

# Executive Powers: Revolutionary War



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## Disclaimer

**This is a work in progress.** Most of the text still needs to be written, and what's currently written needs some more editing. Please let me know if you have any comments on the current draft, especially with regards to critiques/places where the writing is not as smooth.

If I sent you this, I'll emphasize that 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. The editors had once again 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 the same drab stories day after day. They wanted something new. Something spicy. Something to keep them at the edge of their seats.

She clenched her fists. One of these days, she'd find a story so powerful that even her eggheaded editors would be blown away. And when she did, she wasn't going to be some passive bystander watching from afar. No, she was going to be right there, smack dab in the middle of the action.

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

"The hell do you want?"

"Someone's in a foul mood." Curtis Vonnegut spoke coyly. "Another rejection?"

"I'm hanging up." Thompson snapped back.

"Wait, wait, wait," Vonnegut pleaded. "I have a question." He cleared his throat. "...do you believe in parallel universes?"

Thompson raised an eyebrow. "What are you talking about?"

"You see," Vonnegut continued, "I wanted to write a novel that takes place in a world that's similar to, but ultimately distinct from ours. For example, it would feature characters inspired by historical figures from our world, but with new backstories, motivations, and even genders."

Thompson snorted. "If I wanted to read about historical figures, I'd pick up a damn history book."

"But that's not all there is to it," Vonnegut continued. "Unlike our world, no one in this parallel universe would have any Powers, nor Executive Powers. It would just be ordinary folks living ordinary lives..." Vonnegut grinned to himself, "...modulo the occasional breaking of the fourth wall ..."

Thompson scratched her chin. "A world without Powers...without Executive Powers..." she looked out into the horizon. "...I think...I think, that a world like that..."

Thompson slowly stopped herself as she noticed a strange, mushroom shaped cloud in the horizon. Before she could react, a massive shockwave slammed into her building, shattering windows and throwing her to the ground.

"Thompson?" Vonnegut asked from the other end of the line. "Are you there? What happened?"

Thompson rubbed her head and continued to stare at the remnants of the mushroom shaped cloud. She mechanically picked up her phone. "...I think..." she spoke as she wiped a streak of blood from her forehead, then put on a massive grin. "I think a world without Powers wouldn't be half as fun to live in as ours!"

Thompson hung up her phone without waiting for a reply, then ran out of her office. While everyone else rushed for the exit, Thompson sprinted to the helipad with a skip in her step 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 next to her.

"I don't know Gonzo...but whatever it is..." she grabbed a cigarette without breaking her stride, "...it's definitely a scoop!"

The duo made it to the roof, and Gonzo quickly took control of the helicopter, flying off in the direction of the cloud Thompson had spotted. In the air, Thompson activated her Power again, summoning a second Gonzo. She tilted her bucket hat, adjusted her yellow-tinted sunglasses, then nodded to the new Gonzo. He raised three fingers...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 perhaps the aftermath of an epic battle between two Parties? Well, we're about to find out." Thompson shifted to the side, giving Gonzo's lens a full view of the massive crater behind her.

"Below us," Thompson continued, "you can see where the shockwave likely originated. Preliminary calculations suggest that the crater is about 300 feet deep with a radius of 1200 feet. Moreover—"

"Woah, woah," Gonzo pointed his head to the edge of the crater, "there's something down there."

Thompson turned and spotted the bright light shining at the edge of the crater. She grinned. "...take us down Gonzo."

"I'd rather not," Gonzo bemoaned, "I think I'm getting the fear..."

"Nonsense!" she shouted back. "We came out here to figure out what the hell happened, and that right there," she pointed to the light, "is the main nerve!"

Gonzo nodded. "...that's what gives me the fear..." Reluctantly, Gonzo lowered the copter. Before he could finish landing, Thompson was on the ground, dashing straight for the light. The glow faded as she approached, and from within the light, a large man with short gray hair and circular glasses stepped forward.

"Greetings!" the man spoke in a cheery tone, "Are you local or national news?"

Thompson blinked, looked over to Gonzo, then back to the man. "L-local..."

The man maintained his smile, but he was clearly disappointed. "Well...it will get there soon enough. Are you rolling now?"

Thompson slowly nodded her head.

"Excellent." The man cleared his throat. "My fellow Americans..." he raised his right hand, and Thompson instinctively stepped back. His hand bore the all too familiar symbol of a bald eagle inscribed within a circle of stars. A Presidential Seal. "...my name is Henry S. Truman," he continued "I am a President, and the destruction behind me..." he turned to the massive crater, "...is the result of my Executive Power: The Manhattan Project."

Thompson paused for a moment, taking in the full weight of his statements. "...and what do you want?"

Truman drew a slight grin. "You're quick on the uptake." He regained his neutral expression. "As I speak, our nation is being torn apart by a constant stream of violent clashes between Presidents and their Parties...I'd go so far as to say we're on the brink of a second Civil War." He bit his lip. "As a President, I know this is bad, and I've come here today with the hope of putting an end to evils like this. But of course..." he looked out to the distance, "it is not enough to yearn for peace. We must work, and if necessary..." Truman grinned, "...fight for it."

"Fight?" Thompson asked.

"Exactly!" Truman threw out his arms, his grin morphed into a viscous smile. "In order to form a more perfect union, insure domestic tranquility, and to secure the blessings of liberty, I am declaring the establishment of a grand tournament that will decide once and for all: which President stands as the greatest of all time?"

Truman stared expectingly at Thompson. "Please...tell us more?" she spoke hesitantly.

He raised three fingers. "This experiment will be organized by a trinity of Presidents: myself, Bill Taft, and Ruth Hayes..." he raised another finger, "it will take place at this very spot four months from today, on Tuesday, November 4<sup>th</sup>. Each fighter and organizer shall pledge allegiance to the ultimate winner of the tournament." Truman intensified his smile. "I'm also very excited to announce that four Presidents have already agreed to take part ..." he slowly lowered his fingers one at a time, his voice lingering on each syllable as he spoke, "Theo Roosevelt...Gabe Lincoln...Tanya Jefferson...and Jordan Washington..."

Thompson's eyes widened. "The entirety of Rushmore..."

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

He stared unmoving at the camera for half a minute. "C-cut," Thompson stammered. Gonzo's red light flicked off, and Truman let out a deep sigh.

"Well, the die is cast," he said with a significantly thicker Missouri accent. "Say," he turned to Thompson. "We're looking to hire an MC for the tournament, and you seem like you've got some real gumption. Do you want the job?"

Thompson blinked. "...sure?"

"Fantastic!" he gave her a light pat on the back, then looked over to her helicopter. "Say...what kind of model do you have there?" he jaunted to the vehicle while Thompson and Gonzo stayed behind, their bodies frozen in place.

"...Gonzo..."

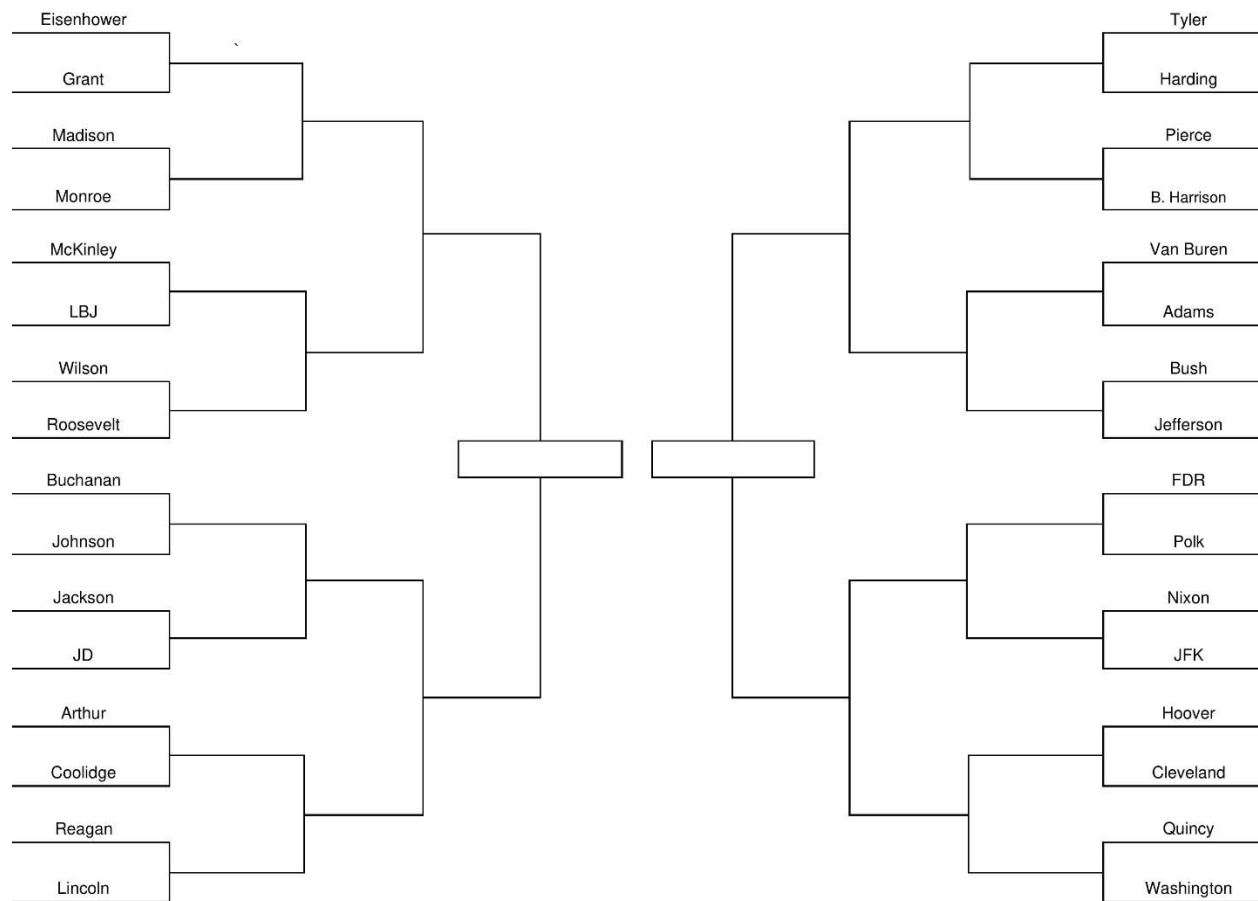
"...Yeah boss?"

"I have a lot of questions..." she said as she watched the large man geek out over their news helicopter. "...in particular..." she scratched her head, "...who the hell is Henry Truman?"

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Over the next three months, dozens of Presidents reached out to Truman about his Revolutionary War. Then, on the eve of November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the fateful bracket was released out into the world...

## The Bracket



### Block R:

[The Supreme Commander] Deedee Eisenhower vs [The Hero of Appomattox] Odysseus Grant.  
[The Sage of Montpelier] Jamie Madison vs [The Heir of Good Feelings] Jane Monroe.  
[The Napoleon of Protection] Will McKinley vs [Landslide Landon] LBJ.  
[The Professor] Whitney 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] FDR vs [The Last of the Whigs] Milly Fillmore

[The King of Camelot] JFK vs [Tricky Dick] Dixie Nixon

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

[Young Hickory] Jade Polk vs [The King of Presidents] Jordan Washington

# Day 1: The First Branch

## Two Star Generals

Huntress Thompson weaved her motorcycle through the cars stuck in traffic. She couldn't believe that, just four months ago, this whole place had been nothing but dirt. But now? Families ate burgers in front of thugs with cigars, saxophonists jammed over the sound of workers building walls, and arms dealers peddled their wares next to fanatics screaming something about religion. It was pure chaos, and Thompson loved every second of it.

She skidded to a halt and gazed at the giant marble coliseum in front of her. Waves of spectators surrounded the entrances, trying to push and shove their way in before the first match started. As she marveled at the sights, two agents dressed in black approached her. She held out her badge. "Huntress Thompson, VIP."

The Secret Service agents examined her ID. "You're fifteen minutes late."

"Sue me."

The agent rolled his eyes and grabbed his walkie-talkie. "Huntress Thompson is at the gate. Requesting teleportation."

Thompson raised an eyebrow. "Requesting wha—" she shook, then found herself in a large room, with a massive glass panel overlooking the inside of the stadium. She gazed out into the stands, then turned to the pianist seated in the back of the room. She smirked, then gave a thumbs up.

The pianist nodded, then quietly tapped away at his keys. His music rang across the speakers throughout the stadium, drawing the attention of the rambunctious crowd. They gradually quieted down as the cameras stationed throughout the arena turned and zoomed into the commentary box, their lenses focused in on Huntress Thompson.

"Welcome," Thompson shouted into her mic, "to the Revolutionary War!" The crowd greeted her with screams and applause. "For those that don't know, I'm Huntress Thompson, your master of ceremonies." She threw out her arm. "And helping me with the technical analysis for our fights, we have the legendary man who made all of this possible..." The piano music suddenly intensified, and the pianist slammed his hands on the keys before standing up to a roar of cheers.

"Hello everyone!" Truman spoke up, "Today, the entire world..."

"Just a minute, Henry," Thompson held the mic away from her, "let me introduce you." Despite the distance, Thompson's mic broadcasted her message across the stadium, inciting a wave of laughter. She coughed. "Anyways, joining me is [The Man from Independence], Henry Shipp Truman!" The crowd erupted.

"Henry S. Truman," he corrected. He turned back to the crowd. "Today, the entire world is looking to America for enlightened leadership to peace and progress. Such leadership requires vision, courage, and unyielding strength. Finding this leadership is my duty, and I shall not shirk from it." The crowd erupted in applause.

"Beautiful stuff, Truman," Thompson spoke up, "now let's get down to brass tacks." The stadium screens changed to a timeline for the rest of the week. "There will be eight fights per day for the first three days," Thompson continued, "followed by four quarterfinal fights on Friday, with the semifinals

and finals on Saturday. The refereeing for all of our fights will be done by the only man in the country who would rather be judge than President. Give it up for [The Big Chief], Bill Taft!"

The giant Taft walked into the arena, carrying his massive war hammer gavel.

"And to make sure nothing goes awry," Thompson continued, "we have Secret Service agents scattered throughout the arena. Leading this group is a true veteran when it comes to quelling riots and getting rid of uninvited guests. Let's hear it for [Scarface], Ruth Hayes!"

From the stands, Hayes waved with her right arm and what little remained of her left, the scars covering her body on full display.

"Now, we must emphasize," Truman continued, "while we have taken every reasonable precaution to protect our spectators, we cannot guarantee your complete safety. Those who don't wish to take the risk can safely watch live footage of the matches from their hotel. As for those who choose to stay..." he grinned, "...get ready for the ride of your lives."

"Enough with the foreplay," Thompson shouted, "let's get to the action!" The crowd roared. "We're starting things with a bang," she continued. "It's a match between two of the greatest commanders the world has ever seen. We may never know who's the better general, but we're about to find out who's the better fighter! Coming from the Western entrance, she's a warrior who's fought around the world. She's trained legions of soldiers during her military career, and generations of students as the head of Columbia University. Let's hear it for [The Supreme Commander], Deedee Eisenhower!"

A tank rolled into the arena. Eisenhower popped her head out of the commander's hatch, wearing her signature wool field jacket and peaked visor cap. She waved to the crowd, then pulled herself out of the tank and grabbed the barrel of its gun. With some effort, she lifted upward, tearing the head of the tank clean off its body. The tank rolled back and Eisenhower walked forward, carrying the barrel of the tank with her to the center of the arena.

"Jesus Christ!" Thompson shouted, "Eisenhower is using the head of the tank as her freaking weapon! We haven't even started and I'm getting goosebumps."

"Eisenhower has an impressive arsenal..." Truman spoke with a sly smile, "...but she might end up being outgunned this time..."

"Let's find out!" Thompson exclaimed. "Coming from the Eastern entrance, we have the second in command of the National Union Party. Despite his reputation as a butcher, he's a gentle soul who can't stand the slight of blood. But don't think he's a pushover! He won't stop fighting until he achieves unconditional surrender. He's [The Hero of Appomattox], Odysseus S. Grant!"

"It's just Odysseus Grant..." he mumbled as he walked into the arena, dragging a giant, lumpy bag behind him. He reached the center of the arena and opened the bag, releasing a stockpile of guns and swords onto the ground. He adjusted his silk hat before crouching down and carefully picking up a weapon.

"This was Calvin's pistol," he spoke softly. "He died in the final fight against Davis without getting the chance to fire a single shot..." Grant placed the pistol down and grabbed a sword, "This one was Benjamin's," he continued. "He was a valiant soldier, slain on that terrible night of Johnson's betrayal."

Grant sighed and placed the weapon back on the ground. "So many young soldiers lost on my watch..." He looked up to Eisenhower. "...and I will not let a single one of their deaths be in vain." He thrust his arms to the side.

The weapons surrounding Grant shook violently and shot into the air. Suddenly, a gun slammed into Grant's arm, followed by another, and another. Before long, both of Grant's arms were completely covered by a mass of weapons, each in the form of a giant, metallic, weaponized arm.

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

Taft looked to Eisenhower, who's smile only deepened. Taft raised his gavel. "Let the first match..." he slammed it down, "begin!"

???Insert Fights 1-4

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## The Worst of the Worst

Thompson looked to Truman. “Nothing?” Truman shook his head. Thompson growled and grabbed her mic. “Hello everyone,” she spoke through gritted teeth, “our technical difficulties should be resolved any minute now. Please bear with us until then.” She turned off her mic and bit angrily into her cigarette.

“Oh, wait,” Truman grabbed his earpiece with excitement, “it looks like they found Johnson...” his smile faded, “...but his fighting condition seems...questionable...”

“I don’t care if I have to drag him onto the field myself,” Thompson snapped back, “tell him he’s going on in five minutes. And while you’re at it,” she slammed her fist, “tell Buchanan that I’m going to do him a favor and introduce Johnson first; but if he still hasn’t gotten me that bio before Johnson’s on the field, then I’m just going to make something up for him.”

Truman nodded and relayed the messages. The two sat in silence as Truman carefully watched the seconds tick on his watch. After what felt like ages, he nodded to Thompson and she grabbed her mic.

“Alrighty,” Thompson shouted, “we’re finally ready to begin the first match of Block L!” The crowd gave a wave of disgruntled cheers. “This fight features two of the most hated Presidents of all time! Our first fighter, coming from the *Eastern* entrance,” she spoke with just a hint of disdain, “was once the second in command for the National Union Party. However, he betrayed his Party and fled north to escape Lincoln’s wrath. Rumor has it he’s been hiding in the Alaskan wilderness ever since, waiting to strike back at his enemies. Let’s hear it for [The Tennessee Tailor], Andre Jackson!”

The crowd booed as Johnson staggered into the arena. His large body was covered with stitches, and his right hand carried a rapier-sized sewing needle. However, everyone’s focus centered on the bottle of whiskey in his left hand as he stumbled towards the center of the arena.

“Oh god...” Thompson mumbled, “I didn’t realize he was *that* drunk...”

Johnson motioned Taft to him, and reluctantly, Taft made his way over. As he approached, Johnson violently snatched his microphone. “I AM NOT FIT TO BE HERE!” he shouted into the mic, startling the audience. “I ought not to have left my home,” he continued, “as...as I was recovering from an attack of typhoid fever...” He pointed his finger at no one in particular. “But Mr. Truman phoned me...as did other friends!” he spoke emphatically, “saying I must be here! And so, I came!”

Johnson burst into laughter, and Taft angrily took back his microphone. Johnson smiled back and grabbed his bottle.

“Now, if you don’t mind,” Johnson raised the glass to his lips, “I will take some more whiskey, as I need all the strength for the occasion that I can have.” He gulped the last of his drink, then threw his empty bottle across the arena, shattering it on the ground.

“Well...uh...” Thompson spoke hesitantly, “that was something...” she turned to see a Secret Service agent holding a notecard behind her. “Finally...” Thompson muttered as she grabbed the card. She cleared her throat. “Johnson’s opponent is a last-minute entry to our tournament...” She looked down and squinted to read the scribbles on the card. “He is very strong...and very smart...and to all the ladies out there...he’s a very, very eligible bachelor...” she blinked, then turned the card over, looking for

any extra information. But no, that was it. He had wasted all of their time, on *that*. She crumpled the card and tossed it to the ground. “Anyways,” she continued, “he’s [10-cent Jimmy], Jim Buchanan.”

A frail man with a dough face shuffled onto the stage. Heavy bags hung under his eyes which darted all over the arena. He bit the nails of his right hand, while his left held onto a metal slingshot.

“Well folks,” Thompson continued, “I don’t think anyone is going to be happy with the winner of the match. But on the bright side, we can all enjoy watching as the loser gets the crap beaten out of them.” She flipped off her mic. “And I for one, hope it’s Buchanan...”

Taft slammed his gavel. “Begin!”

Johnson let loose a monstrous howl, then charged in at Buchanan, stumbling over himself as he ran.

“W-wait a minute,” Buchanan stepped back. “I’m-I’m-I’m not ready!” He let out a shrill shriek as Johnson closed in. “E-Executive Power!” Buchanan stammered, “Dred Scott!”

A metal chain shot from the ground and wrapped itself tightly around Johnson’s right wrist. “What the...” Johnson pulled at the chain with his free hand, but the shackles refused to unravel.

Buchanan let out a deep breath. “Okay...” he paced to the left. “Okay, okay, okay.” He bit his thumbnail. “So now...should I attack?” Buchanan pivoted and paced to the right. “But what if he can still counterattack?” He turned back around. “So...should I restrain him further?” He turned around. “But what if that tires me out?”

The crowd booed as neither fighter did anything. Johnson grabbed his giant sewing needle and sloppily jabbed at the chain to no avail. He continued jabbing at the chains with increasing ferocity. Then, his hand suddenly slipped, causing his needle to pierce straight through his forearm.

The crowd gasped in horror, but Johnson remained non-plussed. “You know, I’d rather...” he burped “...I’d rather sever my right arm...” he spoke as he slowly pried his hand off his body with his needle, “...than be tied down by a lawyer!”

He tore his hand off his body, freeing both his arm and his severed hand from the chains. Before his hand hit the floor, Johnson grabbed it with his left, then hurled it at Buchanan.

“W-What?” Before Buchanan could dodge, the severed hand stuck his chest, knocking him down. As he fell, the hand swiftly crawled up his body, then wrapped its cold fingers around his neck. Buchanan dropped his slingshot and grabbed at the hand as it tightened its grip.

Johnson calmly jaunted over to Buchanan, then pressed his wrist against his severed hand. “Executive Power: Reconstruction.” Stitches appeared across Johnson’s wrist, reconnecting his hand to his forearm. “Now then...” Johnson cracked his wrist as his hand wrapped itself tighter around Buchanan’s neck. “Let’s have some fun!”



## Reconstruction

"Oh Jimmy..." Johnson waved his needle in front of the helpless Buchanan. "Neither of us seem to be very popular these days." He burped. "I guess we both need to work...on our branding!" Buchanan wailed as Johnson jabbed his needle into his chest and carved his name into Buchanan's skin.

Buchanan started to speak. "I surren—" Johnson tightened his grip, cutting him off.

"You damn aristocrats!" Johnson spat at him. "Stopping whenever you feel like it." He pierced deeper as his voice rose. "You see, us plebians can't just quit whenever we want. No sirree. We gotta work...alllll the time," he spoke while driving his needle slowly across Buchanan's body. "Am I right people!"

Johnson turned to the audience, but they met him with utter silence. Every eye was fixated on Buchanan, watching his tears run down his face as he helplessly struggled against Johnson's hold.

"I can't believe I'm saying this," Thompson commented, "but I think Johnson's being too harsh on Buchanan. Hell, this might be the first death of the tournament!"

Truman shook his head. "Johnson might be a degenerate, but even he wouldn't break the Law of the Land when it comes to killing fellow Executives." He watched on as Johnson continued to carve into Buchanan. "Still...one has to wonder; where did all that hatred come from...?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Many years ago, a young Andre Johnson looked at his father. "Daddy, can we skip stones?"

"Sorry kiddo..." his dad looked at his dented pocket watch, "I have to go to work in a bit..." he looked down at his son's innocent expression. He grinned, then ruffled Johnson's hair. "So we'll have to be quick about it!"

The two ran out of the house with screams of joy as they frantically grabbed piles of stones from the nearby river. They laughed themselves silly as they both failed to bounce even a single rock against the raging current.

"I guess the water's too rough today for skipping," Johnson's dad remarked. He looked back at his pocket watch. "Anyways, I need to..."

"Daddy!"

Johnson's dad looked out in horror. A kayak surged down the river, a trio of riders dangling onto its side. Without a moment's hesitation, he jumped into the river, swam at them with full speed, then dragged them against the current back to shore.

The first survivor coughed, then looked down at his clothes. "Shit!" he wringed out his shirt, "these were all designer brands!"

"You're telling me," the second padded his body "I lost my favorite ring out there."

"Didn't you have it a second ago?" The third survivor looked around the ground, then up at Johnson and his father, taking a good look at their second-hand clothing and dirty faces. "Oh...now I get it," he said

with a disgusted tone. "That's why you were so eager to 'save' us..." he spat on the ground. "You damn plebians...just a bunch of cowards and thieves."

"Nuh uh!" Johnson shouted, jumping between the survivors and his dad "my Daddy's not a thief!"

The survivor stared at Johnson's dad with a mixture of fury and disgust. "...whatever," a boy pulled out his golden pocket watch and nodded to the others. "We've wasted enough time in this hick town...let's get out of here..." The boys got up and marched onwards, without giving the Johnson's a second glance.

"Daddy," Johnson looked up, "what's a plebian?"

"...its nothing to be ashamed off," he muttered as he watched the rich boys stroll away, "...especially when compared to the alternative..." He let out a violent cough, then looked down at his pocket watch. "Shoot, I'm late!" He ran off, his soggy clothes slowing him down. "Head back home, Andre," he shouted, "we can play after I get back!"

"Promise?"

"Promise!"

Johnson smiled and trekked back home. He spent the rest of the day planning out all of the fun activities he'd get to do when his dad got back home. But, he never did.

After he showed up late to work, the boss gave Johnson's dad the grueling assignment of ringing the massive town bell on his own. This, combined with the running and the swimming, was too much for his worn-out body to bear. He collapsed just moments after clocking out for the day.

The Johnson's couldn't afford a funeral. Hell, they could barely afford to eat. Johnson's mom tried her best to support the rest of the family, but the burden was too much. With tears in her eyes, she sent Johnson and his older brother to work at a tailor shop.

In theory, the two of them were supposed to work as apprentices. In practice, they were slaves, working 12 hour shifts every day under harsh conditions. The job would have been completely unbearable, if it weren't for the kindness of a single customer.

"Hello Andre," Willie Hill said as walked into the store. "How are you?"

"Fine," Johnson replied curtly. "Did you bring it?"

Hill gave a wink. "Of course." He pulled out a book of oratory from his satchel.

As usual, Hill read out speeches from the book while Johnson tended to his clothing. Hill was perfectly aware that Johnson slowed down his sewing in order to prolong his visit, but the old man was more than happy to play along.

These meetings continued onward until Hill's death four years later. As his family mourned his death, they couldn't help but be perplexed by the last item of his will: that his old book of oratory be given be given to the young apprentice in the tailor shop.

The night of Hill's funeral, Johnson stared aimlessly at the ceiling over his bed. "...we should run away," he spoke softly.

“What...?” his brother asked through a yawn.

“Think about it!” Johnson went over to his bed with excitement in his eyes. “We’ve learned everything we can here. We should start over in a new town where we actually get paid for our work.”

“We’re bound to this shop,” his brother spoke sadly, “we still have another 7 years in our contracts.”

“Who cares!” Johnson shouted, then quickly lowered his voice. “I’m sick and tired of these snobby aristocrats profiting off our skilled labor. We can do better. We deserve better.”

His brother bit his lip. “They’re gonna come after us...”

Johnson grinned. “Let ‘em try.”

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Buchanan tried to talk, but only spats of air came from his throat as Johnson continued squeezing his neck.

“What’s that?” Johnson asked, drawing his ear closer to Buchanan’s mouth, “You want me to cut deeper? Well, since you’re the fancy lawyer, I guess you know better than a plebian like myself!” Johnson drew his needle back, but something suddenly wrapped around his ankles. Before he knew it, a sharp pull flung his body back, forcing him to drop Buchanan and his needle.

Johnson looked down to see his ankle trapped in a pair of steel shackles attached to a metal chain. The chain reeled backwards with tremendous speed, putting Johnson on a collision course with the wall of the arena.

Johnson gritted his teeth and thrust his hands into his legs. “Executive Power: Reconstruction!” He tore his feet off, freeing himself from the receding shackles. He briefly caught his breath, then crawled towards his severed feet. Before he could reach them, an iron wall appeared in front of him. He changed course, but two more walls rose beside him, followed by another behind him. He looked up as an iron ceiling extended across the walls, sealing him inside a pitch-black prison cell.

“I said...” Buchanan coughed and rubbed his neck. “I said,” he spoke in a raspy voice, “Executive Power: Dred Scott.”

## Dred Scott

"Wow oh wow!" Thompson shouted, "Buchanan has completely turned the tables by capturing Johnson inside an iron prison!"

Taft carefully examined the solid prison walls, then raised his arm. "Johnson has three minutes to escape this prison," he spoke into his mic. "If he is unable to do so, he will be deemed unable to fight, and Buchanan will be declared the winner."

"Dammit!" Johnson slammed into the walls, but they would not budge. He angrily dug his fingers into his shoulder. "This isn't over..."

"Well..." Polk spoke from the stands, "it looks like this is over."

Jackson nodded. "Johnson's tough, but he isn't strong enough to break those walls."

Pierce smirked. "And it doesn't look like his EP can help him escape either."

"Such a shame," Van Buren clicked her tongue, "this could have been the first win for the Jacksonians." She turned to the rest of them. "If only you all hadn't kicked Buchanan out of our Party when he tried to join." She smiled. "I bet you're all really regretting that decision right about now, aren't you?"

Polk, Pierce, and Jackson reflected on Van Buren's words as they thought back to their interactions with Buchanan.

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"Buchanan?" Polk got up as a nervous man with a Presidential Seal walked into her office, "it's a pleasure to meet you."

"Y-you too..." Buchanan stammered.

"I'm sure Jackson already told you," Polk continued, "but I'll be overseeing your duties as you adjust to the Party." She examined her clipboard. "Since you used to be a lawyer, I thought we should start you off with a diplomatic mission." She walked to a map and pointed at Oregon. "We're finishing up territorial negotiations with some Canadians, and I want you to represent us."

"Oh, I, uh," he spoke weakly, "I don't know if I should..."

"I know it's scary," Polk placed her hand on his back, "but I believe in you."

The next week, Polk flew out to check on Buchanan's progress, only to find that the situation hadn't changed in the slightest.

"Well," Buchanan spoke meekly, "I came out here...at least that deed is done..."

"Sure..." Polk maintained her smile. "Well, how about this," she handed Buchanan a sealed envelope. "Just tell the Canadians that this is our new stance, take it or leave it. We'll go from there."

Buchanan nodded and headed to the next round of negotiations.

Polk waited patiently for Buchanan's return with a smile on her face, but her smile dropped when she saw him coming back with her unopened letter still in his hands. "...why do you still have that?"

"Oh, well," he stammered, "I didn't want to abandon all of the ground I've gained, so I decided to just leave the letter be."

"What...?" she mumbled under her breath. She shook her head and regained her smile. "Okay, I think that's enough diplomatic experience ...let's try combat next."

"C-combat?" he spoke meekly.

She nodded. "Some skirmishes have popped up near Mexico. I want you to lead a battalion down there and conquer as much land as you can."

The next week, Polk once again flew to Buchanan's side, only to find that no progress had been made. "What are you still doing at the Rio Grande?" She asked angrily, "you should have made it past here days ago!"

"Oh, well," he spoke up, "I just didn't think it would be a good idea to press so deeply into enemy territory."

Polk tightened her fists, then calmly released them. "Okay...how about this..." a sword materialized in her hand. "I'll lead the troops; you watch how things are done."

Polk marched her troops south, fighting valiantly against the masses of Mexican soldiers in their way. Before long, Polk managed to force the other side to cough up a peace agreement with highly favorable terms for the Jacksonians.

"Good," Polk wiped a band of sweat from her face, "now we can stop fighting."

"Well, um," Buchanan spoke up, "what if...what if instead of signing the treaty...we just...conquered all of Mexico...?"

Polk stared at him, her mouth agape. "Were you not the one who said to not press into enemy territory?!" She grabbed her brow and breathed deeply. "Sorry...I shouldn't have shouted. Let's...let's just head back."

A few days later, Greg Woodward walked into Polk's office. "Sorry to bother you, ma'am," he spoke quietly, "but it's about my promotion..."

"Ah yes," she looked up, "how are you enjoying the new position?"

"About that," he shuffled his feet, "it seems Buchanan retracted my offer."

"He...what?" she said, her voice seething with rage. She stormed out of her office. "Buchanan!" she shouted as she spotted him across the hallway. "What's the meaning of this business with Woodward?"

"Oh, well," he stuttered, "I just thought Read would make a better fit, so I..."

"Listen!" The normally reserved Polk grabbed him by the collar. "I am responsible for my appointments, and I will not surrender that power to anyone else!" She dropped him to the ground and walked away.

Polk sat alone in the bar, staring into space.

"Having a rough time?" Pierce took the seat next to her. "I heard about your little spat with Buchanan..." he coughed, "...everyone has."

"I just want him gone..." she stared into her drink. "I even tried offering him that desk job he wanted so badly, but you know what he told me?" She glared at Pierce. "That he'd think about it. Seriously, I just don't get it!" She downed her drink. "Buchanan's an able man, but he is completely without judgement!"

"Calm down," he patted her back, "I can see this is getting to you. Why don't you let me take care of him for a bit?"

"...are you sure?"

Pierce gave a handsome grin. "I know how much pressure comes with joining a Party as renowned as the Jacksonians... I'm sure a lot of Buchanan's mistakes are just a result of nerves and excitement." He walked out of the bar. "Don't worry, I'll have him calmed down by the end of the week."

The next week, Polk spotted Pierce sitting in the common room. "How's Buchanan?" she asked cautiously.

"It was wrong for you to try sending him to a desk job..." he turned to her with dark bags under his eyes. "We need to send him much farther than that."

"...what are you saying?" Polk asked nervously.

"We should send him to Britain," he spoke with dead seriousness.

"Now, now..." the two of them turned to see Jackson walking into the room. "I thought you all were better than this." She grabbed them by the shoulders. "Buchanan might be a handful, but he's strong ..." she spun a nearby globe, "with him, we'll have five Presidents under our Party...we'll be unstoppable..." She turned to Polk and Pierce. "But more important than that...Buchanan is a part of our family now. And the Jacksonians never abandon family. Am I understood?"

"Yes ma'am..." the two spoke quietly.

Jackson gave them pats on their backs, nearly toppling them over. "Let me show you two how it's done." Jackson cracked her wrists. "I'll have Buchanan in top shape before you know it."

The next day, Polk and Pierce ran into Jackson. "So...about Buchanan..." Polk asked nervously.

Jackson shook her head. "Britain's too close..." she let out a heavy sigh. "...let's send him to Russia..."

\* \* \* \* \*

Polk, Pierce, and Jackson vigorously shook their heads. "We made the right decision," they spoke emphatically in unison.

Taft looked at his watch. Only thirty seconds remained, and there was no sign of Johnson making any moves. He raised his gavel, but stopped as he heard a faint ring of metal from within prison. Another ring echoed across the stadium, then another. With each ring, the iron wall bent outward. At first the

change was gradual, but by the fifth ring, the wall looked ready to fall over. With a final ring, the wall burst off its hinges, crashing to the ground.

The crowd stared silently as a figure emerged from the prison. Its head was undoubtedly Johnson's, but that was about all they could recognize. Besides his head, the rest of the figure's 'body' consisted of a single, beefy arm attached to Johnson's neck. "Executive Power," the creature spoke, "Reconstruction; One Armed Bandit."

"W-w-what the hell!" Thompson shouted. "Did Buchanan's prison transform Johnson into some sort of monster?"

"No, it's the opposite," Truman spoke with as much calmness as he could muster. "Johnson turned himself into a monster."

"What?"

"Well," Truman continued, "I can only conjecture...but I think while he was imprisoned, Johnson severed his own body and stuffed it into one of his arms...allowing him to quite literally put all of his weight into his punches."

"You're spot on..." Grant mumbled from the stands. "The true terror of Johnson's Executive Power: Reconstruction, is in Johnson's ability to put his body back together in terrible, twisted ways."

On the ground, Johnson cracked his neck, or at least, what remained of it, and then bent his massive elbow. "Get ready twerp," he said, "I'm armed to the teeth!" He pushed off the ground with his hand, launching his body forward.

Buchanan grabbed his hair and frantically looked around as Johnson hopped towards him. Should he surrender? Or try talking things out? Maybe run away? After all, running away was his specialty. Every indecision, every second guess he made, was just his way of running from the consequences of his actions. After all, as long as he didn't make a decision, he couldn't be the one at fault; he couldn't be the one to take the blame.

Buchanan bit his lip. But wasn't he sick and tired of telling himself these excuses over and over again? After all, hadn't he finally decided to enter this tournament in order to change himself? He could change. He would change. He had to change. He would not run away, not this time. Buchanan looked up with a fire in his eyes that he had never known before. He saw Johnson rapidly approaching, his hideous figure become more horrifying with each leap towards him.

Buchanan instantly lost all of his resolve and ran as fast as he could away from Johnson's terrible form. As he ran, a shadow appeared over him. Before he could look, Johnson's palm slammed onto Buchanan, smashing him to the ground.

"I surrender," Buchanan shouted frantically, "I surrender, I surrender, I surrender!"

Johnson clicked his tongue. "Darn...just when we were about to get interesting."

"Taft is calling it folks," Thompson shouted as Taft slammed his gavel, "the winner of the first fight of Block L is the monstrous [Tennessee Tailor], Andre Johnson!"

## The Masked Fighter

“Okay everyone!” Thompson exclaimed. “We’re ready to start the next match. Our first fighter—”

Truman snatched the mic from her hands. “Our first fighter!” he shouted eagerly, “is one of the greatest Presidents of all time! Known for her fiery temper and unparalleled grit, she leads an army of loyal soldiers that she treats like members of her own family! She’s a divisive figure, but whether you love or hate her, you can’t deny you know what she stands for and what she stands against! Let’s hear it for [Old Hickory], Andrea Jackson!!!!”

Jackson walked into the arena wearing a tank top, her massive muscles on full display as she flexed to the audience.

“So Truman...” Thompson spoke as she pried her mic from his hands, “I take it you’re a fan?”

Truman coughed. “Er, yes...” he sat upright and composed himself. “I know I shouldn’t play favorites, but I just can’t help myself!” He looked down as Jackson greeted the crowd, taking in the cheers while blocking out the boos. “She’s everything I strive for as a President.”

“Well,” Thompson continued, “that’ll be a tough act to follow, but I think our second fighter might end up drawing even more attention! They’re a fighter clouded in mystery, whose true identity is completely unknown. I’ve got nothing more to say, so let’s hear it for [The Masked Fighter], JD!”

JD emerged from the Eastern entrance riding atop a camel. They were dressed from head to toe in a gray suit and mask, with a single hole in their mask revealing a deep blue eye on the right side of their face.

Thompson turned to Truman. “Well?” she asked expectantly. “Do you have anything to say about our mystery fighter? Or did you use all your energy on Jackson?”

“Sorry, sorry,” Truman chuckled, “I just find it hard to get excited by this ‘mystery fighter’ when I know exactly who they are.”

Thompson raised an eyebrow. “You do?”

“Yup,” Truman nodded, “all the Presidents know who’s underneath that mask.”

“What?!” Thompson shouted. “How the hell did that happen?”

“You see,” Truman raised a finger. “Presidents, like all Executives, are attuned to a special force known as Executive Energy, which is the fuel source for Powers and Artifacts. Because of this sensitivity, Presidents are able to detect whenever a President experiences Election.”

“I see,” Thompson bemused, “which means you know exactly how many Presidents have come after you?”

“Exactly,” Truman replied. “And, assuming Washington isn’t lying, there’s been a total of 39 Elections from his onwards.” He started counting on his fingers. “Outside of JD, we have 31 Presidents in the tournament, with Cleveland having experienced Election twice. This gives 32 Elections; and combining this with the 3 Presidents organizing the tournament and the 3 that have already passed on, we have a



total of 38 Elections accounted for. With this, only one President remains unaccounted for..." he pointed to JD. "[The Last of the Whigs], Midori Fillmore!"

"Seriously?!" Thompson jumped out of her seat. "You're saying that JD is the one and only, Midori Fillmore?" She sat down and scratched her head. "...who the hell is that?"

Truman chuckled. "I suppose she isn't well known outside us Presidents..." he crossed his arms. "Fillmore tends to keep out of the spotlight, with no interest in the Presidency nor the acquisition of power. Nevertheless, she's a formidable fighter, having been trained by the late Jacqueline Taylor, and being known to possess one of the strongest EP's in the nation, if not the world!"

"Wowzer!" Thompson shouted. "This sounds like it's going to be a real doozie of a match!"

"It might be," Truman smirked, "unless Jackson ends it with a single hit."

"Come on Truman!" Thompson gave a light punch to his shoulder, "enough with the gushing; let's get to the crushing!"

On the ground, Taft eyed the two fighters, then slammed his gavel. "Begin!"

JD immediately charged forward, and Jackson raised her arms as they threw a punch to her chest. But just before the attack landed, JD stopped herself, then crouched down and struck Jackson's undefended stomach.

Jackson coughed, then fell to one knee.

"Holy smokes!" Thompson shouted. "JD managed to deliver a heavy blow to the titan Jackson!"

"A surprisingly good hit," Truman mumbled, "but this is where the match begins."

Thompson raised an inquisitive eyebrow.

"You see," Truman spoke with a snide grin. "Jackson always lets her opponent get the first hit..."

"That was a fine first strike..." Jackson grabbed JD's extended arm. "...now let me give you..." she dug her feet into the ground, "...with the permission of heaven..." she drew back her arm, "...the final strike!" Jackson let loose a heavy punch, smashing the immobilized JD and sending them flying back. They hit the ground, then swiftly flipped their body back up and readied their stance.

"Impressive," Jackson cracked her neck. "Most Presidents keel over after taking one of my punches." She cracked her neck the other way. "But no matter how tough you are, I swear by the eternal..." She readied her stance. "...I'll smash you yet!"

Jackson charged forward and readied an attack. In a flash, JD rotated their body underneath Jackson's arms until they stood behind Jackson, then thrust their elbow into Jackson's exposed back. Jackson turned to face them, but JD rotated in the opposite direction, moving to Jackson's side and jabbing her flank before she could strike. Jackson flung out her leg, delivering a light hit to JD before they backflipped out of range.

"Enough with the dodging!" Jackson thumped her chest. "Face me like a man!"

"I am not a man..." JD adjusted her tie. "I, am a gentleman. Rather than engage in a brutish slugfest..." JD deftly sidestepped as Jackson delivered another punch, then pushed off Jackson's leg before she could throw another strike. "...I'd rather fight with elegance and calm."

Jackson snorted. "Calm doesn't suit me..." she raised her arm, "...I was born for a storm!" Her Presidential Seal shined. "Executive Power: Trail of Tears!"

JD coughed, then clenched their chest as a wave of sensations washed over their body. Pools of sweat dripped through their mask, and their body shivered as their heart pounded in their chest. Throughout their entire life, JD had never felt so...so...powerful!

JD clenched their fists, then let loose a primal roar.

"Yes!" Jackson shouted. "That's what I—" she stopped as JD appeared in front of her, their eye bloodshot and filled with rage. They punched with tremendous force, knocking Jackson back, then immediately followed up with another attack. Jackson quickly struck JD's head to the side, only for them to snap their head back and continue attacking unabated. Jackson took their punches with a grin, then delivered a heavy counterattack, sending JD back.

JD stumbled and started to run, but suddenly stopped themselves. Their body drooped forward and hung like a marionette. Jackson stood still, waiting for them to resume their charge.

"Interesting," a voice came from JD, but their mouth did not move. "Your EP makes your opponent's body go wild and lose control..." Jackson stepped back as a ghostly image of JD emerged from their body and walked towards her. "...fortunately, my spirit remains perfectly poised."

Jackson readied herself as the ghostly figure drew closer. She swiped at the ghostly image, but her hands passed straight through it.

"An illusion...?" Jackson muttered to herself. JD's spirit grinned, then threw their fist at Jackson's stomach. The strike did not pass through, but landed, hard. Jackson stepped back, both from the pain, and from the shock of the specter's ability to touch her. JD's spirit followed up with another strike, then another. Jackson tried grabbing the creature, but again her hands failed to hold anything.

"I see..." Jackson crouched down. "Your spectral form is invincible..." she ran forward, passing through the ghostly JD, "...but by dissolving the connection to your body..." she drew back her arm in front of the drooped over body of JD, "...you leave yourself open to ruin!" She slammed her fist forward with all her might.

But...her blow did not land.

Jackson looked in shock at JD's body, which, despite staying hunched over, had reached up and grab Jackson's fist just before landing. She hastily swung her other fist, but again JD's body grabbed it while maintaining its lifeless stance.

Jackson yelped as the spectral JD kicked her back with full force. Jackson gritted her teeth and pressed forward, but JD's body would not budge. Jackson snarled. The fact that JD could move their unconscious body was surprising, but the fact that they could match her in a contest in strength was downright insulting.

“...I don’t know who the hell you are,” she shouted, “but I’m going to find out!” She brought her head back and slammed it into JD’s skull. As she made contact, she grabbed JD’s mask with her teeth and yanked back, pulling the mask off them. The crowd gasped as JD’s face appeared across every screen throughout the arena.

The right side of JD’s face featured a beautiful snow-white complexion, together with their dazzling blue eye. However, the entire left side of their face was covered by a massive scar, which was partially obscured by a set of long, brown bangs. It was a face that, even at a glance, every American recognized with a mixture of fear and fury.

“...it can’t be...” Truman spoke, his voice quivering, “...they’re...they’re...”

“The ex-leader of the Confederacy!” Thompson shouted. “Jennifer Davis!!!!”

## Time Out

Jackson stood, stunned. “Davis...? Before Jackson could regain her composure, Davis’ spirit leapt forward and chopped the back of her neck, then yanked Jackson’s hair down and aimed her nails for Jackson’s eyes.

“T-Time out!” Taft shouted and quickly slammed his gavel.

Davis snorted as her hand stopped millimeters from Jackson’s face. Davis moved her spirit to her body, which stood tall as her astral form receded back into her physical form.

Truman’s stared unblinkingly at Davis. “This can’t be...” he mumbled to himself, “...this can’t be...”

Thompson hastily grabbed her mic. “Sorry for the interruption folks,” she spoke calmly, “we’ll be back in just a few short minutes! But rest assured...” she bit her lip, “...we know exactly what’s going on here...”

\* \* \* \* \*

“What the hell is going on here!” Thompson jabbed her finger into Truman’s stomach. “Didn’t you say JD was Fillmore?”

“She goddamn should be!” he snapped back. Truman angrily poured himself a glass of bourbon, then downed the drink in one gulp. “Okay...” he wiped his hand across his mouth, “...let’s just calm down and summarize what we know...”

“Well,” Taft began, “we know Davis has a real Presidential Seal due to the Executive Energy flowing from her.”

“But as I already explained,” Truman added, “she couldn’t have gotten her Seal from Election unless she was Fillmore.”

Thompson lit a cigarette. “So she has a real Seal...” she mumbled to herself, “...but didn’t get it through Election...” Thompson paused for a moment, then widened her eyes. “Which means she must have gotten it from some Power or Artifact!”

Truman nodded. “That’s the only possibility.”

“And that would be all we could conclude...” Hayes spoke up, “if she *only* had a Presidential Seal...”

Taft eyed Hayes carefully “...are you suggesting Davis has an Executive Power?”

Hayes nodded. “When we fought in the Civil War, Davis used her Power: Secession to separate her spirit from her body, just like she did in the match...” she leaned back against the wall, “however, back then she wasn’t able to move her body at the same time, and she definitely didn’t have enough strength to rival Jackson in a fight.”

Truman put a hand to his chin. “And while Powers can change and evolve over time...that much of a boost could only come from an EP.”

Hayes nodded in agreement.

“And if she managed to get a freaking Executive Power...” Thompson snapped her fingers, “she must have gotten it from an Executive!”

Taft crossed his arms. "It's highly unlikely she's getting aid from a foreign Executive," he added, "considering she does have a genuine Presidential Seal."

"Which means..." Truman bit his lip, reluctant to even consider the conclusion, let alone say it out loud. He swallowed, then turned solemnly to the other organizers. "...there's a Confederate amongst the Presidents..."

\* \* \* \* \*

A few weeks after Truman announced the Revolutionary War, Davis sat alone in her rented room, quietly reading her Bible.

"Dearie," Mrs. Surratt spoke from outside her door, "there's a guest downstairs saying they know you."

"Is that so..." Davis shut her book and scrunched her face. She didn't know who had tracked her down after all these years, but they probably weren't friendly. "...tell them I'll be down in just a moment."

Davis got up and quickly gathered her belongings, then silently opened her bedroom window and leapt outside. She landed, but before she could rise, a hand grabbed her from behind.

"Running away?"

Davis slowly glanced towards the hand on her shoulder, her muscles tensing as she noticed the unmistakable glow of a Presidential Seal.

Davis gritted her teeth and jerked backwards, loosening the grip of her assailant. She then swiftly rotated her body upwards and dove her nails straight for their neck...but stopped as she recognized the figure before her.

"...you?" Davis withdrew her hand and dropped her stance. "What do you want?"

"I have a plan," the President smiled. "...why don't we talk about it somewhere that's a bit more...private..."

The two walked some distance into the nearby woods.

"Well?" Davis asked expectedly as they made their way into a clearing. "What is it?"

The President leaned against a tree. "You've heard about Truman's tournament?"

"Obviously." She replied curtly.

"I want you to enter it."

Davis snarled. "...is this some kind of sick joke?" She angrily showed the backs of her hands. "You know very well that the world has never recognized me as a President!"

"The world may not recognize you..." the President raised their hand, "...but I do..."

Davis stepped back; her face frozen in shock. Before her very eyes, a second Presidential Seal formed across the President's raised hand.

"How...how did you...?"

"Doesn't matter," they replied. "What's important, is that I'm willing to give you this Seal in exchange for joining me in the tournament." The President extended their hand. "So...are you in?"

Davis smirked. "...very well," she grabbed their outstretched hand without a moment's hesitation, "I'll permit you to join my Confederacy."

The Confederate smiled. "How kind of you..." With that, the Seal on the Confederate's hand evaporated from their hand and reformed on the back of Davis'.

Davis smiled wide; her usually stoic demeanor unable to suppress the pure joy she felt as her lifelong goal finally came to fruition. Then, she fell to the ground.

"Gahh!" she shouted as her body twitched uncontrollably. "What—" she winced in pain, "...what did you do to me?"

"Oh, right," the Confederate released their hand from hers. "One tiny detail I forgot to mention..." The Confederate crossed their arms. "A President's soul lies in that Seal, and they can be a little...rough..."

"When...when will this stop?"

"Don't know," the Confederate shrugged their shoulders. "Could be a minute, could be forever."

"Forever?!" Davis shouted.

"Yeah..." the Confederate scratched their head, "to be honest, you weren't my first choice for this plan..." They gave an innocent grin. "...and the first three I tried this on ended up dying before their symptoms got better."

"And you didn't tell me any of this?!" Davis snarled.

"Please," the Confederate looked her in the eye, "you wouldn't have changed your decision in the slightest." Davis bit her lip, unable to reply. "Anyways," the Confederate walked off, "I'll come back to check in every day or two," they gave a thumbs up. "Good luck!"

The next day, the Confederate walked through the forest carrying a basket of food and water. The others had been in too much pain to eat or drink, but Davis might be able to force something down by the third day or so.

"Davis..." the Confederate spoke as they entered the clearing. "I..." they stopped. Davis stood in front of them, breathing heavily, but without any sign of pain.

"Incredible..." the Confederate dropped their provisions. "Incredible!" They broke into applause. "Honestly, I didn't think that spirit would ever accept you, but you've really pulled through!" The Confederate stopped clapping and lowered their stance. "Now...let's see how you two are in a fight."

Davis stared at them, dumbstruck. "...what...?" she spoke between heavy gasps of air, "...you're kidding...right...?"

The Confederate smirked, then charged forward.

Davis clicked her tongue. "Power: Secession!" She separated her spirit from her body and flew at her opponent. She threw a punch, but the Confederate easily dodged her attack. Davis' fist continued forward, striking a nearby tree and demolishing it in an instant.

"What the..." Davis' spirit looked at her hand, then back to the shattered tree. "...I've never punched that hard before...not even in peak condition..."

"That strength is from your new EP," the Confederate spoke up, "but don't get carried away..." they continued towards Davis' physical form, "...because your body's wide open!"

The Confederate punched forward. But before it could land, Davis' body deflected the attack and delivered a swift counter to their chest, knocking them to the ground. The Confederate shook out their head, stared at Davis' body, then looked back to Davis' spirit.

"I..." Davis' spirit stammered, her mouth agape. "...I didn't do that..."

The Confederate snorted, then broke into hysterical laughter. "Amazing!" They pulled themselves up. "Because your Power leaves your body without a soul, the spirit inside your Seal can take over your body and defend from attacks!"

Davis stared at her body, taking in the full weight of their words. "...which allows for a perfect offensive-defensive strategy..." she looked back at her spectral fist. "...the perfect marriage of our abilities..." Her lips curled into a vicious grin. "Get ready Lincoln..." she looked to the sky. "...this time...you're going down!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"We're getting off course," Taft interjected. "It doesn't matter how Davis got her Seal. The point is she isn't a President, and as such, she should be disqualified from participating in the tournament."

Hayes shook her head. "I respect your adherence to the rules Taft, but booting Davis is a bad idea."

Taft looked to Hayes in shock. "...you seriously want her to stay in the tournament?"

"Trust me..." Hayes raised the stub where her right arm used to be. "No one wants her to leave more than I do..." she lowered her arm. "However, kicking her out now will cause a lot of problems for us."

"Hayes is right," Truman added. "Davis can be argumentative about the smallest of details...if we kick her out now without any real evidence, she'll definitely throw a fit and bring the legitimacy of the entire tournament into question." He scratched his head. "We've barely managed to bring everyone together to try our American experiment...a nasty uproar by Davis could tear the whole thing apart."

"I recognize it would cause issues..." Taft continued, "...but what about the consequences of keeping her in?" He clenched his fists. "If, by some cruel twist of fate, Davis actually managed to win the tournament..." he swallowed, "...what then?" he shouted. "What the hell do we do then?!"

"Don't worry," Truman placed his hand on Taft's shoulder. "Davis won't win the tournament." He grinned widely. "After all...she won't make it past the first round!"

\* \* \* \* \*

“Okay everyone,” Thompson shouted from the commentary box, “after working out some...technical issues...we’re ready to continue the match! But before we begin, let’s give a proper introduction to our masked fighter. She fought against Lincoln’s National Union Party during the Civil War and nearly destroyed the nation in the process! She prides herself as a gentleman of the highest caliber, and she’ll never stop until she achieves her dreams. She’s [The Mephistopheles of the South], Jennifer Davis!”

The crowd booed as the two fighters took their stance. Taft glared at Davis, then looked wearily to Jackson.

“Don’t worry,” Jackson spoke to Taft, her eyes locked on Davis. “I’ve got this.”

Taft let out a heavy sigh. “Let the match...” he raised his gavel, “...resume!”

Davis’ spectral body left her body, but before either her spectral or physical form could move further, Jackson rushed forward with blinding speed, then delivered a heavy blow to Davis’ body, sending it flying across the arena.

Davis turned to her body in shock, then looked back to Jackson.

“Executive Power,” Jackson spoke as she wiped a band of sweat from her forehead, “Trail of Tears.”



## Trail of Tears

"Trail of Tears!" Jackson shouted, further expanding her muscles as sweat poured down her face. Davis' spectral body flew forward, but Jackson shot past her with a single step of her beefy legs.

Jackson kept sprinting until she reached Davis' unconscious body, then threw a heavy punch. Davis raised her arms to block, but the sheer force from Jackson's blow slammed her across the arena. Jackson let out a yell, then continued after Davis.

"So..." Davis spoke as her astral form flew at Jackson. "...you can use your EP to increase your strength...but if it affects you the way it affected me..." she drew back her fists, "...you won't be able to dodge this!"

Jackson suddenly skidded to a halt, then sidestepped out of the way of Davis' attack.

"Were you trying to urge me to some rash action?" Jackson spoke as Davis flew past her. "This...you cannot do!" Jackson leapt forward and delivered a flying knee. Davis's body dodged and followed with a counterattack, only for Jackson to duck under it and deliver a strike of her own.

Polk smirked from the stands "You're half right, Davis..." she spoke coolly. "When Jackson activates Trail of Tears on anyone, including herself, their mind fills with a boiling rage and a conviction to finish their goal regardless of the consequences. The only difference..." she looked on as Jackson continued dodging Davis' attacks while landing heavy counters, "...is that Jackson has complete mastery of her rage."

\* \* \* \* \*

A young Andrea Jackson rode her horse alongside her cousin Tommy.

"You sure they're out here?" she asked.

"Positive," he pointed in front of them. "The scouting party was just past this hill."

The two teenagers rode to the top, then stopped in their tracks.

"That's no scouting party..." Jackson mumbled as she looked upon hundreds of British soldiers camped below them. "...that's a damn army!"

Tommy clenched his fists. "We need to go...now!" He yanked his reigns, forcing his horse into a muddy patch on the ground. The horse stumbled, then bucked Tommy off its saddle, sending him down the hill towards the encampment.

"Hey!" the soldiers shouted from below, "what's going on there?"

Jackson looked in horror as a platoon of British soldiers rushed towards Tommy. She'd never make it time, and there was no way she could fight that many soldiers on her own.

"I'm sorry..."

Jackson whipped her reigns, riding away as fast as possible. She dismounted after half a mile, then sprinted into a nearby thicket to throw the soldiers off her trail. She ran forward, unconcerned where she was going or what she would do next. Then, a young man leapt out in front of her.

"Andrea!" the man shouted as he ran up to hug her.

"Robbie!" Jackson said as she embraced her older brother.

"Hiding from the British?" he asked. Jackson nodded, and Robbie let out a sigh. "Same here..."

Jackson and her brother separated from each other, then examined their surroundings. "...we should stay here for the night," Jackson spoke as the sun set behind them. "We can't risk running into any more soldiers."

Robbie agreed, and with that, the two siblings waited through the night. They continued waiting all through the next day, and they would have waited even longer if it weren't for the growling of their stomachs.

"...why don't we swing by auntie Crawford's house?" Jackson spoke up. "We can grab a bite to eat, then come back here before anyone catches on." Her brother agreed, and the two headed out of the brush. They proceeded cautiously at first, then sped up as the thought of food took over their mind. After what felt like hours, Crawford's house came into view.

"...we should be careful," Jackson spoke as she slowed her pace, "someone could have tipped off the soldiers that we might come here."

"Everything looks fine to me," Robbie spoke hastily as his stomach growled, "let's just go already."

They picked up their pace and reached their aunt's door, but before their hands reached for the handle, a musket fired behind them.

"Turn around," a voice boomed behind them, "...slowly."

The siblings did as they were told, coming face to face with a squadron of British soldiers.

"So, this is where you scamps were headed?" the British officer spoke as he examined the house. "Well, that must mean this home is allied with the rebellion...and you know what that means..." he lit a match and gave a vile grin.

The children watched in horror as the officer burned their aunt's home down to the ground before their very eyes. He cackled, then turned to the siblings.

"Now..." the officer pushed his dirty boot into Jackson's face, "clean my boots."

"Sir," Jackson calmly pushed his shoe out of his face, "I am a prisoner of war, and I demand to be treated as such."

The officer clenched his fist. "...you little brat!" He grabbed his saber and swung at Jackson's head.

Jackson quickly raised her left arm, throwing the blade off its course and causing it to only nick her forehead. The soldier stared Jackson in the eyes, neither of them willing to give an inch. Finally, the soldier scrunched his face.

"Whatever!" he turned to Jackson's brother. "You! You'll clean them."

Robbie turned to his younger sister, then put on the bravest expression he could muster. "Like hell I—" without warning, the soldier struck Robbie's head, knocking him to the ground.

"Insolent Americans..." he pointed his sword at Jackson, who knelt over her wounded brother. "As prisoners of war..." he spoke sarcastically, "...I command you to march."

Jackson reluctantly nodded, then took the first steps of her arduous journey to the enemy's prison. They walked onwards without rest, without water; all while the blood from their wounds trickled down their faces. The siblings made it about half way before Robbie collapsed to the ground.

"What's this?" The soldier pointed his gun at Robbie. "Are you disobeying my orders?"

"No sir!" Jackson spoke quickly. She hoisted her brother onto her back. "We thought you'd prefer it if I carried a heavier burden."

"Don't make assumptions for me, brat," he spoke while suppressing a grin. "But since you're so eager..." he tossed a bag to Jackson, who nearly toppled over as she caught the heavy load. "...why don't you carry our spare ammo too?"

Jackson gritted her teeth. "With pleasure...sir..."

Jackson continued onward, never breaking her stride despite the officer's continued harassment. Then, after 45 miles of grueling marching, the group arrived at the prison. The siblings let out a sigh of relief, but their troubles had only just begun.

The conditions of the prison were awful: no attention was paid to the wounds or to the comfort of the prisoners, and before long, a contamination of small pox spread to the siblings. The two suffered greatly, especially Robbie, who's wounded head had never been treated. Then, in their bleakest hour, a beacon of hope shined through the darkness.

"Please," Lizzie Jackson knelt at the officer's feet, "let my children go."

"Are you as dumb as your kids?" He yanked her head up to face him. "Why the hell would I do that?" Lizzie maintained a calm face and tossed a bag of coins in front of her. The soldier bit his lip, then snatched the purse with a grin. "Take the brats," he spoke as he counted his coin, "I didn't want them anyways."

Lizzie carried Robbie out the prison and carefully placed him atop one of the horses she brought with her.

"Come on Andrea," she spoke to Jackson. "Saddle up."

Jackson looked to the second horse. If she rode, her mother would have to walk all the way back...and her condition looked no better than her brother's.

"...no thanks," Jackson walked forward, "I want to stretch my legs."

"What are you talking about?" she looked Jackson over, "you aren't even wearing any shoes!"

"It's fine," she dug her feet into the ground. "I like having dirt between my toes."

Lizzie looked back to the prison. "...we don't have time to argue." She hastily mounted her horse. "But you better tell me the moment you need a break!"

Jackson nodded, fully resolved to walk the full 45 miles back without forcing her mother to take a step.

The trek started out okay, but partway through their journey, the travelers were struck by the fury of a violent storm. They pressed onwards, eventually making it through the vicious gale and into their home. However, the foul weather had stimulated the disease in the children, causing their illness to rise up and ravage their bodies.

Lizzie dropped everything to nurse her children back to health, and after some touch and go moments, Jackson's condition finally began to improve. But as her body grew stronger, her brother's grew ever weaker. Then, after two hard days of fighting, Robbie breathed his last breath.

"I'm so sorry Andrea," Lizzie spoke through tears. "I couldn't save him, and now..." she blew her nose, "...now your cousins in Charleston are saying they've caught something fierce. I want to help them, but...but you're in so much pain that I..." she stopped talking as Andrea grabbed hold of her hand with her frail fingers.

"Don't worry," Jackson spoke softly, "I've got this."

Lizzie reluctantly nodded her head, then packed her bags for Charleston.

After weeks of care, Lizzie managed to successfully nurse her nephews back to health, only for her to end up catching the dreaded disease herself. She should have stayed put; she knew that. But she also knew her baby girl was waiting for her. So, through gritted teeth, Lizzie marched onward, desperate to make it back home even if it killed her. In the end, the disease was too much for her wary body. She collapsed on the side of the road, her body never to be found.

With that, Jackson, still just a child, lost the last of her family. She would bury her grief deep inside herself; she had no other choice if she wanted to survive on her own. But still, the yearning for a family would never escape her, and she would the rest of her life building a surrogate family through her Party, one that she would protect no matter the cost. And even though she had lost her mother, she never forgot the last words she spoke to her before she left.

"Andrea," she had said, "if I should not see you again, I wish you to remember to avoid quarrels. But if you ever have to vindicate your feelings or defend your honor...keep thy wrath, and keep it calm."

\* \* \* \* \*

Jackson slammed her fist into Davis' body, pushing her back, then sidestepped as Davis' astral form flew at her.

"It's over!" Jackson shouted as she leapt at Davis' body, throwing her heaviest punch of the match.

But...her blow did not land.

Just as in the beginning of the fight, Davis' body caught hold of Jackson's fist and would not budge.

Truman stared dumbstruck. "...that's impossible..." he spoke under his breath.

"What are you talking about?" Thompson asked.

"In terms of raw physical strength," Truman elaborated, "Jackson is the third strongest President after Roosevelt and Taft...but that's only when it comes to raw strength. When she activates her Executive Power on herself, Jackson becomes the undisputed physically strongest President around." Truman bit his thumb. "...even if Davis somehow managed to match Jackson's strength at the start of the match, she shouldn't be able to hold a candle to Jackson in her present form..."

Jackson calmly looked at her hand held by Davis' crushing grip. "Was this supposed to unsettle me?" She snorted, then drew back her other fist. "Not a chance!" She threw a second fist, and again Davis' body caught hold of it. Jackson smirked. "Now block this!" She lurched her head back, then slammed it into Davis' forehead. Jackson immediately followed up with another headbutt, then another, and another.

"Don't forget," Davis' spectral form appeared behind Jackson, "this isn't a one-on-one fight!" Davis chopped the side of Jackson's head, rattling her brain. Jackson turned to Davis, grinned, then continued bashing her head. Davis scrunched her face in a mixture of anguish and fury. "You mindless barbarian!"

Again and again, Jackson slammed her head into Davis', while Davis' spirit stood by delivering blow after blow to Jackson. The two furious warriors looked as if they could go on forever. But then, for just a moment, Jackson stumbled ever so slightly.

Spotting this, Davis's astral form swiftly shot down and swept Jackson's vulnerable legs, bringing her to the ground. Jackson began to rise, but Davis immediately stomped her foot onto Jackson's skull, bringing her back down. She stomped, and stomped, and stomped, until a thick puddle of blood formed underneath Jackson's head.

Davis's spirit panted, then returned to her physical form, nearly falling over as she took control of her body. Her ears were ringing, and it took everything she had to stop her legs from falling over. She walked towards the arena entrance, not bothering to wait for Taft's official call. Everyone could tell this fight was over.

Everyone, except for the Jacksonians and Truman.

"Trying to kill me, Ms. Davis?" Davis stopped in her tracks as a cold hand wrapped around her shoulder. She turned to see Jackson standing tall, blood covering her face and her nose badly broken. "Well..." Jackson snarled, "...I will kill you!"

## Slugfest

"No way..." Davis stammered, "...you can't be standing...not after all that..."

Jackson gave a sinister grin. "Even if you had shot me through the brain..." Jackson pulled back her arm, "...I would still have beaten you!" She smashed her fist into Davis' face, knocking her to the ground. She tried to rise, only for Jackson to knee her in the stomach.

Davis gritted her teeth. "Power: Secess—" she grabbed her hair as a wave of pain rushed through her brain. All those blows to her skull had left her head ringing, and she couldn't concentrate long enough to activate her Power. Before she could try again, Jackson appeared in front of her and kicked her across the arena.

Polk smirked from the stands. "Looks like Jackson's about to finish things off."

"We shouldn't get cocky..." Van Buren spoke cautiously. "After all, even when her entire army had surrendered..." She looked back to the arena. Davis stood, her blue eye shining with rage. "...Davis would not yield..."

Jackson leapt at Davis. Swiftly, Davis ducked under her, struck Jackson's outstretched chin with her palm, then swung her leg out and knocked Jackson to the side.

Davis charged as Jackson rose from the ground. Davis struck Jackson's chest, but Jackson stood her ground and delivered a heavy uppercut, flinging Davis into the air. Jackson jumped up to deliver a follow up strike, but Davis swiftly countered at the same time. They struck simultaneously, the combined force flinging each other to opposite sides of the arena. They immediately rose from the ground and sprinted forward, their bodies meeting in the center of the arena.

Jackson threw a fist, which Davis easily dodged before throwing her own punch. Jackson endured the strike, then delivered a counter to Davis' chest. Davis gritted her teeth and took the blow before striking right back.

Again and again the two exchanged blows. By this point, neither fighter was even trying to dodge each other's attacks. All they could do was focus on landing the next hit.

"Amazing!" Thompson shouted, "I thought the two were at their limit before, but they just keep going!"

"But..." Truman spoke hesitantly, "...they're only mortal...sooner or later, one of them must fall."

The grueling slugfest continued onwards with the battered fighters refusing to show the slightest sign of weakness. Then, after an agonizingly long minute of grueling torment, the fight came to a sudden close.

It started with Jackson delivering yet another blow to Davis' head. It wasn't any different from the dozens she had thrown before, but it was the straw that broke the camel's back. No matter how hard Davis clung to the idea of victory, she could no longer remain conscious, and her body fell to the ground.

As this happened, Jackson achieved her goal of knocking out Davis. With this accomplished, Trail of Tears automatically deactivated, returning Jackson's body back to its unenhanced form.

Then, in that small, critical window, the President inside Davis' Seal instinctively took over her unconscious body, swinging itself around and delivering a heavy roundhouse kick to the now vulnerable Jackson, smashing her to the ground.

The crowd erupted in screams as Davis' body steadied itself and Taft rushed to Jackson side. It took only a moment to verify she had lost consciousness. Taft rose and looked suspiciously towards Davis' drooping frame. He extended a hand to her, but her body flicked it out of the way. Taft bit his lip. It seemed like she was conscious after all.

With a heavy heart, Taft slammed his gavel to the floor. "The winner...the winner..." he swallowed hard. "...the winner...is [The Mephistopheles of the South]...Jennifer Davis..."

The crowd let out an uproar of boos, jeers, and shouts of foul play. But amidst all their cries, not a soul in the audience suspected for a moment that Davis was no longer conscious as her body shuffled itself out of the arena.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well..." Thompson snarled as she threw her mic to the ground, "looks like Jackson didn't win after all..."

Truman clenched his fist, then calmly grabbed his walkie talkie. "Hayes, double the number of agents tailing Davis. While you're at it, get your best men to comb through all of the video footage we have of her."

"You want us to figure out who her Confederate is?" Hayes asked.

"Exactly," Truman replied. "If we can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that someone gave her that Seal, then we can kick her out while maintaining our credibility."

"Roger."

They cut the call, and Truman scrunched his forehead. He looked up and stared across the Coliseum. Someone out there was trying to undermine their entire operation...but who?

From the stands, the Confederate watched carefully as Truman blindly scanned the crowd of spectators. For a moment, Truman's eyes locked onto theirs, but quickly continued onwards without any signs of change. They let out a sigh of relief and turned their attention back to the bracket on display. For the moment, it looked like they were in the clear. All they had to do now was focus on winning their next fight...

## Silent

"Well," Thompson spoke reluctantly, "that last fight was definitely...something. Anyways..." she grinned, regaining her composure. "Let's keep the ball rolling with the next match! Our first fighter is a gangster known for his lavish lifestyle and secretive nature. He'll do whatever it takes to win, while also making sure to keep his own hands clean. He's [The Gentleman Boss], Charles Arthur!"

Two lines of mobsters walked out to the arena. They turned and bowed as four gangsters carried Arthur sitting atop a gilded chair into the arena. He was a large man, dressed in a fine suit with a mustache and mutton chops covering his face. He grinned and waved with his gloveless right hand, showing a dazzling set of rings together with his Presidential Seal. His men gently placed his chair, saluted, then exited the arena.

"And for his opponent," Thompson continued, "we have a woman who won't talk the talk, but who definitely walks the walk! She's the second in command of The Ohio Gang; give it up for [Silent Cal], Callie Coolidge!"

Coolidge walked into the stadium. She wore a plain robe, together with a mask covering the bottom half of her face. She held a bo staff in her hands, with a starling perched on its tip.

"Hey girly," Arthur snapped his fingers and pointed at Coolidge, "how about we make things a bit more...interesting?" He tapped his chair with his index finger. "I'll bet my finest piece of jewelry that I can beat you without leaving my chair." He eyed Coolidge, who remained nonplussed. "...fair enough," Arthur smirked and adjusted his tie, "it would have been my win anyways."

"Hey Truman," Thompson spoke up, "I gotta ask...does Coolidge ever talk?"

"On rare occasions," he replied, "but when she does talk, people listen. For example, she was the one who gave Rushmore its name."

"Really?" Thompson exclaimed.

Truman nodded. "After Roosevelt's Election, the Presidents currently known as Rushmore engaged in a monumental battle in the Black Hills, nearly demolishing Mt. Rushmore in the process. Afterwards, Coolidge acknowledged these Presidents as the pinnacle of our nation, and ever since, we've referred to these four as Rushmore."

"Fascinating!" Thompson exclaimed. "And what can you tell us about Arthur?"

Truman scratched his head. "Not much, I'm afraid...all I can say with certainty is that he's a very private man."

"Come on Truman," Thompson rebuffed, "you've gotta give us a little more than that."

"Well...I don't like to spread rumors..." he brought his hands together, "...but some say that he was the one who orchestrated the death of his previous boss, President Julia S. Garfield."

A flash of anger shot across Arthur's face, then just as quickly reverted back to his usual jovial expression.



“Ooh,” Thompson cooed, “that’s spicy! Alright, now I’m getting hyped for this match, so let’s get things started already!!”

Taft slammed his gavel. “Begin!”

Arthur promptly raised his hand. “Executive Power,” he snapped his fingers, “Spoils System.”

Dozens of rotten arms sprang from the ground around Coolidge. She stepped back as a horde of corpses dug themselves out of the earth, their lifeless eyes fixed on her.

The closest zombie stumbled forwards and swung its arm at Coolidge. She stepped to the side, its claws just missing her chin, then struck its head with her staff, smashing its head clean off its neck. Undeterred, the headless zombie lashed out with its other arm. Again, Coolidge barely dodged the attack, then sidestepped as another tried biting from behind.

Coolidge stepped towards Arthur, but stopped as two more zombies emerged in front of her. A larger zombie rushed her side and slashed forward. She ducked, its large hand passing through her hair, then swept the creature’s legs, bringing it to the ground. She quickly rolled back as the two zombies in front came forward, barely dodging their attacks.

Harding chuckled from the stands. “Everyone must be thinking that Coolidge is on the brink of defeat with all those close misses.”

“But in reality...” Hoover added, “she prides herself in using the least amount of energy needed to dodge and attack...” She looked to Arthur. “...which is the exact opposite of Arthur’s style of overwhelming with excessive force.”

“And as we both know...” Harding smirked, “...that’s the worst possible strategy to use against Coolidge.”

Arthur wiped a band of sweat from his forehead. “What the...” He was dumbstruck. He hadn’t moved a millimeter since the fight began, but his face was pale, and he felt as if he was about to keel over. “...what the hell did you do to me?”

Coolidge gave Arthur an apathetic look. “Executive Power,” she spoke softly, “Budget Cuts.”

## Gangster

Coolidge swung her staff, destroying two zombies with one strike, then ran at Arthur. He raised his arm. "Spoils System!" Three zombies appeared in front of Coolidge, forcing her back. Arthur smirked, then coughed and grabbed his chest.

Harding crossed her arms. "Looks like Arthur's finally feeling Coolidge's Executive Power: Budget Cuts."

Hoover nodded. "An ability that greatly enhances the energy used by any 'wasteful' action. It's not flashy or exciting...but it's damn effective."

"And not taxing on Coolidge at all," Harding added, "since she's so efficient with her movement."

"Yup," Hoover snorted. "Someone like Arthur doesn't stand a chance against her."

"Well..." Harding spoke reluctantly, "he doesn't stand a chance in a *fair* fight at least..." she stared down at Arthur. "...but that man is known for his bad reputation..."

\* \* \* \* \*

Many years ago, Roxanne Conkling trotted through town. Everyone stared at her: some to take in her blindingly colorful outfit, while other gawked at her half human, half mechanical body.

"Look at that dandy..." a woman muttered across the street.

"She's a real bird..." a girl next to her chuckled, "just look at that turkey gobbler strut!"

Conkling turned, her cybernetic eye glowing red. The women looked down, pretending to chat about something else. "Humans..." Conkling mumbled to herself, "...this is why I prefer machines." She turned, dipping out of the crowd and into a nearby alleyway, instantly regaining a sense of calm. She walked onwards, until a voice shouted at her from behind.

"Drop your wallet!"

Conkling continued without bothering to look back. A hand grabbed her from behind. "I said..." Conkling cringed, then flung her arms, slamming the assailant into the wall.

"Don't...touch me..." Conkling snarled. She adjusted her bright yellow vest, then resumed her stroll.

"Are your robot ears defective or something?"

Conkling stopped, then turned. The mugger stood hunched over in pain, but with an unmistakable fire in his eyes. "I said," spoke a young Charles Arthur, "to drop your wallet."

"...that's some tenacity..." she spoke while eyeing Arthur, "...especially considering you aren't even carrying a weapon."

"I don't wanna hurt nobody," he replied, "but I need the money, and it looks like you've got more than enough to spare."

She eyed him. "How old are you?"

"What's it matter to you?" Arthur barked back. "You gonna turn me in for not being old enough to mug people?"

"Answer the question." She spoke sternly.

"...16," he spoke reluctantly, "17 come October."

"Huh..." Conkling muttered to herself, "...exactly the same age as me..." She stood in front of him. "How are you with people?"

Arthur gave a puzzled expression. "...oh, I'm fantastic with people." he spoke sarcastically. "That's why I got into this job, actually, for the human element, you know?"

"Well, you have a sense of humor...if nothing else." Conkling held out a folded bank note. "I want to hire you," she spoke. "No...I want you to join me."

Arthur looked at her funny. "...do you always hire the people trying to rob you..." he snatched the bill from her hands, "or is this just my lucky day?"

"I have great ambitions," Conkling spoke, ignoring his quip, "but I can't accomplish my dreams alone. I need someone who can connect with people while I handle things from the shadows."

"...and what are these great ambitions?" Arthur asked.

Conkling's sour expression morphed into a smile. "I'm going to transform this twisted city and turn it into a beacon of hope!" Her speech quickened as her voice filled with excitement. "We'll give jobs to the needy! Help immigrants find homes! End segregation on public transport! In a word..." she grabbed Arthur by his shoulders. "I want us to become heroes...no," she corrected herself, "I want us to become...super heroes!"

"Super heroes, huh?" Arthur gave a shy grin. He looked down, then back at Conkling. "Alright..." he snapped his fingers and pointed at Conkling. "Let's be super heroes."

A year later, Arthur strode through the city with two gangsters by his side.

"Arthur!" A woman ran to him and grabbed his hands. "I can't thank you enough for helping my husband find that new job! I don't know what we would have done without you."

"My pleasure," he grinned, "just remember, you can always count on us Stalwarts to help in times of need."

"Hey Arthur!" a man shouted from across the street. "That was a fantastic party last night! Can't wait for the next one."

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself!" Arthur shouted back and patted his gut, "but I think I enjoyed myself a bit too much at the sushi bar!" They all broke into laughter. Arthur glanced at his golden watch. "I hate to run, but we've still got one more job left for today."

"Of course," the woman gave his hands one final squeeze. "Please keep up the good work."

"Oh don't worry," Arthur gave a warm smile, "we will."

Arthur waved goodbye and continued onward with his gangsters, the group arriving at their destination as the sun set beneath the sky. Arthur grabbed the doorknob to the house and tried to turn it.

“Locked.”

Arthur stepped back as one of the gangsters moved forward and artfully picked the lock. They entered the home, quietly making their way to the top floor. They reached the bedroom and slowly creaked the door open, spotting a sickly man sleeping on his bed. Arthur gently put his hand on the man’s shoulder. “Mr. Morton?” he spoke softly.

The man groggily wriggled himself awake. “Wha...” his eyes glazed over his guests. “Who...” his eyes focused on Arthur. “Oh god!” He shot his body back in shock.

“Calm down,” Arthur smiled. “We heard you weren’t feeling well, so we wanted to stop by and check in...”

Morton tried scurrying out of bed, but one of the gangsters forced him back down.

“Why so jumpy?” Arthur asked with an innocent smile. “This is just a friendly visit. It has notttthing to do with you accepting that little offer from the Half-Breeds.”

“Please...Arthur...” Morton stammered. “Have mercy...I was just trying to do what’s best for my family.”

“Ohhh,” Arthur exclaimed, “is that what happened?” He smiled warmly. “So, what you’re saying is, that everything we’ve done for your family, just means nothing to you. Is that right?”

“That’s not...” Morton started to speak, but Arthur snapped his fingers, silencing the room.

Arthur breathed deeply. “Well, what’s done is done.” He looked to Morton. “All we can do now is move forward...for better, or for worse...” he smiled. “Anyways, since you’re under the weather, Conkling thought it might be a good idea to give you some...medicine...” he nodded, and the second gangster pulled out a sinister concoction from his bag.

“No...” Morton screamed, “No!” He flailed his body, but the first gangster held him firm as the second forced the vile liquid down his throat.

“See?” Arthur spoke as Morton screeched and contorted pain. “You’re looking livelier already! And since you’re feeling so energetic, why don’t we all take a nice long walk down to the morgue...”

Morton raised what little resistance he could muster as the gangsters tied and gagged him before carrying him out of the building. The group barely made it two steps out of the house before a voice called out from behind.

“What’s going on here?” A police officer made his way forward.

The two gangsters exchanged nervous glances, while Morton broke into tears of joy. Arthur smiled.

“My oh my,” Arthur turned and faced the cop. “Is that Officer Smith?”

The cop froze. “...yes sir...” he mumbled.

“What a happy coincidence!” Arthur exclaimed. “How’s little Jenny doing these days?”

“...good...” the cop spoke quietly, shifting his gaze from Arthur to Morton, beads of sweat dripping down his face. “...she’s doing good...”

“Fantastic!” Arthur patted his shoulder. “Now, I can tell you’re working yourself way too hard these days. Why don’t you go ahead and take the rest of the night off. I think that would be best, you know,” he smiled innocently. “...for your health.”

The cop bit his lip. “...yes sir,” he spoke while staring directly at Morton, his eyes unable to look away. “...that sounds...good...”

“Glad you agree. And while you’re at it,” Arthur shoved a wad of bills into the officer’s hand, “why don’t you go and buy your wife something pretty? She deserves it.”

“Thank you...” he took one more look at Morton, his eyes pleading with him not to go. “...and sorry...” he shuffled away; his eyes glued to the ground.

“And if your boss complains about you playing hooky,” Arthur shouted after him, “just tell him you’re doing a favor for your old pal, Charles Arthur!”

\* \* \* \* \*

In the present, Arthur coughed violently, then slumped forward in his chair, Budget Cuts continuing to eat away at his energy.

“Wow,” Thompson shouted, “it looks like Arthur’s about to collapse! I didn’t think sitting in his chair would be so tiring for him!” The crowd chuckled at her remarks.

Arthur growled. That wench Coolidge was turning him into a laughing stock. She’d pay for this. Big time. He snapped his fingers. “Spoils System!”

Coolidge sensed a zombie behind her and swung her staff to meet it. She stopped just before smashing its head and stared, dumbstruck. This zombie was different from the others. Its body was smaller, and its flesh was less rotten. Unmistakably, it was the corpse of a young boy, one with pale blue eyes and sandy red hair...a boy just like the son she had lost so many years ago.

“Ma....ma....” the zombie spoke with a scratchy voice. Coolidge stood petrified, her body overflowing with a wave of conflicting emotions. In that instant, two zombies rose behind her and bit the back of her legs.

She winced, then jumped away from the crowd of zombies. As she landed, a jolt of pain rushed through her legs. She didn’t have time to ponder this sensation as a horde of zombies closed in, with the child zombie leading the pack.

Coolidge squeezed her staff. It was a trick. An awful, terrible trick. She knew that, and she knew what she had to do.

With a tear in her eye, she brought back her weapon, then swung forward with all her might. The zombie boy’s head burst open, splattering its brains across her clothing. She immediately followed up with a blow to its body, crushing it and pushing back the line of zombies behind him.

Coolidge panted, then looked straight at Arthur, her calm demeanor replaced with an expression of pure rage.

“What’s wrong?” Arthur smirked while innocently putting his hand to his cheek. “I was only *kidding* around...”

## Corruption

Pierce's eyes burned with anger. "Using the corpse of Coolidge's deceased child as a distraction...?" He squeezed the railing in front of him, crushing it with ease. "I'll kill him...I'll kill him!"

"Calm yourself," Polk placed a hand on his back. "Getting angry won't do any good."

"...I know..." he said, loosening his grip. "...I know that but...but that's just too cruel!"

"I agree..." Polk bit her lip, "...and I can only imagine what's going through Coolidge's mind right now..."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hurry up mama!" Calum Coolidge shouted as he ran through the Vermont forest. "I wanna find some bunnies!"

Coolidge jogged behind her son. "Junior..." she spoke while eyeing his bare feet, "...you sure you don't want to wear any shoes?"

"Nope," he shouted back.

Coolidge shrugged and continued onward. After all, it wasn't her place to try and regulate his life.

The two ran forward for a little longer before Calum stumbled over himself, then fell to the ground and broke into tears.

"There, there," Coolidge picked him up. "Tell mama where it hurts." Still sobbing, the boy pointed to his feet. Coolidge looked down, then gasped. A hideous splinter dug itself into the boy's big toe. She yanked the shard, invoking even louder wails from her son. "Let's get this bandaged," Coolidge spoke calmly. "I'm sure it'll feel better soon."

A few days passed, and although Calum's toe itself began to look alright, it was clear that some sort of poison had spread through his system. Coolidge went out and gathered the best clinicians she could muster, ultimately finding five doctors and two nurses to keep constant vigilance over her boy. However, his symptoms did not dampen.

Desperate to do something, Coolidge went back to the forest and caught a small, snow-white rabbit. She took the little animal in her arms and showed it to Calum in his sick room.

"Look Junior," she placed the animal in his arms, "I found you a bunny. What do you want to name it?"

"Hmm..." the boy pondered as he stroked his hands through its soft fur. "Well since he's a bunny," he reasoned, "his name should start with 'Bu'." He bit his lips, then grinned widely. "Budget Bureau!"

Coolidge chuckled. "That's an excellent name!"

Encouraged by her success, Coolidge rushed back and brought him a new animal, and then another. She would have carried him the whole of the forest, a handful at a time, if it would have done any good. But before long, not even these gifts were enough to bring a smile to his face.

"Mama..." the boy spoke weakly, putting down the starling his mother handed him. "...can't you make me well...?"

"I'm sorry..." Coolidge clenched her fists. "I can not."

Calum said nothing in response and stared outside his window. The next day, he shut his eyes for the last time.

"I just can't believe it has happened..." Coolidge spoke softly, "I can't believe it has happened."

After Calum's death, Coolidge went through her life as if in a dream, wandering aimlessly from place to place while barely keeping herself together. One day, she found herself drifting down the streets of Chicago. In her daze, she bumped into a policeman walking past her.

"Hey!" the officer grabbed her by the collar. "What was that for?"

Coolidge said nothing. The cop gritted his teeth and slapped her hard across the face. She stared back, completely unphased by the cop's strike. In the next instance, Coolidge nonchalantly slammed the officer to the ground.

"Woah!" a skinny man ran up to her. "That was amazing!" He turned to the young woman following behind him. "Harding, I think we found your new second in command!"

A young Wanda Harding raised an eyebrow. "Didn't we decide on Lenroot?"

"We didn't decide that," the man corrected, "those fat cats trying to pull the strings did. But take a look at her," he gestured to Coolidge. "I can already tell she's got a fine spirit and a conservative trend of thought."

Harding rubbed her head. "I don't know McCamant..."

"Come on," he jabbed Harding's side, "Have some faith!"

Harding looked Coolidge over. "Obviously you have no reason to trust us..." she spoke up, "but my name is Harding. My goal is to bring our nation back...back to a time when our nation reigned supreme, when people could proudly declare themselves to be patriots. I'm willing to sacrifice my entire being in order to reclaim the glorious days of our past," she held out her hand, "are you?"

Coolidge stared at Harding, her eyes wide. That was it. It was all so clear now. The past. That's what she had been seeking all this time. Of course she would sacrifice herself for that. She would sacrifice anything for that. She grabbed Harding's hand.

"Okay..." Coolidge spoke for the first time after her son's death. "I'm in."

\* \* \* \* \*

After years of working with the The Ohio Gang, Coolidge had slowly managed to bury away her grief deep within herself. But now, with this single, hideous action by Arthur, all of that grief rose up inside her in the form of a terrible, unyielding rage.

Coolidge charged forward, smashing every zombie in reach with all of the power her body could muster. A huge zombie appeared in front of her. She spun her staff and unleashed a fury of blows, knocking the creature back and forth. She stepped forward, delivering a heavy swing and smashing its body to smithereens.



She breathed deeply, then fell to the ground.

“Oh god!” Thompson shouted, “what’s happened to Coolidge’s legs?”

Coolidge looked down. Her legs were terribly swollen, and her skin took on a sickening green color around where the zombies had bitten her.

“Oh right,” Arthur snapped his fingers. “Forgot to mention in, but my soldiers carry a little disease called Corruption in their teeth and claws. Now that the disease has spread through your legs...” he grinned as a horde of zombies encircled Coolidge, “you won’t be running away anymore!”

Coolidge bit her lip. “It’s not that I won’t run...” she spoke for the first time in the entire match. “I choose not to run...”

Arthur scrunched his face. “The hell does that mean?”

Ignoring him, Coolidge slowly lifted her body with the support of her staff, looking around as the zombies closed in. She breathed in, out, then shut her eyes as her body fell forward. Just before landing, Coolidge struck the ground with her staff, pivoting her body about the tip of her weapon and moving herself out of the way as a zombie lunged at her. She then fell backwards, again striking the ground with her staff and pivoting out of the way of another attack.

A scowl drew across Arthur’s face. “Surround her!” he barked at his zombies. “Don’t give her a single gap for her to swerve through!”

Coolidge paused to catch her breath as the remaining zombies formed a tight block around her. She cracked her neck, then once again fell forward and struck down with her pole. However, she did not use her momentum to move to the side this time. Instead, she pushed down on her staff, lifting her body into the air. She pressed a free hand on one of the zombie’s heads and pushed forward, completing her pole vault over the horde. She landed, then immediately swiveled forward with tremendous speed

“What?!” Arthur gripped the arm of his chair as he looked desperately around the arena. Because he had clumped all his zombies together, there wasn’t anything standing in between him and Coolidge. More than that, he was clearly far too tired to summon anything else. Everyone could see that he was out of options. “...or at least...” Arthur spoke with a grin as Coolidge reached his side, “...that’s what you’re probably thinking.”

The ground beneath the two fighters suddenly shook violently, throwing the unstable Coolidge to the ground. At the same time, a massive rotten elephant rose from the ground, with a smug Arthur sitting on his throne atop the creature’s back. Coolidge stared upward at the beast with a mixture of awe and fear.

“Hey,” Arthur snapped his fingers, “I never said I could only summon *human* zombies.”

Coolidge quickly regained her composure and reached out for her staff, but the elephant’s foot smashed down onto her arm.

“I got two words for you,” Arthur spoke as the elephant’s foot dug in deeper. “You. Lose.”

Coolidge winced and looked out to see the horde of zombies rushing to her. She gritted her teeth and slammed her fist to the ground.

“...I surrender...” she spoke softly.

“The fight is over!” Taft slammed his gavel. “The winner of the match is [The Gentleman Boss], Charles Arthur!”

The zombie elephant lifted Arthur’s chair off its back and placed him down as its body disintegrated into the air. An army of his gangsters swarmed the field, whooping and hollering as they carried their boss out of the arena.

Arthur maintained a jovial expression on the outside, but he felt sick to his stomach. Part of it was from Budget Cuts, but more than that, it was that dirty move he used against Coolidge. He hadn’t planned to do something like that. Coolidge had just gotten him so worked up that, instinctively, he retaliated in the worst possible way he could imagine.

“It’s alright,” he spoke to himself, “I’ll do better next time...” he pulled out a locket containing the picture of a woman. “I promise you...I will do better...”