

To say that Dexter was annoyed would be an understatement.

Granted, 'annoyed' seemed to be his default state most days, but he'd been feeling even more annoyed than usual lately.

It was hard to tell exactly what it was that was causing it. He could easily point the blame to how much more power tech companies seemed to have in terms of using the internet to bend the masses in whatever direction they desired, mostly because the current President and the 'ultimate tech bro' who was helping him made it so easy to turn even what felt at first like mankind's greatest invention into a toxic cesspool of hatred and blame that ultimately accomplished nothing but sunk its victims deeper into the digital sea to drown.

He could blame SCW, partly because ever since he'd made his declaration for the 'Disconnect Match' at Retribution for Glory's rematch, they hadn't left him alone on demanding details for what exactly it even was. Truth be told, he thought he'd satiated their whims enough with the admittedly miniscule request he'd given before leaving the Spectrum Center a few weeks ago. For what he had in mind, he wanted the ring set up in the Alamodome in San Antonio much, much earlier than they likely normally put everything together, and that's all he'd given them to go on. Apparently, it hadn't been enough, but eventually they'd realize he didn't play by the rules of those who put digital marketability above humanity.

Hell, Dexter was pretty sure Wendell had pointed out a merch stand to him on their way out of the Spectrum Center in Charlotte that was selling shirts that had some sort of design meant to represent him, neither of which he'd approved of nor consented to, and he knew he wasn't seeing a single cent of any that might have actually been sold. If anything, that was further justification to keep playing his cards close to the vest, because this company didn't deserve to keep profiting off of his message like it was a joke to them.

Maybe he could blame 'The One'? It could be argued that she had 'technically' handed him his first loss because he'd gone and gotten disqualified against her, but he could care less about whatever hissy fit she was throwing over not taking advantage of the opportunity he'd given her. It wasn't about keeping the title or his match with Glory intact, and he knew full well he could stomp Kirsten Scott into the dirt. Plain and simple, he'd gotten fed up with dealing with her, hearing her keep acting like she was anything special instead of the overrated marketing tool she'd allowed herself to become. Besides, she had a date with someone just as overrated and entitled at Retribution, and if she still wanted to have a problem with Dexter after the fact, then he'd finish what he started.

As Dexter sat at the table in his RV while Wendell drove down the highway towards San Antonio, he decided to stop worrying about what was grating on his nerves more than usual. It was

obvious it was some combination of all of the above and probably a lot more, but he wasn't in the mood to give it any further thought or acknowledgment.

"You alright, Dexter?" Wendell asked, glancing back towards him briefly before remembering to keep his eyes on the road.

"Peachy," he huffed in response. He knew Wendell wanted to press further, but his tone made it clear this conversation was over before it even began, so the kid kept his focus on driving.

He knew Glory was practically chomping at the bit, grasping at straws to figure out what he had in store for her. She could gloat about having won her last match over the underground champion while he'd technically 'lost any momentum he had' or whatever...he knew that she was scared. Scared of whatever he had planned. Scared to the point where she was definitely overthinking this whole situation and setting herself up for failure. He could guarantee that she had no idea what he had set up and would never be able to guess, and in his mind, that was already proof that she needed this match more than she would ever admit. In the grand scheme of things, Dexter was doing her a huge favor. Whether or not she'd see things his way and at least be grateful for what this all was would be up to her.

"Let her complain," he mused to himself out loud as he glanced over to where the adrenaline title was currently resting, over on the counter of what could be considered the kitchen of this RV, plopped right next to the microwave. He honestly felt sorely tempted to just throw the damn thing in and see if it could generate enough heat to melt some of the gold that mocked him, but he wasn't stupid enough to put lives at risk over something so petty and vindictive. "Last I checked, I wasn't disqualified for how I fought that match...hey, Wendell, was Glory disqualified for technically getting help in winning her last match?"

"Nnnnnnno, I don't believe she was," Wendell replied from up in the driver's seat. "Pretty sure she wasn't when you helped her out and put Ace out of commission either."

"That's what I thought," Dexter laughed, a bitter tone lacing the sound. "Rules for thee, but not for me...an old classic when it comes to these brainwashed sheep and the shepherds who tell them what to say and do to spread the virus across the globe."

He huffed as he sat back down, kicking his feet up on the table and crossing his boots as he stared out at the cars passing by. He wasn't surprised that Glory was using the tried and true hypocritical line of thinking when it came to addressing him. Even if it was only a defense mechanism to protect herself from the unknown she was stepping into, it was painfully clear that this woman was deeper into the web than she tried to convince him she was, and a small part of

him hoped that she would truly see things his way once he showed her what kind of world he was offering to her.

After all, it was going to be the dream environment of every pure wrestler who claimed they truly loved this sport for what it was and just being in the ring.

He started to smile at imagining what kind of face she'd make once she understood what he was playing at here, but it didn't last. That could be blamed on the ugly Tesla Cybertruck that he saw trying to pass by his RV at that moment, which made him throw up in his mouth a little.

Whoever thought up the idea of something like that, especially in the hopes of being the first to create the long-sought-after 'self-driving car,' needed to be committed to an institution ASAP as far as he was concerned.

Shaking off the sight of the abomination of an automobile, Dexter decided he might as well kill some time seeing just how much more desperate SCW had gotten, especially considering he'd chosen not to show up to the Breakdown in Columbus. Another thing Glory would probably get her panties in a twist about, but he could care less honestly. He just focused on grabbing his phone and checking the voicemail box, almost laughing at the automated voice telling him how many messages he had waiting for me.

"You remember when the last time we checked voicemail was, Wendell?" he called up to his flunky.

"I...want to say I checked it on your behalf before the big Germany show?" Wendell admitted. "I can't remember if I've checked it since or not, but I remember a few calls from SCW trying to arrange your champion photoshoot that you wanted deleted."

"About a month, for sure, then," Dexter nodded.

*That made it no surprise when the first few messages he listened to were of a similar nature and were instantly deleted. He remembered getting accosted enough for that on the first two Breakdowns after that pay-per-view, which played a part in his decision to skip Columbus regardless of whether or not he was punished or disciplined for doing so. If he didn't have a reason to be present, then why should he **have** to be there? Surely Glory skipped shows while being a champion for the same reason. He knew she'd probably claim otherwise, but he already knew she was playing the double-standard card hoping to call a bluff that didn't exist in the first place.*

*Then came the barrage of messages from CHBK, from road agents, from people claiming they were either from the marketing team or even on the Board of Directors, all demanding details on the Disconnect Match. He almost wanted to laugh at the absurdity that it seemed like these messages alone were eating up roughly 97% of space in his voicemail box. Hearing the messages grow more and more demanding the closer he got to the present day made him feel exactly what he wanted: a sense of power, knowing that he was finally in a position to make demands that couldn't be refused because he held all the cards here. It honestly felt liberating after so long of seemingly getting nowhere in his fight that he finally had some control, that he could **make** people listen to his message.*

"Listen to this one, Wendell," Dexter grinned as he put the voicemail call on speaker.

"Dexter, this is Dean Black, road agent for SCW," the recording relayed. "I'm going to be upfront with you: this game you're playing isn't funny. CHBK isn't happy with the fact that you've given us nothing about this match to go on. If you wanted to make some sort of 'anti-social media' statement or whatever against our marketing team, then congratulations. You win. But the rest of us need more to go off of than just 'have the ring ready early' so we can ensure proper safety protocols are met for both you and Glory. You have two options at this point: you can either call us to share whatever information you're withholding about this match, or we will get the answers the moment you arrive in San Antonio. One way or another--"

"Message marked for deletion."

"Let them think they have more control than they really do," Dexter smirked. "We all know I finally have control for a change. They'll get their answers when I can be absolutely sure we're doing all of this my way."

"I don't know, Dexter..." Wendell looked a bit uneasy even as he kept his attention on the road. "He sounded pretty serious. Should we be concerned once we enter the city limits?"

"They're not going to call the National Guard on us or anything," Dexter confidently reassured his flunky. "Even if they had that kind of power or authority, they wouldn't use it knowing the kind of scandal it could create that puts them in a bad light. More than likely they're going to either have someone scoping out hotels waiting for me to check in—which we have this RV to ignore that little invasion of privacy—or they're going to have people waiting for me the second I show up at the Alamodome, which is what I want. They won't see me to get the details until it's time for this match to actually happen, and by that point, there will be absolutely no chance to properly promote this match or get any eyes on it. In that regard, I win."

“But...what if Glory beats you?” *Wendell openly wondered, his tone one of concern.* “I mean...you haven’t even told me what this match is, so I can’t help but be worried-”

“And you have no reason to be,” *Dexter reassured him, though it was in that aggressive tone that wasn’t actually meant to be reassuring and more just to shut down a conversation.* “The actual result of the match is irrelevant in the bigger picture, Wendell. By having this match play out at all in the manner I want it to, I win. If Glory can handle the pressure of the test I’m giving her, she can have whatever’s left of the title belt back, gloat about how she was the superior wrestler all along if it makes her feel better. No matter what actually happens on Sunday, I ultimately win, and there’s nothing Glory or SCW can truly do about it.”

Wendell hummed in acknowledgment, but Dexter could tell his flunky wasn’t convinced. Given that the kid had started getting involved more and more often in his matches lately, it was becoming clear he might be putting more stock into Dexter’s ‘unbeaten record’ and trying to maintain it than the greater fight they were doing all of this for. If Dexter was half as concerned about pretending to be perfect 24/7 like, say Waylon Creek, then he wouldn’t have gotten himself disqualified against Kirsten Scott when the match became more of a hassle and a waste of his valuable time than it should’ve been.

‘Let that lost little lamb be placed on a pedestal and paraded around for the world to admire by his butcher,’ *Dexter thought to himself.* ‘They’re all just part of the very machine they claim they’re trying to destroy, all while I’m the one actually getting results in making management realize I’m not playing puppet for them.’

“Dexter, buddy, how’ve you been? It’s your old friend Martin!”

*Dexter nearly dropped his phone as the final voicemail played, apparently **not** being from someone in SCW desperately demanding answers he wasn’t going to give unless they were on his terms. He wanted to turn off the speaker, his brain knew he couldn’t let this message play out for Wendell to hear, but his fingers refused to move, his body felt paralyzed. The best he could do was lower his gaze away from Wendell, locking onto the phone as though it were Martin Zachary himself.*

“Look, I knew you weren’t going to answer, even if I called at a better time. I get it, I’m the big bad wolf trying to destroy the house of Dexter Grant, the little pig who thinks he can stand against progress and ‘fight the machine.’ But, I want to show you that I’m not entirely as bad a guy as you want to paint me as.”

‘What the hell kind of game are you playing at, Martin?’ *Dexter couldn’t help but think as he scowled at his phone. He didn’t even notice that Wendell had pulled over into a rest stop and*

parked the RV, no longer having the road to distract him as he glanced back at Dexter with a very interested gaze.

“I heard your family lost their home in the recent wildfires,” Martin’s message continued. “My condolences...at least your family made it out safe and sound, and you had the trip to Germany to keep you out of harm’s way. I know your father’s a good man, Dex. He gave me a real good sell on you after you graduated, after all, and I don’t regret the chance I took on you even up to the point when you walked out on me. Since California’s going to be rebuilding here pretty soon now that everything’s not up in flames anymore, consider your family’s house fully paid off in terms of getting rebuilt. Think of it as my little contribution to your wrestling career so you don’t have to worry about anything but your big crusade to destroy the evil social media empire that’s ruining the world. Just goes to show that I’m not such a bad guy after all...but it’ll be cute watching you continue to paint me as such even when I just helped out the people closest to you. Can’t wait to see what your little Disconnect Match is all about!”

The message came to an end, and it was only then that Dexter deleted it and ended the voicemail call before tossing his phone aside, not giving a damn if it had a hard landing right next to the adrenaline title belt. He was fuming, seething, his blood boiling as he felt like a bomb was ready to explode beneath his skin and redecorate the interior of the RV with his insides in a manner befitting the goriest slasher movie.

“Was that...?” Wendell started asking, but Dexter didn’t give him the chance to finish as he saw out the window that they’d stopped, taking the opportunity to literally kick the door open and storm out.

He saw people wandering around this rest stop, some of which who maybe recognized him and were reaching for their phones to tweet about it or post a ‘Dexter Grant’ sighting on Instagram or something, but he didn’t care. Even the thought of hurting somebody who might dare to approach him and ask for a selfie or something barely crossed his mind, consequences be damned. Thankfully, no one was that stupid, but Dexter marched over to an uninhabited section of the place and just screamed at the top of his lungs, ripping off his vest and throwing it to the ground before kicking a small rock out onto the highway. It looked like it might’ve hit someone’s windshield, but it wasn’t even a blip in his mind right now.

“That son of a bitch really thinks he can play this game with me,” Dexter fumed, taking deep breaths as he watched the cars zoom past on the highway.

He hated the noble gesture that his former employer prior to the existence of the Digital Detoxer was pulling, only because he knew full well there was no sincere motive to actually help him behind it. Martin Zachary was, as loathed as he was to admit it, a brilliant man who earned his

place as a prominent puppet master in the art of social media. He saw a perfect opportunity to turn a legitimate tragedy into an opportunity to put himself in a good light, especially if it made Dexter look like an asshole in the process just for fighting his fight.

Worse yet, because Dexter hadn't been paying attention, he'd accidentally let Wendell into a part of who he was that he would've preferred the kid remained in the dark about, which would open the floodgates for questions. And yet, he couldn't curse himself for being more mindful about mocking SCW's attempts to regain control of his match at Retribution. Given that Wendell also had access to that voicemail box and checked it more often than Dexter himself did, the odds would've been just as likely the kid would've heard that message himself and started asking questions Dexter hadn't wanted to ever answer for him.

At least Wendell seemed to have gotten the hint and given him space, considering Dexter looked back and saw him attempting to put gas in the RV as though none of that had just happened.

After a few more minutes of trying to clear his head, Dexter ultimately picked up his vest and put it back on, running his hands along the various patches that reminded him of exactly why he'd taken up this fight. Martin Zachary had just proven why, now more than ever, people like him were needed in this world to expose the true evil hidden behind the screens and buried beneath layers upon layers of code.

Thankfully, if all went to plan, then Retribution would go exactly as he planned. Glory would perhaps finally understand the truth of what Dexter wanted, SCW would be left with only the bare minimum to work with, and Martin wouldn't have anything he could sink his hooks into as far as trying to spin this charade of being Dexter's 'villain' in his favor.

Maybe he could even retain the adrenaline championship and see how much farther he could keep using it as a bargaining chip to get his point across, but he reminded himself that even if that scenario didn't happen, he still wins at Retribution, no matter what.

And right now?

That was all that mattered.

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The following VHS tape was delivered to SCW officials the morning of Retribution, courtesy of Dexter Grant. Despite Dexter's demands not to do so, the following video was extracted from the tape and converted into a digital format for general viewing.

We start with all the hallmarks of a recorded VHS tape. Blue screen with the occasional crackle of visual white noise, an audible mains hum, the little text in the corner that reads "PLAY" next to the play symbol. Once we move past this however, we find ourselves with the familiar sight of a low quality video, something that perhaps infuriates anyone watching given that this is supposed to be coming from a champion. And yet, Dexter Grant does not seem to care. His lips are curled up into something almost resembling a smirk as he stands somewhere off the highway, a rest stop clearly visible in the distance behind him. The adrenaline title is resting over his shoulder, although the belt definitely looks like it's been beaten down and worn out in the time it's been in Dexter's possession. If he's concerned about the state it's in, then he's clearly not showing it.

"Control...don't deny it, we all want to be the one in control of something these days. You have men and women wanting to be President to control the country, you have companies and organizations seeking to control every facet of your lives through either social media or some sort of product that you absolutely 'must own.' Even the wrestling business is not safe from this desire to be in control of something. How many wars have been fought over control of SCW throughout its history? How many more await us on the horizon?

I could stand here all day and rattle off every single control freak currently running amok on the SCW roster. Selena Frost, with her supposed contract with a guaranteed rematch despite being in defiance of everything the fans have been told time and time again about how the fabled rematch clause works. The Fall of Man, who weave a good story about being the ones who will destroy SCW and yet have consistently failed to deliver on such promises. Even one Glory Braddock is not the saint she proclaims herself to be. After all, what kind of ego does it take to rebrand a title from supposedly representing one country to another and then using that as a means of trying to gatekeep your challengers, all to avoid giving a rematch to someone you know you got lucky against?

You see, there's a difference between myself and all the names I just listed and so many more I could add to my little sermon here. If any of the aforementioned individuals try to get their way, management just scoffs at them and rewrites the terms to better suit the story they want to tell their audience for the most buzz online. When I declare that if Glory wants to have her rematch for this title sitting over my shoulder in a Disconnect Match, then suddenly the supposed 'head honcho' in charge is having a meltdown trying to get answers. That? That is *control*. That is forcing the change you say you're going to bring about. That is how it's done...and it wasn't a big name who's been shouting the loudest in an SCW ring who proved that there is a weakness in the armor of the big promotional power this company possesses. No...it was just some guy no one ever believed would amount to much because I was just a 'gimmick' to each and every one of you.

Still believe I'm not everything that I claim I am?"

Dexter waits for someone to tell him otherwise, knowing he won't get an answer. Maybe Glory is watching this, despite Dexter not wanting this online but knowing SCW will scramble to try and deny him that request, and shouting at her computer screen in some vain hope that her voice will reach him.

"Now, I can tell that Glory has been hard at work trying to figure out exactly what I have in store for her, much like everyone else in SCW has been trying to solve this great mystery that is the Disconnect Match. I know, I must be some sort of devious mastermind sitting on all the details until the last possible moment, scheming to completely screw Glory over with some sort of match that she can't possibly win. How diabolical of me...guess I truly am the villain that I've constantly been portrayed as because only a monster would dare to try and upend the very fabric of what makes the world tick these days claiming he's seen beyond the veil and knows the truth of this digital sickness that has infected the human race.

I'm going to be nice enough to tell you all right now that you're massively overthinking this.

It's sad, isn't it Glory? You've spent so much effort worrying about exactly what this match is and claiming that nothing I throw at you will surprise you that you've allowed me inside your head. I have to truly say I'm disappointed...you're so worried about what I have planned that you've allowed yourself to be led astray by misinformation and consumed by desperation to regain control of the narrative. You say I've been hiding, that I haven't defended this title, much less wrestled, since our match in Germany...clearly someone didn't see my title defense against Kirsten Scott on the very same show where you just so happened to wrestle your most recent match. Sure, you can say what you want about how that played out, but I have to say that for someone who's taken so much issue with how I defeated you in Dusseldorf, you don't seem to be saying too much against how you defeated the underground champion with a bit of help yourself.

I'm pretty sure this is what's referred to as a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

Really Glory, I thought you were better than this. You're the daughter of an old school British wrestling legend after all, or so you love to remind the world whenever that little detail is relevant. One would think you'd have the basics of knowing what you're up against down to a science at this point...but that's just it, isn't it? You can deny it all you want, but you're freaking out over what awaits you at Retribution. You're worried about what I'm planning to do to you, desperately trying to convince the mindless masses that you still have control here and that you're going to defeat me because I'm lazy, because I'm not as dedicated to this as you are, that I'm not acting as a champion should.

And to think I believed this match would actually be perfect for you to have everything you wished you could have when we faced off the last time.”

Dexter shakes his head, looking disappointed. It's hard to tell because of the terrible video quality if he's being genuine or if this is some sort of ruse, but he does slide the adrenaline title off his shoulder and holds it front and center for the shoddy camera to see.

“As I mentioned before, Glory, you’re overthinking this whole thing. I’ve already given you all the clues you need to solve this puzzle, you’re just not trying hard enough. Irony given everything you’ve had to say about me, but that’s the sad reality we live in these days. Why bother doing the work yourself when you can turn to any source that claims it can provide an answer and then running as far as you can with it no matter how factually wrong it may be?

Then again, it all ties back to that theme of *control*. That’s why you’re so stressed out over what awaits you at Retribution this Sunday that you’re not even thinking straight, isn’t it Glory? In order to feel like you have any control here, you need to make this all about *you*. Surely I went through all this trouble of coming up with a match and then keeping all my cards close to the vest until the last possible moment for the sole purpose of screwing you over, right? Surely there’s no ulterior motive that’s far more important to me than you or this championship that could explain why I’ve gone this far with the secrecy?

I have to ask...did your father have this much of an ego when he still wrestled in front of live crowds and nothing else?

Glory...the beauty of the Disconnect Match is that no matter what happens at Retribution, ***I win***. That includes you defeating me and ripping this title from my hands. It doesn’t matter what happens in the match, because at the end of it all, I accomplish two goals no matter what: I deny SCW the chance to promote what’s going to happen and throw a wrench into their precious social media advertising campaign to enslave more people into becoming fans because it’s what the machine tells them to do, because by the time they know what this match even is, it’ll already be over. And...I make you put your money where your mouth is and see just how passionate you truly are about your craft. For all your claims of exactly what wrestling means to you, we’re going to do a little test to see just how true that really is. And maybe...just maybe...when all is set and done, you’ll understand me a little better and gain a newfound appreciation for what I truly want out of all this.

Put your weary head to rest, Glory, because soon you will know what it truly means to Disconnect...to Reconnect. Your final detoxing begins on Sunday, so bring an open mind with you to the Alamodome...and also be sure you show up bright and early.”

With that, Dexter nods, having laid out all the terms he's willing to give regarding the lingering mystery of what to expect as the video finally cuts to static, and then eventually black. Maybe, if we're lucky, we'll understand Dexter's vision when we see exactly what the Disconnect Match is come Retribution, but one thing's for sure: if Dexter Grant is to be believed, then he's walking out of San Antonio a winner, period.