

Steve Sayors has had one hell of a week. There was exhaustion written between the lines on his face.

Cup of bean juice in one hand, Sayors sighed as he thumbed through the docket (his phone schedule) with the other. His footfalls echoed down the concrete corridors of Kroger Field, and while Leap of Faith wouldn't be for another two days, Pay Per View events - or Premium Live Events as the youth say - were hectic from build-up to final bell.

*This is how it's always been*, he reminds himself.

Nose, meet grindstone.

Layota Hixx, for instance, had been here for over a week, living, surviving, thriving even, somewhere beneath the bleacher seats. This time, she and her partner are preparing to take on the team of Reggie Estrada.

Her words, not his.

Razor and Hixx have been hounding the ring crew and terrorizing interns since the moment they stepped foot in Kentucky. Well, long before that. This instance wasn't unusual. Far from it. They must not have liked hotels, or motels, or the local nightlife for that matter. They've lived comfortable lives backstage for the entire two weeks leading up to their next match time after time.

For all of their faults, Hixx and Razor were the first two at every venue and the last two to ever leave it.

Which was, in a way, commendable. But somehow their basic needs in these weeks leading up to their matches had fallen into the realm of Sayors' domain. He wasn't quite sure how it happened. Somehow, somewhere along the way, through fate or delegation and by no objective fault of his own, Hixx and Blade had become his responsibility.

If they were children, Sayors would be their daycare nanny.

Every so often, as luck and/or the Duke kid would have it, his other duties assigned would temporarily pull him away from having to keep a direct eye on the Storm. Instead of relief, however, he spent his downtime feeling the weight of exhaustion. He was drained physically and ten times more than that mentally. Dealing with the madness on a near constant basis left him in a search for his own sanity.

But there were other, and on occasion more pressing needs than just those of his authentically American Nightmare. His daycare had many children, afterall. And he was a soul divined by providence never to find true rest.

Hence "the list".

Steve Sayor: *Let's see here. What to do, what to do - hmm...*

He had to maintain his own schedule just to make sense of it all. So many requests. Scrolling. Scrolling Scrolling.

- Juice boxes and fruit slices (peeled and de-seeded) for Hixx and Razor (check)
- Beer, Wine, and/or Any Other Alcohol for Frances Marigold (check, but also pending)
- Permission to use Jake Borden's time machine (pending)
- Fresh kitty litter for Miss Furry (out for delivery, 8 stops away)
- Smoothe over whatever Aidan Collins said in public this week. (Find out what it was first! But a pre-emptive check)

- 1 KG Protein (dead or alive) for Enigma (check?)
- Permission to use Jake Borden's time machine (used time machine to go back in time to remember to ask Jake for permission first, yet somehow *still* pending)
- Captain Future already knows what he wanted tomorrow, and how you were supposed to get it for him today (check, but also not done yet, still waiting on me with time machine)
- Interview "The Messenger" (more Black Rainbow bullcrap, pending)

Steve Saylor: *Aha. Thee Messenger minus the Thee.. Another weirdo to deal with. Great.*

Sayors stopped and peered out among the grandeur of the open stadium, and the XWF ring at the epicenter of it all. They say it takes a village to raise a child, but the XWF was *his* baby. If it wasn't for the electricity, the elation, the echo of 80-thousand plus standing on the edges of their seats, screaming on the tops of their lungs, he swears he wouldn't put up with all of this.

Steve Saylor: *Let's get this over with.*

### Interview with *Thee* Messenger

Being at an arena (or in this case stadium) early had its perks.

One of which was the damn near wide-open usage of the venue in play. Every show was different. Each new megastructure cracked open a whole wide-world of

possibilities that seemed boundless to the creative mind. They could do a standard interview in a press box. They could move it out to the field. Hell, they could even sit beneath the Kentuckian sky in the nosebleeds, with the grand city of Lexington offering its skyline as the perfect backdrop-



Messenger: *Oh please, Mister Sayors. Let me not take up any more of your precious time!*

Steve Sayor: *I don't exactly feel... comfortable... conducting the interview here, 'Thee Messenger'.*

Messenger: *What could possibly make you feel that way?*

They're doing the interview in a hallway. In a basement.

Under an eerie glow.

Messenger: And no 'thee'. Just Messenger.

Steve Sayor: I'm so sorry, just Messenger, sir. I guess it's just, I don't quite know how to say it exactly-

Messenger: Do you fear the gaze of the Black Rainbow looming over you? Do you feel their ominous presence lurking in the shadows unseen, ready to strike at a moment's notice?

Steve Sayor: Uhh... Yes.

Messenger: Fear not. For as you can see, there are no shadows here.

Steve Sayor: There are several... the entire hallway is actually covered in one big shadow-

Messenger: I AM NOT PLAYING WITH YOU!

Steve Sayor: Oh god!

Messenger: TELL ME- Why do you tremble at the sight of my fate?

Steve Sayor: ...what?

Messenger: YOU ARE NOT THE ONE IN DANGER HERE- Yet you act as though you are destined to the slaughter such as I. Have your rulers not made this clear? Is this not what your KING wanted?



Steve Saylor: I-I don't have a King. I'm not-

Messenger: DON'T - play coy with me, Sir. Am I not here at the behest of the divine rulemaker himself? Subjugated to suffer for Black Rainbow's refusal to bend the knee?

Steve Saylor: Please don't hurt me... I uhm... I literally just do what they tell me to, so...

Messenger: Aha! Another malcontent! A fellow traveller, boldly standing to tyranny, also thrown under thine royal boot! My sincerest apologies! Why didn't you say so earlier, Sir?

Steve Saylor: I... uhm...

Messenger: And hurt you? No no no no NO!

The strange man leans in close and whispers in Sayors' ear.

Messenger: I wouldn't *dream* of such a thing.



Messenger: ...and neither does he.

Steve Sayor: Jesus F\*cking Christ!!! What the [beep]- I thought you said you were alone!

Messenger: We're one in the same, Mister Sayors. Men like us, we're never alone.

(Not the) Interview with The Messenger(?)

As often happens in Sayors' world, he's transported. How? When? Why? It never makes sense, it just *is*. One minute Layota is backstage talking to him on a microphone, and the next second they're standing in the middle of the ring a week

later. Or out in the parking lot with Razor Blade. Or standing by a van outside of a freaky Sanatorium.

This time, Steve wakes up in his suburban bed. How? Why? It just *is*. Sheets and duvet lined in a body print and drenched in cold sweat. He shoots up from a dead sleep screaming-

Steve Saylor: *AHHH!!!*

Deep, heavy breaths. Hyperventilating. Panic. His eyes darted around the room. It's serene, peaceful. Bland white walls, Value City Discount Furniture bedset, and 'Live, Laugh, Love' decor all illuminated by the warm, happy glow of the morning sunrise peeking in.

Steve Saylor: *Oh god, oh sweet jesus, oh f\*ck.*

He reaches for the framed picture of his family on his bedside nightstand. A happy wife, several children that all bear a striking resemblance to the many faces that Steve himself has worn throughout the years.

Steve Saylor: *The goat man wasn't real. The goat man wasn't real. The goat man wasn't real.*

Messenger: *You're not real.*

Steve Saylor: *AHHH!!!*

Interview with Messenger (for real this time?)



Steve Sayor: **AHHH!!!**

Messenger: **What's wrong, Sir?**

Steve Sayor: **GET THE [BEEP] AWAY FROM ME- THE [BEEP]-**

Messenger: **I do believe you may be hallucinating.**

Steve Sayor: **THE [BEEP]- [BEEP]ING [BEEP] [BEEP] [BEEP]!!!!**

Messenger: **Or perhaps you were having... a *dream*?**

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**I had a dream... once, Mister Sayors.**

**It was a long time, in fact, several years ago. As they say, I wore a younger man's clothes back then.**

**I also wore a younger man's head on my shoulders, too. See, I wasn't the brightest tool in the kitchen drawer. Never once claimed to be. I had a friend, though. And this friend of mine I trusted with every fiber of my being, right down to the beating of this very heart.**

**We had grown up together. Risen the ranks of your local public education institution together. We had goals. We had desires. We were boys with imaginations without end. But in the end, we were just boys in a cruel, cruel world. Times change, people change, and as these two inseparable young men grew older and past their teenage years, we found ourselves out on our own and on the streets of the Biggest of Apples.**

Steve Sayors: New York City?

Ahh, yes sir! How quite astute of you to pick up on that. New York mother[beep]ing City. The city that cannot dream, because she is the city that never sleeps.

Now where was I?

My friend and I, we'd do whatever we needed to scrape by. Many a night I scoured a trash can and a raw dumpster. Most of which were teeming with forbidden life... rats and the like... which I find quite funny now.

Steve Sayors: Why?

Because...



My name is Rat.

Steve Sayors: Your name is 'Rat'?

That *is* what I said.

That's another story for another time, my newfound friend.

Steve Sayors: **Wait a minute, how did we end up here?**

That is the exact question I was asking myself, born in the land of opportunity, and receiving none of it. Every man has their breaking point, Mister Sayors, and as it turns out... My friend could not stomach the taste of the vermin that we fought for our meals.

We tried manual labor. We tried the American Dream in the American way. In a land that is, for better and for worse, defined by its refusal to live under the tyranny of Kings. There we were, struggling to get by. But no matter how hard we tried, the ends would not meet. The roof did not erect itself. The food rarely materialized. The rain and the snow, and every harsh reality were the only things that fell from our sky.

So when my friend made a choice to do things his way, I, of course, was there with him. In lockstep, every step of the way.

At first it was the stealing, the dealing, and the lies. Every new venture seemed like the golden opportunity that we never had. We picked up our skills along the way. The streets taught us kids more about life than any two parents ever could. We were in danger, but yet we scraped by.

Steve Sayor: **Wow... that sounds... terrible.**

Messenger: It may not feel like it, but we often get what we deserve, Sir.

The better we gained, the worse we got.

And we lost more of ourselves along the way...



Messenger: I do believe your appearance may have changed again, Sir.

Steve Sayor: My... what?

Messenger: Pardon me.

'Rat', as he called himself earlier, snuffs out his [beep]ijuana cigarette in a nearby ashtray.

Messenger: It *could* be me, I could be dreaming again. Where were we?

Steve Sayor: I asked you: 'What can you tell me about this **Dreamweaver?**'

Messenger: Right. I was just getting to that:

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My friend and I took many jobs. Above the law, below the law, and everywhere in between.

And by take, I mean, *he* took the job, and told *me* what to do.

Trusting as I was, I never asked him any questions.

We had a string of good luck. Things that could have gone wrong didn't. The worse the job, the better the pay. And by then we had grown emboldened.

That night, under a dreary sky, I was instructed to go to a bar.

Steve Sayor: **Just a bar?**

Yes sir. And while I am not at liberty to speak its name, I can tell you that there was nothing special about this bar or this night, other than our job depended on who was inside. See, I was shown a picture of this... person... by my friend. My simple instruction was to wait there in the corner booth, and not to leave until she did.

Steve Sayor: **And?**

After a while, I'm not sure how long to be frank, she was the first to break off from her party and leave. The damp evening outside had fallen under the full cover of night. I paid for my drink and I left when she did. My friend was waiting for me outside, standing by his car. I thought he was there to give me a ride. He asked me where she went, and if she was alone or with friends. I pointed her out to him. I said:

'There's the girl in the picture. Her. She's right there.'

She was just ducking into an alleyway.

Steve Sayor: **So what happened?**

My 'friend' told me to take the car.

## Rat's Nightmare

Rat: **What, why?**

Frustrated, because I never asked him *any* question before that moment.

Friend: **I said take the damn car around the block to the next street over! And whatever you do... DO NOT LET HER OUT OF THAT ALLEY. Do you understand me?**

Again, every fiber in my being wanted to ask *what*, and *why*...

But I couldn't fill my stomach with questions.

Rat: **I... I understand.**

Friend: **Good, well get your ass moving then-**

He said with a flick of his wrist. His keys flew at me and I caught them instinctually.

Friend: **Come on! Hurry the fuck up, will ya?!**

Before I could even exhale a whimper of a protest, His dark clothes disappeared into the darkness.

I turned the key to the ignition. Doubt crawled along my skin. I felt my hand reach up for the shifter on the steering column, and soon I was moving. I had to tell myself that this was *just* another job. I had to somehow let the coldness in my bones and the callouses on my hands make me grow numb to the feeling of wrongness in my actions.

I didn't know what the job *was*. But I did know that it wasn't good. And after sitting in that pub that night I knew what we were doing was wrong. I watched this girl spend an evening with friends from afar. They were all there together, simply celebrating... *something*. I don't know what it was. But they all seemed so... happy. Even in a cruel world. An emotion that I hadn't felt for so long.

By the time I made it around, I wasn't sure if I was too late, or too early. And damn my younger self, I parked the car a quarter-block up from the opposite end of that alley, and extinguished the lights and the engine.

I didn't then realize what I've come to know now, Sir. Back then, it was jealousy. I convinced myself I could do the job because I deserved to feel warm, comfortable, and free just like anyone else. Just like *she* once did.

I stepped out of the car, and walked up to the alley, practically blinded by streetlights.

And when I turned the corner, there she was. I saw *her* for the first time.

Steve Saylor: **Who?**

Messenger: *The Dreamweaver, Steven. In all her glory.*

By now, Steve was on the edge of his seat.

Messenger: *I looked her right in her striking blue eyes...*

Steve Sayors: *...and?*

Friend: *I have a message for you-*

### Interview with Messenger

As it so often happens in Sayors' world, he's transported again.

He's not sure how or why it happened. It just... is.

Messenger: *Oh [beep], oh [beep], hahaha! That [beep] is... intense!*

He said, wiping tears from the corners of his eyes.





Steve Saylor: Are you okay?

Messenger: Of course I am, Sir! A man should never be late to his own funeral, after all. And I could not thank you enough for reminding me!

Steve Saylor: Reminding you of what?

Messenger: That the sacrifice she asks of me is NOTHING compared to what I owe to her.

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Kieran King.

I have it on good authority that you have picked me out by name. Pardon me if you find that the honor is all yours.



And I want you to remember that when you're beating me to my material essence in that ring. Everything that you thought that you wanted, every string that you pull, it all comes back around one day. That's the nature of life, and *she* understands that. The weaver of dreams, the guide, the protector.

Every action you take to snuff her out only makes her influence grow **stronger**.

You are not helpless. You are not hopeless.

But you are pointless.

With my dying breath, I wish to say that I have a *message* for you:

"Your crown cannot protect you when your kingdom burns from below."



Praise be to the Weaver of our Dream.

Steve Saylor: thanks for the support and good luck this Sunday!

Steve Saylor: We hope that Messenger. can win her standing match and see who's gonna be the last person remaining when he and King. both collide for the first time when they meet in the same ring together at Sunday Leap of Faith on XWF.

Steve Saylor: Wait, what am I saying? Where am I? What's going on?

Steve looks up to his right and sees...



Steve Saylor: Nooooo!! NOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

That it was all just a **dream**.