

Hello DDDragoni, and Merry Christmas from your Secret Santa! It was me, as you've obviously worked out by now. What a twist!

Cards on the table - I struggled to come up with a concept I was really happy with as a fitting gift. I have **zero** artistic talent, so that option was never on the table. That left writing as the frontrunner, but in truth writing fiction is not a fort   of mine. I tend to weave bits of narrative in with a more analytical approach, but it's a very ad hoc process usually where I find a statistical quirk and build out from that.

I ummed and ahed for ages, and a few days ago while listening to something on shuffle mode, a particular song came on and the idea hit me. Why not try and make something different, using the way I helped get comfortable with so many in the Taco Stand - as a broadcaster.

Last time we saw the Prime Timeline Tacos, they were careening into the unknown desert, taking the Taco Truck to the end of the world. I know you've explored the scenario and its various implications in your 'Unlimited Until the End' series, so I've tried to craft something that will appeal to that.

As such, I present to you as a Secret Santa gift: The Tacos Take on the End of the World, as a mixtape. I've picked a series of songs, each one corresponding to a different Taco, that try and represent their emotions as they approach the abyss. It runs just a little over an hour in length, but you don't have to listen to it all in one go - you could dip in and out a song at a time, if you so wish. I've penned a short accompanying theory section to each song as well, so you can see the thought process behind the ideas.

We start with the lineup, and batting lead-off is Vito Kravitz. Vito's such an interesting character, but so often reduced to just a caricature. I wanted something that captured the skeleton we all know and love, but also respected the fact he's a core part of the unit, and would bear a large chunk of the responsibility with piloting the Chariot into the desert. For all his showmanship, this isn't completely new ground for him. You're not born as a skeleton, if you catch my drift. I've picked **(Don't Fear) The Reaper** by **Blue   yster Cult**. He's been here before, and it doesn't really phase him. Also, he loves himself some offbeat cowbell.

In the two spot is Felix Garbage, our favourite floating physicist. He's endured some changes in his Blaseball career, be that switching teams, positions, or being encased in a giant peanut shell. That inquisitive mind has never wondered or wavered, though, even as the unknown approaches. He's done as much research as he can, but has many unanswered questions, and tries to balance his curiosity about the next step with his fears as to what he believes it'll be. It's a very fine line to tread. The suggestion is **Race For The Prize** by **The Flaming Lips**, which addresses the balance between determination and pushing yourself to the extremes, as the Tacos are. The ethereal synth sounds so synonymous with The Flaming Lips possess that otherworldly, floating quality that I think Felix would enjoy.

Sexton Wheeler has been through so much. Shelled by his fanbase, only to be pecked free and to pitch until his arm could barely move, at which point he was dispensed with and moved to the lineup. When LA finally won it all in Season 17, he was traded to Yellowstone, suffered with devastating consumer attacks, and returned to the Infinite Cities only for his other half to leave for Chicago just as everything really kicked off. It's ***A Horse With No Name*** by ***America***, as finally Sexton has an opportunity to remove himself from the spotlight, get back to basics, and contemplate his life and career. It feels good to be out of the rain.

What to do about Wanda Schenn. She never asked to be traded here, especially for captain McDowell Mason. A tough ask got even worse when she was saddled with Subtractor, hurting the offense and making it tougher to get her colleagues and the Taco fanbase on her side. Fighting an uphill battle, Wanda, aloof as ever, went about her business as best she could. There's a lot to admire in that. Wanda's choice is my favourite song ever - ***How Soon Is Now?*** by ***The Smiths***. She has the burning, smouldering shyness spoken of, and deserves to be recognised just like everybody else does. The shimmering Johnny Marr guitar has that iridescence that reminds me of Wanda.

Few players league-wide have played as much Blaseball as Basilio Mason. What irony, then, that he never really cared for it. He does care for his team-mates, and is now thrust into a reluctant leadership role for a task that is much bigger than a simple splorts game. He knows they have to push forward, regardless of whether they want to - just like trotting out for another at-bat when you'd much rather be doing something else. ***The Show Must Go On*** by ***Queen*** is my pick - B-Mase has that flamboyance that is very reminiscent of Queen at their swaggering best, and regardless of his internal and external doubts, he'll put on a brave face and lead the Tacos as best he can.

The lineup finishes with Basilio Fig, everyone's favourite unstable fire-eating tree. Their spot on the active roster was once in doubt, until their shelling gave the fanbase the opportunity to experiment in some fire science, giving them a new lease of life as a player when they were eventually pecked free. ***Fire May Save You*** by ***Frances*** encapsulates this, and I feel like they'd vibe with the chilled nature of the music as they watched the end of the world unfold before it kicks into gear, like Fig bursting into flames, only to return to their more familiar mellow nature.

Let's switch to pitching, which starts with Tacos ace Yummy Elliott. God, I love Yummy. Growing up a Taco fan, idolising her hero Sexton, pitching alongside him, then growing into a shutdown pitcher herself and leading her beloved Tacos to a title. It's been quite a career progression for her. Yummy is LA through and through, and of the many Taco fans who one day dreamed of making the squad, she refused to take no for an answer and fought her way to the top. I've gone with a Los Angeles artist and a song that squares up against the odds - ***Harder To Breathe*** by ***Maroon 5***. It has that in-your-face energy that Yummy has on the mound, that youthful exuberance and spikiness. While for most of her Blaseball career she's very much held her destiny in her own hands, for the first time she's faced with a lack of agency that's probably slightly suffocating for her.

Silvaire Semiquaver is still somewhat of a mystery to me - this choice might be slightly more superficial than some of the others, which I can only apologise for. Relatively new to the Infinite Cities after joining in the Season 23 election Gachapon, there's still an element of mystery to me about the former Tokyo femme fatale, armed with sleight of hand and a dashing blade. She might be the odd-one-out on the active roster in terms of Taco tenure, but you can see that she's lightning quick and cutting. Yet here she finds herself, with a squad she hardly knows, driving head first into the desert. I've plumped for **Black Sheep** by **Metric**. I think it carries the same swagger she does, especially with that delicious vocal, and it nods towards the dark arts that she is not unfamiliar with.

King Lucas Petty. If Michelle Sportsman had to go, I'm glad Lucas arrived in her stead. He's not afraid to show-off and be the centre of attention, but he has that drive, desire, and keenness to learn that make him a great pitcher and champion driver. Who better then to co-pilot the Taco Chariot, and what better song to go full throttle to than **The Distance** by **CAKE**, because there's no doubt in my mind that he would attack his task at the wheel with the same urgency and vigour as he would any other, even if others have made it to the desert first and their fate has been... complicated, at best. He's going the distance, and so are the rest of the Tacos.

Let's switch to the shadows - there are too many interesting and important Tacos to ignore this section altogether, even if I haven't been able to fit them all in. Pannonica Oko, for someone who's had so few active games, has few characters as fascinating as she is. Name stealer, sometime shapeshifter and downright mean as hell, there's no-one quite like her. The Tacos head into the desert, seeing the teams ahead of them leave their names behind, and she ponders what this means for her. She does so to **Vampires** by **The Midnight**, seeing everyone return to the nothing from where they came, and also sensing the opportunity to maybe burn some unnecessary bridges on the way out, just because she can. The sax also absolutely wails, and I think she'd get a kick out of that.

Rat Batson was never cut out to be a Blaseball player. There's no shame in that - most aren't, in truth. Not that Batson was deterred, filling in out of necessity (and hitting a homer in the process) before shifting to the shadows to take up the role of team bat boy and clubhouse photographer. He knows that he won't really be remembered for his on-field exploits, but long after the Tacos ride into the sunset, his words and pictures will remain scattered throughout the Infinite Cities as a lasting legacy to his friends and team-mates - **Qwerty Finger** by **Everything Everything** recognises that as the phenomenal achievement it is.

Hendricks Richardson might be an ideologue, albeit one who sees the destruction of the coin and all notions of money along with it and lets out slightly more than a wry smile. He sees the fate that awaits the Tacos in the desert, and wonders if it's actually not so bad after all - it certainly seems that there's a perverse fairness to everyone having themselves stripped down to the core, with not even a name. **Imagine** by **John Lennon** has that same optimism, as the moneyless world he once dreamed of has somehow become a reality.

There was once a time when McKinley Otten had a bright Blaseball future, before it was brutally taken from her by savage consumer attacks. It's infuriating that it was taken out of her hands by no fault of her own, and the dreams that once powered her performances are now flecked with nightmares. There's a tinge of sadness about it, but that's not always a bad thing - it's important to acknowledge your struggles, and it shows a quiet strength. I think ***Dreams*** by ***Fleetwood Mac*** has the relaxing ambience conducive to sleep, but recognises the turmoil she's gone through.

The mixtape finishes on my favourite Taco, the ILB all-time career hits leader, Rat Mason. For a player who's not necessarily seen as a superstar outside the Infinite Los Angeli, that's no mean feat. Rat obviously caught the wider Blaseball public's attention in the semi-centennial when they evaded the clutches of the vault on three separate occasions, but that's Rat Mason for you - they'd rather stay a regular Taco than have any so-called 'Legendary' status foisted upon them. As the sun explodes across the immaterial and extramaterial planes, Rat may finally have to look back on their many achievements and consider what kind of legacy they've left, both for their team-mates and the Tacos fanbase. We end with ***The Racing Rats*** by ***Editors*** - the irony of course being that in the semi-centennial, perhaps for the first time in history, people couldn't keep up with the racing Rats. Not on the basepaths, anyway. When the Taco Chariot falls, there'll be a huge hole left behind, and without Rat Mason it wouldn't be anywhere near as big.