Give credit to Jorge Perez of the Puerto Rican newspaper EL NUEVO DIA for coming up with the earth-shattering news about the Jose Rivera-Thomas Damgaard fight you've all been waiting for. And in case your Spanish is as rusty as mine, fear not: The El Nuevo Dia website facilitates instantaneous translation into plain English. One push of the button and you could have read this yesterday morning:

"The long wait has visos to be done still more long for José Antonio "The Rooster" Rivera."

"The boricua situated in Masacchusetts, who gained the scepter welter of the AMB al to conquer al German Michael Trabant September 13, 2003, and that then remained "dress and disturbed" when Ricardo Mayorga to weigh seven pounds of more to abort the defense that should do before the Nicaraguan April 17 in New York, now will have to wait for that its obligatory defense before the danish one Thomas Damgaard go to auction, was known yesterday."

"The office of Mr. King has just to send me a 'fax' to ask me that the fight go to auction," said Tuesday the Nicaraguan one Renzo Bagnariol, president of the Committee of Championships of the AMB. Rivera is tied promotionally to the company of King, while Damgaard is affiliated to the company of the development danish one Bettina Palle. The auction, according to Bagnariol, would be able to be performed Monday 14 of June in Miami."

"There we have to Gonzalo López (of the AMB) and we have done you auction previously," declared Bagnariol. The advantage of Miami is that in the Florida the lawyer resides Michael Marley, representative in America of the interests of Palle. And the company of King is located in Deerfield Beach, also in the Florida."

There. Doesn't that make you feel better already?

It sure made Steve Tankanow's day.

"Welcome to the world of boxing politics," sighed Tankanow, who only learned about the WBA purse offer after being directed to the Puerto Rican website yesterday.

Tankanow might look like one of Santa's elves, but he is a fight manager from Worcester, Massachusetts, who operates a one-man stable named Jose Antonio Rivera. Rivera is a 31 year-old journeyman pug from Worcester. He owns a belt from the World Boxing Association which says he is the welterweight champion of the world, although, truth be told, this title doesn't hold much significance to anyone save Rivera, Tankanow, Don King, and now, it appears, Thomas Damgaard.

Damgaard is 34-0, but has, literally, never fought outside his native Denmark. He is promoted by Denmark's Mogens Palle, who has been keeping his head particularly low for the past month

since being fingered by Robert Mittelman, who as part of a plea-bargain ratted him out to the Feds, claiming that a few years back he supplied Palle with several fall-down opponents in fixed fights involving heavyweight Brian Nielsen.

To make matters even more bizarre, according to the WBA Palle's authorized United States representative (now that Mittelman has become indisposed) is Boston-bred New York attorney Mike Marley, who in an earlier incarnation served a stretch as Don King's PR flack.

Damgaard's last fight came in February, when won a fifth-round technical decision from Shaka Henry.

Rivera's last scheduled fight was against Ricardo Mayorga at Madison Square Garden. It didn't happen at all.

Mayorga, of course, is the Nicaraguan who took the boxing world more or less by storm a year ago. Already the WBA champion, he beat the previously-undefeated Vernon Forrest (the 2002 'Fighter of the Year' who had scored back-to-back wins over Shane Mosley, at a time when Mosley was widely acclaimed as the world's best pound-for-pound performer), and then whipped Forrest again in a rematch.

Rivera, who is apparently aware of his own limitations, has never given up his day job. He schedules his training sessions around his work hours as a court officer for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, because, he explained, "boxing won't last forever. I'm a single parent of a ten-year old son, and my job includes benefits and has a good health-care plan."

Mayorga's 2003 on the world stage arrival made a big splash. A colorful throwback to hell-raising old-school boxers, he was a fun-loving sort who smoked and guzzled beer even when he was in training, and celebrated his victories by lighting up a cigarette in the ring.

With his wins over Forrest, Mayorga was elevated to "super champion" status. This ridiculous ploy enabled the WBA to auction off yet another "world" championship even as it recognized Mayorga's presumably extraterrestrial title.

So last September Rivera, who had moved up in the rankings since enlisting in the promotional stable of Don King, traveled to Germany where he fought somebody named Michel Trabant for the previously nonexistent belt. Trabant was up until then undefeated, but Rivera knocked him down in the second round and posted a unanimous decision.

Mayorga had already signed for a big-money fight with Mosley last December when he controversially lost to Leon Spinks' son Corey in Atlantic City. Corey Spinks had previously owned the International Boxing Federation title, and by acquiring Mayorga's two belts HE suddenly became a 'super champion.'

King then matched Rivera and Mayorga on the undercard of his April 17 John Ruiz-Fres Oquendo/Chris Byrd-Andrew Golota heavyweight doubleheader at Madison Square Garden, with Rivera's 'championship' in the offing, thus setting the stage for this cautionary tale of boxing

politics.

Clearly, though he promoted both participants, King was banking on Mayorga winning a 'title' that might provide leverage to vault him back into the spotlight, but Rivera would be handsomely compensated for putting his dubious championship at risk. His scheduled $250,000 purse was approximately ten times his largest previous payday.

All went well until the weigh-in the day before the fight. At 146 ½ pounds, Rivera safely made the welterweight limit, but Mayorga nearly broke the scale when he came in nearly seven pounds heavy.

Consternation ensued. Under WBA rules Mayorga could have been allowed two hours to shed the excess six and a half pounds, but that alternative was obviously futile. The Rivera camp finally agreed that if Mayorga lost TWO pounds by nightfall, the bout could proceed as a non-title fight, but evening came and went without Mayorga returning to the scale.

Negotiations continued through the next morning. King so desperately wanted Mayorga on the pay-per-view telecast that he offered to pay Rivera his scheduled quarter-million dollar purse to go through with the fight, in which he would have retained his "championship," win or lose.

Tankanow rightly pointed out that his fighter might be exposed to grave peril by fighting an opponent so much larger. But the danger was apparently not so great that Tankarow wouldn't have allowed Rivera to fight for $300,000. When King refused to budge on this point, the title bout was "postponed" and the promoter found another opponent (Philadelphian Eric Mitchell, who was already penciled in to fight in one of the supporting bouts) for Mayorga.

From King's standpoint this was a sensible alternative, since at least a few thousand customers might have purchased the heavyweight telecast specifically to see Mayorga, while Rivera couldn't have been responsible for more than a dozen buys.

With Rivera, who had done nothing wrong, watching from the audience, then, Mayorga posted an easy ten-round decision over Mitchell, though several hundred Rivera supporters who had traveled to New York to cheer their man on waved placards decrying the perceived injustice. Chants of "Bullshit!" and "We Want Rivera!" punctuated the air throughout Mayorga's fight.

Rivera wasn't present - he was back on the job in the Worcester court -- when the New York State Athletic Commission was asked to act as honest broker in arbitrating the dispute. In a Solomonic decree, Chairman Ron Scott Stevens recommended that someone -- nominally Mayorga, although in all likelihood the sum probably came from King's coffers -- should pay Rivera $50,000 for his trouble.

"I wouldn't say we were satisfied," said Tankanow, "but the deck was stacked against us. We settled, but we didn't feel we were fairly treated."

Rivera still had his title AND his job, and in the end, he collected his largest career purse for sitting in the stands with his son while he watched some other guy fight.

The problem with this solution was that the WBA was out a sanctioning fee, a circumstance LOS BANDIDOS quickly took steps to correct by notifying Rivera that he had 90 days from April 17 to defend against Damgaard.

"The clock started ticking on April 17," said Tankanow. "We've got six weeks to go and we haven't even started NEGOTIATING yet. I didn't even know about this purse bid thing until you told me about it. We haven't had any contact with the WBA, and there's been no contact from Don King or from Dana Jamison - even though the WBA claims THEY contacted King."

Word of the June 14 purse bid already has Tankanow concerned.

"Who's gonna bid?" he asked. "King? The Danes? Obviously it's better for them if the fight is over there, but the minimum bid is supposed to be $150,000, and Jose's supposed to get 75 per cent of that. Would Damgaard fight for 25 per cent of the minimum? I doubt it.

"And there's also the matter of OUR minimum," pointed out Tankanow. "According to our contract with King, Jose is supposed to get at least $200,000 for a title defense. Does a purse bid override that? I don't even know. I guess I'll have to check the fine print. All I know is Jose is training for a fight, but we don't know when and we don't know where."