

Victory: 04.10.2026

April 10, 2026 | Moda Center - Portland, Oregon

Introduction

The screen is black.

Then the sound begins first.

A dull, echoing hum.

The kind that feels less like music and more like memory.

One image fades in.

Chris Ross storming down the ramp last week with murder in his eyes.

Another.

Maxwell Jett standing in the ring, smug, venomous, waving that picture around like he had no soul left to lose.

Then the tearing.

The photograph ripped apart in his hands.

Chris Ross losing all control.

The package cuts faster now.

Ross throwing the UTA Championship into the ring.

Ross diving in after Jett.

Jett slipping away.

Ross pacing like a caged animal.

Valentina Blaze at ringside, trying to calm the storm.

Jett circling.

Talking.

Smiling.

Dragging the champion deeper and deeper into rage.

Then the match itself.

Chris Ross finally getting his hands on him.

Forearms. Lariats. Headbutts. Raw violence.

Jett surviving.

Targeting the shoulder. Targeting the knee. Picking Ross apart piece by piece.

The music underneath the package swells.

We see Ross on his knees.

We see Valentina on the apron, concern all over her face.

We hear her shouting.

Valentina Blaze: "Chris! Chris!"

Ross surges forward.

Jett sidesteps.

And then--

The moment.

Chris Ross crashing violently into Valentina Blaze and knocking her from the apron to the floor.

The music drops out completely.

Only the sickening silence of shock remains.

Ross looking down in horror.

Valentina motionless on the floor.

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Jett rushing in from behind.

The schoolboy.

A fistful of tights.

The referee counting.

ONE.

TWO.

THREE.

The shot freezes on Maxwell Jett with the UTA Championship in his hands.

Then another freeze frame.

Chris Ross at ringside, not even looking at the title, only kneeling beside Valentina Blaze with panic written all over his face.

A final title card slams onto the screen.

LAST WEEK: CHRIS ROSS LOST THE UTA CHAMPIONSHIP.

LAST WEEK: VALENTINA BLAZE PAID THE PRICE.

Smash cut to black.

Then--

"THIS... IS... VICTORY!"

The opening theme blasts through the arena as the screen erupts into the full Victory intro package.

Pyro explodes across the stage in violent sheets of gold and white.

The camera swings wide over a roaring Moda Center crowd in Portland, Oregon, signs bouncing, fans on their feet, the energy in the building electric after the stunning ending to last week's show.

More pyro erupts from the stage corners.

The Victory logo crashes across the screen.

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Quick shots of stars flash in rhythm with the music.

Chris Ross. Maxwell Jett. Hakuryu. Susanita Ybanez. Athena Storm. Emily Hightower. Maxx Mayhem. Selena Vex. Eric Dane Jr.

The final burst of pyro explodes as the camera settles at ringside.

John Phillips and Mark Bravo are already standing at the desk, the crowd loud behind them.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to VICTORY! We are live from the Moda Center in Portland, Oregon, and I don't mind telling you right now--there is a different feeling in the air tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because last week was chaos, JP. Absolute chaos. Maxwell Jett is walking around with the UTA Championship after stealing the biggest win of his life, Chris Ross lost the title in the middle of one of the most emotional main events we've seen in a long time, and Valentina Blaze got wiped out in the middle of all of it."

John Phillips: "Chris Ross had Maxwell Jett beat in a fight. I believe that. I think everybody watching believed that. But Jett never wanted a straight fight. He wanted to drag Chris Ross into anger, into pain, into heartbreak... and that is exactly what he did."

Mark Bravo: "He turned the whole thing into a psychological car wreck and then looted the scene for the championship. That's what happened. He got in Chris' head. He stayed there. And when Ross accidentally collided with Valentina Blaze..."

Bravo shakes his head.

Mark Bravo: "That was it. One second. One opening. One cheap grab of the tights. New champion."

John Phillips: "We still do not know where things stand emotionally between Chris Ross and Valentina Blaze after what happened. We only know that one week ago, Victory ended with Chris Ross kneeling beside Valentina on the floor while Maxwell Jett stood in the ring holding the UTA Championship."

Mark Bravo: "And if you think that's not hanging over this whole show tonight, you are out of your mind."

John Phillips: "But this is Victory, and as always, the road keeps moving forward. We have huge matches tonight with major championship implications, and the Fighting Championship picture is going to come into even sharper focus."

Mark Bravo: "This one's loaded. No filler. No wasted motion. People are fighting for spots, fighting for momentum, and fighting for the right to march into Victorious."

John Phillips: "Tonight, Selena Vex goes one-on-one with Maxx Mayhem in a Fighting Championship

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Qualifier."

Mark Bravo: "That one's got upset potential all over it. Selena Vex is dangerous when she's locked in, but Maxx Mayhem fights like every match owes him blood."

John Phillips: "Also tonight, Emily Hightower faces Athena Storm in another Fighting Championship Qualifier."

Mark Bravo: "That is a serious test for Emily Hightower. We know Athena Storm is explosive, physical, and proud, but Emily has been building real momentum and tonight might be the biggest chance of her career."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page takes on Kaida Shizuka."

Mark Bravo: "Bad night to blink in that one. Bianca's got the poise, Kaida's got the brutality, and I don't think either woman is showing up to play nice."

John Phillips: "And Eric Dane Jr. goes one-on-one with Dante Rivera."

Mark Bravo: "That one could get wild in a hurry. Eric Dane Jr. lives in chaos, and Dante Rivera's the kind of guy who'll drag you into deep water and make you drown in it."

John Phillips: "And later tonight, the winners of our first two qualifying matches will meet to determine who moves on to Victorious in the Fighting Championship picture."

Mark Bravo: "So for two people tonight, this isn't just about winning once. It's about surviving twice. That changes everything."

John Phillips: "An enormous night ahead here in Portland--"

Suddenly both men stop.

John puts a hand to his headset.

John Phillips: "Wait a second..."

Mark Bravo: "We're being told something is happening backstage right now."

John Phillips: "We need to get out of here. Take us backstage--right now!"

Rampage

The camera jerks hard as we cut away from ringside and head backstage.

It is already chaos.

A folding table is upside down in the middle of the hallway.

A crate of bottled water has been split open, plastic bottles rolling in every direction.

A production case is on its side with cables spilling out like guts.

And in the center of it all--

Chris Ross.

He has completely lost it.

Chris Ross: "WHERE IS HE?!"

Ross hurls a chair into the cinderblock wall and it clatters violently down the hallway.

His hair is wild. His breathing is ragged. His eyes are red with fury and something even uglier underneath it.

He kicks over another table, sending papers and clipboards flying into the air.

Chris Ross: "MAXWELL! MAXWELL!"

A pair of backstage assistants scatter out of the way as Ross storms forward like a man hunting through the wreckage of his own mind.

He grabs a road case and shoves it so hard it slams into a wall with a deafening bang.

Chris Ross: "GET OUT HERE!"

A terrified young backstage hand freezes near a lighting cart.

Wrong place. Wrong second.

Ross whips toward him instantly.

Chris Ross: "You!"

The kid barely gets his hands up before Ross is on him.

Chris grabs him by the front of the shirt and drives him up against the wall so hard the poor guy's sneakers nearly leave the floor.

Chris Ross: "WHERE IS HE?! WHERE'S MMJ?!"

The kid's eyes go wide with panic.

Backstage Hand: "I--I don't know! I swear to God, I don't know!"

Chris Ross: "DON'T LIE TO ME!"

Ross jostles him once against the wall, the young staffer completely helpless in his grip.

Backstage Hand: "I don't know! I don't know where he is!"

Ross stares at him for one ugly, trembling second.

Then he throws him down.

The kid crashes to the floor and scrambles backward on his hands, terrified.

Ross doesn't even look at him again.

He turns and storms off down the hallway, shoving through equipment, kicking over a trash can, sending its contents exploding across the concrete.

Chris Ross: "MAXWELL!"

The camera struggles to keep up as Ross disappears around the corner, still smashing anything unlucky enough to be in his path.

Then we cut back to ringside.

John Phillips and Mark Bravo are standing now, both men visibly shaken by what they've just seen.

John Phillips: "My God..."

Mark Bravo: "Chris Ross has absolutely snapped."

John Phillips: "That was not anger. That was not frustration. That was a man in full emotional freefall, and I don't know what happens if he finds Maxwell Jett tonight."

Mark Bravo: "He's not thinking straight, JP. He's not even close. Last week cost him the UTA Championship, it put Valentina Blaze on the floor, and right now all that rage has got nowhere to go except straight through anything in front of him."

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John Phillips: "And that poor backstage assistant just got caught in the middle of it. Chris Ross is beyond reason right now."

Mark Bravo: "Which means somebody better find Maxwell Jett first, because if Ross gets his hands on him before security does, this show is gonna come apart at the seams."

The crowd is buzzing now, unsettled, anxious.

The commentators try to reset, but neither man looks convinced that order is coming back anytime soon.

John Phillips: "We knew tonight would begin with the shadow of what happened last week. I just don't think anybody expected it to get this volatile this fast."

Mark Bravo: "No, and I don't think we've seen the end of it either."

Then--

BLACK FLAME hits.

The crowd erupts instantly.

John Phillips: "Oh no."

Mark Bravo: "No, no, no--he's coming out here."

Chris Ross storms through the curtain.

No pose. No pause. No playing to the crowd.

He is furious beyond language, marching with that same broken, violent purpose from earlier, jaw clenched tight enough to crack teeth.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is headed to the ring and he does not look any calmer now than he did backstage."

Mark Bravo: "He looks worse."

Ross barrels down the ramp, ignoring the fans, ignoring the noise, eyes fixed straight ahead like he has reached the point where destruction is the only thing keeping him upright.

At ringside, he doesn't slow down.

He veers straight toward the commentary area.

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John Phillips: "Guys--guys, move!"

Ross gets both hands under the edge of the commentary table and flips it violently forward.

The monitors, papers, and headsets go crashing everywhere in a burst of sparks and noise.

Mark Bravo: "Move! Move!"

John Phillips and Mark Bravo scramble out of the way as Ross grabs one of the desk monitors and hurls it aside like it weighs nothing.

He kicks a rolling chair away, then snatches another monitor and spikes it to the floor.

The crowd is losing its mind.

Chris Ross: "MAXWELL!"

Ross storms around the wreckage of the desk, grabbing at anything he can throw, shove, or break.

One hand rips loose a cable bundle.

Another sends a small equipment case tumbling over the floor mats.

John Phillips: "This is completely out of control!"

Mark Bravo: "Nobody can talk to him right now! Nobody!"

Ross suddenly spots a metal folding chair near the timekeeper's area.

He snatches it up in one hand.

Then with the other, he grabs a microphone.

The crowd noise swells again because everybody knows this is about to get even worse.

Ross turns toward the ring.

He marches to the apron, rears back, and slings the folding chair under the bottom rope into the ring.

The chair skids across the canvas and spins to a stop near center ring.

Ross follows right behind it, sliding under the bottom rope with the microphone still in hand before rising to one knee, then to his feet.

His chest is heaving.

The ring is his now.

The rage is still climbing.

Chris Ross rises slowly in the center of the ring, microphone in one hand, the metal folding chair hanging at his side in the other.

His chest is heaving.

His face is flushed red.

But it is the eyes that say everything.

There is something dark in them tonight.

Something ugly.

Something old.

The crowd noise rolls over him in waves, but Ross barely seems to hear any of it.

He lifts the microphone.

Chris Ross: "I know I've never been a very patient man..."

His voice is low.

Tight.

Measured only by force.

Chris Ross: "But I try. God knows I try."

He paces once, chair still gripped tightly in his left hand.

Chris Ross: "I know I've never been the best at keeping my cool. I know."

He stops dead center again.

Raises the microphone a little closer.

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Chris Ross: "But if that son of a bitch Maxwell Jett doesn't get his God damn ass down here right now..."

The crowd roars.

Ross's lips curl with contempt.

Chris Ross: "I swear upon everything..."

He lifts the chair slightly.

Chris Ross: "I will destroy every God damn person that comes into this ring until he does."

The crowd reacts with a mix of shock and feverish energy.

Ross turns slowly, staring at the stage.

Waiting.

Daring.

But there is no Maxwell Jett.

No music.

No movement through the curtain.

No swagger.

No champion.

Just Chris Ross alone in the center of the ring, getting angrier by the second.

Chris Ross: "God damn it..."

He steps toward the ropes, voice rising.

Chris Ross: "Get your ass down here, right FUCKING now!"

The profanity rings clean through the arena.

No censor catches it.

Not in time.

And somehow that makes it worse.

You can hear how real it is.

You can hear how badly he means every word.

Ross waits again.

Still nothing.

His grip on the chair tightens.

His breathing sharpens.

Chris Ross: "You son of a bitch... if I have to come find you..."

Nothing.

Ross's face twists with raw grief and rage.

Chris Ross: "Do you realize what you did Max.... That picture was the one piece I had left of Lauren... the woman who kept me grounded. The one who made me sane... Everytime I come out here... I look for her knowing she's nowhere to be found... Max... I'm not a sociopath like you... I actually have a heart..."

You can see his emotion.

Chris Ross: "I didn't think anyone else would ground me like she did but then came Valentina.... And now... She's injured and can't even compete you son of a bitch... Do you know what happens to me in the darkness?"

He snarls.

Chris Ross: "VALENTINA IS HURT!"

The crowd roars again.

Chris Ross: "YOU STOLE MY TITLE!"

He takes another step toward the ropes, practically foaming now.

Chris Ross: "I'M GOING TO RIP YOUR GOD DAMN HEAD OFF!"

Scott Stevens: "Whoa... whoa... whoa! Chris! Hold up!"

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The voice cuts through the chaos from the stage.

The camera swings up the ramp.

Scott Stevens steps out onto the stage in a suit, hands raised, expression serious.

Behind him, security begins flooding out from the back and forming up in a line.

The crowd instantly boos.

John Phillips: "Scott Stevens is out here now."

Mark Bravo: "And he brought security with him, because I don't think even Scott's crazy enough to come out here alone right now."

In the ring, Ross points the chair toward the stage like a weapon.

Chris Ross: "Not now, Scott. I swear, I'll wrap this chair around your damn head too!"

Stevens does not flinch.

Not outwardly, anyway.

Scott Stevens: "I don't doubt you, Chris. I really don't..."

He glances back at the growing line of security, then back to the ring.

Scott Stevens: "But I got to tell you... Maxwell Jett is not here tonight."

The arena erupts in heavy boos.

Ross goes berserk instantly.

He kicks the bottom rope. He hurls the chair against the mat once, then snatches it right back up. He paces in a tight, furious circle like he might come apart from the inside.

John Phillips: "That is the last thing Chris Ross wanted to hear."

Mark Bravo: "No kidding. That just took a bad situation and poured gasoline all over it."

Ross stomps toward the ropes on the hard-cam side, glaring up at Stevens with murder in his eyes.

Security immediately tightens formation and starts creeping forward.

Scott Stevens: "Don't do anything rash now, Chris."

Stevens takes a careful step forward on the stage, choosing every word.

Scott Stevens: "Everything so far... salvageable. Forgotten, even. But I'm going to need you to come out of that ring now and head to the back so we can get the show started."

Ross just stares at him.

Like he cannot believe another human being would say something that stupid out loud.

Chris Ross: "The show, Scott?"

He laughs once.

It is a terrible sound.

Chris Ross: "The fucking show?"

This time the censors catch it a beat too late, the audio clipping awkwardly after the word is already halfway across the building.

Chris Ross: "I'll give you a damn show."

Ross spikes the microphone to the mat.

Then he moves.

Fast.

He storms to the ropes and steps through to the apron in one violent motion before dropping to the floor.

Stevens immediately points down the ramp.

Scott Stevens: "Go! Go now!"

The security team rushes forward all at once.

Ross meets them halfway with the chair.

CRACK.

The first guard drops instantly after taking the chair across the shoulder and side of the head.

CRACK.

The second one gets blasted across the ribs and folds to the ramp in pain.

John Phillips: "My God!"

Mark Bravo: "Chris Ross is dismantling security!"

A third guard lunges in and tries to grab the chair arm.

Ross drives a knee into his stomach, then clubs him across the back with the chair as he stumbles away.

Another rushes from Ross's blind side--

Ross swings backward and catches him flush across the chest.

The man tumbles down the ramp in a heap.

The whole scene turns into a wreck in seconds.

Security bodies are sprawled across the aisle.

One rolling, clutching an arm.

Another flat on his back, gasping.

Another crawling toward the barricade to get out of the line of fire.

Ross stands in the middle of them all, breathing like a monster, chair still in his hands.

John Phillips: "He is uncontrollable right now!"

Mark Bravo: "Nobody is getting through him! Nobody!"

Ross slowly lifts his eyes up the ramp.

Scott Stevens is still on the stage.

Still backed by more personnel, but no longer pretending he has any real control over this situation.

Chris stands halfway up the ramp among the wreckage he just created and points directly at Stevens.

We can't hear every word over the roar of the crowd.

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But the camera catches enough.

Chris Ross: "THIS ISN'T OVER!"

Ross jabs a finger toward the back.

Then toward his own chest.

Then back at Stevens again.

Every bit of his body language says the exact same thing.

This is far from finished.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross has snapped in a way we have not seen in a very, very long time."

Mark Bravo: "And honestly? I don't know how you put this genie back in the bottle now. Maxwell Jett isn't here, Valentina Blaze is hurt, Ross thinks the whole world's against him, and security just got torn apart on the entrance ramp."

John Phillips: "Scott Stevens wanted the show started. Well, the show has started all right--inside absolute chaos."

Mark Bravo: "And the scariest part? Chris Ross still looks like he's got plenty left."

The camera holds on the destruction.

Security everywhere.

Scott Stevens frozen on the stage.

Chris Ross halfway up the ramp, chair in hand, still seething, still glaring toward the back like he might tear through the building itself if that's what it takes to find Maxwell Jett.

Let's Make it Big

We cut backstage where Melissa Cartwright stands in front of a Victory backdrop, microphone in hand, doing her best to project calm professionalism after the absolute disorder we have just witnessed.

Beside her, dressed like the moment was always supposed to belong to him, is Eric Dane Jr.

He looks immaculate.

Smug.

Perfectly comfortable.

Like chaos is something that happens to other people.

Melissa Cartwright: "Eric, after everything we just saw out there with Chris Ross, I have to ask--what are your thoughts?"

Eric exhales through his nose and gives a small shrug.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Sucks to be MMJ."

He smirks.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Been in that spot before. Not fun."

He straightens his jacket cuff and glances off for half a second before turning right back into the camera lens like it personally invited him here.

Eric Dane Jr.: "But this isn't about him. It isn't about Chris Ross. It's definitely not about whatever emotional support group is gonna need to be formed after that little meltdown."

He taps his own chest with one finger.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is about Eric Dane Jr. and how at Victorious... I'm gonna be wearing gold again."

Melissa Cartwright: "Do you mean Bobby Dean's Hardcore Title, which... last I checked... isn't actually an active title or real in any real sense?"

Eric slowly turns toward her.

Then, with all the unearned confidence in the world, he gently places two fingers against her mouth.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Shhh."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Shush your pretty little mouth."

Melissa immediately pulls back, clearly annoyed.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You heard Bobb-o. It's totally a real, totally active championship..."

He flashes that arrogant Dane grin.

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Eric Dane Jr.: "And at Victorious, it's coming home to Daddy Dane."

Melissa groans openly.

Melissa Cartwright: "Well... before any of that, you do have a match tonight against Dante Rivera in what many are calling a warm-up for Victorious."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Who?"

Melissa Cartwright: "Dante Rivera."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Yeah, yeah. Devin Roth. Match tonight. Whatever."

He waves a dismissive hand.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Scott Stevens is just trying to prove a point by booking me a week before my big win against some no-name guy."

Melissa Cartwright: "You mean Dante Rivera?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Does it really matter, Melissa? Really?"

He gives her a look like she is the one being unreasonable.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Some guy they feed to the stars to pad our wins. That's his job, and he'll do it very well tonight."

Eric smooths his shirt front and flashes another grin into the camera.

Eric Dane Jr.: "The fact of the matter is I'm ready. I'm more than ready. Bobby, though?"

He laughs to himself.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Well..."

HONK HONK.

The sound cuts right through the segment.

Eric stops mid-thought.

Melissa blinks.

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The camera pans just in time to catch Bobby Dean rolling into frame on his trusty mobility scooter with the biggest smile imaginable on his face.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Well, speak of the devil. There's Bobb-o."

Bobby Dean: "ERIC! MISSY!"

Melissa Cartwright: "Melissa."

Eric Dane Jr. and Bobby Dean: "Whatever."

Melissa closes her eyes for one long second, already regretting being here.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Whatcha doing here, Dean-a-rino?"

Bobby Dean: "Well, Eric, I was thinking."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Oh boy."

Bobby Dean: "Do you know where to get one of those cool shopping carts and trashcans full of weapons for our hardcore match?"

Eric pauses.

Then slowly, very slowly, a wicked smile starts to spread across his face.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You know what, Bobby? I was thinking too."

Bobby lights up immediately.

Bobby Dean: "Yeah?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Remember last week when I said we should do something that really stands out?"

Bobby Dean: "Yeah!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "What if..."

He steps closer, painting the picture with his hands.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Instead of some boring old hardcore match where we break things we bought from Home Depot over each other..."

He uses exaggerated air quotes.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That some pimply-faced kid in the back already 'gimmicked'..."

He smirks wider.

Eric Dane Jr.: "We do something really big."

Bobby's eyes go huge.

Melissa's expression changes too, though for very different reasons.

Bobby Dean: "Yeah? Like what, Eric?"

Eric leans in like he is about to unveil the greatest idea in wrestling history.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Imagine this, buddy..."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Bobby Dean..."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Eric Dane Jr..."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Hardcore Championship..."

He spreads his arms with theatrical flourish.

Eric Dane Jr.: "LADDER MATCH."

Bobby Dean gasps.

Not a polite gasp.

A full, heartfelt, child-on-Christmas-morning gasp.

Bobby Dean: "OH... MY... GOD!"

Bobby Dean: "I love it!"

Eric grins with all the confidence of a man who knows exactly what he is doing.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I knew you would."

Bobby Dean: "Let's do it, Eric!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Great, Bobby. I can't wait."

Bobby Dean: "Me either! I'm gonna tell everyone!"

Bobby hammers the horn again.

HONK HONK!

Then he zips off down the hallway on the scooter, thrilled beyond reason, nearly clipping a production crate on the way out as he disappears around the corner.

Melissa slowly turns back toward Eric.

Melissa Cartwright: "A ladder match, Eric? Really?"

Eric just smiles.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Yep."

He gives the camera one last impossibly smug look before casually walking off, leaving Melissa standing there with the unmistakable expression of someone who has just watched a disaster get scheduled in real time.

Selena Vex vs. Maxx Mayhem

John Phillips: "Still to come tonight, our Fighting Championship picture gets much clearer--but right now, it starts with this qualifier."

Mark Bravo: "One fall. Fighting Championship rules. Winner moves on to the main event later tonight, and the winner of that goes to Victorious. That is a whole lot of pressure packed into one match."

John Phillips: "And there is another major story hovering over this one. This is Maxx Mayhem's first match back since the injury he suffered in his last outing. We know what kind of punishment he took. Tonight, we find out what kind of shape he is really in."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because being cleared and being right ain't always the same thing. Maxx Mayhem is chaos with boots on, but if that body isn't where it needs to be, Selena Vex is smart enough to find it and stay on it."

The lights in the Moda Center dim.

Then the opening of "Going to Hell" hits, and the crowd reacts immediately.

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But this is not the reaction Selena Vex used to get.

There are still some boos. There always will be. Selena has spent too long giving people reasons to dislike her.

But there are cheers mixed in now too.

Real ones.

Curious ones.

The kind reserved for someone trying to become something different without pretending the past never happened.

Selena Vex steps through the curtain with a serious expression, no smug strut tonight, no taunting of the crowd. She takes one look toward the ring and then begins the walk down the ramp with purpose.

John Phillips: "And there is Selena Vex. A woman who has undergone a major shift in recent weeks. No longer aligned with Amy Harrison. No longer part of the Empire. And to be blunt, no longer interested in letting somebody else define her place around here."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, she's still got that edge. Still got that bite. Don't get it twisted. Selena's not suddenly some smiling good girl. But she's fighting from a different place now, and people can feel that."

Selena reaches ringside and pauses for a second, looking out into the crowd.

There is no smirk.

Just focus.

She climbs to the apron, steps through the ropes, and rolls her shoulders in the corner, eyes already fixed on the stage.

John Phillips: "This is a huge chance for her. A win here, a win later tonight, and Selena Vex is on her way to Victorious with the Fighting Championship in her sights."

Mark Bravo: "And for somebody trying to prove she's more than what Amy Harrison used her for? This kinda opportunity matters."

Then the arena shifts.

Sirens blare.

Static crackles across the screen.

The crowd comes alive.

And then Maxx Mayhem explodes through the curtain.

He hits the stage like a man launched from somewhere unsafe, eyes wide, arms flying, energy spilling in every direction at once.

The grin is there.

The noise is there.

So is the crowd response.

It is huge.

John Phillips: "Listen to this place! Portland is thrilled to see Maxx Mayhem back!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and he looks like Maxx. That's the first good sign. Loud, twitchy, a little dangerous to stand near. Feels right."

Maxx points to the ring. Then to himself. Then slaps his own chest twice and yells toward the hard camera.

Maxx Mayhem: "LET'S MAKE SOME MAYHEM!"

The crowd roars right back at him.

He charges down the ramp, slides under the bottom rope, pops up to his feet, and paces in a tight circle like he has been waiting far too long to do this again.

Then he sees Selena.

She stares right back.

No nonsense.

No playing around.

John Phillips: "Very different personalities. Very different styles. But one identical goal tonight."

Mark Bravo: "And that's surviving this round and moving on. Nobody's preserving energy now. Not with the main event on the line."

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The referee steps in, gives final instructions, checks both competitors, and signals for the bell.

DING DING

Maxx comes out bouncing.

Selena comes out balanced, hands up, feet light, reading him.

John Phillips: "And here we go--qualifier number one."

Maxx feints in, then out, trying to make the match wild right away.

Selena refuses to rush with him.

She circles to her left, keeps her distance, then shoots in low for a quick waistlock.

Maxx immediately peels at the grip, turns, and throws a back elbow that just misses as Selena ducks out and resets.

Mark Bravo: "Good start by Selena. Don't fight Maxx on Maxx terms. Make him think. Make him reset."

They lock up again near center ring.

This time Selena gets the angle first, turns it into a side headlock, and grinds down on it, making Maxx work instead of fly.

Maxx shoves her off to the ropes.

She rebounds.

He drops down.

She hops over.

He pops up and throws a wild clothesline.

She ducks under and catches him on the turn with a sharp dropkick to the chest.

Maxx stumbles backward into the ropes, surprised.

John Phillips: "Nice opening sequence there from Selena Vex!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that's the side of her game that gets overlooked. She can wrestle. Always could."

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Selena moves in and snaps Maxx over with a quick arm drag.

Then another when he charges back up.

Then she traps the arm and drives her knee into the shoulder once, twice, trying to take some of the explosion out of him.

John Phillips: "Smart target. If Maxx Mayhem can't fire with full force, that changes the whole rhythm of the match."

Selena whips him toward the corner and charges in after him, but Maxx suddenly jumps to the middle rope and springs backward over her head.

The crowd erupts.

Selena turns--

and Maxx catches her with a discus elbow that lands flush.

Mark Bravo: "There's your reminder. He doesn't need a lotta room to start wrecking things."

Selena goes down to one knee.

Maxx hits the ropes and comes back with a low running senton that flattens her near center ring.

Cover.

ONE!

Selena kicks out.

John Phillips: "Early cover there from Maxx Mayhem, who wants to test that urgency right away."

Maxx rises and points to his head like he's feeling good.

Then he pounds his chest and screams to the crowd.

Maxx Mayhem: "I'M BACK!"

The crowd roars with him.

He turns back toward Selena--

and she catches him with a kick right to the knee.

Then another.

Then a fast swinging neckbreaker that takes him over clean.

John Phillips: "Selena cuts him off again!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the danger with Maxx. The energy's great. The emotion's great. But if you take your eyes off the fight for one second, somebody smart will make you pay."

Selena covers.

ONE!

TWO!

Maxx powers out.

Selena nods to herself and stays on him, dragging him up and snapping him throat-first across the top rope.

He recoils, coughing.

She hits the ropes and comes back with a running clothesline with just enough extra follow-through to send them both tumbling.

Another cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Maxx kicks out again.

John Phillips: "Selena Vex is in control right now, and you can see what she's doing--she's forcing Maxx to fight her kind of fight."

Mark Bravo: "Yep. Less riot, more grind. And if Maxx starts thinking about the injury, even for a second, that grind gets worse."

Selena pulls Maxx up and sends him hard into the corner.

She follows with a running forearm smash, then traps him there and drives a shoulder into the midsection.

Then another.

Then a third.

She backs up just enough and snaps a kick across the chest.

Maxx fires up and screams through it.

Maxx Mayhem: "MORE!"

The crowd pops.

Selena almost smiles despite herself.

Mark Bravo: "That is the most Maxx thing I've heard in a minute."

Selena steps in again--

and Maxx suddenly surges out of the corner, scoops her up, and lawn-darts her backward into the opposite buckles with a release slam.

The ring shakes on impact.

John Phillips: "What a counter by Maxx Mayhem!"

Selena hits hard and stumbles out glassy-eyed.

Maxx charges, drives her down with a snap DDT, then immediately rolls through and heads to the corner.

The crowd rises as he starts slapping the top turnbuckle pad with both hands.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem may be looking for Crash Course!"

Mark Bravo: "If he lands this, Selena might be done."

Maxx takes off full speed.

Selena drops at the last possible second and Maxx crashes chest-first into the buckles.

He bounces backward in pain.

Selena reaches for the opening and instantly hooks him from behind, trying to steal it with a roll-up.

ONE!

TWO!

Maxx kicks out and sends her rolling across the canvas.

Both competitors scramble up fast.

Selena with a forearm.

Maxx with one back.

Selena fires again.

Maxx answers louder.

The crowd starts rising on every shot.

John Phillips: "Now it's become a fight!"

Mark Bravo: "And I don't know if that favors Selena or not, but we're about to find out!"

Selena lands a clean shot and tries to follow with a kick to the ribs.

Maxx catches the leg.

The crowd reacts.

Selena hops once on the free foot, then snaps an enzuigiri off the other leg and clips Maxx across the side of the head.

He drops to a knee.

Selena sees the moment and races to the ropes, looking for the slingshot leg drop--

but Maxx rolls through out of range.

Selena lands awkwardly.

Turns around--

and gets caught by a hard lariat from Maxx that folds her in half.

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John Phillips: "Maxx turned her inside out!"

He doesn't cover.

Instead, he drags her up, whips her into the corner, and this time when he takes off for Crash Course, there is no hesitation.

No pause.

No second thought.

He drives into her with the full-speed cannonball.

Both competitors spill out of the corner on impact.

The crowd explodes.

Mark Bravo: "There it is! Crash Course just flattened both of them!"

John Phillips: "And you heard the building react! Maxx Mayhem may be seconds away from moving on!"

Maxx crawls.

Slowly.

His first match back showing in every movement now.

He throws an arm across Selena's body.

ONE!

TWO!

Selena barely gets a shoulder up.

Maxx rolls to his back and laughs once in exhausted disbelief.

Maxx Mayhem: "You serious?!"

The crowd loves it.

John Phillips: "Selena Vex will not go away!"

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Mark Bravo: "And good for her. She didn't survive everything around Amy Harrison just to get steamrolled now."

Maxx gets up first and offers a quick nod down toward Selena, almost a sign of respect.

Then he reaches for her--

and she snatches him into a cradle out of nowhere.

ONE!

TWO!

Maxx kicks out again.

Both up.

Selena throws a high knee toward the jaw--

looking for her big shot--

but Maxx ducks under it, spins behind her, and plants her with a brutal swinging neckbreaker.

Selena rolls toward the ropes, dazed.

Maxx follows, hauls her up one more time, hooks her, and lifts.

Not pretty.

Not graceful.

But strong enough.

He drops her with Maximum Carnage in the middle of the ring.

The crowd erupts again.

John Phillips: "MAXXIMUM CARNAGE!"

Mark Bravo: "That'll do it! That has got to do it!"

Maxx collapses on top of her for the cover.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING DING DING

John Phillips: "He got her! Maxx Mayhem is moving on!"

Mark Bravo: "What a return! First match back, first qualifier, and now the Mayhem Machine is headed to the main event tonight!"

Maxx rolls off the cover and lies flat on the mat for a second, breathing hard, staring up at the lights like maybe he needed that more than he even realized.

Then the smile comes back.

He sits up.

The referee helps him to his feet and raises his hand.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... MAXX MAYHEM!"

The crowd roars.

John Phillips: "Give Selena Vex credit as well. She fought a smart, tough match and very nearly stole this thing more than once."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, she looked good. Real good. But tonight belonged to the lunatic from Detroit. Maxx is back, and now he's one win away from going to Victorious."

Selena sits up in the corner, disappointed but not broken, nodding once to herself as she processes how close she came.

Across the ring, Maxx Mayhem pounds his chest again and screams out to the crowd, all chaos and adrenaline and relief.

He came back.

And he survived.

Hold it All

We cut backstage to a narrow concrete corridor somewhere deeper in the Moda Center.

Scott Stevens stands there rubbing both temples like the building itself is giving him a migraine.

Beside him is a nervous production assistant holding a headset and trying very hard not to become the next casualty of tonight.

Scott Stevens: "What about Ross?"

The production assistant shifts awkwardly.

Production Assistant: "I think he's leaving, Mr. Stevens. I saw him go into his locker room."

Scott Stevens: "Well, is he getting his stuff and leaving, or is he just in the locker room?"

The poor kid looks completely lost.

Production Assistant: "Uh... I dunno actually."

Scott closes his eyes for a second.

He looks like a man one sentence away from a stroke.

Scott Stevens: "Well, go see!"

Production Assistant: "You want... me... to go check on him?"

Scott Stevens: "Yes, damn it! Go!"

The PA does not need to be told twice.

He hurries off down the hallway, clearly terrified of the assignment but even more terrified of saying no.

Scott lets out one long, exhausted sigh and turns--

only to stop dead.

Amy Harrison is standing right there.

Behind her, like a wall closing in, are Clovis Black, Trey Mack, and Valkyrie Knoxx.

Scott Stevens: "Oh, Jesus."

Scott is visibly startled.

Amy, on the other hand, looks delighted.

Amy Harrison: "So... Scott..."

Scott Stevens: "What, Amy?"

Amy tilts her head with mock sympathy already dripping off every word.

Amy Harrison: "Seems that Chris' lady friend is gonna be out a while, huh?"

Scott groans immediately.

Scott Stevens: "Yes, Amy. Valentina Blaze is injured pretty bad."

Amy smiles.

It is not a kind smile.

Amy Harrison: "What are you going to do about her Fighting Championship match at Victorious?"

That lands.

You can see from Scott's face that, somehow, in the middle of Chris Ross tearing apart the building, he had not even gotten that far yet.

Scott Stevens: "Well... I guess the opponent should be the person she be--"

Amy Harrison: "What?!"

She cuts him off immediately.

Amy Harrison: "You want to put a loser in the match? Someone who couldn't get the job done the first time?"

Scott's expression hardens now.

Scott Stevens: "What do you suggest, Amy, huh?"

Amy's smile widens just a little.

Then she gestures with one hand.

Valkyrie Knoxx steps forward, arms folded, expression cold and perfectly unreadable.

Amy Harrison: "The way I see it, Valkyrie here doesn't have a match at Victorious."

She takes a small step closer.

Amy Harrison: "She's a former Women's Champion... and one of the toughest women--"

Amy glances at Valkyrie, then back to Scott.

Amy Harrison: "No, people... in the UTA."

Scott looks from Amy to Valkyrie and back again.

Scott Stevens: "Why should I do you a favor and give her the match? Really? Why would I even consider the idea after everything you've done?"

Amy smirks.

Amy Harrison: "That's fair, Scott. Really."

Now he looks confused.

Scott Stevens: "It is?"

Amy Harrison: "Yeah. Sure is. I get it."

She shrugs, almost casually.

Amy Harrison: "You'd rather I have The Empire destroy EVERYONE in your little tournament before Victorious than do the right thing and give Valkyrie the spot."

Scott Stevens: "Now you listen here, Amy. I'm not going to be thre--"

Amy Harrison: "No, *you* listen, Scott!"

Her voice snaps hard enough to freeze the hallway.

Even Trey Mack stops smiling for a second.

Amy Harrison: "You think that little temper tantrum Chris Ross pulled earlier was bad?"

She steps in even closer.

Amy Harrison: "Wait 'til you see what happens if you don't do this."

Scott stares at her.

Stares at Valkyrie.

Stares at Clovis and Trey standing there behind them like backup to a threat that did not need to be spoken twice.

Then finally, his shoulders just... drop.

Scott Stevens: "You know what, Amy?"

Scott Stevens: "Whatever."

Amy's smile brightens.

Scott Stevens: "Fine. Valkyrie can have the spot."

Scott immediately pushes past Amy and the rest of the Empire, too stressed and too angry to even care what they think of him in that moment.

Amy turns slowly and watches him go.

Then she smiles.

That cold, satisfied smile of someone who just got exactly what she wanted.

Amy Harrison: "And just like that..."

She glances toward Valkyrie.

Then to Trey.

Then to Clovis.

Amy Harrison: "The Empire will soon hold it all..."

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We cut deeper into the backstage area, outside Chris Ross' locker room.

The same poor production assistant from earlier approaches the door like he is walking to his own execution.

He glances back once.

No help is coming.

He raises his hand to knock--

and the door opens before he can.

Chris Ross is standing there with his bag in hand.

Fresh shirt.

Still sweating.

Still angry.

Still looking like the hallway itself should be careful how it breathes around him.

Chris Ross: "What do you want?"

The PA nearly stumbles backward.

Production Assistant: "I was just... checking on you."

Ross stares at him for a beat with that same hard, flat glare.

Chris Ross: "You can tell your boss I'm leaving."

He shifts the bag on his shoulder.

Chris Ross: "But this is far from over."

Voice Off Camera: "That it is..."

Ross's eyes cut down the hallway instantly.

The camera pans wider.

Ace Andrews is standing there in that expensive suit and that smug little smile that always looks like it was

tailored to fit the room.

Behind him stands Samuel Scythe.

Still.

Silent.

A mountain of bad intent in human form.

Ace Andrews: "Leaving so soon?"

Ace casually waves the production assistant aside and steps forward, forcing the kid to scramble out of the way.

The PA does not hesitate.

He hurries off down the corridor, wanting absolutely none of what this is becoming.

Chris Ross: "What do you want?"

Ace smiles wider, like he's delighted Ross skipped straight to the point.

Ace Andrews: "Only to help."

Ross does not blink.

Ace takes another measured step, hands relaxed, voice smooth as polished glass.

Ace Andrews: "A little birdy told me that our beloved champion will, in fact, be arriving tonight."

Ross immediately drops the bag.

Not dramatic.

Instinctive.

His shoulders tense. His jaw locks. His hands curl into fists.

Ace notices every bit of it.

And loves every bit of it.

Ace Andrews: "You see, Chris... they call you the Reaper of Harrisburg."

Ace gestures lightly, like he is naming a title of office.

Ace Andrews: "And tonight? I saw it. That rage. That violence. That energy."

He tilts his head, admiring Ross the way a collector might admire a dangerous antique.

Ace Andrews: "There's no denying it now."

Ace motions to the man behind him.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel here..."

Ace Andrews: "Well, Samuel is my Reaper."

Scythe says nothing.

He just stands there glaring forward with that dead, murderous focus that makes the silence feel intentional.

Ace Andrews: "And I don't believe for one second that it was simple coincidence that we arrived on the very same night you revealed your true self."

Ace's smile turns knowing.

Ace Andrews: "No, Chris. I think it was serendipity."

Ross looks like he is seconds away from grabbing Ace by the throat and testing the theory against a wall.

Ace just keeps going.

Ace Andrews: "We want what you want."

Chris Ross: "Oh yeah?"

Chris Ross: "What's that?"

Ace Andrews: "Justice."

That word hangs there.

Ace Andrews: "And we would very much like to help you get it."

Chris Ross: "I don't need help."

Chris Ross: "I can handle this on my own."

Ace nods slowly, as though Ross has just said the exact thing he expected.

Ace Andrews: "I know."

Ace Andrews: "Of course you can."

He glances back toward Samuel Scythe, then returns his attention to Ross.

Ace Andrews: "But every Reaper can sow so much more... together."

Ross does not answer.

He is done with the poetry.

Ace can see it.

And, unlike most men, he is smart enough not to overstay his own words.

Ace Andrews: "But let's not waste time. I know you don't care to talk."

He begins to step away, Samuel turning with him.

Ace Andrews: "Just know this..."

Ace Andrews: "MMJ is on his way."

Ross's face changes instantly.

The rage sharpens.

Focus replaces motion.

Ace Andrews: "And tonight..."

Ace's grin becomes chilling now, all polished arrogance and poisonous certainty.

Ace Andrews: "He will fear a Reaper..."

Ace pauses and gives Samuel a tiny glance.

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Ace Andrews: "One way or another."

Ace turns and walks off down the corridor, Samuel Scythe following just behind him like a storm with a pulse.

Chris Ross does not move.

He stands there outside the locker room, bag at his feet, staring after them.

Thinking.

Breathing.

Seething.

And somewhere in that silence, with Maxwell Jett now confirmed to be on his way, the night becomes dangerous all over again.

Timing Without Purpose

The screen fades to black.

No arena noise.

No commentary.

No crowd.

Just the low hum of wind moving through an empty place.

Then the image fades in.

Not the Moda Center.

Not anywhere near Victory.

An undisclosed location.

Concrete floor. Exposed beams overhead. Light bleeding in through narrow windows high above. Dust floating through the air like the room itself is holding its breath.

Kairo Bey stands alone near center frame.

No neon.

No music.

No spotlight.

Just Kairo in plain black training gear, hands taped, shoulders loose but not relaxed, staring ahead like he is trying very hard not to show how much he is thinking.

Off to one side, just barely in frame at first, stands Troy Lindz.

Still.

Composed.

Braided hair tight. Muay Thai gear. Taped hands. Taped ankles. No theatrics. No posing. Just presence.

And between them--

Eli Creed.

White shirt. Sleeves rolled. Hands folded behind his back. Calm as ever.

Eli Creed: "My name is Eli Creed..."

He takes a slow step forward.

Eli Creed: "And I'm here to help."

Kairo lets out the faintest breath through his nose.

Not quite a laugh.

Not quite dismissal.

Kairo Bey: "You always start with that?"

Eli smiles softly.

Eli Creed: "Only when I'm telling the truth."

That answer sits there.

Kairo does not reply.

Eli begins to circle slowly, not like a predator, not like a coach, but somehow like both at once.

Eli Creed: "Troy once stood where you're standing now."

Kairo's eyes flick toward Lindz.

Troy says nothing.

They just stare forward, breathing slow, a finished version of something Kairo has only just begun to understand.

Eli Creed: "Not physically."

Eli Creed: "Not here."

Eli Creed: "I mean here."

Creed taps his own temple.

Eli Creed: "Conflicted."

Eli Creed: "Frustrated."

Eli Creed: "Aware of the talent... but not yet in command of the truth."

Kairo Bey: "And what truth is that?"

Eli Creed: "That talent without direction is just expensive chaos."

Kairo's jaw tightens slightly.

Kairo Bey: "I'm not chaos."

Eli Creed: "No."

Eli Creed: "You're worse."

That gets Kairo's attention.

His eyes narrow.

Kairo Bey: "Worse?"

Eli Creed: "You are discipline pretending it doesn't need structure."

Eli Creed: "You are timing without purpose."

Eli Creed: "You are electricity..."

He steps a little closer.

Eli Creed: "Still flickering."

Kairo looks away for a second, frustrated that the line lands at all.

Eli notices.

Of course he does.

Eli Creed: "That's the part you hate, isn't it?"

Eli Creed: "Not that I'm talking."

Eli Creed: "That I'm saying things you've already thought by yourself."

Kairo shakes his head once.

Kairo Bey: "You don't know me like that."

Eli Creed: "No."

Eli Creed: "I know patterns."

Eli Creed: "I know hesitation."

Eli Creed: "I know what it looks like when someone with gifts keeps arriving at the edge of something bigger..."

Eli Creed: "And keeps finding a reason not to step fully through."

Troy shifts slightly in the background.

Not impatience.

Recognition.

They have lived this part before.

Kairo Bey: "So what, I'm supposed to just become Troy?"

For the first time, Troy answers.

Troy Lindz: "No."

Troy Lindz: "That's the point."

Kairo turns toward them fully now.

Troy Lindz: "I didn't become somebody else."

Troy Lindz: "I became harder to kill."

That line hangs in the empty room.

Kairo studies Troy differently after that.

Less as Creed's mouthpiece.

More as evidence.

Eli Creed: "Break."

Kairo glances back toward him.

Eli Creed: "That's where everyone starts."

Eli Creed: "The moment your rhythm fails you."

Eli Creed: "The moment the crowd can't save you."

Eli Creed: "The moment your confidence stops sounding like certainty and starts sounding like noise."

Eli takes one more slow step closer.

Eli Creed: "Then..."

Eli Creed: "Bend."

Eli Creed: "Not surrender."

Eli Creed: "Not weakness."

Eli Creed: "Survival."

Eli Creed: "The wisdom to stop mistaking stubbornness for identity."

Kairo folds his arms now, defensive but listening.

Eli Creed: "And then..."

Eli Creed: "Build."

Eli Creed: "That's where Troy is now."

Eli Creed: "And that..."

He looks Kairo dead in the eye.

Eli Creed: "Is where you are trying very hard not to go."

Kairo Bey: "Maybe I don't need you to get there."

Eli Creed: "Maybe."

Eli smiles again, warm and unsettling all at once.

Eli Creed: "But if that were true..."

Eli Creed: "You wouldn't still be here listening."

Kairo doesn't answer.

Because he can't.

Because he is.

Eli turns away from him and takes a few slow steps, giving the silence room to work.

Eli Creed: "You think this is about control."

Eli Creed: "It isn't."

Eli Creed: "It's about clarity."

Eli Creed: "About taking all that style, all that timing, all that instinct..."

Eli Creed: "And removing every part of you that hesitates when pressure arrives."

He turns back.

Eli Creed: "I am not asking you to stop being Kairo Bey."

Eli Creed: "I am offering to make Kairo Bey inevitable."

Troy steps up now, just enough to stand properly beside Creed.

No grin.

No sermon.

Just certainty.

Troy Lindz: "You felt it already."

Troy Lindz: "That pull."

Troy Lindz: "That voice that says there's another gear in you if you stop protecting the old version of yourself."

Kairo looks from Troy... to Eli... then away.

Kairo Bey: "You two make it sound real pretty."

Eli Creed: "Pain always sounds prettier when it has purpose."

A long pause.

No one moves.

The room feels smaller now.

Eli Creed: "You don't have to answer today."

Eli Creed: "You are not Troy Lindz."

Eli Creed: "You are not a copy."

Eli Creed: "You are simply at the beginning of a journey that somebody else already survived."

Eli looks at Troy.

Then back to Kairo.

Eli Creed: "That should comfort you."

Kairo finally lets a small, humorless smile tug at one corner of his mouth.

Kairo Bey: "You really don't know when to quit, do you?"

Eli Creed: "No."

Eli Creed: "Because unfinished things bother me."

Eli begins to walk off.

Troy falls in beside him.

But before they leave frame, Creed stops without turning around.

Eli Creed: "Kairo."

Kairo looks up.

Eli Creed: "When the moment comes..."

Eli Creed: "Don't ask yourself whether you trust me."

Eli Creed: "Ask yourself whether you're tired of being almost."

Creed and Troy walk off into the dim light, leaving Kairo alone in the frame.

He does not call after them.

He does not follow.

He just stands there in the silence, taped hands at his sides, thinking.

Still resisting.

Still listening.

Still at the beginning.

Fade to black.

Carter Durant vs Tyler Cruz

The camera sweeps across a packed arena, the hum of anticipation rolling like distant thunder. Fans lean over the barricades, signs waving, the ring bathed in bright white light as the commentary desk comes into focus. John Phillips sits upright, hands folded, the consummate professional. Beside him, Mark Bravo bounces with restless energy, already half out of his seat before the bell has even rung.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are kicking things off tonight with a matchup that could have major implications down the line. Carter Durant and Tyler Cruz--two of the most athletically gifted young stars in the UTA--are both looking to right the ship and build momentum toward a future title opportunity. And Mark, when you talk about raw potential, these two have it in spades."

Mark Bravo: "Potential? John, these guys have enough potential to power the whole damn building! Durant's a human lightning bolt--every time he hits those ropes, I swear I feel the breeze. And Cruz? The Red Rocket? That kid moves like he's allergic to gravity. You blink, and he's already on the other side of the ring doing something that makes my knees hurt just watching it."

The crowd swells with noise as the camera cuts briefly to fans holding up signs for both men--"HURRICANE SEASON" and "ROCKET FUEL"--before returning to the desk.

John Phillips: "But talent alone doesn't get you to the top. Both of these men have had flashes of brilliance, but flashes don't win championships. Consistency does. Tonight is about proving they can string together the kind of performances that get the attention of the championship committee."

Mark Bravo: "And let's be honest, John--this is the kind of match where somebody makes a statement. You come out here, you put on a show, you get the crowd behind you, you get the office behind you... suddenly you're knocking on the door of a title shot. But you come up short? You stumble? You hesitate? That door slams shut real fast."

The camera cuts to the ring, the referee checking the ropes, the energy building.

John Phillips: "Durant's speed, Cruz's agility, both men hungry, both men desperate to climb the ladder. This is the kind of contest that defines careers."

Mark Bravo: "And the best part? Neither one of them is gonna play it safe. These two are gonna fly, they're gonna flip, they're gonna hit the gas and pray the wheels don't come off. That's why I love matches like

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this--no fear, no hesitation, just pure competition."

The crowd begins to clap in rhythm, sensing the match is moments away.

John Phillips: "The stakes are high, the pressure is real, and both of these young men know exactly what's on the line. A win tonight could be the spark that ignites a run straight toward championship gold."

Mark Bravo: "And a loss could send you tumbling right back down the mountain. That's the beauty of the UTA, John--every match matters. Every moment counts. And tonight? Tonight's gonna be a big one."

The arena lights shift into deep teal and purple, the opening blast of a brass band fanfare erupting through the speakers. A rolling second-line drumbeat follows--lively, sharp, unmistakably New Orleans. The crowd pops instantly, clapping along as the rhythm fills the building.

*Through the curtain, Carter Durant **bursts into view at full sprint**, a streak of motion and adrenaline. He doesn't jog, doesn't pose--he **explodes** down the ramp like he's been shot out of a cannon, wind slicing behind him as he slaps every outstretched hand he can reach.*

The lights dance across him in swirling Mardi Gras colors as he circles the ring, pointing to the sky, hyping the crowd, feeding off their energy. He leaps onto the apron in one smooth bound, vaults over the top rope, and lands in a perfect athletic crouch before springing upright, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

John Phillips: "There he is--The Hurricane himself! Carter Durant bringing that New Orleans electricity to the UTA tonight!"

Mark Bravo: "Look at that speed! If he went any faster, John, he'd break the sound barrier and we'd all lose our eyebrows!"

Durant climbs the turnbuckle, raising a fist to the crowd as the brass band fanfare crescendos. He points skyward again--ritual, gratitude, focus--before hopping down and pacing the ring with restless, coiled energy.

The referee checks him, but Durant barely stands still long enough. He's ready. He's fired up. He's waiting for the bell like a sprinter waiting for the gun.

Red and white strobes continue to pulse in rhythm with the Latin EDM, the beat still thumping through the arena as Tyler Cruz finishes his spin in the center of the ring. He claps above his head, the crowd clapping with him, the energy rising--

--and then he drops his hands, eyes locking across the ring at Carter Durant, who bounces lightly on his toes, matching Cruz's intensity with his own restless, coiled energy.

The referee steps between them, checking Cruz quickly, then signaling to the timekeeper as Cruz backs into his corner, still moving with that playful swagger, shoulders rolling to the rhythm that's fading out over the

speakers.

John Phillips: "Tyler Cruz is ready--look at that confidence. He's loose, he's focused, and he's feeding off this crowd."

Mark Bravo: "Loose? John, the man's made of rubber bands and caffeine. He's vibrating at a different frequency than the rest of us!"

Cruz leans forward, gripping the top rope, stretching, eyes never leaving Durant. The music fades completely now, leaving only the roar of the crowd and the thrum of anticipation.

Durant nods once. Cruz smirks. The referee signals for the bell.

DING DING.

The crowd is alive, buzzing, leaning forward in their seats as Carter Durant and Tyler Cruz stand across from one another, both men coiled tight with anticipation. The referee backs away, giving them space. The ring feels bigger than usual--wide, open, waiting for the first spark to ignite the fire.

Durant shifts his weight from foot to foot, shoulders loose, eyes locked. Cruz rolls his wrists, shakes out his arms, and gives a small, confident nod. The tension is thick enough to taste.

They begin to circle. Slow. Methodical. Each step measured, each breath controlled. Two athletes who know that the first thirty seconds can dictate the next thirty minutes.

John Phillips: "This is where the match truly begins--no rush, no recklessness. Just two competitors reading each other, testing reactions, looking for that first opening."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but you can feel it, John--they're both about to hit the gas. It's like watching two race cars rev their engines before the light turns green."

Durant feints left--Cruz shifts with him. Cruz twitches forward--Durant doesn't bite. They circle again, faster now, the pace tightening like a coil winding up.

Finally, they lock up. A tight collar-and-elbow, both men pushing for leverage. Cruz slips under, twisting into a quick waistlock. Durant tries to break free, but Cruz transitions seamlessly into a standing switch--Durant counters with one of his own, but Cruz cartwheels out of it, landing light as a feather.

Durant charges--Cruz drops flat--Durant hurdles him, hits the ropes--Cruz leapfrogs--Durant rebounds--Cruz drops again--Durant stops dead, sliding into a low stance, eyes locked on Cruz.

The crowd pops at the stalemate.

Victory: 04.10.2026

John Phillips: "Incredible athleticism from both men! Neither one able to get the advantage yet."

Mark Bravo: "They're moving so fast the cameras are filing a complaint with HR!"

Durant lunges first--Cruz sidesteps, grabs the wrist, tries to whip him--Durant reverses--Cruz runs up the ropes, twisting into a rope-walk arm drag--Durant flips through and lands on his feet, skidding backward but staying upright.

Another pop. Louder this time.

Durant grins. Cruz smirks back. Respect. Challenge. Fire.

They circle again, but the pace is different now--faster, sharper, both men warmed up and reading each other's timing with laser precision.

Durant feints high--Cruz bites--Durant drops low and sweeps--Cruz backflips clean over the leg, landing in a crouch. Durant springs up--Cruz springs forward--foreheads nearly collide before both men stop on a dime.

The crowd erupts, stomping, clapping, roaring their approval.

John Phillips: "What an exchange! These two are evenly matched in pure speed and agility."

Mark Bravo: "Evenly matched? John, this is like watching two hummingbirds fight over a can of energy drink!"

They reset again, but this time there's no hesitation. Cruz darts in--Durant sidesteps--Cruz spins behind him--Durant rolls forward, popping up instantly--Cruz charges--Durant leapfrogs--Cruz rebounds off the ropes--Durant drops low--Cruz vaults over him--Durant springs up with a sudden burst of speed--Cruz twists mid-run into a back-flip dropkick--Durant narrowly ducks it, the heel brushing his hair.

The crowd gasps.

John Phillips: "Cruz nearly caught him flush!"

Mark Bravo: "Nearly? John, if Durant had been one inch taller, he'd be picking teeth out of the third row!"

Durant fires back with a springboard--Cruz sees it coming--Durant twists mid-air, landing behind him--Cruz spins--Durant sweeps the legs--Cruz rolls through--Durant charges--Cruz pops up with a tilt-a-whirl headscissors--Durant flips, lands on his feet again, skidding backward but refusing to fall.

The crowd explodes.

Durant wipes sweat from his brow. Cruz taps his temple with a grin. The respect is real--but so is the

competition.

John Phillips: "This is a showcase of pure athleticism. Every move has an answer, every counter has a counter."

Mark Bravo: "And every counter has a 'holy hell, how did he do that?!' These two are putting on a clinic!"

They circle once more, but now the feeling-out process has evolved into something sharper--two men who understand exactly what the other is capable of, and who know the next exchange could be the one that breaks the stalemate.

The crowd chants for both men, the energy rising, the match ready to shift gears at any moment.

Durant and Cruz reset in the center of the ring, both men breathing hard after their blistering opening exchange--when suddenly a violent shockwave of panic erupts through the lower bowl. Fans shove backward, chairs topple, drinks spill, and the cameras whip toward the commotion--

*--just in time to catch Torunn Sigurjonsson **exploding out of the crowd** like a missile made of muscle and fury.*

John Phillips: "What--what is happening?! That's Torunn Sigurjonsson! She's coming straight through the fans!"

Mark Bravo: "JOHN SHE'S MOVING LIKE A FREIGHT TRAIN--GET OUT OF HER WAY!"

*Torunn doesn't weave through the crowd--she **plows** through it. Fans scatter like birds as she storms down the steps, warpaint streaked across her face, jaw clenched, eyes burning with Icelandic rage.*

*She hits the barricade at full speed, grabs the top rail, and **hurls it aside** like it weighs nothing. The metal crashes to the floor as she slides under the ropes--*

--and immediately launches herself at Tyler Cruz from behind.

Cruz doesn't even turn. He doesn't even flinch. He never sees her.

Torunn's forearm smashes into the back of his skull with a sickening crack.

John Phillips: "OH MY--Cruz is down! He didn't even see her coming!"

Mark Bravo: "She hit him like she was trying to knock his soul out of his body!"

Cruz collapses face-first, dazed, and Torunn is on him instantly--mounting him, raining down brutal, piston-like punches to the back of his head, his ribs, his spine. Each shot lands with a thud that echoes

through the arena.

Durant turns--confused, horrified--

--and that's when the second shadow drops.

Theron Tkachuk emerges from the crowd like a silent executioner, sliding into the ring with terrifying speed for a man his size. No roar. No words. No hesitation.

John Phillips: "That's Theron Tkachuk! The Dire Wolf is in the ring--this is a coordinated assault!"

Mark Bravo: "Durant, MOVE--MOVE, KID--DON'T LET HIM TOUCH YOU!"

Durant tries to react--tries to move--tries to do anything--

--but Theron is already on him.

*The Dire Wolf grabs him by the hair and **yanks him backward** so violently Durant's feet leave the mat. Theron drives a knee into his spine, then another, then another--each one folding Durant like a piece of paper.*

Durant gasps, reaching for the ropes--Theron doesn't let him.

*He grabs Durant by the jaw and **headbutts him** so hard the crack echoes like a gunshot.*

John Phillips: "GOOD LORD! Durant might be unconscious! That headbutt was monstrous!"

Mark Bravo: "Theron's not wrestling--he's dismantling him! Somebody get security out here!"

*Torunn drags Cruz up by the mask and **hurls him into the corner**, following with a running knee that caves his chest in. She grabs the top rope and stomps him down--again--again--again--each stomp heavier than the last.*

*Cruz curls up, trying to protect himself--Torunn grabs him by the wrist and **yanks him upright**, only to smash him with a short-range headbutt that drops him like a stone.*

John Phillips: "Torunn is manhandling Tyler Cruz--Cruz is over two hundred pounds and she's tossing him like he's nothing!"

Mark Bravo: "She's not lifting him, John--she's *ragdolling* him! That's raw, terrifying strength!"

Meanwhile, Theron has Durant trapped in the opposite corner, driving heavy, thudding body shots into his ribs--each one deeper, each one more punishing. Durant's legs buckle, but Theron holds him up just to hit

him again.

*Theron grabs Durant by the throat with one massive hand and **hurls him across the ring** like a sack of sand. Durant bounces, rolls, tries to crawl--Theron stomps on his back, pinning him to the mat.*

Torunn drags Cruz to center ring, lifts him effortlessly--

John Phillips: "LOOK AT THAT! She just scooped him like he weighs NOTHING!"

Mark Bravo: "Cruz is 208 pounds, John--Torunn lifted him like a grocery bag!"

--and Torunn begins hammering him with short, brutal forearms--each one snapping his head back.

Then--

--the Wolves look at each other.

And the crowd knows what's coming.

*Torunn grabs Cruz, hoists him high, and **JACKHAMMERS him into the mat**, the impact shaking the entire ring.*

John Phillips: "JÖTUNN DRIVER! She planted him! She planted him like a tent stake!"

Mark Bravo: "She didn't even struggle, John--she LAUNCHED him! That's freak strength!"

Theron steps back, measuring Durant with cold, predatory calm. Durant staggers to his feet--barely conscious, barely upright--

--and Theron explodes forward.

The Clothesline From Hell hits like a car crash.

Durant flips inside out, landing in a heap.

John Phillips: "CLOTHESLINE FROM HELL! Durant might be OUT COLD!"

Mark Bravo: "He didn't just hit him--he DECAPITATED him!"

The ring is littered with bodies. Cruz is face-down, motionless. Durant is folded on his side, gasping for air. The Wolves stand tall over the wreckage--Torunn snarling, Theron looming behind her like a silent, merciless executioner.

Victory: 04.10.2026

The ring is a battlefield--Cruz face-down, Durant barely breathing, the canvas littered with the wreckage left behind by the Wolves. Torunn Sigurjonsson stands in the center of it all, chest heaving, warpaint streaked with sweat, eyes blazing with volcanic fury. Theron Tkachuk looms behind her, silent and still, like a guillotine waiting for the next neck.

The ring announcer on the outside tries to back away--too slow.

*Torunn storms to the ropes, reaches down, and **rips the microphone out of his hands** with such force he stumbles into the barricade. She doesn't even look at him. She just turns, boots pounding against the mat as she climbs back into the ring, stepping over Cruz's limp body without a second glance.*

John Phillips: "Torunn Sigurjonsson just snatched that microphone like she was ready to tear the announcer's arm off! She is furious--absolutely furious!"

Mark Bravo: "John, look at her face--look at her posture--she's not done. She's not even CLOSE to done!"

Torunn stalks to the center of the ring, shoulders rising and falling with each furious breath. She lifts the microphone, her hand shaking--not with fear, but with rage so intense it vibrates through her entire frame.

She points toward the stage, voice erupting like a war horn.

Torunn Sigurjonsson: "HAKURYU! GET OUT HERE!"

The crowd explodes--half in terror, half in anticipation.

Torunn Sigurjonsson: "You hurt Volk... you put your hands on our pack... and now you answer to US!"

She slams her boot into the mat, the ring shaking beneath her fury.

Torunn Sigurjonsson: "Come out here so Theron can BREAK YOU!"

Theron doesn't move. Doesn't blink. Doesn't breathe. He simply lifts his head, eyes locked on the entrance with cold, predatory calm--like he's already imagining Hakuryu's bones snapping in his hands.

John Phillips: "Torunn is calling out the White Dragon--and Theron looks ready to tear him limb from limb!"

Mark Bravo: "Hakuryu better think twice before stepping out here--because the Dire Wolf looks like he wants to END somebody!"

Torunn steps to the ropes, gripping the top strand so hard her knuckles whiten.

Torunn Sigurjonsson: "SHOW YOURSELF, COWARD! FACE THE WOLVES!"

Victory: 04.10.2026

Torunn leans over the ropes, snarling into the microphone, demanding Hakuryu show himself. The arena is a storm of noise--fear, excitement, chaos.

Then--without fanfare, without music, without theatrics--

Hakuryu steps onto the stage.

Silent. Still. White robes draped over scripture-painted skin. The Fighting Championship over his shoulder. Sinja stands beside him, head bowed, hands folded around his shakujo staff.

Hakuryu doesn't posture. He doesn't react to Torunn's rage. He simply looks down at the ring as if observing insects fighting in a puddle.

John Phillips: "There he is--the White Dragon. And look at that expression... he looks completely unimpressed."

Mark Bravo: "Torunn's screaming for blood and Hakuryu looks like he's waiting for a bus."

Torunn slams her fist into the top rope.

Torunn Sigurjonsson: "GET DOWN HERE! FACE THERON! FACE US!"

Hakuryu lifts the microphone Sinja hands him. His voice is calm. Cold. Surgical.

Hakuryu: ????????

Sinja translates, eyes still lowered.

Sinja: "My master says... how foolish you are."

The crowd reacts--gasps, boos, scattered cheers.

Hakuryu continues, tone dripping with disdain.

Hakuryu: ??????????????????????

Sinja: "He says he does not waste his time on low-level soldiers."

Torunn's face twists with rage. Theron's jaw tightens, but he doesn't move.

Hakuryu: ??????????????????????

Sinja: "He says fighting you would only diminish his value."

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Hakuryu shifts the Fighting Championship on his shoulder, making sure they see it.

Hakuryu: ??????????????????????

Sinja: "Next week, he defeats Van Patton and makes history."

Hakuryu steps forward, eyes narrowing--not in fear, but in irritation.

Hakuryu: ??????????????????????

Sinja: "He is not foolish enough to risk injury on the eve of his WrestleZone title victory."

Torunn roars into the mic.

Torunn Sigurjonsson: "YOU COWARD! YOU PUT YOUR HANDS ON VOLK! FACE US!"

Hakuryu tilts his head slightly, as if examining a stain on the floor.

Hakuryu: ??????????????????????

Sinja: "The Dragon has no interest in wolves who only bark."

Theron finally steps forward--one step, deliberate, predatory. The crowd gasps.

Hakuryu doesn't flinch.

He simply turns his back.

Sinja follows, head bowed, as the White Dragon walks away without a single glance behind him.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu... is LEAVING. He's refusing the fight outright!"

Mark Bravo: "He just called them low-level soldiers! He said fighting them would LOWER HIS VALUE! John, that's not arrogance--that's a whole new species of ego!"

Torunn SLAMS her fist into the turnbuckle, shaking the entire ring.

Torunn Sigurjonsson: "RUN, DRAGON! RUN WHILE YOU CAN! WE'RE COMING FOR YOU!"

The White Dragon walks away without a single glance behind him.

And that--

that--

is the moment the Dire Wolf snaps.

*Theron Tkachuk **moves first.***

No roar. No warning. No theatrics. Just a sudden, violent burst of motion--like a predator lunging the instant prey exposes its throat.

John Phillips: "THERON IS MOVING--THERON IS GOING AFTER HIM!"

Mark Bravo: "He didn't even THINK about it, John--he just WENT!"

Theron slides out of the ring with terrifying speed for a man his size, boots hitting the floor like hammer blows. He storms toward the ramp--

--and immediately slams into a wall of security.

Seven men.

All braced.

All terrified.

Theron doesn't stop.

*He **plows** into them, shoving two aside with one arm, sending another stumbling backward over the barricade. A fourth tries to grab him--Theron swats him away like a fly, sending him crashing into the LED boards.*

John Phillips: "Security is trying to hold him back--but Theron is TEARING through them!"

Mark Bravo: "That's not a man, John--that's a NATURAL DISASTER!"

Torunn sees it--sees Theron breaking the line--and she's already moving. She vaults over the top rope, hits the floor running, and barrels into the security pile like a berserker unleashed.

*Two guards go down instantly. Another tries to hold her back--Torunn grabs him by the shirt and **hurls him aside** like a sack of laundry.*

John Phillips: "TORUNN IS IN THE FIGHT NOW! SECURITY CAN'T HOLD EITHER OF THEM!"

Mark Bravo: "This is a PACK, John--once one goes, the other follows!"

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Theron breaks free first, ripping through the last two guards and storming up the ramp with murder in his eyes. Torunn is right behind him, shoving aside the final stragglers.

Hakuryu and Sinja disappear behind the curtain just as Theron reaches the top of the ramp.

He doesn't slow.

He doesn't hesitate.

He disappears backstage after them, Torunn a half-step behind, both Wolves vanishing into the darkness like hunters pursuing wounded prey.

John Phillips: "THE WOLVES ARE IN PURSUIT! HAKURYU MAY HAVE WALKED AWAY, BUT THEY ARE NOT LETTING THIS GO!"

Mark Bravo: "This isn't a chase, John--this is a HUNT!"

The camera tries to follow--too slow.

The curtain swings.

The Wolves are gone.

And the segment ends with the unmistakable message:

The White Dragon can run.

But the Wolves are coming.

His Arrival

We cut away from the ring and head to the loading area outside the building.

A black SUV rolls into frame and comes to a slow, deliberate stop under the harsh white lights of the service entrance.

The engine idles for half a second.

Then the rear passenger door opens.

Out steps the UTA Champion.

Victory: 04.10.2026

Maxwell Max Jett emerges with all the smug confidence of a man who already assumes the camera was waiting for him personally.

A thousand-dollar suit.

Perfectly tailored.

Sharp lines. Expensive shoes. Not a hair out of place.

And in his hand--

The UTA Championship.

He doesn't sling it over his shoulder.

He carries it in one hand like a luxury item he purchased himself.

Jett closes the SUV door with his hip, adjusts one cuff, and looks up at the building with that same infuriating little smirk he always seems to wear when he knows someone else is about to have a very bad night.

John Phillips: "There he is."

Mark Bravo: "And look at him. Cool as ice. Like nothin' has happened all night."

Jett lifts the title slightly and glances down at the faceplate, admiring his own reflection in the gold for a second before beginning the walk toward the entrance.

No urgency.

No concern.

Just that same slow, self-satisfied swagger.

John Phillips: "That is the UTA Champion walking into the building after everything that has already transpired here tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and the big question is simple. Has anybody told Maxwell Jett what kind of powder keg he's walking into?"

John Phillips: "Chris Ross has torn through this arena looking for him. He destroyed property. He assaulted security. He has been completely consumed by what happened last week, and now Maxwell Jett is finally here."

Victory: 04.10.2026

Jett reaches the service door, but before heading inside, he pauses just long enough to look directly into the lens.

That smug grin widens a little more.

Not because he knows something.

Because he assumes he does.

Mark Bravo: "Look at that face. Either nobody's warned him... or they did, and he thinks it's funny."

John Phillips: "Neither possibility makes me feel any better."

With the championship still in hand, Maxwell Jett steps through the entrance and disappears into the building.

The camera lingers for one beat on the now-empty doorway.

The mood changes instantly.

Because now he is here.

Eating Their Words

We cut back to ringside.

Then the music hits.

And the building comes alive.

John Phillips: "Wait a minute--listen to this reaction!"

Mark Bravo: "No way. No way. Don't tell me--"

Madman Szalinski's music pounds through the Moda Center and the crowd immediately rises to its feet.

The camera swings to the stage.

Out steps the Hall of Famer.

Madman Szalinski emerges wearing jeans, a black t-shirt, and that unmistakable trademark mask, the same one that has stared down champions, lunatics, legends, and entire locker rooms for years.

There is no suit tonight.

No formal Hall of Fame shine.

No comedy.

No side act.

Just purpose.

He takes a few steps out onto the stage and the expression in his body language says everything before he even gets to the ring.

Determined.

Focused.

And maybe just a little bit dangerous.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski is here, and if you know anything about the last two weeks, you know exactly why this reaction is as big as it is."

Mark Bravo: "Two weeks ago this man went into the Hall of Fame. One night later, he got planted in the middle of that ring by Silas Grimm after El Fantasma lost the tag titles. We have not heard from him since."

Madman starts down the ramp, not rushing, but not wasting time either.

Fans near the barricade reach for him and, in a moment that feels deeply human for a man called Madman, he slaps a few hands along the way--especially the young fans who are losing their minds just to touch him for a second.

John Phillips: "That is one of the most beloved weirdos in UTA history right there."

Mark Bravo: "And one of the toughest too. Don't let the mask and the madness fool you. Madman Szalinski was a problem in his day."

Madman reaches ringside and heads straight for the timekeeper's area.

He grabs a microphone.

Then he steps up onto the apron, pauses, and looks out over the crowd one time before entering through the ropes.

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Inside the ring, the ovation only grows.

Madman walks to center ring and turns slowly in a circle, taking it all in.

The fans are chanting now.

Crowd: "MAD-MAN! MAD-MAN! MAD-MAN!"

He lowers the microphone for a minute and just soaks it in.

He nods once.

Twice.

You can feel how much it means.

Not because he needs applause.

Because he understands what this moment is.

And what comes next.

John Phillips: "Listen to this building. They love this man."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and the wild part is, I don't think they're just cheering for nostalgia here. I think they know something's coming."

Madman finally raises the mic.

The crowd quiets, though not fully.

There is too much energy in the air for that.

Madman Szalinski: "Two weeks ago..."

He paces once.

Madman Szalinski: "I was laying in the center of this very ring..."

The fans hang on every word now.

Madman Szalinski: "One night removed from bein' inducted into the Hall of Fame."

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He points down to the mat beneath his boots.

Madman Szalinski: "Right here."

Madman Szalinski: "El Fantasma had just lost the UTA Tag Team Championships..."

His voice tightens a little there.

Madman Szalinski: "And Silas Grimm went all Deebo on me."

The crowd boos hard at the mention of Grimm.

Madman lets it roll over him and nods like, yes, that happened, no use pretending otherwise.

Madman Szalinski: "That's what happened."

Madman Szalinski: "Ain't gonna stand here and lie to you. Ain't gonna make excuses. Ain't gonna tell you the old Madman had some secret trick up his sleeve that night."

He shrugs slightly, almost accepting it.

Madman Szalinski: "He got me."

The crowd noise dips. The honesty lands.

Madman Szalinski: "And when I was finally able to get up..."

Madman Szalinski: "And drag myself to the back..."

He stops pacing now.

His shoulders square.

Madman Szalinski: "Your boy Madman was told..."

He lowers the mic just a hair.

Madman Szalinski: "'Jeremy...'"

The crowd reacts instantly to the use of his real name.

John Phillips: "Listen to that--"

Madman keeps going, his voice building now.

Madman Szalinski: "'Jeremy... there's just nothin' you can do about it.'"

His intensity rises with every word after that.

Madman Szalinski: "They told me..."

Madman Szalinski: "That I knew I wasn't gonna be medically cleared to be physical."

Madman Szalinski: "They told me..."

Madman Szalinski: "That I knew my time in professional wrestling was done."

Madman Szalinski: "They told me..."

Madman Szalinski: "That I was lucky I even had the opportunity to be a manager at this point!"

The fans boo loudly again, this time less at a villain and more at the very idea of anybody telling Madman Szalinski that the story was over for him.

Madman lowers the mic.

Lets it breathe.

Lets the moment sit in the room.

Then he lifts it again with a tiny tilt of the head.

Madman Szalinski: "You know what I told 'em?"

The crowd already knows this is going somewhere good.

He waits.

Lets them lean in.

Madman Szalinski: "I told 'em they could all kiss my Parkersburg ass."

The crowd absolutely explodes.

John Phillips: "What a reaction!"

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Mark Bravo: "That's a Hall of Famer talking right there!"

Madman paces now with more life in him, more fire, more old instability creeping back into the edges.

Madman Szalinski: "I jumped in the '95 Crown Vic..."

Madman Szalinski: "And I took myself to see the doctors."

Madman Szalinski: "And after two weeks..."

Madman Szalinski: "Of testin'..."

Madman Szalinski: "Proddin'..."

Madman Szalinski: "And pokin'..."

He slows down again.

Madman Szalinski: "You know what *they* told me?"

He waits again.

The camera moves in tighter now.

The fans are buzzing, half shouting answers, half just waiting for him to say it.

The shot comes in close on the mask.

On the eyes behind it.

And Madman finishes in a tone that is completely serious.

Madman Szalinski: "They told me..."

Madman Szalinski: "I was cleared."

The roof nearly comes off the Moda Center.

John Phillips: "OH MY GOD!"

Mark Bravo: "No way! No way! Madman Szalinski is cleared!"

Madman stands there and lets the noise hit him full force now.

This one is different.

This is not just cheering.

This is realization.

This is the crowd understanding what he is actually saying.

That a Madman Szalinski match is no longer memory.

It is possibility.

Madman Szalinski: "Now those same people in the back..."

Madman Szalinski: "The ones who said my time was up..."

Madman Szalinski: "The ones who said I'd never be cleared..."

Madman Szalinski: "Well..."

He taps his own chest once with the mic hand.

Madman Szalinski: "They're eatin' their words now..."

Madman Szalinski: "'Cause I got that paperwork that says different."

The pop keeps rolling.

Madman turns slightly toward the hard camera now, like he knows exactly who he is really talking to.

Madman Szalinski: "So Silas Grimm..."

The crowd boos again.

Madman Szalinski: "When you put your hands on me two weeks ago..."

Madman Szalinski: "You made the biggest God damn mistake of your life, son."

His body language changes here.

The looseness drains out.

The fun vanishes.

Now he is just focused.

Dead set.

Old danger wrapped in denim and a mask.

Madman Szalinski: "Come VICTORIOUS..."

Madman Szalinski: "You're gonna see why these people are losing their minds right now..."

Madman Szalinski: "And exactly why..."

Madman Szalinski: "They call me..."

He raises the microphone high over his head.

The crowd takes it from there.

Crowd: "MADMAN! MADMAN! MADMAN! MADMAN!"

He lowers the mic again, nodding once as the chant grows louder and louder.

Then, with no extra flourish, he drops the microphone to the mat.

THUD.

The music hits again.

Madman stands in the center of the ring, chest out, head high, the mask somehow making the moment feel even bigger.

John Phillips: "I cannot believe what we just heard!"

Mark Bravo: "A Madman Szalinski match in 2026? Against Silas Grimm? At Victorious? Brother, sign me up right now!"

John Phillips: "Two weeks ago many thought Silas Grimm had ended whatever physical future Madman Szalinski had left. Tonight, Madman just told the world that not only is he cleared..."

Mark Bravo: "But he's coming for Grimm's soul."

John Phillips: "Victorious just got a whole lot more unpredictable."

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The camera lingers one last time on Madman Szalinski standing tall in the middle of the ring as the fans continue roaring for him.

A Hall of Famer.

A survivor.

And apparently...

Still very much a wrestler.

Coming Soon

The screen fades to black.

No commentary.

No arena noise.

Just a low hum.

Then--

A single sneaker squeaks across polished hardwood.

The shot fades in tight.

Not on a face.

Not on a full body.

Just a silhouette in the distance under dim gym lights.

Still.

Poised.

One leg slightly bent.

Hands on hips.

Like the final pose of a routine waiting for the music to hit.

Cut.

A close-up of fingers tightening the laces on a high-top sneaker.

Green.

Black.

White.

Cut.

A hand adjusts an MMA-style glove.

Then smooths a kneepad into place.

Cut.

A fast pan across pleated fabric.

Green and black.

A flash of white trim.

The camera slows.

And for just a second--

We catch the logo across the chest.

HORNETS.

Cut.

A bow tied into a blonde ponytail.

Then another.

Cut.

A gym mat.

A pair of feet plants.

Then suddenly the silhouette springs into motion.

Roundoff.

Back handspring.

Full twist.

Perfect landing.

The figure sticks it cold in the dark.

Cut.

A set of ring ropes.

Hands grip the top strand.

A blur of motion.

Springboard.

Twist.

Landing on both feet.

Too fast to fully see.

Just enough to feel.

Cut.

Now the silhouette again.

Same gym.

Same dim lighting.

Only closer this time.

The figure bounces lightly on the balls of her feet, then throws a playful little shadowbox combination.

A cartwheel.

A handspring.

A spring up to the second rope.

Then a sudden leap backward into a crisp, controlled landing.

The movement is cheerleader precision fused with wrestler timing.

Elegant.

Fast.

Dangerous.

Cut to black.

Then a voice.

Bright.

Bubbly.

Almost too cheerful for how sharp it sounds in the silence.

Voice: "OMG... like... if you blink, you are literally gonna miss me."

A beat.

Voice: "And that would be sooo embarrassing for you."

Cut.

A close-up of a smile.

Then a wink.

Then the camera finally pulls back.

Standing under the spotlight now in full color is a compact burst of game-day energy and polished athletic confidence.

Blonde twin ponytails with bows.

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Green, black, and white cheerleader-inspired gear with HORNETS across the front.

Gloves. High-tops. Kneepads.

Bright smile.

Hands on hips.

All confidence.

All sparkle.

All motion waiting to happen.

Voice: "You can call me..."

She points to herself with both thumbs and beams.

Voice: "The Killer Bee."

She breaks into a quick run, hits the ropes, springboards to the top, and flips backward into a perfect landing in the center of the ring.

She sticks the pose and throws her arms wide like she just won nationals.

Voice: "And trust me..."

Voice: "When I get here?"

She tilts her head, sweet as can be.

Voice: "You're gonna feel the sting."

She blows a kiss toward the camera.

Then the screen slams to a bright graphic.

COMING SOON

BRITTANY REID

"THE KILLER BEE"

Emily Hightower vs. Athena Storm

John Phillips: "Up next, our second Fighting Championship qualifying match of the night, and this one comes with a lot of moving parts."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because Emily Hightower and Athena Storm are already a handful by themselves. But Emily ain't coming out alone. The whole Hightower clan is headed to ringside, and after the last couple of weeks, that's not exactly calming news."

John Phillips: "The winner of this match advances to tonight's main event against Maxx Mayhem, and the winner of that goes on to Victorious for the Fighting Championship opportunity. So the stakes are enormous."

Mark Bravo: "And for Emily, there's another issue. She keeps telling her family to stay out of her matches. They keep deciding they know better."

The lights in the Moda Center dim slightly as a rough-edged country-rock riff blasts through the speakers.

The crowd responds right away.

Then headlights appear at the top of the stage.

A beat-up old pickup truck growls into view, rattling onto the stage like it barely survived the drive over.

John Phillips: "Here comes Emily Hightower."

Emily steps out first, cracking her neck and slamming an energy drink back like she is clocking in for a shift instead of a fight.

Behind her comes Buck Hightower, broad-shouldered and quiet, looking like a walking warning sign.

Then Dakota Hightower, soft smile, easy eyes, all that Southern charm hiding the precision underneath.

Finally David Hightower steps out too, proud as can be, like this whole thing was his idea and therefore must be brilliant.

Mark Bravo: "And there they all are. Buck. Dakota. David. The full Hightower operation."

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower wanted protection from interference. What she did not want was her family deciding to become part of the match itself."

Emily leads the walk down the ramp, eyes forward, jaw set, trying very hard to keep this about her.

David points toward the ring and shouts something we can't quite hear over the crowd.

Emily doesn't even look at him.

Buck walks on one side like silent muscle.

Dakota on the other, scanning everything calmly.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is one of the toughest women in this company. She does not want anyone thinking she needs help winning this match."

Mark Bravo: "Good luck convincing the rest of that family to behave, though."

Emily reaches ringside, slaps the apron once, and climbs into the ring.

Buck settles on one side.

Dakota on the other.

David paces near the foot of the ramp side like he is already coaching a fight nobody asked him to coach.

Emily turns, sees all three of them getting comfortable, and immediately points out through the ropes.

Emily Hightower: "Don't."

David holds his hands up innocently.

David Hightower: "We're just watchin', baby girl."

Emily doesn't look convinced for one second.

Then thunder cracks through the building.

Blue strobes sweep across the stage.

The crowd pops louder as Athena Storm bursts through the curtain, glow staff spinning once in her hand before she tosses it aside and takes off down the ramp.

John Phillips: "And here comes Athena Storm!"

Mark Bravo: "This woman doesn't enter a match. She drops into it like weather."

Athena is all momentum and confidence, sprinting toward the ring with that uplifting, crowd-surf energy she always brings.

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She throws the "Let it rain!" motion with one arm and Portland answers her loudly.

Crowd: "LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN!"

John Phillips: "Athena Storm has the kind of pace that can make an opponent panic. Quick strikes, fluid angles, and the ability to turn one opening into a flood."

Athena reaches ringside and slows only for a second.

Her eyes flick to Buck.

Then Dakota.

Then David.

Then finally to Emily in the ring.

Mark Bravo: "See that? Athena already clocked the whole family. She knows she's not just wrestling Emily. She's wrestling the possibility of nonsense."

Athena steps through the ropes and bounces lightly in her corner, eyes bright, shoulders loose, ready.

The referee calls both women in and makes a point of looking out toward ringside as well.

Referee: "You three stay out of this. All of you."

David smiles like he's offended at the suggestion.

David Hightower: "Wouldn't dream of it."

Mark Bravo: "That sentence has never once been safe."

The referee checks both competitors, backs out, and calls for the bell.

DING DING

Athena comes out bouncing.

Emily comes out stalking.

One is rhythm.

The other is pressure.

John Phillips: "And here we go."

They circle once.

Athena flicks a low kick toward the lead leg.

Emily checks it and surges forward with a collar-and-elbow tie-up that immediately turns into a strength battle.

Emily walks Athena backward two steps.

Then three.

Athena plants, twists, and slips free before getting pushed to the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "That's the story early. Athena wants space. Emily wants to make this thing feel like a junkyard fight."

They re-engage quickly.

This time Athena shoots a body feint and cracks Emily with a quick low kick to the thigh, then a palm strike to the shoulder before darting away.

Emily nods once like she respects the shot, then barrels in again.

Athena tries to angle off--

Emily catches her around the waist and muscles her up into a hard belly-to-belly throw that sends Athena bouncing across the canvas.

John Phillips: "Big throw by Emily Hightower!"

Mark Bravo: "That country-strong power is very real."

Athena rolls through and gets up quickly, only to eat a stiff forearm to the chest from Emily.

Then another.

Emily whips her hard to the ropes and catches her on the rebound with a spine-rattling scoop slam.

Cover.

ONE!

Victory: 04.10.2026

Athena kicks out.

John Phillips: "Emily establishing the physical edge right away."

Emily drags Athena up and backs her into the corner, then drives a shoulder into the midsection.

The referee starts the count.

Emily backs out at four clean.

Athena steps out of the corner and fires a fast combination--body kick, roundhouse feint, then jumping knee--the knee clipping Emily high enough to rock her backward.

John Phillips: "Athena Storm with the counterattack!"

Athena hits the ropes and comes back with a tilt-a-whirl headscissors that sends Emily stumbling toward the ropes.

Then a standing shooting-star press.

It lands flush.

Cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Emily powers out.

Mark Bravo: "That's what Athena needs. Fast combinations. Don't stand there and let Emily turn this into a bar fight."

Athena stays on her, snapping off another quick kick to the leg, then reaching for the arm, looking to string together control.

Emily shoves her off.

Athena rebounds with a rope-walk feint into an enzuigiri attempt--

but Emily catches just enough of her on the landing to yank her down by the waist and fold her with a short clothesline.

The crowd pops.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower just cut her in half!"

Emily stalks forward, drags Athena up again, and plants her with a basic suplex near center ring.

No cover this time.

Instead she steps back and motions Athena up like she wants more.

Emily Hightower: "C'mon!"

Athena rises and fires a sudden roundhouse to the ribs.

Emily answers with one brutal forearm.

Athena throws another kick.

Emily eats it and keeps coming.

Then Athena catches her clean with a jumping knee strike right on the jaw.

Emily drops to one knee.

John Phillips: "Athena Storm just cracked her!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the danger of Athena. She doesn't need a lot of room to turn your lights weird."

Athena races to the ropes and comes back looking for the Tempest Driver--

but Emily blocks the spin, muscles Athena up instead, and drives her down with a rough powerbomb attempt.

Athena rolls through on impact and scrambles toward the apron.

Emily follows--

and this is where the first problem starts.

David Hightower slaps the apron and starts yelling instructions.

David Hightower: "Drag her out! Don't let her breathe!"

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Emily immediately turns and points at him.

Emily Hightower: "I got it!"

That split-second is enough.

Athena slingshots over the ropes and catches Emily with a flying forearm coming back in.

John Phillips: "And that distraction cost her!"

Mark Bravo: "Emily wasn't lookin' at Athena. She was lookin' at her family."

Athena capitalizes immediately with a snap German suplex that sends Emily skidding toward the corner.

The crowd starts chanting again.

Crowd: "LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN!"

Athena throws the arm motion once, then charges in with a corner knee strike.

Emily stumbles out.

Athena plants her with the Tempest Driver.

Cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Emily kicks out.

John Phillips: "Athena nearly stole it right there!"

Athena stays composed and starts climbing to the top rope, sensing a real opening.

Below her, Emily is still trying to recover.

Outside the ring, David is pacing.

Buck looks tense.

Dakota is watching the referee and Athena both.

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Then Dakota does exactly what Emily did not want.

As the referee's attention is split between Emily and the climber, Dakota hops onto the apron and grabs the top rope, shaking it just enough to throw Athena's balance.

John Phillips: "Oh no, Dakota just got involved!"

Mark Bravo: "That's exactly what Emily told them not to do!"

Athena catches herself before falling, but the timing is ruined.

The referee sees it immediately and spins toward Dakota.

Referee: "NO! Get down! One more time and I throw this whole thing out!"

The crowd boos hard.

Dakota drops back to the floor with those innocent hands up, but the warning has been made.

Emily hears every word.

And her face says everything.

Embarrassment.

Anger.

Fury at her family for nearly costing her the match on a disqualification.

Emily Hightower: "What the hell are y'all doin'?!"

John Phillips: "The referee just made it crystal clear. One more move from the Hightowers and this qualifier is over."

Mark Bravo: "And imagine losin' your shot at Victorious because your own family couldn't mind their business."

That frustration almost costs Emily again.

Athena leaps from the top with Lightning Crash--

but Emily rolls just enough at the last second.

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Athena crashes hard to the mat and immediately clutches at her ribs.

John Phillips: "Nobody home! Athena Storm went for it all!"

Both women are down now.

The crowd claps as the referee starts the count.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

Emily rises first, still barking toward the outside.

Emily Hightower: "Stay out of it! All of you!"

David doesn't like being spoken to like that, but even he keeps his mouth shut for the moment because the ref is staring daggers at ringside.

Emily turns back to Athena and charges in with a running splash, then a big boot on the rebound--Hit and Run lands clean.

The crowd pops big.

John Phillips: "Hit and Run connects!"

Emily doesn't cover yet.

She drags Athena up by the wrist and tries to set for Ode To My Father--

the Bull Hammer elbow--

but Athena ducks under it and fires a desperate roundhouse to the body.

Then another to the leg.

Then a pop-up bicycle kick--Storm Front--right to the jaw.

Emily staggers backward into the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "Athena just found a huge opening!"

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Athena runs the ropes and comes back at full speed--

Emily cuts her off in mid-flight with Ode To My Father.

The Bull Hammer elbow lands flush and turns Athena inside out.

The building erupts.

John Phillips: "ODE TO MY FATHER! WHAT A SHOT!"

Emily sucks in air, shakes the cobwebs out, then drags Athena up one last time.

She hoists her high and plants her with Total Loss, folding Athena up tight on the stack.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING DING DING

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower gets it done!"

Mark Bravo: "And she almost didn't, because her family just about wrecked the whole thing for her!"

The referee raises Emily's hand, but Emily does not celebrate immediately.

She pulls her hand away and turns right toward the floor instead.

David starts clapping proudly.

Dakota tries to smile it off.

Buck just stands there.

Emily Hightower: "I told you not to do that."

Her voice isn't for the crowd.

It's for them.

Pure and direct.

Victory: 04.10.2026

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is moving on to tonight's main event against Maxx Mayhem, but this family issue is not going away."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. She won the match, but she sure didn't win control of the Hightowers."

Across the ring, Athena Storm sits up disappointed, one hand on her jaw, knowing how close she came to stealing that spot at Victorious.

In the center, Emily Hightower stands tall, still alive in the qualifier tournament, but with a storm of her own waiting outside the ropes.

It's Official

We head backstage once again.

The camera catches Maxwell Max Jett walking through the corridor with the UTA Championship draped over one shoulder now, the gold gleaming beneath the overhead lights.

The thousand-dollar suit is still immaculate.

The smirk is still there.

The pace is unhurried.

Like the building belongs to him and everybody in it is just trying to keep up.

John Phillips: "There is the UTA Champion again, and I still do not know if anyone has actually gotten through to him about the danger he is in tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Or worse, maybe they have, and he thinks it's funny."

Jett reaches his locker room door and goes to open it--

Scott Stevens: "Max!"

Scott Stevens comes striding into frame, already looking stressed beyond belief.

Jett closes his eyes for half a second like the interruption itself is offensive.

Maxwell Jett: "Scott."

Scott Stevens: "You shouldn't be here tonight. I gave you the night off."

Jett slowly turns and gives Stevens a look that says the concept of being told what to do is adorable.

Maxwell Jett: "Well, that was your first mistake."

He adjusts the title on his shoulder.

Maxwell Jett: "See, Scott, I'm not particularly worried about what you think I should or shouldn't be doing."

Maxwell Jett: "I'm the champion."

He taps the faceplate with two fingers.

Maxwell Jett: "And tonight is the first night I get to show everybody in this company what an actual champion looks like."

Scott Stevens: "Max, listen to me. You need to go. You don't know what's happened so far tonight."

Jett actually laughs.

Maxwell Jett: "Scott, respectfully--well, not respectfully, actually--but in words simple enough for even this company to understand..."

Maxwell Jett: "I do not care what's been happening tonight."

Maxwell Jett: "The only thing on my mind is putting my stuff down..."

He gestures toward the locker room door.

Maxwell Jett: "And then going out there to address the people who paid to see me."

Scott Stevens: "Max--"

Maxwell Jett: "No, no, no. You've done enough talking for one evening, Scott. Let the star handle the live television part."

Jett turns, unlocks the door, and steps inside, shutting it behind him in Scott's face.

Stevens stands there fuming.

Then--

CLICK.

From inside the room, we hear Jett's voice immediately change.

Maxwell Jett: "What are you doing in here?"

And then all hell breaks loose.

A massive bang rocks the door.

Something crashes inside.

Furniture topples.

There is a huge commotion from behind the locker room door.

Scott Stevens: "What the hell?! Max!"

He grabs the handle and yanks.

The door won't open.

Scott Stevens: "Open the door! Open the damn door!"

From down the hall, two familiar voices come rushing into the scene.

The Rich Young GRAPPLRZ--Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington--come into frame, dressed like men who think expensive streetwear counts as a personality trait.

They slow up when they see Stevens practically trying to rip the door off its hinges.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Yo... what is goin' on?"

Darian Darrington: "We were supposed to meet with Max."

Scott Stevens: "Get this door open!"

Both men exchange a look.

Then Jacoby shrugs.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Aight."

They start kicking at the door.

One shot.

Two shots.

Three.

The frame splinters.

Then finally the door bursts inward.

They rush in.

Stevens right behind them.

And the camera catches chaos in a room far too small for it.

Samuel Scythe is standing there holding Maxwell Jett by the throat with one massive hand, the champion half-lifted and seething as his polished image has very suddenly become a lot less polished.

Scythe's expression is terrifying.

Not loud.

Not theatrical.

Just murderous.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Yo, man! What are you doing?!"

Darian Darrington: "Let him go!"

Before either of them can do much more than shout, another body barrels into frame.

Chris Ross.

Ross storms into the room like a missile with no guidance system left at all.

He slams through both members of the GRAPPLRZ, knocking Jacoby into the wall and Darian sideways into a bench.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross found him!"

Mark Bravo: "And now everybody's here!"

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Ross lunges for Jett--

but the GRAPPLRZ recover fast enough to grab him from behind and start hammering away, trying to pull him back before he can reach the champion.

Samuel Scythe sees the numbers shift and tosses Jett aside like discarded luggage.

Jett crashes against the lockers and drops to the floor in a heap, gasping and furious.

Scythe immediately steps forward and blasts into the pile, dragging Ross free just enough to start brawling with him in the middle of the room.

It is a violent mess.

Too many bodies.

Too little space.

Wall lockers rattling.

Equipment cases tipping over.

Forearms smashing into shoulders and heads with nowhere for the force to go but into concrete and metal.

John Phillips: "This is complete insanity!"

Mark Bravo: "That room is way too small for Samuel Scythe and Chris Ross to be trying to kill each other in it!"

Ross and Scythe collide like two wrecking balls, trading clubbing shots in the middle of the locker room while Jacoby and Darian try to jump in and out where they can.

Then Jett starts to come to.

He pushes himself up off the floor, one hand on his throat, tie half-torn loose, fury and humiliation mixing all over his face.

He sees the chaos.

Sees Ross.

And instantly makes it about himself again.

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Maxwell Jett: "You put your hands on me?!"

He shoves into the fight swinging wildly.

Maxwell Jett: "Huh?! You wanna put your hands on the best in the damn world?!"

He throws forearms into the pile, not caring who exactly is in front of him so long as somebody is getting hit and the camera can see him doing it.

Now officials come rushing in from every direction.

Referees. Producers. Security.

The room somehow becomes even more crowded.

Scott Stevens: "STOP! STOP! BREAK IT UP! BREAK IT UP!"

It takes several officials to start pulling the bodies apart.

Ross is being held back by multiple people and is still screaming over all of them at Jett.

Samuel Scythe looks like a monster in a cage, chest pumping, trying to get loose and murder whoever is nearest.

Jacoby is yelling.

Darian is yelling louder.

Jett is straightening his jacket while trying to look like he wasn't just almost strangled to death thirty seconds ago.

Chris Ross: "I'M GONNA KILL YOU!"

Maxwell Jett: "Oh, please. If you were gonna do it, hillbilly, you should've done it before the professionals got here."

John Phillips: "This is out of control!"

Scott Stevens finally forces his way into the center of the frame, pointing wildly as he tries to be heard over all of them.

Scott Stevens: "Chris! Max! You two--you wanna beat the hell out of each other, then you can do it at Vict--"

Maxwell Jett: "Don't you dare finish that sentence."

That lands hard enough to stop even Stevens for half a beat.

Jett points a finger right at him.

Maxwell Jett: "Before you even start, let's make one thing crystal clear..."

Maxwell Jett: "I defend this title on *my* terms."

Maxwell Jett: "Not yours."

Ross surges forward against the officials holding him.

Chris Ross: "I don't give a damn about that title! I want your head!"

The two men immediately try to lunge toward each other again and have to be pulled apart even harder.

In the middle of all that movement, Darian Darrington sneaks a cheap shot into Samuel Scythe from the side.

It lands just enough to make Scythe snap his head toward him like a rabid animal catching scent.

Scythe charges instantly.

It takes three people to catch him before he can launch himself across the room.

Scott Stevens: "ENOUGH!"

That finally cuts through for a second.

Everybody is still thrashing and shouting, but Stevens manages to force words through the madness.

Scott Stevens: "I don't know why you three--"

He points at Jacoby, Darian, and then Samuel Scythe.

Scott Stevens: "--are even here, or how you got mixed up in this, but you cut that crap out right now!"

Jett, somehow already back to being insufferably composed, fixes his collar and smooths his lapel.

Maxwell Jett: "Don't talk to them like that."

Stevens turns slowly.

He genuinely cannot believe what he just heard.

Scott Stevens: "What the hell did you just say?"

Maxwell Jett: "I said..."

Jett steps closer.

Maxwell Jett: "You don't talk to my associates like that."

Now Stevens just stares at him.

Scott Stevens: "Your associates, huh?"

Maxwell Jett: "Yeah."

Jacoby, still half-held back by an official, can't help himself.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Yeah, Scott. Keep up. We're networking."

That gets a look from Stevens that could peel paint.

Then Scott looks over to Chris Ross.

Scott Stevens: "You want to get your hands on him?"

Chris Ross: "Oh yeah."

Scott shifts to Samuel Scythe.

Scott Stevens: "And you..."

Scott Stevens: "You just want to create chaos anywhere you go, huh?"

Scythe doesn't answer.

He just stares.

Breathing hard.

Looking like the answer is obvious.

Scott Stevens: "Fine."

He points at Jett and the GRAPPLRZ.

Scott Stevens: "We'll deal with the title rematch stuff later."

Scott Stevens: "At Victorious..."

Now he points to Jett, Jacoby, and Darian.

Scott Stevens: "You three..."

Then to Ross and Scythe.

Scott Stevens: "And you two..."

Scott Stevens: "Do this crap in the ring."

He looks around the room, already sick of himself for saying the next part but knowing it is the only way to stop this tonight.

Scott Stevens: "Three on two isn't very even..."

Scott Stevens: "So if you have a third, bring them. I don't care."

Scott Stevens: "I just need this to stop. Now."

The room reacts all at once.

Ross still snarling.

Scythe still looking ready to rip a hole through somebody.

Jacoby grinning because he thinks this just became a social event.

Darian puffing up like he got invited to the big table.

And Maxwell Jett...

Maxwell Jett smiles.

Not because things are calm.

Because he already sees how he can stand in the middle of this and make it about him.

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Maxwell Jett: "There we go."

Maxwell Jett: "Now that..."

He adjusts the championship on his shoulder again.

Maxwell Jett: "Sounds like a marquee attraction."

John Phillips: "It's official! Maxwell Jett and the Rich Young GRAPPLRZ against Chris Ross, Samuel Scythe, and one more partner of their choosing at Victorious!"

Mark Bravo: "That is a disaster waiting to happen, and I cannot wait to see who shows up as the third man!"

The camera holds on the final image--everybody still separated, still furious, still barely restrained, with Scott Stevens in the middle of a scene he clearly regrets ever allowing to exist.

The match is made.

The chaos is only getting bigger.

Proving Grounds

The screen cuts to black.

A low, dramatic pulse begins under the silence.

Then quick flashes hit the screen.

A slammed door.

A bunk room.

A kitchen argument.

A weight bench.

Eight silhouettes standing under harsh light.

Voiceover: "Eight competitors."

Voiceover: "One house."

Voiceover: "One dream."

Cut to fast shots.

Someone taping their wrists in a bedroom mirror.

Someone storming out of a common room after an argument.

Two competitors getting in each other's faces during training.

A coach yelling from ringside.

A body crashing into the mat.

Voiceover: "This isn't just a show."

Voiceover: "This is survival."

Voiceover: "Because on **Proving Grounds...**"

Voiceover: "You don't just fight for wins."

Voiceover: "You fight to stay in the game."

The music builds.

We see flashes of life inside the house.

Trash talk in the living room.

Tension at the dinner table.

A late-night confessional.

Someone crying in frustration.

Someone else shadowboxing in the dark while the rest of the house sleeps.

Voiceover: "Eight competitors live together."

Voiceover: "They train together."

Voiceover: "They compete against each other."

Voiceover: "And week by week..."

Voiceover: "They find out who really belongs."

Now the pace quickens.

High-impact training clips.

Promo challenges.

In-ring drills.

Explosive match moments.

A competitor getting their hand raised.

Another staring at the floor in defeat.

Voiceover: "Pressure creates conflict."

Voiceover: "Conflict creates truth."

Voiceover: "And at the end of the season..."

Voiceover: "Only one earns a UTA contract."

The music cuts for one beat.

Silence.

Then one final hard hit.

The logo slams onto the screen.

UTA PROVING GROUNDS

8 COMPETITORS.

1 HOUSE.

1 CONTRACT.

Final voiceover, slower now.

Voiceover: "No more talk."

Voiceover: "No more promises."

Voiceover: "Welcome to **Proving Grounds.**"

Final graphic:

AIRING NOW

Bianca Page vs. Kaida Shizuka

John Phillips: "Still to come tonight, Maxx Mayhem and Emily Hightower will meet in our main event to determine who advances to Victorious in the Fighting Championship picture. But right now, we turn our attention to a fascinating singles clash."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because this one's got style written all over it. Bianca Page has Ace Andrews in her corner, which means the match probably came with legal language and fine print. And across from her? Kaida Shizuka, who fights like she's trying to carve her name into somebody's bones."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page is still very new to the UTA audience, but she made an immediate impression in her debut. And tonight, against someone as dangerous and disciplined as Kaida Shizuka, we may learn even more about exactly who Bianca Page is."

Mark Bravo: "And if Ace Andrews sees money in her, I guarantee you there's something nasty under all that polish."

The lights in the Moda Center soften and turn elegant.

A polished pop sound rolls through the building, expensive and a little smug.

The crowd reaction sours almost immediately.

Bianca Page steps onto the stage with that bright, practiced smile that somehow manages to feel condescending without ever slipping.

She pauses at the top of the ramp, one hand on her hip, chin lifted, soaking in the boos like they are admiration from people too unsophisticated to know how to show it properly.

John Phillips: "And here she comes. Bianca Page. A woman with experience, credentials, championships, and all the confidence in the world."

Mark Bravo: "Confidence, sure. But there's a difference between confidence and assuming the room should stand up when you walk in."

Bianca blows a kiss toward the crowd.

Then Ace Andrews steps out behind her.

Immaculate suit. Hands folded. That same corporate-smug expression that suggests he is always three conversations ahead and all of them end with him getting what he wants.

John Phillips: "And there is Ace Andrews, once again inserting himself into another situation that already feels dangerous."

Mark Bravo: "He's like if a luxury car dealership learned how to manipulate people."

Ace says something quietly off-mic to Bianca.

She nods once, never taking her eyes off the ring.

Then she begins the walk down the ramp.

Every step measured.

Every movement elegant.

Every glance toward the crowd just dismissive enough to let them know she sees them... and does not care for what she sees.

John Phillips: "Bianca calls herself classy. And certainly the presentation fits. But beneath that? We have already seen a more vicious side to her."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that's the part that matters. Anybody can twirl. Not everybody can hurt somebody while still looking camera-ready."

At ringside, Bianca turns slightly toward the hard camera and gives a slow little twirl, as if to present herself one more time before business begins.

The boos only get louder.

Bianca smiles wider.

She ascends the steps, stops on the apron, and motions with her fingers for the referee to open the ropes for her.

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The official hesitates, then does it.

Mark Bravo: "There's that. Every single time with her. She doesn't just want to win, she wants the world arranged correctly before she even starts."

Bianca steps through the ropes gracefully, walks to the center of the ring, and raises her arms outward with a pageant-perfect smile.

Ace watches from ringside, looking thoroughly pleased.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page looks right at home under the lights."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Let's see how at home she feels when Kaida starts kicking chunks out of her legs."

The lights dim again.

A low taiko drum begins to roll through the building.

Indigo light settles over the stage.

Then Kaida Shizuka steps through a falling curtain of cherry-blossom petals, drawing a faux katana as she enters the light.

The crowd reacts with a different kind of energy now.

Less hateful.

More tense.

More respectful.

John Phillips: "And now here comes Kaida Shizuka. The Silent Blade."

Mark Bravo: "This woman doesn't waste a second. No trash talk. No posing. No nonsense. She just walks down, starts chopping pieces off you, and bows when it's done."

Kaida moves with that same stoic purpose she always carries.

Her face unreadable.

Her pace steady.

Her eyes fixed on the ring and the ring alone.

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John Phillips: "A kendo prodigy turned fighter, Kaida Shizuka blends strong-style striking with tactical submission work. She is disciplined, methodical, and dangerous at all times."

Mark Bravo: "And that's a nightmare for somebody like Bianca. Because Bianca likes to control tone. Kaida doesn't care about tone. She cares about damage."

At ringside, Kaida pauses.

She carefully wipes the soles of her boots before entering.

Then she bows once at the apron.

Bianca watches from inside the ring, expression tightening just slightly as if the ritual bothers her more than she would like to admit.

Kaida steps through the ropes and lowers into a ready stance immediately.

No posing.

No smile.

Only readiness.

John Phillips: "What a contrast. Bianca Page presents herself to the room. Kaida Shizuka presents herself to the fight."

Mark Bravo: "And Ace Andrews looks like he already knows this one could get uncomfortable if Bianca lets Kaida drag her into the wrong kind of war."

The referee calls both women in for instructions.

Bianca barely seems interested.

Kaida never blinks.

The official backs away.

DING DING

John Phillips: "And here we go."

The two women circle.

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Bianca upright, elegant, reaching with one hand as if she can determine distance through superiority alone.

Kaida lower, balanced, waiting for the first real opening.

Bianca steps in, then slips out, stalling the engagement ever so slightly.

Bianca Page: "Let's not be barbaric."

The crowd boos.

Mark Bravo: "Too late. You booked Kaida."

They tie up.

Kaida immediately drives low through Bianca's base and forces her back two steps before Bianca twists off and breaks away near the ropes.

Bianca adjusts her wrist, offended more than hurt.

John Phillips: "Kaida Shizuka establishing the physical tone immediately."

They reset.

This time Kaida strikes first with a sharp shoot kick to the thigh.

The sound pops through the arena.

Bianca's face changes.

Bianca Page: "Excuse me?"

Mark Bravo: "That's my favorite reaction to get kicked."

Kaida offers no response.

She simply steps in and fires another low kick, then a rolling elbow that Bianca barely gets out of the way of.

Bianca scrambles sideways, then catches Kaida coming forward with a sudden drop toehold into the middle rope.

Kaida hits awkwardly.

Bianca sees it and pounces, snapping her down by the back of the head and transitioning into a grounded

front facelock.

John Phillips: "Good reaction from Bianca Page. Kaida landed first, but Bianca turned timing into control."

Mark Bravo: "That's the sneaky part of Bianca. She doesn't need to dominate exchanges. She just needs one chance to tilt them."

Bianca keeps Kaida grounded, dragging her slightly away from the ropes and leaning down into the hold with more pressure than elegance now.

Kaida works to one knee.

Bianca clubs her across the back of the neck.

Then again.

Then pulls her up and twists the wrist into a standing arm wringer.

Kaida rolls through the torque--

but Bianca catches her with a snap DDT before she can fully rise.

John Phillips: "Snap DDT by Bianca Page!"

Cover.

ONE!

Kaida kicks out quickly.

Bianca sits up, annoyed but composed.

Bianca Page: "Rude."

Ace applauds once from the floor.

Ace Andrews: "Stay on her. Don't let her breathe."

Bianca nods and immediately does exactly that, pulling Kaida up and driving a knee into the midsection before whipping her hard to the corner.

Kaida hits and turns--

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Bianca rushes in with a running back elbow, then snaps Kaida out of the buckles with a short-arm clothesline that drops her to the canvas.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page putting together a strong stretch here."

Mark Bravo: "And Ace Andrews is getting exactly what he wants. Controlled pace. No flurries. No chaos. Just one problem at a time."

Bianca takes a second to smooth her hair.

The crowd rains boos down.

Then she drags Kaida back up and goes for Graceful--an Ace Cutter attempt--

but Kaida shoves her off.

Bianca rebounds off the ropes--

right into a spinning back-kick to the face.

John Phillips: "Silent Flash!"

Mark Bravo: "Ohhh, that landed clean!"

Bianca tumbles backward and falls through the ropes to the apron, stunned.

Kaida rises slowly now, stalking rather than rushing.

Bianca pulls herself up on the apron--

and Kaida blasts her with a rope-hung double stomp that drives Bianca from the apron all the way to the floor beside Ace Andrews.

The crowd erupts.

John Phillips: "Kaida Shizuka just stomped Bianca Page down to the floor!"

Mark Bravo: "And Ace nearly wore his client for a second there!"

Ace quickly backs Bianca away from the ring, helping her regroup, but not touching too much, not wanting the referee's attention yet.

Inside the ring, Kaida does not pace.

She simply waits.

Watching.

Bianca gets to one knee outside, embarrassed and angry now.

Ace Andrews: "Good. Now you know what she is. Stop trying to out-poise her and start out-thinking her."

Bianca breathes through gritted teeth, straightens her gear, and slides back in at the referee's count of seven.

Kaida is on her immediately with a low kick to the thigh.

Then another.

Then a rolling elbow that staggers Bianca back into the ropes.

Kaida whips her across.

Bianca rebounds--

Kaida catches her with a springboard missile dropkick that sends Bianca skidding on impact.

John Phillips: "Kaida Shizuka has completely flipped the momentum!"

Mark Bravo: "And this is what she does. Real calm, real quiet, and suddenly your front door is off the hinges."

Kaida covers.

ONE!

TWO!

Bianca gets a shoulder up.

Kaida pulls her upright and drives another kick into the body.

Then a snap Saito suplex that folds Bianca across the canvas hard enough to get another reaction from the crowd.

John Phillips: "What a suplex!"

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Kaida stays on her, looking now to trap the arm and neck for Sakura Clutch--

but Bianca panics, thrashes, and claws her way toward the ropes.

Kaida tries to drag her back--

and Ace Andrews reaches up from ringside just enough to place Bianca's boot on the bottom rope before the referee fully sees how it got there.

Mark Bravo: "Ohhh, there he is."

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews just changed the equation!"

The referee sees the rope and forces the break.

Kaida slowly turns her head toward ringside.

Ace gives her a polite, smug little shrug.

Ace Andrews: "Ring awareness."

Kaida does not respond.

She just returns to Bianca--

and that half-second is enough for Bianca to rake the eyes from the mat.

The crowd explodes in boos.

John Phillips: "Come on!"

Mark Bravo: "You knew she was gonna take it if it was there."

Kaida stumbles backward holding her face.

Bianca scrambles up, hits the ropes, and drives a high knee into Kaida's jaw--Binx lands flush.

Kaida drops to one knee.

Bianca runs the ropes again and catches her with Swanky, that superkick snapping Kaida's head back violently.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page just stacked two huge shots!"

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Instead of covering right away, Bianca drags Kaida up, wanting more.

She hooks her for Lavish Lifestyle--the blockbuster--

and spikes Kaida into perfect position.

The crowd is buzzing now because they know what comes next.

Mark Bravo: "That's bad. That is real bad for Kaida."

Bianca goes to the corner.

She climbs.

Ace is nodding from the floor like a man watching an investment mature in real time.

Ace Andrews: "Finish her."

Bianca launches.

Pure Elegance.

The corkscrew moonsault lands flush.

She hooks both legs with a smug little tilt of the head toward the hard camera.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING DING DING

John Phillips: "Bianca Page wins it!"

Mark Bravo: "And there it is. Classy on the outside, vicious where it counts, and just enough Ace Andrews at ringside to make sure the margins went her way."

Bianca rolls off and immediately sits up, pushing her hair back into place before the referee can even raise her hand.

Then she stands and allows the official to lift her arm.

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Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... BIANCA PAGE!"

The boos pour down.

Bianca accepts them like applause.

Ace climbs onto the apron, applauding slowly, proudly.

John Phillips: "Give Kaida Shizuka credit. She had stretches in this match where it looked like her precision and discipline were going to be too much."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but Bianca didn't panic. She adjusted. And with Ace lurking around, one little edge becomes a whole different story."

Across the ring, Kaida sits up slowly, one hand on her jaw, disappointed but still composed. She looks toward Bianca and Ace, then lowers her head for a moment--not in shame, but in acceptance.

In the center, Bianca Page raises both arms again and basks in the hostility, while Ace Andrews watches with the satisfied expression of a man who just added another dangerous piece to the board.

Big Win

We cut backstage to the Hightower locker room.

The room is loud before we even fully enter it.

Not chaotic.

Not yet.

But full.

Full of the kind of energy that only comes after a fight, a win, and a whole lot left unsaid.

Emily Hightower is standing near an open metal locker, still sweating, still breathing a little heavier than normal, one wrist taped tighter than before and a cold bottle of water pressed briefly against the side of her neck.

Across from her, David Hightower is talking like the match went exactly how he wanted it to.

Buck is leaned back against the wall, arms folded, saying nothing.

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Dakota sits on a wooden bench tying and untying the same wrist tape, watching everything.

David Hightower: "That's what I'm talkin' about right there!"

David Hightower: "Big win. Tough win. The kind that matters."

Emily keeps her eyes on the inside of the locker, jaw set.

Emily Hightower: "Mhm."

David Hightower: "That girl was fast, too. Real fast."

David Hightower: "But you got through her."

He points at her like this is the important part.

David Hightower: "That's what winners do."

Emily lowers the water bottle and slowly shuts the locker door.

Emily Hightower: "Y'all almost got me disqualified."

The room changes immediately.

David's smile stays in place for a second too long.

David Hightower: "Oh, here we go."

Emily Hightower: "No. Don't 'here we go' me."

She turns now, looking right at all three of them.

Emily Hightower: "I said stay out of it."

Emily Hightower: "Not once."

Emily Hightower: "Not twice."

Emily Hightower: "I said it over and over again."

Dakota opens her mouth first, voice softer.

Dakota Hightower: "Em..."

Emily Hightower: "No, Dakota."

Emily Hightower: "I love y'all, but no."

Buck shifts off the wall slightly.

Buck Hightower: "We were trying to help."

Emily Hightower: "That ain't help."

Emily Hightower: "Help is stoppin' somebody else from jumpin' in."

Emily Hightower: "Help is makin' sure nobody screws me over."

Emily Hightower: "What y'all did was make the referee look right at me like I couldn't win the damn match on my own."

David scoffs and throws both hands out.

David Hightower: "But you *did* win."

Emily Hightower: "That is not the point!"

That one barks out of her before she can soften it.

Even Buck goes still again.

Emily Hightower: "I don't want Athena Storm thinking she got beat because my family couldn't mind their own business."

Emily Hightower: "I don't want these people thinkin' I needed my daddy and my brother and my sister to bail me out."

Emily Hightower: "And I sure as hell don't want to lose a shot at something bigger because none of y'all can listen."

Dakota looks down for a second.

That one landed.

Dakota Hightower: "I know."

Dakota Hightower: "I shouldn't have touched the rope."

Emily looks at her.

That takes some of the edge off, but not enough.

Emily Hightower: "No. You shouldn't have."

Buck speaks next, direct as ever.

Buck Hightower: "I ain't apologizin' for watchin' your back."

Emily Hightower: "You can watch my back without gettin' in front of my fight."

David shakes his head like this is all nonsense invented by people too soft to survive.

David Hightower: "You're makin' this way bigger than it is."

Emily Hightower: "No, I'm not."

Emily Hightower: "You are, every time you decide you know better than me in my own match."

David steps toward her now.

Not violent.

But prideful.

David Hightower: "You got our name."

David Hightower: "That means somethin'."

Emily Hightower: "Yeah. It means I fight hard."

Emily Hightower: "It means I don't quit."

Emily Hightower: "It means I get up when somebody knocks me down."

Emily Hightower: "It does *not* mean y'all get to decide where the line is for me."

David's face hardens.

David Hightower: "That family got you this far."

Emily Hightower: "That family taught me how to fight."

Emily Hightower: "Now let me do it."

Silence.

Not a long silence.

But enough.

Enough for the room to feel smaller.

Enough for everybody in it to understand this is not a little disagreement anymore.

Dakota finally stands up from the bench.

Dakota Hightower: "She ain't wrong."

David turns his head toward her.

David Hightower: "Excuse me?"

Dakota Hightower: "She ain't wrong."

Dakota's voice stays calm.

That almost makes it hit harder.

Dakota Hightower: "She asked us to do one thing."

Dakota Hightower: "We didn't do it."

Dakota Hightower: "And it almost blew up in her face."

Buck glances toward Dakota, then to Emily, then back at David.

Buck Hightower: "She still won."

Emily Hightower: "Buck."

Emily Hightower: "That is not enough for me."

Now Buck really looks at her.

Not as a sister throwing a fit.

As a wrestler telling the truth.

Emily Hightower: "I don't want to just survive because y'all made a mess and I cleaned it up."

Emily Hightower: "I want to win clear."

Emily Hightower: "I want to know it was me."

Emily Hightower: "And I want everybody else to know it too."

Buck gives one slow nod.

Not agreement, exactly.

But understanding.

Buck Hightower: "Alright."

David can't believe what he just heard.

David Hightower: "Alright?"

David Hightower: "That's it? We just let people take shots at her and stand there lookin' stupid?"

Emily Hightower: "No."

Emily Hightower: "If somebody else jumps in, stop 'em."

Emily Hightower: "If somebody comes for me after the bell, stop 'em."

Emily Hightower: "If somebody tries to make me lose something dirty, stop 'em."

She steps closer to her father now.

Emily Hightower: "But if I'm fightin' my match?"

Emily Hightower: "You let me fight it."

David looks at her.

Really looks at her.

The stubbornness in his face never leaves, but there is something else under it now.

The recognition that his little girl is not asking for permission anymore.

She is laying down terms.

David Hightower: "You got a lotta opinions for somebody still wearin' my last name."

Emily Hightower: "Then be proud of how I use it."

That one hangs there.

David doesn't answer it.

Not because he can't.

Because if he does, he loses the room.

So instead he grunts, turns, snatches up a towel off the bench, and mutters as he walks toward the back of the room.

David Hightower: "Still think y'all are overreactin'."

Dakota exhales through her nose.

Buck shakes his head once.

Emily leans back against the locker, closing her eyes for a second.

Dakota Hightower: "For what it's worth..."

Emily opens her eyes.

Dakota Hightower: "You looked damn good out there."

Buck Hightower: "You did."

Emily nods once.

Emily Hightower: "I know."

That gets the faintest smile out of Dakota.

Even Buck almost smirks.

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Then Emily looks past them both toward where David went.

Emily Hightower: "He's gonna do it again."

Dakota Hightower: "Probably."

Buck Hightower: "Yeah."

Emily pushes off the locker, grabs her bag, and slings it over one shoulder.

Emily Hightower: "Then I guess I'll have to keep sayin' it till he hears me."

She heads for the door.

Not angry now.

Resolved.

Behind her, Dakota watches thoughtfully.

Buck watches like a man trying to decide which side of a line he's about to be on.

And deeper in the room, David Hightower says nothing at all.

The win over Athena Storm moved Emily forward in the tournament.

But inside the Hightower locker room, another fight is only just getting started.

Anger Makes Your Enemies Happier

The camera returns to ringside, showing John Phillips and Mark Bravo seated at the announce desk. Papers are scattered in front of them, monitors glowing, both men wearing the look of people suddenly hearing something in their earpieces.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, hold on--hold on a second. We're... we're getting word from the truck that something is happening backstage."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, I'm seeing the stage manager waving like he's trying to flag down a helicopter. That's never a good sign, John."

John presses a hand to his headset, leaning forward.

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John Phillips: "We're being told there's a commotion involving multiple UTA personnel--security is involved, and it sounds serious."

Mark Bravo: "After what went down earlier tonight? Yeah, I'd bet my last protein shake this is connected."

John Phillips: "Alright, production is telling me we've got a camera on the scene. Let's... let's get back there now."

The feed snaps backstage--and the hallway is a full-scale riot.

Theron Tkachuk is a monster barely contained, five security guards hanging off him like anchors as he lunges forward again and again. His boots scrape across the concrete, shoulders heaving, teeth bared, eyes locked on Hakuryu with a murderous, silent fury. One guard loses his grip and gets flung sideways into a stack of lighting cases, crashing hard and rolling across the floor.

John Phillips: "Theron Tkachuk is trying to break loose--he wants Hakuryu right now!"

Mark Bravo: "And Hakuryu's just standing there! He looks bored, John! BORED!"

Hakuryu stands perfectly still in the center of the hallway, scripture-covered chest rising and falling in slow, meditative breaths. His hands are folded loosely in a prayer position. His eyes are half-lidded, serene, untouched by the chaos around him. He doesn't flinch. He doesn't blink. He watches Theron with cold, superior calm, as if the Dire Wolf is nothing more than a noisy animal behind a fence.

But the real violence is happening just to the side.

Torunn Sigurjonsson has Sinja laid across a production box--his back arched over the metal surface, legs kicking helplessly as she crushes his throat with one massive hand. The box rattles under his weight, metal creaking as Torunn leans in, jaw clenched, warpaint streaked, eyes burning with fury. Sinja's shakujo staff lies on the floor, rolling in a slow circle as his face turns red, then purple.

John Phillips: "Torunn's got Sinja pinned on that production case--she's choking the life out of him!"

Mark Bravo: "Four guards can't even get her off him! She's got him locked down like she's trying to break the table with his spine!"

Four security guards are desperately trying to pry Torunn back, but she's planted like a glacier, boots dug into the concrete, shoulders locked. She doesn't even look at Sinja--her glare is fixed on Hakuryu, hatred radiating off her like heat from a forge. Sinja's hands slap weakly at her wrist, his legs kicking in panic, his voice reduced to a strangled rasp.

The camera pulls back, capturing the full scope of the chaos: Theron raging against five men, Torunn crushing Sinja's windpipe across a production box, security shouting and failing to contain either of them, and

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Hakuryu standing in the middle of it all with the calm, superior stillness of a man who believes none of this can touch him.

It doesn't look like a backstage hallway anymore. It looks like a battlefield--and the Wolves are still trying to start another war.

Security is shouting. Torunn is still crushing Sinja's throat across the production box. Theron is ripping against five guards, boots scraping the concrete as he tries to break free. Hakuryu stands motionless in the center of the chaos, serene and untouched, watching the Wolves with cold superiority.

Then the hallway reacts before the camera even catches up--because Gunnar Van Patton storms into frame.

He limps hard, his right leg locked inside that massive brace, metal hinges clacking with every uneven step. His head is wrapped, stitches hidden under gauze, and every movement looks like it hurts--but the fury in his eyes burns hotter than any pain. Avril Selene Kinkade is right behind him, heels clicking sharply, her expression tight and focused as she keeps pace.

John Phillips: "Gunnar Van Patton is here! The WrestleZone Champion is marching straight into the middle of this chaos!"

Mark Bravo: "He shouldn't even be WALKING, John--and he's charging into a riot!"

Gunnar doesn't slow. He doesn't hesitate. He goes straight to Theron first.

Theron lunges again, dragging three guards with him, teeth bared, eyes locked on Hakuryu like a predator ready to tear into prey. Gunnar steps directly into his path, planting himself between Theron and the White Dragon.

Theron's chest heaves. His fists clench. His entire body shakes with the effort of holding back the urge to kill.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Dire. Attention!"

Theron's eyes flicker toward him--just for a moment.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Not like this. Not here. Not now. Ya hear me?"

Theron snarls, shoulders twitching, but Gunnar steps closer, almost chest-to-chest despite the size difference.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Stand down. That's an order."

Theron's breathing slows. His fists unclench. The five guards holding him nearly fall forward as the monster they were restraining suddenly stops resisting.

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John Phillips: "Gunnar just shut Theron down with one command!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the alpha, John. That's the one of two men on earth Theron listens to."

Gunnar turns next--limping, grimacing, but moving with purpose--toward Torunn.

Torunn is still crushing Sinja's throat across the production box, her forearm flexed, her jaw clenched, her entire body radiating fury. Sinja's legs kick weakly, his face purple, his hands clawing at her wrist as four guards fight to pry her off.

Gunnar slams his palm onto the production box beside her, the metal ringing like a gunshot.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Úlfynja!"

Torunn's head snaps toward him.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Let. Him. Go."

She doesn't move at first. Her nostrils flare. Her eyes burn. She looks one heartbeat away from snapping Sinja's neck.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Did Ah stutter?"

Torunn's grip loosens by a fraction.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Release the little sh*t."

Torunn releases Sinja. He collapses sideways off the box, coughing violently as two guards drag him away.

Torunn steps back, chest heaving, eyes still locked on Hakuryu--but she obeys.

John Phillips: "Torunn stood down. Gunnar Van Patton just walked into this chaos and pulled his Wolves back from the edge."

Mark Bravo: "He's injured, he's limping, he's stitched together--but that's still the most dangerous man in this hallway."

Gunnar positions himself between his Wolves and Hakuryu, breathing hard, leg trembling under the brace, but standing tall all the same. Theron stands behind him, silent and seething. Torunn wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, still glaring daggers at the White Dragon.

Avril steps up beside Gunnar, adjusting her glasses, her expression unreadable--but the faintest hint of a smile curls at the corner of her lips.

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The Wolves are contained. Barely. But contained.

The hallway is still vibrating with leftover chaos--Theron breathing like a caged animal behind Gunnar, Torunn wiping Sinja's spit and sweat off her hand, security regrouping and trying to catch their breath. Hakuryu hasn't moved an inch. He stands exactly where he was when Gunnar arrived, scripture-covered chest rising and falling in slow, meditative rhythm, eyes half-lidded with that same cold, infuriating calm.

And then he finally speaks.

Hakuryu: ????????????????

Gunnar's head snaps toward him instantly. He doesn't need Sinja. He doesn't need context. He knows exactly what was said.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Call 'em dogs again. Go on. Ah dare ya."

Hakuryu's eyes lift just a fraction, acknowledging Gunnar for the first time.

Hakuryu: ??????????

Gunnar's jaw tightens. His nostrils flare. His entire posture shifts--no longer the commander calming his Wolves, but the soldier ready to break someone in half.

John Phillips: "Gunnar understood every word! Hakuryu just told him he's next!"

Mark Bravo: "And Gunnar looks like he's about to tear that brace off and go for his throat!"

Gunnar takes a step forward--limping, but with murder in his eyes.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Ya wanna go, holy man? This leg brace ain't gonna stop me."

Security reacts instantly. Three guards peel off from the Wolves and rush to intercept him, forming a wall between Gunnar and Hakuryu. Gunnar tries to push past them, but they brace hard, hands on his chest, shoulders, arms, anything to keep him from lunging.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Tonight, next week... It don't matter much to me. Ah'll break mah boot off in yer ass."

He shoves one guard aside with his good leg, but the brace on the injured one buckles slightly, forcing him to catch himself on the wall. The guards swarm tighter, trying to hold him back.

John Phillips: "Security is shifting to Gunnar now! They're trying to keep HIM from going after Hakuryu!"

Mark Bravo: "And look at Hakuryu--he's not backing up, he's not flinching, he's not even BLINKING!"

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Hakuryu stands perfectly still, hands folded in prayer, eyes locked on Gunnar with that same cold, superior disdain. The faintest hint of a smirk touches the corner of his mouth--not amusement, but contempt.

Hakuryu: ??????????

Gunnar's eyes go wide with fury. He lunges again, and security barely manages to hold him back, boots scraping across the concrete as he tries to get at the White Dragon.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Broken? Ah reckon you can find out for yer damn self right now, just how broken Ah am."

Theron steps forward behind him, ready to join the fight, but Gunnar throws a hand back without looking--an instinctive command--and Theron stops cold.

Torunn snarls, fists clenched, but she stays behind Gunnar as well, eyes locked on Hakuryu like she's memorizing every inch of him for later.

The hallway is seconds away from detonating again--until a new voice cuts through the chaos like a blade.

Scott Stevens: "ENOUGH!"

And the entire hallway freezes.

Scott Stevens' voice slices through the hallway like a whipcrack, freezing every moving part of the chaos in place. Security stops shouting. Torunn stops advancing. Theron stops shifting his weight. Even Gunnar, still trying to push past the guards, turns his head toward the source.

Scott Stevens: "This... this right here is EXACTLY what I knew would happen."

He steps into frame, suit jacket half-buttoned, tie crooked from rushing, eyes blazing with a mix of fury and vindication. He points at the Wolves first, then at the wrecked hallway around them.

Scott Stevens: "I warned everyone. I said it. I said the second you three were in the same building as Hakuryu, this place would turn into a warzone. And look around--look at this mess! I was RIGHT."

Gunnar snarls, trying to shove past the guards again, but they hold him back. Theron's fists clench. Torunn's jaw tightens. Stevens doesn't flinch.

Scott Stevens: "And I'll tell you something else--this? This will NOT happen again. Not on my watch. Not at Victorious. Not EVER."

He jabs a finger toward Theron and Torunn.

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Scott Stevens: "You two? You're DONE. I don't want to see you again tonight or at Victorious. Security, escort them out of here."

The crowd in the arena watching on the tron erupts in a mix of shock and outrage.

John Phillips: "Torunn and Theron are barred from Victorious! They won't be allowed in the building!"

Mark Bravo: "Stevens is dropping the hammer! He's not playing around tonight!"

Torunn steps forward, fury radiating off her like heat, but Gunnar throws an arm out, stopping her cold. Theron's breathing grows heavier, but he doesn't move. The Wolves are seething, but contained.

Stevens turns his attention now--slowly, deliberately--to Hakuryu.

The White Dragon hasn't moved. Not an inch. He stands with hands folded in prayer, eyes half-lidded, serene and superior. Sinja stands behind him, trembling violently, still clutching his throat where Torunn nearly crushed it.

Hakuryu lifts his chin just slightly, as if acknowledging Stevens' presence is a courtesy, not a necessity.

Stevens glares at him.

Scott Stevens: "And YOU--get out of my hallway."

Hakuryu doesn't bow. Doesn't nod. Doesn't acknowledge the order as anything more than a breeze passing by.

Hakuryu: ????????

Sinja flinches at the sound of his master's voice, then forces out the translation through a raw, shaking throat.

Sinja: "Clear... the... way..."

Hakuryu walks forward. Not fast. Not slow. Just inevitable. Security parts for him instinctively, as if compelled by something colder than fear. Sinja scrambles behind him, still shaking, still coughing, still terrified to be within arm's reach of Torunn.

Hakuryu never looks at Gunnar. Never looks at Theron. Never looks at Torunn. He simply walks past them, serene and untouched, as if the chaos was beneath him.

And as he passes, the camera catches Avril Selene Kinkade in the background.

She isn't shouting.

She isn't panicking.

She isn't even pretending to be upset.

She smiles.

A slow, sinister, knowing grin--like a cat that just ate the canary.

Eric Dane Jr. vs Dante Rivera

John Phillips: "Up next, singles action as Eric Dane Jr. goes one-on-one with Dante Rivera."

Mark Bravo: "And let me tell you right now, Eric Dane Jr. absolutely hates that this match is happening. In his mind, this is beneath him. In his mind, tonight should be about Eric Dane Jr. and only Eric Dane Jr."

John Phillips: "That may be how he sees it, but Dante Rivera is not here to play supporting actor in anyone else's ego trip."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. Dante's the kind of guy who'll take your disrespect personally and then make you wrestle through it."

The lights shift and a flashy, self-important energy rolls through the building.

Eric Dane Jr. steps onto the stage dressed like a man who absolutely believes he should have his own camera crew following him at all times.

Expensive entrance jacket.

Sunglasses.

That smug little look on his face like the crowd should be thanking him for arriving.

John Phillips: "And here comes Eric Dane Jr."

Mark Bravo: "A monolith of ego for absolutely no good reason."

Dane steps out and throws his arms wide, soaking in the boos like they are the natural soundtrack of greatness.

He takes a slow turn on the stage, jawing toward the hard camera before he even starts down the ramp.

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Eric Dane Jr.: "Drink it in, Portland!"

The boos get louder.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. has spent weeks making everything around him about him. Title shots. Bobby Dean. Chris Ross. Susanita Ybanez. If there is a spotlight, Eric Dane Jr. believes it should belong to him."

Mark Bravo: "And if it doesn't, he'll just start yelling until people act like it does."

Eric struts down the ramp, pausing at one point to point at himself with both thumbs, then at the ring, then back at himself again as if the outcome is already signed and notarized.

He reaches ringside, climbs the steps slowly, and wipes his boots on the apron with exaggerated care before stepping through the ropes.

Inside the ring, he climbs the second rope and spreads his arms again.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You're welcome!"

Mark Bravo: "I swear, he thinks gratitude is a legal requirement."

Eric drops down and begins pacing the ring, shadowboxing with just enough sloppiness to remind you he thinks he looks cooler doing it than he actually does.

Then the mood changes.

"Rise Today" by Alter Bridge blasts through the arena.

The crowd comes alive.

John Phillips: "And here comes Dante Rivera!"

Dante bursts through the curtain full of energy, slapping hands with fans on both sides as he heads down the ramp.

He points to the sky for his family before locking his eyes onto the ring and breaking into a more direct pace.

John Phillips: "A passionate second-generation star, Dante Rivera has won over this audience with resilience, charisma, and fight."

Mark Bravo: "And that's exactly why Eric Dane Jr. is treating him like he doesn't matter. Because deep down, guys like Eric hate anybody the people actually believe in."

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Dante reaches ringside, slides under the bottom rope, and pops to his feet quickly.

Eric gives him one dismissive glance, then actually looks away, like he's bored already.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is my warm-up? Really?"

Dante Rivera: "You can keep talking. I'll do the wrestling."

The crowd pops for that.

Mark Bravo: "There we go. That's a good answer."

The referee steps between them and gives final instructions.

Eric barely pays attention.

Dante never stops staring at him.

DING DING

John Phillips: "And here we go."

Dante steps forward ready to engage.

Eric immediately backs into the ropes and raises a hand.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Let's all just appreciate who's standing in front of you right now."

The crowd boos.

Mark Bravo: "Nope. We're already here."

Dante steps in again for the lock-up.

Eric ducks out to the side and points at his own face.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You don't get this for free, champ."

Dante Rivera: "You done?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "No, but you will be."

They finally tie up.

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Dante immediately gets the better of it, driving Eric backward into the corner with straight-up strength and balance.

John Phillips: "Good opening power from Dante Rivera!"

The referee calls for the break.

Dante gives it clean.

Eric instantly cheap-slaps him across the face on the way out.

Mark Bravo: "There's the professionalism."

Dante's head snaps to the side.

Then right back.

Eric smiles.

Dante drills him with a forearm that wipes the smile clean off his face.

John Phillips: "Big forearm by Rivera!"

Eric stumbles backward and Dante is on him fast now--another forearm, then a whip to the ropes, then a flying forearm smash that drops Dane flat.

The crowd roars.

Mark Bravo: "Dante Rivera said enough with the monologue."

Eric scrambles up in a panic and Dante catches him with a deep arm drag, then another, sending Dane rolling toward the ropes with a much different expression now.

John Phillips: "Dante Rivera came ready tonight!"

Eric gets to the floor to regroup, pacing and shouting back toward the ring.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You got one move! Congratulations! Put it on a t-shirt!"

Dante simply points at the ring and motions him back in.

Dante Rivera: "Get back in here."

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Eric rolls his eyes dramatically, slides back in, and this time comes in swinging.

He catches Dante with a quick kick to the gut, then unloads with a sharp elbow and a chop that looks nastier than it really is but still gets the job done.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. with the first real sustained offense of the match."

Mark Bravo: "He's not great, but he is relentless. I'll give him that."

Eric whips Dante hard to the corner and charges in with a cannonball that lands clean, then rolls out of it and spreads his arms like he just reinvented wrestling.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's star power!"

The crowd boos.

Eric hooks Dante for a quick cover.

ONE!

Dante kicks out.

Eric immediately leans over him and talks trash.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You're here to lose, buddy. Do it with dignity."

He drags Dante up and lands a snap suplex, then another quick cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Dante gets the shoulder up.

John Phillips: "Rivera staying in it."

Eric rises and starts jawing with the crowd instead of staying focused on his opponent.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You people really thought this guy had a chance?"

Dante gets to a knee behind him.

Eric turns just in time to catch a body shot, then another, then a sharp forearm that backs him up toward the

ropes.

Mark Bravo: "And there's Dante again. Every time Eric starts admiring himself, he gets hit."

Dante whips him across and catches him on the rebound with a tilt-a-whirl backbreaker.

The crowd comes alive again.

John Phillips: "Beautiful counter by Dante Rivera!"

Eric rolls to the apron, clutching his back, and Dante moves toward him--

but suddenly a familiar sound cuts through everything.

HONK! HONK!

Mark Bravo: "Oh no."

John Phillips: "You have got to be kidding me."

The camera swings toward the stage.

And there he is.

Bobby Dean.

Rolling down the ramp on his mobility scooter like this is the most natural thing in the world.

The crowd erupts in laughter and cheers.

HONK! HONK!

Bobby Dean: "ERIC!"

Eric freezes on the apron, face twisting in disbelief.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No. No, no, no. Bobby, not now!"

Bobby keeps rolling closer, grinning from ear to ear.

Bobby Dean: "I just wanted to ask you somethin' real quick!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is a match, you absolute catastrophe!"

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John Phillips: "Bobby Dean has just rolled down here in the middle of Eric Dane Jr.'s match!"

Mark Bravo: "And I promise you, Bobby thinks this is a perfectly reasonable time to workshop something for Victorious."

Eric points furiously down the ramp.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Go away! We'll do this later!"

Bobby Dean: "But if it's a ladder match, do you think my scooter can count as a ladder if I park it next to the belt?"

The crowd roars laughing.

Mark Bravo: "That is an outstanding question."

Eric Dane Jr.: "No! No, it cannot count as a ladder! It's a scooter! It's barely a vehicle!"

As Eric is losing his mind at Bobby, Dante Rivera sees the opening.

He sprints in from behind and dropkicks Eric off the apron to the floor.

John Phillips: "Dante Rivera takes advantage!"

Mark Bravo: "That's what happens when you stop wrestling to yell at a man in traffic!"

Eric hits the floor hard and pops back up furious, but Bobby is right there beside him now, still on the scooter, still trying to help in the dumbest way possible.

Bobby Dean: "Oh! You should maybe duck next time!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Thank you, Bobby! Tremendous tactical note!"

Dante hits the ropes and launches through with a slingshot crossbody, wiping Eric out on the floor in front of Bobby.

The crowd is fully in it now.

John Phillips: "Dante Rivera is rolling now!"

Dante gets up, fires the crowd up, then grabs Eric and sends him back into the ring.

Bobby follows along at ringside, still keeping pace on the scooter like he belongs in the segment.

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Bobby Dean: "I can still be in your corner if you want!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "I would rather wrestle in traffic!"

Mark Bravo: "I mean... technically he is."

Back in the ring, Dante climbs to the second rope and comes off with a standing moonsault onto Eric, then hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

Eric kicks out.

Dante rises with momentum behind him now, pointing to the crowd and feeding off the energy.

John Phillips: "This match changed completely the moment Bobby Dean came down that ramp."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because Bobby Dean is basically a natural disaster with a horn."

*Dante pulls Eric up and whips him to the ropes, looking for the rebound that sets up Borderline Breaker--
but Eric smartly hooks the ropes and kills the setup before it begins.*

Dante charges anyway.

Eric backdrops him over the ropes--

but Dante lands on the apron.

The crowd pops.

Eric turns and walks straight into a springboard shoulder tackle that knocks him down again.

John Phillips: "Dante Rivera staying one step ahead!"

Dante is feeling it now.

He points to the top rope, thinking about going big--

and at ringside Bobby Dean chooses the worst possible moment to be helpful again.

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Bobby Dean: "ERIC! If you need a timeout, I got granola bars in the basket!"

The crowd laughs again.

Dante looks over for half a second, amused despite himself.

Eric uses that second.

He scrambles up, hits the ropes, and knocks Dante off balance on the top turnbuckle.

Mark Bravo: "And now Bobby distracted Dante too!"

Eric climbs fast, hooking Dante high up on the ropes.

Not elegant.

Not especially safe-looking.

Very Eric Dane Jr.

He muscles Dante into position and lands a top-rope superplex that rattles the ring on impact.

John Phillips: "Huge superplex by Eric Dane Jr.!"

Both men are down for a second.

Eric rises first, breathing hard, hair disheveled, ego very much reassembled.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's why they pay me the big fake money!"

Mark Bravo: "Big fake money?"

John Phillips: "He may still be rattled."

Eric drags Dante up, hooks him, and plants him with the NepoDriver--rope-assisted and ugly in all the right ways.

John Phillips: "NepoDriver connects!"

Eric doesn't go for the cover immediately.

Of course he doesn't.

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Instead he kips up badly, nearly loses his footing, recovers, then points out to Bobby at ringside.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You see that? That's what an athlete looks like!"

Bobby Dean: "Pretty good! Still think the scooter could help though!"

Eric shakes his head in disgust, then finally turns back and pulls Dante up one more time.

He hooks him high, drops him with SD3--the Shooting Star DDT--and drives Dante into the mat.

John Phillips: "SD3! That's gotta be it!"

Eric falls across him for the cover.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING DING DING

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. gets the win!"

Mark Bravo: "But for a few minutes there, Bobby Dean nearly turned this whole thing into a hostage situation."

Eric rolls off and sits up, pushing his hair back and glaring out at Bobby like this victory somehow still annoyed him.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... ERIC DANE JR.!"

Bobby claps enthusiastically from the scooter.

Bobby Dean: "Good job, Eric!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stop encouraging me like we're friends!"

Bobby Dean: "We are friends!"

The crowd laughs as Eric gets his hand raised.

John Phillips: "Credit to Dante Rivera. He took advantage when the opportunity opened and gave Eric

Dane Jr. more of a fight than Eric clearly expected."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but in the end, Eric Dane Jr. survives the warm-up. Now the bigger question is what happens when Bobby Dean and that mobility scooter are part of the actual problem at Victorious."

Eric stands in the ring jawing at Bobby Dean, who is still parked happily at ringside, completely unbothered and somehow even more excited for Victorious than before.

Fighting Championship Qualifier

John Phillips: "It is time for our main event!"

Mark Bravo: "And what a weird, dangerous, beautiful mess this could turn into. Maxx Mayhem. Emily Hightower. Fighting Championship rules. Winner goes to Victorious."

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower survived Athena Storm earlier tonight, but not without more tension with the Hightower Clan at ringside. Maxx Mayhem survived Selena Vex in his first match back from injury. And now, after all of that, these two meet with everything on the line."

Mark Bravo: "And that's the kicker, partner. Emily wants this to be about her. Maxx wants it to be about violence. The Hightowers... well, they want it to be about whatever they think helps, whether Emily likes it or not."

The lights dim and that familiar rough-edged country-rock riff kicks in.

The crowd rises as Emily Hightower's beat-up '78 Chevy pickup rattles onto the stage.

Emily steps out first, cracking her neck, tossing back her energy drink like she is clocking into overtime instead of walking into the biggest match of her night.

But unlike earlier, the full Hightower presence follows her from the start.

David Hightower comes out proud as ever, already looking like he plans to be heard whether anyone asked for it or not.

Buck Hightower follows, looming and quiet, all pressure and bad intentions held in reserve.

Dakota Hightower steps out last, smiling that deceptively sweet little smile that never quite hides how sharp she really is.

John Phillips: "And here comes Emily Hightower, once again with the Hightower Clan behind her."

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Mark Bravo: "And you can already see it on Emily's face. She's focused on the match, but she knows this family issue is standing right beside her whether she wants it there or not."

Emily walks a step ahead of them all, eyes fixed on the ring, trying to separate herself from the picture forming behind her.

David points toward the ring and shouts something proudly.

Buck stays silent.

Dakota scans the floor and apron area like she's already thinking three moves ahead.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower has said it herself. She wants the clan there for protection. She does not want them getting involved."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but wanting that and getting that have been two very different things lately."

Emily reaches ringside, turns, and points right at all three of them before stepping onto the apron.

Emily Hightower: "Don't. I mean it."

David gives her a dismissive grin like she just asked the wind not to blow.

David Hightower: "We got you, baby girl."

Emily Hightower: "That ain't what I said."

She steps through the ropes and goes straight to her corner, still glaring out at them.

John Phillips: "That's about as clear as she can make it."

Mark Bravo: "And I don't know if it'll matter one bit."

Then the mood changes completely.

Sirens blare.

Static crackles across the screen.

Punk rock explodes through the building and the crowd loses its mind as Maxx Mayhem bursts through the curtain swinging an imaginary trash lid and cackling like a man who just heard the world is ending and decided to celebrate.

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John Phillips: "And here comes Maxx Mayhem!"

Mark Bravo: "The Mayhem Machine is back, and I swear he looks even happier than he did in his qualifier."

Maxx storms onto the stage with wild eyes and a stretched grin, looking down toward the ring and immediately seeing not just Emily... but all three Hightowers at ringside.

And somehow that makes him even more excited.

Maxx Mayhem: "OH, THIS IS GONNA BE STUPID!"

The crowd roars.

Mark Bravo: "See? That's what I mean! Most people would hate the extra bodies. Maxx looks like he just found bonus rounds."

He sprints down the ramp, yelling at nobody and everybody, pointing at Buck, then at David, then at Dakota, then at Emily, like he's trying to decide which part of this is funniest.

Maxx Mayhem: "Y'all brought the whole junkyard?!"

He slides under the bottom rope and pops up immediately, pacing in circles and laughing to himself.

Across the ring, Emily stays planted, jaw set, not amused.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower all business. Maxx Mayhem loving every second of the chaos before the bell even rings."

The referee brings both competitors in, then leans through the ropes to make one last point to the Hightowers.

Referee: "I mean it. If you get involved, I will throw this out."

Emily points from inside the ring.

Emily Hightower: "You hear him? Stay out of it."

David nods, but not convincingly.

Buck remains stone-faced.

Dakota lifts both hands like she's innocent already.

DING DING

John Phillips: "Main event underway!"

Emily comes out first, heavy on the front foot, hands up, wasting no time.

Maxx comes out bouncing, loose, twitchy, almost delighted by the danger in front of him.

They meet at center ring in a hard collar-and-elbow tie-up.

Emily immediately puts her country-strong power into it and starts walking Maxx backward.

Maxx digs in, laughing through clenched teeth.

Maxx Mayhem: "YEAH! PUSH ME, COWGIRL!"

Emily drives him back another step, then yanks him into a rough side headlock and grinds down.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower using that strength early!"

Maxx shoves her off to the ropes.

Emily rebounds.

He drops down.

She steps over.

He pops up looking for a discus elbow--

but Emily ducks and blasts him with a shoulder block that knocks him flat.

Maxx rolls to the mat, then sits up laughing.

Mark Bravo: "He got flattened and loved it."

Maxx Mayhem: "Again!"

Emily shakes her head once and snatches him up by the wrist, whipping him hard to the corner.

She charges in with a running splash, then hits the ropes and comes back with Hit And Run, the big boot catching Maxx high enough to spin him sideways to the mat.

John Phillips: "Hit And Run from Emily Hightower!"

Cover.

ONE!

Maxx kicks out fast.

Emily drags him back up and lands a short suplex, then a forearm to the chest that echoes.

John Phillips: "Emily's doing exactly what she should do. Keep Maxx grounded, keep him from turning this into something strange."

Mark Bravo: "Too late. He was strange before he got here."

Maxx gets to one knee and Emily drills him with another forearm, but this time Maxx answers by biting her wrist.

John Phillips: "Oh come on!"

Mark Bravo: "That's veteran nonsense right there."

Emily jerks her hand away and Maxx springs up with a snap DDT out of nowhere, spiking her hard.

The crowd reacts as Maxx kips to his feet badly, almost tumbles, catches himself on the ropes, then points proudly at his own recovery.

Maxx Mayhem: "NAILED IT."

He grabs Emily and throws her through the ropes to the apron, then charges and blasts her with a shoulder through the middle strand, knocking her to the floor in front of the clan.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower sent to the floor!"

Maxx hits the ropes and dives through with a wild slingshot body press that wipes Emily out right in front of Buck and Dakota.

He pops up instantly and turns toward the Hightowers with his arms spread.

Maxx Mayhem: "WHO'S NEXT?!"

Buck steps forward half a pace.

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Emily, still on the floor, points up at him angrily.

Emily Hightower: "No! Stay back!"

Maxx hears it and laughs even harder.

Mark Bravo: "That's the whole story right there. Emily's trying to keep the family out. Maxx is hoping they jump in so he can throw elbows at all of them."

Maxx rolls back inside, breaks the count with a hand slap on the mat, then heads back out and charges Emily with a running cannonball into the guardrail.

Emily barely moves in time, and Maxx smashes himself into the barricade instead.

John Phillips: "Nobody home!"

Emily uses the opening, grabs Maxx by the back of the head, and slams him face-first into the apron.

Then again.

Then she rolls him back into the ring and follows.

Inside, she catches him rising with a release suplex that sends him skidding near center ring.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower taking back control!"

Maxx sits up holding his back, then starts laughing again.

Maxx Mayhem: "That one sucked! Do it harder!"

Emily storms up, grabs him by the jaw, and blasts him with a forearm.

Emily Hightower: "Shut up."

She pulls him up and tries for Burn Out, the tornado double-arm DDT--

but Maxx shoves her off and rebounds with a discus elbow that catches her on the cheek.

Both wobble.

Maxx charges in with Crash Course--

but Emily drops at the last second and Maxx slams chest-first into the buckles.

He rebounds out glassy-eyed.

Emily catches him with Ode To My Father, the Bull Hammer elbow landing flush.

John Phillips: "Ode To My Father!"

Cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Maxx kicks out.

Mark Bravo: "He's still in it!"

Emily sits up frustrated but focused, then points to the floor again as David starts getting louder.

Emily Hightower: "I got it! Leave it alone!"

David claps and shouts anyway.

David Hightower: "Put him down then!"

Emily rolls her eyes and drags Maxx back up.

But that moment of split attention is enough.

Maxx hooks the ankle and yanks her into a cradle.

ONE!

TWO!

Emily kicks out and both pop up.

Maxx catches her with a superkick--Swanky style stolen by accident, ugly but effective--then follows with a swinging neckbreaker.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem turning the tide again!"

He doesn't cover right away.

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Instead he runs to the ropes nearest the Hightowers and yells at them.

Maxx Mayhem: "COME ON! SOMEBODY DO SOMETHIN' DUMB!"

The crowd laughs.

Mark Bravo: "He is openly begging for interference."

Emily rises behind him and clubs him across the back.

She grabs him and launches him with a rough belly-to-belly, then immediately follows with a flipping rebound moonsault--Crash Landing connects.

John Phillips: "Crash Landing from Emily!"

Cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Maxx barely gets a shoulder up.

The pace of the match is starting to show on both of them now.

Maxx is breathing harder.

Emily is starting to grit through the damage.

John Phillips: "Remember, both of these competitors already fought earlier tonight. This is where endurance matters."

Emily brings Maxx up again and looks for Total Loss, the fold-up powerbomb--

but Maxx fights free and shoves her toward the ropes on the clan side.

Emily rebounds--

and Buck, thinking he's helping, slaps the apron and shouts at Maxx to turn.

The distraction doesn't touch Maxx.

It touches Emily.

She turns her head just enough to bark out:

Emily Hightower: "Buck, no!"

That beat costs her.

Maxx blasts her with a discus elbow, then hooks her and lands Maximum Carnage on the mat instead of a chair.

John Phillips: "Maximum Carnage!"

Mark Bravo: "That might do it!"

Cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Emily kicks out.

The building erupts.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower survives!"

Maxx rolls to his knees and screams happily into the air.

Maxx Mayhem: "YES! MORE OF THAT!"

He is loving this now.

He points at David on the floor.

Maxx Mayhem: "You! Do a crime!"

The crowd howls laughing.

Mark Bravo: "He wants the family to cheat. He genuinely thinks it'll make the match better."

Emily pushes to hands and knees and again points angrily toward the floor.

Emily Hightower: "I said stay out of it!"

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Dakota lifts both hands, but David is still muttering and pacing.

Maxx runs in looking for another cannonball in the corner--

Emily explodes out of the corner with a spear-like shoulder that cuts him in half.

Then she drags him up and drives him down with Total Loss.

She stacks him tight.

ONE!

TWO!

David slaps the apron, screaming for the count.

David Hightower: "That's three!"

The referee instantly turns and points at him.

Referee: "One more thing! One more thing and I throw this out!"

Emily is furious now--not at Maxx, at them.

Emily Hightower: "I mean it! Quit helpin'!"

And Maxx, flat on his back and half-dead, starts laughing at that too.

Maxx Mayhem: "This rules."

Emily wastes no more time. She yanks Maxx up one final time, looking to finish him again--

but Maxx drops suddenly and hooks her ankle into Tapout Terror.

He grapevines the leg and screams "SHHHHHH!" while wrenching the ankle viciously.

John Phillips: "Tapout Terror! He's got the ankle!"

Emily claws toward the ropes out of instinct, but Fighting Championship rules keep the hold dangerous no matter where she reaches.

She turns, crawls, reaches again--

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and Dakota takes one step toward the apron before stopping herself.

Emily sees her.

And screams it again.

Emily Hightower: "NO!"

That is enough to keep Dakota from doing anything.

Emily turns back, plants her hands, and uses pure strength to roll through, kicking Maxx off hard into the ropes.

John Phillips: "Emily escaped on her own!"

Mark Bravo: "And she had to, because she would rather lose than have them save her."

Both competitors rise slowly now.

Emily on one leg for a second.

Maxx grinning through exhaustion.

They meet center ring and just start trading.

Forearm from Emily.

Elbow from Maxx.

Another forearm from Emily.

Headbutt from Maxx.

The crowd rises with each shot.

John Phillips: "What a main event!"

Emily swings again.

Maxx ducks and hits the ropes.

He comes back full speed--

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right into Burn Out.

The tornado double-arm DDT plants him hard.

Emily scrambles over, hooks the leg deep, and this time stays locked in through the count.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING DING DING

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower wins it! Emily Hightower is going to Victorious!"

Mark Bravo: "And she did it her way! Family all over the place, chaos everywhere, Maxx Mayhem loving every stupid second of it--and Emily still got it done!"

Emily rolls off Maxx, breathing hard, exhausted, and looks immediately to ringside--not to celebrate with them, but to make sure they understand.

Emily Hightower: "I told y'all."

The referee raises her hand.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... and advancing to Victorious... EMILY HIGHTOWER!"

The crowd roars.

David claps proudly like he helped anyway.

Buck gives one stern nod.

Dakota smiles softly, but stays back.

Inside the ring, Maxx Mayhem rolls onto his side and starts laughing even in defeat, slapping the mat once like he genuinely enjoyed getting his brains scrambled.

Maxx Mayhem: "That was awesome."

John Phillips: "What a performance from both competitors. Maxx Mayhem brought chaos, violence, and insanity. Emily Hightower brought grit, pride, and the will to do this on her own terms."

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Mark Bravo: "And now we've got it. Emily Hightower is headed to Victorious."

The final image is Emily Hightower standing in the center of the ring, hand raised, still breathing hard, still glaring out toward her family with that same message in her eyes.

I won.

Let me own it.

Show Credits

Segment: "Introduction" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "Rampage" - Written by Ben, chris.

Segment: "Let's Make it Big" - Written by Ben, justin.

Match: "Selena Vex vs. Maxx Mayhem" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "Hold it All" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "Fear A Reaper" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "Timing Without Purpose" - Written by Ben.

Match: "Carter Durant vs Tyler Cruz" - Written by tony.

Segment: "His Arrival" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "Eating Their Words" - Written by Ben, jeremy.

Segment: "Coming Soon" - Written by Ben, tony.

Match: "Emily Hightower vs. Athena Storm" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "It's Official" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "Proving Grounds" - Written by Ben.

Match: "Bianca Page vs. Kaida Shizuka" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "Big Win" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "Anger Makes Your Enemies Happier" - Written by tony.

Match: "Eric Dane Jr. vs Dante Rivera" - Written by Ben.

Match: "Fighting Championship Qualifier" - Written by Ben.

Results Compiled by the eFed Management Suite