

SHADOW BOXING

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for the Curious New Voices War Anthology Project
American Intervention in the Chinese Boxer Rebellion

(a bedroom. the STUDENT is sitting on the floor, surrounded by stacks of books and papers. she is talking on her cell phone.)

STUDENT

I don't know, Jordan. This all seems like too much. I can't get my brain around it. *(picks up a piece of paper)* 'How does American intervention in the Chinese Boxer Rebellion relate to the Open Door Policy'? Christ, I don't know. *(pause)* It's not like you paid that much attention either. It's just a quiz. Can't win 'em all, right? *(pause)* Mmm hmm. Whatever. *(looks at book)* I just like looking at the pictures. Did you see the one of Hoover holding the bomb shell? I thought that was pretty crazy. *(pause)* Yeah. And like, who's that other guy in the picture? That's what I want to know. Just some random guy, right? But now I'm looking at him. Did he think, while he was standing there, 'I'm going to be in a history book some day'. No! See, that's what I think is interesting. None of these dates or policies or whatever. *(pause)* I understand that it's important, I guess I just don't ... really understand. You know? As much as they tell us, 'learn history, or it will repeat itself' or whatever I'm still like, whatever, you know? This is like some event at the turn of the century that most people don't know about anyway and they seem to get along just fine. *(pause)* You know what I wonder. If no one was ever taught about it, would it have ever really happened? Huh? Chew on that one for a while. *(pause)* What effects? Tell me. How does this effect what I'm doing right now?

(as she continues to speak a BOXER rebel, wearing the traditional uniform with the addition of a pair of silly boxer shorts on the outside, crawls out from under the bed and stands at attention behind her.)

STUDENT

Don't give me that butterfly effect crap. I want to know! *(pause)* See what I mean? It might as well never have happened, if the end result is nothing.

(she looks up and sees the BOXER for the first time)

HOLY SHIT!

STUDENT

(in her surprise she drops her phone. she stares at the strange visitor, then scrambles for the phone.)

STUDENT

Listen, Jordan? I'm going to have to call you back.

(she hangs up the phone and sets it down. silence.)

BOXER

Greetings.

STUDENT

Who are you and how did you get in my room.

BOXER

I have traveled many lands to bring you a message from the Empress Dowager.

(he pulls out a scroll and unfurls it.)

STUDENT

Is this some kind of joke?

(she looks around, for a hidden camera perhaps. he clears his throat, rather loudly)

BOXER

The Empress Dowager requests your presence in the Forbidden City.

STUDENT

Shut up, shut up, this is crazy.

BOXER

You shall be leaving - shit, I can't pull this off any longer. You got me.

STUDENT

What?

BOXER

I'm not actually a Boxer rebel.

STUDENT

I didn't think you were.

BOXER

I wasn't doing a very good job then.

STUDENT

No you weren't.

BOXER

Do you think I could crawl under the bed and we could try this again?

STUDENT

How about you crawl out of my room and get out of here?

BOXER

No, no, c'mon. Give me another shot.

STUDENT

What is this? You're wearing armor and underwear? Are you some kind of retarded superhero?

BOXER

It's a visual pun. Boxer rebel, boxer shorts. Get it?

STUDENT

Cute.

BOXER

I thought so.

STUDENT

But it totally destroys the effect. Boxer rebels did not wear boxer shorts, especially not on the outside of their armor.

BOXER

Oh, so now you're the expert?

STUDENT

What is that supposed to mean?

BOXER

I heard you talking earlier. You don't know anything about the Boxer Rebellion.

STUDENT

What is this, PBS? Are you going to take me on some magical journey through time so I can learn about history?

BOXER

Actually, yes.

STUDENT

Really?

BOXER

No! Of course not. My methods are a little more subtle.

STUDENT

Methods.

BOXER

Okay. Here. Tell me what you thought was the most interesting part of the reading.

STUDENT

So this is a quiz now.

BOXER

Could you just play along? You might learn something.

STUDENT

That's what I'm afraid of. Okay. The Boxers thought they had magical powers that would make them immune to foreign bullets, right? I thought that was pretty interesting.

BOXER

Look at this. *(he takes off his helmet. he spreads the hair on the back of his head to reveal a bullet lodged in the rear of his skull.)* Pretty nifty, huh?

STUDENT

I guess so. But there's no way that could have actually been true.

BOXER

But you thought it would be interesting if it was, right?

STUDENT

Well, sure.

BOXER

Now we're getting somewhere.

STUDENT

If you say so. But how did you know that's what I thought was interesting? Unless you can get inside of my head of something.

(the BOXER lets that hang in the air)

STUDENT

Oh.

BOXER

Catching on?

STUDENT

You can read my mind?

BOXER

Not quite. But I do have to do with your brain. You thought it would be interesting if the Boxers were actually immune to bullets ...

STUDENT

So you're what I think history should be.

BOXER

Close enough. I'm what you think history is.

STUDENT

Weird. Am I crazy?

BOXER

As sane as me.

STUDENT

That's reassuring. But wait. I know next to nothing about the Boxer Rebellion. So if you're what I think history is, you'll be terribly incomplete and inaccurate.

BOXER

Ah ha.

STUDENT

But what's wrong with that? It's not like it actually changes what the history actually is.

BOXER

Not quite. Remember that picture in the history book?

STUDENT

The one with Hoover and the random guy? Sure.

BOXER

That's history taken out of context. Since we have no definite idea of what it actually is, what we suppose it should be effectively becomes what it is.

STUDENT

So?

BOXER

What if I were to take a picture of your room right now and put it in a history book?

STUDENT

I'd be flattered.

BOXER

Think of what people would deduce about you. Look at all the history books and notes she has lying around. She must love history.

STUDENT

That's not fair! I hate history.

BOXER

But, since this is many years in the future, so you're not there to defend yourself. Sorry. For all intents and purposes, you loved history.

STUDENT

That sucks. Does what people think in the future really determine what happened?

BOXER

How would we ever know? We have nothing to compare to.

STUDENT

So whatever people think happened is what happened.

BOXER

More or less.

STUDENT

So history exists in the minds of the people who know it.

BOXER

Bingo. That's why you have to learn it. To keep the past from changing too much.

STUDENT

That's insane. If that were true, you could teach people the wrong thing and that would have been what happened.

BOXER

How is that any different from the way things already are?

STUDENT

Oh.

BOXER

It's been said that the winners write the history books. But the truth is that the past is written entirely in the present.

STUDENT

You are crazy.

(he puts his hands up defensively)

STUDENT

You confuse me. Get out of here.

BOXER

I'm trying to teach you something.

STUDENT

Yeah, you and everybody else.

BOXER

You won't be able to forget me.

STUDENT

I'll see what I can do.

BOXER

But I've made my impact! My intervention will change your future forever!

STUDENT

Wrong. My future will change your intervention.

(she shoves him back under the bed. sighs. picks up cell phone.)

STUDENT

Hey, Jordan? Yeah, sorry about that. Listen, do you want to just forget this and get some frozen yogurt or something?

END