

# Executive Powers: Revolutionary War



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## Preface

**This is a work in progress.** Please let me know if you have comments on the current draft, especially regarding critiques and/or places where the writing is not particularly smooth.

If I sent you this, I emphasize you are under **no obligation to read any of this**. For those that do choose to read, I hope you enjoy!

# Preamble

## Dropping the Bomb

Huntress Thompson stared outside her office window with a sense of fear and loathing.

Once again, her idiotic editors had rejected her newest piece, saying it was too raw, too edgy, too 'self-centered.'

Well, of course it was!

The people were sick and tired of reading the same drab stories day after day. They wanted something new. Something spicy. Something to keep them at the edge of their seats!

One of these days, Thompson was going to find a story so powerful, even her eggheaded editors would be blown away! And when she did, she wasn't going to just sit back and watch from the sidelines. No; she was going to be right there, smack dab in the middle of the action!

Thompson's phone rang, shattering her concentration. She snarled and picked up her device.

"The hell do you want?!" she screamed.

"Oh my," Curtis Vonnegut said with a chuckle, "sounds like somebody got another rejection."

Thompson clenched her fists.

"I'm hanging up!"

"Wait, wait, wait," Vonnegut pleaded. "I wanted your opinion on my new idea for a novel."

Thompson raised an eyebrow, but said nothing.

"The story," Vonnegut went on, "centers around a universe which parallels our own. For example, its characters are all inspired by historical figures from our world, but with different names, backstories, and even genders."

Thompson rolled her eyes.

"If I wanted to read about history," she said with a snort, "I'd open a damn history book."

"But that's not all!" Vonnegut continued. "The biggest difference is that, unlike in our world, no one in this parallel universe has any Powers, nor Executive Powers! They're just ordinary folks, living ordinary lives."

Thompson scratched her chin.

"A world without Powers...without Executive Powers?"

"Exactly!" Vonnegut remarked, then silently fiddled his thumbs. "So...what do you think?"

Thompson looked out to the horizon.

"...I think..." she spoke, "I think, that a world...like...that..."

Thompson slowed her speech as she noticed a strange, mushroom shaped cloud blossoming in the distance.

“What...the...?”

Before she could finish, a massive shockwave slammed into her building, shattering its windows and tossing Thompson to the floor.

“...Hello?” Vonnegut asked worriedly. “Are you there? Thompson! What just happened?!”

Thompson rubbed her head, then looked back at what remained of the mysterious cloud.

Without listening to Vonnegut’s words, Thompson grabbed her phone and placed it to her ear.

“...I think...” she said, wiping a streak of blood before giving a grin. “I think, that a world without Powers wouldn’t be half as fun as ours!”

Thompson hung up her phone and sprinted down the hall, raising her arms shouting at the top of her lungs.

“Power: Gonzo Journalism!”

Instantly, a tall, lanky figure with a camera for a head materialized by her side.

“What’s up?” The cameraman asked as it ran besides her.

“I don’t know, Gonzo,” she replied with a smile, “but there’s definitely a scoop!”

The duo made it to the roof, jumping into the news helicopter and flying in the direction of the strange cloud. After setting course, Thompson activated her Power again, summoning a second Gonzo to steer them there.

A few minutes later, Thompson nodded to the first Gonzo while adjusting her bucket hat and yellow-tinted glasses. Gonzo raised three fingers...then two...one...

“Hello Baltimore!” Thompson shouted into her mic. “This is Huntress Thompson, reporting live from the air! Moments ago, our city was hit by a titanic shockwave! Was this a natural disaster? A new Artifact? The bloody aftermath of a battle between two Presidents? Well, we’re here to find out.”

Thompson shifted to the side, revealing a massive crater behind her.

“Below,” she continued, “we’ve discovered where the shockwave likely originated from. Preliminary estimates suggest the crater is about 300 feet deep with a radius of 1200 feet. Moreover—”

“Woah, woah, woah!” Gonzo pointed behind her, “there’s something down there!”

Thompson turned, spotting a blazing light flickering at the edge of the crater. She gave a sly grin.

“...take us down, Gonzo!”

“I’d rather not,” Gonzo spoke nervously. “I think I’m getting the fear...”

“Nonsense!” she shouted back. “We came here to figure out what the hell happened! And you must realize,” she pointed emphatically to the light, “that we’ve found the main nerve!”

“I know,” Gonzo said with a shake of his head, “that’s what gives me the fear...”

Reluctantly, Gonzo lowered the copter. Before he could land, Thompson jumped out of the vehicle and sprinted to the crater's edge.

Thompson mentally prepared herself for the wide array of mysteries that awaited her within the strange light. However, she was entirely unprepared as a large, ordinary man with short gray hair and circular glasses stepped out of its glow.

"Greetings!" the man shouted as the light faded around him. "Are you with local or national news?"

Thompson blinked, opened her mouth for a second, then closed it again.

"Uhh..." she spoke, "local?"

The man maintained his smile, but he was clearly disappointed.

"That's alright," he said with a shrug, "it'll get there soon enough. Are you rolling now by any chance?"

Thompson gave a weak nod.

"Excellent!" The man cleared his throat. "My fellow Americans..."

The man raised the back of his hand, inciting Thompson to give an audible gasp.

"A Presidential Seal...?!" she whispered as she looked upon the symbol of a bald eagle inscribed within a circle of stars.

"...my name is Henry S. Truman," the man continued, "a President of our great nation. And the destruction you see here..." he gestured to the crater behind him, "...is a result of my Executive Power: The Manhattan Project."

Thompson paused, taking in the weight of his words.

"...and what do you want?" she asked.

"As thing stands," he replied, "our nation is being torn apart by the constant battles waged between the Presidents and their Parties. Heck, we're practically on the brink of a second Civil War!" He gave a shake of his head. "As a President, I know this is bad, and I've come here today with the hope of putting an end to these pointless feuds."

He looked into the distance.

"But of course, it is not enough to yearn for peace," he continued, "we must work for it, and if necessary..." a small grin appeared across Truman's solemn face, "...fight for it!"

Thompson raised an eyebrow.

"What the heck are you talking about?" she asked.

Truman raised his arms, transforming his friendly grin into a vicious smile.

"In order to form a more perfect union, insure domestic tranquility, and to secure the blessings of liberty!" he exclaimed, "I am declaring the establishment of a grand tournament that will decide once and for all: which President stands as the greatest of all time?!"

Truman stared expectingly at Thompson.

"...please...tell us more?" she asked.

Truman raised three fingers.

"This experiment shall be organized by a trinity of Presidents consisting of myself, Bill Taft, and Ruth Hayes..." he said while raising a fourth finger, "it will take place at this very spot, four months from today, on Tuesday, November 4<sup>th</sup>. I'm also very pleased to announce," he said with a grin, "that we've already secured four prominent Presidents to take part in our event..."

Truman lowered his fingers one at a time, his voice lingering on each name that he spoke.

"Theo Roosevelt...Gabe Lincoln...Tanya Jefferson...and Jordan Washington..."

Thompson widened her eyes.

"Every member of Rushmore!" she exclaimed.

"Exactly..." Truman said, his gaze centered on Gonzo's camera. "So, my fellow Presidents, I sincerely hope you'll join me for what is sure to be...a Revolutionary War!"

Thompson stood dumbstruck, then waved out her arms.

"C-cut!" she shouted.

Gonzo's light flicked off, ending the broadcast. Truman breathed out and wiped a hand across his forehead.

"Well," he said with a thicker Missouri accent than before, "the die is cast!"

He turned to Thompson.

"Say, do you mind if I catch a ride back with you?" he said with a chuckle. "It seems my car didn't quite survive the blast."

"...uh, sure..." she replied automatically, her brain still stuck in a daze.

Thompson continued staring blankly for a moment, then shook out her head.

Jesus, what the hell was she doing?!

The golden opportunity that she had yearned for was standing right in front of her! Was she really going to just stand around and gawk like an idiot while this once in a lifetime chance passed her by?

Thompson gritted her teeth, then slapped herself hard across the face, startling Truman.

"You can come with us!" Thompson shouted, regaining her sense of composure, "on one condition!" She pointed to herself. "I get to be the MC of the tournament!"

Truman gave an icy stare to Thompson, then let loose a hearty laugh.

"Man alive!" he said with a snort, "you've got gumption, I'll give you that!"

Truman gave Thompson a friendly pat; the force of his slap nearly toppling her over.

"I'll have to run it by Taft and Hayes," he said with a grin, "but as far I'm concerned, you've got the job!" Truman looked out, then pointed to the helicopter. "Now then, what sort of model do you have there?"

With that, Truman jaunted to the vehicle, leaving Thompson and Gonzo trailing behind.

"...Gonzo..." Thompson spoke up.

"Yeah boss?"

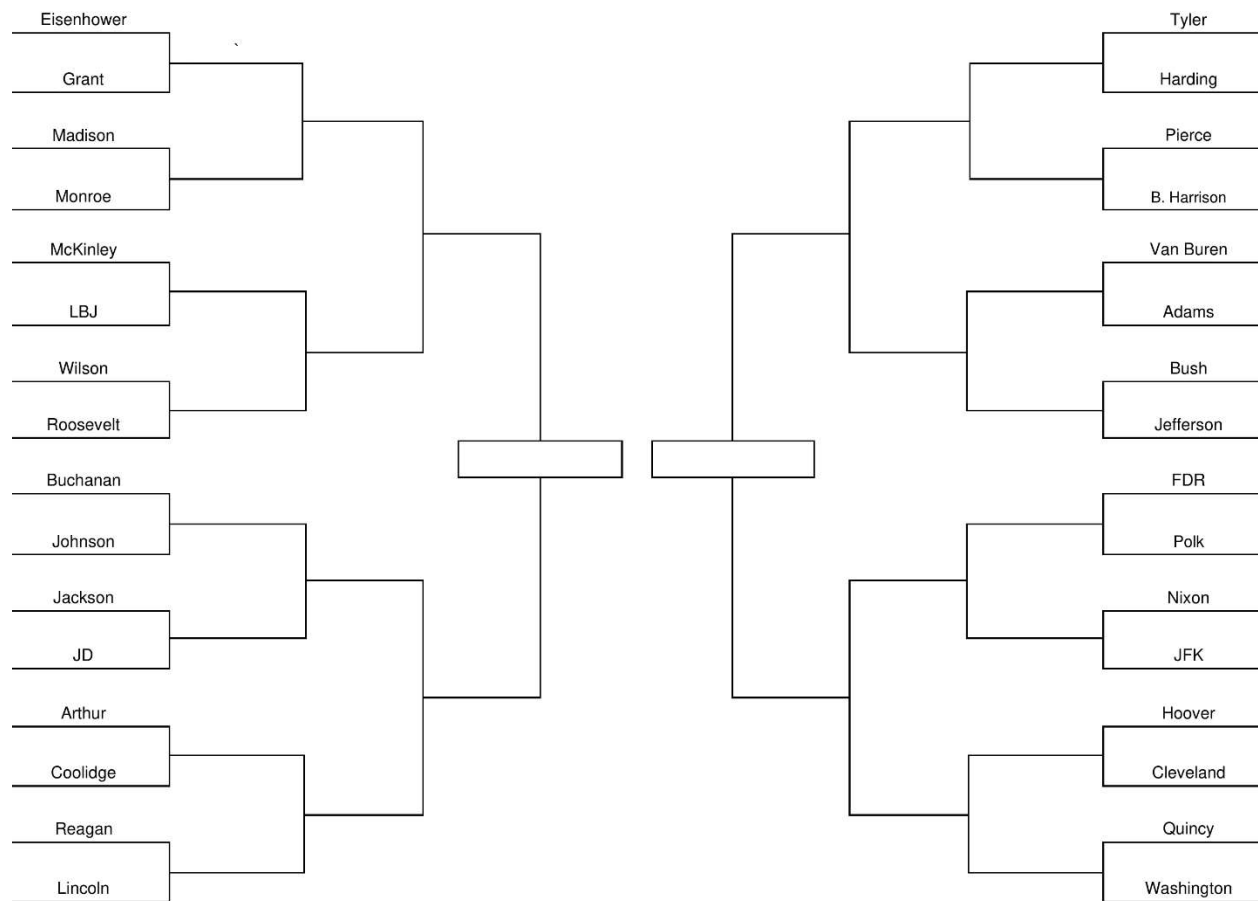
"I have a lot of questions..." she said, looking out at the mysterious man geeking out over their news helicopter. "...the first of which..." she said scratching her head, "...is who the hell is Henry Truman?"

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Over the next few months, dozens of Presidents reached out to join in Truman's Revolutionary War. Then, on the eve of November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the fateful bracket was released for the world to see...



## The Bracket



### Block R:

[The Supreme Commander] Deedee Eisenhower vs [The Hero of Appomattox] Odysseus S. Grant  
 [The Sage of Montpelier] Jamie Madison vs [The Heir of Good Feelings] Jane Monroe  
 [The Napoleon of Protection] Will McKinley vs [Landslide Landon] Landon B. Johnson  
 [The Professor] Willow Wilson vs [The Man in the Arena] Theo Roosevelt

### Block L:

[10-Cent Jimmy] Jim Buchanan vs [The Tennessee Tailor] Andre Johnson  
 [Old Hickory] Andrea Jackson vs [The Masked Fighter] JD  
 [The Gentleman Boss] Charles Arthur vs [Silent Cal] Callie Coolidge  
 [The Platinum Star] Ronda Reagan vs [The Rail Splitter] Gabe Lincoln

### Block J:

[The Presidential Killer] Johnny Tyler vs [The Harmonizer] Wanda Harding  
 [Handsome Hank] Hank Pierce vs [The Human Iceberg] Benny Harrison  
 [The Little Magician] Martina Van Buren vs [The Colossus of Independence] Johan Adams  
 [The Timberwolf] Jorge Bush vs [The Apostle of Democracy] Tanya Jefferson

Block W:

[The Sphinx] Frances D. Roosevelt vs [Young Hickory] Jade Polk

[The King of Camelot] Jay F. Kennedy vs [Tricky Dick] Dixie Nixon

[The Great Humanitarian] Hera Hoover vs [The Beast of Buffalo] Gregory Cleveland

[The Madman from Massachusetts] Quincy Adams vs [The American Cincinnatus] Jordan Washington

## Fact and Fiction: Preamble

**Hello Reader!** In this novel, I have tried to tell a compelling narrative while simultaneously preserving as much historical truth as possible. However, there exist a number places where I have sacrificed historical accuracy for the sake of telling a more compelling story.

Because of this, I have inserted a number of **optional chapters** labelled “Fact and Fiction” in red ink in order to clarify some of the significant points where the book differs from reality. A few things to note about these chapters:

- The writing here will be somewhat informal.
- Huge major historical inaccuracies will be highlighted in **bold**.
- To distinguish between characters in the book and their historical counterparts, I will often specify who I am talking about by their first names (e.g. Henry Truman refers to the book character, while Harry Truman refers to the real-life person he is inspired from).
- Some of the historical inaccuracies are setups for scenes that happen much later in the book. In such cases, I will omit discussing these historical inaccuracies until their payoffs are fully resolved.
- I will use the abbreviation EP:RW to refer to this book, Executive Powers: Revolutionary War.

With that established, let’s begin with some (brief) notes about the Preamble.

**Epitaphs.** In most cases, the epitaphs given to the Presidents are either nicknames they had in real life, or slight deviations of this due to changes in their first name (e.g. [Handsome Hank] for Hank Pierce is based off the real-life nickname “Handsome Frank” for Franklin Pierce). Epitaphs which are not a straightforward modification of a real life nickname will be discussed in later installments of Fact and Fiction.

# Day 1: The First Branch

## Two Star Generals

Huntress Thompson weaved her motorcycle through the crowded lines of traffic. It was hard to believe that just four months ago, all these streets had been nothing but dirt.

But now?

Families ate burgers next to thugs with cigars, saxophonists jammed in front of workers building walls, and arms dealers peddled their wares alongside fanatics screaming about religion.

The city was pure chaos, and Thompson loved every second of it.

She continued a bit longer, then skidded to a halt as reached the city's center: a towering marble Coliseum larger than any arena Thompson had ever seen.

"Damn..." she remarked, as she got off her ride.

"You there!" an agent in black screamed. "You're not allowed to park here!"

Thompson gave a cocky grin.

"Listen up, chump," she said, raising her ID badge to his face, "I'm Huntress Thompson, VIP!"

The Secret Service agent checked her ID, then gave a sour look.

"You were supposed to be here half an hour ago."

"Oh yeah?" Thompson asked sarcastically. "Bite me!"

The agent rolled his eyes, then grabbed a walkie-talkie.

"Huntress Thompson is at gate 7; requesting teleportation."

Thompson tilted her head.

"Requesting wha—?"

She blinked, finding herself inside a spacious room with a long desk and a clear glass panel at its front.

"Hot dog..." she muttered, stepping forward and looking out the window. Below, Thompson saw stands filled with people centered around a giant circle of earth sitting at the stadium's center.

"So that's the arena, huh?" she spoke to herself.

"Ehem," someone coughed from behind.

Thompson turned around, noticing a pianist seated behind her.

"You ready?" the man asked.

Thompson gave a grin, then shot a thumbs up. The pianist nodded, then started to play.

The rambunctious crowd below quieted themselves down as they took notice of the strange sound playing across the stadium speakers. At the same time, the cameras throughout the arena turned straight into the commentary box.

“Good morning everybody!” Thompson shouted into her mic, “and welcome, to the Revolutionary War!!!”

The crowd let loose a torrent of screams.

“For those that don’t know,” she continued, “I’m Huntress Thompson, your master of ceremonies!” She threw out her arm. “Helping me out with the technical analysis of our fights, we have the man who made this entire event possible...”

The music crescendoed, then ended with the pianist slamming his hands across the keys. The man rose and revealed his face to the crowd.

“Hello!” Truman spoke out. “Today, the entire world...”

“Just a minute, Henry,” Thompson spoke while holding the mic away, “let me introduce you first.”

Despite holding it at a distance, Thompson’s mic broadcasted her message across the stadium; inciting a wave of good-hearted laughs from the crowd. Thompson gave an embarrassed cough.

“Anyways,” she continued, “joining me today is [The Man from Independence], Henry Shipp Truman!”

The crowd erupted in cheers.

“Henry S. Truman,” he corrected, then turned to the crowd. “Today, the entire world shall be looking to America for enlightened leadership towards peace and progress. It is my duty to find this leadership, and I shall not shirk from it!”

He reached down and placed a small sign on top of his desk.

“The buck stops here!” he read aloud to another round of applause.

“Beautiful stuff,” Thompson spoke up, “now, let’s get down to brass tacks!”

The stadium screens shifted to a timeline for the rest of the week.

“Our schedule,” Thompson continued, “will consist of eight fights during each of the first three days, followed by the quarterfinals on Friday, with both the semifinals and finals taking place on Saturday. Our closing ceremony will be on Sunday, whereupon all our fighters shall pledge allegiance to the ultimate winner of our tournament!”

She gestured to the arena.

“To help referee our fights, we’ve got the only man in the world who’d rather be judge than President! Give it up for [The Big Chief], Bill Taft!”

At that, the giant Taft walked into the arena with a jolly grin, his hands gripping a massive war hammer as if it were a gavel.

“And as you may have noticed,” Thompson continued, “our Secret Service agents have been stationed throughout to make sure nothing here goes awry. Leading these soldiers is a master when it comes to quelling riots and removing uninvited guests! Let’s hear it for [Ruth the Forgotten], Ruth Hayes!”

In the stands, Hayes waved her right arm together with what little remained of her left; a set of heavy scars covering her body.

"And we ought to emphasize," Truman continued emphatically, "that while we've taken every precaution to protect you, we can't guarantee your complete safety. Those who are concerned can safely watch all of our matches from any of the televisions stationed throughout the stadium, as well as those spread throughout the town. For those who do choose to stay with us..." he grinned, "...get ready for the ride of your lives!"

"Alright, alright; enough with the foreplay!" Thompson shouted, "let's move to the action!"

The crowd roared with approval.

"We're starting things off with a bang!" she continued. "A match featuring two of the greatest commanders the world has ever seen! History may never know who's the better general, but we're all about to find out who's the better fighter!"

She gestured to the arena.

"Coming from the Western entrance, we have a warrior who's fought around the world as the leader of the Hidden Hard Party! She's trained countless soldiers during her military career, as well as generations of students as head of Columbia! If you ask anyone what they think about her, their answer is always the same: I, like, her! Now let's hear it, for [The Supreme Commander], Deedee Eisenhower!"

A tank rolled into the arena. The crowd paused for a moment, then erupted into cheers as Eisenhower popped out the tank's hatch wearing her signature wool field jacket and peaked visor cap. Her clothes were covered in stripes and medals, with a circle of five stars placed squarely atop her shoulders.

She waved to the crowd, then pulled herself out of the tank and grabbed the barrel of its gun. She lifted up, tearing the head clean off the tank's body. The vehicle rolled back as Eisenhower walked forward, carrying the tank head with her to the center of the arena.

"Jesus Christ!" Thompson exclaimed. "It looks like Eisenhower's planning to use that tank head as her freaking weapon! We haven't even started and I'm getting goosebumps!"

"Don't get too excited," Truman said rolling his eyes. "Eisenhower's an alright general, but she doesn't know any more about fighting than a pig knows about Sunday."

"Ouch!" Thompson said, pretending to flinch, "I take it you two aren't on the best of terms, then?"

Truman gave a small smile.

"No comment."

"Anyways," Thompson continued, "coming from the Eastern entrance, we have the second in command of the National Union Party! He carries the reputation as a butcher, but in reality, he's a gentle soul who can't stand the slight of blood! But don't think for a second he's a pushover! No, this man won't ever stop fighting; not until he's obtains complete and unconditional surrender! He's [The Hero of Appomattox], Odysseus S. Grant!"

"There's no S..." Grant mumbled as he entered the arena. He walked in wearing a plain blue army uniform together with a well-worn silk hat and a pair of muddy boots. Behind him, Grant dragged a large, lumpy bag into the arena.

Grant reached the center and opened the bag, releasing a stockpile of weapons to the ground. He adjusted his hat, then picked up a gun from the pile.

"This was Calvin's pistol," he spoke softly. "He died in our battle against Lee before he could fire a single shot..."

Grant placed the pistol back down before grabbing a sword.

"This one was Benjamin's," he continued. "He was a valiant soldier, slain on that terrible night of Johnson's betrayal." Grant shook his head and placed the weapon back down. "I've lost a lot of soldiers on my watch..." He said, looking at Eisenhower. "...and I will not let a single one of their deaths be in vain."

He thrust his arms to the side.

At that, the weapons surrounding Grant rose into the air. One of the guns slammed into Grant's arm, followed by a sword, then another weapon, and another. Before long, each of Grant's arms were covered by a mass of weapons taking the form of two, giant, weaponized arms.

"Executive Power," Grant spoke quietly but decisively, "Union Army; To Arms."

Taft glanced at the two fighters while maintaining his jolly smile.

"Are both of you feeling about ready to start?"

The fighters gave a pair of silent nods.

"Excellent!"

Taft replaced his joyful smile with an icy glare.

"Oh man!" Thompson shouted, "looks like Taft is getting serious!"

"He's an easy-going guy," Truman grinned, "but not when it comes to judging."

Taft breathed out and raised his gavel into the air.

"Let the first match," he shouted, slamming his hammer down, "begin!!"



## Tanks

Grant pointed his arms at Eisenhower.

“Union Army,” he shouted, “21 Gun Salute!”

Dozens of rifles extended out Grant’s weaponized hands and fired in quick succession. Eisenhower placed her tank head down, blocking the shots, then charged forward, crashing into Grant with the force of a moving train.

Grant took one step back from the heavy blow, but no further. He pushed forward, shoving Eisenhower off him and then thrust his hands towards her.

Eisenhower stepped back, barely dodging the attack. She smirked for half a second, then dropped her smile as a sea of blades shot out of Grant’s palms.

Frantically, Eisenhower flung her body back, dodging the blades at the cost of losing her balance. Grant stepped forward, slamming his fist into Eisenhower and flinging her across the arena. In the air, Eisenhower twisted her body around, landing on her feet with poise.

“In spite of the many criticisms I’ve read about you,” Eisenhower spoke, readying her stance, “my respect for you has always been high...I’m certain you’re one of the greatest generals America has ever had, if not its greatest.”

Eisenhower tightened her grip and widened her smile.

“That being said,” she continued, “I’ve got people counting on me...and I’m not going to let them down!”

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Years ago, a bugle blared at Camp Meade, rousing its soldiers awake. The troops eagerly shot out of bed, ready to greet the day with the guidance of their beloved commander.

“Good morning soldiers!” a young Eisenhower shouted.

“Good morning ma’am!” The soldiers shouted back.

Eisenhower smiled as she looked across the line, then gave a light frown.

“Where’s Fitzgerald?”

Someone pointed to a solitary figure sitting beneath a green light by the docks.

“He’s working on his novel again.”

Eisenhower shook her head with a smile.

“I’ll allow it this time,” she said playfully, “but only because we’ve gotten some very good news from headquarters.” She gave a toothy grin. “Pack your bags boys, we’re taking a trip to Europe!”

“...wait a minute,” a soldier responded with glee, “does that mean we’re finally going off to war?”

“You’re damn right!” she replied.

The soldiers gave whoops of cheers as they exchanged high fives, a few of them even breaking into tears.

"Don't start crying on me yet," Eisenhower said with a grin. "I still have one more piece of news to tell you!"

"I knew it!" a soldier said with a groan, "there's always bad with the good!"

"It does seem that way, don't it?" Eisenhower replied with a chuckle. "Heck, you all joined the Tank Corp hoping to take control of the army's greatest weapon, only to find that we didn't have any tanks!"

"That's alright!" a soldier exclaimed. "You helped us build those makeshift ones!"

"That I did," Eisenhower said, looking fondly across the row of trucks with machine guns strapped to their backs. "Sadly," she continued, "we'll be discontinuing our makeshift models starting today."

The soldiers gave a collective moan.

"Because..." Eisenhower went on, "we've gotten ourselves a real one!"

At that, a tank rolled onto the field. The soldiers let out screams of joy as they rushed to their newest toy; none of them waiting long enough for Eisenhower to dismiss them. Eisenhower gave a warm smile, then looked back to the deployment orders.

"November 18<sup>th</sup>..." she spoke to herself.

That was that the day they'd head to Europe; the day Eisenhower would finally achieve her dream of fighting in a real war.

Then, on the morning of November 11<sup>th</sup>, the war, along with all of Eisenhower's dreams, came to a sudden halt.

A few days later, Eisenhower found herself at the army's victory celebration.

"I tell you," she lamented to a nearby friend, "we're going to spend the rest of our lives explaining why we didn't get into this damn war..."

She downed her drink, then got up to grab another. As she rose, she bumped into a large man carrying a pitcher of beer.

"Oye!" the man shouted as he spilled the drink over himself, "watch where you're going!"

"You could do the same..." Eisenhower spoke under her breath.

"Excuse me?!" the man said stepping forward and grabbing his stained shirt. "I'll have you know this uniform costs over \$250!"

"Good to know," she said rolling her eyes, "feel free to send me the bill."

"I don't think you understand!" the man snarled. "Willingly destroying army property is a crime worthy of a court martial!"

Eisenhower stared blankly.

"You're not serious...right?"

The man gave an evil grin.

"I hope you enjoyed whatever fights you had during the war," he continued, "because they're going to be the last fights you ever have in this army!"

The man let out a cackle as Eisenhower tried to keep her anger in check.

"Well," she muttered, taking a step forward, "if I'm going to get court martialed anyways..."

"Just a moment," a voice called from the crowd.

Eisenhower and the man turned to see an older officer approaching them.

"I apologize for butting in," the officer spoke to the man, "but I think it would be best if you dropped this little affair."

"Little affair?!" the man snarled and pointed to himself. "I'll have you know that I'm Inspector General Elliot Helmick! An insult against me is akin to an insult against the entire US Army! So why don't you..."

Helmick turned his finger, stopping as the officer grabbed at his wrist.

"And I'll have you know," the officer replied softly, "that I'm General Dox Conner." Conner lowered Helmick's hand, bringing him to his knees. "And this woman you just threatened is one of my most valued subordinates."

"Conner..." Helmick's eyes widened. "*The* Dox Conner?!"

Helmick glanced at Eisenhower, then back to Conner

"Uhh, well," Helmick said clearing his throat, "seeing as you're a proper authority, I'll uh, leave the punishment for these offenses in your capable hands."

At that, Helmick scurried into the crowd as fast as he could.

"Thanks, Conner," Eisenhower said with a sigh, "you really saved me this time!"

"Saved you?" he said with a knowing smile, "why, I've just been told that I'm in charge of punishing you."

Eisenhower gave a nervous chuckle.

"But it'll be a light punishment...right?"

"Oh no," Conner shook his head with a grin, "I expect it to be quite severe."

Conner pointed a finger dramatically at Eisenhower.

"As your commanding officer," he declared, "I order you to train with me down in Panama."

Eisenhower blinked.

"Are you serious?" she asked, barely able to contain her joy.

“Don’t get too excited,” Conner said wagging his finger. “After your hell week with me, I’m sending you to learn martial arts from Pershing in France, diplomacy from MacArthur in the Philippines, and leadership from Marshall back in the States.”

“Th-thank you sir,” Eisenhower stammered as she processed the names of these world class mentors.

“But...but why do all this for me?”

“Because you’ve got talent,” he spoke frankly, “and by God, it’d be a real loss for the nation if you never got a chance to show off your stuff.”

He placed a hand on her shoulder and gave a warm smile.

“I’m counting on you to do great things,” he continued, “and I order you not to disappoint me.”

Eisenhower gave a sharp salute.

“I won’t let you down sir!”

On the ride home, Eisenhower found herself daydreaming about her upcoming training marathon, then stopped when her car dipped down into a muddy ditch and stalled.

Eisenhower shook out her head.

“I swear,” she remarked as she went out and started pushing her car, “if there’s one danger this country faces, it’s the lack of quality roads!”

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In the present, Eisenhower raised her arm into the air

“Executive Power,” she shouted, “Interstate Highway!”

As she spoke, a grid of miniature roads spread across the grounds of the arena.

Grant raised an eyebrow.

“Interesting,” he remarked, kicking the road beside his feet.

“Now get ready...”

Grant looked up to see Eisenhower suddenly in front of him.

“For my massive retaliation!”

## Interstate Highway

Eisenhower slammed her tank head, throwing Grant back. Grant regained his balance, only for Eisenhower to once again appear with her tank head raised.

Without hesitation, Grant thrust his fist forward. The two attacks landed against each other, flinging both fighters back.

Eisenhower hopped back, rubbing her wounded head.

“Hot dang!” she shouted. “Anyone else in a situation like that would have retreated for sure! But you?” She let out a roaring laugh. “You went for a damn counter!”

Grant shrugged his shoulders.

“Retreating was never my style,” he replied.

“Agreed,” Eisenhower said, calming herself down. “I say, if you’re going to use force...” she crouched down, “use overwhelming force!”

Eisenhower shot forward, sprinting across her road with insane levels of acceleration.

“That speed...!” Grant raised his arms, narrowly blocking Eisenhower’s high velocity strike, “that’s how you appeared so quickly before!”

“Roger that,” Eisenhower said, pushing off Grant. “I gain a speed boost whenever I run along the roads from my EP,” she explained with a taunting grin. “And I’m sorry to tell you, but my roads won’t do a thing for you!”

Grant snorted.

“Fine by me,” he spoke readying his stance, his left foot placed squarely on Eisenhower’s road.

In the stands, a towering figure in a stovepipe hat nodded his head.

“Yes, that’s quite alright,” Gabe Lincoln mused, “now that Grant knows those roads don’t affect him, he has no need to worry where he places his feet.”

Something rustled behind Lincoln. He turned around, but only saw a wall covered by shadows.

“I swear,” a voice called from the wall, “both you and Grant put far too much trust in the words of your opponents.”

A dark figure emerged from within the shadows of the wall.

“And that weakness,” Dixie Nixon continued, “shall be Grant’s undoing.”

Back in the arena, Grant charged with his fist raised. Eisenhower grinned, remaining perfectly still while Grant threw his punch.

Grant’s left-side suddenly jerked back, causing his attack to whiff. At the same time, Eisenhower raised her weapon.

“Fore!”

Eisenhower slammed her tank head into the body of her defenseless opponent. Grant gritted his teeth at the heavy blow, then threw out a counter. Eisenhower smirked.

"I'm not falling for that again!"

Eisenhower's body shifted unnaturally to the side, causing the attack to miss. She swung her weapon a second time, landing another critical hit.

Lincoln clicked his tongue.

"Now I get it," he remarked, "her EP doesn't center around speed...but movement!"

Nixon nodded.

"Interstate Highway," Nixon spoke up, "an EP that grants Eisenhower the ability to move objects along her roads. Not only does it give her a speed boost by moving herself forward along the roads, but she can also use her roads to shift herself out of danger or to throw her opponents off-balance."

"Which is exactly what she did to Grant," Lincoln added on, "after tricking him to think the roads didn't affect him." He shook his head. "I'll admit, I'm somewhat surprised. I never thought of Eisenhower as the trickster type."

"No one ever does," Nixon said with a smirk. "But she's far more devious than most give her credit for."

In the arena, Grant rose from the ground.

"...you're strong," he spoke sternly. "If I hadn't opened the fight with my most defensive form, I'd almost surely have lost by now."

He scanned the roads around the arena.

"But now that I have a rough understanding of your EP," he continued, "I think it's about time I take the offensive."

Eisenhower gave a grin.

"You've been playing defense up to now?" she asked with a mixture of fear and excitement.

Without replying, Grant's weapons peeled off his arms. They dropped to the ground, then swarmed around his legs before lifting him into the air. The mound of weapons twisted itself beneath Grant's feet, settling down into the form of a large horse with legs made of swords with a cannon as its nose.

"Executive Power," Grant spoke atop his steed while grabbing its reigns made of chains, "Union Army; Cavalry."

Eisenhower readied her weapon.

Grant's newest form looked to be far more agile than before. However, he wouldn't be able to use its agility to its fullest. Indeed, if he stepped onto her roads, even for just a second, she'd throw him off-balance and hit him with a heavy strike; one he wouldn't be able to block with his beefy arms.

Yes, Grant would have to tread slowly and carefully, that much she was certain of.

As Eisenhower thought this, Grant made his move.

At first, his horse stepped forward with a light trot, carefully avoiding Eisenhower's roads. The trot then rose into a gallop, before transforming itself into a full-blown sprint.

Eisenhower glanced downwards, waiting for his horse to touch her roads. But, to her surprise, the horse avoided her network with each step.

"What?!"

Eisenhower shook her head and raised her guard as Grant came closer. But, just before colliding, Grant's horse leapt forward, front flipping directly over Eisenhower's head.

As the horse nimbly passed over her, it tilted its neck back, aiming its cannon nose directly above her. The gun fired, detonating its shell on impact.

"Gahhh!!!" Eisenhower screamed in pain; but she did not fall. Instead, Eisenhower gritted her teeth and promptly turned around, readying her EP for the moment Grant made his impromptu landing.

But, to her shock, the horse hit the ground with its feet once again avoiding her roads.

"That's impossible!" Eisenhower exclaimed.

Before she could recover, the horse raised its sword legs, ramming them towards her. Quickly, Eisenhower activated Interstate Highway, moving her body away just before being skewered, then shifted her body back further to avoid another follow-up attack.

Grant raised an eyebrow as Eisenhower fell back.

"Retreating?" he asked.

Eisenhower gave an annoyed smile.

"Oh, don't worry about me," she said, cracking her neck, "I have not taken, and shall not take, a single backwards step!"

## Cavalry

Eisenhower stuck her hand into the head of her tank.

"Take this!"

She pulled something inside her weapon, causing a shell to fire out its gun.

Grant's horse leapt away from the shot, then fired a blast from its cannon in return.

Eisenhower shifted using Interstate Highway, then fired another shot, and another, and another. Grant deftly dodged each of her attacks while launching counters of his own and simultaneously avoiding stepping on Eisenhower's sprawling set of roads.

Nixon placed a hand to her chin.

"I've misjudged Grant," she remarked, "his fighting abilities are far greater than the rumors suggested."

Lincoln gave a proud smile.

"He's the best fighter I've ever had the privilege to command!" he replied cheerfully. "He's strong on the battlefield, and near invincible on a horse!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Years ago, Seargent Herschberger stood in front of the graduating class of West Point cadets.

"Before we begin our ceremonies," Herschberger began, "I thought we could have ourselves a little fun..."

Herschberger strode over to the jumping bar, lifted it higher than his head, then turned to the class.

"Cadet Grant!" he barked.

A small cadet stepped forward atop a towering steed. The cadet was a young Odysseus Grant. The horse was York, a ferocious creature known for his terrifying temper. Only two cadets could ride him, and only Grant could ride him well.

Grant placed his hand along the beast's back. The animal took a step, then charged straight for the bar. The horse leapt into the air, clearing the bar with plenty of room to spare.

The room erupted in cheers. With ease, Grant had just set a new record for the high jump; one that would stand for another 25 years.

"...I can't follow that," Herschberger said with a smirk. "Well done sir; class dismissed!"

Grant got off his mount, then noticed Herschberger calling him over.

"That was quite the spectacle!" Herschberger remarked.

"York deserves all the credit," he replied, gently stroking the horse's mane.

"In any case," Herschberger said handing Grant a letter, "I wanted to give you this." He gave a grin, then patted Grant on the back. "Congratulations son! You've been invited to the Mexican front by [Old Rough and Ready] herself!"



At the Mexican border, future President Jacqueline Taylor strode through camp wearing a plain military uniform.

"Have the new recruits arrived?" she asked an aide.

"Yes ma'am," they replied.

"Good," she looked over her clipboard, "send Lieutenant Grant to meet me posthaste."

"I'm right here, ma'am."

Taylor stopped walking, then turned around to see a short man following behind her

"...how long have you been back there, soldier?"

Grant shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyways," Taylor continued, "the reason I wanted to speak with you," she said, handing over her clipboard, "was to officially appoint you as quartermaster."

Grant looked at the forms, then back to Taylor.

"I'm not sure that's the right position for me, ma'am."

Taylor crossed her arms.

"You complaining, soldier?"

"No ma'am," Grant replied, "I'm merely expressing my opinion. I had expected to serve on the front lines. But, if this is the task you assign me, then I shall perform it to the best of my abilities."

Taylor gave a nod.

"I understand the hesitation," Taylor remarked, "but I assure you, the position of quartermaster is vital to our operations." She pointed to a storage area across camp. "After all, it doesn't matter how brave our soldiers are; they can't fight without weapons, and they can't march on without food."

"Of course," Grant agreed, "I recognize the role's significance, I'm simply confused as to why I was selected for it."

Taylor gave a small grin.

"I love my soldiers," she said, "but most of them can't count past ten. Needless to say, none of them are qualified to keep counts of our supplies." She looked to Grant. "So, when I heard of a young soldier hoping to become a math professor after his terms of service expired," she placed a hand on Grant's shoulder, "well, I just knew I had to grab you before anyone else did."

Grant nodded his head.

"In that case, I—"

A bullet whizzed past Grant's face, cutting him off

Calmly, Grant and Taylor turned to see a group of Mexican soldiers charging through camp.

"Take cover!" Taylor shouted as she and Grant jumped behind a neighboring building.

"What's the situation?" a soldier asked.

Taylor took a quick peek around.

"We've got them outnumbered," Taylor remarked, "but we don't have enough ammo on hand to take them out."

"Is there more back at the storage unit?" Grant asked.

Taylor nodded.

"There's a whole stockpile just outside its doors," she replied, "but there's no way to get there without taking on enemy fire."

"In that case," Grant said mounting a nearby horse, "there's nothing left to decide." He gave a slight grin. "I'm the one in charge of supplying our troops, after all."

Taylor furrowed her brow.

"Don't be a fool," she shouted, "you'll be shot down the moment you're spotted."

"It's fine," Grant said grabbing the reigns, "I won't be spotted."

Before Taylor could continue her protest, Grant ran his horse out of cover and towards the Mexican soldiers.

"Idiot..." Taylor murmured as she closed her eyes, anticipating the inevitable sound of gunfire.

But, to her surprise, nothing happened.

Curious, Taylor peeked out from cover and widened her eyes. Grant's horse was continuing its sprint, but Grant was nowhere to be seen!

"It's just a mount," a Mexican soldier remarked as the horse ran past. "Must have gotten spooked by the gunfire."

The Mexican soldiers continued onwards while ignoring the beast. Meanwhile, Taylor kept watch over the creature with rapt attention. The horse stopped itself in front of the storage shed, at which point Taylor let out a grin.

"My god!" Taylor said as Grant appeared behind the horse and picked up a box of ammunition. "That daredevil just rode through the battlefield while clinging to the side of his horse!"

After picking up the supplies, Grant turned around, rotating his body to the horse's other side before sprinting back to Taylor.

"Hey..." a Mexican soldier remarked as the steed ran by, "isn't that the same horse we just saw?"

Another soldier took a closer look, then noticed flaps of an army uniform rustling underneath the horse's stomach.

"It's the enemy!" he shouted with rage, "fire!"

Grant rotated himself back atop the horse.

"It's alright girl," he spoke, stroking the horse's mane, "I'll get you through this."

He turned around, looking at the Mexican soldiers just before they open fired.

Grant pulled the reigns, shifting his horse away from the shots, then rounded the corner to Taylor's side.

"Excellent work, soldier!" Taylor exclaimed as she distributed the ammo to her troops.

"She did all the work," Grant said, scratching at the horse's ears.

Taylor loaded her rifle, then looked back to Grant.

"I know you're not planning to stick with the army long term," Taylor remarked, "but you should reconsider...I'd hate to lose a man of your talents."

Grant scratched his chin.

"Me...an army man?"

Grant looked out as the battle raged in earnest. His horse trembled at the sound of gunfire, but Grant stroked its back, calming her down.

"I suppose," Grant spoke up, "that doesn't sound half bad..."

"That's what I like to hear." Taylor looked back to the battlefield, then waved her hand at a passing soldier. "Hey!" she shouted, "come over for a second."

The older soldier walked to Taylor's side, unconcerned with the battle raging around him.

"Grant," Taylor spoke up, "this man right is the rising star of our engineering corps. If you're ever in need of fortifications, he's the guy to call."

"Oh madam," the man said with a light bow, "you're far too kind."

Grant dismounted his horse and extended his hand to the man.

"I'm Grant."

The man grasped Grant's outstretched hand.

"Lee," he replied.

\* \* \* \* \*

Eisenhower took her hand out of the tank and swung out her weapon. Grant stepped his horse to the side, dodging the attack. As he moved, firearms sprung from his horse's side and open fired. Eisenhower slid along her road, dodging the shots.

"These fighters are way too nimble!" Thompson shouted, "between Grant's horse and Eisenhower's roads, it seems like this fight is turning into a complete gridlock!"

"It is for now," Truman added on, "but this high intensity can't continue forever. Sooner or later, one of them is going to break."

As if on cue, a series of small cracks spread over Eisenhower's network of roads, followed by whole sections of roads dissolving into the air.

Eisenhower wiped a streak of sweat across her forehead, then slid back as Grant charged towards her.

"You really never stop, do you?" Eisenhower spoke through a forced smile. "Well...I guess I need to wrap things up myself."

Eisenhower snapped her fingers. At that, the road behind Eisenhower extended straight up into the air.

"Executive Power!" Eisenhower shouted as she turned around and ran straight up her vertical road, "Interstate Highway; Space Race!"

She kicked off the road, shooting her body at Grant with the speed of a comet.

"Now get ready!" she screamed, "for a lesson in three-dimensional warfare!"

Grant took half a step a back, anticipating what would likely be Eisenhower's final attack. But, as his horse's foot landed, Grant felt a strange sensation beneath him.

"What the...?" he said, glancing down.

Despite his diligent care and careful calculations with each of his steps, the back feet of Grant's horse had somehow landed themselves on the edge of Eisenhower's roads. Before he could think further, his horse's legs shot back along the road.

Grant clicked his tongue as he took a closer look at the road beneath him.

"You pretended like your roads were breaking up because you were running out of steam," Grant grumbled as his steed toppled over, "but in reality," he shook his head, "you were using the extra energy to widen the road directly behind me!"

"Correct!" Eisenhower screamed. "And despite your gullibility," she continued, "know that you were, without a doubt, one of the strongest opponents I've ever had the privilege to face!"

Grant gave a solemn nod.

"You too."

Grant pulled his reins, sending the back of his horse sliding even farther across Eisenhower's road. The horse kicked off with its hind legs; the combined momentum of Eisenhower's EP together with Grant's pull throwing its legs up and around in a tight circle. The legs reached out, intercepting and wrapping its legs around Eisenhower's airborne body, then continued spinning with the added force from Eisenhower's fall before slamming its legs and Eisenhower hard to the ground.

Eisenhower coughed violently as she hit the floor, then gritted her teeth as she struggled to free herself from the horse's iron grip. She started pushing herself free, then looked in horror to see the horse turn to her, its cannon nose pointed inches from her face.

"Fire," Grant spoke coolly.

Eisenhower grabbed her weapon as the cannon released its blast, the smoke from its shot covering the fighters in a cloud of dust.

“Time out!” Taft screamed while jogging to the center of the arena. He reached the fighters, gave each a brief inspection, then nodded his head.

“The match is over!” Taft shouted, slamming his gavel to the ground.

As he spoke, Grant, got up, brushed the dirt off his jacket, then lit a cigar next to his unconscious opponent.

“The winner of the match,” Taft continued, “is [The Hero of Appomattox], Odysseus S. Grant!”

### Fact and Fiction: Eisenhower vs Grant

**Hayes.** To be clear, **Rutherford Hayes did not lose an arm.** Ruth Hayes' battle-scarred appearance is merely a nod to the fact that in the Civil War, Rutherford Hayes took a lot of serious damage (including heavy damage to his left arm).

In addition to this, it is worth noting that Rutherford Hayes had essentially nothing to do with the Secret Service. In particular, Ruth Hayes being placed in charge of the Secret Service agents in the tournament isn't intended to be a reference to anything in particular.

**Eisenhower's Flashback.** Many of these events really happened: Dwight Eisenhower really did command a tank unit without any tanks, he really did train F. Scott Fitzgerald (though not as Camp Meade specifically), he really did struggle to get into combat with the war ending just a week before his deployment, and Fox Conner really did step in and save Dwight from being court martialed over an essentially bogus fine of \$250.

The scene with Deede Eisenhower's car getting stuck is a reference to Dwight taking part in the army's Transcontinental Motor Convoy, which demonstrated to Dwight how poorly maintained some of the nation's roads were. This event would later serve as inspiration for him pushing for building the Interstate Highway System.

**Grant's Flashback.** The scenes at West Point, including Grant setting a 25 year horse jumping record, are almost word for word true. However, there are some changes with Grant's involvement in the Mexican-American war.

First, while it is true that Ulysses Grant was reluctantly appointed to be quartermaster, it is not true that he was personally recruited by Zachary Taylor himself. He also put up a bit more of a resistance to the position than is displayed in the novel, since he really wanted to go and fight on the front lines.

Ulysses Grant honestly did ride a horse sideways to grab ammo for his troops, but I made some changes to simplify the details of the story. In particular: he didn't do this because he was quartermaster (in fact, the quartermaster wasn't even in charge of ammunition), this event didn't happen on his very first day, Zachary Taylor was not present when it happened, and he did not meet Robert E Lee right after this (though the two would meet during the war).

Another fun and true fact: Ulysses Grant really was planning to become a mathematics professor, but ended up finding his calling in the army after the Mexican-American war.

## Democratic Republicans

Eisenhower opened her eyes and gave a soft groan. Bright lights shone over her head, and she seemed to be lying on top of some sort of hospital bed.

"Have you returned to the land of the living?" a voice called out.

Eisenhower looked over to see a woman wearing an orange dress shirt and a pair of black suspenders.

"Wilson?" Eisenhower asked, rubbing her head, "Where...?" she squinted her eyes, the memories coming back. "That's right..." she spoke quietly, "I lost."

"Indeed," Willow Willson spoke frankly, "and in a very pitiful way too, I might add. But of course," Wilson said raising a cruel smile, "such a lackluster performance is to be expected from the head of a second-rate school like *Columbia*."

Eisenhower gave a light snort.

"I appreciate you trying to lift my spirits by turning grief into anger," she said with a smile, "but there's nothing to worry about...I'm more than accustomed to the harsh realities of battle."

"You sure?" Wilson asked with feigned disappointment, "I was really looking forward to discussing your failures in further detail."

Eisenhower chuckled.

"There's not much to say..." Eisenhower remarked. "I had concentrated my last few attacks towards ending the fight...I felt that I was making big progress," she shook her head, "...but then that stupid Space Race mess ruined all my efforts." She gave a sigh, then put on a somber smile. "But, the decision to attack was based upon the best information I had...any blame or fault is mine alone to bare."

"Righttttt," Wilson spoke sarcastically, "this certainly sounds like something a person who wasn't in any need any cheering up would say."

"Shut up!" Eisenhower retorted, regaining some warmth.

Sounds played in the room, and Eisenhower turned to see a television, its screen announcing the start of the next match.

"Don't you want to watch from the stands?" Eisenhower asked.

"Please," Wilson said waving her hands, "there's nothing to be gained by watching that farce of a match."

"Fair enough," Eisenhower said looking back to the screen. "It's going to be a fixed fight after all..."

In the stands, Thompson grabbed her mic.

"Hello everybody!" she shouted. "We're ready to get back to the action with a fight featuring two Presidents from the legendary Democratic Republican Party!"

She gestured to the arena.

"First, we have the calm, no-nonsense, second in command of the Democratic Republicans! She might seem frail on the outside, but she boasts one of the strongest constitutions the world has ever seen! Give it up for [The Sage of Montpelier], Jamie Madison!"

Madison walked into the arena with a black pinstripe blazer, a trident in her hands, and a sharp gaze across her face.

"Her opponent," Thompson continued, "is a tall sharpshooter known for her friendly disposition! A diligent patriot; she's willing to take on any role and travel any distance for the sake of her country! She's [The Heir of Good Feelings], Jane Monroe!"

Monroe swaggered into the arena wearing a tie dye shirt, baggy pants, and a tri-pointed hat. She shot a peace sign with one hand and carried a rifle in the other.

"So, Truman," Thompson spoke up, "what do you think about this upcoming match?"

"Given that Monroe specializes in long-range combat," Truman remarked, "it's pretty clear Madison holds an edge in our enclosed arena..." he shook his head, "or at least, that would be the case, if the fight actually happened."

"But it might not!" Thompson added on, "because Madison and Monroe come from the same Party!"

"Exactly," Truman replied with a shrug. "It's rather boring, but one of them is probably just going to give up as soon as the match begins. The only question left..." he said looking to the fighters, "is which one is backing down?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Just before entering the arena, Madison and Monroe stood in front of a tall, slender woman.

"I had the most tremendous idea," Tanya Jefferson spoke with jubilation. "We shall decide the outcome through a vote by the people!"

Madison and Monroe exchanged worried glances.

"...are you saying," Monroe asked, "that you want us to poll the audience as to who they want to win the fight?"

"Exactly!" Jefferson replied. "After all, we are the Party of the people, so it is only fitting that we leave the choice in their knowing hands."

Madison bit her lip.

"This is an...admirable idea," she spoke up. "But I believe there are some practical considerations that need to be addressed. For example, how should we conduct such a vote? Orally? Surely this won't work if the voting is close. Paper ballots? Why, such a process would take hours, if not days for us to go through."

Jefferson brought a hand to her chin.



"...yes," she spoke solemnly, "I suppose the plan is too grand to implement on such short notice." She silently nodded her head. "Well, in that case, perhaps you two should just decide who shall go forward."

"We can't," Monroe said with a shake of her head. "We're both convinced that we ought to be the one winning the match. You're the only one who can decide this for us."

Jefferson gave a heavy sigh.

"I was afraid it might come down to this."

Jefferson looked carefully over her two best friends.

"...given Grant's EP," she finally spoke, "Monroe is better suited to fight in the second round."

Monroe gave a small grin, while Madison remained unmoved.

"That being said," Jefferson continued, "Madison shall be the one going forward."

Monroe blinked.

"But...but ma'am!" she stammered, "you just said I was more suitable!"

"Against Grant," Jefferson corrected. "But Grant is not our primary concern..." she tapped her fingers nervously across her leg, "it is Roosevelt and Lincoln for whom we must plan." She looked to Madison. "And for opponents of that caliber, only Madison stands a chance."

Monroe dropped her head.

"So...when you told us you'd make your decision after watching the first match..." she clenched her fists, "that was just a boldfaced lie!" she exclaimed. "You were always going to pick Madison, regardless of the outcome!"

Jefferson frantically waved out her hands.

"No, no!" she insisted, "that's not true at all! The first winner could have possessed an EP for which Madison stood little chance against. In such circumstances, I would have gladly declared you to be our champion!"

"But outside of that one in a million chance..." Monroe grumbled, "it was always going to be her..."

"...I'm sorry, old friend," Jefferson said shaking her head. "It pains me to do this, it really does...but it's for the best of the Party."

Monroe huffed and puffed, then took back her composure.

"Don't worry." Monroe said with a humble smile. "I completely understand. Now, if you'll excuse me," she walked off before the others could reply, "I've got a defeat to prepare for."

Jefferson watched Monroe leave, then gave a shallow moan.

"You know," Jefferson spoke to Madison, "I was originally elated to hear you secured a match between two of our members." She shook out her head. "But as things stand, I would gladly face all of Rushmore on my own if it meant restoring our Party's former sense of unity."

"It's okay," Madison said patting her back. "Monroe is no fool. She'll come around eventually."

"Eventually, yes," she said, tapping at her arm, "but there's no telling when that time shall come."

Jefferson looked Madison in the eye.

"I have complete faith in Monroe's loyalty," Jefferson declared, "but she can be impulsive at times, especially if she think she's been slighted." Jefferson rested a hand on Madison's arm. "Please, be careful out there."

\* \* \* \* \*

In the arena, Taft eyed the two combatants. There was real tension between them; far more than he expected from two members of the same Party. Taft shook out his head, then lifted his gavel with an ounce of hesitation.

"Let the match...begin!"

The gavel hit the ground, but neither fighter moved. Madison waited a moment, then furrowed her brow.

"Well?" she asked. "Isn't there something you'd like to say?"

"Hmmm?" Monroe asked. "Oh, yes, right."

Monroe nonchalantly raised her arms with a smile.

"I, Jane Monroe of the Democratic Republicans, have decided that I shall yield..."

Monroe lowered her arms, aiming her rifle at Madison's head.

"...to no one!" Monroe declared.

## Monroe's Doctrine

During the War of Independence, a young Jordan Washington looked over the enemy encampment.

"They have two large cannons aimed right for us," he remarked. "We'll have to bring a small crew across the Delaware and seize their artillery before our main force can move in."

He turned to his soldiers as they exchanged a series of worried glances.

"...sir," someone finally spoke up, "you're asking us to paddle in the dead of night through a raging snowstorm for over eight hours straight."

"Yes," Washington replied. "Now, who's coming with me?"

No one moved. Then, a small hand rose from the back. The troops turned and whispered as Washington made his way to the volunteer.

"Name and age?" he asked.

"Jane Monroe," the soldier replied, "18 years young, baby!"

Washington nodded his head, then turned to the rest of his army.

"So," he spoke out, "will anyone else be joining me? Or is this young'un here the only one with some courage?"

A few of the older soldiers raised their hands, followed by a couple dozen more.

"Good," Washington spoke. "Ready your boats; we leave in 5."

Monroe headed towards shore, but Washington blocked her path.

"You're coming with me," he said, lifting a nearby flag, "and you'll be carrying our banner."

On the boat, Monroe watched with agitation as her crewmates rowed besides her through the frigid waves.

"Sir," she spoke up, "I really feel like I ought to be doing some of the rowing too."

"Hold the flag," he replied without breaking his gaze.

"Why are we even bringing this thing anyways?" she asked, "it's just going to slow us down!"

Washington turned to Monroe, then stared at the flag.

"This flag," he spoke, running his hand along its stripes, "is a symbol of freedom. A symbol, which possesses far greater strength than any mere weapon." He pointed to the boats. "As these men row through the night...as they put their very lives on the line," he pointed back to the flag, "they can look to this banner and remember exactly what they're fighting for."

Monroe gave a slow nod of her head. She didn't fully comprehend his words, but she could tell she wouldn't be changing his mind.

After some time, the boats reached the bank of the river.

"We'll come back here with the second wave," Washington shouted as his soldiers disembarked, "In the meantime, you're to guard these roads with your lives. Do not leave your posts for an instant; understood?"

"Yes sir!" the troops shouted in reply.

With that, Monroe found herself standing alone on an empty road, waiting in silence as the weather shifted from snow, to rain, to hail.

Near the end of her shift, Monroe let out a heavy yawn and stretched out her arms, only for her to snap back at the sound of footsteps echoing besides her. She turned, raising her rifle.

"Who's there?" she shouted.

Through the fog, Monroe could make out a pistol aimed right for her.

"Get outta here!" a voice screamed through the mist.

"Not happening, baby," Monroe spoke while tightening her grip, "I'm under direct orders from General Washington himself to stay put."

"...did you say Washington?"

The man stepped forward, then looked at the American flag planted behind Monroe.

"Ah, shucks!" the man said with a chuckle, lowering his gun, "I didn't realize you were American!" he pointed to a house just off the road. "Please, come into my home for some food and warmth. It's the least I can do after startling you like that."

Monroe looked to the house and licked her frozen lips.

"...I can't," she said, "I was given strict orders not to leave this post."

The man scratched his chin.

"I see..."

The man thought for a moment, then put on a smile.

"Give me a second."

The man ran into his house. A minute later, he came out carrying a large bag in one hand and a toasty sandwich in the other.

"I'm guessing your 'strict orders' didn't say anything about eating on the job?" he asked with a grin.

"They did not!" she exclaimed before devouring the sandwich.

As she finished off her meal, Monroe took a closer look at the man's bag.

"What's that?"

"A medical bag," the man said with a salute. "I'm a doctor, you see, and I may be able to help some poor fellow in your troupe." The man dropped his salute and scratched at his head. "Assuming General Washington will take me, of course."

Monroe gave a tip of her hat.

"I'm sure he'll be more than happy to have a patriot like you amongst our ranks."

"Indeed, I would."

The two looked back to see Washington marching through the storm, the rest of the battalion trailing shortly behind. Monroe gave a salute, then joined Washington's side as he brought the doctor up to speed.

"The Hessians are an elite band of warriors," Washington explained. "We'd stand no chance against them in a direct fight. Fortunately, most of their troops are out of commission after some heavy drinking, and they won't be expecting an attack from behind. Overall, things should go quite smoothly for us, unless of course..."

Washington froze as his eyes locked onto a Hessian scout coming out of the woods.

"We're spotted!"

Washington lunged forward and struck the scout with the blade, but not before the soldier lifted his arm, launching a flare into the sky.

"Oh god!" a soldier exclaimed as the Hessian camp started to stir. "Should we turn back?"

"No!" Washington shouted. "We press on!"

Washington ran full force into the enemy camp, cutting down twenty Hessians before they even had the chance to draw their weapons.

"Fire!"

A cannonball exploded directly in front of Washington, knocking him to the ground.

The Founding Fighters stood stunned, watching as Washington started to rise, only to fall to the ground.

"What do we do...?" a soldier mumbled nervously, "...what do we do?!"

"Isn't it obvious, baby?"

Monroe charged past the line of soldiers, planting her flag directly in front of Washington.

"We press on!"

Monroe drew her rifle, firing at half a dozen soldiers as they ran towards Washington.

"...the kid's right!" an American shouted behind her, "let's show these Hessians what we're made of!"

The Americans gave a valiant yell and charged into the enemy camp.

"Go for the general!" a Hessian screamed, "they'll lose their morale once we cut off his head!"

"Go ahead and try!" Monroe shouted as she took down another wave of soldiers.

On the ground, Washington jerked his body around.

"Be..." he mumbled.

"Sir?" Monroe asked.

"...Behind you!"

Monroe turned herself around, only for a bullet pierced straight through her chest and into her left shoulder.

"That's what you get," a Hessian marksman snickered as Monroe fell back, "for waving around that gaudy piece of cloth!"

Monroe clenched her teeth.

"This piece of cloth..."

She said grabbing the flagpole, stopping her fall.

"Is a symbol of freedom!"

She fired, striking the Hessian down. She smirked, then collapsed to the ground, the snow beneath her turning a scarlet red.

"Hang in there!" the doctor exclaimed as he rushed to her side. "You're going to be alright!" He took a closer look at the wound, then gave a small gulp. "...but just barely..."

"...Washington..." Monroe spoke wearily, "...save...him..."

"I'm fine, lad," Washington spoke besides her, "just got the wind knocked out of me, that's all." He grabbed her hand. "You just focus on getting better, alright? Do that, and I promise, the next time you enter the battlefield, you'll be a captain!"

"...a...captain...huh?"

A smile drew over Monroe's face as she drifted to sleep, her head filled with dreams of the brave warriors she'd one day command in battle.

But that day would never come, at least, not in this war. Time after time, Monroe would try and get back onto the battlefield, only to be turned away each time. Monroe did her best to maintain a cheerful disposition on the outside, but on the inside, she raged.

With fight after fight taking part without her, Monroe swore to herself she would never again let someone take her out of combat without putting up a fight.

This, above all else, would be her sacred doctrine.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monroe fired her rifle, its bullet grazing past Madison's face.

"Oh man!" Thompson exclaimed, "Against all odds, Monroe has launched an actual attack against her fellow Democratic Republican! It looks like we may have a real fight on our hands after all!"

Madison, without breaking her gaze, rubbed a finger along her cheek, feeling the thin streak of blood trickle down her face.

"...so that's how it's going to be?" Madison said with a sigh.

She paused, her gaze shifting between Monroe, Jefferson, and Grant. Finally, she nodded her head and raised her trident, pointing it directly towards Monroe. As she did, the trident's tips ungulated back and forth.

"Executive Power," Madison spoke, "Ratification; Three Branches!"

Her prongs suddenly lengthened themselves, their tips shooting rapidly at Monroe.

"Don't play with fire, baby!" Monroe said twisting her body, narrowly dodging each of the elongated prongs, "cause you're going to get burned!!"

The crowd drew a collective gasp as blood splattered to the ground.

Madison looked down, noticing three fresh cuts along her arm.

Monroe smiled and shot a peace sign towards Madison.

"Executive Power: Monroe Doctrine, baby!"

Madison retracted her prongs with a solemn expression.

"Ratification; Three Branches."

Again, her trident extended, the prongs thrashing about wildly across the battlefield.

One prong came from below, but Monroe easily jumped over the attack. She leaned back to dodge a followup strike to the head, then landed on her hand and pushed off the ground, leaping away from another attack. And with each of Monroe's dodges, a new wound appeared across Madison's body.

"The heck?!" Thompson shouted, "Madison is the one attacking, so why is she the only one taking damage?!"

"It's obviously Monroe's EP," Truman remarked, "though honestly, I've got no idea how it works."

From the stands, Jefferson gave a deep sigh.

"Things not going as planned?"

She turned to see a young man with a swimmer's body standing beside her.

"No, Quincy," she shook her head, "they are most certainly not."

"I'm surprised you were optimistic in the first place," Quincy said with a chuckle, "you know how free and independent Monroe can be."

“Perhaps she’d be a bit more docile,” she said with a somber smile, “if you hadn’t helped her acquire such a tremendous EP.”

Quincy gave a nod.

“Monroe Doctrine,” he remarked, “the ability to instantly counter any hostile action taken against her...it’s a devastating EP, especially when combined with her magnificent dodges.”

“It would be a very difficult hurdle for Madison to overcome,” Jefferson added, “if she weren’t already aware of its limitations.”

Madison retracted her prongs and charged towards Monroe. Monroe smirked in response.

“You want to get closer to me?” she said readying her rifle, “how sweet!”

She fired, but Madison easily deflected the bullets.

“No funnnn,” Monroe said with a shake of her head. “But even if you don’t take any hits,” she drew back her rifle, readying her stance, “I can still finish you off with Monroe Doctrine!”

Madison raised her trident and thrust it at Monroe’s feet. Monroe stepped back, dodging her weapon and smiling as she waited for her EP to take effect.

“The thing about your EP,” Madison spoke up, “is that it only works if my aim is to hurt you!”

Monroe’s eyes widened as Madison vaulted herself off the trident, then wrapped her legs around Monroe’s torso; her body completely unharmed by Monroe’s EP.



## Madison's Constitution

After the War of Independence, a group of Virginians gathered around a dominating figure.

"Well?" Pat Henry said, folding his arms, "we doing this or what?"

"We will," Eddy Randolph said glancing at his watch. "Our representative should be here any minute now..."

"I already am," a weak voice called from behind.

The group turned to see a haggard Madison standing just outside the circle.

"Jesus!" Randolph exclaimed, "you look like crap!"

"I've caught a small cold..." Madison mumbled between coughs.

"I don't care what you've got!" Randolph insisted. "You can't go out there like that; you'll get destroyed!"

"I have to," Madison replied, "no one here can take Henry in my place."

Randolph started to speak, then looked to the ground, unable to reply.

"It's fine," Madison assured, making her way to the center, "I will not let this land fall to ruin."

"You won't," Henry agreed, raising his arms, "because I'm going to put a stop to your disastrous plans right now!"

Henry charged ahead, not waiting for the referee to begin the match. He stopped in front of Madison, then threw a masterful punch.

"You're too focused on perfection," Madison remarked while dodging his overly prepared attack, "you need to be practical!"

Henry raised his guard as Madison unleashed a fury of thrusts, absorbing the blows while blocking his vision. Madison swung her leg from below, striking Henry's unguarded shins and knocking him to the ground. Henry started to rise, but stopped as Madison's trident pricked at his neck.

"...I surrender..." Henry spoke with a click of his tongue.

The Federalists around released a chorus of cheers, only to be drowned out by the howls come from the Anti-Federalists.

"Screw this!" Joe Mason said stepping forward, "I don't care what we agreed to; I'm going to stop to this ridiculous ploy myself!"

The Anti-Federalists rallied behind Mason, raising their weapons into the air.

"Stand down!" Henry barked, silencing his allies. He turned to Madison. "I swear on my honor," he spoke, "Virginia shall not oppose your plan to unite the States into a single nation."

Henry gave a furious snort, then left the arena.

"What the heck!?" Mason hissed behind him, "you're giving in too easily!"

Henry turned around, then gave an evil grin.

"Who said I was giving in?"

The next day, Randolph barged into Madison's office and slammed a stack of papers onto her desk.

"We've been had!" he exclaimed. "While we were focusing on getting Virginia's approval, Henry's been sneaking clause after clause into our deal!"

Madison skimmed through the papers before her.

"And by the looks of things," she spoke out, "these amendments are all centered on blocking me from the convention."

Randolph nodded in agreement.

"And without you there," he continued, "this entire project is doomed to fail!"

Madison crossed her arms.

"Quite troublesome..."

"I say," Randolph exclaimed, grabbing the pile of papers, "that we take this piece of garbage straight back to Henry and tell him right where he can shove it!"

"We can't," Madison said, calmly lifting the papers out of Randolph's hands. "He played us fair and square; challenging him against these amendments would only undermine our own movement." She shook her head. "No, our only choice is to fight on his terms."

Madison flipped through the papers, then pointed to a line of text.

"...I don't like our odds," Randolph spoke out as she read the line over.

"Neither do I," Madison replied, "but it's our only option."

The next week, Henry greeted Madison and Randolph with a warm smile.

"Greetings, my friends!"

"Shut it," Randolph replied.

"Anyways," Henry continued, "I'm sure you're both dying to learn the details for our match deciding Virginia's final delegate." He gestured behind them. "Well, the battlefield is before you."

Madison and Randolph looked to see an abandoned city with towering buildings separated by wide open spaces.

Randolph raised an eyebrow.

"I'm surprised someone of your stature would want to fight in a dump like this."

Henry gave a feigned look of surprise. "Oh my, I think there's been a misunderstanding." He gave a sly grin. "I never said I would be fighting...only that I would be choosing Madison's opponent."

Randolph and Madison exchanged glances with one another.

"But if you're not representing the Anti-Federalists..." Randolph began.

"...then who is?" Madison asked.

"I am," a voice called from behind.

Madison turned around in shock.

"Monroe?!"

"That's right, baby!" she said with a grin.

"Why..." Madison blinked, "what are you doing!"

"You see..." Monroe said with an innocent smile. "I was a tad miffed after you stole my position for the Virginia conference," she twirled her rifle and pointed it to Madison, "so, I think it's only fair that I take your seat for the convention in return."

"...stole your position?" Madison said, furrowing her brow. "I did no such thing!"

Madison grabbed Monroe's shoulder.

"Listen," she whispered in her ear, "Henry is obviously just using you to get what he wants!"

"Please," Monroe said, shrugging her off, "I'm the one using him."

Randolph clicked his tongue.

"This is bad," he whispered to Madison, "this battlefield is a sniper's paradise! It'd be tricky to beat Monroe if you were in peak condition, but with your illness..."

"...it'll be alright," Madison said, gathering her composure, "I will not fail."

Randolph and Henry stayed back, listening from afar as the fight raged below.

"Oh my," Henry spoke up as the gunfire came to a close, "it sounds like your fruitless struggle is finally over."

Randolph slumped his shoulders down, then raised himself up.

"It is!" Randolph exclaimed with triumph, "cause we're finally done dealing with you!"

"What do you...?"

Henry stopped talking as he spotted Madison walking towards them. Her body was covered in injuries, with the tip of her nose partially shot off, but she strode onwards with confidence and a cold look of determination.

"I win," she declared.

Henry continued staring at Madison with a blank expression, then tightened his fists.

"...you're making a mistake," Henry spoke softly, "uniting the country, giving greater powers to our Executives...it will bring disaster to our land!"

Madison paused for a moment.

"...it's entirely possible that our experiment ends in failure." She said, staring Henry in the eyes. "But if we do nothing, we are certain to perish."

Henry let out a snort.

"I swear," he spoke with a snarl, "I'll never stop fighting you; not until you either give me liberty...or give me death!!"

"And I swear," Madison responded, raising her hand adorned with a freshly formed Presidential Seal, "I'll stop anyone who tries destroying my country."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Wowzer!" Thompson exclaimed, "Madison's managed to capture the agile Monroe between her legs!"

"Did you really think..." Madison remarked as she tightened her grip, "that I wouldn't exploit your EP's weakness of only responding to direct attacks?"

Monroe gave a grin.

"And did you really think," she replied, "that you could trap me with such stubby little legs?"

Monroe twisted her body and ducked down, slipping out of Madison's hold.

Madison landed and lunged forward, leaving her trident stuck in the ground as she reached out for Monroe. Monroe stepped back, her long strides easily outpacing Madison's shorter reach.

In the stands, Quincy placed a hand on his chin.

"So," he spoke up, "who do you think's going to win in the end?"

Jefferson gazed across the arena.

"...naively," Jefferson remarked, "it would appear Madison holds the stronger position. After all, she's forced Monroe into close-range while neutralizing her EP." Jefferson shook her head. "But in terms of experience, Monroe holds a significant advantage."

"True," Quincy said nodding his head. "Monroe is plenty used to facing opponents in close-range. On the other hand, Madison almost never fights without her trident in hand."

"If this were the whole story," Jefferson continued, "I would have to select Monroe as the likely winner. However," she said, crossing her arms, "there's something more lurking under the surface of this match..."

On the ground, Monroe let out a smirk as she dodged yet another failed grab from Madison.

"Stay still!" Madison grumbled as she lunged at Monroe again.

"Sorry, baby," Monroe replied, "but you're never going to catch me..."

Monroe suddenly stepped forward, sweeping Madison's legs off the floor.

“Especially not with your face planted right in the ground!”

Monroe extended her arms, aiming her rifle point-blank at Madison’s falling body.

Madison, remained non-plussed.

“Executive Power,” she spoke, “Ratification; Three Branches!”

“What?”

Three prongs suddenly shot out of the ground, tearing through Monroe’s legs.

“Gahhh!!”

Monroe stumbled back, tripping over herself and dropping her rifle. As she fell, Monroe looked out at Madison’s trident planted in the ground.

“I see,” Monroe hissed, “You purposefully left your weapon behind, all so you could extend its tips beneath my feet!”

Monroe hit the ground, then reached out for her rifle. Madison jumped onto her arm, stopping in place before bringing back her fist

“I’ve been waiting to do this,” Madison said as she readied her punch, “for a very, very long time.”

“Wait, wait, wait!” Monroe spoke frantically, raising her hands, “I surrender! I surrender! For real this time!”

Taft hastily slammed his gavel to the ground.

“The match is over!” he exclaimed. “The winner, is [The Sage of Montepelier], Jamie Madison!”

Madison gave a disappointed shake of her head, then dismounted off Monroe.

Monroe started to rise, but fell onto her injured legs. Madison reached forward, grabbing Monroe’s arm before she hit the ground.

“...thanks,” Monroe replied weakly.

Madison gave a nod, then lifted Monroe to her side. The crowd erupted with cheers as the two walked out of the arena, arm in arm.

“Well,” Eisenhower remarked from her bed, “what did you think about the match in the end?”

“It was absolutely dreadful,” Wilson said with a snide. “There was no point in Madison attacking Monroe at the start if she knew what her EP could do, nor was there any reason for Monroe to fall for such an obvious trap at the end!”

“Agreed,” Eisenhower said with a nod. “There really is no benefit to watching a fixed fight...”

On the ground, Monroe slipped Madison a subtle glance.

“...when did you work it out?”

"I suspected it after your first shot," Madison said, rubbing the scratch along her cheek, "it was a weak attack," she pointed to her chipped nose, "and I'm well aware you can shoot better than that." She looked to the cuts along her arm. "But I was made certain of it as soon as you activated Monroe Doctrine...each of your slashes were designed to look painful, while inflicting almost no real damage."

"And I appreciate you doing the same," Monroe said, wiggling her supposedly injured leg. "Though of course," she said with a smirk, "I let you hit me."

"Anyways," Madison continued, "why in the world did you make us go through such a ridiculous farce?"

"Can't you hear it?" Monroe said, gesturing to the crowd around them, "you put up a valiant fight against a disrespectful ally, then accepted her back with open arms! The audience is completely on your side now!"

"I hardly see the relevance," Madison replied.

Monroe shook her head. "If you won with a bye, the people would never have accepted the Democratic Republican winning the tournament. Sure, the Presidents would still swear their allegiance, but their soldiers would abandon in droves."

"...fair," Madison reluctantly replied, "but why not tell me this beforehand?"

"Because you're a terrible actor!" Monroe said with a grin, then lowered her smile. "That...and I thought, just maybe, there might be a chance you'd blunder badly enough to give me the win."

Madison stepped on Monroe's injured foot, inciting a quiet yelp.

"I swear," Madison said, shaking her head and giving the faintest of smiles, "you never cease to amaze me."

Monroe grinned back.

"You too pal!"

## Fact and Fiction: Madison vs Monroe

**Monroe's Epitaph.** Jane Monroe's epitaph, [The Heir of Good Feelings], is the first epitaph for a fighter we've seen which is not literally a nickname the President had in real life.

Indeed, this epitaph is a slight mutation of James Monroe's most common nickname "The Era of Good Feelings President" due to him being President when there was (at least on the surface) little political disagreement due to a momentary one party system. It is also because of this epitaph that Jane Monroe was given her **hippie aesthetic (which is historically inaccurate** to say the least!).

**Monroe's Flashback.** While James Monroe did volunteer to cross the Delaware, it's not true that he was the first to do so, nor is it true that George Washington gave him any particular praise for this. It also isn't true that he rode in the same boat as George Washington, nor did he carry the flag (and in particular, he didn't have a gallant last stand where he clung to the flag before going down). These last two points were done solely to reference the famous painting "Washington Crossing the Delaware" where James Monroe is depicted (ahistorically) doing both of these things.

Somewhat miraculously, Monroe's interaction with the doctor is almost entirely true! While he didn't have a gun pointed at him, James Monroe was indeed harassed by a passing doctor who mistook him to be British, after which James Monroe denied the doctor's offer to go into his house. The doctor then joined Washington's march, and during the battle this doctor really did narrowly save James Monroe's life after receiving a near fatal wound!

The incident with Washington going down in the fight is half true: it is really the case that during this battle, James Monroe's commander took an injury and went down, after which James Monroe heroically stepped in to lead his troops before chaos erupted, only to go down himself shortly afterwards. However, **this commander was not George Washington** (as depicted in EP:RW), but rather William Washington (a distant cousin of George). Narratively it was far simpler (and cooler) to use George Washington's counterpart in the story rather than introduce another character also named Washington.

**Madison's Flashback.** Few of the events in this flashback literally happened in real life (e.g. there were no physical fights, only political ones), though most of the events are based on James Madison's very real struggle to ratify the Constitution despite the constant roadblocks Patrick Henry put in front of him.

Notably, while it is not true that Patrick Henry literally added secret clauses to their agreements, he did genuinely do a lot of maneuvering to make it so that James Madison didn't appear at the national convention for ratifying the constitution. In particular, he forced James Madison to run in a heavily gerrymandered district against James Monroe (with this gerrymandering represented in the novel through the abandoned city which is highly favorable to Jamie Madison). Nevertheless, James Madison narrowly defeated his old friend James Monroe and succeeded in ratifying the constitution.

Also, James Madison really did have his nose damaged when fighting against James Monroe, specifically by getting frostbite while campaigning in the cold.

## Cross of Gold

A giant cowboy paced through the coliseum wearing a golden watch, golden belt buckle, and golden cufflinks cut in the shape of Texas; each piece of his audacious outfit proudly bearing the letters "LBJ."

"You got this," LBJ muttered to himself, "you got this!"

"You know," a voice called out to him, "in the Chinese language, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters..."

LBJ looked to see a handsome young man wearing a baggy tweed jacket, wrinkled cackles, and mismatched socks.

"One character," JFK continued, "represents danger. The other, opportunity!"

"...the hell are you talking about, Kennedy?" LBJ asked.

"What I'm saying," JFK replied with a chuckle, "is that it's perfectly natural for you to be nervous right now."

"Nervous?" LBJ said puffing out his chest. "Why...why would I be nervous?!"

JFK rested a hand on his shoulder.

"These are extraordinary times," JFK said softly, "and you face an extraordinary challenge. That being said, if you reduce your sights in the face of difficulty...well, perhaps it would be better for you not to go at all."

"Not go...?" LBJ said weakly, then let out a snort. "Not go?!" he exclaimed, throwing JFK's arm off his back. "Like hell I won't!" he screamed, then marched off while JFK gave a small snicker from behind.

LBJ continued onwards with confidence, then stopped his gait upon reaching the final gateway.

He stood there, staring at the sole barrier separating him from his forthcoming challenge, the one which could very well make or break his entire career. He swallowed, then turned back around.

"I should eat something," he muttered before shuffling down the hall.

He walked for some time, then halted after hearing JFK's voice from around the corner.

"I can't stand Johnson's damn long face!" JFK said with frustration, "he just stands around looking sad, waiting for someone to stroke his damn ego!" He shook out his head. "Honestly, we should ask not what our Party can do for LBJ...but what LBJ can do for our Party."

FDR raised an eyebrow.

"I respect your opinion," FDR replied, "but I must remind you that LBJ has contributed tremendously to the New Dealer over the years."

"I know that," JFK said with a nod of his head. "However, my concern is not for what he has done in the past, but what he can do for us in the future!"

He wrapped his hand around a rosary hanging from his neck.



"We are a great and strong Party," JFK exclaimed, "perhaps the greatest and strongest in the world! But greatness and strength are not our natural right...if we do not move forward again," he shook out his head, "we will inevitably be left behind."

FDR paused.

"...I understand what you're saying," she finally spoke, "but we ought to see the outcome of the match before making rash decisions."

"Oh please," JFK said with a roll of his eyes, "McKinley's a veteran fighter! LBJ, on the other hand, is known only for his signature move, the 'Johnson City Windmill'..."

With that, JFK got on his back and started kicking his feet in the air with a windmill motion.

"If you hit me I'll kick you!" he squealed in a mocking tone, "if you hit me I'll kick you!"

FDR crossed her arms.

"That's fair," she remarked, "Johnson can be a coward when it comes to even the mildest of dangers."

Down the hallway, LBJ clenched his fists.

"You damn Harvards," he whispered under his breath, "I'll show you all yet!"

At that, LBJ raced down the hall, not bothering to listen to the end of their conversation.

"But," FDR continued, "although he's weak-willed in ordinary situations, when his back is up against the wall," she gave a small grin, "that is when LBJ shines best!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Alright everybody!" Thompson shouted, "it's time for the next match to begin!"

She gestured to the arena.

"First up," she continued, "we have a major Major from the Civil War! He's a man known for training the Rushmore, Theo Roosevelt, as well as for defeating the infamous Free Silver Gang, not just once, but twice over! Give it up, for [The Napoleon of Protection], Will McKinley!"

McKinley walked into the arena wearing a full suit of tin armor and carrying a pair of hatchets in his hands: one made of silver, the other gold. Upon seeing him enter, a sea of spectators waved tin banners around and beat their hands atop tin buckets and cans.

"For his opponent!" Thompson continued, "We have the big cowboy of the New Dealers! He's crude, he's crass, he's a real-life son of a gun! But dang it; this man knows how to get thing done! Let's hear it, for [Landslide Landon], Landon B. Johnson!"

As she spoke, a helicopter flew out over the stadium and descended to the arena floor. LBJ popped out its doorway, giving a warm smile and wave to the crowd waiting down below. His copter landed on the ground, and LBJ shot McKinley a cold sneer as he walked on over.

"I gotta say," LBJ remarked, "I'm surprised the man known for never wanting to see another war entered this tournament with such excitement! But if I had to guess," he said with a smirk, "I'd say your decision probably went...something like this!"

LBJ suddenly snatched McKinley's helmet off his head. He then placed it awkwardly atop his own giant noggin while puffing out his stomach and lowered his frame.

"Oh, heavens me!" LBJ exclaimed with a perfect imitation of McKinley's voice. "What ever shall I do about this forthcoming Revolutionary War?" LBJ started pacing around. "I swore I'd never get into another battle unless God approved, but he does not answer my prayers!"

LBJ rubbed his chin before snapping his fingers.

"I know!" he exclaimed, "I'll pray to an even higher power than God!"

LBJ fell to his knees.

"Oh, great and powerful Marcus Hanna!" he screamed to the heavens, "please, grant me your sagely advice! Why, you know I'm incapable of making decisions without you telling me exactly what to do!"

The crowd roared with laughter as LBJ removed his helmet, stood back up, and looked down to where he had just been seated.

"I declare," LBJ spoke, imitating the voice of Hanna while stroking an imaginary beard, "that you ought to put your ear to the ground and blindly follow the people's will."

LBJ went to his knees and put the helmet back on.

"Of course!" he shouted eagerly, plopping his ear onto the dirt. "Is this close enough to the ground?" he asked, "or shall I go down even further?"

LBJ rose and stood in a third position.

"Bully!" he exclaimed in Roosevelt's boisterous voice, "What a fool I was for letting a straddlebug like McKinley take command of a star like me! Why, McKinley has no more backbone than a chocolate éclair!" he pointed to his ear covered in dirt, "and his ear's so close to the ground, it's filled with grasshoppers!"

The audience let loose a torrent of applause for LBJ's unexpected performance. He returned their cheers with exaggerated bows before turning to McKinley as he awaited his target's response.

McKinley stood still for a moment, then let out a light snort.

"Oh, heck!" he said with a good-natured chuckle. "How am I not supposed to laugh at something as funny as that?" McKinley directed a light bow towards LBJ. "It's truly an honor to have been the subject of a mimic as talented as yourself!"

LBJ forced a smile across his lips.

"Of course..." he said mockingly as he tossed McKinley's helmet back to him.

Taft eyed the fighters as McKinley put the helmet atop his head, covering the last of his body in shining tin armor.

"Let the match," Taft exclaimed, "begin!"

Quickly, LBJ reached into his pocket and pulled out a handkerchief covering his hand.

"If character assassination won't work," LBJ shouted as he pulled off the handkerchief, revealing a nickel-plated revolver in his hands, "then let's try us a real assassination!"

At that, LBJ fired two shots at point blank range. The bullets struck McKinley's armor with a shallow clang, then plopped straight to the ground.

LBJ looked to McKinley, down to his undented bullets, then back to McKinley.

"Damn," LBJ remarked as he tossed his weapon aside, "my cousin Iver swore this gun could take you down..."

LBJ eyed the McKinley with care. Not only had the bullets failed to dent his armor, they hadn't so much as left a single smudge.

"Finished?" McKinley asked as he readied his hatchets. "If so, I'd like to have my turn now."

LBJ leapt away as McKinley swung out his axe, the blade narrowly cutting across LBJ's shirt. McKinley followed up with another attack, scratching LBJ's arm before he could finish his dodge.

"OUCH!!!!" LBJ hollered while shaking out his lightly injured arm.

"Hot dang!" Thompson shouted from the stands. "McKinley's unleashing some rapid-fire attacks despite wearing armor heavy enough to block bullets! Just how does the man do it?"

On the ground, LBJ stepped back to dodge, only to trip over his leg and fall to the ground. McKinley jerked to a stop and took half a step back.

"You okay there?" McKinley asked with sincerity. "Do you want me to give you a minute to get yourself up?"

"No..." LBJ snarled before throwing out his hand, tossing a pile of dirt into McKinley's face, "I wanted you to get closer!"

McKinley stepped back as clumps of dirt passed through gaps of his helmet. At the same time, LBJ leapt forward, slamming his fist onto the top of McKinley's helmet. To LBJ's surprise, McKinley did not flinch, nor his armor so much as bend from the heavy weight of his masterful punch.

"That wasn't very nice," McKinley remarked as he twirled his axe in hand.

Before LBJ could step aside, McKinley swung his axe upward, landing a decent cut across his chest.

"YEOWCH!!!" LBJ screamed as he jumped back and blew air onto his open wound.

"Come now!" McKinley said with a cheer, "stop all this whining each time you get yourself a little scratch!"

“Easy for you to say!” LBJ snarled. “I’m out here putting my life on the line! But you?” he spoke with disdain. “You pretend like you’re protecting yourself with armor made of plain-old, boring ass tin! But in reality,” he pointed a finger to McKinley, “your armor’s a magical Artifact that eliminates the momentum of anything it touches!”

McKinley gave an annoyed smirk.

“Interesting theory,” he spoke coyly, “got any evidence for it?”

“Like Thompson said,” LBJ replied, “it doesn’t make sense you could move so quickly while wearing armor made of bland, lackluster tin; so it’s gotta be some sort of Artifact.”

LBJ pointed to the bullets on the ground.

“At first,” he continued, “I figured its Power just boosted your defenses. But, if that were the case, my bullets would have ricocheted off you instead of plopping to the ground. Moreover,” he said raising his fist, “my punch didn’t feel like I struck something hard...it felt like it stopped itself all of a sudden as soon I hit you.”

“Not bad,” McKinley remarked. “However,” he continued with a noticeably louder voice, “I must assure you, my armor is no Artifact. It is a creation made solely of the highest quality of Ohio tin; tin cut so finely it weighs close to nothing atop my shoulders!”

“...weighs close to nothing?” LBJ muttered while looking at the armor in awe. “Damn; your craftsmen down in Ohio are on a whole nother level!”

“Indeed they are,” McKinley replied with a smile. “And while you were wrong about the Artifact,” McKinley continued, “your momentum theory was mostly correct.”

McKinley raised a hand bearing his Presidential Seal.

“My Executive Power: Protective Tariff,” he went on, “severely weakens the force of any incoming attack directed to me.”

LBJ bit his lip.

“And that includes attacks hitting anything you’re wearing,” LBJ continued, “such as your super awesome armor...”

“Precisely,” he said with a grin.

“That all makes sense,” LBJ said with a rub of his chin, “but there’s one thing I still just don’t get.” LBJ pointed towards McKinley. “What the hell’s that thing on your head for?”

“My head?” McKinley asked as he placed a hand atop his helmet, feeling something strange wrapped around its rim.

Curiously, McKinley removed his helmet and gave it a look over. There, McKinley spotted a peculiar ornament digging itself into the top.

“A golden crown of thorns?” McKinley spoke out as he examined the object.

A foot stomped, and McKinley looked up to see LBJ charging towards him. McKinley put on his helmet and hastily swung out his axe. However, his unprepared attack was easily avoided.

“Executive Power!” LBJ shouted as he readied his fist, “War on Poverty!”

At that, LBJ punched McKinley’s neck with all the force he could muster.

But once again, McKinley remained unmoved.

McKinley lashed out with both of his axes. LBJ sidestepped the attacks, then delivered a small counter to McKinley’s passing right arm. As LBJ’s fist left the armor, a shining gold watch materialized around McKinley’s wrist.

“What’s this?” McKinley exclaimed, jumping back.

He examined the watch, and as he did, he took notice of a large, golden cross hanging around his neck.

“I say,” he spoke, running a hand along the object, “what in the world is going on here?”

LBJ let out a snicker from afar.

“Hope you like that necklace ...” LBJ quipped as he slammed his fists together.

He pulled his hands apart, and as he did, a pair of diamond encrusted brass knuckles engraved with the letters “LBJ” formed around his fingers.

“...’cause before you know it,” LBJ shouted, “you’re going to be crucified upon that cross of gold!”

## Landon Johnson's Money

McKinley looked over the watch strapped to his wrist, then back to the diamond knuckleduster around LBJ's fingers.

"I see," McKinley spoke out, "so your Executive Powers give you the ability to make these little trinkets, eh?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I suppose an ability like that probably has a use or two."

"Don't patronize me!" LBJ barked as he charged back at McKinley, throwing out his fist.

McKinley thrust his silver axe forward, meeting and stopping LBJ's knuckleduster midswing. As LBJ lost momentum, McKinley pushed his arm further, throwing off LBJ's balance.

LBJ started jumping back, but McKinley slashed his golden axe upward, landing a narrow hit across LBJ's chest. McKinley then stepped again and swung his silver axe, landing another small hit.

"YEOWCH!!" LBJ screamed for a second, then gritted his teeth and readied his stance. "Executive Power!" he shouted, slamming his fists onto either side of McKinley's outstretched hand. "War on Poverty!"

At that, golden bracelets formed across McKinley's right forearm.

McKinley swung his body out, striking LBJ's side with a roundhouse kick and forcing him to keel over. As LBJ's head lowered to McKinley's level, LBJ let out a smirk, then spat out a fresh wad of spit straight into the gaps of McKinley's helmet.

"Jesus Christ!!" McKinley exclaimed as he stepped back and shook out his head. "Why must you keep throwing disgusting things down my helmet?!"

"You think that's bad?" LBJ snarked as he smashed McKinley's chest, making the golden cross on his neck grow in size. "Wait 'till I stick Jumbo down there!"

"I'd rather not..." McKinley spoke as he blindly swung his axes.

LBJ stepped aside and landed a hit to McKinley's right arm, creating another golden bauble.

In the stands, JFK gave a light whistle.

"Color me surprised," JFK remarked with a smirk. "LBJ's actually landing some hits!"

"It is impressive," Hayes admitted with a small grin, "but it doesn't matter...LBJ can't hurt McKinley as long as Protective Tariff is activated. As such, it's only a matter of time before LBJ falls to the damage he's accumulating from McKinley's attacks."

FDR gave a small snort.

"What's so funny?" Hayes asked with a hint of annoyance.

"Just your choice of words," she replied with a smile. "While it is true that LBJ is accumulating damage," she explained to her neighbor. "It is equally true that McKinley is accumulating some debt of his own...one who's magnitude he seems entirely unaware of..."

On the ground, LBJ charged at McKinley, but just before reaching, LBJ juked himself to McKinley's right. McKinley started raising his arm in response, but found his body difficult to move

"What?" McKinley asked as LBJ stepped back, dodging the slowed strike.

As he dodged, LBJ landed a light counter to McKinley's arm, creating another golden bracelet on his forearm. McKinley retracted his arm, finding it even harder to move than it had been before.

"Could it be?!" McKinley shouted with disbelief. "These accessories...they're...they're weighing me down!"

"You're right on the money!" LBJ quipped as he stepped into McKinley's space, smashing McKinley's side and creating a golden shoulder pad. "And money," he continued, stepping back and dodging McKinley's lethargic swing, "is always right!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Years ago, the New Dealer's campaign committee shuffled about with a look of total gloom.

Only three weeks remained before the grand campaign featuring hundreds of fighters began. But despite the encroaching deadline, the committee had barely begun to provide the support their fighters so desperately needed. FDR had promised them she'd be sending someone over to help, but they weren't particularly moved by her offer. After all, there was only so much one person could do.

And so, the committee continued onwards with no expectation of change to come. Then, the group walked into the room which, until the day before, had been their office.

"What the...?" someone asked as a flurry of aides rushed around the room carrying piles of heavy documents.

"Did somebody take over our space?!" another shouted. "Don't they know how busy we are!"

"If you're so goddamn busy!" a voice screamed, "then you should have been here hours ago!"

The group looked to see a fiery LBJ marching towards them with a map in his hands.

"Now tell me," he exclaimed while jabbing the map with his meaty hand, "which one of you idiots thought this district here didn't need any funds?"

"...if I recall," a member replied curtly, "the fighter there had defeated their same opponent last year. As such, we figured it'd be an easy win even without our support."

"Well, you figured wrong!" LBJ screamed, handing the group a thick manilla envelope. "Their opponent's gained five pounds of muscle," he explained while the group scanned the detailed file. "On the other hand," he continued, "our boy's gone and gained five pounds of fat after injuring his left hand to boot! I tell you, he's going to lose this time unless we get him some real help!"

"Even so," a member replied with a shrug, "we don't have the resources to..."

The man stopped talking as LBJ shoved a heavy bag of cash into his arms.

"Spend half of that on personal trainers," LBJ barked, "the rest on a physical therapist. Got it?"

The man slowly nodded his head.

"And when you get there," LBJ said grabbing the man's lapel, bringing him close while jabbing a finger into his chest. "You tell our boy that these funds are thanks entirely to his good pal, L-B-J!"

Three weeks later, FDR looked over her reports in awe.

"You said we'd be getting some gains," she spoke out with wonder, "but I never imagined our numbers would be this strong!"

"Thanks boss," LBJ said with a stern look. "Now, regarding my reward..."

"Of course!" FDR responded cheerfully. "I can get you anything you want!"

"Good," he replied. "Because I want another chance at joining your inner circle."

FDR instantly cooled her friendly demeanor.

"...you know what that entails," she spoke softly, "you need to beat your state's champion in a one-on-one match, no exceptions." She bit into her lip. "You've already tried and failed this once...if you fail a second time..."

"I can do it!" LBJ insisted. "I know I lost to Patty O'Daniel last time, but I would have won if I just hadn't gotten so cocky at the end!"

"I know," FDR replied. "And if O'Daniel were still your opponent, I would have gladly given you my support."

"What?!" LBJ asked in confusion. "Are you saying O'Daniel ain't the champion no more?"

FDR shook her head.

"You were probably too busy with the campaign to hear," she said handing LBJ a newspaper clipping, "but *that man* has come out of retirement to reclaim his throne."

LBJ stared at the image of a slim man with a characteristic pipe in his mouth.

"[Mr. Texas]," LBJ grumbled, "Cole Stevenson."

"The greatest fighter your state has ever known," FDR said with a sigh. "Needless to say, he beat O'Daniel without batting an eye. And with a man like that as your opponent," FDR shook her head. "Well, in any case, your best shot now is to wait a few years until he goes back into retirement."

LBJ continued staring at Stevenson's picture.

"I might not have a few more years..." he muttered, scrunching the picture and holding it to his heart.

He looked to FDR, a fire burning in his eyes.

"I'm taking the match!" he exclaimed.

FDR tightened her gaze.



"You say this," she confirmed, "knowing that, should you be defeated, you'll lose your one and only shot at moving forward in our Party?"

"That's right!" LBJ shouted, giving a shallow gulp. "And if I can't move forward in the Party...then I swear...I'll retire from fighting altogether!"

"...that's some resolve," FDR admitted as she leaned back in her chair.

She looked to the ceiling, closed her eyes, then gave a slight nod.

"Very well," she finally spoke. "It shall be done."

And so, a match between them was arranged. On the promised day, LBJ entered the arena with a band playing behind him and a grand fireworks display shooting out across the sky. Stevenson walked in with no fanfare whatsoever, a look of total disinterest spread across his face.

The referee examined the fighters, then raised his arm.

"Ready?" he shouted, "Begin!"

LBJ charged at Stevenson and threw out a quick punch.

"Take this!" he shouted.

Stevenson shifted to the side, dodging the attack. LBJ followed with another strike, only for Stevenson to dodge once more.

Again and again, LBJ attacked with all the fury he could muster, only for Stevenson to dodge each blow with ease. After fifteen minutes, Stevenson looked to his watch while dodging yet another strike from LBJ.

"I've wasted enough time here," he remarked.

With that, Stevenson turned around and walked out the arena, leaving the crowd speechless at his exit.

"You..." LBJ spoke with shock, then curled his lips with rage, "you cowardly old man!" he snarled, stomping at the ground. "Come back here and face me!" he screamed, "or is dodging the only thing you know how to do?!"

Stevenson continued without slowing his gait or bothering to give LBJ a second glance.

"Uhh," the announcer spoke with hesitation, "I guess...the match is cancelled, then?"

LBJ gritted his teeth and punched the ground beneath him.

"This isn't over," he muttered before storming out the stadium.

After exiting, LBJ looked around and spotted a pile of dead leaves by a withering tree. He scurried to the tree, bending down and crushing a handful of leaves into his hands.

"Power," he spoke out, "Brown and Root!"

LBJ unclenched his fists; the leaves in his hands transformed into crisp dollar bills.

"You'll regret looking down on me," LBJ mumbled as he changed another pile of leaves into cold hard cash. "I'll make sure of that!"

The next morning, Stevenson woke at 4am to read a book by the fire. He switched on the radio for some light music, only to find every station playing the same interview in parallel.

"I tell ya," LBJ said to the host, "Cole Stevenson's a total coward! I wanted to have ourselves a real fight, just like he promised. Hell, I even offered him the first hit! But all that old man ever did was run around, dodging my attacks like some sort of fence straddling city slicker! By the end, Stevenson was practically sprinting out the arena, tears falling down in his eyes!"

Stevenson dropped his book. At first, Stevenson was angered at LBJ for telling such blatant lies across the air. But then it struck him: if LBJ was buying this much radio time at such a ridiculously early hour, he was surely doing far more than just this.

Cursing under his breath, Stevenson got into his car and drove to the city. It took only a moment for him to notice the plethora of billboards showing him cowering in front of LBJ, as well as the posters on every light post depicting him as a senile old man. To make matters worse, every piece of media had the same, horrible word written out across it.

Dodger. Dodger. Dodger.

Bottling his rage, Stevenson drove up to the nearest payphone.

"Helloooo," LBJ answered on the very first ring, as if he were just waiting for Stevenson to call.

"A rematch," Stevenson declared. "Today. Same time. Same place."

"Let's switch up the arena," LBJ replied, "I'm thinking Plot 13 is going to be my lucky spot!"

"Fine," Steveson snarled before hanging up the phone.

And so, the fighters gathered once more; the atmosphere between them entirely different from what it had been the day before.

"Well, well," LBJ said with a grin, "are we finally here to fight?" LBJ asked as he pulled out a pipe and shuddered his body in fear, "or are we just here to dodge?" he asked using Stevenson's characteristic southern drawl.

Stevenson did not bother to reply.

The referee looked over the fighters, then raised his arm.

"Begin!" he exclaimed.

"Get ready!" LBJ shouted as he whirled his hands around in erratic circles, "for my—"

Stevenson instantly appeared in front of LBJ, slamming his fist hard into his chest. The crowd went silent as LBJ buckled at his knees, his mouth gasping for air.

Stevenson's masterful attack had struck his kidneys with greater force than LBJ had ever experienced. It was taking everything he had in him just to keep himself from falling over from the pain.

Then, with all the strength he could muster, LBJ stood tall and forced his face into a smile.

"That all you got?!" he shouted while readying another strike. "Take this!"

Stevenson dodged the attack, then struck LBJ's stomach with a nasty sidewinder. Again, LBJ keeled over from the pain, only for him to rise once more.

"Dodging, dodging, dodging..." he spoke wearily, "is that all you can—"

He stopped talking as Stevenson punched him hard across the face, forcibly shifting his gaze onto the crowd.

"Say it with me now!" LBJ screamed to the audience. "Dodger, dodger, Stevenson's a dodger!"

"Shut it!" Stevenson shouted, delivering another attack. LBJ took the blow and swung out his arm, only for Stevenson to duck down underneath.

"Dodger, dodger!" the crowd started chanting with glee, "Stevenson's a dodger!"

Stevenson clenched his fists, looking to the crowd with an expression of utter bewilderment.

These people weren't just nobody. They were Stevenson's longtime supporters, his friends, his family. They had revered him for his work ethic, his outstanding code of honor, and his personal courage. But now, due to the relentless and repeated taunts of LBJ, all of his years of hard work had reduced itself down to a single word.

Dodger. Dodger. Dodger.

"To hell with this!" Stevenson snapped.

He turned to LBJ, opening his arms.

"Do your goddamn worse," he declared, begging LBJ to strike him down.

LBJ tightened his weary smile.

"Now we're talking," he said pulling back his fists. "TAKE...THIS!"

LBJ threw out the greatest strike he had ever thrown; a strike which, as he very well knew, could be the final punch he'd ever throw. The attack landed hard against the rugged shoulders of Cole Stevenson. But in the end, [Mr. Texas] remained unaffected.

And so, it seemed like LBJ's final shot at achieving power, just like his first, was destined to end in humiliating defeat.

"There!" Stevenson shouted as he took LBJ's attack with a malevolent grin. "Are you happy now—?"

Stevenson stopped talking as LBJ wrapped his hands around Stevenson's arm, then thrust his arms to the side, tossing Stevenson back several yards.

Stevenson landed on his feet, his expression completely unchanged.

"Still got some fight left, eh?" Stevenson spoke bitterly.

He stepped forward, then stopped as he noticed a strange, metallic box sticking out of the ground underneath his feet.

“What in tarnation...?”

Without warning, the earth below Stevenson burst open in a violent explosion of shrapnel and flames, slamming Stevenson back and to the ground.

The crowd stood still, stunned by the sudden eruption. Even the referee found himself unable to move at first, but then came to his senses as someone coughed loudly behind him.

“Ehem,” LBJ said while angrily twirling a finger in the air. The referee quickly cleared out his throat, then raised up his hand.

“We find Stevenson unable to continue!” he shouted to the crowd, “the winner, is Landon B. Johnson!”

“What?!” Stevenson exclaimed as he raised his burning body off the ground. “You can’t be serious here!!”

Stevenson pointed to the giant hole from the explosion.

“I don’t know what just happened,” he continued, “but it was obviously foul play on LBJ part! Moreover,” he said staring at his opponent, “I’m plenty happy to keep on fighting!”

“Sorry,” the referee said with a frantic wave of his arms, “but the official results have already been sent! I couldn’t change the outcome now even if I wanted to.”

As the referee explained himself, his sleeve fell down his arm, revealing a golden watch around his wrist. It was a watch which Stevenson knew for certainty the referee didn’t have the day before. Upon seeing this, Stevenson’s burning eyes transformed into an icy glare.

“...I see,” he said with a growl, “so that’s how it is, huh?”

He looked to LBJ.

“I’d ask how you could sleep at night, knowing the crimes you’ve committed to obtain this ‘landslide’ victory of yours,” he spoke with pure frustration. “But the answer’s clear, ain’t it?”

“Yes it is,” LBJ replied with his biggest grin yet. “I’m going to sleep,” he continued while waving a detonator in his hands, “like a goddamn baby!”

\* \* \* \* \*

McKinley clicked his tongue as LBJ dodged his slowed attacks and added another golden accessory to his glistening right arm.

“If you keep insisting on targeting my right,” McKinley shouted as he spun himself around, “then I’ll just meet you with my left!”

LBJ gave a sinister grin.

“Wrong move!”

Before McKinley could finish his turn, LBJ slammed his bulky frame into the left side of McKinley's tiny body. Normally, such a force wouldn't have even phased McKinley. But, between the incomplete spin and his lopsided weight distribution, McKinley was forced to step back.

"Got ya!" LBJ shouted, slamming his fists into McKinley's chest and enlarging the golden cross even further.

McKinley swung out his axes as he steadied himself, but LBJ stepped away with ease.

"What's wrong?" LBJ said with a snide. "Is the straddler having trouble balancing out his position?"

McKinley tightened his grip, then charged at LBJ. He swung his heavily weighted right arm, only for LBJ to dodge with a grin.

"Come on!" LBJ chuckled. "At this point it's like you're not even trying to hit—"

"Rather than listen to you blab on for a second longer," McKinley spoke as he raised his golden axe into the air, "I would happily suffer the loss of my good right arm!"

Before LBJ could react, McKinley swung his axe down, cutting straight through his own outstretched right arm. LBJ stood still, watching McKinley's arm drop lifelessly to the ground.

"Jesus—" LBJ started to speak, but stopped as McKinley sliced deep into LBJ's exposed chest with his remaining golden axe.

## Protection

"GAHHHH!!" LBJ screamd as McKinley cut into his chest.

LBJ pressed his hands onto McKinley's shoulders and pushed off, separating the two before LBJ jumped back even further.

LBJ gasped for air as he grabbed at his gaping wound, the first real damage he'd taken all day. As he steadied his breathing, LBJ took another glance at McKinley's severed arm on the floor.

"No blood...?" he murmured as he eyed the situation, "...it's some sort of...artificial limb?!"

"Correct," McKinley remarked as he tore out the remains of his prosthetic arm from inside his armor. "I lost my real one ages ago."

\* \* \* \* \*

"They're starving out there!" a young McKinley shouted to his superior officer. "We need to get them some food right now!"

"It's too risky," the officer replied with a shake of their head. "Sorry kid, but no means no."

McKinley lowered his shoulders and slumped off, his eyes looking to the pile of rations gathered at the middle of camp.

"They didn't bite," McKinley lamented to a large, hairy man standing besides him. "I asked two officers for permission, but they both shut me down."

Marcus Hanna gave a solemn nod.

"So, you're giving up then?"

McKinley stared for a moment, then gave a sly smile.

"Not a chance."

"Good," Hanna said with a smirk, "because we've already put together a wagon for us to deliver."

McKinley raised an eyebrow.

"Who's, `we'?"

Hanna pointed to a thin man stuffing his shirt with straw.

"Greetings!" Charlie Dawes exclaimed as Hanna and McKinley walked over. "Are we ready to get going?"

"I appreciate you putting this together, Dawes," McKinley remarked while looking over the meticulously organized wagon of food, "but you really don't have to come with us."

"Nonsense," he said with a wave of his hand, "you two would never make it without my plans." He stuffed another wad of straw down his shirt. "Though I admit," he said with a weak smile, "I am a little worried that this makeshift armor won't quite do the job..."

“Just focus on the plans,” Hanna said, bringing Dawes into his arms, “and I’ll focus on keeping up our courage!” He looked to McKinley with a grin. “And I guess that leaves our boss here with the task of leading us through with heart!”

“And what about me?” a feminine voice called from inside the wagon.

McKinley stepped back to see his wife coming out of the wagon with a travel bag on her back.

“Iris!” McKinley exclaimed. “Surely...surely you’re not planning to come with us, right?! We’re going to be heading straight into enemy fire, and...”

“And what?” she replied curtly. “If you can handle it, honey, then so can I!”

“More than that,” Dawes butted in, “I requested that Mrs. Iris join us in the likely event that we find ourselves in need of her Artifact.” He gestured to the ruby red slippers on her feet. “After all, she’s the only one here that can get us back home if we find ourselves in a pinch.”

McKinley crossed his arms and gave the motley crew a look over. He sighed, then shook out his head.

“Alright you knuckle heads,” he exclaimed with a grin, “let’s do this thing!”

And so, McKinley and his group finished loading up the wagon, then bolted out of camp before anyone could take notice. The moment their wagon hit the road, the group was met with a heavy storm of enemy fire.

McKinley rode on with daring; traveling at breakneck speeds through the terrific fire of musketry and artillery around them. After a few close calls, the group made it through the bombardment, their wagon having miraculously taken only the slightest bit of damage. Soon after, the group found themselves riding along a quiet, yellow brick road.

“Phew,” Dawes spoke from inside the wagon, “looks like we made it through the worst of things!”

“We’re doing great on time too,” Hanna remarked from the front. “At this rate, we should--”

McKinley shoved Hanna to the side. As he did, a silver spike shot out of the nearby forest, piercing the carriage where Hanna had just been seated.

McKinley looked out to the forest, then gave a heavy groan.

“You’ve got to be kidding me...” McKinley lamented as a familiar figure stepped onto the road with a ball of silver floating behind them.

“What happening?!” Dawes exclaimed from inside.

“It’s [The Wicked Will of the West],” McKinley grumbled, “Will Bryan...”

“Well, well,” Bryan said with a smirk, “what are the odds of two bitter rivals running into each other out here in the middle of nowhere, hmm?”

“We aren’t rivals,” McKinley replied, “and we don’t have time for your silly antics right now!”

“Too bad!” Bryan retorted with a growl. At that, Bryan brought a small, silver whistle to his lips and blew out. Upon hearing his signal, dozens of armed soldiers emerged from within the forests depths.

"...we're outnumbered 16 to 1," McKinley remarked as he scanned their surroundings.

Hanna paused, then shook out his head.

"It's too risky to continue," he said with dismay. "Iris!" he shouted to the carriage, "get us out of here, now!"

Hanna waited a moment, but the only response he got was a peculiar hissing sound coming from the carriage.

"We...have a minor problem," Dawes spoke hesitantly. "I'm afraid that Iris is having another one of her episode's right now."

"Seriously!" Hanna shouted behind as he blocked an attack from the side.

"I'll handle this," McKinley declared as he dashed down into the carriage, "just keep them busy for me!"

"Easier said than done..." Hanna muttered as he readied his claws.

Inside the carriage, McKinley found Iris in the middle of a severe epileptic fit.

"There, there," he said calmly as he covered his wife's face with a silken white handkerchief, "everything's going to be okay."

McKinley started stroking Iris' hand with his left, and as he did, a figure leapt out behind him.

"If you won't come out to fight," Bryan screamed, "then I'll bring the fight to you!" He raised his hand into the air. "Power: Free Silver!"

Swiftly, a spike extended out of Bryan's silver orb and shot out at McKinley.

Without taking his eyes away from his wife, McKinley raised his right arm, causing the spike to pass straight through his elbow and stop before meeting his head.

"It's okay, darling," McKinley continued to speak calmly despite the massive wound in his arm, "that was just the sound of some leaves rustling in the wind."

Bryan furrowed his brow and bit into his lip.

"If there's one thing I hate more than losing..." he muttered as he split his orb into several smaller spheres, "it's being ignored!"

At that, Bryan's collection of orbs transformed themselves into a sea of silver spikes aimed for McKinley and his wife.

McKinley glanced behind, then raised his body upward and extended his remaining arm around his defenseless wife.

"Don't worry, darling," he spoke softly, "no matter what the world throws at us...I'll always protect you!"

"Cheap words!" Bryan screamed as the spikes hurtled forward.



Suddenly, a ray of light burst out of McKinley's injured body. The silver spikes struck his shining armor, only to plop harmlessly to the ground.

"Wh...what?!"

Bryan, for once in his life, stood speechless, his eyes fixated on the glowing light from McKinley's unexpected Election. However, it didn't take long for Bryan to regain his senses.

"Seriously?!" he squealed at the top of his lungs. "You've been Elected?!?!? BEFORE MEEEEEEE?!?!?!?"

"Bryan..."

Bryan stopped talking as McKinley turned around, his eyes blazing, his left hand shining with the glow of a Presidential Seal.

"If you can't lower your voice around my wife," he continued, "then I'm afraid I'll have to shut you up myself..."

An hour later, Hayes waited restlessly camp, her gaze alternating between the starving soldiers around her and the phone held tightly in her hand. Then, her phone buzzed with the message she had long been waiting for.

*We're here.*

"Thank the heavens!" Hayes exclaimed as she raised her arm into the air. "Exectuvie Power: Home Rule!"

At that, the cart of supplies materialized in front of Hayes and her soldiers.

"God bless you all!" she shouted, slapping Hanna and Dawes on their backs.

Hayes next turned to McKinley, carefully eyeing his severed arm and new Presidential Seal.

"When you told me what happened..." she spoke somberly, then shook out her head. "Honestly, I never expected to see you in this life again."

She walked forward, giving McKinley a soft hug with her remaining arm.

"You're one of the bravest and finest officers in the army," she whispered to him. "I truly can't thank you enough for what you've done."

"I appreciate the sentiment," McKinley said, looking to his right shoulder with dismay. "It's just a shame that I'll have to drop out of the fighting now."

"What?!" Hayes exclaimed. "Over one missing arm?"

She shot a toothy grin and gave a wave with her stubbed left arm.

"Lad," she continued, "you'll be moving faster than ever with all that extra weight off your shoulders!" She gave McKinley a friendly pat on the back. "And once I teach you a few one-armed techniques I've been developing, why, you'll find you've still got plenty of fighting left in you!"

McKinley smiled, then gave a proud salute with his remaining arm.

“Yes ma’am!”

\* \* \* \* \*

LBJ clicked his tongue as he continued looking down at McKinley’s severed arm

“I always thought you were a passive fool...” he remarked, “but cutting off your fake arm in order to shake up your opponent?” he crossed his arms with disdain. “That’s some high-level manipulation if I’ve ever seen it.”

“Thank you,” McKinley replied. “It was quite difficult keeping up the façade...I tried slowing my left arm down to the speed of my sluggish right, but I just couldn’t quite close the gap between them,” he kicked a golden ornaments on his severed arm. “I suspect that’s why you unconsciously targeted my slower right side with all your attacks.”

“...close the gap...?” LBJ muttered with widened eyes. “You don’t mean...?!”

McKinley nodded with a smile.

“Now that I’ve shown my hand,” he said crouching down, “I’m done slowing myself down!”

## The McKinley Grip

McKinley dashed ahead and swung his axe down like a crack of lighting. LBJ stepped back and took a cut to his arm. McKinley then twirled his hatchet and swung back upward, landing another hit.

LBJ gritted his teeth, grabbing McKinley's outstretched arm and holding it firmly in place.

"Have a taste," he exclaimed, "of my boxer rebellion!"

At that, LBJ pummeled into McKinley's chest with his free arm, causing the golden cross to grow ever larger.

"Even if you restrict one limb," McKinley remarked as he jumped into the air, "I've still got two more!"

McKinley thrust his legs, striking LBJ's gut and forcing him to release his arm. Gathering his wits, LBJ pushed on McKinley's airborne body, shoving him to the ground. McKinley rolled away, then stood back up before LBJ could follow with another barrage.

"Not bad!" McKinley said with a smirk. "Now try this!"

At that, McKinley placed the handle of his axe into the hole of his suit where his arm had been, locking the weapon in place. He gave a grin, then charged forward. As he did, LBJ sidestepped to McKinley's unarmed left side, throwing out a punch.

With miraculous speed, McKinley grabbed LBJ's right hand in the air, pulling it at an awkward angle and causing his attack to whiff. McKinley then rotated his body around, cutting sharply into LBJ's shoulder with his axe.

"SHITTT!!" LBJ screamed.

LBJ readied a punch with his left. At the same time, McKinley shifted his hand along LBJ's arm, grabbing his elbow. McKinley then yanked his arm to the side, pulling LBJ and causing his strike to miss once more. McKinley rotated himself around, landing a cut to LBJ's defenseless side.

Hayes gave a grin from the stands.

"There it is!" she remarked, "The McKinley Grip! His signature fighting style that allows him to land continuous attacks while cutting off his opponent's mobility!"

"You think LBJ is done for, then?" FDR inquired.

"Definitely," Hayes replied promptly. "Sure, LBJ could land another hit or two if he really pushed for it, but he'll take some serious damage in return. And like I said before, LBJ just doesn't have any way of dealing real damage to McKinley."

"Perhaps," FDR said pressing her fingers together, "but then again, perhaps not..."

On the ground, LBJ continued spinning around while McKinley cut into him with his golden axe. Finally, LBJ gritted his teeth.

"Screw this!" he exclaimed, pounding his chest and planting his feet sternly to the ground, allowing McKinley to easily cut deep into his chest.

Without losing his cool, LBJ thrust his fist at the golden cross flaying around McKinley's rotating body. He struck the ornament, causing the punch to lose its momentum. His fist then continued onward, smashing the cross straight into McKinley's chest.

For a moment, neither fighter moved.

Then, McKinley coughed blood.

"What...?" he asked between coughs. "How did...?"

Before he could finish, LBJ yanked the cross back and punched right at it.

Once again, the attack stopped upon hitting the cross, then continued forward and crashed into McKinley's armor, denting it.

McKinley coughed again, then kned LBJ in the stomach, stunning him long enough to back himself away.

"This cross...!" McKinley exclaimed as he took the necklace in hand, "could it be...?!"

"You said it yourself," LBJ said with a smirk. "Protective Tarriff stops the momentum of any 'incoming' attack that hits what you're wearing. On the other hand," he said putting his fists together, "if I continue an attack while touching something you're wearing, it no longer counts as an 'incoming' attack, does it?"

McKinley stepped back in shock.

"Ridiculous!!" he exclaimed. "You had no way of knowing my EP would work like that!"

"Trust me," LBJ said, deepening his smile, "I never make any moves unless I know I'm coming out on top."

He pushed his hands out in front of him.

"When I shoved you," he continued, "and when I slammed into your body, I was confirming that pushes maintained their force as long as I made them while touching your armor."

McKinley furrowed his brow, clenching the cross in his hand.

"I see," he spoke bitterly. "So, you started plotting all this the moment I carelessly told you about my EP?"

LBJ let out a heavy laugh.

"Do you really think," he replied, "that I'd start my planning at such a late stage in the game?"

He shook out his head.

"My plans started the moment I saw your fans waving around those gaudy tin banners," he continued. "That's when I decided I'd throw in a couple of cheap insults at your beloved metal when I told you my bogus guess about your armor being an Artifact."

McKinley widened his eyes.

"You deliberately angered me," he spoke with astonishment, "knowing that in my agitation I'd eagerly correct your theory!"

"From there," LBJ continued with a laugh, "all I did give a single praise to your beloved State of Ohio! After that, you were instantly at ease in my presence; as if we were just two friends chatting alongside your front porch. That, combined with the talkative mood you were in after correcting my insults, made you more than happy to answer my questions about how your EP."

McKinley looked down to the ground.

"So...if I hadn't fallen for that one little trick..."

"Then you would have fallen for my next one," LBJ spoke while stepping forward, "or the one after that, or the one after that!"

LBJ continued walking, the ground shaking with each step he took.

"You thought you were invincible," LBJ shouted with righteous fury, "making you drop your guard! On the other hand," LBJ spoke as he pulled back his shirt, revealing a golden plate strapped along his chest, "I always come prepared for a fight!"

"That plate...!" McKinley stepped back in shock, "you created it just before I attacked you?!"

McKinley stopped talking as LBJ stood before him, his towering frame covering McKinley in shadow.

"Now I reckon," LBJ said as he snatched the cross from McKinley's hands, "that my two attacks just now were the first real hits you've felt since getting your EP. Which means," LBJ grinned as he tossed the cross high into the air, "your body's too shocked right now to even move!"

With a terrifying grin, LBJ raised his arms over his head, slamming them down in unison on the floating cross.

His fists stopped upon impact, then plummeted down, smashing the cross directly onto McKinley's head.

McKinley fell to the ground, his helmet rolling off to the side. Taft rushed to McKinley's body and examined him briefly before raising his arm.

"The fight is over!" he exclaimed. "The winner is [Landslide Landon], Landon B. Johnson!"

In the stands, Hayes shook out her head.

"Dear God," she mumbled to herself, "to set up so many traps so far in advance...that LBJ truly is a monster!"

"McKinley was the all-around better fighter," FDR added on, "he probably could have pulled off a win even at the very end had he been in control of his senses." She gave a slight smirk. "But then he fell for LBJ's final little trick."

Hayes clicked her tongue.

“LBJ purposefully pointed out every place McKinley had gone wrong,” Hayes mumbled, “dominating his psyche. Those psychological wounds, together with his unexpected physical ones, left his mind unable to even think about resisting LBJ’s actions.”

“Way to go big guy...” JFK said with a smirk, then ran off to congratulate his ally.

After a brief search, JFK found LBJ trekking through the halls of the arena.

“There you are!” JFK exclaimed. “Congrats on the win, man!” JFK let out a smirk. “Though of course, I knew my partner was always going to pull through!”

JFK started approaching, but slowed as he noticed an expression of pure rage spread across LBJ’s face.

“I saw it,” LBJ mumbled angrily, “I saw it!”

JFK squinted his eyes.

“What did you see?”

LBJ clenched his fists.

“One of those damn McKinley signs waving in the stands after I won!” he exclaimed, “and on my side of the arena no less!”

LBJ turned expectantly to JFK.

“O-okay?” JFK replied with confusion. “But really, who cares about one measly sign anyhow?” he gave LBJ a pat on the back. “Practically everyone out there was cheering you on after that final hit!”

“Practically everyone,” LBJ said with a snarl, “but not *everyone*!” He kept walking, barely acknowledging JFK’s presence.

“I swear,” he continued with a hiss, “I’m not going to stop until every damn man, woman, and child in this arena is screaming my name!”

## Fact and Fiction: McKinley vs LBJ

**William McKinley did not Lose an Arm.** This is mostly just a metaphor for him ultimately choosing the gold standard after straddling against Bryan, and it is also very loosely inspired by a quote of his saying "Rather than [be nominated], I would suffer the loss of [my] good right arm."

**LBJ and JFK.** While Jack Kennedy did complain about Lyndon Johnson's "damn long face", there isn't a solid record of Jack saying that Lyndon should be ousted. The only exception to this I know of is one conversation recorded by Evelyn Lincoln (though her account was later disputed by Robert Kennedy).

This being said, it is quite plausible that Jack would have wanted Lyndon off of the ticket in 1964, since, at this point, it seemed unlikely that they would be able to win many states in the south (which was the main reason LBJ was brought onto the ticket in the first place).

**LBJ Flashback.** Lyndon Johnson helping the campaign financing committee was essentially unrelated to his fight with Coke Stevenson. In particular, Franklin Roosevelt had already died when this latter event happened. Similarly, it is not true that Coke Stevenson defeated Pappy O'Daniel directly, though he did defeat Pappy's endorsed candidate Hal H. Collins with ease.

A few details of the Texas duel were manipulated slightly. For example, Coke Stevenson never exactly walked out on the fight between them (though he did refuse to engage Lyndon's taunts for quite some time), and Landon's ability to turn dead leaves into cash was made solely in order to reference "Brown and Root" (the real life financiers of Lyndon Johnson) as Landon's source of funds. The word "Dodger" wasn't a particular emphasis of Lyndon's attacks, though his perhaps biggest attack against Coke Stevenson was that he refused to take a public stance against the Taft-Hartley Act.

The gold watch of the referee's isn't a particular reference to anything specific, just to the general fact that Lyndon Johnson spent a lot of money and used a lot of underhanded tactics to win the match. The bomb in plot 13 is a reference to the fact that Lyndon won his race against Cole Stevenson by very blatantly inserting a bunch of fake votes into "box 13" in order to narrowly win the election. The full story here is almost too crazy to believe, and I strongly recommend looking at Robert Caro's amazing book "Means of Ascent" for more.

**McKinley Flashback.** The main reference underlying this flashback is William McKinley going on a death defying supply run during the Civil War, which really did happen. However, Hanna, Dawes, his wife, and Bryan were not present during this time, nor do any of their appearances or personalities in EP:RW have any real connection to reality (in particular, Bryan never had any nickname resembling [Wicked Will of the West]).

The reason all of the characters above were inserted was to make this flashback better parallel the book "The Wizard of Oz", which is an allegory for the gold standard crisis that William McKinley found himself at the center of during his battle with Bryan.

??To Be Continued...

As an aside, I'm planning to write this under some sort of pen name. My two main ideas are the following two simple alterations of my real name:

- Sam Spirits
- Samuel Prose

Feel free to let me know what you think and/or if you have any other ideas.