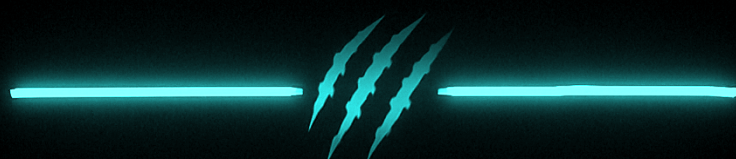


SONIC BOOM



[Exit Music: Act 25]

[Play Music]



The late morning sun cuts through the high windows of the private gym inside the Astoria apartment complex, casting long, sharp shadows across the rubberized flooring. In the background, the soft, rhythmic clank of a cable machine echoes—Misty is wrapping up a set, her presence calm, focused, and entirely synchronized with the man sitting on the weight bench in the foreground.

Dustin sits with his hands loosely clasped between his knees. He's wearing a simple black tank top that shows every bit of the dense, heavy mass he's accumulated over nearly three decades in the sport. He doesn't look angry; he looks incredibly relaxed, almost detached, his dark blue eyes staring directly into the camera lens with the chilling composure of a man who has seen every trick the business has to offer.

He takes a slow, measured breath before he speaks.



Thunderwolf: “You know, Johnny... I listened to every single word you had to say. And I’ve got to admit, there’s a lot about you that I genuinely respect - if I’m being completely transparent. You’re a big man, you’re a tough son of a bitch, and after twenty years of grinding, you finally caught a spark at Cruisin’ for a Bruisin’. I love that passion. I love that at forty-something, you’re still driving to New York City hungry for a fight.”

“But sometimes... sometimes... that’s just not enough, sport.”

“You made a few critical mistakes in that little speech of yours that I’d like to set straight. The first one? You tried to lean into the ‘aging veteran’ weight to, I guess, try and intimidate me? You talked about people looking at you in your early forties, wondering why you’re still doing this.”

“Look at me, man. Wake-up for just a second and remember just who it is that you’re against here for a second. I’ll be **fifty** years old by the time the calendar flips at the end of this year. I’ve been doing this for twenty-six years—even with a decade off the books in the middle— and I have been through the absolute trenches during that time. I’ve stepped into the ring with aggressive beasts that would make Sammy look like a puppy, believe that, and I have slayed giants whose shadows would swallow you whole. Brimstone, Firebrand, now

Napalm - always something fire themed, you Masters of Originality, you. But I digress, you're talking to a man who was fighting for his life at the top of the card in this business while you were still trying to figure out how to lace your boots. The veteran card doesn't work on me... and you should be a little embarrassed that you thought it would."

He leans back slightly, a faint, knowing smirk crossing his face as Misty steps over, leaning against the rack behind him, her arms crossed, her eyes locked onto the frame.

Thunderwolf: "And then you brought up my rapid ascent in SHOOT. You called me a rookie who 'shot up the rankings.' Napalm... I didn't shoot up anything, and I'm far from being a rookie. There was no lucky streak, no sudden burst of momentum. My rise here was, simply, *inevitable*. This is who I am. This is who I have always been. Shame on you for even daring to think otherwise, that's going to come back and bite you in the ass - I assure you of that much."

"And maybe the office here doesn't shout it from the rooftops as much as I'd like for them to, but I walk around with the AOWF World Heavyweight Championship firmly around my waist. I am the standard-bearer for a community that was once the absolute top of the food chain in this industry. I am the most marketable guy in these parts because when people see the name Thunderwolf, they know they're getting the gold standard. Main Event City. The Last Standing Pillar. Again, I point to SHOOT Project's highest-rated PPV and highest-rated Zenith as evidence. Case-closed. You and the faithful here can never take that away from me. I didn't climb a ladder you see; I just took my rightful place at a table I wasn't allowed to sit at for years because of a stupid contractual obligation. In less than a year's time, I've made more of a rumble in YOUR home promotion, than ninety-percent of those guys sitting in the hall-of-fame. Dispute that all you want, but you know it to be true."

Which brings me to the math. Because you laid it out beautifully yourself. Over twenty years, you've held exactly two world titles. And by your own admission, they weren't recent, and they weren't for very long. That's not a badge of honor, brother. That's the definition of underachieving. For a man of your size, with your talent, to only reach the mountain top twice for a cup of coffee each time? That tells me that when the lights get the brightest, something always goes wrong. I get that, once or twice, but when it becomes a repetitive fact... well..."

"That kind of speaks for itself, if you ask me."

He shifts his weight, his expression hardening just a fraction, the calmness turning icy.

Thunderwolf: "Let me follow that up - you asked me how it felt to get my title shot here and fail. You evidently thought you were poking something in the way of a sore spot. Let's talk about that night. Let's talk about the reality of what *really* happened. I went into that main event with my ribs broken. Not once, mind you, but twice in the span of no less than a couple of months. Do you have any idea what it's like to try and wrestle a world-class match, top-of-the-card, everybody expecting you to do your very best when you have shards of jagged bone literally poking into your lungs every time you take a breath?"

“Yeah, I failed to walk out with the gold that night. Yeah, I lost an important match. But the fact that I even walked down that ramp, at almost fifty years old, wrestling at half-capacity against Corey Lazarus—one of the absolute best in the entire world despite being the biggest fucking dickhead I’ve ever met in my life—and still came that close? That’s not a failure to me. That’s a testament to exactly the kind of grit I’m made of. I’ll get my shot again, make no mistake about it. And next time, I’ll be doing it with a clean bill of health.”

“You also spent a lot of time bragging about mastering all those styles. Strong Style, Hardcore, Submission, Deathmatch... you think that’s a flex? I started this journey under two-hundred pounds, doing flips, flying through the air, and being fancy with whatever the latest capoeira trend was. I’ve mastered every style under the sun too. But growing up in this business means realizing that at the end of the day, raw power, clinical mat grappling, and heavy striking dominate everything else. I stripped away the fat and kept the muscle. You’re still trying to use a whole ‘can of fun’ to prove a point; I just use my hands.”

Dustin stands up slowly, towering into the frame, completely at ease in his space. Misty doesn't move, her gaze steady, an unshakeable anchor.

Thunderwolf: “You’re proud of what you did to Sammy on the ship. You said Negligence trained a big monster, but you’re a smarter one. But here’s the difference between Sammy and me, Napalm: Sammy is a monster. Monsters are loud, they’re destructive, and above all else, they are predictable. You know exactly when a monster is going to swing.”

“I, on the other hand, am a predator. And predators don’t telegraph their hand. You won’t see me coming until it’s too late, my friend - and again, it’s nothing personal - but I’m here to win matches and make money as honestly as I can. Even if it’s at your expense.”

“So let me make it clear - I do respect that you have your eyes on the World Title. I respect that you’re aiming for Arthur Pleasant or whoever is holding it when you decide to strike. Go after it. Chase your dream. But understand this: no matter what happens at Zenith 18, if and when you do win that World Title... I will be right on your heels, chomping at the bit.”

“But before we get to the end of summer, you have to get past me. At Zenith 18, you can bring the toughest version of yourself. You can bring the ‘two-dollar steak.’ But you’re stepping into the enclosure with a hungry wolf, and twenty-six years of survival says you’re just next on the food chain.”

He gives a single, sharp nod to the camera.

Thunderwolf: “See you at The Pinnacle.”

