



**12/31/23**

Once upon a time, night wind was barely a thought in the back of my mind. Lake Michigan brought Chicago strolls clarity with a chill that would render visitors little more than a shivering mess, taking inches off height from a hunched position and leaving them wanting for a retreat into fetal position under the covers. That harshness was familiar.

My comfort.

Oakland dropped off when it got dark, but still maintained comparative warmth when stacked up against Middle America. So, why was it that I felt *this* and not that?

Familiarity.

Difference summons discomfort, but at the same time, discomfort can turn your hide to leather.  
It's why I've embraced it.

Corey: People used to ask me "Why?". Why the deathmatch? There's so much sleekness and convenience in modernity, so what's the point in making it all harder on yourself?

The King of All Wrestlers chuckled on empty, slow and precise with his syllables as he stripped tape his wrist, paying no mind to the leveled lines of red that had been blocked from going any further by the wrappings.

Corey: Spectators will tell the tale, but a messenger..well, a messenger can never tell the full story. Spilling DNA changes that. Blood stains and it's not like you can take it from the floorboards.

Corey's locks looking a mess was par the course, but SEB's bangs being left disheveled will always be an odd contrast. Somewhere, there's a high school yearbook with Sebastian's mug centered above the words "best dressed" and yet, he sat outside of Oakland Metro Operahouse feeling the effects of Liberation Frequency as much as we were.

SEB: They're going to hate this, you know.

Corey: A vocal minority is just that and besides, catching the ire of our contemporaries just for showing up and letting our presence be known? I consider that power.

"This" was Pantheon, a supergroup whose label had meant instant merit in the WCF for those attached to it during its heyday. Corey would prove to be the most prevailing among its former ranks over the years, serving as architect. In our preliminary conversations, Corey's pitch to me had been based on the value placed upon my staying power and consistency. As for SEB, a man we'd scouted from the rafters from the opening contest of the Johnny Bacchus supershow, it was both composure and precision. In SEB, Pantheon wouldn't just have a vital addition to benchmark a fresher era, it would be adding a killer who cosplayed as prim and proper.

Sat next to me with backs against brick were two of the best, one friend old and one new. Yet, an emptiness persisted.

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📺 Meek Mill - Wins And Losses [OFFICIAL AUDIO]

*"You have to eat the dream  
You have to sleep the dream*

*You have to dream the dream  
You gotta touch  
You have to see it when nobody else sees it  
You have to feel it when it's not tangible  
You have to believe it when you cannot see it  
You gotta be possessed with the dream"*

### **Funny how things work out.**

Just about ten years back, yours truly got his first real break in this industry via Wrestling Championship Federation, a legacy promotion that had nearly two decades under its belt. I entered the fray without a pot to piss in and found myself put to flame and it wasn't to forge a star, it was to see how quickly I'd burn up but alas, I didn't. No, I stayed the course in this industry. In fact, I embedded myself into this so much so that I didn't just eclipse WCF, I outlived its memory occupying space in the minds of pro wrestling faithful, because I'm a lot of things, but above all else..

### **I'm fucking stubborn.**

### **Petty even.**

No longer do I show up to work as a bright eyed rookie hired on for the sake of filling out a roster spot, but a target for promoters. Before getting a break, I used to sit by the phone waiting for calls and now, it's a struggle getting to them all. This match? This company? I didn't seek this out. I didn't have a chance to do so, because XWF and all of its legacy and longevity came FOR me and good God almighty, I cannot stress enough how quickly I would fork over the whole payout from Free For All to see the look on Seth Lerch's rat fucking face as he's left watching old tapes of his dead promotion from '03 while Badmon Adams plays the headliner in a federation seen as the true lasting giant.

When the offer came up, I accepted it without a second thought. Truthfully, veterans are becoming a rare commodity these days and XWF has no shortage of them in house. While I've always been one to appreciate what makes a show tick from top to bottom and been more than willing to work those who find themselves in the spot I did all those years ago, I want to see what it is that's helped guys like Bobby Bourbon and Louis D'Ville keep up with younger bodies despite more mileage on the knees and back. I want to know why Centurion and Mark Flynn continue on even after doing basically all there is to do under the Xtreme banner.

More than anything, I want to make mainstays like these sweat for once, because what IF someone that Theo Pryce came to for a boost in attention brought to this thing ends up pulling the rug from under your feet and leaving you in an involuntary and collective pile just to spectate you staring up at the ceiling and doing turtle-legged flails like they were choreographed, so perfectly synchronized, yet so fucking lost at the same time? While you get ready to grease up the brow bone to avoid the stiff shots that send you home early, before you start thinking about

how you might win this thing, I want you to consider the possibility that Theo didn't go out and shake hands with a competitor who will raise the bar.

**He handpicked a *fucking* spoiler.**

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I was lucky, honestly. Most of my battle scars could be covered up, stitched and stapled lacerations that I kept concealed under shirts (or in the case of the ones on my forehead, underneath the hang of my locs). Inside the ring, they'd be more unavoidable, but distance would always serve as a sort of illusion. "It's part of it." or "He's still going. Everything's fine." With my son Faith being more up close and personal, I couldn't play it too safe. He's a curious kid, after all.

A pre-teen who due to trauma sustained in the time before my taking him in, operated a couple years behind schedule. This meant questions would always come flying out in bunches and I could see Adilene struggling not to roll her eyes or stockpile points to ream my ass about in the always uncomfortable hand-off situations. "Is dad okay? He looks really beat up." Besides, he didn't need to worry about my well-being. It's his job to be sort of twelve years old and mine to keep up the illusion that I'm invincible to the best of my ability.

Faith: Are you excited?

Spencer: Yeah, buddy. Are you?

Faith: Sure.

His shoulders didn't shrug, but his tone did. My son fell somewhere between an interested viewer and a jaded guest. To him, the noise and overstimulation of our industry was something he'd just adapted to more than anything. We were sort of alike in that way. I was always a brother, a son, and an uncle up until fate's cruel hand took all three titles away from me. For the longest time, I hadn't planned on having a kid as I was career focused. In all fairness, Faith was dealt a shit hand prior to being taken in. Hell, Faith was a handpicked name as the original had been lost to time, buried under the debris that was once Slab City.

He'd been "raised" by someone known only as "The Conductor", a cold hearted evil of a human being who was happy to treat human life and a larger community as a social experiment. For years, he kept the society of snowbirds, junkies, vagrants, and free spirits carefully puppeteered under a veil of lawless freedom. The boy was seen more as a lab rat than human being, tasked as a runner with a set of eyes that could analyze and report back with more depth than the camera feeds ever could.

Adilene Floyd, the mother of my daughter Lakia, had filled the void of a mother sacrificed in the name of The Conductor's cause and greater vision. While my indulgence in work and knack for

putting myself in less than ideal situations had been the thing that unraveled our relationship and effectively cut it short mid-engagement, she never acted any differently towards Faith in the split and still played parent for him as well. The gratitude I've felt for that is something I've tried to make known, but sometimes struggle finding the time to outright say so with the tension created by her disapproval of my work life balance.

Faith: I don't understand how they go for this long.

He stared at the TV with a brow scrunched up in concentration. Across its lower half were English subtitles that sped along as action unfolded between Shinjinaru Natomi and The Great Ito, two Japanese talents at the peak of their game. For many, the echo of chops to purpled chests would be enough to make their holes pucker and their eyes to avert, but Faith seemed unfazed.

Spencer: I think there's a lot of us wondering the same thing.

They were something to emulate and as irresponsible as it may be, I was happy to ignore the time and wreck a sleep schedule in the name of feeding into a point of mutual interest.

Faith: Do you think you're gonna miss WGWF?

Spencer: In some ways, sure.

Faith: Like what?

Spencer: Well, I made connections there the same as with any other place, but bouncing around at least a little bit is sorta the new normal these days.

I wasn't lying about that much, but truth be told, there were a couple reasons to be eager in bouncing. The company had seen scheming types trickle in or form alliances in recent months and after the AW exit last Spring, I wasn't exactly looking to jump to the defense of a logo like I once was. On top of that, Mark Morgan had made it a point to attach himself to my business in a way that had me feeling as if I were shackled to cinderblock. Returning to the search for another stomping grounds was something I couldn't get to fast enough.

Faith: Are you thinking about staying here?

Spencer: I'm not sure yet. What do you think?

Faith: I don't know.

Spencer: You can tell me.

A three-beat tapping of knuckles against the other side of the door drew both our attention away from the strikers on screen.

Spencer: Give me just a minute.

It was late for Corey or Sebastian to come knocking as both knew I was preoccupied. Past history meant being on edge if there were ever question marks. With my heartbeat hitting brief math rock time signatures, I leaned towards the peep hole and clutched the deadbolt with both thumb and pointer finger and found **her** staring back from the hallway. My body froze at the sight of her as her name drowned out all other thoughts and I stopped myself from uttering it, fearing Faith overhearing me.

Lakia..?

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Of course, this match is about more than the usual suspects of these hallowed halls. I've always fancied myself an equal opportunity humbler and with gaps to fill, I'm glad that Theo went out of his way to scour the globe for every big name he could find and spared no expense in doing so. I'm sure it cost a few Brinks trucks, but it's a small price to pay in the end as I ask every listening ear "What's a match won via drawn blood really worth if you aren't draining it from the flesh of those whose stars shine the brightest?"

I lift my right hand to the side of my face and wave with one finger at a time, each curling inward one after the other.

**Hi, Tyler. :)**

Don't worry, I'm not here to bury you neck deep in the sand with reminders about the whole being a slimy piece of shit thing. The horse's grave has been desecrated enough and as much as many wish it would manifest and take the leap from metaphor to literal farm animal and give you the ol' Enumclaw special and wipe you off the face of this Earth, our inaugural meeting inside the squared circle deserves more than that. With your recently granted freedom, I'm sure we'll have plenty of time crossing paths in the biz for me to hold you accountable.

Hopping on my soapbox won't slice you open now, will it? Right now, it's most important that you be recognized more than anything. The kid's didn't forget about Fred Kreuger in this one. While it may have been a hot minute since you were last seen making life Hell for the likes of Lissie Hope, it felt like a century in the moment. A vengeful nature is what put you involuntarily on the shelf, but it's also what propelled you to main villain status in any promotion where your boots touched canvas and while folks may think short term on a lot of things, let's not expect a changed man to emerge.

Time behind bars isn't rehabilitation and even so, you don't try to clean up the image of rot, you have to draw your blade and cut it out, lest it spread and wreak havoc. You are famine, Cypher and I probably don't need to tell you that your contemporaries have not missed you. On their behalf, I'm here with the promise of solace in the form of comeuppance. In case you didn't get the memo, Spencer Adams is as versed as it gets in dealing with your kind and I couldn't think of a more properly ironic way to pop your Badmon match cherry than making you drip hemoglobin over the mat like a shitty Pollock painting.

**Even still, you're hardly the soul offender when talking about a field that includes representation from The Fortunate Ones, ya know?**

Credit, the two of you aren't exactly "wicked" nor are the rest of the family back in WGWF, more a collective of backup vocalists moonlighting as fluffers for Mont whose preferred role looks something like "person who shoves their ugly mug in frame of a group photo they weren't invited to at the last second". That's always sorta been your MO though, hasn't it, Joe? if there's a spot for you to weasel your way into, you're almost always a lock to do just that. Really, you're the finishing touch on the trio of guarantee.

**Death.**

**Taxes.**

**An oversaturation of Joe Montouri.**

Monday Night Brawl literally had to block you and yours from taking up screen time on the show, because Mont with a microphone is Joss Whedon with Justice League, hours that shouldn't have been seconds. You take the reins, showtime runs short, and all that the fans get for the price of admission is a whole lot of nothing. Crazy that your name has popped up for a battle of endurance considering actually wrestling is the thing you do the least when inside a ring. Face it, Joe. You're more aging influencer than you are professional wrestler, more Paul Brother than *insert the name of literally anybody else in this industry*.

You, Joseph, are a pick me ass bitch who I've owed a concussion to for waaaay too fucking long. It's something I never got around to back under Chris Page's roof and that's why this opportunity is the gift that keeps on giving. Everytime you dig a little deeper into this match, there's an echo of "but wait, there's more" lingering somewhere in the distance. What happens here is more painful than Sonya Benson blackmail could ever be as your lack of championship round conditioning is the exact reason your appearances in the top spot have been most fleeting for you.

**By the way, Sev.**

**How does it feel to be second fiddle to Goblin Man?**

I'll make it quick with you, because I wouldn't want you running over what little time J has allotted to you. You're a world champion and consistently pop up in the conversation for the most formidable big man in the sport, but for all the rage and lethality packed in that frame, you're passive in allowing Joseph to put a ceiling on your dome piece with his own lack of an off button or humility. A Monster Machine among men and somehow, you bend the knee for some fucking piss ant and let him be the one playing conductor for that machine. Gold on the shoulder feels closer to the fool's variety, because Enigma is not "dominant" in the traditional sense of the word. You are submissive by every definition, though.

**Now that we've addressed Team Bottle Rocket, I want to talk to you, Knox.**

I'll save the old man jokes for those with more of a taste for the low hanging fruit, because much like the fixtures I mentioned before, I think it would be to my own detriment if I were to view it as anything other than a strength of yours. You ARE old, but you dictate pace and pull desired results more often than not. So I'm not here to scoff at you the way you do with others, but to take the opportunity to show you what I've BEEN showing you and the rest of the world everywhere from Triad to Pro Wrestling Valor.

**That Spencer Adams isn't your fucking young boy.**

I'm someone who grinded and stood toe to toe with the best of them in those strength trials, constantly putting up a fight on a team that was inconsistent at its best and a flaming derailment at its worst. While others would try to undersell my presence, I'd find moments to outlast high end competition the likes of Dickie Watson and Johnny Bacchus and all the while, you maintain this sort of nose in the air bravado about you whenever you and I enter the same conversation. In PWV, I have the key to SEB's world title in tow and you still find your spots to downplay Badmon.

I'm not out here holding my breath for the approval of The Raven the way all the forgotten offspring of Matt Knox would, because that's not what I need here. What I DO need is to once again knock a few holes in your argument for invalidating me in the conversation, because making the negative takes age like milk is my forte. It's something that has kept me and my ascension going throughout the years and in the spirit of all this, I come with money on two certainties. The first being that there is no end point in sight or running out of gas for the rise in Spencer Adams stock. The second being that pretty soon?

**You're going to run out of words.**

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The girl on the other side of the peephole was not a girl at all, but rather a woman in her early twenties, an iteration of the toddler currently back at her mother's house whose existence or reasoning I still struggle to wrap my head around. Triad was stressful for reasons kept mostly close to the chest as I did what I could to navigate the circumstance, to give myself a chance to

analyze and come up with a gameplan. Between weeks one and two of the competition, I found myself bound to a chair in a chamber tucked away past a maze of winding halls.

After a physical struggle and a crash into projector equipment, I watched The Conductor burn away like old film. In the spot where the light of his flickering reel once shined against an otherwise pitch black temple wall, an aged up copy of my own kin became the only other party near me. In the weeks that followed, we would try to put the pieces together only to watch as the dark of a familiar presence took her back through the lens of a polaroid, a moment that played out unbeknownst to crew in the vicinity.

Which..is why in this moment, shock and confusion were living at the forefront mentally. While paranoia and frustration hung over my last days with Triad, I assumed the chapter closed. I had to. I still had no answers, no hunch. How do you explain people appearing and disappearing through film mediums?

Lakia: Can...I come in?

Spencer: ..Are you alone?

Lakia: Yeah..

With fingers locking up in a panic, I slid the chain to the side and pulled the door open.

Faith: Who's that?

Before, I was the one who took the lead, but I had been stumped and Lakia knew.

Lakia: Hi, are you Faith? I've heard so much about you.

Faith: Hi..

Lakia: Sorry, I'm..a trainee.

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**The good with the bad.**

**The wins with the losses.**

As we all countdown the minutes before that opening bell and sit in front of these cameras, prepared to lay out the logic that paints us as the individual victor, I want you to consider what it means to be the one to walk out with the same ten pints that you walked in with. The twist here certainly reduces the luck factor when it's a top rope tumble that traditionally packs your bags for

you. So then WHY Spencer Adams? In a match bursting at the seams with proven, capable talent, what IS it that gives me confidence? What makes me special compared to special?

**Twenty-nine men and women will start this match out on Sunday.**

**Spencer Adams kicked it off thirty-three years ago.**

I'm not one to get queasy when things get sticky, because my whole fucking life has been about bloodshed. I've lost friends, I've lost family, I've lost people and places to implosion and when it would've been perfectly acceptable for me to lose myself in all of it, I hopped up and dusted myself off. Nobody would've blamed me for going recluse and falling off the face of the Earth and I kept..on..chugging. In the name of everyone who has ever cared or held any little modicum of belief in me, I pressed continue and found a way to come out on top.

The cards dished out to me never confined me before and with Free For All on the horizon, they aren't about to now. Poetry takes motion and leaps towards flight here, because when an occasion calls for somebody to step up, I step up. When the challenge is to keep yourself vertical, I put motherfuckers down. In less time than the span of pregnancy, I've taken all "Yeah, he was good in AW, but what about elsewhere?" asterisk-laden statements, turned them sideways, and jammed them into the prostates of my doubters.

**Theo.**

**The show of faith here, that means something to me.**

**So..thank you.**

**Apologies in advance for the collateral.**

