

The Man in the Arena

Revision 1

By

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EXT. DESERTED NEW YORK CITY STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

We stare down the barrel of a small HAND GUN.

GEORGE CARVER, 16, points it at us calmly. A fierce battle has aged his innocent face. Tattered his clothes. Marred his skin. Matted his hair. Yet sympathy peeks through his shiner as he apologizes:

GEORGE (V.O.)
I'm sorry. It's just politics.

He pulls the trigger as we...

FADE TO BLACK

INT. CARVER LIVING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

FRAMED VIETNAM PROTEST POSTERS. BRIGHT TEXTILES. The Carvers' apartment keeps the 70's alive.

GEORGE'S BACKPACK spills its contents into the otherwise clean room.

An AMERICAN GOVERNMENT TEXTBOOK covers George's face as he reclines on the sofa with his feet up. We hear the front door open. George's mom, BETTY, calls out:

BETTY (O.S)
Georgie, are you home?

GEORGE
Yes.

Betty sweeps into the room, looking like a member of the Weather Underground who was forced to go corporate.

BETTY (O.S)
How was your first day at Unity?

GEORGE
Good. I made a friend. His name is James.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

George's POV: JAMES, 16, holds a tattered copy of LORD OF THE FLIES. His glasses and open flannel make him stand out against the preppy backdrop of Unity.

CLANG. George's locker slams over the shuffling of other students.

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE

Didn't you read that in middle school?

JAMES

Yeah. So?

GEORGE

Why are you carrying it?

JAMES

I like it. It gives me perspective.

INT. CARVER LIVING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

We can see Betty making tea in the kitchen. George stares in his textbook.

GEORGE

You'd like him.

BETTY

That's great, sunshine.

GEORGE

I've also decided to run for student government.

INT. G.O. OFFICE - DAY

FRANKLIN, the soul of a Waspy older politician in the body of a 17 year old. He proudly heads a plastic conference table surrounded by eager students. Typical school portraits of past presidents cover the wall behind him.

Next to him, the faculty adviser, MS. ADAMS, consults her watch impatiently. Scribbles on her clipboard.

FRANKLIN

As your G.O. President,

Franklin raps a WOODEN Mallet against the table. The faculty adviser promptly gathers her things.

FRANKLIN

I adjourn this meeting.

FACULTY ADVISER

Thank you, Franklin. Maybe our next president won't be so long winded.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKLIN

Always a delight, Ms. Adams.

George and James sit by the door. Along with other Freshmen, they pack their belongings. An OLDER STUDENT closes the door after Ms. Adams. Nods at Franklin.

Franklin stands intimidatingly over the table.

FRANKLIN (CONT.)

Alright, you plebeians. Stop your packing.

They all freeze.

FRANKLIN (CONT.)

Enough of that farce.

Franklin pulls a HANDGUN from his pocket, laying it on the table.

FRANKLIN (CONT.)

This is how we campaign at Unity.

INT. CARVER LIVING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

George looks up from his textbook at his mom as she heats water.

BETTY

I'm sure you'll do wonderfully.

GEORGE

Can I borrow 50\$?

BETTY

What for?

GEORGE

Campaign supplies.

INT. G.O. OFFICE - DAY

The HANDGUN lies on the table next to Franklins hands. George, James, and the other freshmen stare at it.

GEORGE

How does it work?

(CONTINUED)

FRANKLIN
Excellent question.

Franklin paces the front of the room, stroking the gun.

FRANKLIN (CONT.)
It works like any election. You
campaign. You kiss babies. It
starts with the primary and ends
with the election. But instead of
voting...

Franklin points the gun at George. James glances to George
nervously.

FRANKLIN (CONT.)
We duel.

Franklin shoots. The George winces, preparing for impact.

A harmless RED TRACER sticks to his arm. Franklin and other
upperclassmen snicker.

FRANKLIN (CONT.)
And *that* is how you lose.

INT. CARVER LIVING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Betty stands with her pot of tea, thinking. George watches
her expectantly.

BETTY
Well, I don't see why not.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

CAMPAIGN POSTERS paint the lockers. The walls. Trophy cases.
Litter the ground. All kinds of candidates including George
and Franklin.

One of GEORGE'S CAMPAIGN POSTERS litters the ground. JAMES'S
HAND picks it up. VOTE GEORGE CARVER AND CARVE A PATH FOR
THE FUTURE OF UNITY.

JAMES
You could probably use a better
campaign slogan.

George takes the poster from James.

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE

It's no worse than any of the
others.

FRANKLIN'S POSTER hangs on locker. THERE'S ONLY ONE
PRESIDENT FOR UNITY. LET'S BE FRANK. George pulls it down to
hang his own.

GEORGE (CONT.)

But it doesn't matter. Only the
primary does.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - AFTERNOON

Forty candidates stand tensely in an empty, dilapidated
courtyard wearing business casual clothing. They eye each
other. No one gets too close. Only one candidate doesn't
look nervous.

Franklin. ABIGAIL, his girlfriend, caters to him. Brushes
his shirt. Straightens his tie.

George and James stand closely together. James whispers to
George.

JAMES

So how many people survive this?

GEORGE

Only five.

JAMES

Oh god.

GEORGE

You'll be great. Do you have your
tracer gun and ammunition?

JAMES

Yeah, but I don't think I can shoot
anyone, George. I don't have it in
me.

GEORGE

It doesn't even hurt, James.

JAMES

But it's a very violent action. If
I win I'm changing this whole
thing.

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE
Man up, Academic Integrity's
coming.

JAMES
This is just what William Golding
warned me about.

A SCRAWNY STUDENT dressed in an oversized graduation robe
strides to the edge of the crowd.

He unravels a scroll that falls to the ground. Peers at the
silent crowd. Clears his throat.

SCRAWNY STUDENT
As the head of Academic
Integrity...

Upperclassmen crouch to get ready. Underclassmen follow
suit.

SCRAWNY STUDENT (CONT.)
and the Student Judiciary
Committee...

He smugly juices the moment.

SCRAWNY STUDENT (CONT.)
Welcome to the primary.

The scrawny boy rips the scroll down the middle as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - LATER

The majority of the candidates line up against the wall.
Their dress clothes battered. RED TRACERS stand out like
bullet wounds. Some sit, broken. Some hold back sniffles.

Franklin shakes hands with two surviving candidates, MARTHA
and THOMAS. Franklin proudly dabs his bleeding nose. Martha
and Thomas both have scuffed knees and ripped suits.

George looks around the courtyard, dirty, but particularly
unscathed.

GEORGE
James? James!

James pokes his head over the roof of the playground's
public bathroom. A giant scratch cuts the side of his face.
He carefully holds his place in Lord of the Flies.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
Is it over?

GEORGE
(pleased)
Yes, you nut.

JAMES
That was a massacre!

GEORGE
And you're a survivor!

JAMES
I suppose I am, aren't I?

GEORGE
What happened to your face?

JAMES
The tree to get up here has a lot
of thorns. It's not the first time.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - LATER

George and James walk home, exhausted. James carries Lord of
the Flies. George kicks a rock, thinking.

JAMES
So how many people did you get?

GEORGE
Probably five or six. They went
down little too easy, really.

JAMES
Wow, you're a natural.

GEORGE
I guess you could say that.

JAMES
I've always thought: If we make it
to the top...we should really
change-

GEORGE
I need to ask you a favor, James.

George stops abruptly and puts his hands on James's
shoulders.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
What is it, George?

GEORGE
I need you to punch me.

JAMES
Me, punch you?

GEORGE
Yes. Right in the eye.

JAMES
I don't think I've ever punched
anything, George.

GEORGE
It'll be a favor, James.

JAMES
Why would you want that?

GEORGE
You'll see.

JAMES
Don't want to.

GEORGE
Please.

James clenches his hand in a fist, pantamiming hitting
George.

JAMES
Definitely can't.

George grabs Animal Farm, preparing to rip the spine.

GEORGE
Do it or I'll rip Animal Farm.

JAMES
You wouldn't.

GEORGE
I would.

JAMES
Fine!

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE

Great!

JAMES'S FIST comes toward us as we...

CUT TO BLACK

INT. CARVER KITCHEN - NIGHT

OZ and Betty Carver stand in the kitchen. Frozen. Staring at us in shock. OZ Carver's adjusts his glasses. With these and his beard, he look like a flamboyant psychologist.

George stands in the doorway to the kitchen. A PURPLE SHINER engulfing his eye.

BETTY

Sunshine, what happened? Are you alright?

OZ

That is quite the shade of purple, scout.

GEORGE

I'm great actually.

George searches the freezer for an icepack. He settles for a frozen block of tofu.

GEORGE (CONT.)

The election primaries were today.

OZ

So that's why you're coming home with an eye like an heirloom tomato?

GEORGE

Kind of.

BETTY

Because of the election? Oh, darling. Should we call the principle?

GEORGE

No, Mom.

OZ

We don't want to embarass you at school, George, but if there's

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

FRANKLIN
During the primaries.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAYGROUND - AFTERNOON

George crouches like a sniper in the dark under the jungle gym.

Abigail passes stands in front, nervously looking around.

George takes aim. Pulls the trigger.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

George starts pulling down posters provoke Franklin, who continues hovering.

GEORGE
I don't seem to recall.

FRANKLIN
Lying again. Just like with your black eye. No one wants a liar for President.

GEORGE
I'm not a liar, Franklin. I'm a politician.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

James reluctantly helps George put up MUDSLINGING POSTERS against Franklin. IS HE LOYAL TO HER? THEN HOW WILL HE BE LOYAL TO YOU?

JAMES
Is Franklin cheating on Abigail?

GEORGE
Who knows.

JAMES
Then why are you suggesting he is?

GEORGE
Who's to say he isn't?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

Couldn't this also hurt Abigail
though?

*
*

GEORGE

There's always some collateral
damage, James.

*
*
*

INT. BOYS LOCKER ROOM - AFTERNOON

*

George and James put on dress clothes for the election. The
locker room is disheveled, but empty. Solemn.

*
*

JAMES

If you win today, will you change
it so people vote again?

*
*
*

GEORGE

I guess I could. Why though?

*

JAMES

Because that way it's fair.

*

GEORGE

Do you think anyone really cares
though?

*
*

JAMES

I guess not. But why does it have
to be like this?

*
*
*

GEORGE

Maybe we're just violent people.
Our country started with a war.
It's tradition.

*
*
*
*

JAMES

Our country started with a
revolution.

*
*

GEORGE

A revolutionary war.

*

JAMES

I see your point. But it is sad
isn't it?

*
*

GEORGE

Perhaps. But only if you lose.

*

EXT. CITY PARK - AFTERNOON

The sky looms a threatening grey. The five remaining candidates stand in a circle prepared to roll.

A grungy HOMELESS PERSON watches from a bench. His boombox plays "Life During Wartime" by The Talking Heads.

The robed scrawny student stands beside the candidates. He reads the scroll. He rips.

James runs away as fast as he can.

Other candidates jump behind trashcans, benches, trees.

George spies Thomas behind a tree.

He loads his tracer. Runs up.

POP!

Hits him just as he runs.

Franklin takes the opportunity to charge George.

He chases George to the edge of the park.

POP!

Misses. George keeps running.

EXT. DESERTED NEW YORK CITY STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

Rain pours. George creeps down the city street. Dress clothes drenched. Tracer gun drawn. His eyes crazed. Eerie quiet.

A MIDDLE-AGED MAN crosses the street to avoid him.

No one in front of him. He turns to see:

Franklin. Face tired. Hair frazzled. His tracer gun pointed at George's chest.

He shoots. POP! George dodges. Jumps behind a trashcan, into a pile of trash. Peaks up to shoot Franklin.

POP!

Franklin runs behind a dumpster. Pulls another tracer gun. Creeps toward the trashcans. George doesn't notice, frantically trying to reload-

(CONTINUED)

A drawn out war cry. *

JAMES(O.S) *

AHHHHH! *

James charges at Franklin as if dragged by his gun. Just as Franklin realizes- *

POP! *

A TRACER hits Franklin on the forehead. *

James looks shocked. Hands trembling in a dramatic shooting stance. *

FRANKLIN *

Agh! You fucking twerp! *

Franklin throws his gun. Storms at James who runs toward George's trashcans. Franklin yells furiously. Tries to throw the tracer from his head to the ground, but it sticks to his fingers. *

He faces George and James with horrifying calm. *

FRANKLIN *

Next year. I will climb inside your ribcage, and wear it like a crown. *

He strolls away with forced composure. *

James looks at George. *

JAMES *

I think he has some things to work out. *

We stare down the gun barrel from the opening scene. *

Not knowing what to do, James points his tracer gun back at George. *

GEORGE *

You don't even have ammunition loaded. *

James notices. Keeps the gun pointed at George. Calmly feels his pockets for ammunition. None. He raises his hands in surrender. *

JAMES *

I could run. *

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE
Yeah. But what good would that do? *

JAMES
You've changed, George. *

GEORGE
I think I have too. *

JAMES
Not for the better. *

GEORGE
Who's really to say? *

GEORGE
I'm sorry. It's just politics. *

POP! *

FADE OUT