

World Tour: Mexico '26

May 1, 2026 | Gimnasio Olimpico - Mexico City, Mexico, CMX

The Difference

FLASH!

No opening video package.

No sweeping shots of Mexico City.

No pyro-laced welcome from the commentary desk.

Instead, World Tour: Mexico '26 begins with the hard camera already locked on the center of the ring inside Gimnasio Olimpico, where the crowd in Mexico City is already roaring, whistling, booing, stomping, and filling the building with the kind of hostile electricity that can only come from a sold-out international crowd being forced to look at someone they absolutely cannot stand.

And standing in the middle of it all?

Eric Dane Jr.

He is dressed like a man who believes he was born for statues. Full regalia. Designer jacket. Hair perfect. Chin slightly lifted. Eyes heavy with entitlement. Draped over his right shoulder, gleaming under the house lights like it has been waiting for this exact moment, is the newly reinstated Hardcore Championship.

Totes real.

Totes legit.

At least if you ask him.

Dane Jr. slowly turns in place, allowing every side of Gimnasio Olimpico to get a long, uncomfortable look at him and the title. The reaction builds with every step. Boos. Jeers. Whistles. A few scattered chants in Spanish that the production truck wisely does not translate on screen.

CROWD: "BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

Eric Dane Jr. smiles.

Not because he is amused.

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Because this is exactly what he wanted.

He lets the sound wash over him. Every boo. Every hiss. Every angry voice from the front row. He absorbs it like sunlight, standing there with the kind of generational arrogance that says the world was built incorrectly and he is simply here to correct it.

The camera cuts briefly to the announce desk, where John Phillips and Mark Bravo are already seated, headsets on, both men trying to speak over the volcanic noise of the building.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to UTA World Tour: Mexico '26, and we are not even getting the courtesy of an opening greeting tonight. Eric Dane Jr. has hijacked the beginning of this broadcast."

Mark Bravo: "Hijacked? John, this is a cold open with championship presence. This is cinema. This is prestige. This is a man who walked into Victorious, did exactly what he said he was gonna do, and now he's standing here with gold on his shoulder."

John Phillips: "Gold he claims is the reinstated Hardcore Championship."

Mark Bravo: "Claims? It's right there! I can see it! You can see it! Mexico can see it! That's good enough for me."

Back in the ring, Dane Jr. raises the microphone slowly, deliberately, giving the crowd just enough time to get louder before he speaks.

CROWD: "BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

He waits.

Composed.

Patient.

He has all night, after all.

Finally, the noise dips just enough for his voice to cut through.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I told you what I was going to do."

The boos spike again immediately.

Dane Jr. lowers the microphone a fraction and smirks, letting them get it out of their system. Or trying to. They do not get it out of their system. If anything, the building only gets angrier.

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He looks down at the Hardcore Championship, then slowly adjusts it on his shoulder with an exaggerated little flourish.

Eric Dane Jr.: "And then I did it."

He pauses, eyes narrowing as he looks into the nearest camera.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's the difference."

Another wave of boos.

John Phillips: "That smirk tells you everything you need to know. Eric Dane Jr. believes Victorious was validation. He believes this championship, whether sanctioned or not, is proof that he belongs at the center of the conversation."

Mark Bravo: "Because he does. Look at him. Look at the jacket. Look at the title. Look at the posture. That man did not come to Mexico to ask for respect. He came to collect interest on respect he thinks he's owed."

Dane Jr. begins to pace now, slowly, still soaking up every ounce of hatred from the crowd.

Eric Dane Jr.: "For weeks, people laughed. People whispered. People questioned whether I was serious. Whether I had the guts. Whether I had the right. Whether I had the legacy. Whether I had the nerve to reach into the past, pull out something dangerous, something violent, something that actually mattered, and make it mine."

He taps the championship with two fingers.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Well..."

Dane Jr. looks around the arena, letting the visual answer for him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Here we are."

He turns toward the entrance ramp.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Victorious was not a fluke. It was not a stunt. It was not some cute little nostalgia act for people who still think history belongs to anybody but the people brave enough to take it back."

Dane Jr. lifts the championship slightly off his shoulder, presenting it to the hard camera.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is not just a championship."

The crowd boos even louder, refusing to let him romanticize anything.

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Eric Dane Jr.: "This is a warning."

Dane Jr. shifts the title back onto his shoulder.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is proof that the rules are only real until somebody like me decides they are inconvenient."

He smiles wider.

Eric Dane Jr.: "And from this moment forward, everybody in that locker room should understand one very simple thing."

He takes a step toward the ropes, leaning slightly over the top rope as if speaking directly to the back.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I am not chasing anybody anymore."

A beat.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You are all chasing me."

Dane Jr. turns back toward the center of the ring, clearly ready to continue, when suddenly--

SFX: "HONK. HONK."

The arena goes from hostile to confused in half a second.

SFX: "HONK. HONK."

Dane Jr. freezes.

His face does not change at first, but something behind his eyes dies a small death.

The camera cuts toward the entrance stage.

And there, rolling into view like a man who has confused a wrestling show with a county fair parade, is Beautiful Bobby Dean.

He is perched on a gently used mobility scooter.

Gently used, of course, meaning mostly destroyed.

The front panel is cracked. One side mirror hangs at an angle that suggests it lost a fight with either a doorway or physics. There is a strip of duct tape across the left handlebar. Something near the back wheel

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makes a clicking sound that absolutely should not be ignored but clearly has been ignored for months.

Bobby Dean, meanwhile, is waving to the crowd like this is all completely normal.

CROWD: "BOB-BY! BOB-BY! BOB-BY"

Some sections boo.

Some laugh.

Some just stare.

Bobby waves harder.

John Phillips: "Oh no."

Mark Bravo: "Oh yes."

John Phillips: "Beautiful Bobby Dean is here."

Mark Bravo: "And look at the horsepower on that machine. That scooter has seen war, John. That scooter has stories."

John Phillips: "It may not survive the ramp."

Mark Bravo: "Neither may Eric Dane Jr.'s patience."

Bobby Dean begins the long journey down the ramp.

Long.

Very long.

Incredibly long.

He moves with the confidence of a parade grand marshal and the speed of a haunted shopping cart. Every few feet, he honks the scooter horn again and waves to a different section of the crowd.

SFX: "HONK. HONK."

Dane Jr. stands in the ring, microphone lowered, jaw clenched, staring at Bobby like he is mentally calculating whether the Hardcore Championship is legally heavy enough to be used as evidence.

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Bobby stops halfway down the ramp to point at a fan sign.

It does not appear to be about him.

He nods anyway.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. had a very specific tone he was trying to set here at the beginning of World Tour: Mexico '26."

Mark Bravo: "And Bobby Dean is improving it."

John Phillips: "I am not sure that is the word Eric Dane Jr. would use."

Mark Bravo: "Eric Dane Jr. doesn't understand joy."

Bobby finally reaches ringside.

Then comes the next challenge.

Getting off the scooter.

He puts one foot down.

He reconsiders.

He adjusts the scooter.

He waves off help from a stagehand.

He accepts help from the same stagehand six seconds later.

Dane Jr. is still standing in the ring, staring holes through him.

Bobby reaches the apron and looks at it like it has personally challenged him.

He takes a breath.

He grabs the middle rope.

He hoists himself up.

He stops.

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He points at the crowd and smiles.

The crowd reacts with a mix of booing, laughter, and impatient clapping.

Eric Dane Jr. slowly closes his eyes.

The process continues.

One leg through the ropes.

Pause.

Other leg.

Pause.

Balance check.

Microphone request.

Wrong microphone.

Second microphone.

Another honk from the abandoned scooter at ringside, somehow, as if the thing has developed sentience.

SFX: "HONK."

After what feels like nine full minutes, Bobby Dean finally stands inside the ring with Eric Dane Jr.

Dane Jr. has not moved.

Bobby beams at him.

Bobby Dean: "Hey! Hey!"

Bobby points directly at the Hardcore Championship.

Bobby Dean: "That's it!"

He claps once, loud and proud.

Bobby Dean: "You did it! You went up there and took it!"

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Dane Jr. looks at him.

Expression unchanged.

Somehow, that makes it worse.

Bobby Dean: "I mean it, kid. I mean that from the bottom of my heart. I saw it. I was there. Well, yanno, not all the way there. I was in the area. Emotionally. Spiritually. Physically at one point."

Bobby nods to himself, as though the statement made complete sense.

Bobby Dean: "But I meant what I said up there, yanno."

Dane Jr. gives him nothing.

Bobby takes a half-step closer.

Bobby Dean: "I love you, man."

The crowd erupts in reaction.

Some laugh.

Some boo.

Some immediately begin chanting in a rhythm that sounds suspiciously like they want Bobby to stop talking.

Eric Dane Jr. does not react.

John Phillips: "Well. That is certainly one way to follow up a declaration of violent championship intent."

Mark Bravo: "This is beautiful. This is family. This is healing."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. looks like he wants to be anywhere else on Earth."

Mark Bravo: "That is how some families express love."

Bobby Dean puts a hand over his chest.

Bobby Dean: "And I know, I know, I know. You're standing here thinking, Bobby, this is a big night. Bobby, this is my moment. Bobby, please do not make this weird in front of all of Mexico."

Dane Jr. slowly turns his head toward him.

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Bobby points at him like he has just solved a puzzle.

Bobby Dean: "See? I know you."

Dane Jr. exhales quietly through his nose.

Bobby Dean: "But I had to come out here because this..."

Bobby points at the championship again.

Bobby Dean: "This matters."

Bobby's tone softens, or at least attempts to.

Bobby Dean: "Your Dad and me, we go back. Way back. Like, before most of these people had knees that hurt for no reason."

The crowd boos that too, mostly on principle.

Bobby Dean: "And there were times, man, there were times where it was chaos. It was fighting. It was bleeding. It was yelling. It was somebody getting hit with something they absolutely should not have been hit with."

Bobby smiles warmly at the memory.

Bobby Dean: "But it was family."

Dane Jr. looks down briefly, his face still guarded. The mention of his father lands somewhere, even if he refuses to let the crowd see where.

Bobby Dean: "And when I saw you with that title, when I saw you standing tall, I said to myself, Bobby, that boy did it. That boy went and found the thing that was missing. That boy brought back a piece of what made this place dangerous."

Bobby nods, getting more emotional by the second.

Bobby Dean: "And I got you, fam. For real."

He gestures between himself and Dane Jr.

Bobby Dean: "Just like back in the day with your Dad!"

Dane Jr.'s eyes flicker.

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Bobby does not notice.

Bobby Dean: "We're a family again!"

The crowd reacts loudly again, this time with a bigger wave of laughter cutting through the boos.

Dane Jr. looks out at the people. Then at Bobby. Then at the championship. Then back out at the people.

He looks like a man trying to maintain the image of a generational killer while a golden retriever in human form tries to emotionally adopt him on live television.

Bobby steps closer.

Dane Jr. subtly shifts away.

Bobby instinctively shifts with him.

Somehow, Bobby ends up just behind Dane Jr.'s right shoulder.

Dane Jr. notices.

He does not turn around.

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

That is all he gives him.

Bobby lights up like he has just won the main event of his life.

Bobby Dean: "Yeah?"

Dane Jr. does not look at him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Just don't make it weird, mmkay?"

Bobby opens his mouth.

Stops.

Nods very seriously.

Bobby Dean: "Totally. Not weird. Never weird. Super normal. Family normal."

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Dane Jr. slowly closes his eyes again.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. may have just made the most reluctant alliance in UTA history."

Mark Bravo: "Reluctant? He said alright. That is legally binding where I come from."

John Phillips: "Where do you come from?"

Mark Bravo: "A place where people respect scooter-based loyalty."

Dane Jr. lowers his microphone and turns toward ringside. He hands it off with the kind of controlled frustration that suggests he knows any further words will only encourage Bobby Dean.

He steps through the ropes, Hardcore Championship still resting over his shoulder, and drops down to the floor. Without another glance back, he starts walking up the ramp.

Bobby Dean hurries to follow.

Which, in Bobby Dean terms, means he points toward the ropes, asks them to hold on, carefully gets one leg through, changes his mind about the angle, tries again, and finally makes it to the apron.

Dane Jr. keeps walking.

Bobby Dean: "Hey! Wait up! Family walks together!"

Dane Jr. does not wait.

Bobby drops down to ringside with assistance, climbs back onto the battered mobility scooter, and fires it up with a sound that suggests at least three internal parts have resigned.

SFX: "HONK. HONK."

Bobby begins following Eric Dane Jr. up the ramp, still talking, still nodding, still waving at the crowd like this has been a deeply successful reunion.

Bobby Dean: "I'm proud of you, yanno! Really proud! Your Dad would be proud! Probably! I mean, depending on the day! But proud!"

Dane Jr. never turns around.

He walks with the Hardcore Championship on his shoulder, jaw tight, eyes forward, while Bobby Dean trails just behind him on the scooter, talking a mile a minute and honking once more for absolutely no reason.

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SFX: "HONK."

The camera lingers on the two of them as they disappear toward the back.

Dane in front.

Bobby just behind him.

One man trying desperately to look like destiny.

The other trying desperately to make it a family reunion.

World Tour: Mexico '26 is officially underway.

Fade out.

Introduction

The screen fades from the image of Eric Dane Jr. disappearing through the curtain with Bobby Dean trailing behind him on a busted mobility scooter.

For half a second, the broadcast sits in darkness.

Then--

FLASH!

A rapid burst of images cuts across the screen.

Marie Van Claudio standing tall beneath the lights.

Valkyrie Knox roaring with the Fighting Championship held high.

The chaos of Victorious still fresh in every frame.

Samual Scythe turning his back on the people who thought they knew him.

Kairo Bey staring across the ring, jaw set, eyes locked forward.

Bianca Page throwing her arms wide, confidence radiating through the screen as the crowd reacts around her.

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Shannon Ray glaring from beneath the arena lights, looking less like an opponent and more like a warning.

Emily Hightower planting her boots, chin high, Southern pride and Hightower stubbornness written across her face.

Tyger II stepping through smoke and shadow, the mask catching the light for one haunting second before the frame cuts away.

Trey Mack and Clovis Black raising the UTA Tag Team Championships, the gold reflecting across their faces as The Empire's grip tightens.

El Fantasma standing opposite them, former champions, masked and motionless, carrying the quiet danger of men who know exactly what was taken from them.

The music swells.

The screen shifts into wide cinematic shots of Mexico City. Streets alive with motion. Lights stretching across the skyline. Fans outside Gimnasio Olimpico waving flags, wearing UTA shirts, holding signs, chanting before the doors even open. The building itself glows beneath the night, ready to become the first stop of a new era.

A voiceover rolls in, deep and dramatic.

Voiceover: "Victorious changed everything."

A shot of impact. A championship held high. A stunned crowd. A betrayal. A celebration. A stare-down.

Voiceover: "Champions survived. Challengers fell. Alliances cracked. New monsters stepped forward. And now, with the dust still settling, UTA leaves home soil behind."

The World Tour graphic burns onto the screen in gold and white, wrapped in the colors of Mexico.

Voiceover: "The first stop..."

The camera cuts to the roaring crowd inside Gimnasio Olimpico.

Voiceover: "Mexico City."

Bianca Page appears again, moving through a highlight reel of sharp offense and rising confidence.

Voiceover: "Bianca Page has arrived in UTA with momentum, attitude, and the kind of presence that refuses to be ignored."

Shannon Ray cuts across the screen, intense, focused, and unwilling to be used as a stepping stone.

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Voiceover: "But tonight, Shannon Ray stands in her way."

Emily Hightower and Tyger II flash across the screen in alternating cuts, their styles and energies clashing before they ever touch.

Voiceover: "Emily Hightower brings grit, pride, and power. Tyger II brings mystery, discipline, and the weight of legacy."

Samual Scythe's turn at Victorious replays in sharp, brutal fragments.

Voiceover: "Samual Scythe shocked the world at Victorious."

Kairo Bey appears, eyes narrowed, ready for a fight.

Voiceover: "Now Kairo Bey may be the first man forced to deal with what Scythe has become."

A quick, unsettling flash of Eli Creed and The Creed Method appears before the screen cuts violently to black.

Voiceover: "And the question remains..."

Another flash.

Voiceover: "Is Scythe acting alone?"

The Tag Team Championship graphic fills the screen next. Mack and Black on one side. El Fantasma on the other. The titles shine between them.

Voiceover: "And tonight the UTA Tag Team Championships are on the line."

Trey Mack points toward the camera. Clovis Black stands beside him, cold and composed.

Voiceover: "Trey Mack and Clovis Black defend the gold for The Empire."

El Fantasma appear in slow motion, former champions stepping forward through smoke, their masks unreadable.

Voiceover: "But El Fantasma have worn those championships before."

A hard drumbeat lands with each word.

Voiceover: "They know what it takes."

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Another beat.

Voiceover: "They know what they lost."

Another beat.

Voiceover: "And tonight, they come to take it back."

The music climbs higher. The package becomes faster now. Bodies hitting canvas. Crowds roaring. Lights flashing. Champions screaming. Rivals colliding. Mexico City shaking beneath the weight of the first stop on the tour.

Voiceover: "This is not a reset."

Victorious highlights return one more time, crashing into tonight's match graphics.

Voiceover: "This is the fallout."

The World Tour: Mexico '26 logo fills the screen.

Voiceover: "This is UTA."

The logo explodes into a wall of pyro.

Voiceover: "And the world is watching."

The broadcast cuts live inside Gimnasio Olimpico as fireworks burst across the stage. Red, green, white, and gold pyro erupts upward while the crowd comes unglued. The camera sweeps over thousands of fans packed into the building, signs waving, flags raised, the energy already boiling after the chaotic cold open.

The shot moves from the upper deck down to ringside, where John Phillips and Mark Bravo sit at the commentary desk. Behind them, the Mexico City crowd is loud enough to nearly drown out their headsets.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, now we can officially welcome you to UTA World Tour: Mexico '26! We are live from Gimnasio Olimpico in Mexico City, Mexico, and what a way to begin the first stop of the World Tour."

Mark Bravo: "John, I've called a lot of strange openings in my time, but Eric Dane Jr. trying to declare himself the new face of violence while Bobby Dean followed him around like an emotional support scooter is way up there."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. opened this show by parading that newly reinstated Hardcore Championship, insisting that he did exactly what he said he was going to do at Victorious. But whatever statement he

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intended to make was complicated very quickly by Beautiful Bobby Dean."

Mark Bravo: "Complicated? That was a beautiful reunion. Bobby said he loved him. Bobby said they were family again. Bobby brought heart, history, and a vehicle that may or may not pass inspection."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. looked less than thrilled."

Mark Bravo: "Eric Dane Jr. always looks less than thrilled. That's his whole brand. But he said alright. That means Bobby Dean is now officially somewhere in the Eric Dane Jr. orbit, and I have no idea what that means for the rest of UTA."

John Phillips: "It is certainly something to keep an eye on. Dane Jr. has been desperate to carve out his own legacy, and Bobby Dean invoking his father may have hit a nerve whether Junior wants to admit it or not."

Mark Bravo: "That's the dangerous part, John. Eric Dane Jr. wants to be taken seriously. He wants fear. He wants reverence. And now he's got Bobby Dean hugging the edges of his spotlight. That can either soften a man up or make him even meaner."

John Phillips: "And that is only where tonight began. This is the first show after Victorious, the first stop of the UTA World Tour, and tonight we have a huge lineup. The UTA Tag Team Championships will be defended later tonight when Trey Mack and Clovis Black, Mack and Black, defend against the former champions, El Fantasma."

Mark Bravo: "The Empire wants to keep those championships locked down. El Fantasma want their gold back. That match could change the whole tag division by the time this night is over."

John Phillips: "We will also see Emily Hightower go one-on-one with Tyger II in intergender singles action. Two very different competitors, two very different energies, and I am fascinated to see how that one unfolds."

Mark Bravo: "Emily Hightower does not back down from anybody. Tyger II moves like a ghost story with kickpads. That is going to be a style clash in the best possible way."

John Phillips: "Samual Scythe will also be in action tonight against Kairo Bey after that shocking turn at Victorious. There are still major questions surrounding Scythe, Eli Creed, and The Creed Method."

Mark Bravo: "And Kairo Bey better have eyes in the back of his head. You do not walk into a match with a man like Scythe, with Eli Creed's name hanging around the situation, and assume it's going to be clean."

John Phillips: "But we are starting tonight with singles action, and it is a match that could tell us a lot about momentum here in UTA."

The camera cuts to the ring, where the official checks the ropes and speaks with the timekeeper. The crowd

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continues buzzing, already shifting from the opening spectacle into anticipation for the first match.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has been on a roll since arriving in UTA. Every time she steps into the spotlight, she seems a little more comfortable, a little more dangerous, and a little more convinced that this place belongs to her."

Mark Bravo: "Confidence matters. Some people arrive and wait for permission. Bianca Page walked in like the permission slip was already signed. I respect that."

John Phillips: "But across the ring tonight will be Shannon Ray, and Shannon Ray is not here to be another name on Bianca Page's list. She has the chance to stop that momentum cold here in Mexico City."

Mark Bravo: "That's the beauty of a night like this. First show after Victorious, first match of the World Tour, everybody wants to make the first statement. Bianca wants to prove the roll continues. Shannon wants to prove the roll ends with her."

John Phillips: "Mexico City is ready. Gimnasio Olimpico is alive. The World Tour is underway, and our opening contest is next."

The camera swings toward the entrance stage as the lights begin to shift for the first entrance of the night.

Bianca Page vs. Shannon Ray

The camera holds on the entrance stage as the lights inside Gimnasio Olimpico begin to dim.

The roar of Mexico City shifts into a rolling buzz, thousands of voices reacting before anything even happens. The first match of the night is here, and after the bizarre cold open, after the World Tour video package, after the promise of fallout from Victorious, the building feels ready to exhale through violence.

Then the arena goes black.

Not fully silent.

Never silent.

Mexico City keeps making noise in the dark.

Then a single red dot appears.

Small.

Sharp.

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Precise.

It dances across the stage like the sightline of something deadly searching for a target. The crowd catches it and reacts as the dot snaps from one side of the entrance set to the other, then drifts over the lower bowl, scanning signs, faces, raised hands, and camera lenses.

John Phillips: "And here we go. Opening contest of the night, and the first woman through the curtain is Shannon Ray."

Mark Bravo: "I love this already. That little red dot makes everybody in the building sit up straighter."

The opening pulse of "Lock and Load" hits the sound system.

The red dot stops dead center on the stage.

Then the lights cut upward in a narrow white beam.

Shannon Ray steps into it.

Cool.

Composed.

Unrushed.

She stands at the top of the ramp with her head slightly lowered, eyes forward, expression unreadable. There is no big smile. No frantic playing to the crowd. No wasted motion. Just a woman who looks like she has already measured the distance between herself and the ring, calculated the angles, and decided exactly how many steps this should take.

The Mexico City crowd gives her a strong reaction, a mix of appreciation and anticipation. Shannon does not soak it in so much as acknowledge it with a calm glance from left to right.

John Phillips: "Shannon Ray, originally out of Vancouver, British Columbia, brings a very unique kind of danger to this match. Olympic-level archer background, incredible precision, and inside that ring she is known for picking one target and taking it apart."

Mark Bravo: "That's the thing with Shannon Ray. She does not waste movement. She does not waste strikes. She fights like every inch of you has already been marked before the bell even rings."

Shannon starts down the ramp.

The red laser dot follows her at first, sliding across the floor just ahead of her boots, then flicking up across

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the barricade, over the faces of the fans leaning in to get a closer look. Some of them cheer louder when the dot passes near them. Others instinctively move back and laugh at themselves for doing it.

Ray never changes pace.

She walks like the noise does not affect her.

Like pressure is familiar.

Like nerves are for other people.

John Phillips: "This is not an easy assignment tonight. Bianca Page has been on a roll since arriving in UTA, and when you factor in Ace Andrews, you know Shannon Ray is not just preparing for one opponent. She has to prepare for influence at ringside too."

Mark Bravo: "And that may actually make Shannon even more dangerous. Some wrestlers get distracted by the extra body. Shannon looks like the kind of person who just adds another target to the list."

Halfway down the ramp, Shannon stops.

She turns her head slightly toward the hard camera.

The red dot climbs slowly up the lens until the entire screen briefly blooms red.

Then it snaps away.

Shannon continues forward.

John Phillips: "We saw Shannon Ray at Victorious as part of that volatile Lumberjill environment in the Marie Van Claudio and Amy Harrison main event. Tonight, she is not standing around the battlefield. She is walking directly into it."

Mark Bravo: "And against Bianca Page, she better be ready for a very different kind of fight. Bianca is polished, sneaky, opportunistic. Shannon is cold and calculated. That means whoever controls the tempo early may control the whole match."

Ray reaches ringside and pauses near the bottom of the ramp.

She looks toward the ring.

Then toward the entrance stage.

Not nervous.

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Checking sightlines.

Checking space.

Checking exits.

The same way a marksman reads the wind before the shot.

The crowd buzzes as Shannon steps to the apron. She places one hand on the top rope, pauses, and then pulls herself up smoothly. No flourish. No theatrics. She wipes her boots once against the edge of the apron, then steps through the ropes and into the ring.

John Phillips: "There is a quiet confidence to Shannon Ray. She is not here to match Bianca Page's pageantry. She is here to stop momentum."

Mark Bravo: "And if Bianca thinks this is just another chance to make herself look good, she may find out real quick that Shannon Ray is not scenery. She is a sniper."

Inside the ring, Shannon walks to the far corner and climbs to the middle rope.

She does not raise both arms.

She does not blow kisses.

She simply lifts one hand, forms her fingers into the shape of a pistol, and slowly points it toward the center of the ring.

One shot.

Then she lowers her hand.

The crowd reacts with a sharp pop.

Shannon drops down from the ropes and turns toward the entranceway. The red dot reappears one final time, landing in the center of the empty stage where Bianca Page will soon emerge.

Ray watches it.

Still.

Focused.

Waiting.

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John Phillips: "Shannon Ray is in the ring, and she looks locked in."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, John. Bianca Page is about to walk into the crosshairs."

"Lock and Load" fades beneath the rising sound of the Mexico City crowd as Shannon Ray settles into her corner, eyes fixed on the stage.

Inside the ring, Shannon Ray remains in her corner, still as a statue, eyes locked on the entranceway.

The red dot that had marked the stage fades away.

For a second, the building is left with only noise.

Mexico City clapping, whistling, buzzing, waiting for the other half of the opening contest.

John Phillips: "Shannon Ray has made her entrance, and you can see it in her body language already. She is not here to entertain Bianca Page's sense of occasion."

Mark Bravo: "No, but Bianca Page is absolutely going to have a sense of occasion whether Shannon likes it or not. Bianca does not walk into a room. Bianca arrives, John. There is a difference."

John Phillips: "And lately, she has arrived with momentum."

Mark Bravo: "Momentum, confidence, and Ace Andrews. That is a very dangerous combination."

The lights shift.

Not dark.

Elegant.

Gold and soft white sweep across the stage, cutting through the earlier tension with something polished, expensive, and almost insultingly glamorous.

Then the opening notes of "Wildest Dreams" by Taylor Swift begin to play.

The crowd reaction turns immediately.

CROWD: "BOOOOOOOOOOO!"

The boos pour down before she even appears.

And then she does.

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"Classy" Bianca Page steps through the curtain with a smile so bright it almost dares the crowd to hate her more.

She stops at the top of the entranceway, one hand resting confidently at her hip, chin lifted high, posture perfect. There is pageantry in every inch of her. Not the nervous pageantry of someone trying to be noticed, but the regal arrogance of someone who assumes the lights were already waiting for her.

John Phillips: "And here comes Bianca Page. Naples, Florida by way of New York City. Experienced, decorated, and absolutely convinced that UTA should already be built around her."

Mark Bravo: "I mean, listen, she has credentials. She has won championships elsewhere. She has carried herself like a star since the second she walked through the door. The problem is she knows all of that, and she reminds everybody every time she breathes."

Bianca turns slightly toward one side of the crowd and gives them a beauty-pageant wave with the precision of someone who has practiced making contempt look like charm.

Then she blows a kiss.

The boos grow louder.

Bianca smiles wider.

John Phillips: "That reaction does not bother her in the slightest."

Mark Bravo: "Of course not. In Bianca Page's mind, boos are just applause from people with bad manners."

Behind her, Ace Andrews steps into view.

Immaculate suit.

Measured smile.

Hands relaxed at his sides like he owns the stage, the building, and possibly the paperwork that allowed the show to happen.

He does not rush to catch up to Bianca. He does not need to. Ace Andrews moves with the calm certainty of a man who believes every outcome can be negotiated, manipulated, or purchased.

John Phillips: "And there is Ace Andrews. The Corporate Cutthroat himself."

Mark Bravo: "That man looks like he charges interest on eye contact."

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John Phillips: "Ace Andrews has attached himself to some very dangerous people in UTA, and Bianca Page may be one of the most calculating of them all."

Mark Bravo: "Ace doesn't invest in accidents, John. He sees something in Bianca. And when Ace sees money, power, or leverage, he gets real comfortable real fast."

Ace steps beside Bianca and says something quietly into her ear.

Bianca does not look back at him.

She simply nods once, eyes already on Shannon Ray inside the ring.

The smile stays.

But it sharpens.

Bianca begins her walk down the ramp.

Every step is deliberate. One foot in front of the other with runway confidence, shoulders back, chin high, that unmistakable queenly air around her as if the aisle is not leading to a wrestling ring but to a coronation she believes is overdue.

John Phillips: "We talked earlier about Bianca's frustration at Victorious. She made it clear that she believes every week without television time is UTA wasting money."

Mark Bravo: "That was one of the most Bianca Page things I have ever heard. Not, 'I want an opportunity.' Not, 'I want to prove myself.' No. 'You people are affecting your own bottom line by not putting me on camera.'"

John Phillips: "She has not been shy about championship ambitions either."

Mark Bravo: "Why would she be? Bianca does not seem like the kind of woman who asks for a seat at the table. She walks in, checks the silverware, and complains the table is too small."

Bianca passes the first row and lets her eyes travel across the fans pressed against the barricade.

Someone in the crowd shouts at her.

Bianca pauses.

She turns.

For one brief second, her smile drops just enough to show the disgust underneath.

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Then it returns instantly, polished and poisonous.

She lifts one hand and gives the fan a tiny wave, the kind one might give to a child who has embarrassed themselves in public.

John Phillips: "That right there is the thing with Bianca Page. She can look elegant, she can look composed, but underneath it is something vicious."

Mark Bravo: "Absolutely. The dress code says gala. The attitude says knife fight."

Ace follows a few steps behind, keeping his distance but never disconnecting from the moment. His eyes move constantly. Shannon in the ring. The referee. The crowd. The timekeeper. The space around ringside.

He is not just accompanying Bianca.

He is scouting the environment.

John Phillips: "Watch Ace Andrews at ringside. That is what concerns me. He is not just here to clap politely."

Mark Bravo: "No, he is here to manage margins. He is here to find the two inches nobody else sees. The loose shoelace, the bad camera angle, the distracted official, the moment Shannon looks away when she should not."

John Phillips: "And Shannon Ray is too precise to let herself get pulled into that kind of game."

Mark Bravo: "Maybe. But Bianca Page does not need you to fall apart for ten minutes. She only needs you to make one mistake and then she makes it look like it was her plan the entire time."

Bianca reaches the bottom of the ramp and stops.

She turns toward the hard camera.

Then, with a slow, graceful motion, she gives a slight twirl at ringside. Her arms float outward, the gesture elegant, arrogant, and completely unnecessary.

The crowd boos again.

Bianca soaks it in like applause.

John Phillips: "There is that signature Bianca Page presentation."

Mark Bravo: "Signature? John, that twirl had punctuation. That was a complete sentence."

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John Phillips: "And Shannon Ray has not moved."

The camera cuts to Shannon in the ring.

She watches Bianca with a calm, flat expression.

No intimidation.

No annoyance.

Just calculation.

Mark Bravo: "That is the problem for Bianca. Shannon is not reacting to the show."

John Phillips: "Shannon Ray is studying her."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. Bianca is giving theater. Shannon is taking measurements."

Bianca notices Shannon's stillness and tilts her head, amused.

She says something off-mic toward the ring.

It is not picked up clearly, but her expression says enough.

Ace steps to her side and gestures toward the steel steps, as if reminding her not to waste too much time before business begins.

Bianca gives him a look.

Not anger.

A warning.

Then she ascends the steps.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has that rare ability to make even entering the ring feel like she is granting people permission to watch."

Mark Bravo: "That is not rare. That is expensive. There is a difference."

Bianca reaches the apron and stops beside the ropes.

She looks at the referee.

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Then at the ropes.

Then back at the referee.

She does not say a word at first.

She does not have to.

The official hesitates, then steps over and opens the ropes for her.

The crowd boos louder.

John Phillips: "And of course."

Mark Bravo: "What? She asked with her eyes. That is efficiency."

John Phillips: "That is entitlement."

Mark Bravo: "Sometimes entitlement gets the ropes opened, John."

Bianca steps through gracefully, one leg then the other, entering the ring as though stepping into a ballroom. She pauses just inside the ropes and smooths her hair back with one hand before turning toward the center.

Ace remains at ringside, hands clasped in front of him, watching with a satisfied little smile.

Bianca walks to the middle of the ring.

Shannon Ray stays in her corner.

The two women lock eyes.

Bianca's smile is bright.

Shannon's stare is empty of decoration.

It is a fascinating contrast.

John Phillips: "This is a clash of mentalities as much as styles. Bianca Page wants control through presence, through manipulation, through forcing the room to acknowledge her."

Mark Bravo: "And Shannon Ray wants control through precision. She is looking at Bianca right now like there is a bullseye painted on her ribs."

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John Phillips: "Bianca cannot afford to underestimate her."

Mark Bravo: "Bianca underestimates people emotionally, not tactically. That is what makes her dangerous. She may think she is better than you, but she still plans for you."

Bianca raises both arms out to her sides, chin lifted, letting the lights catch her as the crowd pours boos down over her.

She slowly turns in place, making sure every side of Gimnasio Olimpico gets the full visual.

When she faces the hard camera again, she mouths two words with a flawless smile.

Bianca Page: "You're welcome."

The boos sharpen.

Bianca laughs softly to herself.

John Phillips: "She is impossible."

Mark Bravo: "She is marketable. There is a difference."

John Phillips: "You have been spending too much time listening to Ace Andrews."

Mark Bravo: "I listened once and somehow owed him twelve percent."

Bianca finally lowers her arms and backs toward her corner, but she does it slowly, never giving Shannon the satisfaction of seeing urgency.

Ace steps closer to Bianca's side of the ring and reaches up to the middle rope, leaning in just enough to speak quietly.

Ace Andrews: "Make her chase. She wants clean lines. Break the picture."

Bianca nods without looking at him.

Her smile fades now.

Not completely.

Just enough that the wrestler beneath the pageantry begins to show through.

Sneaky.

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Cerebral.

Vicious when the moment calls for it.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews already giving instruction, and that is going to be a factor all match long."

Mark Bravo: "That advice was good too. Shannon Ray wants angles. Ace just told Bianca to ruin the geometry."

John Phillips: "That may be the most useful thing you have ever said."

Mark Bravo: "I am shocked too."

"Wildest Dreams" begins to fade.

Bianca settles into her corner, one hand resting lightly on the top rope, eyes finally fixed fully on Shannon Ray.

Across the ring, Shannon leans forward slightly, hands loose, gaze steady.

Ace Andrews remains outside, adjusting the cuff of his suit jacket like this is all proceeding exactly on schedule.

John Phillips: "Opening contest of World Tour: Mexico '26. Bianca Page looking to continue her rise. Shannon Ray looking to put a stop to that momentum before it becomes something bigger."

Mark Bravo: "And with Ace Andrews at ringside, Shannon better understand this is not just one-on-one. It may be legal on paper, but emotionally, financially, and probably contractually, Bianca Page is never alone."

The referee steps between both women and motions them toward the center.

Bianca rolls her shoulders once, elegant even in preparation.

Shannon Ray steps out of her corner like a sightline narrowing.

The first match of the World Tour is ready to begin.

The referee brings both women toward the center of the ring.

Shannon Ray arrives first.

No bounce in her step. No last-second theatrics. Just that same cold focus she carried through her entrance, eyes fixed on Bianca Page as if she is already deciding which joint, which angle, which opening is going to

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matter most.

Bianca takes her time.

Of course she does.

She steps out of her corner with an elegant roll of her shoulders, one hand briefly brushing back her hair, chin lifted as if the center of the ring is a place Shannon is lucky to share with her.

John Phillips: "Opening contest underway in just a moment, and you can already see the difference in posture. Shannon Ray is all business."

Mark Bravo: "Bianca Page looks like she's about to correct the room's posture before she wrestles in it."

John Phillips: "She has that presence about her, Mark. Bianca does not just believe she can win this match. She seems offended by the idea that anyone would expect anything else."

Mark Bravo: "That is confidence bordering on royal decree."

The referee gives final instructions, but Bianca's attention keeps drifting away from him and back to Shannon. She smiles slightly, not warm, not friendly, but patronizing.

Bianca Page: "Try to keep up."

Shannon does not answer.

She does not blink.

Bianca's smile tightens just enough to show the lack of reaction irritates her.

The referee looks to Shannon.

Then to Bianca.

Then he calls for the bell.

DING DING DING!

The crowd surges as the first match of World Tour: Mexico '26 officially begins.

Shannon moves first.

No hesitation.

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No feeling-out process.

She steps in and snaps a sharp kick into Bianca's lead thigh, the sound cracking through the opening seconds of the match.

Bianca's smile vanishes.

John Phillips: "Shannon Ray strikes first!"

Mark Bravo: "And that was not a greeting. That was a range finder."

Bianca takes one step back, her expression shifting from regal annoyance to genuine offense.

Bianca Page: "Excuse you."

Shannon immediately follows with a second kick toward the same leg.

Bianca checks it awkwardly, but not cleanly. The shot still lands enough to make her reset her base.

John Phillips: "Shannon already targeting that leg. That is exactly what we expected. Pick a limb, create a weakness, then build the match around it."

Mark Bravo: "And Bianca just got reminded that Shannon Ray is not here to admire her entrance."

Bianca backs off a half-step and lifts both hands, walking a slow circle now, trying to reframe the pace. Shannon does not chase wildly. She advances only when the angle makes sense, cutting off the ring with small, efficient steps.

At ringside, Ace Andrews watches closely, one hand near his chin.

Ace Andrews: "Do not give her a line. Make her adjust."

Bianca hears him.

She breathes once through her nose, then smiles again.

Not because she is comfortable.

Because she refuses to let Shannon see otherwise.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews already coaching Bianca from the outside."

Mark Bravo: "And that was the right call. Shannon wants a straight shot. Bianca needs to make the target

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move."

Shannon steps in again with another kick aimed at the thigh.

This time, Bianca is ready.

She pulls the leg back at the last second, letting Shannon's kick cut through air, then immediately snaps forward with a sharp open-hand slap across Shannon's face.

The crowd reacts loudly.

John Phillips: "Oh! Bianca Page with the slap!"

Mark Bravo: "That was not just a strike. That was a statement."

Shannon's head turns with the impact.

For one beat, she stays that way.

Bianca tilts her head.

Bianca Page: "There. Now we're even."

Shannon turns back.

Her expression has not changed much.

But her eyes have sharpened.

John Phillips: "I am not sure Bianca wants Shannon Ray angry."

Mark Bravo: "Maybe not. But Bianca just proved something important. Shannon can strike first, but Bianca is not slow. Bianca is not fragile. Bianca is not just presentation."

Shannon steps forward quickly now, reaching for Bianca's wrist.

Bianca slips back and pivots, elegant footwork carrying her out of the direct line. Shannon adjusts and reaches again, this time catching the arm, twisting into a quick standing wristlock.

Bianca winces but immediately rolls through, kips lightly to one knee, and reverses the pressure with a smooth twist of Shannon's hand.

John Phillips: "Nice reversal by Bianca Page."

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Mark Bravo: "That was smooth. That was the kind of thing people miss because they're too busy hating her attitude."

Bianca rises with Shannon's wrist controlled, then steps over and wrenches the arm again, forcing Shannon down to one knee.

She looks out at the crowd with a smug little smile.

Bianca Page: "See? Simple."

The crowd boos.

Shannon plants a foot, rolls forward, and uses the momentum to relieve the pressure. She comes up behind Bianca and immediately snakes an arm around the waist.

John Phillips: "Shannon Ray slips behind!"

Bianca throws a back elbow.

Shannon ducks it.

Bianca throws another.

Shannon ducks again, then shoves Bianca forward toward the ropes.

Bianca rebounds--

Shannon drops flat.

Bianca steps over.

On the next rebound, Shannon pops up and catches Bianca with a crisp arm drag that sends her skidding across the canvas.

John Phillips: "Arm drag by Shannon Ray!"

Mark Bravo: "Clean. Quick. Right on target."

Bianca rolls through and pops back to her feet faster than expected, frustration flashing across her face.

Shannon comes in again.

Bianca ducks under the approach, catches Shannon around the waist from behind, and snaps her down with

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a sudden takedown of her own, floating immediately into a front facelock.

John Phillips: "And Bianca answers right back!"

Mark Bravo: "That is what I'm talking about. Shannon got the first clean exchange, but Bianca is matching her adjustment for adjustment."

Bianca tightens the front facelock and leans her weight down across Shannon's neck, pressing her into the mat with more aggression than glamour now.

Shannon pushes up to one knee.

Bianca snaps her back down.

Bianca Page: "No, no. Stay there."

The crowd boos as Bianca shifts her hip, making Shannon carry extra pressure while Ace applauds lightly from the floor.

Ace Andrews: "Excellent. Keep her underneath you."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page showing some real mat awareness here in the early going."

Mark Bravo: "That is the thing. You want her to be all flash so you can dismiss her. But then she gets a hold of you and suddenly you realize there is substance under the sparkle."

Shannon works her way up again, this time getting both knees under her. She reaches for Bianca's wrist, trying to peel the grip apart. Bianca responds with a knee to the shoulder, then another short knee into the upper chest.

Not huge shots.

Not dramatic.

Smart ones.

Enough to slow the escape.

John Phillips: "Bianca using those short knees to interrupt Shannon's base."

Mark Bravo: "She is making Shannon restart the climb every time. That is veteran-level annoyance."

Shannon finally drives forward and backs Bianca into the ropes, forcing the referee to step in.

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Referee: "Break! Off the ropes!"

Bianca lifts one hand.

Then the other.

She gives the clean break.

For about half a second.

Then she snaps a knee into Shannon's midsection.

John Phillips: "And there it is!"

Mark Bravo: "That was technically after the break, which is my favorite kind of technically."

Shannon doubles slightly, and Bianca immediately grabs her by the wrist, whipping her across the ring. Shannon hits the ropes and comes back fast.

Bianca lowers her head too early.

Shannon sees it.

She stops short and snaps a targeted knee upward into Bianca's shoulder and collarbone area.

Bianca staggers upright, grimacing.

John Phillips: "Shannon caught her!"

Mark Bravo: "That is what Shannon does. She does not need the whole body. She just needs one piece of it in the wrong place."

Shannon follows with a sudden chop to Bianca's chest.

SMACK!

The crowd reacts.

Another chop.

SMACK!

Bianca backs toward the corner, her face tightening with every shot.

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Shannon steps in and fires one more sharp chop, higher this time, clipping near the shoulder she already struck.

John Phillips: "Sharpshooter's Chop from Shannon Ray, and you can see the target forming already."

Mark Bravo: "That shoulder and arm just got circled in red ink."

Shannon grabs Bianca's wrist and pulls her out of the corner, looking to extend the arm and maybe start setting the table for deeper damage.

But Bianca yanks her close suddenly.

Hairline close.

Eye to eye.

Then Bianca drives a boot down onto Shannon's foot.

The referee misses the stomp behind their bodies.

Shannon flinches.

Bianca immediately follows with a sudden snap DDT that spikes Shannon into the canvas.

John Phillips: "Snap DDT! Bianca Page plants Shannon Ray!"

Mark Bravo: "That was nasty. That was opportunistic. That was exactly Bianca Page."

Bianca rolls Shannon over and hooks the leg with a sharp, almost irritated urgency.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Shannon kicks out.

The crowd pops.

Bianca sits up, eyes narrowing.

Ace Andrews gives a small nod from ringside, not disappointed at all.

Ace Andrews: "That is fine. Make her spend more."

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John Phillips: "First cover of the match, and Shannon Ray kicks out at two."

Mark Bravo: "But that exchange told us a lot, John. Shannon struck first. Shannon found a target. Shannon got momentum. And Bianca still found a way to cut her down."

Bianca gets to her feet and looks down at Shannon with open contempt now.

She presses the sole of her boot lightly against Shannon's shoulder and gives a little shove, not enough to hurt, just enough to insult.

Bianca Page: "You are not on my level."

The crowd boos.

Shannon rolls toward the ropes, one hand at the back of her neck, trying to create space.

Bianca follows with a slow, stalking confidence, hair falling over one shoulder, that smug regal edge fully back on her face.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page now taking control, and this is where she can be dangerous. When she starts believing the match is happening exactly the way she wants."

Mark Bravo: "And maybe it is. Shannon landed first. Bianca adjusted. That might be the scariest part. Bianca Page may actually be as good as she thinks she is."

Bianca reaches down, grabs Shannon by the hair, and begins pulling her up as the referee warns her immediately.

Referee: "Watch the hair, Bianca!"

Bianca releases just enough to make it look compliant, then hooks Shannon under the chin instead and drags her toward the center.

Ace Andrews watches from ringside, calm and pleased.

Shannon Ray struck first.

But Bianca Page has taken the first real control.

The referee brings both women toward the center of the ring.

Shannon Ray arrives first.

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No bounce in her step. No last-second theatrics. Just that same cold focus she carried through her entrance, eyes fixed on Bianca Page as if she is already deciding which joint, which angle, which opening is going to matter most.

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Shannon rolls toward the ropes, one hand at the back of her neck, trying to create space.

Bianca follows with a slow, stalking confidence, hair falling over one shoulder, that smug regal edge fully back on her face.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page now taking control, and this is where she can be dangerous. When she starts believing the match is happening exactly the way she wants."

Mark Bravo: "And maybe it is. Shannon landed first. Bianca adjusted. That might be the scariest part. Bianca Page may actually be as good as she thinks she is."

Bianca reaches down, grabs Shannon by the hair, and begins pulling her up as the referee warns her immediately.

Referee: "Watch the hair, Bianca!"

Bianca releases just enough to make it look compliant, then hooks Shannon under the chin instead and drags her toward the center.

Ace Andrews watches from ringside, calm and pleased.

Shannon Ray struck first.

But Bianca Page has taken the first real control.

Bianca Page drags Shannon Ray toward the center of the ring with an almost casual cruelty, one hand hooked beneath Shannon's chin, the other guiding her by the arm.

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She is not rushing.

That may be the worst part.

Bianca has found control, and now she is wearing it like jewelry.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has slowed this match down after that snap DDT, and this is where Shannon Ray cannot afford to get trapped underneath her."

Mark Bravo: "Bianca looks like she has already decided the hard part is over."

Bianca slides behind Shannon and hooks her into a seated chinlock, knee planted between Shannon's shoulder blades. She pulls back just enough to bend Shannon's neck and upper spine, but not enough to look desperate.

Her face says this is maintenance.

Not struggle.

Not war.

Just maintenance.

Bianca Page: "This is what they gave me?"

The crowd boos as Bianca glances lazily toward the ropes, then toward Ace Andrews at ringside.

Bianca Page: "Really?"

Ace gives a faint smile and a small shrug, as if the answer is beneath both of them.

Ace Andrews: "Make it educational."

John Phillips: "That is the arrogance of Bianca Page. She is in control right now, but Shannon Ray is far too dangerous to treat like this match is already a formality."

Mark Bravo: "You're right, but this is also psychological. Bianca is making Shannon carry her weight and her attitude at the same time."

Shannon reaches up with both hands, trying to peel Bianca's grip apart. Bianca tightens her fingers, then leans back a little farther, making Shannon's jaw tilt upward toward the lights.

The referee crouches beside them.

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Referee: "Shannon, you good? You want to give it up?"

Shannon shakes her head once.

Sharp.

Immediate.

Bianca rolls her eyes.

Bianca Page: "Adorable."

She releases the chinlock suddenly, only to snap Shannon backward by the hair and drive her forearm across Shannon's chest, flattening her to the mat.

John Phillips: "Bianca using the hair again, and the official is right there to warn her."

Referee: "Bianca! I said watch the hair!"

Bianca lifts both hands innocently, eyes wide with fake surprise.

Bianca Page: "I slipped."

Mark Bravo: "Technically, the hand did slip from hair to face."

John Phillips: "That is not better."

Bianca floats into a cover, but does it lazily, pressing one forearm across Shannon's face while barely hooking the far leg.

Referee: "ONE!"

Shannon kicks out before two.

Bianca sits up, staring down at her like Shannon has committed an etiquette violation.

Bianca Page: "You could have saved yourself some time."

Shannon rolls to her side, trying to create separation, but Bianca immediately places a knee across her ribs and pushes her back down.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page not giving Shannon any room to rebuild her base."

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Mark Bravo: "That's the smart part. The attitude makes you want to dismiss her, but the mechanics are good. She keeps putting Shannon flat, keeps making her restart."

Bianca rises, takes Shannon by the wrist, and pulls her up just enough to snap her back down with a short-arm yank across the canvas. Shannon lands hard on her shoulder and rolls toward the ropes.

Bianca follows.

Slowly.

Almost bored.

She places one boot on the middle rope and leans down over Shannon, who is trying to pull herself upward.

Bianca Page: "I had to fly to Mexico for this."

The crowd boos louder.

Bianca looks out at them, offended.

Bianca Page: "What? She heard me."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page mocking Shannon Ray now, and that could be a mistake."

Mark Bravo: "It could be. But right now Bianca is doing what she said she would do. She is making this match about her."

Bianca pulls Shannon up against the ropes and presses her throat across the middle cable with her knee, using her balance on the top rope to add pressure.

Referee: "Get off the ropes! One! Two! Three!"

Bianca breaks at three and a half, stepping away with her arms lifted again.

Bianca Page: "I know how to count."

Shannon coughs against the ropes, one hand at her throat, the other gripping the middle rope.

Ace Andrews steps closer from the floor, speaking with that calm, surgical tone.

Ace Andrews: "Do not overindulge. Keep ownership."

Bianca looks down at him and gives a tiny nod.

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Mark Bravo: "That is a great line from Ace. Keep ownership."

John Phillips: "It is also a disturbing way to talk about another human being."

Mark Bravo: "Sure, but strategy is not always polite."

Bianca turns back toward Shannon and grabs her wrist, pulling her away from the ropes. She twists the arm once, then steps over into a standing arm wringer, wrenching the shoulder Shannon had already used to escape earlier.

Shannon winces, but Bianca's face barely changes.

She looks almost disappointed that the sound was not louder.

John Phillips: "Bianca going back to the arm now, turning Shannon's own targeting strategy against her."

Mark Bravo: "That is the part I like. Shannon came in trying to pick a target. Bianca said, fine, I can do that too."

Bianca steps behind Shannon and transitions into a grounded hammerlock, forcing Shannon down chest-first to the mat while trapping the arm behind her back.

Then she sits across Shannon's lower back, posture straight, chin high, as if posing for a magazine spread while Shannon is pinned underneath her.

Bianca Page: "Comfortable?"

Shannon reaches toward the ropes with her free hand, but Bianca shifts her weight and drags her back two inches before she can get there.

John Phillips: "Good ring awareness from Bianca Page."

Mark Bravo: "Good? That was excellent. She let Shannon see the rope, then took it away. That is mean and smart."

The referee checks Shannon again.

Referee: "Shannon? Talk to me."

Shannon shakes her head, teeth clenched, trying to build her knees underneath her.

Bianca sighs.

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Actually sighs.

Like this escape attempt is inconveniencing her.

Bianca Page: "You are making this so much longer than it needs to be."

Shannon pushes up to one knee.

Bianca immediately shifts from the hammerlock into a side headlock, dragging Shannon back down and rolling her to the mat.

She grinds the hold in now, cheek pressed against Shannon's temple, her legs stretched elegantly out to the side like even her control positions need to look composed.

John Phillips: "Bianca cuts off another attempt to rise. Shannon Ray has not been able to get back to her feet for any meaningful offense since that DDT."

Mark Bravo: "That is how Bianca makes you feel trapped. Not with one huge move, but with a thousand little reminders that she is deciding when you get to move."

The crowd starts clapping rhythmically, trying to rally Shannon.

Shannon plants one boot.

Then the other.

She starts to roll her hips, trying to create enough space to slip out the back door.

Bianca feels it and clamps down harder.

Then, without warning, she shifts her weight and rolls Shannon's shoulders to the mat.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Shannon kicks out again.

Bianca keeps the headlock, dragging her back to the side before Shannon can fully sit up.

John Phillips: "Near fall from the headlock position, and Bianca holds on."

Mark Bravo: "That is a veteran move. Make the rest hold a pinning combination. Make Shannon defend two

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problems at once."

Bianca looks directly into the camera from the mat, still holding Shannon down.

Bianca Page: "This is the competition?"

She laughs softly and looks toward Ace.

Bianca Page: "I thought this was television."

Ace smiles faintly.

Ace Andrews: "It is. That is why you are on it."

Bianca's smile returns, pleased with that answer.

John Phillips: "That arrogance is unbelievable."

Mark Bravo: "It is unbelievable, but it is also becoming harder to argue with at this moment. Bianca Page has Shannon Ray stuck in second gear."

Shannon hears enough.

Her expression changes for the first time.

Not panic.

Not anger exactly.

Resolve.

She reaches up and grabs a handful of Bianca's wrist, pulling downward to create space beneath the chin. Bianca tries to cinch tighter, but Shannon shifts her hips and rolls her weight toward Bianca's shoulders again.

For a second, Bianca's own hold works against her.

Referee: "ONE!"

Bianca kicks out, releasing the headlock as she does.

Both women scramble up.

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Bianca gets there first and swings a clothesline.

Shannon ducks underneath.

She hits the ropes.

Bianca turns--

And Shannon blasts her with a Deadeye Dropkick right to the chest.

John Phillips: "Deadeye Dropkick! Shannon Ray caught her clean!"

Mark Bravo: "That woke Bianca up!"

Bianca crashes backward to the mat and rolls quickly toward the ropes, more stunned than badly hurt.

Shannon pushes herself up to one knee, breathing hard, one hand still near her neck from the pressure of the holds.

The crowd pops as Bianca looks genuinely irritated now, her bored expression gone.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page spent the last several minutes acting like Shannon Ray was beneath her, and Shannon just reminded her that one clean shot can change the tone."

Mark Bravo: "But look at Bianca. She is already moving away, already getting to the ropes, already trying to slow Shannon's next shot. That dropkick landed, but Bianca's instincts are still sharp."

At ringside, Ace Andrews steps closer, one hand raised in warning.

Ace Andrews: "Distance, Bianca. Reset the room."

Bianca pulls herself up near the ropes, eyes narrowed now as she stares at Shannon Ray.

The match has not escaped her yet.

But for the first time, it has stopped feeling easy.

Bianca Page pulls herself up along the ropes, one hand at her chest where Shannon Ray's Deadeye Dropkick landed clean.

For the first time in the match, Bianca does not look bored.

She looks insulted.

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That may be worse.

John Phillips: "That dropkick changed Bianca Page's expression in a hurry."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, the queen got touched, John. And she did not care for it."

Shannon pushes up to her feet near the center of the ring, rolling one shoulder, still feeling the effects of Bianca's earlier control, but the opening is there. She sees Bianca against the ropes. She sees the target. She moves in.

Bianca ducks halfway through the ropes immediately, forcing the referee to step between them.

Referee: "Back up, Shannon! She's in the ropes!"

Shannon stops just short, hands raised, jaw set.

Bianca stays between the ropes longer than she needs to.

Her eyes never leave Shannon's.

Bianca Page: "You had your little moment."

The crowd boos as Bianca slowly steps back inside.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page using the ropes to force that separation."

Mark Bravo: "Smart. Aggravating, but smart. Shannon wanted to build. Bianca made the official stop the construction."

Ace Andrews steps closer at ringside, voice calm but firmer now.

Ace Andrews: "No more indulgence. Punish the attempt."

Bianca gives the smallest nod.

Then her face changes completely.

The polished smile fades.

The elegance remains, but now it has teeth.

Shannon steps forward again, looking to close the gap, and Bianca suddenly explodes out of the ropes with a stiff forearm to the side of the head.

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John Phillips: "Bianca fires back!"

Shannon staggers a half-step.

Bianca does not pose this time.

She follows with another forearm.

Then another.

Then she grabs Shannon by the back of the head and drives a knee hard into the midsection.

Mark Bravo: "There's the aggression. Bianca got embarrassed, and now Shannon has to pay the invoice."

Shannon doubles over. Bianca hooks her by the wrist and whips her hard into the corner.

Shannon hits back-first, the impact knocking air from her lungs.

Bianca charges in immediately and crushes her with a running back elbow, snapping Shannon's head sideways against the turnbuckle.

John Phillips: "Hard back elbow in the corner!"

Mark Bravo: "That one had a little more attitude on it than before."

Bianca steps out, grabs Shannon by the wrist, and yanks her forward into a short-arm position.

For a split second, Shannon tries to brace.

Too late.

Bianca turns through and blasts her with the Right Stuff, a discus clothesline that drops Shannon flat to the canvas.

John Phillips: "Right Stuff! Discus clothesline by Bianca Page!"

Bianca drops immediately into the cover, this one much more serious than the lazy pin from earlier.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Shannon kicks out.

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The crowd pops, but Bianca does not sit up in disbelief.

Not this time.

She sits up with anger.

Bianca Page: "Fine."

One word.

Flat.

Cold.

John Phillips: "Shannon Ray stays alive, but Bianca Page has changed the pace of this match dramatically."

Mark Bravo: "She went from bored superiority to active punishment. That is a bad transition for Shannon."

Bianca grabs Shannon by the hair and pulls her up before the referee can get fully into position to warn her.

Referee: "Bianca, let go of the hair!"

Bianca releases with one hand and immediately clubs Shannon across the upper back with the other, sending her down to one knee.

Bianca Page: "Better?"

The referee glares.

Bianca turns away from him and drives a boot into Shannon's ribs.

Then another.

Then one more, sharper, meaner, right as Shannon tries to crawl toward the ropes.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page stomping Shannon Ray down now, and this is far less glamorous than what we saw earlier."

Mark Bravo: "That's because glamour is for when people behave. Shannon had the audacity to make Bianca look vulnerable."

Bianca grabs Shannon by the arm and drags her back toward the center of the ring, away from the ropes

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and away from any easy escape. She steps over the arm, twists, and drops down into a tight grounded armbar variation, pulling back across the shoulder Shannon used to strike earlier.

Shannon grimaces immediately.

Bianca leans into the hold, eyes locked on Shannon's face.

Bianca Page: "You wanted targets?"

She wrenches back harder.

Bianca Page: "Here's mine."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page now targeting the arm and shoulder, and listen to Shannon Ray."

Mark Bravo: "This is what Ace was talking about earlier. Break the picture. Shannon wanted clean shots. Bianca is trying to take away the weapon."

The referee drops beside Shannon.

Referee: "Shannon, do you want to give it up?"

Shannon shakes her head, reaching out with her free hand, fingers stretching toward the nearest rope.

Bianca sees it and shifts her hips, dragging Shannon back another foot.

The crowd groans.

John Phillips: "Excellent positioning by Bianca. She knew exactly where Shannon was and pulled her away before that rope break was available."

Mark Bravo: "That is the thing, John. Bianca Page is arrogant. She is condescending. She is absolutely insufferable. But she is not careless when she gets serious."

Shannon tries to roll her shoulder inward to relieve pressure, but Bianca follows the motion, keeping the arm trapped and using her long frame to stay glued to the hold.

Ace Andrews nods approvingly from the floor.

Ace Andrews: "Steady. Let her carry it."

Bianca does exactly that.

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She does not yank wildly.

She does not waste motion.

She settles back into control, but this is different from before. Not bored now. Focused. Sharper. More aggressive beneath the polish.

John Phillips: "Bianca has regained steady control, but there is more bite behind it now."

Mark Bravo: "Because Shannon reminded her this is a fight. Bianca's answer is to make Shannon regret the reminder."

The crowd begins clapping for Shannon again.

Shannon plants her boots, trying to twist her body underneath Bianca. Her face tightens with pain as she pulls her knees in and starts inching toward the ropes again.

Bianca feels the movement and releases the armbar before Shannon can reach safety.

Then she transitions immediately, pulling Shannon up by the wrist and snapping her down shoulder-first into the mat with a vicious arm wringer takedown.

John Phillips: "Oh! Shoulder-first into the canvas!"

Mark Bravo: "That was ugly. That was Bianca turning control into damage."

Shannon rolls onto her side, clutching the arm now.

Bianca stands over her, breathing harder than before, but fully composed again. She looks down at Shannon, then slowly turns her head toward the crowd as they boo.

The smile returns.

Smaller now.

Meaner.

Bianca Page: "See? I am better."

The boos rain down.

Bianca bends down, grabs Shannon by the wrist, and places one boot lightly against Shannon's shoulder. She pulls the arm outward, stretching it while looking directly toward the hard camera.

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John Phillips: "Bianca Page is not just trying to beat Shannon Ray now. She is trying to prove a point."

Mark Bravo: "And that point is pretty clear. You can catch Bianca once. You might even embarrass her once. But if she gets her hands back on the wheel, she can drive the whole match wherever she wants."

Bianca releases the stretch only to drop a sharp knee directly across Shannon's shoulder.

Shannon cries out and rolls toward the ropes again.

Bianca follows, measured and predatory.

Ace Andrews paces a few steps along the floor, eyes bright, his earlier calm returning as Bianca settles back into the rhythm he wanted.

Ace Andrews: "There it is. Control the asset. Control the outcome."

John Phillips: "Listen to Ace Andrews. Everything with him sounds like a hostile takeover."

Mark Bravo: "Well, Bianca is treating Shannon's arm like a company she just acquired."

Bianca reaches down again, pulling Shannon up by the damaged arm.

Shannon tries to fire a short body shot with her free hand, but Bianca absorbs it, answers with a knee to the ribs, and hooks Shannon into a tight side headlock.

She grinds the hold in and walks Shannon away from the ropes, dragging her back toward the middle where the escape gets harder.

John Phillips: "Bianca cuts off another attempt from Shannon. Every time Shannon starts to move, Bianca is there with a knee, a twist, a hold, something to stop the next step."

Mark Bravo: "That is what makes this feel steady again. Bianca is not rushing for the big finish. She is rebuilding the wall around Shannon one brick at a time."

Bianca drops to one knee and takes Shannon down with her, keeping the headlock clamped while trapping Shannon's sore arm awkwardly against her own body.

Shannon kicks her legs, trying to turn toward Bianca's back.

Bianca flattens her again.

The referee checks position.

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Shannon's shoulders are almost down.

Referee: "ONE!"

Shannon rolls a shoulder up.

Bianca squeezes tighter and speaks through clenched teeth.

Bianca Page: "Stay. Down."

Shannon refuses, pushing at Bianca's grip with her good hand while the crowd tries to pull her back into the match with noise.

John Phillips: "Shannon Ray is still fighting, but Bianca Page has taken the air out of this comeback."

Mark Bravo: "And that may be the most impressive part. Shannon created one real opening. Bianca answered, got meaner, and now she's right back where she wants to be."

The camera tightens on Bianca's face.

No boredom now.

No lazy contempt.

Just a controlled, regal irritation.

As if Shannon Ray's resistance is not a threat.

Just an inconvenience Bianca intends to correct.

The crowd inside Gimnasio Olimpico continues clapping, trying to will Shannon Ray back into the match as Bianca Page keeps the side headlock cinched in tight near the center of the ring.

Shannon's face is strained.

Her damaged arm is still tucked awkwardly against Bianca's body.

Bianca's expression is calm again, but not bored now.

Controlled.

Regal.

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Irritated that this has lasted even this long.

John Phillips: "Shannon Ray is still trying to build out of this, but Bianca Page has done a tremendous job dragging this match back into her pace every time Shannon starts to find daylight."

Mark Bravo: "And look at Bianca's face. That is not panic. That is not concern. That is a woman who has decided the meeting has gone five minutes too long."

Shannon plants her feet beneath her.

One boot.

Then the other.

The crowd grows louder with each inch she gains.

Bianca tries to crank the headlock tighter, but Shannon twists her hips and drives an elbow into Bianca's ribs.

Bianca absorbs it.

Shannon drives another.

Then a third.

This one forces Bianca's grip to loosen.

John Phillips: "Shannon Ray starting to fight out!"

Mark Bravo: "She needs something now. Not a full comeback, not a long rally. She needs one clean shot to make Bianca respect the distance again."

Shannon finally shoves Bianca off toward the ropes.

Bianca hits them and rebounds, already looking to cut Shannon down again.

But Shannon drops low and catches Bianca's arm on the way through, twisting her down into a sudden quick roll-up.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Bianca kicks out hard.

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The crowd pops at the near fall.

Bianca scrambles to one knee, eyes wide for half a second before anger takes over.

John Phillips: "Shannon nearly stole it!"

Mark Bravo: "That got Bianca's attention. She can pretend all she wants, but that was almost embarrassing in a hurry."

Bianca lunges back up and swings a forearm.

Shannon ducks underneath and snaps a kick into Bianca's thigh.

The same thigh she attacked at the opening bell.

Bianca stumbles, her base finally showing a crack.

John Phillips: "Shannon goes back to the leg!"

Mark Bravo: "That is the deadeye instinct. She remembered the first target."

Shannon pushes through the pain in her arm and fires a sharp chop across Bianca's chest.

SMACK!

Bianca reels back.

Another chop lands high near the collarbone.

SMACK!

The crowd rises with Shannon now.

She grabs Bianca by the wrist, looking to shoot her across the ring.

But her damaged arm betrays her.

The whip lacks full force.

Bianca feels it immediately.

She plants her feet, reverses the pressure, and yanks Shannon in close.

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Shannon tries to counter with a knee.

Bianca sidesteps it.

Then she grabs Shannon by the back of the head and drives her face-first into the middle turnbuckle.

John Phillips: "Oh! Shannon's comeback cut off hard!"

Mark Bravo: "That arm gave her away. She tried to force the pace, and Bianca read it immediately."

Shannon staggers backward out of the corner.

Bianca does not follow right away.

She stands there for one beat.

Breathing through her nose.

Watching Shannon wobble.

Then the smile returns.

Not the bright entrance smile.

Not the pageant smile.

Something colder.

Something finished.

Bianca Page: "Enough."

Ace Andrews hears it from ringside and slowly straightens his jacket.

Ace Andrews: "There it is."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page just said enough, and that may be the most dangerous thing we have heard from her all match."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. That sounded less like frustration and more like a decision."

Shannon turns, still fighting, still unwilling to give Bianca the satisfaction of seeing her fold.

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She steps forward and throws one more desperate strike with her good hand.

Bianca blocks it.

Hard.

She traps Shannon's wrist, pulls her forward, and snaps a vicious high knee into her face.

John Phillips: "Binx! High knee by Bianca Page!"

Shannon drops to a knee, dazed.

Bianca keeps hold of her.

She does not let Shannon fall.

Not yet.

Instead, Bianca pulls her back up just enough, hooks her, and drives her down with Graceful, the Ace Cutter, snapping Shannon hard into the mat.

Mark Bravo: "Graceful! That cutter folded her!"

John Phillips: "Bianca Page could have the match right there!"

But Bianca does not cover.

The crowd boos as she rises slowly to her feet, looking down at Shannon Ray sprawled near the center of the ring.

She tilts her head.

Almost bored again.

But this time it is not because she thinks Shannon is beneath her.

It is because she believes she has proven it.

John Phillips: "Come on. Make the cover."

Mark Bravo: "She's not done, John."

John Phillips: "She should be."

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Mark Bravo: "That is the difference between winning and making a point."

Ace Andrews watches from ringside with a faint, approving smile.

Ace Andrews: "Finish the presentation."

Bianca looks toward him.

Then toward the crowd.

Then back down at Shannon.

She steps over Shannon's body, walks to the nearest corner, and begins to climb.

Not quickly.

Not urgently.

With all the poise of someone ascending a staircase in a gown.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page going up top now."

Mark Bravo: "If she hits this, Shannon Ray is done."

Shannon stirs below, one hand reaching weakly toward the ropes, but she is too far away and too dazed to make it matter.

Bianca reaches the top turnbuckle and steadies herself.

She stands tall for just a second, arms out slightly, letting the boos wash over her.

Then she looks down.

Cold.

Certain.

Bianca Page: "Class dismissed."

Bianca launches.

Her body turns beautifully in the air, rotating with picture-perfect control before crashing down across Shannon Ray with Pure Elegance, the corkscrew moonsault landing flush.

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John Phillips: "Pure Elegance! Pure Elegance by Bianca Page!"

Mark Bravo: "That was gorgeous. Mean, unnecessary, and gorgeous."

Bianca stays across Shannon for the cover, but even that has arrogance in it. She hooks one leg, presses her forearm across Shannon's chest, and turns her head toward the hard camera instead of looking at the referee.

Referee: "ONE!"

Ace Andrews nods once.

Referee: "TWO!"

Shannon does not move.

Referee: "THREE!"

DING DING DING!

The bell rings, and the crowd immediately showers Bianca Page in boos.

Bianca remains across Shannon for one extra second after the three-count, as if proving she could have stayed there longer if she wanted to.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... 'Classy' Bianca Page!"

"Wildest Dreams" begins to play again as Bianca finally rises to one knee.

She looks down at Shannon, then shakes her head with a faint little laugh.

Bianca Page: "Too easy."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page wins the opening contest of World Tour: Mexico '26, and whether you like her or not, that was decisive."

Mark Bravo: "Shannon Ray had a few moments. She struck first. She nearly caught Bianca with that roll-up. But once Bianca decided she was done toying with her, the whole thing changed fast."

Ace Andrews climbs onto the apron and steps through the ropes, joining Bianca in the ring. He does not check on Shannon. He does not look concerned about the damage done.

He simply walks to Bianca and raises her wrist with the calm satisfaction of a man whose investment has

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performed as expected.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews looking very pleased with what he just witnessed."

Mark Bravo: "Why wouldn't he be? Bianca Page did exactly what she needed to do. She kept momentum. She made a statement. And she made it look like the ending was always inevitable."

Bianca stands over Shannon Ray with one arm raised, chin high, the same regal arrogance back in full bloom beneath the Mexico City lights.

Shannon rolls toward the ropes, clutching her ribs and shoulder, frustrated but beaten.

Bianca does not watch her leave.

She is already looking toward the camera.

Already looking past this match.

Already looking like she expects UTA to understand what she has been saying all along.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page asked for more television time. She asked for bigger opportunities. Tonight, she opened the World Tour with a win."

Mark Bravo: "And now everybody in the women's division has to deal with the annoying part."

John Phillips: "Which is?"

Mark Bravo: "She may have been right about herself."

Bianca Page and Ace Andrews remain in the center of the ring, soaking in the hatred of Mexico City as the broadcast lingers on the image of Bianca victorious, composed, and completely convinced that this was never in doubt.

A Not So First-Class Arrival

The camera cuts to the backstage loading dock of Gimnasio Olimpico.

The sound hits first.

Engines.

Rolling equipment cases.

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Spanish and English overlapping through production headsets.

The low, constant hum of a major UTA event already in motion.

Then a sleek black SUV pulls into frame.

It is polished, expensive, and very clearly not designed to be anywhere near a cracked concrete service entrance.

The rear passenger door opens.

Out steps UTA Champion Maxwell "Max" Jett.

Designer sunglasses.

Perfectly tailored suit.

Scarf draped with calculated arrogance.

The UTA Championship rests over one shoulder like it was born there.

He takes one step onto the pavement.

Looks around.

Immediately regrets the step.

Maxwell Jett: "Absolutely not."

From the other side of the vehicle, Jacoby Jacobs and Darran Darrington step out, the Rich Young Grapplr moving with the kind of expensive confidence that can only come from people who have never had to wonder if they were welcome anywhere.

Together, they are First Class.

And from the look on Maxwell Jett's face, First Class has just arrived somewhere beneath its standards.

Jacoby Jacobs: "We here, champ."

Darran Darrington: "World Tour, baby."

Jett lowers his sunglasses just enough to look at both of them.

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Maxwell Jett: "Do not say that with enthusiasm."

Jacoby's smile fades slightly.

Jacoby Jacobs: "My bad."

Jett turns slowly, taking in the loading dock, the staff, the equipment, the hallway beyond, and the distant sound of the Mexico City crowd already filing into the building.

His expression tightens with theatrical disgust.

Maxwell Jett: "This is what they meant by international expansion?"

He lifts one polished shoe and looks at the bottom of it like the concrete has personally offended him.

Maxwell Jett: "I was promised a world tour. This feels like a hostage situation with catering."

Darran snorts a laugh.

Jett immediately looks at him.

Maxwell Jett: "Was that funny?"

Darran straightens up.

Darran Darrington: "No."

Maxwell Jett: "Good. Because I was not joking. Jokes have rhythm. This has consequences."

A production assistant approaches with a clipboard, trying to be professional and invisible at the same time.

Production Assistant: "Mr. Jett, welcome to Mexico City. We have your locker room ready down the hall and--"

Jett raises one hand.

The assistant stops immediately.

Maxwell Jett: "Do not say welcome like I owe you gratitude for surviving the parking lot."

The assistant blinks.

Production Assistant: "I'm sorry?"

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Maxwell Jett: "You should be."

Jacoby steps forward with a grin, enjoying himself now.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Champ needs space."

Darran Darrington: "And better air."

Jett points toward Darran without looking at him.

Maxwell Jett: "That was almost helpful. Do not get comfortable."

The assistant tries again, carefully.

Production Assistant: "Your locker room has been set up according to the request sheet."

Jett slowly turns back.

Maxwell Jett: "My request sheet was seventeen pages."

Production Assistant: "Yes."

Maxwell Jett: "Single-spaced."

Production Assistant: "Yes."

Maxwell Jett: "With diagrams."

Production Assistant: "We did our best."

Jett removes his sunglasses completely.

Somehow, that feels more threatening than if he had yelled.

Maxwell Jett: "Your best is not a standard. It is a confession."

The assistant looks toward Jacoby and Darran, searching for mercy in the wrong place.

Jacoby smiles.

Darran shrugs.

Jett adjusts the UTA Championship on his shoulder and steps closer to the assistant.

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Maxwell Jett: "Now, I am going to walk into this building. I am going to tolerate the noise, the smell, the humidity, the fluorescent lighting, and whatever someone backstage is pretending qualifies as coffee."

He pauses.

Maxwell Jett: "But if I open that locker room door and find one thing out of place, one thing not chilled, steamed, pressed, arranged, imported, sanitized, or removed according to my instructions..."

Jett smiles.

It is not warm.

Maxwell Jett: "I will make your evening very educational."

The assistant nods quickly.

Production Assistant: "Understood."

Jett slides his sunglasses back on.

Maxwell Jett: "I doubt that."

The assistant retreats down the hall.

Jacoby laughs under his breath.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Man, you really hate it here."

Jett looks toward him, offended by the understatement.

Maxwell Jett: "Jacoby, I hate most places."

He gestures vaguely around him.

Maxwell Jett: "This place has simply worked harder than most to earn it."

Darran adjusts the collar of his jacket and looks down the hallway toward the arena noise.

Darran Darrington: "Crowd sounds hot though."

Jett smirks.

Maxwell Jett: "Of course they are. They paid money to be in the same building as me."

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He pats the UTA Championship.

Maxwell Jett: "This title did not come to Mexico because Mexico deserved it. Mexico is receiving a supervised visit."

Jacoby nods, enjoying the line.

Jacoby Jacobs: "First Class customs clearance."

Darran Darrington: "Diplomatic immunity."

Jett glances between them, then nods once like a teacher reluctantly accepting a mediocre answer.

Maxwell Jett: "Better."

A small group of local staff passes by with cables and production cases. One of them glances at the UTA Championship for a little too long.

Jett notices immediately.

Maxwell Jett: "Eyes up."

The staffer looks startled.

Maxwell Jett: "Actually, no. Eyes down. I changed my mind."

Jacoby and Darran laugh now, fully leaning into the champion's cruelty.

John Phillips: "Well, we are being shown this arrival backstage, and Maxwell Jett has wasted absolutely no time endearing himself to Mexico City."

Mark Bravo: "Endearing himself? John, he stepped out of an SUV and declared war on concrete."

John Phillips: "The UTA Champion arriving with Jacoby Jacobs and Darran Darrington, First Class in full force here tonight."

Mark Bravo: "And as much as I hate the attitude, this is why Jett is dangerous. He walks into every room and makes everybody else react to him. Staff, wrestlers, fans, doesn't matter. He takes the oxygen first."

Jett begins walking down the hallway, Jacoby and Darran flanking him on either side like obnoxiously expensive security.

He does not carry his own bag.

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Of course he does not.

A trailing assistant struggles with a garment bag and a designer duffel, walking several steps behind them.

Jett suddenly stops.

Everyone behind him almost collides.

He turns toward Jacoby and Darran.

Maxwell Jett: "Tonight, understand something. We are not guests."

Jacoby nods.

Darran listens.

Maxwell Jett: "Guests say thank you. Guests act honored. Guests eat whatever someone puts in front of them and pretend the experience was charming."

He adjusts the title again.

Maxwell Jett: "We are not guests."

Jacoby Jacobs: "We're First Class."

Darran Darrington: "And everybody else boards last."

Jett finally smiles for real.

It is awful.

Maxwell Jett: "There may be hope for you two yet."

He turns and resumes walking.

The camera tracks with them as they move deeper into the venue, the boos from the live crowd swelling faintly as the segment plays on the arena screens.

Jett hears the reaction through the walls.

He stops again.

Looks toward the distant sound.

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Then smirks.

Maxwell Jett: "Listen to them."

A beat.

Maxwell Jett: "Desperate for culture."

He taps the faceplate of the UTA Championship.

Maxwell Jett: "Fortunately, I brought some."

Jacoby and Darran laugh as First Class turns the corner, disappearing into the backstage corridor with the UTA Champion leading the way.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett, Jacoby Jacobs, and Darran Darrington have arrived. First Class is in Mexico City."

Mark Bravo: "And Mexico City already hates them. Which means, unfortunately, Maxwell Jett probably thinks this is going perfectly."

The final shot catches the assistant struggling to keep up with Jett's luggage before the camera cuts away.

The New First Lady of the UTA

The camera returns to ringside inside Gimnasio Olimpico, where the Mexico City crowd is still riding the emotional high of the night's earlier moments.

The lights settle into a warm gold-and-white glow.

Then the opening notes of "Forever & Ever" by Lacey Sturm featuring Lindsey Stirling begin to play.

The reaction is immediate.

A wave of cheers rolls through the arena as fans rise to their feet.

John Phillips: "Listen to this ovation!"

Mark Bravo: "The First Lady of the UTA has arrived in Mexico City!"

Marie Van Claudio steps through the curtain.

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No UTA Women's Championship over her shoulder tonight.

No army behind her.

No proud march into battle.

But for the first few seconds, she tries to be Marie Van Claudio anyway.

She steps into the lights, lifts her chin, and gives the crowd the familiar pose they know so well. The posture is there. The grace is there. The muscle memory of greatness is there.

The fans cheer louder, trying to lift her into the version of herself they remember.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio, the UTA Women's Champion, the woman who helped build the very foundation of this division, coming out here after what happened at Victorious."

Mark Bravo: "And that is the part that hurts, John. She is still champion. She is still Marie Van Claudio. But after losing to Amy Harrison at Victorious, that stipulation is hanging over her like a chain."

Marie takes one step forward.

Then her music scratches.

A violent, ugly stop.

The arena lights snap from warm gold into cold pink, blue, and black.

The opening chords of "Sanctify Me" by In This Moment hit.

The cheers become boos in an instant.

John Phillips: "Oh no."

Mark Bravo: "You knew she wasn't going to let Marie have this moment."

Amy Harrison steps through the curtain behind Marie.

The International Championship sits around her waist.

Her chin is high.

Her smile is vicious.

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Behind her stand Valkyrie Knox, Trey Mack, and Clovis Black.

The Empire.

Not arriving.

Occupying.

Valkyrie Knox stands nearest to Marie, her stoic face carved from stone. Trey Mack bounces loosely behind Amy, grinning at the boos like they belong to him. Clovis Black stands with silent menace, unmoving, expressionless, a freight train waiting for permission to run someone over.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison, Valkyrie Knox, Trey Mack, and Clovis Black. The Empire is here."

Mark Bravo: "And look at Marie. She came out to be greeted by these fans, and Amy cut it off before she could even breathe."

Amy turns toward Valkyrie and barks something sharp enough that the camera catches only the edge of it.

Amy Harrison: "Now."

Valkyrie steps forward.

Marie turns just as Valkyrie's hand clamps down on the back of her neck.

The boos become thunder.

Marie's face tightens immediately, discomfort cutting through the composure she was trying so hard to hold.

She reaches up instinctively, trying to pry at Valkyrie's grip, but Valkyrie does not release.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knox has Marie by the back of the neck!"

Mark Bravo: "This is disgusting already."

Amy pushes past Marie like the former First Lady is furniture in her way.

She steps to the center of the stage and throws both arms out, soaking in the hatred with a delighted smile.

The International Championship gleams against her waist.

Her expression says this is not punishment.

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This is pageantry.

This is coronation.

This is ownership.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison is taking this in like she has won some kind of royal procession."

Mark Bravo: "She thinks she has, John. That's the sick part. She thinks Victorious gave her the right to parade Marie Van Claudio around like a trophy."

Amy looks back over her shoulder.

Amy Harrison: "Move her."

Valkyrie shoves Marie forward by the neck.

Marie stumbles one step, catches herself, then keeps walking because there is no real choice in the grip holding her.

Trey and Clovis follow behind, forming a wall of muscle and arrogance around the scene.

The procession starts down the ramp.

Slowly.

Deliberately.

Amy first.

Marie being forced along behind her.

Valkyrie's hand locked at the back of Marie's neck.

Mack and Black trailing with smug control.

John Phillips: "Marie is visibly uncomfortable. She is trying to walk under her own power, but Valkyrie is forcing every step."

Mark Bravo: "That woman is the UTA Women's Champion. She is a pioneer here. She is the First Lady of the UTA. And Amy Harrison is humiliating her in front of the world."

As they move down the aisle, a young child in the front row reaches out toward Marie, hand extended, eyes

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wide, trying to touch the champion's hand.

Marie sees the child.

For a second, her eyes soften.

She reaches slightly.

Trey Mack lunges forward from behind Amy and slaps the child's hand away from the barricade.

He laughs directly in the child's face.

Trey Mack: "Nah, nah, nah! No touching Empire property!"

The boos turn venomous.

John Phillips: "Come on! That is a child!"

Mark Bravo: "Trey Mack should be ashamed of himself, but look at him. He thinks it's hilarious."

Marie flinches at the moment, looking back toward Trey with hurt and anger mixed together, but Valkyrie tightens the grip and forces her forward again.

On the other side of the ramp, a fan holds a sign high above their head.

SIGN: "FREE MARIE!"

The camera catches the sign for one second.

Clovis Black sees it too.

Without a word, Clovis steps to the barricade, reaches out, and rips the sign from the fan's hands.

The fan shouts at him.

Clovis does not respond.

He simply tears the sign in half.

Then tears it again.

Pieces fall to the floor.

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John Phillips: "Clovis Black just ripped that sign out of a fan's hands!"

Mark Bravo: "Despicable. Absolutely despicable."

Amy laughs as she reaches ringside.

She turns and looks back at the wreckage of the sign, at Trey still grinning near the barricade, at Marie's discomfort, and it all seems to please her.

She climbs the steel steps first.

Then stops on the apron.

She turns back and barks another order.

Amy Harrison: "Bring her."

Valkyrie pushes Marie forward and finally releases the grip on her neck.

Marie takes a half-step away, one hand rising to the back of her neck, eyes lifting toward Amy.

Sad.

Angry.

Trapped.

Amy points to the ropes.

Amy Harrison: "Open them."

Marie does not move.

Not at first.

Her eyes stay on Amy.

The boos roar again, but beneath them is something else.

Begging.

The crowd pleading with Marie not to do it.

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John Phillips: "Amy is ordering Marie Van Claudio to hold the ropes for her."

Mark Bravo: "Don't do it, Marie."

Amy's face twists.

Amy Harrison: "I said open them!"

Marie lowers her head for a second.

Then slowly, with visible shame cutting across her face, she sits on the second rope and lifts the top rope open.

Amy smiles.

She steps through the ropes like royalty entering a throne room.

As soon as Amy is inside, Valkyrie climbs onto the apron behind Marie and shoves her forward.

Valkyrie Knoxx: "Inside."

Marie stumbles through the ropes and into the ring.

Trey Mack and Clovis Black remain on the floor, taking up positions at ringside like guards posted outside a cell.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack and Clovis Black standing firm on the outside. Valkyrie inside with Amy and Marie."

Mark Bravo: "This is not a wrestling segment. This is a hostage scene with theme music."

Amy is handed a microphone.

She lifts it to her lips.

But the boos are too loud.

She lowers it slightly and smiles, letting the crowd exhaust itself.

They do not.

The boos get louder.

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Amy's smile tightens.

CROWD: "FREE MA-RIE! FREE MA-RIE! FREE MA-RIE!"

Marie closes her eyes for a second.

That chant lands.

Valkyrie stands behind her, stoic and still, one hand flexing at her side.

Amy finally raises the microphone again.

Amy Harrison: "Are you finished?"

The boos answer.

Amy Harrison: "No, really. Are you finished embarrassing yourselves?"

More boos.

Amy laughs softly.

Amy Harrison: "Because I did not come to Mexico City to listen to peasants cry over a woman who made a deal and lost."

She turns slowly toward Marie.

Marie stands near the ropes, shoulders tense, eyes down.

Amy Harrison: "I came here to make something very clear."

Amy steps toward the center of the ring and lifts her chin.

Amy Harrison: "It is time for every single one of you to bow down to the Empress."

The crowd erupts in boos again.

Amy Harrison: "Bow down to the International Champion."

She pats the championship at her waist.

Amy Harrison: "Bow down to the woman who owns the ending before the story even begins."

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Then she smiles, cold and cruel.

Amy Harrison: "Bow down to the new First Lady of the UTA."

The boos become deafening.

John Phillips: "Oh, come on. Amy Harrison calling herself the new First Lady of the UTA is a deliberate insult to Marie Van Claudio."

Mark Bravo: "That's the point. Amy doesn't just want the win. She wants the name. The history. The dignity. She wants to take everything that made Marie matter and wear it like jewelry."

Amy turns sharply toward Marie.

Amy Harrison: "I said bow down."

Marie does not move.

Amy's eyes harden.

Amy Harrison: "Marie."

Still nothing.

Amy Harrison: "I said bow down!"

Valkyrie steps in behind Marie.

One hand grips Marie's shoulder.

Then Valkyrie presses her boot into the back of Marie's knee.

Marie gasps as her leg buckles.

She drops to one knee in front of Amy Harrison.

The arena responds with pure fury.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie forced Marie down!"

Mark Bravo: "This is sickening."

Amy looks down at Marie and smiles.

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Amy Harrison: "Much better."

Marie keeps her head lowered, breathing hard, one hand braced on the mat.

Amy begins to slowly circle her.

Amy Harrison: "At Victorious, I beat Marie Van Claudio."

The crowd boos.

Amy Harrison: "No excuses. No misunderstandings. No heroic little footnote for all of you to cling to. I beat her."

She stops behind Marie and leans slightly over her shoulder.

Amy Harrison: "And because I beat her, the deal is now real."

Amy walks back in front of Marie.

Amy Harrison: "So as still your International Champion, I am here tonight to make sure Marie Van Claudio is told publicly, clearly, and permanently what is expected of her as the newest Empire slave."

The word lands like a slap.

The crowd explodes.

John Phillips: "That is vile."

Mark Bravo: "She didn't say servant. She said slave. Amy Harrison is saying exactly what she means because she wants this to be as cruel as possible."

Marie looks up for the first time, horrified and furious.

Marie Van Claudio: "Amy..."

Amy immediately bends down toward her.

Amy Harrison: "No. You do not say my name like we are equals."

Marie's jaw trembles, but she says nothing else.

Amy Harrison: "A deal is a deal, Marie."

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Amy's eyes narrow.

Amy Harrison: "You can keep your little toy."

Amy gestures vaguely, clearly referring to the UTA Women's Championship that Marie does not have with her.

Amy Harrison: "For now."

She straightens.

Amy Harrison: "But you will do any and everything I tell you to do. You will go where I tell you to go. You will stand where I tell you to stand. You will speak when I allow it. You will be silent when I demand it. You will represent The Empire because your pride is no longer more important than my command."

She crouches slightly, bringing the microphone closer to Marie's face.

Amy Harrison: "And if you refuse..."

Amy smiles.

Amy Harrison: "Not only will you vacate that championship you love so much, but you will face consequences far worse than losing a belt."

Marie looks up at her, eyes wet but not broken.

Amy sees that resistance and hates it.

Amy Harrison: "Are you listening to me?"

Marie does not answer.

Amy Harrison: "Are you listening to me?!"

Valkyrie tightens her grip on Marie's shoulder.

Marie swallows hard.

Marie Van Claudio: "Yes."

Amy shakes her head.

Amy Harrison: "Yes what?"

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Marie closes her eyes.

Marie Van Claudio: "Yes... Empress."

Amy smiles again.

Amy Harrison: "There she is."

The boos rain down harder.

John Phillips: "This is public degradation. That is what this is."

Mark Bravo: "And Amy is loving every second of it."

Amy turns from Marie to the crowd.

Amy Harrison: "Now each and every one of you will see it."

She points down at Marie.

Amy Harrison: "Marie Van Claudio will pledge her undying allegiance to The Empire."

A beat.

Amy Harrison: "To me."

Amy lowers the microphone slightly, then looks down at her boots.

Then back at Marie.

Amy Harrison: "Kiss my feet."

The building becomes molten with rage.

Marie's eyes widen.

Marie Van Claudio: "No."

Amy's face twists instantly.

Amy Harrison: "Do it."

Marie Van Claudio: "Please..."

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Amy Harrison: "Do it!"

Marie shakes her head, still on one knee, hands trembling.

Marie Van Claudio: "Amy, please. Don't."

Amy's voice rises into a scream.

Amy Harrison: "Kiss them!"

Valkyrie suddenly drives a boot into Marie's back.

Marie falls forward, catching herself too late, landing face-down at Amy's feet.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie just kicked Marie down!"

Mark Bravo: "This is too far. This is beyond too far."

Amy stands over Marie, boots inches from her face.

Amy Harrison: "Kiss them!"

She bends forward, screaming now.

Amy Harrison: "Kiss the feet of the new First Lady!"

Marie presses her palms to the mat, trying to push herself up, but Valkyrie kneels beside her.

The Iron Valkyrie grabs Marie by the back of the neck again.

Marie struggles.

The crowd chants desperately.

CROWD: "NO! NO! NO! NO!"

Valkyrie forces Marie's head down.

Marie's lips touch Amy Harrison's boot.

A reluctant kiss.

A forced humiliation.

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A chorus of the loudest boos of the night crashes over the ring.

John Phillips: "My God."

Mark Bravo: "I don't even know what to say."

Amy throws her head back and laughs.

Valkyrie releases Marie, who rolls slightly onto her side, one arm across her face as if she can hide the shame from the entire world.

Amy lifts the microphone again, laughing through the heat.

Amy Harrison: "This is your champion?"

She points down at Marie.

Amy Harrison: "This is your hero?"

The boos answer her.

Amy Harrison: "No."

Amy steps closer and boots Marie away from her.

Marie rolls toward the ropes, clutching her midsection, humiliated and hurt.

Amy Harrison: "This is what happens when heroes lose to Empresses."

She turns toward the hard camera.

Amy Harrison: "And tonight, The Empire continues doing exactly what The Empire does."

She points toward Trey Mack and Clovis Black at ringside.

Amy Harrison: "Trey Mack and Clovis Black will retain the UTA Tag Team Championships."

Trey throws both arms out on the floor, grinning through the boos.

Clovis remains still, silent, and threatening.

Amy Harrison: "Valkyrie Knoxx remains a weapon nobody in this division can survive."

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Valkyrie stands behind her again, stone-faced.

Amy Harrison: "And I..."

Amy taps the International Championship.

Amy Harrison: "I remain the woman this company bends around."

She looks down at Marie again.

Amy Harrison: "No one can stop me."

Amy slowly turns toward the crowd.

Amy Harrison: "No one can stop The Empire."

She lets the statement hang in the air.

Then drops the microphone.

It hits the canvas with a sharp thud.

"Sanctify Me" hits again.

The boos flood the arena.

Amy immediately turns and barks another order toward Valkyrie.

Amy Harrison: "Get her up."

Valkyrie reaches down and yanks Marie to her feet by the arm and the back of the neck.

Marie nearly collapses under herself, but Valkyrie holds her upright.

Amy exits the ring first, once again expecting the world to move around her.

Trey Mack and Clovis Black hold position on the floor, making sure no fan, official, or brave soul gets too close.

Valkyrie forces Marie through the ropes and down to ringside, keeping a firm grip as they begin the march back up the ramp.

John Phillips: "This is one of the most degrading, cruel things I have ever witnessed in UTA."

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Mark Bravo: "Marie Van Claudio is the Women's Champion. She is a legend here. And Amy Harrison just made the world watch her kneel, made her kiss her boot, and then dragged her away like property."

The Empire walks back up the ramp.

Amy leads, International Championship around her waist, smiling like royalty.

Valkyrie follows with Marie in her grip.

Trey Mack and Clovis Black walk behind them, satisfied and unbothered by the hatred pouring down from the Mexico City crowd.

Marie's eyes remain lowered.

But not empty.

Hurt.

Humiliated.

Furious somewhere beneath the surface.

The camera catches the torn remains of the "FREE MARIE!" sign on the floor near the barricade.

Then it cuts back to the ramp, where Amy Harrison never once looks back.

John Phillips: "The Empire has made its statement. But I cannot believe this is the end of Marie Van Claudio's fight."

Mark Bravo: "Maybe not. But tonight, Amy Harrison wanted the world to see Marie broken. And that is the image we are left with."

The final shot follows Marie being pulled through the curtain by Valkyrie Knox while Amy Harrison disappears ahead of them, smiling through the hate.

The music continues.

The boos continue.

And the scene cuts away on one of the ugliest moments of the World Tour's opening night.

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Chaos Walking

The camera cuts backstage.

Concrete walls. Equipment cases. Production assistants trying very hard not to be part of whatever is about to happen.

And moving through all of it--

Eric Dane Jr.

Still in full regalia. Still carrying himself like the building was constructed around him. The Hardcore Championship remains draped over his shoulder, untouched, like it has already accepted its place.

Behind him--

The sound.

SFX: *electric whirring... a loose rattle... something lightly scraping plastic...*

Bobby Dean.

Still on the scooter.

Still following.

Still talking.

Bobby Dean: "--and I'm telling you, that's the thing people don't understand, right? It's not just about climbing the ladder. Anybody can climb a ladder. Well--no, not anybody, I mean, I probably shouldn't, medically speaking, but you know what I mean--"

Dane keeps walking.

Does not acknowledge him.

Does not slow down.

Bobby adjusts the speed knob.

The scooter responds with a noise that suggests it resents being asked.

SFX: *WHRRRR--clunk.*

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Bobby Dean: "--it's about knowing when to climb the ladder. That's timing. That's instincts. That's family--"

Dane turns a corner.

And nearly collides with Scott Stevens.

Both men stop.

Dane doesn't move back.

Stevens doesn't move forward.

There is a moment where neither man speaks, and the air tightens just enough for everyone in the hallway to suddenly find something else to do.

Stevens adjusts his cuffs.

Scott Stevens: "Eric."

Dane tilts his head slightly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Scott."

Stevens' eyes drift to the championship.

He lets that sit there for a second longer than necessary.

Scott Stevens: "Still carrying that."

Dane shifts it on his shoulder.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I haven't misplaced it yet."

A beat.

Stevens' jaw tightens.

Scott Stevens: "You know exactly what I mean."

Dane doesn't respond.

Behind them--

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SFX: *whirr... squeak... HONK.*

Bobby rolls into frame and stops just behind Dane, peeking around him like a child trying to see past an adult at a parade.

Bobby Dean: "Hey--Scott!"

Stevens blinks.

That was not part of his plan.

Before he can respond--

Clapping.

Slow.

Measured.

Deliberate.

All three turn.

Maxx Mayhem leans against a stack of production crates like he's been there the entire time and simply chose to exist now.

Clap.

Clap.

Clap.

Maxx Mayhem: "That was good."

He nods toward Dane.

Maxx Mayhem: "Victorious."

A small smile.

Not friendly.

Maxx Mayhem: "That was very good."

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Dane says nothing.

Stevens looks irritated.

Bobby smiles like someone just complimented his cooking.

Maxx pushes off the crates and takes a few slow steps forward.

Maxx Mayhem: "You saw it before anyone else did."

A glance at the championship.

Maxx Mayhem: "That's rare."

Beat.

Maxx Mayhem: "Most people don't see anything until it's already gone."

He looks back at Dane.

Maxx Mayhem: "You didn't wait."

A pause.

Maxx shrugs.

Maxx Mayhem: "Now everybody else gets to catch up."

Another beat.

Just long enough to make the hallway feel smaller.

Maxx smiles.

Then just... walks past them.

No confrontation.

No escalation.

Just gone.

The sound of his boots fades down the corridor.

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Silence hangs for a moment.

Bobby leans forward slightly.

Bobby Dean: "He wants it."

Dane doesn't look at him.

Bobby nods to himself.

Bobby Dean: "Yeah. He *wants* it."

A bigger nod.

Bobby Dean: "Then let him have a shot."

The hallway freezes.

Stevens' head snaps toward Bobby.

Dane turns.

Slowly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "...What?"

Bobby gestures, excited, like he just solved a problem nobody else could see.

Bobby Dean: "Yeah! That's what you do! He wants it, you got it, boom--title match!"

He points down the hallway where Maxx disappeared.

Bobby Dean: "He can try and take it just like you did!"

Stevens steps in immediately.

Too fast.

Like he was waiting for anything that sounded like this.

Scott Stevens: "You know what--"

Dane doesn't take his eyes off Bobby.

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Scott Stevens: "I like that."

Now Dane looks at Stevens.

Flat.

Immediate.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No."

Stevens doesn't hesitate.

Scott Stevens: "Maxx Mayhem."

A step closer.

Scott Stevens: "Tonight. Main Event!"

The word hangs there.

Heavy.

Dane studies him.

Not angry.

Not rattled.

Thinking.

Stevens gestures toward the championship.

Scott Stevens: "You wanted to make it matter."

A beat.

Scott Stevens: "Make it matter tonight."

Dane exhales slowly through his nose.

There's a flicker--just for a second--that suggests he doesn't like how quickly this turned.

Then it's gone.

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

Stevens nods once.

Done.

Dane raises a hand slightly.

Not loud.

But enough.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I pick the stipulation."

Stevens pauses.

Considers.

Then--

Scott Stevens: "Alright."

Dane gives a small nod.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I'll let you know."

He turns.

Starts walking.

Conversation over.

Behind him--

SFX: *WHRRR--clunk--HONK.*

Bobby scrambles to follow.

Bobby Dean: "Yeah! That's it! That's what I'm talking about!"

He turns the scooter too sharply, corrects it, then speeds up just enough to be a problem.

Bobby Dean: "Big match! Big night! Family business!"

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Dane doesn't look back.

Stevens watches them go.

Then glances down the hallway where Maxx disappeared.

Something about this has gotten away from him.

The camera lingers for just a second longer--

Then cuts away.

Emily Hightower vs. Tyger II

The broadcast returns from the opening match replay with one final shot of Bianca Page and Ace Andrews heading through the curtain, Bianca still wearing that satisfied, untouchable expression after putting Shannon Ray away in the center of the ring.

Back live inside Gimnasio Olimpico, the Mexico City crowd is still buzzing.

Not just from the match.

From the tone of the night.

World Tour: Mexico '26 has already delivered arrogance, spectacle, and a cold statement from Bianca Page. Now the energy inside the building begins to shift again as the ring crew clears the area and the referee assigned to the next contest steps through the ropes.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page with a decisive victory to open our in-ring action tonight, and whether anyone in this building wants to admit it or not, she looked impressive."

Mark Bravo: "That is the annoying part, John. Bianca Page is arrogant, condescending, and she might actually be exactly as good as she keeps telling everybody she is."

John Phillips: "Shannon Ray had moments in that match, especially early, but once Bianca Page decided she was done letting the match breathe, she closed the door."

Mark Bravo: "And Ace Andrews looked like a man watching a stock go up. That should concern people."

The camera cuts to a wide shot of the ring as the crowd continues making noise, signs waving, flags visible in the stands, the bright colors of Mexico City filling every corner of the arena.

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John Phillips: "We move now to our second match of the evening, and this one is fascinating for a completely different reason. Intergender singles action. Emily Hightower goes one-on-one with Tyger II."

Mark Bravo: "That is a style clash, a personality clash, and maybe even a philosophy clash. Emily Hightower does not step backward from anybody. Tyger II practically treats the ring like sacred ground."

John Phillips: "And for Tyger II, every match carries the weight of legacy."

Mark Bravo: "That's a heavy thing to carry, John. Some people get crushed by legacy. Tyger II walks with it like armor."

The lights begin to fall.

Slowly at first.

Then all at once.

The noise inside Gimnasio Olimpico drops into a rumbling anticipation as the stage is swallowed in darkness.

For one long second, there is nothing.

Then--

SFX: "THOOM."

A single taiko drum echoes through the arena.

The crowd reacts immediately.

SFX: "THOOM."

A second drumbeat lands, deeper than the first, vibrating beneath the floor as cold blue light begins to creep across the stage.

Low mist rolls out from the entranceway, crawling along the ramp like fog over stone.

A haunting flute melody rises through the speakers, thin and ancient, curling around the heavy drums as the first notes of "Claw of the Yokai" begin to take shape.

John Phillips: "Listen to this building."

Mark Bravo: "You can feel the atmosphere change before he even steps out."

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The mist thickens.

The blue light sharpens.

Then a silhouette appears at the top of the stage.

Still.

Motionless.

Centered.

The camera pushes in slowly as the figure stands in the haze, head lowered, shoulders squared, unmoving beneath the sound of drums and flute.

Then the lights rise just enough for the yellow tiger mask to catch the glow.

Tyger II is here.

The crowd rises with him.

John Phillips: "Kaito Watanabe. Tyger II. The son of the legendary Tatsumi 'Tyger' Tanaka, carrying one of the most respected masks and names in wrestling into a new generation."

Mark Bravo: "And he doesn't carry it like a costume. That's the thing. He doesn't come out here pretending to be his father. He comes out here like the next spirit wearing the mask."

Tyger II slowly lifts his head.

The mask, modern and fierce, glows beneath the cold blue light. There is something supernatural in the presentation, but not theatrical in the usual sense. He does not play to the crowd for ego. He does not soak in cheers like they belong to him.

He simply stands there.

Present.

Focused.

As if the match has already begun somewhere inside his mind.

John Phillips: "Tyger II is a former WrestleZone Champion, and while that reign was brief, it proved something important. This is not a man living off a family name. He has already shown he can win gold in

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UTA."

Mark Bravo: "And he has done it against serious competition. The kid has taken his lumps, too. He does not always win, but he makes everybody earn every inch against him."

Tyger II lowers into a ceremonial crouch at the top of the stage.

One hand touches the steel beneath him.

The flute lingers.

The drumbeat rolls again.

For a moment, the entire entrance feels less like an arrival and more like a ritual.

John Phillips: "That ceremonial crouch, that moment of respect before battle. Everything Tyger II does has meaning."

Mark Bravo: "He treats this like sacred ground, and I respect that. But tonight he's facing Emily Hightower, and Emily might not care how sacred the ground is once she starts swinging."

Tyger II rises.

Slowly.

Deliberately.

Then he begins his walk toward the ring.

Every step is measured. His arms remain loose at his sides. His shoulders stay relaxed. His eyes never leave the ring ahead. Fans reach out from behind the barricade, some shouting his name, some bowing their heads slightly as he passes, others holding up phones to capture the entrance.

Tyger II does not ignore them.

But he does not break focus either.

John Phillips: "There is a quiet connection between Tyger II and the audience. He is not out here begging for reaction. He earns it through presence."

Mark Bravo: "That's rare. A lot of people come out here trying to convince you they're special. Tyger II comes out here like he already knows what he is, and he leaves it up to you to understand it."

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The camera cuts to the ring, then back to the ramp.

Tyger II continues forward through the mist, blue light trailing across the contours of the mask. The design feels like a bridge between generations: the yellow tiger legacy of his father, Tatsumi Tanaka, sharpened into something more modern, more mythic, more dangerous.

John Phillips: "His father, Tatsumi 'Tyger' Tanaka, became a cult icon in Japan and Mexico, blending flash, tradition, and fierce junior heavyweight spirit. And now here is Tyger II, carrying that lineage into Mexico City on the first stop of the UTA World Tour."

Mark Bravo: "That matters too, John. This is Mexico. This is a place that understands masks, legacy, fighting spirit, and family names that become bigger than one person."

John Phillips: "Absolutely. Tyger II walking into this building tonight is not just another entrance. There is history in this presentation."

Tyger II reaches the bottom of the ramp and stops at ringside.

He looks up at the ring.

The crowd swells again as the drums continue beneath the flute.

He lowers his head slightly, not in submission, but in respect.

Then he climbs the steel steps.

Mark Bravo: "Now watch this. Every time. No rush. No wasted movement."

Tyger II pauses on the apron.

He wipes his boots carefully before entering, treating the act like a boundary crossed between the world outside and the battle space inside.

John Phillips: "Respect for the ring. Respect for the fight. That is who Tyger II is."

Mark Bravo: "And he's going to need all of that focus tonight, because Emily Hightower is not coming out here to participate in a ceremony. She is coming out here to hit him in the mouth."

Tyger II steps through the ropes and enters the ring.

Once inside, he walks slowly to the center and turns toward the hard camera.

For the first time, he raises one hand.

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The fingers curl into the Tiger Claw.

The crowd responds with a strong cheer.

Tyger II holds the gesture for one beat.

Then lowers it.

John Phillips: "There is the Tiger Claw, and you can hear the response from Mexico City."

Mark Bravo: "Silent but powerful. That's the whole deal with him."

He moves to his corner and removes his entrance gear with careful precision, handing it off to the ringside attendant without ever appearing disconnected from the moment.

The lights slowly return to a more natural tone, but the blue still lingers faintly around his side of the ring.

Tyger II lowers into a composed stance in the corner.

Calm.

Ferocious beneath the surface.

Waiting.

John Phillips: "Tyger II is in the ring. Intergender singles action is next, and Emily Hightower is about to bring a very different kind of energy through that curtain."

Mark Bravo: "Tyger II is discipline. Emily Hightower is pride, grit, and a right hand that can ruin your evening. This one is going to be interesting fast."

"Claw of the Yokai" fades beneath the noise of the Mexico City crowd as Tyger II remains motionless in his corner, eyes fixed on the entranceway.

Tyger II remains motionless in his corner as "Claw of the Yokai" fades beneath the roar of the Mexico City crowd.

The blue haze from his entrance still lingers faintly near the stage, giving the arena a cold, spiritual atmosphere for a few extra seconds.

Then the mood changes.

Hard.

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The lights warm.

The mist begins to clear.

And the rough-edged opening of "The Outsiders" by Eric Church hits the speakers.

The reaction from Gimnasio Olimpico rises immediately, not polished, not pretty, but loud and alive, matching the grit of the song as headlights suddenly flare at the top of the stage.

John Phillips: "And now here comes Emily Hightower."

Mark Bravo: "Well, we just went from sacred ground to scrap yard in about three seconds."

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower, from West Memphis, Arkansas, one of the toughest competitors in the UTA women's division, and tonight she steps into intergender singles action with Tyger II."

Mark Bravo: "And Emily does not care who you are, what mask you wear, who your daddy was, or what kind of ritual you did on the way to the ring. If she can turn it into a fight, she will."

A beat-up, rugged 1978 Chevy pickup rolls onto the stage, engine growling, body rattling like every mile it has ever survived is still trapped somewhere under the hood.

It is dented.

It is loud.

It looks like it should have died three states ago and simply refused out of spite.

The truck stops near the top of the ramp.

The driver's side door swings open.

Emily Hightower steps out first.

She slams the door shut behind her, cracks her neck once, and takes a casual pull from an energy drink like she is not walking into a match so much as clocking in for a shift that is going to leave someone sore tomorrow.

John Phillips: "That is Emily Hightower in a nutshell. No nonsense. Country strong. Rough around the edges, and proud of every bit of it."

Mark Bravo: "She looks like she changed a tire, punched somebody in a parking lot, and still had time to make the bell."

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Emily starts forward.

Then the passenger doors open behind her.

The Hightower Clan begins to emerge.

David Hightower steps out first, proud, loud, and carrying himself like the whole building should understand the family name before the family even reaches the ring.

Buck Hightower follows, broad and dangerous, a quiet pressure around him that feels less like hype and more like warning. He does not play to the crowd. He does not need to. He simply steps out and looks toward the ring with that Mad Dog stillness that says if the situation turns ugly, he will be ready before anyone else is.

Dakota Hightower comes last, pigtails bouncing, flannel tied just right, boots hitting the stage lightly. There is sweetness in the smile she gives a few fans near the aisle, but her eyes are already moving, already scanning, already checking the floor, the ring, the referee, and Tyger II's corner.

John Phillips: "And Emily is not alone tonight. David Hightower, Buck Hightower, and Dakota Hightower accompanying her to ringside."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but look at the spacing, John."

Emily walks ahead of them.

Not by accident.

There is distance between her and the rest of the Clan.

A clear gap.

A visible boundary.

Emily is not waiting for them. She is not turning to make sure they are with her. She is not presenting them like an army at her back.

She is walking first.

They are following.

And every step of her body language says she would rather they were not.

John Phillips: "You are absolutely right. Emily Hightower is leaving space between herself and her family here."

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Mark Bravo: "That is not a group entrance. That is Emily walking to work while her family refuses to stay in the truck."

David says something from behind her, off-mic, one hand gesturing toward the ring as if giving advice she did not ask for.

Emily does not turn around.

She just lifts one hand slightly, palm back, a silent signal.

Enough.

David keeps talking for half a second longer before Dakota reaches out and touches his arm.

David looks at her.

Dakota gives him a small shake of the head.

Buck says nothing.

He just keeps walking, several paces behind Emily, eyes forward.

John Phillips: "There has been tension around Emily and the Hightower Clan for a while now. She loves her family, there is no questioning that, but she has wanted her fights to be hers."

Mark Bravo: "And tonight, she didn't send them back. That's the interesting part. She let them come. But she is making damn sure everybody understands she is the one leading this walk."

Emily takes another drink from the can and tosses it aside near the barricade without breaking stride.

Her eyes are locked on the ring.

Locked on Tyger II.

Inside the ring, Tyger II watches from his corner in silence, hands resting low, mask turned toward the stage.

He sees the family.

He sees the distance.

He sees Emily.

John Phillips: "Tyger II is going to have to account for more than Emily in this one, even if Emily herself

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does not seem thrilled about that."

Mark Bravo: "That's the problem. Buck is dangerous. Dakota is clever. David is David Hightower. Even if they do nothing, they change the geometry around the ring."

John Phillips: "And Tyger II is a competitor who thrives on precision, space, and timing. Any disruption can matter."

Mark Bravo: "But Emily looks like she is here to put work in. Not to play numbers games. Not to hide behind family. Work."

Emily reaches the lower half of the ramp and finally slows.

She turns her head just enough to look back over her shoulder.

The Clan stops.

All three of them.

David opens his mouth.

Emily points one finger toward him before he can say a word.

Emily Hightower: "I got it."

Short.

Firm.

Not cruel.

But not negotiable either.

David's jaw tightens. Buck glances at him, then back toward Emily. Dakota gives Emily a small nod, understanding the line better than the others.

John Phillips: "That says everything."

Mark Bravo: "It really does. Emily is not rejecting them. She is telling them to stay out of her damn way."

Emily turns back toward the ring and continues down the aisle.

The Clan follows again, still several steps behind.

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David looks annoyed, but proud in spite of himself. Buck stays quiet, shoulders squared, almost like he is willing to let Emily set the pace as long as nobody else tests the family. Dakota remains alert, friendly smile mostly gone now, her eyes doing more talking than her mouth ever needs to.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is the daughter of David Hightower, and you can see so much of that toughness in her. But what separates Emily is that she took the scrap-yard fight and sharpened it with real training, real athletic ability."

Mark Bravo: "That is the scary thing. David Hightower came up fighting because that's what life gave him. Emily learned that from him, then went and added schooling, technique, and just enough high-flying wildness to make no sense whatsoever."

John Phillips: "She can turn a match into a hoss fight, but she can also leave her feet when the opening is there."

Mark Bravo: "A snorting bull with a moonsault, John. That is a terrible thing to prepare for."

Emily reaches ringside and stops at the foot of the steps.

She looks up at Tyger II.

Tyger II looks back.

For a second, the contrast is perfect.

The masked legacy fighter from Osaka, still and ritualistic in the corner.

The scrap-yard daughter from West Memphis, all grit, muscle, and mean intent, standing below him with fists flexing at her sides.

John Phillips: "What a visual. Tyger II and Emily Hightower could not be more different in presentation, but there is a shared toughness there."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, both of them believe in respect, but they speak very different languages. Tyger bows. Emily punches you until you understand."

The Hightower Clan reaches ringside behind her.

David starts toward Emily's side of the ring.

Emily catches the movement immediately.

She turns and points to the floor near the opposite corner.

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Emily Hightower: "Over there."

David stops, incredulous.

David Hightower: "What?"

Emily Hightower: "Over. There."

Buck looks between them.

Dakota moves first, stepping toward the area Emily indicated, not arguing, not making a scene.

Buck follows after a beat.

David lingers just long enough to show he hates being directed, then finally goes with them.

John Phillips: "Emily is literally positioning her family away from her corner."

Mark Bravo: "That is hilarious and kind of important. She wants them present, but she does not want them in her ear."

John Phillips: "She wants accountability. She wants this match to be hers."

Mark Bravo: "And maybe she wants them to see her do the work without grabbing the wheel."

Emily watches until the Clan settles at ringside several feet away from her corner. David folds his arms. Buck stands like a guard dog that has been told to sit but not stay. Dakota leans lightly near the barricade, smile returned, but her eyes never stop moving.

Only then does Emily turn back to the ring.

She climbs the steel steps.

Not slow.

Not theatrical.

She takes them like she has somewhere to be.

On the apron, she pauses for one second and rolls her shoulders.

Then she steps through the ropes.

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The crowd gives her another strong reaction as she enters.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower entering the ring now, and this building is ready for this matchup."

Mark Bravo: "I know I am. This is not just a wrestling match. This is discipline versus dirt-under-the-fingernails violence."

Emily walks into the center of the ring and stops.

Tyger II steps out of his corner by one pace.

The two face each other.

Tyger gives a slight bow.

Respectful.

Measured.

The crowd murmurs appreciatively.

Emily watches him for a second.

Then gives a short nod back.

Not a bow.

Not pageantry.

Just acknowledgment.

Emily Hightower: "Alright then."

She backs toward her corner, cracking her knuckles now, eyes never leaving Tyger II.

At ringside, David Hightower shifts in place like he already wants to shout something.

Dakota looks at him again.

Buck remains silent.

John Phillips: "The Hightower Clan is here, but Emily Hightower has made it very clear: this is her fight."

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Mark Bravo: "And that might be the story to watch. Not whether they can help her. Whether they can stop themselves from trying."

The referee steps between Emily Hightower and Tyger II, motioning both competitors closer for final instructions.

Emily rolls her neck once more.

Tyger II lowers slightly into a ready stance.

Outside the ring, the Hightower Clan watches from a distance Emily herself demanded.

The bell is moments away.

The referee stands between Emily Hightower and Tyger II, giving final instructions as the crowd inside Gimnasio Olimpico keeps buzzing with anticipation.

Emily rolls her neck once.

Tyger II remains still, balanced, calm behind the tiger mask.

At ringside, the rest of the Hightower Clan watches from the distance Emily demanded. David Hightower has his arms folded tight across his chest. Buck Hightower stands with that quiet, junkyard-dog menace, unmoving but ready. Dakota Hightower leans near the barricade, sweet smile faintly in place, eyes sharp enough to cut wire.

John Phillips: "This is an interesting emotional setup here, Mark. Emily Hightower and Tyger II are both fan favorites. There is mutual respect in that ring already."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but respect does not mean soft. Tyger II fights with honor. Emily Hightower fights like somebody owes her money at a gas station. They can respect each other and still beat the hell out of each other."

John Phillips: "And outside the ring, the Hightower Clan may respect Tyger II less than Emily does."

Mark Bravo: "That is putting it kindly. David and Buck especially? They'd probably love it if Emily stopped worrying about clean fights and just started cracking people the Hightower way."

The referee finishes his instructions and steps back.

Tyger II gives Emily a slight bow.

Emily stares at him for a beat, then nods again, more firmly this time.

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Emily Hightower: "Ain't no problem with me."

Tyger II raises his hands into a ready stance.

Emily does the same, though hers looks less like martial discipline and more like someone ready to win a fight behind a bar.

DING DING DING!

The bell rings, and the crowd comes alive.

Neither competitor rushes recklessly.

Tyger II circles left, light on his feet, shoulders relaxed, eyes reading everything. Emily circles opposite him, heavier in her steps, grounded and ready, hands up but loose enough to swing from anywhere.

John Phillips: "And we are underway. Tyger II against Emily Hightower, and this should be a fascinating contrast."

Mark Bravo: "Tyger wants angles. Emily wants contact. That is the whole match in one sentence."

Tyger feints forward with a slight shoulder twitch.

Emily does not bite.

She smirks faintly.

Emily Hightower: "C'mon now."

Tyger gives the smallest nod, then steps in with a quick low kick to the lead thigh.

THUD!

Emily absorbs it, her leg shifting but her body staying planted.

She looks down at the spot where the kick landed, then back at Tyger.

Emily Hightower: "Okay."

Tyger moves again, this time snapping another kick toward the ribs.

Emily catches enough of it on her forearm and fires back with a short right hand that Tyger barely slips under.

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John Phillips: "Tyger II testing the range early, but Emily Hightower almost made him pay for it."

Mark Bravo: "That is the thing with Emily. You can be faster than her, but if she gets one clean touch, suddenly the whole math changes."

Tyger circles out cleanly, then steps back in with a sharper kick to the outside of the thigh.

WHACK!

Emily grits her teeth.

At ringside, David Hightower immediately leans forward.

David Hightower: "Hit him back, girl!"

Emily's eyes flick toward him for half a second.

Just half.

Enough for irritation to flash across her face.

John Phillips: "There's David already trying to coach from the floor."

Mark Bravo: "Coach is a generous word. That was more like yelling advice from a tailgate."

Tyger notices the distraction and does not attack it dishonorably. Instead, he steps back and lets Emily reset.

Emily catches that.

So does the crowd.

John Phillips: "And look at that. Tyger II could have pressed the opening, but he backed off."

Mark Bravo: "That is respect. That is also dangerous, because Emily Hightower might take that as permission to come forward."

Emily turns her attention fully back to Tyger.

Emily Hightower: "Appreciate it."

Then she lunges.

Tyger tries to angle away, but Emily crashes into him with a collar-and-elbow tie-up, forcing him back two

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steps on impact. Tyger drops his hips and pivots, trying to redirect her momentum. Emily digs in, boots gripping the mat, and shoves him backward again.

John Phillips: "There is that Hightower strength!"

Mark Bravo: "Tyger gave her space. Emily used it to hit the gas."

Tyger twists underneath and captures the wrist, rolling into a standing arm wringer. Emily winces as he turns the arm over, but she immediately steps through the pressure and drives a shoulder into his chest, backing him toward the ropes.

The referee calls for a break as Tyger's back touches the cables.

Referee: "Break! Clean break!"

Emily holds for a second.

Tyger keeps his hands visible.

Emily lets go and backs away.

No cheap shot.

No shove.

Just the clean break.

The crowd applauds.

John Phillips: "Clean break from Emily Hightower."

Mark Bravo: "You hear that groan from David? That man wanted a forearm on the break so bad."

The camera catches David indeed looking mildly disappointed, while Dakota mutters something to him without taking her eyes off the ring. Buck remains expressionless, but his jaw tightens like he would not have minded seeing Emily take the opening either.

John Phillips: "The rest of the Hightower Clan comes from a rougher school of thought."

Mark Bravo: "Rougher? John, their family crest is probably a dented trash can lid."

Tyger and Emily reset in the center.

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This time Emily motions for him to come on.

Tyger steps forward, feints low, then snaps a kick toward the ribs again. Emily absorbs it and catches his leg under one arm, drawing a big reaction from the crowd.

John Phillips: "Emily caught him!"

Tyger immediately hops on one foot, hands up, eyes alert.

Emily grins.

Emily Hightower: "Gotcha."

Tyger twists, looking for an enzuigiri.

Emily ducks under it, keeps the leg hooked, and yanks Tyger backward, dumping him hard onto the mat.

Mark Bravo: "That is country problem solving. Catch the leg, throw the man."

Tyger rolls quickly to a knee, but Emily is already moving in. She grabs for a front facelock, trying to keep him grounded. Tyger slips an arm inside, turns his shoulder, and reverses into a waistlock from the side.

Emily elbows backward.

Tyger ducks the first.

The second clips him on the shoulder.

Emily turns through and catches him with a rough forearm across the chest, staggering him back.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower making this physical now."

Mark Bravo: "That is what she needs. Tyger can dance in and out all day if she lets him. She has to make every exchange feel like a collision."

Tyger answers with a quick kick to the calf.

Emily answers with a forearm.

Tyger snaps a kick to the body.

Emily steps through it and shoves him backward with both hands.

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Tyger rolls with the shove and springs off the ropes.

Emily braces.

Tyger comes back fast and leaps for a flying forearm--

Emily catches him across the body.

The crowd gasps.

John Phillips: "Caught by Emily!"

Mark Bravo: "Oh, that is bad airspace to fly through!"

For one second, Emily has Tyger in her arms, but Tyger shifts his weight quickly, sliding down behind her before she can fully convert it into a slam.

He lands on his feet.

Emily turns--

Tyger catches her with a sharp rolling back elbow, a tribute snap of movement that lands clean against the side of the jaw.

Emily staggers back one step.

Then stops.

She looks at Tyger.

Then smiles.

Emily Hightower: "There we go."

John Phillips: "That one landed, but Emily Hightower is almost welcoming the contact."

Mark Bravo: "That's because now it feels like her kind of night."

Emily rushes forward with a heavy clothesline attempt.

Tyger ducks under it, hits the ropes, and comes back with a basement dropkick to Emily's knee.

Emily drops to one knee, and Tyger immediately follows with a quick snap kick to the chest.

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CRACK!

The crowd reacts hard.

Emily rocks backward but does not fall.

Tyger hits the ropes again, looking to build speed.

David Hightower pounds the apron instinctively.

David Hightower: "Grab him!"

Emily shoots David a glare from one knee.

Emily Hightower: "I know!"

That split second costs her.

Tyger rebounds and connects with a running dropkick to the shoulder, knocking Emily flat onto her back.

John Phillips: "Tyger II takes her down!"

Mark Bravo: "And that right there is why Emily wanted distance. Her family means well, but a half-second distraction against Tyger II is a bad investment."

Tyger floats quickly into the first cover of the match.

Referee: "ONE!"

Emily powers out before two, throwing Tyger off with authority.

Tyger rolls smoothly back to his feet.

Emily sits up, jaw set, and wipes at her mouth with the back of her hand.

She looks angry now.

Not at Tyger.

At the situation.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower out quickly, but you can see her frustration building."

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Mark Bravo: "And not because Tyger took her down. She can respect that. She's frustrated because the noise from her own corner is already creeping into the match."

Tyger backs away just enough to let Emily rise, again refusing to swarm her while she is clearly distracted by the family dynamic.

Emily gets to her feet, breathing harder now.

She points toward David without looking away from Tyger.

Emily Hightower: "Stay outta my head."

David throws his hands up, but he does not argue this time.

Buck takes half a step closer to David, not threatening him, just grounding the space.

Dakota keeps watching Tyger, then Emily, then the referee.

John Phillips: "Emily wants this clean. She wants to beat Tyger II the right way."

Mark Bravo: "And that is what separates her from the rest of the Hightower Clan right now. They'd be perfectly happy if she got a little rougher, a little meaner, a little more like them."

John Phillips: "But Emily is not trying to be them."

Mark Bravo: "No. She's trying to prove she can be Hightower and still do this her way."

Emily steps back toward the center of the ring.

Tyger II meets her there.

They pause for one second, face to face.

Tyger gives another small nod.

Emily nods back, then raises her fists.

Emily Hightower: "Alright. Again."

The crowd roars as the two reset, respect intact, but the intensity climbing fast.

The feeling-out process is over.

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Emily Hightower and Tyger II reset in the center of the ring, the crowd in Mexico City rumbling louder now that the first hard exchanges have established exactly what this match is going to be.

Respect is still there.

But so is impact.

And outside the ring, the Hightower Clan can feel the momentum beginning to tilt away from Emily.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower told Tyger II, 'again,' and that is exactly what we're getting. Two competitors who respect each other, but neither one willing to give an inch."

Mark Bravo: "That is the fun part. This ain't hatred. This ain't ego. This is two people trying to find out who can make the other one break first."

Emily steps forward with her fists high, looking to force another collision. Tyger II does not meet her straight on this time. He slides to the outside angle, just a half-step, just enough to make Emily turn her hips before she can throw.

She swings a heavy forearm.

Tyger ducks under it.

He catches the wrist on the way by and twists into a standing arm wringer, then snaps a kick into the back of Emily's thigh.

WHACK!

Emily drops to one knee for just a second.

John Phillips: "Tyger II changing the angle and going right back to that leg."

Mark Bravo: "He figured something out. Emily wants to meet him chest-to-chest. Tyger is saying, 'No, you're going to turn, you're going to chase, and I'm going to pick pieces off you while you do it.'"

Emily pushes back up quickly, but Tyger holds the wrist and drives a second kick into the thigh.

WHACK!

Emily grimaces this time.

On the floor, David Hightower takes a step forward.

World Tour: Mexico '26

David Hightower: "Don't let him chop you down like that!"

Emily hears him, but she keeps her eyes on Tyger.

Tyger twists the arm again and uses the pressure to guide Emily toward the ropes. Emily tries to reverse with raw strength, but Tyger rolls under the arm, keeps the grip, and pulls her down into a quick short-arm scissors on the mat.

John Phillips: "Tyger II grounds her! Excellent transition!"

Mark Bravo: "That was slick. Emily tried to muscle through and Tyger used the motion against her."

Emily kicks her legs and tries to stack Tyger's shoulders, but Tyger shifts his hips, keeping the arm trapped while bending the wrist backward. Emily clenches her teeth, refusing to cry out, but the strain is obvious.

Buck Hightower's posture changes at ringside.

He does not rush forward.

But his shoulders square.

His hands open and close once.

John Phillips: "Now look at Buck Hightower. The family is getting uneasy out there."

Mark Bravo: "They do not like watching Emily get handled like this. Especially not cleanly. That makes it worse for them."

Emily bridges, rotates, and finally rolls her body enough to relieve the pressure. She gets one knee under her and shoves Tyger backward with her free hand, forcing the hold to break.

Tyger rolls back to his feet before Emily can fully stand.

She charges.

Tyger sidesteps again and catches her with a sharp kick to the ribs.

CRACK!

Emily staggers sideways.

Tyger follows with a second kick to the opposite side, then a quick palm strike to the chest that backs her toward the ropes.

World Tour: Mexico '26

John Phillips: "Tyger II starting to string together offense now!"

Mark Bravo: "This is where he gets dangerous. It looks quiet until suddenly you realize he has hit you six times in eight seconds."

Emily swings back with a rough right hand.

Tyger ducks beneath it and springs off the middle rope, twisting back toward her with a springboard armdrag that sends Emily rolling across the canvas.

The crowd pops big.

John Phillips: "Springboard armdrag! Tyger II with that fluid movement!"

Mark Bravo: "That is the wild card against Emily. She can brawl with anybody, but Tyger can change levels and angles faster than she can plant her feet."

Emily rolls through and pops up near the corner, but Tyger is already charging.

She gets her boot up.

Tyger catches it.

Emily tries to shove him away, but Tyger throws the leg aside and snaps a flash kick to the side of her head.

Emily drops into a seated position against the bottom turnbuckle.

John Phillips: "Tyger catches her clean!"

Mark Bravo: "And now the Hightowers are really not liking this."

David Hightower is pacing now.

Buck takes another step along the floor, edging closer to Emily's side before Dakota catches him with a look.

Dakota says something quietly, too low for the cameras to catch, but Buck stops.

He does not relax.

He just stops.

John Phillips: "Dakota Hightower may be the one keeping this from getting messy right now."

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Mark Bravo: "That's the funny thing. She might be the smallest Hightower out there, but she's reading this better than David and Buck. Emily told them to stay back. Dakota understands that line."

Tyger II backs to the opposite corner, not wasting motion, not taunting, simply measuring.

Emily pulls herself up from the seated position, shaking off the kick and blinking hard.

Tyger sprints forward.

Emily rises just in time--

But Tyger leaps, plants a foot on the middle rope beside her, and flips over her shoulder, landing behind her.

Emily turns.

Tyger snaps a superkick toward the jaw.

Emily catches enough of it on the forearm, but the impact still knocks her back into the corner.

John Phillips: "Emily got a piece of that, but not all of it!"

Mark Bravo: "That still rattled her. You can block the bullet and still feel the blast."

Tyger grabs Emily by the wrist and tries to whip her across the ring. Emily reverses with power, sending Tyger instead.

Tyger hits the opposite corner, runs up the turnbuckles, and backflips over the charging Emily as she barrels in.

Emily stops short, turns--

Tyger catches her with a rolling back elbow to the jaw.

This one lands harder than the first.

Emily stumbles out of the corner.

John Phillips: "Rolling back elbow! Tyger II landed that tribute shot clean!"

Mark Bravo: "Emily's still standing, but she is getting tagged up now."

Tyger hits the ropes.

World Tour: Mexico '26

He rebounds fast, leaps, and drives both knees into Emily's chest with a running meteora, knocking her down near the center of the ring.

John Phillips: "Meteora by Tyger II! Cover!"

Tyger hooks the leg.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Emily kicks out with force, but not as easily as before.

The crowd reacts, and the Hightower Clan collectively moves closer without meaning to.

David is the first one the referee notices.

Referee: "Back up! Stay back!"

David throws his hands out in frustration.

David Hightower: "I ain't doin' nothin'!"

Mark Bravo: "That is exactly what people say when they are thinking real hard about doing something."

John Phillips: "The referee is right to keep an eye on them. Tyger II is gaining momentum, and the Hightowers are not comfortable watching Emily fight from underneath."

Tyger II rises first and takes two controlled steps backward, giving Emily enough room to sit up.

Again, he does not swarm dishonorably.

But this time, he does not completely reset either.

He stays near enough to keep pressure.

Emily gets to one knee, breathing harder, one hand at her chest from the meteora.

She looks over at her family.

David is agitated.

Buck is coiled.

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Dakota is calm but tense.

Emily shakes her head once.

Emily Hightower: "Stay there."

David looks like he wants to argue.

Dakota steps in front of him just enough to block the path without making it obvious.

John Phillips: "Emily still insisting she does not want them involved."

Mark Bravo: "But the more Tyger controls this, the harder that gets. Family can watch you fight. It is a whole lot harder watching you lose."

Emily turns back to Tyger and pushes herself upright.

Tyger gives her a small nod, then steps in with another kick to the thigh.

Emily catches it this time.

The crowd pops.

For a moment, it looks like she has found the opening.

But Tyger immediately jumps, twists, and catches Emily with an enzuigiri using the free leg.

CRACK!

Emily drops to one knee again, dazed.

John Phillips: "Enzuigiri! Tyger had the counter ready!"

Mark Bravo: "That is what's driving the Hightowers crazy. Emily keeps finding half-openings, and Tyger keeps turning them into traps."

Tyger pulls Emily into position, hooking her head and arm. He looks briefly toward the corner, then back to Emily, trying to lift her for a suplex variation.

Emily blocks with her leg.

Tyger adjusts and instead snaps her down with a quick neckbreaker across his knee.

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Emily rolls to the mat, clutching the back of her neck.

John Phillips: "Tyger II continuing to adapt."

Mark Bravo: "That is a problem. Emily blocked plan A. Tyger didn't force it. He went straight to plan B."

Tyger covers again, hooking the far leg.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Emily kicks out again.

This time, David slaps the mat from the floor in frustration.

David Hightower: "Get up, Em!"

Emily rolls onto her side, jaw tight.

Tyger rises and steps back, hands low, breathing steady, fully in control of the tempo now.

John Phillips: "Tyger II has taken control of this match, and he has done it cleanly. No cheap shots. No shortcuts. Just movement, precision, and timing."

Mark Bravo: "And that might be the thing that agitates the Hightowers most. They can't even complain about it. He is just beating her to the spot."

Emily slowly pushes herself up again.

The crowd claps with her, trying to pull her back into the fight.

Tyger II waits in a low stance.

Outside, the Hightower Clan watches with growing unease.

David pacing.

Buck tightening.

Dakota calculating.

Emily still refusing to ask for help.

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And Tyger II, calm as ever, preparing the next strike.

Emily Hightower gets one boot underneath her.

Then the other.

Her breathing is heavier now, her jaw set, one hand briefly reaching to the back of her neck after the sharp neckbreaker from Tyger II.

Across from her, Tyger remains low, balanced, and patient.

He does not rush.

He does not celebrate.

He simply waits for the next opening.

John Phillips: "Tyger II has done such a tremendous job controlling the rhythm of this match. Emily Hightower is used to dragging opponents into deep water physically, but right now Tyger is making her chase angles."

Mark Bravo: "And chasing Tyger II is exhausting. He's not just fast. He's making Emily restart every time she thinks she has him lined up."

Emily steps forward, trying to close the distance.

Tyger snaps another kick to the thigh.

WHACK!

Emily absorbs it with a wince and keeps coming.

Tyger fires a second kick, this one toward the ribs.

Emily catches it against her side and powers through with a clubbing forearm that clips Tyger high on the shoulder and jaw.

Tyger staggers one step.

The crowd pops.

John Phillips: "Emily got through with that forearm!"

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Mark Bravo: "That's what she needed. It wasn't pretty, but pretty was never the point."

Emily reaches for Tyger, but he pivots out again, catches her wrist, and turns into another arm wringer.

This time Emily does not try to out-wrestle him.

She drops her weight, grabs his wrist with her free hand, and yanks him straight into her chest before blasting him with a short headbutt.

John Phillips: "Oh! Headbutt from Emily!"

Mark Bravo: "That is pure Hightower problem solving."

Tyger stumbles back, one hand briefly touching the mask near the brow.

Emily shakes out her arm and steps forward, finally getting her kind of contact.

She lands a right hand to the body.

Then another.

Then a short forearm across the chest that forces Tyger toward the ropes.

The Hightower Clan perks up immediately on the outside.

David Hightower: "There ya go! That's it!"

Emily hears him, but this time she does not look back.

She stays on Tyger.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower finally starting to create the kind of fight she wants."

Mark Bravo: "And notice, she did not need to get dirty to do it. She just needed one clean ugly shot."

Emily whips Tyger across the ring.

Tyger rebounds fast.

Emily lowers her shoulder for a back body drop.

Tyger sees it and flips over her back, landing on his feet behind her.

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Emily turns immediately--

Tyger snaps a quick superkick toward the jaw.

Emily catches the leg again.

This time she does not smile.

She yanks him in and crushes him with a short clothesline that turns him sideways before he hits the mat.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower caught him that time!"

Mark Bravo: "And she just planted him. That was a big answer."

Emily drops to one knee, still feeling the damage to her leg, but she crawls into a cover.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Tyger kicks out.

The crowd reacts with a mix of cheers and applause as Emily sits back on her knees, nodding once.

Not frustrated.

Not shocked.

Respectful of the fight.

John Phillips: "Tyger II out at two, but Emily Hightower has finally stopped that sustained run of offense."

Mark Bravo: "And now she has to be careful. This is where the Hightowers want her to keep pouring it on, and that instinct is not wrong. But Emily has to do it her way."

Emily pulls Tyger up by the arm and shoulder, steadying him for a moment before hooking him around the waist.

She lifts.

Tyger blocks with a leg inside hers.

Emily adjusts and powers through, muscling him up anyway for a basic vertical suplex.

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She holds him there for one second.

Two.

Then drops him hard.

John Phillips: "Vertical suplex by Emily Hightower!"

Mark Bravo: "Nothing fancy. Just lift the man and make gravity help."

Tyger arches off the mat, clutching his back.

Emily pushes up to her feet and limps half a step, the earlier leg kicks still lingering.

David notices immediately.

David Hightower: "Quit limpin' and stomp him!"

Emily shoots a quick glare toward the floor.

That little flash of distraction gives Tyger room to roll toward the ropes.

Dakota catches it before anyone else.

Dakota Hightower: "David."

David throws his hands out, annoyed.

David Hightower: "What? I'm helpin'!"

Mark Bravo: "David Hightower's version of helping is yelling exactly the thing that makes Emily look away."

John Phillips: "And against Tyger II, those small distractions matter."

Emily turns back and goes after Tyger near the ropes.

Tyger rises quickly and catches her with a kick to the midsection.

Emily doubles just enough for Tyger to grab the top rope, spring onto the middle, and launch backward with a twisting kick that clips Emily on the side of the head.

Emily drops to one knee again.

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John Phillips: "Tyger II answers! Tremendous rope-assisted counter!"

Mark Bravo: "That's why you can't blink with him. One second he's on the ropes, next second his boot is in your ear."

Tyger does not cover.

He sees Emily kneeling and immediately runs the ropes, picking up speed.

Emily pushes up, trying to meet him--

Tyger leaps and catches her with a flying knee to the chest, sending her backward into the corner.

The crowd rises again as Tyger rolls through the landing and turns toward her.

John Phillips: "Tyger II building momentum again!"

Mark Bravo: "And the Hightowers are about to come out of their skin."

Buck takes a step toward the apron.

The referee spots him immediately.

Referee: "Back up! Now!"

Buck stops, eyes fixed on the official.

He does not say anything.

That somehow makes it worse.

Dakota reaches out and places a hand lightly against Buck's chest.

He looks down at her.

She shakes her head.

Buck steps back.

John Phillips: "Dakota again keeping Buck from getting too close."

Mark Bravo: "That family wants to protect Emily, but Emily does not want protection. That tension is getting louder every minute."

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Tyger turns back to Emily, who is slumped in the corner, breathing hard.

He charges.

Emily explodes out of the corner with a sudden running splash attempt of her own.

Tyger slides underneath it at the last possible second.

Emily hits chest-first into the turnbuckles.

She stumbles backward.

Tyger springs to the middle rope and launches off with a flipping neckbreaker.

John Phillips: "Feral Descent! Feral Descent by Tyger II!"

Emily crashes to the mat, and Tyger crawls quickly into the cover.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Emily gets a shoulder up just before three.

The crowd erupts.

David nearly steps onto the apron before stopping himself.

Buck's fists clench.

Dakota exhales slowly, eyes never leaving Emily.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower survives Feral Descent!"

Mark Bravo: "Barely. And now we are getting dangerously close to the point where somebody on the outside might decide Emily's pride is less important than Emily's safety."

Tyger II sits up, not angry, not frustrated, but aware.

He glances briefly toward the Hightower Clan.

David points at him, barking something that the microphones do not fully catch.

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Tyger does not respond.

He simply rises and turns back to Emily.

John Phillips: "Tyger II is not letting himself be pulled into the outside drama."

Mark Bravo: "That might be his best weapon right now. He knows the family is agitated. He knows they're a factor. But he is staying centered."

Emily slowly rolls onto her stomach and pushes to all fours.

Tyger steps behind her and looks toward the rafters for the briefest second.

A silent acknowledgment.

Then he lowers his hand into the Tiger Claw gesture.

The crowd rises.

John Phillips: "Tyger II may be thinking about ending this."

Mark Bravo: "Emily is in real trouble now."

Tyger reaches down, trying to pull Emily up into position.

Emily suddenly grabs his wrist.

Not strong enough to counter fully.

But enough to stop the setup.

Tyger tries to adjust.

Emily rises just enough to drive her shoulder into his midsection, forcing him backward toward the ropes.

John Phillips: "Emily still has fight left!"

She drives another shoulder in.

Then another.

Tyger's back hits the ropes, and Emily releases cleanly when the referee steps in.

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Referee: "Break! Let him off!"

Emily takes a step back, breathing hard, then points toward the Hightower Clan without turning her head.

Emily Hightower: "Nobody moves."

The command lands.

Even David stops pacing for a moment.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower knows exactly how close her family is to inserting themselves here."

Mark Bravo: "And she just barked at the whole kennel."

Tyger steps off the ropes.

He and Emily meet eyes again.

The respect is still there.

But now both of them are hurt.

Both of them know the next big mistake may decide everything.

Emily wipes sweat from her mouth.

Tyger resets his stance.

The Hightower Clan stays still, but uneasily.

And the crowd comes alive as the match starts to build toward its next collision.

Emily Hightower and Tyger II stand across from one another near the center of the ring, both breathing harder now, both carrying the damage of the match in different ways.

Emily's leg is clearly bothering her from the repeated kicks. Her neck and upper back are still feeling Feral Descent. Tyger II, meanwhile, holds one arm close to his ribs after Emily's shoulder drives and heavy forearms started to add up.

But the bigger damage may be happening outside the ring.

The Hightower Clan is restless.

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David Hightower paces like a man trying to talk himself out of doing something stupid.

Buck Hightower stands too close to the apron, silent and coiled.

Dakota Hightower keeps watching everyone at once, but even she looks more tense now than before.

John Phillips: "You can feel the pressure changing around this match. Tyger II has had stretches of control, Emily Hightower has fought back, but the Hightower Clan is becoming harder and harder to ignore."

Mark Bravo: "They are watching Emily take damage, and that family is not built to watch quietly. They are built to jump a fence and start swinging."

Emily takes a step toward Tyger.

Tyger steps in at the same time.

They meet in the middle with a sharp exchange.

Emily throws a heavy forearm.

Tyger answers with a kick to the thigh.

Emily fires another forearm, catching him higher this time.

Tyger spins and lands a back kick to the ribs.

Emily staggers, but stays upright, shaking her head like she refuses to let him see how much it hurt.

John Phillips: "Back and forth now, and neither competitor backing down."

Mark Bravo: "This is where respect starts getting expensive."

Tyger darts in again, looking for wrist control.

Emily catches him instead with a rough knee to the midsection, then hooks him for a suplex.

Tyger blocks.

Emily tries again.

Tyger slips behind and shoves her toward the ropes.

Emily rebounds--

World Tour: Mexico '26

Tyger leaps for another strike, but Emily catches him awkwardly against her shoulder and turns it into a rough slam that sends both of them crashing to the mat.

John Phillips: "Emily muscled him down! Not clean, not pretty, but effective!"

Mark Bravo: "That is Hightower wrestling. Sometimes the technique is just, 'I got you and gravity exists.'"

Emily rolls over and hooks the leg.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Tyger kicks out.

Emily sits up, frustrated but not surprised. She nods once toward Tyger, acknowledging the kickout, then starts pushing herself to her feet.

On the outside, David Hightower slaps the apron hard.

David Hightower: "Stay on him! Don't give him no room!"

Emily's head snaps toward him.

Emily Hightower: "I said I got it!"

David points into the ring, voice rising.

David Hightower: "Then act like it!"

The crowd reacts sharply.

Emily's expression flashes with hurt before anger covers it.

John Phillips: "Oh, come on. That is the last thing Emily needs to hear right now."

Mark Bravo: "David thinks he is lighting a fire under her. He may be lighting the wrong fuse."

Tyger II starts to rise behind Emily, but he does not attack immediately. He sees the exchange. He sees Emily distracted by her father.

He waits.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Respectfully.

But Buck Hightower does not see that as respect.

He sees Tyger standing behind his sister.

Buck steps forward and plants one hand on the apron.

Buck Hightower: "Back off."

The referee turns immediately.

Referee: "Get down! Get off the apron!"

Buck has not climbed up fully, but he is close enough to draw the official's attention.

Emily turns and sees him there.

Emily Hightower: "Buck, no!"

Buck does not look at the referee.

He looks at Tyger.

Tyger II stands still, hands low, not engaging with Buck, not escalating.

John Phillips: "Buck Hightower getting involved now, and Tyger II is not taking the bait."

Mark Bravo: "That might frustrate Buck even more. He wants an excuse. Tyger is refusing to hand him one."

Dakota Hightower moves quickly to Buck's side and puts a hand on his arm.

Dakota Hightower: "Buck. Not like this."

Buck's jaw works, but he slowly lowers his hand from the apron.

Emily points toward the floor, voice cracking with frustration more than fear.

Emily Hightower: "Please. Don't."

That word lands differently.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Please.

Not an order.

Not a bark.

A plea.

David hears it. Dakota hears it. Buck hears it.

And Tyger II hears it too.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is pleading with her family not to take this away from her."

Mark Bravo: "That is rough, John. She is trying to win a wrestling match and manage a family intervention at the same time."

Emily turns toward David now, stepping closer to the ropes.

Emily Hightower: "I don't need y'all doin' this for me!"

David throws his hands out, frustration boiling over.

David Hightower: "Ain't nobody doin' nothin' for you! We're trying to make sure you don't get embarrassed out here!"

Emily's face hardens.

That one hurt too.

Emily Hightower: "Then trust me."

For a second, David has no answer.

Tyger II, still behind Emily, shifts his stance slightly.

He has waited.

He has given the space.

But this is still a match.

And Emily, standing near the ropes with her back partially turned, has opened herself wide.

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John Phillips: "Emily has completely taken her eyes off Tyger II."

Mark Bravo: "And Tyger has shown respect all night, but respect does not mean refusing to win."

Tyger steps in.

Quick.

Clean.

He hooks Emily around the waist from behind and rolls backward, pulling her into a tight schoolboy pin near the center of the ring.

John Phillips: "Roll-up! Tyger II with the roll-up!"

The crowd explodes.

Referee: "ONE!"

Emily kicks her legs, shocked, trying to shift her weight.

Referee: "TWO!"

David lunges toward the apron instinctively.

Dakota grabs his arm.

Buck steps forward.

The referee's hand comes down--

Emily twists at the last possible moment and kicks out.

Referee: "TWO!"

The official throws two fingers in the air.

The crowd erupts at the near fall.

John Phillips: "Almost three! Tyger II almost caught Emily Hightower right there!"

Mark Bravo: "That was inches, John. Inches! And it happened because Emily had to turn away from the match to beg her own family not to ruin it."

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Emily scrambles to one knee, eyes wide now, breathing hard.

Tyger II rolls backward and rises to his feet, hands up immediately, ready for whatever comes next.

Emily looks at him.

Then looks at the Hightower Clan.

Her face is full of anger now.

But not at Tyger.

Not really.

Emily Hightower: "That's what I'm talkin' about!"

David points toward Tyger, shouting back.

David Hightower: "He took advantage!"

Emily rises, furious.

Emily Hightower: "It's a match!"

The crowd reacts loudly to that.

Tyger II stays where he is, giving Emily the space to turn back into the fight.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower understands what happened. Tyger II did nothing wrong. He took a legal opportunity in the middle of a match."

Mark Bravo: "And Emily knows the opportunity only existed because her family keeps pulling her attention away from where it needs to be."

Dakota says something to David again, more forcefully this time.

David looks ready to explode, but Buck puts a hand on his shoulder now.

For the moment, the Clan backs off.

For the moment.

Emily turns fully back to Tyger II.

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Her chest rises and falls.

Her fists tighten.

Tyger gives the slightest nod, an acknowledgment that this is still between them.

Emily nods back.

But her eyes are different now.

More desperate.

More urgent.

Because she knows how close that was.

John Phillips: "This match nearly ended because of the chaos around Emily Hightower, and now she has to find a way to refocus."

Mark Bravo: "And fast. Because Tyger II already proved he only needs one clean opening."

The two circle again, but the atmosphere has shifted.

The respect remains.

The danger has grown.

And outside the ring, the Hightower Clan is standing on a very thin line between support and sabotage.

Tyger II and Emily Hightower circle once more near the center of the ring, the energy inside Gimnasio Olimpico shifting from admiration to anxiety as the match enters a more dangerous phase.

The respect is still there.

But now it has been complicated by distraction.

By family.

By frustration.

And by the growing sense that one mistake may not just decide the match, but rupture everything around it.

John Phillips: "That near fall changed the temperature of this one. Emily Hightower knows exactly why

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Tyger II almost stole this match, and Tyger knows he cannot afford to hesitate if another opening appears."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and now everybody is mad at the wrong people. Emily is mad at her family. David is mad at Tyger. Buck is mad at the world. Dakota is probably the only person out here making sense."

Emily raises her fists and steps in first this time, clearly wanting to put the focus back where it belongs.

On the fight.

She throws a hard right hand.

Tyger slips outside it and answers with a kick to the body.

Emily grunts, absorbs it, and clubs him across the shoulders with a forearm that drives him down to one knee.

John Phillips: "Emily comes out aggressive!"

Mark Bravo: "Good. She needs to turn the noise off by hitting something."

Tyger rises quickly, but Emily stays on him now, throwing another forearm, then a short knee to the midsection, then a rough clubbing shot across the upper back that sends him stumbling toward the ropes.

The crowd cheers the burst.

John Phillips: "This is better from Emily Hightower. More direct. More forceful."

Mark Bravo: "She's back to being herself. No looking outside. No arguing. Just putting hands on him."

Emily grabs Tyger by the wrist and tries to whip him across the ring.

Tyger reverses.

Emily hits the ropes and rebounds hard.

Tyger lowers for a back body drop--

Emily sees it and drives a kick into his chest instead, halting him in place.

Then she snatches him into a front facelock and snaps him down with a quick DDT.

John Phillips: "DDT by Emily!"

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Mark Bravo: "That was clean. Maybe the cleanest thing she's hit all match."

Emily rolls into the cover.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Tyger kicks out.

Emily exhales sharply through her nose, not wasting time complaining. She gets right back to her feet and pulls Tyger up by the arm, looking to keep him from settling back into his rhythm.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower doing the smart thing here. No arguing with the count. No pause. Stay on him."

Mark Bravo: "Which, if you ask David, is what she should have done two minutes ago."

The camera briefly catches David Hightower at ringside, clearly wanting to say something.

Dakota sees it and points at him.

Dakota Hightower: "Don't."

David scowls but keeps his mouth shut.

For now.

Emily hooks Tyger around the waist and tries to lift him again, this time for a possible side slam. Tyger fights free with a quick elbow, lands on his feet behind her, and shoves her forward.

Emily turns around into a sharp round kick to the ribs.

Then a second one.

Then a snap kick to the chest that rocks her backward.

John Phillips: "Tyger II stopping the momentum swing!"

Mark Bravo: "That's what he does. You think you've got him stalled, and then suddenly he's kicking pieces off you again."

Emily tries to answer with a clothesline.

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Tyger ducks under it and hits the ropes.

He rebounds with a running forearm that catches Emily flush under the jaw, sending her backward another step.

Emily stays up, but her balance is visibly compromised now.

John Phillips: "That one landed clean."

Mark Bravo: "And now Tyger's got room again. That's bad for Emily."

Tyger keeps moving.

He hits the far ropes, comes back, and leaps for a flying knee.

Emily gets an arm up and blocks enough of it to avoid going down, but the impact still knocks her into the ropes on the camera side of the ring.

She catches herself on the top rope, chest heaving.

Tyger lands and turns immediately.

He sees Emily hanging there for half a second and begins to measure his next shot.

John Phillips: "Emily near the ropes now, and Tyger II can feel this opening."

Mark Bravo: "This is where his timing gets scary. He doesn't need a big gap. He just needs a clean line."

Outside the ring, Buck Hightower takes a step closer.

Then another.

Emily is turned partly toward the ring, not seeing him yet.

David sees Buck move and nods like the idea makes perfect sense.

Dakota sees it too, and her expression changes immediately.

Dakota Hightower: "Buck."

Buck does not answer.

His eyes are locked on Tyger II.

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Tyger backs up several steps, building the lane he wants.

Emily is still near the ropes, trying to steady herself.

Buck suddenly climbs onto the apron.

John Phillips: "Buck Hightower is on the apron!"

Mark Bravo: "Oh no. Here we go."

The crowd erupts in noise.

The referee immediately turns toward Buck.

Referee: "Get down! Get off the apron!"

Emily looks up and sees Buck there.

Her face drops in disbelief.

Emily Hightower: "Buck! No! Get down!"

Buck points into the ring toward Tyger.

Buck Hightower: "Watch him!"

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower does not want this!"

Mark Bravo: "Of course she doesn't. But Buck thinks he's protecting her."

Tyger II hears the noise, sees Buck on the apron, and sees Emily turning toward her brother instead of back toward the middle of the ring.

He commits.

Not to Buck.

To Emily.

Tyger bursts forward, sprinting across the ring toward the ropes and launching into a running dropkick aimed at Emily's chest while she is still near the cables.

John Phillips: "Tyger II with the dropkick--!"

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At the last possible instant, Emily twists aside, half because she sees Tyger coming, half because she is still trying to gesture Buck down from the apron.

Tyger's boots miss Emily.

And slam directly into Buck Hightower.

THUD!

Buck is blasted backward off the apron and crashes hard to the floor.

The crowd explodes in a mixture of shock and noise.

John Phillips: "He got Buck! Tyger II got Buck Hightower by accident!"

Mark Bravo: "Buck just got kicked right off the apron! That is exactly what Emily was trying to stop!"

Tyger lands awkwardly and tumbles through the ropes to the apron, catching himself before falling fully outside.

Emily stumbles backward into the ring, stunned.

Then immediately drops to one knee near the ropes, looking out to the floor.

Emily Hightower: "Buck!"

On the outside, Buck rolls onto one side, clutching at his chest and jaw after the unexpected collision.

David Hightower loses his mind instantly.

David Hightower: "What the hell was that?!"

He rushes toward Buck.

Dakota is right there too, dropping beside her brother to check on him.

Dakota Hightower: "Buck? Buck, look at me."

John Phillips: "This is chaos now. Tyger II was aiming for Emily Hightower, she moved, and Buck Hightower took the full impact."

Mark Bravo: "And let's be clear, John, Buck should not have been on the apron. But that does not make this any less ugly."

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The referee leans through the ropes, shouting for the Hightowers to stay back while also checking whether Buck can continue at ringside.

Tyger II has climbed back into the ring now, but he does not charge Emily.

He remains a few steps behind her, clearly aware that what just happened has detonated the ringside situation.

John Phillips: "Tyger II is staying back here, and I think that is wise."

Mark Bravo: "Very wise. Because David Hightower is one heartbeat away from climbing in there himself."

Emily stays near the ropes, torn between the match and the family disaster that just unfolded below her.

She looks back over her shoulder at Tyger.

Tyger does not advance.

Then she looks back down at Buck.

David is still yelling.

David Hightower: "I told you this was gettin' outta hand!"

Emily snaps back at him immediately.

Emily Hightower: "He wasn't supposed to be up there!"

That only enrages David more.

David Hightower: "He was tryin' to help you!"

Emily Hightower: "I didn't ask him to!"

The crowd roars again at that exchange.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is right! This is exactly what she did not want!"

Mark Bravo: "And now everybody's mad, nobody's listening, and Tyger II is still standing in the ring trying to win a match."

Dakota looks up from Buck and points sharply at David.

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Dakota Hightower: "Enough! Just enough!"

That manages to shut David up for a moment.

Buck pushes up to one knee on the floor, still hurting, but conscious.

Emily exhales, relieved he is moving.

She starts to turn back toward the ring--

Then hesitates one second longer.

One second too long.

John Phillips: "Emily has got to get back into this match."

Mark Bravo: "She knows it. But her brother just got booted into next week."

Tyger II, recognizing the opening but also keeping his composure, steps in from behind and reaches for Emily's waist, looking to capitalize before she can fully reset.

Emily feels him and throws an elbow backward instinctively.

Tyger partially blocks it, but it still forces him to give ground.

Emily turns, fury and panic mixing on her face now.

Emily Hightower: "Not like this."

Tyger nods once, almost acknowledging the mess of it all, then raises his hands again.

The match is still alive.

But the clean line it once had is gone.

On the floor, Buck is being helped up by Dakota while David keeps barking in outrage.

In the ring, Emily is furious with her family, furious with the situation, and still trying to fight through it.

And Tyger II, who never asked for any of this outside interference, now has to navigate the fallout of accidentally blasting a Hightower off the apron.

John Phillips: "This match has taken a turn, and now the emotional wreckage may matter just as much as

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the physical damage."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because if Emily was frustrated before, now she's wrestling angry, guilty, distracted, and wounded all at once. That is a dangerous mix."

Emily pulls herself fully away from the ropes and raises her fists again, but the look on her face has changed.

Tyger II steps forward carefully.

The crowd buzzes, sensing that what comes next may decide everything.

Emily Hightower stands near the ropes, chest rising and falling hard, fists clenched at her sides.

Her eyes move from Tyger II...

to Buck Hightower on the floor...

to David Hightower shouting at ringside...

then back to Tyger.

She knows Buck should not have been on the apron.

She knows her family caused the opening.

She knows Tyger did not aim for Buck.

But knowing all of that does not make the sight of her brother getting blasted off the apron any easier to swallow.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is trying to process all of this in real time. She knows her family should not have inserted themselves, but that does not mean she is going to feel nothing when Buck gets knocked to the floor."

Mark Bravo: "That is the thing about family, John. You can be furious with them, you can tell them to stay out of your business, but the second somebody hits one of them? The blood starts talking."

Tyger II steps forward cautiously, hands raised, not looking for a cheap follow-up, not trying to mock what happened. He remains composed, but there is an awareness in his posture now. He sees the change in Emily.

Everybody does.

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The frustration has sharpened into something dangerous.

Emily wipes a hand across her mouth.

Then she charges.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower coming right at Tyger!"

Mark Bravo: "Oh, she is done thinking!"

Tyger tries to meet her with a quick kick to the thigh.

Emily eats it.

Fully.

No dodge.

No retreat.

She steps through the impact and crashes into Tyger with a forearm that sends him stumbling backward.

Tyger resets quickly and fires a kick to the ribs.

Emily absorbs that too, grimacing, but pushing through it like a bull charging through a fence.

She grabs Tyger by the back of the head and hammers him with a second forearm.

Then a third.

Then a fourth, each one rougher than the last.

John Phillips: "Emily is overwhelming him now!"

Mark Bravo: "That dropkick woke up something ugly!"

Tyger tries to cover up, backing toward the corner. Emily follows, not giving him the angles anymore, not letting him reset, not letting him breathe.

She drives a shoulder into his midsection.

Then another.

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Then a third that folds him into the turnbuckles.

The referee steps in close immediately.

Referee: "Emily! Out of the corner! Let him out!"

Emily backs up one step.

Only one.

Then she surges forward again with a clubbing clothesline across Tyger's chest in the corner.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is losing some of that restraint now!"

Mark Bravo: "She is still inside the rules, but she is right on the edge. And listen to David!"

On the floor, David Hightower is no longer pacing in frustration.

He is smiling.

Wide.

Proud.

Almost relieved.

David Hightower: "That's it, baby girl! That's family! He hits one of us, he hits all of us!"

Emily hears it.

Her jaw tightens.

For the first time, she does not tell him to shut up.

She grabs Tyger by the wrist and yanks him out of the corner, then short-arms him into a heavy clothesline that flips him onto his back.

John Phillips: "Big short-arm clothesline from Emily!"

Mark Bravo: "That was nasty. That was Hightower nasty."

Emily drops into a cover, pressing her forearm across Tyger's chest with more force than technique.

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Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Tyger kicks out.

Emily immediately grabs him again, not giving him room to roll away.

John Phillips: "Tyger II gets the shoulder up, but Emily is staying right on him."

Mark Bravo: "This is exactly what David wanted to see. He wanted her rougher. He wanted her meaner. Well, he's getting it now."

Dakota Hightower remains beside Buck, who is back on his feet but still holding his jaw and chest from the dropkick. Dakota looks toward Emily with concern, not because Emily is winning the exchange, but because of how she is winning it.

Buck, meanwhile, watches through clenched teeth, clearly still angry but also visibly satisfied to see Emily turning the match into something uglier.

John Phillips: "There is a difference between fighting harder and fighting angry. Emily is walking that line right now."

Mark Bravo: "And David is standing over there with gasoline."

Emily pulls Tyger up and sends him hard into the ropes.

Tyger rebounds, looking for a quick counter, but Emily rushes forward at the same time and crushes him with a running body block that sends him down hard.

The crowd reacts loudly as Emily roars for the first time in the match, not a celebratory roar but a release of everything boiling in her chest.

David Hightower: "Yeah! That's the Hightower in you!"

Emily turns toward him sharply.

For a second, it looks like she might snap back.

But Tyger starts moving behind her, and she turns back instead, dragging him up by the arm.

John Phillips: "Emily almost took the bait from David again, but she caught herself."

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Mark Bravo: "Barely. She is trying to hold onto herself while the whole family is screaming for the version of her they understand best."

Tyger fires a quick palm strike to Emily's ribs.

Emily answers with a knee to the body.

Tyger fires another strike, this one catching her across the jaw.

Emily stumbles back a half-step.

Tyger tries to create space and hits the ropes.

Emily follows immediately, catching him on the rebound with a running splash that crushes him against the ropes before he can fully launch.

John Phillips: "Hit And Run starting to form there! Emily caught him with that splash!"

Mark Bravo: "She cut the lane off completely. Tyger needs space, and Emily is taking it away with her whole body."

Tyger staggers forward from the ropes, clutching his ribs.

Emily turns, hits the opposite side, and comes back with a big boot that catches Tyger high on the chest and jaw, sending him crashing to the mat.

John Phillips: "Big boot! Emily Hightower just flattened Tyger III!"

Mark Bravo: "There it is! Hit And Run connects in full!"

Emily drops to her knees and hooks both legs this time.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Tyger kicks out just before three.

The crowd explodes.

Emily sits back, breathing hard, eyes wide for just a second before she pounds the mat once with her fist.

John Phillips: "Tyger II stays alive!"

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Mark Bravo: "But Emily almost had him right there. That anger gave her the biggest stretch of this match."

David Hightower claps hard on the floor, nodding with visible pride.

David Hightower: "See? See what happens when you stop bein' nice? That's family! That's blood!"

Emily rises slowly, turning toward David with sweat on her face and anger still in her eyes.

This time, she answers him.

Emily Hightower: "I said I got it!"

David points back at her, still smiling, still egging her on.

David Hightower: "Damn right you do! Now finish him!"

Emily looks back to Tyger, who is rolling toward his side, hurt but still moving.

Her expression tightens again.

There is conflict there.

Not over whether she wants to win.

She does.

Not over whether she is angry Buck got hit.

She is.

But over whether David's voice is pulling her somewhere she does not want to go.

John Phillips: "Emily is dominating this stretch, but you can see the conflict on her face. She is furious. She is protective. But she does not want to become something just because her family approves of it."

Mark Bravo: "That is the whole fight inside the fight, John. Emily can be rough without being reckless. She can be Hightower without letting David steer the wheel. But right now? That wheel is shaking."

Emily reaches down and pulls Tyger up again, this time hooking both arms.

The crowd buzzes as she starts to turn, looking for Burn Out, the tornado double arm DDT.

Tyger senses the danger and drops his weight.

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Emily tries to force it.

Tyger blocks again.

David shouts from the floor.

David Hightower: "Drive him down! He hit Buck!"

That phrase lands.

He hit Buck.

Emily's grip tightens.

Tyger twists suddenly, slipping one arm free and driving a sharp knee into Emily's midsection.

Emily doubles just enough for Tyger to create separation.

John Phillips: "Tyger II escapes the Burn Out attempt!"

Mark Bravo: "And that hesitation from Emily, that extra second of emotion, may have helped him survive it."

Tyger backs away toward the ropes, breathing hard, one hand pressed to his ribs.

Emily stays in the center, fists still clenched, caught between charging again and regaining control of herself.

David is still smiling outside.

Dakota is not.

Buck watches silently, jaw tight, still shaking off the dropkick.

And in the ring, Emily Hightower looks more dangerous than she has all match.

But also less steady.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower has become a force to be reckoned with in this match, but the question now is whether that force is still fully under her control."

Mark Bravo: "And if David Hightower has his way, maybe he doesn't want it under control. Maybe he wants the family dog off the chain."

Tyger II stays near the ropes, one hand pressed to his ribs, mask angled down as he tries to pull air back

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into his body.

Emily Hightower stands several steps away, shoulders rising and falling, fists clenched, the roar of Mexico City circling her like heat.

For a moment, she does not move.

David Hightower's voice still hangs in the air.

He hit Buck.

Across the floor, Buck Hightower is upright now, still feeling the accidental dropkick, jaw tight, eyes locked on Tyger. Dakota Hightower stands beside him, not smiling, not shouting, just watching Emily with a look that says she understands the conflict even if she cannot solve it for her.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower has had this match pulled in every direction. Respect for Tyger II. Anger at her family. Anger for her family. And now she is standing there trying to decide which part of herself finishes this match."

Mark Bravo: "That is a lonely place, John. Especially when your blood is standing ten feet away telling you exactly what they want you to be."

Tyger pushes off the ropes.

He steps forward, still hurt, still composed, still fighting.

Emily sees him coming.

Tyger snaps a kick toward her thigh.

Emily absorbs it.

Another kick, higher this time, catches her ribs.

She winces, but she steps through.

Tyger spins for a back kick--

Emily catches him around the waist before he can fully turn through.

John Phillips: "Emily caught him!"

Tyger immediately throws elbows backward, trying to break free.

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One clips Emily near the cheek.

Another lands near the shoulder.

Emily grits her teeth and lifts.

She drops Tyger with a hard back suplex that folds him across the mat.

Mark Bravo: "That stopped the flurry!"

Tyger rolls toward his side, trying to recover, but Emily is already crawling after him.

Not with grace.

Not with poise.

With work.

With grit.

With dirt-under-the-fingernails urgency.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower knows she has to keep him grounded now. Tyger II is too dangerous with space."

Mark Bravo: "And Emily is done giving him space. You can see it."

Tyger gets to one knee.

Emily clubs him across the upper back.

He stays up.

She clubs him again.

Tyger reaches for her wrist, trying to pull her into a counter, but Emily drives a knee into his ribs and pulls him backward into her body.

One arm snakes under his chin.

The other locks behind his head.

Her hands clasp.

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The crowd reacts as Tyger's eyes widen behind the mask.

John Phillips: "Sleeper hold! Emily Hightower has the sleeper locked in!"

Mark Bravo: "Right in the middle! Tyger's in trouble!"

Tyger reaches immediately for Emily's forearm, trying to create the smallest pocket of air between the pressure and his throat.

Emily drops her weight backward and pulls him down with her, wrapping her legs around his waist from behind to take away his base.

Tyger's boots scrape against the canvas.

He reaches outward.

The ropes are too far.

John Phillips: "Tyger II is trapped. Emily has her body locked around him now, and there is nowhere for him to go."

Mark Bravo: "That is not pretty. That is not fancy. That is just a scrap-yard choke, and it is sinking in fast."

The referee drops beside them, checking Tyger's position.

Referee: "Tyger! Talk to me! Can you continue?"

Tyger does not answer.

He fights instead.

He pries at Emily's arm.

He shifts his hips.

He tries to roll toward one side, looking for an angle, anything, any small mistake that might loosen the hold.

Emily tightens.

The pressure changes.

Her forearm slides deeper beneath the chin.

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Her hands lock harder.

Tyger's movement slows for half a second.

And then the camera cuts to David Hightower.

He is smiling.

Not yelling now.

Not barking instructions.

Smiling.

Proud.

Because this, to him, looks like family.

This looks like blood answering blood.

John Phillips: "Look at David Hightower."

Mark Bravo: "That smile says a lot, John. Maybe too much."

Emily sees him.

She is still behind Tyger, still squeezing, still fighting for the finish, but her eyes lift toward ringside.

David's smile is there waiting for her.

Buck stands beside him, bruised and angry, but watching with approval now.

Dakota is quieter, more conflicted, but even she does not look away.

Emily stares at them.

Her jaw trembles slightly.

Not with weakness.

With the weight of it.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is looking right at her family while she has Tyger II trapped in that sleeper."

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Mark Bravo: "And she knows what they see. She knows what they want to see."

Tyger's hand reaches again.

His fingers stretch toward the mat.

He tries to pull one knee under him, but Emily's legs stay locked around his middle.

She squeezes tighter.

Her eyes do not leave the Hightowers.

The crowd begins to rumble, realizing Tyger is fading.

John Phillips: "Tyger II is fading. He is fading fast."

Mark Bravo: "He's fought like hell, but that hold is in deep."

The referee checks again.

Referee: "Tyger! Stay with me!"

Tyger tries to answer with movement.

His hand lifts.

Then drops halfway.

Emily's grip tightens again.

Her eyes remain locked on David.

David nods slowly.

David Hightower: "That's it."

Emily hears him.

She does not smile.

She does not nod back.

She just keeps squeezing.

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John Phillips: "This is hard to watch, because Emily is winning the match. She has Tyger II beaten here. But the emotional part of this is... complicated."

Mark Bravo: "It is complicated because Tyger didn't cheat her. Tyger didn't disrespect her. But Buck got hit, the family reacted, and now Emily is choking him out while looking at the people who pushed her toward this edge."

Tyger's body slackens.

The referee lifts Tyger's arm.

It drops once.

Referee: "One!"

The crowd noise swells.

Emily's face tightens.

The referee lifts the arm again.

It drops a second time.

Referee: "Two!"

David Hightower's smile widens.

Buck leans forward, eyes intense.

Dakota places one hand near her mouth, watching carefully.

Emily finally looks away from them and down at Tyger.

For the first time, conflict cuts clean across her face.

She can let go.

She can keep going.

The hold is legal.

The match is still active.

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Family is family.

And winning is winning.

John Phillips: "One more check."

The referee lifts Tyger's arm for the third time.

For a heartbeat, it hangs there.

Mexico City holds its breath.

Then it falls.

Referee: "That's it! Call it!"

DING DING DING!

The bell rings.

Emily Hightower keeps the hold for one extra fraction of a second, not out of malice, but because her body has not caught up with the moment.

Then she releases immediately and rolls away from Tyger II.

The referee moves in to check on Tyger as "The Outsiders" begins to play again.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... Emily Hightower!"

The crowd reacts with cheers, applause, and a noticeable layer of uncertainty.

Emily sits on the mat, breathing hard, staring at Tyger as the official checks him. Tyger is limp but stirring, the match taken from him by a hold he could not escape.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower wins by referee stoppage. Tyger II was rendered unable to continue in that sleeper hold."

Mark Bravo: "That is a huge win. A clean hold. A legal finish. But man, John... there is a lot sitting underneath it."

David Hightower climbs onto the apron, thrilled now, applauding hard.

David Hightower: "That's my girl! That's Hightower blood!"

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Buck stands beside the apron, still holding his jaw, but nodding with satisfaction.

Dakota is slower to react. She claps, but her eyes remain on Emily, reading the conflict before anyone else can put words to it.

Emily rises slowly.

The referee tries to raise her hand.

She allows it.

But her eyes are not on the crowd.

They are not even fully on Tyger.

They drift toward her family.

David smiling.

Buck proud.

Dakota quiet.

And Emily, standing between victory and the cost of how she got there.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower came into this match wanting to prove she could do it her way. And technically, she did. Nobody interfered in the finish. Nobody touched Tyger II at the end. She won it herself."

Mark Bravo: "But the family changed the match, John. Buck getting hit changed her. David egging her on changed her. And maybe Emily needed that edge to win... or maybe that edge is exactly what she has been fighting not to become."

Tyger II begins to stir more clearly now, one hand moving toward the mat as the referee speaks to him.

Emily takes a step in his direction.

Then stops.

David calls from the apron.

David Hightower: "Come on, Em! You got him!"

Emily looks at Tyger.

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Then at David.

Then down at her own hands.

Hands that just choked out a competitor she respected.

Hands that won the match.

Hands that proved the Hightower in her is still there, whether she wants to define it or escape it.

John Phillips: "That is not the look of someone fully celebrating."

Mark Bravo: "No. That is the look of somebody who knows family is family... but also knows family can pull things out of you that you are not always ready to face."

Emily finally steps back from Tyger and moves toward the ropes. David reaches through to clap her on the shoulder as she exits, but Emily pauses before accepting it.

Just for a second.

Then she lets him.

David grins wider, proud and loud, while Buck nods beside him. Dakota watches Emily carefully, softer now, maybe concerned, maybe understanding.

The Hightower Clan begins backing away from ringside together.

Emily walks ahead of them again.

But this time, the space between them feels different.

Not distance.

Gravity.

She does not look back at Tyger II until she reaches the bottom of the ramp.

When she does, Tyger is seated now, recovering, one hand to his throat as the referee checks him.

Emily gives the smallest nod.

Respect.

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Regret.

Victory.

All of it at once.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower wins here at World Tour: Mexico '26, but I do not think this is simple for her."

Mark Bravo: "Nothing about the Hightowers is simple. But tonight, Emily won. The family is happy. And whether she likes all of it or not... family is family."

The camera lingers on Emily's conflicted face as she backs up the ramp with the Hightower Clan behind her.

Then it cuts back to Tyger II in the ring, still recovering, still respected, but beaten.

The match is over.

The feeling is not.

Making My Mark

The camera cuts backstage, where Melissa Cartwright stands in front of a UTA-branded interview backdrop, microphone in hand.

Beside her stands "Classy" Bianca Page, still in her wrestling gear after her victory over Shannon Ray earlier tonight. She looks immaculate in the way only Bianca Page can look immaculate after a fight: hair fixed, chin high, smile bright, and confidence somehow even louder than the crowd had been.

Ace Andrews stands at her side in a crisp suit, one hand buttoned near the front of his jacket, wearing the calm, satisfied expression of a man whose investment has already started paying dividends.

Just behind them is Sione Maivia, silent and broad-shouldered, arms folded, the kind of presence that does not need to speak to make the space around him feel smaller.

Melissa Cartwright: "Bianca, congratulations on a big win tonight over Shannon Ray."

Bianca's smile widens immediately.

She flicks her hair over one shoulder, then the other, making sure the camera catches every second of it.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Yes, Melissa. Thank you. Another big win. Another spotlight. Another reminder to

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everyone watching that Bianca Page does not arrive anywhere quietly."

She glances toward Ace Andrews, who gives the smallest approving nod.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Tonight, I did exactly what I said I would do. I walked into Mexico City, I handled Shannon Ray, and I once again showed all of you what I am about."

Melissa Cartwright: "And what exactly are you about?"

Bianca laughs softly, almost offended by the simplicity of the question.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Come on, Melissa. Don't play coy with me."

She takes half a step closer to the microphone.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "I am class. I am excellence. I am the kind of athlete this company should be building around. Quite frankly, I am becoming the standard bearer of UTA whether people are ready to admit it or not."

Melissa Cartwright: "That is a very big statement from someone whose UTA tenure has not been that long."

Bianca's smile does not fade, but it sharpens.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Time is something people bring up when they don't have results."

Ace Andrews smirks.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "It does not matter how long I have been here, Melissa. What matters is what happens when the bell rings. What matters is who leaves people talking. What matters is who looks like a star, who carries themselves like a champion, and who has the nerve to take what everyone else is still politely asking for."

Bianca tilts her head slightly.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "That is me."

Ace Andrews: "And it is not only Bianca."

Melissa shifts the microphone toward Ace.

Ace Andrews: "People keep making the mistake of looking at us as individuals. Bianca Page. Samuel Scythe. Sione Maivia. Myself. They see separate names and think separate ambitions."

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Ace smiles, cool and corporate.

Ace Andrews: "That is incorrect."

Sione remains silent behind them, staring straight ahead.

Ace Andrews: "Platinum Made Society is not here to participate. We are not here to wait in lines built by people beneath us. We are not here to ask permission from champions who are only keeping those titles warm."

Bianca nods, pleased.

Ace Andrews: "You will all see soon enough that Platinum Made Society gets everything we want."

Melissa Cartwright: "Including championship gold?"

Bianca leans back into the microphone before Ace can answer.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Especially championship gold."

She looks directly into the camera now, the smile still there but the sweetness gone.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "So let me make this very clear for every champion in UTA. Every single one of you needs to raise your standards immediately."

She lifts one finger.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Because if you do not, we will expose you."

A second finger.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "We will embarrass you."

A third.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "And then we will take what you have."

Sione finally shifts behind her, just slightly, enough to pull Melissa's attention for half a second.

Bianca notices and smiles wider.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Is that clear enough for you, Melissa?"

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Melissa nods carefully.

Melissa Cartwright: "Very clear."

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Good."

Bianca looks back into the lens.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Great."

Her voice drops slightly.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Because Platinum Made Society is not chasing UTA."

Ace's smile grows.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "UTA is about to start chasing us."

Bianca flicks her hair once more and steps out of frame with Ace Andrews beside her. Sione Maivia lingers one extra second, staring into the camera without expression, before following them down the hall.

Melissa watches them leave, then turns back toward the camera with a measured look.

Melissa Cartwright: "Strong words from Bianca Page and Platinum Made Society."

"El Sol de México"

The camera cuts from a sweeping shot of Gimnasio Olimpico to a tighter angle near the stage.

The crowd is already loud.

Mexico City does not wait for permission to be heard.

Flags wave throughout the lower bowl. Signs bounce in the air. Fans press close to the barricades, already leaning toward the entranceway like they can feel something coming before the lights even change.

The energy feels different here.

Warmer.

Louder.

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Personal.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, we talked about the World Tour kicking off in a major way... and it doesn't get bigger than this."

Mark Bravo: "You bring UTA to Mexico City, you better bring something worth showing them. This crowd will let you know real fast if you don't."

The lights shift.

Not a full blackout.

Just enough for anticipation to ripple through the building, section by section, until the noise tightens into a waiting roar.

Then--

The music hits.

A sharp, rhythmic beat layered with Latin percussion floods the arena, alive and fast, something the crowd does not just hear.

They feel it.

The reaction is immediate.

The crowd pops before she even appears.

And then she is there.

Sol Azteca steps out onto the stage.

Mask on.

Bright.

Alive.

But tonight is not just her usual energy.

This is different.

This is home.

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She pauses at the top of the ramp, letting the moment reach her before she gives anything back. No rush. No forced theatrics. Just Sol Azteca standing still while Mexico City rises around her.

The reaction builds.

CROWD: "¡SOL! ¡SOL! ¡SOL! ¡SOL!"

Mark Bravo: "Okay... yeah. That's not a polite welcome. That's a takeover."

John Phillips: "And if you're wondering, yes. Sol Azteca, making her official debut here in UTA... and doing it in her home country."

Sol adjusts the strap of a small duffel bag slung over her shoulder, then starts down the ramp.

Light on her feet.

Clapping along with the crowd.

Feeding off them.

Giving it right back.

Halfway down, she stops.

She reaches into the bag.

Pulls out a shirt.

Holds it up.

The crowd explodes again.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, she came prepared."

Sol grins beneath the mask, visible in the way her shoulders lift and the way she turns slightly, showing the design off to different sections of the crowd.

Then she tosses it.

Not random.

Targeted.

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Into a section that has been loud all night.

She reaches back in.

Another shirt.

She throws it to the opposite side.

Then another.

And another.

Each one gets a bigger reaction than the last, the crowd fighting over them, laughing, reaching, living in the moment with her.

John Phillips: "This is how you make a first impression. You don't wait for the crowd, you meet them halfway."

Mark Bravo: "She's not meeting them halfway, John. She's jumping right into it."

Sol pulls out the last shirt.

She looks at it for a second.

Then, instead of tossing it immediately, she points to a kid in the front row wearing a mask.

Sol leans over the barricade and hands it to them directly.

The place erupts.

Mark Bravo: "Yeah... that's how you make sure they remember you."

The bag is empty.

She flips it once, showing it to the camera like, that's all I got, then slings it away and slides under the bottom rope into the ring in one smooth motion.

Sol pops up to her feet and takes a few steps forward, turning slowly as she looks out across the arena.

The energy does not dip.

It swells, louder now that she is in their space.

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CROWD: "¡SOL! ¡SOL! ¡SOL!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah... they're not letting this moment go."

John Phillips: "And neither is she."

Sol moves toward the nearest corner, climbing up to the second rope.

She taps her chest once, then points out into the crowd.

Not a pose.

A connection.

She drops down and crosses the ring, climbing the opposite side, repeating it. This time she holds it just a second longer as the crowd roars back at her.

She lands, exhales, and steps into the center of the ring just as a microphone is handed to her.

She takes it.

But she does not speak.

Not yet.

She paces once, slow.

Turns.

Looks out again.

Lets them settle just enough.

Then--

Sol Azteca: "Mexico City..."

The reaction hits instantly.

Loud.

Proud.

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Alive.

Sol nods slightly, then continues.

Sol Azteca: "...sí... cómo extrañaba esto."

The crowd roars again.

Mark Bravo: "Even if you don't understand every word, you feel it."

Sol Azteca: "No hay mejor lugar... para comenzar algo como esto."

She gestures outward, then brings her hand back to her chest.

Sol Azteca: "Esta empresa está a punto de recorrer el mundo. Nuevas ciudades... nuevas luchas... nuevos nombres..."

A beat.

Sol Azteca: "Pero antes de todo eso..."

She taps her chest.

Sol Azteca: "...empieza aquí."

She looks out into the crowd.

Sol Azteca: "Con mi gente."

The arena erupts.

John Phillips: "That one they understood perfectly."

Sol Azteca: "Yo crecí en lugares como este. Ring pequeños. Gente ruidosa. Personas que no esperan permiso para creer en algo."

Sol Azteca: "Y cuando tenía dieciséis años..."

Sol Azteca: "...dejé todo esto."

Sol Azteca: "Dejé mi casa... para ir al otro lado del mundo."

Sol Azteca: "A Japón."

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Sol Azteca: "A entrenar en el dojo de Sendai Girls."

Sol Azteca: "Fui para aprender disciplina... para aprender a luchar... para aprender a sobrevivir."

Sol Azteca: "Pero no importaba qué tan lejos estuviera..."

Sol Azteca: "...ni qué tan duro me exigieran..."

Sol Azteca: "...mi corazón..."

Sol Azteca: "...mi alma..."

Sol Azteca: "...nunca salió de México."

She nods once.

Sol Azteca: "Y esta noche..."

A pause.

Sol Azteca: "...entro a UTA como la primera luchadora enmascarada en su historia."

The reaction swells.

Pride.

Volume.

Identity.

Sol Azteca: "Eso no es solo ser la primera..."

A slight shake of her head.

Sol Azteca: "Eso es una responsabilidad."

She taps her mask.

Sol Azteca: "Esta máscara... este estilo... esta lucha..."

She gestures outward again.

Sol Azteca: "...viene de aquí."

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The crowd surges again.

Mark Bravo: "That gave them chills. I don't care who you are."

Sol Azteca: "La próxima semana..."

She raises one finger.

Sol Azteca: "Turín, Italia."

The response is mixed. Some cheers for the World Tour continuing. Some disappointment that Mexico City will not be the site of her first match.

Sol nods immediately, understanding the feeling before it can grow into anything else.

Sol Azteca: "Ahí es donde entro a este ring por primera vez en UTA."

A pause.

Sol Azteca: "No aquí."

The crowd reacts again.

Sol Azteca: "Yo también quería que fuera aquí."

That grounds it.

The disappointment softens into something warmer, more personal.

Sol Azteca: "Pero cuando vaya a Italia..."

She straightens slightly.

Sol Azteca: "...no voy sola."

A beat.

Sol Azteca: "Llevo el corazón de México conmigo."

The place explodes.

The biggest reaction of the segment crashes across the arena as Sol lowers the microphone and lets the sound wash over her.

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John Phillips: "That is a statement right there."

Sol lets it breathe.

Then shifts.

Sol Azteca: "Así que si no puedo luchar aquí esta noche..."

A small pause.

She looks out, the energy building again.

Sol Azteca: "...entonces celebramos."

The crowd pops instantly.

Sol Azteca: "Porque así es México."

The noise rises again.

Sol Azteca: "Vamos a enseñarle a UTA..."

She turns slightly, gesturing to each side.

Sol Azteca: "...cómo lo hace la Ciudad de México."

The arena explodes.

Loud.

Chaotic.

Alive.

Clapping spreads through sections. Chants overlap. Fans stomp their feet and wave their flags as the building becomes one roaring celebration.

CROWD: "¡SOL! ¡SOL! ¡SOL!"

Mark Bravo: "Okay, this is something special."

Sol stands in the center of it, turning slowly, letting it live.

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Then she lifts the mic again as it settles just enough.

Sol Azteca: "Y la próxima semana..."

A beat.

Sol Azteca: "Ustedes miran."

She points outward.

Sol Azteca: "Miran a su chica..."

A small pause.

Sol Azteca: "...comenzar su camino hacia la cima."

Another pop.

Sol lowers the mic slightly.

One last line.

Sol Azteca: "El sol no se detiene."

Her music hits.

She does not leave immediately.

Instead, Sol moves to the ropes, leaning over and slapping hands with fans at ringside, taking her time, letting the connection linger.

John Phillips: "If this is the beginning of Sol Azteca in UTA, it's already unforgettable."

Mark Bravo: "And next week, the rest of the world finds out what Mexico already knows."

Sol steps out of the ring, heading back up the ramp.

At the top, she turns once to look back at the crowd still chanting for her.

CROWD: "¡SOL! ¡SOL! ¡SOL!"

Sol taps her chest once more, then points to the crowd.

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The music continues.

The chant continues.

Fade out.

Not So Warm Welcome

The camera cuts backstage.

A monitor hangs from a rolling production rack, still showing the final moments of Sol Azteca's in-ring debut segment. The Mexico City crowd can be heard roaring through the feed, their reaction loud enough to bleed through the small speakers and into the hallway around it.

Standing in front of the monitor is Brittany Reid.

The Killer Bee is all bright energy and wide-eyed enthusiasm, dressed in green, black, and white with that unmistakable cheerleader polish. Twin ponytails. Bows. A smile that looks like it could survive anything the wrestling business throws at it and still ask if everyone had fun.

She watches Sol Azteca on the screen with both hands clasped under her chin, bouncing lightly on the balls of her feet.

Brittany Reid: "Omigosh, I totally love her!"

Brittany beams at the monitor, genuinely delighted.

Brittany Reid: "That was like, mega cool! The mask, the crowd, the whole vibe? O-M-G, totally yes!"

She does a tiny excited clap, trying not to make too much noise but absolutely failing to contain herself.

Behind her, footsteps approach.

Measured.

Expensive.

Annoyed before anyone even speaks.

Brittany turns just as "Classy" Bianca Page walks into frame looking every bit as composed and self-satisfied as she did after defeating Shannon Ray and her own previous segment.

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Ace Andrews walks beside her in a crisp suit, face already carrying the look of a man who has discovered a bright color in a room he intended to keep beige.

Samuel Scythe follows behind them.

Silent.

Heavy.

Unreadable.

Brittany's smile stays in place because Brittany Reid has not yet encountered the idea that maybe it should not.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "And who are you supposed to be?"

Brittany blinks once, then smiles even brighter, extending a hand.

Brittany Reid: "Hiya! Brittany Reid--The Killer Bee. I'm new here, but I brought the sparkle and the sting."

Bianca looks at the extended hand.

Then at Brittany.

Then back at the hand.

She does not take it.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Clearly."

Brittany slowly lowers her hand, not offended so much as recalibrating around a level of rudeness she was not expecting this fast.

Brittany Reid: "Okay. Total dick move, but whatever."

She gives a tiny laugh, trying to keep things light.

Brittany Reid: "But seriously, nice to meet you. I saw your match earlier too. You're super kick-ass out there."

Bianca's smile returns.

Not warm.

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Validated.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Yes. I am."

Brittany waits for more.

There is no more.

Brittany Reid: "Right. Cool. Total mega-bitch. Love that."

Ace Andrews looks Brittany up and down now, making no attempt to hide the disgust settling across his face.

Ace Andrews: "Bianca."

Bianca does not look away from Brittany.

Ace Andrews: "Do not engage with this."

Brittany's smile finally falters a little.

Brittany Reid: "This? Um, excuse you, dickweed?"

Ace adjusts one cuff.

Ace Andrews: "Whatever this is."

He gestures vaguely at Brittany's outfit, hair bows, and general sunshine.

Ace Andrews: "We have a match to get to."

He turns toward Samuel Scythe.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel. Come on."

Scythe does not speak.

He simply begins to move past Brittany like she is furniture placed too close to a doorway.

Ace follows, already done with the conversation.

Bianca starts to leave with them, but Brittany's voice stops her.

Brittany Reid: "Whoa, hold up!"

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Bianca pauses.

Ace stops too, visibly irritated.

Brittany steps forward, still smiling, but there is a little more backbone in it now.

Brittany Reid: "I said you were kick-ass. You could at least say thank you. Ever heard of freakin' manners?"

Bianca turns slowly.

Now she looks amused.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "I could."

A beat.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "But I try not to reward obvious observations."

Brittany absorbs that.

Her smile remains, but her eyes sharpen just a touch.

Brittany Reid: "Wow. You are, like, super freakin' committed to the whole snobby rich girl thing."

Bianca's smile fades.

Ace's eyebrows lift slightly, as if Brittany has just said something legally actionable.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Excuse me?"

Brittany Reid: "I mean, it's impressive. The hair flip, the little fake smile, the way you look at people like they're totally gross zombie guts."

Brittany nods, honestly considering it.

Brittany Reid: "It's a lot. But you really do commit to being an asshole."

Bianca steps closer now.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "You are very brave for someone I have never heard of."

Brittany Reid: "Thanks!"

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Bianca narrows her eyes.

Brittany Reid: "Wait, that was a compliment, right?"

Ace sighs sharply.

Ace Andrews: "Bianca, she is baiting you through incompetence. It is not worth your time."

Brittany Reid: "As if! I'm not freakin' incompetent!"

She points at herself proudly.

Brittany Reid: "I'm inexperienced in some areas, maybe, but I'm like, dangerously good at flips."

Bianca gives a small laugh.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Flips."

She says the word like it has been pulled from the bottom of a public pool.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Sweetheart, this is UTA. This is not a cheer competition. This is not a gymnastics recital. This is not your little indie highlight reel where everyone claps because you cartwheeled and smiled."

Brittany's smile dims.

Not gone.

But dimmed.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "You are standing in the same company as women who fight for championships, for money, for power, for legacy. So take the bows out of your hair, stop squealing at monitors, and understand something before you embarrass yourself."

Bianca leans in slightly.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "People like me do not exist to inspire people like you."

Brittany looks down for a second.

Ace smirks, satisfied.

Bianca starts to turn away.

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Brittany Reid: "Good."

Bianca stops.

Brittany looks back up.

The smile is back, but now there is steel under it.

Brittany Reid: "Because I totally wasn't looking for inspiration."

Bianca turns back fully.

Brittany Reid: "I was looking to kick some ass."

The hallway reacts in tiny ways.

A production assistant stops pretending to adjust a cable.

Ace's smirk fades.

Even Samuel Scythe, several steps away, turns his head slightly.

Brittany Reid: "And I get it. I'm new. I'm little. I smile too much. I have rad bows in my hair. A bangin' bod. People underestimate me all the time."

She steps closer to Bianca now.

Brittany Reid: "But I've been underestimated by my older brothers, coaches who thought I was too tiny, opponents who thought I was just some dumb cheerleader, and people who thought I'd cry and quit when things got hard."

A beat.

Brittany Reid: "I totally didn't."

Bianca studies her now, less amused than before.

Brittany Reid: "So if you wanna see if I belong here, let's freakin' find out."

The faintest grin returns to Brittany's face.

Brittany Reid: "Next week."

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Bianca looks at Ace.

Ace immediately shakes his head.

Ace Andrews: "No."

Bianca looks back at Brittany.

Her pride is already making the decision before strategy can catch up.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Next week?"

Brittany Reid: "Unless you're busy doing hair flips and being terrible."

Ace closes his eyes for half a second.

Ace Andrews: "Bianca."

Bianca raises one hand toward him without looking away from Brittany.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Fine."

Brittany's face lights up.

Brittany Reid: "Holy crap, really?!"

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Do not get excited."

Too late.

Brittany is already excited.

Brittany Reid: "I'm totally freakin' excited!"

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Next week, I am going to teach you exactly what happens when perky little rookies step into my spotlight."

Brittany Reid: "And I'm gonna try super hard not to get glitter all over you when I beat you!"

Bianca's expression tightens again.

Ace steps in before she can answer.

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Ace Andrews: "Enough."

He points down the hall.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel. Bianca. We are done here."

Scythe turns away first, walking down the hallway without a word.

Ace follows, still visibly disgusted by the entire exchange.

Bianca lingers one second longer, staring Brittany down.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Enjoy smiling while you can."

Brittany makes an "L" gesture with her hand and presses against her forehead, with her tongue protruding from her mouth.

Brittany Reid: "Later, losers! See you next week!"

Bianca turns and storms after Ace and Scythe.

Brittany watches them go, then slowly looks back at the monitor where Sol Azteca's segment has ended and the broadcast feed has shifted back toward ringside.

For a second, she looks like she might finally process what she just talked herself into.

Then she smiles again.

Brittany Reid: "Okay."

She bounces once on her toes.

Brittany Reid: "That was balls-out terrifying."

A beat.

Brittany Reid: "But so rad."

Brittany gives the monitor one more happy little point.

Brittany Reid: "Still love her."

The camera lingers on Brittany Reid's bright, nervous, fearless smile as the challenge for next week hangs in

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the air.

Then it cuts away.

Samual Scythe vs. Kairo Bey

The camera returns to ringside after the fallout of the UTA Tag Team Championship match, where the Mexico City crowd is still buzzing from Mack and Black surviving El Fantasma's challenge.

The image of Silas Grimm's disappointment lingers for a moment longer in the memory of the broadcast.

Then the arena lights settle.

The ring is cleared.

The referee for the next match steps through the ropes and checks with the timekeeper.

John Phillips: "Mack and Black retain the UTA Tag Team Championships in a hard-fought defense against El Fantasma, but now we turn our attention to a singles match that may tell us a great deal about where three different careers are heading."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and I don't think this is just Kairo Bey versus Samual Scythe. That's the match on paper. But the story around Kairo right now has Eli Creed's fingerprints all over it."

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey has been circling The Creed Method for weeks. At Victorious, we saw him in the room with Eli Creed and Troy Lindz. We saw him watching. Listening. Maybe resisting. Maybe learning."

Mark Bravo: "And tonight, he is not walking out alone. That tells me something."

The lights dim.

Not into darkness.

Into gold.

A soft, warm glow begins to spread from the stage, gentle at first, almost beautiful, almost comforting.

Then the comfort starts to curdle.

The gold becomes too bright.

The shadows around it too deep.

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A low, measured pulse hums through the arena.

No neon yet.

No blue, pink, or white strobes.

No glossy beat.

No immediate burst of Kairo Bey electricity.

Just gold light.

Stillness.

And then Eli Creed steps through the curtain.

John Phillips: "And there he is. Eli Creed leading the way."

Mark Bravo: "That visual says a lot. Not Kairo first. Not Troy first. Eli Creed first. The Method walks behind the message."

Creed stands center stage in a white shirt, sleeves rolled, hands folded loosely in front of him.

He smiles out at the booing Mexico City crowd with the unbearable warmth of a man who believes their hatred is simply a symptom he has not cured yet.

The boos rise.

Creed closes his eyes for one second and breathes them in.

Not like a villain bathing in heat.

Like a preacher accepting a congregation's confession.

John Phillips: "There is something uniquely unsettling about Eli Creed. He does not scream. He does not stomp. He does not rage. He just speaks as if everyone else is too damaged to understand how much he is helping them."

Mark Bravo: "That's what makes him dangerous. He doesn't look like he's forcing people. He makes them think they chose the cage themselves."

Creed turns slightly and extends one arm toward the entrance.

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Behind him, Troy Lindz steps into view.

The United States Championship is with them.

But this is not the old Troy Lindz entrance.

No shimmering curtain of pyros.

No voguing.

No blown kisses.

No demand for the camera to admire every angle.

Troy walks out with braided hair tight, hands taped, posture compact, the United States Championship carried less like jewelry and more like proof.

Their eyes are forward.

Guard relaxed but ready.

Expression cold.

John Phillips: "And there is Troy Lindz, the United States Champion, transformed under Eli Creed's guidance."

Mark Bravo: "Transformed is the word. Troy used to make every entrance feel like a Broadway finale. Now they come out here like a fighter walking into a locked room."

John Phillips: "And that transformation led Troy to the United States Championship at Victorious."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. That is the evidence Eli Creed keeps pointing to. He can say, look what happened when Troy stopped protecting the old noise."

Troy stops a step behind Creed and slightly to his side.

Not beneath him.

Not quite beside him either.

Positioned like the result of the lesson.

Then the stage shifts again.

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A flicker of blue cuts through the gold.

Then pink.

Then white.

For a heartbeat, the familiar neon pulse of Kairo Bey tries to come alive.

But it does not flood the stage the way it used to.

It strains through the gold.

Like electricity trapped behind stained glass.

Then Kairo Bey steps out.

The crowd reacts immediately, but the reaction is complicated.

Cheers from those who still remember The Neon Ace.

Boos from those who see who he is standing with.

Confusion from everyone trying to decide whether this is a man being sharpened or swallowed.

John Phillips: "And here comes Kairo Bey."

Mark Bravo: "Look at him, John. That's not the same entrance we're used to."

Kairo stands behind Eli Creed and Troy Lindz, not buried in their shadow, but clearly changed by their presence.

There is still style in him.

Still rhythm.

Still that effortless athletic ease that has always made Kairo feel like the lights are following him even when they are not.

But the grin is gone.

The easy crowd connection is gone.

He does not point to the hard camera.

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He does not glide forward like a man arriving at his own highlight reel.

He stands still, wrists taped, shoulders loose but controlled, eyes fixed on the ring like he is trying to prove to himself that the noise around him has no power unless he gives it permission.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey has always been pure electricity. Fast, creative, charismatic. The Neon Ace. But lately, Eli Creed has been telling him that talent without direction is chaos. That timing without purpose is not enough."

Mark Bravo: "And the scary thing is, Kairo looks like he heard him. He looks like he may believe some of it."

Eli Creed takes the first step down the ramp.

Troy Lindz follows.

Then Kairo.

The formation is deliberate.

Creed leading.

Troy as the proof of concept.

Kairo as the unfinished work.

The gold light follows them, while thin neon strips pulse across the ramp beneath Kairo's boots, unable to fully take over the presentation.

John Phillips: "You called it earlier. This visual says something. Eli Creed in front. Troy Lindz, the United States Champion, walking with him. Kairo behind them, preparing to face Samuel Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "And that matters, because Scythe is not some easy test. After what he did at Victorious, after that turn, Kairo might need every bit of clarity Creed claims to offer."

John Phillips: "Or Creed is placing Kairo in deeper danger by pulling him further away from who he was."

Mark Bravo: "Maybe. But who he was kept coming up short, right? That is the hook. That is how Eli gets you. He does not start with lies. He starts with the thing you are already afraid might be true."

Halfway down the ramp, Creed stops.

Troy stops immediately.

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Kairo takes one more step before he catches himself.

That small detail does not escape the camera.

It does not escape Eli either.

Creed turns his head slightly, not fully looking back.

Kairo lowers his eyes for half a second, then stills.

John Phillips: "Did you see that? Kairo almost walked past the pause."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. He's still adjusting to the rhythm. Troy moves with Eli now. Kairo is still learning the count."

Eli lifts a microphone that had been resting in his hand the whole time.

The music drops underneath him, not gone, just low enough that his calm voice can cut through.

Eli Creed: "Mexico City..."

The boos pour down immediately.

Creed smiles softly.

Eli Creed: "I know."

He nods with infuriating patience.

Eli Creed: "Growth is uncomfortable to witness when you have spent your entire life mistaking noise for meaning."

The boos sharpen.

Kairo's jaw tightens slightly behind him.

Troy remains still.

Eli Creed: "But tonight is not for you."

Creed turns slightly, finally gesturing back toward Kairo.

Eli Creed: "Tonight is for him."

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The crowd reacts with another mixed wave.

Eli Creed: "Kairo Bey has spent too long flickering."

Eli Creed: "Too long chasing rhythm without understanding purpose."

Eli Creed: "Too long being almost."

Kairo looks out at the crowd now, and the words visibly land.

He does not smile.

He does not argue.

He listens.

Eli Creed: "Samual Scythe believes he revealed something at Victorious."

Eli Creed: "He believes betrayal is strength."

Eli Creed: "He believes shock is transformation."

Creed's smile fades.

Eli Creed: "He is mistaken."

Troy slowly turns their head toward Kairo, as if watching to see whether the lesson is being absorbed.

Eli Creed: "Transformation is not what happens when you hurt someone else."

Eli Creed: "Transformation is what happens when you stop protecting the parts of yourself that keep failing."

Creed lowers the microphone slightly and looks back at Kairo.

Not commanding.

Inviting.

Which somehow feels worse.

Eli Creed: "Walk."

Kairo holds his stare for a second.

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Then he steps forward.

This time, Kairo walks beside Troy.

Still behind Creed.

But no longer trailing quite as far.

John Phillips: "Eli Creed is using this entrance as a sermon, and Kairo Bey is the subject."

Mark Bravo: "And maybe the student. That is the uncomfortable part."

The trio resumes the walk.

Troy Lindz moves with measured discipline, United States Championship catching the gold light with each step. The old flamboyance is still somewhere in the DNA, but compressed now into control, sharpness, violence waiting behind stillness.

Kairo, beside them now, moves differently than before.

Less dancing rhythm.

More measured footwork.

But every so often, the old Neon Ace flashes through.

A slight roll of the shoulders.

A light step into the beat.

A glance toward the crowd that almost becomes a grin before he swallows it down.

John Phillips: "There is still Kairo in there. You can see it. The rhythm, the charisma, the electricity. It has not disappeared."

Mark Bravo: "No, but Creed is teaching him to cage it. The question is whether Kairo controls that cage or whether Eli does."

They reach ringside.

Eli stops first at the bottom of the ramp and looks into the ring.

Troy stands to his right, championship held at their side.

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Kairo stands to his left, eyes scanning the ropes, the corners, the canvas.

Not soaking in the moment.

Studying it.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey has all the talent in the world. Springboards, cutters, sudden kicks, unmatched timing. But tonight, he walks into this match with Eli Creed and Troy Lindz at ringside, and that changes the feeling around everything."

Mark Bravo: "And against Samuel Scythe, who turned at Victorious and showed the world a colder side of himself, maybe Kairo thinks he needs that change."

Eli steps toward the steel steps, but does not climb them.

Instead, he turns to Kairo.

Kairo looks at him.

Creed speaks without the microphone now, low enough that the ringside camera barely catches it.

Eli Creed: "Do not perform."

Kairo's eyes flick toward the crowd.

Eli Creed: "Correct."

Kairo breathes in slowly.

Then he nods.

Kairo Bey: "Break. Bend. Build."

Troy Lindz's expression does not change, but their eyes sharpen with approval.

John Phillips: "Kairo just repeated the Creed Method."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. That is not speculation anymore, John. He may not be as far down the road as Troy, but he is on it."

Kairo climbs the steps.

He pauses on the apron.

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For a second, the neon lighting finally flickers brighter around him.

Blue.

Pink.

White.

The crowd reacts, remembering the old entrance beat, expecting him to spring in, pop up, salute, and let the building catch fire with him.

Kairo's hand twitches toward the top rope.

He almost does it.

Almost.

Then Eli Creed's voice rises from below.

Eli Creed: "Purpose."

Kairo closes his eyes briefly.

When he opens them, the grin is gone again.

He steps through the ropes normally.

No springboard.

No salute.

No pop to the second rope.

Just Kairo Bey entering the ring with contained electricity humming under his skin.

John Phillips: "That may be the most telling moment of the entire entrance. Kairo almost gave this crowd what he usually gives them."

Mark Bravo: "And then he stopped himself."

John Phillips: "Or Eli stopped him."

Mark Bravo: "Same question, different answer depending on who you ask."

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Kairo walks to the center of the ring.

He does not throw his arms out.

He does not call for the lights.

Instead, he turns toward the hard camera, shoulders squared, eyes focused, and taps two fingers against his temple.

Then he lowers his hand.

At ringside, Eli Creed stands with hands folded, calm and satisfied.

Troy Lindz remains beside him, the United States Championship visible, their stance compact and disciplined.

John Phillips: "The Creed Method has already transformed Troy Lindz into the United States Champion. Tonight, we may find out what it is doing to Kairo Bey."

Mark Bravo: "And Samuel Scythe better not assume this is the same Kairo he scouted before. The old Kairo was fast. This one might be focused."

Kairo backs into his corner.

He bounces once.

Small.

Contained.

Then stills.

Eli Creed looks up at him from the floor and nods once.

Troy Lindz watches with arms folded, gold resting against their shoulder now, the finished product observing the work in progress.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey is in the ring. Eli Creed and Troy Lindz are at ringside. The Creed Method is here in full view."

Mark Bravo: "And now we wait for Samuel Scythe, a man who shocked UTA at Victorious and might be walking into a very different fight than he expected."

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The gold light fades slightly, leaving thin neon edges around Kairo's corner.

He stares toward the entranceway.

No smile.

No salute.

No spotlight chase.

Just purpose.

Kairo Bey waits in the ring, standing in his corner with a controlled stillness that still looks unfamiliar on him.

The thin neon edges around his side of the ring flicker in blue, pink, and white, but they are muted beneath the gold glow Eli Creed brought with him.

At ringside, Eli Creed stands with his hands folded in front of him, calm and satisfied.

Beside him, Troy Lindz watches with the United States Championship resting against their shoulder, expression focused, posture compact, the Creed Method's most successful example standing in full view of the unfinished one.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey is in the ring, accompanied by Eli Creed and Troy Lindz, and that alone changes the entire complexion of this match."

Mark Bravo: "Kairo has always had the electricity, John. What we just saw in that entrance is Eli Creed trying to teach him how to trap that electricity in a bottle and point it at somebody."

John Phillips: "And tonight, that somebody is Samuel Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "Which is not exactly a gentle test."

Kairo's eyes remain fixed on the entranceway.

No grin.

No salute.

No attempt to draw the crowd back to him.

He waits.

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Then the broadcast abruptly cuts to black.

A low static crackle fills the screen.

White text flashes:

VICTORIOUS -- APRIL 18, 2026

The replay begins.

Chris Ross is shown in the ring, furious, dragging Darran Darrington toward his corner. Ross is battered, boiling, and fighting at a disadvantage, but still dangerous enough to make the entire building feel unstable.

Samuel Scythe stands on the apron.

Hand extended.

Ready.

Or so it seemed.

John Phillips: "This is what happened at Victorious. Chris Ross, fighting short-handed, finally looking to tag Samuel Scythe into the match."

Mark Bravo: "And this is where everything changed."

Ross reaches.

Scythe pulls his hand away.

The replay slows as Ross freezes, staring at Scythe in absolute disbelief.

The crowd reaction from Victorious is deafening, boos pouring over the moment as Ross mouths the question everyone was asking.

Chris Ross: "What the hell are you doin'?!"

Scythe gives him nothing.

No explanation.

No rage.

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No remorse.

Just that empty stare.

The replay jumps ahead.

Ace Andrews moving quickly around ringside, suddenly animated, his eyes alive as the trap reveals itself.

Scythe stepping down from the apron.

Ross turning from anger to realization.

First Class realizing the numbers had become even uglier.

Ross alone.

Ross exposed.

Ross left to be swallowed by the consequences of trust misplaced.

John Phillips: "Samuel Scythe left Chris Ross alone. He did not just refuse the tag. He abandoned him."

Mark Bravo: "And Ace Andrews was right there. That's the part that sticks with me. Ace didn't look surprised. Ace looked like a man watching paperwork get signed."

The replay freezes on Scythe walking away from the apron while Chris Ross glares after him.

Then the screen glitches again.

A scythe blade cuts across a dead field.

White letters flash:

REAP WHAT YOU SOW

The lights inside Gimnasio Olimpico go out.

Complete darkness.

For one beat, even the Mexico City crowd seems to hesitate.

Then the opening riff of "Useless Sacrifice" by Death Decline crashes through the arena.

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A single cold spotlight drops onto the stage.

Samuel Scythe stands inside it.

Hood up.

Head lowered.

Shoulders tight.

Motionless.

John Phillips: "And here comes Samuel Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "The Reaper himself. And after Victorious, I don't know if the most frightening thing about him is the destruction or the emptiness."

Scythe does not look at the crowd.

He does not look toward Kairo Bey.

He does not acknowledge Eli Creed.

He simply stands there, framed by the light, like something waiting to be given permission to move.

Then Ace Andrews steps into view behind him.

Immaculate suit.

Measured smile.

Hands relaxed at his sides.

He is polished in a way that makes Scythe seem even more brutal by contrast. Ace does not look like a man accompanying a wrestler. He looks like a billionaire walking beside a weapon he owns the patent to.

John Phillips: "And of course, Ace Andrews is with him."

Mark Bravo: "The Corporate Cutthroat. The man who found Samuel Scythe and decided the world needed a Reaper with management."

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews has spent a long time in this business finding shortcuts, finding leverage, finding ways to turn physical danger into profit. Samuel Scythe may be his most terrifying investment."

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Mark Bravo: "And that investment paid off at Victorious in a very ugly way."

Ace steps half a pace closer to Scythe and says something low, too quiet for the cameras to fully catch.

Scythe does not nod.

Does not respond.

But after the words are spoken, he lifts his head.

The crowd reaction hardens immediately.

Boos.

Whistles.

Unease.

Across the ring, Kairo Bey's eyes narrow.

John Phillips: "Look at Kairo. He watched that replay like the rest of us. He knows what Scythe did to Chris Ross. He knows the kind of man walking down that ramp."

Mark Bravo: "And Eli Creed knows it too. That is why this match fascinates me. Creed talks about transformation. Ace Andrews deals in weaponization. Those are two very different kinds of control standing at ringside tonight."

Scythe begins walking.

Slow.

Heavy.

Deliberate.

Every step down the ramp lands with the kind of weight that makes the entrance feel less like music and more like a countdown.

Ace follows beside and slightly behind him, eyes moving constantly.

The ring.

Kairo.

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Eli.

Troy.

The referee.

The crowd.

He is already taking inventory of the room.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews is already looking at every variable. Eli Creed and Troy Lindz at ringside are not just moral support for Kairo. They are factors."

Mark Bravo: "And Ace hates uncontrolled factors. He wants to know where every piece is before Scythe starts breaking the board."

Halfway down the ramp, Scythe stops.

Ace stops with him.

Scythe slowly turns his head toward Eli Creed at ringside.

Creed does not move.

He simply smiles faintly, hands still folded, the warm gold light from Kairo's entrance still clinging around him.

Two different kinds of menace meet in the space between them.

Creed's calm says he wants to reshape people.

Scythe's silence says he wants to break them.

Ace Andrews smiles at Creed.

Creed smiles back.

Neither smile reaches the eyes.

John Phillips: "That is an unsettling exchange between Ace Andrews and Eli Creed."

Mark Bravo: "Two managers, two philosophies, two very scary men pretending they're not measuring each other right now."

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John Phillips: "And between them, Kairo Bey and Samuel Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. One man being built. One man being unleashed."

Scythe resumes his walk.

He reaches ringside and stops at the bottom of the steel steps.

Kairo steps forward inside the ring, not fully out of his corner, but enough to show he is not shrinking from the moment.

Eli Creed turns slightly toward him.

Not speaking.

Just watching.

Troy Lindz remains beside Eli, eyes fixed on Scythe, the United States Championship gleaming against their shoulder.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey has faced tough opponents before, but this may be the first time we are seeing him walk into a match as part of The Creed Method."

Mark Bravo: "And Samuel Scythe is a hell of a test for whether that method actually holds up when the other guy just wants to cave your chest in."

Scythe climbs the steps.

One heavy step.

Then another.

He reaches the apron and pauses there.

Ace remains on the floor below, straightening one cuff before looking back toward Eli Creed.

Creed watches him with that same soft, terrible patience.

Scythe steps through the ropes.

The arena lights remain cold around him, draining the color from the canvas as he enters.

Once inside, he walks to the center of the ring and slowly reaches up with both hands.

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He pulls the hood back.

His face is blank.

Not angry.

Not smug.

Blank.

That somehow feels worse.

Then he turns toward Kairo Bey.

Slowly, deliberately, Scythe drags his thumb across his throat.

John Phillips: "A chilling message from Samuel Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "And Kairo did not blink."

Kairo does not move from his corner.

But his hands tighten.

For half a second, the old Neon Ace might have answered with a grin, a gesture, something flashy to take the moment back.

Instead, he breathes in slowly.

He taps two fingers to his temple again.

Purpose.

At ringside, Eli Creed nods faintly.

John Phillips: "Kairo is trying to stay composed. You can see him fighting that instinct to respond like he used to."

Mark Bravo: "That is the Creed influence. Don't perform. Correct. That's what Eli told him."

Scythe backs into his corner without taking his eyes off Kairo.

Ace Andrews takes position on the floor outside Scythe's side of the ring, hands folded behind his back now,

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every bit the corporate handler watching his asset prepare to destroy.

Across the way, Eli Creed and Troy Lindz remain on Kairo's side, an entirely different kind of pressure surrounding The Neon Ace.

John Phillips: "Look at the four people outside and around this match. Ace Andrews with Samuel Scythe. Eli Creed and Troy Lindz with Kairo Bey. This is not just a singles match. This is a collision of influence."

Mark Bravo: "Ace wants Scythe to wreck the world. Eli wants Kairo to evolve past needing the world's approval. Somewhere in the middle, two wrestlers are about to start throwing hands."

The referee steps between Kairo Bey and Samuel Scythe, motioning both men toward the center.

Kairo steps out first, controlled but alive, neon still flickering beneath the gold restraint.

Scythe steps forward second, all weight and silence, the Reaper moving toward the man Creed believes can be built into something inevitable.

Ace Andrews watches with a small, satisfied smile.

Eli Creed watches like a teacher waiting for the lesson to begin.

Troy Lindz watches like proof that the lesson can work.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey versus Samuel Scythe is moments away."

Mark Bravo: "The Neon Ace under The Creed Method. The Reaper under Ace Andrews. This one could get ugly fast."

The cold light and the gold light meet across the ring.

Kairo and Scythe stare each other down.

The bell is next.

The referee steps between Kairo Bey and Samuel Scythe, one hand extended toward each man as he gives the final instructions.

Kairo stands loose but contained, the neon still flickering at the edges of his corner, his breathing measured, eyes locked on the larger man across from him.

Samuel Scythe does not bounce.

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Does not roll his shoulders.

Does not test the ropes.

He simply stands there.

Blank.

Heavy.

Waiting to destroy whatever is placed in front of him.

At ringside, Ace Andrews adjusts one cuff and keeps his eyes moving between Kairo, Eli Creed, Troy Lindz, and the official. On the opposite side, Creed remains perfectly still, hands folded, while Troy watches with the United States Championship against their shoulder.

John Phillips: "The referee has given the instructions. Kairo Bey, now under the direct influence of The Creed Method, set to go one-on-one with Samuel Scythe, managed by Ace Andrews."

Mark Bravo: "And look at the people around this ring, John. This match feels like a chessboard where every piece has teeth."

The referee looks to Kairo.

Kairo nods once.

The referee looks to Scythe.

Scythe gives him nothing.

The referee accepts that as close enough and points to the timekeeper.

DING DING DING!

The bell rings.

And before either man moves--

The crowd erupts.

Not a normal reaction.

Not the swell of a match beginning.

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This is sudden.

Sharp.

A wave that starts near the entrance and rolls down over the entire Gimnasio Olimpico like someone just opened a door the whole building was waiting for.

John Phillips: "Wait a minute."

Mark Bravo: "What's going on?"

The camera cuts away from the ring and swings toward the stage.

No music hits.

No lights change.

No titantron package plays.

No smoke.

No pyro.

No grand entrance.

Just Chris Ross.

Walking slowly out from the back.

A folded steel chair hangs from one hand.

He does not storm.

He does not stomp.

He does not curse at the camera.

He does not point toward the ring and threaten to leave bodies behind.

He walks.

Slow.

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Deliberate.

Quiet.

John Phillips: "That's Chris Ross."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, I can see that. What I can't figure out is why he's not trying to sprint down here and tear Samuel Scythe's head off."

John Phillips: "After what happened at Victorious, after Scythe left Ross alone in that match, you would expect Ross to come out here looking for a fight."

Mark Bravo: "That is what's creeping me out. Chris Ross doesn't do quiet. He doesn't do patient. He doesn't just appear."

Inside the ring, Samuel Scythe turns his head toward the stage.

Slowly at first.

Then fully.

His blank expression sharpens into something colder. Not fear. Not panic. Recognition.

Ace Andrews steps forward immediately at ringside, one hand lifting toward the official.

Ace Andrews: "No. No, no, no. Get him out of here. This match has started."

The referee glances toward the stage, then toward Scythe, then toward Ace, unsure what to call because Ross is nowhere near the ring.

Kairo Bey turns too, eyes narrowing as he takes in the sight of Ross at the top of the ramp.

Eli Creed watches from ringside, head tilted slightly, like a man studying a new symptom.

Troy Lindz remains still beside him, but their eyes do not leave Ross.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews is already protesting, but Chris Ross has not come down the ramp. He has not approached the ring. He has not done anything illegal."

Mark Bravo: "That might be the weirdest part. He's doing nothing. Chris Ross doing nothing feels like a threat."

Ross reaches the center of the stage.

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He stops.

The crowd continues roaring, but the sound is beginning to change now.

Excitement gives way to confusion.

Confusion gives way to unease.

Ross looks down at the folded steel chair in his hand.

Then he unfolds it.

The metal legs snap open with a small, cold sound that somehow cuts through the arena noise.

He places it carefully on the top of the stage.

Facing the ring.

John Phillips: "What is he doing?"

Mark Bravo: "I have no idea. And I hate that answer."

Ross takes one step around the chair.

Then he sits.

Quietly.

Deliberately.

No microphone.

No gesture.

No words.

He leans forward slightly, elbows resting on his thighs, hands clasped and hanging between his legs.

His eyes lock on the ring.

On Samuel Scythe.

And he just watches.

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That is all.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross has just set up a chair at the top of the stage, and he is sitting there watching this match."

Mark Bravo: "I don't like this, John. I don't like any of this. Chris Ross is a man who usually comes through the curtain like somebody kicked open a prison door. He is never silent. He is never just... there."

John Phillips: "And maybe that is the message."

Mark Bravo: "If it is, I don't know who it's for. Scythe? Ace? Everybody?"

Ace Andrews is still protesting on the outside, now more visibly irritated.

Ace Andrews: "He has no business here! Do your job!"

The referee leans through the ropes toward Ace.

Referee: "He's on the stage, Ace! He's not at ringside!"

Ace Andrews: "He has a chair!"

Referee: "He's sitting in it!"

That line draws a strange ripple from the crowd, part laugh, part tension, part disbelief.

Ace does not find it funny.

Samuel Scythe remains turned toward the stage, his stare fixed on Ross.

Ross does not move.

Does not blink dramatically.

Does not mouth a threat.

He just sits.

Hands clasped.

Eyes forward.

Watching the man who abandoned him at Victorious.

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John Phillips: "Samuel Scythe is distracted. Maybe only slightly, but he is distracted."

Mark Bravo: "How could he not be? You betray Chris Ross, and two weeks later he shows up with a chair and calmly sits down to watch you? That's not normal. That's scarier than if he ran down here swinging."

Kairo Bey sees it.

So does Eli Creed.

Creed's voice rises from ringside, calm but immediate.

Eli Creed: "Now."

Kairo moves.

No hesitation.

No flourish.

No neon burst.

Just action.

He closes the distance and drives a hard forearm into the back of Samuel Scythe.

John Phillips: "Kairo attacks from behind!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the opening! Ross didn't touch anybody, but he just changed the match!"

Scythe lurches forward one step from the impact, more surprised than hurt. Kairo follows immediately with another forearm across the upper back.

Then a third.

Scythe turns, and Kairo snaps a quick kick into the thigh before Scythe can fully square up.

Another kick lands to the ribs.

Then Kairo steps off-line and cracks him with a sharp forearm to the jaw.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey taking full advantage of the distraction!"

Mark Bravo: "And this is not the old Kairo wasting a beat to make it look pretty. He saw the crack and hit it."

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Ace Andrews slams both hands onto the apron.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel! Focus!"

Scythe staggers toward the ropes, and Kairo keeps pressing, firing a rapid kick into the side, then another into the leg, trying to chop down the larger man before the Reaper can reset.

At the top of the stage, Chris Ross does not react.

He does not smile.

He does not clap.

He does not lean back satisfied.

He just watches.

John Phillips: "Look at Ross. Nothing. No reaction at all."

Mark Bravo: "That is the part that's gonna haunt me. Chris Ross, of all people, is sitting in silence while Samuel Scythe gets jumped off his distraction."

Kairo grabs Scythe by the wrist and tries to whip him across the ring.

Scythe plants his feet.

The power stops the attempt cold.

Kairo immediately changes plans, stepping up and snapping a basement-style kick into the knee.

Scythe drops slightly, and Kairo uses the moment to hit the ropes.

He rebounds fast.

Scythe turns--

Kairo leaps and catches him with a flying forearm that finally knocks Scythe backward into the ropes.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey has Scythe rocked early!"

Mark Bravo: "And it started because Samuel Scythe took his eyes off the man in front of him. He looked at the man he left behind."

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Kairo lands on his feet and backs toward the center, hands raised, breathing measured.

For a second, the old Kairo might have thrown a grin toward the crowd.

He does not.

Instead, he looks toward Eli Creed.

Creed gives him the smallest nod.

Troy Lindz watches with quiet approval.

On the opposite side, Ace Andrews looks furious, but he keeps it contained, jaw tight, eyes darting between Scythe and the silent figure sitting at the top of the stage.

John Phillips: "This is already unlike anything we expected. Chris Ross has not interfered. He has not said a word. But his presence has altered everything."

Mark Bravo: "Because it is wrong. That's what it is. It's wrong to see Chris Ross this still. It's wrong to see him just sitting there. And Samuel Scythe knows it too."

Scythe pushes off the ropes and turns back toward Kairo, his face no longer blank in quite the same way.

There is a new edge there.

Cold irritation.

Maybe even uncertainty.

Kairo adjusts his stance.

Scythe glances once more toward the stage.

Ross remains seated.

Hands clasped.

Eyes locked down the ramp.

Watching.

John Phillips: "Samuel Scythe had better keep his eyes on Kairo Bey, because if he keeps looking toward Chris Ross, this match could get away from him quickly."

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Mark Bravo: "And if he stops looking at Ross entirely? I don't know. Somehow that feels dangerous too."

The camera pulls wide.

Kairo Bey in the ring, focused and ready.

Samuel Scythe near the ropes, angry and unsettled.

Ace Andrews protesting from the floor.

Eli Creed and Troy Lindz watching their student work.

And Chris Ross sitting alone at the top of the stage, silent as a threat that has not chosen its moment yet.

Chris Ross does not move.

Not when Kairo Bey lands the flying forearm.

Not when Samuel Scythe backs into the ropes.

Not when Ace Andrews turns halfway up the ramp and shouts something toward him from ringside.

Ross does not answer.

He does not smile.

He does not threaten.

He does not even shift in the chair.

He just watches.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross has not said a word since he came out here."

Mark Bravo: "And I know we keep saying it, but that is not Chris Ross. That man built a career on violence, profanity, and making sure everybody in the room knows exactly how mad he is. This? This is different."

In the ring, Samuel Scythe pushes off the ropes and turns fully back toward Kairo Bey.

The Reaper's jaw tightens.

The distraction is there.

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But so is the anger now.

Kairo steps in with another quick kick to the leg, trying to keep the bigger man from rebuilding his base.

Scythe absorbs it.

Kairo fires another kick, sharper this time, aimed at the ribs.

Scythe catches it.

The arena reacts as Kairo's eyes widen for half a second.

John Phillips: "Scythe caught the leg!"

Mark Bravo: "That is bad news for Kairo. You do not want to be trapped in Samuel Scythe's hands."

Kairo immediately jumps, trying to twist into an enzuigiri, but Scythe shoves him away before the kick can land clean. Kairo hits the mat, rolls through, and comes up fast near the center.

Scythe steps forward.

Heavy.

Deliberate.

Back in the match.

Or trying to be.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel! On him!"

Scythe's eyes stay on Kairo.

Kairo raises his hands, bouncing lightly now, letting some of that old rhythm leak through despite the Creed Method's restraint.

For a second, the match seems ready to settle into itself.

Then Scythe's eyes shift.

Just briefly.

Back toward the stage.

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Back toward Chris Ross.

Ross is still there.

Still seated.

Hands clasped between his knees.

Eyes fixed on the ring.

No reaction.

No movement.

No intent anyone can read.

John Phillips: "There it is again. Scythe looked back."

Mark Bravo: "He can't help it. That chair at the top of the stage might as well be a loaded gun sitting in plain sight."

Kairo sees the glance.

So does Eli Creed.

Eli Creed: "Use what he gives you."

Kairo darts forward.

Scythe turns back just in time to catch a quick forearm to the jaw.

Kairo follows with another.

Then a spinning back kick that lands to the midsection.

Scythe doubles slightly, more from timing than damage, and Kairo hits the ropes.

He rebounds with speed, looking for a tilt-a-whirl headscissors--

But Scythe catches him across the body.

John Phillips: "No! Scythe caught him!"

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Kairo tries to shift his weight, trying to rotate free, but Scythe powers him upward and drives him down with a brutal spinebuster that shakes the canvas.

Mark Bravo: "Spinebuster! That'll stop the neon real quick!"

Kairo arches off the mat, rolling to one side as Eli Creed's expression tightens for the first time.

Troy Lindz takes one step closer to the apron, not interfering, just watching with sharper focus.

Ace Andrews exhales at ringside, then points toward Kairo.

Ace Andrews: "There. Stay there. Make him pay for it."

Scythe stands over Kairo.

He should attack.

He should follow up.

He should drag Kairo up and turn this match into the kind of wreckage Ace Andrews built him to leave behind.

Instead, Scythe looks back again.

Just once.

But long enough.

At the top of the stage, Chris Ross remains a statue in a steel chair.

The former UTA Champion stares down the ramp with the dead patience of a man who has already made his decision but refuses to tell anyone what it is.

John Phillips: "Scythe just scored a major counter, but he is still looking back at Chris Ross."

Mark Bravo: "Because nothing about this makes sense. Ross should be screaming. He should be coming down here. He should be trying to take Scythe's head off with that chair. Instead he is just sitting there like judgment day got tired and needed a seat."

Ace Andrews turns toward the stage again, frustration beginning to crack through his polished exterior.

Ace Andrews: "You are not part of this, Ross!"

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Ross says nothing.

Ace points at him.

Ace Andrews: "You hear me? You are not part of this."

Ross still says nothing.

His eyes remain on Scythe.

Not Ace.

Not Kairo.

Scythe.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews keeps trying to provoke a response, and Ross is giving him absolutely nothing."

Mark Bravo: "Which means Ace can't manage it. Ace can manage anger. He can manage chaos. He can steer a fight. But silence? From Chris Ross? That's a variable nobody planned for."

Scythe reaches down and grabs Kairo by the wrist, yanking him up with one violent pull.

Kairo grimaces, still feeling the spinebuster.

Scythe whips him hard into the corner.

Kairo hits back-first and staggers forward immediately, trying not to stay trapped.

Scythe charges.

Kairo sidesteps, and Scythe crashes shoulder-first into the turnbuckles.

John Phillips: "Kairo got out of the way!"

Kairo sees the opening and springs to the middle rope.

For one second, the old Neon Ace flashes bright.

Fast.

Effortless.

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Instinctive.

He launches backward with a springboard crossbody.

Scythe turns and catches him again.

The crowd groans.

Mark Bravo: "Caught again!"

This time Kairo does not try to fight with power.

He slips one arm around Scythe's neck, shifts his hips in midair, and counters into a sudden DDT that spikes Scythe down.

John Phillips: "Kairo turned it into a DDT! Great adjustment!"

Kairo rolls Scythe over and covers quickly, hooking the far leg tight.

Referee: "ONE!"

Scythe powers out before two, launching Kairo off him.

Kairo lands on his knees and slides backward, breathing hard but focused.

John Phillips: "Only one, but that was an important counter from Kairo Bey."

Mark Bravo: "And that is the thing. Kairo's speed is still there. The flash is still there. But under Creed, he is trying to make every flash mean something."

Scythe rolls to one knee, one hand on the canvas.

He looks toward Kairo.

Then, again, toward the stage.

Chris Ross has not moved.

Not after the spinebuster.

Not after the DDT.

Not after the cover.

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Nothing.

Just the former UTA Champion sitting alone beneath the stage lights, silent, still, and watching the man who left him to be destroyed at Victorious.

John Phillips: "That stare is doing damage without Ross lifting a finger."

Mark Bravo: "And that's the most un-Chris Ross thing imaginable. He's hurting Scythe by not attacking him."

Scythe rises fully now, shoulders rolling as irritation builds beneath the surface.

His attention snaps back to Kairo.

He points one finger at him.

No words.

Just warning.

Kairo backs up half a step, then glances toward Eli.

Creed gives him a calm look.

Eli Creed: "Let him divide himself."

Kairo looks back at Scythe.

For the first time, the faintest trace of a smile appears.

Not showboating.

Recognition.

He understands the assignment.

John Phillips: "Eli Creed just told Kairo to let Scythe divide himself."

Mark Bravo: "That is cold, but it is smart. Scythe is fighting Kairo in the ring and Chris Ross in his head."

Scythe steps forward, heavy and angry now.

Kairo circles, lighter, quicker, no longer trying to overwhelm him straight on.

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Scythe reaches.

Kairo slips away.

Scythe turns.

Another glance to the stage.

Ross remains seated.

Watching.

Waiting.

Doing nothing.

And somehow making that nothing feel like the loudest thing in the building.

Samuel Scythe steps forward with anger beginning to show beneath the surface, that blank, dead-eyed stare giving way to something rougher around the edges.

Kairo Bey circles him carefully, light on his feet, one hand raised, the other low, watching the bigger man's shoulders and hips.

At the top of the stage, Chris Ross remains seated.

Hands clasped.

Elbows on thighs.

Eyes locked on the ring.

No expression.

No movement.

No words.

John Phillips: "I have called a lot of Chris Ross matches, Mark. I have seen the man violent. I have seen him reckless. I have seen him unhinged. I have seen him turn a wrestling match into something that barely qualifies as sport."

Mark Bravo: "We know that Chris Ross. Everybody knows that Chris Ross. That Chris Ross can be pointed

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at something. Maybe not controlled, but managed. You can bait him. You can use his anger. You can get him to chase the wrong thing."

John Phillips: "But this..."

The camera cuts back to Ross.

Still sitting.

Still watching.

John Phillips: "This is something different."

Mark Bravo: "And I hate it. I really do. Because a wild Chris Ross is terrifying, but at least you can hear him coming. This Chris Ross? This cold, silent version? This might be the scariest I have ever seen him."

Scythe lunges forward, reaching for Kairo with both hands.

Kairo slips underneath and snaps a kick to the back of Scythe's leg.

Scythe turns with a heavy back elbow.

Kairo ducks that too, moving behind him and firing a forearm into the ribs.

Another forearm follows.

Then a sharp kick to the thigh.

Scythe staggers one step, more annoyed than damaged, and whips around with a brutal clothesline attempt.

Kairo bends backward just enough for it to miss, then spins through and catches Scythe with a quick heel kick to the chest.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey staying mobile, refusing to let Samuel Scythe get a clean grip."

Mark Bravo: "That's the only way to fight this guy. If Scythe gets both hands on you, suddenly the floor starts coming up real fast."

Ace Andrews steps closer to the apron, clapping once sharply.

Ace Andrews: "Stop chasing him. Cut him off."

Scythe's eyes move to Ace.

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Then, despite himself, they flick back toward the stage.

Ross has not changed position.

Not by an inch.

He simply stares.

Ace Andrews: "Do not look at him. Look at Kairo."

Scythe turns back into the ring.

Kairo comes in fast with a running forearm.

Scythe catches him this time.

The crowd reacts as Kairo's momentum dies in Scythe's arms.

John Phillips: "Caught! Scythe caught him!"

Mark Bravo: "And this is exactly what Ace wanted. No more chasing. Just catch and destroy."

Scythe powers Kairo up across his shoulder, turning toward the center of the ring as if preparing to drive him through the canvas.

Kairo kicks his legs, trying to shift loose, but Scythe clamps him tighter.

For a second, the Reaper looks like he has regained full control.

Then he hears the crowd swell again.

Not for Kairo.

Not exactly.

For the sight above the ramp.

For the silent man in the chair.

Scythe's head turns.

Just slightly.

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Just enough.

John Phillips: "Again! He looked again!"

Mark Bravo: "He cannot stop himself!"

Kairo uses the shift immediately, sliding off Scythe's shoulder and landing behind him.

Scythe turns and swings wild.

Kairo ducks.

Scythe keeps moving with the miss, hitting the ropes chest-first as Kairo springs to the middle rope beside him.

Kairo launches backward for a springboard cutter--

Scythe shoves him off in midair.

Kairo lands hard but rolls through, popping up near the opposite side.

Scythe charges.

Full speed.

Looking for Reapers Blade.

John Phillips: "Scythe looking for the spear!"

Kairo leapfrogs at the last possible second.

Scythe misses completely and crashes shoulder-first into the middle turnbuckle.

The ring shakes with the impact.

Mark Bravo: "Nobody home! Scythe missed big!"

Samuel Scythe stumbles backward from the corner, holding his shoulder for half a second before dropping to one knee.

The crowd rises, sensing Kairo's opening.

But Kairo does not rush blindly.

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He hears Eli Creed at ringside.

Eli Creed: "Purpose, Kairo."

Kairo steadies himself.

He watches Scythe.

Waits for him to turn.

Chooses the moment.

John Phillips: "Kairo is trying not to overextend. That is Creed's influence again."

Mark Bravo: "Old Kairo might have flown in right there just because the crowd gave him the runway. This Kairo is measuring."

Scythe rises from one knee.

Then suddenly slams both palms into the canvas.

THUD!

Again.

THUD!

And again.

THUD!

The burst of rage is startling because it breaks the silence of him.

Scythe's face twists now, anger fully surfacing as he kneels on the mat, breathing hard, one hand braced against the canvas, the other striking it again in frustration.

John Phillips: "Samuel Scythe is losing his composure."

Mark Bravo: "That is what Ross is doing. That silent stare is getting under his skin, and Scythe does not know what to do with it."

Ace Andrews circles quickly around ringside, pointing up toward the stage.

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Ace Andrews: "Get him out of here!"

The referee turns toward Ace, frustrated.

Referee: "He is not interfering!"

Ace Andrews: "He is sitting there with a weapon!"

Referee: "He is sitting in a chair!"

Ace's face tightens with fury.

Ace Andrews: "Ross! Leave!"

The camera cuts to the top of the stage.

Chris Ross remains seated.

Still.

Cold.

Unmoved.

Ace's voice echoes from ringside, but Ross gives no sign that he hears it.

His hands stay clasped.

His posture stays forward.

His eyes stay on Samuel Scythe.

John Phillips: "Ross has not reacted to Ace Andrews once."

Mark Bravo: "And that might be driving Ace crazier than anything. Ace wants a response. He wants anger. He wants Ross to give him something he can use. Ross is giving him nothing."

Scythe pushes himself fully upright, chest rising and falling.

He looks toward the stage again.

There is Ross.

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The former UTA Champion.

The man Scythe abandoned.

The man who should be screaming.

The man who should be attacking.

The man who is doing neither.

Just staring.

Watching.

In silence.

John Phillips: "You said it earlier. A wild Chris Ross can be managed. Maybe not controlled, but managed. You can prepare for that monster."

Mark Bravo: "You can put guards near the ramp. You can bait him into a fight. You can use the rules against him. You can run from him. You can get him disqualified. There are ways to survive a Chris Ross who comes in swinging."

John Phillips: "But how do you manage this?"

Ross sits.

Scythe stares.

Kairo waits.

Mark Bravo: "You don't. You just sit there wondering when the explosion comes. And the waiting becomes the explosion."

Eli Creed's voice is calm at ringside.

Eli Creed: "Again, Kairo."

Kairo moves.

He hits the ropes and comes at Scythe from the blind side with a low dropkick to the knee.

Scythe drops back to one knee, snarling now as the shot lands.

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Kairo follows with a running knee to the side of the head that sends Scythe down to both hands.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey capitalizes again!"

Mark Bravo: "And Scythe is letting this happen. Not because Kairo is not good, Kairo is very good, but because Samuel Scythe is split in half right now."

Kairo grabs Scythe by the wrist, trying to pull him into position for more offense.

Scythe suddenly yanks him forward with brute force and blasts him with a European uppercut that sends Kairo staggering backward.

The impact snaps Kairo's head up and drops him into the ropes.

John Phillips: "What an uppercut by Scythe!"

Scythe rises again, anger dragging him up faster than balance should allow.

He storms toward Kairo.

One step.

Then another.

Then he stops.

Looks back.

Ross is still there.

Still seated.

Still watching.

Still saying nothing.

Scythe's fists clench.

The rage now is not just at Kairo.

Not just at the match.

It is at the silence.

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At the waiting.

At the fact that Chris Ross has become a presence Samuel Scythe cannot hit from inside the ring.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel! Forget him!"

Scythe turns sharply toward Ace, and for one second even Ace Andrews stops talking.

Then Scythe turns back toward Kairo.

The Reaper is angry now.

And Kairo Bey, recovering against the ropes, can see it.

John Phillips: "Samuel Scythe is becoming more dangerous, but also more unstable."

Mark Bravo: "That's a terrible combination. Kairo can exploit it, but if Scythe catches him clean, all that anger is going to land in one place."

Kairo pulls himself off the ropes and raises his guard.

Eli Creed watches with quiet approval.

Troy Lindz remains composed, eyes narrowed, studying Kairo's reactions as much as Scythe's.

Ace Andrews points toward Kairo again, trying to redirect his monster.

At the top of the stage, Chris Ross sits in the chair he brought out himself.

Cold.

Silent.

Still.

The loudest quiet in the building.

Kairo Bey peels himself off the ropes, one hand briefly touching his jaw where Samuel Scythe's European uppercut landed clean.

Across from him, Scythe stands near center ring, chest rising and falling heavier now, fists clenched, eyes narrowed.

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He should be focused on Kairo.

He should be closing the distance.

He should be following Ace Andrews' instruction and turning this match into the kind of destructive, brutal fight that favors him.

Instead, his eyes drift again.

Up the ramp.

To the stage.

To Chris Ross.

Still seated.

Still silent.

Still watching.

John Phillips: "Again. Samuel Scythe looked again."

Mark Bravo: "Chris Ross is living rent-free in that man's skull right now, and Ross hasn't done a single thing but sit in a chair."

Ace Andrews circles along the floor, his polished control beginning to show small cracks. His jaw is tight. His hands are no longer calmly folded. He points toward Kairo, then toward the ring, trying to force Scythe's attention back where it belongs.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel. The match is there. He is there. Finish the asset in front of you."

Scythe does not look at Ace.

He keeps staring up the ramp.

Ross does not blink.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews is trying to redirect Samuel Scythe, but I am not sure Scythe is even hearing him right now."

Mark Bravo: "That is the nightmare for Ace. He bought himself a Reaper, but right now the Reaper is staring at a ghost he created."

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Kairo takes one step forward.

Then stops.

He looks to Eli Creed.

Creed stands at ringside, calm as ever, hands folded, eyes not on Ross, not on Ace, but on Kairo.

The teacher watching the student find the lesson in real time.

Eli Creed: "Do you see it now?"

Kairo's breathing slows.

His eyes flick from Creed back to Scythe.

Eli Creed: "Strength without clarity is just weight."

Troy Lindz stands beside Creed, United States Championship against their shoulder, gaze locked on Kairo with quiet intensity.

Eli Creed: "He is divided."

Kairo nods once.

Eli Creed: "So correct him."

That lands.

Kairo's posture changes.

The old rhythm is still there, pulsing beneath the surface, but it is no longer spilling out in all directions. It narrows. It sharpens. It becomes a line.

John Phillips: "Eli Creed motivating Kairo Bey, and listen to the words. He is telling Kairo that Scythe is divided."

Mark Bravo: "And he's right. That is the scary part. Eli Creed may be manipulative, he may be dangerous, but he is reading this match perfectly."

Kairo moves.

Fast.

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Scythe finally turns back toward him, but the reaction is half a beat late.

Kairo snaps a kick into Scythe's lead thigh.

Then another.

Then he spins and lands a back kick to the ribs that bends Scythe just enough for Kairo to step in with a sharp forearm to the jaw.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey stringing together strikes now!"

Mark Bravo: "This is targeted. This is not just flash. He's hitting, moving, making Scythe reset over and over."

Scythe swings back with a heavy clubbing arm.

Kairo ducks under it and hits the ropes.

He rebounds quickly, springing low with a basement dropkick to the knee.

Scythe drops to one knee.

Kairo keeps moving, bouncing off the opposite ropes and coming back with a running bicycle knee that catches Scythe high across the chest and jaw.

John Phillips: "Mirage Kick! Kairo caught him!"

Scythe rocks backward, nearly falling, one hand hitting the mat to keep himself upright.

The crowd rises.

Kairo does not pose.

He does not celebrate.

He looks to Creed.

Creed nods once.

Eli Creed: "Again."

Kairo grabs Scythe by the wrist and pulls, trying to guide him toward the ropes.

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Scythe's power stops the motion almost instantly.

He yanks Kairo toward him, looking to end the burst with one violent counter.

Kairo spins through the pull and lands behind him.

Scythe turns, furious now, and charges.

Kairo steps aside.

Scythe barrels past and hits the ropes chest-first.

He turns around, enraged, and for one second his eyes flick back up the ramp again.

Ross has not moved.

Still seated.

Still clasped hands.

Still staring.

John Phillips: "Ross again! Scythe cannot stop checking on him!"

Mark Bravo: "And every time he does, Kairo gets another inch."

Ace Andrews slams a palm on the apron.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel! Enough! He is nothing! He is doing nothing!"

Scythe turns sharply toward Ace.

For the first time, there is something almost defiant in the look.

Ace freezes.

Just for a second.

Because Samuel Scythe is not listening.

Not to him.

Not to the referee.

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Not to the match.

The silence at the top of the stage has swallowed the voice at ringside.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews just told him Ross is doing nothing, but that is exactly the problem. Samuel Scythe knows Chris Ross is doing nothing."

Mark Bravo: "Because if Ross was swinging that chair, Scythe could fight him. If Ross was screaming, Scythe could ignore him. But Ross is just sitting there. No threat. No promise. No explanation. Just judgment."

Kairo sees Scythe's attention fracture again.

He steps onto the bottom rope.

Then the middle.

For the first time tonight, The Neon Ace lets the rope-walk rhythm come back.

One step.

Two.

Three.

The crowd reacts as Kairo balances with smooth precision, blue and pink light briefly flashing across his gear.

But this is not vanity.

It is timing.

Purpose.

Scythe turns toward him too late.

Kairo leaps and snaps Scythe over with a rope-walk arm drag, sending the larger man rolling across the canvas.

John Phillips: "Rope-walk arm drag! There is the Neon Ace, but with direction!"

Mark Bravo: "That was the old Kairo's flash with the new Kairo's intent. That is dangerous."

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Scythe rolls through and crashes to one knee, slamming a fist against the mat in rage.

Once.

Twice.

Then he pushes himself up and charges wildly.

Too wildly.

Kairo ducks.

Scythe keeps running and rebounds off the ropes.

Kairo springs onto the second rope and twists backward into a springboard crossbody.

This time Scythe does not catch him clean.

Kairo's momentum crashes across Scythe's upper body and takes him down.

Kairo hooks the leg immediately.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Scythe powers out at two, shoving Kairo off with force.

John Phillips: "Two-count! Kairo Bey is getting closer!"

Mark Bravo: "And Scythe is making mistakes he does not usually make. He's rushing. He's overcorrecting. He is angry at a man who isn't even in the ring."

Kairo lands near the ropes and quickly pulls himself up.

Scythe rises more slowly, furious now, chest heaving, jaw clenched.

He looks toward Ross again.

Ross sits.

Stares.

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Watches.

Nothing more.

Nothing less.

Ace Andrews steps between the ramp and the ring as much as he can without leaving ringside, almost trying to block Scythe's view with his own body.

Ace Andrews: "Look at me."

Scythe does not.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel. Look at me."

Still nothing.

Ace Andrews: "I gave you the room. I gave you the path. Do not let him take it from you by sitting in a chair."

That line finally gets Scythe's attention.

He turns toward Ace with a glare that is no longer empty at all.

It is rage.

It is insult.

It is the fury of a monster being told he is being controlled by a man doing nothing.

Ace's expression hardens, but his eyes betray the smallest flicker of concern.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews may be losing control of Samuel Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "And if Ace loses control of Scythe while Chris Ross is sitting at the top of the ramp waiting for whatever comes next, that is a terrifying triangle."

Eli Creed watches the exchange with a faint smile.

Not amused.

Pleased.

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He turns his head toward Kairo, who is already watching him.

Eli Creed: "You are not here to survive him."

Kairo breathes hard, sweat on his brow, eyes focused.

Eli Creed: "You are here to prove he can be solved."

Kairo nods once.

Troy Lindz steps closer behind Creed, their voice low but sharp enough for Kairo to hear.

Troy Lindz: "Stay clear. Make him chase the wrong fight."

Kairo's eyes move back to Scythe.

The message is clear.

Scythe is big.

Scythe is violent.

Scythe is dangerous.

But right now, Scythe is not whole.

Part of him is in the ring.

Part of him is on the stage with Chris Ross.

And part of him is slipping out from under Ace Andrews' voice.

John Phillips: "The Creed Method may be morally complicated, but Kairo Bey is being coached brilliantly right now. Eli Creed and Troy Lindz are telling him to exploit the division inside Samuel Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "And Kairo's listening. That might be the real development. He is not just hearing Creed. He is applying it."

Scythe turns back toward Kairo and charges with a running shoulder block.

Kairo sidesteps again.

This time, Scythe catches himself before hitting the corner, but the miss only enrages him more.

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He spins around and swings a huge lariat.

Kairo ducks beneath it and jumps to the second rope.

Scythe grabs for him.

Kairo kicks backward, catching Scythe in the face and knocking him away.

Scythe staggers toward the center.

Kairo springboards off the rope and twists into a slingshot-style cutter attempt--

Scythe shoves him off before impact, but the shove sends Kairo rolling smoothly to his feet instead of crashing.

Kairo turns.

Scythe charges again.

Kairo drops low and pulls the top rope down.

Scythe catches himself before spilling outside, but his momentum carries him awkwardly into the ropes.

He turns his head.

Again.

Ross.

Still there.

Still silent.

Still staring.

That half-second costs him again.

Kairo springs off the opposite rope and blasts Scythe with a running dropkick to the back, sending him chest-first into the ropes and staggering backward into the center of the ring.

John Phillips: "Another mistake by Scythe! Another opening for Kairo!"

Mark Bravo: "Chris Ross hasn't lifted a finger, and he is the most effective person in this match besides

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Kairo Bey!"

Kairo rises quickly, fire in his eyes now.

Not the old showman's fire.

Something more focused.

Something sharper.

At ringside, Eli Creed lifts one hand slightly.

Eli Creed: "Build."

Kairo hears it.

He steps forward.

Samuel Scythe turns around, furious, exposed, and losing the thread of the match piece by piece.

And at the top of the stage, Chris Ross remains seated in silence.

Doing nothing.

Changing everything.

Samuel Scythe turns slowly toward Kairo Bey, fury rolling off him now in heavy waves.

Kairo stands ready, chest rising and falling, eyes sharp, legs light beneath him.

At ringside, Eli Creed watches with the calm satisfaction of a man watching a lesson land exactly where he intended.

Troy Lindz remains beside him, United States Championship against their shoulder, eyes narrowed, studying the unraveling of Samuel Scythe like it is something they have already been taught to recognize.

Across the ring, Ace Andrews has had enough.

He storms toward the apron.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews is moving again."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and this is not calm corporate Ace anymore. This is Ace Andrews realizing his Reaper

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is standing in the ring thinking about the wrong damn man."

Ace grabs the top rope and pulls himself onto the apron, one hand raised, the other pointing directly at Samuel Scythe.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel!"

Scythe stops.

His head turns toward Ace.

Ace Andrews: "End it!"

The referee immediately moves toward Andrews, arms out, voice sharp.

Referee: "Get down, Ace! Get off the apron!"

Ace Andrews: "Do not touch me. I am speaking to my client."

Referee: "You are interfering. Down. Now."

Kairo stands a few steps away, watching the exchange unfold.

He does not rush.

He does not force it.

He waits.

Creed's voice carries softly from the floor.

Eli Creed: "Let the fracture widen."

Kairo's eyes flick once toward Creed.

Then back to Scythe.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey is not lunging in recklessly. He is watching this situation develop."

Mark Bravo: "That is the Creed influence. Old Kairo might be flying already. This Kairo is letting the mistake finish forming."

Ace continues pointing at Scythe.

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Ace Andrews: "He is nothing. Do you hear me? He is nothing. Finish him."

Scythe's jaw tightens.

His fists flex.

For a second, the command seems to land.

Then the crowd swells again.

The camera cuts to the stage.

Chris Ross is still seated.

Still leaning forward.

Still with his hands clasped between his knees.

Still watching.

Silent.

Unmoving.

Cold as a threat written in stone.

John Phillips: "And there is the reason Samuel Scythe cannot stay locked in."

Mark Bravo: "Chris Ross is in his head, John. All the way in. He moved in, changed the locks, and he hasn't even stood up."

Scythe looks toward the stage again.

Ace sees it.

His face flashes with frustration.

Ace Andrews: "No! No! Look at me!"

The referee steps closer, warning him again.

Referee: "Ace, I'm not telling you again!"

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Ace throws his hands up in disgust and drops back down to the floor.

But he does not retreat.

He paces immediately, one hand raking back through his hair, his immaculate control cracking just enough for the entire arena to see it.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews has been forced off the apron, but the damage may already be done."

Mark Bravo: "Damage from Ace, damage from Ross, damage from Scythe's own head. He is fighting three fights and Kairo is the only one actually hitting him."

Scythe turns back toward Kairo.

Kairo steps forward, looking for another strike.

Scythe explodes.

He catches Kairo with a brutal running shoulder block that turns him inside out and sends him crashing to the mat.

John Phillips: "Scythe finally catches Kairo!"

Mark Bravo: "That is the danger! Confused or not, distracted or not, Samuel Scythe can end your night with one collision!"

Kairo rolls onto his side, clutching his ribs.

Eli Creed's expression tightens, but he does not panic.

Troy Lindz steps half a pace forward.

Scythe stands over Kairo now, breathing heavily, fury and confusion burning together behind his eyes.

Ace slaps the apron from the floor.

Ace Andrews: "There! There! Now finish him!"

Scythe reaches down and hauls Kairo up by the head and arm.

Kairo's legs are unsteady.

Scythe hooks him, looking to muscle him into position for something devastating.

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John Phillips: "Scythe may be thinking Elysian Gift here."

Mark Bravo: "If he hits that Jackhammer, Kairo is done."

Scythe begins to lift.

Kairo blocks with a knee.

Scythe clubs him across the back.

Kairo drops to one knee, and Scythe pulls him back up by force.

But before he can lift again, his eyes drift.

One more time.

To the stage.

To Ross.

Still seated.

Still staring.

Nothing.

Everything.

John Phillips: "He looked again!"

Mark Bravo: "Samuel, what are you doing? Finish the match!"

Ace Andrews finally snaps.

Ace Andrews: "Forget it!"

Scythe turns toward him.

Ace Andrews: "Forget it and come on!"

The crowd roars with confusion.

Kairo drops slightly, still in Scythe's grip, one hand on the larger man's wrist.

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Scythe does not move.

He looks conflicted now.

Not afraid.

Not unsure of the fight.

Conflicted between finishing the match in front of him and answering the silent challenge sitting above the ramp.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews just told Samuel Scythe to forget the match and come on."

Mark Bravo: "Because he sees it. Ace knows this is slipping. He wants Scythe out of there before Ross makes him come completely unglued."

Ace points toward the stage now, voice sharp, almost desperate beneath the authority.

Ace Andrews: "Kairo is nothing!"

Kairo's eyes sharpen at the words.

Eli Creed's face does not change, but his voice rises, calm and clear.

Eli Creed: "Hear that, Kairo."

Ace keeps going.

Ace Andrews: "Chris Ross is right there!"

Scythe looks from Ace...

to Ross...

to Kairo.

Then back to Ross.

The match is leaving his mind.

You can see it happen.

The Reaper is being pulled away from the body in his hands by the ghost on the stage.

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John Phillips: "Samuel Scythe is thinking about leaving. He is thinking about following Ace Andrews out of this match."

Mark Bravo: "And that is insane. He had Kairo hurt. He had the match right there. But Ace said Chris Ross is right there, and now Scythe looks like he wants to go reap something else."

Scythe releases Kairo.

Kairo drops to one knee, one hand against the canvas.

Scythe turns toward the ropes.

Ace backs up on the floor, motioning for him to come.

Ace Andrews: "Now. Come on."

The referee steps closer, warning Scythe.

Referee: "Samuel, stay in the ring. You leave, I count."

Scythe does not seem to care.

He takes one step toward the ropes.

Then another.

Kairo hears Creed.

Eli Creed: "Not nothing."

Kairo's hand tightens against the mat.

Eli Creed: "Purpose."

Kairo moves.

Fast.

Sharp.

Before Scythe can step through the ropes, Kairo lunges from behind, hooks Scythe around the waist, and rolls backward with everything he has.

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Scythe's size makes it ugly.

Awkward.

Desperate.

But Kairo twists his hips, traps one leg, and stacks Samuel Scythe's shoulders to the mat in a tight surprise roll-up.

John Phillips: "Roll-up! Roll-up by Kairo!"

The crowd explodes.

Referee: "ONE!"

Scythe kicks his legs, shocked, trying to power out.

Ace Andrews: "No!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Kairo grips tighter, face strained, every muscle in his body fighting to hold the bigger man down for one more second.

Scythe reaches, but he is out of position.

Too distracted.

Too late.

Referee: "THREE!"

DING DING DING!

The bell rings, and the arena detonates.

Kairo releases immediately and rolls away, scrambling toward the ropes as Samuel Scythe kicks free a half-second too late.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... Kairo Bey!"

Kairo pulls himself up near the ropes, breathing hard, eyes wide with the shock of what just happened.

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Eli Creed stands at ringside with the faintest smile.

Troy Lindz nods once, approval contained but clear.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey did it! Kairo Bey just pinned Samuel Scythe!"

Mark Bravo: "He stole it! No, not stole it. He solved it. Eli Creed told him Scythe was divided, and Kairo made him pay for every single second of it!"

Ace Andrews stands frozen on the floor, disbelief cutting through his polished exterior.

Then fury arrives.

Ace Andrews: "That does not count! He was leaving the ring!"

The referee points toward the timekeeper and then back at Ace.

Referee: "Shoulders were down. Three count."

Samuel Scythe rises to one knee, staring at the mat like he cannot fully process the result.

Then his head snaps toward Kairo.

Kairo is already out of the ring, backing toward Eli Creed and Troy Lindz, one hand still against his ribs from the shoulder block, the other briefly tapping two fingers to his temple.

Purpose.

John Phillips: "Samuel Scythe had the match. Ace Andrews told him Kairo was nothing. Told him Chris Ross was right there. And that split focus cost him everything."

Mark Bravo: "That is the most dangerous loss for a man like Scythe, because Kairo did not overpower him. He did not out-destroy him. He beat him because Samuel Scythe could not stay whole for three seconds."

Scythe turns toward Ace.

Ace points toward the stage, still trying to redirect the rage before it lands on him.

Ace Andrews: "Ross. Samuel. Ross."

Slowly, Samuel Scythe turns toward the top of the stage.

Chris Ross is still there.

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Still seated.

Still leaning forward.

Still watching.

Not celebrating.

Not laughing.

Not reacting to Scythe's loss.

Just staring.

John Phillips: "And look at Ross. Kairo Bey just scored a huge win, and Chris Ross still has not moved."

Mark Bravo: "Because this was never about Kairo winning. Not to Ross. This was about letting Samuel Scythe feel him there. Letting him know that the bill from Victorious is still open."

Kairo Bey stands at the bottom of the ramp now with Eli Creed and Troy Lindz, the winner of the match but not the only story in the room.

Creed places a hand lightly on Kairo's shoulder.

Kairo allows it.

That small detail says plenty.

Eli Creed: "Build."

Kairo nods, still breathing hard, still absorbing what he just did.

Inside the ring, Scythe is standing now, eyes fixed on the stage.

Ace Andrews is on the floor, jaw tight, anger and concern mixing across his face.

At the top of the stage, Chris Ross finally shifts slightly in the chair.

Only slightly.

Enough to make the crowd react.

But he does not stand.

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He does not lift the chair.

He does not say a word.

He just keeps watching Samuel Scythe.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey wins. Samuel Scythe loses focus. Ace Andrews loses control. And Chris Ross never had to leave that chair."

Mark Bravo: "That might be the scariest part of all."

The camera stays wide for a moment, holding the entire picture in one uneasy frame.

Kairo Bey stands near the bottom of the ramp with Eli Creed and Troy Lindz, still breathing hard after the biggest win of this new chapter in his career.

Ace Andrews remains at ringside, jaw tight, face flushed with anger, trying to decide whether to scream at the referee, Samuel Scythe, Chris Ross, or the entire building.

Samuel Scythe stands inside the ring.

Still.

Furious.

Humiliated.

Eyes locked on the top of the stage.

And there sits Chris Ross.

The former UTA Champion.

Hands clasped.

Leaning forward.

Silent.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey has just defeated Samuel Scythe, and yet somehow Chris Ross still feels like the center of the storm."

Mark Bravo: "Because he never had to swing the chair. He never had to walk down the ramp. He never

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even had to open his mouth. He just sat there and let Samuel Scythe destroy himself thinking about what might happen."

Scythe grips the top rope with one hand now, knuckles tightening against the cable.

He stares upward.

Ross stares back.

No words.

No gestures.

No threat.

Just the distance between them, heavy enough to bend the whole room.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel."

Scythe does not look at him.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel, we are leaving."

Still nothing.

Ace follows Scythe's stare and looks toward the stage again.

For the first time all night, Ace Andrews has no immediate answer.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews is trying to pull Samuel Scythe back under control, but I am not sure Scythe even hears him right now."

Mark Bravo: "He hears Ross saying nothing louder than he hears Ace saying anything."

At the bottom of the ramp, Eli Creed keeps one hand lightly on Kairo Bey's shoulder.

Kairo's eyes move from Scythe to Ross, then back to Creed.

Creed gives him a small nod, almost approving of the lesson more than the victory.

Eli Creed: "That is how you solve a monster."

Kairo does not smile.

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He only nods once, still processing it.

Then the crowd reacts again.

Not explosively this time.

Not like before.

A ripple first.

Then a swell.

Because Chris Ross has moved.

Slowly, Ross lifts his head just a little higher.

His hands unclasp.

He plants both palms on his knees.

Then he stands.

The crowd rises with him.

John Phillips: "Ross is standing."

Mark Bravo: "Now what?"

Samuel Scythe takes one step away from the ropes, eyes locked on Ross, body tensing like he expects the charge.

Ace Andrews immediately backs away from the apron, looking from Scythe to the stage, anticipating violence.

Kairo Bey turns slightly, keeping the stage in view.

Troy Lindz shifts their stance, ready just in case the whole thing spills toward them.

Eli Creed does not move.

Ross reaches down.

He takes the steel chair by the backrest.

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For one second, the building tightens.

Everyone expects the same thing.

Chris Ross.

Steel chair.

Samuel Scythe in the ring.

The obvious next step seems written in blood.

But Ross does not come down the ramp.

He folds the chair.

Cleanly.

Calmly.

The metal snaps shut in his hands.

John Phillips: "He's folding the chair."

Mark Bravo: "I don't know if that makes me feel better or worse."

Ross holds the folded chair at his side.

Then he stares.

One last long look down the ramp.

Past Kairo.

Past Eli Creed.

Past Troy Lindz.

Past Ace Andrews.

Straight into Samuel Scythe.

Scythe stares back, chest heaving now, both fists clenched.

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Ace gestures toward Ross, shouting again, but even his voice feels smaller now.

Ace Andrews: "Say something, Ross!"

Ross does not.

He just looks at Scythe.

The stare lasts long enough to become uncomfortable.

Long enough for the crowd to stop filling every second with noise.

Long enough for the silence to feel deliberate.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews just told Chris Ross to say something. And Ross still has not given him a word."

Mark Bravo: "That is the message, John. The silence is the message."

Then Ross turns.

No warning.

No final gesture.

No charge.

No chair raised overhead.

No profanity.

No promise.

He simply turns away from the ring and walks toward the curtain.

Slow.

Deliberate.

Chair in hand.

Still saying nothing.

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John Phillips: "Chris Ross is leaving."

Mark Bravo: "He came out here, sat down, watched Samuel Scythe lose, stood up, folded his chair, and left. That's it."

John Phillips: "And somehow that may be more disturbing than if he had attacked him."

Mark Bravo: "Because now Scythe has to live with it. Ace has to live with it. Everybody has to live with the fact that Chris Ross did absolutely nothing... and changed absolutely everything."

Ross reaches the curtain.

He does not look back.

Not once.

He disappears through the back with the folded steel chair still at his side.

The camera cuts back to the ring.

Samuel Scythe is still staring at the empty stage.

That may be the most telling part.

Ross is gone.

And Scythe is still looking for him.

John Phillips: "Ross is gone, and Samuel Scythe still cannot take his eyes off the place where he was sitting."

Mark Bravo: "That man is in trouble, John. Not physically. Not yet. But mentally? Chris Ross just set up camp."

Ace Andrews climbs onto the apron again, more carefully this time, speaking low toward Scythe.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel. Look at me."

Scythe does not.

Ace's expression hardens.

Kairo Bey, Eli Creed, and Troy Lindz begin backing up the ramp now, Kairo still looking over his shoulder at

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the ring.

He won.

He knows he won.

But even Kairo seems to understand that his victory happened inside something larger and darker.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey leaves with the win, and that cannot be taken away from him. He seized the moment. He followed The Creed Method. He pinned Samuel Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "But Samuel Scythe did not just lose to Kairo Bey. He lost to the silence Chris Ross brought with him."

The camera holds on Scythe's face.

Blankness gone now.

Replaced by something angry.

Something confused.

Something unfinished.

Ace Andrews continues trying to talk to him from the apron.

Scythe finally turns his head, but not toward Ace.

Only toward the empty entranceway.

The chair is gone.

Ross is gone.

The silence remains.

John Phillips: "What did we just witness?"

Mark Bravo: "I don't know. But I know Samuel Scythe is not going to sleep easy with it."

The shot lingers on Samuel Scythe standing alone in the ring, Ace Andrews beside him but not truly reaching him, while the crowd buzzes with the uneasy knowledge that Chris Ross never threw a punch.

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He did not have to.

Unanswered Questions

The camera cuts backstage.

A corridor behind the stage.

Concrete walls.

Black road cases stacked against one side.

Production cables taped down across the floor.

The noise from Gimnasio Olimpico is still loud enough to feel through the walls, the Mexico City crowd buzzing after what just happened between Kairo Bey, Samuel Scythe, and the silent presence of Chris Ross.

Then Chris Ross enters frame.

Walking alone.

Steel chair in one hand.

Folded.

Hanging at his side.

His face is cold.

Not angry in the way people are used to seeing from him.

Not red-faced.

Not screaming.

Not storming through the hallway looking for something to break.

Cold.

Focused.

Silent.

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That is the unsettling part.

John Phillips: "There is Chris Ross backstage, moments after he left that chair at the top of the stage, sat down, and watched Samuel Scythe lose to Kairo Bey without ever once getting physically involved."

Mark Bravo: "And look at him, John. That is not the Chris Ross we are used to. That chair is still in his hand, and he looks like he just did exactly what he came to do."

Ross continues down the hall.

Each step measured.

The folded chair swings slightly beside his leg.

A production assistant sees him coming and immediately steps backward into a doorway.

Ross does not look at them.

He does not look at anyone.

Until Melissa Cartwright hurries into frame from the opposite side, microphone already raised.

Melissa Cartwright: "Chris! Chris, wait!"

Ross keeps walking.

Melissa quickens her pace, matching him for two steps before cutting slightly in front of him.

Melissa Cartwright: "Chris, everyone just saw you walk out with that chair, sit at the top of the stage, and say nothing while Samuel Scythe lost that match."

Ross slows.

Melissa steadies herself, sensing she may only have one chance to ask.

Melissa Cartwright: "What was that?"

Ross stops.

The hallway seems to stop with him.

The chair hangs from his right hand.

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His left hand stays loose at his side.

Melissa holds the microphone between them.

Chris Ross turns his head slowly.

He looks at her.

Not through her.

At her.

And for one long second, the former UTA Champion says absolutely nothing.

Melissa's expression changes.

She is a professional.

She has interviewed furious wrestlers, arrogant champions, unstable monsters, broken men, and people moments away from violence.

But this silence lands differently.

Because Chris Ross is never this quiet.

John Phillips: "Melissa asked the question everyone wants answered."

Mark Bravo: "And I don't think she likes the answer she's getting, because the answer is nothing."

Ross keeps looking at Melissa.

No smirk.

No glare built for the camera.

No profanity.

No warning.

Just that cold, empty focus.

Melissa lowers the microphone slightly without meaning to.

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Then Ross turns away.

He resumes walking.

Slow.

Deliberate.

The folded chair still in his hand.

He leaves Melissa standing there in the hallway, the question unanswered and somehow heavier because of it.

Melissa Cartwright: "Chris..."

He does not stop.

He does not look back.

He disappears around the corner.

Melissa remains where she is, microphone still in hand, eyes fixed on the space Ross just left behind.

She looks unsettled.

Almost awed.

Not by what Ross said.

By what he refused to say.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross just walked away without a word."

Mark Bravo: "And somehow, John, that said more than any threat he could have made."

Melissa finally looks back toward the camera.

She takes a breath, trying to reset her broadcast composure.

Melissa Cartwright: "Back to ringside."

But even as she says it, her eyes drift once more toward the corner where Ross disappeared.

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The camera lingers on her expression for another beat.

Then cuts away.

Terms of Engagement

The hallway outside General Manager Scott Stevens' office is quiet, save for the low, rolling tension that fills the air like a coming storm. Standing outside the door are three massive figures -- Theron Tkachuk, looming like a glacier carved into the shape of a man; Arkady Bogatyr, twitching in place, shifting his weight from foot to foot, his right arm bound in a sling; and Torunn Sigurjonsson, jaw set, warpaint already streaked across her face, fists tight at her sides. They look like wolves pacing outside a fence -- not because they can't break it down, but because they haven't been told to. Yet.

Standing apart from the three, just to the side of the door, is Gunnar Van Patton. He is still. His black trucker cap is pulled low, one eye covered by the leather patch. His jaw works slowly, methodically, the faintest bulge of tobacco tucked in his cheek. His hands are loose at his sides, but there is nothing relaxed about him. The eye that is visible stares at the door like he is burning a hole through it.

Bogatyr breaks first.

Arkady Bogatyr: She is in there right now. On the other side of that door. Alpha. Alpha, are you listening? She is in there. We go in, all four of us, and we burn the whole damn place to the ground. We take what is ours and we --

A single look from Van Patton stops him cold. Not a word. Just the look. Bogatyr's mouth closes with an audible snap.

Gunnar Van Patton: Volk.

Arkady Bogatyr: ...Yes?

Gunnar Van Patton: Shut. Yer. Yap.

Bogatyr shuts up. He shifts his weight, tilts his head at a violent angle, and goes back to twitching in silence.

Van Patton turns to look at all three of them, slow and deliberate. When he speaks, his voice is low. Controlled. The kind of controlled that only comes from a man who has had to hold himself back before, and learned what happens when he doesn't.

Gunnar Van Patton: Ah know what yer feelin'. Every single one of ya. Ah feel it too. Ya'll don't think Ah'm wantin' to get some revenge? That woman slid that bastard a crowbar so he could cave in mah knee. And he ain't think twice about usin' it. Both of 'em are right on the other side of this here door. Ya bet yer sweet ass

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Ah wanna walk in that office and turn it into a goddamn crime scene.

He lets that sit for a beat.

Gunnar Van Patton: But that ain't how we get what we want. Volk, yer arm's still in a sling 'cause of one man in there. Bettin' she's got those two fat f***ers in there with her too. Ah reckon us marching in there and sending them to their graves sounds good on paper, but that dog won't hunt. Not today. If Ah want that belt back, we gotta play their game.

He looks at Tkachuk, who has been still as stone the entire time. The giant gives the faintest nod, almost imperceptible.

Gunnar Van Patton: Ya'll are gonna stay right here and guard this door. Ah go in alone. Ah handle it. The only time ya come through that door is if ya hear a ruckus startin' up. Then and only then. Ya copy?

A beat.

Torunn's jaw tightens. She dips her chin once -- a soldier acknowledging her commander.

Bogatyr looks physically pained by the order, but gives a sharp, twitchy nod.

Tkachuk says nothing. He simply steps to the side of the doorframe, crosses his massive arms, and plants himself there like a stone wall.

Torunn Sigurjonsson: No one will get through.

Gunnar Van Patton: Shut up, darlin'. Ah know it.

Van Patton rolls his neck once, produces a dark stream of tobacco spit into a Dixie cup and hands the cup to Arkady, who finds it utterly disgusting.

Inside the office, the atmosphere is curated. Everything about the room feels arranged -- not the casual disorder of a working GM's space, but something deliberate. Intentional. Theatrical.

Scott Stevens sits behind his desk, the weight of the situation visible in the set of his shoulders. He is a man at the center of a chess game, where his opponent is solidly in check.

To one side stand Kimo and Keanu Fatu -- the PuiPuiga A Stevens -- identical and enormous, arms folded, bare tattooed chests like carved monuments, watching Van Patton's entrance with the flat, unreadable calm of men who have already decided what they are willing to do.

In the corner, half-draped in shadow and utterly still, stands Hakuryu. White facepaint. Hands clasped loosely. The WrestleZone title is draped over his shoulder for all to see. His eyes find Van Patton the moment

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the door opens, and they do not move. Beside him, Sinja stands at his right, composed and waiting.

And then there is Avril Selene Kinkade.

She is seated in the chair nearest the desk -- not beside Stevens, but close enough to make the power dynamic absolutely clear. She wears a charcoal blazer over a deep burgundy blouse, every line immaculate, every thread deliberate. Her dark hair falls perfectly into place. One leg is crossed over the other. Her hands are folded in her lap with the patience of a woman who has already won and is simply waiting for everyone else to realize it. She does not look up when the door opens. She looks up when she is ready.

Which is precisely three seconds after Van Patton steps inside.

Van Patton surveys the room. His eye moves across Stevens, to the twins, lingers a moment on Hakuryu, and finally -- and last -- lands on Avril. He lets the silence stretch out a full five seconds. Then he closes the door behind him. When he speaks, there is nothing warm in his voice. There never was.

Gunnar Van Patton: Well now. If this ain't the prettiest lil' collection of snakes, hired muscle, and glorified gift shop security Ah've ever had the displeasure of sharin' oxygen with.

He nods toward the twins without warmth, a dismissive flick of the chin.

Gunnar Van Patton: Boys. Nice of ya to show up to work. Stevens.

He glances at the smirking GM with the particular brand of contempt reserved for a man he's decided is furniture.

Gunnar Van Patton: Sure is takin' a lot of folks to help you deal with me, Stevens.

His eye moves to the corner. To Hakuryu. He looks at him the way a man looks at a debt he intends to collect -- no heat, just cold, patient arithmetic.

Gunnar Van Patton: And there he is. The man himself. Ah gotta hand it to ya -- usin' a crowbar on a busted knee takes real conviction. Not skill. Not honor. But conviction. Ah'll give ya that much.

He does not wait for a response. He turns his eye to Avril last, and something settles over his expression -- not rage, not grief, but the specific, ice-cold stillness of a man who has already filed this betrayal somewhere permanent.

Gunnar Van Patton: Jezelbel.

The name lands like a blade laid flat on the table -- not yet cutting, but present.

Avril Selene Kinkade: Sergeant Van Patton. How refreshingly predictable of you to use the door. I confess I

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had rather anticipated a more theatrical entry -- something through the wall, perhaps, or a window. One must make allowances for one's guests.

She gestures to the chair across from Stevens' desk with two fingers -- not an invitation, an instruction.

Avril Selene Kinkade: Do sit down, Sergeant Van Patton. There is business to be conducted, and I find standing about like a gargoyle does rather nothing for the atmosphere.

Van Patton doesn't sit. Remains in middle of the office, his arms crossed, making his choice of standing the only statement he needs to make.

Scott Stevens: Sit your ass--

Avril Selene Kinkade: Mr. Stevens.

The two words from Avril halt Stevens mid-sentence as efficiently as a gavel. She keeps her eyes on Van Patton.

Avril Selene Kinkade: That will do, Mr. Stevens. This is a matter of some legal and professional delicacy, and I should very much prefer it handled correctly.

She rises from her chair in one fluid motion, smoothing her blazer.

Avril Selene Kinkade: You are here, Sergeant Van Patton, because you believe yourself aggrieved. Wronged. Hard done by. And I have no doubt whatsoever that the language in which you privately frame that sentiment would make a dockhands' convention blush. So let us dispense with the performance of outrage entirely, shall we, and proceed to the matter at hand.

She clasps her hands behind her back and begins a slow, measured circuit around the near end of the desk -- not pacing, never pacing. Moving with intention.

Avril Selene Kinkade: At Victorious, Hakuryu retained the WrestleZone Championship. The match was contested in full, the result recorded, and the matter closed. Contractually. Legally. With the absolute finality that this institution is obliged to honour. Any claim you may believe you hold to that title by virtue of a rematch clause is, I'm afraid, precisely nothing -- the terms of your original agreement stipulated a singular contest, the conditions of which were satisfied. There is no clause. There is no right. There is only what I choose to offer you.

A beat. She lets it settle.

Avril Selene Kinkade: However.

She stops. Faces him directly.

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Avril Selene Kinkade: I am, however, a woman of considerable patience and a certain philosophical commitment to the notion that opportunity ought to be available to those willing to earn it. Against my better judgement, I am prepared to extend you that courtesy.

She walks to the desk and produces a single document, laying it flat on the surface between them. She does not push it toward him.

Avril Selene Kinkade: At International Affair, you will captain a six-man tag team in competition against Hakuryu and the Puipuiga A Stevens. Should your side prevail -- and I wish to be perfectly transparent that I consider the probability of that outcome to be rather slim -- you will be granted your rematch for the WrestleZone Championship.

From the corner, Hakuryu speaks -- unhurried, immovable, the words arriving like the close of a verdict.

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

Sinja: My master says you are a dog. He'll throw you a bone.

Van Patton still doesn't look at Hakuryu. He doesn't blink. He keeps his eye on Avril, steady as a scope. He knows that his platoon is down a man and he hasn't made a single ally in UTA. So, the numbers game is at play.

Gunnar Van Patton: Ah know damn well what he said, so shut yer trap, ya parasite. He's real generous, considerin' he needed a woman to help him finish a job. He's a warrior alright...

He finally turns his gaze to Hakuryu directly, and there is nothing theatrical in it. No bluster. Just the flat, honest promise of a man who has a very long memory.

Gunnar Van Patton: Yer time's comin', partner. Bet yer bottom dollar.

He looks back to Avril.

Gunnar Van Patton: And if mah team loses?

Avril picks a piece of invisible lint from her sleeve. Drops it.

Avril Selene Kinkade: Should your team lose, Sergeant Van Patton, you will retire. Immediately. Unconditionally. You will vacate any claim to any match, any championship, any position within this company, in perpetuity. You will go home -- wherever that is -- and you will remain there. Quietly. Permanently. And with considerably less drama than you have afforded us thus far.

The room breathes.

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Van Patton is quiet for a long moment. His jaw works once. Then the corner of his mouth pulls back -- not quite a smile, something older and meaner than that.

Gunnar Van Patton: Retire. That's real cute. F*ck's sake, look at all the confidence in this room. Every one of ya'll in here actin' like ya've already measured me for a casket.

He looks at Avril directly, steady as a rifle barrel.

Gunnar Van Patton: Ah've been to real war, darlin'. Dug into ground that wanted to swallow me whole, with men tryin' to kill me who were a damn sight more dangerous than anyone in this room. And every single one of 'em thought they had me beat before the bullet left the chamber. Proverbs eleven-two: "When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but with the humble is wisdom." Ah wonder which one of us that's talkin' about.

Kimo shifts his weight. Keanu's expression doesn't change at all. Hakuryu remains as still as a carved idol behind the silence.

Avril Selene Kinkade: The Good Book and a grievance. How very you, Sergeant Van Patton. Do sign the contract. Or don't -- the choice is entirely yours, and I assure you I shall sleep equally well regardless of which you select.

A pause. Van Patton reaches forward and picks up the pen from the desk. He doesn't hurry. He looks at the contract for exactly one second -- not reading it, because reading it isn't the point. He already knows what it says. He already knows he's going to sign it.

He signs.

Gunnar Van Patton: See ya at International Affair.

He straightens. Slides the pen back across the desk. He turns for the door.

Avril Selene Kinkade: One more thing.

Her voice is pleasant. That is somehow the worst part.

Van Patton stops. Does not turn around.

Avril Selene Kinkade: There is one further condition, and I shall require your full attention for it. Between now and International Affair, you will not lay so much as a finger on Hakuryu. Not a hand. Not an elbow. Not even the ghost of an intention. Should you do so -- should you touch him in any capacity, at any time, for any reason, before that bell sounds -- the contract is void, your place in the match is forfeit, and your retirement takes effect that very moment. No appeals. No hearings. No recourse whatsoever. Have I made myself sufficiently clear, Sergeant Van Patton?

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A very long beat.

Van Patton's hand finds the doorframe. His knuckles whiten for just a moment.

Gunnar Van Patton: ...Roger that. Just make sure yer boy doesn't go losing it before I get my rematch. Ah reckon if he needs help from a woman like you, he must trade that monk gear for a schoolgirl outfit, as soon as he steps out those arena doors.

That comment doesn't sit well with Hakuryu, who gets a cocky smirk from Gunnar in response. He pushes the door open and walks out. It closes behind him. Not a slam. That would give something away.

The office settles. Stevens lets out a slow breath and leans back in his chair, grinning like the cat that ate the canary. The twins remain still. Hakuryu turns slightly to look at the signed contract on the desk.

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

Sinja: The dog took the bone.

Avril picks up the contract. She examines the signature with the clinical satisfaction of a surgeon reviewing a clean incision. She sets it back down.

Avril Selene Kinkade: Mr. Stevens.

Stevens looks up.

Avril Selene Kinkade: Our rather tiresome problem will shortly be a matter of historical record. Consider it sealed in blood.

She straightens her blazer, collects her portfolio from the desk, and allows herself one small, private smile -- the kind that does not require an audience to enjoy.

The kind that has already seen the ending.

Wouldn't Dream of It

The camera cuts backstage to a quieter hallway away from the main interview area.

Not silent.

Nothing in Gimnasio Olimpico is silent tonight.

The crowd can still be heard through the concrete, a distant roar rolling under the hum of lights and

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production equipment.

But here, tucked near a row of road cases and folding chairs, the noise feels muffled enough for a family argument to breathe.

Emily Hightower stands with her hands on her hips, sweat still drying at her hairline, tape still wrapped around her wrists, the physical toll of her match with Tyger II visible in the way she shifts weight off one leg.

David Hightower stands in front of her, proud as anything, still riding the high of seeing his daughter choke out a respected opponent in the middle of the ring.

Buck Hightower is nearby, one hand at his jaw from the accidental dropkick he took during the match.

Dakota Hightower lingers slightly behind the men, arms folded, watching Emily more than anyone else.

Emily is not celebrating.

That is the first problem.

David Hightower: "I don't know why you're standin' there lookin' like somebody stole your truck."

Emily looks up at him.

David Hightower: "You won."

He points back toward the arena.

David Hightower: "You hear me? You won. Tyger this, Tyger that, legacy, mask, honor, all that fancy mess... and you put him to sleep."

David smiles wide.

David Hightower: "That's Hightower blood."

Emily exhales through her nose and looks away.

Emily Hightower: "Don't start."

David Hightower: "Start what?"

Emily Hightower: "That."

She gestures at him, then at Buck, then vaguely back toward the ring.

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Emily Hightower: "All of that."

David's smile fades just a little.

David Hightower: "All of what?"

Emily Hightower: "Actin' like you did somethin' right because I had to spend half my match yellin' at my own family not to get involved."

Buck's jaw tightens.

Buck Hightower: "I was tryin' to keep him off you."

Emily turns to him immediately.

Emily Hightower: "He wasn't on me, Buck."

Buck Hightower: "He was lining you up."

Emily Hightower: "It was a match."

Buck holds her stare.

He does not look ashamed.

That might bother her more.

Buck Hightower: "And then he kicked me in the face."

Emily steps closer.

Emily Hightower: "Because you climbed on the apron."

A beat.

Buck says nothing.

Dakota finally speaks, quiet but clear.

Dakota Hightower: "She ain't wrong."

David turns toward her.

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David Hightower: "Dakota."

Dakota Hightower: "What? She ain't."

Dakota steps forward now, not aggressive, not loud, but certain enough that everyone gives her room.

Dakota Hightower: "Buck got on the apron. Emily told him not to. He got hit. Then all of us got mad like Tyger did somethin' dirty."

She looks at Buck.

Dakota Hightower: "He didn't."

Buck shifts his jaw, still feeling the shot.

Buck Hightower: "Didn't say he did."

Emily Hightower: "You acted like it."

David steps back into the middle of it, hands out, trying to retake control of a conversation that has started slipping away from him.

David Hightower: "Alright, alright, everybody calm down. Nobody's sayin' the masked fella cheated. Nobody's sayin' he was dirty."

Emily gives him a look.

David Hightower: "What I'm sayin' is, when one of ours gets hit, intentional or not, you answer it."

David taps his own chest.

David Hightower: "That's family."

Emily's face tightens.

Emily Hightower: "I know what family is."

David Hightower: "Do you?"

The hallway gets colder.

Dakota's eyes snap to David.

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Buck looks down.

Emily goes still.

Emily Hightower: "You wanna try that again?"

David realizes the line landed harder than he meant, but David Hightower is not a man built to retreat gracefully.

David Hightower: "I'm sayin' you been so busy tryin' to prove you don't need us that you forgot needing us ain't weakness."

Emily Hightower: "I didn't forget anything."

David Hightower: "Then why'd you look so mad when you won?"

Emily opens her mouth.

No answer comes out at first.

That bothers her too.

David Hightower: "You had him, Em. You had that boy wrapped up, and you squeezed until he couldn't answer the bell."

David's voice softens, but only slightly.

David Hightower: "That's not something to be ashamed of."

Emily looks away.

Emily Hightower: "I ain't ashamed I won."

Dakota Hightower: "Then what?"

Emily looks at Dakota.

That question lands differently from her.

Less like pressure.

More like permission.

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Emily Hightower: "I respected him."

She swallows, annoyed that the words feel vulnerable.

Emily Hightower: "I still do."

Buck nods once, grudgingly.

Buck Hightower: "He can fight."

Emily Hightower: "Yeah. He can."

She looks at David again.

Emily Hightower: "And I don't like that the best stretch I had in that match came after I got mad because you all got involved."

David tilts his head.

David Hightower: "Why?"

Emily Hightower: "Because that ain't the same as fightin' better."

David almost laughs.

Almost.

David Hightower: "Baby girl, sometimes it is."

Emily shakes her head.

Emily Hightower: "Not for me."

Another beat.

This one lasts longer.

Dakota steps closer to Emily.

Dakota Hightower: "You won your way at the end."

Emily looks at her, skeptical.

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Dakota Hightower: "You did. Nobody grabbed him. Nobody hit him. Nobody held his foot. You caught him, you locked it in, and he went out."

She pauses.

Dakota Hightower: "But David liked it for the wrong reasons."

David points at her.

David Hightower: "Careful."

Dakota Hightower: "I am."

That quiet answer stops him.

Emily looks between them.

Emily Hightower: "I don't need y'all making every fight about whether I'm Hightower enough."

Buck looks up.

Buck Hightower: "Nobody said that."

Emily Hightower: "You don't have to."

Buck absorbs that.

David does too, though he hides it worse.

Emily Hightower: "I know where I come from. I know who raised me. I know what kind of hands taught me how to hit, and what kind of house taught me how to stand back up."

She points toward the arena.

Emily Hightower: "But when I'm in that ring, I gotta be me."

She points at David.

Emily Hightower: "Not you."

She points at Buck.

Emily Hightower: "Not you."

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Then, gentler, toward Dakota.

Emily Hightower: "Not even you."

Dakota nods, accepting it.

Dakota Hightower: "Good."

David frowns.

David Hightower: "Good?"

Dakota Hightower: "Yeah. Good."

Dakota looks at Emily.

Dakota Hightower: "Then make us follow your lead next time."

Emily's expression softens for half a second.

Just half.

Then David steps in again, but quieter now.

David Hightower: "You think I'm tryin' to take somethin' from you."

Emily Hightower: "Aren't you?"

David takes that one.

It lands.

He looks down the hall, jaw working.

David Hightower: "I'm tryin' to make sure nobody else does."

For once, Emily does not immediately fire back.

David looks at her again.

David Hightower: "That world out there don't care how clean you wanna be. It don't care how fair. It'll take from you and smile while it does it."

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He taps the side of his head.

David Hightower: "I know what I know because I learned it the hard way."

Emily's voice is quieter now, but still firm.

Emily Hightower: "Then let me learn what I need to know."

David stares at her.

Buck shifts beside him.

Dakota watches both men like she is daring them to ruin the moment.

David finally exhales.

David Hightower: "Fine."

Emily raises an eyebrow.

David Hightower: "Fine."

He points toward her.

David Hightower: "Next time, we stay where you put us."

Emily studies him, not fully believing it.

David Hightower: "Mostly."

Dakota immediately sighs.

Dakota Hightower: "David."

David Hightower: "What? I said mostly. That's honest."

Despite herself, Emily almost smiles.

Almost.

Emily Hightower: "You step on that apron again, Buck, I'm kicking you myself."

Buck looks at her.

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Then, slowly, he nods.

Buck Hightower: "Fair."

Emily Hightower: "I mean it."

Buck Hightower: "I said fair."

A beat.

Emily steps closer to him and looks at his jaw.

Emily Hightower: "You alright?"

Buck shrugs.

Buck Hightower: "Been hit harder."

Emily gives him a look.

Buck Hightower: "Not by a tiger ghost man, though."

Dakota snorts softly.

Emily finally lets out a small laugh, more breath than sound.

It breaks the tension just enough.

David sees it and smiles, but wisely chooses not to make a big thing of it.

David Hightower: "Look, Em."

She turns to him.

David Hightower: "You won tonight. However you wanna carry that, carry it. But don't you dare act like there's somethin' wrong with having us behind you."

Emily holds his stare.

Emily Hightower: "There ain't."

Then, after a beat--

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Emily Hightower: "Long as behind me means behind me."

David considers that.

Then nods once.

David Hightower: "Alright."

Dakota steps beside Emily now.

Dakota Hightower: "So what now?"

Emily looks down the hallway toward the distant roar of the arena.

The conflict is still there.

The win.

The sleeper.

Tyger II going limp.

David smiling.

Family pulling something out of her she is not sure she wants to name yet.

But she stands a little taller anyway.

Emily Hightower: "Now?"

She rolls one sore shoulder.

Emily Hightower: "Now I keep winning."

David grins.

David Hightower: "That's my girl."

Emily points at him immediately.

Emily Hightower: "Don't make it weird."

David raises both hands.

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

Dakota gives Emily a look that says he absolutely would.

Emily shakes her head and starts down the hallway.

Dakota follows first.

Buck lingers just long enough to glance back toward the arena, one hand touching his jaw again, then follows.

David watches Emily for a second longer.

Proud.

Concerned.

Still convinced he knows best.

Then he follows too.

The Hightower Clan moves down the hallway together.

Not fully settled.

Not fully fractured.

Family rarely is.

The camera lingers on the empty space they leave behind.

Then cuts away.

Mack & Black vs. El Fantasma

The camera returns from commercial on a wide shot of Gimnasio Olimpico, the Mexico City crowd alive and restless as the broadcast shifts toward championship stakes.

The ring has been reset.

The UTA Tag Team Championship graphic flashes briefly across the lower third of the screen.

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Mack & Black.

El Fantasma.

Gold on the line.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, it is now time for the UTA Tag Team Championship match. Trey Mack and Clovis Black defend against the former champions, El Fantasma."

Mark Bravo: "And if there was ever a match on this show where the word atmosphere matters, this is it. El Fantasma in Mexico City, with the titles on the line, after everything that happened at Victorious? This building knows something big is coming."

John Phillips: "El Fantasma are not just former champions. They are two-time former UTA Tag Team Champions, and tonight they have a chance to reclaim the gold from Mack and Black."

Mark Bravo: "But the question is, what version of El Fantasma are we getting? Because at Victorious, things got very strange around them."

The camera briefly cuts to a replay still from Victorious.

Silas Grimm walking into the darkness.

Madman Szalinski standing across from him.

El Fantasma appearing in that cold, heavy fog behind Grimm like shapes summoned out of some other place.

Then another flash.

La Flama Blanca returning in chaos, striking fast, taking out El Fantasma and ripping that eerie control away from the moment.

John Phillips: "At Victorious, Silas Grimm went one-on-one with Madman Szalinski in a deeply personal match. Grimm had El Fantasma with him, seemingly drawn into that dark orbit he has been creating."

Mark Bravo: "And then La Flama Blanca came back like a ghostbuster with a grudge and took El Fantasma out of the equation. That changed everything."

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski defeated Silas Grimm that night, but the questions around Grimm and El Fantasma did not end there."

Mark Bravo: "No, they got louder. Because if Silas Grimm is walking out with El Fantasma tonight, you have

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to ask whether this is management, manipulation, or something worse."

The arena lights begin to dim.

Not completely.

Just enough for the energy in the building to change.

The roar of Mexico City becomes a low, uneasy rumble.

Then a bell tolls.

SFX: "GONG."

One slow echo rolls through the arena.

SFX: "GONG."

A second follows.

Fog begins spilling across the entrance stage, thick and white at first, then darkening beneath the lights until it seems to crawl instead of drift.

A soft spotlight appears high above the stage.

Inside it stands Silas Grimm.

Hood drawn.

Half-mask in place.

Still as a grave marker.

John Phillips: "And there is Silas Grimm."

Mark Bravo: "The Black Veil. And every time he appears, it feels like the temperature drops ten degrees."

Grimm does not move at first.

He does not acknowledge the boos.

He does not look toward the crowd.

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His eyes remain fixed on the ring, cold and hollow beneath the mask, as if the championship match ahead is less sport and more ritual.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm lost to Madman Szalinski at Victorious, but you would never know it by looking at him. No embarrassment. No rage. Just that same disturbing calm."

Mark Bravo: "That might be worse. Some guys lose and get emotional. Grimm loses and starts making the next room feel haunted."

The fog thickens behind Grimm.

Then two shapes appear.

One on either side.

El Fantasma Oscuro 1.

El Fantasma Oscuro 2.

El Fantasma step into the half-light behind Silas Grimm, their masks barely visible through the haze, their bodies still and silent in a way that makes the entrance feel less like three men walking to a ring and more like something drifting out of a legend Mexico City already understands too well.

John Phillips: "And here come the challengers."

Mark Bravo: "Listen to this crowd. They know the mystery. They know the masks. They know what this kind of presence means."

The reaction is layered.

Cheers from those who remember the championships.

Unease from those who remember Victorious.

Noise from everyone else because this entrance demands some kind of response, even if the people giving it cannot fully decide what they are responding to.

John Phillips: "El Fantasma held the UTA Tag Team Championships twice. They know what it means to stand on top of this division. They know what it means to lose those titles, and tonight they have the chance to take them back."

Mark Bravo: "And against Mack and Black, they better be ready for a fight. Trey Mack brings power and speed. Clovis Black brings silence and bad intentions. But El Fantasma? They bring confusion, timing, and

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that feeling that they're never exactly where you thought they were."

Silas Grimm finally moves.

Slowly, he reaches up and removes the half-mask.

He holds it in one hand.

Then lowers the hood.

His face underneath is carved in disdain, not emotional enough to be anger, not alive enough to be satisfaction.

Just cold purpose.

Behind him, El Fantasma remain silent.

They do not speak.

They do not pose.

They do not ask Mexico City for approval.

They simply wait until Grimm begins walking.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm leading them down, and that is still a sight I am not sure I understand."

Mark Bravo: "I do not think we're supposed to understand it. Grimm doesn't manage like Ace Andrews. Ace has contracts and percentages. Grimm feels like he found them in a fog bank and whispered something awful."

John Phillips: "At Victorious, Grimm appeared to be using El Fantasma as extensions of his own darkness. Tonight, though, the Tag Team Championships are the focus. El Fantasma cannot afford to let anything distract them from Mack and Black."

Mark Bravo: "Especially not after La Flama Blanca. Because that return didn't just take them out physically. It embarrassed the whole plan."

Grimm walks first.

El Fantasma follow several steps behind him.

Not like bodyguards.

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Not like disciples exactly.

More like shadows attached to a man who should not have shadows moving that independently.

Oscuro 1 glides along the left side of the ramp, head slightly tilted, never breaking eye contact with the ring.

Oscuro 2 moves to the right, every step quiet and measured, his masked face occasionally turning toward the barricade as fans reach out, then pull their hands back when he looks their way.

John Phillips: "El Fantasma Oscuro 1 and 2, two ghostly presences, trained in a style that feels impossible to prepare for. Rope-based offense, sudden dives, vanish-and-reappear timing. They do not wrestle like a traditional team."

Mark Bravo: "They don't even stand on the apron like a traditional team half the time. You look away for one second and suddenly one of them is springboarding into your face."

The trio reaches the lower half of the ramp.

Grimm stops.

El Fantasma stop behind him.

The lights flicker once.

For a breath, the stage-side camera catches all three of them in silhouette.

Silas Grimm in front, still and severe.

El Fantasma behind him, masked and unreadable.

Former champions.

Challengers again.

Haunted by the return of La Flama Blanca.

Possibly guided by something worse.

John Phillips: "You have to wonder what state of mind El Fantasma are in after Victorious. They were supposed to be part of Grimm's advantage against Madman Szalinski. Instead, La Flama Blanca returned and wiped them out of the equation."

Mark Bravo: "That kind of thing sticks with you. Especially if you are El Fantasma. They're used to being the

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ones people can't track. At Victorious, somebody found them and took them out first."

Silas turns his head slightly.

Not all the way back.

Just enough to acknowledge the men behind him.

Then he continues to ringside.

El Fantasma follow.

At the foot of the ring, Grimm steps aside and allows the challengers to pass him.

That small gesture draws attention.

He leads the procession.

But the match belongs to them.

John Phillips: "Interesting. Grimm stepping aside and letting El Fantasma approach the ring first."

Mark Bravo: "Maybe that is respect. Maybe that is strategy. Maybe that is him reminding them what they're here for before he starts making everything weird again."

Oscuro 1 slides onto the apron in one smooth motion, then stops there, crouched low, fingers gripping the middle rope as he stares silently into the ring.

Oscuro 2 moves around the opposite side, stepping onto the apron with the same eerie calm, creating the visual of two masked figures flanking the ring from opposite angles.

The fog continues to curl along the floor at ringside.

Silas Grimm stands below them, hands folded in front of him, eyes lowered for a second as if listening to something no one else can hear.

John Phillips: "This is already a psychological challenge for Mack and Black, and they have not even made their entrance yet."

Mark Bravo: "Mack might not care. Trey Mack likes a fight. Clovis Black probably has nightmares about other people. But you cannot deny El Fantasma know how to change a room."

Oscuro 1 steps through the ropes first.

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Oscuro 2 follows from the other side.

They enter without flourish, then move to opposite corners, each climbing to the second rope.

Neither raises a championship.

They do not have them yet.

Neither gestures wildly to the crowd.

They simply look out over Mexico City through their masks.

Silent.

Unsettling.

Waiting.

John Phillips: "El Fantasma in the ring. Former champions with a chance to reclaim what they lost."

Mark Bravo: "And maybe reclaim more than that. Maybe they need this after Victorious. Maybe they need to remind everybody that they are not somebody else's shadows. They are El Fantasma."

Silas Grimm climbs the steps last.

He does not enter fully at first.

He stands on the apron, one hand on the top rope, head tilted, watching both members of El Fantasma in their corners.

Then he slowly steps through the ropes and moves to the center of the ring.

The boos become sharper.

Grimm does not react.

He kneels briefly on one knee and places the half-mask flat against the canvas.

A ritual.

A warning.

Or perhaps a reminder.

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John Phillips: "Every movement from Silas Grimm feels intentional."

Mark Bravo: "That man could tie his shoe and I'd assume it meant somebody's career was cursed."

Grimm rises and retrieves the mask, then backs out of the ring beneath the bottom rope, taking his place at ringside.

El Fantasma step down from the corners at the same time.

They meet briefly in the center.

No words.

No visible emotion.

Just a brief forehead-to-forehead lean between masks before they turn toward the stage.

Waiting for the champions.

John Phillips: "This is the opportunity El Fantasma have been waiting for. Two-time former UTA Tag Team Champions, standing in Mexico City with the gold within reach again."

Mark Bravo: "But Mack and Black are not coming out here to hand anything back. The champions have power, momentum, and The Empire behind them."

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm at ringside, Mack and Black still to come, the UTA Tag Team Championships hanging over all of it... this one feels volatile already."

The camera cuts to Silas Grimm at ringside.

He stands perfectly still, the half-mask in one hand, eyes trained toward the entranceway.

Then back to the ring.

Then to El Fantasma.

Oscuro 1 and Oscuro 2 remain in the ring, unmoving, watching the stage like ghosts waiting for the living to arrive.

The fog curls around the base of the ring.

The crowd buzzes louder.

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The challengers are here.

The champions are next.

Inside the ring, El Fantasma remain still.

Oscuro 1 stands near one corner, hands resting lightly on the top rope, masked face turned toward the entranceway.

Oscuro 2 mirrors him across the ring, quiet, unreadable, and waiting.

At ringside, Silas Grimm stands with the half-mask in one hand, eyes lowered, posture calm in a way that makes him feel more threatening than if he were pacing.

The fog still clings to the lower edge of the ring.

Then the lights shift.

The cold misty palette gives way to deep purple and gold.

The boos begin before the champions appear.

John Phillips: "The challengers are in the ring, Silas Grimm is at ringside, and now here come the UTA Tag Team Champions."

Mark Bravo: "And here comes The Empire's muscle in the tag team division. Trey Mack and Clovis Black walked into Victory and took those titles from El Fantasma. Tonight, El Fantasma gets the chance to take them back."

A bassline begins thumping through the arena like a heartbeat under concrete.

Deep.

Heavy.

Confident.

Then the fictional heavy funk-rap beat of "Get Up" hits, and the stage lights pulse in purple and gold.

Trey Mack steps through the curtain first.

The UTA Tag Team Championship is over his shoulder.

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His grin is immediate.

Wide.

Arrogant.

Alive.

He looks out at the booing Mexico City crowd like every insult is just rhythm for his entrance.

John Phillips: "There is Trey Mack, one half of the champions. Three hundred pounds of speed, power, and swagger."

Mark Bravo: "Trey Mack is built like a wrecking ball and moves like somebody cut the brakes. That is a bad combination for anybody standing across from him."

Trey rolls his shoulders, slaps his own chest once, and bounces in place at the top of the ramp, the gold moving against him as he laughs toward the crowd.

Behind him, Clovis Black steps out.

The reaction changes again.

Not louder exactly.

Heavier.

Clovis comes through the curtain with his hood up and the other UTA Tag Team Championship gripped in one hand. No grin. No bounce. No flash. He walks out like a runaway locomotive given human shape, eyes locked forward, every movement direct and joyless.

John Phillips: "And there is Clovis Black. Kansas City, Missouri. Two hundred seventy-three pounds. A bruiser, an enforcer, and one of the most physically direct men in UTA."

Mark Bravo: "Clovis Black does not come out here to entertain people. He comes out here to collect debts. And from the look on his face, everybody owes him money."

Trey throws an arm out wide, gesturing toward the title on his shoulder and shouting toward the hard camera.

Trey Mack: "MACK ATTACK!"

The crowd boos, but a few voices still echo the phrase because Trey's charisma is annoyingly difficult to

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ignore.

Clovis does not react to it.

He simply starts down the ramp.

Trey follows half a step ahead and to the side, bouncing loose, rolling his neck, talking to fans along the barricade like he is inviting them to be madder.

John Phillips: "Mack and Black representing The Empire tonight, and that name continues to hang over everything they touch."

Mark Bravo: "It really does. The Empire is not just a group anymore. It feels like an ecosystem. Amy Harrison creates pressure at the top, and people like Trey Mack and Clovis Black enforce it everywhere else."

John Phillips: "And after Victorious, the implications of Amy Harrison's power have only become more uncomfortable. We have seen what happens when someone falls under that control. We have seen how far Amy is willing to push humiliation and dominance."

Mark Bravo: "That is what makes these titles matter even more. Mack and Black are not just carrying gold. They are carrying proof that The Empire's reach extends beyond Amy's personal wars. Tag division, women's division, ringside politics, intimidation, leverage. It all connects."

The camera cuts briefly to Silas Grimm at ringside.

He watches the champions approach without expression.

Then to El Fantasma in the ring, both masked challengers standing completely still.

Then back to the ramp, where Trey Mack has begun to pick up speed.

Not a full run.

A short burst, like a big man warming up to crash through something.

He stops himself halfway down the aisle, laughing as he points at Oscuro 1 inside the ring.

Trey Mack: "You remember what happened last time!"

Oscuro 1 does not respond.

Oscuro 2 does not move.

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Trey's grin lingers for a second, but there is a flicker beneath it. El Fantasma's silence does not give him the easy reaction he wants.

John Phillips: "Mack and Black won those UTA Tag Team Championships from El Fantasma at Victory on March 27. That loss still hangs over the challengers."

Mark Bravo: "And so does the fact that El Fantasma have won these titles twice before. This is not some team trying to prove they belong. They know they belong. They're trying to take back what they believe is theirs."

Clovis reaches Trey's side, and the difference between them is stark.

Trey is motion and mouth.

Clovis is pressure and silence.

Trey slaps the faceplate of his championship, then looks into the nearest camera.

Trey Mack: "Empire gold stays Empire gold."

Clovis looks at the same camera for half a second.

No words.

Just the dead-eyed stare of a man who would rather demonstrate than explain.

John Phillips: "There is a confidence around Trey Mack that can get under your skin, but Clovis Black is something else entirely. He brings no wasted motion, no emotion, just impact."

Mark Bravo: "That is why this team works. Trey is the spark. Clovis is the engine block coming through your windshield."

Mack and Black reach ringside.

The fog from El Fantasma's entrance still curls around the floor.

Trey notices it and waves a hand through it dismissively.

Trey Mack: "Man, cut all that ghost stuff."

Silas Grimm slowly turns his head toward him.

Trey catches the look and smirks.

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But he stops waving at the fog.

Mark Bravo: "Trey Mack is brave. Or stupid. There is a fine line when you are mocking a man like Silas Grimm."

John Phillips: "Grimm has been surrounded by questions since Victorious. His loss to Madman Szalinski, La Flama Blanca's return, El Fantasma getting taken out, and now here he is at ringside for a Tag Team Championship match."

Mark Bravo: "And I am telling you, John, Grimm being quiet does not make him less dangerous. It means the plan is already in motion somewhere behind those eyes."

Clovis walks toward the steel steps, but pauses when he gets near Silas Grimm.

The two men stand within a few feet of each other.

Clovis looks down slightly.

Grimm looks up slightly.

Neither speaks.

The moment lasts only a second, but it pulls a reaction from the crowd.

John Phillips: "That is an unsettling staredown at ringside."

Mark Bravo: "Clovis Black is not impressed by much. Silas Grimm is not bothered by much. That makes that kind of silence feel very dangerous."

Trey, meanwhile, slides into the ring under the bottom rope with surprising quickness for his size. He pops up fast, throws his arms wide, and turns toward the hard camera.

Trey Mack: "MACK ATTACK!"

The boos rain down harder.

Oscuro 1 and Oscuro 2 do not flinch.

Trey looks from one to the other, then lifts his championship high above his head.

Clovis steps onto the apron and enters through the ropes, slower and heavier, his title held at his side. Once inside, he pulls the hood down and strips off the sleeveless trench coat in one sharp motion, handing it off without looking at the attendant.

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John Phillips: "Mack and Black now in the ring with the challengers, and you can feel how different these two teams are."

Mark Bravo: "El Fantasma are misdirection, silence, rope work, sudden attacks. Mack and Black are collision and control. If the champions can keep this match grounded, they can hurt them badly. If El Fantasma can make this weird and fast, the titles may be in real danger."

The referee steps toward the champions and motions for the titles.

Trey hesitates, clutching his belt a second longer than necessary.

He looks at Oscuro 2.

Trey Mack: "You had your turn."

Then he hands the title over.

Clovis gives his belt to the referee without ceremony, eyes never leaving El Fantasma.

The referee raises both UTA Tag Team Championships high above his head.

The crowd roars.

John Phillips: "That is what it is all about. The UTA Tag Team Championships on the line here in Mexico City."

Mark Bravo: "And look at the four men in that ring. Former champions. Current champions. Silas Grimm at ringside. The Empire's reputation hanging over this whole thing. There are a lot of ways this can go sideways."

The camera catches Silas Grimm at ringside again.

He watches the titles rise.

Then lowers his eyes toward El Fantasma.

The expression does not change.

But something about the way he grips the half-mask tightens.

John Phillips: "And this match could have implications far beyond the belts. If Mack and Black retain, The Empire keeps control of championship gold. If El Fantasma win, maybe they reassert themselves as their own force in this division after the chaos of Victorious."

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Mark Bravo: "And maybe they step out of Grimm's shadow a little bit. Or maybe that shadow gets darker with gold in it. That's the part I can't figure out."

The referee hands the championships to the timekeeper and begins directing each team toward their corners.

Trey Mack bounces in place, still grinning, still talking, still trying to get a reaction.

Clovis Black stands behind him, arms loose, shoulders heavy, looking less like a man waiting for a bell and more like machinery waiting for power.

Across the ring, Oscuro 1 and Oscuro 2 stand shoulder to shoulder for one breath, masks turned toward the champions.

Then they separate.

One steps onto the apron.

The other remains inside.

Silent.

Focused.

Former champions trying to become champions again.

The Empire trying to keep its gold.

John Phillips: "We are moments away from the opening bell. Mack and Black defend the UTA Tag Team Championships against El Fantasma."

Mark Bravo: "Mexico City is ready. Silas Grimm is creepy. Trey Mack is loud. Clovis Black looks like he wants to fold somebody in half. Let's do this."

The referee checks both corners one final time.

Silas Grimm steps back from the apron, still watching.

The champions settle in.

The challengers wait.

The bell is next.

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The referee backs toward the center of the ring, glancing from one corner to the other as the Tag Team Championship match settles into its final pre-bell tension.

In one corner, Trey Mack bounces on the balls of his feet, grinning like the noise belongs to him.

Behind him, Clovis Black stands with his arms loose at his sides, silent and heavy, every inch of him built for impact.

Across the ring, El Fantasma are still.

Oscuro 1 remains inside the ropes, crouched slightly, masked face tilted toward the champions.

Oscuro 2 waits on the apron, one hand on the tag rope, unmoving except for the slow rise and fall of his chest.

And around them, Mexico City begins to make its choice.

CROWD: "FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA!"

John Phillips: "Listen to this crowd here in Mexico City. El Fantasma may carry darkness with them, they may be aligned tonight with Silas Grimm, but to these fans, there is a deep respect for the mask, for lucha tradition, and for what El Fantasma represent inside those ropes."

Mark Bravo: "That is the thing, John. You can be eerie, unsettling, and maybe morally questionable, but when you bring that lucha soul into Mexico, these fans understand the language."

Oscuro 1 does not visibly react to the chant.

But the building reacts for him.

The chant rolls louder.

At ringside, Silas Grimm slowly turns his head toward the fans nearest him.

His face twists into the faintest sneer.

Not outrage.

Disdain.

He lifts the half-mask in his hand, holding it up toward a row of cheering fans as if presenting something sacred.

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Then, with slow deliberate cruelty, he lowers it and wipes imaginary dust from it, as if their voices have contaminated it.

CROWD: "BOOOOOOOOOOO!"

John Phillips: "And Silas Grimm just found a way to turn that reaction back against himself."

Mark Bravo: "That man cannot let warmth exist near him. The crowd starts embracing El Fantasma, and Grimm immediately decides to be the worst guy in the room."

Grimm steps closer to the barricade, looking directly at a fan waving a lucha mask in the front row.

He tilts his head.

The fan shouts something at him.

Grimm slowly raises one finger to his lips.

Not playful.

Not theatrical.

A command.

The boos sharpen.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm does not want El Fantasma celebrated. He wants them feared. Maybe controlled."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. This crowd is giving El Fantasma something human. Grimm wants them to remain ghosts."

Inside the ring, Trey Mack looks around at the chanting crowd and shakes his head with exaggerated disbelief.

Trey Mack: "Y'all cheering these dudes?"

He points at Oscuro 1.

Trey Mack: "He don't even talk!"

The crowd cheers louder.

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Trey laughs, annoyed now beneath the swagger.

Trey Mack: "Alright. Cool. Cool. Cheer him now."

Clovis Black says nothing.

He steps forward one pace, and that alone makes the referee quickly gesture him back toward the apron.

John Phillips: "It looks like Trey Mack will start this match for the champions, and Oscuro 1 will start for the challengers."

Mark Bravo: "That is a smart opening for El Fantasma. Start with movement. Make Trey chase shadows before Clovis can turn this into a demolition derby."

The referee looks to both corners.

He points to the timekeeper.

DING DING DING!

The bell rings, and Mexico City roars.

Trey Mack steps out of his corner with a loose bounce, shoulders rolling, grin back on his face as he circles the smaller masked man.

Oscuro 1 glides sideways, not bouncing, not rushing, simply moving along the edge of Trey's range.

John Phillips: "UTA Tag Team Championship match officially underway. Trey Mack, the agile powerhouse, starting against Oscuro 1."

Mark Bravo: "And you can already see the size difference. Trey is nearly three hundred pounds, but he can move. Oscuro 1 cannot treat him like a normal heavyweight."

Trey lunges forward for a collar-and-elbow tie-up.

Oscuro 1 is not there.

He slips under Trey's reach and appears behind him, hands briefly touching Trey's shoulder blades before vanishing to the side.

Trey turns fast, eyebrows raised.

Trey Mack: "Okay, ghost man."

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The crowd applauds the evasiveness.

John Phillips: "There is that vanish-and-reappear style from El Fantasma."

Mark Bravo: "Trey wanted contact. Oscuro gave him a reminder that contact has to be earned."

Trey circles again, a little less playful now.

He reaches out with one hand, testing distance.

Oscuro 1 flicks a low kick into Trey's lead leg, not heavy enough to damage him, but sharp enough to irritate.

Trey immediately steps forward with a clubbing forearm.

Oscuro ducks it.

Trey spins with surprising speed and catches him with a back elbow that clips the shoulder but not the jaw.

John Phillips: "Trey nearly caught him there!"

Mark Bravo: "That is why Trey is dangerous. He is big, but the man turns corners fast."

Oscuro 1 rolls away, pops to his feet, and hits the ropes.

Trey plants himself and waits.

Oscuro rebounds and leaps for a headscissors--

But Trey catches him.

The crowd gasps as Trey holds Oscuro across his chest with raw power.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack caught him out of the air!"

Mark Bravo: "That is a bad place to be!"

Trey grins, turning toward the crowd.

Trey Mack: "What now?"

Oscuro 1 suddenly shifts his weight, hooks Trey's head with both legs, and finally snaps him over with the tilt-a-whirl headscissors after all.

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Trey rolls across the mat and slides near the ropes, stunned more than hurt.

The crowd explodes.

John Phillips: "Oscurо 1 turned it around!"

Mark Bravo: "That is lucha instinct. Trey thought he had the catch. Oscurо was still finishing the sentence."

Trey pops up quickly, embarrassed, and charges.

Oscurо 1 drops low, pulling the top rope down just enough to make Trey skid to a stop before tumbling out.

Trey catches himself, points at his own temple, and smirks like he saw it coming.

Then Oscurо 1 tags Oscurо 2.

John Phillips: "Quick tag made by El Fantasma."

Mark Bravo: "This is where they can start messing with Trey's rhythm. One ghost leaves, another one appears."

Oscurо 2 springboards in over the top rope immediately, landing behind Trey as Oscurо 1 drops to the apron.

Trey turns--

Oscurо 2 catches him with a slingshot dropkick to the chest that sends Trey backward into the challengers' corner.

Oscurо 1 tags himself right back in before Trey can recover.

Oscurо 2 drops to all fours near the corner.

Oscurо 1 runs in, plants a foot on his partner's back, and launches into a flying corner forearm that catches Trey high.

John Phillips: "Great tandem offense by El Fantasma!"

Mark Bravo: "That is what the crowd wanted. Fast, weird, perfectly timed, and Trey Mack is suddenly the guy being bounced around."

Trey stumbles out of the corner, shaking his head.

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Oscuro 1 hits the ropes again, but this time Trey lowers his shoulder and explodes forward with a running body block that turns the masked challenger inside out.

John Phillips: "Oh! Trey Mack just flattened Oscuro 1!"

Mark Bravo: "That is the equalizer. You can haunt the room all you want, but three hundred pounds moving downhill changes the weather."

The crowd groans at the impact.

Trey drops to one knee beside Oscuro 1, breathing harder now, grin returning as he points down at him.

Trey Mack: "Found you."

He drags Oscuro 1 toward the champions' corner and slaps Clovis Black's hand.

John Phillips: "And here comes Clovis Black."

Mark Bravo: "This is where the match gets heavier."

Clovis steps through the ropes with no flourish.

No wasted motion.

Trey holds Oscuro 1 in place as Clovis drives one heavy boot into the ribs.

The sound lands ugly.

Then Clovis grabs Oscuro by the mask and shoulder, yanking him upright before the referee can warn him too harshly.

Referee: "Watch the mask, Clovis!"

Clovis looks at the referee.

Just looks.

The referee repeats himself, but with less confidence.

John Phillips: "Clovis Black does not need to say much to make his point."

Mark Bravo: "No. His face does all the threatening for him."

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Clovis muscles Oscuro 1 up and throws him with an overhead belly-to-belly suplex that sends him skidding across the canvas.

Oscuro 1 lands hard but rolls toward the ropes, trying to use motion to keep from absorbing the full damage.

Clovis follows like a man walking down a debt.

At ringside, Silas Grimm watches with narrowed eyes.

The Mexico City crowd begins chanting again, trying to rally the challengers.

CROWD: "FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA!"

Grimm turns toward them again.

This time, he steps closer to the barricade and slowly lifts both hands as if conducting the chant.

The crowd gets louder for a second, thinking he is acknowledging them.

Then Grimm drops his hands sharply and mouths one word.

Silas Grimm: "Silence."

The boos come down hard.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm cannot stand that these fans are rallying behind El Fantasma."

Mark Bravo: "He wants control of the mood. That is what this is. If the people turn El Fantasma into heroes tonight, Grimm loses part of the grip."

Back in the ring, Clovis pulls Oscuro 1 up again and whips him hard into the champions' corner.

The impact shakes the turnbuckles.

Trey tags himself in with a slap to Clovis's shoulder and immediately charges corner-to-corner, crushing Oscuro 1 with a splash.

Clovis exits without complaint, while Trey backs up and plays to the crowd with both arms wide.

Trey Mack: "That's championship pressure!"

John Phillips: "Mack and Black cutting the ring in half now."

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Mark Bravo: "And this is what El Fantasma cannot let happen. They need movement. They need tags. They need confusion. The Empire wants them pinned in a corner getting hit by trucks."

Trey drags Oscuro 1 out of the corner and drops into a cover, pressing his weight across the chest.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Oscuro 1 kicks out.

The crowd cheers.

Trey sits up and looks annoyed at the reaction.

Trey Mack: "Y'all cheerin' kickouts now?"

He turns toward Oscuro 2 on the apron.

Trey Mack: "You better hope he gets to you."

Oscuro 2 says nothing.

He just grips the tag rope tighter.

Silas Grimm stands at ringside, still absorbing the boos, still needling the fans with every cold glance.

John Phillips: "The champions are in control for the moment, but the atmosphere is complicated. The fans in Mexico City are behind El Fantasma, Grimm seems almost offended by that, and Mack and Black are trying to impose The Empire's will on this match."

Mark Bravo: "That is the story right now. El Fantasma have the crowd. Silas wants the fear. Mack and Black have the power. Something has to break."

Trey pulls Oscuro 1 up again, dragging him back toward the champions' corner as Clovis Black reaches for another tag.

Across the ring, Oscuro 2 stretches his arm out, silent but urgent.

The crowd keeps chanting.

Silas Grimm keeps sneering.

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And the Tag Team Championship match begins to settle into its first dangerous rhythm.

Trey Mack drags Oscurro 1 back toward the champions' corner, one hand clamped around the back of the mask and the other hooked near the waistband, making sure the challenger cannot crawl toward his partner.

Oscurro 2 stretches from the opposite apron, one arm extended, fingers open, but the distance might as well be a mile.

Silas Grimm watches from ringside, his expression carved into that same unsettling calm, while the Mexico City crowd continues to chant for the challengers.

CROWD: "FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA!"

John Phillips: "This crowd is trying to pull El Fantasma back into this match, but Trey Mack and Clovis Black have done a strong job cutting the ring in half."

Mark Bravo: "That's championship tag wrestling. It doesn't matter how fast El Fantasma can move if they're trapped in the wrong neighborhood."

Trey slaps Clovis Black's hand.

Clovis steps through the ropes.

Trey holds Oscurro 1 upright and grins toward the crowd before driving a heavy body shot into the ribs.

Clovis follows with a clubbing forearm across the upper back that drops Oscurro 1 to one knee.

The referee immediately steps in, ordering Trey out.

Referee: "Trey, out! You made the tag!"

Trey lifts both hands, walking backward with exaggerated innocence.

Trey Mack: "I'm leavin', ref. I'm leavin'. Don't rush greatness."

John Phillips: "Trey Mack milking every second of that five count."

Mark Bravo: "Of course he is. That is what good teams do when they're in control. You use the rules until the rules start yelling."

Clovis grabs Oscurro 1 by the arm and yanks him up violently, then pulls him into a short-arm position.

There is no shout.

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No warning.

Just impact.

Clovis hammers him with The Whistle, a short-arm lariat that folds Oscurro 1 backward and sends him crashing to the mat.

John Phillips: "The Whistle! Clovis Black nearly took his head off!"

Mark Bravo: "That was like getting hit by a train in a hallway."

Clovis drops into the cover, forearm pressed hard across the face.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Oscurro 1 gets a shoulder up.

The crowd cheers the kickout.

Clovis sits up and turns his head slowly toward the referee.

The referee shows two.

Clovis keeps staring.

Then he stands.

John Phillips: "Clovis Black did not like that count."

Mark Bravo: "Clovis Black does not like anything, John. He just decides what to hit first."

Clovis pulls Oscurro 1 up again and drives him into the champions' corner, crushing him chest-first against the turnbuckles. He presses a forearm into the back of the neck and leans his weight forward, making the smaller man carry all of it.

Trey reaches over the top rope and pats Oscurro 1 on the mask.

Trey Mack: "Crowd still loud now?"

The referee turns immediately.

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Referee: "Trey! Knock it off!"

Trey backs away again, smirking.

Across the ring, Oscurο 2 grips the tag rope with both hands now.

He has not spoken.

He has not shouted.

But his posture has changed, the urgency visible in the forward lean of his body.

John Phillips: "Oscurο 2 is desperate for that tag, but El Fantasma's silence makes it almost eerie. You can feel the urgency without hearing a word."

Mark Bravo: "That's why this team works. They don't need to call plays. They move like they're sharing the same nightmare."

Silas Grimm takes a few slow steps along the floor, coming closer to the side where the crowd has been chanting.

A fan in a silver mask pounds the barricade and shouts for El Fantasma.

Grimm stops in front of him.

He lifts the half-mask in his hand.

Then slowly turns it away from the fan, denying him the image.

The fan boos in his face.

Grimm smiles for the first time.

It is awful.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm seems almost offended by this audience embracing El Fantasma."

Mark Bravo: "Because the audience is giving them identity. Grimm wants them to be instruments. Mexico City is treating them like luchadores, like former champions, like men. That bothers him."

Back in the ring, Clovis backs away from the corner and tags Trey back in.

Trey immediately enters, and the champions double-team Oscurο 1 for the count.

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Clovis whips the challenger out of the corner and into Trey, who catches him with a scoop slam in the center of the ring.

Trey hits the ropes with surprising speed.

He rebounds, leaps, and crashes down with a rolling senton across Oscurο 1's chest.

John Phillips: "Rolling senton by Trey Mack! Big man flies!"

Mark Bravo: "That is almost three hundred pounds coming down in motion. You do not scout that until it is already crushing you."

Trey hooks the leg.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Oscurο 1 kicks out again.

The crowd explodes with another cheer.

Trey sits up, more annoyed now.

Trey Mack: "Y'all love pain, huh?"

He looks toward Oscurο 2.

Trey Mack: "You see what's happening? This your boy getting flattened!"

Oscurο 2 says nothing.

His hand remains outstretched.

Trey laughs and drags Oscurο 1 by the leg back toward the wrong corner.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack is starting to get irritated that he cannot keep Oscurο 1 down."

Mark Bravo: "That's the danger with El Fantasma. You think they're fading, but they're really waiting for one moment where the lights flicker."

Trey reaches down for Oscurο 1 again.

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Suddenly, Oscuro 1 snaps his legs up and catches Trey in a quick headscissors from the mat, rolling him forward toward the challengers' corner.

The crowd surges.

Oscuro 1 releases and crawls.

Fast.

Desperate.

John Phillips: "This could be the opening!"

Mark Bravo: "He's got daylight! He's got daylight!"

Oscuro 2 leans as far as he can over the top rope.

Trey rolls to a knee, sees the danger, and lunges forward.

He grabs Oscuro 1 by the ankle just inches from the tag.

The crowd groans.

Trey grins and pulls him back.

Trey Mack: "Nope!"

But Oscuro 1 turns onto his back and kicks Trey hard in the face with his free leg.

Trey staggers backward.

Oscuro 1 dives.

The tag lands.

John Phillips: "Tag made! Here comes Oscuro 2!"

Mexico City erupts.

Oscuro 2 springboards over the top rope and enters like a projectile, catching Trey Mack with a flying forearm that sends the champion stumbling backward.

Clovis Black enters the ring instinctively.

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Oscuro 2 ducks beneath his clothesline, hits the far ropes, and rebounds with a low dropkick to Clovis's knee.

Clovis drops to one knee.

Oscuro 2 immediately springs to the middle rope and fires back with a sharp kick to the side of Clovis's head, sending him rolling under the bottom rope to the floor.

John Phillips: "Oscuro 2 cleaning house!"

Mark Bravo: "That is what El Fantasma needed! Speed, chaos, movement!"

Trey charges again, looking to cut him off.

Oscuro 2 slips behind him and shoves him toward the ropes.

Trey rebounds.

Oscuro 2 leaps, twisting through the air into a hurricanrana that sends Trey tumbling across the ring.

Trey scrambles up near the corner, stunned.

Oscuro 2 charges and blasts him with a running corner knee.

John Phillips: "Black Veil! Running corner knee from Oscuro 2!"

Mark Bravo: "Trey got caught clean!"

Trey stumbles out of the corner.

Oscuro 2 climbs to the second rope, leaps, and connects with a somersault cutter that spikes Trey near the center of the ring.

The crowd explodes again.

John Phillips: "Somersault cutter! New champions! New champions!"

Oscuro 2 covers.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

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Clovis Black dives back into the ring and breaks the count with a heavy clubbing blow to the back.

Mark Bravo: "Clovis saves the titles!"

John Phillips: "That was dangerously close for Mack and Black!"

The referee immediately gets between Clovis and Oscuro 2, forcing the powerhouse back toward his corner.

Clovis does not argue with words.

He just stares through the official while backing away slowly.

Outside the ring, Silas Grimm has stopped taunting the crowd.

For the first time in the match, his full attention is back on the ring.

El Fantasma have momentum.

Mexico City is behind them.

And the possibility of the titles changing hands feels real.

John Phillips: "El Fantasma have found their opening, and listen to Mexico City!"

Mark Bravo: "Grimm might hate the noise, but the noise is working. The challengers are alive, and the champions just got rocked."

Oscuro 2 pushes himself up, one hand at his back from Clovis's save, while Trey Mack crawls toward the champions' corner, blinking hard and trying to figure out how the match changed so fast.

Oscuro 1 is back on the apron now, recovering but ready.

Clovis reaches for Trey.

Oscuro 2 reaches for his partner.

The crowd rises with both possible tags hanging in the air.

Oscuro 2 and Trey Mack crawl in opposite directions, both men hurt, both men reaching for their partners as the Mexico City crowd rises with the moment.

Oscuro 1 stretches from the challengers' corner, one hand extended over the top rope.

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Clovis Black reaches from the champions' corner, eyes locked on Trey with that same grim, impatient intensity.

John Phillips: "Both men need tags here! Oscuro 2 exploded into this match, but Clovis Black stopped that near fall just in time!"

Mark Bravo: "And now this thing may come down to who gets fresh power into the ring first."

Trey lunges.

Oscuro 2 lunges.

Tag to Clovis.

Tag to Oscuro 1.

The crowd erupts as both fresh men enter fast.

John Phillips: "Tags on both sides!"

Oscuro 1 springboards in, looking to catch Clovis before the big man can fully set his feet.

He connects with a missile dropkick to the chest.

Clovis rocks backward, but does not fall.

Mark Bravo: "He hit him, but Clovis is still standing!"

Oscuro 1 pops up and hits the ropes.

He rebounds with a second dropkick, this one lower, catching Clovis near the thigh and forcing him to one knee.

The crowd comes alive.

John Phillips: "Low dropkick to the knee! That brings Clovis down a level!"

Mark Bravo: "That is how you deal with a tank. You do not punch the hood. You take out the tires."

Oscuro 1 runs again, faster now.

Clovis rises just enough to swing a brutal lariat.

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Oscuro 1 ducks beneath it, keeps running, and leaps to the middle rope.

He springboards back with a moonsault press, crashing into Clovis and finally taking him down.

John Phillips: "Springboard moonsault! Oscuro 1 takes Clovis Black off his feet!"

Oscuro 1 hooks the leg.

Referee: "ONE!"

Clovis powers out before two, throwing Oscuro 1 off with force.

Oscuro 1 rolls through and lands near the ropes, eyes still fixed on the champion.

Mark Bravo: "That was not a kickout. That was an eviction."

John Phillips: "But El Fantasma are forcing Mack and Black to wrestle at their tempo again."

Clovis pushes up to one knee, clearly annoyed now. Oscuro 1 does not wait. He runs toward the ropes, springboards again, and looks for a rope-assisted hurricanrana.

Clovis catches him.

The air leaves the building for half a second.

Oscuro 1 kicks his legs, trying to complete the rotation, but Clovis plants both boots and holds him upside down with raw strength.

John Phillips: "Clovis caught him! He caught him!"

Mark Bravo: "This is where the fun stops!"

Clovis turns away from the ropes and walks two heavy steps toward the center.

Then he drops Oscuro 1 violently with a second-rope-style powerslam impact from the catch, driving him into the canvas with awful force.

John Phillips: "Huge powerslam by Clovis Black!"

Mark Bravo: "That is what happens when you fly too close to the freight train."

Clovis does not cover right away.

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He sits on one knee beside Oscuro 1, breathing heavily through his nose, then turns his head slowly toward Oscuro 2 on the apron.

Oscuro 2 grips the tag rope tighter.

Silas Grimm watches from the floor, both hands clasped in front of him, his expression unreadable again.

John Phillips: "That may have stopped the momentum of El Fantasma cold."

Mark Bravo: "Momentum is a weapon until Clovis Black grabs it and slams it through the floor."

Clovis drags Oscuro 1 toward the champions' corner by the ankle, then tags Trey Mack back in.

Trey steps through the ropes still shaking off the earlier flurry, but the grin comes back quickly when he sees Oscuro 1 down.

Trey Mack: "That's what I'm talkin' about!"

Clovis pulls Oscuro 1 up and whips him hard toward Trey.

Trey catches the challenger on the rebound with a pop-up powerslam, planting him near the center of the ring.

John Phillips: "Pop-up powerslam by Trey Mack! The champions are back in control!"

Trey hooks the leg deep.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Oscuro 2 springboards in and breaks the count with a diving double stomp across Trey's back.

Trey rolls away in pain.

The crowd explodes.

Mark Bravo: "Oscuro 2 from the clouds!"

John Phillips: "The challengers save their title opportunity!"

Clovis immediately enters and charges at Oscuro 2.

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Oscuro 2 ducks under the first shot and fires off a quick kick to the ribs.

Then another.

He tries a third, but Clovis catches the leg.

Oscuro 2 jumps for an enzuigiri.

Clovis ducks.

Oscuro 2 lands on his feet, but Trey Mack, from behind, crushes him with a spinning back elbow.

John Phillips: "Trey caught Oscuro 2!"

Mark Bravo: "That was a nasty shot. That might have scrambled him."

Oscuro 2 staggers into Clovis, who grabs him by the throat and shoulder and throws him over the top rope to the floor with brutal force.

Oscuro 2 crashes near Silas Grimm's side of ringside.

Silas does not move to help him.

He simply looks down.

Cold.

Disappointed.

John Phillips: "Oscuro 2 thrown hard to the outside, and Silas Grimm just standing there."

Mark Bravo: "That is not a manager checking on his team. That is a man judging a ritual gone wrong."

Inside the ring, the referee tries to get Clovis out while Trey pushes himself upright.

Oscuro 1 crawls toward the ropes, dazed from the powerslam and pop-up powerslam sequence.

Mexico City rallies again.

CROWD: "FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA!"

Silas Grimm hears it.

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He slowly turns away from Oscuro 2 on the floor and looks at the crowd.

The boos begin even before he does anything.

Grimm steps toward the barricade, raises a hand, and points toward Oscuro 2 lying on the floor.

Then he points toward the ring.

Then he makes a slow, dismissive motion toward the crowd, as if telling them their voices are useless.

John Phillips: "Grimm continues to antagonize these fans, and I do not think he appreciates what they are giving El Fantasma tonight."

Mark Bravo: "He wants fear. They are giving support. That is not the same kind of fuel."

On the floor, Oscuro 2 pushes up to one knee, still shaken.

Grimm finally crouches beside him.

Not to comfort him.

To whisper something.

Oscuro 2's masked face turns slowly toward him.

Whatever Grimm says is not picked up by the cameras, but Oscuro 2's posture stiffens.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm saying something to Oscuro 2 on the outside."

Mark Bravo: "And I guarantee it was not, 'You're doing great, buddy.'"

Back in the ring, Trey Mack grabs Oscuro 1 and backs him into the corner.

He drives a shoulder into the ribs.

Then another.

Then backs up with a grin as Clovis tags himself in.

Trey Mack: "Bring the noise now!"

Clovis enters, and the champions set Oscuro 1 up in the corner.

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Trey charges first with a corner splash, crushing the challenger against the turnbuckles.

Oscuro 1 staggers out.

Clovis immediately follows with a corner avalanche splash of his own, smashing him back into the buckles with even more force.

John Phillips: "Back-to-back splashes from the champions!"

Mark Bravo: "That is a terrible car crash in two installments."

Oscuro 1 collapses forward to the mat.

Clovis rolls him over and covers.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Oscuro 1 gets a shoulder up again.

The crowd roars.

Clovis sits up slowly.

Now he looks angry.

Not wild.

Not out of control.

Just quietly, dangerously angry.

John Phillips: "Oscuro 1 still alive somehow."

Mark Bravo: "And Clovis Black is starting to look personally offended by physics."

Clovis drags Oscuro 1 up again and pulls him into short-arm range.

He looks for another lariat.

Oscuro 1 ducks under it at the last second.

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He hits the ropes.

Clovis turns.

Oscuro 1 leaps for a crossbody--

Clovis catches him again.

The crowd groans.

Mark Bravo: "No, no, no, no!"

Clovis begins to lift for another slam, but Oscuro 1 shifts suddenly, sliding down the back and landing behind him.

Oscuro 1 stumbles forward and dives toward his corner.

But Oscuro 2 is still on the floor, not on the apron.

The crowd groans as Oscuro 1 reaches an empty corner.

John Phillips: "There is nobody there! Oscuro 2 is still down on the outside!"

Mark Bravo: "That might be the whole match right there!"

Oscuro 1 looks up and sees the empty apron.

That split second of hesitation is all Clovis needs.

He grabs Oscuro 1 from behind and launches him with a deadlift German suplex, folding him hard onto the back of his shoulders.

John Phillips: "Deadlift German by Clovis Black!"

Clovis rolls through, still holding on, then drags Oscuro 1 back toward the champions' corner.

Trey Mack is waiting now, one hand extended, breathing hard but ready to finish.

On the floor, Oscuro 2 finally pulls himself onto the apron with Silas Grimm watching him like a judge waiting for a verdict.

But it may already be too late.

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John Phillips: "Oscuro 2 is back up, but Clovis has dragged Oscuro 1 away again!"

Mark Bravo: "El Fantasma are surviving, but surviving is not the same as escaping."

Clovis tags Trey Mack.

Trey steps through the ropes as Clovis hauls Oscuro 1 upright.

The champions exchange a look.

No long conversation needed.

The Empire smells the end.

Silas Grimm steps closer to the apron, eyes fixed on Oscuro 1.

Oscuro 2 reaches desperately from the far side.

Mexico City chants louder.

CROWD: "FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA!"

Trey laughs through the noise, then looks toward the hard camera.

Trey Mack: "Empire keeps what Empire takes!"

He turns back toward Oscuro 1 as Clovis holds him in place.

John Phillips: "The champions may be setting up to finish this."

Mark Bravo: "El Fantasma need a miracle, or they need the lights to flicker right now."

Trey Mack stands in the center of the ring, grinning through the roar of Mexico City as Clovis Black holds Oscuro 1 upright from behind.

Oscuro 1's body sags, the damage from the champions' corner offense obvious in every unsteady breath.

Across the ring, Oscuro 2 leans over the top rope, arm extended, fingers stretching into empty space.

At ringside, Silas Grimm stands near the apron, still and severe, eyes fixed on the trapped challenger.

John Phillips: "Mack and Black believe they have this match right where they want it. Oscuro 1 has been isolated, beaten down, and dragged away from his partner again and again."

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Mark Bravo: "And this crowd knows it. They can feel the danger. Mexico City is trying to breathe life into El Fantasma before The Empire shuts the door."

CROWD: "FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA!"

Trey steps closer, slapping his own chest once.

Trey Mack: "Nah. Nah, y'all too late."

Clovis shoves Oscuro 1 forward.

Trey swings for a spinning back elbow, looking to crush him clean and set up the final stretch.

But Oscuro 1 drops.

Not gracefully.

Not smoothly.

Desperately.

Trey's elbow whistles over his head and catches Clovis Black across the jaw.

The crowd explodes.

John Phillips: "Trey missed! Trey caught Clovis!"

Mark Bravo: "That is the opening! That is the ghost slipping through the wall!"

Clovis staggers backward, more stunned than badly hurt, but enough to break the structure.

Trey turns, eyes wide.

Trey Mack: "Whoa! My bad!"

Oscuro 1 rolls behind Trey, hooks him by the waist, and shoves him forward into Clovis.

The champions collide chest-to-chest, Trey bouncing off Clovis and stumbling backward.

Oscuro 1 springs up just enough to catch Trey with a quick dropkick to the back, sending him crashing into Clovis again.

Clovis spills through the ropes and drops to the floor.

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John Phillips: "Clovis Black sent to the outside!"

Mark Bravo: "El Fantasma just turned the champions into traffic cones!"

Mexico City comes unglued.

CROWD: "FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA!"

Silas Grimm's head snaps toward the crowd.

He does not like it.

Not at all.

He steps toward the barricade with that half-mask still in hand, glaring at the fans as they grow louder and louder for the luchadores in the ring.

John Phillips: "Listen to this place! Mexico City is all the way behind El Fantasma!"

Mark Bravo: "And Silas Grimm looks like somebody just opened the curtains in his crypt."

Oscuro 1 crawls.

Trey Mack grabs his ankle.

Just barely.

Oscuro 1 kicks backward once.

Trey hangs on.

Another kick.

Trey still grips the boot.

Oscuro 1 twists to his back and plants both feet into Trey's chest, shoving him backward into the ropes.

Trey rebounds forward.

Oscuro 1 catches him with a sudden low dropkick to both knees.

Trey drops face-first to the canvas.

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John Phillips: "Low dropkick! Trey is down!"

Mark Bravo: "Now crawl! Crawl, ghost man!"

Oscuro 1 turns and dives.

This time, Oscuro 2 is there.

The tag lands.

John Phillips: "Tag made!"

The building erupts as Oscuro 2 vaults over the top rope, landing in the ring with sudden speed.

Trey pushes up to one knee.

Oscuro 2 hits the ropes and blasts him with a running dropkick to the chest.

Trey rolls backward and scrambles up near the corner.

Oscuro 2 charges and springs onto the middle rope beside him, twisting through the air into a rope-assisted hurricanrana that sends Trey flipping across the ring.

John Phillips: "Hurricanrana by Oscuro 2! The challengers are rolling!"

Mark Bravo: "This is what Mack and Black wanted to avoid! The match is getting fast, weird, and very, very Mexican!"

Clovis Black climbs back onto the apron, jaw tight and eyes furious.

Oscuro 2 sees him.

He does not hesitate.

He sprints across the ring and nails Clovis with a slingshot dropkick through the ropes, knocking the powerhouse back to the floor.

The crowd detonates again.

John Phillips: "Clovis Black knocked down again!"

Mark Bravo: "You don't usually see Clovis Black getting bounced around like this!"

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Trey Mack staggers to his feet near center ring.

Oscuro 1 is back up on the apron now, still hurt but alive, one hand on the top rope.

Oscuro 2 turns to him.

No words.

Just a nod.

The tag is made again.

John Phillips: "Quick tag by El Fantasma!"

Oscuro 1 springboards in immediately.

Oscuro 2 drops low.

Oscuro 1 uses his partner's back as a launch point, flying into Trey with a crossbody that wipes him out near the center of the ring.

He hooks both legs.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Trey Mack powers out, barely.

The crowd groans, then immediately rallies again.

John Phillips: "Near fall! El Fantasma almost reclaimed the titles!"

Mark Bravo: "And now Trey Mack looks like he does not know what building he is in!"

Silas Grimm steps closer to the apron, his eyes narrowed.

For the first time, his hands are not folded calmly.

The half-mask is clutched tight in one fist.

The crowd notices and boos him again.

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Grimm slowly turns toward them.

Then he lifts the half-mask to his own face, holding it there without putting it on, as if hiding from their joy, as if rejecting the life they are pouring into El Fantasma.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm is watching this momentum shift, and I am not sure he likes what the people are doing for El Fantasma."

Mark Bravo: "He hates it. This is not fear anymore. This is celebration. This is lucha energy. This is Mexico City taking the ghosts back from the graveyard."

Oscuro 1 rises, feeding off the crowd despite the damage.

Oscuro 2 enters again as the referee starts warning him, but the challengers are already moving.

They grab Trey Mack by both wrists and shoot him into the ropes.

Trey rebounds.

Oscuro 1 drops flat.

Trey steps over.

Oscuro 2 leapfrogs him on the next pass.

Trey turns around into a double dropkick that sends him flying backward into the corner.

John Phillips: "Double dropkick! Trey Mack is in trouble!"

Mark Bravo: "This building is shaking!"

Oscuro 2 exits to the apron only to immediately climb to the top rope.

Oscuro 1 charges into the corner and catches Trey with Black Veil, a running corner knee that snaps Trey's head back.

As Trey staggers forward, Oscuro 2 leaps off the top with a missile dropkick that sends him crashing flat to the mat.

The referee looks overwhelmed trying to restore order, but the legal man is Oscuro 1, and he dives into the cover.

Referee: "ONE!"

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Referee: "TWO!"

Clovis Black reaches into the ring from the floor and yanks Trey's boot under the bottom rope, breaking the count by placement before the referee can hit three.

John Phillips: "Clovis saves the titles again! He pulled Trey to the ropes!"

Mark Bravo: "That was veteran-level theft right there!"

The crowd boos the save, then turns the boos into louder chants for El Fantasma.

CROWD: "FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA!"

Oscuro 1 looks toward Clovis on the floor.

Oscuro 2 does too.

Then both members of El Fantasma look at each other.

The crowd senses it before the commentators say it.

John Phillips: "Wait a minute."

Mark Bravo: "Oh, Mexico City knows what they want!"

Clovis Black stands on the floor, trying to drag Trey farther from danger.

Oscuro 2 runs first, hitting the far ropes and diving through the middle and top rope with a suicide dive that drives Clovis backward into the barricade.

The crowd explodes.

Oscuro 1 follows immediately, springboarding from the middle rope to the outside with a corkscrew plancha that wipes out both Clovis and the rising Trey Mack near ringside.

John Phillips: "Phantom Spiral to the outside! El Fantasma takes out the champions!"

Mark Bravo: "Mexico City just came apart!"

All four men are down around ringside as the crowd roars at full volume.

Silas Grimm stands a few feet away from the wreckage.

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He looks down at El Fantasma.

Then out at the crowd.

The fans are cheering the challengers wildly now, chanting, stomping, waving arms and masks and flags.

Grimm's expression darkens.

For the first time, the ritual feels like it has escaped him.

John Phillips: "El Fantasma have come alive, and this crowd in Mexico City is carrying them!"

Mark Bravo: "The champions are down, the challengers are down, Grimm looks miserable, and the titles are suddenly very much in play!"

Oscuro 1 slowly pushes up on the floor, one hand gripping the apron skirt.

Oscuro 2 rolls to a knee beside him.

Trey Mack is down near the barricade.

Clovis Black is slumped against it.

The referee begins his count as the live crowd continues to roar for the challengers.

For the first time all match, Mack and Black do not look like they are defending The Empire's gold.

They look like they are trying to survive El Fantasma's storm.

The referee's count reaches four as all four men remain scattered around ringside.

Oscuro 1 is the first to pull himself fully upright, using the apron skirt to stand while Mexico City keeps chanting behind him.

Oscuro 2 follows, one hand braced against the barricade, body still aching from the dive through the ropes.

Trey Mack is down near the floor mats, rolling onto one side.

Clovis Black is slumped against the barricade, eyes half-lidded, breathing hard.

For one glorious moment, the challengers have the champions broken up and vulnerable.

John Phillips: "El Fantasma have taken the champions down on the outside, but they have to get this back

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into the ring! The titles cannot change hands on the floor!"

Mark Bravo: "And that is the problem. The dive got the crowd, it got the momentum, it got the champions rattled... but now they have to turn chaos into a pinfall."

Referee: "FIVE!"

Oscuro 1 grabs Trey Mack by the back of the head and tights, pulling the big man up with effort. Trey is heavy, dead weight at first, and Oscuro 1 struggles to guide him toward the apron.

Oscuro 2 keeps his eyes on Clovis, who is still against the barricade.

Silas Grimm stands nearby, watching everything unfold with a face that has lost all patience for the cheers around him.

CROWD: "FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA!"

Grimm slowly turns toward the audience again.

The chant gets louder.

He sneers.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm has been antagonizing this crowd all match long, but right now this crowd is the reason El Fantasma are still moving."

Mark Bravo: "And that has to drive Grimm insane. He wants them feared. Mexico City is lifting them up."

Referee: "SIX!"

Oscuro 1 finally rolls Trey Mack under the bottom rope and slides in after him.

The crowd pops as the legal men return to the ring.

Oscuro 1 crawls into position, drapes himself across Trey's chest, and hooks the leg.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Trey Mack kicks out.

Barely.

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The entire building groans.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack survives! The champions are still alive!"

Mark Bravo: "That was close. That was real close. Trey is running on instinct now."

Oscuro 1 rolls onto his back, one hand over his mask, chest heaving.

Oscuro 2 climbs back to the apron, reaching for the tag again.

On the floor, Clovis Black slowly rises behind him.

Not quickly.

Not cleanly.

But with that awful inevitability that makes him feel less like a wrestler and more like a problem returning from the dead.

John Phillips: "Clovis Black is back on his feet."

Mark Bravo: "That is bad news. When Clovis gets up like that, somebody usually goes down worse."

Oscuro 1 sees Trey stirring and reaches toward his corner.

Tag to Oscuro 2.

Mexico City roars again.

Oscuro 2 slingshots over the top rope and lands inside, immediately pulling Trey toward the center of the ring.

Oscuro 1 rolls out to the apron, still hurt, while Oscuro 2 points briefly to the corner.

The fans rise.

John Phillips: "Oscuro 2 may be looking to go up!"

Mark Bravo: "This could be the moment. Trey Mack is down. Clovis is outside. If he hits this, we may have new champions."

Oscuro 2 climbs.

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Second rope.

Top rope.

He steadies himself, looking down at Trey Mack.

The crowd reaches a fever pitch.

Silas Grimm steps toward the apron, eyes locked upward.

For once, even he appears fully invested in the possibility.

John Phillips: "Oscuro 2 is perched up top! The Tag Team Championships are hanging in the balance!"

Oscuro 2 launches for the Veil Breaker, twisting in the air for the top rope spinning frog splash.

But Trey Mack moves.

At the last possible second, the big man rolls aside.

Oscuro 2 crashes chest-first into the canvas with nothing but mat beneath him.

John Phillips: "Nobody home! Oscuro 2 missed the Veil Breaker!"

Mark Bravo: "That might be it. That might be the miss that kills the comeback."

Oscuro 2 bounces off the mat and rolls to his side, clutching his ribs.

Trey Mack crawls toward the champions' corner, desperate now.

Clovis Black pulls himself onto the apron.

His hand extends.

Oscuro 1 sees it and steps through the ropes, trying to cut Trey off before the tag can happen.

The referee moves to stop him, because Oscuro 1 is not legal.

Referee: "Back out! Get back to your corner!"

Oscuro 1 tries to move past him.

That is all the distraction Mack and Black need.

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Trey dives and tags Clovis.

John Phillips: "Tag made! Clovis Black is legal!"

Mark Bravo: "And Oscuro 2 is still down!"

Clovis enters like a freight train leaving the station.

Oscuro 1 turns toward him first, still trying to protect his partner.

Clovis blasts Oscuro 1 with a big boot that sends him tumbling through the ropes and crashing to the floor.

John Phillips: "Big boot to Oscuro 1!"

Mark Bravo: "He just erased the non-legal man!"

Oscuro 2 pushes up slowly, one hand across his ribs from the missed frog splash.

Clovis turns toward him.

The arena noise shifts.

Still loud.

Still hopeful.

But now there is dread inside it.

John Phillips: "Oscuro 2 has no idea what is behind him."

Mark Bravo: "He is about to find out."

Clovis grabs Oscuro 2 by the wrist and violently yanks him inward.

The Whistle.

The short-arm lariat lands flush, turning Oscuro 2 inside out.

John Phillips: "The Whistle connects!"

Mark Bravo: "That man folded in half!"

Clovis does not cover.

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He looks toward Trey Mack, who is pulling himself up on the apron.

Trey gives him a tired grin and nods.

The champions are not done.

Clovis drags Oscurro 2 toward the corner and tags Trey back in.

John Phillips: "Another tag by the champions. Mack and Black are setting up to finish this now."

Mark Bravo: "They weathered the storm, John. Now they're bringing the building down on El Fantasma."

Clovis hauls Oscurro 2 up and whips him hard into the corner.

Trey Mack backs into the opposite corner, slapping his chest once, firing himself up as the crowd boos.

Then he charges.

Full speed.

Cannonball in the corner.

All of Trey's weight crashes into Oscurro 2.

John Phillips: "Cannonball! Crash Landing sequence starting!"

Oscurro 2 collapses out of the corner, body limp and folded.

Trey drags him out two steps, exactly as Clovis steps back through the ropes.

Oscurro 1 tries to climb back onto the apron, desperate to save the match.

Silas Grimm, standing near him, does not help him.

Instead, Grimm looks at him and says something low, something cold.

Oscurro 1 hesitates for a split second.

Not long.

But long enough.

John Phillips: "What did Grimm just say to Oscurro 1?"

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Mark Bravo: "Whatever it was, it stopped him for half a heartbeat, and half a heartbeat is all Mack and Black need."

Trey hauls Oscuro 2 up with pure force, hooking him for the finish.

Clovis stands guard, intercepting Oscuro 1 as he finally tries to enter.

Clovis catches him through the ropes and blasts him with a forearm, knocking him back to the floor.

Trey drops.

Mack Truck.

The sit-out powerbomb lands with authority, Trey stacking Oscuro 2's shoulders beneath all of his weight.

John Phillips: "Mack Truck! Mack Truck connects!"

Mark Bravo: "He's got him stacked!"

The referee drops to count.

Referee: "ONE!"

Oscuro 1 tries again to dive in.

Clovis grabs him by the mask and shoulder from the floor side, dragging him back down violently.

Referee: "TWO!"

Oscuro 2's legs kick weakly, but Trey's weight is too much.

Referee: "THREE!"

DING DING DING!

The bell rings, and the boos cascade through Gimnasio Olimpico as Trey Mack remains seated in the pin for one extra second, chest heaving, eyes wide with exhausted satisfaction.

Ring Announcer: "Here are your winners... and still UTA Tag Team Champions... Trey Mack and Clovis Black... Mack and Black!"

"Get Up" hits the speakers again as Clovis Black steps back into the ring, jaw tight, breathing hard, but still carrying that cold, bruising presence.

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The referee retrieves the UTA Tag Team Championships and hands them to the champions.

Trey pulls himself up, clutching the title to his chest before throwing it over his shoulder.

Clovis takes his belt without celebration, lifting it just enough to show the hard camera before lowering it back to his side.

John Phillips: "Mack and Black retain the UTA Tag Team Championships, but El Fantasma pushed them to the limit here in Mexico City."

Mark Bravo: "They absolutely did. El Fantasma had this crowd believing. They had the champions reeling. But Mack and Black shut it down when it mattered, and The Empire keeps the gold."

Mexico City continues booing the champions, but there is still applause mixed in for El Fantasma, especially as Oscuro 1 pulls himself back toward his partner.

Oscuro 2 lies on his side, still feeling the Mack Truck, while Oscuro 1 reaches him and places a hand briefly on his shoulder.

Silas Grimm stands nearby.

He looks down at both members of El Fantasma.

Not concerned.

Not comforting.

Just disappointed.

John Phillips: "Look at Grimm. El Fantasma came close tonight, and this crowd embraced them, but Silas Grimm does not look like a man who takes moral victories."

Mark Bravo: "Silas Grimm looks like he watched something slip out of his hands. Not the titles. Control."

Trey Mack steps onto the middle rope, raising his championship high as the crowd boos louder.

Trey Mack: "Empire keeps what Empire takes!"

Clovis stands below him, title in hand, eyes on Silas Grimm for a moment before shifting back toward the ramp.

There is no smile from Clovis.

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No taunt.

Just the look of a man who did the job.

John Phillips: "Whether anyone likes it or not, The Empire remains draped in championship gold, and with everything surrounding Amy Harrison and her reach over this company, that matters."

Mark Bravo: "It matters a lot. Mack and Black retaining means The Empire keeps its grip on the tag division, and after what we've seen from that group lately, every piece of gold they hold feels like another lever Amy Harrison can pull."

Trey drops down from the ropes and exits the ring with Clovis, both champions backing up the ramp with the titles in hand.

Trey keeps talking, shouting toward the fans, pointing to the belts, laughing through the boos.

Clovis walks beside him in silence.

In the ring, El Fantasma remain down but not forgotten, the Mexico City crowd still chanting for them even in defeat.

CROWD: "FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA! FAN-TAS-MA!"

Silas Grimm hears it.

He turns his head slowly toward the chanting fans.

His expression darkens.

Then he looks back at El Fantasma.

Oscuro 1 helps Oscuro 2 sit up.

Grimm says nothing.

He simply steps backward from them, half-mask in hand, as if leaving them alone with the sound of a crowd that believes in them more than he does.

John Phillips: "Mack and Black retain. El Fantasma fall short. But the reaction from these fans may create questions that go far beyond this match."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Mexico City saw something in El Fantasma tonight. Silas Grimm saw something too. I'm not sure it was the same thing."

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The final shot of the segment catches three layers at once.

Mack and Black on the ramp, titles still in The Empire's possession.

El Fantasma in the ring, beaten but being chanted for by Mexico City.

And Silas Grimm at ringside, standing in the shadow between them, looking like a man whose disappointment may be more dangerous than anyone's victory.

The First Step is Evidence

A quieter corridor inside Gimnasio Olimpico.

The kind of place where the roar of Mexico City is still present, but muffled behind concrete walls, equipment cases, and black production drape.

Kairo Bey stands near a UTA-branded road case, one hand pressed lightly against his ribs, still feeling the punishment Samuel Scythe managed to deliver before the match slipped out from under him.

He is breathing more evenly now.

Still sweaty.

Still sore.

Still carrying the adrenaline of the win.

But the look on his face is not simple celebration.

It is processing.

It is conflict.

It is the expression of a man who won exactly the way he was told he could, and is not entirely sure how he feels about that.

Footsteps approach.

Measured.

Controlled.

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Eli Creed enters the frame first, hands folded in front of him, expression calm and warm in the way a locked door can look polished.

Troy Lindz follows half a step behind him, the United States Championship resting against their shoulder, posture compact and focused.

Kairo looks up as they arrive.

Eli Creed: "There he is."

Creed smiles softly.

Eli Creed: "The man who solved Samuel Scythe."

Kairo lets out a small breath through his nose.

Kairo Bey: "Solved is a strong word."

Eli Creed: "Accurate words often feel strong when you are not used to hearing them."

Kairo shifts his weight, still holding his ribs.

Kairo Bey: "Ross was out there."

Troy Lindz's eyes move to Kairo.

Creed's smile does not change.

Eli Creed: "Yes."

A beat.

Eli Creed: "And Scythe looked."

Kairo says nothing.

Eli Creed: "Again and again."

Creed takes one slow step closer, not crowding him, just narrowing the conversation.

Eli Creed: "Do you know what most men would have done?"

Kairo Bey: "Taken advantage?"

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Eli Creed: "No."

Creed shakes his head gently.

Eli Creed: "Most men would have performed."

Kairo looks away briefly.

Eli Creed: "They would have seen a distracted monster and thought, this is my moment. They would have chased applause. They would have climbed higher than necessary. They would have added flourish where pressure was required."

He pauses.

Eli Creed: "They would have made the mistake about themselves."

Kairo looks back at him.

Eli Creed: "You did not."

Troy steps forward now, voice low and even.

Troy Lindz: "You waited."

Kairo glances toward Troy.

Troy Lindz: "You let him split himself open. Then you took what was there."

Kairo's jaw tightens slightly.

Kairo Bey: "That sounds a lot cleaner than it felt."

Eli Creed: "Growth rarely feels clean."

Creed's eyes drift briefly to the United States Championship on Troy's shoulder, then back to Kairo.

Eli Creed: "It feels like friction. Like your old instincts screaming while a better version of you learns how to speak."

Kairo lets out a quiet laugh, but there is no humor in it.

Kairo Bey: "A better version."

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He shakes his head slightly.

Kairo Bey: "You make it sound like everything before this was broken."

Creed does not answer immediately.

He lets the silence sit.

Troy watches Kairo carefully, perhaps recognizing the resistance, perhaps remembering their own.

Eli Creed: "Not broken."

Creed's voice softens.

Eli Creed: "Unfinished."

Kairo looks at him.

Eli Creed: "There is a difference."

Kairo's hand leaves his ribs and drops to his side.

Kairo Bey: "I won because Chris Ross got in his head."

Eli Creed: "No."

Creed's answer is immediate this time.

Firm.

Almost parental.

Eli Creed: "Chris Ross opened a door."

He points lightly toward Kairo's chest.

Eli Creed: "You walked through it."

Kairo does not respond.

Eli Creed: "Do not minimize your own victory because you are uncomfortable with the method that made it possible."

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Troy Lindz nods once.

Troy Lindz: "That's the old reflex."

Kairo looks at Troy.

Kairo Bey: "What is?"

Troy Lindz: "Making yourself smaller so nobody can accuse you of being changed."

That lands.

Kairo looks down for a second, then away toward the distant arena noise.

Creed watches him with patient satisfaction.

Eli Creed: "You heard me tonight."

Kairo's eyes move back.

Eli Creed: "You heard Troy."

Troy remains still.

Eli Creed: "You did not perform. You corrected."

Creed steps beside Kairo now, turning so they both face the same direction down the hall instead of standing opposite each other.

Eli Creed: "That is the Creed Method."

Kairo swallows, then speaks quietly.

Kairo Bey: "Break. Bend. Build."

Creed's smile grows faintly.

Eli Creed: "Yes."

Kairo shakes his head, not in denial exactly, but in resistance to how natural the words felt coming out.

Kairo Bey: "I'm not Troy."

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Troy Lindz's expression does not change.

Troy Lindz: "Nobody asked you to be."

Kairo looks at them.

Troy Lindz: "I became what I needed to become."

A beat.

Troy Lindz: "You will too."

Kairo studies Troy's face, the calm, the certainty, the gold on their shoulder.

There is proof standing in front of him.

That might be the problem.

Kairo Bey: "And what if I don't like what that is?"

Creed answers before Troy can.

Eli Creed: "Then you will finally be honest enough to change it."

Kairo's brow tightens.

Eli Creed: "But do not confuse discomfort with danger."

Creed places a hand gently on Kairo's shoulder.

Kairo looks down at the hand.

He does not shrug it off.

He does not lean into it either.

He simply lets it remain there.

Eli Creed: "Tonight, you did something important."

Creed leans in just slightly.

Eli Creed: "You stopped chasing the version of yourself people cheer for."

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A beat.

Eli Creed: "And you became the version that wins."

Kairo closes his eyes for a moment.

The arena noise hums behind the walls.

Somewhere out there, people are still reacting to what he did.

Somewhere out there, the old Neon Ace might have wanted to run back into that noise and dance inside it.

This Kairo stands still.

Kairo Bey: "I don't know if I'm ready to call myself one of you."

Creed removes his hand from Kairo's shoulder.

There is no offense in his expression.

No impatience.

Only that terrible calm.

Eli Creed: "Of course not."

Kairo looks at him, surprised.

Eli Creed: "If you were ready tonight, then tonight would not have mattered."

Creed takes a step back.

Eli Creed: "The first step is not belief."

He turns slightly, gesturing for Troy to follow.

Eli Creed: "The first step is evidence."

Troy begins to move with Creed, but pauses beside Kairo for one brief second.

Troy Lindz: "You got the evidence."

Kairo holds Troy's gaze.

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Troy nods once, then walks after Creed.

Kairo remains in the hallway alone for a moment.

He looks down at his hands.

The hands that pinned Samuel Scythe.

The hands that did not point to the crowd.

The hands that listened.

He flexes them once.

Then, quietly, almost like he is testing whether the words still belong to him, he speaks.

Kairo Bey: "Break. Bend. Build."

He does not smile.

Not fully.

But he does not reject the words either.

The camera lingers on Kairo Bey, still not fully bought in.

Not yet.

But closer than he was when the night began.

Then the scene cuts away.

First Class in Ring

The camera returns to ringside inside Gimnasio Olimpico, where the Mexico City crowd is still buzzing from the night's chaos, pride, humiliation, and uneasy silence.

Then the lights change.

A single gold spotlight hits the stage like a red-carpet flash.

The opening riff of Maxwell Jett's music crashes through the arena, cocky arena rock bleeding into heavy

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trap drums.

The boos are instant.

Loud.

Violent.

Personal.

John Phillips: "And here comes the UTA Champion."

Mark Bravo: "Mexico City was already mad tonight, John. Maxwell Jett is about to make sure they get all the way there."

Maxwell "Max" Jett steps through the curtain first, and of course he does.

Tailored suit.

Designer scarf.

Hair perfect.

Expression unbearable.

The UTA Championship rests over his shoulder, polished and prominent, carried less like a title and more like evidence in a case he has already won.

He stops beneath the spotlight and slowly lowers his sunglasses just enough to look out over the crowd.

His lip curls.

Disgust.

Not hidden.

Not subtle.

Performed with surgical cruelty.

Behind him, Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington step out together, the Rich Young Grapplrz flanking the UTA Champion with all the coordinated arrogance of men who believe proximity to gold makes them royalty.

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John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett, Jacoby Jacobs, and Darian Darrington. First Class, together in Mexico City."

Mark Bravo: "And look at Jett. He's not walking into this building like champion of the people. He's walking in like the people failed a background check."

Jett slowly raises one hand.

Jacoby and Darian stop behind him.

The three men hold the pose for a second longer than anyone wants them to.

Jett in front.

UTA Championship over his shoulder.

Jacoby smirking to his left.

Darian nodding to himself on his right.

The boos rain down.

Jett mouths something toward the front row.

Maxwell Jett: "You're welcome."

The boos get louder.

That makes him smile.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett won the UTA Championship from Chris Ross, and at Victorious, First Class left Ross in a situation that still has people talking."

Mark Bravo: "Talking? Chris Ross has been haunting people tonight without saying a word. And I don't use that lightly. He has turned silence into a weapon."

First Class begins the walk down the ramp.

Jett takes the center lane, naturally, moving at the speed of someone who has never once worried that anyone else's time mattered.

Jacoby walks to one side, jawing at fans and laughing at every insult thrown his way.

Darian points toward the ring, then toward Jett, making sure everyone understands exactly who they are

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supposed to be looking at.

A fan in the aisle shouts something at Jett in Spanish.

Jett stops.

He slowly turns his head.

Then he looks at Jacoby.

Maxwell Jett: "Was that supposed to hurt me?"

Jacoby Jacobs: "I think he tried."

Darian Darrington: "Effort was there."

Jett gives the fan a pitying look.

Maxwell Jett: "That's adorable."

The fan boos harder.

Jett continues toward ringside, stepping around an imaginary spot on the floor as if the arena itself might stain his shoes.

Mark Bravo: "Maxwell Jett has been in Mexico for maybe a few hours, and somehow he has already insulted the building, the fans, the floor, and probably the air."

John Phillips: "That is what he does. He does not just want to be hated. He wants the hatred to revolve around him."

Jett reaches the steel steps and pauses at the bottom.

He looks at them.

Then at Darian.

Maxwell Jett: "Are these safe?"

Darian looks at the steps, then back at Jett.

Darian Darrington: "They're steel steps."

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Maxwell Jett: "That was not my question."

Jacoby laughs as Jett ascends carefully, wiping his shoes on the apron with exaggerated disgust before stepping through the ropes.

Jacoby and Darian enter after him, each taking a side of the ring while Jett walks straight to the center.

The UTA Champion lifts the title high above his head.

The boos thunder down again.

John Phillips: "There is the UTA Championship. The title Maxwell Jett stole from Chris Ross at Victory and has clung to ever since."

Mark Bravo: "Stole, won, finessed, whatever word keeps legal happy. The point is he has it, and he never lets anybody forget it."

Jett lowers the championship and demands a microphone from ringside with two impatient fingers.

A staffer hands him one.

Jett looks at the microphone.

Then at the staffer.

Maxwell Jett: "Wipe it."

The staffer hesitates.

Jett stares.

Jacoby snatches a towel from the apron and wipes the microphone dramatically before handing it back to Jett.

Jacoby Jacobs: "First Class service."

Jett nods, satisfied.

He raises the microphone.

The boos are too loud.

Jett waits.

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Then he smiles.

Maxwell Jett: "Please. Keep going."

The boos get louder.

Maxwell Jett: "No, really. This is the most organized I've seen any of you people tonight."

The reaction spikes immediately.

John Phillips: "Oh, come on."

Mark Bravo: "You knew he was going there. You knew it before he opened his mouth."

Jett adjusts the UTA Championship on his shoulder and walks slowly around the ring.

Maxwell Jett: "Mexico City."

The crowd roars, mostly in hatred.

Maxwell Jett: "I have to admit something. When UTA told me the World Tour was starting here, I had questions."

He glances around.

Maxwell Jett: "Most of them were related to sanitation."

Massive boos.

Jacoby covers his mouth, laughing.

Darian chuckles and points at a furious fan in the front row.

Maxwell Jett: "But then I thought about it. I thought, Max, you are the UTA Champion. You are a global attraction. You are a generational talent trapped in a company that spent far too long letting animals pretend they were main eventers."

He looks into the hard camera.

Maxwell Jett: "So maybe this is exactly where the lesson should begin."

Jett spreads one arm outward.

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Maxwell Jett: "Welcome to a new era in UTA."

The boos continue.

Maxwell Jett: "A higher class era."

He taps the title.

Maxwell Jett: "An era where elegance replaces chaos. Where intelligence replaces brute force. Where men like me, men like Jacoby Jacobs, men like Darian Darrington, finally drag this company out of the gutter and into First Class."

Jacoby nods proudly.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Tell 'em, champ."

Darian Darrington: "Upgrade season."

Jett turns toward the side of the crowd with a smile.

Maxwell Jett: "And I understand why that bothers you."

A beat.

Maxwell Jett: "Because when you spend your entire life sitting in coach, luxury looks like an insult."

The crowd erupts again.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett is going out of his way to insult every person in this building."

Mark Bravo: "And somehow he still thinks he's the victim."

Jett's smirk sharpens.

Maxwell Jett: "Which brings me to Chris Ross."

The crowd reaction changes.

They cheer the name.

Not with uncomplicated joy.

Not after the way Ross has behaved tonight.

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But with recognition.

With hunger.

With the memory of the cold, silent man and the steel chair.

Jett notices.

For half a second, the smirk tightens.

Maxwell Jett: "Yes, yes. Cheer your little cave creature."

More boos.

Maxwell Jett: "Cheer the unwashed temper tantrum with wrestling boots. Cheer the man who has spent his entire career confusing volume with value. Cheer the scum who thinks violence is a personality."

Jett turns toward Jacoby and Darian.

Maxwell Jett: "That is why First Class did what we did at Victorious."

He looks back at the camera.

Maxwell Jett: "Because Chris Ross has no place in the future of UTA."

The crowd boos louder.

Maxwell Jett: "He is not championship material. He is not leadership. He is not standard. He is not class. He is a blunt instrument with anger issues, and at Victorious, we showed the world exactly what happens when a blunt instrument runs into men with a plan."

Jacoby steps closer, nodding with forced bravado.

Jacoby Jacobs: "That's right. We handled that."

Darian Darrington: "Put him where he belonged."

Then the crowd shifts.

Not because music hits.

Not because lights change.

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Nothing dramatic happens at all.

That is why the reaction feels so sudden.

The camera cuts toward the stage.

Chris Ross walks through the curtain.

No music.

No fanfare.

No entrance video.

Just Chris Ross.

And a folded steel chair in his right hand.

The arena erupts.

John Phillips: "Oh my God."

Mark Bravo: "There he is again."

Ross steps onto the stage.

Cold.

Silent.

Expression carved into something unreadable and awful.

Inside the ring, Maxwell Jett stops speaking.

Jacoby's smile fades.

Darian takes one step closer to the ropes, then stops himself.

Ross does not walk down the ramp.

He stops at the top of the stage.

Jett raises the microphone again, voice suddenly sharper.

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Maxwell Jett: "No. No, no, no. Stay right there."

Ross looks at him.

No answer.

Maxwell Jett: "You hear me? Stay away from this ring."

Ross slowly looks down at the folded chair.

Then he unfolds it.

One metal leg.

Then another.

The scrape and snap echo faintly through the arena microphones.

He sets it down at the top of the stage.

Facing the ring.

Mark Bravo: "He's doing it again."

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is setting up that chair at the top of the stage."

Ross turns the chair slightly.

Then sits.

Elbows on knees.

Hands clasped.

Eyes locked on Maxwell Jett.

Silent.

Cold.

Still.

The building buzzes with unease.

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John Phillips: "Earlier tonight, Chris Ross did this during Samuel Scythe's match with Kairo Bey. He sat. He watched. He never said a word. And Samuel Scythe unraveled."

Mark Bravo: "Now he's doing it to the UTA Champion."

Jett stares at Ross from the ring.

For a moment, he says nothing.

Then he forces out a laugh.

Maxwell Jett: "That's it?"

He looks at Jacoby and Darian, inviting them into the joke.

Maxwell Jett: "That's the big move? You brought furniture?"

Jacoby laughs too loudly.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Man brought his own seat. That's crazy."

Darian Darrington: "VIP section up there, huh?"

Their laughter is not convincing.

Not completely.

Ross does not react.

He sits.

He stares.

Jett turns away from him, trying to reclaim the room.

Maxwell Jett: "As I was saying before I was interrupted by whatever emotional support chair situation this is..."

The line gets a few laughs from Jacoby and Darian.

Not from the crowd.

Not from Ross.

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Jett paces slowly, trying to reset his rhythm.

Maxwell Jett: "First Class represents refinement. It represents winners. It represents men who understand that this company has been begging for a standard it was never intelligent enough to demand."

He glances toward the stage.

Ross is still there.

Still staring.

Jett looks away quickly.

Maxwell Jett: "And men like Chris Ross--"

He stops.

The crowd catches it.

So does Jacoby.

So does Darian.

Jett clears his throat.

Maxwell Jett: "Men like Chris Ross are relics. They are fossils in wrist tape. They are what happens when a company spends too much time rewarding tantrums because it is too afraid to elevate excellence."

He glances again.

Ross has not moved.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett keeps looking."

Mark Bravo: "Of course he does. That chair has become a spotlight, and Ross is aiming it right at him."

Jacoby leans toward Jett and speaks off-mic, but close enough for the camera to catch pieces.

Jacoby Jacobs: "You good. Keep going. This guy, right?"

He laughs again.

Darian joins in, but his eyes are still on Ross.

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Darian Darrington: "Yeah. Weird dude. Real weird dude."

Jett nods once, annoyed that anyone thinks he needs reassurance.

Maxwell Jett: "I am perfectly fine."

He faces the crowd again.

Maxwell Jett: "You see, this is what Chris Ross does. He tries to intimidate civilized men because he cannot outthink them. He cannot outtalk them. He cannot outclass them. So he sits there like some bargain-bin horror movie extra and expects the world to tremble."

Jett points at Ross.

Maxwell Jett: "I do not tremble."

Ross remains seated.

Staring.

The silence after Jett's line is louder than the line itself.

Jett's jaw tightens.

Maxwell Jett: "I said I do not tremble."

The crowd begins to buzz, sensing the loss of control.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett is trying to convince Chris Ross, this crowd, and maybe himself."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and the worst thing Ross can do to him is exactly what he's doing. Nothing."

Jett paces again.

Faster now.

Maxwell Jett: "At Victorious, First Class did not attack Chris Ross because we were afraid of him. We did it because men like him are bad for business. Men like him are bad for the brand. Men like him are bad for the future."

Another glance.

Ross sits.

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Still.

Cold.

Unblinking.

Jett stops.

His whole body tightens.

Maxwell Jett: "What?"

The microphone lowers slightly.

He stares up the ramp.

Maxwell Jett: "What are you looking at?"

No response.

Ross does not move.

Jacoby steps in quickly, trying to laugh it off.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Man, he just mad. That's all. Big mad. Sitting mad."

Darian Darrington: "Yeah. Chair mad."

Jacoby laughs.

Darian laughs.

Neither laugh lasts long.

Maxwell Jett: "No, no, no."

Jett turns fully toward the stage now.

Maxwell Jett: "You do not get to do this."

Ross continues to stare.

Maxwell Jett: "You do not get to come out here without music, without a microphone, without the basic

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human decency to participate in the segment like a professional, and just sit there like I am supposed to be impressed."

The crowd gets louder.

Jett's voice rises.

Maxwell Jett: "Say something!"

No response.

Maxwell Jett: "Tell me what the hell you are doing out here!"

Ross does nothing.

Just sits.

Just stares.

Silently.

Coldly.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is giving Maxwell Jett the same treatment he gave Samuel Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "And look what it's doing. Jett came out here to announce a new era, and now he can't get through a paragraph without checking the stage."

Jett turns away, forcing himself to breathe.

He lifts the mic again.

Maxwell Jett: "This is pathetic."

His voice cracks slightly with anger, not fear.

But anger can be useful to Ross too.

Maxwell Jett: "This is what you people cheer. A man who cannot speak because he knows when he opens his mouth, nothing intelligent is going to come out."

He looks again.

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Ross remains still.

Jett's concentration is gone now.

The rhythm is gone.

The speech is gone.

All that remains is the UTA Champion, the microphone in his hand, and the former champion sitting on a steel chair at the top of the stage, saying nothing.

Jett suddenly throws the microphone down.

It hits the mat with a sharp thud.

John Phillips: "Jett just threw the mic down!"

Mark Bravo: "Ross broke the speech without saying a word!"

Jett storms toward the ropes, rolling his sleeves up as he moves.

Jacoby and Darian immediately follow, suddenly alert, suddenly less interested in jokes.

Maxwell Jett: "Come on then!"

Jett leans through the ropes, pointing up the ramp.

Maxwell Jett: "Bring it! You want me? Come get me!"

At the top of the stage, Chris Ross finally moves.

The crowd rises with him.

Ross unclasps his hands.

Plants them on his knees.

And stands.

First Class stops in their tracks.

All three of them.

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Jett at the ropes.

Jacoby just behind him.

Darian beside them.

The whole ring freezes.

John Phillips: "Ross is standing."

Mark Bravo: "And look at First Class now."

Jett swallows the hesitation quickly and forces the bravado back onto his face.

He rolls one sleeve higher.

Maxwell Jett: "Yeah. That's right. Come on!"

Jacoby raises his fists, but his eyes flick to Darian.

Darian adjusts his stance, ready for a fight he no longer seems excited about.

Ross reaches down.

He folds the chair.

Cleanly.

Calmly.

The metal snaps shut.

The crowd buzzes.

Ross holds the folded chair at his side.

He looks down the ramp.

Not at Jacoby.

Not at Darian.

At Maxwell Jett.

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Jett keeps his arms out.

Maxwell Jett: "I'm right here!"

Ross stares.

One long second.

Two.

Three.

Then Ross turns.

No charge.

No raised chair.

No words.

He simply turns away from the ring and walks toward the curtain.

The folded steel chair hangs at his side.

He does not look back.

He disappears through the curtain.

For a moment, no one in the ring moves.

First Class stands there, ready for a fight that never came, caught in the uncomfortable aftermath of being ignored.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross just left."

Mark Bravo: "He came out here, sat down, ruined Maxwell Jett's big speech, stood up, and walked away. Again."

Jett remains at the ropes, breathing hard, face flushed with anger.

Jacoby lowers his hands slowly.

Darian looks from the empty stage to Jett, then to Jacoby, clearly unsure what the correct reaction is

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supposed to be.

Jacoby Jacobs: "That was... weird, right?"

Darian Darrington: "Yeah. Yeah, that was weird."

Jett turns toward them sharply.

Maxwell Jett: "Shut up."

They do.

Jett looks back toward the empty stage.

His moment is gone.

The speech is dead.

The new era announcement has been swallowed by one man sitting in a chair and saying absolutely nothing.

The crowd knows it.

First Class knows it.

Jett knows it most of all.

He angrily snatches the UTA Championship from where it rests near the corner and throws it over his shoulder.

Then he waves sharply for Jacoby and Darian to follow.

Maxwell Jett: "Come on."

Jacoby and Darian exchange one more uneasy glance before following him out of the ring.

Jett exits first, furious, trying to make the walk look like a choice instead of a retreat.

Jacoby follows, throwing one half-hearted insult toward the crowd that barely has any air behind it.

Darian backs down the steps, still watching the entranceway like Ross might come back the second they stop paying attention.

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John Phillips: "First Class came out here to declare a new higher class era in UTA. Chris Ross never opened his mouth, and somehow he completely derailed them."

Mark Bravo: "That cold silence is doing more damage than any chair shot could have done tonight. Maxwell Jett wanted control. Chris Ross walked out and took it from him by sitting down."

First Class heads up the ramp, angry and confused, the UTA Champion walking fast now, no longer taking his time, no longer soaking in the reaction, no longer enjoying the moment.

The crowd boos them out, but underneath the boos is something else.

Unease.

Anticipation.

The sense that Chris Ross has found a new way to hurt people.

The camera holds on the empty stage for one final beat.

Then cuts away.

Standard Rules Apply

The camera cuts backstage.

Near the curtain.

The muffled roar of the Mexico City crowd bleeds through the black drape, a constant, restless pressure waiting on the other side.

Production assistants move quickly and quietly through the narrow space, carrying headsets, cue sheets, and cables while doing everything possible to stay out of the orbit of the man standing just off to the side of the entrance.

Eric Dane Jr.

Still composed.

Still immaculate.

Still carrying himself like the main event is not something he has been placed into, but something that has finally caught up to him.

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The Hardcore Championship rests over his shoulder like it has always belonged there.

Dane has not moved in a while.

Just standing.

Waiting.

Listening to the crowd without looking like he cares what it has to say.

Behind him--

SFX: *whirr... click... a soft plastic rattle...*

Bobby Dean.

Still on the scooter.

Still present.

Still watching the curtain like it might open on its own if he believes hard enough.

Bobby leans slightly to one side, trying to get a better look past Dane toward the entrance.

Bobby Dean: "Big one."

Dane does not respond.

Bobby nods anyway.

Bobby Dean: "Real big one."

Another nod.

Bobby Dean: "Family business."

Dane adjusts the championship on his shoulder.

Just once.

Precise.

The kind of movement that says he heard Bobby without granting him the satisfaction of a response.

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Footsteps approach.

Measured.

Professional.

New UTA Interviewer, Katy Winters, steps into frame, microphone already in hand, timing her entry like she has done this a hundred times before and knows better than to waste the champion's patience.

Katy Winters: "Eric--"

Dane turns his head slightly.

Not surprised.

Just acknowledging.

Katy positions herself just enough to get both herself and Dane in frame, the curtain looming behind them like a waiting mouth.

Katy Winters: "Earlier tonight, you told Scott Stevens you would decide the stipulation for your Hardcore Championship match with Maxx Mayhem."

A small pause.

The crowd noise swells behind the curtain.

Katy Winters: "We're about to find out what that is."

Dane looks at her.

Then at the curtain.

Then back at her.

A faint smile appears.

Not big.

Not theatrical.

Just enough.

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Eric Dane Jr.: "Singles match."

No emphasis.

No flourish.

Eric Dane Jr.: "One fall to a finish."

Another beat.

Katy does not interrupt.

Does not react.

She simply lets him finish.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Standard rules apply."

Silence.

Just the noise of the arena behind them.

Katy blinks once.

Processing.

That is it.

No follow-up.

No clarification.

Because there is not one.

The Hardcore Championship, newly reinstated and practically begging for chaos, will be defended under the plainest terms possible.

Singles match.

One fall.

Standard rules.

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Against Maxx Mayhem.

Somehow, that feels less safe than anything else he could have chosen.

Behind Dane--

Bobby leans forward slightly.

Bobby Dean: "...Yeah!"

He nods, like that made perfect sense.

SFX: HONK.

Nobody reacts.

The music hits.

Eric Dane Jr.'s music.

Sharp.

Immediate.

The reaction from the arena punches through the curtain like a shockwave.

Dane does not wait.

Does not say anything else.

He turns and steps through the curtain, disappearing into the noise, the light, and the hostility waiting on the other side.

Bobby jolts.

Bobby Dean: "Oh--!"

He fumbles with the scooter controls.

SFX: WHRR--clunk--HONK.

The scooter turns too wide, nearly clipping a rolling equipment case before Bobby corrects it with a little panic swerve.

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Bobby Dean: "Wait up! I'm comin'! I'm comin'!"

He speeds toward the curtain, still several seconds behind Dane and somehow already out of breath despite being seated.

Bobby disappears through the curtain after him.

The camera holds for a moment on the now-empty backstage space.

Katy Winters remains there, microphone lowered slightly, still wearing the expression of someone who expected violence, spectacle, or at least a clever loophole.

Instead, she got standard rules.

The roar from the arena continues to pour through.

Then--

Cut to black.

Eric Dane Jr. vs Maxx Mayhem

The camera returns to ringside inside Gimnasio Olimpico, where the Mexico City crowd is already restless for the main event.

The ring has been cleared.

No ladders surround it.

No tables lean ominously against the barricade.

No chairs sit stacked near the timekeeper's area.

No trash cans.

No kendo sticks.

No visible instruments of violence waiting to be introduced.

Just a wrestling ring.

Just a referee.

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Just the Hardcore Championship about to be defended under standard rules because Eric Dane Jr. decided that was funnier, safer, smarter, or all three.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, it is time for tonight's main event. Eric Dane Jr. defends the newly reinstated Hardcore Championship against Maxx Mayhem."

Mark Bravo: "And I still cannot believe I'm saying this, John, but this Hardcore Championship match will be contested under standard rules. One fall to a finish. No weapons. No stipulations. No chaos."

John Phillips: "That was the stipulation chosen earlier by Eric Dane Jr."

Mark Bravo: "Of course it was. The kid found a way to defend a Hardcore Championship match by making it as un-hardcore as possible. That is either cowardice, strategy, or the most Eric Dane Jr. thing I have ever heard."

The lights dim slightly.

A sharp spotlight cuts across the stage.

Then Nas' "Made You Look" hits the speakers.

The boos roll in immediately.

Heavy.

Hostile.

Mexico City already knows exactly who is about to make the moment about himself.

John Phillips: "And here comes the champion."

Mark Bravo: "I can feel his ego from here."

Eric Dane Jr. steps through the curtain like the entire World Tour has been constructed as a personal showcase for his entrance gear.

He is draped in a sparkling robe that catches every light in the building and throws it back ten times louder.

Silver.

White.

Hints of gold.

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A pair of wrap-around sunglasses sit on his face despite the fact that he is indoors, under arena lighting, at night.

The Hardcore Championship rests across his shoulder, positioned perfectly for the camera, because of course it is.

Dane pauses at the top of the ramp.

He spreads his arms.

Not to welcome the fans.

To remind them where they are supposed to look.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Yeah. There he is."

The boos get louder.

Dane smirks like he has just been complimented.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. won that Hardcore Championship at Victorious in a ladder match against Bobby Dean, and tonight he makes his first defense under completely different circumstances."

Mark Bravo: "Different circumstances? John, he turned a Hardcore Title match into a regular singles match against a man named Maxx Mayhem. That is like ordering a salad at a barbecue joint and acting like you're the genius."

Dane starts down the ramp.

Slow.

Deliberate.

Absurdly pleased with himself.

He does not slap hands.

He does not acknowledge the kids leaning over the barricade.

He does, however, stop in front of one particularly loud fan and slowly tilt the Hardcore Championship toward them, letting them see it before pulling it back against his chest.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Not yours."

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The fan boos in his face.

Dane laughs.

He keeps walking.

John Phillips: "There is no denying the arrogance. Eric Dane Jr. genuinely believes every room he walks into belongs to him."

Mark Bravo: "That kid has main character syndrome so bad he thinks the camera owes him rent."

Dane reaches ringside and stops before the steel steps.

He looks around.

Again, no weapons.

No obvious hardcore trappings.

Just a clean ringside area.

He smiles.

Not a little smile.

A proud one.

He knows exactly what he did.

John Phillips: "Look at him. He is proud of this."

Mark Bravo: "He should be ashamed. But Eric Dane Jr. and shame have never met formally."

Dane climbs the steps with exaggerated dignity, wiping both boots on the apron before entering the ring.

Once inside, he walks straight to the center, lifts the Hardcore Championship high above his head, and turns slowly so every side of the arena can boo him equally.

The championship glints under the lights.

Dane's chin rises.

The boos rain down.

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John Phillips: "The Hardcore Champion, Eric Dane Jr., taking his time here before the biggest title defense of his young reign."

Mark Bravo: "Young reign, young brain, same ego."

Then--

SFX: HONK! HONK!

Dane freezes.

The crowd reaction changes immediately.

From boos to cheers.

From hostility to laughter.

From Eric Dane Jr.'s spotlight to someone else's nonsense.

Mark Bravo: "Oh no."

John Phillips: "You had to know he was not far behind."

SFX: WHRRRRR--clunk--HONK!

Bobby Dean emerges through the curtain on his battered mobility scooter, one hand on the controls, the other waving proudly to the fans like he is leading a parade in his own honor.

The scooter rattles beneath him.

The front panel appears to be hanging on by faith and stubbornness.

Bobby, however, looks thrilled.

Bobby Dean: "I'm comin'! I'm comin'!"

He honks twice more.

SFX: HONK! HONK!

Inside the ring, Eric Dane Jr. slowly lowers the title.

His jaw tightens.

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Eric Dane Jr.: "No."

Bobby continues down the ramp, smiling wide, soaking in the cheers, occasionally veering just a little too close to the barricade before correcting the scooter with a dramatic wobble.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean, the former holder and, in his mind for a long time, rightful guardian of the Hardcore Championship, accompanying Eric Dane Jr. to ringside tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Accompanying? John, he is haunting him on wheels."

Bobby reaches ringside and begins to circle the ring on the scooter.

He waves to the front row.

He waves to the camera.

He waves to Mark Bravo.

Bobby Dean: "Hi, Mark!"

Mark Bravo: "Do not make eye contact with me while driving that thing."

Bobby laughs and honks again.

SFX: HONK!

Dane steps toward the ropes, pointing down at Bobby with the championship still in hand.

Eric Dane Jr.: "What are you doing?"

Bobby looks up at him, innocent as can be.

Bobby Dean: "Supporting family!"

Dane closes his eyes for a second.

That answer hurt him spiritually.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Do not call it that."

Bobby Dean: "You got this!"

Another honk.

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SFX: HONK!

Dane turns away from the ropes, trying to reclaim his composure and the spotlight at the same time.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. looks less than thrilled that Bobby Dean is out here."

Mark Bravo: "Of course he is. Eric wants this to be a coronation. Bobby turns every room into a county fair with emotional baggage."

Bobby parks the scooter near the corner closest to the timekeeper's area, lining it up with painstaking care.

He backs it up.

Pulls forward.

Backs it up again.

Turns the handlebars slightly.

Pulls forward two inches.

Back again.

Dane watches from inside the ring, becoming visibly more annoyed with every second.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Park it!"

Bobby raises one finger.

Bobby Dean: "Safety first!"

He finally stops the scooter at ringside.

SFX: whirr... clunk... soft plastic rattle.

Bobby pats the handlebar like a cowboy settling a horse.

Bobby Dean: "Good girl."

The crowd laughs and cheers.

Bobby settles into position at ringside, beaming up at Dane with unconditional support that Dane clearly did not request.

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John Phillips: "Bobby Dean appears to be remaining on the outside for this Hardcore Championship match."

Mark Bravo: "I cannot wait to see how a mobility scooter factors into a standard rules Hardcore Title match. That sentence should not exist."

Dane turns his attention back to the hard camera.

He lifts the Hardcore Championship again, trying to erase the last thirty seconds from the presentation.

The crowd continues buzzing for Bobby.

Dane notices.

He hates it.

He climbs onto the middle rope in the nearest corner, title raised overhead, sunglasses still on, robe still shimmering, chin lifted like the boos are applause he simply has not translated correctly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Look at the champion!"

The crowd boos.

Bobby applauds enthusiastically from ringside.

Bobby Dean: "That's it! Big moment! Big night!"

Dane glances down sharply.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stop helping."

Bobby nods, then immediately gives him a thumbs up.

Bobby Dean: "You got it."

Dane steps down from the corner and removes the Hardcore Championship from his shoulder, holding it out toward the referee.

But he does not let go right away.

He pulls it back once, wipes imaginary dust from the faceplate, then finally hands it over with a look that says he expects it returned in exactly the same condition.

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John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. handing over the Hardcore Championship, and again, we need to stress the oddity here. This is not a ladder match like Victorious. This is not anything goes. This is a standard singles match."

Mark Bravo: "Which means Maxx Mayhem has to beat Eric Dane Jr. without doing the thing Maxx Mayhem loves most, which is using anything not nailed down as a weapon. And Eric knows that."

The referee raises the Hardcore Championship in the center of the ring.

The camera catches Dane beneath it, arms stretched outward, still demanding the focus.

Then it cuts to Bobby Dean at ringside, parked on the scooter, clapping proudly like a proud uncle at a school play.

Dane looks between the referee, the title, the crowd, and Bobby.

He exhales through his nose.

Then he points toward the stage.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Bring him out."

He backs into his corner, rolling his shoulders and adjusting his wrist tape, every movement exaggerated for the camera.

Bobby leans slightly over the scooter handlebars, eyes on the stage, excited despite himself.

Bobby Dean: "Main event time."

Dane glares down at him.

Bobby Dean: "Sorry. Whispering."

He lowers his voice, badly.

Bobby Dean: "Main event time."

Dane looks away, jaw tight.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. is in the ring. Bobby Dean is posted at ringside. The Hardcore Championship is on the line under standard rules."

Mark Bravo: "And now we wait for Maxx Mayhem, a man whose entire personality is about breaking rules,

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to walk into a match where he technically has to obey them."

The camera holds on Dane in the corner, smug and tense all at once, the spotlight still catching the shimmer of his robe as the boos continue to roll around him.

At ringside, Bobby Dean gives the scooter horn one tiny, accidental tap.

SFX: honk.

Dane slowly turns his head toward him.

Bobby freezes.

The crowd laughs.

The champion does not.

The camera holds on Eric Dane Jr. in the ring, still glaring down at Bobby Dean after the tiny accidental scooter honk.

Bobby keeps both hands frozen on the handlebars, eyes wide, like a child caught touching something expensive.

Dane slowly points one finger at him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Do not."

Bobby nods quickly.

Bobby Dean: "No honks."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "Unless emergency."

Dane closes his eyes and turns away.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. awaiting his challenger now, and again, the Hardcore Championship is on the line tonight under standard rules."

Mark Bravo: "Which is still ridiculous. But it might be the smartest ridiculous thing Eric Dane Jr. has ever done, because Maxx Mayhem and standard rules go together like gasoline and an open flame."

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The arena lights flicker.

Static slashes across the video screen.

A siren blares.

Then "Holiday" by Green Day blasts through Gimnasio Olimpico.

The crowd erupts.

Not just cheers.

Anticipation.

Because everyone knows what usually follows Maxx Mayhem.

Noise.

Damage.

Poor decisions.

And then he appears.

Maxx Mayhem bursts through the curtain like chaos learned how to walk upright.

He is grinning like a lunatic, eyes wild, shoulders bouncing to the music, one hand gripping the handle of a battered shopping cart loaded to the brim with weapons.

Trash can lids.

A dented baking sheet.

Kendo sticks.

A stop sign.

A coil of rope.

A plunger for reasons nobody should investigate.

A folded chair sticking out at an unsafe angle.

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Something that might be a hubcap.

Something that might be a toaster.

Something that almost certainly did not pass customs.

John Phillips: "And here comes Maxx Mayhem!"

Mark Bravo: "Oh, he brought inventory."

Maxx shoves the cart forward and rides the back bar for a few feet, cackling as the weapons rattle violently inside it.

The cart wobbles left.

Then right.

Maxx hops off before it can tip over and gives it a sharp slap on the side.

Maxx Mayhem: "Wake up, toys! We got work!"

The crowd roars.

Inside the ring, Eric Dane Jr. steps toward the ropes, eyes widening behind his sunglasses.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No. No, absolutely not."

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem has brought a shopping cart full of weapons to the main event."

Mark Bravo: "Which makes sense if you heard the words Hardcore Championship and stopped listening before standard rules."

The referee immediately moves toward the ropes, gesturing with both hands.

Referee: "No weapons! Maxx, no weapons!"

Maxx is too far up the ramp to hear or too happy to care.

Possibly both.

He reaches into the shopping cart, pulls out a trash can lid, and holds it high like Excalibur.

Maxx Mayhem: "ORDER IS FOR COWARDS!"

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Mexico City explodes.

Mark Bravo: "I don't think anybody told him."

John Phillips: "Told him what?"

Mark Bravo: "That this Hardcore Championship match is... somehow... not a hardcore match."

Maxx starts down the ramp again, pushing the cart with wild enthusiasm as the weapons bang, clatter, and shift with every step.

Bobby Dean, still parked near the timekeeper's side, sees the problem developing in real time.

He looks from Maxx to the ring.

Then to Eric Dane Jr.

Then back to Maxx.

He straightens on the scooter with sudden purpose.

Bobby Dean: "I got this!"

Dane turns his head slowly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You have never had this."

Bobby grips the scooter controls and pulls away from ringside.

SFX: *WHRRRR--clunk--HONK!*

The crowd pops as Bobby Dean begins driving up the ramp toward Maxx Mayhem.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean is heading up the ramp!"

Mark Bravo: "This is the strangest traffic stop in UTA history."

Bobby meets Maxx about halfway down the ramp.

Maxx stops the shopping cart abruptly, causing a kendo stick to slide forward and poke out through the front bars.

Bobby stops the scooter with a squeal of plastic and a tiny bounce.

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SFX: *honk.*

Bobby winces.

Bobby Dean: "Sorry. That one was emotional."

Maxx looks down at Bobby.

Then at the scooter.

Then at the shopping cart.

Then back at Bobby.

Maxx Mayhem: "You bring backup wheels?"

Bobby Dean: "Kind of. Listen, Maxx, buddy, pal, weapon enthusiast... little thing."

Maxx leans on the shopping cart handle, still smiling.

Maxx Mayhem: "Little things are where they hide the explosives."

Bobby Dean: "Right. Okay. Great. Love that. But here's the thing."

Bobby points toward the ring, where Eric Dane Jr. is standing by the ropes with both hands out, silently begging the referee to enforce civilization.

Bobby Dean: "It's not a hardcore match."

Maxx blinks.

The crowd laughs and buzzes.

Maxx slowly looks into the shopping cart.

Then back at Bobby.

Maxx Mayhem: "But it's for the Hardcore Title, innit?"

Bobby nods, delighted to confirm at least one thing.

Bobby Dean: "Yep!"

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Maxx's face twists into deep confusion.

He looks at the cart again.

Then at the ring.

Then at the referee.

Then at Eric Dane Jr., who points to his own head like he is very smart.

Maxx slowly mouths the words to himself.

Maxx Mayhem: "Hardcore Title."

He points at the weapons.

Maxx Mayhem: "No hardcore."

Bobby nods again.

Bobby Dean: "Standard rules."

Maxx stares.

For one long second, everyone waits for anger.

Instead, Maxx begins to smile.

Slowly.

Wider.

Then he starts laughing.

Maxx Mayhem: "That's stupid."

Bobby thinks about it.

Bobby Dean: "A little bit."

Maxx Mayhem: "I love it."

The crowd cheers.

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John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem has just been informed this is a standard rules match."

Mark Bravo: "And he loves it because it makes less sense. Chaos is his friend, John. Confusion is just chaos wearing glasses."

Maxx grabs the trash can lid from the cart and looks at it with affection.

Maxx Mayhem: "Can't bring you in, apparently."

He kisses the trash can lid.

Maxx Mayhem: "Wait for me."

He drops it back into the cart with a clang.

The referee yells again from the ring.

Referee: "Leave the cart on the ramp!"

Maxx points at him.

Maxx Mayhem: "You're lucky I respect almost none of your authority!"

He turns to Bobby, suddenly very serious.

Maxx Mayhem: "Can you babysit them?"

Bobby looks into the shopping cart full of weapons.

His eyes widen like he has just been handed a sacred duty.

Bobby Dean: "I would be honored."

Maxx places one hand on Bobby's shoulder.

Maxx Mayhem: "If the toaster gets mouthy, bite first."

Bobby nods solemnly.

Bobby Dean: "Understood."

Maxx leaves the shopping cart parked halfway down the ramp beside Bobby Dean's scooter, then starts walking toward the ring again.

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He takes about three steps.

Stops.

Runs back to the cart.

Pulls out a kendo stick.

The referee immediately shouts.

Referee: "No!"

Maxx sighs dramatically and drops it back in.

Maxx Mayhem: "Fine. But I want credit for personal growth."

He resumes the walk to the ring, now empty-handed but still vibrating with chaotic possibility.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem continuing to the ring, and somehow leaving the weapons behind seems to have made him more dangerous, not less."

Mark Bravo: "Because now he's amused. You never want a man like Maxx Mayhem amused before a fight."

At the halfway point between the cart and the ring, Maxx suddenly turns to the crowd and throws both arms out.

Maxx Mayhem: "STANDARD MAYHEM!"

Mexico City roars back.

Inside the ring, Dane shakes his head in disgust.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is beneath me."

Maxx hears enough of it to point at him while walking.

Maxx Mayhem: "Everything's beneath you if I drop you hard enough!"

The crowd pops.

Mark Bravo: "That is technically true."

John Phillips: "I am not sure that is the standard we should be applying."

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Maxx reaches ringside and slides under the bottom rope fast, popping up to one knee and grinning at Dane.

Eric immediately steps backward, pointing at the referee.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Check him. Check him for weapons."

Maxx slowly raises both hands.

The referee approaches cautiously.

Maxx opens his mouth.

The referee stops.

Referee: "Do not."

Maxx closes his mouth.

Maxx Mayhem: "You don't even know what I was gonna do."

Referee: "Yes, I do."

The crowd laughs as the referee pats him down quickly.

He finds nothing.

Maxx looks deeply proud of himself.

Maxx Mayhem: "Clean living."

Outside, Bobby Dean sits beside the shopping cart like a guard posted outside a dragon's cave.

He looks down into the weapons.

Then up at the ring.

Then down again.

He reaches toward the toaster.

Stops himself.

Nods.

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Bobby Dean: "Not today."

In the ring, Maxx Mayhem rises to his feet and bounces in place, laughing under his breath, eyes fixed on Eric Dane Jr.

Dane removes his sunglasses slowly and hands them off at ringside, never taking his eyes off Maxx.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. wanted standard rules. He got them. But now he has to actually wrestle Maxx Mayhem, a man who seems delighted by the absurdity of all of this."

Mark Bravo: "The weapons are outside. Bobby Dean is guarding a shopping cart. The Hardcore Championship is being defended like a normal singles title. And Maxx Mayhem is smiling. This is already a disaster, and the bell hasn't even rung."

The referee takes the Hardcore Championship from the timekeeper and raises it high again for the crowd.

Eric Dane Jr. points toward it with smug certainty.

Maxx Mayhem looks at it, then at Dane, then out toward the cart halfway up the ramp.

He grins.

Maxx Mayhem: "Chaos adapts."

The referee lowers the championship and hands it out to the timekeeper.

Bobby Dean sits proudly near the cart, scooter parked beside it, keeping watch over the weapons he has been trusted to protect.

Dane and Maxx step toward the center.

Standard rules.

Hardcore title.

Maxx Mayhem smiling like the contradiction is a gift.

The bell is next.

The referee steps between Eric Dane Jr. and Maxx Mayhem, giving both men the final instructions.

Eric barely listens.

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His eyes are on Maxx.

Not with fear, exactly.

With the careful irritation of a man who has realized the thing across from him may not behave according to any script he wrote in his own head.

Maxx, meanwhile, is bouncing on the balls of his feet.

Not warming up.

Vibrating.

His eyes are too wide.

His grin is too big.

His hands flex like he is trying very hard to remember he is not allowed to hit Eric with a toaster.

John Phillips: "The Hardcore Championship is on the line. Standard rules. One fall to a finish."

Mark Bravo: "And Maxx Mayhem looks like a raccoon that got into an energy drink factory."

Outside the ring, Bobby Dean sits proudly on his mobility scooter beside Maxx's shopping cart full of weapons, watching over it like a sworn guardian of forbidden treasure.

He glances into the cart.

Then at the ring.

Then back into the cart.

Bobby Dean: "Everybody stay calm."

A kendo stick shifts slightly in the cart.

Bobby narrows his eyes.

Bobby Dean: "I mean it."

The referee backs away and points to the timekeeper.

DING DING DING!

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The bell sounds.

Maxx Mayhem explodes forward.

No feeling out process.

No lockup.

No circling.

He charges at Eric Dane Jr. like somebody opened the cage door by mistake.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem out of the gate!"

Eric's eyes go wide.

He immediately drops to his back and rolls under the bottom rope, spilling out to the floor before Maxx can get a hand on him.

The crowd boos hard.

Mark Bravo: "And Eric Dane Jr. wants absolutely no part of that!"

Maxx skids to a stop near the ropes, hands on the top strand, staring down at Eric with a delighted, dangerous smile.

Eric backs away from the apron with both hands raised.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No. No. Reset. We reset."

Maxx leans over the top rope.

Maxx Mayhem: "Bell rang, sparkle pants!"

Eric points at him sharply.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You do not set the pace. I set the pace."

Maxx looks at the crowd, then back at Eric.

Maxx Mayhem: "Pace this."

Maxx suddenly slaps both hands against the top rope and barks like a maniac.

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Eric flinches backward.

The crowd erupts.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. bailed out immediately, and Maxx Mayhem is already in his head!"

Mark Bravo: "Eric wanted standard rules because he thought it would cage Maxx. Problem is, Maxx doesn't need a weapon to act like something that should be contained."

The referee starts a count.

Referee: "ONE!"

Eric turns away from the ring and begins pacing near the barricade, shaking his head, clearly trying to slow the match down before it becomes whatever Maxx wants it to become.

Fans in the front row scream at him.

One points toward the ring.

Eric looks at them with deep offense.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I know where the ring is."

Inside, Maxx drops to all fours for a second and crawls toward the ropes, peering down at Eric like an animal studying prey from under a fence.

Mark Bravo: "Why is he crawling?"

John Phillips: "I don't know that Maxx Mayhem operates with a why."

Eric notices and recoils.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stop doing that."

Maxx pops up to his feet and throws both arms out.

Maxx Mayhem: "Standard rules, baby!"

The crowd cheers.

Referee: "TWO!"

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Outside, Bobby Dean turns the scooter slightly and rolls closer to Eric's side of ringside.

SFX: *whirr... clunk...*

Eric hears it and turns.

Bobby gives him a supportive thumbs up.

Bobby Dean: "You're doing great! Tactical retreat!"

Eric stares at him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Do not narrate me."

Bobby Dean: "Sorry."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "Strategic pause."

Eric throws his hands out in frustration and walks away from him.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean trying to be supportive, and Eric Dane Jr. might be more annoyed by him than by his challenger."

Mark Bravo: "Bobby is the kind of moral support that comes with a warning label and a horn."

Referee: "THREE!"

Maxx backs away from the ropes and claps his hands once.

Then twice.

Then he begins leading the crowd in a rhythm.

CROWD: "MAXX! MAXX! MAXX!"

Eric looks disgusted by the sound of it.

He reaches up and adjusts his wrist tape, as if claiming the break was intentional all along.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I am composing myself."

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Mark Bravo: "He is outside the ring because Maxx ran at him."

John Phillips: "That is one interpretation."

Mark Bravo: "It is the correct interpretation."

Referee: "FOUR!"

Eric finally steps toward the apron.

Maxx immediately lunges toward the ropes again.

Eric hops backward so fast he nearly bumps into Bobby's scooter.

SFX: HONK!

The accidental horn blast makes Eric jump sideways.

Bobby gasps.

Bobby Dean: "Emergency!"

The crowd roars with laughter.

Maxx laughs too, gripping the top rope and shaking it with excitement.

Maxx Mayhem: "He honked you!"

Eric points at Bobby, then at the scooter.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Move that thing!"

Bobby looks down at the scooter.

Bobby Dean: "She has feelings."

Eric turns away, now visibly losing patience.

Referee: "FIVE!"

Dane marches around ringside, putting distance between himself, Bobby, Maxx, the cart full of weapons, and apparently joy itself.

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Maxx steps through the ropes, but the referee quickly blocks him.

Referee: "Stay in the ring, Maxx!"

Maxx Mayhem: "I'm just checking on him!"

Referee: "No, you're not."

Maxx Mayhem: "Emotionally, maybe!"

The referee points him back.

Maxx holds both hands up and backs away, but his grin never fades.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem is trying to bait Eric Dane Jr. back inside. Dane is trying to slow this entire thing down."

Mark Bravo: "And this is where Eric might actually be smart. If Maxx gets to make this weird and fast, Eric is in trouble. If Eric makes it boring and controlled, that helps him."

Referee: "SIX!"

Eric stops near the announcers' side and points toward the referee.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Back him up!"

The referee turns toward Maxx, who is standing near center ring now, swaying side to side like he is hearing music no one else can hear.

Referee: "Maxx, back up."

Maxx takes one exaggerated step backward.

Then another.

Then he salutes.

Maxx Mayhem: "I respect the rules I understand."

Mark Bravo: "That list is short."

Referee: "SEVEN!"

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Eric slides onto the apron slowly, still watching Maxx.

Maxx crouches low in the ring, hands on his knees, eyes bright, practically begging him to enter.

Eric points at him again.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stay."

Maxx tilts his head.

Maxx Mayhem: "Like a dog?"

Eric realizes too late that he has given Maxx something to use.

Maxx immediately pants like an excited dog for half a second, then snaps upright and growls.

Eric recoils.

John Phillips: "This is already off the rails."

Mark Bravo: "No, this is Maxx Mayhem on rails. This is what the ride is."

Eric steps through the ropes at eight, one hand still gripping the top rope, making sure Maxx cannot rush him cleanly.

The referee steps between them again, forcing separation.

Eric uses the moment to adjust his trunks, smooth his hair, and act like the last minute was part of a master plan.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Now we begin."

Maxx claps once.

Maxx Mayhem: "We already began. You left."

The crowd laughs and cheers.

Eric's face tightens.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You do not talk to champions like that."

Maxx Mayhem: "Which champion?"

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Maxx points toward the Hardcore Championship at ringside.

Maxx Mayhem: "The hardcore one in a not-hardcore match?"

The crowd pops again.

Bobby Dean leans over the scooter handlebars, deeply impressed.

Bobby Dean: "He's got a point."

Eric's head snaps toward Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You are on my side!"

Bobby Dean: "Family tells the truth!"

Maxx suddenly rushes forward again.

Eric, mid-argument with Bobby, barely turns in time before Maxx barrels into him with a wild shoulder tackle that sends Dane crashing backward into the corner.

John Phillips: "Maxx caught him!"

Mark Bravo: "That's what happens when you argue with your scooter uncle!"

Maxx immediately unloads in the corner.

Not punches so much as a storm of legal-ish forearms, shoulder bumps, and frantic clubbing shots that make the referee rush in and start counting.

Referee: "ONE! TWO! THREE!"

Maxx backs off at four, spinning away with both hands raised.

Maxx Mayhem: "Clean break!"

Dane staggers out of the corner, hair slightly out of place, robe glitter still clinging to one shoulder, ego already bruised.

Maxx sees him and charges again.

Eric dives through the ropes and lands back on the floor.

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The boos hit immediately.

John Phillips: "And Dane bails out again!"

Mark Bravo: "He got a taste of standard mayhem and decided he wanted the premium exit package."

Eric stumbles away from the ring, clutching the back of his head, furious and embarrassed.

Maxx leans between the ropes, grinning down at him.

Maxx Mayhem: "Come back! I'm out of weapons and everything!"

Bobby Dean rolls slightly closer on the scooter, careful not to hit anything this time.

Bobby Dean: "You're doing great, Eric! Just... maybe do it inside the ring!"

Eric turns slowly toward Bobby.

Then toward Maxx.

Then toward the shopping cart halfway up the ramp.

For the first time, the champion looks trapped between the rules he chose and the chaos he failed to eliminate.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. wanted this match under standard rules. He may have underestimated the fact that Maxx Mayhem is still Maxx Mayhem, weapons or no weapons."

Mark Bravo: "You can take the trash can away from Maxx Mayhem, but you cannot take the trash can out of his soul."

Maxx backs away from the ropes and begins pacing in the ring, wild-eyed and ready for the next charge.

Eric Dane Jr. remains outside, breathing hard, annoyed, and already searching for another way to make this match happen on his terms.

Eric Dane Jr. stalks around the outside of the ring, one hand on the back of his head, the other raised toward the referee like the official is somehow responsible for the fact that Maxx Mayhem exists.

Inside the ring, Maxx paces in short, jittery lines.

Left.

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Right.

Stop.

Grin.

Repeat.

He looks less like a challenger waiting for the champion to return and more like a malfunctioning carnival ride with fists.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. again taking his time on the outside, and this is exactly what he wanted to do from the opening bell. Slow Maxx Mayhem down. Frustrate him. Drain the chaos out of this match."

Mark Bravo: "Good luck draining chaos out of Maxx Mayhem. That man runs on chaos, off-brand soda, and whatever was in that shopping cart."

The referee leans through the ropes and points at Dane.

Referee: "Eric, get back in the ring!"

Dane glares up at him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I am the champion. I know how rings work."

Maxx hears that and leans over the ropes.

Maxx Mayhem: "Then use one!"

The crowd pops.

Dane slowly turns his head toward Maxx, his expression shifting from irritation to insulted disbelief.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You are not funny."

Maxx Mayhem: "Neither is your haircut, but here we are."

Mexico City roars with laughter and cheers.

Dane's jaw tightens.

Mark Bravo: "Maxx is not just in the ring. He's in Eric's head, in Eric's closet, and apparently in Eric's grooming routine."

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John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. is trying desperately to control the pace, but every time he creates distance, Maxx Mayhem turns it into another opportunity to humiliate him."

Bobby Dean rolls the scooter just a little closer to the champion's side of the ring.

SFX: *whirr... clunk...*

Dane hears it and immediately points at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stay there."

Bobby freezes.

Bobby Dean: "I am there."

Eric Dane Jr.: "No. There there."

Bobby looks down at the floor, then back up.

Bobby Dean: "This is a lot of theres."

Dane throws both hands up and turns away.

The referee's count continues.

Referee: "SIX!"

Eric takes a breath, then walks toward the apron again.

Maxx immediately backs up to center ring and sits cross-legged on the canvas.

The crowd buzzes.

Dane stops with one hand on the apron.

Eric Dane Jr.: "What are you doing now?"

Maxx folds his hands in his lap with exaggerated politeness.

Maxx Mayhem: "Making you comfortable."

Dane narrows his eyes.

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Maxx Mayhem: "I can be normal."

A beat.

Maxx slowly raises one hand and licks his own palm.

Dane recoils.

Maxx Mayhem: "Mostly."

Mark Bravo: "Nope."

John Phillips: "That may not qualify as normal."

Mark Bravo: "That does not qualify as anything that should be televised."

Referee: "SEVEN!"

Dane forces himself onto the apron, eyes never leaving Maxx.

Maxx remains seated in the middle of the ring, smiling up at him.

Dane steps through the ropes slowly.

Maxx does not move.

Dane straightens, brushing imaginary dust from his shoulder.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Finally. We wrestle."

Maxx nods seriously.

Maxx Mayhem: "Wrestle."

Dane takes one cautious step forward.

Maxx remains seated.

Dane takes another step.

Then, suddenly, Maxx shoots forward from the seated position, rolling across the canvas toward Dane's legs.

Dane yelps and jumps backward, barely avoiding the grab.

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Maxx pops up to his feet laughing.

John Phillips: "Maxx almost caught the ankle!"

Mark Bravo: "He went from preschool carpet time to attempted mauling in half a second!"

Dane rushes forward now, angry at being made to flinch, and catches Maxx with a sudden knee to the midsection.

The shot lands clean.

Maxx doubles over.

Dane immediately grabs him by the head and drives a forearm across the back of his neck.

Another follows.

Then a third.

The crowd boos as Dane finally begins to assert himself.

John Phillips: "There is the opening Eric Dane Jr. needed."

Mark Bravo: "And that is what Eric has to do. Stop reacting to the weird and start hitting the man."

Dane hooks Maxx by the wrist and whips him toward the ropes.

Maxx rebounds fast.

Dane drops down.

Maxx steps over him and keeps running.

On the second rebound, Dane leaps for a dropkick.

Maxx stops dead.

Dane crashes onto his back.

Maxx looks down at him.

Then drops a quick senton across Dane's chest.

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John Phillips: "Senton by Maxx!"

Mark Bravo: "That is two hundred thirty-five pounds of bad decisions landing on your ribs!"

Dane kicks his legs and rolls onto his side, coughing hard.

Maxx scrambles into a cover.

Referee: "ONE!"

Dane kicks out quickly, more embarrassed than hurt enough to stay down.

Maxx immediately grabs him by the head and pulls him up.

Dane rakes the eyes.

The referee warns him instantly.

Referee: "Watch the eyes!"

Dane staggers away, one hand up in innocence.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I was looking for a hold!"

Mark Bravo: "In his eyes?"

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. taking the shortcut there, and now Maxx Mayhem is temporarily blinded."

Maxx stumbles forward, blinking and swinging one arm through empty space.

Dane snaps into motion, rushing behind him and driving a knee into the back of Maxx's leg.

Maxx drops to one knee.

Dane immediately follows with a knee drop to the back of the head, putting Maxx face-first into the canvas.

John Phillips: "Knee drop to the back of the head! Dane finally slowing Maxx down."

Mark Bravo: "That is the Eric Dane Jr. path to success. Cheat once, act offended, then pretend the plan was genius."

Dane rises, smoothing his hair back into place before looking directly into the hard camera.

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Eric Dane Jr.: "That is called wrestling."

Maxx, face-down on the mat, lifts one hand weakly.

Maxx Mayhem: "Boo."

The crowd laughs.

Dane stomps him in the back.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Shut up."

Outside, Bobby Dean winces.

Bobby Dean: "That felt unnecessary."

Dane hears him.

Of course he does.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He is my opponent."

Bobby Dean: "Still. Tone."

Dane points down at Bobby while keeping a boot pressed between Maxx's shoulder blades.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I do not need tone coaching from a man guarding a toaster."

Bobby glances at the shopping cart halfway up the ramp.

Bobby Dean: "That toaster has been very respectful."

Mark Bravo: "We are in the main event of a professional wrestling television show."

John Phillips: "Yes, we are."

Mark Bravo: "Just checking."

Dane pulls Maxx up by the hair and wrist, then snaps him over with a quick suplex.

Maxx hits hard and rolls toward the ropes.

Dane floats over into a cover, hooking the leg with a smug look toward Bobby.

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Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Maxx kicks out.

Dane sits up, annoyed, then slaps the mat once.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Count correctly."

Referee: "That was two."

Eric Dane Jr.: "It felt longer."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. already arguing with the referee after a two count."

Mark Bravo: "Eric's relationship with reality is conditional."

Dane drags Maxx toward the center of the ring and applies a side headlock on the mat, wrenching it in tight.

The crowd boos the sudden slowdown.

Dane grins.

This is exactly what he wants.

Control.

Stillness.

The opposite of Maxx.

John Phillips: "Dane going to the headlock now, and as much as the crowd hates it, this is smart. He is grounding Maxx Mayhem."

Mark Bravo: "Absolutely. You don't win a tornado by yelling at it. You put it in a jar. Or a headlock. I lost the metaphor."

Maxx grimaces, one hand pawing at Dane's arm.

Dane cranks harder and speaks through clenched teeth near Maxx's ear.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Standard rules. My rules. My match."

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Maxx's eyes dart toward the ramp, where the shopping cart sits beside Bobby's empty scooter path.

The weapons glimmer under the arena lights.

Forbidden fruit with dents.

Maxx Mayhem: "I miss my stuff."

Dane cranks the headlock harder.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Good."

Bobby Dean, still at ringside, slowly raises one hand.

Bobby Dean: "For the record, your stuff is doing fine!"

Maxx gives a weak thumbs up from inside the headlock.

Maxx Mayhem: "Tell them I love them."

Bobby Dean: "They know!"

Dane closes his eyes in irritation while still holding the headlock.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is not happening."

Mark Bravo: "It is very much happening."

The crowd starts clapping for Maxx.

Slow at first.

Then louder.

Maxx's hand rises.

He begins tapping along on Dane's forearm.

Not a submission tap.

A beat.

Dane looks down, confused.

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Eric Dane Jr.: "What are you doing?"

Maxx Mayhem: "Crowd's got rhythm."

The clapping grows.

Dane tries to crank the hold tighter, but Maxx starts pushing up to one knee.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem trying to build back to his feet here."

Mark Bravo: "With emotional support from Mexico City and an emotionally guarded shopping cart."

Maxx powers up to both knees.

Dane shifts his base, keeping the headlock tight.

Maxx rises to one foot.

Then the other.

The crowd claps louder.

Maxx drives one elbow into Dane's ribs.

Then another.

Dane loosens just enough.

Maxx shoves him into the ropes.

Dane rebounds.

Maxx drops down.

Dane steps over.

On the second rebound, Maxx launches for a wild crossbody.

Dane ducks.

Maxx crashes to the canvas and rolls through near the corner.

He pops up immediately, but Dane is already moving.

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Dane charges in with a running boot to the face.

Maxx drops at the last second.

Dane's boot sails over him and catches the top turnbuckle.

His leg gets hung up awkwardly.

John Phillips: "Dane got caught!"

Mark Bravo: "That is a bad place to be for a man who thinks cardio is a rumor."

Maxx looks up from the mat and sees Dane trapped.

A grin spreads across his face.

Dane looks down.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Don't."

Maxx gets to his feet.

Maxx Mayhem: "Standard."

He backs up to the opposite corner.

Maxx Mayhem: "Rules."

Then he charges.

Full speed.

Maxx leaps into a running cannonball, crashing into Dane in the corner and smashing him against the turnbuckles.

John Phillips: "Cannonball in the corner!"

Mark Bravo: "That was completely legal and deeply upsetting!"

Dane collapses out of the corner, clutching his ribs, robe glitter still somehow stuck to his shoulder like a souvenir from his own bad decision.

Maxx scrambles into the cover, hooking one leg and grabbing the other like he is trying to fold Dane into

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luggage.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane kicks out.

Maxx rolls backward to his knees, eyes wide.

Maxx Mayhem: "That was almost tidy!"

Bobby Dean claps from ringside.

Bobby Dean: "Great standard wrestling!"

Dane rolls toward the ropes, trying to breathe and preserve whatever dignity remains.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem almost had the Hardcore Championship right there, under standard rules, with nothing more than impact and chaos."

Mark Bravo: "Eric picked the rules, but he forgot Maxx can be a disaster in any format."

Maxx rises and throws both arms out to the crowd.

Mexico City answers with a roar.

Dane drags himself to the apron, trying to roll out again.

But this time Maxx catches him by the ankle.

Dane's eyes widen.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No. Break. Ropes."

Maxx looks at the referee.

Maxx Mayhem: "Is the apron ropes?"

Referee: "He's in the ropes. Break."

Maxx sighs and releases at four, raising both hands.

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Maxx Mayhem: "Growth."

Dane slides fully out to the floor, staggering away.

He turns, thinking he has created distance again.

Instead, he finds himself standing a few feet from Bobby Dean and the scooter.

Bobby smiles up at him.

Bobby Dean: "Hydrate?"

He offers a half-full water bottle from the scooter basket.

Dane slowly looks at the bottle.

Then at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Why do you have that?"

Bobby Dean: "Main event."

Dane does not know what that means.

Neither does anyone else.

Maxx, meanwhile, backs into the far ropes inside the ring.

The crowd rises because they see it before Dane does.

John Phillips: "Wait a minute. Maxx Mayhem has space."

Mark Bravo: "No way. Standard rules do not mean safe rules!"

Maxx charges across the ring.

Dane turns just in time.

Maxx dives through the ropes with a reckless suicide dive toward the champion.

Dane grabs Bobby's scooter handle and yanks himself aside at the last second.

Maxx crashes past him and wipes out against the barricade, shoulder and chest taking the brunt of the

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landing.

The crowd gasps.

John Phillips: "Maxx missed! Maxx Mayhem hit the barricade hard!"

Mark Bravo: "Eric used Bobby's scooter to pull himself out of the way! That's not illegal, but it is deeply annoying!"

Bobby looks down at the scooter handle, then at Dane.

Bobby Dean: "She's not a rope."

Dane points at him sharply.

Eric Dane Jr.: "She is whatever I need her to be."

Dane turns toward Maxx, who is down near the barricade, clutching his shoulder.

For the first time since the match began, Eric Dane Jr. smiles like he truly has control.

John Phillips: "And now Dane may finally have the opening he has been looking for."

Mark Bravo: "Maxx brought weapons he can't use, Eric brought standard rules, and somehow Bobby Dean's scooter just became the most important object in the match without technically becoming a weapon."

The referee begins the count as Dane approaches Maxx on the floor, confidence returning with every step.

Referee: "ONE!"

Dane grabs Maxx by the head and pulls him up near the barricade.

He looks out at the booing fans.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Watch closely. This is what competence looks like."

Then he drives Maxx shoulder-first into the barricade.

Maxx crumples to a knee.

Dane adjusts his wrist tape again, ego fully refueled.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. now using the environment within the rules, taking advantage of Maxx

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Mayhem's missed dive."

Mark Bravo: "He is obnoxious, but he is not stupid. Once Maxx made the mistake, Eric went right to the damage."

Bobby sits nearby on the scooter, watching the champion work.

He looks worried.

Then he looks back toward the shopping cart full of weapons halfway up the ramp.

He slowly shakes his head to himself.

Bobby Dean: "No. Standard rules."

The temptation remains in the metal clatter of the cart.

But for now, everyone obeys.

Barely.

The referee continues the count as Eric Dane Jr. stands over Maxx Mayhem on the floor, the champion's confidence returning in bright, obnoxious waves.

Referee: "TWO!"

Maxx is down near the barricade, one hand across his shoulder, the other gripping the floor mats as he tries to push himself up.

Dane crouches slightly beside him, leaning in just enough for Maxx to hear.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is what happens when you confuse being unpredictable with being good."

Maxx turns his head toward him, still grimacing.

Maxx Mayhem: "I confuse a lot of things."

Dane's face tightens.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Yes. That is very obvious."

Dane grabs Maxx by the back of the head and trunks, then rolls him hard back under the bottom rope.

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John Phillips: "Dane wisely getting Maxx back inside before the count can become an issue."

Mark Bravo: "And before Maxx starts getting ideas near that shopping cart. I can feel that cart calling to him from here."

The camera cuts to the ramp, where the shopping cart full of weapons remains parked beside Bobby Dean's scooter.

Bobby is still sitting guard, hands folded over the handlebars, eyes flicking between the cart and the ring.

A kendo stick slowly shifts and slides a half-inch lower in the pile.

Bobby points at it.

Bobby Dean: "Don't start."

Dane slides into the ring after Maxx and immediately hooks a leg.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Maxx kicks out.

Dane sits up, annoyed, then looks at the referee like the official has just failed a very simple math test.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That was three."

Referee: "It was two."

Eric Dane Jr.: "It was emotionally three."

Mark Bravo: "Emotionally three is not recognized by the rules committee."

John Phillips: "Especially not in a standard rules Hardcore Championship match, which is already testing enough definitions."

Dane gets to his feet and drags Maxx up with him, keeping control by the wrist and back of the head.

He snaps Maxx into the corner, hard enough that Maxx hits back-first and drops immediately to a seated position.

Dane turns toward the crowd and throws both arms out.

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Eric Dane Jr.: "Watch greatness."

The boos answer him.

Dane backs into the opposite corner and points toward Maxx, calling his shot with the kind of confidence that always feels seconds away from becoming a mistake.

John Phillips: "Dane may be looking for a cannonball of his own here."

Mark Bravo: "Of course he is. Maxx hit one earlier, so Eric has to prove he can do it prettier."

Dane charges.

He runs full speed across the ring and launches into a cannonball toward the seated Maxx Mayhem.

Maxx rolls out of the corner.

At the last possible second.

Dane crashes back-first into the turnbuckles, hitting nothing but pad, rope, and regret.

John Phillips: "Nobody home!"

Mark Bravo: "That was gravity filing a complaint!"

Dane collapses out of the corner, clutching the back of his head and shoulders.

Maxx rolls to the ropes, pulling himself upright with one arm while still favoring the shoulder from the missed dive.

The crowd begins to build again.

Maxx shakes out the bad arm.

Dane gets to one knee.

Maxx charges.

Dane ducks his head, looking for a back body drop.

Maxx stops short and kicks him in the chest.

Dane snaps upright.

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Maxx spins and cracks him with a discus elbow that sends Dane stumbling sideways.

John Phillips: "Discus elbow by Maxx!"

Mark Bravo: "That one was legal, ugly, and effective. The holy trinity of Maxx Mayhem."

Maxx grabs Dane by the head and drops him with a snap DDT near the center of the ring.

The crowd pops as Dane spikes into the mat and rolls onto his back.

Maxx hooks both legs.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane kicks out.

Maxx rolls backward to his knees, eyes wide, grin returning despite the pain.

Maxx Mayhem: "That was almost responsible!"

He looks toward the shopping cart on the ramp.

Maxx Mayhem: "Did you see that? I used wrestling!"

Bobby Dean claps proudly from the scooter.

Bobby Dean: "They saw! I told them!"

Dane rolls toward the ropes, trying to create space again, but Maxx crawls after him and grabs him by the ankle.

Dane kicks with the free leg, catching Maxx in the shoulder.

Maxx releases and winces.

Dane sees the opening and pulls himself to the apron, then to the floor.

The boos hit again.

John Phillips: "Dane rolling out again, and that shoulder of Maxx Mayhem may be becoming a real target."

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Mark Bravo: "That missed dive into the barricade changed the match. Eric may be arrogant, he may be annoying, but he can smell a weak spot."

Maxx rises inside the ring and immediately starts toward the ropes.

The referee cuts him off.

Referee: "Stay back, Maxx!"

Maxx Mayhem: "He keeps leaving!"

Referee: "I'm counting him!"

Maxx Mayhem: "Count louder!"

The referee turns toward Dane.

Referee: "ONE!"

Dane waves him off and stumbles around ringside, still collecting himself.

He reaches the side of the ring near Bobby Dean and the shopping cart.

Bobby straightens on the scooter.

Bobby Dean: "Hi."

Dane stops.

He looks at Bobby.

Then at the shopping cart.

Then back at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Why is this still here?"

Bobby Dean: "Babysitting."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Of course you are."

Dane reaches toward the shopping cart, maybe to shove it farther away, maybe to make a point, maybe because his worst instincts have started whispering to him.

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Bobby immediately slaps his hand away.

The crowd gasps, then laughs.

Bobby Dean: "No touching."

Dane slowly turns his head toward Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Excuse me?"

Bobby Dean: "Maxx trusted me."

Dane stares at him, offended on multiple levels.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I am family."

Bobby Dean: "That's why I used my words first."

Mark Bravo: "That might be the most Bobby Dean logic ever spoken."

John Phillips: "Dane appears absolutely stunned that Bobby Dean is policing the shopping cart."

Referee: "TWO!"

Inside the ring, Maxx watches the argument unfold.

His grin widens.

Then he looks toward the opposite ropes.

The crowd rises again, sensing danger.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem has that look again."

Mark Bravo: "Someone stop him. Or don't. I don't know anymore."

Maxx backs up.

Dane is still arguing with Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You are supposed to be on my side!"

Bobby Dean: "I am! But ethically!"

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Maxx hits the ropes.

Dane hears the crowd before he sees Maxx.

He turns.

Maxx comes flying over the top rope with a wild crossbody to the floor.

This time he connects.

Maxx crashes down onto Eric Dane Jr., both men spilling hard onto the ringside mats as the crowd erupts.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem over the top! He takes out Dane!"

Mark Bravo: "He learned nothing from the missed dive, and somehow it worked!"

Bobby Dean recoils on the scooter, both hands up, as Maxx and Dane land just short of the front wheel.

Bobby Dean: "Safe distance! Safe distance!"

Maxx rolls off Dane and lies on his back, laughing through the pain.

Maxx Mayhem: "Standard!"

The referee throws both arms out and starts the count again.

Referee: "ONE!"

Maxx crawls to his knees first, still holding his shoulder but alive with momentum.

Dane rolls onto his side, clutching his ribs and cursing under his breath.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem sacrificing his own body to keep this match from slowing down."

Mark Bravo: "That is what Eric cannot account for. Maxx does not care if the crash hurts him too. He just wants there to be a crash."

Maxx grabs Dane by the head and starts pulling him up near the shopping cart.

The weapons rattle slightly.

Maxx's eyes drift toward them.

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Trash can lid.

Kendo stick.

Chair.

Stop sign.

The forbidden menu.

Bobby notices immediately.

Bobby Dean: "Maxx."

Maxx freezes with one hand on Dane's head.

He looks at Bobby.

Bobby Dean: "Standard rules."

Maxx looks heartbroken for half a second.

Maxx Mayhem: "But it's right there."

Bobby Dean: "I know."

Maxx Mayhem: "The stop sign is smiling at me."

Bobby Dean: "It has no face."

Maxx Mayhem: "You don't know that."

Dane suddenly shoves Maxx hard, sending him shoulder-first into the side of the shopping cart.

The cart rattles violently, weapons clanging inside it, but Maxx does not grab anything.

He drops to one knee, clutching the bad shoulder.

John Phillips: "Dane sends Maxx into the shopping cart! The cart is not being used as a weapon directly, but that impact did the damage."

Mark Bravo: "That is Eric Dane Jr. finding the gray area. He didn't hit Maxx with the cart. He made Maxx hit the cart. Annoying. Legal. Effective."

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Referee: "TWO!"

Bobby points at Dane from the scooter.

Bobby Dean: "That felt loopholey!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "That felt championship."

Dane grabs Maxx by the hurt shoulder and yanks him upright, then drives him shoulder-first into the barricade again.

Maxx drops, biting down on the pain.

Referee: "THREE!"

Dane crouches in front of him, suddenly meaner, suddenly more focused.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You want chaos? Here's structure."

He grabs Maxx and rolls him under the bottom rope again.

Dane follows, sliding into the ring and immediately hooking the injured arm.

He drives a knee down across Maxx's shoulder.

Then another.

Then he stretches the arm out and stomps the shoulder joint.

John Phillips: "Dane targeting the shoulder now. That is smart, calculated offense."

Mark Bravo: "That's the thing that makes Eric dangerous when he gets past himself. He can be a punk, but he's not useless."

Maxx rolls toward the ropes, grimacing, trying to create distance.

Dane grabs the wrist, twists the arm, and drops down into a tight armbar across the canvas.

Not a finishing hold.

A punishment hold.

A way to stretch time and pain at the same time.

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Eric Dane Jr.: "Look at this. Actual wrestling."

Maxx reaches with his free arm, fingers stretching toward the ropes.

The crowd begins clapping again.

John Phillips: "Dane has the arm extended. Maxx Mayhem's shoulder has taken a lot of damage in this match."

Mark Bravo: "And without that shoulder, Maxx loses a lot. The dives. The brawling. The ability to throw himself at somebody like a haunted sandbag."

Maxx grits his teeth, trying to turn his body.

Dane pulls back harder.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Tap. Go back to your shopping cart."

Maxx shakes his head.

Maxx Mayhem: "Cart would never respect me again."

Bobby Dean leans forward from ringside.

Bobby Dean: "It believes in you!"

Dane yells without releasing the hold.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stop encouraging him!"

Bobby Dean: "I'm encouraging sportsmanship!"

Dane torques the shoulder again.

Maxx growls through the pain and drags himself closer to the ropes inch by inch.

The crowd claps louder.

Maxx reaches.

Dane pulls him back half an inch.

Maxx reaches again.

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His fingers brush the bottom rope.

Not enough.

One more stretch.

He grabs it.

Referee: "Rope break!"

Dane holds until four.

Referee: "ONE! TWO! THREE! FOUR!"

Dane releases, then immediately stands and argues.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I was releasing."

Referee: "At four."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Before five."

Dane turns and kicks Maxx's shoulder once more before the referee can fully step in.

The crowd boos hard.

John Phillips: "Cheap shot after the break!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the champion. Everything legal until it's not, and everything not legal until four and a half."

Maxx rolls to the apron, half outside the ring, clutching the shoulder.

Dane grabs him by the head and pulls him through the ropes, setting him up with Maxx's upper body draped over the middle rope.

Dane backs up.

He points to himself.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Flippy-doo."

Then he charges and leaps, driving a knee across the back of Maxx's neck while Maxx is hung over the

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rope.

Maxx snaps backward and collapses to the mat.

John Phillips: "Running knee across the ropes!"

Mark Bravo: "That one had a little more Dane Jr. flavor. Risky, obnoxious, but it landed."

Dane covers again.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Maxx kicks out.

Dane's frustration spikes.

He sits up and looks toward the ceiling like the building itself has wronged him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Why?"

Mark Bravo: "He's asking the universe now."

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem continues to fight, and Eric Dane Jr. may be realizing this will not be as clean or as easy as standard rules made him hope."

Dane stands and drags Maxx up by the bad arm.

He twists it again, then pulls Maxx close and drives a knee to the midsection.

Another knee.

Then he hooks Maxx, looking for a suplex.

Maxx blocks with his foot.

Dane tries again.

Maxx blocks again.

Dane clubs him across the damaged shoulder.

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Maxx drops to one knee.

Dane backs up and runs forward, looking for another knee.

Maxx suddenly surges upward and catches him with a swinging neckbreaker out of nowhere.

John Phillips: "Swinging neckbreaker! Maxx caught him!"

Mark Bravo: "Maxx Mayhem just changed the temperature!"

Both men are down.

Dane lies on his back, one hand at his neck.

Maxx rolls onto his stomach, bad arm tucked close to his chest.

The crowd comes alive again.

Bobby Dean honks the scooter horn in excitement.

SFX: HONK! HONK!

Dane, still down, turns his head toward the sound with pure hatred in his eyes.

Bobby Dean: "Sorry! Support honks!"

John Phillips: "Both men down, the Hardcore Championship hangs in the balance, and Bobby Dean continues to be... Bobby Dean."

Mark Bravo: "Which may be the most reliable thing in this match."

The referee begins checking on both men, then starts a count.

Referee: "ONE!"

Maxx stirs.

Dane rolls toward one side.

Referee: "TWO!"

The shopping cart rattles faintly on the ramp as if the weapons themselves are impatient.

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Bobby looks back at it and points again.

Bobby Dean: "Not yet."

In the ring, Maxx Mayhem starts pushing up with one good arm.

Eric Dane Jr. pulls himself toward the ropes, breathing hard, his perfect presentation finally beginning to come apart.

The match is still standard.

But it is no longer clean.

Referee: "THREE!"

Maxx Mayhem pushes himself up to one knee, bad shoulder tucked tight against his body, jaw clenched through pain.

Eric Dane Jr. reaches the ropes and pulls himself up slowly, the glittering confidence from his entrance now smeared by sweat, frustration, and the very unpleasant discovery that Maxx Mayhem does not stop being dangerous just because the rules say he should.

Referee: "FOUR!"

Dane gets to his feet first, using the ropes for support.

Maxx rises a moment later, wobbling, grinning anyway.

Dane sees the grin.

He hates the grin.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Why are you smiling?"

Maxx rolls his neck once, then winces as the motion pulls at his shoulder.

Maxx Mayhem: "Pain means it's working."

Dane blinks.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That is not what pain means."

Maxx charges.

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Dane ducks under a wild clothesline and immediately hooks Maxx from behind, looking for a quick back suplex.

Maxx throws an elbow backward with the good arm.

It catches Dane on the side of the head.

Dane stumbles.

Maxx turns and cracks him with another elbow.

Then a third.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem trying to build momentum with those elbows!"

Mark Bravo: "He's only got one good arm right now, but he's making that arm count!"

Dane staggers toward the corner.

Maxx follows, grabbing him by the wrist and trying to whip him across the ring.

Dane reverses.

Maxx hits the turnbuckles back-first, and the impact jars the bad shoulder hard enough that he drops to one knee.

Dane sees it instantly.

The champion's eyes sharpen.

John Phillips: "That shoulder again. Every time Maxx hits the corner, every time he lands awkwardly, that shoulder gets worse."

Mark Bravo: "And Eric Dane Jr. may be a walking ego in sunglasses, but he knows what to attack when it's right in front of him."

Dane rushes in and drives a knee into Maxx's shoulder while he is still kneeling against the turnbuckles.

Maxx grunts and rolls sideways, trying to get out of the corner.

Dane grabs the injured arm and yanks it hard across the middle rope.

Referee: "Hey! Break it!"

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Dane pulls again, stretching Maxx's shoulder against the rope.

Referee: "ONE! TWO! THREE!"

Dane releases at four, then immediately turns to the crowd with both hands raised.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I know the rules!"

The boos answer him.

Bobby Dean leans forward on the scooter, concerned.

Bobby Dean: "Eric, that was not very family business of you."

Dane turns toward Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He is not family."

Bobby thinks about that.

Bobby Dean: "Could be someday."

Dane's face drops.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Do not expand the family."

Maxx suddenly grabs Dane's tights from the mat and pulls him forward into the corner pad face-first.

Dane's head snaps into the turnbuckle.

The crowd erupts.

John Phillips: "Maxx catches him! Dane spent too much time arguing with Bobby Dean!"

Mark Bravo: "That is going to be written on Eric Dane Jr.'s tombstone if he keeps this up."

Dane staggers backward, stunned.

Maxx pulls himself up in the corner, bad arm hanging slightly lower than the other.

He looks at Dane.

Then at the opposite corner.

World Tour: Mexico '26

The crowd starts to rise.

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

Mark Bravo: "Corner to corner cannonball, and if he hits this, Dane might be done!"

Maxx points to the corner.

Then points to himself.

Then points toward the shopping cart halfway up the ramp.

Maxx Mayhem: "This one's for you, toaster!"

Bobby Dean salutes the cart solemnly.

Bobby Dean: "He heard you."

Maxx charges.

Full speed.

He launches for the cannonball.

Dane dives out of the corner.

Maxx crashes into the turnbuckles back-first and shoulder-first, missing everything but the unforgiving corner.

John Phillips: "Nobody home! Maxx missed Crash Course!"

Mark Bravo: "That shoulder just ate the corner again!"

Maxx rolls out of the corner in agony, clutching the injured shoulder tight against his chest.

Dane crawls toward center ring, breathing hard, then looks back and realizes Maxx is down.

The champion's expression changes.

Opportunity.

Greed.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Camera awareness.

All at once.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That was your big move?"

Dane pushes himself up and stalks toward Maxx.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That was embarrassing."

He stomps the bad shoulder.

Maxx rolls over, gritting his teeth.

Dane stomps it again.

Referee: "Eric, back off the joint!"

Dane points at the referee.

Eric Dane Jr.: "It is attached to him. It is legal."

Mark Bravo: "Unfortunately, that is hard to argue with."

John Phillips: "Dane has become vicious with that shoulder, and now he may be thinking about putting this away."

Dane pulls Maxx up by the bad arm and immediately twists underneath it, wringing the shoulder again before stepping onto the middle rope.

The crowd boos as Dane balances for half a second, looking out with a smug grin.

John Phillips: "Dane going to the ropes now. This is where he gets dangerous, but also where he gets reckless."

Mark Bravo: "Flippy-Doo Bullshit territory."

Dane springboards off the middle rope and comes back with a twisting knee aimed at Maxx's shoulder and head.

Maxx ducks.

Dane lands on his feet but stumbles forward.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Maxx rolls him up from behind.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane kicks out hard, scrambling backward with wide eyes.

John Phillips: "Almost! Maxx nearly stole it!"

Mark Bravo: "The champion's heart just tried to exit through his scarf."

Dane lunges back to his feet, furious.

Maxx rises slower, one arm hanging, but the grin is back.

Maxx Mayhem: "Standard almost-chaos!"

Dane charges with a roaring elbow.

Maxx ducks and hooks him around the waist.

Dane throws a back elbow into the injured shoulder.

Maxx releases, stumbling away.

Dane grabs him immediately, hooks the head, and spikes him with a snap suplex.

He rolls through, keeping hold.

Another suplex.

Then a third, this time releasing Maxx near the center of the ring.

John Phillips: "Three suplexes by the champion!"

Mark Bravo: "Eric Dane Jr. is stringing offense together now, and that is where Maxx has to be careful. The chaos is fun until somebody starts wrestling your arm off."

Dane crawls into another cover.

Referee: "ONE!"

World Tour: Mexico '26

Referee: "TWO!"

Maxx kicks out again.

Dane slaps the mat with both hands.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No!"

He grabs Maxx by the face and speaks down to him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You do not get to be difficult. You are a joke with a shopping cart."

Maxx blinks through the pain.

Maxx Mayhem: "A beloved joke."

Dane slams a forearm across his face.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Shut up."

Outside, Bobby Dean frowns.

Bobby Dean: "That's not nice."

Dane turns, yelling through the ropes.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stop evaluating my tone!"

Bobby lifts both hands.

Bobby Dean: "I'm just saying, family has values."

Dane looks like he may actually leave the match to address Bobby Dean personally.

Instead, he drags Maxx up and pulls him toward the corner.

Dane points up.

The crowd starts booing because they recognize the body language.

John Phillips: "Dane may be thinking high risk here."

Mark Bravo: "That's his comfort zone and his danger zone. Sometimes they're the same thing."

World Tour: Mexico '26

Dane shoves Maxx into a seated position near the corner, then steps through the ropes onto the apron.

He starts to climb.

Slow enough to make sure the camera sees him.

Fast enough to pretend this is smart.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Watch this."

He reaches the top rope and rises, balancing above Maxx.

Bobby Dean looks up from ringside, concerned.

Bobby Dean: "Eric, maybe don't."

Dane looks down at him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is what stars do."

Bobby Dean: "Stars also fall."

Dane hesitates for half a second.

That half-second is enough.

Maxx springs from the corner with sudden life and throws himself into the ropes.

The ropes shake.

Dane loses balance and drops awkwardly, crotching himself on the top turnbuckle.

The crowd explodes.

John Phillips: "Dane got caught on the top rope!"

Mark Bravo: "Family warned him!"

Dane's mouth opens in silent agony.

His sunglasses, somehow still tucked into the corner area from earlier, fall off the apron.

Bobby winces.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Bobby Dean: "That looked personal."

Maxx pulls himself up, shaking out the bad shoulder, then climbs to the middle rope in front of Dane.

Dane is trapped, seated on the top turnbuckle, dazed and miserable.

Maxx throws one good-arm forearm into Dane's chest.

Then another.

Dane tries to shove him away.

Maxx bites the top rope.

The referee immediately yells.

Referee: "Maxx! Don't bite the rope!"

Maxx releases it.

Maxx Mayhem: "It started it."

Mark Bravo: "I am exhausted."

Maxx climbs another step and hooks Dane by the head.

John Phillips: "This could be dangerous! Maxx has Dane up top!"

Dane suddenly rakes Maxx's eyes again.

The referee misses part of it from the angle but sees enough to warn him.

Referee: "Eric!"

Maxx loses his grip and drops down to the mat, clutching his face.

Dane, still hurting, steadies himself on the top rope.

He rises.

The crowd boos as he stands tall.

John Phillips: "Dane saved himself with another eye rake, and now he's up top!"

World Tour: Mexico '26

Mark Bravo: "That kid is reckless enough to believe whatever he is thinking right now is going to work."

Maxx stumbles near center ring, blinking, one hand at his eyes and the other cradling his shoulder.

Dane points down at him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is the difference!"

Dane launches.

Shooting Star Press.

Beautiful rotation.

Too much ego.

Maxx moves.

Dane crashes chest-first into the mat.

The entire ring bounces.

John Phillips: "Shooting Star missed! Shooting Star missed!"

Mark Bravo: "He flew like a star and landed like a lawsuit!"

Dane rolls onto his back, gasping for air.

Maxx falls backward into the ropes, still half-blinded, then realizes Dane is down.

The crowd rises.

Bobby Dean rises slightly off the scooter seat, which is about as close as he gets to a standing ovation.

Bobby Dean: "Oh! Oh! This is happening!"

Maxx staggers toward Dane.

He drops into the cover.

Bad shoulder screaming.

Good arm hooked around Dane's leg.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane kicks out at the last second.

The crowd groans.

John Phillips: "Dane kicks out! The champion survives!"

Mark Bravo: "Barely. That was barely, and Eric knows it."

Maxx rolls onto his back, staring up at the lights.

He starts laughing.

Dane rolls away, clutching his ribs, face full of panic and rage.

Maxx Mayhem: "Almost got fancy boy."

Bobby Dean claps from ringside.

Bobby Dean: "Good effort! Very close! Proud of both!"

Dane slowly turns his head toward Bobby from the mat.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Do not be proud of him."

Bobby looks conflicted.

Bobby Dean: "Sportsmanship is hard."

Both men begin crawling toward opposite sides of the ring.

Dane crawls toward the ropes closest to Bobby and the shopping cart.

Maxx crawls toward the opposite ropes, trying to use his good arm to pull himself up.

The crowd pounds the barricades, claps, and roars.

John Phillips: "This main event has become exactly the contradiction we expected. Standard rules, but total mayhem. Eric Dane Jr. picked the stipulation, but Maxx Mayhem has dragged him into discomfort anyway."

World Tour: Mexico '26

Mark Bravo: "And the champion is one bad decision away from losing the title he tried to protect with rulebook bubble wrap."

Dane pulls himself onto the apron, trying to roll out again.

Maxx sees it.

He forces himself upright and charges.

Dane ducks low, grabs the top rope, and yanks it down.

Maxx spills over the top rope but catches himself on the apron with one hand.

The bad shoulder nearly gives out.

Dane sees the pain and snaps a quick kick into the arm.

Maxx drops from the apron to the floor, landing near the shopping cart.

The weapons rattle again.

The crowd buzzes.

Dane looks down.

Maxx looks up.

Bobby looks into the cart.

Everyone knows what temptation looks like.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem is down right next to that cart full of weapons."

Mark Bravo: "And every single object in that cart is screaming his name."

Maxx slowly reaches toward the shopping cart.

The crowd rises.

Bobby Dean rolls the scooter forward, blocking the cart with his body.

Bobby Dean: "Maxx."

World Tour: Mexico '26

Maxx freezes, hand inches from a trash can lid.

Bobby Dean: "Standard rules."

Maxx looks wounded.

Maxx Mayhem: "It's for the Hardcore Title."

Bobby Dean: "I know."

Maxx Mayhem: "That lid understands me."

Bobby Dean: "It understands patience."

Dane, still on the apron, watches this exchange with disbelief.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Why is he the responsible one?"

That question hangs in the air longer than anyone is comfortable with.

Maxx pulls his hand back from the cart.

The crowd cheers the restraint.

Then Eric Dane Jr. leaps from the apron with a double axe handle to Maxx's injured shoulder.

Maxx drops to the floor.

John Phillips: "Dane from the apron! Right to the injured shoulder!"

Mark Bravo: "Maxx hesitated because of the rules, and Eric made him pay for it!"

Dane stands over Maxx, breathing hard, then turns toward Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That is how you use rules."

Bobby's face falls a little.

Bobby Dean: "I don't think I like that."

Dane grabs Maxx by the head and rolls him back into the ring.

The champion slides in after him, eyes locked on the injured shoulder, the finish starting to form in his mind.

World Tour: Mexico '26

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. has found the path. Hurt the shoulder, exploit the rules, and keep Maxx Mayhem away from what makes him most dangerous."

Mark Bravo: "Now he just has to finish him before the chaos gets loose again."

Dane drags Maxx toward center ring.

Maxx is hurting badly now, the bad arm barely moving.

Dane looks toward the corner.

Then down at Maxx.

Then toward the Hardcore Championship at ringside.

He smiles.

The champion smells the ending.

Eric Dane Jr. stands over Maxx Mayhem near the center of the ring, chest rising and falling, face flushed with the dangerous confidence of a man who thinks he has finally solved the problem.

Maxx is down, curled slightly toward his injured shoulder, teeth clenched, one boot scraping against the canvas as he tries to force feeling back into the arm.

Dane looks toward the corner.

Then toward the Hardcore Championship resting safely at ringside.

Then toward Bobby Dean, who sits on the mobility scooter with the worried expression of a man who has accidentally become the moral compass of a main event.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Watch this part closely."

Bobby blinks.

Bobby Dean: "I've been watching all the parts."

Dane ignores him and reaches down, grabbing Maxx by the damaged arm.

He drags him upward.

Maxx tries to swing with the good arm, but Dane ducks under it and hooks him from behind.

World Tour: Mexico '26

John Phillips: "Dane may be looking to put Maxx away here."

Mark Bravo: "He's got the arm compromised. Maxx can't balance right, can't post, can't grab. This is where Eric gets dangerous if he doesn't get too cute."

Dane lifts Maxx for a back suplex.

Maxx kicks his legs.

Dane tries to hold him.

Maxx twists in midair and lands awkwardly on his feet behind the champion.

The bad shoulder buckles from the landing, but Maxx stays upright just long enough to shove Dane forward.

Dane hits the ropes chest-first and rebounds backward.

Maxx ducks low, catches him around the waist, and rolls backward into a desperate schoolboy.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane kicks out, scrambling away instantly, eyes wide with panic.

John Phillips: "Another near fall! Maxx Mayhem almost caught him again!"

Mark Bravo: "Maxx is hurt, but he is still dangerous in short bursts. You cannot assume that man is out until he is either pinned or distracted by something shiny."

Dane gets up fast and boots Maxx in the shoulder before Maxx can rise.

The crowd boos hard.

Maxx rolls onto his back, grimacing.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Enough!"

Dane stomps the shoulder again.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Enough with the almost!"

Another stomp.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Referee: "Eric, back up!"

Dane turns toward the referee, pointing down at Maxx.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He keeps trying to win."

The referee stares at him.

Referee: "That is the match."

Dane looks genuinely annoyed by the reminder.

Mark Bravo: "Eric Dane Jr. just complained that his opponent is trying to win the match."

John Phillips: "That may tell you everything about the champion's mindset."

Dane drags Maxx back to his feet and pulls him toward the nearest corner.

He stuffs Maxx against the turnbuckles, then climbs to the second rope, standing over him and grabbing the top rope for balance.

The crowd boos as Dane raises one hand, looking out over Mexico City like they are obligated to recognize history before it happens.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Count along if you can keep up."

He drives a punch into Maxx's head.

CROWD: "BOO!"

Another punch.

CROWD: "BOO!"

A third.

Maxx sags in the corner, arms low.

Dane looks around, offended that they are not counting properly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That was three."

Maxx suddenly looks up.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Maxx Mayhem: "Was it?"

Dane looks down.

Maxx grabs him by the waistband with his good hand and steps forward, carrying Dane off the ropes just enough to throw him face-first into the top turnbuckle.

Dane stumbles backward, stunned.

Maxx turns out of the corner, shaking his head loose.

The crowd erupts.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem fighting out of the corner!"

Mark Bravo: "He's hurt, but he's still got weird left in the tank!"

Dane swings wildly.

Maxx ducks.

Dane turns back around.

Maxx catches him with a short headbutt.

Both men stagger from it.

Maxx laughs first.

Maxx Mayhem: "Bad idea!"

Then he hits Dane with another headbutt.

Dane stumbles into the ropes, dazed.

John Phillips: "Maxx using his own head as a weapon, and under standard rules, that is legal!"

Mark Bravo: "His head might be the only weapon nobody can confiscate."

Maxx grabs Dane by the wrist and whips him across the ring.

Dane reverses, sending Maxx toward the ropes instead.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Maxx rebounds, but Dane drops down and catches the bad arm, yanking it across his own shoulder into a modified arm breaker.

Maxx crashes to the mat, howling through clenched teeth.

John Phillips: "Arm breaker by Dane! Right back to that injured shoulder!"

Mark Bravo: "Every time Maxx gets moving, Eric goes back to the arm. That is the smartest thing he can do."

Dane rolls through and keeps hold of the arm, shifting into another grounded armbar.

This time he traps Maxx's wrist between his legs and leans back, putting full pressure on the shoulder joint.

Maxx kicks his legs immediately.

The crowd starts clapping again.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Tap!"

Maxx shakes his head.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Tap, you discount junkyard mascot!"

Maxx grimaces, sweat running down his face.

Maxx Mayhem: "Mascots have health insurance."

Dane leans back harder.

Maxx yells in pain.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem may have nowhere to go here. He is too far from the ropes."

Mark Bravo: "And this is not funny anymore. That shoulder has been hit, stretched, driven into barricades, driven into the cart, and now Eric's trying to rip it apart."

Outside the ring, Bobby Dean grips the scooter handlebars tightly, worry taking over his face.

Bobby Dean: "Come on, Maxx."

Dane hears him and turns his head without releasing the hold.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Eric Dane Jr.: "Are you cheering against me now?"

Bobby Dean: "I'm cheering for everyone's joints."

Dane pulls back again.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Pick a side!"

Bobby Dean: "I picked family!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "I am family!"

Bobby Dean: "Then act like it!"

That lands strangely.

Not enough to break Dane's focus completely.

But enough that his expression changes for half a second.

Maxx uses that half-second.

He rolls his hips, shifts his weight, and stacks Dane's shoulders while the armbar is still applied.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane releases the hold to kick out.

Both men scramble away from each other.

John Phillips: "Maxx forced the break by turning it into a pin!"

Mark Bravo: "And Bobby may have accidentally helped him by saying something that got under Eric's skin."

Dane sits up, furious.

He points through the ropes at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You are distracting me!"

Bobby points to himself.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Bobby Dean: "Me?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Yes, you!"

Bobby Dean: "I am parked."

The crowd laughs.

Dane stands, still yelling at Bobby, and does not notice Maxx crawling toward him from behind until it is almost too late.

Maxx grabs Dane by the ankle and yanks.

Dane falls face-first into the mat.

Maxx immediately tries to turn him over.

John Phillips: "Maxx has the leg!"

Mark Bravo: "Is he thinking Tapout Terror?"

Maxx tries to roll into the ankle lock, but the bad shoulder makes it hard to maintain the grip.

He gets the ankle trapped for a second.

Dane panics, kicking wildly with the free leg.

Maxx Mayhem: "SHHHHHHH!"

Dane kicks again and catches Maxx in the injured shoulder.

Maxx loses the hold immediately, rolling away in pain.

John Phillips: "Maxx couldn't keep the ankle lock applied with that shoulder!"

Mark Bravo: "That injury saved Eric Dane Jr. right there."

Dane scrambles backward into the corner, breathing hard, eyes wide.

Maxx rolls to the opposite side, clutching his shoulder and laughing through the pain again, though this time the laugh is thinner.

Dane's expression shifts from panic to anger.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Then anger to humiliation.

Then humiliation to something mean.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You think this is funny?"

Maxx sits up, wincing.

Maxx Mayhem: "Most things."

Dane charges and drives a knee into Maxx's face.

Maxx drops flat.

John Phillips: "Running knee by Dane!"

Dane covers immediately, hooking the good arm and pressing his forearm across Maxx's face.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Maxx kicks out again.

Dane pounds the mat in frustration.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stay down!"

Dane grabs Maxx by the head and pulls him up roughly.

He hooks the head and one arm, looking for a rope-assisted variation as he backs them toward the corner.

John Phillips: "Dane may be setting up NepoDriver here, or at least trying to position Maxx for it."

Mark Bravo: "If he hits that rope-assisted piledriver, this thing is over."

Dane drags Maxx toward the ropes, hooking him tightly.

Maxx drops his weight.

Dane clubs the shoulder again.

Maxx drops to one knee.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Dane pulls him back up and tries to twist him into position.

Maxx suddenly bites Dane's hand.

Referee: "Maxx!"

Dane screams and releases instantly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He bit me!"

Maxx Mayhem: "Instinct!"

Referee: "No biting!"

Maxx Mayhem: "Copy!"

Mark Bravo: "He said copy like that fixed everything."

Dane backs away, shaking his hand and shouting at the referee.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Disqualify him!"

Referee: "It's a warning!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "For biting?"

Referee: "Do you want me to start with the eye rakes?"

Dane stops arguing.

The crowd pops for the referee.

John Phillips: "The official making it clear he has seen plenty from both men tonight."

Mark Bravo: "That ref has had enough of the nonsense, which is unfortunate because nonsense is the match's main export."

Maxx uses the moment to pull himself up in the corner.

Dane, still angry, charges.

Maxx sidesteps.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Dane crashes chest-first into the turnbuckles.

He staggers backward.

Maxx hooks him from behind with one good arm and plants him with a half-and-half style suplex, sloppy but effective.

John Phillips: "Maxx got him over!"

Mark Bravo: "I don't even know what to call that, but Eric landed on his neck and that's usually the point."

Dane rolls onto his stomach, stunned.

Maxx sits up, shaking feeling into the bad arm.

The crowd is roaring now.

Bobby Dean pounds one hand on the scooter handlebar like a drum.

SFX: *honk! honk!*

Bobby looks down.

Bobby Dean: "That one was me."

Maxx hears the horn and looks toward Bobby.

Bobby points to the corner.

Bobby Dean: "Do the thing!"

Maxx points back at him.

Maxx Mayhem: "Which thing?"

Bobby thinks.

Bobby Dean: "The legal one!"

Maxx nods like that narrows it down.

He gets to his feet and backs toward the corner, eyes on Dane, who is trying to rise near the center of the ring.

World Tour: Mexico '26

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem may be thinking Crash Course again."

Mark Bravo: "He missed it earlier. If he hits it now, we could have a new Hardcore Champion in the least hardcore Hardcore Championship match ever."

Maxx slaps his good shoulder once.

Then his bad one.

He immediately regrets that.

Maxx Mayhem: "Ow. Motivational mistake."

Dane rises slowly, unaware of Maxx lining him up.

Maxx charges.

Full speed.

He looks for the running cannonball as Dane turns.

But Dane drops flat to the mat.

Maxx has to hurdle him awkwardly to avoid crashing over him.

He hits the ropes instead, rebounds, and Dane pops up with a sudden leaping knee that catches Maxx on the jaw.

John Phillips: "Jumping knee! Dane caught him!"

Maxx staggers, glassy-eyed.

Dane hooks him quickly.

He tries to lift for SD2 positioning, but Maxx's weight and his own exhaustion make it messy.

Maxx drops behind him.

Dane turns.

Maxx kicks him in the gut.

Hooks the head.

World Tour: Mexico '26

The crowd rises.

John Phillips: "Maxx has him hooked!"

Mark Bravo: "He can't use the chair, but he can still hit Maximum Carnage on the mat!"

Maxx tries to lift for the cradle brainbuster.

The bad shoulder gives.

Dane slips out the side and lands behind him.

He immediately shoves Maxx chest-first into the ropes.

Maxx rebounds backward.

Dane rolls him up, hooking the tights.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Bobby Dean sees the tights from ringside.

Bobby Dean: "Tights! Tights! He's got the pants!"

The referee notices and stops the count before three, pointing at Dane's hand.

Referee: "Let go!"

Dane releases and rolls backward, furious.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He is not wearing pants!"

Bobby Dean: "Trunks count as little pants!"

The crowd laughs and cheers.

Mark Bravo: "Bobby Dean, legal scholar."

John Phillips: "And that warning may have just saved the match for Maxx Mayhem."

Dane stands, pointing at Bobby with pure venom.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Eric Dane Jr.: "You are costing me everything!"

Bobby looks genuinely hurt.

Bobby Dean: "I'm trying to help you be better."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I am already better!"

Dane turns back toward Maxx.

Maxx is waiting.

Good arm ready.

Dane steps right into a sudden discus elbow.

The shot cracks him across the jaw.

Dane drops to one knee.

John Phillips: "Discus elbow! Maxx caught him again!"

Maxx grabs Dane and hooks the head.

He cannot lift cleanly for Maximum Carnage, so he changes course, dropping backward and spiking Dane with a brutal DDT.

He rolls him over and covers.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane gets a foot on the bottom rope.

The referee sees it immediately.

Referee: "Rope break!"

Maxx rolls away, staring at the rope like it betrayed him.

Maxx Mayhem: "Coward rope."

World Tour: Mexico '26

Mark Bravo: "He has beef with the ring architecture now."

Dane lies near the ropes, one boot still draped across the bottom strand, eyes half-lidded, mouth open as he tries to get his bearings.

Maxx gets to his knees and looks toward the shopping cart.

The crowd rises again because they know that look.

Bobby sees it too.

Bobby Dean: "No."

Maxx slowly points toward the cart.

Maxx Mayhem: "Just one?"

Bobby Dean: "Standard rules."

Maxx Mayhem: "Tiny weapon?"

Bobby Dean: "No."

Maxx Mayhem: "Emotionally supportive lid?"

Bobby Dean: "Still no."

Maxx sighs and gets back to his feet.

The crowd cheers the restraint again, though some clearly wanted the lid.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem fighting every instinct in his body to stay within the rules."

Mark Bravo: "And Bobby Dean is somehow the angel on his shoulder. I don't know what that says about this match or our industry."

Maxx reaches down and grabs Dane by the ankle, dragging him away from the ropes.

Dane suddenly turns and kicks Maxx in the bad shoulder again.

Maxx drops down.

Dane crawls toward the corner, desperate.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Maxx follows.

Dane grabs the middle turnbuckle pad with one hand.

Maxx grabs his leg.

Dane kicks again.

This one catches Maxx in the face.

Maxx staggers back.

Dane pulls himself up in the corner.

He looks at Maxx.

Then at the referee.

Then at Bobby.

Then something ugly crosses his face.

Dane grabs at the middle turnbuckle pad and starts pulling at the laces.

John Phillips: "Wait a minute. What is Dane doing?"

Mark Bravo: "Trying to expose that turnbuckle! That's not standard rules, that's standard cheating!"

The referee notices and rushes in.

Referee: "Hey! Get away from that!"

Dane lets go immediately and backs off, hands raised.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Loose! It was loose!"

The referee checks the pad, making sure it is still secure.

Dane turns away.

But as the official is distracted, Dane drops to the mat and rolls toward the apron.

He reaches under the bottom rope toward the outside.

World Tour: Mexico '26

His hand stretches toward the Hardcore Championship at ringside.

John Phillips: "Dane reaching for the championship!"

Mark Bravo: "The referee is checking the turnbuckle!"

Bobby Dean sees it.

His eyes widen.

He rolls the scooter forward as quickly as it can go.

SFX: WHRRRR--clunk--HONK!

Bobby positions himself between Dane and the title.

Bobby Dean: "No weapons!"

Dane looks up at him in absolute disbelief.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That is mine!"

Bobby Dean: "Then respect it!"

The crowd pops for Bobby.

Dane reaches again, but Bobby nudges the scooter forward just enough to block him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Move!"

Bobby Dean: "No!"

The referee turns back around.

Dane immediately pulls himself back into the ring, furious.

Maxx, still recovering near center ring, sees Dane distracted and starts forward.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean just prevented Eric Dane Jr. from grabbing the Hardcore Championship!"

Mark Bravo: "Family business just became family interference prevention!"

Dane gets to his feet, rage boiling over.

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He points down at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You are done. You hear me? Done."

Bobby's face falls, but he holds his ground on the scooter.

Bobby Dean: "I'm just trying to keep it fair."

Dane turns back toward Maxx.

Maxx catches him with a boot to the midsection.

Maxx hooks Dane again, looking desperately for Maximum Carnage without a chair.

The crowd rises.

Maxx tries to lift.

This time he gets Dane halfway up.

The bad shoulder shakes.

Dane kicks his legs.

Maxx cannot hold him.

Dane slips down behind him, grabs the bad arm, and yanks it violently backward.

Maxx cries out and drops to one knee.

John Phillips: "Again to the shoulder! Maxx just cannot get that finisher because of the damage!"

Mark Bravo: "Dane's entire game plan has paid off there. He took away the lift. He took away the finish."

Dane steps back.

He looks at Maxx, who is kneeling and vulnerable.

Then he looks toward the top rope.

The crowd boos because they know he is thinking about it again.

Dane wipes sweat from his mouth.

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Eric Dane Jr.: "Fine."

He points at Maxx.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stay there."

Maxx, barely upright, looks at him.

Maxx Mayhem: "No promises."

Dane rushes to the corner and climbs quickly this time.

No posing.

No extended taunt.

Just urgency.

John Phillips: "Dane going up again, and this time he is not wasting as much time."

Mark Bravo: "That might be the smartest adjustment he's made all night."

Maxx starts to rise.

Dane reaches the top.

He looks down.

Then launches.

Shooting Star Knees.

The rotation is fast.

Reckless.

Beautiful in the most obnoxious way.

Maxx tries to move, but the bad shoulder slows him.

Dane's knees crash down across Maxx's upper chest and shoulder.

Both men hit hard, but Maxx takes the worst of it.

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John Phillips: "Shooting Star Knees! Dane connects!"

Mark Bravo: "He got him! He finally hit the big risk!"

Dane rolls through, clutching his own knees for half a second, but adrenaline pushes him forward.

He crawls onto Maxx and hooks the leg deep.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Maxx kicks out.

Barely.

The arena explodes.

John Phillips: "Maxx kicks out! Maxx kicks out!"

Mark Bravo: "How? How did he kick out of that?"

Dane sits up in shock.

Not frustration now.

Shock.

He stares at the referee, then at Maxx, then at the referee again.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No."

The referee holds up two fingers.

Referee: "Two!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "No."

Referee: "Two!"

Dane grabs his own hair with both hands.

Outside, Bobby Dean is on the edge of the scooter seat, one hand over his mouth.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Bobby Dean: "Oh boy."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. thought that was it. He hit the Shooting Star Knees, targeted the damaged shoulder, and Maxx Mayhem still found a way out."

Mark Bravo: "Now what does Eric do? Because the clean plan just hit and didn't finish the job."

Dane slowly gets to his feet.

His expression changes again.

The shock drains.

Something uglier replaces it.

He looks toward Bobby.

Then toward the Hardcore Championship.

Then toward the shopping cart.

The crowd buzzes, sensing the line being approached.

Dane looks down at Maxx, who is barely moving.

Then he smiles faintly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Standard rules."

He steps through the ropes and onto the apron.

John Phillips: "Where is Dane going now?"

Mark Bravo: "I don't like that look."

Dane drops to the floor.

Bobby Dean immediately rolls the scooter toward him, blocking the path again.

Bobby Dean: "Eric."

Dane stops inches from the scooter.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Bobby Dean: "Don't."

Dane looks at him.

Really looks at him.

For one second, the family business line from earlier hangs between them like a bad joke that has become too real.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Move."

Bobby shakes his head.

Bobby Dean: "No."

The crowd cheers.

Dane's jaw tightens.

The referee leans through the ropes, yelling for Dane to get back inside.

Referee: "Eric! Back in the ring!"

Dane does not look away from Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You wanted family?"

Bobby looks uncertain now.

Bobby Dean: "Yeah."

Dane leans closer.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Then act like you know your place in it."

The line hits Bobby harder than any shove would have.

The smile disappears from his face.

He does not move the scooter.

But he stops speaking.

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Dane turns away from him and slides back into the ring, having not touched the title, not touched the cart, but having left something ugly behind anyway.

John Phillips: "That was cold from Eric Dane Jr."

Mark Bravo: "Bobby Dean has been ridiculous all night, but that hurt him. You could see it."

Inside the ring, Maxx Mayhem is beginning to stir.

Dane walks toward him, colder now, the showmanship stripped down into intent.

He grabs Maxx by the head.

Pulls him up.

Hooks him.

John Phillips: "Dane may be looking for SD2."

Maxx's legs wobble.

The bad shoulder hangs uselessly.

Dane starts to lift.

Maxx blocks with everything he has left.

Dane clubs him once.

Twice.

Then hooks tighter.

The crowd rises, willing Maxx to fight it.

Bobby sits at ringside, quiet now, one hand still on the scooter handle, the other resting against the side of the cart.

He watches Eric Dane Jr. try to finish the match.

And for the first time tonight, Bobby Dean is not smiling.

Eric Dane Jr. tightens his grip around Maxx Mayhem's head, trying to muscle him into position as the Mexico

World Tour: Mexico '26

City crowd rises into a restless roar.

Maxx's knees tremble.

His bad shoulder hangs low.

His good hand claws at Dane's wrist, fingers slipping against sweat and tape.

Dane grits his teeth and pulls again.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. is trying to finish this. He is trying to put Maxx Mayhem away with that Stardriver variation, but Maxx is fighting it with everything he has left."

Mark Bravo: "And everything he has left might not be much, John. That shoulder is a mess. He can barely post. He can barely grip. He can barely defend himself."

Dane clubs Maxx across the damaged shoulder once more.

Maxx drops to one knee.

Dane immediately yanks him back up.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No. No more almost."

He hooks Maxx tighter, dragging him toward the corner.

The crowd boos, sensing Dane wants height.

Not enough to win.

Enough to make sure everyone remembers who did it.

John Phillips: "Dane is not just trying to win. He wants the highlight. He wants the visual."

Mark Bravo: "That is always the problem with this kid. He can have the match in hand and still look for a prettier way to make it about himself."

Dane shoves Maxx into the corner and drives a knee into his ribs.

Another knee follows.

Maxx sags against the turnbuckles.

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Dane steps onto the middle rope, dragging Maxx's head with him as if setting up something ugly from above.

The referee steps in immediately, warning him about the ropes and the position.

Referee: "Eric, watch it! Get him out of the ropes!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "I know what I'm doing!"

Mark Bravo: "Historically, that sentence has not helped him."

Maxx suddenly throws a desperate body shot with his good arm.

It catches Dane in the ribs.

Dane holds on.

Maxx hits him again.

Then again.

Dane's grip loosens.

The crowd begins clapping in rhythm.

John Phillips: "Maxx fighting back from the corner!"

Dane tries to club him again, but Maxx ducks underneath and slips out between Dane's legs, dropping awkwardly to the mat behind him.

Dane is still on the middle rope, turned halfway around.

Maxx grabs him from behind with his good arm and yanks.

Dane crashes down from the ropes, landing hard on the back of his head and shoulders.

John Phillips: "Maxx pulls him down! Dane crashes from the middle rope!"

Mark Bravo: "Not pretty, not clean, but effective. That is Maxx Mayhem in one sentence."

Dane rolls toward the center of the ring, stunned.

Maxx collapses to one knee, grabbing his shoulder again, the burst costing him as much as it helped.

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Outside, Bobby Dean remains quiet on the scooter.

He is watching.

Not honking.

Not shouting.

The words from Dane still sit on him.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean has been unusually quiet since Eric Dane Jr. told him to know his place."

Mark Bravo: "That hurt Bobby. We can joke all night about the scooter, the honks, the toaster, all of it. But Bobby Dean came out here because he thinks there is some kind of family connection with Eric Dane Jr., and Eric just treated him like a problem."

Maxx crawls into the cover, draping his good arm across Dane's chest.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane kicks out.

Maxx rolls onto his back, laughing weakly through the pain.

Maxx Mayhem: "Still standard."

Dane rolls to the ropes, one hand at the back of his head.

Maxx pushes himself up slowly.

He looks toward the shopping cart again.

This time he does not reach.

He just looks.

Bobby looks too.

The cart sits halfway up the ramp, full of everything this match is not allowed to become.

Mark Bravo: "The most dangerous thing in this match may be what neither man is allowed to use."

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John Phillips: "The weapons have been a constant presence. They are temptation. They are distraction. They are the match Maxx Mayhem thought he was coming to fight."

Maxx shakes his head and turns back to Dane.

He pulls the champion up by the wrist.

Dane suddenly snaps a chop across Maxx's chest.

The crowd reacts.

Maxx answers with a forearm from the good arm.

Dane staggers.

Dane fires back with an overhand chop.

Maxx stumbles, then grins.

Maxx Mayhem: "Again."

Dane looks annoyed by the invitation.

He chops him again.

Maxx absorbs it and fires back with a headbutt that sends both men reeling.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem using that skull again!"

Mark Bravo: "That man's head is like a legally recognized foreign object."

Dane stumbles backward into the ropes.

Maxx charges.

Dane ducks low and pulls the top rope down.

Maxx spills over, but this time he lands on the apron.

The landing jars the shoulder.

Maxx almost falls.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Dane turns and drives a sharp forearm into the bad shoulder.

Maxx drops to one knee on the apron.

Dane grabs him by the head, pulling him through the ropes again.

John Phillips: "Dane trying to bring Maxx back in the hard way."

Maxx suddenly grabs Dane's head and drops down off the apron, snapping Dane throat-first across the top rope.

Dane whiplashes backward and collapses to the mat.

Mark Bravo: "There's the chaos! Legal chaos!"

Maxx lands on his feet on the floor, staggers, and nearly falls into Bobby Dean's scooter.

Bobby reaches out instinctively and steadies him with one hand.

Maxx looks at Bobby.

Maxx Mayhem: "Thanks, big man."

Bobby gives a small nod.

Bobby Dean: "You're welcome."

It is quieter than Bobby has been all night.

Maxx notices, but the match pulls him back before he can say anything.

Inside the ring, Dane is down near center, clutching his throat.

Maxx rolls back in under the bottom rope and drags himself toward the champion.

He hooks the leg.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane kicks out again.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Maxx sits up, breathing hard, shoulder screaming, sweat dripping from his hairline.

John Phillips: "Another near fall. Maxx Mayhem is getting closer and closer, but Eric Dane Jr. keeps surviving."

Mark Bravo: "That relentlessness is one thing Eric really does have. He is like a cockroach in silver trunks. You think he's done, and then he kicks out and asks for better lighting."

Maxx gets up slowly and grabs Dane by the head.

He hooks him for another DDT.

Dane twists out and shoves Maxx chest-first into the referee.

Maxx stops himself just short, hands up, avoiding the official.

The referee flinches and steps back.

Dane uses the moment.

He drops low and chop-blocks Maxx from behind, clipping the leg and sending him down awkwardly onto the bad shoulder.

John Phillips: "Dane uses the official as a distraction, then clips the leg!"

Mark Bravo: "That is not illegal, but it smells illegal."

Maxx rolls in pain, clutching both the knee and the shoulder now.

Dane scrambles to his feet, breathing hard, and immediately looks to the corner.

Again.

The crowd boos as he starts climbing.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. going back up top. He has hit one major aerial shot tonight, missed another, and now he is gambling again."

Mark Bravo: "Because he cannot help himself. The kid loves a camera angle more than he loves breathing."

Dane climbs to the top rope, eyes locked on Maxx.

Maxx is down.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Flat.

Hurt.

Dane looks out to the crowd and raises one hand.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is why I'm champion!"

Bobby Dean looks up from ringside.

Bobby Dean: "Eric."

Dane glances down.

Bobby Dean: "Just win."

There is something almost sincere in it.

Something pleading.

For one second, Dane pauses.

Then that smug little smile returns.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Exactly."

He leaps.

Shooting Star Legdrop.

Beautiful rotation again.

Dangerous landing.

Maxx rolls.

Dane crashes tailbone-first and leg-first into the canvas with nothing beneath him but regret.

The crowd explodes.

John Phillips: "He missed! Dane missed the Shooting Star Legdrop!"

Mark Bravo: "Bobby told him to just win, and Eric heard, add a flip!"

World Tour: Mexico '26

Dane sits upright in agony, face twisted, both hands going to his lower back and leg.

Maxx rolls toward the ropes, using them to pull himself upright.

The crowd builds.

Maxx looks down at Dane.

Then toward the corner.

Then toward the ramp.

The shopping cart glints under the lights.

He shakes his head.

Maxx Mayhem: "No toys."

He slaps his own chest with the good hand.

Maxx Mayhem: "Just me."

Bobby hears that and looks up.

The crowd cheers.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem choosing to stay within the rules. Choosing to fight this match straight, even if everything in him wants the opposite."

Mark Bravo: "That may be the wildest thing he's done all night."

Dane tries to get up.

Maxx charges from the corner.

This time he hits Crash Course.

A full-speed cannonball crushes Dane against the turnbuckles as Dane had staggered back into the corner, both men collapsing from the impact.

John Phillips: "Crash Course! Maxx got all of it!"

Mark Bravo: "He flattened Eric and half of himself too!"

World Tour: Mexico '26

Maxx rolls backward, clutching the shoulder and ribs, but forces himself to crawl across Dane's body.

The crowd counts along before the referee even drops.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane kicks out.

Somehow.

Maxx rolls off and stares at the ceiling.

Maxx Mayhem: "Rude."

John Phillips: "Dane survives Crash Course!"

Mark Bravo: "And Maxx is running out of body parts to throw at him."

Both men are down again.

The referee checks them.

The crowd is on its feet.

Bobby Dean is still at ringside, quiet, almost frozen, watching the man who told him to know his place crawl away from defeat by inches.

Dane rolls toward the ropes.

Maxx rolls toward the opposite side.

The Hardcore Championship rests at ringside.

The shopping cart waits halfway up the ramp.

The rules still hold.

But they feel thinner than they did before.

John Phillips: "What is it going to take? Standard rules or not, this has become a war of attrition for the Hardcore Championship."

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Mark Bravo: "And every second this goes longer, the chance of somebody finally reaching for something they're not allowed to use gets higher and higher."

Dane pulls himself to the ropes near Bobby's side.

Maxx does the same across the ring.

Both men rise slowly.

Dane sees Maxx first.

Maxx sees Dane.

They stagger toward the center.

Dane throws a chop.

Maxx throws a forearm.

Dane throws another chop.

Maxx answers with another forearm.

The crowd rises with each shot.

Dane's strikes are sharper.

Maxx's are heavier.

Dane kicks the shoulder.

Maxx headbutts him again.

Both men stagger.

Dane suddenly fires a rolling elbow that catches Maxx flush.

Maxx wobbles.

Dane hits the ropes.

He comes back looking for a flying knee.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Maxx catches him mid-charge with a desperation spine-rattling snap powerslam.

John Phillips: "Powerslam! Maxx turned him inside out!"

Maxx hooks the leg, nearly collapsing over Dane.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane kicks out again.

Maxx's face drops.

Then he laughs.

Not because it is funny.

Because that is what Maxx Mayhem does when the sane response is no longer available.

Maxx Mayhem: "Okay."

He sits up.

Maxx Mayhem: "Okay, sparkles."

Maxx grabs Dane by the head and slowly drags him upward.

The bad shoulder trembles.

He hooks Dane again.

John Phillips: "Maxx is going back for Maximum Carnage. He has not been able to hit it because of the shoulder."

Mark Bravo: "He doesn't need a chair. He just needs one clean lift. But that shoulder may not let him have it."

Maxx tries to lift.

Dane blocks.

Maxx tries again.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Dane drops his weight.

Then Dane grabs the injured arm and yanks down violently.

Maxx drops the hold with a shout.

Dane immediately rolls behind him, grabs a handful of tights again, and pulls Maxx backward into another pin attempt.

Referee: "ONE!"

Bobby sees the tights again.

Bobby Dean: "Little pants!"

The referee spots it immediately and stops counting.

Referee: "Eric!"

Dane releases and stands, absolutely losing control now.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He cannot keep doing that!"

Referee: "Then stop grabbing the tights!"

Eric Dane Jr.: "I am trying to win!"

Maxx rolls him from behind again, this time without the tights.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Dane barely kicks out.

Both men scramble up.

Maxx swings.

Dane ducks.

Maxx turns.

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Dane catches him with a sudden knee to the face.

Maxx drops to one knee, dazed.

Dane stumbles backward into the ropes, breathing hard, eyes wild, angry, humiliated, and desperate to end this.

John Phillips: "Dane caught Maxx with that knee, and Maxx may be out on his feet."

Mark Bravo: "If Eric has anything left, now is the time."

Dane looks toward the corner again.

The crowd boos.

Bobby Dean looks up from ringside.

Bobby Dean: "Eric, no more flips."

Dane turns toward him.

The words from earlier return to his face.

Know your place.

But Bobby does not look away this time.

Bobby Dean: "Just win."

Dane stares at him for a second.

Then looks back at Maxx.

He does not climb.

Instead, he steps forward and hooks Maxx by the head.

John Phillips: "Dane listened. He is not going up top."

Mark Bravo: "That might be the first smart thing Bobby has talked him into all night."

Dane pulls Maxx into position.

World Tour: Mexico '26

He hooks one arm.

Then the other.

Maxx's knees sag.

Dane twists.

Looking for a planted finish in the center.

But Maxx suddenly surges with one last burst, driving Dane backward into the ropes.

Dane rebounds off them, keeping the hold for half a second, then losing it.

Maxx swings wildly with the good arm.

Dane ducks and slips behind him.

He hooks Maxx from behind, using the bad arm against him, and drives him down with a sudden backstabber-like lungblower variation that jars the shoulder and upper back.

John Phillips: "Dane with a lungblower! Maxx's shoulder and back take the impact!"

Maxx bounces off the knees and collapses forward.

Dane rolls through, dragging Maxx up by the head again before Maxx can recover.

The champion's face is twisted in effort.

No smirk now.

No pose.

No flourish.

Just survival.

Dane hooks him.

Lifts.

And spikes Maxx down in the center of the ring with a compact, brutal Stardriver variation.

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John Phillips: "Stardriver! Stardriver by Eric Dane Jr.!"

Mark Bravo: "He got him! No flip, no weapon, no shortcut that time. He got him!"

Dane collapses across Maxx's chest, hooking the leg with both arms, pressing his weight down through exhaustion and panic.

Referee: "ONE!"

The crowd roars.

Referee: "TWO!"

Bobby Dean leans forward on the scooter, eyes wide.

Referee: "TH--"

Maxx kicks out.

The arena detonates.

John Phillips: "No! No! Maxx kicked out!"

Mark Bravo: "You have got to be kidding me!"

Dane rolls off Maxx and sits upright in complete disbelief.

His mouth is open.

His eyes are wide.

His hands slowly go to his hair.

Maxx lies flat, barely conscious, shoulder wrecked, chest heaving.

The crowd is shaking the building.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. hit him clean in the middle of the ring, and Maxx Mayhem still kicked out!"

Mark Bravo: "That was supposed to be it. That was supposed to be the version Bobby told him to take. No extra showboating. No nonsense. And it still was not enough."

Dane looks toward Bobby Dean.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Bobby looks back.

For once, Bobby has no joke.

No honk.

No family business line.

Dane's expression is unreadable for half a second.

Then it collapses into rage.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Your fault."

Bobby's brow furrows.

Bobby Dean: "What?"

Dane gets to his feet, staggering slightly, and points down at him through the ropes.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is your fault!"

The crowd boos.

The referee tries to redirect Dane back toward Maxx.

Referee: "Eric, stay on your opponent!"

Dane ignores him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You and your stupid scooter and your stupid family and your stupid title and your stupid rules!"

Bobby sits still.

The words hit harder than the earlier ones.

Bobby Dean: "Eric..."

Dane steps closer to the ropes.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I don't need you."

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A hush cuts through part of the crowd, swallowed quickly by boos.

Bobby's face falls completely now.

Inside the ring, behind Dane, Maxx Mayhem is stirring.

John Phillips: "Dane is losing the plot here. Maxx Mayhem kicked out, and instead of staying focused, he is turning on Bobby Dean."

Mark Bravo: "And look at Bobby. That hurt him. There's no punchline there."

Dane turns away from Bobby with disgust and storms back toward Maxx.

Maxx is on one knee.

Dane grabs him by the head again.

He pulls him up.

Maxx suddenly shoves Dane backward.

Dane stumbles into the ropes closest to Bobby.

Bobby instinctively reaches up as if to steady him, but stops halfway.

Dane looks down at the hand.

Then at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Don't touch me."

Bobby slowly lowers his hand.

Maxx charges.

Dane sidesteps.

Maxx crashes into the ropes, stopping himself before he spills out.

Dane grabs him from behind and pulls him into another roll-up, again reaching for the tights.

But Bobby immediately rises as much as he can on the scooter.

World Tour: Mexico '26

Bobby Dean: "Ref!"

Dane releases the tights before the referee turns, but the roll-up loses leverage.

Referee: "ONE!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Maxx kicks out and rolls through.

Dane scrambles up and turns toward Bobby in a fury.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I said I don't need you!"

Maxx rises behind him, barely standing.

Bobby points past Dane.

Bobby Dean: "Eric."

Dane sneers.

Eric Dane Jr.: "What now?"

Bobby's voice is quiet.

Bobby Dean: "Behind you."

Dane turns.

Maxx catches him with a boot to the gut.

The crowd explodes.

Maxx hooks Dane again.

One arm barely working.

One last chance.

John Phillips: "Maxx has him! Maxx has him hooked!"

Mark Bravo: "Can he lift him? Can he get him up with that shoulder?"

World Tour: Mexico '26

Maxx tries.

His bad shoulder trembles violently.

Dane fights.

Maxx roars through the pain and gets Dane vertical for just one second.

Not high.

Not pretty.

Not clean.

But enough.

Dane slips down before the full brainbuster can land, landing behind Maxx.

He immediately grabs the bad arm and spins Maxx around.

Dane hooks the head.

Twists.

And plants Maxx again, this time with a faster, nastier Stardriver variation, using Maxx's own damaged arm trapped across his body on the way down.

John Phillips: "Another Stardriver! Dane spikes him again!"

Mark Bravo: "That one was ugly. That one was desperate. That one might be enough."

Dane does not pose.

Does not shout.

Does not look at Bobby.

He throws himself over Maxx and hooks both legs, stacking him tight, face pressed down with every ounce of panic he has left.

Referee: "ONE!"

Bobby watches.

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Referee: "TWO!"

Maxx's legs twitch.

But the shoulder gives him nothing.

Referee: "THREE!"

DING DING DING!

The bell rings.

The crowd erupts into boos as Dane rolls off Maxx and lies flat on his back, exhausted, furious, and still champion.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... and STILL Hardcore Champion... Eric Dane Jr.!"

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. survives Maxx Mayhem! The Hardcore Championship stays with the champion!"

Mark Bravo: "And he did it under standard rules, but he did not make it look easy. Maxx Mayhem pushed him to the edge, bad shoulder and all."

The referee retrieves the Hardcore Championship and brings it into the ring.

Dane sits up slowly, hair damp, chest heaving, face sour even in victory.

He snatches the championship from the referee, clutching it against his chest like someone might take it from him if he blinks.

Maxx rolls onto his side, one hand clutching the injured shoulder, the fight finally drained from him.

The crowd gives Maxx a loud ovation despite the loss.

John Phillips: "Listen to this crowd for Maxx Mayhem. He came in expecting chaos, adapted to standard rules, and nearly took the Hardcore Championship."

Mark Bravo: "No weapons, no plunder, no shortcuts. Just pain, stubbornness, and whatever is wrong with him personally. Maxx earned that reaction."

Dane hears the cheers for Maxx.

Of course he does.

World Tour: Mexico '26

His victory expression twists into resentment.

He gets to his feet and raises the Hardcore Championship, trying to drown the cheers in boos.

The boos come.

Loud.

But so do the cheers for Maxx.

And that makes Dane angrier.

At ringside, Bobby Dean remains on the scooter, looking at Dane with something complicated on his face.

Pride, maybe.

Hurt, definitely.

Dane steps toward the ropes closest to Bobby, championship over his shoulder.

Bobby looks up at him.

For a second, it seems like Bobby might say something.

Instead, Dane speaks first.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I told you."

Bobby says nothing.

Dane points to the championship.

Eric Dane Jr.: "My title."

Bobby looks at the belt.

Then at Dane.

Still nothing.

Dane's jaw tightens.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Say something."

World Tour: Mexico '26

Bobby's hands rest on the scooter handlebars.

He looks like he wants to smile.

Like he wants to make it okay.

Like he wants to say family business one more time and believe it.

But he does not.

He just looks at Eric Dane Jr.

Dane scoffs.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Whatever."

Dane turns away, lifts the Hardcore Championship overhead again, and climbs to the middle rope, forcing the camera to catch his victory pose.

The boos pour down.

Bobby Dean remains at ringside, quiet.

The shopping cart full of unused weapons sits halfway up the ramp.

Maxx Mayhem lies near the ropes, hurt but still somehow laughing weakly to himself.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. leaves Mexico City still Hardcore Champion, but there is something fractured here with Bobby Dean."

Mark Bravo: "Eric won the match. He kept the title. But he may have done real damage to the one person out here who actually wanted to believe in him."

Dane drops down from the ropes and steps through to the apron, still clutching the championship.

He starts down the steps without waiting for Bobby.

Bobby watches him go.

Then slowly turns the scooter.

SFX: *whirr... clunk...*

World Tour: Mexico '26

No honk.

The absence is noticeable.

Dane walks up the ramp first, title over his shoulder, one arm raised, trying to make the main event end on his image alone.

Bobby follows several feet behind on the scooter, slower than before, quieter than before.

Halfway up the ramp, they pass the shopping cart.

Maxx's weapons remain untouched.

Bobby glances at them.

Then continues after Dane.

John Phillips: "A bizarre, brutal, and emotional main event. Eric Dane Jr. retains the Hardcore Championship in a standard rules match against Maxx Mayhem."

Mark Bravo: "And somehow the loudest thing at the end might be Bobby Dean not honking that horn."

Dane reaches the top of the ramp and turns back toward the ring, raising the Hardcore Championship high.

The crowd boos him mercilessly.

Bobby rolls up behind him and stops, not quite beside him.

A few feet back.

Dane does not notice at first.

Or he notices and does not care.

Inside the ring, Maxx Mayhem has pulled himself to a seated position, holding his shoulder and staring toward the title that stayed just out of reach.

Eric Dane Jr. victorious.

The Hardcore Championship still his.

Bobby Dean behind him, silent.

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Maxx Mayhem in the ring, beaten but not broken.

Eric Dane Jr. remains at the top of the ramp, Hardcore Championship lifted high, his chest rising and falling as he forces the image to last.

The boos keep coming.

He welcomes those.

Boos still mean attention.

Boos still mean the camera is on him.

Boos still mean everyone is looking where he wants them to look.

But Bobby Dean's silence is different.

Dane finally lowers the championship and turns his head slightly, noticing that Bobby is not beside him.

Not really.

Bobby sits a few feet behind on the mobility scooter, hands resting on the handlebars, eyes lowered for just a moment before lifting back toward Dane.

No smile.

No thumbs up.

No family business.

No horn.

John Phillips: "That is not the Bobby Dean we saw earlier tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Earlier tonight, Bobby was following Eric Dane Jr. around like this whole thing meant the world to him. Like he had found something again. Like this was family. Right now? That look says he heard every word Eric said."

Dane stares at Bobby.

For a second, the champion's expression almost shifts.

Almost.

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There is a flicker there.

Not remorse.

Eric Dane Jr. does not seem built for remorse.

But recognition, maybe.

Recognition that something easy and useful has become less easy.

Then the flicker dies.

Dane turns away from Bobby and lifts the Hardcore Championship again, aiming himself toward the hard camera at the top of the stage.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Still mine."

He taps the faceplate.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Still mine."

Mexico City boos louder.

Bobby remains behind him.

Quiet.

Still.

The scooter rattles softly beneath him, but even that sound feels smaller now.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. said he did not need Bobby Dean. He said it in the middle of the match. He said worse than that. And Bobby Dean may be ridiculous, he may be loud, he may be a walking liability on that scooter, but he is not made of stone."

Mark Bravo: "That kid won the match, but he treated Bobby like garbage to do it. You can see it. Bobby is not celebrating with him. He is following because he does not know what else to do yet."

In the ring, Maxx Mayhem has rolled toward the ropes and dragged himself to a seated position against the bottom strand.

His injured shoulder hangs low, taped wrist pressed against it, pain clear across his face.

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But he is smiling.

Not big.

Not wild.

Just enough.

Because Maxx Mayhem survived the rules.

He did not win.

But he made the champion work.

He made the champion panic.

And he made Mexico City believe.

The crowd gives him another ovation as he pushes himself up with the ropes.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem came up short tonight, but he proved something. He proved he can be dangerous even when you remove the weapons. He can be dangerous even when you take away the environment he thrives in."

Mark Bravo: "He nearly won the Hardcore Championship in a match designed to take the hardcore out of him. That is not nothing."

Maxx looks out toward the ramp.

His shopping cart still sits there, untouched, abandoned halfway between what he wanted this match to be and what it became.

He slowly points to it with his good hand.

Maxx Mayhem: "You were beautiful."

A few fans nearby laugh and cheer.

Maxx turns his eyes toward Eric Dane Jr. at the top of the ramp.

The smile fades slightly.

Not fully.

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But enough.

There is unfinished business in the look.

John Phillips: "I do not think Maxx Mayhem is done with Eric Dane Jr."

Mark Bravo: "Why would he be? He almost beat him under Eric's rules. Imagine what happens if Maxx ever gets him in Maxx's kind of match."

Dane sees Maxx looking.

The champion pulls the title closer to his chest.

Then he raises it again, higher this time, as if altitude alone can settle the argument.

Maxx nods from inside the ring.

Slow.

Still smiling a little.

Maxx Mayhem: "Next time."

The camera does not need to hear him clearly to understand it.

Dane turns away before the moment can feel like a challenge accepted.

He steps through the curtain first, disappearing backstage with the Hardcore Championship still over his shoulder.

Bobby Dean remains at the top of the ramp for another second.

Just one.

He looks back toward the ring.

At Maxx.

At the shopping cart.

At the crowd.

Then he looks toward the curtain where Eric Dane Jr. disappeared.

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His hands settle on the controls.

The scooter starts forward.

SFX: *whirr... clunk...*

No honk.

Bobby Dean disappears through the curtain after him.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. retains. Bobby Dean follows, but something has changed there."

Mark Bravo: "The horn didn't honk, John. I know that sounds ridiculous, but it matters. Bobby Dean has been a human sound effect all night. Now he is quiet. That says a lot."

The camera cuts back to Maxx Mayhem inside the ring.

The referee checks on him, but Maxx waves him off with the good arm.

He uses the ropes and slowly gets one foot under him.

Then the other.

The crowd cheers as he stands, unsteady but upright.

Maxx looks toward the ramp again.

Then rolls out of the ring and stumbles toward the shopping cart.

He reaches it and places one hand on the handle.

He looks down at the pile of unused weapons inside.

Trash can lid.

Kendo stick.

Stop sign.

The toaster.

All of them untouched.

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All of them waiting for a match that never happened.

Maxx reaches in with his good hand and pulls out the trash can lid.

The referee stiffens, but the match is over.

Maxx looks at the lid.

Then gently places it against his bad shoulder like an ice pack.

The crowd laughs and cheers.

Mark Bravo: "That's one way to use it."

John Phillips: "The match is over, and Maxx Mayhem finally gets his hands on one of those weapons. Not to attack anyone. To nurse the damage from a standard rules Hardcore Championship match."

Maxx begins pushing the shopping cart slowly up the ramp, limping beside it, trash can lid still pressed to his shoulder.

The Mexico City crowd gives him a loud, appreciative ovation.

He stops halfway up and looks out to them.

For a second, the wildness softens into something like gratitude.

Then he ruins it by pointing at the toaster.

Maxx Mayhem: "He says thank you too!"

The crowd cheers again.

John Phillips: "What a night here in Mexico City. The first stop of the UTA World Tour is in the books. We saw Bianca Page continue her momentum. We saw Emily Hightower embrace something darker inside herself. We saw Mack and Black retain the UTA Tag Team Championships. We saw Kairo Bey score a major win under the influence of The Creed Method. And we saw Chris Ross turn silence into one of the most unsettling weapons in UTA."

Mark Bravo: "And then, in the main event, Eric Dane Jr. somehow defended the Hardcore Championship in a standard match, survived Maxx Mayhem, and maybe damaged the one relationship he accidentally had."

Maxx disappears through the curtain with the shopping cart, leaving the ramp empty.

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The camera returns to the announcers at ringside.

John Phillips and Mark Bravo sit beneath the arena lights, the energy of the crowd still buzzing behind them.

John Phillips: "The World Tour continues next week from Turin, Italy, and after what we have seen tonight, the landscape of UTA feels anything but settled."

Mark Bravo: "Amy Harrison has Marie Van Claudio trapped under The Empire's thumb. First Class has Chris Ross breathing down their necks without saying a word. Eli Creed may be pulling Kairo Bey closer to The Creed Method. And Eric Dane Jr. is still Hardcore Champion, but I don't think anybody walked out of tonight clean."

John Phillips: "From Gimnasio Olimpico in Mexico City, Mexico, for Mark Bravo, I'm John Phillips. Thank you for joining us for World Tour: Mexico '26."

Mark Bravo: "Goodnight, everybody. And somebody please check the toaster through customs before Italy."

The camera cuts one final time to the entranceway.

No Eric Dane Jr.

No Bobby Dean.

No Maxx Mayhem.

Just the empty stage where the World Tour began, where silence did damage, where pride was tested, where gold was kept, and where more than one relationship left Mexico City cracked.

The crowd noise swells one final time.

Fade out.

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Show Credits

Segment: "The Difference" - Written by justin.

Segment: "Introduction" - Written by Ben.

Match: "Bianca Page vs. Shannon Ray" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "A Not So First-Class Arrival" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "The New First Lady of the UTA" - Written by Ben, dave, meagan.

Segment: "Chaos Walking" - Written by justin.

Match: "Emily Hightower vs. Tyger II" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "Making My Mark" - Written by Carlos, Ace, Ben.

Segment: ""El Sol de México"" - Written by boone, Ben.

Segment: "Not So Warm Welcome" - Written by Ben, tony, Ace, Carlos.

Match: "Samual Scythe vs. Kairo Bey" - Written by chris.

Segment: "Unanswered Questions" - Written by Ben, chris.

Segment: "Terms of Engagement" - Written by tony.

Segment: "Wouldn't Dream of It" - Written by Ben, chris.

Match: "Mack & Black vs. El Fantasma" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "The First Step is Evidence" - Written by Ben.

Segment: "First Class in Ring" - Written by Ben, chris.

Segment: "Standard Rules Apply" - Written by justin.

Match: "Eric Dane Jr. vs Maxx Mayhem" - Written by justin.

Results Compiled by the eFed Management Suite