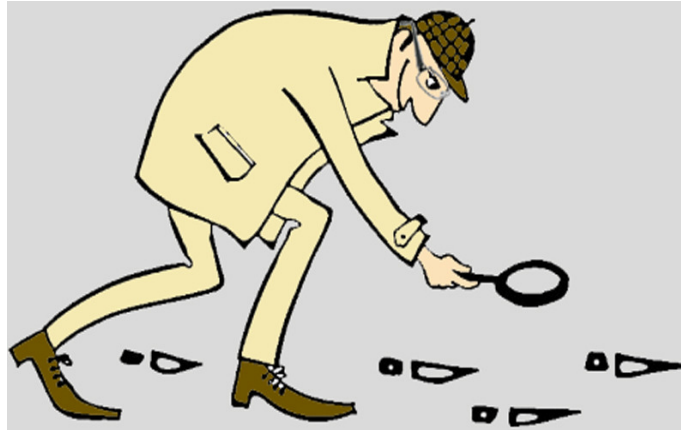


THE STAR AND I
CHAPTER 13: Quantum leap

Following the Star's spectacular Irish Champion Stakes success, his ultimate day of destiny lay now ahead. Could he pay his mother the supreme tribute? Could he follow in her footsteps at Longchamp, by winning the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe?



Urban Sea, winning the Prix de l'Arc 1993 ahead of 22 others



Could he follow in his mother's footsteps at Longchamp sixteen years later?

What a privilege, what an honour had been bestowed on me, to have my 'imperial' yellow jacket carried to success in the 2000 Guineas, the Derby itself, three other championship races and now finally racing in the Prix de Arc de Triomphe 2009!



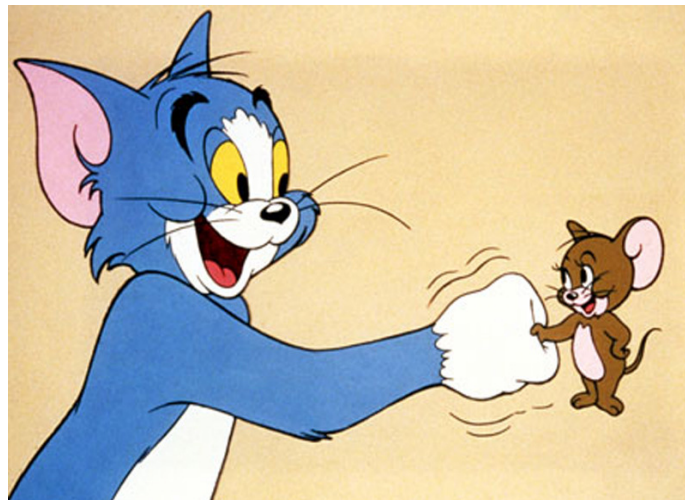
My 'imperial' yellow colour reigns over European famous racecourses

Now, we faced the challenge that I and others in the Star's team had deliberately played down, asking how often did Longchamp on the first Sunday in October provide the terrain on which the Star could shine. I might think or say, or do as I liked, but the elephant remained firmly in the room, immovable. Could Sea The Stars win the Arc?



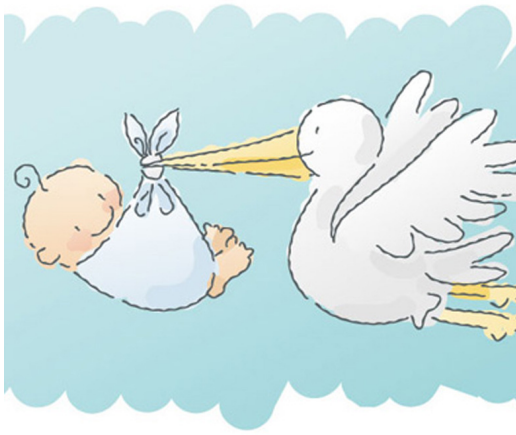
The elephant remained firmly in the room day and night with me

History weighed heavily against him succeeding. Derby winners – Mill Reef and Lammtarra – had gone on to Arc glory. Dancing Brave was a Guineas winner to have done likewise. However, no horse had ever completed that treble, not since the Arc had first been staged as a championship event in 1920.



Tom and Jerry become friends and there was no precedent

For my 'ling' horse to succeed in climbing to the very apex of the thoroughbred species, he would need all of his famous mother's determination. He would need her inspiration. His team had not missed a single beat throughout his fabulous racing career. They would not fail him now. As for me, I would need the full thrust of my own mother's steely resolve, and several precautionary apples!

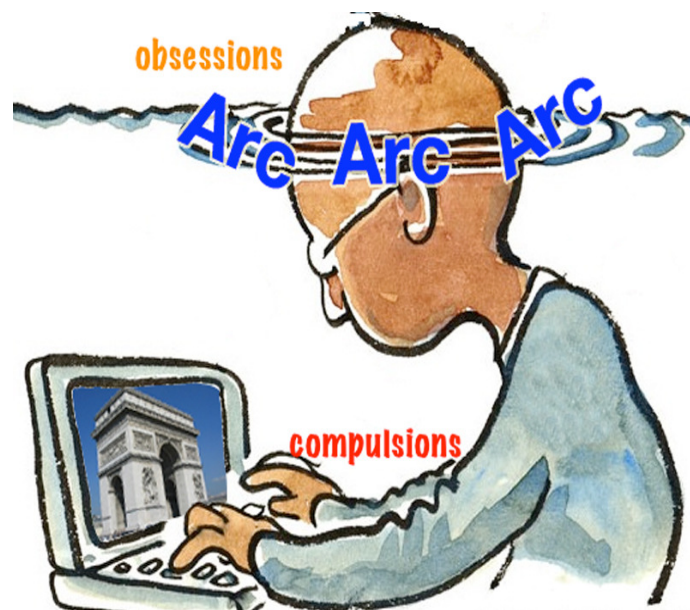


Urban Sea has given her determination to Sea The Stars when she brought him into this world in 2006



As for me, several precautionary apples were needed

In the preceding weeks, that old OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) kicked in big time, taking control of my waking moments, destroying the hours of darkness. I lost all appetite for 'proper' work, focused exclusively on anything that concerned the Arc, especially the weather.



I focused exclusively on anything that concerned the Arc

The weather gods played their part in the Star's preparation for his date with destiny. Mr. Oxx gave the all clear since he knew that the Star was on a mission in his mother's memory. On Arc Eve, I longed for my bed in the Prince de Galles and the sleep that I knew would hardly come.



Unexpected good weather in Paris in October

The day started in a different manner than what it seemed to portend. As an obvious occurrence, I was not able to sleep that night (niente-nada). I headed out of the hotel, distracting myself with a short walk on the Champs Elysees where I spent most of my childhood.



sleepless night



Avenue Des Champs Elysees where I spent most of my childhood

That did not bring any solace in the least, because outside the walls of the hotel, and seemingly on every billboard, there were large "Qatar Prix de L'Arc de Triomphe" posters. I was dreadful, passing by a nostalgic French kiosk picking up a newspaper and saw my 'Star' on the front page. Once I was back into my hotel room, I felt the angst take a hold of me even more so than when I had left.

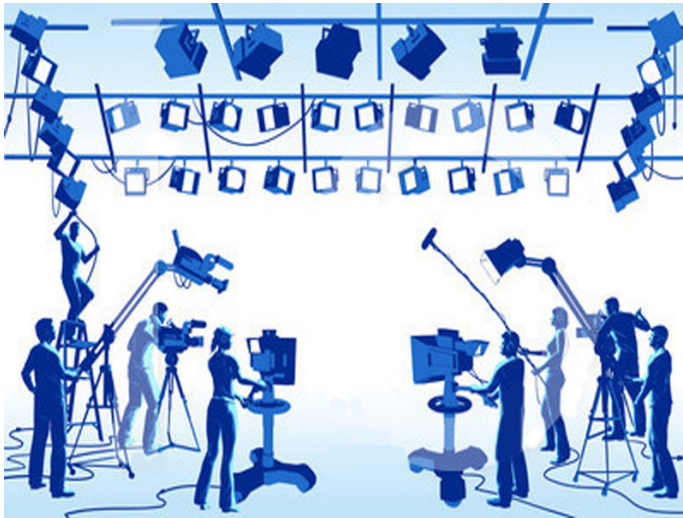


I was passing by a nostalgic French kiosk



I saw 'Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe' posters everywhere

Once we arrived at Longchamp, our team was confronted by camera crews, assailed from all directions by well-wishers. We struggled to make our way to the tent where lunch was being served. Then we cracked it. The mere mention of Sea the Stars conferred an immediate 'Access All Areas'. Such is the reflected glory of being associated with a Superstar.

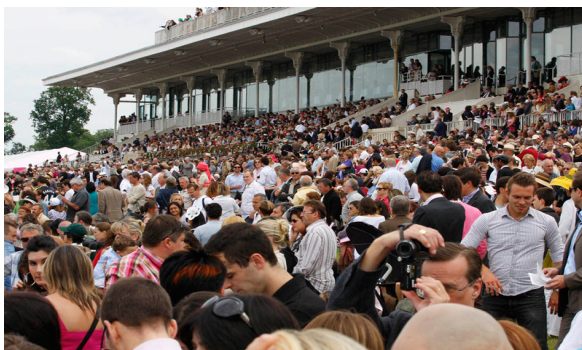


We were confronted by camera crews



People wished us good luck

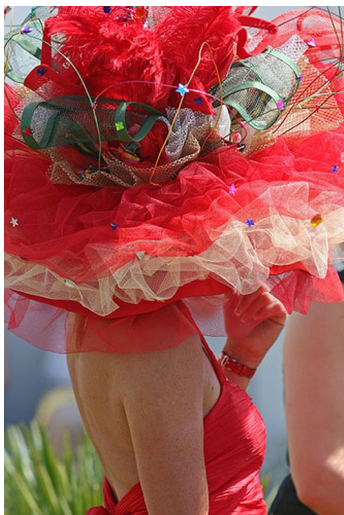
Longchamp on Arc day is uniquely different. The air is electric with anticipation and mounting excitement. It is the epitome of the racing year in France, the one occasion on which racing becomes the focus not just of the French people but of like-minded aficionados all over Europe.



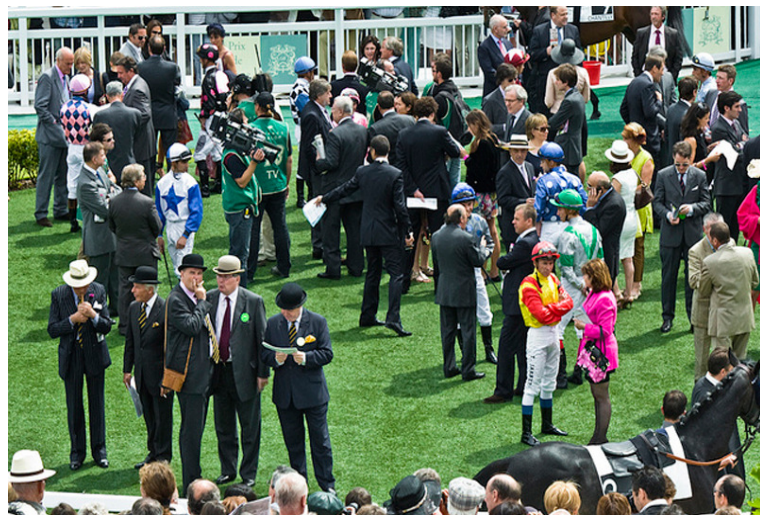
Longchamp on Arc day



Height of fashion



Fashion summit



The air is electric with anticipation and excitement



It is the epitome of the racing year

Schoolboy in 1993, owner and host in 2009, I led our party of eight to table number eight. Just as it had been for the Derby, the Eclipse and the International, so it must be for the Arc. Patrick and his brother, the famous artist Hubert de Watrigant, Charles de Bavier, his wife and family, children in 1993, adults now joined us later.



From left to right: Ines de Bavier, Christopher, Cyril and Diane de Bavier

We went down to the pre-parade ring, where the Arc runners were being saddled. It was bedlam, camera crews scuttling everywhere, thrusting cameras up against the horses' faces, flashes going off in their very eyes. And all human eyes were focused on the Star. He, alone in this madhouse remained unmoved.



In the pre-parade ring, all human eyes were focused on the Star



He alone remained unmoved

He was the Star and this was his stage. He entered the main parade ring amidst increased frenzy, Irish followers flourishing Irish flags, and through the hubbub and the raucous. Sea The Stars calmly acknowledged the applause that he had long assumed his rightful due.



Acknowledgement of the applause, his rightful due



Irish followers flourishing Irish Flags

As the runners paraded before the towering grandstand, our party pushed and jostled to reach the box 128, the same box from which we had shouted Urban Sea home in 1993. To our dismay, we were met by a camera crew. They had apparently evicted the occupants of the adjoining box in order to film us throughout the race.



The crew, filming us from the adjoining box

The buildup to the race was more than I could take. My Star should win, was in the least expected to. All my mind could focus on were the things that could go awry. Were he to get bumped, blocked or trapped on the rail, how would he deal with the obstacles ahead of him? As dictated by Murphy's law, "anything that can go wrong will go wrong". And it did go wrong. Into the race...

MURPH



Anything that can go wrong will go wrong

Looking at the large screen, I could see he was pretty far back. I could see the Star break too well, almost in front. Michael Kinane took him back. Then the other jostling runners shuffled him even further back. He was in jail! Disaster was the word that slithered through my mind. But that thought lasted only a couple of seconds. Then a gap appeared in the racetrack as comparable to a ski slope and my Star would transform into Jean-Claude Killy. A sharp left, then a sharp right and slipping through a gap. Suddenly, he is in front.



My 'Star' transformed into Jean Claude Killy

He had bounded beyond recall. His immortal mother had won her Arc. Her son had upped the ante. He had slammed his field. He was Pegasus!



Sea The Stars won the Prix de l'Arc 2009



My 'Star' in the winning enclosure with his connection overwhelmed by such a victory



He is the Pegasus of this century

The race has reached its conclusion. My champion, my partner has crossed the line in front of 18 others. He had won. We had won.

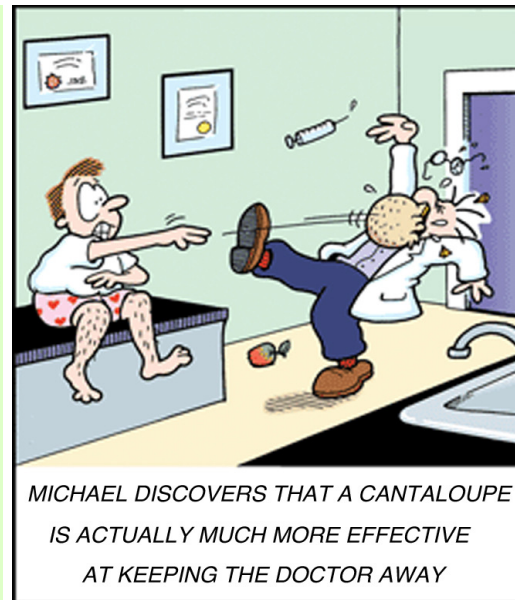


My champion has crossed the line in front of 18 others

I felt this dizziness take over once again. Was I going to lose consciousness and fulfill the newspapers' prophecies? The French had been ironic about my episode at the Eclipse Stakes.



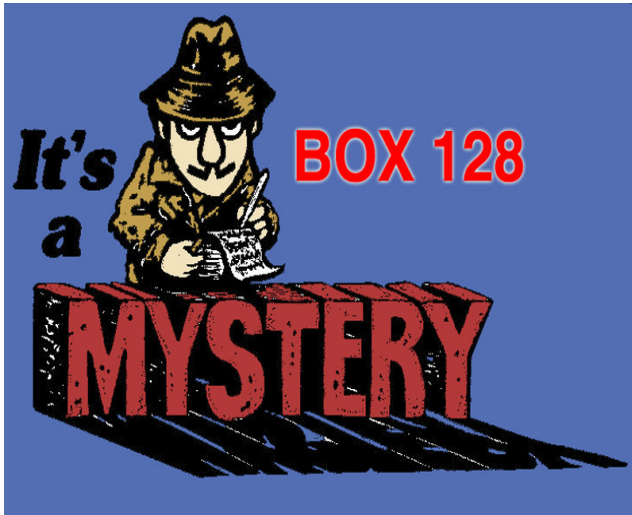
I felt this dizziness take over once again



MICHAEL DISCOVERS THAT A CANTALOUPE IS ACTUALLY MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE AT KEEPING THE DOCTOR AWAY

The French were ironic about me fainting at the Eclipse Stakes

However, I knew what to do this time around. Quickly I find an empty seat, but not before hugging everyone in that crowded box number 128. There is somewhat of a mystery to this box 128. Yes, I am Chinese and superstitious I am as well. I was standing in the exact same spot, watching this exact same race, seeing similar silk crossing the line in front of 22 others sixteen years earlier.



The mystery of box 128



I was standing in the exact spot of box 128, seeing similar silk crossing the line in 1993

I remember that day vividly as if it was yesterday. October 3rd 1993. I was barely tall enough to see over the ledge. On my right, the tall silhouette of Clement, screaming uncontrollably. I wondered whether he was being possessed since he didn't seem to behave like his usual self.



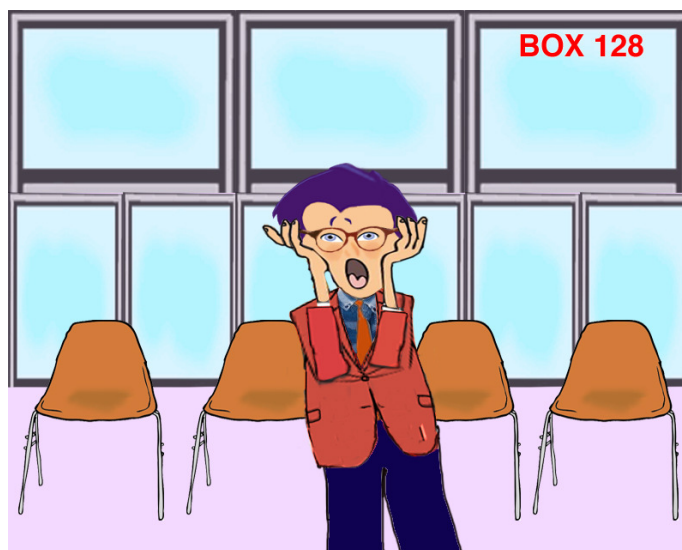
I was barely tall enough to see over the ledge. On my right, the tall silhouette of Clement, screaming uncontrollably

As the horses raced down the final furlong, Clement jumped onto the ledge of the box, totally disregarding the 10 foot drop to the level below. Well the advantage of being 6f4. I can still picture the scene. I clearly remember the hand of my father, reaching out to grab Clement by his jacket, preventing the otherwise inevitable fall.



Clement thought he could fly

As Urban Sea crossed the line a neck in front of Yoshida's White Muzzle, Mr. Lesbordes and Clement raced down the stairs to lead the horse in, Clement wise not to take the even shorter route, perhaps now finally realizing that he could not fly. My father and Charles de Bavier both went to the bar behind the restaurant for a quick few shots of whisky, not for celebration but to calm father's nerves. In the Chapter 18 'The Arc day 1993', my mother has previously mentioned how I was left behind.



Christopher had been left alone in the box 128

That fateful day in 1993 will be forever marked in my memory, but so will October 4th 2009. Now an adult myself, I fully realize how important the Arc is. It is the pinnacle of the racing world. It is the dream of thousands of racehorse owners, trainers and jockeys. Just to have a horse in the race is an achievement in itself.



Thousand miles horse is Chinese Emperor's dream



Sea The Stars is the dream of thousands of racehorse owners

The next few hours went by in slow motion and had a dreamlike quality. People coming up to me, hands shaking, interviews. I was on autopilot mode. All I could do was going through the motions but my mind was no longer able to think. The day kept getting longer and longer. Even though I was exhausted, that smile would not leave my face.



Arc press conference, I was on autopilot mode



My smile would not leave my face



Mr. & Mrs. Lesbordes with me in the winner's enclosure at Longchamp but I am an adult now

Later that night, I went on to celebrate the victory of a millennium with my family and friends but this time we had dinner at the Petrus, a restaurant serving " French Haute Cuisine ". This time nobody could call me a weirdo eating a cheap pizza. Mission accomplished!



Petrus "la haute cuisine Francaise"



I am not a weirdo eating a cheap pizza, not this time