

Muhammad stepped atop the foam with bare feet. He felt the padding folding under his heels. He smiled and blew a peace sign to his fans and in response, they amplified their voices. At this time, the referee came forward with brand new, shiny four-ounce gloves. Williams received the gloves and shoved them onto Muhammad's hands, as Gabriel rubbed vaseline on his forehead and cheeks. Muhammad climbed the ice-cold, steel steps. The referee nodded his head to signify he accepted Muhammad as a combatant.

“After losing his fight against the Russian Concussion by technical knockout and winning his second by technical knockout, the current AGC heavy-weight champion is here to go against his fiercest opponent in a battle which determines the champion. From Denver Colorado and fighting out of the blue corner, the unorthodox fighter, Muhammad Hussein.” Grant's voice was overcome with an explosion of roars so loud, the people screaming had to stop smashing their hands together and cover their ears.

The ring girl's breasts jiggled in a pink bikini top and her hips bounced as she walked toward Muhammad. Her blonde hair reached her tiny, bronze waist. From this short distance, Muhammad had no choice but to give his attention to this model. Her blue eyes contrasted cherry-red lips. However, this rat bastard once again thought of no lust. He only pondered the composition of feminine beauty; God bequeathed to the women of Earth. Dude's such a queer.

Once this blonde cock socket walked by him, Muhammad watched the crisscrossing spot lights and scanned the lit crowd beyond the vinyl, chain-linked fence. Some fans in the light sat appearing pensive. One older pot-bellied Texan, in a cowboy hat, sat with arms folded, viewing the ticking clock. Above his seat, a middle-aged woman couldn't keep her eyes off the model strutting around the hexagon. Other people were leaning on the edge of their seats, either tickling their wrist-phone screens or scratching the arm of their smart glasses. One tatted-up Englishman in a suit leaned forward and vomited hard liquor onto the arena floor. Fans pointed out this obnoxious drunk to their giggling friends. Unintentionally, Muhammad's eyes landed on a chubby pale-skinned brunette sitting a few rows in front of this party animal. She realized Muhammad was briefly looking in her direction. She batted her big eyes, toasted him with her plastic cup and blew a kiss. While this heavy set lady amused her self, Muhammad again ventured his gaze elsewhere. Finally, his thoughts were seized by the forty foot polyester flag with stripes of red and white and a white crescent with a white star over a blue background in the shape of an eagle, suspended from a truss. The crescent moon and star comforted him. I'm an American, he thought. He faced east with his thumbs up and fists outwards. Muhammad

kneeled down on the canvas, atop a Harley Davidson decal. Muhammad asked God to deliver Boris' weaknesses to him and stood up, the way his father showed him as a child. Muhammad felt his Dad's presence inside the hexagon, as he repeated his prayer.

"Please welcome. Boris 'The Russian Concussion' Babikov!" Grant screamed, as Boris came running down the opposing aisle, shadow boxing the air. Ivan and his crew were in lockstep, as he trucked through flailing arms.

"Boris has twelve wins with AGC, all knock outs except one technical knock out and a single loss. Hailing from Kazan Russia. Feared in his country for being born at the exact moment when a meteorite struck Russia, way back in 2013. He weighs in at two-hundred and thirty-four pounds and is six foot, five inches tall. Fighting out of the red corner, please welcome, Boris 'The Russian Concussion' Babikov." A mixture of applause and boos rolled through the stadium.

"I hope all of you know, who are watching this live, Muhammad and Boris' fight tonight, here, at the MGM Arena is going to be a privilege to watch! I'm not alone in calling this one of the most highly anticipated fights of the 21st century. Especially considering for the first time VIP subscribers can see the fighters' view, thanks to the people at Genius, who developed Oculus the first camera smart lens." Boris entered the hexagon. He shook the fence and bared his teeth at the press. The press flashed their teeth back in fear, as they looked upon Boris, who was already sweating.

"Now for everyone's enjoyment. Muhammad will sing the national anthem." The masses howled and clapped. Muhammad opened his mouth and bellowed out the words.

"Oh say can you see by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming, whose broad stripes and bright crescent with a star through the perilous struggle against the unfaithful in our God-worshipping nation." Muhammad stood still, as he intoned into the microphone. His perfect key and intensity in pronouncing with pride every word, brought a love for The United States out in every citizen, except for one man. Muhammad was distracted, slightly, by this Russian. Boris ice-grilled Muhammad and made the motion of snapping a neck, as the poem was heard.

Mixed-martial artist fans stood on their feet until the song ended. Once they settled their clapping hands by their sides, the referee motioned for the fighters to come together. Thousands of thuds from asses hitting seats echoed through the arena. Muhammad and Boris met at the hexagon's center. The two men made eye contact.

"Welcome to the hexagon. I'm the official referee. Nate Donaldson." Neither blinked, as they listened. Even, Ivan and Boris' second, Dimitri, remained bug-eyed. Williams and Gabriel were standing behind Muhammad, listening to Nate's words. Muhammad was too, but he was thinking about

how he would crack the arm of a man who dared tattoo on his skin an American flag being torn by a bear.

“I want a clean fight. When I say break, you break. You both agreed to the rules of the State of Nevada earlier. Follow them. You will have five, five-minute rounds. Do you understand?” a Russian translator was there for Boris, but Boris understood what was happening and enunciated, “Da,” at the right moment.

“Do you?” Muhammad nodded his head.

“Yeah.”

The clock counted down to ten seconds. The whistle sounded off and Daniel shouted from outside the cage, “Let’s go brother! Yeah!” Daniel pounded his fist into his palm. The stadium erupted with a deafening roar and camera flashes glinted across the ocean of humans. Three judges scooted forward in their seats. Muhammad, Boris, and Nate remained, as the rest exited the hexagon through the two gates. The gate doors closed and the clock’s seconds were down to the final three. Two seconds. One second. Muhammad heard the bell ring and it was show time.

I would let that phony Grant narrate the fight for you, after all he did undergo a backdoor surgery for his voice, but since I’m better at it, here goes; Muhammad and Boris charge the center.

Muhammad plants and jabs first. Boris keeps his distance. Boris replies with a combination of elbows and fists. A big straight right is sent, but Muhammad blocks it with his bicep held tight to his head. Boris pressures Muhammad, as Muhammad retreats to the fence. The Russian Concussion now controls the hexagon. Suddenly, Muhammad rolls off the fence and lifts his body off the mat and whips a right knee into his opponent’s jaw. Muhammad feels the connection and somewhere in his mind; smiles, because of Boris experiencing pain. But Boris keeps both feet on the canvas. So, Muhammad fires off an elbow, another elbow, and an uppercut. The uppercut is lightning fast, as is expected from the fastest man and where it strikes Boris, it vibrates his skull like a tuning fork. Boris refuses to explore the canvas with his back. The whistle blows. The current champion and The Russian Concussion spear each other at the same second. They grab hands. Both their heels anchor into the canvas. The timekeeper hammers the bell. However, the two fighters’ wrists remain locked. The timekeeper bangs on the instrument’s rim again and again, until he resembles Animal the Muppet on the drum. Muhammad’s ten fingers continue to interlock with Boris’ ten fingers. Boris is struggling to snap the young man’s wrists. Nate runs up and divides Muhammad from Boris.

“Both of you this is a warning. When that bell goes off you go to your corners. Believe me I will foul you both.” The sweaty Champion returns without a word to his corner and sits on the stool Gabriel delivers.

“What were you doing? You wanna lose a point?” Williams shouts. From across the hexagon Boris is shouting in English, “I kill you.” Williams crushes the water bottle into Muhammad’s mouth. Gabriel ices Muhammad’s bruises.

“Ignore that fool. Other than that, that was a good start Champ. That was your round. Just like the next is. We’ll take it one at a time,” Williams says. Gabriel keeps the ice bag on Muhammad’s temple.

“You kept control of his distance. But, he’s got reach, so, remember you gotta watch his footwork too. Don’t give him the chance again to hit you with those clubs of his.” Muhammad moves his head up and down, as Williams shares pointers.

“He’s taken your combinations. You know he’s strong. Can you tell?” Muhammad nods. Meanwhile, Boris is spitting vitriol toward Muhammad in Russian and butchered English.

“Dry that mess up,” Williams shouts to Gabriel, who runs a towel over Muhammad. The whistle sounds. Williams lifts the stool and Gabriel grabs his tools.

The bell rings, the gate closes, and Boris attempts to beat Muhammad to the middle. The Russian Concussion shoots on Muhammad. Muhammad flings his feet back and pushes down on Boris’ spine. The Russian Concussion is planted in the ground, like a seed. Muhammad passes guard, raining punishing punches and stinging elbows, but Boris’ strength is too great and he peels away to regain his footing on the mat. A raspberry appears on Boris’ eyebrow ridge. Muhammad taking no for an answer races up and strikes Boris’ eye socket with a Superman fist. Muhammad breaks through Boris’ forearms with another flying knee, forcing Boris backwards with this thunderous hit. Muhammad curls his fingers around The Russian Concussion’s nape and using his neck as a fulcrum, flies his knee up again and this time crashes it into Boris’ nose. The impact splits Boris’ septum, like a Cedar log under a new axe. Blood, the stuff people enjoy seeing, pours down The Russian Concussion’s mouth and chin. Yet, Boris remains vertical. A rumble shakes the entire hexagon. Boris can’t hear the crowd and wipes blood onto his hairy, sweaty forearm. He looks at his blood. Seeing his blood naturally makes him combust. He licks his upper lip and dilutes the blood in his mouth by swallowing it. He tastes burnt metal and grins. The big, bad Boris lunges forward and starts striking a well defended Muhammad with elbows and head butts. Muhammad backpedals from the center and crashes his lumbar into the cage. Boris lifts and dumps the cocksucker. His takedown is successful. Boris suffocates the grappler with his free hand. A couple minutes pass and the referee orders the two to the center. They pause and reset

themselves. Nate unleashes the two and Boris shoots a salvo of straights, hooks, and elbows to Muhammad's upstairs, but every attack misses by a country mile. The timekeeper hits the bell again and again, as Nate intervenes. He tosses Boris off Muhammad.

"You're getting docked a point," Nate shouts at the top of his lungs. He runs over and tells Muhammad about the penalty. Muhammad returns to the blue corner. He's breathing in deep like [Makua Rothman](#), post wipeout. The hexagon's custodian wipes a white towel into the bright red puddles. Nate sprints over and informs the three judges Muhammad wins round two. Despite Nate nearly having a heart attack from Boris' disobedience, the crowd is thrilled as a leprechaun seeing all their gold. Nate returns from sharing the scorecard with the commission and asks Williams if Muhammad was alright.

"You need to keep that Russian under control. He can't have his, li'l, road-rage bullshit here."

"We know. He knows. I fouled him and Muhammad has that round." The whistle blows and Gabriel leaves the hexagon with Williams.

The third round kicks off with the men charging out like two bulls in their prime. In the fray, Babikov blocks a bounty of beautiful blows. Muhammad's creative combinations continue until finally, it cuts into his opponent's cranium. Muhammad sniffs The Russian Concussion's exhaustion in the acidic-scented air. Boris' defense is slowly becoming a dark, cold and shallow well and Muhammad knows it. The ten-second mark sounds off and Muhammad tells himself it is time to crack open Boris' skull, like a ripened coconut in the hands of a Polynesian. He takes a step closer and hurls his entire body up in the air, the bell rings throughout the arena as Boris' nose is again smashed. Boris' eyes welt up with tears, like Brannan's would when a child and his step father pulled into their driveway. The disgusting maggot's significant-strikes-absorbed-per-minute rate hits eighty-percent. This time, Boris stumbles to his corner without incident. Muhammad gallops to his corner, arms in the air, and rests on the stool. Ice-cold water squirts his face. It washes down his neck and chest and into his trunks.

"You're wearing him thin. But you need to not focus so much on his nose. He's gonna expect you to go for it. He's expecting you to target it," Williams shouts. The whistle blows. The bell rings.

"Remember. Move. Stay on your toes."

The fourth round starts with less fury. Muhammad's limbs no longer seem weightless, but heavy. His previous gloves made of foam, now feel like they had been cast with iron. His once nimble feet are suddenly slow, because of oxygen-poor blood in every muscle fiber. Muhammad toys with Boris, like a cat with a mouse. The crowd must have this and Muhammad can appreciate their desire.

“Come on!” Muhammad slowly shouts. He fills the bottom of his lungs with air, between words.

“Do something!” The Champion puts his guard down further, by spreading out his arms and showing his palms. Boris sees this and shoots on Muhammad. In the blink of an eye, the wrestler pushes him aside and The Russian Concussion can only look up at Muhammad with bewilderment. How is he so fast? The Russian Concussion asks himself. Muhammad sends a hook and it smashes Boris’ dome, but not enough to cause a concussion. Boris staggers. The judges mumble to each other how it is possible for The Russian Concussion to remain conscious.

“Is that all? You’re done?” Muhammad screams. The Champion starts dancing around his foe. He claps his hands, inches in front of the Russian’s face. Muhammad bitch slaps Boris’ ear. This angers Boris more than anything, because Muhammad is lowering his competitive spirit. Boris is bitch slapped again by Muhammad who is now smiling. The fans go bananas. A few more right jabs and slaps are dealt upon Boris’ body. Shithead forces the weaker-looking Boris against the chain-linked fence. A nasty left hook, a vicious knee, and a colossal left elbow further destroy Boris and cause the placard to shake and the pattern of black diamonds to rattle, again and again. The whistle blows. Muhammad pulls back to re-energize and Boris takes advantage of this moment to regain his footing. So, Muhammad pauses to admire his handiwork, unimpaired. He closed his opponent’s right eye and Muhammad expected Boris’ left eye to be swollen shut, soon. However, between those puffy lids is still an eye with a twinkle. It looks straight at Muhammad and declares to him, ‘I am a man. I am fearless.’

This defiance to Muhammad’s might makes him furious. How dare he not fall, Muhammad thinks. How dare he be so stubborn. How dare he be so passionate about not losing. So, the li’l cocksucker begins to provoke Boris, by tonguing away his mouth piece and saying, “You got it. Come on. Free shot.” Muhammad criss-crosses his pointer fingers above his jaw.

“Right here. You think you can take me out?”

“Fight,” Nate demands.

“Muhammad let’s go. Four seconds!” Daniel shouts.

“Keep your guard up!” Williams demands.

“Guard yourself. He’s never done this? Keep your hands up,” Gabriel screams. The crowd looks on with confusion and laughter. How can this barely-standing Russian injure Muhammad? the masses think. Waves of deafening claps and continuous screams flood the hexagon from every angle. Muhammad looks at his pathetic opponent.



Muhammad waits for the right moment to strike The Russian Concussion.

“Angelica thinks you can’t please her,” I whisper. Muhammad suddenly stops thinking of finishing the fight and instead remembers how he couldn’t perform in their moment of passion. Meanwhile back in the real world, the one-eyed Boris lifts his left toes and inches them forward, rear foot trailing. He raises his right fist, cocks it back, and snaps it into Muhammad’s jaw, like a wrecking ball.

To the select few watching the live feed, through Muhammad’s and a quarter of Boris’ lenses, they didn’t see what happened, because it was quick. Viewers saw a man with a raw, hamburger-patty face launch his fist deep into Muhammad’s button, right where his pointer fingers were intersecting. From this bone-cracking impact, Muhammad went airborne. There was the briefest moment of silence, as the crowd processed Muhammad on his spine. Kids, women, dudes and their brothers stopped being awed and jumped from their seats in hysteria. Boris darted toward a defenseless Muhammad. Meat-tenderizing punches pummeled Muhammad. Nate shoved The Russian Concussion away from Muhammad.

The Russian Concussion paused briefly with his mouth wide-open in surprise. He went ping-ponging off the six cages in celebration. Ivan burst onto the scene screaming like a pineapple had been shoved up his rectum. The bell was ringing and Ivan was latched onto Boris, riding him around the hexagon. Amidst all the chaos, Williams was hoping to wake Muhammad.

“Champ. Can you hear me?” There was no answer. Muhammad had no sense of what was happening to him.

Finally, Oculus subscribers’ black screens dissolved into a shining ophthalmoscope and a flashing red circle around a white plus sign. Paul and his two medics, as well as Nate and Williams were huddled around Muhammad. Regaining consciousness after being knocked out, to you humans, is like being black-out drunk in an arctic lake. You know nothing of how you got there, where you’re going, but you know one thing. You should be feeling something, but no. The little maggot quickly regained his memory by pulling his torso forward. All the men forbid him from trying to stand. Despite

the joules of energy his brain meat absorbed, this little bitch started crying and crying hard.

“Nooo! I’m done. I’m done. Aren’t I?” Muhammad sobbed. Williams patted his shoulder. I’m gonna hover back from the hexagon and the story for a second for the sake of savoring the flavor. This is probably my second favorite moment in wrecking his life, in my innocent and humble opinion. The fact is the more he cries the more his lacerations sting. Knowing a human’s tears cause them additional physical pain is dope. It’s as close to being a good time as when a funeral progresses into murder. Some Belfastites know what I’m saying. Anyway, an ensemble of idiots holding brass instruments formed outside the hexagon.

“Please stand in recognition of the new AGC heavy weight champion of the world, Boris The Russian Concussion Babikov.” Nate held up The Russian Concussion’s hand. The musicians were playing the Russian Federation’s national anthem.

“Wide spaces for dreams and for living are opened for us by the coming years. Our loyalty to the fatherland gives us strength. So it was, so it is, and so it will always be,” the choir sang this verse, as the golden band was stolen from Brannan and Daniel’s custody. The Russian Concussion’s tongue rested on his lower lip, as he listened to Sergey Mikhalkov’s lyrics. Dwayne placed it atop Boris’ cave-man head, despite Boris rocking back and forth from exhaustion. Ivan held onto Boris and Dimitri hopped around, waving the Russian flag like a giddy, little kid sugared up on soft drinks. Muhammad walked away, facing only his feet as they stepped over rose petals layering the canvas.

Muhammad would have walked head first into the door, had not the security guard opened it and said his name. Muhammad entered and tore off his gloves, unwrapped everything and sat in the folding chair. His hands held his face in the silence. Suddenly, voices were heard coming into the dressing room. They are not coming in here, Muhammad said to himself. The door opened and the locker room quickly filled with Gabriel, Brannan, Daniel, and Williams. Muhammad yelled at them, “Get out!” Without delay, Muhammad stood and picked up the metal folding chair and swung it toward the white cinder block wall. But, the object hit Daniel. Daniel’s reaction was to be cool. He raced into the hallway, followed by his brother and friend.

“What the hell?” Williams asked, standing his ground. Muhammad was sweaty and his chest inflated and deflated.

“You hit your brother.” Muhammad wrinkled his face.

“What did you do up there?”

“I dunno.” His temper returned and he attacked the free-standing bag. The bag and chain rocked back and forth, but never tipped, although it almost did with one of his strikes.

“I lost! I lost? Why God?” Dwayne Dwight poked his head in the room. He saw Muhammad wiggling out and shouted, “Wow. Holy shit. Stop Muhammad.” Dwayne jumped in front of Muhammad. Tony Caito casually entered behind him.

“What’s wrong with you?” Muhammad stopped beating the bag. Dwayne grabbed Muhammad’s punching bag.

“Get it together. Shit. You shoulda’ done that in the hexagon. What the hell happened? You throw your fight? People are saying you did. It’s unlike you to taunt. It’s out of character. I’m wondering if you did goddamn it.”

“What?” Williams asked.

“I said your fighter is being accused of throwing the fight. I saw something odd, plain and simple. You can’t argue that?”

“My boy did something foolish. He’s not a criminal.”

“Did you let him knock you out? What happened?” Dwayne asked again.

“I dunno what happened.”

“You don’t know what happened? Did he say that he doesn’t know what happened?” Tony asked Dwayne. Dwayne looked at Tony and rocked his head in agreement.

“Throwing a fight is a serious charge,” Tony said in a slow, monotone voice.

“Don’t listen to them,” Williams said, as he placed his arm over Muhammad’s wet shoulder.

“What a mess. You need to get his story together before the press conference,” Dwayne demanded.

“This is nonsense. We didn’t fix the fight. He showboated. What’s the big deal? The kid won’t do it again. Does he look like he’s happy?” Williams puffed his chest.

“That’s not what our intelligence shows.” Muhammad moved away from them and sat on the couch.

“Hey? Where are you going?” Dwayne asked, clicking together his thumb and middle finger.

“Get Paul to check on him again,” Dwayne said to Tony. Tony left the dressing room in a flash.

“My kid’s upset. He lost his parents and now you’re accusing him of rigging his own title fight. What the hell is wrong with you man?”

“Tony is verifying things here in a few and he’ll make an announcement,” Dwayne replied.

“What announcement?”

“We’re going to find the truth.” Williams put his hand on his brow ridge, closed his eyes, and paced.

The door swung open again with Tony entering in front of Paul. Muhammad glanced in the hallway and saw Daniel standing and looking in at him. The two locked eyes. Daniel raised his hands and squinted. The door shut behind Paul. Light shined in Muhammad's eye.

"AGC is taking precautions, before we move forward," Tony said to Paul.

"Yeah. I can imagine. That was ugly," Paul replied.

"Hey Champ, I mean Muhammad, can you tell me where you are?"

"Yeah. I'm in the MGM Grand stadium." Paul put on his latex gloves and began feeling Muhammad's jaw for swelling.

"Do you know what year it is?"

"2033." Paul pulled out a tongue blade.

"That's correct. Open your mouth." Muhammad opened his mouth.

"Bite. Can you hold it there?" After a moment, Muhammad answered, "Yeah."

"How do you feel? You feel sick? You feel like throwing up?" Paul took back the instrument.

"No."

"I want you to repeat these string of numbers you ready?"

"Yeah."

"10, 1, 14, 9, 1, 89, 11." Muhammad repeated them without incident.

"Checks out. You have an iron jaw my friend. I felt his punch from my seat." Muhammad glared up at him and asked, "Did it end your career?"

"No." Paul packed up his bag and walked toward the door.

"Keep an eye on him over the next four hours. Look for erratic behavior." Williams interrupted, "More erratic than The Modest Mongoose provoking someone to hit him?"

"Yeah. If you notice anything stranger than that, get him to a hospital." Paul again turned around and left the dressing room. Tony followed him and returned with two troopers.

"Serve him," Tony said to Dwayne. Dwayne handed a scroll to Williams.

"Everything's there to suspend Muhammad's license and to withhold the purse under bond, until our investigation proves the fight was a clean fight," Dwayne said.

"You sombitch. You are not withholding his purse. What charges? What evidence? This is bullshit. You know it." Dwayne folded his arms and blew smoke from his nostrils.

"Hey. Williams. This is not a conviction. Take a minute to read it." Tony added with his chest puffed in Williams' space, "It is notifying you of an investigation. That's it. It's our normal protocol." Williams poked his pointer finger in Tony's chest with each word, "No Tony. Normal protocol is not pulling this shit." Tony casually brushed off Williams' finger and said, "Innocent men don't worry."

He stepped even closer to the aggressive man who needed a diaper for that cleft chin of his.

“I got this,” Dwayne said to Tony, backhanding him aside. He pointed his finger in Williams’ face and shouted, “Williams. We are pulling this shit and we can pull it the hard way or you can sign it!” Williams looked down with squinted eyes and reviewed the electronic paper. Muhammad tapped Williams’ hands and asked, “May I see it?”

“Here.” Muhammad took possession of the scroll and held it sideways, automatically switching the content on the screen to portrait view. Muhammad thumbed through the body of the document.

“You will sign it,” Dwayne said.

“I didn’t throw my fight.”

“If you didn't do it, we’ll find out. You must realize, half the planet is accusing you of a crime.” Muhammad finished reading the language and signed with his fingertip. Williams threw his hands in the air.

“This is like a scene from a bad movie.”

“No this is real and I’m not getting paid,” Muhammad said. Dwayne snatched the glowing, paper-thin device back from Muhammad. He turned around and left the room.

“Idiot in the hexagon,” Dwayne mumbled. Tony and the two cops left behind him. Once everyone was gone, Williams asked, “My goodness Muhammad. What did you do? Come clean with me now if you did something.”

“I didn't. I was beaten.”

“You don't deserve this. You're a prize fighter. Prize fighters don't arrange matches.” Muhammad leaned back in the couch with eyes closed, rubbing his temples with his thumb and middle finger. Williams pat Muhammad on his knee and said, “Tell me. Why did they say they have evidence?”

“I don't know.”

“You feeling OK? Your tongue numb?”

“My neck hurts. My head is bumping.” Williams waved his hand, because he knew beforehand the answer to his question.

“You really are something else. Shower up. I'll be outside.”

Muhammad stepped out of his sweaty trunks and tapped Distant Thunderstorm mode on the shower’s glass. He slid under the ceiling faucet. The sound of thunder slowly rolled in and grew louder. The overhead light flickered, to mimic lightning. Suddenly hot water, mixed with warm puffs of air, streamed down over his cuts. The stinging on his lips and eyebrow ridge quickly subsided, as steaming rain bathed his body and sedated his mind.

“Sports news.” The smart glass powered on, which automatically lessened the thundering sound effects. The glass illuminated with attractive faces, sitting around a mahogany table. A woman and two men were chatting in Mandarin.

“Language selection. English.”

“And in the world of MMA,” said a man with a box-shaped head.

“Tonight, twenty-year-old Boris The Russian Concussion knocked out twenty-one-year old Muhammad Hussein at the MGM Grand Casino in Las Vegas, in an event the world is talking about and will be talking about for days to come. If you are onboard the Orion heading toward Mars, here is the news of the century. Many are speculating tonight’s fight... was fixed.” The blonde with a fat diamond on her left hand gasped, as did the bald, bow-tie wearing man.

“Throw the fight? He’d get caught wouldn’t he?” the blonde asked. The bald dude with a bow tie looked up to his left and answered, “No. It’s so easy to leave invisible money trails today. I mean there are players that dwarf the contract he has with AGC.” The lead anchor, with a Minecraft-shaped head, added, “It is suspicious. The Nevada Athletic Commission is briefing everyone here in the next half hour, on the heavy-weight fight. We will be bringing it to you, live. The event will be covered by our very own Jeremy Schlott.” There was a break in the script, which was being read by the crew. They were gathering their thoughts over the idea of Muhammad being foul.

“It’s definitely the dumbest thing to do in the hexagon, cheating or not cheating,” the bald man in a bow tie said, as he palmed his fist. The lead anchor replied, “It’s a bloodsport.” A clip appeared on the shower wall of Muhammad outboxing Boris in the hexagon.

“Look at The Russian Concussion here. He looks like Carrie!” the woman said. The commentators laughed together.

“Muhammad shot himself in the foot, I mean the face,” the lead anchor with his flattop haircut said. Muhammad watched himself spread his hands fully apart and expose his jaw.

“This is my favorite part.” Muhammad watched himself make an 'X' shape on his jaw.

“Blam! Can you believe he made a target?”

“How stupid can you be?”

“What was he thinking?” the woman asked.

“Let’s watch it in slow motion one more time,” the lead anchor said, “Holy shit. His head almost comes off.”

“De-cap-a-tation!” Muhammad watched himself smashed by The Russian Concussion. The video editor was replaying the moment of contact, over and over again.

“Hank,” the lead anchorman said to the video engineer with a chuckle. His two co-anchors were

wiping their tears.

“You gotta stop doing that, that's painful to watch. I mean look at how he hits. Look at Muhammad's blood!” The three were laughing uncontrollably.

“He's gonna need to watch this to remember,” the chick said between bursts of hysterics. Muhammad, witnessed himself on the smart glass being knocked out and to him, it was a combination of embarrassment, déjà vu, and amnesia.

“The referee kind of let him get hits in.”

“Uhh. Yeah. Look at the referee.” The lead anchor gave a direction to his video engineer.

“Zoom in on Nate Donaldson's face.” Nate's face became big on the smart glass and it showed him with his hands on his cheeks. The woman and two men were cackling and holding their sides at the referee's expression.

“He didn't know what to do. He couldn't believe what just happened.” The woman sportscaster said, “I don't think Muhammad did either. That's a career ender.” They burst out laughing even more obnoxiously. The laughs seemed to continue on and on, Muhammad thought.

“Or did he?” the brick-jawed man said.

“Maybe. I could be wrong. Maybe he was thinking about the payoff,” she continued.

“You sure are right Stacey. Let's watch the fighter's face as he wakes up from a haymaker.” The smart glass zoomed in on Muhammad's face, like he was looking in a vanity mirror.

“Paymaker?” the shiny-scalped man said with a smirk. His coworkers cheeks blushed and they smiled.

“That's good Willy. Perhaps it is a paymaker Boris hit the ex-champion with tonight. The press conference is starting here in about thirty minutes. And I can't wait to hear Muhammad's opinion of the fight.”

“Hey you wanna know why he made an 'X' shape with his fingers?” Willy asked his co-workers.

“Why?”

“Make me an ex-champ by pressing here.”

“Oh geez,” the married woman said. Muhammad locked shut his eyelids as rain droplets, coupled with the darkness, shielded him from reality, for only a moment.

Eventually, he stepped out of the steam shower and wrapped himself in the terrycloth towel and walked toward his locker. Muhammad opened his white locker and saw his victory attire, earlier laid out on the rack by Daniel. He unplugged his wrist phone from his OLED shirt and walked to the mirror. Immediately upon reaching the mirror, he was startled by the reflection of a swollen face.

“My face has never looked like this,” he whispered aloud, while simultaneously examining intently the cuts and fist marks in his dark flesh.

“Boris. You beat me.” Suddenly, he saw the man in the mirror and how it resembled his dead mother. The cheek bones, his lips, his whole face was a copy of hers. What can I do? he thought. The significance of all this shit is phony, he thought to himself, even that man in the mirror. He sighed and left his Oculus lens connected.

“Open missed messages.” Muhammad saw an image of an envelope, overlaying the real world. The number twelve above the stack informed him of the number of missed messages. He watched, as the messages drifted on his screen.

6:10 p.m. 04/16/2033

Muhammad Hussein. This is TCN. The most liked Celebrity Sousveillance Contractor. We invite you to live stream your post-victory evening. As the most sousgenic celebrity and with your platinum status you would be at will to go where you like, when you like, but Good News Management Group has some suggestions. You will be given V.I.P. access, all expenses paid, to every Las Vegas nightclub listed. After you win your fight, please sign with us and entertain your fans by broadcasting your lucky night in Las Vegas with TCN. We'll pay you seventy percent of advertising proceeds of each product or service endorsement which you voluntarily promote per a six-hour episode agreement. Any incidental event occurring during transmission, that our team of resolution experts deems defamatory to you is and will be fully insured up to your specified dollar amount per your social-media-insurance agreement. Open the link. And we'll deposit your payment within twenty-four hours.

He swiped away the offer on his wrist phone and read the next email.

9:00 p.m.

Muhammad Hussein. This is TCN. The most liked Celebrity Sousveillance Contractor. Good News Management Group has cancelled your V.I.P. attendance at every nightclub listed and is closing your account until further notice.

This too was swiped away from his phone.

“God is great.” His wrist phone rang and simultaneously in the lower right corner of his vision popped up the photograph of Gabriel, holding his motorcycle helmet.

“Answer.”

“Muhammad.”

“Yeah?”

“How are you doing in there?” There was a pause.

“I'm dressing.”

“Alright. Williams said they want you out here in a few minutes.”

“Is Daniel OK?”

“Yeah. He's fine. We'll be in the hall waiting.” Gabriel gently said. The call ended and Muhammad strapped his phone on his wrist, as he strolled back to his locker. There, sitting on the rack, was his all black shirt. He activated the OLED screen on his shirt by opening the application via his wrist phone. What media should I add, Muhammad thought. He browsed through video clips showing his career highlights. However, one option was not of his prior opponents being whupped, but instead it was a poet's words flashing on and off with gilded filigree animation moving around the background of the screen. He selected it. The poem uploaded to his shirt.

'Righteousness in its true form is believing in God.'

Muhammad turned down the shirt's brightness on his wrist phone. He pulled it down his back, laced up his freshly printed sneakers with a small logo of a right hand and an eye inside it, and left the locker room. His crew was relaxing.

“It's time,” Williams said, unfolding his arms and running up to him.

“Why'd you throw that at me?” Daniel asked, lunging off the wall and planting his foot on the ground.

“Yeah about that.”

“You’re gonna apologize.” Gabriel hugged Daniel and said, “Don’t.”

“I don’t get it,” Daniel shouted.

“Now’s not the time to get anything. We gotta put this back together. Humpty Dumpty is in pieces. And if we’re putting him back together it starts by going up to that press conference,” Williams shouted at Daniel, “Who cares about the damn chair hitting you?” To Williams, these were his boys.

“Now, it sounds like they’re gonna ask you about throwing the fight. Don’t say anything about anything. Arnold told me to keep you quiet.”

The group divided up in the corridor and only Muhammad and Williams were admitted into the brightly lit press room.

“I’m gettin’ you your crown back. So, stay cool up there. I’ll be here.”

“If it’s my destiny?” Muhammad rhetorically asked, as he hopped up the stage’s steps. Muhammad grabbed a seat, pulled it out, and gracefully sat at the table of fighters. Budweiser beer bottles were spread out, like a college dormitory shelf. He saw Deon and J. Cook both sipping beer. He noticed the one light-heavyweight fighter known for wearing face paint in the hexagon. Boris hit the stage. The Russian had to be led to his seat by Ivan. The Russian Concussion’s whole body was stiff. His lips were fat, like he’d participated and won the Kylie Jenner challenge. His eyes were swollen shut, despite being bled. The poor bastard barely had the energy to turn and glance at Muhammad, not nearly enough to stand up and demand compensation. What mattered to him was the crown, which precariously balanced itself on Boris’ caveman skull. Meanwhile, Muhammad received a text message from Angelica asking him to call. He heard, “Welcome everyone. I’m starting off by saying that, that is what I call fight night! AGC 410 will not be soon forgotten.” Those in the press instantly responded with cheering, clapping, howling, and whistling.

“OK ya’ll. Let’s get down to it. We all saw something tonight that I never would of imagined. It’s unbelievable, but in this sport I guess ...” Dwayne chortled.

“It, it’s only believable in this sport. That’s what we do here at AGC. We bring the unbelievable to your screens. Boris The Russian Concussion knocked out Muhammad Hussein.” He emphasized the words ‘knocked out’ in his announcement.

“The anticipation for this heavyweight championship fight was unparalleled and it didn’t disappoint. Now we have The Russian Concussion wearing the crown!” Dwayne looked at Boris. He paused, in the hopes Boris would acknowledge his good fortune.

“Uhhh you there Boris?” Boris was looking around, like a blind man high on LSD. Ivan mumbled.

“Da. Russia number one!” He raised his meat hooks and slowly shook them, but the man couldn’t hold them up for long. He dropped them heavily on the table and flashed a grin.

A judgmental voice shouted, “Muhammad tossed that fight.”

“Who is that?”

“Jeremy Schlott. ESPN,” a petite male with a handsome face and long brown hair said.

“You’re jumping the gun,” Dwayne said. Jeremy flipped his hair from his face.

“It’s a race to find answers. That’s journalism.”

“Very well.” Dwayne crossed his arms.

“I’ve been made aware of that allegation.”

“Excuse me. I’m Erica, from Pop News Talk. We have a John Doe claiming your fighter, Muhammad Hussein told him to bet on Boris Babikov.” Dwayne squinted at the woman with smart glasses.

“Muhammad. Would you like to comment?” Muhammad didn’t respond.

“You don’t seem too upset about this charge.”

“Obviously people think what they wanna think. So, why waste my breath in telling you all the truth.”

“Perfect. Glad you’re cooperating. Look. Erica. There’s a lot of hot air going around about this fight. Because of this. The commission has an investigation underway as well as an internal AGC investigation. This means the purse is held in escrow. However, Muhammad has assured me, NAC, and others this charge is baseless. If that’s the case, we’ll be moving on.” Quickly, there were cameras clicking, mouths murmuring, and plenty of gasps.

A moment later Tony walked onto stage. He whispered in Dwayne's ear. He walked off and Dwayne said, “Erica. Please know if it is true, you have an obligation to contact NAC with the identity of that person.”

“And ESPN,” Jeremy said, fingering up the smart glasses resting on his nose.

“Buzz off you crumb snatcher. Before I tell everyone about you roofying your intern. Oops. I just did.” The crowd erupted into laughter. Jeremy was shoved in the back by a cackling man. The one-hundred and forty pound schoolboy in a J-crew gray blazer bit his tongue clean off, because defending himself before the world would add credibility to Erica. Jeremy stood up and raised only his middle finger to Erica. Erica was so offended she threw her drink at him. The press conference exploded into disorder.

Muhammad stood and walked past the half-awake contenders and pack of jackal journalist. He passed Boris. Muhammad paid no attention to the golden crown that rested atop his beat-up eyebrow

ridge. The Russian Concussion was looking off into space, probing wounds with his finger.

Four security officers escorted Muhammad away from the stage.

“Get away.” Williams clotheslined the security.

“Williams. Where is your fighter going? He’s not excused,” Dwayne announced.

“You watched him come up through the ranks. You know him Dwayne. You’re gonna get it when we show up at a different organization.” He turned back around and walked with Muhammad out of the room. Dwayne squeezed the lectern’s edges and shouted, “No he can’t. Get back here. Get back here.”

“How can they suspend my license?”

“Where the hell did they find someone to say you wanted Boris to win? This is a witch hunt,” Williams said. Daniel, Gabriel, and Brannan watched on their wrist phones Muhammad and his trainer charge out of the press room. They turned their heads and saw the live broadcast fuse with their perception. The three left their seats and joined their brother and Williams.

“I don’t know,” Muhammad answered. He was thinking of the people he spoke with in the last three months. So many interviews.

“Arnold’s gonna get to the bottom of this. He needs to get his ass back to the States.”

“How can they say that in front of a billion people?” Daniel asked.

“View hungry,” Williams answered. Muhammad didn’t respond and his team looked at each other waiting for someone to clear up the moment.

“I’m jobless?” Muhammad said.

“You feeling OK brother?” Daniel was worried Muhammad had traumatic brain injury.

“My career is over.”

“You’re suspended, not fired Muhammad,” Williams said. They returned to the dressing room. Williams looked at his lit up wrist. It was Tony calling him and demanding they get together and talk. The call was ex’d out by Williams.

“Shit. Shoot, I mean. I gotta go. Oh. You have to be out in twenty minutes to greet blue ribbon fans. Daniel make sure he’s there.” Williams looked at Muhammad.

“Your fans care about you at least.” He walked out of the locker room ranting about how he would be unemployed soon.

Daniel said, “Muhammad what you did is so... not like you. Why’d you lose?”

“I didn’t. I dunno. I didn’t think he could hurt me.” Daniel flung his hands in the air and showed his back to Muhammad. Daniel faced his brother again, “You have all your stuff?”

“My bag.” Daniel grabbed Muhammad’s gym bag. Daniel left the dressing room. Muhammad

took a second to capture the site with his Oculus lens, realizing it may never be seen again. The photograph of the all-white dressing room had been uploaded to Muhammad's gallery, where it received no love, except a few hearts and encouraging comments from Daniel, his wife, Gabriel, Brannan, and Angelica.

Security led the two to the lobby, where the blue ribbon guests had been waiting. Children, teenagers, and parents stood together waiting for the world-famous fighter. When Muhammad arrived, they swarmed him. A dozen voices shouted questions to him.

"Why did you lose?"

"Does your mouth hurt?"

"Did you not want to win?"

"How can you not fight?" A lanky, blonde-haired man wearing smart glasses confronted the crowd, "One at a time. We'll open the line in two minutes." The tall blonde man dropped his hands and faced Muhammad.

"The Modest Mongoose. Good to see you again. You OK?" Nick asked, while shaking hands with the brothers.

"Daniel," Nick said.

"Not really," Muhammad answered.

"Well, my supervisor called and wanted me to let you know. When one of our clients is not first in their competition we bring them a special gift, to show them their skills and talents are recognized by us, at Blue Ribbon Entertainment. No matter where they place, they're always a star." He smiled and his blue eyes brightly shined.

"That's great," Daniel said.

"Thank you Nick. Is it here?" Muhammad asked.

"No. It'll be delivered shortly. Let's start Champ." Nick clasped palms with Muhammad and ran up to the podium. A group of Muhammad's biggest fans stood on the rug, under the vaulted ceiling and chandelier lights.

"Are the biggest fans of The Modest Mongoose ready to give him a warm welcome?" The crowd enthusiastically kept their mouths shut and their hands apart, as they collectively pictured the cost of meeting this tool.

"Here he is, the most amazing fighter, Muhammad Hussein." Nick hooked his finger between his neck and shirt collar and pulled, as all the fans rolled their eyes and shuffled their feet.