

# Executive Powers: Revolutionary War



By Sam Spiro

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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 barked angrily.

"Oh my," Curtis Vonnegut said with a chuckle, "it sounds like somebody's gotten another rejection."

Thompson clenched her fists.

"I'm hanging up!"

"Wait, wait, wait," Vonnegut pleaded. "I wanted your opinion on a 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 enthusiastically. "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 scrunched her face and 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 softly, "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 for a moment, then looked back at what remained of the mysterious cloud.

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

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

At that, Thompson hung up her phone and sprinted down the hall. As she ran, Thompson raised her arms into the air and shouted 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 boss?” The cameraman asked as it ran besides her.

“I don’t know what’s going on, Gonzo,” she replied with a smile, “but there’s a scoop for sure!”

Before long, the duo made it to the roof’s helipad, jumping into the helicopter and flying off in the direction of the strange cloud. Upon setting their course, Thompson activated her Power again, summoning a second Gonzo to take control of the vehicle.

A few minutes later, Thompson nodded to the first Gonzo while she adjusted 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 weapon? Or maybe the aftermath of a bloody 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 calculations suggest this crater is about 300 feet deep with a radius of 1200 feet. Moreover—”

“Woah, woah, woah!” Gonzo pointed his camera to the edge of the crater and zoomed in, “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 out 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 shook his head, “and sthat’s what gives me the fear...”

Reluctantly, Gonzo lowered the copter. Before he could finish landing, Thompson jumped out of the vehicle and sprinted full-speed towards the crater's edge.

As she ran, Thompson readied herself for the plethora of otherworldly mysteries that might be waiting for her within the strange light. However, she found herself 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 last of the light faded around him. "Are you with local or national news?"

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

"Uhh..." she finally managed to speak, "local?"

The man maintained his smile but was clearly disappointed.

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

Thompson gave a weak nod.

"Excellent!" The man said clearing his throat. "My fellow Americans..."

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

"A Presidential Seal...?!" Thompson whispered as she looked upon the glowing 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 massive 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 nervously.

"As thing stands," he replied, "our nation is being torn apart by the constant battles waged between the Presidents. 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 off 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 previously 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?"

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 up 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 sly 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 as he spoke.

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

Thompson's eyes widened.

"All of Rushmore!"

"Exactly..." Truman said as he stared directly into 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 for a second, then waved her arms.

"C-cut!" she exclaimed.

Gonzo's light flicked off, ending the broadcast and causing Truman to let loose a heavy sigh.

"Welp," he said with a noticeably 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 light 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 suddenly shook her head.

Jesus, what the hell was she doing?!

The golden opportunity that she had always 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 former sense of composure, "on one condition!" She pointed to herself with a snarl. "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 light slap nearly toppling her over.

“I’ll have to run it by Taft and Hayes first,” 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 slowly behind.

“...Gonzo...” Thompson spoke up.

“Yeah boss?”

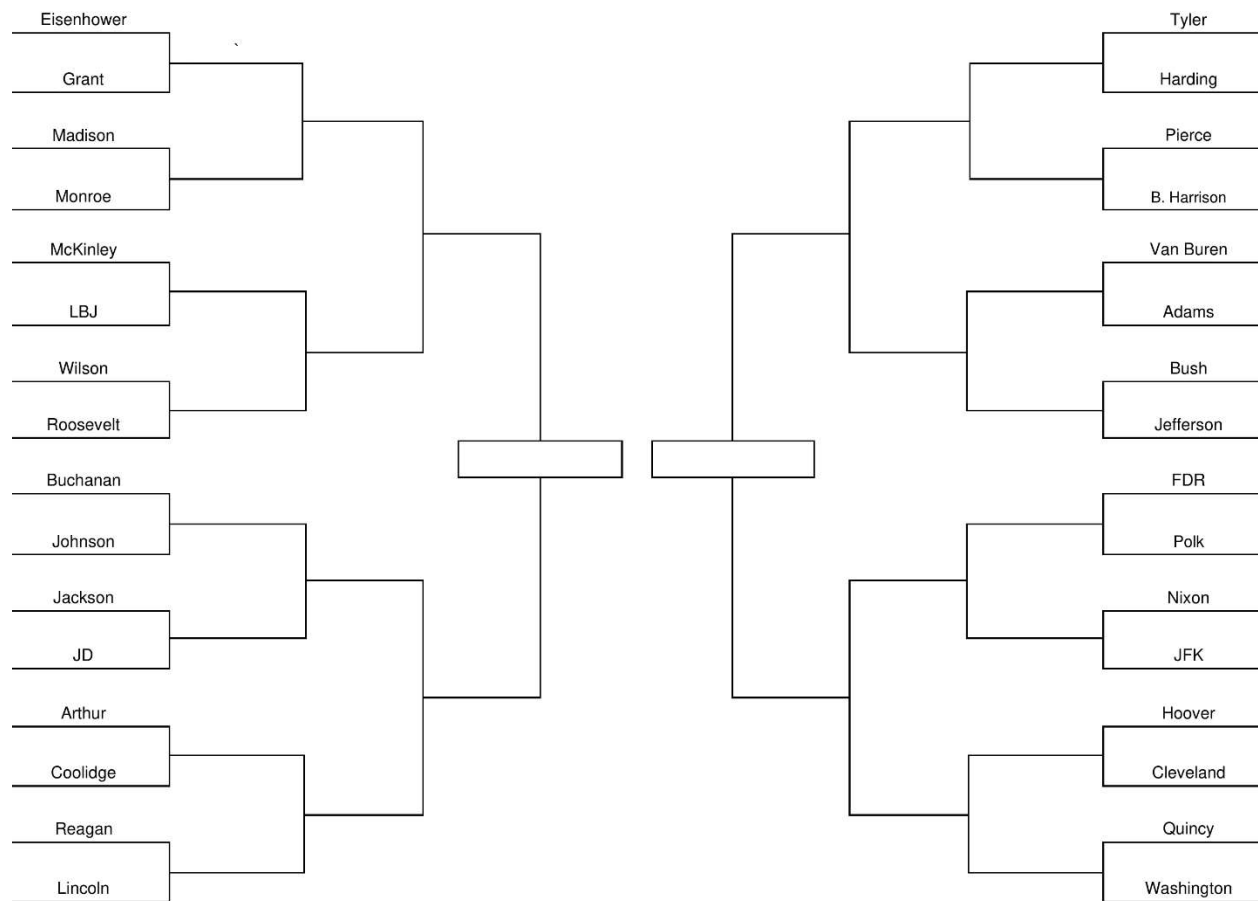
“I have a lot of questions...” she said while looking at the mysterious man geeking out over their news helicopter. “...the first of which...” she said scratching her head, “...is who the hell is Henry Truman?”

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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.
  - Moreover, since these chapters are not my main focus right now, the writing quality is a lot weaker than that of the main text (though I hope to polish these up some more before the book is finished).
- 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 or even mentioning 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 changing their first name (e.g. the epitaph [Handsome Hank] for Hank Pierce is based off the real-life nickname “Handsome Frank” for Franklin Pierce). Those 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 crowded lines of traffic. It was hard to believe that just four months ago, all these streets had been nothing more than dirt.

But now?

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

The city was pure chaos, and Thompson loved everything about it.

She continued forward a bit longer, then skidded to a halt as she hit the town's center. She got off her ride, staring in awe at the giant marble Coliseum before her.

"Damn..." she remarked as she snapped a photo of the stadium with her camera.

"Hey!" an agent in black shouted at her. "You're not allowed to park your vehicle here!"

"Oh yeah?" she asked with a smirk. "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 her a sour look.

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

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

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

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

Thompson tilted her head.

"Requesting wha—?"

She blinked, instantly finding herself inside a large room with a clear glass panel at its front.

"Hot dog..." she muttered as she stepped forward and looked out the window. Below, Thompson saw stands filled with thousands of people, all of them 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 loudly from behind.

Thompson turned around, noticing a pianist seated behind her.

"You ready?" the man asked.

Thompson grinned and shot him a thumbs up. The pianist nodded his head, then slowly started to play.

His music rang quietly in the beginning, so much so that no one hardly noticed it at the start. The music then increased in volume, with the rambunctious crowd quieting down somewhat as they took notice of

the strange sound playing across the stadium speakers. At the same time, the cameras throughout the arena turned to look straight into the commentary box.

“Good morning everybody!” Thompson shouted, “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 discussing the technical analysis of our fights, we have the man who made this entire event possible...”

The music suddenly crescendoed, then ended with the pianist slamming his hands across the keys. The man rose from his seat, revealing his face to the crowd.

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

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

Despite the distance, Thompson’s mic accidentally broadcasted her message across the stadium; inciting a wave of good-hearted laughs throughout the crowd. Thompson let out 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 back 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!”

The crowd gave another round of applause.

“Beautiful stuff, Truman,” 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 the tournament!”

She gestured down 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 already noticed,” Thompson continued, “Secret Service agents have been stationed throughout the stadium 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 every inch of her body.

"And we should emphasize," Truman continued emphatically, "that while we've taken every precaution to protect our spectators, we can't guarantee your complete safety. Those who are concerned about getting hurt can safely watch all of our matches from any of the televisions stationed throughout the stadium, as well as those spread throughout the town. And 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 already!" Thompson shouted, "let's move on to the action!"

The crowd roared.

"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 invariably the same: I, like, her! Now let's hear it for [The Supreme Commander], Deedee Eisenhower!"

Suddenly, a tank rolled on into the arena. The crowd paused for a moment, taking in the sight, 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 upward, tearing the head clean off its body. The tank rolled back as Eisenhower walked forward, carrying the tank head with her to the center of the arena.

"Jesus Christ!" Thompson exclaimed, "Looks like Eisenhower is planning to use that tank head as her freaking weapon! We haven't even started the fighting and I'm already getting goosebumps!"

"Don't get too excited now," 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 while pretending to flinch, "I take it you two aren't on the best of terms, then?"

Truman gave a sly 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 obtained complete and unconditional surrender from his opponents! He's [The Hero of Appomattox], Odysseus S. Grant!"

"There's no S..." Grant mumbled to himself as he made his way into the arena. He walked in wearing a plain blue army outfit 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 stadium's center and opened up the bag, releasing a stockpile of weapons onto the ground. He adjusted his hat, then carefully leaned forward and picked up a gun from the pile.

"This was Calvin's pistol," he spoke softly. "He died in our fight against Lee before he even had the chance to fire a single shot..."

Grant gently placed the pistol back down before grabbing a nearby 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 weapons back down. "I've lost a lot of soldiers on my watch..." He said looking straight 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 just about ready to start?"

The fighters gave a pair of silent nods.

"Excellent!"

Instantly, Taft replaced his happy smile with an icy glare.

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

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

Taft breathed out and raised his gavel high into the air. "Let the first match..." he shouted as he slammed his hammer down, "begin!!"



## Tanks

Grant pointed his arms towards Eisenhower.

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

As Grant spoke, dozens of rifles extended out his weaponized hands and fired in quick succession. Eisenhower placed her tank head in front of her, blocking the shots, then charged forward, crashing into Grant with the force of a moving train.

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

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

Frantically, Eisenhower flung herself back, dodging the blades at the cost of losing her balance. Without missing a beat, Grant stepped forward, slamming his fist into Eisenhower and flinging her halfway across the arena. In the air, Eisenhower calmly twisted her body around, landing on her feet with perfect poise.

“In spite of the many bitter criticisms I’ve read about you,” Eisenhower spoke as she readied 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, then widened her smile.

“That being said,” she continued, “I’ve got people counting on me...and I’m not about 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 their beds, 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 her line, then gave a light frown.

“Where’s Fitzgerald at?”

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

“He’s working on that novel of his again.”

Eisenhower shook her head with a smile.

“I’ll allow it this time,” she said playfully, “but only because we’ve got such good news from headquarters.” She gave a toothy. “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 we are!" she replied.

The soldiers let out whoops of joy as they exchanged high fives, a few of them even breaking into tears.

"Don't start crying yet," Eisenhower said with a grin. "Because 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 said with a chuckle. "Heck, you all joined the Tank Corp hoping to take control of the army's greatest weapon, only to find out we didn't have any tanks!"

"That's alright, ma'am!" a soldier exclaimed. "You helped us with those makeshift ones!"

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

The soldiers let out a collective moan.

"Because..." Eisenhower continued with a grin, "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 towards their new toy; none of them waiting long enough for Eisenhower to officially dismiss them. Eisenhower let out a warm smile, then looked back to their 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 grand 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 his drink over himself, "watch where the hell you're going!"

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

"Excuse me?!" the man stepped forward. "I'll have you know this uniform you just ruined 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 federal crime...one worthy of a court martial!"

Eisenhower stared blankly.

"You're not serious...are you?"

The man gave an evil grin.

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

The man let out a cackle as Eisenhower stood still, trying and failing to keep her anger in check.

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

"Wait a moment," a quiet voice called out from the crowd.

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

"I apologize for the intrusion," the officer spoke out 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, and an insult against me is akin to an insult against the entire US Army! So why don't you..."

Helmick turned his finger, then stopped as the officer calmly grabbed 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 grave offenses in your capable hands."

At that, Helmick scurried back into the crowd as fast as his legs could take him.

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

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

Eisenhower gave a nervous laugh.

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

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

With that, Conner pointed a finger dramatically at Eisenhower.

"As your commanding officer," he spoke defiantly, "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'll be 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 the world class mentors that Conner was assigning to her. "But...but why do all this for me?"

"Because you've got talent, kid," he spoke matter of factly, "and by God, it'd be a loss for the nation if you never got a chance to show your stuff."

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

"I'm counting on you to do great things for this country," he continued, "and I order you not to disappoint me."

Eisenhower smiled and gave a sharp salute.

"I won't let you down sir!"

On the ride back home, Eisenhower found herself daydreaming about her forthcoming training marathon. She continued thinking this way until her car suddenly dipped down into a muddy ditch and stalled.

Eisenhower dropped her smile and 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 System!"

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

Grant raised an eyebrow.

"Interesting," he remarked as he calmly kicked the road beside his feet.

"Now get ready..."

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

"For my massive retaliation!"

## Interstate Highway System

Eisenhower slammed her tank head, throwing Grant back.

Grant started regaining his balance, only for Eisenhower to once again suddenly 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 a bit, 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 gruffly.

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

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

“That speed...!” Grant hastily raised his arms, narrowly blocking Eisenhower’s high velocity strike, “so 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 as he readied his stance, his left foot placed squarely on Eisenhower’s road.

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

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

Lincoln lifted his head slightly as he heard something rustle behind him. He turned around, but only saw a wall covered by shadows.

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

Slowly, a dark figure emerged out of the shadows of the wall.

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

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

Suddenly, Grant's left-side jerked backwards, causing his attack to whiff. At the same time, Eisenhower raised her weapon.

"Fore!"

At that, Eisenhower slammed her tank head hard into the body of her defenseless opponent.

Grant gritted his teeth at the heavy blow, then immediately threw out a counter. Eisenhower smirked.

"I'm not falling for that again!"

As she spoke, Eisenhower's body shifted unnaturally to the side, causing the attack to miss. She then 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 her head.

"Interstate Highway System," 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 into think the roads didn't affect him." He shook his head. "I'll admit, I'm rather surprised. I never thought Eisenhower was 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 slowly rose from the ground.

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

He scanned the mesh of roads around the arena.

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

Eisenhower gave a grin.

"You're saying 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, dropping to the ground before swarming around Grant's legs and lifting him into the air. The mound of weapons twisted itself beneath Grant's feet, then settled down into the form of a large horse with legs made of swords and its nose a large cannon.

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

Eisenhower readied her weapon as she looked Grant over.

From what she could tell, Grant's newest form was far more agile than before. However, he wouldn't be able to use its agility to its fullest. Indeed, if he stepped on 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 finally transforming itself into a full-blown sprint.

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

"What?!"

Eisenhower shook her head and hastily raised her guard as Grant came closer. But, just before colliding, Grant's horse suddenly 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 Eisenhower's head. The gun fired, detonating its shell on impact.

"Gahhh!!!" Eisenhower screamed out in agonizing 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 her senses, the horse raised its sword legs, ramming them towards her. Quickly, Eisenhower activated Interstate Highway System, 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 sincerely.

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 from inside her weapon, causing a shell to fire out the barrel of its gun.

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

Eisenhower shifted from the attack using Interstate Highway System, then fired another shot, and another, and another. Again and again, Grant deftly dodged each of her attacks while also launching counters of his own and simultaneously avoiding stepping on any of Eisenhower’s sprawling set of roads.

Nixon placed a hand to her chin.

“It seems 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 practically invincible on a horse!”

\* \* \* \* \*

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

“Before we begin our ceremonies,” Herschberger began, “I thought we could have ourselves a little bit of fun...”

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

“Cadet Grant!” he barked.

At that, 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.

Quietly, Grant placed his hand along the beast’s back. The animal took a step forward, then charged straight for the bar. The horse leapt into the air, clearing the bar with 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 stepped down from his mount, then noticed Herschberger calling him over.

“That was quite the spectacle, Grant!”

“York deserves all the credit,” he replied while gently stroking the horse’s mane.



"In any case," Herschberger said handing Grant a letter, "I wanted to give you this." He gave a big grin, then patted Grant on the back. "Congratulations son! You've been personally 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 come yet?" 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 just behind her

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

Grant shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyways," Taylor said with a wave of her hand, "the reason I wanted to speak with you," she said, handing over her clipboard, "was to officially appoint you as quartermaster of our regiment."

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 sternly, "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 your 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 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 chuckled.

"I love my soldiers," she said with a smirk, "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.

"Understood. In that case, I—"

Before he could finish, a bullet whizzed past Grant's face.

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

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

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

Taylor nodded.

"There's a whole stockpile sitting 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: I'm the one in charge of supplying our troops, after all."

Taylor furrowed her brow.

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

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

Before Taylor could protest further, 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, then widened her eyes. Grant's horse was continuing to sprint forward, 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 all the gunfire."

At that, the Mexican soldiers ignored the beast. Meanwhile, Taylor kept watch over the creature with rapt attention. The horse eventually 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 straight 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 again, "isn't that the same horse we just saw?"

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

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

Quickly, Grant rotated himself back atop the horse.

"It's alright girl," he spoke softly while 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 at the reigns, shifting his horse away from the shots, then swiftly rounded the corner to Taylor's side.

"Excellent work there, soldier!" Taylor exclaimed as she took the ammunition and distributed it to her troops.

"She did all the work," Grant said as he scratched at the horse's ears.

Taylor loaded her rifle, then looked back up at Grant.

"I know you're not planning to stick with the army long term," Taylor remarked quietly, "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 finally spoke up, "that doesn't sound half bad..."

"Hey!" Taylor exclaimed as she saw a passing soldier. "Come over here for a second!"

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

"Grant," Taylor spoke up, "I want you to meet the rising star of our engineering corps."

"You're far too kind," the man said with a light bow.

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

"I'm Grant."

The man nodded his head and grasped Grant's outstretched hand.

"Lee," he replied.

\* \* \* \* \*

Eisenhower took her hand out of the tank and went back to grabbing its barrel. She charged forward and swung 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 brawl can't continue forever. Sooner or later, one of them is going to have to break."

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

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

"You really never stop attacking, 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 and ran straight up her vertical road, "Interstate Highway System; 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 with his horse, anticipating what would likely be Eisenhower's final attack.

But, as the horse's foot landed, Grant felt a strange sensation beneath him.

"What the...?" he said as he quickly glanced down, then widened his eyes.

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 rapidly shot back along the road.

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

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

"Correct!" Eisenhower screamed as she pulled back her weapon. "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."

At that, Grant pulled his reigns, sending the back of his horse sliding even farther across Eisenhower's road. The horse then 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.

Before Eisenhower could react, the horse reached out, intercepting and wrapping its legs around Eisenhower's airborne body. The horse continued spinning with the added force from Eisenhower's fall, then slammed its legs and Eisenhower hard into 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 towards her, its cannon nose pointed mere inches across from her face.

"Fire," Grant spoke coolly.

Eisenhower quickly grabbed her weapon and slammed it forward as the cannon released its blast, the smoke from its shot covering the two fighters in a cloud of dust.

"Time out!" Taft screamed as he jogged 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 as he slammed his gavel to the ground.

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

"The winner of the first 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 just a nod to the fact that in the Civil War, Rutherford Hayes took a lot of serious damage (including damage to his left arm, hence why that arm is missing in EP:RW).

In addition to this, it is worth noting that Rutherford Hayes had essentially nothing to do with the Secret Service. As such, 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 regarding Grant's involvement in the Mexican-American war.

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.

While Ulysses Grant honestly did ride a horse sideways to grab ammo for his troops, I made some changes to simplify the details of the story. In particular: he didn't go and 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 on the job, Zachary Taylor was not present at the scene when it happened, and he did not meet Robert E Lee right after this (though the two would go and 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 let out a small groan. Bright lights shone just over her head, and she seemed to be lying on top of some sort of hospital bed.

"Have you finally come back to the land of the living?"

With some effort, Eisenhower raised her head to see a woman sitting across from her wearing an orange dress shirt together with a pair of black suspenders.

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

"Indeed you did," Willow Willson said matter of factly, "and in a very pitiful way as well. But of course," Wilson continued while putting on a cruel smile, "such lackluster performances are 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 shifting my grief into anger," she said with a smile, "but there's no need to worry...I'm more than accustomed to the harsh realities of battle."

"Are 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 said looking down. "I had concentrated my last few attacks towards ending the fight...I felt that I was making big progress," she shook her head, "...then that stupid Space Race mess ruined all my efforts." She gave a sigh, then took 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, "that definitely sounds like something a person who doesn't need any cheering up would say."

"Shut up!" Eisenhower said playfully, regaining some warmth in her smile.

Some sounds started playing in the room, and Eisenhower turned to see a television by the bed, its screen announcing the start of the second match.

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

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

"Fair enough," Eisenhower looked back to the television. "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 that Madison holds a significant edge in our enclosed arena..." he shook his head, "or at least, that would be the case, if the fight actually took place."

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

"Exactly," Truman said with a nod. "It's pretty boring, but one of them's just give up at the very start of the fight. The only question left..." he looked to the fighters, "is which of them 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 sheer jubilation. "We shall decide this match through a vote by the people!"

Madison and Monroe exchanged worried glances.

"...do you mean to say," Monroe spoke slowly, "that you want us to poll the audience as to which of us should win the fight?"

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

Madison bit her lip.

"This is...an admirable idea," she spoke cautiously. "But I believe there are several practical considerations that must be addressed. For example, how should such a vote be taken? Orally? Surely this won't work if the voting is too 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 and furrowed her brow.

"...yes," she spoke solemnly, "I suppose the plan is perhaps too grand to implement on such short notice." She looked to the two of them. "Well, in that case, perhaps you two should just decide amongst yourselves who shall go forward."



"No can do," Monroe said with a shake of her head. "We're both convinced we ought to be the one winning the match. You're the only one who can decide the winner."

Jefferson gave a heavy sigh.

"I was afraid it might come to this."

Jefferson raised her head and looked carefully over her two best friends.

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

Monroe gave a small grin, but Madison remained unmoved.

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

Monroe blinked.

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

"Against Grant," Jefferson corrected. "But Grant is not our concern here..." she tapped her fingers nervously across her leg, "it is Roosevelt and Lincoln for whom we must plan for." 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 her hands.

"No, no!" she spoke feverishly, "That's not true at all! The first winner could have possessed an EP for which Madison stood no 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 hanging 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 slowly took back her composure.

"Don't worry," Monroe said with a humble smile. "I completely understand your decision. 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 as she left, then gave a shallow moan.

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

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

"Eventually, yes," she said while 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 spoke sternly, "but she can be impulsive at times, especially if she feels she's been slighted." Jefferson rested a hand gently on Madison's arm. "Please, be careful out there."

\* \* \* \* \*

In the arena, Taft eyed the two combatants. There was a noticeable tension between the two of them; far more than was to be expected from two members of the same Party. He lifted his gavel with an ounce of hesitation.

"Let the match...begin!"

The gavel hit the ground, but neither fighter moved an inch.

Madison waited a moment, then furrowed her brow.

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

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

Monroe smiled and nonchalantly raised her arms.

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

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

"...to no one!" Monroe declared with a sinister grin.

## Monroe's Doctrine

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

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

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

"...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 without batting an eye. "Now, who's coming with me?"

No one moved. Then, a small hand rose from the back. The troops turned and whispered to themselves 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. "Now then," he spoke out loud, "will anyone else be joining me? Or is this young'un the only one here with some courage?"

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

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

Monroe started off for shore, but Washington blocked her path.

"You're coming with me, lad," he lifted a nearby flag, "and you'll be in charge of carrying our banner."

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

"Sir," she finally spoke up, "I really feel like I ought to do some of the rowing as well."

"Keep holding 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 as he ran his hand along its stripes, "is a symbol of freedom. A symbol, which possesses greater strength than any 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 towards this banner and remember exactly what it is they're all fighting for."

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

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

"We'll be back with the second wave as soon as we can," Washington shouted as his soldiers disembarked, "While we're away, you're to guard these roads with your lives. Do not leave your spots 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.

Towards the end of her shift, Monroe let out a heavy yawn and started stretching out her arms, only for her to snap back to attention at the sound of footsteps echoed besides her. She turned quickly, raising her rifle.

"Who's there?" she shouted.

Through the fog, Monroe could make out a pistol aimed directly towards her.

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

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

"...did you just say Washington?"

The man took a small step towards her, then looked at the American flag planted behind Monroe.

"Shucks!" the man said with a chuckle as he lowered his gun, "I didn't realize you were a fellow 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 towards the house and licked her frozen lips.

"...I can't," she finally 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 one second."

The man ran into his house. A minute later, he ran back 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 most certainly did not!" she exclaimed before devouring the sandwich in a matter of seconds.

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

"What's that?"

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

Monroe smiled and gave a tip of her hat.

"I'm certain 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 his battalion trailing shortly behind. Monroe gave a quick 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, the majority of their troops are out of commission after a night of heavy drinking, and they won't be expecting an attack from behind like this. Overall, things should go smoothly for us, unless of course..."

Washington froze as his eyes locked with those of a Hessian scout coming out from the woods.

"We're spotted!"

Washington lunged forward, striking the scout with the blade, but not before the scout lifted his arm, firing 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!"

Without pause, Washington ran full force into the enemy camp, cutting down twenty Hessians before they had the chance to draw their weapons.

"Fire!"

Before Washington could react, a cannonball exploded directly in front of him, knocking him to the ground.

The Founding Fighters stood still, watching as Washington started to rise, only to fall back 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 Hessians 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 let out a valiant yell and charged into the enemy camp.

“Go for the general!” a Hessian screamed, “they’ll lose all 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 and twisted his body.

“Be...” he mumbled.

“Sir?” Monroe asked.

“...Behind you!”

Monroe turned herself around, but she was too late. Before she could react, a bullet pierced straight through her chest and into her left shoulder.

“That’s what you get,” the 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 while grabbing the flagpole, stopping her fall.

“Is a symbol of freedom!”

She fired her rifle, knocking the Hessian down. She smirked, then collapsed to the ground, the snow beneath her quickly 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 her wound, then gave a small gulp. “...but just barely...”

“...Washington...” Monroe spoke wearily, “...save...him...”

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

“...a...captain...huh?”

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

But that day would never come; at least, not in this war. Time after time, Monroe would try to get herself back onto the field of battle, only to be turned away each time. Throughout the process, 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 across Madison's face.

"Oh man!" Thompson exclaimed, "Against all odds, Monroe has launched an 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 with Monroe, 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 for a minute, 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 tips of her trident ungulated back and forth.

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

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

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

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

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

Monroe smiled and shot out a peace sign to Madison.

"Executive Power: Monroe Doctrine, baby!"

Madison retracted her prongs with a solemn expression.

"Ratification; Three Branches."

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

One prong came at Monroe from below, but she easily jumped over the attack. She leaned back to dodge a followup blow to the head, then landed on her hand and pushed off the ground, leaping away from another strike.

Again and again, Madison attacked Monroe with her trident from every possible angle, only for Monroe to dodge each strike. And each time she dodged, a new wound appeared across Madison's body.

"What the heck?!" Thompson shouted, "Madison is the one attacking, and yet she's the only one taking damage!"

"It's obviously the result of Monroe's EP," Truman said with a scratch of his chin, "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 look at the young man with a swimmer's body standing beside her.

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

"I'm surprised how optimistic you were in the first place," Quincy replied 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 snicker.

"Monroe Doctrine," he remarked, "the ability to instantly counterattack any hostile action taken against her...it's a devastating EP, especially when combined with her magnificent dodging abilities."

"It would certainly be a difficult hurdle for Madison to overcome," Jefferson added on, "if she weren't already aware of all its limitations."

Madison retracted her prongs and charged towards Monroe.

Monroe smirked.

"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 playful 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!"

"The thing is..." Madison said as she raised her trident and thrust it towards Monroe's feet. Monroe stepped back, easily dodging her weapon, then smiled as she waited for her EP to take effect.

"Your EP," Madison continued, only works if my primary aim is to hurt you!"

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



## Madison's Constitution

Soon 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?"

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

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

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

"Jesus, Madison!" 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 continued. "You can't go out there like that; you'll get destroyed!"

"I have to," Madison replied coldly, "no one here is strong enough to take Henry in my place."

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

"It's fine," Madison reassured him as she made her way to the center, "I will not allow this land fall to ruin."

Henry snorted loudly.

"No, you will not," Henry said raising his arms, "because I'm going to put a stop to your disastrous plans here and now!"

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

"You're too focused on perfection," Madison remarked as she easily dodged his overly prepared attack, "you need to be practical!"

Madison unleashed a flurry of thrusts with her trident. Henry raised a perfect guard in response, absorbing the blows while blocking off his vision. Madison swung out 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 his neck.

Henry clicked his tongue.

"...I surrender..." he spoke bitterly.

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

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

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

“Stand down!” Henry barked loudly, silencing his allies. He turned to Madison. “I swear on my honor,” he spoke quietly, “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 are you doing?” Mason hissed besides him, “you’re giving in too easily!”

Henry looked to him, then gave an evil grin.

“Who said anything about giving in?”

The next day, Randolph barged into Madison’s office, slamming a stack of papers onto her desk.

“We’ve been had!” he said with a snarl. “While we were busy focusing on getting Virginia’s approval, Henry’s been sneaking in clause after clause into our deal!”

Madison skimmed through the papers before her.

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

Randolph nodded his head.

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

Madison crossed her arms.

“Troublesome...”

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

“We can’t,” Madison said as she calmly lifted the papers out of Randolph’s hands. “He played us fair and square; challenging him with these amendments would only serve to undermine our movement.” She shook her head. “No, our only choice is to fight him on his terms.”

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

“...I don’t like our odds,” Randolph spoke as she read the line over.

“Neither do I,” Madison replied curtly, “but it’s our only option.”

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

“Greetings, friends!”

“Shut it,” Randolph replied bluntly.

“Anyways,” Henry continued, “I’m sure you’re both dying to learn more about the details for deciding Virginia’s final delegate.” He gestured behind them. “Well, the battlefield is before you.”

Madison and Randolph looked out to an abandoned city consisting of 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 slight misunderstanding." He gave a malevolent grin. "I never said I would be fighting...only that I would be choosing Madison's opponent."

Randolph and Madison exchanged confused 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 in shock.

"Monroe?!"

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

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

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

"...stole your position?" Madison furrowed her brow. "I did no such thing!"

She grabbed Monroe's shoulder.

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

"Please, baby," Monroe said shrugging her off before heading into the arena, "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 before heading down, "I will not fail."

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

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

Randolph slumped his shoulders down...then suddenly raised himself up.

"It is!" Randolph exclaimed, "cause we're finally done 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 forward with confidence and a cold look of determination.

"I win," she spoke matter of factly.

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 only bring destruction to our land!"

Madison paused for a moment.

"...it's entirely possible that our experiment ends in failure." She stared 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 said, raising her hand and revealing a freshly formed Presidential Seal, "I'll stop anyone who tries to destroy my nation."

\* \* \* \* \*

"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 slight grin.

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

Monroe twisted her body around before ducking down and slipping out of Madison's hold.

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

In the stands, Quincy turned to Jefferson.

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

Jefferson gazed across the battlefield.

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

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

"If that were the whole story," Jefferson continued, "I would have to select Monroe as the likely winner. However," she crossed 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 desperate grab from Madison.

"Stay still already..." Madison grumbled as she lunged at Monroe.

"Sorry, baby," Monroe remarked with a grin, "but you're never going to catch me with such slow grabs..."

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

"Especially not with your face planted in the ground!"

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

Madison, in turn, remained non-plussed.

"Executive Power," she spoke softly, "Ratification; Three Branches!"

"What?"

Before Monroe could react, three prongs shot out of the ground, tearing up her 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 quickly reached back for her rifle. Before she could grab it, Madison jumped onto her arm and brought back her fist

"I've been waiting to do this," Madison spoke coldly as she readied her punch, "for a very, very long time."

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

Taft hastily slammed his gavel.

"The winner," he exclaimed, "is [The Sage of Montepelier], Jamie Madison!"

Madison quietly shook her head, then dismounted Monroe.

Monroe started to rise, but fell back on her injured legs. Madison quickly reached forward, grabbing Monroe's arm before she hit the ground.

"...thanks," Monroe replied meekly.

Madison gave a small 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 hospital bed, "what did you think of the match in the end?"

"It was dreadful," Wilson said with a snort. "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 quick glance.

"...when did you figure it out?"

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

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

"Anyways," Madison continued onwards, ignoring her quip, "why in the world did you make us go through this ridiculous farce?"

"Can't you hear it?" Monroe gestured to the crowd around them, "you put up a valiant fight against a disrespectful ally, then accepted her back without any hard feelings! The audience is completely on your side now!"

"I hardly see the relevancy," Madison replied sharply.

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 have to swear their allegiance, but their soldiers would abandon us in droves."

"...that's fair," Madison reluctantly replied, "but why not tell me all this beforehand?"

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

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

"I swear," Madison shook her head and gave the smallest 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 around the coliseum. He wore 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 himself, "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.