

High Fry at the Golden Arches

\$FRYNOON



On an empty boulevard packed with rival fast-food signs, Colonel Sanders and Ronald McDonald square off at high noon while a tornado of flying chicken and burgers pelts both sides. The Colonel twirls his cane like a six-shooter; Ronald's grin never wavers as the sky literally rains McNuggets. It's a dead-serious Western standoff played entirely with drive-thru mascots and airborne grease.

Treatment

The boulevard stretched under a flat noon sun, its cracked asphalt lined with rival signs that clacked in the dry wind: golden arches half-unbolted, a red-and-white bucket silhouette swinging on rusted chains, a faded crown above a drive-thru speaker that coughed static every few minutes. Between the Golden Arches and the Colonel's stand, the pavement was empty except for scattered fry cartons and a single plastic lid rolling in circles. The Colonel stepped from the shadow of his bucket sign at 11:58, white suit already dotted with yesterday's grease, cane polished until the brass tip caught the light like a revolver sight. Across the divide Ronald waited, shoes the size of hubcaps planted wide, one gloved hand resting on the counter of his service window as though it were a saloon bar.

The first gust came from the east, carrying loose napkins that spiraled upward and joined a thickening column of wrappers, lids, and half-empty sauce packets. The Colonel planted his cane point-down and began to twirl it, slow circles that cut the air with a low whistle. Ronald's painted smile stayed fixed while his eyes tracked the forming funnel; a single McNugget lifted from an overturned tray behind him and spun once before dropping. The tornado tightened, now visible as a rope of airborne grease that smelled of rendered fat and powdered seasoning. At exactly twelve the first volley crossed the street-six breaded strips and a hail of sesame-seed buns that struck the Colonel's lapel and burst open, spilling pickles that slid down his vest like spent brass.

Ronald answered by lifting both arms; the drive-thru window behind him vomited a fresh sheet of nuggets that rode the updraft and came down sizzling. One struck the Colonel's cane mid-twirl and stuck; he shook it free and answered with a short, sharp jab of the cane that sent a chicken wing spinning back like a returning boomerang. The funnel grew taller, now tall enough to scrape the lower edge of the arches, tearing loose a strip of yellow plastic that wrapped itself around Ronald's neck before he tore it away. Both men held their ground while the sky rained heavier: whole Filet-O-Fish sandwiches slapped the asphalt and skidded, their tartar sauce leaving snail trails; a drumstick the size of a forearm embedded itself in a yield sign and quivered.

Midway through the exchange the Colonel felt the rhythm shift. A cluster of hot nuggets struck his right knee and he dropped to one hand, cane clattering. Ronald's grin widened by a millimeter; he took one oversized step forward, shoes crunching through a drift of onion rings. From the KFC service window a forgotten pressure cooker vented a final plume of steam that fed the tornado, turning the funnel briefly white. The Colonel rose again, suit now streaked with red from a burst ketchup packet, and began to twirl the cane faster, carving tighter circles that pulled stray fries into a secondary whirl. The two funnels brushed; grease lightning cracked between them and the boulevard lights flickered.

Ronald faltered when a whole bucket, lid still sealed, dropped from the upper current and struck his shoulder. For the first time the painted smile slipped; the corners of his mouth trembled as though the hinges had loosened. He reached into his jumpsuit and produced a single paper crown, creased and stained, that he fitted onto his head with both hands. The gesture steadied him. He raised his arms again, but the motion lacked the earlier snap; the next wave of food that left his window arrived lower and slower, burgers tumbling end-over-end rather than slicing through the air.

The Colonel saw the hesitation and pressed. He advanced three measured steps, cane now spinning above his head so that the brass tip drew a bright circle against the darkening funnel. The tornado responded, leaning toward Ronald's side of the street, scooping up trays and cups and flinging them in a widening spiral.

Ronald's shoes caught in a sudden drift of loose salt; he staggered, one arm windmilling, the grin now a rigid line across his face. The Colonel stopped at the exact center of the boulevard, lowered the cane until it pointed at Ronald's chest, and held it there while the sky continued to empty itself around them.

When the last of the heavier debris had fallen, the funnel thinned to a drifting veil of paper and grease. Ronald remained standing, crown askew, one shoe half-buried in a mound of cold nuggets. The Colonel did not fire the final shot. Instead he reversed the cane, tucked it beneath his arm, and turned his back on the arches. He walked toward his own bucket sign without looking again at the figure across the street. Behind him the paper crown slipped from Ronald's head and was caught by a last, dying gust that carried it upward until it snagged on the lower curve of the golden arches and hung there, rocking once before it settled, a small red-and-yellow shape against the empty blue.

AT HIGH NOON, THE CHICKEN HITS THE FAN



COLONEL HARLAND SANDERS · RONALD MCDONALD · WENDY THOMAS · JACK BOX

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