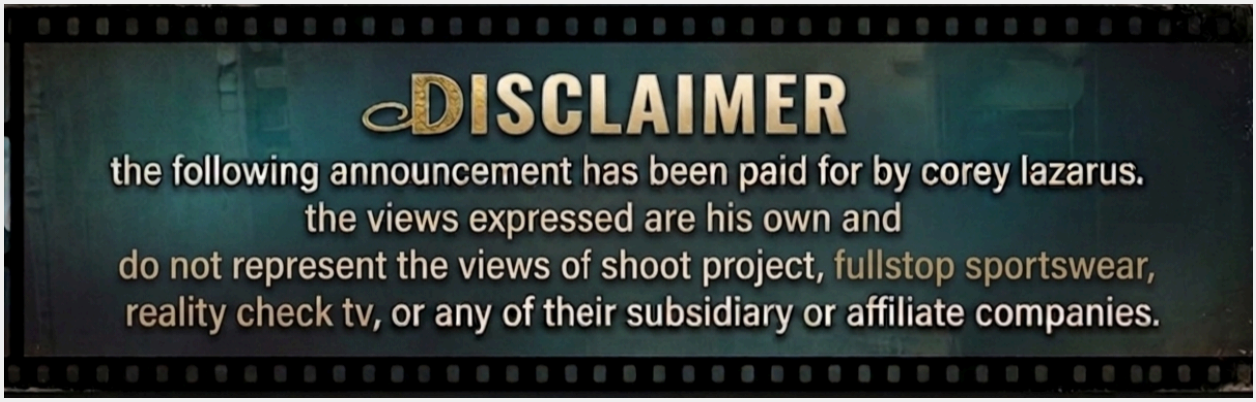




mcc theater - main auditorium.
new york city, new york. 3:44 pm.

[A painted backdrop of a rocky cliff hangs at the back of the stage, glowing lines of lightning cascading from its upper right corner. The camera pans down, revealing COREY LAZARUS bent at a knee, his red-cloaked body hunched forward.]

Lazarus
And man? Man is least himself when he talks in his own person!

[He lifts his head up, revealing a plain and off-white mask. Expressionless, vaguely pointed at the nose, with narrow slits for eyes, a narrow opening around the mouth.]

Lazarus
But give him a mask...

[Corey curls one hand around the mask covering his face, raising his other hand high over his head.]

Lazarus
...and he will tell you the truth.

[Slowly, he peels the mask away from his face to reveal his Trademark Devilish Grin, tilting his head upward...]

Lazarus
And...

[...before he drops his raised hand, signaling the curtain to drop behind him. He pauses for a moment, his tongue pressing outward on his bottom lip, before he nods.]

Lazarus
...*scene*.

[He leaps to his feet, throwing the cloak off his shoulders to reveal a white short-sleeve Henley bearing the FULLSTOP logo over the heart, a pair of black acid wash Ksubi bootcut jeans, and a pair of black, gold, and red high-top sneakers bearing the FULLSTOP logo on the outer walls.]

Lazarus
Hi. I'm **Corey Lazarus**. You may remember me from such classic programming as *On the Downside: the Second Reunion*, or even as the star in the recently announced Guilty Gear limited series, coming this spring to Howdy.

Now, to my lovely production assistants, if you'd please...?

[The curtain pulls back up, revealing a rear projection backdrop and, on it, a cycling of clips and images from the past year of Corey's return to a SHOOT Project ring.]

Lazarus
Thank you.

You'll have to forgive me for the self-important and intellectually masturbatory usage of a famed **Oscar Wilde** quote to begin this little soirée of ours, but I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen and theyfolk, that it'll be worth it. Hell, some of you may even learn a thing or two, and once you know? You realize, of course, that knowing is half the battle.

You see, buckaroos, I've noticed that a funny correlation can be made between my return to the SHOOT Project ring just over one year ago, following a decade spent traversing all manner of sport and entertainment abroad, and the sheer volume of facades that have fallen to the wayside. Whether these events are circumstantial to the return of the Last Damn Icon or tied directly to it may be up for interpretation if, of course, you're the kind to not pay particularly close attention, but for the purposes of this exercise?

[He shrugs, disregarding whatever potential criticism may follow his words.]

Lazarus
We're choosing to assume the truth...which is, naturally, the former.

As exhibit A, we have the ever-present workhorse of the **Empire**, a woman who has punched so far beyond her weight class that she is deserving of all the respect and admiration that could fill her goblet. It just so happens, unfortunately for her, that

this amounts to a double shot to the layperson, because the individual I'm talking about is none other than **Izzy Sia**.

"*The Katamayan*," as she's called.

[He clicks his tongue, shaking his head as he runs a hand over his face, pausing for a brief moment as his thumb drags across the patch over his left eye.]

Lazarus
I had to look that up, which shouldn't be any surprise, and what struck me as the most interesting tidbit that I gathered, in doing so, is the revelation that death comes in snack-sized morsels.

Which is pretty cool. For real. I'm just, like, struggling to figure out how someone that keeps selling herself as being this super tough, rough-and-tumble badass motherfucker just keeps winding up on the losing side, dig?

[He holds up the four fingers of his left hand, "slicing" them away with each talking point...]

Lazarus
The Premier championship? Gone. Twice. Both times - yeah, *both* times - because that Amazonian drink of sparkling water - just oh, so *sparkling* - that you called a stablemate decided she wanted a new bracelet.

The Empire State championship? Gone. Quickly. My pal **Johnny** figured that he wanted another little trophy from the Big Apple to bring back to Beantown, one more shot in the eternal rivalry between our two cities, and voila. Gone.

As for the Pantheon championships...

[...before ridding himself of the final two standing fingers, shaking his head with a knowing smirk. He tuts his tongue, snickering under his breath.]

Lazarus
...tsk, tsk, tsk...well, Izzy, correct me if I'm wrong here, but I've been assured by a few people that the entire reason those titles were switched from requiring a solidified pairing of individuals to being a bit looser with how its teams were put together, a little bit of some "Freebird action"...

[Corey forms the quotation marks with the index and middle fingers of either hand, smirking all the while.]

Lazarus
...if you will, is entirely owed to you and your cohorts.

Does that seem accurate to you? Is that little factoid something that can be verified, validated, notarized, and certified? I'm not saying this out of intended disrespect, kiddo, but more because I, quite literally, do not possess the mental

capacity to recall each and every hors d'oeuvre that I've ever had the pleasure - or discomfort, if you wish - of tasting.

That all being said, let's assume that, you know, it is. And that after thinking on it for a hot second, it turns out that my son, **Ricky Tenet**, and I are actually owed a Pantheon championship shot!

[He raises an eyebrow, stepping forward to the edge of the stage as he kneels down, drawing the camera in close with a quick "come hither" motion of his fingers.]

Lazarus
See, we had you and **Gilded Berkowitz**, or whatever that bottled blond d-bag's name is, back in May - so, of course, my mind was elsewhere, being the rightful World Heavyweight champion and all - and that scrappy little "Iron Saint" kid was on one of those career-defining tears through just about anyone on that could be tossed in front of him.

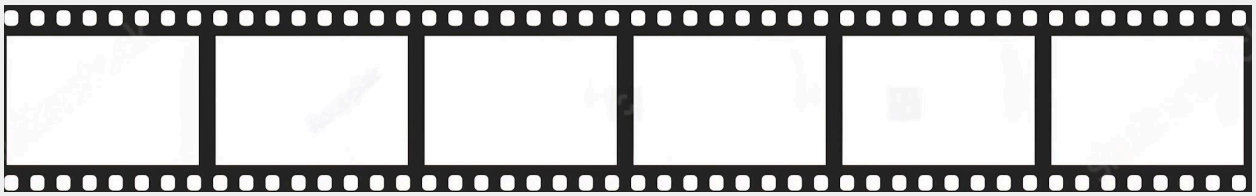
[He holds up a finger, tonguing the inside of his cheek for a moment as he ponders something.]

Lazarus
Oh...wait a second...that was back when the Empire was still a thing.

Meaning that's another unfortunate truth that's been revealed to the world just because the Hollywood Kid decided to stroll into the Pinnacle and shoot from his perfect hip.

Isn't that right, **J Jonah Bedpan**?

[Corey points to the camera...]





fairlane counseling services - dr. fairlane's office.
new york city, new york.
tuesday. july 28, 2026. 10:37 am.

Lazarus

...because he got him a fucking *Hardee's* deal!

[Corey paces back and forth between the leather sofa and DR. FAIRLANE's desk, holding out his left hand and "chopping" it with his right as he emphasizes his words.]

Lazarus
Did he ever get *me* a Hardee's deal? Or even a fucking *Steak n' Shake* one? Oh no. No, sir, he did NOT.

Dr. Fairlane
I don't understand, Corey. I thought you said that you hate Hardee's?

[Lazarus runs his hands over his head and drops into the sofa, rubbing his eye.]

Lazarus
It's the *principle*, **Bharati**. It's the *principle* of it all.

[Corey leans back in the corner of the sofa, crossing his left ankle over his right knee as his hands clutch the back of his neck, and stares at the ceiling with equal parts betrayal and shock behind his eye.]

Lazarus
I asked him a thousand times to try to work some deal like that. Some sort of L-A-Z kids meal, with a sandwich and a side and a cheap little toy that'll be sold by collectors in twenty years...

Dr. Fairlane
Now, Corey, I have to wonder if the way you're reacting is because of the action...

[Dr. Fairlane adjusts herself in her chair, looking over the top of her glasses toward Corey across the office from her.]

Dr. Fairlane
...or who it involves?

[Lazarus snickers at the thought, clicking his tongue before reaching into the pocket of his olive green Balenciaga cargo shorts to retrieve his phone. He opens the screen...]

Dr. Fairlane
I thought we agreed on no phones, Corey.

Lazarus
I'm not calling anyone, Doc. I'm bringing something up for you to see.

[...and nods, slapping the heel of his brand new FULLSTOP Premiere GT - a high-top cross-trainer with black, gold, and ruby red designs - before he rises.]

Lazarus

Just look at this Spit. Look at it.

[Corey holds the phone up to her face and Dr. Fairlane, humoring her client's wishes, adjusts her glasses to read it.]

Dr. Fairlane
“Hot Desi MILFs are in your area”?

Lazarus
...what?!

[Lazarus pulls the phone back, checking the screen. He shakes his head...]

Lazarus *(muttering)*
...goddamn ads on this fucking thing...

Dr. Fairlane
Why don't you pay for the Premium plan?

Lazarus
Because I never use it.

Dr. Fairlane
It seems like you'd want to keep your name in the public eye as much as possible, especially given...

Lazarus
Here. Read *this*.

[He holds the phone back up to her again.]

Dr. Fairlane *(reading)*
“And”...is this going somewhere? Is there a point to this?

Lazarus
Scroll around, find out. Up, down, left and right, flip it into a cartwheel, roll it up and smoke it...

Dr. Fairlane *(reading)*
I...

[She blushes and looks up at Corey again, offering as kind a shrug as she can muster.]

Dr. Fairlane
...I'm not seeing anything...?

[He holds up a finger, nodding.]

Lazarus

Exactly. There should be hundreds of Spits - Spats? Sputs? - mentioning that RD lifted my suspension from the Pinnacle. Even more asking what this means for Arthur and *my* World title, when we're going to get what we both want, what...do you see where I'm going with this?

Dr. Fairlane
Somewhat, but it seems more like your ego has taken a bruising than anyone, in particular, slighting you.

Lazarus
Not even a single goddamn mention of the new Premiere GT's that hit the shelves on Thursday. Not *one*.

[Corey shakes his head as he pockets his phone, falling back into the sofa once more.]

Lazarus
It's wrong.

[He thinks for a beat, swinging his feet onto the cushions. He fluffs the cushioning on the armrest...]

Lazarus
It's *pathetic*.

[...and lies down, holding his hands over his eyes. Fairlane glances at him before making a few notes, adjusting the collar of her sapphire Georgette Portofino blouse as she sits up.]

Dr. Fairlane
Corey, let's move on from...!

Lazarus
With all due respect, Doc, I'd rather not. This is, like, *really* fucking with me.

Dr. Fairlane
...as you wish. So, tell me about...

[Fairlane brushes loose strands of her dark hair away from her face and groans under her breath. She puts her pen down and pulls her hair back, twisting it around into a tastefully messy bun before sliding the pen through it to hold.]

Dr. Fairlane
...tell me about this...oh, what's his name...Jimmy?

[The temperature in the room drops as Corey growls behind his teeth.]

Lazarus
Jaime.

Dr. Fairlane
Right, *Jaime* Alejandro.

Lazarus
He's a filthy prick. End of story.

Dr. Fairlane
You said that he visited you when you were *detained* on the cruise, and that he...

Lazarus
He threatened my fucking son.

[Beat.]

Dr. Fairlane
I see...and how did that make...?

Lazarus
How'd it make me feel? How did it make me *feel*?!

[Corey jumps off the sofa, practically frothing at the mouth at the very question.]

Lazarus
Bharati, listen, I know that you don't have kids, whether you couldn't or just *didn't*, but think long and *real fucking hard* about that question. It's stupid. It's a dumbfuck bullshit question. Jesus fucking...

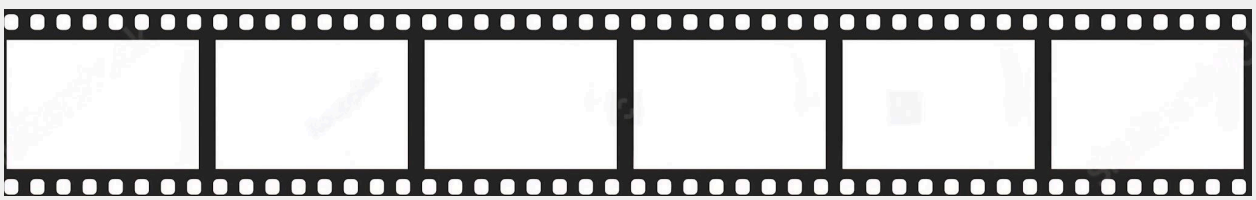
[He marches to the door, nearly ripping it off its hinges as he pulls it open.]

Lazarus
Consider this our final session, Doc. At least for a bit. If you're going to ask me something like *that* after everything that's gone down...

Dr. Fairlane
Please, don't...!

[Lazarus slams the door behind him, rattling the walls within her office.]

Dr. Fairlane
...slam the door...





mcc theater - main auditorium.
new york city, new york. 3:51 pm.

[...and flashes his eyebrows quick.]

Lazarus
You know what I mean, right? How you just had to cry your little eyes out over how hurt your little shoulder was, throw a tantrum because the would-be murderer's row you hired treated your presence like an annoying middle manager rather than the self-aggrandizing would-be conqueror, and then swung back in without even saying “hello” to the fine people that you were hiding from?

Oh, Josh, you rascal...don't ever think that the Surest Thing - trademark pending - would ever let such an act of cowardice and disrespect stand. You cried bitter tears about working hurt and conveniently took time off right when actual, legitimate competition made its presence known, and then returned to...to what? Hm?

To the maws of the Faithful, agape in their collective bewilderment. To the resounding indifference of those who've been taking this company - hell, this very sport - to greater heights than you could ever dream of.

[Corey stands up straight, clasping his hands together, almost in a prayer-like position, as he halts himself for a moment. Almost flustered, he forces the words out, practically pleading with the universe, with JOSHUA BREEDLOVE, to understand the simple math.]

Lazarus
Babe - and I mean this with the utmost respect that an individual in your position, with your pedigree, and with your personalized brand of histrionics deserves - have you come to terms with the nature of your success just yet? How it only seems to happen when someone of a certain caliber, such as yours truly, is otherwise preoccupied?

[He shakes his head, sighing, before backing away from the edge of the stage.]

Lazarus
Call me when you realize that whatever you and **Dustin** are trying to cook up needs a little taste test, dig? I'll be the brutally honest and scathing critic you'll never

want, but will secretly need...even if only due to some hitherto unspoken degradation fetish.

[Corey turns his back to the camera, walking toward the rear projection screen as his own bloodied visage comes across it.]

Lazarus
So let's see...that's three folks that have all started showing their true colors once poked, so who else...oh...

[The cause of that bloodied visage fills the screen as Corey looks up, his body tensing at the sight of ARTHUR PLEASANT staring back at him.]

Lazarus
...right. *That* guy.

[The clip of Corey locking the rest of the DEMONSTRANCE out of the cage aboard the *SS Powerbomb* rolls, drawing a deep and soulful chuckle from him now.]

Lazarus
Oh, **Artie**. Dear, sweet, infantile, small-minded Artie. It sure was about time that mask fell off you too, now, wasn't it?

You've spent the past - what? Year? Maybe even more? - trying to tell the world about "the Lie," and how you had the answer that was going to save not only the SHOOT Project, but the entire sport of professional wrestling itself.

Tiger, you shed blood to add credence to it. *My* blood. My *son's* blood. Your *own*. Countless others. And it's all been for...what?

[Lazarus turns, just as the clip of Pleasant convulsing after being shocked with his own cattle prod is projected across the screen.]

Lazarus
A dodgy little goth kid *shitfit*?

[Corey shakes his head, pulling a small bottle of Visine from his pocket. He clears his throat and tilts his head back, putting a few drops in the corner of his good eye to let the fluid trickle down. He stands up straight, forcing a sniffle, and pouts out his lower lip.]

Lazarus *(mockingly)*
"My weal daddy didn't wub me. My foster pawents made me eat my broccoli. I could've weft this sport behind forever ago and fwipped burgers but I didn't have the *balls* so you all need to pay."

[He shakes his head, wiping the remnants of the Visine from the side of his face.]

Lazarus

Spare me, babe. Spare *us*. *All* of us.

Spare **Sammy** another round of demagoguery non-fucking-sense that he'll pretend not to understand while he takes that phone the walking applause factory known as **Lou**, DEPRAVITY, or whatever the fuck else she's calling herself these days handed off to him, and he's surfing every wrestling subreddit he can find and dropping grand pontifications about the nature of deceit and man's ego, right in between checking whatever website he can to book a red rocket appointment.

Spare **Jaime** this faltering ideology that he's clearly already seen the cracks behind, to the point where he's already begun to call shots beyond the scope of what is, and is not, within the realm of your touted and conveniently re-routed plans.

And most importantly, Artie?

[The camera zooms in so that Corey's face fills the entire screen, whatever sense of joviality that existed to now displaced.]

Lazarus
Spare yourself the fucking embarrassment that's going to come from having the handful of minions still deaf, dumb, and blind enough to follow some pissant pied piper toward the abattoir and its various accoutrements be locked away from giving aid to their would-be deliverer. Spare yourself the trouble of de-soiling your undergarments after that cage door slams shut and the realization washes over you that oh, so many have shared in years prior.

That the L-A-Z is not now, nor has he ever, been one to fuck with and walk away unscathed.

So I say this, to Izzy and Breedlove and Jaime, Arthur, and all other unmasked mounds of cowering flesh alike...that's just life, dig? All you can do is deal with it. Rock n' roll, babes.

ROCK N' FUCKING ROLL.


That's life.
Deal with it.
Rock n' Roll, babe.
LAZARUS
ROCK N' FUCKING ROLL

fini