

Phineas T Phrump's Monument

"Come in!"

The door to the Oval Office opened. Lockjaw Lemon, the President's Chief-of-Staff, entered and held the door for his Press Secretary, Rose Ruby. They both bucked up as they strode briskly across the room toward the President's desk. Phineas T Phrump was gazing out across the South Lawn to the Washington Monument, his hands clasped behind his back.

No one spoke immediately. The President slowly turned to face them. He was grinning.

"Lockjaw? Rosie? It's time for us to choose a monument to the greatest President this country has ever seen!"

Lockjaw looked quizzically at Rosie. Both were still standing. "Mr. President we already have a monument to George Washington."

"I know that, you idiot! I'm talking about ME! We need to begin construction of a monument to our Great Presidency!"

"But Mr. President, monuments aren't constructed for Presidents ... I mean, you know, for great Presidents like yourself ... during their lifetimes."

"What good is that! I want to see just how I'm to be remembered."

"You can't design your own monument!"

A scowl spread across his face. "I can do whatever I want! *I am the President!*"

Lockjaw looked down. “Yes, sir.”

Phineas T Phrump stepped back away from the desk and inhaled deeply as he looked up to the ceiling, satisfaction creeping onto his countenance. “I’ve decided that we’re going to build a Triumphal Victory Arch. It will be the largest in the world. Bigger than the Arc de Triomphe or the Brandenburg Gate. It will be surrounded by a moat, and it will be perpetually lit each evening and throughout the night in red, white, and blue colors swaying victoriously in perpetual motion.” He slowly waved his hands back and forth before him, imitating the light show he imagined. “It will be greater than any other monument in the city! In the World!”

“Mr. President . . . ?”

“What now, Lockjaw?”

“There’s a lot to be considered, Sir, I mean you have to lay a foundation . . . ”

“I *have* considered it. And here’s what we’ll build. A great arch topped with two golden eagles on either side flanking a large statue of ME in the center, looking down on the nation’s capital! And it’s going to be BIG! Taller than every other structure in the District!”

“Sir . . . ?”

The President turned to his Chief-of-Staff, glowering at the interruption of the nascent ideation he’d been savoring as he spoke of it.

“Sir, the Washington Monument is over 500 feet

high. That's like a 50 story building!"

"So what?"

"There's a height restriction on all other buildings in Washington, DC."

"Restriction?"

"Yes, I believe it's about 130 or 140 feet."

"That's ridiculous!"

"I'm just saying, Sir, that it would take an act of Congress to allow such a tall building . . . even for such a good and just cause as honoring your legacy. And that will take time."

"Hmm. Well, I want you to look into it. Or maybe we could build it on one of the approaches to the city. There're a bunch of bridges that we could span aren't there?"

"I don't know, Sir. Maybe. But even so, it may not be very practical . . ."

"You jughead! You don't build monuments to great leaders to be practical!"

"That wasn't what I was thinking. I mean if you want visitors to see your statue on top of the building, I don't think it would be very visible if it's over 50 stories in the air,"

The President paused and looked away.

Rose Ruby cleared her throat to break the awkward silence. "Mr. President, I will have to explain to the public exactly what the arch will be celebrating? . . ."

"What do you mean?!"

"Well, I'm certain I'll be asked why you've chosen

to erect a Triumphal Arch. They're normally served as a remembrance of great military victories."

"What about all of those boats bringing drugs into America? We blew 'em outta the water! That was a victory. A glorious victory!"

"It's a matter of scale, Sir. I don't think that would count as a major war. In fact, the United States hasn't really won a major war since World War II."

"What?" He turned away, his disturbed brow wrinkling at this annoyance. "What about the Middle East? That's certainly become a war."

"At this point I don't think we can count that invasion in the Middle East a war that we've won. If you'll allow me, Sir. It's hard to explain to the public and the press, which is my job, how a lasting benefit from that war has accrued to America."

"Now just a minute, Rosie!" The President was fuming. "What about . . . yeah! What about that ugly depressing monument to Vietnam out on the Mall. That war wasn't won, but it stood up for American values and it got a monument! And right there on the Mall!"

"But Sir, that was not a monument to a great military victory, it's dedicated to the lives of those Americans who fought and died in the conflict. There were over 50,000 of them."

"Well, we haven't had many killed in our war in the Middle East yet, but it's early."

Lockjaw piped up. "Sir, you did have success in

that covert operation in South America where you ousted the country's President and ..."

"What's your point? We didn't have any losses there. Nobody ... at least ... no Americans died."

"No, but it was a successful military operation. I mean look at what you did. You brought foreign oil to America in vast quantities! Sitting there just for the taking! Lots of it! And with your policies promoting fossil fuels, it becomes an even greater success."

"Yeah, we did, didn't we?"

"Yes, Sir. And what we won there was something tangible, not just putting down some political ideology."

"Ah! Yeah!" The President cracked an unfamiliar smile at his Chief-of-staff." Well, Lockjaw I knew you had it in you! I mean to say, you really got something there. We'll dedicate the new Triumphal Arch to that brave, brilliant military success!"

"Yes, but we would still have the problem of where to construct the Arch. I have a better idea. And you can build a monument right there on the Mall! There's still plenty of room for one ..."

"But if we don't put up a Triumphal Arch, what kind of monument are you talking about?"

"It's obvious, Sir! Right in front of the Capital, you construct an oil derrick!"

A broad grin instantly swept across the face of President Phineas T Phrump. "Lockjaw, that's brilliant!"

The President was still smiling when he returned to his chair behind the desk. Lockjaw and Rosie felt the relief from the President's tirade and took a seat before him.

“Tell me, Lockjaw: Do you think they might strike oil?”

— Milton H Marquis