

## **The Orange Devil**

**Jon Cohen**

*Golf.* How can an ancient game that involves hitting a tiny ball with a long stick into a petite hole, across rolling grass fields (that are neutered by chemicals and drag city water supplies to their knees) jerk a principled individual from his moorings and potentially piss everyone-the-fuck-off? I'll tell you.

During the Great Plague of 2020, like legions of fellow Americans, I took up the game. My noodling around cratered into a bottomless addiction: lessons, practice, utter distraction at work, frayed home life. Rehearsing my swing technique in airport bathrooms, in front of my embarrassed kid, and at funerals, I was categorically unhinged, searching day and night for that *one* fluid movement that would transform my labored game into a dependable routine. Good luck. This sport is impossible. Even pros will tell you it can't be mastered, cornered or cheated. I imagine some folks have been committed trying to shave a handicap point, or been beaten senseless after errantly hurling a club.

Don't get me wrong, I've made strides over the past two years. Or at least enough progress that a person we shall call individual A (very well connected) invited me to play with an individual we shall call individual B, who is also named Donald J. Trump, the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

Let's call me individual C, or drop the letters altogether and just refer to me as a liberal Californian with a banged-up moral compass hamstrung by a vexing conundrum: Eighteen holes on a *PRISTINE* course. Trump. Me. Categorical alienation from family and friends.

I'm in.

Golf demands commitment -- an understatement; it requires total obedience if you have any hope of improving. Look at the landscape: sprawling vistas of hypnotizing terrain peppered with fairway bunkers, greenside bunkers, tall grass, short grass, uphill banking, downhill crevices, trees, dirt, wood chips – and to slay this dragon all you have is a quiver of spindly instruments.

Commit to it, and you'll find yourself in a world that is all-at-once euphoric and maddening. And you'll chase after it at all costs, *the feeling*, the club squaring perfectly to squash the ball, after so many goddamn shanks. The *click*, rising ball flight...one arcing shot that sails toward the pin where it drops out of the air and dents the green. Golf is the great equalizer. Doesn't matter who you play with, and I've played with celebrities and longshoremen. Scenic layouts, Vitamin D and Zen focus-in-the-moment, counterbalanced by frantic prayers to any totemic object that brings you luck.

I want to believe, in my heart of hearts, I can seduce Forty-Five. (I understand Trump likes to be called Forty-Five on the course.) *What if I can reason with this man and get my poor, hapless brother a pardon??*

Stu Cohen...my older brother, mixed up for most of his life, and currently stuck in prison for a steak-knife Ponzi scheme. Not the brightest bulb, Stu; ended up inverting the pyramid strategy and losing the most money. My gawky teenage daughter, of course, loves Uncle Stu, and my mother blames *me* for not keeping a closer eye on him.

But maybe I can fix things, here. Despite the indictments, I've got Trump's chances of re-election hovering at eighty percent; I mean, Christ, if this guy somehow nudges things down the field, gets back in the Oval and purges the DOJ, the entire world will have to bend the knee. He'll be dealing out pardons like jellybeans!

My wife is repulsed. She drops sheets on the basement stairs. “It’s all a big joke to you,” she says after kicking me out of the bedroom. “This country’s in real trouble, Jon.”

“This country’s always in trouble,” I reply.

“Democracy is at stake.”

“Didn’t Franklin say it was all an experiment?” I flash my cute smile, she doesn’t find cute anymore.

“Get your own fucking pillow,” she starts to head upstairs but turns back. “And if you even think about wearing this thing you’re walking with me and my group.” She hurls an opened Amazon box at me and a crisp, red hat tumbles out.

The *walks*...door-to-door sojourns through underprivileged neighborhoods with “Moms for Sanity,” an action group aimed at signing up new voters. The worst. And the hat. I’ve ordered a custom MAGA hat for the golf date with the number forty-seven embroidered on the side – Trump in a potential second presidency. It’s blasphemy, but it’ll loosen him up.

I can’t stop watching videos of this lunatic’s golf swing. I zip into the kitchen for my laptop. No one’s around. I pull up clips of Trump’s swing in slow-mo. It’s not a good swing, but it’s not bad. It’s functional. The man shifts his weight from right to left, like a whale fluking with intent, and believe me – weight shift matters, and balance, and the mixture of the two is not easy to replicate over and over.

“You’re pathetic, Dad,” my daughter has appeared over my shoulder.

I slap closed the computer. “It’s for a piece, sweetie. It’s...”

She turns and disappears from the kitchen. “Mom!” she calls upstairs from the hallway.

“Fuck...” I dart for the basement and almost trip over the sheets at the top stair. I scurry down into our exercise room, railing is *so damn wobbly*. I toss the bedding on the old couch. I’m gonna sweat my balls off down here; it reeks of Peloton sweat and dying yoga mats.

I get a call from individual A, who shall remain nameless but he exists, I assure you. Let’s call him DeepBall. He drives it a mile. Trump’s twice-removed cousin, some relative by way of some marriage, is tying the knot back east, so it looks like the course we’ll play is either Mar-a-Lago or Whispering Plate... Whispering Polecat?? I’m only half-listening to DeepBall; I can barely breathe – *it’s happening!!* I’ll patch things up with the family later. They’ll thank me when I get Stu his pardon.

I head to the sporting goods store to clear my head.

I only play orange balls, namely the Callaway Supersoft with the matte finish. The Supersoft maximizes spin and control, assuming you can harness spin and control. I can’t, but the playful orange ball eases tension in my body.

I trot to the counter with a case of balls, hoping one of the hot-shot golfers working there will inquire about my game so I can drop Trump’s name, climate permitting. No one asks me shit. A middle-aged man spending a ridiculous sum on orange Supersofts reeks of high-handicap amateur. I slink out of there.

I can’t stop thinking about one thing: how does Trump deal with so much stress? He’s clinically unhealthy, fueling his body with McDonald’s bread and sodium, and he’s had a full house of lawsuits hanging in the wind for his entire life. I mean honestly, how does he do it? There’s something otherworldly about this man; I need to see him up close. I *know* I can pry a pardon out of him.

I sneak back into the basement and book the flight to Florida. I get a text from my wife upstairs: it's a notification that the family weekend in Santa Barbara (which I blew off for the golf trip) has now turned into a "girls' week" for my wife and daughter -- *and*, there'll be plenty of shopping.

*This* might be unreparable.

Screw it all.

DeepBall and I arrive in Florida. We took a crack-of-dawn flight and I'm pouring sweat the second the baggage claim doors open; it's a blast furnace out here. And no shorts on the golf course, DeepBall *now* informs me. I brought mostly shorts, and one pair of golf pants just in case, some oil-based, polyester blend. I can't let restrictive slacks distract me.

We drop our bags at the hotel and head straight to the course for an afternoon round. Turns out we're playing Trump International. I'm so fucking nervous...

We're meeting Forty-Five on the first tee. After we're searched and handled by security, we walk from the clubhouse to our carts (already loaded with our golf bags); I'm entirely certain I've forgotten how to swing a club. My synapses are misfiring: firm handshake, don't stare at him! Swing through the ball, hold finish -- buy dog food before heading home. According to my golf guru, you shouldn't have any thoughts on the tee. I'm fucking dead. The two Xanaxes I popped on the plane are keeping me from hyperventilating.

Guided by one of Trump's aides, DeepBall and I close in on the motorcade of golf carts packed with individuals; there's chatting, laughter, mega-ass-kissing. Another Trump handler taps the former president and he turns to us. He's wearing a white golf shirt with a presidential crest, dark slacks, white golf glove and the MAGA hat.

My body goes limp. I'm soaked with sweat. The man is huge! Not just wide, but tall, *really* tall. I'm not so sure he's completely unattractive, *very* broad, strong jaw. I hang back, silent. DeepBall gets introduced first. One of the aides turns to me for the introduction and I can't remember my name.

"Jon Cohen," I finally pipe up, gripping Forty-Five's hand, "it's a pleasure, Mr. President."

Wow. Powerful grip. My boney hand disappears into his paw. Not sure who said he has small hands -- *I* have small hands.

He doesn't notice the forty-seven on the side of my MAGA hat.

"You're Jewish," Trump says. "Israel loves me. Done more for that country than any other president. Ask Jared."

"Indeed," I reply, a little shaken. This is the first time I've seen the brashness up close, a Great White banging the cage.

It's time to start. I glance back at the carts occupied by the Secret Service. The guards look older, some on the brink of nodding off. Trump marches up to the tee box — he's first. He mounts his ball on a tee, no practice swing. He lurches back and hurls that bulky frame around the horn, powering a drive some 230, 240 yards, down the middle of the fairway!

*Holy shit!* The sheer re-distribution of that weight and balance. How the fuck did he do that -- so quickly?? Confidence, automation.

DeepBall goes next. He sprays a drive 260 to the right, into a bank of trees.

"Ha!" Trump chortles. "Didn't turn the club over."

DeepBall nods and agrees with Trump.

My turn. *God, please let my legs work – pleeease let me get off the tee...*

"Love the hat," Trump says to me as I square up. "Walt, I want these hats," he

calls over his shoulder. “Brilliant. I love this guy.”

“Thank you, Mr. President,” I smile.

*The hat -- it worked!!*

Walt Nauta, sitting in his own cart, jots something down on a note pad.

“Lets see it, Jon-Jon,” Trump blurts out as I take a labored practice swing.

*Jon-Jon! I’m Jon-Jon already!!*

Wait, is he screwing with me? Getting into my head -- hoping I don’t outdo his drive?

I have a chance to out-distance him, but that wouldn’t be good for my mission, not on the first tee – *and yet*, I don’t have the best control to shorten my swing and bunt the ball.

Clear the head. I swing. Weight stays slightly on the back leg, club grounds-out a tad. It’s a drop-kick, but the ball stays on a low rope, straight. My orange Callaway rolls out 210, 220. Not horrible for the first tee, and Trump has the furthest drive. First stage accomplished!

“I can work with that,” Trump nods. “Walt, I’m riding with Jon-Jon.”

Nauta hops from his cart, unlatches my golf bag from DeepBall’s cart and puts it on the presidential cart.

*Holy Fuck! I’m in!!*

DeepBall is crestfallen.

Okay. Strategy. Tighten the plan. I can *truly* talk to this guy. He’s already revealed a little frat-banter, so it’s an easy lane. I’m gonna massage the ego, then lock in the pardon for Stu if – *when* he gets re-elected. As the day goes on, I lace in credible praise on his game, and it works. By the eighth hole I’m calling him Donny.

“Donny,” I say at hole nine, as I lift my MAGA hat and wipe my forehead, “I gotta ask you something...”

The Great White turns his massive head, a ray of sunlight melting into his clay-like face.

“Ask away, Jon-Jon,” he says.

*Stage one: gain trust.*

“As a humble citizen of this great nation of ours...” I clear my throat. “I marvel, Mr. President, how do you manage it all? The incredible power you wield, the magnificent heights you’ve reached, and the constant battle against those that want to tear it down?”

The ex-President furrows his orange eyebrows and narrows his eyes.

I gulp.

“I’ll be honest with you, Jon-Jon” he sighs. “It’s not easy.”

*Honest??*

“It’s not easy being magnificent,” Trump pulls the cover from his diver. “But I’m a patriot, the best patriot ever. And we fight. It’s a wonderful fight.”

He turns his steely gaze on me. “Are you a patriot, Jon-Jon?”

“A patriot...” I stammer.

Trump cranes forward, his balance admirable. He’s waiting for an answer.

*Now or never, down the rabbit hole...*

“I’m the best patriot ever, Mr. President!” I spring up. “Er...third best patriot? Next to your children, of course.”

“Ha!” Trump roars. “You *are* my children. I knew that the minute we met. You’re one of us.”

“Yes...I am one of us!”

*My god, he loves me!!* I’m *actually* doing this!! This pardon is gonna be a lock. I mean, is it fair to give a guy seven years for cooking the books? Stu is a line cook at best; he flash-fried the books, and lost everything himself. His wealthy “victims” piled up another tax write-off.



Amazingly, I've been so busy brown-nosing I haven't been thinking about my swing, and it's paying off in spades. If I can get through the back-nine without a double-bogey, I might break ninety!!

Trump smiles, his pearly-whites jammed into his top gums. Before he approaches the ninth tee-box, he plops back down into the cart. "What'd you have on that last hole?"

"I parred it!" I blink joyously. "I can't believe it, Mr. President, but I'm playing out of my mind. I never play this well!"

Forty-Five cocks his head and tsks. "You chunked that chip on your approach, Jon-Jon. I've got you in for a bogey." He firmly marks the card in pencil. "*I parred the hole.*"

"Right..." my body goes slack.

*Wait a sec. I didn't chunk a chip, on that hole at least. Any golf nut knows his score to the stroke. "Er...I'm pretty sure that was the seventh hole, Mr. President, and I *did* get a bogey there, but..."*

Trump's about to get out of the cart and head to the tee box.

*Let it go, Jon. Grab your club and keep your mouth shut...*

I gotta stay on point, BUT -- does he have my score right? It's blasphemy to screw with a golfer's score. And speaking of that, what's he got in for himself? He's playing like shit!

I pivot toward the steering wheel to glance at the card. Like a practiced Ninja, Trump spins and cuts off access with his giant marshmallow back. "Grab your club, Jon-Jon."

"Of course..." I mumble. I head back to the rear of the vehicle.

Trump snatches the scorecard from the steering wheel and tucks it away in a folder in the front compartment.

I pause. *Are those...are there a stack of folders on his side?? Jesus H. Christ -- they're stamped "Top Secret/SCI"!!*

Is this lunatic traveling *everywhere* with stolen files, and didn't he turn them all in??

*The pardon for Stu, Jon...stay the course.*

BUT -- he's gonna read our scores at the end of the round. DeepBall's been spraying his shots everywhere; he's for sure cheating on his card. I'M LEADING THESE IDIOTS!!

*Breathe.* I'm going to calmly remove my 3-wood and creep in through the passenger's side; I gotta see my score!

I peek in at Forty-Five over the golf bags. He's finally heading to the tee box.

I grab my club and trail behind. I stop to tie my shoe, next to the passenger's seat, the driver side compartment in my peripheral.

Trump's almost at the tee.

I see the folder where he stuck the scorecard, the edge of it hanging out. If I can just yank it out for a sec...

*Hold it.* There's a paper that's skittered out of another folder stamped "To be Translated." I rise to my feet and crane forward...it's a goddamn draft letter to Kim Jong Un. Is he referring to Kim as "Big Guy and Giant Panda"??

*Moron! The Panda is Chinese...*

A piercing whistle shoots out from the tee. "Bobby! Chico!!" Trump yells.

I freeze. Before I know it, a golf cart is barreling toward me, two Secret Service hanging off the sides.

"Fuck this," I dart in and snatch the folder with the card. I drop my club and race down the fairway on foot. I secure the card and toss away the folder, papers flying out everywhere. Sweat

is flooding my eyes, but I see the scores now -- *a double on two?? No goddamn way; I parred that!*

“Stolen document, boys!” Trump screams. “We have a traitor!”

*Hold it – he didn't birdie three!!*

The Secret Service is closing in. *WeeeeemmmVVVV* -- their cart is emitting some crazy siren sound. I glance back: their bumper is three inches from my heels. Before I can turn back around, I plummet into a gaping sand-trap and tumble ass-over-heels through the sand, narrowly missing a rake.

The guards have me pinned in less than a minute.

I wince in pain. “His card is fucked...” I spit out a puff of sand.

They snatch the papers from my fingers, zip-tie my hands and ankles and carry me like a stuck pig into the back of their cart. Before I’m whisked off, I catch a glimpse of DeepBall standing on the ninth tee, dumbfounded. Trump is halfway up the fairway; he’s teed off.

They don’t technically arrest me, but I’m held for two hours in some golf gulag (perhaps the kitchen manager’s office), and vigorously questioned: Do I realize the gravity of my actions? Was this pre-meditated? Was I planning on harming the president? (On the last question, I’m glad I’m not on a polygraph.)

I had a momentary and massive lapse of judgement, I explain. I’m a new, highly-addicted golfer and simply *had* to see the scorecard. I cower: I should’ve asked; the president had been *so* gracious all day. I offer up my deepest apologies and regret. At the end of it, they seem to believe me. They’ve probably seen this behavior before.

Under close guard, I'm escorted back to the hotel to gather my things. They confiscate my Forty-Seven hat. I'm jammed onto the next flight out of Florida.

Time to call the wife and grovel. I *gotta* get my family back. I have an idea.

The second I break free of my escort, I dig out my cell phone. I reach her in Santa Barbara. She picks up and we exchange "hellos."

"I completely blew it, honey," I start in, softly, nervously. "You were right. I don't know what the hell I was ever thinking."

No response.

"Anyway, I got here..." *slowing the cadence*. "I checked into the hotel and had a panic attack -- like immediately. Never made it to the golf course. I mean, the pardon for Stu was far-fetched, I get it...but I had to try."

I can hear her breathing. That's definitely breathing...

"I'm at the airport. I'll be home in six hours."

A text pings my phone. I glance down. It's from my wife and it's a TikTok link.

"Er..." I click the link. Apparently, a number of privileged spectators were watching our round. Several people have posted videos -- and one, with a zany boomerang effect, has gone viral: it's me, bound up like a bacon-wrapped hot dog, being thrown onto the golf cart, my legs flailing.

"We're signing up voters the second I get home," my wife says.

"Right..." I whisper, about to throw up.

"We're walking twice a week."

"How's Santa Barbara?"

"And you're wearing a button-down."

*Ahhhhhhhhh!!! I hate buttoning anything, anymore -- she knows that!*

I clear my throat. "Of course, honey..."

**THE END**

