

# World Tour: Spain '26

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**Promotion:** United Toughness Alliance  
**Date:** May 29, 2026  
**Location:** Palacio Vistalegre Madrid — Madrid, Spain

## Preview

The United Toughness Alliance embarks on an epic World Tour for 2026.

## Results

### Introduction

Segment

The screen fades in from black.

A sweeping shot of Madrid at night fills the screen. The lights of the city burn gold against the deep Spanish sky. Traffic cuts through the streets like veins of fire. The camera glides past historic architecture, crowded plazas, waving flags, and finally toward the roaring exterior of Palacio Vistalegre Madrid.

The building is alive.

Fans are lined outside in UTA shirts, championship belts over shoulders, signs in the air, voices carrying into the night. The final stop on the road to International Affair has arrived, and there is no calm before the storm. Not tonight. Not in Madrid.

The UTA logo flashes across the screen.

A rapid-fire video package begins.

Brittany Reid and Bianca Page are shown jawing at one another in previous weeks, their rivalry growing sharper with every encounter.

Eric Dane Jr. clutches the UTA Hardcore Championship, looking over his shoulder as Maxx Mayhem crashes through bodies and Bobby Dean grins like a man who has accidentally wandered into opportunity.

Kirsty McKinney appears in quick flashes — intense eyes, clenched fists, a new arrival stepping into the UTA spotlight for the first time. Athena Storm follows, focused and dangerous, a veteran presence looking to rebuild her climb through the rankings.

Chris Ross stalks forward in cold silence, his face no longer twisted with rage but carved into something colder. Samuel Scythe stands across from him in shadow, a monster refusing to move aside.

Then the screen cuts to Sol Azteca, the rising force making her official UTA in-ring debut. Across from her, Emily Hightower smirks with violence in her eyes.

A heavy steel tow chain slams onto concrete.

The screen glitches.

VOICEOVER: "One week before International Affair..."

The chain is dragged across the floor.

VOICEOVER: "Momentum matters."

Chris Ross drives a shoulder through an opponent. Athena Storm throws a strike. Maxx Mayhem swings a weapon into the camera frame. Bianca Page screams from the ropes. Brittany Reid fires back. Eric Dane Jr. raises the Hardcore Championship with desperate defiance.

VOICEOVER: "Survival matters more."

The final image is the tow chain pulled tight between Sol Azteca and Emily Hightower.

VOICEOVER: "Tonight, Madrid becomes the final battlefield before International Affair."

The screen explodes into the official show graphic.

UTA WORLD TOUR: SPAIN '26

LIVE FROM PALACIO VISTALEGRE MADRID — MADRID, SPAIN

Pyro erupts from the stage in red, gold, and white bursts as the cameras cut inside Palacio Vistalegre Madrid. The crowd is thunderous. Thousands are on their feet, chanting, waving signs, and roaring as the UTA production rig sweeps spotlights over the packed arena.

Signs flash across the screen.

"ROSS WANTS HIS CROWN BACK"

"BIANCA OWNS BRITTANY"

"SOL AZTECA HAS ARRIVED"

"BOBBY DEAN HARDCORE LEGEND?"

"MAXX = MAYHEM"

"MADRID IS UTA COUNTRY"

The camera settles at ringside where John Phillips and Mark Bravo are seated behind the commentary desk, the crowd roaring behind them.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Madrid! Welcome to Palacio Vistalegre! And welcome to UTA World Tour: Spain I'm John Phillips alongside Mark Bravo, and Mark, this is it — the final stop before International Affair!"

MARK BRAVO: "You can feel it, John! This place is electric, the roster is tense, everybody is looking over their shoulder, and one week before International Affair, nobody wants to limp into the biggest international showcase of the season."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Tonight, the stakes are enormous. Brittany Reid and Bianca Page meet again after weeks of tension. Kirsty McKinney makes her official UTA debut against the dangerous Athena Storm. Chris Ross collides with Samuel Scythe in a match that could shake the UTA Championship picture heading into International Affair."

MARK BRAVO: "And don't forget the Hardcore Championship! Eric Dane Jr. has talked, dodged, survived, and somehow kept that title around his waist, but tonight? Tonight he's got Maxx Mayhem and Bobby Dean in a Hardcore Match. That is not a title defense, John. That is a medical emergency waiting to happen."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And in tonight's historic main event, Sol Azteca makes her official UTA in-ring debut against Emily Hightower in the first-ever Tow Chain Match in UTA history."

MARK BRAVO: "That is insane. I don't care how tough you are. I don't care how ready you think you are. A tow chain changes everything. That thing is not a wrestling stipulation. That thing belongs hooked to a truck pulling wreckage off the highway."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And tonight, it may be used to create wreckage. Sol Azteca has all the promise in the world, but Emily Hightower is not the opponent you want when steel is involved."

MARK BRAVO: "Sol wanted to make an impact. Well, congratulations. There may be dents in both of them by the time this night is over."

The camera cuts to the stage as the crowd continues to roar. The lights pulse over the entrance way while the Spanish audience claps and chants in rhythm.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "International Affair is one week away, but before we get there, the UTA locker room has one more night to fight for momentum, one more night to settle scores, and one more night to prove who is ready for the pressure."

MARK BRAVO: "Or who cracks under it."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "We are live in Madrid, Spain, and World Tour: Spain starts right now!"

The camera pans across the sold-out crowd one more time as the arena lights shift toward the entrance stage.

## **Whispers in the Dark**

Segment

The show has not yet gotten into full swing when it shifts to a secluded corridor.

The camera is already moving when the feed cuts to it — not positioned and waiting, but moving, hand-held, the slightly unstable framing of footage that was not meant to be broadcast. As though a camera operator found something already in progress and made a decision. The corridor is narrow, institutional, lit by the overhead fluorescents of a backstage area that was not designed to be seen. There is no crowd noise. No commentary. Just the ambient hum of a building preparing for a show that has not yet begun.

Avril Selene Kinkade is talking.

She is dressed in a charcoal suit — fitted, immaculate, the high-collar silk blouse visible at the neck, the vintage onyx brooch catching the fluorescent light. Her slim leather briefcase is in one hand and her sheer black gloves are on both hands and she is talking with the measured cadence of a woman delivering a legal argument to a judge she has already won over. She does not raise her voice. She does not gesture broadly. She occupies the corridor the way she occupies every room — as though it belongs to her and the other people in it are present by her permission.

Hakuryu is listening.

He is standing with his hands folded in front of him and his eyes closed, the posture of a man in meditation rather than a meeting. The white facepaint is already applied. He is in his full pilgrimage garments — the white robes, the shakujo staff resting against the wall behind him. He is perfectly still. Whether he is absorbing every word or has already made his decision and is simply allowing Avril the courtesy of finishing is impossible to say. Both feel plausible.

Sinja stands off to Hakuryu's left, half a step behind, arms folded. He is watching Avril with the attentive calm of a man performing his professional function — interpreter, witness, disciple. His expression is controlled. Beneath the control, in the very back of his eyes, there is something else. Something private. Something that has been sitting there since the night Torunn Sigurjonsson closed her hand around his throat and held him against a barricade while the referee counted to ten.

The Fatu Twins are at either end of the corridor. Kimo at one end, Keanu at the other — arms folded, faces still, positioned with the patient, immovable efficiency of men who are very good at making sure that whatever is happening in the space between them stays between them. They are not participating in the meeting. They are ensuring that no one else does either. The corridor belongs to this conversation for as long as Avril needs it to.

The camera settles. The audio sharpens. Avril is mid-sentence.

Avril Selene Kinkade: "— and I shall ask that we are entirely clear on what the objective is this evening, because I find that clarity at the outset prevents a considerable amount of difficulty later. The objective is not to harm the girl. The objective is Van Patton."

She pauses. She adjusts the briefcase in her hand with the small, precise movement of a woman who is never imprecise.

Avril Selene Kinkade: "Van Patton must strike you. That is the entirety of what we require. The moment he makes physical contact — a single strike, a shove, contact of any description — the retirement clause is triggered and his career terminates on the spot. No match at International Affair. No six-man tag. No rematch, no return, no further involvement in this company's affairs whatsoever. It ends here. This evening. In this building. Pursuant to terms he himself agreed to and signed." She tilts her chin upward by a degree. "That is what we are constructing tonight. Not a confrontation. A conclusion."

She holds that word in the corridor for a moment. Then continues.

Avril Selene Kinkade: "To that end — the warpainted Norse savage is our instrument. Not our target. There is a material distinction between the two and I require that distinction to be observed." Her voice acquires a particular precision on the next sentence — the precision of a lawyer drawing a line in a contract and making absolutely certain it is legible. "We are placing her in a position of sufficient danger that Van Patton loses the capacity for rational restraint. We are not breaking her arm. We are threatening to. We are presenting Van Patton with a scenario so unbearable, so immediate, so viscerally intolerable to a man of his particular psychology, that the contractual barrier between him and his instincts simply ceases to function."

She pauses. One breath. Controlled.

Avril Selene Kinkade: "He will not be able to help himself. That is not a hope. It is a studied assessment of the man's character. He has demonstrated repeatedly that his discipline has a ceiling and that ceiling is the people he considers his responsibility. He will watch you hold that girl and he will cross that line. I am quite certain of it."

She looks at Hakuryu directly now. The emerald eyes behind the ultra-thin glasses are doing what they always do — focusing on a target with the complete, unblinking attention of something that has identified exactly what it wants.

Avril Selene Kinkade: "However." The word lands with the weight of a full stop. "I must be unambiguous on the matter of consequences. Torunn Sigurjonsson is not to be seriously harmed. I want her frightened. I want her compromised. I want her in a position that communicates to Van Patton with absolute clarity that he is moments away from losing her. But she walks out of this building this evening under her own power. That is a condition, not a preference." She holds his gaze. "What I am about to say is not legal counsel. It is a practical assessment that I would ask you to receive in the spirit in which it is offered."

She steps forward. One measured step — closing the professional distance by a fraction, the way a person steps forward when they want to be certain that what they are saying is being heard rather than simply received.

Avril Selene Kinkade: "Van Patton is not the only person in this world who regards that woman in high regard. There are others." She pauses — a deliberate pause, the kind that does not exist to gather thought but to allow weight to accumulate. "People considerably further from this building tonight. People I have devoted considerable effort and resource to keeping as far from this company as possible. People I have no desire whatsoever to give cause to." Her voice does not change in volume. It changes in quality — the particular quality it takes on when she is not making a legal argument but stating a simple, personal, considered truth, the kind a woman states when she has looked at something squarely and does not enjoy what she sees. "If that girl is genuinely, seriously, irreversibly harmed — I cannot manage what follows. I want to be precise about that because I am not in the habit of overstating things. I am

telling you that there exists a response to that specific outcome that falls entirely outside the parameters of anything I could contain, mitigate, or address through any instrument available to me. Legal or otherwise." A beat — barely a beat, the smallest possible pause before the next sentence. "And I have tried every instrument available to me where these particular people are concerned. At considerable length."

She lets that sit in the corridor. The fluorescent hum fills the silence. Something in Avril's face in this moment is different from every other moment in this conversation — not vulnerability, not exactly. But the face of a woman who has looked at something she finds genuinely unpleasant and is choosing to be honest about that rather than perform composure she does not entirely feel.

Avril Selene Kinkade: "I have no interest in finding out whether that response is as significant as I believe it to be. I have every intention of ensuring we never have occasion to discover it." A beat. "She is not harmed seriously. Not tonight. Not unless there is genuinely, demonstrably, no other available path to the outcome we require. And I do not anticipate that there will be, because Van Patton will move long before it reaches that point."

She stops talking. She holds Hakuryu's gaze and waits.

Hakuryu has not moved. His eyes have been open since she stepped forward — open and on her face with the focused, unhurried attention of a man who has been listening to every word and has already formed a view of all of them. He looks at Avril for a long moment. Then something shifts in his expression — small, controlled, the shift of a man who finds a position mildly insufficient and is deciding whether to say so.

He speaks.

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

Sinja: "What if she does not break?"

The question is not aggressive. It is clinical. The question of a man examining a plan for structural weaknesses the way an engineer examines a bridge — not to undermine it, but because the question needs an answer before the weight goes on.

Avril looks at him for a moment. Then:

Avril Selene Kinkade: "She will not break. She is not the variable I am concerned with. Van Patton is the variable. And Van Patton will not allow it to reach the point where she breaks. That is the entire foundation of the plan."

Hakuryu looks at her. He is quiet for a moment. Then he speaks again, and his voice is still level, still without heat — but there is something in it now that was not present before. Something that is not quite disagreement and not quite a threat. The considered position of a man who finds the constraint unnecessary and wants that noted.

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

Sinja: "He does not fear the consequences."

He says it the way he says everything — as a fact, not a boast. The flat, final statement of a man for whom the concept of consequences operates on a different register than it does for most people. He is not being reckless. He is being accurate. The consequences Avril is carefully mapping — the Brigade's response, Eriksson's people, the disproportionate and uncontainable retaliation — none of it occupies space in Hakuryu's calculus in the way Avril needs it to.

Avril looks at him. A beat. Her expression does not change in any conventional sense. But something in it does the work of acknowledging that she has heard him and is not dismissing him and is also not moving from her position.

Avril Selene Kinkade: "I am aware that you do not." A beat. "I, however, am the one who would be managing the consequences. And I have a considerably clearer picture of what those consequences look like than you do, which I

trust you will permit me to regard as sufficient grounds for the instruction." She holds his gaze. "Van Patton will move. I am not asking you to exercise restraint out of timidity. I am asking you to trust the assessment. The threat is the instrument. The position is the instrument. Van Patton believing — with absolute, unshakeable conviction — that you are prepared to go through with it is all that is required. He will come through that line. I am quite certain of it." She pauses. "Should it become apparent that the position alone is insufficient — that Van Patton has found some reserve of restraint I have not accounted for — then and only then do we consider what comes next. That decision is made in the moment, with full awareness of what it invites. Not before." Her voice drops by one final degree. "I would very much prefer that it does not come to that."

The corridor is very quiet.

Hakuryu looks at her for a long moment. Then he nods. Once. Small. The nod of a man who has noted the position and has chosen, for now, to operate within it — reserving the right to revise that choice should circumstances warrant. It is not agreement in the full sense. It is the acknowledgment of a professional courtesy extended between two people who understand each other's methods and have elected, for the duration of this evening, to trust them.

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

Sinja: "It shall be done."

Avril holds his gaze for one more moment. Then she nods — once, small, the nod of a woman confirming the execution of a contractual term. She adjusts the briefcase in her hand. She pauses.

Avril Selene Kinkade: "Tkachuk will not be a problem this evening. Kimo and Keanu shall see to that."

She turns her head — not to Hakuryu, not to Sinja. To Kimo at the far end of the corridor. Then to Keanu at the other. She holds each look for exactly one second. Two men who do not move, do not nod, do not change expression in any visible way — and yet something is communicated between them that does not require any of those things. She turns back to Hakuryu.

Avril Selene Kinkade: "They are to separate Tkachuk from Van Patton and keep him separated for as long as the situation requires. They are not to cause him undue harm." Another half-beat — the same barely-there softening around the eyes, controlled before it becomes anything, gone before it can be named. "Van Patton must be alone when he finds you. Without Tkachuk beside him, he has only himself and whatever he is feeling. That is precisely the condition in which I require him."

She turns. She walks away down the corridor. Her footsteps are measured and even and they do not change pace. The long black coat moves with her. Kimo and Keanu peel away from their positions at either end of the corridor and fall into step on either side of her at a discreet distance — returning to their natural formation as she goes.

She does not look back.

The camera holds on Hakuryu and Sinja in the corridor. Hakuryu reaches for the shakujo staff against the wall. He takes it in both hands. He does not pray. He does not close his eyes. He simply holds the staff and looks at the empty corridor ahead of him.

Sinja unfolds his arms. He smooths the front of his white jacket with one hand. He looks in the direction Avril walked. Then straight ahead down the corridor in the other direction.

The thing in the back of his eyes is fully present now.

He is ready.

The camera cuts.

## **Where you're supposed to be**

Segment

We cut backstage.

Not to the interview position. Not to Scott Stevens' office. Not anywhere with a monitor, a desk, or the comforting lie of structure.

Just a quiet stretch of hallway somewhere inside the arena, where the noise of World Tour: Spain feels distant enough to be someone else's problem.

Bobby Dean sits alone in the Battle Chair.

The scooter hums softly beneath him. One of the side panels still carries a strip of black tape from previous abuse, slapped on crooked and doing its best. Bobby's hand rests over it like he is checking a bandage.

He looks tired.

Not sleepy tired.

Bobby tired.

The kind where a man has spent too many weeks being shoved, shouted at, dragged into trouble, blamed for trouble, and then asked why he is standing in trouble.

From off-camera:

ERIC DANE JR.: "There you are."

Bobby looks up.

Eric Dane Jr. enters frame with the UTA Hardcore Championship over his shoulder. He is composed, dressed sharp, hair perfect, face arranged into something that wants to be calm.

It does not quite make it.

BOBBY DEAN: "Hey, Eric."

Dane looks at him for a moment.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You've been difficult to find."

BOBBY DEAN: "I've been here."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Yes. Well. Here was not where I expected you to be."

Bobby glances around the hallway.

BOBBY DEAN: "Where was I supposed to be?"

Dane gives him a look.

Small.

Automatic.

Then he catches himself.

ERIC DANE JR.: "That's actually what I wanted to talk to you about."

Bobby's face tightens.

BOBBY DEAN: "Oh."

Dane steps closer, lowering his voice.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Tonight got out of hand."

Bobby nods slowly.

BOBBY DEAN: "Yeah."

ERIC DANE JR.: "And I know you well enough to know you did not ask for this."

Bobby does not answer.

Dane continues.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You didn't wake up this morning thinking you belonged in a Hardcore Championship match. You didn't scheme your way into this. You didn't manipulate anyone. You got swept up."

Bobby looks down at the taped panel on the chair.

BOBBY DEAN: "I guess."

ERIC DANE JR.: "No. Not 'I guess.' You did."

Dane adjusts the title on his shoulder.

ERIC DANE JR.: "That is what happens when people lose sight of what they are good at."

Bobby looks back up.

BOBBY DEAN: "What am I good at?"

Dane pauses.

A fraction too long.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You're loyal."

Bobby's expression changes. Not much. Enough.

BOBBY DEAN: "That matters?"

ERIC DANE JR.: "Of course it matters."

BOBBY DEAN: "It hasn't felt like it."

Dane's jaw tightens.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Bobby."

BOBBY DEAN: "I'm just saying."

ERIC DANE JR.: "And I'm telling you that tonight is not the night to start questioning things you already understand."

Bobby sits with that.

The chair hums.

The hallway noise rolls faintly behind them.

ERIC DANE JR.: "This match is dangerous. It is unpredictable. It is exactly the kind of situation where people get hurt because they let emotion make decisions for them."

BOBBY DEAN: "You think I'm emotional?"

ERIC DANE JR.: "I think you're confused."

Bobby looks away.

ERIC DANE JR.: "And that is not an insult."

BOBBY DEAN: "It usually is when people say that."

Dane exhales through his nose.

ERIC DANE JR.: "I am trying to help you."

BOBBY DEAN: "By telling me I don't belong?"

ERIC DANE JR.: "By reminding you that you don't have to prove anything to anyone."

Bobby looks at the title.

Just briefly.

Dane sees it.

His hand shifts across the faceplate.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Especially not with this."

BOBBY DEAN: "I'm in the match."

ERIC DANE JR.: "You were put in the match."

BOBBY DEAN: "Still means I can win it."

Dane's eyes sharpen.

Bobby almost shrinks from it, but not all the way.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Winning this would not solve your problem."

BOBBY DEAN: "What's my problem?"

Dane steps closer.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Your problem is that you keep mistaking attention for respect."

That lands.

Bobby's mouth opens, then closes again.

Dane softens his tone, because now he knows he has him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "I know you. I know where you fit. I know what you are when you stop letting other people push you around."

BOBBY DEAN: "What am I?"

Again, Dane pauses.

Again, too long.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Useful."

Bobby blinks.

Dane hears it after it leaves his mouth.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Valuable."

BOBBY DEAN: "That's not the same thing."

Dane's calm starts to crack.

ERIC DANE JR.: "It is if you're smart enough to understand value."

Bobby looks down again.

Dane reins himself in.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Listen to me. Tonight, stay close. Let the match become what it becomes. When things get ugly, you do what you have always done best."

BOBBY DEAN: "What's that?"

ERIC DANE JR.: "You follow my lead."

Bobby is quiet.

Too quiet.

Dane waits.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Bobby."

BOBBY DEAN: "Yeah."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Tell me you understand."

Bobby's fingers press into the armrest.

BOBBY DEAN: "I understand what you're saying."

Dane studies him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "That is not what I asked."

Bobby finally looks up.

BOBBY DEAN: "I know."

Silence.

For the first time, Dane does not have the next sentence ready.

The champion shifts the title on his shoulder, his composure returning in pieces.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Think very carefully tonight."

BOBBY DEAN: "I will."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Good."

Dane turns to leave, then stops.

ERIC DANE JR.: "And Bobby?"

BOBBY DEAN: "Yeah?"

ERIC DANE JR.: "Don't make me regret trusting you."

Bobby looks at him.

BOBBY DEAN: "Are you?"

Dane frowns.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Am I what?"

BOBBY DEAN: "Trusting me?"

Dane says nothing.

There it is.

That tiny bit of daylight.

Dane adjusts the title one more time.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Just be where you're supposed to be."

He walks off.

Bobby remains in the hallway, alone in the Battle Chair, staring after him.

The chair hums underneath him.

BOBBY DEAN: "Where I'm supposed to be."

He says it quietly.

Not convinced.

Cut.

### **Brittany Reid vs. Bianca Page**

Match

The camera returns to the inside of Palacio Vistalegre Madrid, where the Spanish crowd is still roaring from the official start of World Tour: Spain '26. The lights sweep over the packed arena, catching signs, waving flags, replica championship belts, and fans pressed against the barricades with their phones already raised.

Inside the ring, the referee checks the ropes while the timekeeper settles near the bell. The energy in Madrid is restless and bright, the kind of buzz that comes before a match carrying weeks of unfinished business.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Welcome back to ringside here in Madrid, and we are opening tonight with a match that has been building across the World Tour. Brittany Reid, The Killer Bee, goes one-on-one with 'Classy' Bianca Page."

MARK BRAVO: "And Bianca Page has to be sick of hearing Brittany Reid's name by now. Brittany beat Bianca in her UTA debut, John. Then she had the nerve, the absolute audacity, to call Bianca out for taking shortcuts afterward."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany Reid has made an immediate impression since arriving in UTA. She is young, fearless, incredibly athletic, and she has shown she will not back down from someone like Bianca Page, even with Ace Andrews standing nearby."

MARK BRAVO: "That is either courage or a complete lack of survival instinct. Ace Andrews is not just some guy in a suit. He is rich, ruthless, and he looks at wrestling matches like hostile corporate takeovers."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And tonight, Ace Andrews will be at ringside with Bianca Page. That alone changes the complexion of this match."

MARK BRAVO: "It changes the complexion, the tax structure, the legal liability, and probably the referee's retirement plan."

The arena lights begin to dim.

A ripple of anticipation moves through the Madrid crowd. The giant screen above the stage flickers black, then flashes in sharp bursts of green, black, and white.

For one second, everything goes dark.

Then the first hard beat of "Catch Me If You Can" by BabyMetal slices through the arena.

A green spotlight cuts through a cloud of smoke at the top of the entrance ramp.

On the next beat, a cannon of green and black confetti explodes outward, showering the stage in a burst of color.

The Madrid crowd erupts.

Through the falling confetti, Brittany Reid appears at the top of the ramp.

Twin ponytails bounce beneath big pom-pom bows. Her green, black, and white cheerleader-inspired gear catches the light, the HORNETS logo across the front bright and unmistakable. Her gloves flash as she throws both arms up, her smile wide, bright, and completely genuine.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And here she comes! From Charlotte, North Carolina, weighing in at one hundred and five pounds, The Killer Bee, Brittany Reid!"

MARK BRAVO: "Madrid just got hit with a sugar rush wearing kneepads."

Brittany looks out over Palacio Vistalegre with wide-eyed excitement, bouncing on the balls of her feet as if the ovation is charging her battery in real time. She clasps both hands over her heart, then points up toward the second level where a group of fans hold a bright green sign reading, "BUZZ BUZZ BRITTANY!"

BRITTANY REID: "Oh my gosh! Madrid, that is, like, soooooo cute!"

The crowd cheers louder.

Brittany throws her arms wide again, then snaps into a quick cheer pose at the top of the ramp, chin lifted, smile shining beneath the spotlight. She holds it for two beats before breaking into a jog down the aisle.

Step. Clap.

Step. Clap.

Her rhythm matches the percussion of the music as she moves down the ramp, slapping hands on one side, then darting across to the other. She reaches for kids at the barricade, squeezes hands, points to bows, signs, and homemade shirts, reacting to each one like it is the best thing she has seen all day.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany Reid has connected with the UTA audience almost immediately. There is something infectious about her energy, but when the bell rings, that cheerleader background and that gymnastics training turn into serious offensive weapons."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the thing. You see the bows, the smile, the confetti, and you think this is all fun and games. Then she springboards into your face and suddenly you are wondering why the pep rally has medical consequences."

Brittany stops near a young fan in the front row wearing green ribbons in her hair. Brittany gasps dramatically, points at the ribbons, then points to her own bows.

BRITTANY REID: "Twinsies! You look amazing!"

The girl beams as Brittany gives her a quick high-five, then blows a kiss to the section before spinning away and continuing toward the ring.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany may be one of the smallest competitors in this division, but she wrestles with incredible speed, fluidity, and creativity. We have seen the arm drags, the head scissors, the springboard attacks, and that Hornet's Sting can come out of nowhere."

MARK BRAVO: "She is five-foot-one and somehow uses every inch of the ring like it belongs to her. Ropes, corners, apron, turnbuckles. Most people see obstacles. Brittany sees launch pads."

Three paces from the ring, Brittany plants her feet.

With crisp gymnastic precision, she folds into a compact cartwheel, her hands hitting the apron cleanly as her legs whip through. She lands facing the ring with no wasted motion, drawing another cheer from the crowd.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Look at the control!"

MARK BRAVO: "I would tear six things attempting that, and four of them would be emotional."

Brittany hops onto the apron, pivots smoothly, and steps through the ropes in one fluid movement. Once inside, she bounces once, then races toward the nearest corner.

The green spotlight tightens around her as she climbs the turnbuckle with quick, confident steps.

Facing the Madrid crowd, Brittany hits a bright cheerleader pose, arms wide, chin high, ponytails falling over her shoulders. Palacio Vistalegre answers with a louder cheer, and Brittany's smile somehow gets bigger.

BRITTANY REID: "Let's freakin' gooooo, Madrid!"

The audience roars back.

Brittany dips slightly on the turnbuckle.

Then she launches into a tight, controlled forward flip dismount.

She lands on both feet in the center of the ring, chest up, arms extended, steady as if she has just finished a competition routine in front of judges.

The crowd pops again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Beautiful dismount by Brittany Reid!"

MARK BRAVO: "She landed that like gravity owed her money and paid on time."

Brittany turns the landing into immediate crowd work. She skips toward one side of the ring, points to a sign, then mimes taking a quick selfie with a group near the barricade. She leans back against the ropes and cups a hand to her ear, asking Madrid for more noise.

They give it to her.

She laughs, bouncing in place, then turns toward the hard camera and gives a quick wink.

BRITTANY REID: "Okay, okay, I am, like, totally obsessed with this place already!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There is the personality, there is the joy, but beneath all of that, Brittany Reid is becoming a real problem for opponents who underestimate her. Bianca Page did that once already."

MARK BRAVO: "And Bianca has not forgotten it. Trust me. People like Bianca Page do not just remember losses. They frame them in gold, hang them on the wall, and stare at them while plotting revenge."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany Reid scored what many considered an upset over Bianca Page in her debut. Since then, Brittany has not been shy about questioning Bianca's methods, especially when Ace Andrews is involved."

MARK BRAVO: "That is where Brittany might be in trouble. Calling out Bianca is one thing. Calling out Bianca while Ace Andrews is managing her? That is asking for a problem with cufflinks."

Brittany's music continues to pulse as she finally begins to settle into the corner. The smile remains, but the bounce slows. She stretches one leg against the middle rope, shakes out her wrists, then rolls her shoulders.

Her eyes shift toward the entrance stage.

The crowd still cheers, but Brittany's expression changes slightly.

Still bright.

Still fearless.

But focused now.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "You can see it setting in. Brittany Reid loves the crowd, loves the moment, but she knows exactly who is coming next."

MARK BRAVO: "Bianca Page is not coming out here alone tonight. She is bringing Ace Andrews, and that means Brittany is not just wrestling a woman who wants revenge. She is wrestling a plan."

Brittany steps out of the corner for a moment and gives the fans one final wave. Then she backs into position, hands resting lightly on the top rope as she stares toward the stage.

The music begins to fade beneath the Madrid crowd.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The Killer Bee is in the ring. Brittany Reid is ready. And now we await 'Classy' Bianca Page."

The camera holds on Brittany in the corner, ponytails resting over her shoulders, green and black gear glowing beneath the lights, her smile now sharpened into competitive focus as the arena begins to shift for her opponent.

Brittany Reid remains in her corner as the last traces of "Catch Me If You Can" fade beneath the rolling noise of Palacio Vistalegre Madrid. She bounces once on her toes, then twice, keeping herself loose while her eyes stay locked on the entrance stage.

The green light around the ring dims.

For a moment, the arena falls into a low, expectant rumble.

Then the screen above the entrance ramp blooms in elegant white and gold.

Sweeping script writes itself across the video wall.

CLASSY

The opening notes of "Wildest Dreams" by Taylor Swift drift through the building.

The reaction shifts immediately.

The cheers that carried Brittany Reid into the ring turn into a wave of boos, whistles, and jeers from the Madrid crowd.

A single white spotlight blooms at the top of the ramp.

Gold light follows, moving in smooth, expensive arcs over the stage as Bianca Page steps through the curtain.

She stops at the top of the entrance way as if she has arrived late to a party she owns.

Bianca stands tall, chin lifted, one hand resting at her hip. Her white-and-gold entrance robe glitters beneath the spotlight, every small movement catching the light like the arena was built specifically to flatter her. She smiles out at the crowd, but there is no warmth in it.

It is polished.

Practiced.

Dismissive.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And here comes her opponent. From Naples, Florida by way of New York City, 'Classy' Bianca Page."

MARK BRAVO: "Listen to this place, John. Madrid saw Brittany Reid and opened its arms. Madrid saw Bianca Page

and immediately checked its wallet."

Behind Bianca, Ace Andrews steps into view.

The boos deepen.

Ace is immaculate, dressed in a perfectly tailored suit, expression calm, posture straight, hands folded in front of him. He does not wave. He does not smile for the crowd. He simply stands beside Bianca like a man supervising an acquisition.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And accompanying Bianca Page tonight, Ace Andrews. A fourteen-time world champion, billionaire casino owner, and now one of the most calculating managerial presences in UTA."

MARK BRAVO: "Ace Andrews looks like he just bought the building and is disappointed by the carpet."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ace has attached himself to Bianca Page in recent weeks, and that is not something Brittany Reid can ignore. Bianca is already dangerous on her own. With Ace Andrews at ringside, every match becomes a numbers game, a mind game, or both."

MARK BRAVO: "Exactly. Ace does not have to throw a punch to change a match. Sometimes all he has to do is stand there, talk to the right person, distract the referee at the right second, and suddenly Bianca Page has a shortcut paved in gold."

Bianca slowly extends both arms, allowing the robe to fall open just enough to catch the light. She turns her head slightly, giving the camera her profile, then blows a kiss toward the crowd.

The Madrid crowd boos louder.

Bianca smiles wider.

BIANCA PAGE: "You're welcome."

Ace leans closer, murmuring something just loud enough for Bianca to hear. She nods once without looking at him, her eyes fixed on the ring.

Inside the ropes, Brittany Reid watches from her corner. The smile has not vanished completely, but it has tightened. She shifts her weight from foot to foot, ponytails resting over her shoulders, hands on the top rope as Bianca begins her slow walk down the ramp.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There is a history here already. Brittany Reid defeated Bianca Page in Brittany's UTA debut, a result that Bianca Page has not taken well."

MARK BRAVO: "Of course she has not taken it well. Bianca Page does not process embarrassment like a normal person. She turns it into a lawsuit, a vendetta, and a matching accessory."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany followed that up by calling Bianca out after another questionable victory, and that may have made this even more personal."

MARK BRAVO: "Brittany is sunshine and bows, but she has this habit of saying the honest thing directly to people who absolutely do not want honesty. Bianca Page is one of those people."

Bianca descends the ramp without hurrying.

She does not slap hands.

She does not acknowledge signs unless they insult her, and even then she only glances at them like they are a disappointing menu option.

Ace walks one measured step behind and slightly to her left, eyes moving constantly. He watches Brittany. He watches

the referee. He watches the timekeeper, the apron, the steps, the ringside area, and everything in between.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Look at Ace Andrews. He is already studying the environment."

MARK BRAVO: "That man has never accidentally stood anywhere in his life. Every step is planned. Every angle is calculated. I guarantee he knows which camera is on him, which official is easiest to annoy, and which side of the ring gives Bianca the best advantage."

Brittany steps forward in the ring and points toward Ace from behind the ropes.

BRITTANY REID: "You are, like, not sneaky just because your suit is expensive!"

The crowd cheers.

Ace pauses at the bottom of the ramp and looks up at her, expression unchanged.

ACE ANDREWS: "Expensive things rarely need to sneak."

Bianca laughs softly, still facing the ring.

BIANCA PAGE: "Adorable. She thinks she's clever."

Brittany lifts both eyebrows and gives the crowd a look.

BRITTANY REID: "I mean, I kind of am."

Madrid cheers again.

MARK BRAVO: "Brittany Reid is playing with fire right now. Very cheerful fire, but still fire."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany refuses to be intimidated, and that has been part of why the UTA audience has embraced her so quickly."

Bianca reaches ringside and stops near the steel steps.

She turns slowly, giving the crowd a slight twirl as her robe trails behind her. The movement is elegant, almost theatrical, but the expression on her face makes it clear the performance is for herself more than anyone else.

Ace remains on the floor, hands folded again, calm and watchful.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bianca Page has held titles across multiple promotions before arriving here in UTA. She is not just attitude. She is not just presentation. Bianca can wrestle, and she knows exactly how good she is."

MARK BRAVO: "That is what makes her dangerous. The arrogance is annoying, sure. The entitlement is exhausting, absolutely. But she has the resume to back up enough of it that you cannot just roll your eyes and move on."

Bianca climbs the steel steps one at a time, pausing on the apron as if waiting for the building to appreciate the moment properly.

The referee moves toward the ropes.

Bianca looks at him and motions sharply with two fingers.

BIANCA PAGE: "Open them."

The referee hesitates for half a second, then sits on the middle rope and lifts the top rope.

Bianca steps through with a smug little smile.

MARK BRAVO: "The match has not even started, and she is already delegating."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bianca Page entering the ring, and Brittany Reid has not taken her eyes off either Bianca or Ace Andrews."

Bianca walks to the center of the ring and raises both arms out to the side.

The boos pour down.

Ace applauds from ringside, slow and measured, like he is the only person in the building qualified to recognize excellence.

ACE ANDREWS: "Class speaks for itself."

Brittany leans slightly out of her corner.

BRITTANY REID: "Then why do you keep talking?"

The crowd pops again.

Bianca's smile fades for just a flicker.

Then it returns, thinner than before.

BIANCA PAGE: "Enjoy this while it lasts."

Bianca turns away from Brittany and walks toward the ropes. She carefully removes her robe and hands it through to Ace Andrews, who accepts it like it belongs in a museum.

Ace folds the robe over one arm, then steps down from the apron area to take his position near Bianca's corner.

Bianca rolls her shoulders and adjusts her wrist tape with slow, deliberate elegance. Brittany stays light on her feet across the ring, bouncing once, then twice, trying to keep the tension from settling into her legs.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There is such a contrast between these two. Brittany Reid, all energy, speed, and heart. Bianca Page, composed, cerebral, vicious when the opening presents itself."

MARK BRAVO: "And that is what Brittany has to watch. Bianca does not always have to cheat, but if the opportunity is there, she will take it, frame it, monetize it, and call it strategy."

The referee steps between both women and begins issuing final instructions.

Brittany nods quickly, eyes darting once toward Ace before returning to Bianca.

Bianca barely acknowledges the referee. Her eyes remain locked on Brittany, that smug smile settling back into place.

BIANCA PAGE: "You got lucky once."

Brittany tilts her head.

BRITTANY REID: "Maybe. Or maybe you're just, like, super beatable."

The crowd reacts loudly as Bianca's jaw tightens.

Ace Andrews raises one hand at ringside, palm down, calming Bianca without saying a word.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany Reid not backing down verbally or physically."

MARK BRAVO: "That was a good line. Dangerous line, but good. I would have said it from farther away."

Bianca takes one slow step backward into her corner.

Brittany backs into hers, still bouncing lightly, green bows bobbing with each movement.

Ace places Bianca's robe carefully over the barricade-side chair near the timekeeper's area, then returns to Bianca's corner, hands clasped behind his back.

The referee checks both competitors one final time.

Brittany gives the crowd one quick clap above her head.

Bianca does not move.

She only stares.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany Reid and Bianca Page, one-on-one. The rematch from Brittany's debut. The question tonight: can Brittany prove the first win was no fluke, or will Bianca Page, with Ace Andrews in her corner, even the score?"

MARK BRAVO: "And more importantly, how long before Ace Andrews becomes a factor? Because he will. Men like that do not stand ringside for cardio."

The referee turns toward the timekeeper and points for the bell.

Brittany lowers into a ready stance.

Bianca steps forward from her corner with polished confidence.

Ace Andrews watches from ringside, still as stone, eyes sharp.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "We are ready to go here in Madrid!"

The bell is next.

The referee looks once to Brittany Reid, then across the ring to Bianca Page. Brittany bounces lightly in her corner, green bows bobbing with every small hop, while Bianca stands still, composed, almost bored by the noise around her.

At ringside, Ace Andrews adjusts one cufflink and takes half a step closer to Bianca's side of the ring.

The referee turns toward the timekeeper.

DING DING DING!

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There's the bell, and Brittany Reid versus Bianca Page is officially underway here in Madrid!"

MARK BRAVO: "And look at Bianca already. Calm. Cool. Annoyingly moisturized. Brittany is moving like she had three energy drinks during the commercial break."

Brittany comes out of her corner quickly, circling with light, springy steps. Bianca moves slower, hands raised, eyes narrow, refusing to be rushed into Brittany's pace. The two women circle once, then twice, the crowd clapping along as Brittany gives a quick smile and wiggles her fingers for a lockup.

Bianca raises an eyebrow.

BIANCA PAGE: "You're serious?"

BRITTANY REID: "Like, totally."

They step in for a collar-and-elbow tie-up, but Bianca immediately shifts to a side headlock, clamping down tight and wrenching Brittany's neck sideways. Brittany pushes at Bianca's hip, trying to send her off, but Bianca plants her feet and grinds the hold in harder.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bianca Page slowing Brittany down right away, and that may be the smartest strategy she can take here."

MARK BRAVO: "Absolutely. Brittany wants speed, angles, flips, and motion. Bianca wants this match at the pace of an expensive lunch meeting."

Brittany backs Bianca toward the ropes and shoots her across the ring. Bianca rebounds, but Brittany drops flat to the mat. Bianca hops over. Brittany pops up instantly, leapfrogs Bianca on the return, then drops down again as Bianca

hits the ropes a second time.

Bianca comes back fast.

Brittany springs up and catches her with a quick arm drag.

Bianca rolls through and scrambles back to her feet, but Brittany is already moving. A second arm drag sends Bianca sliding across the canvas. Bianca pops up again, frustrated now, and charges with a clothesline.

Brittany ducks under, hits the ropes, and comes back with a tilt-a-whirl head scissors that sends Bianca spinning across the ring.

The Madrid crowd erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany Reid picking up the pace! That is exactly where she wants this match!"

MARK BRAVO: "Bianca just got turned into luggage on a carousel!"

Bianca lands near the ropes and immediately rolls to the floor, one hand at her hair, the other pressed against her lower back. The crowd boos as she takes a breather, glaring into the ring.

Brittany rushes to the ropes and leans over them, bright smile returning.

BRITTANY REID: "You okay? I can slow down if you need, like, a second!"

The crowd laughs and cheers.

Bianca's expression hardens.

Ace Andrews steps beside her and speaks quietly, his eyes never leaving Brittany.

ACE ANDREWS: "Do not chase the routine. Break the rhythm."

Bianca takes a slow breath, nodding once. Inside the ring, Brittany claps above her head, getting the Madrid crowd to clap along.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ace Andrews already giving Bianca Page instructions on the outside."

MARK BRAVO: "That is why he is dangerous. Bianca got embarrassed in there for thirty seconds, and Ace immediately turned it into a board meeting."

The referee begins the count.

REFEREE: "One!"

Bianca paces outside the ring, shaking out her arms.

REFEREE: "Two!"

Brittany steps back from the ropes, still bouncing lightly, but her eyes flick to Ace. She points at him from inside the ring.

BRITTANY REID: "You better not do anything weird!"

Ace looks offended in the most expensive way possible.

ACE ANDREWS: "Define weird."

MARK BRAVO: "That is not a comforting answer."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Not at all."

REFEREE: "Three!"

Bianca climbs back onto the apron, but she does not enter right away. She motions at the referee, complaining about Brittany's hair, her gear, the crowd, possibly the lighting. The referee steps toward her, trying to get her back inside.

Brittany waits near center ring, hands on her knees for a moment, then straightens and waves Bianca in.

BRITTANY REID: "Come on! We were, like, just getting fun!"

Bianca steps through the ropes slowly this time.

They circle again.

Brittany darts in for another quick lockup, but Bianca backs away, forcing Brittany to reset. Brittany steps in again, faster this time. Bianca suddenly catches her with a knee to the midsection.

Brittany doubles over, and Bianca immediately clubs her across the upper back with a forearm.

The crowd boos.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bianca Page catches Brittany coming in, and that may be the opening she needed."

MARK BRAVO: "That was Ace's advice right there. Do not chase the routine. Break the rhythm. Brittany came in expecting a wrestling exchange and got a knee for her trouble."

Bianca grabs Brittany by the wrist and whips her hard toward the corner. Brittany hits the buckles chest-first but uses the impact to spring upward, planting both boots on the middle ropes. Bianca charges after her.

Brittany flips backward over Bianca's shoulder, landing behind her with clean gymnastic precision.

Bianca turns around.

Brittany snaps off a dropkick that catches Bianca in the chest and sends her stumbling backward into the corner.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany lands on her feet! Dropkick connects!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is what I am talking about! The ring is a trampoline to her! A very dangerous, lawsuit-friendly trampoline!"

Brittany rolls through to one knee, pops back up, and rushes in. She throws herself into a quick corner splash, but Bianca slips aside at the last possible second.

Brittany catches herself on the middle rope before hitting the turnbuckle fully, then kicks both legs backward, catching Bianca in the chest and knocking her away.

The crowd pops again.

Brittany turns, grabs the top rope, and springboards from the middle strand.

Bianca steps forward.

Brittany twists in midair, landing a flying crossbody across Bianca's chest.

She hooks both legs.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Bianca kicks out.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Near fall for Brittany Reid!"

MARK BRAVO: "Bianca Page is in trouble early, and that is not going to help her mood, her ego, or Ace Andrews' blood pressure."

Brittany gets to her feet quickly, clapping once to rally the crowd. Bianca rolls to her side, breathing harder now, her perfect composure beginning to crack at the edges.

Brittany reaches down and pulls Bianca up by the wrist, but Bianca suddenly rakes her forearm across Brittany's face while turning away from the referee's line of sight.

Brittany recoils, one hand going to her eyes.

The crowd boos loudly.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Oh, come on! Bianca went across the face there!"

MARK BRAVO: "The referee did not see the fingers, John. He saw a forearm. Very classy. Very legally ambiguous."

The referee steps in, asking Brittany if she is okay. Brittany blinks rapidly, trying to clear her vision, while Bianca takes the moment to rise behind her.

Ace Andrews spreads his hands innocently at ringside.

ACE ANDREWS: "She is very dramatic."

Brittany turns back toward Bianca.

Bianca strikes instantly.

She drives a sharp knee into Brittany's midsection, then hooks her by the head and snaps her down with a crisp DDT.

Brittany's head hits the mat, and the brightness of the crowd dims into a hard wave of boos.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Snap DDT by Bianca Page! And that came after Bianca caught Brittany across the face!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is Bianca Page. If the door opens half an inch, she walks through it wearing designer heels."

Bianca rolls Brittany over and hooks the leg.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Brittany kicks out.

The crowd cheers as Brittany rolls onto her side, one hand still near her face. Bianca sits up slowly, annoyance flashing across her features.

She looks at the referee and holds up three fingers.

BIANCA PAGE: "That was three."

REFEREE: "Two."

BIANCA PAGE: "Are you guessing?"

Ace Andrews gives a small, disapproving shake of his head from ringside.

ACE ANDREWS: "Consistency is not his strength."

MARK BRAVO: "Ace is already reviewing the officiating performance like he is about to fire a hotel manager."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bianca Page now in control, and Brittany Reid has to find a way to get her vision clear and her pace back."

Bianca stands and smooths one hand over her hair, restoring the image before returning to the violence. She pulls Brittany up by the wrist, drives a forearm into her jaw, then backs her into the ropes.

Bianca whips Brittany across the ring.

Brittany rebounds and ducks under a clothesline, then hits the opposite ropes.

She comes back fast.

Bianca catches her with a sudden discus clothesline.

Right Stuff turns Brittany inside out.

The crowd groans as Brittany hits the mat hard, her small frame bouncing from the impact.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Right Stuff! Bianca Page nearly took Brittany Reid out of her boots!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is the size and experience difference showing up. Brittany is fast, but when Bianca times her right, she can make every ounce of that momentum crash in the wrong direction."

Bianca drops to cover again, pressing her forearm across Brittany's face.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Brittany kicks out again.

Bianca stays on her knees for a moment, staring down at Brittany with open irritation now.

BIANCA PAGE: "You are exhausting."

Brittany rolls toward the ropes, dragging herself forward with one arm. Bianca stands behind her, watching with a cold smile as the Madrid crowd begins chanting.

"BRIT-TA-NY! BRIT-TA-NY!"

Brittany reaches the bottom rope and pulls herself up to one knee.

Bianca walks up behind her and places one boot lightly against Brittany's back, pressing her throat down across the middle rope.

REFEREE: "Bianca! Off the ropes!"

Bianca leans in, using the pressure until the referee starts counting.

REFEREE: "One! Two! Three! Four!"

Bianca breaks at four and steps away, hands lifted innocently.

BIANCA PAGE: "I heard you."

As the referee backs Bianca away, Ace Andrews takes one slow step closer to Brittany and says something down toward her through the ropes.

ACE ANDREWS: "The sequel is rarely better than the original."

Brittany coughs against the rope, then turns her head enough to glare at him.

BRITTANY REID: "You talk too much."

Ace's mouth curves into a faint smile.

ACE ANDREWS: "I am paid very well for it."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ace Andrews inserting himself verbally, and that is part of the danger. Every second Brittany has to think about Ace is a second Bianca can take advantage."

MARK BRAVO: "And Bianca will. Bianca Page is not missing free money."

Bianca pushes past the referee, grabs Brittany by the hair, and drags her back toward the center of the ring.

REFEREE: "Watch the hair, Bianca!"

BIANCA PAGE: "I am watching it. It is everywhere."

Bianca pulls Brittany upright and hooks her for another DDT, but Brittany suddenly twists free and drops behind her.

Brittany hooks Bianca by the waist and pushes her forward.

Bianca hits the ropes chest-first and staggers backward.

Brittany rolls her up from behind.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Bianca kicks out hard.

Both women scramble back up.

Bianca swings wildly with a forearm, but Brittany ducks under it and hits the ropes.

Brittany comes back and leaps, catching Bianca with a quick hurricanrana that sends her tumbling toward the corner.

The crowd erupts as Brittany rolls through, still blinking away the sting from earlier, but moving again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany Reid still has fight left! Still has speed!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is the Killer Bee! You swat at her, you think she is gone, and then suddenly she is buzzing around your head again!"

Bianca pulls herself up in the corner, stunned and angry.

Brittany pushes to her feet near center ring as the Madrid crowd rises with her. She claps once. Then again. The fans clap with her, louder each time.

Bianca looks from Brittany to the crowd, and for the first time in the match, there is real concern beneath the arrogance.

Ace Andrews steps closer to the apron, his expression still controlled but his eyes sharper now.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany is trying to rally here in Madrid!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Ace Andrews knows it. Look at him. The calculator is running."

Brittany lowers into a ready stance, one hand out, the crowd buzzing around her as Bianca pulls herself upright in the corner.

The momentum is shifting again.

Brittany Reid stays low near the center of the ring, one hand extended, the Madrid crowd clapping faster behind her. Bianca Page pulls herself upright in the corner, one arm hooked over the top rope, frustration clear in her eyes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany Reid is starting to find that second gear again, and Bianca Page may be in trouble if she cannot slow this down."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the dangerous thing about Brittany. You can knock her down, you can cut her off, you can make her look like she is running on fumes, and then she hits one springboard and the whole room changes."

Bianca steps out of the corner and swings a sharp forearm.

Brittany ducks underneath.

Bianca turns around and eats a quick kick to the thigh.

Then another.

Brittany spins through and snaps a dropkick into Bianca's chest, sending her staggering back into the ropes.

Bianca rebounds awkwardly.

Brittany catches her by the wrist, twists underneath, and snaps Bianca over with a quick arm drag. Bianca hits the mat and rolls to her knees, but Brittany is already moving again.

Brittany hits the ropes, comes back fast, and leaps into a low basement dropkick that catches Bianca near the shoulder and knocks her flat.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany Reid stringing offense together now! That relentless motion is back!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Bianca hates this. You can see it. She likes control. She likes elegance. She likes everything to be very designer. Brittany turns matches into a bounce house with consequences."

Brittany pops back to her feet and throws both arms up.

The crowd roars.

She turns toward the ropes, measuring Bianca as Bianca pushes herself up slowly.

BRITTANY REID: "Okay, Madrid! Buzz buzz!"

The fans answer with a loud chant.

"BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ! BUZZ!"

Ace Andrews watches from ringside, jaw tight, his expression still controlled but visibly less pleased than before.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The Madrid crowd is firmly behind Brittany Reid!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Ace Andrews looks like someone just told him his luxury suite does not include private parking."

Bianca rises near center ring, swinging again out of desperation.

Brittany catches the arm, ducks under, and spins behind her.

Bianca reaches back, but Brittany jumps, hooks the head, and snaps Bianca down with a quick tornado-style takedown that sends Bianca rolling toward the corner.

Brittany does not stop.

She rushes to the opposite side, hits the ropes, and charges toward Bianca.

Bianca pushes up in the corner just as Brittany leaps.

Brittany drives both boots into Bianca's chest with a sharp corner dropkick.

Bianca collapses to a seated position against the bottom turnbuckle.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Corner dropkick! Bianca Page is down!"

MARK BRAVO: "Bianca needs a timeout, a legal consultation, and maybe a new plan!"

Brittany rolls backward from the impact, landing on one knee near center ring. She looks out at the crowd, eyes bright again, then points toward the top rope.

The arena rises.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany may be thinking big here!"

MARK BRAVO: "This is where she gets dangerous, John. When Brittany starts climbing, the altitude becomes everybody's problem."

Brittany moves quickly toward the corner. Bianca rolls away from the turnbuckles, trying to create distance, but Brittany adjusts on the fly. She steps onto the apron, grips the top rope, and waits as Bianca staggers up.

Ace Andrews moves around ringside, slow at first, then just enough to draw Brittany's eyes for half a second.

ACE ANDREWS: "Careful up there. Accidents happen."

Brittany snaps her head toward him.

BRITTANY REID: "Not today, suit guy!"

The crowd cheers.

But that half-second is enough.

Bianca rushes forward and clips Brittany's legs out from under her. Brittany drops hard onto the apron, her shoulder and ribs catching the edge before she tumbles down to the floor.

The crowd groans.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Oh! Brittany Reid crashes off the apron! Ace Andrews drew her attention just long enough!"

MARK BRAVO: "He did not touch her. He did not grab her. He just talked. That is the Ace Andrews special. Legally irritating."

Brittany lands on the floor near the barricade, clutching her side. Bianca drops to one knee inside the ring, breathing hard, then looks down at Brittany with a cruel smile.

The referee leans through the ropes, checking on Brittany.

REFEREE: "Brittany, can you continue?"

Brittany nods quickly, already trying to pull herself up using the apron skirt.

BRITTANY REID: "Yeah. Yeah, I'm good. Totally good."

Her voice says yes.

Her body says otherwise.

Bianca steps through the ropes to the apron, then drops down to the floor. Ace takes a few casual steps away, hands lifted innocently, as if he has no idea how any of this happened.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany is trying to continue, but she hit hard on that apron."

MARK BRAVO: "That apron is the hardest part of the ring, and Brittany does not exactly have a lot of padding to absorb that kind of fall."

Bianca grabs Brittany by the hair and pulls her upright.

REFEREE: "Bianca! Get it back in the ring!"

Bianca turns toward him with a look of exaggerated patience.

BIANCA PAGE: "I'm helping."

She immediately drives Brittany back-first into the apron.

Brittany cries out and drops to one knee.

The crowd boos heavily.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bianca Page taking full advantage now."

MARK BRAVO: "That is what Bianca does. Once something hurts, she circles it. She is a shark in couture."

Bianca rolls Brittany back under the bottom rope, then slides in after her. Brittany tries to crawl away, but Bianca catches her by the ankle and drags her back toward the center.

Bianca stomps down once on Brittany's lower back.

Then again.

She pulls Brittany up and hooks her by the head.

Brittany suddenly fires a forearm into Bianca's ribs.

Then another.

Bianca loosens her grip.

Brittany spins free and fires a quick kick to Bianca's midsection. Bianca doubles over.

Brittany hits the ropes.

She comes back, leaps, and throws all of her bodyweight into a high-impact superkick that catches Bianca near the jaw.

Both women go down from the force of it.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Super Duper Kick! Brittany Reid caught Bianca flush!"

MARK BRAVO: "She threw everything into that! Brittany just kicked Bianca so hard she may have changed her tax bracket!"

The Madrid crowd explodes as Brittany rolls onto her stomach, breathing hard. Bianca lies on her back, one hand near her jaw, stunned.

Ace Andrews steps toward the apron again, eyes narrowing.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany has a chance! Brittany has a chance to put Bianca away again!"

Brittany crawls toward Bianca and throws an arm over her chest.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Bianca gets one shoulder up.

The crowd groans.

Brittany rolls onto her back, eyes wide, then sits up quickly. She does not argue. She does not complain. She just nods, pushing herself through the pain.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Only two! Bianca Page survives the Super Duper Kick!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Brittany has to stay on her. This is where inexperience can hurt her. Do not ask the crowd. Do not look at Ace. Do not think. Finish."

Brittany pushes to her feet, grabbing at her ribs for a moment. Bianca rolls toward the corner, dazed.

Brittany looks to the turnbuckle.

The Madrid crowd rises again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany may be thinking Queen Bee!"

MARK BRAVO: "Double-rotation moonsault. If she hits this, Bianca is done!"

Brittany climbs, slower than before because of the damage to her ribs, but still with remarkable control. She reaches the top turnbuckle and steadies herself, crouched low, eyes on Bianca.

Bianca remains down near the center, one arm over her face.

Ace Andrews moves to the side of the ring closest to Brittany.

The referee spots him immediately and steps toward the ropes.

REFEREE: "Ace, back up!"

Ace lifts both hands.

ACE ANDREWS: "I am observing."

REFEREE: "Observe from back there."

As the referee deals with Ace, Bianca rolls suddenly out of position, just enough to make Brittany hesitate on the top rope.

Brittany looks down, recalibrating.

She decides against the moonsault and drops lightly back to the apron instead, trying to stay smart.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany had to abandon the Queen Bee. Bianca moved, and Ace Andrews created another distraction."

MARK BRAVO: "That is two times now Ace has changed Brittany's timing without laying a finger on her."

Brittany grips the top rope from the apron and waits as Bianca staggers up.

Bianca turns toward her.

Brittany springboards.

She flies toward Bianca, looking for a hurricanrana.

Bianca catches her just enough to block the full rotation, then drops backward, snapping Brittany face-first into the mat with a sudden counter.

Brittany rolls through, stunned, pushing up on instinct.

Bianca rises behind her, grabs Brittany by the head, and drives her down with Graceful.

The Ace Cutter lands clean.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Graceful! Bianca Page hits the Ace Cutter!"

MARK BRAVO: "That might be it! Brittany's momentum just got cut out from under her!"

Bianca rolls Brittany over and hooks the far leg.

REFEREE: "One!"

Brittany kicks her legs, trying to shift her weight.

REFEREE: "Two!"

Bianca reaches her free arm backward, stretching just enough to hook the middle rope with her fingers.

Ace Andrews steps directly into the referee's peripheral vision, clapping once and shouting toward Bianca.

ACE ANDREWS: "Finish it!"

The referee's eyes flick toward Ace for the smallest fraction of a second.

He never sees Bianca's hand on the rope.

REFEREE: "Three!"

DING DING DING!

The Madrid crowd erupts into boos.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bianca Page wins it! But did you see the hand on the rope?"

MARK BRAVO: "I saw it. You saw it. Madrid saw it. The referee saw Ace Andrews' very expensive haircut instead."

Bianca releases Brittany immediately and rolls toward the ropes, smiling as she pulls herself upright. The referee raises her hand while Brittany lies on the mat, blinking, one arm across her ribs, still trying to process what happened.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Brittany Reid had this match turning in her favor, but once again, Ace Andrews became a factor. Bianca Page used the ropes, and the official missed it."

MARK BRAVO: "That is not a robbery with a ski mask, John. That is a robbery with a receipt."

Ace Andrews steps through the ropes just long enough to join Bianca near the center of the ring. He takes her wrist and lifts her arm himself, applauding his own client with calm satisfaction.

Bianca looks down at Brittany and smiles.

BIANCA PAGE: "No flukes tonight."

Brittany pushes up to one elbow, still breathing hard. She looks from Bianca to Ace, then toward the referee, frustration written across her face.

BRITTANY REID: "She had the rope!"

The referee shakes his head, insisting he did not see it.

Bianca gives Brittany a small wave with her fingers.

BIANCA PAGE: "Better luck next sparkle show."

The boos intensify as "Wildest Dreams" begins to play again.

Ace holds the ropes open for Bianca this time, and she exits with a smug smile, leaving Brittany in the ring with the crowd rallying behind her.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bianca Page evens the score against Brittany Reid, but not without controversy."

MARK BRAVO: "Brittany proved she can hang with Bianca again. Bianca proved she can win ugly. And Ace Andrews proved he is worth every irritating penny."

Brittany sits on the mat, rubbing her jaw and ribs, then slowly gets to one knee as the Madrid fans begin applauding her effort.

She looks disappointed, but not broken.

On the outside, Bianca Page backs up the ramp beside Ace Andrews, one arm raised, her smile gleaming under the lights as the opening match ends with Brittany Reid staring after her from inside the ring.

## **A buffet of poor decisions**

Segment

We cut backstage again.

This time, the quiet is gone.

The camera finds a loading corridor near the rear of the arena, where production cases are stacked against the wall, cable ramps cut across the floor, and several folding tables sit off to the side with the unmistakable energy of furniture that has no idea how bad its night might get.

Eric Dane Jr. is already there.

The UTA Hardcore Championship rests over one shoulder. His other hand is raised, pointing sharply at a member of the ring crew who looks like he has just realized he is trapped in a conversation he is not paid enough to win.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No. Absolutely not."

The crew member blinks.

CREW MEMBER: "Sir, it's just extra equipment."

Dane looks offended by the phrase.

ERIC DANE JR.: "It is not just extra equipment. It is a buffet of poor decisions."

The camera pulls wider.

Beside the tables are several trash cans, a stack of chairs, a ladder folded against the wall, and a metal road case marked with tape that reads: SPARE RINGSIDE.

Dane points at all of it.

ERIC DANE JR.: "This goes somewhere else."

CREW MEMBER: "Where?"

ERIC DANE JR.: "Away."

CREW MEMBER: "Away isn't really a location."

ERIC DANE JR.: "It is if you walk long enough."

The crew member looks past Dane, hoping someone with authority will arrive and save him.

Instead, he gets Maxx Mayhem.

Maxx enters from the far end of the corridor carrying a traffic cone under one arm and wearing the bright, satisfied expression of a man who has already made several bad choices and is considering a few more.

Behind him, Bobby Dean rolls into frame in the Battle Chair.

Bobby looks less satisfied.

More concerned.

Possibly winded, somehow.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Good news. I found a cone."

Dane slowly turns.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Why?"

Maxx looks down at the cone, then back up at Dane.

MAXX MAYHEM: "You don't find a cone because of why. You find a cone because the world provides."

BOBBY DEAN: "He said it was a sign."

ERIC DANE JR.: "It is a traffic cone."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Signs come in many shapes."

Dane stares at him.

Then at Bobby.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Why are you with him?"

Bobby shifts in the chair.

BOBBY DEAN: "I was going to sit there a minute."

ERIC DANE JR.: "And?"

BOBBY DEAN: "Then he came back and said Auxiliary Storage B was locked."

Maxx nods.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Cowards."

Dane closes his eyes.

Not for peace.

For containment.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No."

MAXX MAYHEM: "You don't know what I'm asking."

ERIC DANE JR.: "You are standing near weapons holding municipal equipment. I know enough."

Maxx looks at the stack of chairs.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Those aren't weapons."

Dane points at him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Correct."

Maxx smiles.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Yet."

The crew member immediately takes one step back.

Dane turns on him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You. Move all of this."

CREW MEMBER: "I don't think I'm supposed to."

ERIC DANE JR.: "I am the Hardcore Champion."

CREW MEMBER: "I know."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Then respect the office."

The crew member looks at the belt.

Then at the trash cans.

Then at Maxx.

CREW MEMBER: "Isn't this kind of the office?"

Maxx points at him.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Promote that man."

Dane's jaw tightens.

Bobby, quietly:

BOBBY DEAN: "He has a point."

Dane turns slowly.

ERIC DANE JR.: "What?"

Bobby immediately regrets having a voice.

BOBBY DEAN: "I mean... it is a Hardcore Match."

Dane steps toward him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "And that means what?"

Bobby looks from Dane to the equipment.

BOBBY DEAN: "That maybe this stuff is supposed to be here."

Dane's expression changes.

Not anger first.

Concern.

Then anger, because concern is unacceptable.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Bobby, we talked about this."

BOBBY DEAN: "I know."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Did you listen?"

BOBBY DEAN: "I listened."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Then why are you repeating his disease?"

Maxx leans toward Bobby.

MAXX MAYHEM: "I don't think it's airborne."

Dane snaps toward him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Stop helping."

MAXX MAYHEM: "That was medical."

Dane turns back to Bobby.

ERIC DANE JR.: "This is exactly what I warned you about. He makes nonsense look like freedom."

Maxx considers that.

MAXX MAYHEM: "That's pretty good."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Do not compliment me."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Too late."

Bobby's eyes drift to the Hardcore Championship.

Dane sees it immediately.

This time, Bobby does not look away quite fast enough.

The champion's hand moves over the faceplate.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Don't."

BOBBY DEAN: "I didn't say anything."

ERIC DANE JR.: "You didn't have to."

Bobby's hands settle on the armrests of the Battle Chair.

BOBBY DEAN: "I'm in the match too."

The hallway goes still.

Even Maxx lets that one breathe.

Dane steps closer, low and sharp.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You are in the match because people who do not care about you found a way to make you useful."

Bobby looks up.

That word again.

Useful.

Maxx's smile fades.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Hey."

Dane does not look at him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Stay out of this."

MAXX MAYHEM: "No."

Dane finally turns.

Maxx stands there with the cone under one arm, but for once, the joke is not the whole room.

MAXX MAYHEM: "You don't get to talk to him like he's a chair you forgot to fold."

Dane laughs, short and cold.

ERIC DANE JR.: "And you do?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "No. I talk to chairs with respect."

Bobby should laugh.

He does not.

Dane notices that too.

A voice cuts in from off-camera.

AVRIL SELENE KINKADE: "Gentlemen."

Avril steps into frame with a clipboard tucked against her side, looking every bit like someone who has already heard enough and expects to hear worse.

Dane turns toward her.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Finally. Tell them this circus is being removed."

Avril looks at the equipment.

Then at Dane.

AVRIL SELENE KINKADE: "No."

Dane freezes.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No?"

AVRIL SELENE KINKADE: "Correct. No."

Maxx whispers to Bobby.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Lawyered."

Avril continues.

AVRIL SELENE KINKADE: "Per Scott Stevens, the match remains a Triple Threat Hardcore Match. No disqualifications. No count-outs. Falls must occur in the ring."

Dane points toward the stack of equipment.

ERIC DANE JR.: "And all of this?"

AVRIL SELENE KINKADE: "Is not my concern unless someone uses it before the bell."

Maxx slowly lowers the traffic cone.

AVRIL SELENE KINKADE: "Thank you."

MAXX MAYHEM: "That felt personal."

AVRIL SELENE KINKADE: "It was efficient."

Dane steps toward her.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You are encouraging this."

AVRIL SELENE KINKADE: "I am clarifying it."

Dane looks past her to Bobby.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Fine."

He shifts the Hardcore Championship on his shoulder.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Then everyone gets exactly what they think they want."

His eyes settle on Bobby.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Including you."

Bobby does not answer.

Dane waits.

Still nothing.

The champion turns and walks away, controlled enough to look composed, angry enough not to fool anyone.

Avril exits the opposite direction, already done with all of them.

The crew member decides this is a perfect time to be somewhere else.

That leaves Maxx, Bobby, the equipment, and the quiet hum of the Battle Chair.

Maxx looks at Bobby.

MAXX MAYHEM: "So."

BOBBY DEAN: "So."

MAXX MAYHEM: "You wanna hit him with the cone, or should I?"

Bobby keeps looking where Dane disappeared.

BOBBY DEAN: "I don't know what I want."

Maxx nods.

MAXX MAYHEM: "That's okay."

He sets the cone gently on top of the road case.

MAXX MAYHEM: "We got time."

Bobby looks at the stack of chairs.

Then at the tables.

Then toward the ring.

BOBBY DEAN: "Not much."

Cut.

## **Locked Doors**

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage inside Palacio Vistalegre Madrid, away from the noise of the arena and into the colder, tighter atmosphere of the locker room hallway.

The camera catches Susanita Ybanez moving quickly down the corridor, her face tense, her eyes fixed ahead. She is not dressed like someone looking for a fight. Not tonight. This is different. This is personal.

She reaches a black door marked with a polished Empire emblem.

Before Susanita can knock, Valkyrie Knox steps into frame.

The UTA Fighting Champion places herself directly between Susanita and the door, championship resting over one shoulder, eyes narrowed. She does not say anything at first. She does not need to. Her body language says enough.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Move."

Valkyrie tilts her head slightly, almost amused, but there is no warmth in it.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "Wrong door."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "I need to see Marie."

VALKYRIE KNOX: "Marie does not need to see you."

Susanita tries to step around her, but Valkyrie shifts with her, blocking the path again. The tension between them tightens instantly.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "This has nothing to do with you."

VALKYRIE KNOX: "Everything behind this door has something to do with me."

Susanita's jaw tightens. She looks past Valkyrie toward the door, trying to keep herself calm.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Marie!"

The name hits the hallway hard.

For a second, nothing happens.

Then the door opens.

Amy Harrison steps out, composed and sharp, already wearing the expression of someone who has no intention of allowing this to become messy unless she is the one making the mess.

Behind her, through the partially open door, Marie Van Claudio can be seen inside the Empire locker room.

She is standing near the back, quiet and still, eyes lowered toward the floor. She does not move toward the door.

Susanita sees her immediately.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Marie."

Marie lifts her eyes only slightly.

Amy glances back over her shoulder, her voice calm but cutting.

AMY HARRISON: "Keep staring down."

Marie's eyes lower again.

Susanita looks from Marie to Amy, disbelief and anger fighting across her face.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "What are you doing to her?"

AMY HARRISON: "Protecting her from people who do not know when to leave."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Protecting her? Look at her."

Amy steps fully into the doorway now, Valkyrie still standing beside her like a wall with gold on her shoulder.

AMY HARRISON: "Susanita, you need to go."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Not without talking to Marie."

AMY HARRISON: "You are talking to me."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "I did not come here for you."

Susanita looks past Amy again, her voice softening as she speaks into the room.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Marie, please. Just come with me."

Marie does not answer right away.

The hallway grows quiet, even Valkyrie's expression shifting slightly as the silence stretches.

Susanita takes half a step closer, but Valkyrie's hand comes up, stopping her before she can get any farther.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "You do not have to stay here. Whatever they told you, whatever they made you believe, you can walk out right now. I am right here."

Marie's lips part.

Her voice is barely above a whisper.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I can't."

Susanita's face drops.

Amy's mouth curves, not into a full smile, but something close enough to hurt.

AMY HARRISON: "See? She does not want to go with you."

Amy turns her head slightly, speaking back into the locker room without taking her eyes off Susanita.

AMY HARRISON: "Do you, Marie?"

Marie stands in the background, shoulders tight, eyes still down. For a moment, it looks like she might not answer.

Then she does.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "No."

The word is soft.

Sad.

Not convincing.

But spoken.

Susanita looks like she has been hit.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Marie..."

Marie does not look up.

Amy steps back into the doorway, her patience now gone.

AMY HARRISON: "You heard her."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "I heard what you wanted her to say."

Valkyrie takes one step closer to Susanita, the Fighting Championship glinting under the hallway lights.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "You should leave before this becomes a different kind of conversation."

Susanita's eyes stay locked on Marie in the background. Her voice lowers, breaking slightly at the edges.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "I am not giving up on you."

Marie's hands tighten at her sides, but she still does not raise her head.

Amy notices.

She reaches back and slowly begins closing the door.

AMY HARRISON: "Goodbye, Susanita."

The door shuts between them.

Susanita remains in the hallway, staring at the Empire emblem on the door. Valkyrie stays in front of it for another

moment, making sure the message is understood.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "She made her choice."

Susanita slowly turns her eyes to Valkyrie.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "No. Someone made it for her."

Valkyrie's expression hardens.

Susanita backs away, not because she is afraid, but because she knows this fight is not happening here. Not like this.

The camera stays on the closed door as Susanita disappears down the hallway.

Behind it, unseen now, Marie Van Claudio remains trapped inside the Empire locker room.

### **Maxx Mayhem vs. Eric Dane Jr. vs. Bobby Dean**

Match

The camera returns to ringside inside Palacio Vistalegre Madrid, where the energy has shifted into something stranger, louder, and far less predictable. Around the ring, UTA officials are already removing anything that looks too expensive to survive the next fifteen minutes. The referee stands inside the ropes with the UTA Hardcore Championship graphic on the screen above the stage.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ladies and gentlemen, it is time for the UTA Hardcore Championship to be defended in a Triple Threat Hardcore Match. Eric Dane Jr. puts the championship on the line against Bobby Dean and Maxx Mayhem."

MARK BRAVO: "That sentence should come with a warning label, John. Eric Dane Jr., Bobby Dean, Maxx Mayhem, no disqualifications, no count outs, and the Hardcore Championship involved? This is not a match. This is a workplace incident waiting for a clipboard."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This match was made official last week after Maxx Mayhem brought his request to General Manager Scott Stevens, and through Avril Selene Kinkade, Eric Dane Jr. learned he would not just be defending against Maxx. He would also be defending against Bobby Dean."

MARK BRAVO: "And Eric Dane Jr. reacted with the grace and composure of a man being told his hotel room has bed bugs and a connecting door to a chainsaw convention."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. won the UTA Hardcore Championship from Bobby Dean at Victorious, and tonight Bobby gets another opportunity. Maxx Mayhem, meanwhile, has somehow formed what can only be called a friendship with Bobby Dean."

MARK BRAVO: "Friendship is a strong word. They bonded over a mobility scooter, snack weapons, and their shared love of making Eric Dane Jr. miserable. Honestly, I have seen worse foundations for a tag team."

The arena lights suddenly cut lower.

A harsh burst of static rips across the video screen.

The Madrid crowd turns toward the stage as the screen flickers between broken test patterns, warning signs, dented trash can lids, and the word MAYHEM flashing in jagged white letters.

Then the sirens hit.

Loud.

Piercing.

Chaotic.

The arena lights pulse red and white as the opening blast of "Holiday" by Green Day crashes through the speakers.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That is the sound of Maxx Mayhem!"

MARK BRAVO: "Hide the chairs, hide the tables, hide the barricades, hide the electrical cables, and somebody, please, for once in this company, hide the scooter."

The crowd rises, expecting Maxx Mayhem to burst through the curtain like a man fired out of a cannon.

Instead...

Nothing.

The sirens continue.

The stage flashes.

The crowd buzzes with confusion.

Then, from somewhere behind the curtain, a small horn chirps.

SFX: HONK.

The crowd reacts immediately, laughter and cheers rolling through Palacio Vistalegre.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Oh no."

MARK BRAVO: "Oh yes."

The curtain parts slowly.

First comes the front wheel.

Then the patched front panel.

Then the crooked UTA sticker.

Then the cup holder.

Then, rolling onto the stage with all the majesty of a state parade and all the speed of a suspicious grocery cart, comes Beautiful Bobby Dean on the battle chair.

Bobby sits proudly on the mobility scooter, one hand on the handlebars, the other raised to the Madrid crowd. He is beaming, nodding to the rhythm of Maxx Mayhem's music as if this entrance was not only planned, but professionally choreographed.

Behind him, standing on the rear platform with one foot braced against the back axle and one hand gripping Bobby's shoulder for balance, is Maxx Mayhem.

Maxx is wild-eyed and grinning, trash can lid tucked under one arm, a dented road sign held high in the other like a flag. He leans out from behind Bobby and screams into the arena.

MAXX MAYHEM: "MADRIIIIIIID!"

The crowd roars.

MAXX MAYHEM: "LET'S MAKE SOME MAYHEM!"

He slams the trash can lid against the road sign.

CLANG.

Bobby flinches so hard the scooter swerves three inches to the left.

BOBBY DEAN: "Easy back there! She's sensitive!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "She's a war machine, Bobby!"

BOBBY DEAN: "She's got one and a half cup holders and a bad hip!"

MARK BRAVO: "This is the greatest entrance in the history of combat sports."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "I am not sure it qualifies as an entrance or a traffic violation."

The scooter begins its slow descent down the ramp.

Very slow.

Maxx stands behind Bobby like a man riding into battle on the world's least reliable tank. Every few feet, he smacks the road sign against the trash can lid.

CLANG.

CLANG.

CLANG.

The crowd claps along with the metallic noise, some laughing, some cheering, and some openly pointing at the screen as if trying to confirm that yes, this is really happening on a professional wrestling broadcast.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Let us be very clear here. Bobby Dean and Maxx Mayhem are opponents tonight. This is every man for himself. The Hardcore Championship is on the line."

MARK BRAVO: "Sure, technically. But right now they look like two guys on their way to ruin Eric Dane Jr.'s entire week, and honestly, I respect the unity."

Bobby waves to the fans along the barricade, looking delighted by the response. Maxx leans over Bobby's shoulder, pointing at people, shouting at signs, and occasionally pretending to steer.

BOBBY DEAN: "Hands off the controls!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "I'm navigating!"

BOBBY DEAN: "You said left means chaos and right means destiny!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Exactly! System works!"

The scooter hits a small seam in the ramp.

It bumps.

Bobby jolts forward.

Maxx stumbles, windmills his arms, and nearly falls off the back before catching himself on Bobby's shoulders.

BOBBY DEAN: "Do not die on me before the match starts!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "I refuse to die at this speed!"

MARK BRAVO: "That may be the most reasonable thing Maxx Mayhem has ever said."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And somehow, that makes me more concerned."

The camera catches a sign in the crowd reading, "BATTLE CHAIR SECTION." Bobby spots it and points with delight.

BOBBY DEAN: "They get it!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "They are our people!"

Maxx lifts the road sign again, but Bobby reaches back blindly and pats his arm down.

BOBBY DEAN: "No more clanging near my good ear."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Which one is the good ear?"

BOBBY DEAN: "Whichever one you are not yelling into."

The scooter continues toward ringside as "Holiday" pounds through the arena. The referee watches from inside the ring, already looking like he is questioning every decision that led him to this assignment.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem has made a career out of being unpredictable. He is loud, he is dangerous, he is reckless, and in a Hardcore Match, that makes him one of the last people you want near a weapon."

MARK BRAVO: "And Bobby Dean may be the strangest wildcard in this whole thing. Former Hardcore Champion, beloved by the people, somehow both harmless and impossible to fully kill. He might trip into a championship if everyone else makes enough mistakes."

Bobby and Maxx finally reach the bottom of the ramp.

The crowd applauds like they have just witnessed a marathon finish.

Bobby takes the corner wide, steering the battle chair carefully around ringside. Maxx leans dramatically with the turn like they are taking a mountain curve at seventy miles an hour.

MAXX MAYHEM: "LEAN INTO IT!"

BOBBY DEAN: "We are going two!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Two is enough if you believe!"

They pass the commentary desk.

BOBBY DEAN: "Evening, gentlemen."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby."

MARK BRAVO: "Maxx."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Mark! John! Warm something up for me!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Absolutely not."

MARK BRAVO: "What does that even mean?"

Maxx suddenly tosses the trash can lid onto the announce desk.

CLANG.

Mark Bravo jumps in his chair.

MARK BRAVO: "Why is it always us?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Because you're pretty!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is upsettingly flattering."

Bobby parks the scooter near the steel steps with tremendous concentration. He taps the brake, then immediately pats the handlebars with affection.

BOBBY DEAN: "Good girl. We made it."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Barely broke the sound barrier."

Maxx hops off the back platform and lands beside the scooter, bouncing on the balls of his feet. He circles the battle chair once, admiring it with the deep reverence of a man looking at sacred machinery.

MAXX MAYHEM: "If I win tonight, I want visitation rights."

BOBBY DEAN: "To the championship?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "To her."

He points at the scooter.

BOBBY DEAN: "Absolutely not."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Joint custody?"

BOBBY DEAN: "No."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Holidays?"

BOBBY DEAN: "She does not celebrate."

MAXX MAYHEM: "She's strong."

Bobby begins the careful process of getting off the scooter. He places one hand on the armrest, shifts his weight, pauses, then raises one finger to ask the entire arena for patience.

The Madrid crowd begins clapping rhythmically.

Maxx immediately joins in, clapping directly in Bobby's face.

BOBBY DEAN: "Too close."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Motivation!"

BOBBY DEAN: "Breath mint!"

Bobby finally stands upright beside the scooter. The crowd cheers like he has just completed a daring high-risk maneuver.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean is vertical, and somehow that feels like phase two of this entrance."

MARK BRAVO: "This match might end before Eric Dane Jr. even gets here if Bobby survives dismounting."

Bobby turns toward the ring steps, taking one careful step at a time. Maxx grabs the dented road sign and follows beside him like an overexcited guard dog with opposable thumbs.

REFEREE: "Maxx, leave the sign outside."

MAXX MAYHEM: "It is a Hardcore Match!"

REFEREE: "Not until the bell."

MAXX MAYHEM: "That is a very narrow interpretation of fun."

Maxx props the road sign against the ring apron, then slides under the bottom rope. Bobby climbs the steps slowly and steps through the ropes with the referee watching closely, prepared in case gravity attempts a sneak attack.

Inside the ring, Bobby raises both arms to the crowd.

Maxx immediately does the same beside him.

The Madrid crowd roars.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This is one of the strangest scenes we have ever had before a championship match. Bobby Dean

and Maxx Mayhem entering together, celebrating together, and in just a few moments they will be opponents."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the beauty of it, John. They are friends now, enemies soon, maybe co-conspirators later, and somehow all of it is Eric Dane Jr.'s problem."

Maxx walks to the ropes and points toward the stage.

MAXX MAYHEM: "BRING OUT THE CHAMP!"

Bobby steps beside him and points too, though with far less aggression and much more concern about his breathing.

BOBBY DEAN: "Yeah! Bring him out! But, like, not too fast."

Maxx turns to Bobby.

MAXX MAYHEM: "We rush him."

BOBBY DEAN: "We what?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Teamwork."

BOBBY DEAN: "Against each other?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "After Eric."

Bobby thinks about this.

BOBBY DEAN: "That does sound fair."

MAXX MAYHEM: "See? Strategy."

MARK BRAVO: "I cannot believe I am saying this, but that might be the correct strategy."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "In a Triple Threat, the champion does not need to be pinned to lose the title. Eric Dane Jr. is walking into a match where the two challengers, at least for the moment, seem united by one common purpose."

MARK BRAVO: "Destroy Eric. Maybe win title. Protect scooter. In that order."

Bobby and Maxx stand side by side in the ring, pointing toward the entrance ramp while the crowd buzzes with anticipation.

At ringside, the battle chair sits parked near the steps, silent and ominous, as if waiting for its moment.

The music begins to fade.

The lights shift again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean and Maxx Mayhem are here. The challengers are waiting. And next, the UTA Hardcore Champion, Eric Dane Jr., has to walk into this madness."

MARK BRAVO: "Somewhere backstage, Eric Dane Jr. just heard that scooter horn and aged six years."

Bobby Dean and Maxx Mayhem remain side by side in the ring, both pointing toward the entrance stage with different levels of intensity. Maxx is practically vibrating, one boot tapping against the canvas, his grin wild and impatient. Bobby is breathing a little harder from the entrance alone, but he keeps one arm raised, nodding to the crowd like this whole situation makes perfect sense.

At ringside, the battle chair sits parked near the steel steps.

Silent.

Waiting.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean and Maxx Mayhem have arrived together, somehow, despite being opponents in this Triple Threat Hardcore Championship match. And now the man who wanted absolutely none of this has to make his way out here."

MARK BRAVO: "Eric Dane Jr. is furious, John. He did not want Maxx. He did not want Bobby. He definitely did not want the battle chair. And he absolutely did not want all three of those things in one match with his championship on the line."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The UTA Hardcore Championship can change hands without Eric Dane Jr. being pinned. That is the danger of a Triple Threat. Bobby Dean could pin Maxx Mayhem. Maxx Mayhem could pin Bobby Dean. Eric Dane Jr. could lose the title without being involved in the fall."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the part keeping him awake at night. Well, that and the sound of the scooter horn."

The house lights sink into a theatrical darkness.

The crowd begins booing before the music even hits.

On the video wall, blue and silver stars scatter across a glossy black background. The UTA Hardcore Championship appears in dramatic slow motion, spinning across the screen like it is part of a luxury commercial no one asked for.

Then a sharp, obnoxiously triumphant guitar riff hits the speakers.

A spotlight snaps to the entrance stage.

Eric Dane Jr. steps through the curtain.

He is already yelling.

The UTA Hardcore Championship is wrapped around his waist, polished and centered, and he has added far too much entrance attire for a match that might involve trash cans within thirty seconds. A sequined headband glitters beneath the lights. Wrap-around sunglasses sit on his face despite the arena being indoors. A feather boa hangs around his neck like he is entering a nightclub instead of a Hardcore Match. Over one shoulder rests an overly ornate walking stick that absolutely looks like he bought it because he thought champions should have one.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No! No, turn their music off! Why were they allowed to come out together? This is not a buddy comedy!"

The Madrid crowd boos louder.

Eric points immediately toward the ring, where Maxx Mayhem waves with both hands.

MAXX MAYHEM: "HI, ERIC!"

BOBBY DEAN: "Evening, champ!"

Eric stops dead at the top of the ramp and stares at them with the exhausted fury of a man who has been personally attacked by friendship.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Do not evening champ me. You two are supposed to be opponents. Opponents do not ride together."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Carpooling saves gas!"

BOBBY DEAN: "And my knees!"

Eric slowly removes his sunglasses, not because the moment calls for it, but because he clearly wants everyone to see how offended his eyes are.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. is the UTA Hardcore Champion, but he may be entering this match more frustrated

than focused."

MARK BRAVO: "He looks like a man who asked for a title defense and got assigned a group project with the two weirdest kids in class."

Eric turns toward the nearest camera and jabs a finger toward the lens.

ERIC DANE JR.: "This is what happens when management stops respecting generational excellence. I am the champion. I am the brand. I am the reason people pretend this division has prestige."

The crowd boos hard.

Eric throws both arms out, somehow offended by the reaction.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Oh, boo yourselves! You people cheered a scooter!"

The crowd cheers immediately at the mention of the scooter.

Sensing the moment, Bobby Dean reaches toward the ropes and points down at the battle chair parked near ringside.

BOBBY DEAN: "She heard that!"

Maxx Mayhem leans over the ropes and cups both hands around his mouth.

MAXX MAYHEM: "APOLOGIZE TO HER!"

The crowd begins chanting.

"AP-O-LO-GIZE! AP-O-LO-GIZE!"

Eric's face twists in disbelief.

ERIC DANE JR.: "I am not apologizing to a scooter!"

MARK BRAVO: "That may be a mistake. The scooter has momentum."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. has been haunted by that battle chair for weeks now, and tonight it is sitting at ringside in a Hardcore Match."

MARK BRAVO: "That thing is Chekhov's scooter, John. If it is parked there in act one, somebody is getting run over by act three."

Eric begins his walk down the ramp, but every few steps he stops to complain at someone. First a fan. Then the referee. Then the camera operator. Then no one in particular.

ERIC DANE JR.: "This is not fair. This is not professional. This is not how champions are treated. My father never had to deal with a mobility scooter."

He pauses, thinking about it.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Actually, I do not know that for a fact, but probably not!"

Inside the ring, Maxx steps up onto the middle rope, bouncing slightly.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Bring the belt in here, bruv!"

Eric points the walking stick at him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Do not bruv me. I am your champion."

MAXX MAYHEM: "For now!"

The crowd pops.

Eric looks to Bobby.

ERIC DANE JR.: "And you. You are only in this match because people feel bad for you."

Bobby places one hand over his heart, wounded.

BOBBY DEAN: "People feel lots of things for me."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Mostly hunger!"

Bobby nods, accepting this as fair.

BOBBY DEAN: "That is true."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "For Eric Dane Jr., this entire situation is almost impossible to control. Bobby Dean wants the championship back. Maxx Mayhem wants the championship and probably half the furniture. And under Hardcore rules, anything can happen."

MARK BRAVO: "That is exactly why Eric is so upset. He prefers chaos when he creates it. He does not like being trapped inside someone else's chaos."

Eric reaches ringside and immediately stops near the scooter.

He stares at it.

The crowd gets louder.

Maxx leans over the ropes again.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Careful. She bites."

ERIC DANE JR.: "It is a scooter. It does not bite."

As if responding, the scooter horn chirps lightly when Bobby's hand brushes the remote fob tucked near the apron.

SFX: HONK.

Eric jumps backward.

The crowd explodes with laughter and cheers.

MARK BRAVO: "She bites."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. nearly left his boots."

Eric turns toward the timekeeper's area, pointing furiously.

ERIC DANE JR.: "That should not be legal! Check the rules! Check the bylaws! Check whatever Avril pretended to read last week!"

The referee leans through the ropes, already trying to get the champion into the ring.

REFEREE: "Eric, get in the ring."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Do not rush greatness."

REFEREE: "Get in the ring."

ERIC DANE JR.: "I am preserving the aura."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Your aura smells like hairspray!"

Eric glares at him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "That is imported finishing spray, you uncultured landfill goblin."

Maxx looks genuinely touched.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Landfill goblin is strong. I like that."

Eric climbs the steel steps, still holding the walking stick like it might become evidence later. He steps onto the apron and carefully removes the feather boa, handing it to a ringside attendant with far more seriousness than it deserves.

ERIC DANE JR.: "If anything happens to this, I will know."

The attendant takes it silently.

Eric then removes the championship from around his waist, lifts it high above his head, and turns toward the crowd with a smug, forced smile.

The boos pour down.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There it is. The UTA Hardcore Championship, currently held by Eric Dane Jr., who won it from Bobby Dean at Victorious."

MARK BRAVO: "And despite everything we say about him, Eric Dane Jr. is still champion. He still survived Bobby Dean once. He still survived Clovis Black in France. He is annoying, he is ridiculous, he is overconfident, but he keeps finding ways to leave with that title."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The question is whether he can do it again tonight, with two challengers and Hardcore rules."

Eric steps through the ropes, and immediately both Bobby and Maxx take one synchronized step toward him.

Eric freezes.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No. Personal space. Champion space. There is supposed to be champion space."

Maxx takes another step.

Bobby does too, though slightly slower.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Referee, control them."

REFEREE: "The bell hasn't rung yet."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Then ring it later!"

The referee reaches for the Hardcore Championship, but Eric pulls it back against his chest.

REFEREE: "Give me the title."

ERIC DANE JR.: "I do not like your tone."

REFEREE: "Eric."

Eric looks from the referee to Bobby, then to Maxx, then down toward the scooter again.

He reluctantly hands the championship over.

The referee raises it high.

The Madrid crowd roars.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The championship is on the line! Triple Threat rules! Hardcore rules! Eric Dane Jr. does not have to be pinned to lose the title!"

MARK BRAVO: "He might not even have to be conscious near the ending, depending on what Maxx finds under the ring."

The referee hands the title out to the timekeeper.

Eric slowly backs into his corner, still looking furious. Maxx crouches low like a sprinter, eyes bright and dangerous. Bobby stands near his side of the ring, glancing once at Maxx, once at Eric, then once at the battle chair outside.

BOBBY DEAN: "We still doing the plan?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Destroy Eric first."

BOBBY DEAN: "Right."

Eric hears this and points at both of them.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Collusion! This is collusion!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "This is friendship with benefits!"

BOBBY DEAN: "Title benefits."

MARK BRAVO: "They have a mission statement."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. has every reason to be concerned. The challengers may be opponents, but right now they are staring at one target."

The referee checks all three men, then looks toward the timekeeper.

Eric is still arguing.

ERIC DANE JR.: "I want it noted that I object to every part of this."

Maxx smiles wider.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Noted."

Bobby nods solemnly.

BOBBY DEAN: "Denied."

The crowd pops as Eric's expression turns from annoyed to offended to fully horrified.

The referee calls for the bell.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Here we go!"

DING DING DING!

DING DING DING!

The bell has barely finished ringing when Maxx Mayhem launches out of his corner like a man who has been waiting all week to become a felony.

Eric Dane Jr. immediately throws both hands up and backs toward the ropes.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No! No! Strategy meeting! Champion's privilege!"

Maxx does not slow down.

Neither, surprisingly, does Bobby Dean.

Bobby takes three determined steps forward, realizes Maxx is moving much faster than he is, and points after him with great urgency.

BOBBY DEAN: "Get him!"

Maxx crashes into Eric with a wild running forearm that sends the Hardcore Champion spilling through the ropes and

out to the floor.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem wastes no time! Eric Dane Jr. is already on the outside!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was not a wrestling exchange. That was a man being removed from a conversation."

Eric lands hard near the barricade, clutching the UTA Hardcore Championship no longer because the title has already been handed away, but because his body seems to remember needing something to hide behind.

Maxx grips the top rope with both hands, eyes wide, grin stretched across his face.

MAXX MAYHEM: "HARDCORE TIME!"

He starts to step through the ropes, but Bobby Dean grabs him by the back of the tights.

BOBBY DEAN: "Wait, wait, wait!"

Maxx turns, confused and slightly offended.

MAXX MAYHEM: "What?"

BOBBY DEAN: "We should have a plan."

Maxx blinks.

MAXX MAYHEM: "The plan is hit him with things."

BOBBY DEAN: "That is a good plan."

Bobby nods, satisfied.

BOBBY DEAN: "Carry on."

Maxx dives through the middle rope toward Eric.

Eric sees him coming at the last second and yelps, throwing himself backward. Maxx crashes shoulder-first into Eric anyway, both men tumbling into the barricade as the Madrid crowd roars.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem through the ropes! He takes Dane Jr. down on the outside!"

MARK BRAVO: "Eric asked for a strategy meeting and got hit by a Detroit weather event."

Inside the ring, Bobby Dean watches from the ropes, clapping along with the crowd.

BOBBY DEAN: "Good job!"

Then he remembers he is also in the match.

BOBBY DEAN: "Oh. Right."

Bobby starts to exit the ring. He places one leg through the ropes, pauses, reconsiders, shifts awkwardly, then decides the bottom rope might be easier. He lowers himself carefully, one knee at a time, while the action continues around him.

MARK BRAVO: "Bobby Dean is leaving the ring like the floor requested a deposit."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby has been a Hardcore Champion before, but this match has already turned into Maxx Mayhem setting the pace against Eric Dane Jr."

On the floor, Maxx pulls Eric up by the sequined headband and slams him face-first into the barricade.

The crowd cheers.

Eric stumbles away, grabbing at his face.

ERIC DANE JR.: "My brand!"

Maxx grabs him again and whips him toward the ring apron.

Eric hits back-first and arches in pain, stumbling forward directly into Maxx's waiting arms.

Maxx hooks him for a swinging neckbreaker on the floor, but Eric jabs a thumb toward Maxx's eye before the move can fully connect.

Maxx recoils, laughing through the pain more than reacting to it properly.

MAXX MAYHEM: "That's the spirit!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "Stop enjoying things!"

Eric grabs Maxx by the head and drives him face-first into the apron. Maxx bounces off, staggers backward, and immediately reaches under the ring with one hand while still half-blinded.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem is already looking for hardware."

MARK BRAVO: "Of course he is. Maxx sees under the ring like most people see a kitchen drawer."

Maxx pulls out a steel chair.

The crowd cheers.

Then he pulls out a second steel chair.

The cheers grow.

Then he pulls out a traffic cone.

The crowd laughs and roars.

Maxx holds the cone above his head like Excalibur.

MAXX MAYHEM: "I HAVE FOUND THE CROWN!"

He immediately puts the traffic cone on his head.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem has armed himself."

MARK BRAVO: "With road safety."

Eric stares at him in disbelief.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You look stupid."

Maxx's head slowly turns beneath the traffic cone.

MAXX MAYHEM: "You look hittable."

Maxx charges.

Eric scrambles away around the ring post, nearly tripping over Bobby Dean, who has finally made it to the floor and is standing very proudly beside the battle chair.

BOBBY DEAN: "Careful!"

Eric grabs Bobby by the shoulders and tries to shove him between himself and Maxx.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Block him!"

BOBBY DEAN: "I do not work for you anymore!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "You barely worked for me then!"

Maxx comes around the corner with the traffic cone still on his head and a steel chair in hand. He swings the chair toward Eric.

Eric ducks.

Bobby also ducks, despite not being the target.

The chair smashes into the ring post with a loud metallic crack.

Maxx's arms vibrate from the impact.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Ow! Worth it!"

Eric takes advantage and dropkicks the chair backward into Maxx's chest. Maxx stumbles into the barricade, traffic cone wobbling on his head.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Dane Jr. using the chair against Maxx!"

MARK BRAVO: "Eric Dane Jr. may be ridiculous, but he is opportunistic. He will use whatever bad idea is closest."

Bobby sees Eric turn his back and suddenly grabs him around the waist from behind.

The crowd pops as Bobby attempts what may generously be called a German suplex.

Eric's eyes go wide.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No! Absolutely not!"

Bobby strains.

Nothing happens.

He strains again.

Still nothing.

BOBBY DEAN: "Little help?"

Maxx, still against the barricade, lifts the traffic cone off his head just enough to see.

MAXX MAYHEM: "With Eric or with your back?"

BOBBY DEAN: "Yes!"

Eric elbows Bobby in the side of the head, breaking the grip, then grabs the dented road sign Maxx left propped against the apron.

He swings it wildly.

Bobby ducks again.

Maxx steps in and takes the road sign across the shoulder with a loud crack.

The crowd groans.

ERIC DANE JR.: "That is what happens when you carpool to my title defense!"

Eric swings again, this time catching Maxx across the back. Maxx drops to one knee, still laughing, though the laughter is starting to sound more like pain.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. has found a weapon and he is finally creating some separation."

MARK BRAVO: "That road sign has already done more work tonight than the referee will be allowed to do."

Bobby grabs Eric from behind and rolls him up on the floor in a sudden schoolboy pin attempt.

The referee drops down.

REFEREE: "One!"

Eric kicks out immediately, scrambling away in panic.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No! No floor pins! I was emotionally unprepared!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Falls count anywhere under Hardcore Championship rules! Eric Dane Jr. almost got caught!"

MARK BRAVO: "By Bobby Dean, no less. That would have ended this championship reign with the energy of slipping on a wet floor sign."

Eric scrambles backward, then stops when he bumps into the battle chair.

The Madrid crowd rises instantly.

Eric turns slowly.

The scooter stares back at him.

At least, in Eric's mind, it does.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No."

Maxx rises behind him, eyes lighting up.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Yes."

Bobby realizes what Maxx is looking at and immediately steps between Maxx and the scooter.

BOBBY DEAN: "No one touches her."

Maxx points at Eric.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Not even if we touch him with her?"

Bobby thinks about this.

The crowd buzzes, waiting for the answer.

BOBBY DEAN: "Maybe gently."

Eric's eyes widen.

ERIC DANE JR.: "That is not a rule! That cannot be a rule!"

Maxx grabs the front of Eric's entrance jacket and throws him backward into the battle chair.

Eric lands seated on it by accident.

The crowd erupts.

Eric looks down, horrified, as if he has been placed onto an active bomb.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Get me off this thing!"

Maxx drops to one knee in front of the scooter and grips the handlebars.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Captain Eric Dane Jr., prepare for launch."

Bobby shoves Maxx's hands away.

BOBBY DEAN: "Do not call him captain. That gives her mixed signals."

Eric tries to stand, but Maxx grabs his shoulders and pushes him back down. Bobby tries to protect the scooter while also helping, which mostly means he is now blocking Eric's legs from escaping.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. is trapped on the battle chair!"

MARK BRAVO: "This is his nightmare. This is literally his nightmare with cup holders."

Maxx reaches for the horn.

SFX: HONK.

Eric screams.

The crowd explodes.

ERIC DANE JR.: "I hate both of you!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "We know!"

BOBBY DEAN: "That is why this is bonding!"

Maxx and Bobby both get behind the scooter.

For one incredible second, they appear united.

Then Maxx starts pushing left.

Bobby starts pushing right.

The scooter does not move forward.

It rotates slightly in place.

Eric spins halfway toward the commentary desk, horrified and helpless.

MARK BRAVO: "They are turning him into luggage claim."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This is a Hardcore Championship match!"

MARK BRAVO: "And yet somehow, yes, this is exactly what that means now."

Eric finally manages to kick backward, catching Bobby in the shin. Bobby hops away with a yelp. Maxx loses leverage, and Eric throws himself off the scooter, tumbling onto the floor beside it.

Maxx immediately grabs him.

Eric rakes Maxx's eyes and staggers backward.

Then Bobby, still hopping from the shin kick, accidentally bumps into Eric from behind.

Eric stumbles forward directly into Maxx, who lifts him and drives him down with a snap DDT onto the thin ringside mats.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Snap DDT on the floor! Maxx plants the champion!"

MARK BRAVO: "Bobby did not mean to help, but he helped. That is the Bobby Dean experience."

Maxx rolls Eric over and hooks the leg.

The referee dives down beside them.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Bobby Dean panics and drops a heavy elbow toward Eric to make sure he stays down.

Eric rolls away at the last second.

Bobby's elbow lands across Maxx's ribs instead.

The pin is broken.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Bobby!"

BOBBY DEAN: "I was helping!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "Keep helping!"

Eric crawls away, clutching the barricade as he drags himself toward the timekeeper's area. Maxx rolls onto his side, coughing and laughing in equal measure. Bobby sits on the floor, looking between the two men as if he is starting to realize that being helpful may be more complicated than originally advertised.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean just broke up Maxx Mayhem's pin by mistake!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is the whole match right there. Maxx is trying to win. Eric is trying to survive. Bobby is trying to help, hurt, stand, sit, and protect the scooter all at once."

Eric reaches the timekeeper's table and pulls himself up, eyes darting around for something, anything, that can turn the match back in his favor.

Maxx rises behind him, holding his ribs, grin returning.

Bobby begins crawling toward the scooter, muttering apologies to it.

The Madrid crowd gets louder as Eric grabs the ring bell from the timekeeper's area.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. has the bell!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Maxx Mayhem has no survival instinct!"

Maxx charges.

Eric turns with the bell clutched in both hands.

The match is already out of control.

Maxx Mayhem charges toward the timekeeper's area, ribs still aching from Bobby Dean's accidental elbow, but his grin spreading wider with every step.

Eric Dane Jr. turns with the ring bell clutched in both hands.

Maxx sees it.

He does not stop.

MAXX MAYHEM: "DO IT!"

Eric's eyes widen.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Why are you like this?!"

Eric swings the bell.

Maxx ducks low, and the bell smashes into the top of the barricade with a loud, ugly CLANG that sends fans in the front row jumping backward.

Eric's arms recoil from the impact. Maxx pops up underneath him, catches him around the waist, and drives him

backward into the edge of the timekeeper's table.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem avoids the bell shot and drives the champion into the table!"

MARK BRAVO: "Eric Dane Jr. tried to ring Maxx's bell and rang the barricade instead!"

Eric drops the bell, clutching his lower back, staggering sideways. Maxx grabs the bell from the floor, looks at it, then looks at the crowd.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Dinner time!"

He turns and brings the bell down toward Eric.

Eric dives away.

The bell crashes onto the timekeeper's table instead, scattering papers, a headset, and a bottle of water that bursts open across the floor.

MARK BRAVO: "The timekeeper's table has taken more punishment than Bobby Dean so far."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That may change at any second."

Bobby Dean has finally pulled himself up beside the battle chair. He pats the scooter's handlebar gently, whispering something comforting to it before turning back toward the match.

BOBBY DEAN: "Okay. Focus. Championship. Violence. Snacks later."

Bobby spots Eric stumbling near the barricade.

He also spots Maxx lifting the ring bell again.

Bobby raises both hands.

BOBBY DEAN: "Wait! Wait! Nobody hit anybody with anything until I get over there!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "That's not how this works!"

Eric, sensing Bobby moving toward them, quickly grabs Bobby by the wrist and yanks him forward, using him as a human shield.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Hit him! He said he wanted to be involved!"

BOBBY DEAN: "I did not mean like this!"

Maxx freezes with the bell raised over his head.

Bobby closes his eyes.

Eric peeks over Bobby's shoulder with a smug, terrified expression.

ERIC DANE JR.: "See? He cannot do it. Friendship. Weakness. Morons."

Maxx slowly lowers the bell.

Then he grins.

MAXX MAYHEM: "You're right. I can't hit Bobby."

Eric smiles wider.

MAXX MAYHEM: "But Bobby can hit you."

Maxx tosses the bell gently into Bobby's hands.

Bobby catches it with a startled grunt, nearly dropping it onto his own foot.

BOBBY DEAN: "Oh! Heavy."

Eric tries to back away, but Bobby still has the bell, and for one rare second, Bobby Dean sees the opening.

BOBBY DEAN: "Sorry, champ."

Bobby swings.

Eric ducks.

The bell catches Maxx in the shoulder instead.

CLANG.

Maxx staggers backward into the barricade, eyes wide, jaw loose.

BOBBY DEAN: "Oh no."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Oh yes."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean just hit Maxx Mayhem with the ring bell!"

MARK BRAVO: "He apologized first, John. In Bobby's defense, that makes it polite assault."

Eric immediately dropkicks Bobby in the back, sending him chest-first into Maxx.

Maxx and Bobby collide awkwardly, both men stumbling into the barricade together. Bobby's momentum carries him halfway over the guardrail before several fans reach out and help keep him from disappearing into the front row.

BOBBY DEAN: "Thank you! Sorry! Thank you!"

Eric grabs the steel chair Maxx pulled out earlier and folds it shut with a sharp snap.

Maxx turns from the barricade.

Eric swings.

The chair cracks across Maxx's ribs.

Maxx folds sideways, dropping to one knee.

Eric swings again, driving the chair across Maxx's back.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. taking control now with that steel chair!"

MARK BRAVO: "And that is the champion's survival instinct. Let Bobby make the mistake, then capitalize before anyone can correct it."

Eric raises the chair over his head, soaking in the boos as if they are applause from people with poor manners.

ERIC DANE JR.: "This is what championship intelligence looks like!"

Bobby, still half-draped over the barricade, points weakly.

BOBBY DEAN: "I thought we were all mad at you."

ERIC DANE JR.: "You are all bad at being mad!"

Eric turns toward Bobby with the chair.

Bobby's eyes widen.

BOBBY DEAN: "Now, hold on. I am a former champion."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Former is the important part."

Eric swings the chair toward Bobby.

Bobby ducks as much as a man wedged into the barricade can duck.

The chair smashes against the top rail. Eric's hands sting from the impact, and he shakes them out angrily.

Maxx suddenly rises behind Eric with a dented trash can lid in both hands.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Knock knock."

Eric turns.

Maxx slams the trash can lid over Eric's head.

CLANG.

Eric drops backward onto the floor, one leg kicking up dramatically as the crowd roars.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Trash can lid to the skull! Dane Jr. is down!"

MARK BRAVO: "That lid has been waiting all night to fulfill its purpose."

Maxx drops the lid, grabs Eric by the ankle, and drags him toward the ring apron.

Bobby finally frees himself from the barricade and turns around, dizzy but upright.

BOBBY DEAN: "Did we win?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Not yet!"

BOBBY DEAN: "Then why do I hurt already?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "That's how you know it's working!"

Maxx lifts the apron skirt and begins rummaging beneath the ring with feverish purpose.

He throws out a kendo stick.

Then another chair.

Then a baking sheet.

Then a stop sign.

Then a small black bag.

The crowd reacts with a nervous buzz.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem has found something under the ring."

MARK BRAVO: "I never like mystery bags in wrestling. Nothing good has ever come out of a mystery bag. Except snacks. And I do not think that is snacks."

Bobby leans over Maxx's shoulder.

BOBBY DEAN: "Is it snacks?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Better."

Maxx opens the bag and dumps it onto the floor.

A scatter of plastic building blocks spills across the ringside mats.

The crowd pops and laughs at the same time.

MARK BRAVO: "No. No, no, no. That is worse than thumbtacks."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Those are plastic building blocks, and if you have ever stepped on one barefoot, you know exactly why this crowd reacted that way."

Eric sees the blocks from the floor and immediately starts crawling backward.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Absolutely not. I have standards. My feet are insured emotionally."

Maxx grabs Eric by the ankle and pulls him back toward the scattered blocks.

Eric kicks wildly, catching Maxx in the chest once, then twice, but Maxx holds on.

MAXX MAYHEM: "You wanted hardcore, champ!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "I wanted marketable hardcore!"

Bobby steps around the blocks with exaggerated care, lifting each foot high.

BOBBY DEAN: "Watch your step. These things are evil."

Maxx pulls Eric upright and hooks him around the head.

He points to the blocks.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Snap DDT into childhood trauma!"

Maxx goes to drop backward.

Eric shoves him off.

Maxx stumbles.

Bobby, trying to avoid the blocks, accidentally backs into Maxx.

Maxx loses balance and steps directly onto the pile.

His face changes instantly.

MAXX MAYHEM: "HHHHNNNNN!"

He freezes, one foot planted in the blocks, arms spread wide like a man being judged by the heavens.

MARK BRAVO: "That man has been hit with chairs and laughed. He just stepped on plastic bricks and saw God."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem is in agony!"

Eric does not waste the opening.

He grabs the baking sheet and smashes it over Maxx's head.

Maxx staggers backward, still limping from the block, and collapses against the apron.

Bobby looks horrified.

BOBBY DEAN: "I'm sorry! I was tiptoeing!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "Keep tiptoeing, Tubby Baryshnikov!"

Bobby turns toward Eric, wounded.

BOBBY DEAN: "That felt mean."

Eric swings the baking sheet at Bobby.

Bobby catches it against his chest more by accident than skill, hugging it like a shield.

Eric pulls.

Bobby holds on.

They tug back and forth.

BOBBY DEAN: "Mine."

ERIC DANE JR.: "It is not yours!"

BOBBY DEAN: "I'm holding it!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "That is not how property works!"

Maxx suddenly charges from the side, limping but furious, and dropkicks the baking sheet into both men.

The sheet blasts backward into Bobby's chest and Eric's face at the same time.

Bobby falls backward against the barricade.

Eric spins away and collapses near the ring steps.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chair-assisted, baking-sheet-assisted, whatever-you-call-that dropkick by Maxx Mayhem!"

MARK BRAVO: "Maxx just turned kitchenware into a group discount!"

Maxx grabs Eric and rolls him into the ring for the first time in several minutes. Eric crawls toward the center, dazed, while Maxx slides in after him with the stop sign in hand.

Bobby remains on the outside, sitting against the barricade with the baking sheet across his lap.

BOBBY DEAN: "I am okay."

A fan in the front row says something to him.

BOBBY DEAN: "No, I do not know where the snacks are."

Inside the ring, Maxx stalks Eric with the stop sign.

Eric slowly rises to his knees and looks up.

ERIC DANE JR.: "We can negotiate."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Stop."

Eric blinks.

ERIC DANE JR.: "What?"

Maxx lifts the stop sign.

MAXX MAYHEM: "It says stop."

He smashes it across Eric's back.

Eric screams and flops forward onto the mat.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Stop sign across the back of the champion!"

MARK BRAVO: "For once, Eric Dane Jr. should have obeyed traffic laws."

Maxx drops the sign and covers Eric.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Eric kicks out.

Maxx sits up, nodding like the kickout has only made things more exciting.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Good. More toys."

Maxx rolls out of the ring again, this time on the opposite side, and ducks beneath the apron.

Eric lies in the ring, breathing hard, one hand reaching toward the ropes.

Bobby slides under the bottom rope with surprising urgency, crawling toward Eric.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean is back in the ring! Bobby may have a chance here!"

Bobby flops across Eric's chest.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Eric kicks out just before three.

Bobby rolls onto his back, disappointed but not shocked.

BOBBY DEAN: "That was close."

Eric gasps beside him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No, it wasn't."

BOBBY DEAN: "It felt close emotionally."

Outside the ring, Maxx emerges from under the apron holding a table.

The Madrid crowd erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem has a table!"

MARK BRAVO: "Of course he has a table. This match was only a matter of time before furniture applied for hazard pay."

Maxx shoves the table into the ring and slides in after it. Bobby slowly sits up and sees the table.

BOBBY DEAN: "Oh boy."

Eric sees the table too.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No. No, no, no. I have a title defense next week."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. has a title defense right now!"

MARK BRAVO: "He means one he planned to survive."

Maxx starts setting the table near the corner. Bobby, trying to be helpful, grabs one of the legs and pulls it the wrong way.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Other way, Bobby."

BOBBY DEAN: "This way?"

The leg collapses.

The table drops sideways.

Maxx stares at it.

Bobby stares at it.

Eric stares at both of them from the mat.

ERIC DANE JR.: "This is the division I am carrying."

Maxx slowly turns toward him.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Set it up again."

Bobby nods with sudden determination.

BOBBY DEAN: "We can fix this."

Eric begins crawling toward the far ropes, but Maxx catches him by the ankle and drags him back.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Where you going, champ?"

ERIC DANE JR.: "To a better company."

Maxx laughs and pulls Eric upright, then drives a knee into his gut. Bobby finishes setting the table correctly this time, looking proud of himself as the legs lock into place.

BOBBY DEAN: "There. See? Teamwork."

Maxx turns, smiling.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Beautiful."

For one second, Maxx and Bobby admire the table like craftsmen admiring a completed project.

Eric, doubled over nearby, slowly reaches for the kendo stick on the mat.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Dane Jr. has the kendo stick!"

Eric rises and cracks Maxx across the back.

Maxx arches, teeth clenched, but does not go down.

Eric swings again.

Maxx turns and catches the stick under one arm.

The crowd roars.

MAXX MAYHEM: "My turn."

Eric's face falls.

Maxx yanks the kendo stick away and snaps it across Eric's ribs.

Eric stumbles backward.

Maxx hits him again across the shoulder.

Then again across the back.

Eric drops to one knee near the table.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem unloading with that kendo stick!"

MARK BRAVO: "Eric wanted hardcore until hardcore started returning his calls!"

Maxx throws the broken kendo stick aside and pulls Eric up.

He looks to the table.

The crowd rises.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Crash Course!"

Maxx starts to whip Eric toward the corner, clearly setting up the full-speed cannonball that could drive the champion through the table.

But Bobby Dean steps in, grabbing Eric by the wrist too.

BOBBY DEAN: "I got him!"

Maxx pulls one way.

Bobby pulls the other.

Eric is stuck between them, arms stretched, screaming in protest.

ERIC DANE JR.: "I am not a wishbone!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Let go, Bobby!"

BOBBY DEAN: "You let go!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "I am doing the move!"

BOBBY DEAN: "I was helping with the move!"

Eric suddenly drops to his back, yanking both men forward.

Bobby stumbles into Maxx.

Maxx loses balance.

Eric rolls away under the bottom rope to the apron.

Bobby and Maxx collide chest-to-chest, then bounce apart awkwardly.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean just disrupted Maxx's setup!"

MARK BRAVO: "He is trying to help, and every time he helps, Eric Dane Jr. lives another thirty seconds."

Maxx turns toward Bobby, frustration finally breaking through the chaos.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Bobby!"

BOBBY DEAN: "What?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "You're killing the rhythm!"

BOBBY DEAN: "I thought we hated rhythm!"

Maxx pauses.

MAXX MAYHEM: "That is fair, but still!"

Eric, on the apron, sees both men arguing and climbs to the top rope with the kind of sudden confidence that always gets him into trouble.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. is going upstairs!"

MARK BRAVO: "This is either brilliant or deeply stupid, which is the Eric Dane Jr. brand promise."

Eric reaches the top rope, arms out, chest heaving, hair wild, ego somehow fully restored.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Watch greatness!"

He leaps.

Shooting star press toward both men.

Maxx shoves Bobby out of instinct.

Bobby stumbles backward.

Eric crashes down onto Maxx alone.

Both men hit hard.

The crowd erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Shooting Star Press! Dane Jr. caught Maxx Mayhem!"

MARK BRAVO: "Eric Dane Jr. hit it! I cannot believe he hit it!"

Eric rolls off Maxx, clutching his own ribs from the impact. Bobby turns back around, sees both men down, and realizes he may be the only one standing.

The crowd begins to buzz.

BOBBY DEAN: "Oh."

Bobby looks at Eric.

Then at Maxx.

Then at the table.

Then back at the crowd.

BOBBY DEAN: "This might be my moment."

The Madrid crowd starts cheering him on as Bobby Dean slowly raises one arm.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean may have the opening of the match!"

MARK BRAVO: "He just has to choose correctly, which has not been the strong theme of this match so far."

Bobby takes one step toward Eric.

Then one step toward Maxx.

Then he looks at the table again.

The table sits nearby, fully set, waiting.

Bobby Dean's eyes narrow with determination.

BOBBY DEAN: "I can do this."

The crowd gets louder.

Maxx and Eric remain down.

Bobby Dean starts climbing the nearest turnbuckle.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Oh no."

MARK BRAVO: "No, Bobby. No, no, no, no."

Bobby reaches the middle rope and pauses, breathing heavily.

The crowd rises with a mix of horror and hope.

BOBBY DEAN: "For the championship."

Eric begins to stir on the mat.

Maxx rolls toward the table.

Bobby looks down from the middle rope, suddenly realizing the floor seems much farther away than it did from ground level.

MARK BRAVO: "This is not going to end well for somebody."

Bobby takes a breath.

The crowd roars.

And the match teeters on the edge of disaster.

Bobby Dean stands frozen on the middle rope, one hand gripping the top turnbuckle, the other pressed to his own chest as if he is trying to manually convince his heart to cooperate.

Below him, Eric Dane Jr. rolls toward one side of the ring, still clutching his ribs after the Shooting Star Press. Maxx Mayhem lies closer to the table, one arm across his chest, eyes blinking toward the lights as if they personally offended him.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean is on the middle rope, and I do not think anybody, including Bobby Dean, knows what comes next."

MARK BRAVO: "This is the most dangerous altitude in sports entertainment, John. Not because it is high, but because Bobby Dean is thinking."

The Madrid crowd rises, cheering him on with the kind of reckless encouragement that only a live wrestling audience can provide.

"BOB-BY! BOB-BY! BOB-BY!"

Bobby looks out at them.

For one second, he believes.

BOBBY DEAN: "I am beautiful."

He looks down at Eric.

Eric looks up at him.

Eric's eyes go wide.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No. No, no, no. Absolutely not. You are not licensed for altitude!"

Bobby shifts his weight.

The ropes bounce beneath him.

Maxx Mayhem, still down near the table, rolls onto one elbow and sees Bobby perched above them.

MAXX MAYHEM: "FLY, BOBBY!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "Do not encourage weather patterns!"

Bobby takes a deep breath.

He leaps.

It is not graceful.

It is not quick.

It is less a flying attack and more a human refrigerator tipping forward with intent.

Eric rolls away in panic.

Maxx tries to move too, but he is closer to the table, still hurt, and a half-second too slow.

Bobby comes crashing down across Maxx's upper body with a heavy splash.

The ring shakes.

The crowd erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean connects! Bobby Dean just flattened Maxx Mayhem!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was not a splash. That was a zoning violation!"

Bobby rolls off Maxx onto his back, eyes wide, one arm raised weakly.

BOBBY DEAN: "I did it."

Eric Dane Jr. is on the far side of the ring, breathing hard, half-horrified and half-relieved that he is not the one who took the impact.

Then he sees Maxx down.

He sees Bobby down.

He sees opportunity.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Actually... I did it."

Eric crawls toward Maxx, but Bobby rolls instinctively across Maxx's chest first, still too dazed to realize he has made a cover.

REFEREE: "One!"

The crowd roars.

REFEREE: "Two!"

Eric dives and breaks it up with a forearm to the back of Bobby's head.

Bobby rolls away, clutching the back of his head.

BOBBY DEAN: "Ow! I was winning accidentally!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "That is the only way you win!"

Eric grabs Bobby by the wrist and tries to pull him up, but Bobby's weight and dead-limbed exhaustion turn the simple act into an argument with physics.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Get up!"

BOBBY DEAN: "I am trying!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "Try lighter!"

Eric finally gets Bobby to one knee, then drives a knee into his face. Bobby slumps backward against the ropes, stunned.

Eric turns just in time to see Maxx Mayhem rising behind him, one hand pressed to his ribs, smile gone now.

Maxx is still chaotic.

Still wild.

But now he looks angry.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem is back up, and Eric Dane Jr. may not like what he sees."

MARK BRAVO: "Maxx was having fun earlier. That look says the fun is getting sharp."

Eric swings first, throwing a forearm toward Maxx's jaw.

Maxx absorbs it.

Eric throws another.

Maxx rocks back half a step, then snaps forward with a discus elbow that catches Eric across the side of the head.

Eric staggers.

Maxx grabs him and whips him hard into the corner.

Eric hits the buckles back-first and collapses into a seated position.

The crowd rises because they know what is coming.

MAXX MAYHEM: "CRASH COURSE!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx is calling for Crash Course!"

MARK BRAVO: "Full-speed cannonball into the corner! If Dane Jr. eats this, the champion may be finished!"

Maxx backs into the opposite corner, slapping himself across the face once, then twice. He points at Eric, then at the crowd, then at the floor.

He takes off.

Full speed.

Bobby Dean, dazed against the ropes, stumbles forward at exactly the wrong moment.

Maxx sees him and tries to adjust mid-run.

Too late.

Maxx clips Bobby shoulder-first.

Bobby spins awkwardly and falls backward into the ropes.

Maxx loses half his momentum but still crashes toward Eric.

Eric rolls out of the corner at the last second.

Maxx cannonballs into the empty buckles, his back and shoulders slamming hard into the turnbuckle pads.

The crowd groans.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Nobody home! Bobby Dean got in the way, and Maxx Mayhem missed Crash Course!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is Bobby's whole presence in this match. He is not a third wheel, he is a traffic cone with feelings!"

Maxx rolls out of the corner, clutching his back. Eric crawls toward the ropes, still trying to recover. Bobby shakes his head, blinking hard as he tries to regain his balance.

BOBBY DEAN: "Sorry! Sorry! I thought I was over there!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "You are everywhere!"

Eric pulls himself up with the ropes and looks toward the apron.

The table is still set inside the ring, slightly off-center, one leg wobbling from the earlier setup chaos.

Eric sees it.

Then he sees Maxx pushing up slowly.

Then he sees Bobby staggering nearby.

The champion's eyes narrow.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Fine. If this is the circus, I am the star attraction."

Eric grabs Bobby by the back of the head and shoves him toward Maxx.

Bobby stumbles forward, arms windmilling.

Maxx catches him on instinct.

MAXX MAYHEM: "You okay?"

BOBBY DEAN: "Define okay."

Eric charges from behind.

Maxx senses it and shoves Bobby aside, then catches Eric with a boot to the stomach.

Eric doubles over.

Maxx hooks him.

The crowd rises.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem may be looking for Maximum Carnage!"

MARK BRAVO: "Cradle brainbuster! There is a table nearby! This could be it!"

Maxx pulls Eric in tight, trying to set him for the cradle brainbuster. Eric kicks his legs, fighting the lift, but Maxx powers through the resistance and begins to hoist him up.

Bobby Dean, trying to help again, grabs Eric's legs.

BOBBY DEAN: "I got his feet!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Why?!"

BOBBY DEAN: "To help!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Stop helping!"

Eric uses the confusion to slip free, dropping behind Maxx. Bobby is still holding one of Eric's boots, and as Eric yanks away, Bobby falls backward onto the mat, boot in hand.

Eric is suddenly standing in one boot and one sock.

The Madrid crowd erupts in laughter.

Eric looks down.

Then at Bobby.

Then at his bare-socked foot.

ERIC DANE JR.: "That is Italian leather!"

BOBBY DEAN: "It came right off!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Use it!"

Bobby looks at the boot in his hand.

Eric lunges to grab it back.

Bobby panics and swings.

The boot catches Maxx in the side of the head.

Maxx drops to one knee, stunned.

Bobby freezes.

BOBBY DEAN: "Oh no. Again."

MARK BRAVO: "Bobby Dean is now two-for-two accidentally hitting Maxx with objects."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And Dane Jr. has another opening!"

Eric snatches the boot from Bobby's hand, then kicks Bobby in the stomach with his socked foot.

It is not especially effective.

Bobby looks down at Eric's foot, then at Eric.

BOBBY DEAN: "That did not feel like much."

Eric screams in frustration and smashes the boot across Bobby's face.

Bobby drops to the mat.

ERIC DANE JR.: "How was that?!"

Maxx rises behind Eric, one hand on his head from the boot shot. Eric turns and swings the boot again, but Maxx ducks under it and scoops Eric onto his shoulders.

The crowd roars.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx has the champion up!"

MARK BRAVO: "And that table is right there!"

Maxx staggers toward the table with Eric across his shoulders. Eric claws at Maxx's face, kicking with one boot and one sock. Bobby, still woozy, crawls toward the table and reaches up.

BOBBY DEAN: "I'll hold it steady!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Do not touch the table!"

Bobby touches the table.

The wobbly leg gives out.

The table collapses sideways before Maxx can drive Eric through it.

Maxx stares down at the ruined setup in disbelief.

Eric slips off Maxx's shoulders and lands behind him.

Eric grabs Maxx by the trunks and drives him head-first into the top turnbuckle.

Maxx staggers backward.

Eric hooks him from behind.

He tries for a German suplex, but Maxx blocks it with a wide stance.

Eric tries again.

Still nothing.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Why are you dense?!"

MAXX MAYHEM: "Detroit!"

Maxx elbows backward, catching Eric in the jaw.

Eric releases and stumbles away.

Maxx turns and charges with a clothesline.

Eric ducks.

Maxx keeps running and rebounds off the ropes.

Bobby, trying to drag the collapsed table out of the way, accidentally leaves one half of it angled awkwardly across the mat.

Maxx hits the uneven surface with one boot.

His footing slips.

He stumbles forward.

Eric catches him with a sudden jumping knee to the face.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Jumping knee by Dane Jr.! Bobby's table cleanup just tripped Maxx Mayhem!"

MARK BRAVO: "Bobby Dean is a human banana peel with a heart of gold!"

Maxx drops to one knee.

Eric looks down at him, breathing hard, eyes wild.

Then he looks toward the top rope.

The crowd begins to buzz.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Dane Jr. may be thinking about going up again."

MARK BRAVO: "He is thinking about it because he is Eric Dane Jr., which means thinking is optional and consequences are theoretical."

Eric drags Maxx closer to the corner and lays him out across the remains of the half-collapsed table, adjusting the broken pieces just enough to create something that looks almost stable.

Bobby sits nearby, watching with concern.

BOBBY DEAN: "Should I help?"

MAXX MAYHEM: "No!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "Yes!"

Bobby looks between them.

BOBBY DEAN: "Mixed signals."

Eric climbs through the ropes to the apron, then starts up the turnbuckle with the confidence of a man who has forgotten every bad decision he has ever made.

He reaches the top rope, one boot still missing, one sock planted precariously on the buckle.

The referee watches closely, eyes darting between Eric, Maxx, Bobby, and the wreckage of the table.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. is on top! Maxx Mayhem is laid across the table remnants!"

MARK BRAVO: "This is either how Eric keeps the title or how he invents a new injury."

Eric stands tall on the top rope, arms stretched wide.

ERIC DANE JR.: "This is generational!"

Bobby Dean, trying to move out of the landing zone, crawls toward the ropes.

His hand accidentally hits the battle chair remote that had fallen near the apron earlier.

SFX: HONK.

Eric flinches on the top rope.

The crowd gasps, then laughs.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Stop honking at me!"

Maxx rolls off the table remnants at the last second, trying to recover.

Eric sees him move and adjusts mid-crouch.

He leaps anyway.

Shooting Star Legdrop.

Maxx moves just enough that Eric crashes awkwardly through the broken table pieces instead of landing clean.

The wood splinters under him.

Eric bounces off the wreckage, clutching the back of his leg and hip, howling in pain.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Dane Jr. crashes through the table! He missed Maxx Mayhem!"

MARK BRAVO: "The scooter horn just created turbulence!"

The Madrid crowd erupts as Eric writhes in the wreckage. Maxx rolls toward the ropes, pulling himself up slowly, battered but alive.

Bobby stares at the remote in his hand.

BOBBY DEAN: "Was that me?"

Maxx looks at him from the ropes, breathing hard.

MAXX MAYHEM: "For once, that helped!"

Bobby smiles, relieved.

BOBBY DEAN: "I helped!"

Eric groans from the table wreckage.

ERIC DANE JR.: "I hate helping."

Maxx pulls himself up fully, eyes locking onto Eric in the broken wood. He looks toward the corner, then toward the folded chair still lying near the ropes.

His grin returns.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Now we finish nasty."

Maxx grabs the folded chair and drags Eric out of the wreckage by the ankle.

Bobby, emboldened by having finally helped correctly, rises to one knee and points dramatically.

BOBBY DEAN: "Finish nasty!"

MARK BRAVO: "Bobby Dean is supportive again, and that means disaster is circling the airport."

Maxx sets the folded chair near center ring.

He drags Eric toward it.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem is setting up that chair. He may be looking for Maximum Carnage."

MARK BRAVO: "Cradle brainbuster onto the folded chair. If he hits it, we may have a new Hardcore Champion."

Maxx hooks Eric.

Eric is barely moving.

Bobby Dean pulls himself up behind them, wanting desperately to be part of the moment.

The crowd rises.

Maxx tightens his grip.

Eric's eyes flick open just enough to see Bobby standing behind Maxx.

And even through the pain, a desperate idea crosses the champion's face.

Maxx Mayhem has Eric Dane Jr. hooked near center ring, the folded steel chair waiting beneath them like a loaded trap. The Madrid crowd is on its feet, roaring as Maxx tightens his grip around the champion's head and arm.

Eric is glassy-eyed, one boot missing, hair wild, his body still aching from crashing through the broken table. But his eyes flick backward just enough to see Bobby Dean standing behind Maxx.

Bobby is breathing hard, one hand on his ribs, the other lifted like he wants to help but has no idea what help should look like anymore.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maxx Mayhem has the champion hooked! The chair is set! If Maxx hits Maximum Carnage here, we may have a new UTA Hardcore Champion!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Eric Dane Jr. knows it. Look at his eyes. He is not just hurt. He is calculating. Desperate, but calculating."

Maxx starts to lift.

Eric kicks his one booted foot against the mat, fighting it with everything he has left.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Bobby!"

Bobby freezes.

BOBBY DEAN: "What?"

Maxx tries to pull Eric up again.

ERIC DANE JR.: "He is going to win your title!"

Bobby blinks.

Maxx stops for half a second, annoyed.

MAXX MAYHEM: "It's not his title!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "It was his title!"

BOBBY DEAN: "That is true."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Bobby, do not listen to him!"

ERIC DANE JR.: "He rode your scooter! He used your chair! He stole your spotlight! And now he is stealing your championship moment!"

Bobby looks toward the battle chair outside the ring.

Then toward Maxx.

Then toward the Hardcore Championship sitting at the timekeeper's area.

The wheels turn slowly.

BOBBY DEAN: "Wait a second."

MARK BRAVO: "Oh no. Bobby is thinking again."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. is trying to manipulate Bobby Dean in the middle of the finishing sequence!"

Maxx yanks Eric back into position.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Bobby, I swear, if you touch anything, I'm gonna scream."

BOBBY DEAN: "I am touching nothing."

Bobby takes one step backward.

Unfortunately, that step lands on the edge of the stop sign still lying on the mat.

The sign shifts under his foot.

Bobby's arms pinwheel.

He stumbles forward.

BOBBY DEAN: "Whoa, whoa, whoa!"

Maxx starts to lift Eric for the cradle brainbuster.

Bobby falls into Maxx from behind.

The impact knocks Maxx off balance.

Eric slips free.

Maxx stumbles forward and lands chest-first across the folded steel chair, his ribs taking the edge with a sickening thud.

The crowd groans loudly.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bobby Dean just fell into Maxx! Maxx Mayhem lands on the chair!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was not betrayal. That was worse. That was gravity with comedic timing!"

Bobby lands on one knee, horrified.

BOBBY DEAN: "I did not mean to do that!"

Maxx rolls onto his side, clutching his ribs, his face twisted in pain.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Bobby..."

BOBBY DEAN: "I stepped on the stop thing!"

Eric Dane Jr. collapses into the ropes, breathing hard, eyes wide as he realizes he has survived Maxximum Carnage by the single dumbest possible margin.

Then he sees Bobby kneeling near Maxx.

He sees Maxx hurt.

He sees the chair.

And the champion moves.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Dane Jr. has an opening! Bobby's mistake may have saved the championship for Eric Dane Jr.!"

MARK BRAVO: "Eric did not create that opening. Bobby gift-wrapped it, tripped over it, and landed on the receipt."

Eric grabs Bobby by the shoulder and spins him around.

BOBBY DEAN: "Eric, wait, I'm having an emotional moment."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Have it horizontally."

Eric blasts Bobby across the face with a sudden jumping knee.

Bobby drops backward onto the mat, stunned.

Eric drops to a seated position beside him for half a second, too exhausted to immediately capitalize. He looks from Bobby to Maxx, then back to Bobby.

ERIC DANE JR.: "No. Not him. He is too stupid to pin."

Eric crawls toward Maxx.

Maxx is dragging himself toward the ropes, still clutching his ribs from the chair impact. Eric grabs him by the ankle and yanks him back toward center ring.

Maxx kicks weakly, trying to fight him off, but the damage is mounting.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. choosing Maxx Mayhem. He knows Maxx took the worst of that mistake."

MARK BRAVO: "That is ugly, but it is smart. Bobby is down, but Maxx is hurt in the ribs, hurt from the table, hurt from the chair, and still probably wondering why friendship feels like blunt-force trauma."

Eric pulls Maxx up by the head, hooks him from the side, and glances toward the folded chair still nearby.

The crowd boos as Eric drags Maxx closer to it.

ERIC DANE JR.: "My division. My brand. My title."

Maxx suddenly shoves Eric backward.

Eric stumbles.

Maxx lunges with one last burst, throwing a wild discus elbow.

Eric ducks.

The elbow catches Bobby Dean, who has just pushed himself up to one knee behind Eric.

Bobby drops flat again.

BOBBY DEAN: "Still helping..."

MAXX MAYHEM: "Bobby!"

That moment of concern is all Eric needs.

Eric grabs Maxx from behind and drives a sharp forearm into the back of his head. Maxx drops to one knee.

Eric looks at the chair.

Then at the corner.

Then at Maxx.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Dane Jr. may be thinking SD3."

MARK BRAVO: "Shooting Star DDT. He barely has anything left, but Eric Dane Jr. thinks he can hit anything from anywhere, especially when he absolutely should not try it."

Eric drags Maxx up and positions him near the folded chair. Maxx sways on his feet, hunched over, ribs screaming, but still trying to stand.

Eric backs toward the corner, stumbling once on his socked foot before catching the ropes.

The crowd buzzes with dread and anticipation.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Watch. Greatness."

Eric climbs.

Slowly.

Painfully.

One boot on the middle rope.

One sock on the top.

MARK BRAVO: "That sock is doing a lot of work right now."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Dane Jr. is risking everything. He does not need to do this."

MARK BRAVO: "He always needs to do this, John. Not strategically. Emotionally."

Eric reaches the top rope and crouches.

Maxx staggers beneath him.

Bobby Dean, still dazed, rolls toward the ropes and accidentally bumps Maxx's ankle with his shoulder.

Maxx stumbles half a step forward.

Just enough.

Eric launches.

He flips through the air in a reckless Shooting Star motion, catching Maxx around the head on the way down.

SD3.

Shooting Star DDT.

Maxx's head and upper body spike onto the mat just beside the folded chair, the chair clipping his shoulder as the impact folds both men awkwardly into the canvas.

The arena explodes in shock.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "SD3! SD3! Dane Jr. hit it on Maxx Mayhem!"

MARK BRAVO: "Bobby bumped Maxx into position! Bobby Dean accidentally lined Maxx up for the kill shot!"

Eric rolls through the landing, clutching his own neck and shoulder, but he is close enough to crawl.

Maxx lies motionless, one arm twitching near the folded chair.

Bobby sits up and sees what happened.

BOBBY DEAN: "Oh no."

Eric throws himself across Maxx's chest.

The referee dives into position.

REFEREE: "One!"

Bobby starts crawling toward them.

BOBBY DEAN: "Wait!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Bobby reaches out, fingertips inches away from Eric's boot.

Eric sees him coming and hooks Maxx's far leg with every bit of strength he has left.

REFEREE: "Three!"

DING DING DING!

The Madrid crowd erupts into boos, groans, and scattered stunned cheers for the chaos of what they have just seen.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. retains! Eric Dane Jr. retains the UTA Hardcore Championship!"

MARK BRAVO: "Because Bobby Dean made the wrong mistake at the wrong time! He saved Eric earlier, hurt Maxx later, and accidentally put Maxx exactly where Dane Jr. needed him!"

Eric rolls off Maxx and lies flat on his back, one arm raised weakly. He is not celebrating so much as confirming he is still alive.

The referee retrieves the UTA Hardcore Championship and kneels beside him, placing it across Eric's chest.

Eric clutches the title with both arms like a man rescued from shipwreck.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Never... doubted... me."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "I am not sure Eric Dane Jr. dominated this match. I am not sure he controlled this match. But he survived it."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the reign, John. That is the whole reign. Survive, complain, take credit, repeat."

Bobby Dean sits near the ropes, staring at Maxx with guilt written all over his face. Maxx has not moved much, still folded on the mat from the SD3, the failed Maximum Carnage, the chair, the table, and all the accidental damage Bobby helped create.

BOBBY DEAN: "Maxx?"

Maxx groans faintly.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Did we win?"

Bobby looks at Eric Dane Jr., who is now hugging the championship and trying to roll away from everyone.

BOBBY DEAN: "No."

Maxx lets his head fall back to the mat.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Did the scooter win?"

Bobby looks out toward ringside.

The battle chair remains parked near the steps.

Untouched.

Still standing.

BOBBY DEAN: "She survived."

Maxx gives the faintest thumbs up.

MAXX MAYHEM: "Good girl."

The crowd laughs and applauds despite the boos for Eric's victory.

Eric Dane Jr. rolls under the bottom rope, clutching the Hardcore Championship tight to his chest. He drops to the floor near the timekeeper's area, immediately demanding his missing boot from a ringside attendant.

ERIC DANE JR.: "My boot! Give me my boot! And sanitize it!"

The attendant hands him the boot. Eric hugs the championship closer with one arm and points back toward the ring with the other.

ERIC DANE JR.: "I beat both of you! I beat your scooter! I beat your friendship! I beat public transportation!"

MARK BRAVO: "He did not beat the scooter."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "No, he did not."

Eric limps backward up the ramp, one boot still off, the Hardcore Championship held high despite the fact he can barely stand straight. The Madrid crowd boos him loudly, but Eric forces a smug smile through the pain.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. walks out of Madrid still the UTA Hardcore Champion, but he had to survive Maxx Mayhem, Bobby Dean, weapons, a table, the battle chair, and pure chaos to do it."

MARK BRAVO: "And somehow the most dangerous weapon in the match was Bobby Dean's timing."

Inside the ring, Bobby crawls toward Maxx and pats him apologetically on the shoulder.

BOBBY DEAN: "I really did mean to help."

Maxx slowly turns his head toward him.

MAXX MAYHEM: "I know."

A beat.

MAXX MAYHEM: "That's what scares me."

Bobby nods sadly.

At ringside, the battle chair gives one final tiny chirp as someone bumps the remote near the apron.

SFX: HONK.

Eric Dane Jr., halfway up the ramp, flinches so hard he nearly drops the championship.

The Madrid crowd erupts one more time as Eric screams back toward the ring.

ERIC DANE JR.: "I STILL WON!"

He clutches the UTA Hardcore Championship against his chest and limps through the curtain, victorious, furious, and somehow still haunted by the sound of a mobility scooter.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Eric Dane Jr. retains the Hardcore Championship, but one week before International Affair, you have to wonder how much of the champion is left."

MARK BRAVO: "Enough to complain. Enough to limp. Enough to hold the title. For Eric Dane Jr., that is apparently enough."

The camera settles on Bobby Dean and Maxx Mayhem in the ring, both battered, both disappointed, and both looking toward the battle chair like it is the only true survivor of the match.

## **Hands Tied**

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage to Scott Stevens' office.

The General Manager is behind his desk, a stack of papers in front of him, one hand pressed against his temple like the night has already found several new ways to test his patience.

Before he can turn another page, the door swings open.

Susanita Ybanez storms in.

Stevens looks up immediately.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Susanita."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "You need to do something."

Stevens slowly lowers the paper in his hand.

SCOTT STEVENS: "About what?"

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "About Marie."

The name changes the room.

Stevens exhales through his nose, already understanding where this is going.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "I just saw her. She is not okay. She is standing there like she is afraid to breathe wrong. Amy is talking for her. Valkyrie is guarding the door. They would not even let me speak to her."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Susanita—"

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "No. Do not Susanita me. You saw what happened. You know what The Empire does. You know what Amy Harrison is capable of."

Stevens leans back in his chair, jaw tight.

SCOTT STEVENS: "I know."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Then help her."

There is a long pause.

Stevens looks down at the papers on his desk.

Then back up at Susanita.

SCOTT STEVENS: "My hands are tied."

Susanita stares at him like he has slapped her.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Your hands are tied?"

SCOTT STEVENS: "Marie signed the contract."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "So what? That makes it right?"

SCOTT STEVENS: "No."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Because it is not right."

SCOTT STEVENS: "I agree with you."

That stops her for half a second.

Only half.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Then do something."

Stevens stands now, both hands on the desk.

SCOTT STEVENS: "What do you want me to do, Susanita? Void a signed agreement because I do not like the people standing around her? Drag Marie Van Claudio out of The Empire locker room against her will? Force her to say something different than what she already said to you?"

Susanita's frustration flashes across her face.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "She said what they wanted her to say."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Maybe."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Maybe?"

SCOTT STEVENS: "I cannot run this company on maybe. I need Marie to say it. I need her to come to me. I need something I can actually act on."

Susanita shakes her head, pacing once in front of the desk.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "She is not going to come to you while Amy is standing over her shoulder."

SCOTT STEVENS: "I know."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Then you know she is trapped."

Stevens does not answer right away.

That silence is enough.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "You know."

Stevens looks away for a second, then back at her.

SCOTT STEVENS: "I know something is wrong."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "But you are going to let it happen?"

SCOTT STEVENS: "I am going to follow the rules until I have a reason that lets me break them without making this worse for Marie."

Susanita laughs bitterly under her breath.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Rules. Contracts. Paper. That is what you have?"

SCOTT STEVENS: "That is what they are hiding behind."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "And you are letting them."

Stevens' expression hardens, but not with anger at her.

With frustration.

SCOTT STEVENS: "I am trying not to hand Amy Harrison exactly what she wants."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "She already has what she wants."

Susanita points toward the door, toward the hallway, toward wherever The Empire has Marie tucked away.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "She has Marie."

The words hang in the office.

Stevens has no answer that satisfies either of them.

SCOTT STEVENS: "I am sorry."

Susanita looks at him for a long moment.

The anger does not leave her face.

But something underneath it breaks a little.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Sorry does not get her out."

She turns sharply and heads for the door.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Susanita."

She stops with one hand on the handle, but she does not turn around.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Be careful."

Susanita looks back over her shoulder now, eyes hard.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "No."

A beat.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "She needs someone who is not careful."

Susanita storms out, the door slamming behind her.

Stevens remains standing behind his desk, staring at the closed door.

He looks down at the papers again.

The contract.

The rules.

The thing tying his hands.

His jaw tightens.

Cut.

## **Kirsty McKinney vs. Athena Storm**

Match

The camera returns to ringside inside Palacio Vistalegre Madrid, where the crowd is still buzzing from the chaotic Hardcore Championship match that left debris, noise, and laughter in its wake. The ring crew has done what it can to clear the wreckage, but the energy of the building has shifted into something curious now.

This is not about scooters.

This is not about weapons.

This is about a debut.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Welcome back to World Tour: Spain '26, and now we turn our attention to singles action in the women's division. Athena Storm is looking to get herself back into the rankings, but tonight she faces a woman making her official UTA in-ring debut."

MARK BRAVO: "And not just any debut, John. Kirsty McKinney has arrived in UTA with a reputation that sounds almost impossible. Amateur wrestling prodigy. Collegiate monster. Lifetime record that looks like somebody typed it wrong. And apparently she thinks professional wrestling is ridiculous."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney was a decorated amateur wrestler, once considered a serious Olympic hopeful before brutal weight cuts ended that path. She has transitioned into professional wrestling, but she brings a very different mentality with her."

MARK BRAVO: "Different is a nice word. Kirsty wrestles like she is personally offended by Irish whips, turnbuckles, and people pointing at signs before they do moves."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "She is a mat specialist. Waistlocks, rides, cradles, suplexes, stacks, submissions. Her goal is not to impress you. Her goal is to stop you from moving."

MARK BRAVO: "Which is a problem for Athena Storm, because Athena's whole thing is movement. Speed, strikes, capoeira angles, Muay Thai bursts. Athena wants motion. Kirsty wants to make motion illegal."

The lights lower slightly.

No lightning.

No pyro.

No video package full of grand declarations.

Just a low, dirty guitar growl as "In Walks Barbarella" by Clutch begins to rumble through Palacio Vistalegre.

The crowd turns toward the entrance stage, waiting for some sort of arrival spectacle.

They do not get one.

Kirsty McKinney steps through the curtain.

No pose.

No dramatic pause.

No arms thrown wide to introduce herself to Madrid.

She simply appears at the top of the ramp with a focused, almost-neutral expression, pale eyes moving across the building like she is taking inventory rather than soaking in the moment.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And there she is. From Amherst, Massachusetts, weighing in at one hundred forty-nine pounds,

Kirsty McKinney."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the face of a woman who walked into a sold-out international arena and immediately decided the vibes were inefficient."

Kirsty stands in place for one beat, not because she is posing, but because she seems to be deciding whether the crowd is worth acknowledging at all. A few cheers rise first, mixed with curious murmurs from fans who saw the vignette last week and remember the phrase that stuck with them.

No more cuts.

Kirsty hears a heckler near the ramp shout something at her.

She turns her head slowly.

Not angry.

Not amused.

Just irritated that someone has already wasted oxygen.

She gives the heckler a brief side-eye, then continues forward.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There is a certain bluntness to Kirsty McKinney. She has made it clear she does not view professional wrestling the way many of her peers do. She is not interested in flash. She is not interested in chasing a perfect finishing move if something else will end the fight sooner."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the scary part. Some wrestlers want to hit their big move. Kirsty looks like she would pin you with a weird cradle in forty seconds, sigh because it took too long, and then ask why everyone is clapping."

Kirsty begins walking down the ramp at first, measured and direct. Her shoulders are loose, her hands low, her expression unbothered. She glances once toward a pocket of fans trying to clap along with the music, then rolls her eyes as if the idea of coordinated enthusiasm offends her.

Halfway down the ramp, she picks up into a jog.

Not for the crowd.

Not for the music.

Just because walking is apparently taking too long.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney grew up on a goat farm in Amherst, Massachusetts. That may sound unusual, but it gave her an early understanding of leverage, strength, balance, and controlling resisting bodies."

MARK BRAVO: "I have heard a lot of wrestling origin stories, John. 'Before I wrestled people, I wrestled goats' is one of the more alarming ones."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "From there, youth wrestling, high school dominance, a scholarship to Campbellsville University, and an amateur career that had Olympic expectations attached to it before her health forced the end of the weight cuts."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the part that matters. She did not stop because she stopped being good. She stopped because her body said no more cuts. Now she is here, in UTA, with all that resentment and all that skill pointed at people who may not be ready for it."

Kirsty reaches ringside and does not circle the ring, slap hands, jaw with fans, or look for the best camera angle.

She drops flat, slides under the bottom rope, and rolls smoothly to her knees.

Then she stands in the center of the ring.

Still no pose.

Still no celebration.

Just Kirsty McKinney, standing there as the music grinds around her, looking like the entire concept of an entrance is something she is tolerating because the match cannot start without it.

MARK BRAVO: "She looks bored, and the match has not even started."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That is part of who she is. Detached. Irritable. Efficient. Kirsty McKinney wants to frustrate opponents, control them on the mat, and make them feel helpless."

Kirsty lowers into a deep squat.

Then another.

The motion is smooth, heavy, powerful, and controlled, showing the kind of lower-body strength that does not need to be announced because it makes itself obvious.

She rolls one shoulder.

Then the other.

She flicks her hair out of her face with a sharp, contemptuous motion that somehow lands harder than most taunts.

The camera catches her expression.

Flat.

Focused.

Vaguely annoyed.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "You can already see the physical base. Kirsty McKinney is not going to try to match Athena Storm in the air. She is not going to meet Athena's pace if she can avoid it. She wants to drag Athena down, ride the hips, trap limbs, stack shoulders, and make every escape feel impossible."

MARK BRAVO: "Athena better keep moving. If Kirsty gets hands on her and turns this into a wrestling room, we may find out how long Athena can survive under a woman who thinks rope breaks are an inconvenience and finisher names are stupid."

Kirsty walks to her corner and places both hands on the top rope. She does not bounce. She does not pump herself up. She simply leans forward slightly, eyes fixed on the entrance stage now.

A few fans near ringside cheer her name.

Kirsty glances toward them.

For half a second, it looks like she may acknowledge it.

Instead, she gives the smallest possible nod, then looks away like even that was more than she intended to give.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This is an important night for Kirsty McKinney. Official UTA in-ring debut, international stage, and a very capable opponent across from her in just a moment."

MARK BRAVO: "If Kirsty is nervous, she is hiding it behind the expression of someone waiting in line behind a slow customer at the grocery store."

"In Walks Barbarella" continues underneath the crowd noise as Kirsty settles into the corner. Her hands flex once against the ropes. Her jaw shifts slightly. Her eyes remain locked on the stage.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney has arrived. The debut is official. And now we await Athena Storm."

The camera holds on Kirsty in the corner, stripped down, dismissive, and ready, while the lights begin to shift for her opponent.

Kirsty McKinney remains in her corner as her music fades beneath the Madrid crowd. She leans forward slightly with both hands on the top rope, eyes fixed on the stage, expression unchanged.

No nerves.

No show of excitement.

Just waiting.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney is in the ring for her official UTA in-ring debut, and now comes a very different kind of test."

MARK BRAVO: "Yeah, because if Kirsty wants to turn this into a wrestling room, Athena Storm wants to turn it into a dance floor during a thunderstorm. Movement, strikes, angles, speed. This is a clash of styles in the truest sense."

The lights suddenly drop.

A low rumble rolls through Palacio Vistalegre.

For one heartbeat, the arena is dark.

Then thunder cracks through the speakers.

Blue strobes sweep across the crowd in rapid bursts, cutting through the darkness like flashes of lightning over open water.

The opening pulse of "Thunder" by Imagine Dragons hits, and the Madrid crowd comes alive.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And here comes The Tempest!"

MARK BRAVO: "Now that is an entrance. Kirsty walked out here like she was annoyed her flight got delayed. Athena Storm walks out like the weather report gave up."

Athena Storm bursts through the curtain with a glow staff spinning in one hand, blue light trailing in smooth circles around her body. She hits the top of the ramp with instant energy, shoulders rolling with the beat, eyes bright, smile wide, soaking in the roar from the Madrid crowd.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "From San Juan, Puerto Rico, weighing in at one hundred forty-two pounds, Athena Storm!"

Athena twirls the glow staff once behind her back, catches it clean, then thrusts it high into the air as another thunderclap cracks through the building.

The crowd responds with a chant that starts in the lower bowl and spreads quickly.

"LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN!"

Athena grins and pumps one arm overhead in a rolling motion, encouraging the chant as the blue strobes continue to flash around her.

ATHENA STORM: "Madrid! Let it rain!"

The crowd roars louder.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena Storm brings a background in Muay Thai and Capoeira, and when she gets rolling, she can overwhelm opponents with lightning-quick combinations."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the danger for Kirsty. Athena does not just strike. She moves through strikes. Knees, kicks, headscissors, rope-walk attacks, corkscrews. She can hit you from an angle you did not know existed."

Athena starts down the ramp at a quick pace, not walking so much as bouncing with the tropical-house rhythm underneath the music. She reaches out to slap hands with fans on either side, then spins once in the aisle, swinging the glow staff in a bright blue arc before tucking it under one arm and sprinting the last few steps toward ringside.

Inside the ring, Kirsty watches the entire thing with the expression of someone observing an unnecessary public exercise.

MARK BRAVO: "Look at Kirsty. She is not impressed."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "I am not sure Kirsty McKinney wants to be impressed. She wants Athena on the mat."

MARK BRAVO: "And Athena wants Kirsty chasing lightning. That is the fight right there."

Athena reaches the bottom of the ramp and hops lightly onto the apron. She turns toward the crowd, plants the glow staff against one shoulder, and rolls her free arm overhead again.

"LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN!"

The chant echoes around Palacio Vistalegre.

Athena laughs, energized by it, then hands the glow staff off to a ringside attendant before grabbing the top rope with both hands.

She vaults over the top rope in one clean motion, lands on her feet, and immediately rolls into a fluid capoeira step near center ring, turning the landing into motion without pause.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena Storm wasting no movement. Everything she does flows into the next thing."

MARK BRAVO: "And everything Kirsty does is designed to stop flow. That is why this is fascinating. Athena wants rhythm. Kirsty wants a clamp."

Athena springs back to her feet and rushes to the nearest corner. She climbs to the middle rope, points out across the Madrid crowd, and lifts both arms as the blue strobes flash one more time.

ATHENA STORM: "Let it rain!"

The crowd shouts it back.

Across the ring, Kirsty exhales through her nose and gives the smallest roll of her eyes.

Athena notices.

She drops down from the ropes, turns toward Kirsty, and smiles.

ATHENA STORM: "You good?"

Kirsty looks at her for a long second.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY: "Are you done?"

The crowd reacts with a mix of laughter and cheers.

Athena's smile gets sharper, but she does not lose the energy.

ATHENA STORM: "Not even close."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "A little exchange there between Athena Storm and Kirsty McKinney, and you can already feel the contrast."

MARK BRAVO: "Athena is all uplift, motion, fire, storm clouds. Kirsty looks like she just wants to double-leg the forecast."

Athena backs into her corner, bouncing lightly on the balls of her feet. She rolls her shoulders, shakes out her arms, and keeps her eyes on Kirsty.

Kirsty steps away from the ropes and stands upright now, hands low, expression flat, posture relaxed in a way that somehow feels more threatening than if she were pacing.

The music fades.

The lights return to normal.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena Storm is looking to get back into the rankings, but Kirsty McKinney is looking to make a first impression at her expense."

MARK BRAVO: "And if Kirsty can get hands on her, Athena may spend this whole match trying to peel herself off the mat. But if Athena keeps distance, keeps moving, and starts landing those strikes, Kirsty's debut could get real uncomfortable real fast."

The referee steps toward the center of the ring, looking from Athena Storm to Kirsty McKinney.

Athena bounces once more in her corner and rolls her arm overhead, drawing one final "LET IT RAIN!" chant from the crowd.

Kirsty does not react to the chant.

She only lowers her stance slightly, eyes locked on Athena's hips, already studying the first shot.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena Storm. Kirsty McKinney. Speed versus control. Striking versus mat wrestling. This one is next."

The referee checks both competitors one final time.

The bell is coming.

The referee looks first to Athena Storm, who bounces lightly in her corner, shoulders loose, hands moving, still feeling the rhythm of the crowd. Across the ring, Kirsty McKinney stands with her hands low, knees slightly bent, eyes fixed not on Athena's face, but on her hips.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This is such an interesting clash of styles. Athena Storm wants space. She wants motion. She wants rhythm. Kirsty McKinney wants grips, leverage, mat control, and pressure."

MARK BRAVO: "Athena needs to make this a storm. Kirsty wants to make it a chore."

The referee checks both women one more time, then turns toward the timekeeper.

DING DING DING!

The bell rings, and Athena immediately starts moving.

She circles wide, light on the balls of her feet, cutting a fast arc around Kirsty while rolling one arm overhead to pull another chant from the Madrid crowd.

"LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN!"

Kirsty does not follow the chant.

She barely follows Athena.

Instead, she turns in place, small steps, economical, keeping her base underneath her and refusing to be drawn into

the wider circle Athena is trying to create.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Right away, Athena Storm trying to create movement."

MARK BRAVO: "And Kirsty is not chasing. That is smart. If she chases Athena, she gets kicked in the mouth from some weird angle. If she holds center, Athena has to come to her."

Athena darts in with a quick low kick to the thigh.

Kirsty absorbs it, shifts her stance, and reaches for Athena's lead arm. Athena pulls back before Kirsty can secure the grip, spinning away with a capoeira-style turn that draws a quick cheer.

Kirsty watches her land.

Expression unchanged.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY: "Cute."

Athena smiles.

ATHENA STORM: "You haven't seen cute yet."

Athena steps in faster this time, firing a sharp kick toward Kirsty's ribs. Kirsty catches the leg against her side, clamps down with both arms, and immediately drives forward.

Athena hops backward on one foot, eyes widening as Kirsty uses the captured leg to shove her toward the ropes.

Athena reaches the ropes and grabs the top strand.

REFEREE: "Rope break! Kirsty, break!"

Kirsty looks at the referee like he has interrupted something important. She releases at four, but only after pressing Athena's captured leg down just enough to make Athena wince.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That is the grip strength and the control Kirsty McKinney brings from her amateur background."

MARK BRAVO: "And look at that release. She broke before five, but she made sure Athena felt every second of it."

Athena shakes out the leg and backs off, still smiling, but with more caution now. Kirsty flicks her hair from her face with a short, dismissive motion and resets in the center of the ring.

Athena comes in again, this time feinting low before snapping a quick roundhouse toward Kirsty's shoulder.

The kick lands.

Kirsty grunts and turns half a step.

Athena follows with a second kick, then a jumping knee strike that catches Kirsty under the jaw and sends her stumbling backward for the first time.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena Storm finds the jaw with that jumping knee!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is what Athena has to do. Touch and move. Hit and leave. Do not let Kirsty put hands on her."

Athena rushes forward, hits the ropes, and comes back looking for a tilt-a-whirl headscissors. She leaps, wraps the legs, and starts to rotate.

But Kirsty plants.

The motion stops halfway.

Athena's eyes flash with surprise as Kirsty catches her around the hips, denies the rotation, and drops straight down into a hard, ugly mat return that folds Athena onto her side.

The crowd reacts with a heavy "OHHH!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty blocked the headscissors! Athena could not complete the rotation!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is horrifying. Athena went for a highlight and Kirsty turned it into a takedown drill."

Athena tries to scramble immediately, but Kirsty is already on her back. She slides one knee behind Athena's thigh, hooks a waist ride, and drops her weight down across Athena's hips.

Athena reaches for the ropes.

Kirsty drags her backward by the waist before she can get there.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Look at the positioning. Kirsty denying the rope break, keeping Athena's hips trapped."

MARK BRAVO: "This is where Athena does not want to be. Flat, trapped, and carrying Kirsty's weight. You cannot capoeira your way out from under somebody sitting on your hips."

Athena posts one hand and tries to build up to a knee. Kirsty threads an arm around the waist, shifts to the side, and snaps Athena back down with a tight waist mat return.

Athena hits chest-first and exhales hard.

Kirsty stays on her, chin tucked, legs heavy, arms busy. She slides from the waist ride to an arm ride, pulling Athena's right arm across her own body and forcing her shoulder awkwardly toward the mat.

Athena kicks her legs, trying to turn through.

Kirsty blocks the hip.

Athena tries the other way.

Kirsty blocks that too.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This is suffocating control from Kirsty McKinney."

MARK BRAVO: "And the annoying part is she looks bored doing it. Athena is fighting for her life under there, and Kirsty looks like she is waiting for a microwave to finish."

Kirsty glances toward the hard camera while keeping Athena trapped. She gives the smallest exhale through her nose, then rolls Athena into a quick cradle stack.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Athena kicks free, rolling to her side and immediately grabbing for the ropes. This time she gets them, forcing the break.

REFEREE: "Break, Kirsty!"

Kirsty releases, but not with urgency. She rises slowly, gives the referee a flat look, then steps back with exaggerated irritation, hands briefly lifting as if the entire concept of ropes is beneath serious athletes.

MARK BRAVO: "There it is. The rope break flounce."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney may be a newcomer to UTA, but she is not a newcomer to controlling bodies. That amateur wrestling foundation is immediately obvious."

Athena pulls herself upright at the ropes, shaking out her arm. The crowd begins chanting again, trying to rally her.

"LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN!"

Athena nods with the chant, rolling her shoulders, trying to loosen the tension Kirsty has already started building in her arm and ribs.

Kirsty stands in the center, unimpressed.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY: "That help?"

Athena smirks despite herself.

ATHENA STORM: "Yeah."

Athena pushes off the ropes and suddenly comes forward fast.

Kirsty drops her level, looking for the shot.

Athena anticipated it.

She leaps over Kirsty's reach, lands behind her, and fires a quick roundhouse to the back of Kirsty's thigh.

Kirsty drops to one knee.

Athena follows with a rope-bounce burst, springing off the middle rope and snapping an enzuigiri across the side of Kirsty's head.

The crowd erupts as Kirsty goes down to both hands.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Rope-walk enzuigiri! Athena Storm caught Kirsty clean!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is how Athena has to do it! Make Kirsty guess wrong, then make her pay before she can reset!"

Athena keeps moving, hitting the ropes again as Kirsty pushes up.

Athena comes back with a low sliding kick to Kirsty's chest, knocking her onto her back. Athena immediately follows with a standing shooting-star press, flipping cleanly and landing across Kirsty's torso.

She hooks the leg.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Kirsty kicks out.

Not explosive.

Not dramatic.

Just enough.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena gets two!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Kirsty kicked out like she was annoyed the referee counted that loudly."

Athena rolls to her knees and immediately pumps one arm overhead.

ATHENA STORM: "Let it rain!"

The crowd answers.

Kirsty rolls toward the ropes, one hand on the side of her head, blinking away the enzuigiri. Athena stays on her, grabbing Kirsty by the wrist and pulling her upright.

Athena fires a forearm.

Then another.

Then she whips Kirsty toward the ropes.

Kirsty reverses, sending Athena instead.

Athena rebounds, ducks under Kirsty's first reach, and leaps again for another headscissors.

This time she gets more rotation.

But Kirsty drops to one knee mid-spin, shifts her hips, and converts the momentum into a sudden stack, folding Athena's shoulders toward the mat with both legs trapped high.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Athena kicks free at two and a half, rolling out to the side with a startled look.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty nearly caught her! Athena went for another speed-based attack, and Kirsty turned it into a pinning combination!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is the trap. Athena has to move, but the more she throws herself at Kirsty, the more chances Kirsty has to catch limbs and fold her into math."

Both women rise.

Athena is breathing harder now, still energetic, still dangerous, but aware that every big movement has a cost.

Kirsty wipes at the side of her head where the enzuigiri landed, looks at her fingers, then looks back at Athena with the first real hint of irritation on her face.

Not anger.

Worse.

Annoyance.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY: "Okay."

Athena raises her hands, bouncing lightly again, but not as freely as before.

ATHENA STORM: "You feeling the storm yet?"

Kirsty lowers her stance.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY: "I've wrestled goats with better balance."

The crowd reacts with a mix of laughs and cheers.

Athena's smile tightens.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney may not talk much, but when she does, it lands."

MARK BRAVO: "Yeah, and Athena just found out Kirsty's trash talk is also mat-based. Dry, mean, and somehow farm-related."

Athena comes forward again, but this time Kirsty does not wait.

She shoots.

Fast.

Low.

Clean.

Athena tries to sprawl, but Kirsty cuts the angle, catches the far leg, and drives through with a double-leg takedown that folds Athena hard to the canvas.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Beautiful shot by Kirsty McKinney!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was not a tackle. That was a system."

Athena tries to scramble immediately, but Kirsty rides the hips again, dragging her away from the ropes and settling heavy across the back.

This time, Kirsty's expression is colder.

More focused.

Athena has landed enough to irritate her.

And now Kirsty McKinney is done letting the match breathe.

Kirsty McKinney settles heavy across Athena Storm's back, knees wide, hips low, her weight positioned with the sort of calm cruelty that makes every inch of movement feel expensive. Athena reaches forward, fingers stretching toward the bottom rope, but Kirsty hooks one arm around the waist and drags her backward before she can get close enough.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena Storm is trying to scramble, trying to create any kind of space, but Kirsty McKinney is just shutting the door every time."

MARK BRAVO: "That is what makes this miserable. Athena gets half an opening, and Kirsty closes it with a hip shift and a sigh."

Athena posts both hands and tries to build to a base. Kirsty immediately shifts to the side, threading one leg inside Athena's and hooking the ankle just enough to break the post. Athena drops back to one elbow, frustration flashing across her face.

Kirsty does not smile.

She just leans closer.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY: "Stop rushing."

Athena grits her teeth.

ATHENA STORM: "Stop holding."

Kirsty gives a tiny, unimpressed shrug while still controlling the ride.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY: "No."

The crowd reacts with laughter and scattered cheers, but Athena uses that half-second of conversation to pop one knee under herself and surge toward the ropes.

Kirsty catches the waist again.

Athena keeps driving.

Kirsty tries to pull her back, but Athena twists, turns her hips, and finally manages to get one boot on the bottom rope.

REFEREE: "Rope break! Kirsty, break it!"

Kirsty holds for two.

Then three.

Then releases at four with the exaggerated irritation of someone being asked to stop doing the obvious correct thing.

REFEREE: "Kirsty, I need cleaner breaks."

Kirsty looks at him.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY: "You got one."

MARK BRAVO: "She is technically correct, which is her entire personality right now."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney using the referee's count to her advantage, but she is not breaking the rules. Not exactly."

Athena pulls herself up along the ropes, one hand on her ribs, the other shaking feeling back into her trapped arm. The Madrid crowd tries to rally her again.

"LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN! LET IT RAIN!"

Athena nods with the chant, breathing hard, then rolls her shoulders and steps back toward the center. Kirsty stands opposite her, hands low, chin slightly tucked, still staring at Athena's hips rather than her eyes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena Storm has had moments. She caught Kirsty with the enzuigiri. She got the standing shooting-star press. But every time Athena opens the match up, Kirsty drags it back down."

MARK BRAVO: "And that is the fight. Athena needs fifteen seconds of storm. Kirsty needs one grip."

Athena takes a quick step in, then pivots out before Kirsty can shoot. Kirsty does not bite. Athena throws a low kick, then a second, then fakes a third and comes up high with a roundhouse toward the head.

Kirsty ducks under it.

Athena spins through, lands clean, and immediately leaps into a jumping knee.

This one connects.

Kirsty staggers backward into the ropes, head snapping slightly from the shot.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Jumping knee lands again! Athena found the jaw!"

MARK BRAVO: "That one got Kirsty's attention. I think she blinked with emotion."

Athena charges, clotheslining Kirsty over the top rope.

But Kirsty lands on the apron.

Athena sees it and immediately hits the opposite ropes, building speed as Kirsty rises outside the ropes.

Athena comes back fast.

Kirsty tries to duck through the ropes.

Athena catches her with a rope-bounce DDT variation, driving Kirsty's head and shoulder into the apron edge before both women tumble back toward the ring.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Apron rope-bounce DDT! Athena Storm may have created the opening she needs!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was the kind of angle Kirsty does not want to deal with. You cannot wrestle someone's hips when your head just bounced off the apron."

Kirsty rolls inside under the bottom rope, dazed for the first time in the match. Athena climbs to the apron and pumps her arm once more.

ATHENA STORM: "Let it rain!"

The crowd roars back.

Kirsty pushes up to one knee near center ring.

Athena springboards.

She flies toward Kirsty with a corkscrew body attack, looking to crash down across her chest and maybe put this debut on ice.

Kirsty rolls underneath at the last possible second.

Athena lands on her feet but has to stumble forward to keep balance.

That is all Kirsty needs.

From her knees, Kirsty hooks Athena's near leg, drives her shoulder behind the opposite knee, and yanks backward into a sudden mat return that dumps Athena flat on her back.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty caught the landing! Athena landed on her feet, but Kirsty still found the leg!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is ridiculous awareness. Athena missed by an inch, landed clean, and Kirsty still turned it into a wrestling exchange."

Athena tries to kick free, but Kirsty stays glued to the leg. She threads one arm underneath, steps over the ankle, and begins tying Athena's lower body into an ugly entanglement.

Athena sits up and reaches toward Kirsty's head, trying to push her away.

Kirsty catches that arm too.

The crowd reacts as the position tightens.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney is transitioning again. Athena's leg is trapped, and now Kirsty has the arm."

MARK BRAVO: "This looks like something you find in an old wrestling manual next to the words, 'Do not let this happen.'"

Athena twists her hips, trying to roll through. Kirsty follows, blocking the turn with one knee and forcing Athena back down. Athena reaches for the ropes with her free arm.

Kirsty drags her back toward center.

The Madrid crowd starts clapping again, urging Athena to fight.

Kirsty looks annoyed by the noise.

Athena plants her free hand and kicks hard, finally loosening the entanglement enough to turn to her side.

Kirsty transitions instantly, abandoning the leg to take the back.

Athena realizes too late.

Kirsty's arms snake around her head and neck.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty is looking for that bulldog choke! Pitty Choke may be coming!"

MARK BRAVO: "Athena has to move now. If Kirsty cinches that, the debut is over."

Athena fights the hands, tucking her chin, scrambling toward the ropes with everything she has left. Kirsty rolls with her, legs heavy, hips following every attempted turn.

Athena gets one knee under herself.

Then one foot.

The crowd rises as Athena begins to stand with Kirsty hanging onto her back.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena Storm powering up! She is trying to shake Kirsty loose!"

Athena backs toward the corner and rams Kirsty into the turnbuckles.

Kirsty's grip loosens.

Athena drives back again.

Kirsty releases and drops to her feet behind Athena.

Athena turns and fires a roundhouse.

Kirsty catches the leg.

Athena immediately leaps with the other leg, looking for an enzuigiri.

Kirsty ducks, still holding the captured leg, and Athena crashes to the mat stomach-first.

Kirsty steps over, folds the leg, and drops her weight across Athena's upper back.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena went for the counter, but Kirsty had it scouted!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is the problem after one of these mat specialists gets a few minutes with you. Every scramble teaches her something."

Kirsty pulls Athena away from the ropes by the trapped leg, then suddenly shifts her grip, hooks Athena's head and far arm, and rolls her into a brutal legscissor cradle.

Athena's shoulders are stacked.

Her neck is compressed.

Her legs kick, but Kirsty's thighs clamp down like a vise.

Kirsty settles into the pin, chin resting lazily against one hand.

She looks directly into the hard camera.

Bored.

Irritated.

Completely in control.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Shear Cradle! Shear Cradle by Kirsty McKinney!"

MARK BRAVO: "Look at her face! She is pinning Athena Storm in her UTA debut and somehow looks inconvenienced by it!"

REFEREE: "One!"

Athena kicks hard, trying to swing her hips loose.

REFEREE: "Two!"

Kirsty tightens the legscissor and shifts her weight half an inch, killing the escape.

REFEREE: "Three!"

DING DING DING!

The Madrid crowd reacts with a loud mix of surprise, applause, and appreciation. Athena Storm kicks free only after the bell, rolling onto her side and grabbing at her neck and shoulder, breathing hard.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney wins her UTA in-ring debut! What a statement!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was not flashy. That was not pretty. That was not inspirational. That was a woman getting folded up and told, 'No, you are done now.'"

Kirsty releases the cradle and rises to one knee. The referee reaches for her wrist, but Kirsty stands before he can fully lift it, as if even the formality is taking too long.

He raises her hand.

Kirsty allows it for exactly one second.

Then she pulls her hand away and rolls one shoulder.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Athena Storm had her moments. She used her speed, she landed strikes, and she nearly changed the match with that apron rope-bounce DDT. But once Kirsty McKinney got the final grip, Athena could not get out."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the warning to the whole division. You can be faster than Kirsty. You can be flashier than Kirsty. You can have the crowd chanting with you. But if you make one bad landing, one bad scramble, one bad reach, she can turn your whole body into a receipt."

Athena pushes up to a seated position, clearly disappointed but not bitter. She looks toward Kirsty, still breathing hard, one hand working at the side of her neck.

Kirsty looks back at her.

No smile.

No celebration.

Just the smallest nod.

Respect, maybe.

Or simply acknowledgment that Athena made her work more than she preferred.

ATHENA STORM: "Not bad."

Kirsty flicks her hair out of her face.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY: "For you either."

Athena lets out a tired laugh despite the pain, while Kirsty turns away and steps through the ropes without waiting for more applause.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "A successful debut for Kirsty McKinney here in Madrid, and maybe the arrival of a very different kind of threat in the UTA women's division."

MARK BRAVO: "Different? John, that woman just made Athena Storm look like a weather pattern trapped under a weighted blanket."

Kirsty drops to the floor and starts up the ramp with the same detached expression she entered with. The crowd gives her a reaction now, stronger than before, partly cheers, partly curiosity, partly uncertainty over whether she wants any of it.

She glances once toward the fans.

Then away.

Inside the ring, Athena gets to one knee as the referee checks on her. She nods that she is okay, though clearly frustrated, watching Kirsty leave with a look that says she understands exactly how real that debut was.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney came to UTA to prove that her kind of wrestling belongs here. Tonight, she did exactly that."

The camera follows Kirsty as she reaches the stage, pauses for half a second, rolls her neck, and disappears through the curtain without a pose, without a wave, and without pretending she came here for anyone's approval.

## **By Any Means Necessary**

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage to Susanita Ybanez's locker room.

The door is closed.

The room is quiet except for the distant sound of the Madrid crowd bleeding through the walls.

Susanita stands near a bench, pacing in short, angry lines. Her hands are on her hips. Then in her hair. Then clenched at her sides. She is trying to calm herself down, but the more she tries, the more impossible it becomes.

She turns toward the lockers and exhales sharply.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Contract."

She laughs bitterly to herself.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "They keep saying contract like that makes this okay."

She turns back toward the door, jaw tight, eyes burning with frustration.

Then the door opens.

Susanita snaps around immediately.

Amy Harrison walks in first.

Calm.

Composed.

Smiling like she owns the room before she has permission to stand in it.

Behind her comes Valkyrie Knox, the UTA Women's Championship over her shoulder, eyes fixed on Susanita with a cold, guarded stare.

And behind Valkyrie, almost hidden between them, is Marie Van Claudio.

Marie's posture is small. Her eyes are down. The championship she holds is clutched close, not with pride exactly, but like it is the only solid thing left in her hands.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Get out."

Amy tilts her head, amused.

AMY HARRISON: "That is not very welcoming."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "I am not welcoming you."

Valkyrie steps slightly to the side, making herself larger in the doorway.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "Watch your tone."

Susanita's eyes flash to Valkyrie.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Or what? You will guard another door?"

Valkyrie's expression hardens, but Amy lifts one hand gently, stopping her from moving forward.

AMY HARRISON: "No need. Susanita is upset. She has had a long night running to management, begging people to solve problems she does not understand."

Susanita steps toward Amy.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "You followed me?"

AMY HARRISON: "I pay attention."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "You mean you spy."

AMY HARRISON: "I mean I protect my interests."

Susanita's eyes move past Amy to Marie.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Marie is not your interest."

Amy's smile sharpens.

AMY HARRISON: "Marie is exactly where she agreed to be."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Agreed?"

Susanita looks at Marie, pleading now beneath the anger.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Marie, look at me."

Marie's fingers tighten around the championship.

She lifts her eyes for only a second.

There it is.

A flicker.

Something afraid.

Something trapped.

Something still alive under all of this.

Then she looks down again.

AMY HARRISON: "See? Still chasing ghosts. You think going to Scott Stevens is going to do anything?"

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "He knows what you are doing."

AMY HARRISON: "And yet here we are."

Amy takes another step into the room.

AMY HARRISON: "Scott Stevens can glare at contracts all night if he wants. Marie signed. Marie chose. Marie belongs with The Empire."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "No."

The word is immediate.

Firm.

Susanita points directly at the title in Marie's hands.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "The only thing keeping Marie bound to you is that championship."

Amy's smile fades by a fraction.

AMY HARRISON: "Yeah. So?"

Susanita looks from Amy to Valkyrie.

Then back to Marie.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "All or Nothing is next week."

The room changes.

Just slightly.

Amy's eyes narrow.

Valkyrie shifts her weight.

Marie's head lifts a little.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "What are you going to do when Marie is no longer champion?"

Amy does not answer right away.

For the first time, Susanita has said something that does not fit neatly into Amy Harrison's prepared script.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "You did not think about that, did you?"

AMY HARRISON: "Careful."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "No. You be careful. Because next week, that title can change hands. One match. One moment. One mistake. And then what?"

Susanita steps closer.

Valkyrie moves slightly, but Susanita does not back down.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Are you going to give up your shot to keep her?"

Amy's face tightens.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Because that is what it would take, right? If Marie has to stay champion to stay useful to you, then what happens when you have the chance to take it from her?"

Amy says nothing.

Susanita turns her eyes to Valkyrie.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Or what about you, Valkyrie?"

Valkyrie's jaw sets.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "What about me?"

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Are you going to protect Marie when you could be UTA Women's Champion again?"

That lands harder than Valkyrie wants it to.

Her eyes flick, almost against her will, toward the championship in Marie's hands.

Only for a second.

But Susanita sees it.

So does Amy.

So does Marie.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "You all talk about family. Empire. Loyalty. But next week, all of you are going to have to decide what matters more."

Susanita points at the championship again.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Her."

Then she points at Amy and Valkyrie.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Or that."

The room goes quiet.

Amy is still composed, but now it is work. Valkyrie looks caught between offense and realization. Marie stares down at the title, but her eyes are different now.

A glimmer of hope appears there.

Small.

Fragile.

But real.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Marie..."

Marie slowly looks up.

Susanita's voice softens.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "You hear it, don't you? You know this can end."

Marie swallows hard.

For one second, it looks like she might step forward.

Then her eyes fall back to the championship.

Her grip tightens around it.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I'm sorry, Susanita."

Susanita freezes.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "But I won't give up the title."

Susanita's face breaks into disbelief.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "It is just a belt."

Marie's head snaps up.

Not fully angry.

Not fully herself.

But sharper than she has sounded all night.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "Marie, it means nothing."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "It means everything!"

The room stops.

Even Amy Harrison looks surprised.

Valkyrie's eyes cut toward Marie, stunned by the sudden force in her voice.

Marie breathes hard, clutching the championship to her chest, like the outburst took something out of her.

Susanita stares at her.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "This is not you, Marie."

Marie's face softens again.

The fire fades as quickly as it came.

She looks down, ashamed, but still holding the title.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I'm sorry."

Amy regains herself, stepping back into the moment like she can stitch control over the tear Susanita just opened.

AMY HARRISON: "You heard her."

Susanita does not look at Amy.

She keeps her eyes on Marie.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "No. I heard enough."

She steps closer, emotion hardening into resolve.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "At All or Nothing, I am entering that rumble."

Amy's expression shifts again.

Valkyrie straightens.

Marie slowly lifts her eyes.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "And it is my personal mission to free you from The Empire."

Marie's lips part, but no words come.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "By any means necessary."

Amy steps forward now, cold and sharp.

AMY HARRISON: "You are making a mistake."

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "No."

Susanita's eyes finally move to Amy.

SUSANITA YBANEZ: "I am fixing one."

Valkyrie moves between them before it can become physical, the championship on her shoulder catching the locker room light. Amy's eyes stay locked on Susanita. Susanita does not flinch.

Behind them, Marie stands with the title held close, hope and fear fighting across her face before she lowers her eyes again.

But this time, she cannot fully hide what Susanita saw.

Not anymore.

Cut.

## Ashes to Ashes

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage inside Palacio Vistalegre Madrid.

The energy from the arena is still audible through the walls, muffled by concrete, steel, and distance. Production cables snake along the floor. Equipment cases sit stacked against the far wall. A crew member hurries past with a headset pressed to one ear, speaking quietly into the microphone as the camera settles on a long hallway near the locker room area.

Then Ace Andrews enters the frame.

The Corporate Cutthroat walks alone, immaculate as always, suit tailored perfectly, posture straight, expression composed. He adjusts one cufflink as he moves down the corridor, his polished shoes clicking softly against the floor.

He looks like a man on his way to supervise violence, not suffer it.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There is Ace Andrews backstage, and we know what is scheduled next. Chris Ross is set to go one-on-one with Samuel Scythe."

MARK BRAVO: "And Ace Andrews has been the brain behind Scythe. He calls Samuel Scythe his Reaper, and every time Ace is nearby, things become more complicated for whoever is standing across from him."

Ace slows near an intersection in the hallway and glances toward the noise coming from the arena. He smooths the front of his jacket with calm precision, then reaches into his inner pocket and pulls out his phone.

ACE ANDREWS: "Yes. I am on my way."

He pauses, listening.

ACE ANDREWS: "No. Ross is emotional. Emotional men are predictable. Samuel understands the assignment."

Ace takes another step.

Behind him, the hallway darkens.

Not from the lights.

From the shape stepping into frame.

Chris Ross emerges behind Ace Andrews.

No music.

No warning.

No rush.

Just The Reaper of Harrisburg appearing in the corridor with that cold, hollow stare and a black rose gripped loosely in one hand.

The crowd watching on the arena screen erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Wait a minute."

MARK BRAVO: "Ace does not know."

Ace hears the reaction from the arena before he hears Ross.

His footsteps stop.

His eyes narrow.

Slowly, Ace lowers the phone from his ear.

Then Chris Ross speaks behind him.

CHRIS ROSS: "I told you..."

Ace turns his head just enough for the camera to catch the realization hitting his face.

CHRIS ROSS: "Any time..."

Ross surges forward.

One hand clamps around the back of Ace Andrews' neck.

Ace barely has time to raise an arm before Ross drives him forward and throws him face-first into the wall.

The impact is ugly.

Ace's phone clatters across the floor, skidding beneath a production case as the crowd inside the arena explodes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross just attacked Ace Andrews!"

MARK BRAVO: "Ross said any time, and he meant any time!"

Ace stumbles away from the wall, one hand going to his face, trying to catch himself against a rolling equipment trunk. The polished control is gone instantly, replaced by pain and panic.

ACE ANDREWS: "Security! Security!"

Ross does not answer.

He grabs Ace again by the back of the neck.

With one hand.

Just one.

Ross lifts Ace up and shoves him backward toward an equipment table loaded with cables, monitors, and stacked cases.

Ace tries to grab Ross's wrist, tries to pry himself loose, but Ross's grip does not move. His expression does not change. He looks less like a man fighting and more like a man disposing of something.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross has Ace by the neck!"

MARK BRAVO: "Ace Andrews is six-foot-four, two hundred twenty pounds, and Ross is handling him like luggage!"

Ross steps forward.

Then he throws Ace.

Ace Andrews crashes through the equipment table like a ragdoll.

The table explodes beneath him. Cables snap loose. A monitor flips off the side and cracks against the floor. Metal legs collapse inward as Ace disappears through the wreckage with a violent crash.

Crew members scatter.

Someone shouts for help from off-camera.

The arena crowd roars through the feed.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "My God! Ross just put Ace Andrews through the equipment table!"

MARK BRAVO: "Ace Andrews was supposed to be at ringside for Samuel Scythe. I do not think he is making it there,

John."

Ace lies sprawled in the broken equipment, motionless except for the faint rise and fall of his chest. His suit jacket is twisted beneath him. One sleeve has torn at the shoulder. A cable rests across his chest like a black line drawn through the middle of him.

Ross stands over the wreckage.

Breathing steady.

Hands low.

No hurry.

No satisfaction.

Only purpose.

He looks down at Ace Andrews.

CHRIS ROSS: "Ashes to ashes..."

Ross slowly kneels beside the broken table.

CHRIS ROSS: "Dust to dust..."

He places the black rose across Ace Andrews' unconscious body.

The flower rests against the ruined front of Ace's suit, stark and deliberate.

Ross stays there for one beat, staring down at him.

Then he rises.

Officials begin rushing into the hallway from both directions, but Ross is already turning away.

He casually brushes his hands together as he walks out of the picture, as if the entire attack was nothing more than dirty work that needed finishing before the match.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross has just taken Ace Andrews out of the equation before Ross faces Samuel Scythe."

MARK BRAVO: "Samuel Scythe may be The Reaper, but Chris Ross just left a calling card on Ace Andrews' body."

The camera lingers on the wreckage.

Ace Andrews lies unconscious in the remains of the table.

The black rose sits on his chest.

Medical personnel and officials crowd around him as the shot slowly fades back toward ringside.

## **International Affair**

Segment

The broadcast fades from black into a sweeping aerial shot of Madrid at night.

The lights of the city burn gold beneath the Spanish sky, but the music underneath is not peaceful. It is tense. Rising. Heavy with consequence.

The screen cuts quickly.

Championship gold.

Hands reaching.

Bodies falling over ropes.

Faces twisted with desperation.

The UTA logo flashes across the screen.

Then the words appear.

ONE WEEK FROM TONIGHT

VOICEOVER: "For one night only, every champion stands on unstable ground."

A rapid montage begins.

The UTA Championship flashes under arena lights.

The UTA Women's Championship is clutched tight against Marie Van Claudio's chest.

The UTA Tag Team Championships are raised in triumph.

The Hardcore Championship rests over Eric Dane Jr.'s shoulder as he looks behind him with paranoid fury.

VOICEOVER: "Every title will be on the line."

The screen cuts to a darkened arena.

The ring is empty.

Then one spotlight hits the ropes.

Another hits the entrance aisle.

Another hits the championship display at ringside.

VOICEOVER: "Seventy participants."

The number fills the screen in massive metallic text.

70

VOICEOVER: "One match."

Clips begin to flash faster now.

Chris Ross standing bloodied, staring forward like violence has become a language only he speaks.

Samuel Scythe reaching toward an empty corner.

Susanita Ybanez standing defiant, promising to free Marie Van Claudio by any means necessary.

Amy Harrison watching from the shadows, expression sharp and calculating.

Valkyrie Knox gripping the UTA Women's Championship, her eyes cutting toward the title like old hunger has awakened.

Marie Van Claudio looking down at the championship in her hands, conflicted, trapped, and unwilling to let it go.

Maxx Mayhem screaming toward the camera with reckless joy.

Bobby Dean sitting in the Battle Chair, uncertain, staring toward the fight ahead.

Eric Dane Jr. clutching the Hardcore Championship, shouting that he still won.

VOICEOVER: "One opportunity."

The screen cuts to bodies being thrown over the top rope in rapid succession.

Hands cling to ropes.

Feet scrape the apron.

Someone crashes to the floor.

Another participant enters from the stage at full sprint.

The clock ticks down in the corner of the screen.

VOICEOVER: "And one rule above all others..."

The screen goes black.

Silence.

Then the words slam onto the screen.

**ALL OR NOTHING**

The music surges.

VOICEOVER: "At International Affair, the All or Nothing Rumble returns."

The ring fills with chaos.

Competitors brawl in every corner. Bodies press against the ropes. Alliances form and shatter in seconds. Champions fight beside challengers. Enemies become temporary partners. Partners become immediate threats.

VOICEOVER: "Seventy men and women enter with everything to gain..."

A shot of a title belt being lifted.

VOICEOVER: "And everything to lose."

A shot of a champion being dumped over the top rope.

A referee points to the floor.

The crowd explodes.

VOICEOVER: "Every championship in UTA is at stake. Every reign is vulnerable. Every name on the roster has a chance to change history."

The montage grows more intense.

Bianca Page smirks beside Ace Andrews.

Brittany Reid launches from the ropes, green bows flying behind her.

Kirsty McKinney folds an opponent into a cradle with cold precision.

Athena Storm raises one arm as blue light flashes behind her.

Emily Hightower stands bloodied and defiant.

Sol Azteca rises with her mask torn, skull paint smeared, refusing to break.

The Empire stands together.

Susanita stands alone.

The visual lingers there.

Then cuts to the championship gold again.

VOICEOVER: "For some, it is about gold."

Marie Van Claudio clutches the UTA Women's Championship.

VOICEOVER: "For some, it is about freedom."

Susanita Ybanez stares ahead, fire in her eyes.

VOICEOVER: "For some, it is about survival."

Eric Dane Jr. backs away, title in hand, eyes wide.

VOICEOVER: "And for some..."

Chris Ross wipes blood from his mouth.

VOICEOVER: "It is about leaving nothing standing."

The screen cuts back to the empty ring.

One title appears on the canvas.

Then another.

Then another.

Then another.

All of them rest under the spotlight.

VOICEOVER: "No champion is safe."

The ropes shake violently as unseen bodies collide with them.

VOICEOVER: "No challenger is out of reach."

The countdown clock appears.

Ten.

Nine.

Eight.

The crowd noise builds underneath it.

VOICEOVER: "No alliance can be trusted."

Seven.

Six.

Five.

VOICEOVER: "No legacy is protected."

Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

The buzzer sounds.

The screen explodes into the official event graphic.

UTA PRESENTS

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIR

FEATURING THE ALL OR NOTHING RUMBLE

70 PARTICIPANTS. ALL TITLES ON THE LINE.

VOICEOVER: "Next week, at International Affair, seventy competitors step into the unknown."

The music drops low.

The final shot is the ring from above, empty again, surrounded by darkness.

VOICEOVER: "Some will chase glory."

A flicker of championship gold.

VOICEOVER: "Some will chase revenge."

A flash of blood on canvas.

VOICEOVER: "Some will chase freedom."

A quick shot of Susanita staring toward Marie.

VOICEOVER: "But only one truth matters."

The screen goes black.

ALL OR NOTHING

VOICEOVER: "You either leave with everything..."

A final burst of roaring crowd noise.

VOICEOVER: "Or you leave with nothing."

The International Affair logo burns on the screen one final time before the broadcast fades back to the arena.

## **Chris Ross vs. Samuel Scythe**

Match

The camera returns from backstage to the inside of Palacio Vistalegre Madrid, where the crowd is still buzzing from what they just witnessed on the video screen.

Ace Andrews.

The equipment table.

The black rose.

The message could not have been clearer.

Chris Ross told Ace Andrews any time.

He meant it.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are set for Chris Ross versus Samuel Scythe, but this match has changed dramatically before either man has even made it to the ring."

MARK BRAVO: "Ace Andrews was supposed to be in Samuel Scythe's corner, John. He was supposed to be the brain, the strategist, the man giving Scythe direction. Instead, Chris Ross just put him through an equipment table and

left him unconscious with a black rose on his chest."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross has been colder, more calculated, and more disturbing in recent weeks. He is focused on regaining the UTA Championship, and Samuel Scythe has been standing in his way."

MARK BRAVO: "And now Ross has removed Ace Andrews from the equation. That means Samuel Scythe may be walking into this fight alone."

The camera cuts briefly to the entrance stage.

No movement yet.

Just anticipation.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Samuel Scythe calls himself The Reaper. Ace Andrews calls him his Reaper. But tonight, Chris Ross has made a statement before the bell that there may only be room for one Reaper on this road to International Affair."

MARK BRAVO: "And Ross did not make that statement with a promo. He made it with a wall, a table, and a flower. That is not mind games anymore. That is a crime scene with symbolism."

The arena lights begin to fall.

Not all at once.

One section at a time.

The bright Madrid crowd slowly disappears into darkness until only the ring remains under a cold white glow.

Then the video screen flickers.

Static.

A dark street.

Red, white, and blue police lights flash across wet pavement.

The image jumps again.

Alleys.

Concrete.

A cracked curb.

The suggestion of Harrisburg at night.

Then a Reaper symbol appears in stark white.

The opening of "Black Flame" by Bury Tomorrow begins crawling through the speakers.

The crowd rises.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Here comes The Reaper of Harrisburg."

MARK BRAVO: "And listen to this place. Madrid knows what kind of violence is coming."

The lights pulse in violent flashes of red, white, and blue, not celebratory, but harsh and emergency-like, as if the arena has become the scene of something already too late to prevent.

Smoke rolls across the stage.

For several long seconds, nobody appears.

The music builds.

The crowd noise grows.

Then Chris Ross steps through the curtain.

No chair tonight.

No rushing.

No wild tirade.

Just Ross.

Cold.

Heavy.

Unblinking.

He stands at the top of the ramp in his ring gear, shoulders squared, jaw set, eyes fixed on the ring like he can already see Samuel Scythe standing there. One hand flexes at his side. The other slowly opens and closes, as if still remembering the back of Ace Andrews' neck.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross, from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, six-foot-two, two hundred fifty-five pounds. Former UTA Champion. Former UTA Legacy Champion. One of the most violent men to ever step into a UTA ring."

MARK BRAVO: "And lately, he is not screaming. He is not losing control. That is the part that scares me. The old Chris Ross was rage with fists. This version feels like the rage learned patience."

Ross starts down the ramp.

Slow.

Measured.

Every step lands with purpose.

Fans near the barricade lean over and reach toward him, some cheering, some shouting, some just trying to get his attention. Ross does not look left. He does not look right. His eyes stay forward.

The screen behind him continues flashing Harrisburg street imagery, police lights cutting through darkness while "Black Flame" pounds harder through the building.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross has said before that a three-count does not mean anything to him if the other man leaves in an ambulance. That is the mindset Samuel Scythe is dealing with tonight."

MARK BRAVO: "And that is a terrifying mindset when the man across from him is Samuel Scythe, because Scythe does not fear pain either. He does not back down. He does not cower. He is built to hurt people."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "But without Ace Andrews at ringside, Samuel Scythe loses the direction, the strategy, the outside presence that has helped make him so dangerous."

MARK BRAVO: "Maybe. Or maybe taking Ace out just leaves Scythe with no leash. Ross may have removed the strategist, but he may also have unleashed the weapon."

Ross reaches ringside and stops at the bottom of the ramp.

He looks toward the ring.

Then toward the entrance stage behind him.

Not checking for Ace.

Not checking for Scythe.

Just letting the silence sit between the music's pulses.

The camera moves in close on his face.

There is no smile.

No satisfaction from what he did backstage.

No adrenaline spill.

Only the same fixed, grim emptiness.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There is no remorse on his face. No regret. Chris Ross did exactly what he set out to do."

MARK BRAVO: "That attack on Ace Andrews was not impulsive. That was preparation. Ross did not just want Samuel Scythe tonight. He wanted Samuel Scythe without the man whispering instructions in his ear."

Ross walks around the ring slowly, passing the commentary desk without turning his head.

MARK BRAVO: "I hate when he walks near us and does not blink."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "You and me both."

Ross reaches the steel steps, but he does not climb them.

Instead, he turns toward the apron, drops to one knee, and slides under the bottom rope.

He rolls into the ring and rises only halfway, staying low for a moment on one knee as the lights continue to pulse.

Then he stands.

The crowd roars.

Ross walks to the nearest corner and lowers himself into it, sitting with his back against the bottom turnbuckle, arms draped loosely over his knees.

He stares straight ahead.

Waiting.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That has become such an unsettling image. Chris Ross seated in the corner, waiting for the fight to come to him."

MARK BRAVO: "It feels like walking into a room and seeing someone already sitting in the dark. You do not know how long they have been there. You just know something bad is about to happen."

"Black Flame" continues to burn through the arena as Ross slowly tilts his head to the side, neck cracking once. He lifts one hand, rubs his thumb across his knuckles, then lets the hand fall again.

No theatrics.

No playing to the crowd.

No message held up to the camera.

He already delivered his message backstage.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross has arrived. Ace Andrews is not here. Samuel Scythe is next. And one week before International Affair, this collision could reshape everything around the UTA Championship picture."

MARK BRAVO: "Samuel Scythe wanted to be Ace Andrews' Reaper. Chris Ross just buried the manager before the match even started. Now we find out what happens when the monster has to walk alone."

The camera holds on Ross seated in the corner, red, white, and blue lights flickering across his face while the crowd buzzes around him.

Then the music begins to fade.

The darkness remains.

Ross does not move.

He only waits.

The last notes of "Black Flame" fade into the shadows of Palacio Vistalegre Madrid.

Chris Ross remains seated in the corner.

Still.

Silent.

Waiting.

The camera lingers on him for a moment longer, red, white, and blue light dying slowly across his face before the arena sinks into a deeper darkness.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross is in the ring, and now we await Samuel Scythe. But the situation has changed. Ace Andrews is not coming out with him."

MARK BRAVO: "And that matters, John. Samuel Scythe is destructive on his own, no doubt about it, but Ace Andrews has been the voice in his ear. The man who found him. The man who gave him direction. The man who turned that destruction into something pointed."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Moments ago, Chris Ross took Ace Andrews out backstage. We have not received a full medical update yet, but after being thrown through an equipment table, Ace Andrews is clearly in no condition to accompany Scythe to ringside."

MARK BRAVO: "So now the question becomes simple. What is Samuel Scythe without Ace Andrews standing beside him?"

The arena goes completely black.

For a moment, silence reigns.

No music.

No movement.

No voice.

Then the titantron flickers.

A grainy image appears: a scythe passing slowly over a field.

The blade cuts through tall grass in a slow, deliberate sweep.

The screen glitches.

For half a second, the words appear.

REAP WHAT YOU SOW

Then the image stutters.

The words distort.

The screen flickers again, as if the production cue itself has lost confidence.

The opening riff of "Useless Sacrifice" by Death Decline hits the speakers.

Normally, a single spotlight would drop cleanly onto the stage.

Tonight, it comes a beat late.

When it finally snaps on, Samuel Scythe is standing beneath it.

Hooded.

Head lowered.

But different.

His shoulders are not squared the same way. His hands flex at his sides. One fist opens and closes, opens and closes, as if looking for something that is not there. His head tilts slightly toward the empty space beside him.

The space where Ace Andrews should be.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There he is. Samuel Scythe. The Reaper. But Mark, you can see it immediately. Something is off."

MARK BRAVO: "He looks wrong. Not weak. Not afraid. Wrong. Like somebody pulled one wire out of a machine and now the whole thing is still running, but sparking."

Scythe does not move when the music hits its first heavy turn.

He remains beneath the spotlight, hood shadowing his face, breathing slowly.

The Madrid crowd boos, but the reaction is mixed with curiosity now. They expected The Reaper. They expected the weapon. They expected the monster.

They did not expect hesitation.

Scythe turns his head slightly again.

Still looking at the empty space beside him.

No Ace.

No command.

No hand on the shoulder.

No calm voice reminding him of the assignment.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Samuel Scythe was discovered by Ace Andrews at the Montecito Resort and Casino. Ace gave him this path. Ace gave him this identity in UTA. Ace calls him his Reaper."

MARK BRAVO: "And now Ross took Ace away from him before the fight. That is not just removing a manager. That is ripping out the control panel."

Inside the ring, Chris Ross slowly lifts his head from the corner.

He watches Scythe from beneath lowered brows.

No surprise.

No reaction.

Almost like he wanted exactly this.

Scythe finally starts walking.

But it is not the usual steady, dead-eyed march.

His first step is heavy.

The second comes too quickly.

The third slows again.

His rhythm is broken.

He moves down the ramp like a storm trying to remember which direction it was pointed.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Samuel Scythe is still dangerous. Make no mistake about that. Six-foot-three, two hundred fifty pounds. Pure brute force. Exploder suplexes, spinebusters, running shoulder blocks, the Scythe Slam, Reaper's Blade, Elysian Gift. But this is not the controlled presence we are used to seeing."

MARK BRAVO: "Ace always gave him the final instruction. Tonight, there is no instruction. Just anger. And against Chris Ross, anger is fuel and a liability at the same time."

Scythe reaches the middle of the ramp and suddenly stops.

He turns his head toward the side of the stage, toward the backstage area.

The crowd noise swells.

For a second, it looks like he might turn around and go back for Ace Andrews.

Then Ross stands in the ring.

The simple movement draws Scythe's attention like a hook through the jaw.

Ross walks out of the corner and stands near the ropes, staring down the ramp.

Scythe freezes.

Ross says nothing.

He does not need to.

Scythe's hands curl into fists.

MARK BRAVO: "There it is. That is the target."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross took Ace out, and now Scythe has to decide whether to stay focused on the match or lose himself trying to punish Ross for it."

Scythe continues forward, faster now.

The hood shifts over his face with each step, but the camera catches his mouth beneath it. Tight. Tense. Not expressionless anymore.

Distraught is not fear.

Not for Samuel Scythe.

Distraught is violence looking for the closest exit.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There is no Ace Andrews at ringside. No one walking beside him. No one calming him down. No one telling him when to wait, when to strike, when to pull back."

MARK BRAVO: "And I do not think Samuel Scythe wants to pull back tonight."

Scythe reaches the bottom of the ramp and stops again, this time at ringside.

His eyes lift toward the ring from beneath the hood.

Ross is still standing there.

The two men stare at each other.

One Reaper in the ring.

One Reaper at the floor.

The crowd gets louder.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This has become deeply personal. Samuel Scythe aligned with Ace Andrews at Victorious. Ross has not forgotten. Ross does not forget anything."

MARK BRAVO: "Ross does not forget. He files it away, waits, and then one day you find out your receipt has teeth."

Scythe turns toward the steel steps, then stops halfway.

He looks again toward the empty ringside corner.

The camera frames it deliberately.

No Ace Andrews.

No polished suit.

No Corporate Cutthroat giving last-second instructions.

Just empty floor.

Scythe's jaw tightens.

He grabs the top of the steel steps with both hands.

For one second, it looks like he might rip them loose.

Instead, he climbs.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe is trying to hold himself together, but there is visible frustration there."

MARK BRAVO: "I do not know if 'hold himself together' is the right phrase. That man looks like a building with all the doors locked and a fire inside."

Scythe steps onto the apron.

He pauses, one hand on the top rope.

Ross steps backward from the ropes, giving him room to enter.

Not out of respect.

Out of invitation.

Scythe steps through the ropes.

The second both feet hit the canvas, Ross takes one step forward.

The referee immediately moves between them.

REFEREE: "Back up! Back up! Not yet!"

Scythe ignores him at first, eyes locked on Ross.

Ross says nothing.

Scythe slowly reaches up and pulls the hood back.

The crowd boos as his face comes fully into view.

But there is no clean cut-throat gesture this time.

No ritual.

No perfect presentation.

Scythe's eyes are red with anger. His breathing is heavier. His gaze keeps snapping from Ross to the empty ringside area and back again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Normally, this is where Samuel Scythe makes that cut-throat gesture and backs into the corner. Tonight, he cannot take his eyes off Chris Ross."

MARK BRAVO: "Because Chris Ross did not just attack Ace. He proved he could get to him whenever he wanted. That is the kind of thing that messes with a monster's head."

Scythe finally lifts one hand across his throat.

He starts the cut-throat gesture.

Then stops halfway.

His hand lowers.

His fist tightens.

He points at Ross instead.

SAMUEL SCYTHE: "You reap what you sow."

Ross's expression does not change.

He takes one slow step closer.

CHRIS ROSS: "Already did."

The crowd erupts.

Scythe surges forward, but the referee throws himself between them again, both hands up, trying to keep the match from starting before the bell.

REFEREE: "Corner! Both of you! Corner!"

Ross backs away first, not because he is intimidated, but because he has already gotten the reaction he wanted. He returns to his corner and rests both hands on the top rope.

Scythe takes longer.

He stands near center ring, chest rising and falling, staring at Ross with open hatred.

Then, slowly, he backs into his own corner.

The camera cuts to ringside one more time.

The space beside Scythe's corner remains empty.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That empty corner tells the story. Ace Andrews is not here. Samuel Scythe is alone."

MARK BRAVO: "And Chris Ross is responsible for that. This may have started as a match, but it already feels like a punishment."

"Useless Sacrifice" fades beneath the rising noise of the Madrid crowd.

Ross leans forward in his corner, eyes cold, hands gripping the top rope.

Scythe stands opposite him, no hood now, no manager, no calm instruction from the floor. Just rage, grief, and the weight of what Ross did to the man who gave him direction.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross versus Samuel Scythe. One week before International Affair. Ace Andrews has been taken out of the equation. And now, we are moments away from finding out whether Samuel Scythe can survive The Reaper of Harrisburg alone."

MARK BRAVO: "Survive may be the right word for both men, John."

The referee steps toward the center of the ring, looking from Ross to Scythe, already aware that control may be an illusion.

The bell is next.

The referee stands between Chris Ross and Samuel Scythe, one arm extended toward each man, but the distance already feels pointless.

Ross leans forward from his corner, both hands on the top rope, eyes locked on Scythe.

Scythe stands across from him, chest rising and falling harder than normal, his gaze flicking once toward the empty space outside his corner.

No Ace Andrews.

No voice in his ear.

No direction.

Just Ross.

The man who took Ace out.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "You can feel the tension in this building. Chris Ross and Samuel Scythe are not looking at this like competition. This is personal. This is violent. This is about punishment."

MARK BRAVO: "Samuel Scythe is usually scary because he is controlled destruction. Tonight? There is no control. Ace Andrews is gone, and Ross made sure of it."

The referee glances from Ross to Scythe one more time.

Then he calls for the bell.

DING DING DING!

Scythe explodes out of the corner.

Ross meets him in the center.

No lockup.

No feeling-out process.

No wrist control.

Scythe throws the first shot, a clubbing right hand that smashes across the side of Ross's head. Ross's neck snaps to

the side, but his feet do not move.

Ross turns back slowly.

Then he fires a forearm into Scythe's jaw.

Scythe absorbs it and answers with another heavy right.

Ross fires back.

Forearm.

Right hand.

Forearm.

Right hand.

The crowd rises as both men stand in the middle of the ring and trade bombs like neither one understands retreat as a concept.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross and Scythe are just unloading on each other!"

MARK BRAVO: "This is not wrestling, John. This is two wrecking balls arguing over who gets to knock the building down."

Scythe lands a shot to the ribs, then a second across Ross's neck. Ross stumbles half a step, and Scythe immediately grabs him by the back of the head and drives a knee into his stomach.

Ross folds slightly.

Scythe clubs him across the spine.

Again.

Again.

Ross drops to one knee.

Scythe grabs him by the head and roars down into his face.

SAMUEL SCYTHER: "You reap what you sow!"

Ross looks up from one knee.

There is a thin smile there.

Not joy.

Something worse.

CHRIS ROSS: "Then come collect."

Ross drives a headbutt into Scythe's stomach.

Scythe doubles over, and Ross surges upward, catching him around the waist and driving him backward into the corner.

The turnbuckles shake from the impact.

Ross buries his shoulder into Scythe's midsection.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

The referee rushes in, trying to force a break.

REFEREE: "Ross! Out of the corner!"

Ross ignores him and grabs Scythe by the throat with one hand, pressing his forearm under Scythe's jaw while driving short, nasty punches into the body with the other.

REFEREE: "One! Two! Three! Four!"

Ross breaks at four by stepping back only long enough to create space.

Then he charges forward and smashes into Scythe with a running shoulder of his own.

Scythe rocks backward into the buckles but does not go down.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross is taking the fight right to Scythe, and Scythe is absorbing punishment that would drop almost anyone else."

MARK BRAVO: "These are not normal men. These are two people built like consequences."

Ross grabs Scythe by the wrist and tries to whip him across the ring.

Scythe reverses with raw power, sending Ross instead.

Ross hits the opposite corner back-first.

Scythe charges.

Running shoulder block.

The impact nearly folds Ross through the turnbuckles.

The crowd groans.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe with that running shoulder block! Ross took all of it!"

MARK BRAVO: "That looked like somebody drove a truck into a brick wall, and I am not sure which one of them was the truck."

Ross staggers out of the corner.

Scythe grabs him around the waist, turns his hips, and launches him with an exploder suplex.

Ross crashes hard onto the canvas and rolls toward the ropes, one hand immediately clutching at his shoulder.

Scythe rises fast, breathing harder now, eyes wide with anger. He does not cover. He does not even look toward the referee.

He stalks Ross.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Samuel Scythe could have gone for a cover there, but he is not interested in winning yet."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the Ace Andrews problem. Ace would be screaming at him to cover. Ace would be telling him to stay efficient. Ace is gone. Scythe wants pain."

Ross pulls himself up with the ropes.

Scythe grabs him from behind and clubs him across the back of the neck.

Ross drops to one knee again.

Scythe grabs him by the face and pulls him upright, forcing Ross to look at him.

SAMUEL SCYTHER: "Where is he?"

Ross spits to the side, then turns back toward him.

CHRIS ROSS: "Sleeping."

Scythe snaps.

He drives a European uppercut into Ross's jaw.

Ross staggers into the ropes, and Scythe hits him again.

Another uppercut.

Another.

Ross's lip splits under the pressure, a thin line of blood appearing at the corner of his mouth.

The crowd reacts as Ross slowly brings his thumb to the blood.

He looks at it.

Then at Scythe.

CHRIS ROSS: "There he is."

Ross lunges forward and drives a forearm into Scythe's face.

Scythe fires back with one of his own.

Ross answers with another.

This time, Scythe stumbles.

Ross steps in and headbutts him square in the bridge of the nose.

Scythe staggers backward, blinking hard.

Ross grabs him by the side of the head and bites him across the forehead.

The crowd erupts in shock and noise.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross is biting Samuel Scythe! Come on!"

MARK BRAVO: "You said this was a fight, John. Fights get ugly when Chris Ross is involved!"

The referee grabs Ross by the shoulder and tries to pull him off.

REFEREE: "Ross! Get off him! Get off!"

Ross releases and turns toward the referee just long enough to make him back away.

Scythe touches his forehead.

There is a small smear of blood on his fingers.

His eyes change.

Whatever instability was there before becomes something even more dangerous.

He lunges.

Ross ducks the first wild swing, but Scythe catches him with the second, a clubbing forearm that sends Ross through the ropes and to the floor.

Ross lands hard near the announce desk.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross to the outside!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Scythe is coming after him!"

Scythe steps over the middle rope and drops to the floor with no hesitation. The referee begins warning both men, but neither listens.

Ross pushes up near the barricade.

Scythe grabs him by the back of the head and throws him face-first into the announce table.

The table rattles.

Phillips and Bravo both jerk backward.

MARK BRAVO: "Hey! We are working here!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe just bounced Ross off our table!"

Scythe grabs Ross again and tries to send him into the steel steps, but Ross plants a boot, reverses the momentum, and hurls Scythe shoulder-first into the steps instead.

The steel explodes apart on impact, the top half flying loose as Scythe crashes into them with a violent metallic crack.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe into the steps! Ross turned it around!"

MARK BRAVO: "And look at Ross. He is not looking for a count-out. He is not looking for a reset. He is looking for damage."

Ross grabs the loose upper half of the steel steps.

The referee shouts from the ring.

REFEREE: "Ross! Do not do it!"

Ross does not even look at him.

Scythe pushes up to his knees.

Ross raises the steps.

Scythe surges forward at the last second and drives his shoulder into Ross's midsection.

The steps fall from Ross's hands and crash to the floor.

Both men slam into the barricade, the front row recoiling as security moves closer.

Scythe drives short shoulder thrusts into Ross against the barricade.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

Ross snarls and slams a forearm down across Scythe's back.

Scythe answers by grabbing Ross around the waist and powering him up.

For one second, it looks like an overhead suplex on the floor.

Ross blocks by grabbing the barricade.

Scythe tries again.

Ross headbutts him.

Then again.

Then Ross grabs Scythe by the back of the neck and drives him face-first into the top of the barricade.

Scythe staggers away, blood now more visible near his brow.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Both men are already busted up, and this match has barely started!"

MARK BRAVO: "This was never going to be about pacing. This was about who could turn the other man into wreckage first."

The referee leans through the ropes, shouting at both men to bring it back inside.

Ross grabs Scythe and rolls him under the bottom rope.

Then Ross looks down.

At the loose steel steps.

At the barricade.

At the announce table.

Then back to Scythe inside the ring.

For a moment, it seems like Ross is deciding how much of the arena he wants to use as evidence.

MARK BRAVO: "I do not like that look."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross thinking about more punishment here."

Ross slides into the ring.

Scythe is already rising.

Ross charges.

Scythe catches him.

Spinebuster.

The ring shakes as Ross is driven hard into the canvas.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Spinebuster by Scythe! Ross got planted!"

Scythe stays over him for a second, both hands pressed into Ross's chest, breathing hard. The referee drops down, thinking it is a cover.

REFEREE: "One!"

Scythe rises before two.

The referee looks up at him in disbelief.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe broke his own cover!"

MARK BRAVO: "He does not want the pin. He wants Ross to know what happens when he touches Ace Andrews."

Scythe grabs Ross by the throat and pulls him halfway up.

SAMUEL SCYTHER: "You took him from me."

Ross coughs, blood on his lip, eyes still cold.

CHRIS ROSS: "No."

Ross suddenly grabs Scythe's wrist with both hands.

CHRIS ROSS: "I showed you what happens when you need him."

Ross drives a knee into Scythe's ribs.

Then another.

Scythe loosens his grip.

Ross hooks him around the waist.

Belly-to-belly suplex.

Scythe lands hard and rolls through to his stomach, but Ross is already crawling after him.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Belly-to-belly by Ross! The power of Chris Ross on display!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is the scary thing. Scythe is huge, but Ross can throw big men. He has built a career out of turning strong people into crash test footage."

Ross mounts Scythe and starts hammering down with forearms.

One after another.

Heavy.

Ugly.

Directly into the side of the head and jaw.

Scythe covers, then suddenly bucks his hips and throws Ross off to the side.

Both men scramble to their knees.

They meet there, throwing punches from the mat.

Ross lands one.

Scythe lands one.

Ross lands two in a row.

Scythe roars and drives a headbutt into Ross's face.

Ross drops backward, then immediately sits up.

Blood now runs from his nose.

He wipes it away with the back of his hand.

Scythe rises to his feet, blood on his brow, chest heaving.

Ross rises too.

The Madrid crowd is fully standing now.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Neither man is staying down!"

MARK BRAVO: "This is a collision between two men who think pain is just paperwork."

Scythe charges.

Ross charges too.

They meet in the center with simultaneous lariats.

Both men stagger.

Neither falls.

Scythe hits the ropes and comes back with another running shoulder block.

Ross stumbles backward but stays standing.

Ross hits the ropes now and returns with a brutal shoulder of his own.

Scythe staggers.

Still standing.

Ross spits blood onto the canvas.

CHRIS ROSS: "Come on."

Scythe's jaw tightens.

SAMUEL SCYTHER: "You wanted blood."

Scythe runs again.

Ross steps in this time and catches him mid-charge, twisting with every bit of strength he has.

Overhead belly-to-belly suplex.

Scythe is thrown across the ring and lands hard near the corner.

The arena erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross throws Scythe! He threw him across the ring!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is two hundred fifty pounds of Reaper getting mailed priority across Madrid!"

Ross rises slowly, rolling his neck, blood smeared across his mouth and nose. Scythe pulls himself up in the corner, blood streaking down from his brow now, eyes still fixed on Ross.

The referee looks between them, already sweating, already realizing this match is not going to be controlled.

Ross starts forward.

Scythe steps out of the corner.

Both men are hurt.

Both men are bleeding.

Neither man looks close to finished.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This fight is just getting started."

MARK BRAVO: "And I do not think either one of them is interested in surviving clean."

Chris Ross starts forward from one side of the ring.

Samuel Scythe steps out from the corner.

Blood runs from Scythe's brow, cutting a dark line down the side of his face. Ross has blood smeared across his mouth and nose, his breathing heavy, his shoulders rolling like every joint in his body is being forced to accept more violence than it was built for.

Neither man slows down.

They collide near center ring again.

Scythe drives a knee into Ross's midsection.

Ross answers with a forearm to the jaw.

Scythe fires a European uppercut that snaps Ross's head back.

Ross steps forward anyway and lands a short headbutt to the bridge of Scythe's nose.

Scythe staggers, spits blood to the mat, then lunges with both hands around Ross's throat.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Samuel Scythe just choking Ross in the center of the ring!"

MARK BRAVO: "There is nothing technical about this. He is not trying to set up a hold. He is trying to squeeze the life out of him."

The referee moves in immediately, shouting for the break.

REFEREE: "Scythe! Open the hands! Open the hands!"

Scythe ignores him, forcing Ross backward one step at a time until Ross's back hits the ropes.

Ross grabs the top rope with one hand.

With the other, he rakes his forearm across Scythe's bloodied brow.

Scythe roars and releases, both hands going briefly to his face.

Ross grabs Scythe by the back of the head and pulls him throat-first across the top rope, hanging him there with one hand while hammering short punches into his ribs with the other.

REFEREE: "Ross! Break! Break it!"

CHRIS ROSS: "Make me."

The referee starts counting.

REFEREE: "One! Two! Three! Four!"

Ross releases at four and immediately blasts Scythe with a clubbing shot to the back of the neck that sends him stumbling sideways.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross is walking right up to the line of disqualification and daring the official to stop him."

MARK BRAVO: "Ross does not care about the line. Ross thinks the line is just where polite people stop getting results."

Scythe turns back, fury in his eyes.

Ross charges.

Scythe catches him with a sudden powerslam, driving him flat into the mat with a heavy thud.

The crowd groans from the impact.

Scythe stays on his knees beside Ross, chest heaving.

He could cover.

He does not.

Instead, he grabs Ross by the hair and drags him up to a seated position.

SAMUEL SCYTHER: "Where is Ace?"

Ross laughs under his breath, blood on his teeth.

CHRIS ROSS: "Ask the rose."

Scythe snaps.

He clubs Ross across the back of the head.

Then again.

Then he pulls Ross up and hurls him shoulder-first through the ropes and into the ring post.

Ross's shoulder cracks against the steel with a sickening sound.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross shoulder-first into the post! Scythe is targeting that arm now!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was not strategy from Ace Andrews. That was rage finding a body part."

Ross drops to the apron and rolls to the floor, clutching his shoulder. Scythe follows immediately, stepping through the ropes and dropping down beside him.

The referee leans out and starts yelling again, but Scythe is already dragging Ross upright.

He grips Ross around the waist and drives him spine-first into the barricade.

The barricade shifts under the impact. Fans in the front row jerk backward as security braces the rail.

Scythe pulls Ross away, then drives him into it again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe is just battering Chris Ross against that barricade!"

MARK BRAVO: "Ace Andrews is gone, but whatever he built in Samuel Scythe is still there. It is just uglier without supervision."

Scythe pulls Ross away a third time.

This time Ross clamps both hands around Scythe's head and bites into the wound above his eyebrow again.

Scythe howls and staggers backward.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross biting him again! That is disgusting!"

MARK BRAVO: "Disgusting, yes. Effective, also yes. Ross is not here to win a sportsmanship award."

Ross releases and immediately grabs Scythe by the back of the neck.

He runs him forward and launches him face-first into the edge of the announce table.

The table jumps under Scythe's weight.

John Phillips and Mark Bravo both push backward from the desk.

MARK BRAVO: "Again with the desk!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross returns the favor, and Samuel Scythe may be in trouble here!"

Ross does not stop.

He grabs Scythe around the waist from behind, muscles him backward, and launches him with a release German suplex on the floor.

Scythe lands hard on the thin protective mats, the back of his shoulders and head bouncing off the floor.

The crowd erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "German suplex on the outside! Ross just dumped Scythe on the floor!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is what Ross does. He throws big men like he is mad gravity has not worked fast enough."

Ross rolls onto one knee, breathing hard. Blood drips from his nose onto the floor. Scythe lies on his back, staring upward, eyes blinking as the arena noise swells around him.

The referee has had enough.

He slides out to the floor and gets directly in Ross's face.

REFEREE: "Get it back in the ring! Now!"

Ross slowly turns his head toward him.

The referee immediately takes half a step back.

MARK BRAVO: "That referee just remembered he has loved ones."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The official trying to maintain some kind of control, but I do not know how realistic that is anymore."

Ross grabs Scythe by the hood of his entrance vest, even though the hood is down now, and drags him toward the ring. He rolls him under the bottom rope, then slides in after him.

Scythe crawls toward the center.

Ross stalks behind him.

He grabs Scythe around the waist again, trying to pull him up for another suplex.

Scythe throws a backward elbow.

It catches Ross in the jaw.

Ross does not let go.

Scythe throws another elbow.

Ross's grip loosens.

Scythe turns inside, hooks Ross around the waist, and powers him up.

Scythe Slam.

The running powerslam drives Ross into the canvas with brutal force.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe Slam! Samuel Scythe plants Ross!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is two hundred fifty pounds of rage throwing two hundred fifty-five pounds of misery into the mat!"

Scythe covers this time, hooking one leg with a violent grip.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Ross kicks out.

Not cleanly.

Not easily.

But enough.

Scythe sits up, blood running down his face, eyes wide with disbelief and anger.

SAMUEL SCYTHE: "No."

Ross rolls onto his side, coughing, one hand pressed to his ribs.

CHRIS ROSS: "You hit softer without him."

The words land like gasoline.

Scythe's face twists.

He grabs Ross by the head and starts raining down forearms, one after another, not caring where they land as long as they land hard.

The referee tries to wedge himself in.

REFEREE: "Scythe! Open the fists! Open the fists!"

Scythe shoves him aside without thinking.

The referee stumbles backward and nearly falls.

The crowd reacts loudly.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe just shoved the official!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is what I was afraid of. Ace is not here to pull him back, and Scythe is losing the thread."

Scythe realizes what he has done only after the referee regains his balance and points at him with warning in his eyes.

REFEREE: "You touch me again, and I will call it!"

Scythe stands over Ross, chest heaving, fists clenched, caught between the official and the urge to tear Ross apart.

Ross uses the moment to sit up slowly.

Blood drips from his nose.

His shoulder hangs lower from the post shot.

But he is smiling again.

CHRIS ROSS: "That's it."

Scythe turns back toward him.

CHRIS ROSS: "Come apart."

Scythe charges.

Ross pulls himself up just enough to catch Scythe coming in.

Spinebuster.

Ross drives Scythe hard into the mat, then immediately mounts him and starts hammering away with forearm shots.

The arena erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Spinebuster by Ross! Mounted forearms! Ross is unloading!"

MARK BRAVO: "Ross baited him. He wanted Scythe emotional, reckless, charging straight in, and Scythe gave him exactly that!"

Ross rains down forearms across Scythe's head and face.

Scythe covers up, then forces one arm between them and shoves Ross back.

Ross immediately comes forward again.

Scythe catches him around the throat from the mat.

Ross grabs Scythe's wrist and drives his forehead into Scythe's nose.

Again.

Again.

The blood on Scythe's face thickens.

Ross finally rises, dragging Scythe up by the head.

He hooks him.

Running Muscle Buster setup.

The crowd surges.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross may be looking for the Running Muscle Buster!"

MARK BRAVO: "If he hits this, Scythe's night may be done!"

Ross tries to muscle Scythe into position, but his damaged shoulder slows the lift.

Scythe elbows free.

One shot to the shoulder.

Another.

Ross releases with a grunt.

Scythe hits the ropes.

Reaper's Blade.

The spear cuts Ross in half.

The ring shakes from the impact.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Reaper's Blade! Reaper's Blade by Scythe!"

MARK BRAVO: "Ross got folded! He got folded in half!"

Scythe stays on top of him, hooking both legs this time, almost crushing Ross under his weight.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Ross kicks out again.

The crowd explodes.

Scythe rises onto his knees, staring at Ross like the kickout is an insult to the universe.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross kicked out of Reaper's Blade!"

MARK BRAVO: "Samuel Scythe hit him with the spear, all of it, and Chris Ross is still breathing."

Scythe looks toward his corner again.

Empty.

No Ace.

No instruction.

No answer.

Scythe's hands go to his head for half a second, fingers digging into his own skull as if trying to force the next command into existence.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Look at Scythe. He is searching for Ace Andrews. He is searching for direction."

MARK BRAVO: "That hesitation is the wound Ross opened before the match started."

Ross rolls onto his stomach, dragging himself toward the ropes.

Scythe finally snaps back to him and grabs Ross by the ankle, pulling him toward center ring.

Ross turns on his back and kicks Scythe in the face.

Scythe stumbles backward.

Ross pulls himself up with the ropes.

Scythe charges again.

Ross ducks low and sends Scythe over the top rope.

Scythe crashes to the floor hard, landing near the bottom of the ramp.

Ross drops to one knee in the ring, breathing through blood, pain, and something that looks almost like satisfaction.

CHRIS ROSS: "Where's your handler now?"

Scythe starts pushing up on the outside, one hand on the floor, blood dripping from his brow onto the ringside mats.

Ross steps through the ropes and drops to the floor.

The referee follows them with his eyes, pleading uselessly from inside the ring.

REFEREE: "Back inside! Both of you!"

Neither man listens.

Ross grabs Scythe by the head.

Scythe suddenly scoops Ross up from nowhere.

He charges.

Scythe Slam on the floor.

Ross's back hits the mats with a horrible thud.

Both men stay down.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe Slam on the floor! Ross may be broken in half!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Scythe collapsed too. He used everything he had left just to hit that."

The camera cuts close.

Ross lies on his side near the ramp, eyes open but unfocused, one hand gripping at the floor.

Scythe lies beside him, blood running down his face, one arm stretched toward the empty aisle as if reaching for someone who is not there.

The Madrid crowd pounds on the barricades.

The referee finally begins counting from the ring, not because he thinks either man cares, but because he has to try.

REFEREE: "One!"

Neither man moves.

REFEREE: "Two!"

Ross's fingers flex against the floor.

Scythe rolls slowly toward his stomach.

REFEREE: "Three!"

The camera holds on both men, wrecked and bleeding near the bottom of the ramp, as the fight threatens to end not with a pinfall, but with both beasts refusing to rise before the count.

REFEREE: "Four!"

Chris Ross lies near the bottom of the ramp, one arm across his ribs, blood smeared across his mouth and nose. A few feet away, Samuel Scythe rolls onto his stomach, his forehead open now, blood dripping down onto the floor beneath him.

Neither man looks human in this moment.

They look like wreckage trying to remember how to stand.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Both men are down on the outside after that Scythe Slam to the floor, and I do not know how much either one has left."

MARK BRAVO: "This has not been a match. This has been two beasts trying to prove the other one can bleed enough to stay down."

REFEREE: "Five!"

Scythe pushes up to one knee first.

His hand reaches instinctively toward his corner.

Toward where Ace Andrews should be.

There is no Ace.

Only the crowd.

Only the noise.

Only Ross beginning to move.

REFEREE: "Six!"

Scythe looks toward the stage, jaw trembling with rage, then turns back toward Ross. He grabs Ross by the back of the head and hauls him up with both hands, dragging him toward the apron.

Ross suddenly throws a short punch to the ribs.

Scythe absorbs it.

Ross throws another.

Scythe shoves him hard into the apron, then rolls him under the bottom rope.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe gets Ross back into the ring, and that breaks the count."

MARK BRAVO: "That may be the first smart thing Scythe has done in five minutes, and I am not convinced he meant to do it. I think he just wants Ross where he can keep hitting him."

Scythe slides in after him, but slower than before. The damage is building. His shoulder is heavy. His brow is a mess. His breathing is uneven.

Ross crawls toward the ropes, dragging one leg behind him for a moment before forcing it underneath himself.

Scythe grabs Ross around the waist from behind.

Ross immediately clamps both hands on the top rope.

Scythe tries to pull him free.

Ross holds on.

Scythe pulls harder.

Ross finally releases the rope on purpose, snapping backward into Scythe and driving the back of his skull into Scythe's face.

Scythe staggers away, hands going to his nose and brow.

Ross turns.

360 discus rotating elbow.

The 10-71 catches Scythe across the side of the head.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The 10-71! Ross caught him with that discus elbow!"

MARK BRAVO: "That landed like a car door in a bar fight!"

Scythe drops to one knee.

Ross does not cover.

Instead, he grabs Scythe by the head and pulls him back up.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross could try to cover here, but he is not done."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the problem with Chris Ross. Winning is not always the point. Sometimes winning is just paperwork after the damage is done."

Ross hooks Scythe around the waist.

He lifts.

German suplex.

Scythe lands hard on the back of his shoulders.

Ross keeps the grip.

He rolls through.

Another German suplex.

The crowd roars as Scythe crashes down again, his massive frame bouncing off the canvas.

Ross keeps the grip one more time, dragging Scythe up with raw, ugly effort.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross is trying for a third! He is trying to suplex Samuel Scythe again!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is two hundred fifty pounds of dead weight and hatred. This is insane."

Ross tries to lift.

Scythe blocks.

Ross tries again.

Scythe drives an elbow backward into Ross's jaw.

Ross's grip breaks.

Scythe spins and drives a European uppercut into Ross.

Ross stumbles backward.

Scythe charges.

Reaper's Blade.

Ross sidesteps at the last possible second.

Scythe crashes shoulder-first into the corner post through the turnbuckles.

The impact echoes through the arena.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Nobody home! Scythe hit the post!"

MARK BRAVO: "Ross moved, and Scythe just drove himself into steel because there is nobody here to tell him when to stop charging!"

Scythe staggers backward out of the corner, one arm hanging lower now, his shoulder clearly damaged from the collision.

Ross steps in behind him.

He grabs Scythe by the back of the neck.

Side Walk Smash.

Ross drives Scythe face-first into the canvas with brutal force.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Side Walk Smash! Ross planted Scythe face-first!"

MARK BRAVO: "And that is the setup, John. We know what comes after this."

Ross rises slowly, standing over Scythe's body. Blood drips from Ross's nose onto the canvas beside Scythe's head.

The crowd begins to swell.

They know.

Ross reaches down and grabs Scythe by the head, pulling him into position.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross may be looking for Welcome To Harrisburg."

MARK BRAVO: "Paul Burchill-style curb stomp. If he hits this, Scythe may be done."

Ross steps over Scythe.

He hooks the arms.

For one second, Scythe looks finished.

Then Scythe surges upward with a roar, powering out before Ross can complete the stomp. He grabs Ross around the waist and drives him backward into the corner.

Ross hits hard.

Scythe steps back.

Then charges.

Running shoulder block.

Ross absorbs the full impact in the corner and collapses to a seated position.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe escapes! Running shoulder block in the corner!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was pure survival. That was not technique. That was a wounded animal throwing everything forward."

Scythe backs away from the corner, breathing like a machine running too hot. His bloodied face turns slowly toward the empty ringside floor again.

No Ace.

Scythe's expression twists.

He looks down at Ross seated in the corner.

SAMUEL SCYTHER: "You took him."

Ross lifts his head, blood on his teeth.

CHRIS ROSS: "You still need him."

Scythe grabs the top rope with both hands and starts stomping Ross in the corner.

Boot after boot after boot.

The referee dives in, trying to pull him away.

REFEREE: "Scythe! Back out! Back out now!"

Scythe shoves the referee away again, harder this time.

The referee stumbles backward into the ropes.

The crowd gasps.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That is the second time Scythe has put hands on the official!"

MARK BRAVO: "He is losing it. Scythe is completely losing it without Ace Andrews!"

The referee points directly at Scythe, furious now.

REFEREE: "One more time and you are done! I mean it!"

Scythe turns toward the referee, eyes wild, chest heaving.

For one terrifying second, it looks like he might go after him.

Ross uses that second.

From the corner, Ross reaches out, grabs Scythe by the waistband and arm, and yanks him face-first into the middle turnbuckle.

Scythe's head snaps off the padding.

Ross pulls himself up behind him.

He hooks Scythe around the waist.

Release German suplex.

Scythe lands on the back of his neck and rolls through to his knees, dazed but somehow still upright.

Ross charges off the ropes.

25 To Life.

The cyclone kick catches Scythe flush across the face.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "25 To Life! Ross caught Scythe clean!"

MARK BRAVO: "That should knock out a horse, and Scythe is still trying to move!"

Scythe collapses backward onto the mat.

Ross drops into the cover, hooking the far leg.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Scythe kicks out.

The crowd erupts.

Ross rolls to a seated position, staring down at Scythe.

Not shocked.

Not frustrated.

Almost approving.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Samuel Scythe kicks out of 25 To Life!"

MARK BRAVO: "These two are refusing to stay dead. That is the only way to say it."

Ross pushes to his feet, slow and heavy. He reaches down for Scythe, but Scythe suddenly clamps one hand around Ross's throat again from the mat.

Ross tries to pry the hand loose.

Scythe rises with him.

Both men come up together, Scythe's hand still at Ross's throat, Ross's hands still fighting the grip.

Scythe drives a knee into Ross's midsection.

Then another.

Then he muscles Ross up into a stalling front vertical position.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sowing The Fields! Scythe has Ross up!"

MARK BRAVO: "Look at the strength! Look at the strength after everything he has taken!"

Scythe holds Ross there.

One second.

Two.

Three.

His damaged shoulder trembles.

Ross begins hammering knees downward into Scythe's head.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

Scythe loses balance and drops Ross forward instead of completing the suplex.

Ross lands on his feet badly but stays upright.

Scythe turns.

12 Gauge.

The ripcord headbutt cracks into Scythe's face.

Both men collapse.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "12 Gauge! The ripcord headbutt! Both men are down!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was skull on skull, and there is no winner in that except maybe the nearest trauma unit."

Ross lies flat on his back.

Scythe lies beside him.

Blood marks the canvas around both of them.

The referee drops to one knee, checking first Ross, then Scythe. Both men are breathing. Both men are stirring.

Neither man should be.

The crowd in Madrid begins clapping.

Slow at first.

Then louder.

Then the chant begins.

"UTA! UTA! UTA!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This crowd knows they are watching a war."

MARK BRAVO: "Not a classic. Not a clinic. A war. There is nothing pretty here. There is blood, there is anger, and there are two men who have completely forgotten there is supposed to be a way to win."

Ross turns slowly onto his stomach.

Scythe does the same.

They begin crawling toward each other.

Not away.

Toward.

The referee watches, almost helpless.

Ross reaches out and grabs Scythe by the wrist.

Scythe grabs Ross by the wrist.

They pull themselves closer.

Forehead to forehead.

Both men on their knees.

Blood on both faces.

Breathing hard into the same space.

SAMUEL SCYTHER: "I will end you."

Ross's eyes lift.

CHRIS ROSS: "Get in line."

They start throwing again from their knees.

Ross lands a forearm.

Scythe lands one back.

Ross lands another.

Scythe answers with a headbutt.

Ross reels, then comes back with a headbutt of his own.

Both men slump against each other for a second, forehead to shoulder, too damaged to separate and too stubborn to fall.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "How much more can either man take?"

MARK BRAVO: "The wrong question is how much can they take. The right question is how much will they ignore?"

Scythe suddenly rises first and drags Ross with him.

He hooks Ross around the waist and tries to lift for the Elysian Gift.

Ross blocks with dead weight.

Scythe tries again.

Ross headbutts him.

Scythe staggers.

Ross grabs the back of Scythe's neck.

The crowd rises.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross has him!"

Scythe swings wildly.

Ross ducks under.

Ross hooks both arms.

He tries again for Welcome To Harrisburg.

Scythe fights, kicking, twisting, refusing to go.

Ross forces him down.

Scythe's face is inches from the mat.

Ross raises his boot.

Then Scythe reaches backward and grabs Ross's damaged shoulder, yanking hard.

Ross grimaces and loses the grip.

Scythe rolls away toward the ropes, saving himself at the last second.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe escaped again! He got to that shoulder!"

MARK BRAVO: "That shoulder that hit the post earlier. Scythe found the one crack Ross cannot hide."

Ross clutches his shoulder and turns toward Scythe.

Scythe pulls himself up by the ropes.

Both men are upright again.

Barely.

The referee steps between them, trying to check on Ross's shoulder, but Ross shoves past him with his good arm.

REFEREE: "Ross, let me check you!"

CHRIS ROSS: "Move."

The referee wisely moves.

Scythe charges.

Ross charges too.

Both men collide again in the center, this time with Ross's bad shoulder absorbing the impact.

Ross drops to one knee.

Scythe grabs him immediately.

Jackhammer position.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Elysian Gift! Scythe may have him!"

Scythe lifts Ross.

Ross twists in the air just enough to land behind him.

Scythe turns.

Ross lunges forward.

The 10-71 again.

This time Scythe ducks.

Ross spins through.

Scythe hits the ropes.

Reaper's Blade.

The spear lands again, but Scythe cannot follow through cleanly. His damaged shoulder gives out on impact, and both men collapse in a heap instead of Scythe driving fully through.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Reaper's Blade again! But Scythe could not hit it clean!"

MARK BRAVO: "His shoulder gave out! He hit the spear, but he hurt himself doing it!"

Scythe rolls onto Ross anyway and covers.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Ross gets a shoulder up.

The Madrid crowd erupts again.

Scythe rolls off and stares at the ceiling, both hands shaking. His breathing is broken now. His face is covered in blood. His shoulder is damaged. And still, his eyes drift toward the empty corner.

No Ace.

No answer.

Ross turns his head slowly toward him.

Both men lie there, inches apart.

CHRIS ROSS: "Nobody's coming."

Scythe's face twists.

He rolls toward Ross with a roar.

Ross meets him halfway.

They collide on the mat again, grabbing, punching, clawing, neither man willing to create enough distance for the referee to separate them.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "They are still fighting! They are still fighting from the mat!"

MARK BRAVO: "This is instinct now. This is hatred and survival and nothing else."

The camera pulls back as Ross and Scythe roll toward the ropes, still throwing short punches, still bleeding, still refusing to let the other man breathe.

The referee follows them, shouting warnings that may as well be thrown into a storm.

Madrid roars as the fight continues, and the match threatens to break fully beyond any control the official has left.

Ross and Scythe roll beneath the bottom rope in a tangled mess of fists, blood, and dead weight.

They hit the floor almost together.

Neither man lands clean.

Neither man cares.

Scythe ends up on top for half a second, driving a forearm into Ross's jaw. Ross answers by grabbing Scythe by the side of the head and ramming his skull backward into the floor.

Scythe rolls off, clutching at the back of his head.

Ross turns onto his side, coughing blood onto the ringside mats.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "They are back on the outside, and I do not know how much more of this either man can physically withstand."

MARK BRAVO: "That stopped being the question three minutes ago, John. They are past withstanding. They are just refusing to quit existing near each other."

The referee climbs out of the ring and gets between them, arms out, pleading more than officiating now.

REFEREE: "Back in the ring! Both of you! Back in the ring now!"

Ross pushes up to one knee and looks through the referee like he is not there.

Scythe rises against the barricade, one hand on his damaged shoulder, the other gripping the rail hard enough to make his knuckles pale beneath the blood.

The crowd pounds the barricade behind him.

Scythe turns toward them, wild-eyed, then snaps his focus back to Ross.

SAMUEL SCYTHER: "You do not get to take him."

Ross wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

CHRIS ROSS: "Then protect him better."

Scythe lunges.

Ross ducks low and drives Scythe backward into the apron. Scythe grunts from the impact but clubs Ross across the back of the neck with both forearms.

Ross drops to one knee.

Scythe grabs him by the head and tries to throw him into the ring post.

Ross blocks with one boot.

Scythe tries again.

Ross blocks again and drives an elbow backward into Scythe's ribs.

Then Ross turns, grabs Scythe by the back of the neck, and hurls him shoulder-first into the post.

Scythe's damaged shoulder cracks against the steel.

He drops instantly to the floor, teeth clenched, one hand clutching the joint.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe's shoulder into the post again! That is the same shoulder that failed him on the Reaper's Blade!"

MARK BRAVO: "Ross found the wound, and now he is digging into it with both hands."

Ross staggers backward, breathing hard, then grabs Scythe by the arm and yanks him up just enough to send him into the barricade.

Scythe hits chest-first, turns, and eats a charging forearm from Ross that nearly sends both men over the rail.

The crowd in the front row erupts as security rushes closer.

REFEREE: "Ross! Get him back in the ring!"

Ross grabs Scythe by the wrist.

For one second, it looks like he might obey.

Instead, Ross yanks Scythe short-arm into another headbutt.

Scythe drops to one knee.

Ross pulls him back up.

Another headbutt.

Scythe wobbles, blood dripping from his brow onto his chest.

Ross pulls him up a third time.

Scythe suddenly explodes forward and drives Ross backward into the apron with a desperate running shoulder.

Ross's back slams against the edge.

He gasps, his legs nearly buckling.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe still has that burst! Even wounded, he can change the match with one collision!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is not technique anymore. That is a wounded animal throwing itself through a door."

Scythe grabs Ross and rolls him under the bottom rope, then follows slowly. The referee slides in after them, visibly relieved that the fight is at least back between the ropes.

Ross pulls himself up near the center.

Scythe rises opposite him.

Both men are swaying.

Blood on both faces.

Chests heaving.

Hands hanging low because lifting them now costs too much.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "They are standing again. Somehow, both of these men are standing again."

MARK BRAVO: "This is the kind of fight that changes people. Win or lose, neither man walks out of this the same way he walked in."

Scythe throws a right hand.

Ross takes it.

Ross throws a right of his own.

Scythe takes it.

They trade again.

Slower now.

Heavier.

Each shot landing with the exhausted thud of men who have almost nothing left but hate.

Scythe lands an uppercut.

Ross staggers back one step.

Ross comes forward with a forearm.

Scythe stumbles one step.

Scythe swings wild.

Ross ducks.

Ross catches him around the waist.

German suplex.

Scythe lands high and rolls through to his knees again, refusing to stay down.

Ross grabs him immediately.

Another German suplex.

This time Scythe lands and does not roll through.

He lies flat for one breath.

Then starts pushing up again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "How is Scythe still moving?"

MARK BRAVO: "Because whatever Ace Andrews built, whatever Samuel Scythe already was, it does not understand normal damage."

Ross stands behind him, watching Scythe rise.

There is blood on Ross's face.

Blood on his chest.

Blood on his hands.

He does not wipe it away now.

He waits.

Scythe gets to one knee.

Ross steps in.

Scythe suddenly lunges upward and catches Ross around the waist.

Jackhammer lift.

The crowd erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Elysian Gift! Scythe has him up!"

Scythe gets Ross vertical.

But his damaged shoulder trembles immediately.

Ross shifts his weight, hammering a knee down into Scythe's skull.

Scythe tries to hold him.

Ross hammers another knee.

Scythe loses the balance.

Ross drops behind him.

Scythe turns.

Ross blasts him with 12 Gauge.

The ripcord headbutt lands flush again, skull to skull, and both men nearly collapse.

Ross stays upright by sheer refusal.

Scythe drops to his knees.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "12 Gauge again! Scythe is on his knees!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was not a move. That was two foreheads signing a damage waiver."

Ross grabs Scythe by the back of the neck.

He drags him forward.

Side Walk Smash.

Scythe's face hits the canvas hard.

Ross stands over him.

For a second, everything slows.

The crowd rises.

The referee leans in.

Scythe tries to push up.

His arms shake beneath him.

Ross hooks him.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross has him! Ross has him this time!"

Welcome To Harrisburg.

The curb stomp drives Scythe face-first into the mat.

The impact snaps Scythe's body flat.

The Madrid crowd erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Welcome To Harrisburg! Welcome To Harrisburg! Ross hit it!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is it. That has to be it. Samuel Scythe just got planted!"

Ross drops to his knees beside Scythe.

He could cover.

The referee drops close, ready.

Ross looks down at Scythe.

Then Ross slowly shakes his head.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ross is not covering."

MARK BRAVO: "Of course he is not. That man said a three-count does not mean a thing. He wants to leave people broken."

Ross grabs Scythe by the jaw and forces his face upward just enough.

Scythe's eyes are glassy.

His face is bloodied.

His body is nearly limp.

Ross leans down close.

CHRIS ROSS: "Tell Ace..."

Ross shifts behind Scythe.

He snakes one hand into Scythe's mouth.

Asiatic spike.

Then he wraps his legs around Scythe's body.

The Crime Scene.

The submission is locked in center ring.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The Crime Scene! Ross has The Crime Scene locked in!"

MARK BRAVO: "After Welcome To Harrisburg! He is not trying to pin Scythe. He is trying to send a message through him!"

Scythe's body jerks immediately.

His legs kick against the canvas.

His good arm claws at Ross's wrist.

His damaged arm barely moves.

Ross keeps the body scissors tight, one arm locked in place, the spike buried deep.

The referee drops beside them.

REFEREE: "Samuel! Samuel, do you give up?"

Scythe refuses to tap.

He reaches forward with his good hand.

Not toward the ropes.

Toward the empty corner.

The camera catches it.

His fingers stretch toward nobody.

No Ace Andrews.

No rescue.

No command.

No way out.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Scythe is reaching toward the corner. Toward where Ace Andrews should have been."

MARK BRAVO: "Ross took that away. He took the voice, the plan, the leash, everything. And now Scythe is trapped in the middle of the ring with the man who did it."

Scythe's hand trembles.

He refuses to tap.

Ross tightens the hold.

Scythe kicks once.

Hard.

Then again.

Weaker.

The referee checks him.

REFEREE: "Samuel! Show me something!"

Scythe's hand is still reaching.

Still searching.

Then it drops.

The referee grabs Scythe's wrist and lifts it.

It falls.

The crowd roars.

The referee lifts it again.

It falls again.

Ross's face stays cold behind him, blood running from his nose, eyes fixed forward.

The referee lifts Scythe's wrist a third time.

For a moment, the hand hangs in the air.

Scythe's fingers twitch.

The crowd gasps.

Ross tightens the body scissors and drives the spike deeper.

The hand drops.

The referee calls for the bell.

DING DING DING!

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The referee stopped it! Chris Ross wins! Samuel Scythe passed out in The Crime Scene!"

MARK BRAVO: "Scythe did not tap. He would not give Ross that. But Ross choked the fight out of him after planting him with Welcome To Harrisburg."

The bell rings again as the referee grabs at Ross's arm, trying to get him to release the hold.

REFEREE: "Ross! Let go! Let go!"

Ross holds for one extra second.

Then two.

Then he releases.

Scythe collapses face-first onto the canvas, motionless except for the faint rise and fall of his back.

Ross rolls away and sits beside him, breathing hard, blood on his face and chest, one arm hanging slightly from the damage to his shoulder.

The referee kneels beside Scythe, checking him immediately.

Ross slowly pushes to one knee.

The crowd in Madrid is roaring now, a mix of awe, shock, and pure adrenaline from the violence they just witnessed.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross took out Ace Andrews before the match, then he took out Samuel Scythe in the ring. That was not a wrestling match. That was a dismantling. That was a fight."

MARK BRAVO: "And now one week before International Affair, Chris Ross has sent the loudest possible message. He removed the manager, broke the monster, and left both of them down."

Ross stands slowly.

The referee reaches to raise his hand.

Ross pulls it away.

He looks down at Scythe instead.

Then toward the empty corner where Ace Andrews should have been.

Ross spits blood onto the mat.

CHRIS ROSS: "Ashes to ashes."

The crowd roars again.

Ross turns and steps through the ropes, dropping to the floor without another word.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Chris Ross leaves with the victory, but more than that, he leaves a path of wreckage behind him."

MARK BRAVO: "Ace Andrews backstage. Samuel Scythe in the ring. Black rose on one. Blood on the other. That is Chris Ross right now."

Inside the ring, medical staff enter to check on Scythe. The referee stays beside him, speaking urgently, trying to get a response.

Ross walks up the ramp slowly, not celebrating, not looking back at the fans, not raising his hands.

He only pauses once near the top of the stage.

He turns his head slightly toward the ring.

Scythe is still down.

Ace is still gone.

Ross gives the smallest nod, as if confirming the work is finished.

Then he disappears through the curtain.

## **The Worst Thing that happened**

Segment

The camera catches up with Kirsty McKinney in a backstage corridor.

Gone are the singlet and boots. She's changed into a fitted gray t-shirt and powder blue dolphin shorts, a gym bag slung over one shoulder and her phone in hand. Judging by the pace she's walking, she's headed for the parking lot.

Melissa Cartwright: "Miss McKinney?"

Kirsty stops and turns.

Melissa Cartwright steps into frame.

Melissa Cartwright: "Melissa Cartwright. UTA head interviewer. Have you got a minute?"

Kirsty pulls out her phone, glances at the time, then slips it back into her pocket.

Kirsty McKinney: "I guess."

Melissa smiles professionally.

Melissa Cartwright: "Well, first of all, congratulations on your debut victory tonight."

Kirsty sighs.

Kirsty McKinney: "Thanks."

The response hangs there.

Melissa doesn't say anything, but her expression changes just enough.

Kirsty notices.

Kirsty McKinney: "What?"

Melissa blinks.

Melissa Cartwright: "What?"

Kirsty McKinney: "What was that face?"

Melissa Cartwright: "I don't know what you're talking about."

Kirsty McKinney: "Sure."

Kirsty adjusts her grip on the bag.

Kirsty McKinney: "You congratulate somebody on winning a wrestling match and they don't immediately start talking about how inspiring and magical the experience was."

Melissa laughs awkwardly.

Melissa Cartwright: "Well—"

Kirsty McKinney: "I've won lots and lots of wrestling matches, Melissa."

A shrug.

Kirsty McKinney: "That's kind of what I've been doing for... ever."

Another beat.

Kirsty McKinney: "You did watch the video my people put together last week, right?"

Melissa clears her throat.

Melissa Cartwright: "Well, regardless, this is still UTA. The biggest promotion you've appeared in, certainly in the United States."

Kirsty nods.

Kirsty McKinney: "The biggest promotion I've appeared in in the United States."

A beat.

Kirsty McKinney: "C'est le frickin' différence."

Melissa folds her hands together.

Melissa Cartwright: "So you don't consider this the biggest stage of your career?"

A pause.

Melissa stares.

Kirsty stares back.

Melissa takes a breath, then powers onward.

Melissa Cartwright: "Anyway. Having won your debut match tonight, what's next for Kirsty McKinney?"

Kirsty McKinney: "Pretty much the same thing you just watched."

Melissa blinks.

Melissa Cartwright: "Meaning?"

Kirsty McKinney: "I wrestle somebody. Then they get pinned."

Melissa exhales slowly.

Melissa Cartwright: "Well, meaning no disrespect to Athena Storm, she hasn't exactly had the most successful run in UTA. Do you really think you're going to have such an easy time against the top women in this company?"

Kirsty lets out a long, passive-aggressive sigh.

Then she suddenly sets her bag down.

Kirsty McKinney: "The worst thing that happened to me tonight was I pinched my calf in my wrestling boot."

Melissa's brow furrows.

Melissa Cartwright: "What?"

Kirsty plants one foot on a nearby road case.

Kirsty McKinney: "Look."

Melissa looks.

A ridiculously well-sculpted calf muscle flexes beneath smooth skin.

Melissa looks.

And keeps looking.

Kirsty waits.

Kirsty McKinney: "See that?"

Melissa Cartwright: "No."

Kirsty McKinney: "It's a welt. I have to wear custom boots because normal boots can't handle the girls."

She raises her leg up onto her toe, making the calf muscle bunch up.

Kirsty McKinney: "So I've got low back boots with an elastic strap for the top. I got a friction burn from the strap. See the red spot? It hurts."

Kirsty points at a random spot on her calf, then flexes it again. Her voice takes on a pouty tone.

Melissa opens her mouth.

Closes it again.

Then rubs at the bridge of her nose.

Melissa Cartwright: "Kirsty—"

Kirsty puts her leg down with a small smirk.

Melissa Cartwright: "Do you really think that's evidence that you're going to dominate the top of the division?"

Kirsty McKinney: "Yeah. I mean, that, and the track record of excellence, and that I'm not exactly a newbie in the squared circle, and that I've had some pretty elite training."

She smiles, thinly, briefly.

Kirsty McKinney: "Hey, here's some ancient history for you. Marie Van Claudio's one of the top women here, isn't she? One of my trainers kicked her face through the back of the skull back in 2014."

Melissa starts to speak up, but Kirsty raises her hand.

Kirsty McKinney: "As for me, right now? If you've got questions about what I'm capable of, go watch ICW's The Iron Way. Might see a familiar face."

She picks her bag back up.

Kirsty McKinney: "I'm going to do just fine here. Thanks."

Melissa starts to respond, but Kirsty is already walking in the other direction.

She sighs, smiles helplessly, and shrugs at the camera.

## **Valor in the Line of Duty**

Segment

It's been amazing night of action so far for UTA. THE crowd is still buzzing when things shift unexpectedly to the commentary table, cutting off what looked to be the start of a sit-down interview between Melissa Cartright and Brittany Reid.

John Phillips: "Pardon the interruption. We're — we're being told to take you backstage. We have a camera in the production corridor and — Mark, I don't know what we're looking at yet, let's just — let's go there."

Mark Bravo: "Okay — alright — something's happening back there."

The feed cuts.

The camera finds Van Patton and Tkachuk mid-stride through the wide service corridor behind the production area. Van Patton has a red Solo cup in one hand — tobacco juice, not a drink — and is scrolling through his phone with the other. He is in his ring gear under an unzipped hoodie, Dallas Stars cap forward on his head. Relaxed. Unhurried. Tkachuk walks beside him in characteristic silence, arms loose, six feet six inches of cold patience moving at Van Patton's pace.

Mark Bravo: "That's Van Patton and Tkachuk. They're just walking — looks like they're coming from the production side."

John Phillips: "Nothing unusual there on the surface — but somebody in the truck thought we needed to see this, so let's stay with it."

Van Patton glances up from the phone.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Ah'm gonna tell ya somethin', Theron. Ah sent that girl to get me a Ghost energy drink thirty minutes ago. Thirty minutes. It's a straight walk to the catering table and back. How does that take thirty minutes?"

Tkachuk says nothing. He looks at Van Patton with the flat, patient expression of a man who has long since stopped expecting Torunn to be quick about anything.

Gunnar Van Patton: "She's in a dark corner somewhere sentencing some poor SOB to death by snu snu. That's what's happening. That girl — ah swear to God — ah feel for that man, ah truly do. Somebody oughta warn him."

Tkachuk signs something brief with his right hand. Brief and expressive.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Yeah well, if ah had a dollar for every wrecked hotel room and every bar tab and every time ah had to bail one of y'all out of jail, ah'd be retired already." He spits into the Solo cup. "Young and stupid. Every last one of 'em."

John Phillips: "Van Patton frustrated with Torunn — apparently she was sent to get him something from catering and hasn't come back — Tkachuk not exactly surprised by that."

Mark Bravo: "Ha — look, the Unholy Wolf Brigade is a lot of things and responsible isn't one of them. Van Patton has been cleaning up after those people for years. This is just a Tuesday for him."

Van Patton pockets his phone. He and Tkachuk continue walking — and ahead of them, where the corridor opens at an intersection beneath a bank of fluorescents, Sinja is standing.

Hands folded. White suit immaculate. Perfectly still. Looking directly at them.

Van Patton and Tkachuk stop.

A beat of complete stillness — three people in a corridor, two of them reading the third. Sinja does not move. He holds the eye contact with the composed attention of a man who has been here for some time and was ready before they arrived.

John Phillips: "That's Sinja — Hakuryu's interpreter — standing in the middle of the corridor—"

Mark Bravo: "Why is he just — standing there like that? That's not normal. That's not a guy who got lost."

Van Patton's eye moves past Sinja — reading the space, the sides, the depth of the corridor beyond. Tkachuk has shifted his weight. Almost imperceptibly. But the shift is there — the body of a large, dangerous man that has identified a situation and is orienting toward it.

The Fatu Twins come from directly behind them.

Together. In absolute unison. At a dead sprint — both of them, side by side, filling the width of the corridor, moving with the coordinated ferocity of men who have been running since before Van Patton and Tkachuk rounded the last bend. There is no angle, no separation, no geometry — it is a wall of muscle moving at speed and it is aimed at one man. They hit Tkachuk like a pair of stampeding bulls — both of them simultaneously, chest and shoulder, their combined weight and momentum enormous and immediate and completely without warning. Tkachuk absorbs the first split second of it the way only a man his size can absorb something — and then the physics resolve and all three of them are moving, driven forward by the sheer unrelenting force of the charge, crashing into the set of double doors at the end of the corridor and through them and out into the night air of the parking lot beyond. The doors slam shut behind them with a sound like a gunshot.

John Phillips: "THE FATU TWINS — OUT OF NOWHERE — THEY HAVE CHARGED TKACHUK THROUGH THOSE DOORS—"

Mark Bravo: "BOTH OF THEM! A DEAD SPRINT, JOHN! They came from behind like a freight train and took Tkachuk straight through those doors! Van Patton didn't even have time to react — nobody had time to react—"

The sound of the brawl in the parking lot is immediate and violent and growing more distant as it moves further from

the building. Van Patton is already moving toward those doors — two strides, hand on the push bar —  
Sinja's voice cuts through the corridor.

Sinja: "If you want to see the Valkyrie again — follow me."

Van Patton stops. His hand is on the push bar and he stops. He does not look at the doors. He looks at Sinja. The corridor is quiet now except for the fading sounds from the parking lot and the fluorescent hum overhead. Van Patton's jaw is set. He looks at Sinja's face and reads everything in it and processes what he reads very fast.

John Phillips: "The Valkyrie — that is Torunn Sigurjonsson — what does he mean by that?"

Mark Bravo: "John — Sinja did not move when the Twins came through. He was already in that corridor. He was already standing there. This was the plan. They stopped them in the corridor, took Tkachuk out of the equation, and now Sinja is telling Van Patton that Torunn is somewhere in this building and something has happened to her. This is a trap. This whole night has been a trap."

Van Patton takes his hand off the push bar. He spits into the Solo cup. He looks at Sinja.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Lead the way."

Flat. The voice of a man who has made a decision and has nothing further to say about it until he has more information.

Sinja turns and walks. Van Patton follows — close, silent, the hoodie unzipped, ring gear underneath. The Solo cup still in his hand. His free hand opens and closes at his side in a rhythm that is not conscious — the body managing what the mind is not yet expressing.

John Phillips: "Van Patton following Sinja through the backstage area — and folks, Theron Tkachuk is in the parking lot with the Fatu Twins and Van Patton is walking deeper into this building alone and I — we don't know what's at the end of this."

Mark Bravo: "He has no backup. That was the point of the Twins. Tkachuk is the one person in this company who steadies Van Patton when things go sideways and they just removed him from the board with a full speed charge through a set of double doors. Whoever built this plan understood exactly what they were doing."

The corridor narrows as they move deeper into the building's infrastructure. Further from the show. Further from the crowd noise. Further from anyone who could intervene. The footsteps of the two men are the loudest thing in the space. Sinja does not hurry. He does not look back. He walks with the purpose of a man leading someone to something already done, already waiting, already finished before this walk began.

He rounds a corner.

Van Patton rounds it behind him.

And stops.

Hakuryu has Torunn's arm.

John Phillips: "Oh God—"

Mark Bravo: "TORUNN—"

She is on her feet — barely. Hakuryu is positioned behind her, one hand controlling her wrist, the other braced against her elbow, the arm extended and angled with the mechanical precision of a man who understands joint manipulation at an expert level and is applying that expertise with absolute deliberation. There is no struggle in the hold. No urgency. No chaos. He is completely, horrifyingly calm. He has taken a position and he is holding it with the patient certainty of a man who planned every degree of this angle and every ounce of this pressure and has been waiting in this corridor for

the right audience to arrive.

He was waiting for Van Patton.

He looks up when they round the corner. He looks at Van Patton with the focused, cold satisfaction of a man who set a time for a specific event and has watched it arrive on schedule. He does not move. He does not speak. He holds the position and looks.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu has Torunn in a joint hold — that arm is in serious danger — and Van Patton cannot touch him. The retirement clause — the moment he makes any physical contact—"

Mark Bravo: "His career ends. Right here. Right now. In this corridor. Avril Selene Kinkade drafted that contract and there is no grey area in it. Hakuryu is standing inside a legal force field and Van Patton is locked outside of it and Torunn Sigurjonsson is paying for it."

Torunn's face is the face of a woman conducting herself in considerable pain as though the pain is a separate matter from who she is. Jaw set hard. Free hand balled into a fist. The warpaint has caught the sweat of whatever happened before this moment — one streak has run slightly, cutting across her cheek. She has already tried to fight out of this hold. The evidence is in her feet, her posture, the configuration of her body against Hakuryu's grip — the endpoint of everything she attempted before arriving at the conclusion that the physics are wrong and the leverage is his and there is nothing to be done about it from where she stands. She does not scream. She does not call out. She gives Hakuryu nothing she can prevent giving him.

Sinja has moved to the wall. Out of the direct line between the two men. Hands folded. He looks at Torunn on her feet in Hakuryu's hold, and the thing that has been private in the back of his eyes since Show 1 — since the night her hand closed around his throat — is fully present and no longer private at all.

Van Patton steps forward. One step.

Hakuryu's hands tighten by a fraction.

Torunn makes a sound. Sharp, involuntary, immediately shut down as her jaw clamps closed over it — but it escapes before she can stop it and it crosses the corridor and lands in Van Patton and he stops. Because the contract is the most present thing in this corridor and it does not care what Van Patton is feeling and it will not move for any of it.

John Phillips: "Van Patton stopping himself—"

Mark Bravo: "He heard that sound and he stopped. John, do you understand what that takes? The instinct of every human being alive is to move when they hear that sound from someone they care about. He stopped himself. That is not a normal thing."

Van Patton looks at Hakuryu across the corridor. His jaw is set. The Solo cup hangs at his side, forgotten. He speaks. In Japanese — not for Sinja, not for the camera, directly for Hakuryu. Clean, fluent, the language of a man who learned it as a tool and is using it as one now.

Gunnar Van Patton: ??????????????????????

Release her. Tell me what you want.

Hakuryu looks at him. He holds the look for a moment — reading the face, reading the Japanese, reading the discipline of a man who is arriving at this moment and choosing words over violence. Something in his expression registers it. Not respect. Something colder. The acknowledgment of a variable performing exactly as anticipated.

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

I do not want anything from you. I have something to show you.



The corridor is very quiet.

Then he increases the pressure.

One final, deliberate increment. Not impulsive. Not rushed. The application of force by a man who planned this specific moment down to the angle of the joint and the distance between them and the expression on Van Patton's face when it happened. Every degree of the angle is intentional. He is not finishing this because he is angry. He is finishing it because it was always going to finish this way and the only variable was when.

Torunn's free hand hits the wall. Her palm strikes the corridor wall and the sound of it is the sound of the last defense failing — the body acting before the mind can stop it — and she grits her teeth and her entire frame shakes with the effort of staying upright and refusing to give him a single syllable more than the involuntary sounds she cannot prevent.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu increasing the pressure — Torunn hitting that wall—"

Mark Bravo: "Van Patton asked him. He asked him and Hakuryu is doing it anyway because he was always going to do it anyway. This was never a conversation. This was a demonstration and Van Patton is the audience."

Van Patton steps forward. One step — and he catches himself. Arrests the forward momentum with everything he has, every muscle involved in the stopping of it, the visible effort of a man slamming a door shut from the inside that wants very badly to open.

John Phillips: "He stepped — he stopped himself — Van Patton stopping himself—"

Mark Bravo: "STOP. Van Patton — do not — please—"

Hakuryu looks at Van Patton.

And breaks her arm.

The sound of it is small. Clinical. Final. The sound of something that cannot be undone.

Torunn does not scream. Not because it does not warrant it — because she is a Viking warrior, and she will not give him that, not one syllable of it, not in front of Van Patton, not here. What comes out of her instead is a single, compressed sound that is not a scream and is worse than a scream, and then her legs go and she is down — her body fighting the fall the way it fights everything, with every available resource, right up until the moment there are none remaining — and she is on the ground and the arm is wrong and the corridor is very quiet. Hakuryu straightens. He releases the hold with the unhurried, finished quality of a man setting something down after he is done with it. He does not look at her as she goes down. He looks at Van Patton. He watches Van Patton's face absorb it and he watches it happen with the patient, intent focus of a man who came here specifically to see this face make this expression.

John Phillips: "She is down. Torunn Sigurjonsson is down."

A beat of silence at the commentary table.

Mark Bravo: "Her arm is in multiple pieces, John. He snapped her arm and he did it looking Van Patton directly in the eye."

Sinja exhales. One barely audible breath. He does not move from the wall. He looks at Torunn on the ground, and then he looks at Van Patton, and the expression on his face is the settled, complete expression of a debt paid in full.

Hakuryu steps toward Van Patton. Closing the distance. Van Patton does not move back. He does not move at all. He is standing at the exact boundary and Hakuryu has walked into it and the difference between the retirement clause and the permanent end of everything is now a matter of inches.

Hakuryu looks at him. Close enough that commentary can see both faces at once — Hakuryu's face, which is completely at rest, cold and patient and at absolute peace with everything that has just occurred — and Van Patton's

face, which is the face behind the face, the one that has been underneath every controlled moment for three weeks, and it is fully out now because there is nothing left with which to manage it. The fury. The grief. The specific burning of a man who has lost something irretrievable and is standing within arm's reach of the person who took it.

Van Patton's fists are closed and shaking. Not from fear — there is no fear in this man, not a molecule — but from the force of the war happening entirely inside his body between everything he is and everything the contract requires him to be right now.

Hakuryu takes one more step. Close enough now that the corridor itself feels smaller.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu closing in on Van Patton — if he so much as—"

Mark Bravo: "He can't. He cannot. I'm watching this man's hands shaking from here and he cannot touch him. John, I don't have the words for what I'm watching."

Hakuryu speaks. Quiet. Not for the corridor. For the man directly in front of him.

Hakuryu: ????????

Go ahead and try.

Van Patton understands it before Sinja can open his mouth. His fists tighten further — the shaking moves from his hands up through his forearms, into his shoulders — and the visible eye does something that lives in the space between grief and fury and the absolute unwilling restraint of a man who knows exactly what is being done to him and cannot stop knowing it.

John Phillips: "Do not do it. Van Patton — do not — do it. Don't let her sacrifice be for nothing."

Mark Bravo: "He told him to do it. In Japanese. And Van Patton understood every single word."

The Solo cup drops.

Not thrown — released. Van Patton's hand opens and the cup falls to the floor of the corridor and the small sound it makes is the loudest thing in the space. Both hands are free. Both fists closed. His weight shifts forward — barely, the body loading into something.

John Phillips: "The cup — he dropped the cup — both hands free — Van Patton—"

Mark Bravo: "No — no no no—"

One second.

Two seconds.

He breathes.

One single breath. Drawn slowly through his nose, held, released through his mouth. The most expensive breath of air this man has ever taken. The breath of a man pulling himself back from the absolute edge of a decision by the narrowest margin a human being can manage.

Three seconds.

The weight shifts back.

The fists do not open. The shaking does not stop. The fury does not go anywhere. But something settles behind the eye — the recognition, at the last possible moment, of a man catching himself standing exactly where someone needed him to stand. He looks at Hakuryu. He looks at the expression on Hakuryu's face — the cold, patient absence of surprise, the look of a man who set a trap and is watching it sit untriggered and is entirely prepared to wait as long as it takes — and Van Patton reads it the way he reads everything. And he does not like what it says. And he has no

choice but to understand it anyway.

He does not move.

John Phillips: "He's not going to do it. Van Patton is not going to do it."

Mark Bravo: "I watched that cup hit the floor and I thought — that was it. Twenty years, over, right here under fluorescent lights in a service corridor. And he pulled himself back. I have covered this sport for a long time and I cannot tell you what it takes to do what that man just did. I genuinely cannot."

John Phillips: "Because he is smarter than Hakuryu needed him to be. Hakuryu built every piece of tonight to extract one punch from one man. And that man chose Sunday. He chose the ring. He chose to make Hakuryu answer for all of it where it counts. And I'll tell you this — whoever walks out of International Affair as WrestleZone Champion, the worst thing Hakuryu may have done tonight is push Gunnar Van Patton to the very edge of himself and discover that the edge holds."

Hakuryu holds the look. Four seconds. Five. Then he steps back — one step, then another — and turns and walks away down the corridor. Unhurried. Even. Not triumphant in any theatrical sense. A man completing a task and filing the results.

Sinja peels from the wall and falls into step beside him. He glances back once — one look over his shoulder at Van Patton still at the boundary — and the expression on his face is settled and complete. Then he turns away and they walk until the corridor takes them out of frame.

The corridor is empty behind them.

Van Patton does not move for a long moment. He stands at the exact spot where he has been standing and he stands there longer than the situation requires — as though moving means accepting that what just happened is finished, and he is not ready to accept that yet.

Then he crosses the distance in two strides and drops to one knee beside Torunn. Both hands go to her. He calls for medical. His voice has the quality it takes on when nothing is being performed — no crowd, no contract, just a man beside someone he is responsible for, with the only instruments available to him right now, which are his presence and his voice and the fact that he is here.

Torunn's free hand finds his forearm. She grips it. She does not look grateful — that expression is not in her vocabulary — she looks furious. At the arm, at the corridor, at the engineered inevitability of all of it. But her hand stays on his forearm.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Ah've got ya, kid."

Low. Not for broadcast. Not for anyone but her.

She looks at him. Something passes between them that does not require words and would not be improved by them.

John Phillips: "Medical is being called for Torunn Sigurjonsson — and with Arkady Bogatyr already unable to compete, if Torunn cannot go at International Affair, Van Patton and Tkachuk walk into that six-man tag two men short. We will have updates on her condition as they become available."

Mark Bravo: "What I keep coming back to, John — is that Van Patton is still standing. He walked into a trap that was built specifically to end his career without a match, using someone he loves as the mechanism, and he is still standing. He is still going to International Affair. And I genuinely think Hakuryu is going to spend every hour between now and Sunday asking himself whether tonight helped him or handed Van Patton something he cannot take back."

The camera holds on Van Patton kneeling beside Torunn. Her hand on his forearm. The Solo cup on the corridor floor a few feet behind him — the small, quiet evidence of the moment everything almost ended. The fury has not left Van

Patton's face. It has been compressed — condensed into something smaller and hotter and more permanent than what it was an hour ago. Something that will still be burning at this exact temperature when the bell rings at International Affair on Sunday.

The camera holds.

Then cuts.

## **Sol Azteca vs Emily Hightower**

Match

The broadcast returns to ringside, but the atmosphere inside the arena feels different now.

Not excited in the normal way.

Tense.

Restless.

The ring has been cleared. The referee stands near the ropes with two officials beside him, both of them holding a heavy tow chain between gloved hands. It hangs low between them, thick and ugly, each link catching the lights as it sways over the canvas.

At ringside, extra security has been stationed along the barricade.

The crowd notices.

They know why.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ladies and gentlemen, what we are about to witness is not a normal match. This is Sol Azteca versus Emily Hightower in a Tow Chain Match, and after what happened last week, I do not know how else this could have ended."

MARK BRAVO: "Sol Azteca tried to protect Emily Hightower from Dahlia Cross and a steel chair. Emily won anyway, but she felt like Sol stole that moment from her. Then David Hightower slid that tow chain into the ring, and Emily made her choice."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Emily attacked Sol with that chain. She choked her with it. She bloodied her with it. And perhaps worst of all, she tore at Sol Azteca's mask."

MARK BRAVO: "And for a luchadora, that is not just gear. That is identity. That is heritage. That is the thing you do not touch unless you are ready for the consequences."

The camera moves closer to the chain as the referee checks the cuffs attached to both ends. One official tests the lock. Another runs his hand down the metal, making sure there are no breaks, no loose pieces, no surprises.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The rules are simple. Sol Azteca and Emily Hightower will be chained wrist to wrist. No count outs. No disqualifications. The chain is legal. Victory by pinfall, submission, or referee stoppage."

MARK BRAVO: "Which means there is no running. There is no hiding. There is no getting away when the other woman decides she wants you close."

The lights begin to dim.

The crowd turns toward the stage.

The rough-edged opening of "The Outsiders" by Eric Church hits the speakers.

The reaction is immediate and hostile.

Emily Hightower steps through the curtain first.

Not behind David.

Not beside Buck.

Not protected by Dakota.

First.

The boos hit her hard, but Emily does not flinch. She stands beneath the lights with her jaw set and her shoulders squared, wearing black and denim ring gear trimmed with Hightower red. Her wrists are taped tightly. Her expression is colder than it was a week ago. Cleaner. Sharper. Like the hesitation has been cut out of her.

Behind her, David Hightower appears.

Calm as ever.

Then Buck Hightower steps out, grinning through the hate, already shouting at the crowd before he has even taken three steps. Dakota comes last, quieter, watching Emily more than the people booing around them.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Here comes Emily Hightower, and this is the first time we are seeing her since she stood over Sol Azteca last week with that chain in her hand."

MARK BRAVO: "Look at her face, John. No apology. No shame. She is not coming out here conflicted. Emily Hightower made a choice last week, and tonight she is walking like she believes it was the right one."

Emily begins down the ramp. David walks a step behind her, not leading, not dragging her forward, just present. Buck stalks on one side, barking toward the front row. Dakota stays near the other, eyes on the ring, eyes on the chain, eyes occasionally flicking to Emily.

Emily reaches the bottom of the ramp and stops.

She looks into the ring.

At the chain.

A faint smirk touches her mouth.

Buck leans close, saying something that does not reach the camera. Emily does not look at him. Her eyes stay on the chain.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That chain is the instrument Emily used last week. Tonight, it becomes part of the match."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the thing about violence. Sometimes the weapon comes back with your name on it."

Emily climbs the steps and enters the ring. The boos rise again as she walks to the center, standing over the chain for a moment before stepping back into her corner.

David remains on the floor at ringside, hands low, expression unreadable. Buck paces near the apron, restless already. Dakota stays back, her arms folded, face tight.

The music fades.

For a moment, there is no sound but the crowd.

Then the lights change.

Gold light does not flood the arena the way it usually does for Sol Azteca.

It flickers.

Dimmer.

Lower.

A slow drumbeat begins, heavier than the bright rhythm that normally brings Sol to the ring. The screen fills with the image of a sun half buried behind black clouds.

Then Sol Azteca appears.

The crowd does not erupt at first.

They inhale.

Because Sol does not look like Sol.

Her mask is still on, but the damage is visible. The torn top has been repaired with rough black stitching that cuts across the gold and dark fabric like a scar. Around the exposed upper portion of her face, where Emily tore the mask open last week, skull paint has been applied in sharp black and white lines.

Not decorative.

Not festive.

War paint.

A warning.

The mask is not hidden.

The damage is not hidden.

She has made it part of her.

Her ribs are taped. One shoulder is taped. The side of her neck still carries dark bruising from where the chain was pulled against it. Her eyes are locked on Emily from the second she steps into view.

No dancing.

No clapping.

No reaching for the fans.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "My God."

MARK BRAVO: "That is not the Sol Azteca we are used to seeing."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Last week in medical, Sol said Emily wanted to rip her mask, and tonight she would show Emily what lives under it."

MARK BRAVO: "I think we are looking at it."

Sol starts down the ramp.

Every step is direct.

The crowd begins to chant her name, but Sol does not respond. She does not ignore them out of arrogance. She simply is not there with them right now. Her whole world has narrowed to the woman in the ring.

Emily steps forward inside the ropes, staring back.

For the first time tonight, the smirk fades.

Only a little.

But it fades.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Look at Emily. That visual landed."

MARK BRAVO: "Emily wanted to tear something open. She may not like what came out."

Sol reaches ringside. She stops at the bottom of the ramp and looks at David.

David looks back at her.

Neither says a word.

Sol then turns her eyes to Buck. Buck leans toward her, shouting something, but Sol does not blink. Dakota watches from behind him, tense.

Then Sol slides into the ring.

Emily immediately steps forward.

The referee throws himself between them.

REFEREE: "Back up! Both of you, back up!"

Sol does not move at first.

Emily does not either.

The chain lies between them on the canvas.

The referee points to their corners.

REFEREE: "You want this match? Then let me attach the chain."

Sol slowly backs toward her side.

Emily backs toward hers.

The two officials lift the chain from the mat. One brings the cuff to Emily. She extends her right wrist without looking away from Sol. The official locks the metal around her wrist and checks it twice.

The other official approaches Sol.

Sol holds out her left wrist.

The cuff closes.

The sound of the lock clicking around her wrist cuts through the arena.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There it is. They are attached now. Sol Azteca and Emily Hightower are chained together."

MARK BRAVO: "That chain is not just a weapon tonight. It is a promise."

The officials step back.

The referee lifts the center of the chain and drops it.

Metal hits canvas.

The bell rings.

DING DING DING!

Emily takes half a step forward.

Sol yanks the chain with both hands.

Emily is ripped forward violently, stumbling straight into Sol's forearm.

The crowd explodes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sol yanks her in immediately!"

Sol does not stop. She blasts Emily with another forearm. Then another. Emily tries to cover, but Sol uses the chain to pull her arm down and fires a fourth shot that sends Emily staggering backward into the ropes.

Sol pulls again.

Emily snaps off the ropes and crashes into a knee to the midsection. Sol grabs the back of Emily's head and drives her face-first into the top turnbuckle once.

Then again.

Then a third time.

The crowd counts with each impact.

CROWD: "ONE! TWO! THREE!"

Emily tries to drop to the mat and roll away, but the chain snaps tight.

Sol pulls her back.

Emily's body slides across the canvas toward her like the ring itself has decided there is no escape.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Emily tried to get away, and the chain brought her right back to Sol Azteca!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is exactly what Sol wanted. Emily cannot run to the ropes. She cannot run to the floor. She cannot run to David. She is attached to the woman whose mask she tore."

Sol mounts over Emily and hammers down with short punches, each one sharp, each one controlled by pure anger. Emily covers up, trying to twist under her, but Sol grabs the chain near Emily's wrist and wraps it once across Emily's forearm before yanking the arm open.

Sol drives another forearm into Emily's face.

Emily's head snaps to the side.

Buck slaps both hands on the apron from the floor.

BUCK HIGHTOWER: "Get off her!"

Sol turns her head slowly.

Buck backs down half a step despite himself.

David does not move.

Dakota watches, lips pressed tight.

Sol turns back to Emily and drags her up by the chain. Emily swings wildly, catching Sol in the ribs. Sol grunts, but does not release. Emily hits her again, this time to the taped shoulder, and Sol finally gives enough space for Emily to shove her back.

Emily grabs the chain with both hands and pulls hard.

Sol stumbles toward her.

Emily charges forward and drives her knee into Sol's ribs.

Sol folds slightly.

Emily grabs the back of her mask.

The crowd reacts instantly.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Emily went right for the mask!"

Sol explodes.

No hesitation.

She drives a sharp elbow into Emily's ribs, then another, then catches Emily under the jaw with a palm strike that sends her stumbling backward.

MARK BRAVO: "That was the wrong button to press."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Every time Emily reaches for that mask, Sol Azteca becomes something else."

Sol wraps the chain around Emily's upper body and throws her with a rough, chain-assisted snapmare that sends Emily skidding across the canvas.

Emily rolls toward the floor, but again the chain stops her. Sol steps through the ropes onto the apron, still holding the chain. Emily is halfway out when Sol pulls.

Emily's throat catches against the bottom rope.

The referee can only watch.

No disqualification.

No rope break that matters here.

Sol pulls again, dragging Emily back under the rope and into the ring. Emily coughs and clutches at her throat, eyes wide as Sol steps back inside.

For the first time, Emily looks less confident.

Sol sees it.

She leans down toward her.

SOL AZTECA: "No puedes correr."

SOL AZTECA: "You cannot run."

Sol pulls Emily up again, but Emily suddenly drops her weight and yanks the chain downward. Sol is pulled shoulder-first into the mat, landing hard on the taped side. Emily immediately scrambles over her, wraps part of the chain around her fist, and drives it into Sol's ribs.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

Sol's body jerks with each shot.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Emily Hightower creating an opening and going right to the ribs, right where Sol is taped from last week's attack."

MARK BRAVO: "That is the Hightower in her. Hurt what is already hurt. Make the old damage new again."

Emily stands and pulls Sol up by the chain, yanking her into a short clothesline that drops Sol onto her back. Emily keeps hold of the metal and drags Sol toward the corner, pulling her arm up and around the bottom turnbuckle.

Sol realizes it too late.

Emily yanks the chain backward, trapping Sol's cuffed wrist against the post.

Sol cries out as the shoulder pulls tight.

The crowd boos heavily.

Emily leans down, face close to Sol's.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Still wanna be chained to me?"

Then she stomps the taped shoulder.

Sol screams through clenched teeth.

Emily stomps again.

The referee warns her out of instinct, then catches himself. There is nothing to enforce except the ending.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This match is legal, but that does not make it comfortable to watch."

MARK BRAVO: "Nothing about this was ever going to be comfortable. Sol asked for this because Emily crossed the line. Emily is using that same line to drag her deeper."

Emily releases the pressure just long enough to drag Sol back toward the center. She wraps the chain once across Sol's face, grinding the links against the repaired stitching of the mask.

Sol's hands shoot up immediately.

The skull paint around her exposed brow twists with fury.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You said you would show me what lives under it."

She grinds the chain harder.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "So show me."

Then Emily yanks the chain sideways.

The metal scrapes across the stitched tear in Sol's mask and catches the exposed skin beneath it.

Sol jerks backward, one hand flying to her face.

For a second, she freezes.

Then the blood starts.

A thin red line opens above the skull paint, cutting down through the white and black, turning the paint into something uglier. Realer. Sol lowers her hand and sees the blood across her fingers.

The crowd noise changes.

Emily sees it too.

And she smiles.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Emily Hightower just opened Sol Azteca up again!"

MARK BRAVO: "That is the same area she tore last week. Same mask. Same wound. Emily knew exactly what she was doing."

Sol looks at the blood.

Then slowly looks back at Emily.

The expression beneath the torn mask does not soften.

It disappears into something colder.

SOL AZTECA: "Ahora tú."

SOL AZTECA: "Now you."

Emily comes in again, swinging the chain like a club, but Sol catches the movement and ducks under it. She drives a kick into Emily's thigh, another into the ribs, then snaps a hard forearm across Emily's jaw. Emily staggers, but Sol keeps the chain tight and yanks her back into a knee to the body.

Emily drops to one knee.

Sol wraps the chain once around Emily's upper arm and pulls until Emily's shoulder twists awkwardly.

Emily screams and reaches for Sol's mask again out of instinct.

Sol catches her wrist.

SOL AZTECA: "No."

She twists the arm and stomps down near Emily's hand, not breaking it, but making the message clear.

Emily cries out and rolls away, but the chain only lets her get so far.

Sol pulls her back and lashes the chain across Emily's back.

The sound cracks through the arena.

Emily arches in pain.

Sol whips her again.

A red mark opens across Emily's shoulder.

Another shot.

Emily drops to all fours, gasping.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sol Azteca is using that chain like punishment now!"

MARK BRAVO: "This is exactly what she wanted. She wanted Emily attached to the consequence."

Sol pulls Emily up from behind, but Emily reaches back and catches the stitched edge of the mask again, fingers clawing into the rough black thread.

The crowd erupts in alarm.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Emily has the repaired part of the mask again!"

Sol slams a forearm into Emily's ribs.

Emily does not let go.

Sol hits her again.

Emily's grip slips.

Sol hooks her by the head and drives her face-first into the canvas.

SOL AZTECA: "You do not touch it."

She drags Emily up and drives her down again.

SOL AZTECA: "You do not touch it."

A third time, harder.

SOL AZTECA: "You do not touch it."

Emily rolls to her back, blood now starting to appear near her mouth from the impact. Sol stands over her, chain hanging from her wrist, skull paint streaked with blood, mask torn and stitched, looking less like the sun now and more like something that crawled out of an eclipse.

MARK BRAVO: "Emily brought this out of her."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And I do not know if Emily understands how dangerous that is yet."

Sol pulls Emily up and whips her toward the corner. Emily hits hard. Sol charges in with a running corner forearm, then another. Emily slumps. Sol steps back, wraps the chain around her own forearm, and charges a third time.

Emily moves.

Sol hits the turnbuckle chest-first.

Emily grabs the chain and yanks it downward, pulling Sol backward into a brutal neckbreaker.

Both women are down.

The crowd stands.

The referee checks both, but there is no count out. No easy reset. Only two women breathing hard on the canvas with blood on Sol's face, blood near Emily's mouth, and a chain stretched between them.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This match is already taking something out of both women."

MARK BRAVO: "And we are past strategy now. Now it is about who has more hate left in the tank."

Emily crawls toward David's side of the ring.

Sol crawls toward the opposite ropes.

The chain pulls tight between them.

Emily looks at David.

David lowers his voice, but the camera catches just enough.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "Survive her."

Emily blinks through the sweat and blood.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "Then finish her."

Emily nods.

Sol sees it.

She yanks the chain.

Emily is pulled away from her father and back toward the center of the ring. Sol rises, breathing hard, and uses the chain to whip Emily across the back.

Emily screams and falls forward.

Sol whips her again.

The second strike cuts across the first red mark and makes Emily's whole body jolt.

A third shot lands lower across the ribs, and Emily rolls to the side, kicking at the mat, trying to find any space at all.

There is none.

Not enough.

Not tonight.

Sol drags Emily to her feet and snaps a kick into her chest.

Then another.

Then another.

Emily tries to cover up, but the chain keeps one arm extended awkwardly. Sol grabs Emily by the wrist and pulls her into a short-arm knee to the ribs that folds her over.

Sol takes two steps back, using every inch the chain allows.

Then she rushes forward.

Emily catches her with a desperation boot to the stomach.

Sol folds.

Emily wraps the chain around Sol's taped ribs and pulls tight, cinching the metal across the bandages. Sol gasps, her eyes widening as the pressure digs into the same ribs Emily attacked earlier.

Emily screams as she pulls harder.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You asked for this!"

She drives Sol back-first into the corner.

Then again.

The second impact shakes the turnbuckles.

Sol nearly collapses, but the chain keeps her upright, caught between Emily and the corner. Emily charges in.

Corner splash.

Sol sags.

Emily pulls her out and hits the big boot.

Hit And Run connects.

Emily covers.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Sol kicks out.

Emily stares at the referee.

Then at Sol.

Then at the mask.

She reaches for it again.

Sol catches her wrist.

The two are frozen there, Emily trying to reach the mask, Sol holding her back with pure strength.

Sol slowly rises with Emily's wrist still trapped.

SOL AZTECA: "No."

She twists the arm and pulls Emily into a sharp kick to the ribs. Then another. Emily doubles over. Sol grabs the chain and backs toward the ropes, trying to create enough distance.

The chain hangs between them.

Short.

Limiting.

But enough.

Sol steps onto the middle rope and launches herself into a tight springboard knee that catches Emily on the side of the head.

The impact drops Emily flat.

The crowd explodes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Springboard knee! Sol found enough room even with the chain!"

Sol crawls into the cover, blood dripping from her face onto Emily's chest.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Buck reaches under the bottom rope from ringside and puts Emily's foot on the rope.

The crowd erupts in boos.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Buck! Buck put Emily's foot on the rope!"

MARK BRAVO: "No disqualification, John. The Hightowers just used the rules against Sol."

Sol slowly turns her head.

Buck is still on the floor outside, hand barely withdrawn from under the bottom rope.

He freezes.

The referee saw it. He cannot do anything. He only points at Buck and shouts.

Buck backs away along the floor, hands up, but still smirking.

BUCK HIGHTOWER: "What? Rules are rules!"

Sol releases the cover and rises.

Buck keeps backing away near the barricade.

Sol grabs the chain with both hands and whips the loose length outward toward him.

The chain cracks across the bottom rope and snaps toward Buck's shoulder. He tries to jump back, but the metal catches him enough to make him curse and stumble into the barricade.

The crowd roars.

MARK BRAVO: "Sol just caught Buck with the chain!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And Buck suddenly looks less eager!"

Dakota steps forward on the other side, shouting toward Emily.

DAKOTA HIGHTOWER: "Get up, Em!"

Sol turns toward her too.

Dakota stops.

Sol's eyes are wild under the damaged mask, blood now running fully down the upper half of her face and through the skull paint.

Emily uses the distraction.

She grabs the chain and yanks Sol backward into a schoolgirl.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Sol kicks out.

Both women scramble up.

Emily swings Ode To My Father.

Sol ducks.

Emily turns.

Sol yanks her forward with the chain and drills her with a spinning back kick to the stomach. Emily doubles over. Sol hooks her, trying to lift for a suplex or a driver, but Emily blocks with dead weight, grabbing the chain and wrapping it around Sol's leg.

Emily pulls.

Sol drops to one knee.

Emily hits Ode To My Father from close range.

The chain-wrapped bull hammer elbow catches Sol in the jaw.

Sol drops.

Emily collapses into the cover.

REFEREE: "One!"

REFEREE: "Two!"

Sol kicks out.

The arena explodes.

Emily sits up, blood now running from her own forehead after the earlier canvas shots, her eyes wide and furious.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sol Azteca kicks out! Sol kicks out of the chain-assisted Ode To My Father!"

MARK BRAVO: "Emily hit her with everything on that elbow, and Sol still got the shoulder up."

Emily looks to David.

For the first time, David's calm has a crack in it.

Not panic.

Concern.

Small.

But there.

Sol rolls to her side, one hand on the mat, pushing up.

Emily sees it.

Emily's face changes.

She hits Sol again with a short chain-wrapped punch.

Sol does not go down.

Emily hits her again.

Sol stays on one knee.

Emily hits her a third time.

Sol slowly turns back toward her.

Blood runs down from the stitched tear in the mask. Skull paint smeared into red and black. Eyes burning.

Emily takes a step back.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Emily is backing up."

MARK BRAVO: "She should."

Sol rises.

Emily swings again.

Sol catches the wrist.

The crowd erupts.

Sol pulls Emily in and drives a knee into her ribs. Emily folds, and Sol follows with a chain-assisted forearm to the jaw that sends Emily stumbling sideways.

Emily tries to swing back.

Sol ducks and hooks the chain around Emily's waist, yanking her into a brutal short-range German suplex.

Emily lands high on her shoulders and rolls through to her stomach.

Sol does not cover.

She drags Emily back.

Once.

Twice.

Center ring.

Sol wraps the chain around Emily's midsection and one arm, binding her enough that Emily cannot scramble away.

Emily kicks, struggling, panic finally breaking through the heel confidence.

Sol stands over her.

SOL AZTECA: "Ahora entiendes."

SOL AZTECA: "Now you understand."

She pulls Emily up by the chain.

Emily is trapped close.

Sol backs toward the ropes as far as the chain allows.

The crowd rises.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sol has her trapped! Emily cannot get away!"

MARK BRAVO: "This is what Sol wanted. This is the moment. Emily is chained to her, and nobody can pull her out."

Sol steps onto the middle rope.

Springboard.

She launches forward for the Kinshasa.

Emily's eyes widen.

Buck slides into the ring from the floor.

Sol sees him mid-motion and twists just enough to catch Buck instead.

The knee blasts Buck in the face.

Buck collapses instantly, rolling toward the ropes.

The crowd erupts.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sol caught Buck! Sol caught Buck with the springboard knee!"

MARK BRAVO: "Buck tried to save Emily, and Sol wiped him out!"

Emily drops to the mat, gasping, freed from the immediate hit because Buck absorbed it.

Dakota jumps onto the apron.

Sol turns toward her, chain in hand.

Dakota hesitates.

That hesitation is enough for Sol to yank Emily toward the ropes. Emily crashes into Dakota, knocking her off the apron and to the floor.

Another eruption from the crowd.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Dakota goes down too! Sol Azteca is fighting off the whole family!"

MARK BRAVO: "Emily needed saving, and the Hightowers are getting wrecked trying to do it!"

Sol turns back toward Emily.

Emily is on her knees now.

Bleeding.

Breathing hard.

Eyes wide.

Sol pulls the chain tight.

David moves.

Not fast.

But finally.

He steps onto the apron.

The crowd boos like thunder.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "David Hightower is on the apron now!"

The referee turns to him immediately, shouting for him to get down. David does not argue. He simply stands there, calm, drawing the official's attention for the smallest possible window.

Sol turns toward David.

She steps forward.

David looks at her.

No fear.

Sol raises the chain.

Then Emily yanks from behind with everything she has.

Sol is pulled backward throat-first across the loose chain as Emily wraps it under her chin from behind. Sol's body snaps back, and David drops from the apron the instant the damage is done.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "David created the opening! Emily used the chain!"

MARK BRAVO: "That was the save. That was the difference. Sol had Emily beaten."

Emily screams as she pulls the chain against Sol's throat, dragging her backward to the mat. Sol claws at the metal, boots scraping, the bruising from last week now attacked all over again.

Emily wraps the chain tighter and uses it to pull Sol up just enough.

She drives a chain-wrapped forearm into the torn, painted upper mask.

Sol drops to one knee.

Emily hits her again.

Sol drops lower.

Emily looks toward David.

David nods once.

Emily pulls Sol into position, tucks the head, and with every bit of strength she has left, powers her up.

Total Loss.

The powerbomb drives Sol into the mat with the chain caught awkwardly beneath and around them, metal clattering under impact.

Emily folds over the pin.

She hooks both legs as best she can, keeping the chain tight across Sol's body.

REFEREE: "One!"

The crowd screams.

REFEREE: "Two!"

Sol kicks out.

The arena comes apart.

Emily rolls off her and sits there for one second, staring at the referee like she has just watched reality break in front of her.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "SOL KICKED OUT! SOL AZTECA KICKED OUT OF TOTAL LOSS!"

MARK BRAVO: "After the chain, after the interference, after everything, Sol still kicked out!"

Emily looks down at Sol.

Sol is barely moving.

But she kicked out.

Her whole face is a mess of blood now. The skull paint is almost gone beneath it, smeared into red streaks across exposed skin and torn fabric. Blood drips from the repaired seam of the mask onto the canvas, mixing with Emily's where both women have been dragged across the mat.

Emily's breathing turns ragged.

Not tired anymore.

Something worse.

She looks at David.

Then at Buck, still down near the ropes.

Then at Dakota, trying to pull herself up on the floor.

Then back at Sol.

Sol's fingers twitch against the canvas.

Emily's face twists.

Not fear now.

Not confidence.

Rage.

Pure, humiliated rage.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Stay down."

Sol does not.

She plants one hand.

Then the other.

Trying to push herself up.

Emily snaps.

She grabs the chain with both hands and loops it around Sol's throat from behind. Sol's hands immediately shoot to the metal, but Emily drops behind her, hooks her legs around Sol's waist, and pulls her backward into a rear naked choke with the chain trapped across the front of Sol's neck.

The crowd screams.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "No! No, Emily has the chain around Sol's throat again!"

MARK BRAVO: "Rear naked choke with the chain! She has the chain across the throat!"

Sol kicks hard, boots scraping through the blood on the canvas.

Emily pulls back with everything she has.

The chain tightens.

Sol's body arches.

Her hands claw at the metal, trying to wedge fingers underneath, trying to make any space at all.

Emily locks her grip tighter and screams into the side of Sol's ruined mask.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "I said stay down!"

The referee drops low, checking Sol's face.

REFEREE: "Sol! Sol, can you continue?"

Sol's eyes are open.

Burning.

Defiant.

But her hands are slipping.

Emily pulls harder.

Blood runs down Sol's face, over the torn edge of the mask, down her chin, and onto Emily's forearm. Emily is covered in it too now, her own blood mixing with Sol's until neither woman looks clean, neither woman looks untouched, neither woman looks like she should still be moving.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This is horrific. Sol Azteca is trapped. The chain is across the throat. Emily has the body locked."

MARK BRAVO: "And there is nowhere to go. She is chained to her. She cannot create distance. She cannot crawl out. This is what Sol asked for, and now Emily has turned it into a trap."

Sol reaches one hand toward the ropes.

The chain keeps her close.

She kicks.

She twists.

She nearly turns her shoulder enough to roll, and for one second the crowd rises, believing she might break free again.

Emily screams and rolls with her, keeping the chain across the throat, dragging Sol back into the choke.

Sol's legs kick once.

Hard.

Then again.

Weaker.

The referee is right there.

REFEREE: "Sol! Show me something!"

Sol's hand reaches up.

Not to tap.

She reaches for her mask.

Her fingers touch the torn, blood-soaked edge.

Then they slip.

Her arm drops.

The arena noise changes from fury to alarm.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sol is fading. Sol Azteca is fading."

MARK BRAVO: "She is not tapping. She is not giving Emily that. But she is fading."

The referee grabs Sol's wrist and lifts it.

It falls.

The crowd groans.

He lifts it again.

It falls again.

Emily keeps the chain tight, eyes wide, face covered in blood, teeth clenched like she is trying to pull every last piece of resistance out of Sol's body.

The referee lifts Sol's wrist a third time.

For a second, it hangs.

The crowd rises.

Sol's fingers twitch.

Emily screams and pulls back one final time.

The hand drops.

The referee immediately calls for the bell.

DING DING DING!

The crowd erupts in boos and shock.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The referee has stopped it! Sol Azteca passed out! Emily Hightower wins by referee stoppage!"

MARK BRAVO: "Sol did not tap. She did not quit. She passed out in the chain. That is the only way Emily Hightower could stop her."

The referee and officials rush in, trying to pry Emily off.

But Emily does not release right away.

Her eyes are still locked on Sol.

The referee screams at her.

REFEREE: "Emily! Let go! Let go!"

David slides into the ring and finally puts a hand on Emily's shoulder.

Not forcefully.

Just enough.

Emily blinks.

Then releases.

Sol collapses forward onto the canvas, motionless, blood spreading beneath her face and mask. The chain falls loose around her, one end still cuffed to her wrist, the other still cuffed to Emily's.

Officials immediately move around Sol, checking her neck, her face, the torn mask, trying to create space without exposing her further.

Emily rolls backward onto her knees, breathing hard, blood running down her face and chest. She looks almost empty now. Like the rage burned everything out and left only exhaustion behind.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Look at the canvas. Look at both women. This was not a match. This was a war."

MARK BRAVO: "And if anyone in the back is supposed to follow this, good luck. Because these two just left pieces of themselves in that ring."

The officials unlock Emily's cuff first.

The metal drops from her wrist.

Then they move to Sol's.

Emily tries to stand and nearly falls.

David catches her.

Buck pulls himself up near the ropes, one hand on his jaw, eyes still unfocused from the springboard knee. Dakota climbs back in slowly, shaken, watching Sol as officials work around her.

The referee raises Emily's hand.

She can barely keep it up.

David steps beside her and lifts it higher.

The crowd boos with everything they have left.

RING ANNOUNCER: "Here is your winner by referee stoppage... Emily Hightower!"

Emily does not smile.

She looks down at Sol.

Sol is still not moving much. One hand twitches faintly near the bloodied edge of the mask as officials keep checking her. Her face is covered in blood, the skull paint almost completely swallowed by it now, the repaired mask soaked red across the torn seam.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Emily Hightower gets the victory. The Hightowers get the victory. But it took interference, it took a powerbomb, it took the chain, and finally it took choking Sol Azteca unconscious to keep her down."

MARK BRAVO: "And even then, she did not quit. That matters. Sol did not give them the tap. She did not give them

surrender. Emily won, but Sol made them survive her."

David starts guiding Emily toward the ropes.

Buck follows, still shouting at the crowd, but there is less confidence in it now. Dakota lingers half a second longer, looking down at Sol, something uneasy crossing her face before David's voice pulls her away.

Emily steps through the ropes with David's help.

She looks back once.

Sol is being tended to in the center of the ring, surrounded by officials and medical staff. Blood stains the canvas where both women had fought, crawled, and refused to stay down.

The crowd starts chanting.

CROWD: "SOL! SOL! SOL!"

Emily hears it.

Her face tightens.

David raises her hand again on the ramp.

The boos answer him.

Emily won.

But the chant belongs to Sol.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This crowd knows what they saw. Emily Hightower leaves with the win, but Sol Azteca leaves with something else. Respect. Fear. Maybe both."

MARK BRAVO: "Emily's first match as a full Hightower, Sol's first match in UTA, and they may have just made every match after this feel impossible to follow."

The final shot holds between them.

Emily Hightower, victorious and surrounded by family, blood covering her face as David keeps her upright.

Sol Azteca, motionless in the ring, torn mask soaked red, skull paint buried beneath blood, the chain lying loose beside her as officials check on her.

The message is clear.

Emily Hightower won the Tow Chain Match.

But she did not break Sol Azteca.

She had to choke her unconscious to survive her.

## Conclusion

CARD SUBJECT TO CHANGE

## Show Credits

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