

Cross of Gold

"Hello everybody!" Thompson screamed. "We're ready for the next match to begin! First up, we've got a major Major from the Civil War! He's a famed warrior known for training Theo Roosevelt, as well as for defeating the Free Silver Gang not just once, but twice over! He's a man of rare capacity, whose kindly nature and lovable traits knows no bounds! Let's hear it, for [The Napoleon of Protection], Will McKinley!"

McKinley walked in wearing a full suit of tin armor and carrying a pair of hatchets in his hands: one made of silver, the other gold. His fans greeted his arrival with wide waves of tin banners together with the noisy clackings of tin buckets and cans.

"For his opponent!" Thompson continued, "We have the big cowboy of the New Dealers! He's crude, he's crass, and he's a real-life son of a gun! But whatever may be said about him, one thing remains certain: this man understands power! He knows where to find it and he knows how to use it, and Lord; this man means to use it! Give it up, for [Landslide Landon], Landon B. Johnson!"

A helicopter flew out over the stadium. The crowd looked up and cheered as LBJ popped out of its door, waving to the spectators down below. He wore his usual cowboy outfit together with 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."

The helicopter landed, and LBJ shot a cold sneer as he walked over to McKinley.

"Now ain't this a bigger shock than tits on a bull!" LBJ exclaimed. "How come you, the man known for never wanting to see another war in his life, entered this tournament with so much gusto, huh?"

"Well, you see—"

"Personally!" LBJ interjected as he stepped in front of McKinley, "I'm guessing your decision went...a little like this!"

LBJ suddenly snatched McKinley's helmet off his head and placed it on his own.

"Heavens me!" LBJ exclaimed in a perfect imitation of McKinley's voice. "What in the world shall I, Will McKinley, do regarding this forthcoming Revolutionary War? I swore to myself I'd never get into another battle unless God approved, but alas, he does not answer my prayers!"

LBJ rubbed at his chin, then gave an exaggerated snap of his fingers.

"I know!" he exclaimed, "I'll do what I always do: put my ear to the ground and blindly follow the will of the people!"

With that, LBJ suddenly plopped his ear down onto the floor, inciting a wave of laughter from the stands. LBJ instantly stood back up, taking off the helmet and puffing out his chest.

"Bully!" he exclaimed in Roosevelt's high-pitched voice, "What a fool I was for having 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 over in dirt, "And his ear's so close to the ground, it's filled with grasshoppers!"

The audience exploded at LBJ's sudden unexpected performance. He gave a quick bow to the stands, then turned over to McKinley, eagerly awaiting his response. McKinley stood still for a moment, then gave a light snort.

"Oh, heck!" he said with a chuckle. "How am I not supposed to laugh at something as funny as that?" He gave a light applause with genuine enthusiasm. "Bravo; bravo! Really, it's an honor to have been made the subject of a mimic as talented as yourself!"

LBJ scrunched up his nose, forcing a smile onto his face.

"Of course..." he mumbled, tossing the helmet back.

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

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

LBJ immediately stuck his hand straight down his pants.

"Hey McKinley!" he shouted, "Let me show you something that'll really knock you off your feet!"

"By the love of Heaven!" McKinley screeched, casting his gaze from LBJ, "Please do not!"

"Oh, get your dirty head out of the gutter!" LBJ quipped, pulling out a handkerchief covering up his hand. "There are women and children here for Pete's sake!"

"I'm glad you're aware of that much at least..." McKinley replied, turning back over to examine LBJ's cloth. "So...what is it then?"

"An experiment," LBJ said with a smirk. "You've already shown that you can handle my character assassinations just fine..." he drew back the cloth, revealing a shining revolver in his hand, "...now let's see how you handle a real assassination!"

LBJ fired two shots from his gun. The bullets struck McKinley's armor, only to plop harmlessly to the ground. LBJ looked to McKinley, down to his undented bullets, then back over to McKinley.

"Ah heck," LBJ remarked, tossing his weapon to the ground, "my cousin Iver swore to me this gun of his could take you down for sure..."

LBJ studied McKinley with care.

I wasn't honestly expecting those bullets to do much against [The Napoleon of Protection], LBJ thought, but I had hoped they'd at least leave a smudge or two on that ugly armor of his...

"Are you just about finished?" McKinley asked. "If so, I'd like to go ahead and have my turn now."

LBJ jumped back as McKinley swung down his axe, scratching LBJ hand.

"OUCH!" LBJ screamed as he shook out his lightly injured arm. He hastily stepped back, tripping over himself and tumbling down to the ground. McKinley jerked back, separating himself from LBJ.

"Are you alright?" McKinley asked. "Do you want me to give you a minute to get yourself back up?"

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

McKinley coughed as dirt passed through the gaps in his helmet. At the same time, LBJ leapt forward, smashing McKinley's head with his fist. However, McKinley did not move an inch from the impact of LBJ's titanic punch.

"That wasn't very nice," McKinley remarked as he swung out his axe, landing a small cut to LBJ's chest.

"YEOWCH!" LBJ screamed, jumping back and blowing on his microscopic wound.

"Come now!" McKinley exclaimed with cheer. "Stop whining every time you get yourself a little scratch."

"Easy for you to say!" LBJ snarled. "After all, your EP makes it so that anything hitting your tacky suit of armor loses all its momentum in an instant!"

"Oh?" McKinley replied with a disgruntled grin. "And what makes you say that?"

"It's clear you want me to think your EP boosts your defenses like crazy." LBJ explained, pointing to the bullets on the ground. "But, if that were the case, my bullets wouldn't have plopped down like that after hitting your ugly armor, and my hand would be aching right now from my heavy punch! No, the only way to explain all this is if you're eliminating the force of my attacks the moment they make contact with you."

He pointed over to McKinley.

"Lastly," he said with a sneer. "Your EP's gotta work only for that specific suit of armor! Otherwise, there'd no be reason to be running around in such a hideous outfit made from a worthless metal like tin!"

McKinley tightened up his smile.

"Not bad," he spoke softly, "but I'm afraid you're a tad mistaken there, friend. You see, my Executive Power: Protective Tariff severely weakens the force of incoming attacks directed at me or *anything* I'm wearing," he explained, emphasizing his words. "In particular, my choice of armor has no relation whatsoever on my EP!" He slammed his hand to his chest. "No, I wear this masterpiece of Ohio craftsmanship solely from the love and pride I feel for my glorious State!"

LBJ shook his head as McKinley's audience burst into cheers around him.

"Oh yeah?" LBJ snided. "If you're so in love with tin, then why are you wearing that funky thing on top of your head?"

"My head?"

McKinley put a hand on his helmet, feeling something wrapped along its edge. Curious, McKinley removed his helmet, noticing something digging into its rim.

"Oh my," McKinley remarked as he examined the object further, "is this some sort of...golden crown of thorns?"

McKinley continued studying the crown, stopping himself as LBJ started charging right at him. Hastily, McKinley put his helmet on and swung out his axe, only for LBJ to easily dodge the impromptu attack.

“Executive Power!” LBJ bellowed as he revved up his punch, “War on Poverty!”

LBJ smashed his fist into McKinley’s neck, but McKinley again remained unmoved.

“You’ll have to do better than that, my friend,” McKinley declared as he swung out with a counter.

“Oh don’t worry,” LBJ snarled as he jumped back, “I will!”

As LBJ landed, a shining, golden cross materialized around McKinley’s neck.

“What the...?” McKinley asked as he ran his fingers along the peculiar object. “How in Heaven’s...?”

“I hope you like that necklace there, ‘friend’...” LBJ remarked 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 barked, “you’re going to be crucified upon that there cross of gold!”

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LBJ Imitating McKinley. Lyndon Johnson was very good at imitating people in real-life. In the novel, Landon Johnson uses this talent to make a series of insults that were actually made against the real-life William McKinley. These insults include the claims that William McKinley blindly followed the orders of his benefactor Marcus Hanna, and that he caved in easily to public opinion. This latter insult led people to say William McKinley “kept his ear so close to the ground that it was full of grasshoppers,” and Theodore Roosevelt in particular to say “McKinley has no more backbone than a chocolate éclair.”

Assassination. Landon Johnson shooting Will McKinley at the start is a rough approximation of what happened with the real assassination of William McKinley by Leon Czolgosz (though in real-life the shots landed successfully). The weapon Szolgosz used was an Iver Johnson revolver, hence Landon’s comment about his “cousin Iver.”

Crown of Thorns and Cross of Gold. The golden items placed on Will McKinley here are a reference to the famous “Cross of Gold” speech made by William McKinley’s political rival William Jennings Bryan, the ending of speech concluding with the lines “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.”

Mr. Texas

McKinley studied the golden necklace around his neck with care.

"I see," he remarked, "so your EP lets you create these little trinkets whenever you hit someone with your fists?" He gave a light shrug. "Well, I suppose an ability like that probably has a use or two."

LBJ snarled.

"Don't patronize me, punk!"

LBJ swung out his fist. McKinley calmly thrust with his axe, meeting and stopping LBJ's knuckleduster midswing. LBJ tightened up his frown, then flashed a quick smile as he spat a wad of spit through the gaps of McKinley's helmet.

"Heavens!" McKinley exclaimed, shaking out his head. "Why must you keep throwing these disgusting things down my helmet!"

"You think that's bad?" LBJ cackled as he punched McKinley's side, forming a golden bracelet around his right arm. "Wait 'till I stick Jumbo down there!"

"I'd rather not..." McKinley replied, blindly swinging out his axe.

LBJ stepped back and struck McKinley's outstretched arm, forming a golden watch on his wrist.

"Color me surprised," JFK remarked from the stands. "LBJ's actually landing some hits!"

"It is impressive," Hayes admitted with a grin, "but it doesn't matter. LBJ can't hurt McKinley as long as Protective Tarriff is active. As such, it's only a matter of time before LBJ falls prey to the damage he's gradually accumulating with this fight."

FDR gave a light snort besides her.

"What's so funny?" Hayes asked with a growl.

"Just your choice of words," FDR replied with a chuckle. "While it is true that LBJ is accumulating damage here, it's equally true that McKinley is accumulating a debt of his own...one who's magnitude he seems entirely unaware of..."

LBJ juke'd over to McKinley's right. McKinley raised his arm in response, but found his body difficult to move. LBJ stepped back, dodging the slowed strike, then struck McKinley's hand, creating another golden bracelet on his arm. McKinley retracted his arm, finding it even harder to move than it had been before.

"Could it be?" McKinley shouted as he stared at the golden ornaments strung along his arm. "These accessories! They're...they're weighing me down!"

LBJ let out a violent cackle.

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

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Years ago, FDR looked over her reports in awe.

"I knew you'd be getting some gains for us this campaign," she spoke to LBJ, "but I never imagined your numbers would be this strong!"

"Thanks boss," LBJ replied with a stern expression. "Now, regarding my reward..."

"Of course! Just tell me what you want and I'll get it for you with pleasure!"

"I want another shot at joining your inner circle," he replied without hesitation.

FDR instantly cooled her previously friendly expression.

"...You know what that requires," she spoke grimly, "you have to defeat your state's champion in a one-on-one match, no exceptions. You've already failed to do this once before, and if you fail a second time..."

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

"I wholeheartedly agree," FDR remarked with a sigh, "and if O'Daniel were still your opponent this time around, then I would gladly have given you my blessing."

"Wait, what?" LBJ asked. "Are you saying O'Daniel ain't the champion no more?"

FDR shook her head.

"You were probably too busy dealing with the campaign to notice," she said, handing LBJ a newspaper, "but *that man* has come back from retirement."

LBJ glared at the newspaper picture in front of him depicting a slim man holding a characteristic pipe in his mouth.

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

"The greatest fighter your state has ever known," FDR continued. "He defeated O'Daniel with ease, and with a man like that as your opponent..." FDR looked to the picture. "Well, needless to say, your best bet now is just to wait a few years until he goes back to retirement."

LBJ continued staring at Stevenson's image.

"I might not have a few more years," he muttered, scrunching up the picture and holding it close to his heart. He looked at FDR. "I don't care how bad my odds are, I'm taking this match!"

FDR tightened her gaze.

"You say this," she confirmed, "knowing full well that failure here means losing your one and only shot at advancing in our Party?"

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

"Well now," FDR replied, leaning back in her chair, "that's quite some resolve you have there."

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

"It shall be done."

And so, a match between LBJ and Stevenson was arranged. LBJ entered the arena alongside a marching band together with a fireworks show shooting out behind him across the night sky. Stevenson walked in without any fanfare whatsoever; a look of complete disinterest spread over his face.

The referee raised his arm into the air as the two fighters came face to face with one another.

"Let the match...begin!"

"Take this!" LBJ shouted as he threw out a quick punch.

Stevenson shifted aside, dodging the attack. LBJ followed with another strike, only for Stevenson to dodge once more. Stevenson shook his head as he dodged yet another strike.

"This is a waste of my time."

Stevenson suddenly turned himself around and started walking out of the arena.

"Wha..." LBJ spoke softly, then curled his lips with rage. "You...you cowardly old crap! You come back here right this instance and face me like a man! Or is dodging the only thing you know how to do, huh?"

Stevenson stopped walking and tightened up his fists.

"Such baseless remarks," he muttered, "don't deserve the dignity of my response."

LBJ stared at Stevenson for a moment, then twisted his scowl into an evil smile.

"So, you won't answer, eh? Well now, that certainly sounds like something a dodger would say!"

"I already told you," Stevenson replied, deepening his frown, "I refuse to answer you as a matter of principle alone!"

"Say it with me here, folks!" LBJ chanted to the crowd. "Dodger, dodger! Stevenson's a dodge—"

Stevenson slammed into LBJ, striking his kidneys with greater pressure than LBJ had ever experienced, forcing him down. LBJ looked up to Stevenson, then forced a smile onto his face as he rose off the floor.

"Dodger, dodger!" LBJ continued to shout while readying another attack. Stevenson dodged and retaliated with a nasty sidewinder to his side. 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 froze in place. He stepped back, turning to the crowd with an expression of utter bewilderment.

"Dodger, dodger; Stevenson's a dodger!"

Stevenson gritted his teeth.

“To hell with all this!” he snapped, turning to LBJ with open arms, begging LBJ to strike him down. “Do your goddamn worse...” he muttered.

LBJ tightened up his weary smile.

“Now we’re talking here...TAKE...THIS!”

LBJ’s fists landed squarely against the rugged shoulders of Cole Stevenson. But once again, [Mr. Texas] remained unaffected.

“There!” Stevenson screamed over to the crowd with a malevolent grin. “Are you all happy n—?”

Stevenson stopped talking as LBJ wrapped his meaty fingers around both his shoulders, then thrust him hard to the side, tossing him back. Stevenson landed on his feet, his expression unchanged.

“So you still got some fight left in you, eh?” Stevenson asked bitterly. He stepped forward, then glanced down, noticing a strange metallic box buried just below his feet. “What in tarna—?”

The earth below his feet suddenly burst open with a fiery explosion, slamming Stevenson to the ground. The crowd stayed silent as they watched Stevenson cough on the floor. Even the referee found himself unable to move, with him coming to his senses only after someone started coughing besides him.

“Ehem,” LBJ remarked, firmly twirling a finger in the air. The referee cleared his throat and raised up his hand.

“We find Stevenson unable to continue!” he spoke quickly, “The winner, is Landon B. Johnson!”

“What!” Stevenson exclaimed, shooting his burning body off the ground. “You can’t be serious here!” Stevenson pointed over to the fragments of the bomb scattered across the floor. “I don’t know what just happened here, but it’s obviously foul play on LBJ part! More than that,” he stared down his opponent, “I’m plenty ready to keep up the fight!”

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

As the man explained the situation, a sleeve fell past his arm, revealing a golden watch with the letters “LBJ” etched into its side. The referee looked down and hastily pulled back up his sleeve as Stevenson let out a growl.

“...well now,” Stevenson spat, “so that’s how it is, huh?” He looked over to LBJ. “I’d ask how you could sleep at night, knowing all the crimes you’ve committed in order to obtain this ‘landslide’ victory of yours...” he shook out his head. “...but the answer’s clear, ain’t it?”

“Indeed it is!” LBJ replied with a grin. “I’m going to sleep...” he continued, blatantly flaunting a detonator in his hands for everyone to see, “...like a goddamn baby!”

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McKinley gritted his teeth as LBJ dodged his swing while adding yet another golden item to his already glistening right arm.

“Fine!” McKinley shouted while spinning himself around, “If you keep targeting my right, then I shall simply meet you with my left!”

McKinley shot out a cocky smile, only to drop it as he spotted the vile grin spread over LBJ’s face.

“Wrong move!” LBJ screamed.

Before McKinley could finish spinning, LBJ slammed into the left side of McKinley’s body, forcing the unbalanced McKinley back.

“Got ya!” LBJ shouted, smashing his fists into McKinley’s chest and enlarging the golden cross further.

McKinley gritted his teeth as he jumped back, panting heavily as he fought to keep his right arm raised. He turned to his arm, back over to LBJ, then let out a light sigh.

“So be it...” he mumbled underneath his breath.

McKinley tightened up his grip, then swing out with his weighted right arm.

“Come on now!” LBJ chuckled as he dodged the strike. “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 shouted as he lifted his golden axe high into the air, “I would happily suffer the loss of my good right arm!”

At that, McKinley swung his axe down, slicing straight through his own outstretched arm. LBJ stood still, watching McKinley’s arm drop lifelessly to the ground.

“Jesus—” LBJ stopped talking as swiftly McKinley cut across LBJ’s exposed chest with his golden axe.

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McKinley’s Debt. The “debt” that Will McKinley occurs in this fight is a reference to the very real financial troubles William McKinley stumbled into by accident. At some point in time, William McKinley cosigned loans for an old friend Robert Walker, and after the recession of 1893 he was called to pay these loans. William thought the amount was around \$10,000, but they were actually ten times that amount! William nearly dropped out of politics to go out and pay back the loans, but several of his wealthy supporters who raised enough money to pay off the loans.

LBJ Flashback. This flashback is centered on Lyndon Johnson’s battle for a senate seat against Coke Stevenson. Coke was one of the most popular figures in Texas and had won every previous contest he had entered by huge margins with virtually zero campaigning on his part. Moreover, Lyndon entered the race with the conviction that if he lost, he would leave politics for good.

Despite having every odd stacked against him, Lyndon would win this competition after pouring unprecedented amounts of money into the campaign, largely due to a number of dirty tactics (such as pressing Coke to take a stand on the Taft-Hartley Act, knowing that Coke would refuse to answer his attacks out of pride, and thereby making it look like he was dodging the question). Most damning of all, Lyndon would very blatantly buy the election by having 200 new votes (written in alphabetical order and

with identical handwriting) suddenly appear after the votes had previously been announced, conveniently giving Lyndon a very narrow win. This corruption would later become the source of his nickname "Landslide Lyndon," a name which Lyndon himself went out of his way to brag about.

There are many, many more details to this crazy story, and I strongly recommend looking at Robert Caro's amazing book "Means of Ascent" which tells this story in far greater detail.

Protection

"GAHHHH!" LBJ screamed as McKinley cut across his chest.

LBJ pushed off McKinley's shoulder, separating the two of them before LBJ jumped back even further. LBJ steadied his breathing, then looked back to McKinley's severed arm on the floor.

"No blood?" he murmured as he eyed the situation with greater care, "...it's...it's an artificial limb!"

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

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

"Sorry kid, but no means no. It's just way too risky for us to go out there right now."

McKinley clenched up his fists and slumped back into camp.

"...they didn't bite," McKinley lamented to a large, hairy man standing beside him. "I asked two officers for permission and both of them shut me down."

Marcus Hanna nodded his head.

"So, you're going to give up then?"

McKinley looked up, then gave a sly smile.

"Not a chance."

"Good," Hanna smirked, "because we've already put together a wagon of supplies to deliver."

McKinley raised an eyebrow.

"What do you mean by...`we'?"

Hanna pointed over to a woman loading up a wagon with food.

"Iris!" McKinley exclaimed upon seeing his wife carrying a crate of supplies. "Surely...surely you're not actually planning on coming with us here, right? We're heading into enemy fire, and—"

"And what?" she replied sternly, putting her hands on her hips. "If you can handle it honey, then so can I!"

"More than that," Hanna interjected between them, "I requested lady Iris join in case we need to make use of her Artifact." He gestured to the pair of ruby red slippers worn on her feet. "After all, she's the only one here who can get us back home if we find ourselves in a real pinch."

McKinley looked over his two best friends. He shook out his head, rubbing his fingers deep into his forehead.

"...alright you knuckleheads," he finally spoke up with a grin, "let's do this thing!"

The group bolted out of the camp as fast as they could. They rode on with daring, traveling at breakneck speeds through a terrific fire of musketry and artillery around them. Finally, the group made it through the enemy's bombardment and onto a quiet, yellow brick road.

"Phew," Iris spoke from inside the wagon, "looks like we made it through the worst of it!"

"And we're doing great on time too," Hanna remarked from the front seat. "At this rate, we should—"

McKinley suddenly shoved Hanna aside. As he did, a silver spike shot out from the neighboring forest and into the carriage where Hanna had just been seated. McKinley stared into the trees, then gave a heavy groan.

"You've got to be kidding me..." he lamented as a familiar figure stepped out of the brush.

"Well, well!" Will Bryan snided as he walked ahead with a silver orb floated besides him, "if it isn't my archnemesi, Will McKinley in the flesh! Really now, what are the odds of us lifelong rivals running into each other like this, hmm?"

"We aren't rivals," McKinley grumbled, "and we don't have time for your antics right now!"

"Well too bad!" Bryan retorted as he blew into a silver whistle hanging around his neck. At his signal, dozens of soldiers from the forest emerged around them.

McKinley took a quick scan of their surroundings.

"...we're outnumbered 16 to 1," he grumbled.

Hanna clicked his tongue.

"It's too dangerous for us to keep going here..." he turned back to the wagon. "Iris! Get us out of here, now!"

Hanna waited for a moment, but the only response he got was a hissing sound coming from inside the carriage.

"Are you serious right now?" Hanna shouted, "Is she really having another one of her episodes?"

"I'll handle this," McKinley insisted as he dashed 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 spoke softly, covering his wife's face with a handkerchief, "everything's going to be alright now."

McKinley stroked Iris' hand, and as he did, a figure leapt out from behind.

"...if you won't come to fight me..." Bryan screamed, "...then I'll just have to bring the fight to you!" He raised his hand into the air. "Power: Free Silver!"

A silver spike shot out of Bryan's orb. Without turning around, McKinley raised his right arm as the spike passed through his elbow and stopped just before meeting his head.

"It's okay," McKinley continued speaking to his wife as blood poured out of his limb, "that was just the sound of some leaves rustling in the wind."

Bryan furrowed his brow.

"If there's one thing I hate more than losing," he muttered as his orb split into several smaller spheres, each of them transforming into a silver spike, "it's being ignored!"

McKinley glanced back as the sea of spikes shot towards him, then calmly extended out his remaining arm around his wife.

"Don't worry, darling," he spoke softly, "no matter what the world throws at us...I'll always be there to protect you."

"Cheap words!" Bryan screamed as the spikes hurtled forward.

A ray of light suddenly burst out of McKinley's injured body, the silver spikes freezing upon striking his glistening armor.

"Wh...what?"

Bryan stood still, his eyes transfixed on the glow from McKinley's sudden Election. However, it didn't take long for Bryan to come back to his senses.

"Seriously?" he squealed. "You've been Elected?!? BEFORE MEEEEEEEE?!?!?!?"

"Bryan."

Bryan stopped talking as McKinley turned back around, his left hand shining with 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 greeted McKinley's wagon with cheer.

"God bless you all!" she shouted, slapping Hanna on his back. She turned to McKinley, eyeing his severed arm together with his Presidential Seal. "...I can't thank you enough for what you've done for us...you're one of the bravest and finest officers I've ever seen."

"Thank you," McKinley replied, looking to his right shoulder. "It's just a shame that I'll have to be dropping out of the war now."

"What!" Hayes exclaimed. "Over one missing arm?" She waved her own stubbed arm with a grin. "Lad, you'll be moving faster than ever with all that extra weight off your shoulders! And once I teach you a few one-armed techniques I've been developing lately, why, you'll see that you've still got plenty of fight left in you!"

McKinley smiled broadly and threw out a proud salute.

"Yes ma'am!"

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LBJ clicked his tongue while staring out at McKinley's severed arm

"I thought you were a passive fool," he snarled, "but cutting off your fake arm in order to shake up your opponent? That's some high-level manipulation if I've ever seen it."

"Thank you!" McKinley replied with sincerity. "To tell the truth, it was pretty difficult for me to keep up the act, what with me needing to purposefully slow my left down to match the speed of my sluggish prosthetic." He kicked one of the ornaments on his severed arm. "In fact, I'd wager that my inability to completely close this gap in speed was why you unconsciously targeted my slower right side with all your attacks."

"Close the gap..." LBJ widened his eyes, "you don't mean...!"

McKinley nodded his head.

"Now that I've shown you my hand," he said crouching down, "I'm done slowing myself down!"

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William McKinley did not Lose an Arm. This is merely a metaphor for him ultimately choosing to embrace the gold standard rather than a gold+silver standard after straddling for some time against Bryan, and is very loosely inspired by a quote of his saying "Rather than [be nominated], I would suffer the loss of [my] good right arm." It's also a bit of an excuse for Ruth Hayes to serve as a mentor for Will McKinley, mirroring the real-life mentorship that existed between Rutherford Hayes and William McKinley.

McKinley Flashback. This is based off William McKinley's daring supply run during the Civil War, which he made after two of his superior officers told him not to go because it was too dangerous.

To be clear, none of the other people depicted here (e.g. his wife, Marcus Hanna, nor William Bryan) were present during this time, nor do any of their appearances or personalities have any real connection to reality (other than William McKinley's wife suffering from frequent seizures). These extra characters were inserted to make this flashback 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 William Bryan.

The McKinley Grip

McKinley swung his axe down with lightning speed, slicing into LBJ's arm. He then twirled his hatchet around and swung upwards, landing another hit. LBJ gritted his teeth, grabbing McKinley's outstretched arm and holding it still.

"Why don't you have a little taste," he exclaimed, "of my boxer rebellion!"

LBJ pummeled McKinley's chest with his free arm, causing his golden cross to grow ever larger.

"Even if you stop one of my limbs," McKinley remarked as he jumped into the air, "I've still got two more to work with!"

McKinley thrust out his legs, smashing LBJ's gut and forcing him to release his grip around McKinley. LBJ snarled, shoving McKinley's airborne body down and pushing him to the floor. McKinley rolled away, standing up before LBJ could follow up with another barrage.

"Not bad!" McKinley said with a smirk. "Now try this!"

McKinley placed his axe into the hole where his artificial right arm had previously been, locking it in place. As he did this, LBJ stepped over to McKinley's left side, throwing out a punch. McKinley quickly grabbed LBJ's right hand with his left, pulling it aside and diverting the attack. McKinley then rotated around, cutting LBJ's shoulder with his axe.

"SHOOOTTT!" LBJ screamed as he readied a punch with his left.

McKinley shifted his left hand up to LBJ elbow and yanked to the side, pulling LBJ and causing his strike to miss. McKinley rotated himself around again, landing a cut to LBJ's defenseless side.

"There it is!" Hayes remarked with a grin, "The McKinley Grip! McKinley's signature fighting style allowing him to land continuous attacks while destroying his opponent's mobility! With this LBJ is done for!"

"Can you really be so sure?" FDR asked.

"Of course!" Hayes replied with pride. "While it is true that LBJ might be able to land another hit or two if he really pushes for it, he'll take some serious damage in return without dealing any real damage to McKinley in the process. There's nothing he can do now but wait for his inevitable demise!"

"Perhaps," FDR said pressing her fingers together, "but then again, perhaps not..."

On the ground, LBJ continued spinning around as McKinley cut into him with his axe. Finally, LBJ gritted his teeth.

"Screw this!" he exclaimed, pounding his chest and planting himself down where he stood. "Stop all this turning around and face me head on already!"

"With pleasure!" McKinley remarked as he raised up his axe and slashed ahead, cutting deep across LBJ chest.

At the same exact time, LBJ punched at the golden cross flailing about McKinley's rotating body. His fist struck the ornament, instantly losing its momentum, then continued onwards, smashing the cross into McKinley's chest.

For a moment, neither fighter moved.

Then, McKinley coughed blood.

"What?" he asked between coughs. "How did...?"

LBJ swiftly yanked the golden cross back and punched at it again. As before, the attack stopped upon hitting the cross, then continued and crashed into McKinley's armor, denting it inward. McKinley coughed, then kned LBJ in the stomach, stunning him long enough to get back away.

"This cross!" McKinley exclaimed as he took the necklace in his hand, "could it be...!"

"You said it yourself," LBJ said with a smirk. "Protective Tarriff stops the momentum of any 'incoming' attack that hits anything you're wearing. On the other hand," he said putting his fists together, "if I continue with my attack while continuing to keep contact something you're wearing, then it no longer counts as an 'incoming' attack, now does it?"

McKinley took a step back.

"That's..."

"That's ridiculous!" LBJ exclaimed in a perfect imitation of McKinley's voice. "You had no way of knowing my EP would work that way!"

LBJ pushed his hands out in front of him.

"That's why I shoved you earlier," he continued in his normal voice, "and why I slammed into you; I was confirming that pushes maintained their force as long as I made them while already touching your armor."

McKinley stood still, his mouth agape.

"Does...does that mean..."

"Does that mean," LBJ repeated in McKinley's voice, "that you started plotting all of this after I carelessly told you the details of my EP!"

LBJ shook his head.

"My plan started," he went on, "the moment I saw your fans waving around all those gaudy tin banners of theirs. That's when I decided to throw in a couple of cheap insults at your beloved metal when I told you my theory about your EP." He gave an evil grin. "And with that little provocation, you were more than eager to correct any errors I had in my explanation!"

McKinley tried speaking, but no words came from his mouth.

"You thought you were invincible!" LBJ shouted as he stepped forward, "Caausing you to drop your guard! On the other hand," LBJ spoke while pulling back his shirt, revealing a gold plate with a deep cut across its center, "I always come prepared for a fight!"

"That plate..." McKinley murmured, "...you made it when you thumped at your chest just now..."

McKinley stopped talking as LBJ stood in front of him, his enormous frame covering his opponent's body in shadow.

"Now I reckon," LBJ said as he snatched the cross from McKinley, "that my two attacks just now were the first real hits you've felt since getting your EP. Which means," LBJ snarked as he tossed the cross high into the air, "your body's in too much shock right now to even move!"

Before McKinley could respond, LBJ raised his arms over his head, slamming both of his fists onto the floating cross. They stopped at impact, then plummeted down, smashing the cross directly into the crown of thorns placed around McKinley's head.

McKinley hit the ground, his helmet rolling to the side. Taft rushed over to McKinley's side, quickly examining his body before raising his arm in the air.

"The fight is over!" he exclaimed. "The winner, is [Landslide Landon], Landon B. Johnson!"

In the stands, Hayes stared out in disbelief.

"...to set up so many traps so far in advance..." he whispered quietly, "...that LBJ is truly a monster!"

"McKinley was the all-around better fighter," FDR spoke up. "Even at the end he might have still turned things around if he were in control of his senses." She gave a slight smirk. "But then he went and fell for LBJ's final trick."

Hayes clicked her tongue.

"LBJ purposefully pointed out every place McKinley went wrong in order to take control of his psyche. Those psychological attacks, together with his unexpected physical ones, left McKinley unable to even consider going against LBJ's actions."

"Way to go big guy," JFK said with a smirk, then ran off to congratulate his ally.

After a quick search, JFK found LBJ trekking through the halls of the arena.

"Congrats on winning the match!" he shouted from across the hall. "Though of course, I knew my partner was always going to pull through!"

JFK ran towards his ally, slowing himself down as he noticed the rage spread across LBJ's face.

"I saw it," LBJ mumbled, "I saw it!"

JFK squinted his eyes.

"What...what did you see?"

LBJ glared directly at JFK.

“Somebody was waving one of those cruddy McKinley signs after I won!” he screamed, “And on my side of the arena no less!”

LBJ looked expectantly to JFK.

“...Okay?” JFK replied with confusion. “But who cares about one measly sign anyhow? Almost everyone out there was cheering for you after that awesome final hit you made!”

“*Almost* everyone,” LBJ snarled, “but not *everyone*!” He kept on walking, barely even acknowledging JFK’s presence. “I swear, I’m not going to stop until every man, woman, and child is screaming out my name!”

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The McKinley Grip. This was a special handshake developed by William McKinley to shake as many hands as possible without tiring himself out or injuring his hand. Roughly speaking, he would pull someone’s hand to him, give a quick shake, then grab their elbow and yank them away in order to greet the next person.

Look at that Sign! The final scene in this chapter is a reference to a campaign trip Lyndon Johnson made on behalf of John Kennedy’s Presidential campaign. As one colleague wrote, Johnson "jumped like was shot and told a companion ‘Look at that son of a bitch ! Look at that sign there!’ There was one [unfavorable] sign! It wasn't a foot high. There were thousands of signs, and that was the one he picked out. ‘Goddammit look at that sign’...but that was typical Johnson...it had to be unanimous as far as he was concerned."