

RICE'S DERBY CHOICE JOURNAL

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40th Edition



F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther....And one fine morning----

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

- THE GREAT GATSBY (1925)

Gregory (Scotland Yard detective): "Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

Sherlock Holmes: "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

Gregory: "The dog did nothing in the night-time."

Sherlock Holmes: "That was the curious incident."

- ***Silver Blaze (Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes)***
- ***by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1892)***

A journey into the netherworld of New Orleans is wanting if unaccompanied by the personalities linked to Fair Grounds horse racing. Invariably those characters include politicians, grifters, organized crime figures, street-smarts on the hustle, soldiers of fortune, and alleged conspirators in the JFK assassination.

My long-time fixation with the game and that place produced associations with every category mentioned above. What follows are some of the most memorable.

The trainer of the first Breeders Cup Classic (1984) winner, Wild Again at 31/1, was an archetypical Orleanian. Vincent Timphony toiled largely in the realm of low-level claimers before and after his run with Wild Again. For many years, he did this while operating an Italian restaurant, named for himself, called Vincenzo's.

Although Vincenzo's was known as much for its poker room as for its cuisine, my own tutorial courtesy of the proprietor was in gin rummy. How good was he? Good enough to be Champion of the 2000 Gin Rummy Association Tournament in Las Vegas. That good.

That first BC Classic lived up to its name with a three-horse photo finish. Three HOF jockeys (Day, Cordero, Pincay) battled to the wire with the most improbable of the three getting the win. The purse was \$3,000,000 but Wild Again's owner had not nominated his colt and had to pay a supplemental fee of \$360k just to be eligible.

The melee in the last eighth of a mile produced an immediate stewards' inquiry that dq'd Gate Dancer's second place finish and placed him third for interference with heavy favorite Slew O'Gold.



VINCENT TIMPHONY AT BC I (1984)

Wild Again's owner, Bill Allen, reneged on a promise to Vincent of shares in the horse's successful stallion career. Decades later, Allen got three years for bribing Alaskan legislators. Under the plea deal, his son walked and reappeared as the owner of 2009 Kentucky Derby winner, Mine That Bird, at 50/1. Sometimes crime does pay.

Vincent benefitted from an early racing and gastronomic tuition as his family ran the track kitchen at Fair Grounds during his childhood. His older brother Frank bred, owned, and trained 1990 Louisiana Derby winner, Heaven Again (by Wild again), while still finding time for his backstretch bookmaking business. A Metropolitan Crime Commission report on corruption in Louisiana sports cited Frank as a "notorious gambler." I would have replaced notorious with celebrated.

The three of us spent many a pre-dawn winter morning on the Fair Grounds backside "training" one another's horses. Both brothers are gone now but I treasured their friendship greatly.



WILD AGAIN (2) SLEW O' GOLD (1A) GATE DANCER (5)

Sturges “Duke” Ducoing is another singular character who is, in his late 70’s, still training race horses. A former football and baseball player at Tulane University, Sturges made a brief appearance as a pitcher in the Boston Red Sox organization prior to his turf career. Although mostly involved in the claiming ranks, he trained a very nice colt, Majesty’s Imp, that finished second in the 1989 Louisiana Derby.

His collection of owner-clients included Rolland “Big Mac” McMaster, a Detroit Teamster who provided muscle to the union’s recruiting efforts. He later served as Jimmy Hoffa’s bodyguard before their falling out.

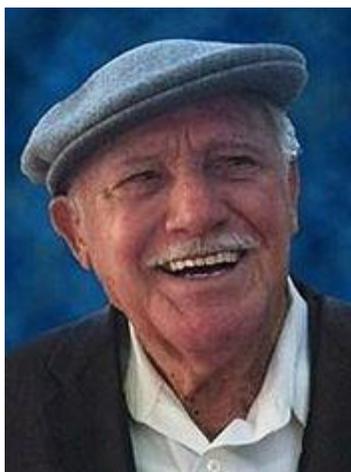
At the close of Fair Grounds racing season, Sturges would ship to Detroit for summer racing. In the late 70’s he purchased a small parcel of land on Mac’s thousand acre spread there that provided turnout for the Ducoing trainees. Shortly after Hoffa’s disappearance in 1982, Big Mac became a person of interest in the investigation.

Years later, acting on a tip from an informer, the F.B.I. launched a team of bulldozers that turned over the entire Ducoing property in a vain search for Hoffa’s corpse. By that time Sturges had sold the land but he still underwent detailed questioning about his former client.

J.E. “Boyzee” Jumonville was a Louisiana state senator who became an instant billionaire when a large tract of scrub land he owned was found to rest in the heart of the prolific Tuscaloosa Trend in Louisiana.

In 1982 his health was failing and he wanted to run a horse in that year’s Kentucky Derby, fearing he would never have another shot.

Jumonville had raced horses before but being Louisiana-breds, they were of humble pedigree and limited staying power. The best state bred three-year-old that year was a gelding named Real Dare. After the Senator’s offer of \$3 million for Linkage (a legitimate contender who later finished second in the Preakness) was rejected, he bought Real Dare for \$750k and entered him in the Louisiana Derby. He engaged Steve Cauthen to ride and flew the jock in from London for the race. To no one’s surprise, other than Real Dare’s connections, the gelding finished last and Cauthen caught the next flight back to England.



J.E. JUMONVILLE, SR.



J.E. JUMONVILLE, JR.

An undeterred Jumonville not only entered Real Dare in the Kentucky Derby, but began exploring the feasibility of surgery to reinstate the gelding’s ability to procreate. The veterinary experiment was abandoned after Real Dare failed to beat a horse in the field of 19. The succinct entry on the Derby chart read: *Real Dare tired badly.*

Sadly, so did Boyzee and the Senator passed three days before the following year’s Derby won by Sunny’s Halo and ridden by fellow Cajun Eddie Delahoussaye. Since the Senator’s death, his seat in the Louisiana legislature

has been held by J.E. Jumonville, Jr. who, at 76, still races horses and cashes those royalty checks. Louisiana dynasties are somp'n else.

In 1999 my small racing stable made frequent use of a talented young rider from Cajun country named Billy Patin (pronounced pah-tan). In that year's Louisiana Derby, he rode a maiden named Valhol that the bettors logically dismissed. Billy made the lead with the horse and was still on top deep stretch before tiring and finishing a close fourth. The next day he was riding for me in a race at Fair Grounds.

Before giving him a leg up in the paddock, I complimented him on his ride and the colt's effort. He thanked me, then looked me straight in the eye and spoke in his lilting South Louisiana patois:

“Mistuh Tim. I win the Arkansas Derby wit dat harse next munt. You can bet.”

He did and we did at 30/1. Subsequent to the results becoming official, the race video showed a foreign object dropping from Billy's whip hand shortly past the finish line. The stewards later ruled that the object was an illegal shocking device (AKA battery, joint, machine). Billy claimed it was a rubber band used to keep the sleeve of his silks secure. The result was a five- year suspension. With no Billy up, Valhol finished 15th of 19 in the Kentucky Derby.



BILLY PATIN

The jock resumed his riding career after serving his time, but in 2015 was nailed again along with his older brother Joe and another rider for race fixing at Evangeline Downs. Joe and his fellow conspirator held their mounts and

Billy won the race. The stewards caught him again with ye olde shocking device. This time the sentence was life, a sad ending for a guy I really liked.

Few are the Fair Grounds alums that can match Jim Chehardy for pure color. A one- time operator of the track kitchen and licensed owner-trainer, he opened (and closed) sixteen restaurants over three decades. His ability to obtain track credentials and liquor licenses in spite of multiple felony convictions continues to amaze.

Jim served three years of a six-year sentence in 1960 for burglarizing a post office. In 1977 he was busted for cashing counterfeit win tickets at the track.

While neither of the foregoing offenses provided a regulatory hurdle, a later transgression in the 1980's did. Jim incorporated the Louisiana Cattle Company Restaurant which he opened near my office in Covington. Unfortunately, Jim was found guilty of filing false and forged documents related to his license applications. His partner, the Chief of Detectives in neighboring Jefferson Parish's Sheriff's Office, was not charged and Jim got a suspended sentence.



JIM CHEHARDY

If you thought that ended his career, you would be mistaken. His denouement ten years later was an ornate Creole and Italian venue named

Goodfellas. Operations began with three consecutive nights of grand opening parties attended by every elected official in Jefferson Parish as well as the state's Lt. Governor. Goodfella's lifespan was predictably brief and mutual friends are unaware of Jim's present whereabouts. My guess is that somewhere in the cosmos, Jim is still a restaurateur and a race track is nearby.

There was once a purveyor of race track opinion, more specifically a tout, at the New Orleans Fair Grounds known as Confidential Charlie. Over time our acquaintance grew into friendship, but I never asked for nor did he offer his true name.

Charlie favored three-piece polyester suits, cubic zirconia rings, and Wrigley's Spearmint gum. He never carried a Racing Form which in those days was on newsprint. My supposition was that he did not want to subject his manicured digits to ink stains. His only supporting document was the track program marked with Charlie's encrypted commentary of every horse on the day's card.

Like most wizened elders at the track, Confidential Charlie was ready with handy quotes. In a discussion on the integrity or lack thereof at our local track, Charlie said "if the betting public thought the game was on the up and up, I'd be out of a job."

Players seek an edge beyond traditional handicapping tools. What they want is inside information. During a stretch in the late 1970's and early 1980's, a collection of malefactors took possession of the jock's room at Fair Grounds and produced pre-determined outcomes with alarming frequency. The larceny was so pervasive that the Vegas sportsbooks either refused Fair Grounds action or set low limits on wagers.

Since fixed races were almost always low-level claimers run in painfully slow times, fans dubbed any suspicious outcome a "boat race." One of those that remains indelible in the memories of Fair Grounds old-timers was a Valentine's Day Massacre of chalk eaters on February 14, 1981.

In that day's fourth race, a \$15,000 claimer, the winner was a hapless Louisiana-bred gelding named Bye Gem whose record showed two wins in thirty starts. In his previous three starts, all of which were \$12,500 claimers restricted to La-Breds, he was beaten by a total of forty-eight lengths. In two of those races bettors sent him off at triple digit odds.

On this day he would race in open company and for a higher tag. A clue as to what was coming was that Bye Gem went off at 11/1. The DRF chart was a howler:

BYE GEM, showing vast improvement in speed, split rivals entering the stretch and held sway under constant rousing.

Though I was a minor actor in the Fair Grounds *tableau vivant*, Charlie viewed me as important enough to offer his knowledge gratis. His protocol was to interrupt the constant clicking of his ballpoint long enough to circle a horse's program number. When imparting classified intelligence, Charlie's lips moved no more than a ventriloquist's and his speech barely exceeded a whisper. The sentence structure was always the same:

"They like the _ horse."- appropriate number inserted.

"They like" was Charlie's way of imparting that a power higher than his own was in play. The Saturday after the Bye Gem race, I quizzed him about that outcome.

"They liked that horse" was all he offered which was an executive summary of what had transpired.

Three gentlemen that did not "like that horse" were the somnambulant Fair Grounds stewards, whose watch was routinely confined to egregious fouls and detection of electrical devices in the hands of riders.

But this time the sentinels of fair play were woke to the injustice but were unable to crack the case. Track ownership suspected that a prodigal gambler of doubtful character was behind the pre-determined outcome in the race.

Management declared that the person of interest, Laurence Solow, was an undesirable and banned him from the confines of Fair Grounds. Solow took umbrage at the assault on his good name and brought a civil suit against Fair Grounds seeking reinstatement of track privileges.



LARRY SOLOW (1974)



LARRY SOLOW (1978)

In defending its decision Fair Grounds attorneys called to the stand jockeys Curtis Hale and L.J. Dourousseau who testified that another rider, Angelo Trosclair, had given each several hundred dollars in cash to prevent their mounts from finishing in the money.

Unlike his accusers, the twenty-four-year-old Trosclair had already produced over one million dollars in winnings and his career was on the rise.



Fair Grounds alleged that Solow was the source of the money but Trosclair denied any knowledge of any bribe or fix. Judge Steven Plotkin called Hale and Dourousseau “liars”, dismissed the case and restored Solow’s track access.

In a subsequent criminal trial, a federal court convicted Trosclair of sports bribery, but suspended his four-year sentence.

Laurence Solow had a criminal history that reached back at least as far as 1967 when he was arrested for theft and forgery. Although he favored financial scams, in 1982 Solow masterminded the biggest bank heist (\$440,000) in Louisiana history.

The perpetrators held a bank official’s family hostage in their home and forced the official to open the Whitney Bank drop box in Lakeside Mall. Solow departed to Spain and fought extradition until losing his appeal in 1990.

The assistant U.S. attorney prosecuting the case was a since deceased high school classmate of mine and Fair Grounds communicant. In a plea bargain that included a charge of distribution of phony RCA stock certificates, the court sentenced Solow to twenty-five years. He served eight prior to parole.

The most bizarre aspect of Solow’s unconventional life story may have been his association with a central figure in Jim Garrison’s conspiracy probe in the assassination of JFK: Gordon Novel.

Garrison considered Novel, a private investigator and bugging device expert, to be the critical cog in the inquiry. Novel had a brief gig on behalf of the Nixon White House advising how to erase incriminating parts of the infamous Rosemary Woods tapes.

Some JFK researchers alleged that Novel was a CIA mole and also the infamous umbrella man on Dealey Plaza. Others tabbed Solow as the driver of a limousine stopped for speeding in a Dallas suburb shortly after the JFK hit. Police released that vehicle after a passenger displayed Secret Service credentials.

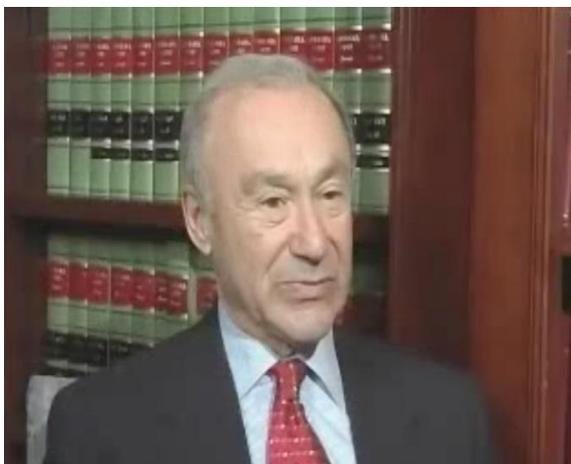
During the Garrison investigation, Novel’s lawyers were two future judges, Eddie Sapir and Steve Plotkin. I knew then City Councilman Sapir as a Fair Grounds regular and as an opposing captain in a fast pitch softball league. Eddie was also the landlord/neighbor of weird David Ferrie (played by Joe Pesci in the JFK film).

The genial Councilman was at the same time a sports agent and represented NY Yankees manager Billy Martin. Sapir also aided Angelo Trosclair in gaining connections when the rider sought opportunity on the NYRA circuit.



GORDON NOVEL

Novel and Solow were teammates on an excellent mile relay team at East Jefferson High School and, at the time of the Bye Gem incident, partners in the Jamaican Village, a joint at the edge of the French Quarter featuring topless female waitstaff.



JUDGE STEVEN PLOTKIN



JUDGE EDDIE SAPIR

Did Steve Plotkin's legal representation of Larry Solow's business partner later influence his ruling as the judge in the Bye Gem civil case? Probably not

as the case against Solow was a weak one. Whatever shenanigans filled Larry's *curriculum vitae*, there is now reason to believe the Bye Gem race was not fixed.

Bye Gem's trainer, a professed non-gambler, testified that the horse had experienced foot soreness in those races he ran so badly. To the gelding's credit, he had a useful career subsequently with a total of twelve wins, twenty-four seconds, and fourteen thirds. Bye Gem and Real Dare were both sired by Thirty Romans.

One of Bye Gem's owners reported an unknown caller offered her a \$25,000 bribe to testify that Larry Solow and the GM of Louisiana Downs, Vincent Bartimo, were part owners in the horse. Accompanying the bribe offer was a threat of physical harm if she declined, which she did. In the end, no harm befell her.

If we ask ourselves the *cui bono fuerit?* (to whose benefit) query posed by Cassius as reported by Cicero, the arrow points directly at Fair Grounds. No further investigation transpired.

Despite the corruption that pervaded Louisiana horse racing in this period, my conclusion is that the Bye Gem race was not fixed. The clincher for me came from a longtime roguish jockey friend who was the bursar and script writer for payoffs to maladroit riders for stopping their horses. He was the literal gatekeeper of the jock's room.

That friend, who had a mount in the Bye Gem race, assured me he knew of no bribery activity in that race. For me that was the equivalent of the Sherlock Holmes "dog in the night" quote preceding this piece. If the dog didn't bark, Holmes correctly deduced that the perpetrator was an insider. In this case if my jockey friend was not involved in a fix, almost certainly there was none.

Gordon Novel died in 2012, pre-deceasing Larry Solow by two years. Novel was seventy-four and Solow was seventy-seven. Angelo Trosclair retired from riding and now operates a thoroughbred transportation business. Both of his accusers are deceased. Judges Sapir and Plotkin are living well in retirement.

If he is still among the quick, I pray that Confidential Charlie is still snapping his gum and clicking his ballpoint pen at a track somewhere.

“Chaos is my friend”

- Bob Dylan

If Jimmy was thinking 2019 Kentucky Derby when he issued the quote above, he summed it up perfectly. This year we have a complex of twenty entrants, none of which are complete throw-outs. Here we go:

BY MY STANDARDS- By any standards, winning the Grade II LA Derby off of four maiden races warmup is impressive. Sire Goldencents is long time fave and underrated. Same could be said for trainer Calhoun. Churchill works have drawn raves and colt likely to have a say in the outcome.

CODE OF HONOR- Broke the code in the FOY in a driving close but lost a little honor in the FLA Derby with a non-competitive third after getting knocked around at the start. Trainer McGaughey delivered our last Derby win (Orb-2013). Pedigree and running style say COH will love the eight-furlong route. Johnny V keeps mount over Spinoff option. Live threat.

COUNTRY HOUSE- The second teamer on the Mott roster was on our short list after his second in the Risen Star. His fourth and third in the LA and ARK Derbies were uninspiring but being a May foal prob accounts for late development. Still think he could be sitting on a big effort. Not impossible he could take it to the house.

CUTTING HUMOR- Found the water too deep in Arkansas but gets in with score in the Sunland Derby. Solid connections but looks like an outsider.

GAME WINNER- Won everything at two including the BC Juvenile. Sophomore season comprised of two tough beats to Beach and Roadster that could have easily been two wins. Might not be the winner but no denying he has game. Opinion here is that GW has best shot of the strong Baffert trio.

GRAY MAGICIAN- Sneaks in with points from his closing second in the UAE Derby. Deserves respect for that effort but it would take Houdini to get the roses for this guy.

HAIKAL- Owned and bred by Shadwell Farm operated by Deputy Dubai Brother, Sheik Ramdan. Name is a popular Arabic boy's moniker. All starts to date at Aqueduct including a win in the Gotham G-3 at a mile and a third in the Wood from way back. Best chance is a repeat of the Wood effort.

IMPROBABLE- Like his stablemate GW, this guy was perfect at two and has been second twice at three in a pair of close ones. Sire City Zip was a sprinter but his offspring have lengthened somewhat. Still not convinced that, despite obvious talent, he really wants a mile and a quarter. Name fits here.

LONG RANGE TODDY- Looked like he was getting serious after running down Improbable in the G-2 Rebel but bounced badly in the Ark Derby. Always respect anything that Asmussen brings to Louisville but best chance probably the back of a tri or a superfecta.

MASTER FENCER- This entry is as inscrutable as his society. If he wins the abdication of Emperor Akihito will be bumped off the front page of the *Asahi Shimbun* for sure. Sushi on the house.

MAXIMUM SECURITY- Started his career in maximum obscurity in a \$16K maiden claimer. He is now four for four by a total of thirty- five lengths including a wiring of the field in the G-1 Florida Derby. Sire won BC Juvenile in 2013 before injury ended his career. Unless security locks the starting gate, MS will break at maximum level. Might not look back.

OMAHA BEACH- Owner has two Derby seconds with horses I loved (Eight Belles and Hard Spun). Trainer is best known for older horses (his Dare and Go ended Cigar's win streak at sixteen) but he has handled O.B. beautifully. Mike Smith leaving S.A. Derby winner Roadster for this guy says a lot. Legit favorite and barring mishap the invasion will succeed.

PLUS QUE PARFAIT- In two LA Derby preps, colt was MOINS QUE PARFAIT finishing thirteenth in the Risen Star. Trip to Dubai brought out his best where he scored against a less than all-star field. Pedigree and running style say the longer the better so look for improvement down the lane. If he gets it all that would rate a *Sacre Bleu!*

ROADSTER- Looked like #1 in the Baffert string until third place finish to Game Winner in the Del Mar Futurity. Breathing problem was blamed and throat surgery corrected it but left a six-month gap between starts. Turned

the tables on G.W. in the S.A Derby but still playing catch up. Rider Smith goes to the Beach. The road less traveled could be an issue.

SPINOFF- Homebred from one of the storied European racing houses, the Wertheimers. Having Derby runner-up Hard Spun as his sire and the wonderful race mare Zaftig as his dam give him max pedigree points. In second start after six-month layoff, he held the lead late in LA Derby before conceding to winner By My Standards. Expect major effort at a monster price and that is no spin.

TACITUS- The Roman Senator he is named for won't be on hand as he cashed out in the second century, A.D. Made easy work of the TB Derby and Wood Memorial fields. Our picks of sons of Tapit and Wood winners have fared poorly but that's our fault. Juddmonte-Mott-Ortiz are grade I connections. Interesting that Tacitus means "speechless" in Latin which is where we sit on this guy.

TAX- Clever claim of Claiborne homebred by Gargan in a Maiden \$50k. Won the G-3 Withers but his second in the Wood was no match for Tacitus. Has speed and stamina which the opposition may find taxing.

VEKOMA- Named for the Dutch roller coaster maker but colt's career has no ups and downs. His third in the FOY is the only loss and drew away from the field in the Blue Grass. Twenty-eight years since a BG winner has won this race. Not impossible but looks to be in the second tier.

WAR OF WILL- Was winless in four grass starts at two then blew away a maiden field in his last start at two in the slop at CD. Easily won both LA Derby preps at FG before coming ninth in the big one as 4/5 chalk after a troubled start. Likely to force the pace but will have company. Where there's a will there's a war.

WIN WIN WIN- gets negative ratings for his speed figures but has always seemed to find trouble. Came from far back to get the place in the BG roller derby. If he ever gets a clean trip, he might live up to his name.

OUR PICK-

As much as we like Omaha Beach, the tradition of this letter is to never pick the favorite so we will look elsewhere. We think our pick will likely be the fourth choice and offer double digit odds.

Normally a four-start resume would not qualify for a battle-tested label but we think he deserves that designation. His two G-2 wins (Tampa Derby and Wood Memorial) were both challenging accomplishments. In the latter race he was knocked around a lot in the early going (bumping and clipped heels) but still prevailed.

There is every reason to expect another step forward for our pick on Saturday.

His pedigree is perfect for this race. Sire Tapit has produced Belmont winner Tonalist but still looking for his first Derby. Dam Close Hatches was Champion Older Female in 2014. This is her first foal.

Our trainer Bill Mott trained Cigar and has ten Breeders Cup wins and a Belmont.

Our rider Jose Ortiz, though just twenty-five, has two BC wins and a Belmont. In 2017 he won the Eclipse Award for best jockey.

Owner/breeder is Juddmonte Farms, owner of sixteen Eclipse awards and twenty-one Cartier Racing Awards (Euro equivalent of our Eclipse Awards).

A win here will be the first for owner, trainer, and jockey.

Our pick for the 145th Kentucky Derby is.....

TACITUS



THE BET

We will bet TACITUS win and place and make a serious exacta box with TACITUS-OMAHA BEACH and GAME WINNER

LONG SHOT PICK-

CODE OF HONOR – win-place-show

ULTRA LONG SHOTS-

COUNTRY HOUSE & SPINOFF- win-place show

We will make smaller exactas and trifectas using all above.

-JTR

AFTER COMPLETION OF OUR LETTER, OMAHA BEACH WAS SCRATCHED DUE TO A RELATIVELY MINOR THROAT ISSUE AND ALSO ELIGIBLE, BODEXPRESS, DREW INTO THE RACE. ONLY CHANGE FOR US IS SERIOUS EXACTA BOX IS NOW

TACITUS-GAME WINNER-CODE OF HONOR