

Epilogue II

The Further Adventures of the Talking Skull of Teddy Roosevelt:

Episode 9: Giving a Hand While Armed to the Teeth

By

Jesse Baruffi

Gallantly galloping astride his stalwart and steadfast steed, the Talking Skull of Teddy Roosevelt was off again in search of adventure. He was fresh from his victory over the Moon Men of Pluto and ready to enjoy a long, relaxing weekend of bull-wrestling, when he received a tip from one of his Junior Rough Riders (NOTE: You too can easily be a Junior Rough Rider! Just send in six Crinkle Bits Cereal box tops along with thirteen self-addressed, stamped envelopes to this station!). Apparently, one of his missing body parts had been sighted in a lost, forgotten cave, buried deep in what was known as “the armpit” of Siberia. Armed with his trusty elephant gun and saber, the noble 26th president and his equally noble, yet castrated, steed traversed treacherous tundra, monstrous mountains, and perilous plains. “Hold, Bleistein,” Roosevelt said to his taxidermized horse as they arrived at the doorstep of a macabre mausoleum. “This commie weather is damnably cold! If not for my unique physiology of being only a skull, we might be up a creek! After deep, powerful cogitation, I think our best bet is to sally forth into the breach!”

The pair plunged ahead, into a tomb filled with swinging sickles, harrowing hammers, and other deleterious deathtraps before he found his way to the middle of the menacing maze. As they approached the tomb at the center, Roosevelt tugged his horse’s reins. “Something’s amiss. I can feel it in my bones- all eight of them!” It was then that a treacherous laughter began to echo throughout the chamber.

“Pathetic, imperialist skull! You have walked right into my trap! Now, please to be saying your capitalist prayers!”

Roosevelt gritted his teeth. “If it isn’t my arch enemy, the Mummified Right Arm of Josef Stalin! I might have known!”

The Mummified Right Arm of Stalin, emerging from the flickering shadows, floated diabolically (yes, at shoulder height, dear readers!). He wore an old, sickle-shaped signet ring, an anachronistic digital wristwatch (to know the exact time of capitalism’s defeat), and was poised and flexing for battle. Behind him, his minions, the remaining bones of his bodyguards in life, hobbled out, those that could wielding rusty hammers and dull-bladed sickles, those that couldn’t simply with bayonets affixed to their foreheads. Using his hand to mimic a puppet-like mouth, he slowly, and over-dramatically turned towards Roosevelt. “That is right, capitalist lapdog! Your few bones will be distributed equally among the people, and your horse will be put to work in our glorious vodka mines!”

“Bull feathers!” Roosevelt said, readying his weapons. “I stand for a square deal for every man, but right now the only square I see is you, and I’m going to deal you a punch, square in the nethers! Deal?!” The powerhouse president leapt from his saddle, saber in teeth, and lined up perfectly with Stalin’s Arm. Upon striking hard and true, however, he was flabbergasted to see his blow had almost no effect.

The Mummified Right Arm of Stalin laughed again, his hand quaking, thumb spread further from the index finger as anyone had ever dared before. “It seems you’ve learned the power of my Ring of Collectivism! Any damage done to me is spread equally amongst my comrades!”

“Deadly, yet a mere parlor trick to me, Stalin. Seems you’ve forgotten my arsenal of grit, gumption, and good old American know-how! Bleistein, maneuver delta-cappa-minervo!” (you too can learn Roosevelt and Bleistein’s top secret combat maneuvers! Just send eighteen box tops of Krinkle Bits and your parents’ credit card information to this station!) Roosevelt and his horse split in opposite directions and began a triangular assault on the bodyguard bones, quickly stomping and cutting them one by one into dust. Pausing to wipe his brow with a bloody red, white, and blue handkerchief, Roosevelt was nearly waylaid from behind, except for Bleistein who snatched up the treacherous bones, treating a femur and clavicle like a feedbag of over-ripened apples. Before long, they had heroically trounced their foes and caught The Mummified Right Arm of Stalin in a double-triple-pincer attack. “We’ve got your surrounded, Stalin! Surrender and we’ll go easy on you!”

“Foolish bourgeoisie! You may be strong like ox, but I’ve met no capitalist yet who could defeat me in hand-to-arm combat!” As Bleistein reared up on his hind legs to kick, the Mummified Right Arm of Stalin delivered a devastating uppercut to the horse, knocking the beast on his side. “Now it is down to you and me, Roosevelt. Prepare to be crushed under my People’s Knuckles!”

“Like fun I will!” Roosevelt said, dodging as the deadly mummified elbow launched at him with the hard to define force of, say, 25,000 migrating geese. “Oh, and I neglected to mention the final tool in my arsenal: Good ol’ fashioned elbow grease!”

“What? Nyeeeeeeettttt!!!” Stalin cried out as he slid along the ground, colliding with the wall of the tomb. Dazed and disoriented, the menacing Muscovite appendage tapped a secret panel on the wall, revealing a mountaineer’s ice axe. “You see this? It is the weapon that killed Trotsky!”

Roosevelt and Bleistein looked askance at the reference to an event which happened long after their own deaths.

The Mummified Right Arm of Stalin fumed like a poorly run communist factory. “Seriously? You know not of Trotsky? No matter, as it will send you to the nonexistent afterlife!” The Mummified Right Arm of Stalin swung the axe in a deadly arc that would surely cleave The Talking Skull of Teddy Roosevelt in twain. Thinking back to his training as a naturalist, Roosevelt realized he had but one chance. Using his lucky pair of spectacles to line up a perfect shot, he jumped, unleashing his signature finishing move, the Rushmore Avalanche (NOTE: You too can learn this fantastic move! Just send fifty Crinkle Bits box tops and your Power of Attorney to this station)! Stalin’s arm trembled and went numb, hanging limply in the air as his axe collapsed like the Soviet Union itself. “W-what is this? What have you done to my Means of Destruction?”

“Why, I’d always heard you Bolsheviks didn’t have a funny bone! I guess that’s not true after all! Ha! Now, it’s time to strike from the bully pulpit!” Roosevelt, despite his lack of hands, managed to put the more obscure parts of his training as a boxer to good use, shattering his felonious foe’s finger bones one by one.

The Mummified Right Arm of Stalin, admitting defeat, beat a hasty retreat and shook his gnarled fist. “I’ll get you next time, Talking Skull of Teddy Roosevelt! Next ti—wait, I said that last time, I now recall. Well, then I’ll get you next, next time!!”

Roosevelt helped pull the recovering Bleistein to his feet, and the stuffed horse whinnied his approval. “There you go! Stiff upper lip, old friend. We’ll catch that rascally red, but for now, we’ve got a six-continent safari to attend to.” Before Roosevelt could give the signal to leave, however, the horse reared up and kicked the stone lid off the tomb at the center, which crashed

against the floor. “Bleisten, what are you doing? Don’t tell me you—wait, what’s this? Is that—my hand?” And so it was. A set of bones, as if compelled by magic, crawled out and affixed itself underneath the skull. “Why, it is indeed my shooting hand! Bully! At this rate, I’ll be back to my old self in no time! Now, onward, by cracky, to the next adventure!”

And so the Talking Skull of Teddy Roosevelt’s quest drew that much closer to completion. But are his troubles over and done? We bet no, dear readers! Tune in next time on *The Further Adventures of the Talking Skull (and Hand!) of Teddy Roosevelt to see: Attack of the Fifty Foot Taft!*