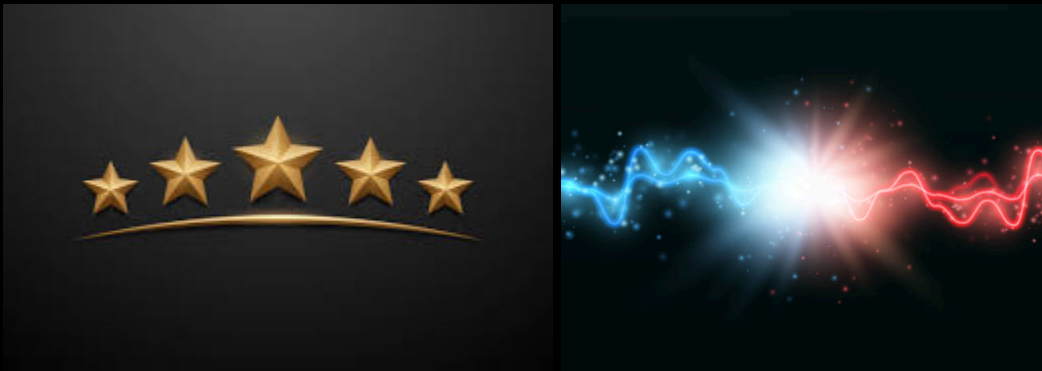




It's time we set this record straight in the XWF.

With our beloved Television Champion.

Beloved by many, but not by me. Because in a short amount of time, there's been a lot of bad blood between us.

You may all be surprised to discover that I'm not as responsible for this current dynamic as one Lucy Wylde. I will accept that I started this. I called her a bitch and, even before that Skeet, I took it to Aurora.

We all know how that went for me, right?

XWF Star of the Month

Wait, Lucy, were you expecting me to droop and speak to my two losses versus your bestie? Sorry to disappoint, but like I said in the other triple threat we're both in next week...

I don't have time to sulk. I don't have time to feel sorry for myself. I'm sure you'll do your ever-best to impose that on the XWF faithful, who look to you with adoration. They want Lucy to give them a good show, and send the fans home happy.

Fortunately, this week, you'll still be able to do so at Warfare. You'll still give them a scintillating match for the XWF Television Championship.

You just won't walk out with that title.

I'll again shoulder responsibility. For putting on an excellent match that the fans can lose themselves in, through the ups and downs. The big stretches and canvas rattling suplexes. The back-and-forth exchanges and hard hitting action.

I'll also claim responsibility for taking that mantle of Television Champion.

I'll be the bad so you can be the good. I'll let the crowd embolden your spirit anew with their cheers and uplifting shouts as you walk back up the aisle—empty handed.

Because that's who I am, Lucy. I'm not a superhero but a wrestler with a will that can break down even the top shelf competitors. It may take some time, but I'm always working towards that goal. I've never lost sight of you, Lucy. Even when me and Aurora began our trilogy, I knew that you and I would come to blows again, eventually.

It's not as if I haven't told everyone that I think you're one of the most underecognized and amazing talents in the world of professional wrestling today. I've never faltered from that.

I just think you have a terrible outlook. You cast judgment on people for your past. You have a faulty radar when it comes to seeing who's genuine and who's full of shit.

You want me to be your villain. The one who tormented you, made you feel less than because it was good sport, or because they needed it to keep their control over you. Really, you see me as both and then some. That's what your main beef seems to be. That and taking issue with one of your closest friends in Aurora.

Funny how you didn't seem to care much about what I said to Sebastian years ago, when we got in the ring together. I guess it's who you know, and when Lucy knows them. Or did you not do your research?

See, I learn plenty from you, too. I know how to play the game of going low, Lucy. I'm aware of a sordid past with your family.

A twisted history with Aurora... even despite her fucking criminal deeds as it relates to CJ.

All that history with Rogan.

I'm aware of it, Lucy. But I don't claim to know it, wrap it around me like a damn shield. I'm not weaponizing it.

Because that's the quality of character I possess. Our approaches disagree, but only one of us decided that was too much to keep things where they belong, in the arena.

Only one of us wanted to keep this about competition, and challenging the history of a Final Boss.

You reached down into the darkness.

That's going to cost you at Warfare, and beyond, Lucy. Because now you've made me want to stick the knife in and torque it in deep. But I still won't make this about your personal affairs, phony moral compass, or how little you actually care about anyone, despite your claiming to be a champion for all of Television.

Maybe you'll take the easy road once again, and come at me for losing the Television Championship you took from me, without my defending it a single time. It's almost a certified #TactFact that you'll weaponize that, too, disparaging me as a humiliating example of an XWF title holder, or competitor overall.

Even though you yourself have won titles and then dropped them without a successful defense.

This time, at least you got one.

But it's not something I say with appreciation because at Rebellion, you took it out on my guy, Jake Borden. Did it give you added satisfaction because Jake opened up to me, and took it upon himself to join the ranks of the Tactilize Yourself program? Did it feel extra good to raise that title at Rebellion?

It's going to be the last time for some time, Lucy. Because I'm back to take that title, just as I said I would.

And you're going to feel my humbling wrath.



"Can we please discuss this a little bit longer?"

Lazarus Tact takes a seat on a flat padded bench in one of the fitness centers of the Lazarus Compound. This center isn't for general physical fitness instruction, or having gym fare. Laid out in the center is a machine that you step into, with arms and legs spread wide. Presently, Larry Tact is secured in the assessment mode, dressed in navy blue Under Armour shorts and a black sleeveless t-shirt.

"Lazarus, I don't think there's much we need to discuss. Until we enter the Infinity and begin searching for Morgan, we're just wasting our time doing recon missions. Or is that what you're really after?"

Lazarus doesn't show any sign of admittance nor denial. He intertwines his fingers in a light clasp and rests them on his lap.

"Most certainly not. In fact, Fanatic has been making regular trips, but we haven't gleaned much more than we've already known for some time. It seems there are limits to what we can discover given our unfamiliarity with the Other Worlds."

“Which begs the question, why are we waiting? Obviously, CindyT and her Fanatic had planned out routes to their destinations. They had to have made connections before ever launching their abduction.”

Cindy Winstead walks over to lean against an island countertop near the machine Larry is using.

“Yes, there is a reason, and I’ve been trying to have it sink into you both. The Infinity is a dangerous place to toy with. It isn’t for amateurs to try and navigate blindly, much less attempting to run an extraction operation. Even I, who have been going through the Infinity for far longer than either of you, will attest that I take risks in carrying out my research.”

“What is your research in the Infinity, anyway?”

Lazarus demurs.

“There are less invasive ways that I use the Infinity to help with my businesses. The Lazarus Compound, of course, benefits from having enhancements I’ve found through the Infinity, and have been able to incorporate. But that does not entail potentially altering the course of our world, or other ones.”

“You’d be surprised, Lazarus. Larry already detailed the risks to me about what damage we could do here, and in the Infinity, if we try and save Morgan. But we’re already committed to doing it, no matter the price we pay.”

Before anyone else can respond, an authoritative sounding voice cuts in.

“Is that so? You’re prepared to sacrifice the fates of countless others to save my granddaughter?”

They all see the statuesque form of Antonio Tact striding into the center wearing a white sleeveless undershirt and blue athletic pants with white stripes. He doesn’t look any more satisfied than the last time they encountered him. If anything, he may seem more acidic today.

Larry knows he’ll continue to see his father if he sets foot in the Lazarus Compound. He tries to choke down his disdain and put on a neutral face as he and Antonio see each other. Antonio gives a dismissive wave of his hand.

“What are we trying today for him, a full reconstruction? Because I don’t think he’s fit to even try saving my Morgan.”

“Excuse you, but Morgan is our daughter, Antonio. You should know it’s me and Larry going after her, not anyone else. We will helm this mission.”

Antonio looks at Cindy as if she’s simply adorable.

“Cindy, daughter-in-law. I hate to make a pretty face cry. But you’ve hitched your wagon to an already dead horse.”

He juts a thumb at Larry.

“The humane thing to do for him is to put him down where he stands. He gave up the wrong career and should have stuck to his business world

affairs. As a professional wrestler, you can't see he's already finished? Which means, as someone who needs to rely on action and intellect to figure out where my granddaughter is? He's got no shot whatsoever."

"Sorry to disappoint you, Antonio—"

"Dad, that's enough. You've made your point."

Cindy looks at Larry, as does Antonio and Lazarus. Cindy mouths the word, 'Calmly' to her husband.

But Antonio doesn't need much to stoke his fire, gesticulating towards his eldest son.

"No, it's you who's shown us enough, Lawrence. When will your wrestling obsession, this insanity be put out to pasture with a bullet to the throat, and two to the head for good measure? All you've proven this year, without a shadow of a doubt, is that you welcome failure. One after another, failure failure and GODDAMN FAILURE! IT MAKES ME SICK!"

He fumes, his chest heaving and threatening to tear the fibers of his shirt.

Larry, for his part, looks as if he's expecting some sort of barrage, and came prepared.

"If you want to talk about the ring, I've got plenty of opportunities lined up. I can reclaim the Television Championship against Lucy Wylde. I can defend my Chaos title in the UGWC, and make a big splash in their Battleground match. I'm going to defend my Spirit of the Fight title in Pro Wrestling Valor.. That's just next week. So maybe wait until after all of that

before you go talking up failures. You may get more material, but I doubt it."

Larry dares to smirk at Antonio, which serves to raise the ire of his father. He points a accusing finger at Larry.

Specifically, his middle finger.

"I don't need to wait when you lost that title to Miss Wylde. A wrestler worthy of respect and who, like me, takes no issue with calling out your horse's ass logic."

"My father, do you mean... ass backwards?"

Antonio glances at his youngest son with a small grin.

"Either/or, Lazarus. Either/or."

But the moment of reprieve lasts only that long, as he comes back around to Larry.

"You're about to get smoked again by Miss Wylde, and then what? Is she going to take that Chaos belt off of you, too, or will it be that boy SEB? He's another closer, a true textbook definition of the word. Plus, he has a great amount of wealth that he actually knows how to make use of."

He glances at Cindy.

“There must be a reason Lucy hangs around him, and I bet that enormous wealth doesn’t just run deep in his pockets.”

Cindy sticks her finger in her mouth, making a gagging sound.

Larry, however, looks slightly amused, which Antonio picks up on.

“What the hell is that look?”

“Oh, nothing, go on. It’s just that Lucy Wylde is most definitely with the head of the XWF, Thaddeus Duke. Who happens to be close friends with Sebastian. The misogyny isn’t lost on me, though.”

Instead of seething, Antonio laughs as if he’s heard the joke of the day.

“As if a champion like Lucy isn’t wise enough to know exactly how to play that game. Talk about game changers... I’m sure she’s well versed in how to service multiple masters.”

“For the love of the gods, dad...”

“Ugh, okay, now you hit it... I don’t need these gross images to wash out of my mind, thank you very much.”

“What? You don’t think Thaddeus and Sebastian are attractive men? Plus, they’re real championship caliber athletes! You know they can go...”

“For the love of the gods! Dad, turn on your filter!”

"THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD, LAWRENCE!"

Larry wishes he hadn't gotten into the machine, seeing the timer still having a couple minutes left to complete its assessment.

"Jesus, you're an absolute horror show. You think that you can throw your opinions around because why? You overcame some illness with a daily cocktail of drugs, and now you think you're invincible? You look like a walking muscle demons, and sound like a nightmare."

Antonio laughs at that, too.

"Better this than whatever it is you've amounted to. But humor me, then. How do you expect to take down Lucy Wylde, much less whatever awaits you in the Infinity? You can't even beat the known quantities here. There are only unknown quantities out there."

Lazarus offers a nod of agreement, his expression one of caution.

"This much is true, Larry, Cindy. I've been trying to make this point over and over, but you seem deadset on ignoring the obvious. You know who your targets are, but you've no way of reaching them. You also don't know who, or what, will be in your way to them. You could be killed before you even gain a lead."

Larry scoffs in lieu of shaking his head, not wanting to disturb the analysis scans at work.

“There are always going to be unknowns, Lazarus. You don’t think we know that? What’s the flip side to all of this? Leave her in the hands of those demented kidnappers? Let her be raised by them? Learn under their rule, and then be set loose on the world to do who knows what harm? I will not accept that future for Morgan!”

“Neither will I. This roundabout discussion has got to stop. We don’t need to hear about these variables because we’ve already decided. I don’t need to live a life where I gave up on bringing back Morgan. I won’t live with that regret. Don’t try to tell us how to feel about going in to save her. Don’t give me facts and figures when this is clearly a matter of the heart.”

Lazarus sighs, nodding again in agreement.

Antonio looks as if he was just fed a bowl of earwax.

“This is why you don’t leave a woman in charge. You get emotional distress, poor decision-making, and a lack of real, strong leadership. Maybe I’m wrong... maybe you’re the problem with my son. Because when I raised him, he was strong. He did dominate, and he went against my wishes to do it. That hasn’t changed at all, but in the years since I was guiding him he’s clearly gone soft. Women and old men beat the ever-loving crap out of him on a weekly basis. You know that saying? ‘Behind every great man is a great woman?’ It’s just a saying, not the real truth. You’re dragging my son down.”

Cindy narrows her focus on Antonio, but the lone move she makes is with her mouth.

"No, Antonio, I don't think that's true. I think you just raise the bar anytime he meets it. Larry has been XWF Television Champion."

"Pfft, yes, for how many hours?"

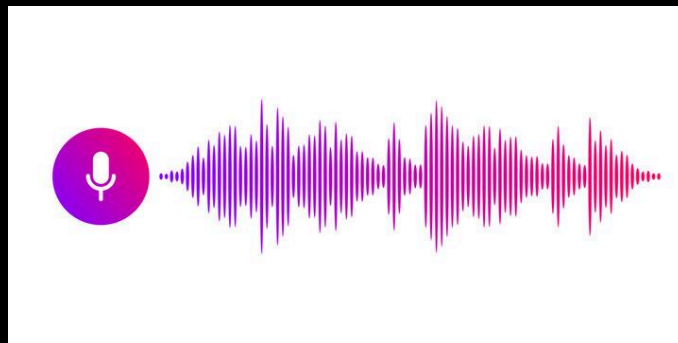
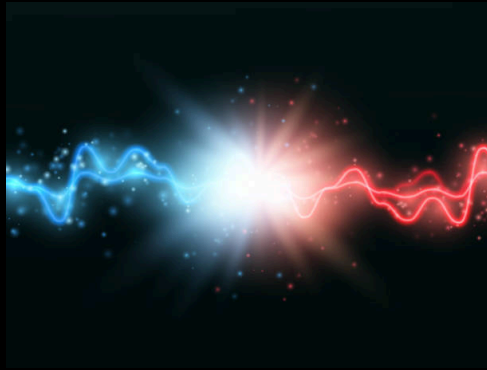
"He won it and he can do it again. He beat Aurora for it, but it wasn't on the right stage for you, with the right spotlight. What if he goes out and beats Lucy and Scoops at Warfare? Wash, rinse, repeat? Or will you finally lay down that dagger you've got ready to stab with again. You think you're doing something good, 'toughening up' Larry when in reality, all you're achieving is to slow him down."

Antonio considers Cindy's words, and takes a deep breath. When he exhales and responds, he sounds matter-of-fact.

"We'll see. But if I had to guess, Miss Wylde will bruise the rest of his ribcage that Aurora didn't, and Mister McGee will leave him needing to be fit for a new skin after he tears open this frayed and frail epidermis."

Cindy shakes her head, but doesn't respond as a beeping sounds out and the sounds of clasps releasing as Larry steps out from the machine. He steps up to his father.

"We will see."



Scoops McGee, on the other hand, is someone I've become more familiar with. We've been in solo matches, tag team matches, and now, a Television Championship match. It's a wild ride when you dig in with Scoops, and I'm looking forward to having you in this match.

Mainly, I'm looking forward to rectifying a loss I ate from you earlier this year. I wasn't right after Sarah Wolf gave me a dose of her custom death saliva. Now, I'm more ready to face you than I was back then. But Scoops, what is it that you've done to improve yourself?

You've been an X-Treme Champion twice, I get it. You've competed in the Ides of March, and I have to say, that's impressive considering the harm you put yourself at risk for. I know that you've preceded your reputation for the anything goes style, especially having been dropped on my head through flames at your hands.

But this won't be an environment where you can get away with that. In fact, there isn't even a ton of time to get the job done here, with fifteen

minutes. It's going to be a match for efficiency and quick wits, seeing as triple threats aren't the easiest to score a pinfall or submission.

What I know is, in this very same Television title match format, as a Fatal Fourway... I submitted Aurora to win the title. Say what you want about my record, but I've been making it clear to the XWF that I'm here to fight with every bit of my being.

I know you embody that spirit, too, Scoops, but I'm gonna have to knock you down in this one. It's a more than a little personal between Lucy and I, but if I'm being honest, the biggest thing I want out of this is to reclaim what I lost. The Television Championship means a great deal to me because it represents what the XWF faithful see as their champion.

I'll be someone they can respect, and humbly, Scoops..

You can Tactilize Yourself.

\$ \$ \$ \$ \$

#TACTFACTS

