 77...

Suddenly... CRASH! The crowd gasps. Avery opens his eyes. On the opposite end of the rink, the ZAMBONI has burst out onto the ice, making an unscheduled appearance.

AVERY
What the hell?

The Cookers' eccentric Zamboni driver, FRANK, waves a bottle of WHISKEY as he shouts to no one in particular.

FRANK
Try and catch me, motherfuckers!

P.A. ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Watch out, folks! Here comes Uncle Frank, and it looks like he's off his meds again!

The crowd cheers. It would appear that "Uncle Frank" is some kind of unofficial mascot.

ON AVERY

AVERY
Christ. Not again.

Avery jumps on the ice and skates up next to the Zamboni.

AVERY
Frank, did someone forget their Risperdal today?

Frank looks down, smiles as he sees Avery.

FRANK
They tried to take her, Avery, but I wouldn't let them!

He takes a swig from the bottle.

AVERY
Who was it this time, Frank? The Freemasons? The little blue men? Why don't you Smurf down from there and we can Smurf this later.

FRANK
No, it was those assholes!

Frank points to the edge of the rink, where two hulking, pissed-off REPO MEN wait. Avery skates over to them.

AVERY
What's the meaning of this?

REPO MAN #1
What do you think?

AVERY
But I sent a check last week!

REPO MAN #2
Oh yeah.
(to Repo Man #1)
Which one was it this month?
Pompeii Mutual?

REPO MAN #1
Nah, I think it was Camelot Federal.

The Repo Men share a hearty laugh.

ON THE ZAMBONI

Ornery fans are now pelting the Zamboni with debris.

FRANK
You'll never take me alive, Charlie!

A PRETZEL smacks Frank in the face. He drops his whiskey.

FRANK
Shit--

Frank bends down to fish for the bottle. Zamboni SPEEDS UP.

ON AVERY

Avery pleads with the Repo Men.

AVERY
Can't you at least wait until after
the game?

REPO MAN #1
And miss Dancing With the Stars?

They look at Avery like he's crazy.

ON THE ZAMBONI

Fans in the first few rows flee as the runaway Zamboni heads their way... except for one DIPSHIT up front who's busy LIVE-TWEETING the event on his smartphone. A CLOSE-UP of his phone shows an image with the caption "Drunk Zamboni Fail!!!"

ON AVERY

Avery, oblivious to the mounting danger, presses his case.

AVERY

Come on, guys. It's our season finale. You can wait a few hours.

The Repo Men look at each other, then Avery.

REPO MAN #1

Fine. But that thing better not have a scratch on it.

AVERY

Absolutely. This really means a lot to me. You know, people say repo men can be rude, but I've always felt...

As he continues, we see the runaway Zamboni enter Avery's background. It crawls across the frame, a slow-motion disaster in the making, before finally SMASHING through the boards and into the stands, burying Twitter Dipshit beneath the wreckage.

Frank arises, hoisting the whiskey bottle triumphantly.

FRANK

Found it!

INT. DONAHUE'S PUB - NIGHT

Once a sports bar, now a dive. Inside we find a dozen scruffy boozehounds -- or loitering vagrants. It's a coin toss. Scattered about are dozens of old PHOTOS of Avery in action, none newer than ten years old.

A handful of NEWSPAPER CLIPS chronicle Avery's career path:

--CLIP 1: The typical "draft day" photo. Avery, a fresh-faced rookie, holds up an Alberta IceHawks (a fake NHL team) jersey. The headline: "SoCal Phenom Drafted in First Round."

--CLIP 2: Avery, older but still fit, flanked by dour Scandinavian players. Headline: "Donahue Signs With Finnish League." The sub-header: "NHL Shuns Former Bad Boy"

--CLIP 3: Is entirely in KOREAN LETTERING. Avery, unkempt and possibly intoxicated, holds up a Pyongyang Phantoms jersey.

--CLIP 4: "Lazerockey: Sport of the Future?" An apathetic Avery hoists a gaudy, glow-in-the-dark jersey.

--CLIP 5: Avery, reinvigorated, in his Cookers uniform: "NHL Washout Seeks Redemption With Doomed Startup League."

BEHIND THE BAR, we find... nobody. The bartender, SETH (mid-20s, excitable - picture a less annoying SHIA LABEOUF, pre-meltdown), is currently absorbed by GOLDEN TEE, a classic arcade golfing game, pausing only to take an occasional sip of beer.

TED (O.S.)

Seth!

At the bar, TED, a regular, waves an empty glass beseechingly.

TED

How bout a refill?

Seth nods. Ted reaches over the bar and POURS HIMSELF a pint. Seth returns to his game. The pub's phone RINGS.

SETH

Damnit.

(over his shoulder)

Ted, can you grab that for me?

Ted picks up the receiver, walks it over to Seth and holds it to his ear as Seth continues playing.

SETH

(to phone)

Donahue's Pub... He's got a game tonight, but he sometimes stops by after... No, I can't take a message. My hands are full at the moment...

The caller hangs up. Ted walks the phone back to the bar.

SETH

(shakes head)

"Take a message." Asshole.

Another regular, EDDIE, grabs a few napkins.

SETH

Whoa! Conserve those! I already made two trips to TGI Friday's this week. They're starting to get suspicious.

Eddie grumbles, puts a napkin back.

EDDIE

Seth, when's your boss gonna spend some money to fix up this dump?

SETH
 Dump? I'll have you know this
 "dump" is completely--

Suddenly, a decrepit barstool COLLAPSES underneath a patron.

SETH
 (points at patron)
 That was his fault.

They laugh. It's a friendly crew. Ted points at the bar's TV.

TED
 Hey, ain't that your boss up there?

Seth looks up at the TV. A local NEWSCAST is showing video from the Zamboni crash scene. The headline: "ZAMBONER!"

INT. TORRANCE EXECU-SUITES - LOBBY - THE NEXT MORNING

Avery enters, looking suitably glum. He peruses a stack of complimentary NEWSPAPERS. His eyes light up at one in particular, a local alt-weekly...

INT. DONAHUE'S PUB - DAY

It's just opened. Seth is wrapping up a game of Golden Tee. As he adds his name to the HIGH SCORES, we see that all of them are his, and they're all crude innuendos: "SethOffender," "SethyBeast," "Seth12inches," and "NoSeriouslySeth12inches."

Avery enters, a spring in his step, holding the newspaper.

AVERY
 Seth, my boy, things are looking up.
 Check this out.

He unfolds the paper. On the front is a huge PHOTO of the Zamboni crash. The headline: "NEW DARWIN AWARDS FRONTRUNNER."

SETH
 And this is a good thing how?

AVERY
 This kind of publicity is just what the Cookers needed! We've already gotten 12 season-ticket orders. Last year we had zero. Percentage-wise, that's literally an increase of infinity.

SETH

I don't think that's how math works,
Avery.

AVERY

If I play it right, this might even
land me back on the League's radar.

SETH

But didn't that guy almost die?

AVERY

Almost, Seth. Keyword is almost.
From what I hear, he's got a decent
shot at breathing on his own again
someday. Everybody wins!

(shakes his head)

I can't believe I spent all that
money on conventional promotion,
when all I needed to do was
grievously injure someone.

Just then, a man and his meek YOUNG SON enter the bar. The
boy shyly approaches Avery bearing a NOTEPAD.

LITTLE BOY

Excuse me Mr. Donahue. Can I have
your autograph?

AVERY

(to Seth)

See, it's working already.

(to boy)

Of course you can, little man!

Avery happily signs. The boy promptly hands him a SUBPOENA.

LITTLE BOY

You've been served.

The boy looks back at his father, who beams proudly.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

On the left side is the plaintiff, the injured TWITTER
DIPSHIT from earlier, surrounded by a phalanx of ATTORNEYS.
On the right is the defendant, Avery, alone. He stands,
addressing the female JUDGE.

AVERY

Your honor, I won't deny the severity of the injuries this man suffered while enjoying the first-rate entertainment and unbeatable value of the Riverside Cookers.

The judge glares at Avery -- not appropriate. Avery sighs.

AVERY

Look, I'm just a hockey player. I'm not a business... guy. When I started this company, I was assured that I'd be shielded from any liability relating to it.

Avery indicates the empty seat next to him.

AVERY

If my attorney were present today, he would affirm that sentiment. Unfortunately he was called away last-minute for an emergency disbarment hearing.

The judge is unmoved. Sensing imminent defeat, Avery takes out a pen, scrawls a quick NOTE.

AVERY

If it pleases the court, I'd like to submit one more item of evidence.

He hands the note to the bailiff, who gives it to the judge.

JUDGE

What is this? An address?

AVERY

That's the Plaza Motel, where I will be tonight at 8pm. room 239.
If it pleases the court.
(leans in, suggestive)
If it pleases the court.

The judge shakes her head in disbelief.

JUDGE

Is that all, Mr. Donahue?

AVERY

Yes. I throw myself on the mercy of the court. Or anything else the court would like me to throw myself on.

(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)
(to bailiff)
Anything.

The bailiff recoils. The judge pauses to process this.

JUDGE
Wow. That may be the most
disgraceful defense I've witnessed
since Alabama v. Notre Dame.

Everyone but Avery explodes in laughter.

JUDGE
Court awards full damages to the
plaintiff.

She bangs her gavel. The plaintiff's team erupts in cheers.

INT. DONAHUE'S PUB - DAY

Seth tries to console a stunned Avery.

SETH
All we need is a mannequin, some
pig's blood, and a couple Ambien.
It's totally easy. I did it to my
step-dad.

AVERY
I'm not going to frame the judge
for murder, Seth.

SETH
So that's it? They just get to take
your team from you?

AVERY
The team at a minimum.

SETH
Can't you... object or something?

AVERY
I don't know, Seth. I'm not a
lawyer.
(beat)
Neither was my attorney, apparently.

Avery stares absently into his beer.

AVERY
I'll never get another job in
hockey after this. I'm finished.