

TIMING & LOSS

July 17th 2024, London, England

Sebastian pushed his hands into the pockets of his trousers and leaned back against the front desk of the headquarters of what was, until today, Everett-Bryce Holdings. Three months ago, he could have walked into any room, of any floor of this building and now... He was waiting for a visitor's pass.

It had been six weeks since Seb's plan had fallen apart right in front of him. Six weeks since George Morland-Heath had used the knowledge that Sebastian had given him to convince his father that they would be better served as allies. And so, as Sebastian had hoped to remove his father's power once and for all, instead he'd been faced with the merger from hell.

He glanced at his watch - 9.04am. One hour and four minutes since the confirmed merger of Everett-Bryce Holdings and GMH Industries. One hour and four minutes since EBMH had been created.

Everett-Bryce-Morland-Heath.

The prick had even managed to get his own name first as part of the agreement. And that wasn't to be the only piece of business conducted today. At some point in the next thirty minutes, Sebastian would sign an agreement to merge Veneras with EBMH. The idea of it sent a wave of nausea through him. Veneras had belonged to Thad's father - he'd signed it over to Seb and Sloane without a second thought.

And then Seb had forced Sloane out and forced a buyout of her shares.

And today... Well today he...

"Sebastian?" said a female voice. Seb turned and felt his stomach churn - the welcoming committee. One of George's stooges, his father's new Chief of Staff and, just to rub salt into the wounds, Anabel.

"To what do I owe this pleasure?" asked Seb.

"Your father asked for me to be here so I..." Anabel began.

"You did what any good girl would do, and said 'yes sir'." said Seb. Anabel's cheeks flushed.

"I'm here for you," she said, a slight bite in her voice. "It was the only way I could be sure I'd see you - I've not heard from you in weeks."

"I'm sure you've been kept abreast of my movements," said Seb. "George seemed to know where I was at all times."

Anabel stepped forward and reached for his hand.

"I'm so sorry. About Kinsey," Anabel said, and Seb's eyes snapped in her direction and he snatched his hand away.

"You don't say her name in this fucking building," said Seb. "You don't say her name at all until I know for sure that you're not part of the reason I'm in this fucking mess."

"Seb, everything I've done I've done for you..." Said Anabel, tears in her eyes.

"I'm sure Grantham will say the same," said Seb. Anabel stiffened, and all the warmth in her eyes disappeared, replaced with ice.

"Ask him yourself," she said, callously. "He's upstairs, helping your father finalise the paperwork."

So it was true then - Grant had stayed close. He'd wondered, after seeing his name in that ledger. After knowing that Grant had lied about having not seen Lazlo in the months leading up to Oliver's death. Seb hadn't had the stomach to confront him - not until after this.

"Shall we head upstairs?" asked Anabel.

"Can't wait," said Seb with a smirk on his face.

The elevator ride was silent, Seb and Anabel stood apart, doing their best not to make eye contact. There was an almost tangible sense of relief when the doors opened and they made their way inside. Anabel led the way to his father's office, and when the door pushed open Seb felt anger and hatred rise in his throat.

George. His father. Grant.

Each of them had cost him something, each of them had stolen from him - and now they were smiling, in anticipation of stealing something else. George and his father were holding glasses of champagne, their victory fresh. They had him - they knew they had him. And they were going to crow about it.

"Sebastian!" said George. "So glad you could make it, would you like a glass?"

"Not really in a celebratory mood," said Seb with a smirk. "Shall we get this over with?"

"What's the rush?" asked his father. "The joining of two powerful families is a momentous occasion."

"I'm sure it is - and if you and Juliet are quite finished with your whirlwind romance, I'd like to skip to the part where you poison yourselves," said Seb with a snarky grin.

"So crass," said his father, shaking his head. "But if you insist..."

He glanced at Grant who placed a leather bound folder on the desk between them. He refused to look Seb in the eye. He pulled open the binder to reveal the newly created EBMH logo and beneath it...

"Veneras," said his father. "Your final punishment."

"We've been talking about what to do with it - we think we'll probably break it down and sell it for scraps. The assets are worth more than the business," said George.

"You're wrong," said Seb.

"I know, but we'll do it anyway," said George with a grin.

"I wonder, what will your friend have to say when he finds out how you crippled his father's legacy," said his father.

"He'll probably slap me on the back and tell me he hopes to do the same for me one day," said Seb.

His father chuckled, derisive, mocking.

Seb bit down on the anger as he picked up the pen, he turned pages, until he found where he needed to sign.

"Not going to read the fine print?" asked George.

"What's the point?" asked Seb as he scrawled his name and tossed the pen on the desk.

He turned away from the desk, and dropped into a seat. He put his hands over his face and leaned forward as he felt that familiar feeling creep up through his stomach and into his chest. He felt his shoulders start to move involuntarily.

"Sebastian," said George, "I do believe... Your son is crying,"



Sean Parker. Mark Flynn. Sebastian Everett-Bryce.

Its a simple story when you think about it - a story of timing and loss. For you, Sean, this match is about trying to make proud the man who made you the competitor you are today. The man you lost - the man who will never see whether you fulfil the dream you both shared. Your Sensei. And as for timing, well... Could there be a better time for you to be walking into this match? Afterall - Centurion said it best.

Sean Parker is on top of the business right now.

That is, until you're compared with me.

And you Flynn? Well... That's even easier. You've held that 24/7 Briefcase for close to a year, biding your time, waiting for the right person at the right moment. Some may think you were waiting to cash in when the impact was greatest, but in truth? I think you waited until you had no choice - like a coward, you were waiting for the easiest moment. And as I continued to win, you started to recognise that you'd lost the upper hand.

Because you left yourself with me as your only choice.

For me, timing and loss go hand in hand. Because I've lost plenty this past year. Friends, family, future. And yet, in the midst of it all, I found myself here in XWF. In the last few months, I've talked about fate and fear, but the timing of my arrival here in XWF couldn't have been more perfect. Afterall, this company needed someone like me. Because for all the eyes trained upon the two of you, it's mine that is the face of this company.

Not yours.

Which is why I can't lose again - I refuse to lose. I refuse to walk out of the Vatican without that which I've earned since the day I walked into this company. And to do so, I'm faced with the last two men to have beaten me one on one. And while that gives the two of you confidence in victory, it should give you pause. Because the list of names of people who have beaten me twice is short.

And neither one of you have earned the right to be the next added to that list.



July 17th 2024, Sonoran Desert, Arizona

Seb loved UGWC's Wrestlestock Festival. Or at least, historically, he'd always loved Wrestlestock. Five years earlier, this had been the first event he'd wrestled in North America. Five years earlier he'd met Sloane Taylor, and they'd spent every Wrestlestock together since, enjoying the festivities. Every Wrestlestock until this one.

The thought had hit him as he'd left London for the event. He'd arranged to spend the time with Lucy, and when that hadn't quite filled the gap, he'd called Thad and asked him to join them. He'd arrived, and Seb had become Uncle Seb while Lucy and Thad spent their free time enjoying the festival.

How had he not seen that coming?

He was happy for his friends, and liked that they were growing closer. But this entire event reminded him of a life he'd lost and worse, a life that he could have had. If things had been just a

little different, Kinsey would be here in a pair of denim shorts, a Seb t-shirt and a wish to see everything.

It might not have filled the hole in his chest completely, but it would have helped.

Seb sat at a table, listening to hear whether Frankie or the twins had woken up. He'd thought about drinking, but decided against it, and so when his head rocked back as he drifted off to sleep, Seb snapped his eyes open to try and wake up.

"You might want to lay down, before you hurt your neck," said an Eastern European accent that made the hairs stand up on the back of Seb's neck. "You have a busy week ahead."

Seb made to lunge across the table, but the silver-haired man in the beige three-piece suit held up a hand and waved it in the general direction of where the Duke brood were sleeping. A muscle in Seb's face twitched, as he held himself back.

"Give me one good reason I shouldn't..." Seb began, but Death chuckled.

"What exactly are you going to do? Kill me?" he asked. Seb made to move again, but Death merely rolled his eyes. "I'm not here to fight you."

"Here to steal someone else I care about?" asked Seb, and he suddenly found himself moving between Death and the sleeping children.

"I didn't kill Kinsey," said Death.

"Don't you say her fucking name," spat Seb. Death paused and tilted his head.

"I did not... Kill... Kinsey," said Death, "That is not what I am - I do not choose who plays the games, I merely try to win."

"You took her to punish me because I said I would stop you," snapped Seb. Death paused, and scratched his jaw before he replied.

"I did not take her to punish you, Sebastian," said Death. "I took her... Because it was her time. She played her game, and she lost."

Seb slammed his fist on the table, and then glanced towards where the kids were sleeping. If they stirred, they made no sound.

"You couldn't have made it easy? Couldn't have... Given her a chance?" Seb asked.

"I did give her a chance - the same chance as I give everyone," said Death. He shook his head. "Do you think I enjoy what I am? Hmm? Do you think I enjoy any version of this?"

Seb didn't answer, he wasn't about to have his heart bleed for the entity that stole souls from this world.

"Do you think I enjoyed taking coin from people before they could pass the Styx? Do you think I enjoyed taking sailors who just wanted to go home down to the locker?" asked Death. "We are what we are made - and no manner of choice, nor any fantasy of freewill can give something like me the luxury of choice."

"You chose me," said Seb.

"I did," said Death. "And you have no idea what it cost me - and despite that, the victory was only temporary... Because your song is ending, Sebastian. Your game is to be played."

"Mmm..." said Seb. He should have been afraid of that. Knowing what was coming - instead he felt a sense of contentment about it. Seb looked into the eyes of Death.

"I swear, on all that I am, that I had no choice in what happened to Kinsey," said Death.

Seb paused thoughtfully, and surveyed the man that sat before him. He closed his eyes for a few moments, before opening them once more and offering a small curt nod. Death, seemingly accepting of the gesture, climbed to his feet and buttoned his jacket.

"Though if you wish to extend blame for the journey that led to this destination, I would suggest you focus on those much closer to home - both yours and hers." Death added.

There was a noise from where the kids slept and Seb's head snapped around, but none of the three had risen. Seb turned back to Death, but he was gone.

No more than a shade in the night.



Both of you were here before me - long before. So I recognise the frustration that must eat away at the pair of you. Afterall, why did XWF need someone like me, when they already had people like you. Why reach out and try to attract the Best In The Business, when they had the Sky Assassin and The King of the Mid-Carders?

There's no need to answer. Because the answer is obvious.

Without me? This is at best a Main Event on Warfare followed by any other segment to close the show. Because it's me the world is tuning into see. The people who want to see me succeed, the people who want to see me fail. Everyone, wanting to see what happens to SEB. Not the two of you.

Me.

But I mean no disrespect - after all, you've both beaten me. I know how good the two of you are - but only one of you seems to recognise how good I truly am.

And that's your great mistake.

Because for all your pretty words, Sean - I believe the reality of action. You saved me from Flynn because you didn't think I'd be able to beat him. But what it also proved, in that moment, is that you think you have a better chance of beating me than you have of beating him. Knowing everything that you know, you still made the decision to save me to protect your shot. Your lip service means nothing in the shadow of the choices you've made.

And for that I owe you - and not thanks.

But you, Flynn, you proved to me that you know the truth. That one on one, despite your last victory, you know you can't beat me. You'll never admit the truth in what I'm saying but at every turn you've made it obvious that you know there's no ending where you beat me one on one again. Instead, you try to steal my title. Instead, you give yourself the easier path to victory - Sean instead of me. Ironically, you've accidentally shown me more respect than Sean has.

But that respect won't stay my hand.

It's been a hell of a week for me gentlemen - I've been breaking records everywhere I go, but right now everything I've achieved elsewhere gets left at the door. I've been here in XWF for six months, and I've held the XWF Universal Championship for almost four. As of right now, I am the single most successful competitor to have ever set foot in this company.

Bar none.

The two of you have resumés that would make the blood pump for any promoter in professional wrestling. But in me, you face the Best In The Business. The XWF Universal Champion. The Arsonist. The Mauler of Markham Square. In me, you face a mountain insurmountable. And for that, I offer my sympathies. This Sunday, I know there will be those who hope that the Empire crumbles under the weight of Assassins and Kings.

But as far as I'm concerned, Leap of Faith is just the perfect timing for the both of you to taste loss at my hand.

See you both Sunday, Gents.

It will be my honour.



Wave after wave after wave hit him, and he held back as best he could. There were signs, for sure, the way his shoulders moved. He just had to hold it together, just a little longer and he could let it all out.

"Oh for goodness sake, Sebastian, pull yourself together," said his father, taking a sip from the Champagne. "Take your defeat like a man, shrug it off. Now be a good lad - do as you're fucking told from now on."

That was it - he couldn't hold it back anymore. He'd held it for as long as he could, but that, right there, his father's gloating and vile boasting. It was all too much, Seb pulled his hands away from his face and..

Howled with laughter.

George immediately looked nervous, but Seb's father seemed to look... curious.

"What the fuck are you laughing at?" asked George.

"Just... Wait another twenty seconds..." said Seb.

"For what?" asked George. "Bryce, what the hell is going on."

"I'm... Not sure... But I think we're about to find out," said Seb's father.

"5... 4... 3... 2... 1..." suddenly, the cellphones in the room began to beep uncontrollably. Specifically, those belonging to anyone in the employ of his father or George. "Ahhhh, I love it when a plan comes together."

"What the hell are you talking ab..." began George, as he began to scan his phone.

"Its always amused me, father, that you've always looked down upon me and the kinds of people I work with. As though we're less than you, despite how successful we become - not only in professional wrestling, but in the other vocations we so choose... For example..." said Seb, "That, George, is news that broke around five minutes after the London Stock Exchange opened this morning - news that my father is about to be investigated by His Majesty's Revenue and Customs for fraud. Along with suspicion of bribery, corruption... You name it, he's done it." said Seb.

"Bullshit," said his father. "You're bluffing."

"Not quite, you see, one of those lesser humans I've had the fortune of meeting is Harvey Marx - and Harvey is one of the most media savvy people I've ever met. And he has spent the last couple of months making sure this story lands today, exactly when I needed it to," said Seb.

"We'd have known, boy. You're bluffing!" said his father.

"You'd think so, wouldn't you? But you see, I have another friend by the name of Tyler - he's very good with technology, and he's trying his best to make amends for some truly terrible things, but while he does, he's needed to make a little cash on the side. So much so, he was delighted to hack into the administrative software for all of the

phones belonging to your company and ensure that any mention of this story was blocked... Until right about now," said Seb with a smirk. George turned to Seb's father.

"I'm... I'm sorry, Sebastian, but in the light of this I'll have to consider the future of this merger..." said George.

"No. No, no, George." said Seb with a smirk. "You see, Tyler was also able to find a paper trail to you, too - a similar set of transgressions with some good old fashioned physical violence to boot."

"This isn't... Happening," said George.

"Oh, it is, George. And while the two of you were sipping Champagne before nine am, you were failing to notice that rather than your stock prices soaring, they were dropping as your investors were selling their shares at a rate of knots." said Seb, before glancing at his father. "And the good news for me is that, my friend Thad, has been purchasing all of them at a very good price. Enough that I should be just an hour or so away from forcing the two of you to sell what shares you have left. To me."

"So we make a loss on the profits," said his father.

"Problem is, father, the morality clause in the contract you signed as part of the merger, means you're not entitled to a single penny for any of your shares." said Seb with a smirk. "Oh, and whilst I know you think it was a good idea to have your property portfolio owned by the business to avoid personal tax, that just means that in an hour, I will own all of your property, including the Everett-Bryce Estate..."

"Sebastian..." said his father dangerously.

"Don't worry dad - Tony and Cass Baker-Savage have made me a very generous offer. They're going to give me a tank! And then they're going to turn that fucking house into a school for the disadvantaged." said Seb.

His father moved to launch at him across the desk, but George stopped him.

"You think you've won?" said George. "We have the resources to destroy you for this. You think I'm above petty revenge? I know you

and Benjamin have gotten close these past weeks - just think of how much damage I can do once he lives under my roof,"

George's mouth curled into a dangerous smile.

"You are clear evidence of that," he said. And Seb couldn't help but notice his father's head turn slowly towards George. It was a curious look, but one that indicated that in one sentence, George Morland-Heath had suddenly acquired all of the anger that Seb's father had just been aiming his son's way.

"Family is everything, isn't it George?" said Seb. "Kins felt like that too - she always wanted a family. She told me that the night she came to visit me, her heart broken because she'd found your son fucking his secretary. And when she confronted him about it, he told her that all she was good for was breeding."

George sneered.

"That night, nine months before Benjamin was born," said Seb, glancing at his father. He slid his hand into the inside pocket of his jacket, and pulled out a letter. He opened it up and dropped it on the desk. "Benjamin Morland-Heath is not your grandson,"

Seb turned his eyes towards his father.

"He's yours," Seb said. "Ironic isn't it, father, that I finally give you the heir you've always wanted right when I take away everything you've ever worked for,"

"Sebastian..." said his father.

"The police are already on their way," said Anabel. Seb smirked, and glanced over his shoulder and winked at her. She winked right back. She really was one hell of an actress.

"This isn't over," said his father as George looked down at the letter in his hands.

"It is," said Seb. "At least for now... Small print and all that,"

This time it was George's turn to lunge, but as he did, the door of the office opened and the police arrived. Seb smirked, and moved out of the way. He and Anabel watched as George and his father were read their rights before finally being escorted out of the office. Seb

offered his father a small wave, and he couldn't help but feel like he had something that looked like regret etched across his face.

"Is it over?" asked Anabel.

"Almost," said Seb, before he turned towards Grant. He pulled a second document from his pocket, and turned it over to his old friend "Anything you want to tell me about the night that Oliver died?"

Grant's eyes flooded with tears as he looked Seb in the face.

"Everything," he said, before his knees gave way.

THE END