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All-Star Duel

CONTENT WARNINGS (Highlight to reveal): [REDACTED]

Notes: This story was conceived and written in one day, over the course of a few hours. I wrote it while commuting to and from a Seattle Mariners game, as well as while sitting in the stands. The story is based loosely on the memory of going to the All Star 2023 Home Run Derby and being there to feel the electric energy of Julio Rodriguez breaking the single-round record, smashing out 41 homers. It's fast, it might be sloppy, and it's all for fun, so enjoy the debut of the supervillain Electric Factory!

The Seattle subway bustled with many creatures of various sorts looking to get this direction and that, everyone having their own place to be. Things to do. People to see. It was easy to blend in here - hiding in plain view was easiest in busy streets, making going topside easy. Even easier when you had RCGs shaped like aviators, the tint modified to simply look like shades. At that point, especially if you covered up? Child's play. Easy to find people.

The relatively short otter poked through the shifting pack of people, a light smirk on her lips as she closed in on her prey. Her paws were stuffed in a white pullover with the hood up, logos on the front and back bearing the title of the local major league baseball team. *He should be in that train car, M's*. The voice of her handler rang in her ear - a gruff, sultry voice. Good for radio. With a nod, the woman slipped inconspicuously into the subway car, her movements light and graceful as she slid effortlessly past people.

A cursory glance about revealed her target. Ace Pitcher, he was called. Ramiro Vigro. In game, the front of their rotation. Out, a hero who uses flaming fastballs to enact the ideals of his masters upon the underbelly of the city. Thing is, the guy wasn't so clean himself, being involved in shady organizations conducting experiments. The one thing Melissa Seagal hated? Unfair play. Breaking the rules. Cheating. So, this couldn't stand, could it? Plus, a real pretty girl put in this order, and she couldn't say no to that face.

"Yo. Can I sit here?" There was a space open next to Ramiro. Given his powers, they let him roam around without a detail, though of course, the public doesn't know. To them, he's a star pitcher, throwing some of the hottest strikes in the league.

"Hmh? Oh. Sure." The tall wolf easily made room, his imposing height paired with a refined, lean body. Today was an off day for him, so he was going about town, under something of a disguise. One could tell it was him if they scrutinized, but Ramiro was skilled with the art of

camouflage, himself. It seemed like nobody else on the train was bothering him, so he got to enjoy some peace on his commute.

Too bad that was coming to an end. Melissa sat herself next to the man, crossing her legs in front of her. She kept her hands in her pockets, smirk ever present as she looked ahead. "So. Season's going well, huh? Top three ERA of starters in the first month."

The train lurched to a start as the wolf paused, sparing the hooded otter a glance. "...Hm? I'm not sure what you're talking about."

She turned her head to look at him in kind, yellow-blue irises barely peeking over the top of her aviators. "C'mon, Ramiro. I'm a big fan of yours! Young rising star. Drafted two years ago, sped through the minor leagues. Having a great debut as a rookie, for a real nice contract price. You're really livin' it up, y'know? The dream, for real." She balled her paw into a fist and bumped her modest chest twice.

The man sighed, shaking his head lightly. "Apt description. Yeah... I suppose it is. Glad to meet a fan." The wolf turned his head back forwards, assuming that would be it from the young fan.

"Big fan of your pitching. Got some real heaters. Some even say they almost look like they're *on fire*... y'know, but the detractors got a point, too. Puttin' out 102s as a starter who's got a few full-game shutouts? Better hope you've got good elbow genes."

Twitch. That emphasis didn't go unnoticed. Ramiro turned his head again to regard the otter, eyes narrowing. "...Yes. Well, so far, I don't have signs of needing tommy-john, rest assured."

Melissa grinned a little wider, drawing her paws out of her pockets to rest behind her head, fingertips having that same strange, yellow-blue hue, offsetting her brown fur. "Y'sure? I mean, you're really workin' those *paws*.... Speaking of which, been *experimenting* with any new pitches lately?"

The wolf was beginning to shift in his seat, staring harder at the otter. There were a whole lot of people on this train, but he didn't want to cause a scene. Either way, he wasn't a fan of the way this girl was emphasizing certain words. "...I'm not at liberty to discuss that with a stranger."

"Aw, really? I heard you've had a real good changeup this year... and y'know, you've got curveballs, too. With a solid spread of fastballs and offspeed, you'll make a good *Ace Pitcher*...."

...Shit. Ramiro felt his ears pin, glancing around the train again. *I need to get out before any civvies get hurt.* Thankfully for the wolf, the train was coming to a stop, arriving at the next stop on the subway. Right in the middle of downtown. “...Right. Well, if you’ll excuse me, this is my stop.”

“Is it? Me, too. Got some business near the stadium.” The otter’s grin grew wider as she stood up after the man and started following him off, nudging through the crowd after him as he tried to get away. No dice.

Dusk’s gloom greeted them as they returned topside, sun grazing the tops of people’s heads. “...Y’know, I wouldn’t mind a tour.”

“Fu--” The wolf jumped, seeing that same woman right behind him. “You...! Why are you following me?” He picked up his pace, power walking down the street. The stop was right by the stadium; it was just minutes away, walking.

“Haven’t figured it out yet? They told me you were smart. Straight A’s in school. Great asset in advancements in the facility. A real go-getter, eh?” *He’s taken the bait. Y’all ready?*

“I-- the facility?” *Who the fuck is this?* “What are you talking about? Pitching advancements?”

“Mmmhm. Y’know, there’s this snow leopard girl I know - big fan of yours. She’s pretty famous where you work, right?” The otter kept following even as the wolf picked up the pace, claws clacking against the ground as he tried to get away inconspicuously from the situation.

“...Grrrrr... listen, woman. I’m gonna have to ask you to leave me alone. Otherwise, I’ll need to get security involved with your removal.” The canine growled back at her, baring his fangs in a snarl as his hand started to wick.

“Oh, gonna fight me in public? Just a sweet innocent civilian?” The girl let down her hood, revealing flowing brown hair with striking yellow and blue streaks. It was straight, but unkempt, and billowed down to her shoulder blades. “See, I don’t even have a hood up anymore. Not suspicious at all!”

Oh, fuck. That’s... that’s not her, is it? “I am going to call security.” He reached up for an earpiece, but flinched away from it, being met by an electric shock. “Ow! Shit!” He looked back to the otter, who’d raised a finger, lightning sparks arcing from it.

“Can’t let y’do that, man. C’mon, just a little tour? I always wanted to run around the bases as a little girl.”

"The stadium is *locked*," Ramiro growled. Despite his best snarling, the damn girl didn't seem scared at all!

"Oh, that right? You want a bit of help?" The otter extended a paw to her side, more yellow sparks zipping out.

"That will not be necessary." With a grunt, the man quelled his own flames, bunching his hand into a tight fist and speeding towards an entrance. "Look. If I let you in and you ask whatever you want, will you leave?"

"Oh, sure." Smirking wider, the otter lowered her arm again. "Lead the way, Mr. Vigro. Just got a few questions..."

With a turn on his paws and a huff, the wolf lead the otter the rest of the way towards the stadium. "...You wanted to run the bases, right? I'll let you in. It'll be a favor, got it?"

"Mmmhm. Whatever makes you feel more comfortable, dude." *Heh. He's weaker than I thought!*

Melissa decided to spare Ramiro a mercy, keeping her maw shut as they entered the property and traveled through private passages, until finally, they emerged onto the field. It wasn't often that she got to stand on fields like this - only once as a kid, and when she did softball.

"Here. Now go run." The wolf commanded gruffly, but much to his chagrin, the otter didn't go for it.

"Nah. Tell ya what... I'll give you a challenge. I bat, you pitch. If you beat me, I leave. If you don't... well. Your reputation won't be the only thing that hurts."

"...That's it? Are you kidding me?" The wolf narrowed his eyes, crossing his arms as his tail crooked in annoyance. "We don't have gear, much less balls and bats. It's dark."

"Oh, that?" With a tap to her aviators, the tint suddenly changed to a magenta. The stadium lights turned on, giving a good amount of vision in spite of the encroaching night. "Not a problem. As for the rules... How about a home run derby? Two minutes. And I gotta get the bonus, but I won't get the time." On the gigantic screen behind right field, a counter appeared, pink against a dark backdrop. 2:00. "So. Two homers past 440 feet... and how about this. I'll have to hit 25 homers, and you can stand on the mound and give me your best heat - strikes only."

Oh, *HELL*. "...Those are some very lofty challenges for a little girl to hit," the wolf grunted. "And you still don't have a bat. Korps, huh? How do you mean to even accomplish this? And how am I meant to take you at your word that you'll leave if you fail?"

Melissa pulled down the collar of her shirt, revealing a collar with a red light on it. "This. I'll be disabled if I fail." Her smirk cracked even wider as her eyes started to glow softly behind her pink aviators. *And the stream is live. Good.* She glanced around at the camera emplacements around the stadium, already appropriated by supporting agents.

"As for the bat problem...." The otter held out her hand again, levin sparks arcing forth as she channeled electricity and gave it form. A standard length bat formed, crackling with yellow lightning. She held it in her hands, appearing solid as she twirled it about, prancing backwards to take a spot in the right-handed batter's box. "Wanna throw me a meatball to see how it works?"

Ramiro grunted. He couldn't resist such a challenge like this. He too backed up, towards the pitcher's mound. His right hand wicked, and a fireball was lobbed toward the plate, a lazy high arc with practically no speed.

Swinging the bat up onto her rear shoulder and taking a sideways stance, the otter wound up with a lifted forward paw before ripping her bat at the fireball, hips twisting with the force and a loud, resounding **CRACK** ringing out as the otter ripped the ball into the left field stands, a towering shot that left it to fizzle out right before it hit the seats. "So. We got a deal?"

Ramiro turned to watch the ball fly, grunting as he followed its path beyond the warning track. "...Hm. And I can use my full arsenal? As long as it's strikes, right?" The wolf turned back to the otter, a look of determination on his face. He knew this was a bad idea, but damn it, his pride was at stake. "...And you're gonna let me throw as hard as I want?"

"Yup. All good. Hard as you want, my dude." The otter took a particular pose, reminiscent of someone recently inducted into the Hall of Fame, who spent most of his time with the team that called this stadium home. She held her forearm straight out towards the wolf, bat pointed straight up in her hand. As she began to tug on her shirt and hoodie collar and upper sleeve, the sound system in the stadium started to play music - for now, just a beat, a steady thrum as backdrop for their battle. "We can start soon as you're ready." Stance completed, she swung the bat back into its position, digging in to the batter's box, to prepare to rock. "Oh, and, one more thing, hotshot! Don't hold back, yeah? Power or speed. If you cheat and don't throw at least 25 pitches... well. You know we've got this place under lock, yeah? Best to make sure it's a fair ballgame~."

At the same time, cameras trained in, getting all the angles on the show. There were agents and drones manning much of the place, and even had a few people including her handler in the radio booth, beginning to broadcast the happenings to theater rooms set aside in Korps bases for this very event. One of which, of course, held Silvia, Fey, and more of her friends, watching with a drink and a sense of catharsis as the show began.

Welcome, Korps, to the special edition, one-player Home Run Derby! Tonight we have an all-star matchup - homegrown home-run legend Melissa Seagal, squaring up against local sports rookie into break-out star, Ramiro Vigro. For all those folks watching right here at the onset, can we hear some NOISE?! Make everyone in the base wonder what the hell's goin' on and show support for ELECTRIC FACTORY! At the bottom of the screen, a pop-up appeared, with one side set ablaze with fireballs, the other side complete with lightning bolts racing out of the letters: **ACE PITCHER vs ELECTRIC FACTORY**

Thump, thump, thump, thump... The steady beat rumbled through the ground, crawling up into the hearts of the two battles. "...Fine. Then I have one condition, myself." The wolf took his spot, placing his pitching arm behind his back. Heat waves pulsed from behind him in rhythm to the beat. "Your name."

"...Heheh. They call me... **Electric Factory**." Her bat, too, pulsed to the beat, as a low, tense bass joined the percussion. Her eyes started shining behind her glasses, glowing mostly yellow with only a small sliver of blue visible.

Nothing was offered in response save a grunt. Instead, the wolf straightened up, set, and sighed.

Aaaand we are getting underway! Send up your support! The pitcher, sets, winds up, fires...!

Ramiro didn't have time to look behind him, if this girl even had the ability to hit his stuff. He had pitches to throw. Thankfully, he already intuited something. Behind the plate, the pitch clock had been repurposed, sitting as a fat zero to start with. Hopefully, it'd stay that way, so he can arrest this girl and turn it in. *Shit, why did I agree to this? My fucking pride!* A heavy thump accompanied his first pitch, a flaming straight shot down the pipe.

A crackling swing, and... a miss. The otter swung late, underneath the fastball, letting it fly by and smack against the backstop, fizzling out. For some reason, though, Melissa's smirk seemed to grow. "Mmmm.... I see."

A cut and a miss! First pitch and she didn't even hit it! Is she going to make it? On the screen, both broadcasted and the giant one in the outfield, the countdown started. Only two minutes to blast twenty-five beyond the wall. After each pitch, a speed indicator was shown. This first

one? A meager 90 MPH. Impossible for any random person off the street to hit first try, but considered a little slow in the big leagues.

"Cocky bitch." The wolf chuffed, feeling more confident. What an awful swing. He would up and fired another shot. Another fastball, painting the top right corner of the strike zone. He wouldn't let this be easy for her. Just pitch his best, and she's screwed.

CRK! The fireball smacked off the bottom of the bat and fizzled into the ground behind the plate. The contact made a bright show of light, and to pair, the percussion got heavier, an electric guitar joining the beat, starting at a medium note and dropping to a long, held low note. The otter's tail bounced to the beat, the bottom of the handle of her bat starting to turn from yellow to blue.

Contact? Shit... but it was bad contact. It's still in the bag. Composure intact, he fired another. Six seconds burnt. Fastball, top left.

Melissa makes contact! That one was ninety-three!

CRACK! Ripped foul, sailing up into the netting above the backstop and fizzling into it. *Thump, thump, thump, thump.* Melissa tapped her feet now too, blue creeping up her bat's handle and filling her eyes, slowly encroaching on the yellow base. "Best you got?!"

"Haven't even hit it fair!" Another fastball was launched, diving to the bottom-middle of the zone. 95.

CRACK! Another foul, but this one went closer. It pounded into the ground to her right, a trail of embers flickering past the impact zone to the side of the first base line. "Not for long!" Streaks running up the sides of her hoodie started to fill with blue energy too, each contact lighting up the field. The lights had been slowly dimming, bass and guitar thrumming, steady beat building up the sparks in the air as their battle truly started to kick into gear.

This continued for another few pitches. The heaters got faster and faster, gaining a couple miles per hour each time, and the electric otter seemed to grow more crazed, sparks beginning to fly out from her eyes and fingers. The encroachment of blue on yellow progressed, growing with the beat.

Electric Factory, keeping up the fight! Last one was 103 and she's still making contact! Any one might go out, but she's running out of wiggle room! C'mon, fans, is that all you've got? Let's hear a LOOOOUD CHEEEER! HOWL FOR HER!

How does she keep fucking hitting them? Quit worrying about it. She's running out of time. She'd have to be perfect to get her quota now. He threw his hardest fastball yet, the flaming fastball rising up to the center of the top edge of the zone.

Melissa's eyes pulsed with blue energy, strength surging through her body suddenly as she locked on to the ball, aimed, and swung hard. **CRAAACK!!** The ball was pounded over Ramiro's head, a laser line drive straight through the center of the field, disappearing just over the fence.

She hits one! It's a laser beam, and it's GOOOONE! First homer for Melissa!

"What the fuck?! What are you?" The wolf did pause to turn to look, before whipping his gaze back around to the sparking otter. *Fuck - gotta do something else!* Finally deviating from fastballs, he threw a devastating breaking ball, one that start off looking like it was fly in high, but dropped like a rock to touch the bottom of the zone.

It didn't matter. Even though the curveball was at a blistering 85 MPH, devastatingly fast for that type of pitch, Melissa tracked it and sliced through it, sending it sailing high towards the right side stands. The power was surging through her now, blue rapidly crawling up her bad and filling her irises. Every "look look" or "come on" or "oh my god" from the people watching? This is what she lived for.

She's finding her stride! The Electric Factory is generating tons of energy! Can she keep it up and hit 25 before a minute's up? She's only got two after half a minute! And she needs to hit a few really far to count!

By now, the stadium had darkened more, but it didn't matter. The arcing electricity, the bright fireballs, and the pulsing from both in tune to the beat, slowly growing frenetic? There was no need for lighting, because the two engaged in battle shone bright enough.

Smack, smack, smack. It didn't matter what Ramiro threw. Curveball, fastball, slider, changeup? Each was sent into the stands. Each pitch faster, each hit longer. More power surged through Melissa each second. As the streak of home runs grew, the beat gave way to tense music, filling the nearly empty stadium with vibration and life as cracks, sparks and flames lit up the darkening sky. A juxtaposition of yellow and blue against red and orange. The commentators grew louder and more excited, barely even able to follow the action anymore as the fireballs picked up in heat, only to be smashed out of the park each time by the otter.

"HOW?! ARE?! YOU?! DOING?! THIS?!" *Fuck. Fuck! Twelve, thirteen - shit!* Ramiro picked up the heat even more, his arm becoming something of a howitzer as he launched balls at 130, 140, 150 mph, fireballs turning yellow as the heat increased.

But the more Melissa filled with that blue energy, she just kept launching them right back, scoring home run after home run and growing faster and faster, earth beginning to levitate around her as electromagnetic waves pulsed out to the beat. Blue had overtaken more than half of her bat now, as she glanced at the clock. 15 home runs, 40 seconds left. She'll need to be absolutely perfect. "LET ME HEAR IT, BABY!" She screamed, vibrant streaks in her hair glowing as it, too, rose with her power.

LET ME HEAR IT, BABY! *You heard the girl! At this pace, she'll need every bit of support to smack 25 by the time the timer runs out! And the pitches keep getting faster - shit, was that a 160 mile-per-hour slider? Folks, I can't keep up, but COME ON, MELISSA! SHOW UP THAT ACE PITCHER!*

By now, the wolf was sweating. Expending so much energy and heat, firing pitch after pitch, only for it to get smacked away? Who can even see and think that fast? "Where is your power coming from?!" Eighteen, nineteen... the percussion seemed to beat in tune with his very heart, which went twice as fast. Staring down that otter, who'd turned from an unassuming girl to a terrifying beast, large bolts of lightning shooting every which way as she overflowed with electricity.

180, 190, 200. Melissa only sped up. Everything got stronger - strength, speed, reflexes. The theater rooms were roaring with shouts and howls, and even in other areas of bases, for areas where transmitting the broadcast was permitted, the air was electric with the frantic screams coming from the announcers, bringing smiles to all who heard it. Her eyes and bat nearly turned completely blue now, sparking violently and shining brightly, pulsing to the music.

Twenty-two... twenty-three... FUCK!! The last one he threw was shot off, too. Only a few seconds left... he had to seal it with this. The last pitch. The frantic beat now pulsed in tandem with his heart. A deep breath sucked in, a wind-up, and he let it loose. Suddenly, the sound all stopped. The bass, the guitar, the beat, everything. Just the sound of a white-hot flaming fastball, launched at a blistering 275 miles per hour, faster than anyone could even blink at.

For just a moment, time seemed to stand still. Melissa watched the ball approach - a sloppy placement, right down the middle. Perfect. The shining blue parts turned a vibrant light purple, the path of her swing leaving a purple web of lightning arcing behind it as she smashed her energy bat into the ball.

I DON'T BELIEVE IT! THE ELECTRIC FACTORY REACHED MAXIMUM POWER! THE BALL IS GOING, GOING - AND IT'S GOING TO LEAVE THE ENTIRE BALLPARK! THE FIREBALL, THROWN AT TWO-SEVENTY-FIVE, HAS BEEN SMASHED AWAY, GOING TO LAND OUT ON THE STREET OUTSIDE THE STADIUM! HOOOLY SMOKES! THE LAST PITCH, AND SHE HITS THE GOAL IN SPECTACULAR FASHION!

Melissa let her bat hang behind her, smirk wide as she watched her handiwork. "You wanna know my power, Hotshot? I'll tell ya. It's called 'Crowdfunded'... and thousands of people watched me beat your ass. Including that one precious escaped experiment."

Ramiro stood dumbfounded for a moment, having turned to watch his last pitch be demolished. He'd lost. He'd lost.... How could he have lost? What the fuck happened? This... this bitch...!

"...AaaawwwrrrrrooooOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOUUUUUUUHHHHH!!!"

The wolf rounded and fired a shotgun blast of fireballs towards home plate, a wide web of flame designed to encase and knock out anyone unfortunate to still be standing there.

Unfortunately for him, Melissa wasn't. Before the wolf could react, he'd had his legs swept out from him and had fallen onto his back, the otter sitting on top of his chest, pinning him to the dirt and gripping his face, electricity coursing through his body from the fully-charged supervillain, purple sparks shooting from her eyes. Those shining pools were the only thing he could see as the lights shut completely off, the stadium deafening silent in contrast to the tense beat during their duel. "Gnh--"

Melissa gripped the wolf's snout. "Quiet, now. Show's over. Now... tell me everything you know about the PAWS Initiative. The *real* one."