

Point of Review

June 14, 2026 | The Foundry - Birmingham, AL

Lousy reviews

Sometime before the show.

The conference room is unusually quiet. Eric Dane Sr. sits at one side of the table, slouched in his chair and staring at his phone. Across from him sits Todderick Davenport Jr., a broad, imposing man whose sheer size somehow makes the room feel smaller. A folder of paperwork sits between them, largely ignored while both men occupy themselves elsewhere.

The door opens.

Cito Conarri walks in carrying another folder, thicker than the one already on the table.

Cito Conarri:

"Results of the review are here, fellas."

Without looking up from his phone, TD Jr. raises an eyebrow.

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"Good?"

Cito Conarri:

"Absolutely not."

That gets both men's attention.

TD Jr. lowers his phone.

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"How bad?"

Cito drops the folder onto the table.

Cito Conarri:

"BlackRock Holdings is kicking ICW out of The Foundry bad."

A pause.

Cito Conarri:

Point of Review

"We've got through 4.5."

Both men look at Eric.

Eric looks back.

Then slowly sets his phone down.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"What?"

Cito Conarri:

"What's the plan?"

Eric shrugs.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Fuck Birmingham."

TDJR's mouth opens slightly. He starts to speak, then just turns to look at Cito.

Cito sighs.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Yeah, I said it."

The door opens again.

Without a word, Jeff Andrews walks into the room, grabs a chair, sits down, and starts reading the top page of the report.

Nobody acknowledges him.

Nobody appears surprised he's there.

Cito Conarri:

"Eric, just because we're--"

Eric Dane Sr.:

"No, I'm serious."

He waves a hand vaguely toward the outside world.

Point of Review

Eric Dane Sr.:

"I'm sick of this city."

Another shrug.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Fuck the review, and fuck Birmingham. Anything's better."

Cito exhales through his nose.

Cito Conarri:

"Do we even have a plan?"

Eric Dane Sr.:

"We most certainly do."

He leans back in his chair.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Fuck. Birmingham."

A long, awkward silence settles over the room.

Nobody says it out loud, but everybody present is well aware that this conversation is eventually going to end up in front of the public. Somehow. Some way. These things always do.

Cito finally breaks first.

Cito Conarri:

"We don't necessarily have to leave. There's other locations. Local gymnasiums. Civic centers. We can try to work something out while we--"

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Cito, the problem with that is fuck Birmingham."

Cito closes his eyes.

Not for long. Just long enough.

When he opens them again, the fight is gone.

Cito Conarri:

"...Right."

Point of Review

Across the table, TD Jr. folds his hands.

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"Gentlemen, since it seems it's coming to it, can we go through my proposal again?"

Cito Conarri:

"The Iowa move?"

At that, Jeff finally looks up from the review packet.

Jeff Andrews:

"Iowa?"

TD Jr. nods.

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"Yes. My family owns property in Davenport. Specifically an out-of-use storage facility on a wharf along the Mississippi. It isn't too dissimilar an environment from--"

He pauses.

Even TD Jr. realizes comparing anything favorably to Birmingham is unlikely to help his case at the moment.

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"Any other larger small town with a working-class backbone. You wouldn't be answerable to corporations or review boards anymore."

Jeff Andrews:

"Only you, right?"

TD Jr. nods immediately.

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"And I've said all along that yes, that would be the case. My involvement in the wrestling business is in large part because of my son's involvement."

He gestures toward the paperwork.

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"But it's also an opportunity to improve an unused property and provide an entertainment service to a town that could genuinely use one. And I've made it clear that I have absolutely no interest in becoming a--"

He grimaces slightly, makes quote signs with his fingers.

Point of Review

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"Heel authority figure.' You guys know how to actually run a wrestling company. I'm just here to facilitate. The existence of the company itself helps my son."

Jeff considers this for a moment.

Jeff Andrews:

"I'm not sure I'm buying it."

A beat.

Jeff Andrews:

"Is Iowa actually a thing?"

TD Jr. stares.

Eric sits up a little.

Not because he cares about the proposal.

Because a new opportunity to be difficult has just presented itself.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"You remember this stuff better than I do."

He points at Andrews.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Back in the interfed days. WIFWA. CAL. NWC. Even the fuckin' NeWA."

A pause.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Did any of those places ever have an Iowa territory?"

Jeff thinks about it.

Jeff Andrews:

"No."

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Exactly."

Point of Review

He leans back in his chair.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"The only thing that happens in Iowa is every four years politicians go there to shake hands with farmers and pretend to care about corn."

Jeff Andrews:

"Oh yeah. That place."

Another pause.

Jeff Andrews:

"According to the internet, they eat sour cream and raisin pie."

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Horrific."

Jeff Andrews:

"I dunno."

He shrugs.

Jeff Andrews:

"Sometimes something sounds so awful you know it's probably good, because otherwise it wouldn't exist. I would eat some."

Eric Dane Sr.:

"You're a sick man, Andrews."

TD Jr. pinches the bridge of his nose.

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"Guys?"

Cito Conarri:

"So if this is really happening... do we have any plans? How are we going to?"

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"My family's been developing property in the area for a long time. I'm familiar with the zoning laws."

He folds his hands on the table.

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

Point of Review

"The city is usually delighted when somebody finds a use for an out of use industrial building. It happens far less often than you'd think. My people can handle permitting, renovation, accessibility, parking, utilities, all of it. The logistics are the easy part."

Dane Sr. slowly nods.

Cito Conarri:

"So we could really do this."

Todderick Davenport Jr.:

"Yes."

A pause.

Everyone looks at Eric again.

Eric looks at the paperwork.

Looks at TDJr.

Looks at Cito.

Pointedly doesn't look at Andrews.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"I've got a pay-per-view tonight."

Another beat.

He points at Andrews. Still without looking at him.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"He's probably gonna fuck it up on purpose anyway."

Jeff Andrews:

"You wound me. I'm as professional as Tom Brady is overrated."

Dane starts to answer, can't think of a good rejoinder. Instead, he stands.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Whatever. If we're really moving, I'll deal with it later."

A shrug.

Point of Review

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Or never."

Another shrug.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"I don't fuckin' know anymore."

Dane stands up, leaving all the paperwork he was looking at scattered across the top of the table, and steps through a door, slamming it behind him.

For a few seconds, nobody says anything. The silence left behind by Eric somehow feels louder than the argument that preceded it.

Cito reaches for the review packet. TD Jr. is still staring at the office door. Andrews mumbles some indistinct profanities under his breath, pushes his chair back, stands, and heads towards the door.

Nobody tries to stop him. Nobody asks where he's going, either. As he reaches the doorway, he pauses.

Without turning around, he shakes his head.

Jeff Andrews:

"You see what I've had to deal with for all these years?"

Cito snorts despite himself.

TD Jr. just blinks.

Andrews doesn't wait for an answer. He steps into the hallway and disappears from view.

The camera lingers.

For a moment it looks as though the conversation is over.

Then it shifts slightly.

Standing against the wall, just outside the conference room door, is Eric Dane Jr.

He has clearly heard enough. The look on his face makes that abundantly clear.

The office door remains shut.

Point of Review

Junior looks at it.

Then down the hallway where Andrews just left.

Then back at the office.

Fade.

Welcome to Point of Review

The camera sweeps across a packed Foundry as fans are already on their feet. Homemade signs bob above the crowd -- support for Graysie Parker, Eric Dane Jr., Sunny Holliday, The Brothers Gluck, and dozens more scattered throughout the sea of people. The energy in the building is unmistakable.

RRRAAAHHHH!!!

ICW doesn't have pyros, but it does its best. Fog rolls in from nowhere, lights flicker, lasers cut through the mists.

The camera settles at ringside where Robbie Ray Carter and Angus Skaaland are waiting.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome, after considerable delays, to ICW Point of Review! I'm your host, Robbie Ray Carter, as always alongside the Motormouth of Malcontent, Angus Skaaland. Say hi to the fans, Angus!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Hi to the fans. Robbie, there's been something sitting wrong with me for a while now. They had those meetings, right? They pulled Jacoby Jacobs and Kirsty McKinney in and had them interviewed by the board, but there were supposed to be more, and then they just stopped. It's been radio silence ever since, and then we had that big delay getting this show put together."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I'm sure I don't know anything more than you do, Angus, but you're right. It does feel like there's something missing, doesn't it?"

Angus Skaaland:

"Like something's hanging over the promotion."

Robbie pauses for a moment, then deliberately steers things back on course.

Robbie Ray Carter:

Point of Review

"Well one thing we can tell is hanging over the promotion is anticipation, because we've got a tremendous lineup tonight, and let's talk about the main event!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Hold on, I gotta see if Toddy's check cleared so I know whether to fanboy for the Trust Fund or not."

Angus taps at his phone several times.

Angus Skaaland:

"Nope."

A beat.

Angus Skaaland:

"Fuck that spoiled little shit. I hope Graysie headlocks him to death."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"What Angus means is that in our main event, Iron Crown Champion Todderick Davenport III -- who has renamed the title the Trust Fund International Championship -- defends against no fewer than three top contenders. Kirsty McKinney, the matwork phenom and disciple of Jeff Andrews. Graysie Parker, the handpicked protégé of Eric Dane Sr. And of course Eric Dane Jr., who has simultaneously devoted his career to living up to his father's legacy while breaking out of his shadow."

Angus Skaaland:

"It's sort of funny. Toddy-boy feels like an afterthought in his own match, and to a lesser extent, so does Junior."

He shrugs.

Angus Skaaland:

"This one's all about Graysie and Kirsty, folks. Especially if you ask them."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Then under that we've got The Brothers Gluck defending the Iron City Tag Team Championship against The Night Riders. The Night Riders have been on a small winning streak, defeating the Urban Ninjaz and then ALEXANDER to earn this opportunity. The Glucks did roll over the Riders really early on, but--"

Angus Skaaland:

"But I have no idea who Buck and Wolfe were, or where the real Night Riders were."

He points toward the stage.

Angus Skaaland:

Point of Review

"Neon Blaze and Steel Thunder aren't the same guys from Season One."

A pause.

Angus Skaaland:

"But man, I don't know. Those Glucks..."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Then we've got a huge six-man tag. On one side, The James Gang -- Zeke, Zeb, and Cherry Mae. On the other side, The New Untouchables--"

Angus Skaaland:

"Hate them so much."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"--teaming with none other than Jeff Andrews."

Angus Skaaland:

"Fuck him too. Look, I lived through everything he put DEFIANCE through, and I'm not saying what happened there was right, but he left this entire circle for the XHF and I thought it was good riddance. He and Dane Sr. pretended each other didn't exist for a decade."

He shakes his head.

Angus Skaaland:

"And now he's back. Robbie, I could go on all night about all the ways in which I don't like this."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"We've got two more title matches tonight as well. First, we've got Lowlife Larry Edwards defending the ICW Television Championship against the inaugural champion, the returning Jack Havok."

Angus Skaaland:

"Havok spent half the season angry drinking, but he sure did make his presence known last week."

He pauses.

Angus Skaaland:

"Or year. Or whatever. Time flies when Keyboard Jeff's busy."

Robbie visibly chooses not to acknowledge that.

Angus Skaaland:

"He bushwhacked Edwards, laid him out, dropped the Television Title right on his face."

Point of Review

A grin spreads across his face.

Angus Skaaland:

"Oh yeah. And Edwards got up laughing."

He points at the camera.

Angus Skaaland:

"Shit's gonna be wildin', Robbie. Did I say that right?"

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I'm sure I don't know, Angus. In our other title defense, Sunny Holliday puts the Women's Championship on the line against Celestina Cruz. Cruz talked her way into this opportunity after a brutal attack on Sunny's friends, Jenn Tinsley and Sam Gardner."

Angus Skaaland:

"I wonder how Sam's ear is doing after Valeria clobbered it with a cast."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"We've also got two additional matches. Speaking of the women's division, Duchess Vaughn was removed from it at the end of last season due to excessive violence, and she I mean they have been turning their attention toward the television division."

He catches himself before continuing.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And wouldn't you guess who decided to try stepping up and stopping them?"

Angus Skaaland:

"Iron freakin' Kid."

He laughs.

Angus Skaaland:

"Look, he's got heart. I love that."

The laughter fades.

Angus Skaaland:

"But he already had his underdog story against Toddy, and it didn't go too well. Now he wants to do it against Bronson Box's niece?"

A wince.

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"She's gonna flatten him like one of those anvils that were manufactured in India."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And then, last but also first, our opening bout..."

The crowd begins to stir as anticipation builds.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"...and I think we're just about to get started!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Thank freaking God. Just ring the bell before somebody starts another board meeting or has to evict someone!"

Preston Price vs Marcus King vs Eli Dresden vs Cole Marksson vs Sammy Starr vs Riley Cross

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is a high-stakes six-man scramble to determine the next challenger for the ICW Television Championship, and there's no shortage of history packed into it. Primetime Preston Price and Marcus 'The Titan' King have both been circling champion Lowlife Larry Edwards, but neither man has been able to get the job done when it counts. Meanwhile, Sammy Starr has found himself tangled up in Price and Ricky Dale Cash's orbit in a situation that's only escalated in recent weeks."

Angus Skaaland:

"Escalated' is real polite, Robbie. They stomped on Starr for like five minutes straight--this ain't a disagreement, that's a mugging with a theme song. And now Dane Sr. says, 'Hey, let's throw 'em all in a match and see who survives,' like that's not going to explode in his face."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And if that wasn't enough, Eric Dane Sr. added another layer entirely--calling up three prospects from The Foundry and dropping them right into this environment. Cole Marksson, Eli Dresden, and Riley Cross all get a massive opportunity here tonight, with a chance to jump the line and change their careers in one match."

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah, and also a chance to get their heads taken off, let's be honest. You've got three kids trying to make a name for themselves, and three guys who already think they run this place--two of 'em actually might. This isn't just about winning, Robbie... this is about who walks out of here looking like they belong in that TV Title picture."

Point of Review

Cito Conarri:

"The following contest is our opening bout of the evening! It is a six way dance, set for one fall, with no time limit, and it will determine the next number one contender to the ICW Television Championship! Introducing first, from New Orleans, Louisiana, weighing 215 pounds... accompanied to the ring by Ricky Dale Cash... 'Primetime' Preston Price!"

A brassy N'awlins jazz riff gives way to swaggering rhythm as Preston Price steps through the curtain with a grin already plastered across his face. He spreads his arms wide, soaking in the attention, while Ricky Dale Cash follows a step behind, clutching The Cash Stick and talking animatedly to anyone willing to listen. Price takes his time down the aisle, pointing to himself, jawing with fans, and making sure the cameras catch every angle before sliding into the ring and striking a pose in the center.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Preston Price has been knocking on the door of the Television Title picture for months now. Tonight may be his best opportunity yet."

Angus Skaaland:

"That's because he's smart, Robbie. Let everybody else do somersaults and backflips. Price is worried about winning."

Cito Conarri:

"Introducing next, from Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, weighing 194 pounds... Eli Dresden!"

"Ultimate" hits and Eli Dresden bursts through the curtain like he was fired from a cannon. He barely pauses long enough to acknowledge the crowd before charging down the aisle, bouncing on the balls of his feet and shadowboxing at nobody in particular. Reaching ringside, he hops onto the apron and slingshots himself over the ropes in one fluid motion, immediately pacing the ring as if the match should have started thirty seconds ago.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"A tremendous opportunity here for one of The Foundry's young prospects."

Angus Skaaland:

"Last time we saw Dresden he got introduced to Jack Havok's definition of a bad day. Let's see if he learned anything from it."

Cito Conarri:

"Introducing next, from Tupelo, Mississippi, weighing 213 pounds... 'Superstar' Sammy Starr!"

The familiar opening of "I Was Made For Lovin' You" hits again, and Sammy Starr emerges in his glittering green jacket with all the confidence of a man convinced he's the biggest celebrity in the building. He points both thumbs toward the oversized SUPERSTAR logo on his back, adjusts his lapels, and strolls down the aisle at an unhurried pace, posing whenever he feels the crowd isn't paying enough attention.

Point of Review

At ringside, Starr comes to a stop as Ricky Dale Cash immediately starts talking at him from the floor. Cash gestures with his free hand, pitching something only Starr can hear. Starr doesn't look impressed. He says something sharp in return, and whatever response Cash gives earns him a dismissive shake of the head before Starr turns away.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Cash tried to recruit Sammy Starr just days ago, and Starr made it very clear what he thought of that offer."

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah, well, Cash has never let rejection slow him down. That's one thing I'll give the old grifter."

Ignoring both Price and Cash now, Starr climbs onto the apron and steps through the ropes. He gives one final turn toward the hard camera, throwing his arms wide like a conquering hero before backing into a corner and staring across the ring at Price.

Cito Conarri:

"Introducing next, from Saraland, Alabama, weighing 204 pounds... Cole Marksson!"

"Cut the Cord" hits and Cole Marksson appears with immediate energy, clapping his hands once and nodding to himself before jogging down the ramp. He slaps hands with fans along the way, then springs onto the apron, vaults over the ropes, and lands lightly on the middle strand before launching into a quick moonsault. He sticks the landing cleanly, gives the crowd a brief acknowledgment, and immediately settles into focused warmups.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Marksson has only had one match in ICW, but tonight is exactly the kind of opportunity that can change a young wrestler's trajectory."

Angus Skaaland:

"Maybe. I'd settle for seeing him survive longer than he did against Duchess Vaughn."

Cito Conarri:

"Introducing next, from Asheville, North Carolina, weighing 175 pounds... Riley Cross!"

The synth-heavy pulse of "Future Club" fills the arena and Riley Cross emerges to a noticeably warmer reception. Dressed in black and moving like he's got music nobody else can hear, Cross bounces down the aisle with restless energy, slapping hands and grinning as he goes. He slides under the bottom rope, pops to his feet in one motion, and paces a quick circle around the ring before settling into his corner.

RRRAHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Listen to this reaction. Riley Cross made a lot of fans in a very short amount of time."

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"Annoyingly. I was all set to dislike him and then he went out there and started being entertaining."

Cito Conarri:

"And introducing last, from Dayton, Ohio, weighing 255 pounds... Marcus 'The Titan' King!"

A solemn orchestral march rolls through the Foundry as Marcus King steps onto the stage with the composure of a man arriving exactly when he intended to. A towel hangs around his neck, his warmup jacket draped over broad shoulders, and his expression suggests he already finds everyone else in the match disappointing. King strides to the ring without haste, climbs the steps, folds the towel neatly in his corner, and slowly surveys the field assembled before him.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Marcus King came up short against Television Champion Lowlife Larry Edwards, but many people left that match believing King's ceiling in this business remains incredibly high."

Angus Skaaland:

"Many people? Just say me, Robbie. I'll say it. That guy's got something. You can't teach whatever it is that makes a room pay attention when you walk into it."

The bell rings and the six men immediately fan out around the ring, each trying to find an opening before somebody else does. It doesn't take long for the younger wrestlers to come to the same conclusion.

Marcus King is the problem.

Cole Marksson charges first, springing off one foot and firing a sharp dropkick toward King's chest. King barely moves. He simply swats the legs aside with both hands, sending Marksson skidding awkwardly across the canvas.

Riley Cross tries a different approach. He spins into a heel kick aimed at the side of King's head--

King catches the leg.

The crowd groans as Cross realizes his mistake a fraction too late. King yanks him forward, turns his hips, and launches him overhead with a beautiful suplex.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Everybody's trying to take King down early!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Good. That's the smartest thing they've done all match."

Point of Review

Before King can capitalize, Eli Dresden barrels across the ring with a spear attempt, throwing himself forward without hesitation.

King sees it coming.

The Titan wraps Dresden into a front facelock and drops to one knee, using leverage rather than power to stop the charge cold. Dresden's momentum dies instantly as King cinches the hold tighter.

Then a blur streaks across the ring.

Preston Price plants a foot on Dresden's back and springs upward.

THWACK!

A step-up enzuigiri catches King flush on the side of the head.

The hold breaks.

King stumbles.

Then falls.

RRRAHHH!!!

Price lands smoothly, adjusts his wrist tape, and spreads his arms wide to soak in the reaction.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"King finally taken off his feet!"

Angus Skaaland:

"By Preston Price. Coincidentally the smartest guy in the match."

Price turns toward the hard camera with a smirk.

And immediately gets rolled up.

Sammy Starr slips in behind him with a schoolboy.

ONE!

Price kicks free before two, rolls through, keeps hold of Starr's arm, and yanks him upright.

THWACK!

Point of Review

The leg sweep backbreaker folds Starr over Price's knee. Price lets him tumble to the mat, then calmly resumes the pose he'd been interrupted in.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

Unfortunately for Price, somebody else has recovered while he was admiring himself.

Marksson storms over, grabs him by the shoulder, and spins him around.

Right hand. And another, and another. Price's head snaps side to side as Marksson unloads with crisp overhand shots.

The exchange lasts all of three seconds before Cross comes flying in from nowhere.

THWACK!

One foot hits Price, one foot hits Marksson, and both men get blasted off their feet.

Now the ring is chaos. Bodies are everywhere, and nobody has control.

Except the man everybody forgot about.

Marcus King pushes himself up from the canvas, jaw tight and expression darkening.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Marcus King back to his feet, and he's not looking happy."

Cross rises first and turns directly into disaster.

KRAK!

The Royal Elbow crashes into the side of his head. Cross collapses instantly, King doesn't even look down.

Starr is climbing back to his feet nearby. King hooks him, lifts him, and dumps him over with a brutal suplex.

OOOHHHHH!

The Titan rises once more, surveying the wreckage around him.

Angus Skaaland:

"That's Professor level smarts right there, Robbie. King may like to do that lecture clinic thing, but when he's got 5 smaller bodies flying around, he knows when it's time to stop talking and act decisively."

Point of Review

King's eyes settle on Preston Price.

The smile disappears from Price's face.

King takes a single step forward. Then another. No rushing, no panic, just a very large, very angry man closing the distance.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I don't think Marcus King appreciated getting kicked in the head earlier."

Angus Skaaland:

"No, Robbie. I don't think he did."

Marcus King keeps advancing.

Preston Price does the only sensible thing available to him. In one fluid motion he darts in with a side knee lift and slips on a side headlock.

The bigger man is briefly, ever so briefly, stunned by the audacity. The crowd laughs.

HAH!

Price cranks down on the hold, trying to slow the bigger man, but King immediately shoves him off toward the ropes. Price rebounds at full speed--

And King moves.

One fluid motion.

No hesitation.

No setup.

King catches Price's arm, turns his hips, and suddenly the headlock has become an abdominal stretch.

Before Price can even react, King rolls through.

ONE!

Price's shoulders hit the mat as the stretch transitions seamlessly into a pinning predicament.

TWO--

Point of Review

Dresden dives in and stomps the hold apart.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"What a counter by King!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Now those are two guys who know wrestling, Robbie. Price didn't just rush him and get tossed like the kids did, he made King react, King recognized a strikefest and tried to slip in a quick pin instead."

Price rolls away clutching his ribs while Dresden immediately tries to capitalize. He ducks behind King, locks his waist, and strains for the Blue Thunder Driver.

King's toes brush the mat, but Dresden can't get the leverage to loft him. .

Dresden strains harder.

King still doesn't move.

The Titan simply drops his weight. Dresden's eyes widen as King peels one hand free, breaks the grip, spins behind into a hammerlock, then leaps sideways to trap the far arm with his legs.

Suddenly Dresden is folded up in a crucifix pin.

ONE!

TWO!

THWACK!

A dropkick from Riley Cross catches King square in the stomach, knocking the hold off balance and spilling both men apart.

RRRAHHH!!!

Cross pops up immediately.

King rises.

THWACK!

Another dropkick sends King staggering backward.

Cross points, Dresden nods, and the two young wrestlers hit the far ropes, rebound, and launch.

Point of Review

KA-THWACK!

Stereo dropkicks finally send King tumbling through the ropes to the floor.

RRRAAHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"King's out!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Took half the match to do it."

The celebration lasts exactly one second.

Cole Marksson is already moving.

He sprints toward the ropes, leaps to the top strand, twists outward, lands momentarily on the middle rope facing the floor--

And springs backward.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

The Asai moonsault is picture-perfect.

King disappears beneath 204 pounds of Alabama enthusiasm.

Both men crash to the floor.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"What a moonsault from Marksson!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Kid finally figured out gravity works both directions."

Inside the ring, meanwhile, Sammy Starr sees opportunity. Cross is still scrambling to his feet after the double dropkick, a little faster than Dresden. Starr hooks him and drops him with the Shining Starrplex.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That slippery little...!"

Starr immediately turns toward Dresden. He slips his head under the armpit, wraps him up for another Shining Starrplex--

Point of Review

--and Dresden slips free!

Arm drag! Star stumbles up into another armdrag. Up again into a third armdrag! Feeling it, dancing on his toes, the crowd behind him, Dresden waits on the disoriented Starr and hits a Japanese armdrag that sends him awkwardly sprawling towards the corner.

RRRAAHHH!!!

Dresden is feeling it now. The crowd is with him. He's bouncing on the balls of his feet, clapping to get the fans going, ready to charge--

SMACK!

The entire arena gasps.

Preston Price has returned.

No fancy setup. No flashy offense, nothing high risk. Just grabbing Dresden by the shoulder, spinning him around, and a disrespectful open-handed paintbrush across Dresden's face.

Dresden grasps his cheek in shock. The crowd erupts.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

Price smirks.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Oh come on!"

Angus Skaaland:

"...That's gonna be a mistake."

Dresden doesn't hesitate.

The moment Preston Price finishes admiring his handiwork, Eli charges across the ring and drives him backwards into the turnbuckles. The impact rattles the ropes and Dresden immediately starts unloading, hammering Price with frantic alternating body shots while the crowd roars its approval.

RRRAAHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Dresden's had enough of the cheap shots!"

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"That tends to happen when you slap people, Robbie."

Dresden grabs Price by the wrist and fires him across the ring. Price hits the opposite corner hard, but as Dresden charges in after him, Price reverses course and launches him into the turnbuckles instead. It's the kind of Irish whip designed to hurt. Dresden collides chest-first, recoils out of the corner in a daze, and Price is already moving.

Two exaggerated swaggering steps.

A fold at the waist.

THWACK!

The Lagniappe Lariat nearly turns Dresden inside out.

Price immediately pops upright and spreads his arms wide while Ricky Dale Cash applauds from ringside like he's witnessing fine art.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

Unfortunately for Price, somebody else has reached his limit.

Sammy Starr comes charging in from behind and cracks him between the shoulders with a running forearm smash.

Price stumbles forward.

Starr is on him immediately.

Forearm.

Forearm.

Forearm.

Mounted punches rain down as the crowd comes alive.

This isn't polished offense. It's a veteran wrestler finally getting sick of somebody's nonsense.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Starr's not interested in posing for the cameras!"

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"Well somebody's gotta hit Preston while he's busy admirin' himself."

Starr drags Price upright and hooks him for the Shining Starrplex.

But before Starr has a chance to lift him off his feet, Price's hand flashes upward and his thumb catches Starr in the eye.

Starr recoils, and in one movement Price wraps his arm around Starr's neck from in front, jumps, and drops.

THWAMM!

The Crescent City Cutter plants Starr into the canvas.

BBBOOOOO!!!

Price hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

Cross comes flying off the top rope.

Price sees him.

At the last second he rolls away.

Cross crashes into Starr instead.

KRA-KOOM!!!

OOOOHHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:

"You see that, Robbie? Brilliant counter wrestling. Brilliant ring awareness. There's a reason Ricky Dale Cash is all in on Preston Price, and we're seeing it."

Price grins. For about half a second.

Then he turns directly into Cole Marksson.

Price throws a haymaker. Marksson ducks, slips behind him with textbook precision, secures the waistlock,

Point of Review

and bridges.

THWACK!

German suplex. Textbook high bridge.

ONE!

TWO!

THR--

--KICKOUT!

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Price scrambles away on hands and knees, staring at the referee in utter disbelief.

Not fear.

Not relief.

Offense.

As though the official has personally insulted him by allowing the count to get that far.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Marksson almost stole it!"

Angus Skaaland:

"And Preston Price is genuinely offended somebody thought they were allowed to pin him."

Near the ropes, Starr slowly rolls onto his side, still blinking away the effects of the eye poke and cutter.

Unfortunately for him, Ricky Dale Cash is right there.

Cash is red-faced, sweating, waving The Cash Stick, and shouting loud enough for the front row to hear every word.

Or at least every word in theory.

Ricky Dale Cash:

"(Unintelligible southern managerial screaming)"

Point of Review

Starr stares at him in anger, the ref stares in confusion.

In the background, the visual of a handful of younger fans faces' likewise frozen in confusion, while a much older fan nods sagely.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I think Ricky Dale Cash is giving Sammy Starr advice."

Angus Skaaland:

"You think, Robbie? He ain't sharin' his recipe for macaroni salad."

Cash continues gesticulating wildly as the action carries on around him. He only settles down a bit when he almost drops The Cash Stick. Clutching it to his chest like his life is flashing before his eyes, he hustles several paces away.

Marksson reaches down to pull Preston Price back to his feet.

Price responds by driving a forearm directly between his legs. Marksson crumbles immediately.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

The referee lunges forward, shouting at Price and pointing a warning finger in his face. Price responds by holding his hands up innocently and backing away.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Come on! That's as blatant as it gets!"

Angus Skaaland:

"If the ref wanted him disqualified, he'd disqualify him."

Price turns directly into Riley Cross.

Cross grabs him by the shoulder and spins him around before planting a punch squarely in his face. Price stumbles backward. Cross follows with a kick. Price catches the leg and tries to flip him to the mat--

But Cross lands on his feet.

RRRAHHH!!!

A wild clothesline follows. Price barely ducks it. Cross keeps moving, hits the ropes, rebounds towards Price, Price shunts him away, Cross rebounds again--

THWACK!

Point of Review

The running shotgun dropkick sends Price sprawling across the canvas.

Cross is already moving when Dresden enters the picture.

The Capital Kick comes flying toward his head.

Cross ducks.

Dresden turns.

A Tae Kwon Do-style kick whistles toward him.

Now Dresden ducks.

The two younger wrestlers spring back to their feet simultaneously--

And stop.

Marcus King is standing on the apron.

OOOOHHHHH...

The Titan steps through the ropes with the calm certainty of a man returning to collect a debt.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Oh no."

Angus Skaaland:

"Class is back in session."

Cross and Dresden don't wait.

Both men fire boots into King's chest at the same time.

The impact rocks him backward but doesn't stop him.

They grab his arms and try for an Irish whip.

King plants his feet.

Nothing.

Not an inch.

Point of Review

Then he yanks, and launches Cross over the top rope. Cross manages to catch the rope, but still takes a nasty landing on the apron.

Meanwhile Dresden gets hooked, lifted, and violently dumped with a backdrop suplex.

THWAMM!

OOOOHHHH!!!

Marksson staggers back into the action just in time to get caught.

Double underhooks.

Lift.

THWAMM!

Double underhook suplex.

Marksson bounces hard across the canvas.

King rises and surveys the ring.

His eyes settle briefly on Sammy Starr. A pause, a dismissive look, and then he turns away. The Professor has analyzed the facts of the matter: Starr isn't worth the effort.

King goes looking for Price instead.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"King didn't even bother with Starr!"

Angus Skaaland:

"...That's gotta sting."

Price sees him coming. Again. A hand shoots upward.

Thumb to the eyes.

King recoils, momentarily blinded.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

Price grins.

Point of Review

King reaches out blindly.

Finds hair.

And yanks.

THWACK!

Price gets sling-shotted into the mat by his own hair.

The grin disappears instantly.

RRRAHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I'm not saying the fans love Marcus King, Angus, but they sure loved that."

Angus Skaaland:

"Turns out Marcus King knows where people usually keep their heads."

King wipes at his eyes, and Starr sees an opening.

He slides in behind him and rolls him up with a schoolboy - and keeps moving, sprawling across the backs of King's legs with a lateral bridge.

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

King explodes upward.

The look on his face says everything. Not concern. Insult.

THWACK!

A sharp elbow catches Starr in the jaw.

Then comes the Royal Elbow.

KRAK!

Point of Review

Starr crumples to the canvas.

King turns--

THWACK!

A flying spinning kick from Riley Cross catches him flush.

RRRAAHHH!!!

Cross lands in a crouch. King stumbles, but doesn't fall.

THWACK!

The Superman Clothesline from Marksson catches him from the opposite direction.

Now King falls to a knee. The crowd rises.

Dresden is already moving. He hits the ropes. Charges. Leaps.

KRA-KOOM!!!

Capital Kick.

King's head snaps backward.

The Titan tumbles through the ropes and crashes to the floor.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

All three Foundry wrestlers remain standing in the ring.

Cross breathing hard.

Marksson clutching his ribs.

Dresden pointing toward the fallen giant outside.

For the second time in the match, it has taken the combined effort of multiple opponents to remove Marcus King from the equation.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"They got him again!"

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah. And somehow I don't think he's gonna be in a better mood when he comes back."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Still - I know we haven't seen a ton of success from Dresden in ICW so far, but that Capital Kick of his is his preferred finisher. Big as King is, he's going to be feeling that one for a bit."

Marcus King hits the floor in front of the aisle hard. The remarkable part is that he somehow stays standing. Not exactly steadily, though. His eyes aren't quite focused and his legs aren't quite under him, yet somehow the big man remains upright through sheer stubbornness.

That turns out to be a mistake.

Eli Dresden is already moving.

He leaps to the middle rope next to the turnbuckle, then springs off it, over the top rope, and connects flush with a triangle jump plancha on King!

Both men crash into the ringside floor.

RRRAAHHH!!!

Dresden scrambles up first, pumping a fist as the crowd responds.

He doesn't get long to celebrate, though. Cole Marksson is already climbing. The young Alabamian reaches the apron, balances himself, and launches.

The second Asai moonsault is a little different. Less elaborate setup than the first, but this time, it's off the top rope instead of the middle.

More height.

More hangtime.

THWAAM!!!

Marksson crashes into the growing pile at ringside.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Marksson's doing everything he can to make a name for himself tonight!"

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"Kid's finally quit thinkin' about it and started doin' it."

Back inside the ring, Sammy Starr sees the opening.

The pile is growing, the crowd is buzzing.

He starts measuring the distance, getting his timing down, and Preston Price appears from nowhere.

Two swaggering steps. A fold at the waist.

THWACK!

Lagniappe Lariat.

Starr folds up and tumbles backward.

Price doesn't even stop moving.

The momentum carries him directly toward the ropes.

He slips between the middle and top strands--

Twists--

And launches.

KRA-KOOM!!!

RRRAAHHH!!!

The tope con giro wipes out half the field.

Price rolls through the landing and somehow comes up on his feet.

Of course he does.

The crowd boos.

Price spreads his arms anyway.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

At ringside, Ricky Dale Cash looks like he's witnessing a religious experience. He claps furiously, points at

Point of Review

Price, claps some more, and raises his arms to the heavens.

The enthusiasm is somewhere between proud manager and Southern revival preacher.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I gotta admit, that was impressive."

Angus Skaaland:

"He heard everybody else gettin' attention and decided he wanted some too."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That Lagniappe Lariat straight into the tope con giro without breaking stride--I've never seen Price do that before."

Angus Skaaland:

"...You think I've just been cheering on Price because I'm doing the color commentator thing, Robbie? That kid has it. Not the fanciest dive in the world, but seamless."

The pile slowly starts to untangle. Bodies roll apart. People begin pushing themselves upright.

Price is basking in the moment. Dresden is crawling. Marksson is trying to find his feet.

Cross is climbing.

Nobody notices him until it's too late.

The crowd does.

A wave of anticipation ripples through the building.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Cross reaches the top turnbuckle. He adjusts his feet, balances, and launches. A corkscrew, a front somersault--

KRA-KOOOOOM!!!

The Phoenix Press dive obliterates everybody.

The entire ringside area explodes into bodies.

RRRAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!

Point of Review

Robbie Ray Carter:

"CROSS JUST TOOK OUT EVERYBODY!"

Angus Skaaland:

"That kid has absolutely no survival instincts."

For a moment, nobody moves.

Then slowly, painfully, people begin stirring.

Price.

Cross.

Dresden.

Marksson.

All of them start dragging themselves back toward the ring.

All of them except one.

Marcus King remains down.

And inside the ring stands Sammy Starr.

Alone.

The crowd's attention is outside.

Ricky Dale Cash isn't looking at him.

Cash is too busy trying to get Preston Price back on his feet.

Starr looks toward the pile.

Looks toward the crowd.

Looks toward the manager that once promised him the world.

Everybody else had a moment.

Everybody else got a reaction.

Point of Review

Everybody else gave the fans something to remember.

His chance never even happened.

Angus Skaaland:

"What's goin' on with Sammy Starr in there? He's got an opening and he looks like he's seeing ghosts!"

Bodies are scattered all around ringside.

For a moment it looks like Riley Cross might be the first man back into the fight.

Cross reaches Preston Price near the apron and tries to shove him back toward the ring, hoping to capitalize before anybody else can recover, but Price has other ideas.

He grabs Cross by the head and throat and drops backward.

THWACK!

Cross gets flapjacked face-first across the edge of the apron.

OOOOHHHH!!!

Cross collapses into a heap while Price immediately shoves him underneath the bottom rope and back into the ring.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Price is picking his spot here!"

Angus Skaaland:

"That's called strategy, Robbie."

Price doesn't follow him immediately. Instead he spots Cole Marksson trying to rise in the entrance aisle. A grin spreads across his face.

Bad news for Marksson.

Price hooks him, lifts, and plants him with the Bayou Bomb.

KRA-KOOM!!!

Marksson bounces hard off the aisle and rolls onto his side clutching his back.

OOOOHHHH!!!

Point of Review

While this was going on, Eli Dresden had rolled into the ring. Cross, using the turnbuckle's help to rise, doesn't seem to notice him. Dresden rushes in, thinking Capital Kick.

Cross ducks at the last second!

Dresden ends up straddling the turnbuckle, and that's when Price springs into action. He grabs Dresden's leg and drops, crotching him across the top rope.

BBBOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Price picking his spots! First he takes Marksson out of the equation with the Bayou Bomb in the aisle, and now a low blow on Dresden!"

Price wastes no time. Cross is in the ring, trying to recover. Dresden is incapacitated, Marksson and King aren't in position to do anything, and the bag is in sight.

Cross is still trying to recover when Price boots him in the midsection. Price butterflies both arms, lifts, and sits out.

THWACK!

Spotlight Special.

Cross is driven face-first into the mat.

Meanwhile, Starr has slipped to the apron and climbed the turnbuckle behind Price. He sets himself on the middle rope and waits.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That Spotlight Special is Price's main finisher, but has he got the chaos under control enough to get the pin?"

Price immediately rolls through into the cover.

Dresden sees this. He pulls himself off the top rope, takes a few hobbling steps towards the fall

He's seen the pin.

He sees Starr.

He starts moving toward them.

Point of Review

ONE!

Starr leaps from the middle rope and drills Dresden with the Shining Supernova.

The arena freezes.

Then the realization hits.

OOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"No! No! Sammy Starr just hit Dresden!"

Angus Skaaland:

"..."

TWO!

Starr lands on his feet and doesn't even look at the cover.

Instead he sprints toward the ropes.

Marcus King is dragging himself onto the apron.

Starr is waiting for him.

Stomp.

Another stomp.

Another.

Another.

King tries to force his way through the ropes.

Starr won't let him.

He kicks and stomps relentlessly, driving the bigger man back toward the floor as the crowd erupts in outrage.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Point of Review

Robbie Ray Carter:

"He knew exactly what he was doing!"

Angus Skaaland:

"...Yeah."

Inside the ring, Price keeps the leg hooked.

THREE!

The bell rings.

DING DING DING!

The crowd rains boos down on the ring.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Preston Price releases the cover and immediately throws both arms into the air.

Sammy Starr stands near the ropes, breathing heavily, watching Marcus King finally fall back to the floor after the barrage of stomps.

For a moment neither man acknowledges the other.

Then Ricky Dale Cash explodes into the ring.

Not enters.

Explodes.

Cash is clapping before he's even through the ropes.

Pointing.

Laughing.

Beaming.

The grin stretches from ear to ear as he rushes toward Price and wraps him in a hug.

Price tolerates it.

Point of Review

Barely.

Cash then immediately pivots and throws his arms around Starr.

Starr looks considerably less enthusiastic about the arrangement, but he doesn't pull away.

BBBBBOOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I can't believe this."

Angus Skaaland:

"..."

Cash isn't finished, not even close. He wedges himself between the two wrestlers and grabs a wrist in each hand. Then he raises them both triumphantly overhead.

BBBBBOOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Cash looking like a proud father right now."

Angus Skaaland:

"I mean, whatever this thing he was trying to pull off was, he pulled it off."

Cash turns them toward one side of the building. Then the other. Then the hard camera. Making sure everybody gets a good look.

Price finally glances over at Starr. Starr glances back. A moment passes. Then the two men share a firm handshake.

The crowd hates it.

BBBBBOOOOOOO!!!

Cash loves it. The instant he sees the handshake he nearly jumps out of his shoes.

He wedges himself back between them, grabs both wrists again, and raises their hands even higher than before. More enthusiasm. More celebration. More volume.

More of whatever indefinable bingo hall preacher energy Ricky Dale Cash seems to generate naturally.

If the first hand raise was a victory celebration, this one is a campaign rally.

Point of Review

Robbie Ray Carter:

"After everything Ricky Dale Cash and Preston Price put Sammy Starr through, I cannot believe he decided to throw his lot in with them."

Angus Skaaland:

"It was the right career move, Robbie."

The response comes quietly.

Not defensive.

Not triumphant.

Just matter-of-fact.

Angus Skaaland:

"Some people love wrestling, but they ain't ever gonna be The Guy. At some point they've gotta find another way to make themselves valuable. Starr's got timing. Pacing. Ring awareness. Twenty years of experience. Ricky Dale Cash'll find a use for all of that."

In the ring, Cash is still conducting the celebration like a man trying to convince himself it's even bigger than it already is.

Price is smirking.

Starr's expression is harder to read.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Something eating at you, Angus?"

Cut to the announce desk, and a peculiarly solemn looking Angus. He shrugs.

Angus Skaaland:

"I dunno, man. Fuckin' magnets, I guess."

Robbie opens his mouth, reevaluates, closes it, and tries again.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Fans, we'll be right back."

The camera lingers one final moment on Ricky Dale Cash, still grinning from ear to ear as he raises the hands of his two newest investments.

Point of Review

A Champion's reception

Outside The Foundry, a long black limousine glides to a stop.

The front passenger door opens first.

Millison -- the same unfortunate butler who found himself tied to a chair by Kirsty McKinney back on Under Review 3.2 -- steps out and straightens his jacket.

He walks toward the rear passenger doors, then pauses.

Something seems off.

His eyes sweep the area.

The camera pans wider.

There are fans arriving in the parking lot. A few people wander toward the entrance carrying programs and merchandise bags. Cars come and go.

What there isn't, however, is any sign of the grand reception that appears to exist in Todderick Davenport III's imagination.

No red carpet.

No waiting reporters.

No photographers.

No crowd gathered to greet the champion.

Millison adjusts his glasses and quietly opens the limousine door.

Out steps Darian Darrington.

Then Jacoby Jacobs.

Then Todderick Davenport III himself, the Trust Fund International Championship gleaming around his waist.

TD3 takes a deep breath and spreads his arms slightly.

Todderick Davenport III:

"Gentlemen, tonight feels like success."

Point of Review

The camera remains pulled back far enough to reveal that, aside from the limousine and the butler, there is very little evidence supporting this statement.

Darrington looks around.

Darian Darrington:

"Where is everyone?"

TD3 stiffens almost imperceptibly.

Then he smooths his lapels.

Todderick Davenport III:

"Tardy, naturally. Mediocrity can't keep up with greatness, after all."

Jacoby Jacobs:

"They late-late, Hot Toddy. NPC behavior."

TD3 nods smugly.

That explanation appears entirely satisfactory to him.

Beside him, Darrington subtly adjusts his own jacket, pulling the lapels wider to broaden his chest. Having realized he may have asked the wrong question, he wisely elects not to ask another.

Instead:

Darian Darrington:

"I guess this means you're ready, champ."

TD3 surveys the empty entranceway one more time.

Todderick Davenport III:

"Of course I am."

He places a hand on the championship belt.

Todderick Davenport III:

"Their lack of preparedness only reflects poorly on themselves."

A smug smile spreads across his face.

Todderick Davenport III:

Point of Review

"This is why we're the Trust Fund International, and they're paying for the privilege of seeing us."

Apparently satisfied that reality has now been properly corrected, TD3 turns and strides toward the building.

Jacobs follows.

Darrington follows.

Millison follows.

Together, the Trust Fund International disappears into the arena, carrying themselves like royalty arriving at a coronation.

The mostly empty parking lot remains entirely unimpressed.

Sunny Holliday (c) vs Celestina Cruz

Robbie Ray Carter:

"This match was set in motion two weeks ago when the Cruz Sisters turned a victory into a message--targeting Sam Gardner right in front of Jenn Tinsley, forcing Sunny Holliday to step in and put a stop to it. Celestina Cruz made the challenge, Sunny accepted on the spot, and now the ICW Women's Championship is on the line."

Angus Skaaland:

"And ever since they got here, the Cruz Sisters have been a double-teaming nightmare. It doesn't matter who they're facing or what the situation is, they find a way to make it two-on-one. Duchess Vaughn snapped Valeria's wrist, sure--but all that did was give her a weapon. If anything, they're worse now."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Earlier tonight, Celestina Cruz took things a step further, accusing Sunny Holliday of being a fake--saying that the positivity, the energy, the connection with the crowd, it's all an act waiting to crack under pressure."

Angus Skaaland:

"I don't think it's fake. But I don't know how long it lasts when Celestina's laughing in your face and Valeria's lining up that cast every time your back's turned."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"From a pure wrestling standpoint, Celestina Cruz is as well-rounded as they come--technical, agile, opportunistic. But Sunny Holliday brings a different kind of threat. She's probably the most powerful woman in this division, and that Sunshine Bomb has been a one-hit finish every time we've seen it. But with the amount of power Sunny can generate, you have to believe that is not the only match-ending tool in her arsenal."

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"And let's be honest--Celestina's probably not hoisting Sunny up for that Queen's Gambit. But she doesn't have to. She's got the Blood Moon Splash, she's got that Mindanao Stretch, and she's got absolutely no problem taking a dirty win if she can get it. However it happens, she just wants the result."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Championship on the line--let's send it down to Cito Conarri."

Cito Conarri:

"The following contest is set for one fall, with a 20 minute time limit, and it is for the ICW Women's Championship! Introducing first, the challenger! Hailing from Cagayan de Oro, Northern Mindanao, Philippines, and weighing in at 138 pounds! Accompanied to the ring by her sister and tag team partner Valeria... this is CELESTIIIIINAAAA... CRUUUUUZ!

"Rumba" by Ill Niño hits and Celestina Cruz steps through the curtain first, composed, already locked in on the ring as if she's measuring distance rather than making an entrance. A half-step behind her, Valeria Cruz stalks with that cast raised slightly, jaw tight, scanning the aisle like she's daring someone to try something. Celestina doesn't rush--she walks at her own pace, calm and deliberate, while Valeria drifts just off her shoulder, barking sharp words in Spanish at anyone within earshot.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

At ringside, Celestina slides under the bottom rope and rises smoothly, rolling her shoulders once before settling into her corner. Valeria circles the apron, dragging the cast along the edge of the ring before slamming it once against the canvas for emphasis. Celestina glances out toward the crowd, that faint, knowing smile already in place--not playing to them, just acknowledging that she's exactly where she wants to be.

Valeria leans in close from the apron, speaking low and quick, and Celestina gives the slightest nod without taking her eyes off the stage.

Cito Conarri:

"And the champion! Hailing from Gulf Shores, Alabama, and weighing in at 188 pounds! This... is... SUNNNYYY... HOOOOLLLLIDAYYYY!!!!

"Walkin' on Sunshine" by Katrina and the Waves hits--and Sunny Holliday bursts through the curtain.

RRRAAHHH!!!

She throws both arms wide out of instinct--but there's a split-second hitch before the full smile lands. It's still there, still bright, but her eyes are already locked on the ring. She slaps hands down the aisle, quick and purposeful, then picks up speed, sliding under the ropes and popping to her feet.

Point of Review

Sunny hits the near corner, pounds a fist to her heart, and traces that wide circle over the ring--but instead of lingering, she turns immediately, clapping once, sharply, more to center herself than to rally. Her stance tightens as she faces Celestina, the energy still there--but focused now.

RRRAAHHH!!!

Sunny steps forward out of her corner, shoulders squared, eyes never leaving Celestina. Across from her, Celestina tilts her head just slightly, that same faint smile returning as if she's already seen something she expected.

At ringside, Valeria paces along the apron, tapping the cast lightly against her palm, waiting.

The referee steps between them, holding the championship belt high for both women to see--then hands it off and calls for the bell.

Sunny steps out of her corner immediately, hands up and ready to engage. Across from her, Celestina smirks and immediately ducks through the ropes instead, forcing the official to back Sunny away before anything can start. Valeria paces outside the ring with restless energy, cast already visible and threatening as she barks something sharp in Spanish toward the crowd.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Celestina takes her time wiping her boots on the apron before stepping back inside. Sunny stays patient in the middle of the ring, shoulders loose, expression calm. The challenger circles once, teases a lockup--

--and slips away again with a grin before Sunny can touch her.

Angus Skaaland:

"See? That right there. Make the champion wait. Make her think. Make her chase."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Or avoid wrestling altogether. Celestina's spent more time backing away than engaging so far."

Celestina raises her hands again, inching forward cautiously while still talking under her breath. Sunny answers by spreading her arms toward the audience instead of lunging after her. The crowd immediately picks up the cue, clapping in rhythm as Sunny bounces lightly on her feet and nods along with them.

CLAP! CLAP! CLAP-CLAP-CLAP!

That smile on Celestina's face tightens just a little.

She steps in for real this time.

Point of Review

The collar-and-elbow tie-up lasts barely a second before Sunny plants her feet and drives forward, physically walking Celestina backward across the ring. Celestina's boots scrape against the canvas as Sunny shoves her clean into the ropes.

Valeria instantly slaps the apron and climbs onto it, yelling at the referee and waving her cast in the official's face. Sunny backs off with her hands raised--

--and Celestina immediately rakes both eyes.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Sunny recoils hard, blinking rapidly as Celestina hammers quick forearms into the side of her head and chest before grabbing the wrist and trying to sling her across the ring. Sunny catches the top rope with both hands before the whip can send her moving, her body jolting but holding firm.

Celestina looks irritated immediately and yanks harder the second time--

--but Sunny suddenly reverses the whip with force.

Celestina sprints unwillingly toward the opposite ropes. Sunny charges right behind her.

Celestina rebounds--

--and Sunny flattens her with a brutal shoulder block that sends the challenger flipping onto her back.

THWACK!

RRRAAAHHHH!!!

Celestina rolls halfway across the canvas from the impact, eyes wide in shock before immediately scrambling under the bottom rope to regroup beside Valeria. Sunny stays in the ring, pumping both arms once to the crowd as the building comes alive around her.

Sunny motions with both hands for Celestina to come back into the ring, making no effort whatsoever to pursue her outside. Celestina paces beside Valeria instead, jawing with the referee while the official leans over the ropes warning her to get back inside and start wrestling.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"The referee's patience is already wearing thin here. Celestina keeps trying to dictate the pace instead of actually engaging the champion."

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"Well she ain't gonna win a strength contest with Sunny Holliday, Robbie. You can see her thinkin' through this thing in real time."

Celestina finally slides back under the ropes with obvious reluctance, immediately complaining to the referee about Sunny's earlier shove before the official can even start talking again. Sunny just stands calmly in the center of the ring waiting on her, smile still intact.

The two move toward another lockup--

--but Celestina only catches one wrist before driving a quick boot into Sunny's stomach.

THUMP!

She instantly twists into an armwringer, cranking down sharply before slipping behind into a waistlock.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Good adjustment there from Cruz -- avoid the direct tie-up entirely."

Celestina squeezes tight around the waist, trying to drag Sunny backward--

--and Sunny simply swings her hips and throws her clean over with raw force.

WHAM!

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Celestina lands hard on her back and immediately scoots backward into a seated position, pointing accusingly at Sunny and shouting about a hair pull.

Angus Skaaland:

"Oh c'mon now."

Sunny's smile widens just a little.

Then she reaches down, grabs a handful of Celestina's hair in plain view of everyone, and yanks her upright.

RRRAAAHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Well if there was any question about the first one, there's no question about that one."

Sunny keeps hold of the hair and drills a forearm into Celestina's jaw.

Point of Review

THWACK!

Another forearm snaps Celestina's head sideways.

THWACK!

Celestina stumbles backward dazed--

--and Sunny steps in with a third forearm that drops her flat onto the canvas.

KRAK!

RRRRAAAAAHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"The power difference is enormous right now. Celestina's trying to wrestle around it, but every clean exchange is going Sunny's way."

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah, and that's the danger. If Cruz can't out-think her, this gets ugly fast."

Sunny backs away again instead of pressing the advantage, waving Celestina back up with almost casual confidence. The champion is still smiling, still feeding off the crowd rhythm.

Across from her, Celestina rises much slower this time.

The smirk is mostly gone now.

She wipes her mouth, glances toward Valeria outside the ring, then back toward Sunny -- frustration growing visibly underneath the surface as she tries to figure out what approach to take next.

Celestina finally steps back toward the middle of the ring, but there's nothing cautious about her now. She gets right in Sunny's face immediately, talking angrily while jabbing a finger against the champion's chest.

Angus Skaaland:

"Now we're gettin' somewhere. Cruz is mad."

Celestina keeps talking, voice sharp and venomous.

Celestina Cruz:

"You think this is funny? Huh? You having fun?"

Sunny nods once without hesitation.

Point of Review

Sunny Holliday:

"Yep."

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Celestina slaps her across the face as hard as she can.

SMACK!

The arena gasps--

--and Sunny's smile barely even flickers.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That may not have had the effect Celestina wanted."

Celestina looks genuinely offended by that reaction.

Sunny suddenly lunges forward and scoops her clean off the mat into a crushing bearhug, immediately squeezing the air out of the challenger.

RRRAAAHHHH!!!

Celestina kicks wildly at first, trying to pry free--

--but then her expression changes.

She drives the ball of her boot straight into the back of Sunny's knee.

THUD!

Sunny winces.

Celestina stomps it again.

THUD!

This time the knee buckles hard enough to force Sunny downward for half a second, loosening the pressure of the hold. Celestina instantly twists sideways and slips free before dropping low into a single-leg takedown that drags Sunny to the canvas.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"There it is! Right back to the knee that Marisol Serrano softened up weeks ago!"

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"That's smart wrestling. Sunny's base is where all that power comes from."

Celestina immediately tangles Sunny's legs into a deathlock, wrenching backward while keeping the champion grounded. Sunny grits her teeth and tries to sit up--

--and Celestina grabs a fistful of hair with her free hand and yanks backward viciously.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

The referee instantly drops down beside them yelling at her to let go. Celestina releases the hair--

--and jerks harder on the leglock instead.

Sunny pounds the mat once in pain as Celestina smirks and shifts positions, trying to transition into a bow-and-arrow stretch. She hooks the arms and leans back--

--but Sunny's strength immediately becomes a problem again.

Celestina strains trying to pull her upward. Sunny instead simply extends both legs with explosive force. Celestina loses balance instantly and tumbles backward onto the mat.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Sunny rolls through the opening, pushes up off one knee, then rises back to her feet before Celestina can recover.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That's the danger Cruz is dealing with. She can attack the knee, she can attack the balance -- but Sunny Holliday is still unbelievably powerful, even compromised."

Celestina scrambles backward into a crouch, visibly annoyed all over again as Sunny stands tall across from her, flexing the leg once to test it before raising her hands for another exchange.

Celestina circles cautiously now, clearly trying to avoid another direct collision with Sunny's power. She darts in suddenly with a sharp kick toward the ribs--

--but Sunny catches the leg clean against her side.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Celestina reacts instantly, hopping once and throwing herself into an enzuigiri with the free leg. Sunny ducks underneath it just in time, and Celestina lands awkwardly on one foot trying to recover her balance.

Point of Review

That recovery lasts exactly one second.

Sunny abruptly yanks the trapped leg upward with both hands.

Celestina crashes face-first into the canvas.

SPLAT!

RRRRRAAAAHHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:

"HAHA! Oh that one embarrassed her."

Celestina grabs at her face immediately while the crowd erupts laughing and cheering at the ugly wipeout. Sunny grins openly now, feeding off the reaction as she stoops down and drags the challenger back upright by the arm.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That's the danger of fighting someone this physically strong. One mistake and Sunny can turn it into a crash landing instantly."

Sunny whips Celestina hard toward the corner. Celestina hits back-first and barely has time to straighten up before Sunny charges across the ring and crushes her with a running back elbow.

THWUMP!

RRRAAAAHHHH!!!

Celestina folds downward in the corner, stunned and gasping. Sunny backs up across the ring while the crowd starts buzzing in anticipation.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Here comes the cannonball!"

Sunny breaks into a run toward the corner--

--but Celestina instantly bails underneath the bottom rope before the jump can happen, scrambling out to ringside beside Valeria.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Sunny stops herself before crashing into the corner and throws both hands out in frustration while Valeria immediately steps between the sisters and the ring, cast raised defensively. The referee moves to intercept

Point of Review

Sunny before she can follow them outside, ordering her back toward the center while Celestina huddles beside Valeria catching her breath.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And again, Celestina Cruz slows this match to a crawl the second momentum turns against her."

Angus Skaaland:

"Oh these people are gettin' MAD now. Listen to this place."

The boos grow louder as Celestina deliberately takes her time outside the ring, talking strategy with Valeria while the referee continues the count.

Angus Skaaland:

"This used to happen every Saturday night somewhere in America, Robbie. Heel gets rocked, powders outside, crowd gets furious, then pays to see somebody finally punch 'em in the mouth."

Sunny leans against the ropes watching the sisters carefully, still smiling, but there's a little more edge behind it now as the crowd claps and stomps impatiently waiting for Celestina to get back in the ring.

The referee finally loses patience and starts an aggressive count toward Celestina at ringside.

ONE!

TWO!

Celestina rolls her eyes dramatically and slaps the apron in irritation before climbing back up. She steps onto the apron carefully--

--and Sunny suddenly grabs the top rope and yanks hard.

Celestina flips awkwardly over the top and crashes into the ring back-first.

RRRAAAHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Sunny's done waiting around for her!"

Celestina scrambles up in a panic and Sunny immediately catches her by the wrist, whipping her hard across the ring. Celestina rebounds off the ropes--

--and Sunny catches her clean with a snapping powerslam that rattles the canvas.

WHAMMM!!!

Point of Review

RRRRRAAAAHHHH!!!

Sunny hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

Celestina kicks out.

Angus Skaaland:

"That had some force behind it there."

Sunny stays right on her this time, pulling Celestina back up before firing her into the corner again. Celestina hits hard against the turnbuckles and Sunny charges in right behind her, crushing her with a running chest press that folds the challenger up.

Then Sunny wraps both arms around her waist and launches her halfway across the ring with a huge overhead belly-to-belly suplex.

KRAAASHHH!!!

RRRRRAAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"What elevation!"

Celestina lands badly and rolls onto her side clutching at her back while the crowd roars. The referee kneels beside her to check the challenger--

--and Valeria immediately strikes.

She lunges forward from ringside and drives the cast directly into Sunny's knee.

THUD!

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Sunny stumbles hard and grabs at the ropes instinctively before wheeling around toward Valeria with an angry shout. She reaches through the ropes, catches Valeria by the hair, and starts dragging her up toward the apron.

RRRAAAHHHH!!!

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"UH OH!"

The referee rushes over immediately trying to pull Sunny away before she can haul Valeria into the ring.

That split-second distraction is all Celestina needs.

She darts in from behind, hooks Sunny's arm, and drops backward violently, spiking the limb across both knees with a brutal armbreaker.

CRACK!

Sunny cries out and drops to both knees, clutching at the arm immediately.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Right on the arm!"

Celestina doesn't give her a second to recover. She grabs the wrist, stretches the arm out across the mat, and stomps down on it once.

STOMP!

Again.

STOMP!

Again.

STOMP!

Sunny rolls partly onto her side protecting the arm while Celestina finally starts smiling again.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I understand attacking the knee after what Marisol Serrano exposed, but now she's shifted directly to the arm."

Angus Skaaland:

"Because the knee was just the door opener. Sunny's power comes from grabbin' people and throwin' people. You wreck the arm, you wreck the bombs, the suplexes, all of it."

Celestina kneels beside Sunny and twists the wrist cruelly against the mat while Valeria shouts

Point of Review

encouragement from outside, pounding the cast against the apron with a grin spreading across her face.

Sunny shakes life back into the damaged arm and steps forward aggressively again, clearly deciding that if Celestina wants a technical fight, she's not getting one.

Celestina tries to dart around her toward the side, but Sunny catches her with a hard shove to the chest that sends her stumbling backward into the ropes. On the rebound Sunny scoops her up across the body and drives her down with a heavy side slam.

WHAMMM!!!

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Celestina rolls away holding her back while Sunny rises quickly, keeping pressure on instead of giving space this time.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That's more of the pace Sunny wants. Less finesse, more force."

Sunny grabs hold of Celestina again before she can fully escape, trapping her in a rough front facelock. The hold itself isn't flashy, but with Sunny's strength advantage it immediately becomes dangerous as she leans all her weight down across the neck and shoulders.

Celestina drops to one knee trying to relieve the pressure.

Angus Skaaland:

"See, that's what Robbie was talkin' about earlier. Sunny's not some mat wizard, but when somebody that strong gets ahold of you, simple holds stop bein' simple."

Sunny shifts her footing and reaches down with the bad arm, clearly trying to muscle Celestina upward for another throw--

--and Celestina instantly attacks the opening.

She hammers a short shot directly into the right elbow.

THWACK!

Sunny jerks in pain and loses her grip for half a second.

That's all Celestina needs.

She slips free immediately and spins away toward open space instead of following up.

Point of Review

Then she starts laughing.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Celestina cradles her own elbow theatrically, mocking Sunny while backing away in a loose circle around the ring.

Celestina Cruz:

"Oh nooo. Does it hurt?"

She shakes her arm out dramatically with an exaggerated fake grimace, then flashes that cruel smile again.

Celestina Cruz:

"Still having fun?"

Sunny flexes the arm once, irritation finally creeping visibly across her face as the crowd rains boos down on the challenger.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Now there's the real game Celestina Cruz wants to play. She's trying to turn this from a wrestling match into a mental battle."

Angus Skaaland:

"And she finally found somethin' that's workin'. Look at Sunny's face now."

Celestina keeps grinning as she lightly bounces on her feet, confidence returning now that she's proven she can stop Sunny's power game before it fully gets going.

Sunny's irritation finally boils over.

She charges straight at Celestina looking to run her over again, but this time Celestina is waiting for it. She slips sharply to the side, snatches the damaged arm, and twists into another vicious armwringer that forces Sunny to turn with the pressure instead of through it.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Again, right back to the elbow!"

Celestina doesn't stop moving. She springs onto the middle rope, then to the top turnbuckle in one fluid burst while still controlling the wrist. Before Sunny can react, Celestina rolls across her shoulders in a smooth joshi-style transition, snapping Sunny forward into a flying arm takedown and instantly trapping the arm in another brutal bicep slicer.

WHAM!

Point of Review

RRRAAAHHH--then immediately BBBBBOOOOO!!!

Sunny shouts in pain this time, her face twisting as Celestina cranks back hard on the hold and pulls the arm deeper across her shin.

Angus Skaaland:

"Okay NOW she's got her where she wants her."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That transition was incredible. Cruz is attacking the same joint over and over from different angles."

Celestina leans back even farther, smiling now as Sunny struggles underneath her. The champion grits her teeth and fights her way up onto both knees, trying to muscle through the pain.

The crowd rises as Sunny starts lifting Celestina off the mat entirely, trying to deadlift her into another powerbomb.

RRRAAAHHHH!!!

Celestina reacts instantly and switches her grip into a tight shoulder lock before Sunny can complete the lift. She twists violently downward and forces Sunny back onto the canvas face-first.

THUD!

Sunny pounds the mat with her free hand, screaming in pain as the pressure shoots through the shoulder and elbow together.

Angus Skaaland:

"That's nasty. That is NASTY."

Sunny plants her free hand against the mat and actually starts forcing herself upward one-handed in a painful pushup, her damaged arm shaking violently underneath her own weight.

Then the elbow gives slightly.

Sunny cries out again.

OOOHHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"The arm almost collapsed under her!"

Still, Sunny keeps fighting. She pushes through the pain, tucks forward, and rolls through the pressure hard

Point of Review

enough to break Celestina's leverage before scrambling toward the ropes.

She hooks both boots against the bottom rope immediately.

The referee orders the break.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

Celestina releases cleanly at three with exaggerated innocence, backing away with both hands raised while the crowd boos furiously.

Then, as she turns away, she casually steps directly on Sunny's elbow.

STOMP!

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Sunny jerks back clutching the arm while Celestina smirks down at her.

Celestina Cruz:

"¿Te estás divirtiéndote, pinche gordota?"

BBBBBBBBBOOOOOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Completely unnecessary."

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah... now she's just bein' cruel."

Celestina backs toward the center of the ring again, confidence growing with every second now that Sunny's power game is starting to visibly break down under the sustained damage.

Sunny fires a pair of body shots into Celestina's ribs trying to create space, but the damaged arm betrays her immediately. The punches land without their earlier force behind them, and Celestina can feel it.

Her smile returns instantly.

Celestina Cruz:

Point of Review

"That all you got, gordota?"

BBBBBOOOOOOO!!!

Celestina spins sharply in place and blasts Sunny upside the head with the tight Hotta-style spinning heel kick.

THWACK!

Sunny drops hard to both hands and knees.

OOOOHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"What a shot!"

Celestina wastes absolutely no time. She snakes herself onto Sunny's side and threads her legs and arms into the Mindanao Stretch, wrenching backward while trapping the weakened arm tight against Sunny's body.

The crowd noise changes instantly.

OOOOOOOOHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"She's got it locked in! Celestina Cruz has already forced Sam Gardner to submit with this hold before!"

Angus Skaaland:

"And this ain't just about the arm. Normally you'd counter an abdominal stretch variation with a hiptoss, but Sunny can't get enough force with that bad arm hooked up like that."

Sunny grimaces in pain as Celestina leans farther backward, hanging off the hold with every ounce of her weight while screaming in Spanish at the crowd.

Celestina Cruz:

"TAP! TAP, GORDOTA!"

Sunny refuses.

The champion starts inching herself toward the ropes one painful step at a time, dragging both women while the crowd rallies behind her.

LET'S GO SUNNY! *clap clap clapclapclap*

LET'S GO SUNNY! *clap clap clapclapclap*

Point of Review

Robbie Ray Carter:

"She's moving! Somehow Sunny Holliday is still moving!"

Sunny stretches one foot toward the ropes--

--but Celestina suddenly kicks the back of the knee again.

THUD!

Sunny collapses downward immediately and Celestina transitions with her, rolling through into a grounded octopus variation that bends Sunny nearly sideways against the mat.

OOOOOOOOHHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:

"OH I THINK THAT'S IT!"

Sunny screams into the canvas, free hand clawing desperately across the mat while Celestina cranks backward with everything she has.

The referee drops beside them asking repeatedly if Sunny wants to quit.

Sunny shakes her head wildly.

Then somehow, blindly, she manages to hook her free ankle over the bottom rope.

RRRRRAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"She got the rope! She got the rope!"

Celestina slaps the mat in fury before finally releasing the hold at four. She grabs Sunny immediately by the wrist and tries to drag her back up into another Mindanao Stretch--

--but Sunny suddenly yanks her inward with a ripcord motion and crushes her with the Sunbeam Elbow.

KRAKKK!!!

Both women collapse.

RRRRRAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:

Point of Review

"GOOD LORD!"

Sunny stays doubled over after the strike instead of capitalizing, dropping to both knees and clutching the damaged arm tightly against her stomach while Celestina sprawls onto her back glassy-eyed from the elbow.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That may have hurt Sunny almost as much as it hurt Celestina!"

The crowd rallies loudly as both women slowly struggle upward. Sunny reaches Celestina first and drives a series of short headbutts into her forehead.

THUD!

THUD!

THUD!

Celestina stumbles badly and Sunny hooks her up, trying to muscle her into the High Tide Suplex--

--but the damaged arm gives just enough for Celestina to slip free behind her.

Angus Skaaland:

"There's that arm again!"

Valeria immediately leaps onto the apron screaming instructions while the referee turns to deal with her. Celestina grabs Sunny by the wrist and tries to whip her across the ring.

Sunny reverses hard.

Celestina hurtles toward the corner where Valeria's standing--

--and instead of getting blasted off the apron like every wrestling fan expects, Valeria suddenly leans backward and catches her sister against her chest, keeping her from rebounding.

The crowd gasps in surprise.

Angus Skaaland:

"WAIT A MINUTE! I've seen that spot a thousand times and I think these two are the first sisters in wrestling history who DIDN'T screw it up!"

Before Angus can continue, Sunny explodes across the ring.

RRRRRAAAAHHHHHH!!!

She launches herself into both sisters with the Joyride, crushing Celestina against the ropes and absolutely

Point of Review

wiping Valeria off the apron.

KRAAAAASHHHH!!!

Valeria crashes violently to the floor outside while Celestina folds to the canvas in a heap.

The building erupts.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"SHE TOOK THEM BOTH OUT!"

The referee immediately points toward the aisle and starts shouting for security.

RRRRRAAAAHHHHH!!!

Valeria tries to get back up arguing wildly in Spanish, but she's too dazed to fight effectively as security finally swarms her and forces her away from ringside while the crowd roars in approval.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And finally, finally, Valeria Cruz has been thrown out of this match!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Aw c'mon, she was contributin'!"

Sunny pulls herself upright using the ropes while Celestina struggles out of the corner still rattled from the Joyride. The champion charges forward and hooks Celestina up immediately for the Sunshine Bomb.

RRRRRAAAAHHHHH!!!

But the damage is obvious now.

Sunny winces trying to secure the grip and visibly shifts more of Celestina's weight toward the left arm before lifting. The adjustment buys her enough strength to muscle Celestina upward--

--but Celestina recognizes the setup instantly.

She slips free right at the top and lands behind Sunny.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Cruz knew exactly what was coming!"

Celestina immediately hooks both arms, trying to force Sunny up into the Queen's Gambit--

Point of Review

--and realizes almost instantly that she cannot lift her.

The crowd actually cheers the failed attempt.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:
"That was ambitious!"

Celestina abandons it quickly and shifts upward into a tight cravat instead, pulling Sunny downward and stumbling her toward the corner. She pivots sharply and drives Sunny down with the spinning Cruz Control.

WHAMMM!!!

Both women hit hard.

Celestina rolls through immediately and scrambles for the top rope while Sunny is still stunned from the impact.

Robbie Ray Carter:
"Blood Moon Splash! She's going for it!"

Celestina launches into the twisting 450--

--but Sunny gets both knees up.

KRAAASHHH!!!

RRRRRRRAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!

Celestina crumples across Sunny's knees and rolls away clutching her ribs in agony.

Both women struggle back up almost entirely on instinct now.

Sunny grabs Celestina again.

Another Sunshine Bomb attempt.

The crowd rises.

Sunny powers Celestina upward despite the screaming pain in her arm--

--and at the apex Celestina rakes both eyes.

Point of Review

SCRATCH!

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Sunny stumbles blindly and Celestina twists around her body immediately, trying to drag her down into the Mindanao Stretch one last time.

Angus Skaaland:

"SHE'S GOT IT! SHE'S GOT IT!"

Celestina nearly threads the hold together completely. One leg hooks across Sunny's neck while she desperately tries to trap the damaged arm again--

--but in focusing on the injured arm, she loses control of the other.

Sunny rips her good arm free.

The crowd explodes.

RRRRRRAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"WAIT A SECOND!"

Sunny powers upward instead of downward.

Celestina's expression changes instantly from confidence to panic as Sunny rises to full height with one of her legs trapped across the back of the champion's neck.

Angus Skaaland:

"UH OH."

Sunny secures the captured leg with her left arm and steps over Celestina's body before sitting backward into a brutal leg rack crab.

Celestina screams.

OOOOOOOHHHHHH!!!

The hold bends her nearly in half instantly.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"What IS this?!"

Point of Review

Celestina claws desperately at the mat trying to drag herself toward the ropes, but nothing moves. She tries pushing upward with both arms and gets nowhere. Sunny's weight and leverage keep her completely trapped in the center of the ring.

Celestina reaches.

Pulls.

Pushes.

Nothing.

Then she taps frantically against the canvas.

TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP!

The referee immediately calls for the bell.

DING DING DING!

RRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!

Sunny releases the hold the instant the referee grabs her shoulder and rolls away clutching her injured arm tightly against her chest.

But she's still smiling.

Still breathing hard.

Still champion.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Sunny Holliday survives one of the toughest title defenses of her career!"

Angus Skaaland:

"And somehow she just invented a new way to hurt people in the process."

Cito Conarri:

"Here is your winner, and STILL ICW Women's Champion! SUNNY... HOLLLLIDAAAYYYY!!!

Return the Baroness

Point of Review

"Walkin' on Sunshine" blasts back through the arena as Sunny Holliday accepts the championship belt with her left arm, her right still tucked protectively against her ribs. She's exhausted, sweaty, hurting, but smiling all the same as the crowd rises to its feet roaring for her.

Across the ring, Celestina Cruz slips quietly out under the bottom rope. There's no swagger left now, no smirk, no mocking applause. She walks with a slight limp beside the barricade, one arm wrapped around her ribs, eyes downcast.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Sunny Holliday said her joy was real, and tonight she proved it. Celestina Cruz threw everything she had at her -- the arm work, the mind games, the humiliation, the interference -- and Sunny Holliday came through the other side still herself."

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah, but she paid for it. That arm's a mess. I mean, don't get me wrong, she lost, but I wasn't really expecting Celestina to put up a fight like that. Lady still might raise her standing if she can pick up a couple wins next season."

Sunny climbs the nearest turnbuckle and raises the championship overhead with her good arm.

RRRRRAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!

She hops down carefully and starts making her way around the ring, holding the title high toward each side of the arena in turn while the crowd volume swells with each section she acknowledges.

The smile is still there.

The celebration feels earned.

Then suddenly--

--the music cuts out.

Sunny stops mid-step.

The crowd noise dips into confusion.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"What happened to the music?"

Angus Skaaland:

"Technical problem maybe?"

Point of Review

Sunny looks toward the stage, visibly puzzled, still clutching the title belt against her side.

Then the arena speakers erupt.

DA DA DA DAAAH...
DA DA DA DAAAAAHHH...

The opening violins of "Requiem (The Fifth)" hit.

And the entire mood in the building changes instantly.

OOOOOOOOHHHHHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:
"...No."

The heavy metal strings continue building through the arena as the crowd reaction shifts from confusion into a wave of anxious recognition.

Because everyone knows exactly whose music this is.

Robbie Ray Carter:
"Astrid Reichert is back."

Sunny tries to keep smiling through it, shaking her head once and motioning toward the ring with her good arm, inviting Astrid to come down and try her luck face-to-face.

But the smile doesn't quite reach the eyes anymore.

Angus Skaaland:
"...Robbie, I swear I see fear in her face."

Robbie Ray Carter:
"Can you blame her? Celestina Cruz spent fifteen minutes trying to break Sunny Holliday mentally. Astrid Reichert may have just done it with a violin section."

The curtain parts.

And Astrid Reichert steps out onto the stage.

BBBBOOOOOOOOOO!!!

She stands motionless beneath the entrance lights for a moment, dressed in black leather and silver, died

Point of Review

hair perfectly coifed, that jagged smile of hers in place. Around her waist sits an unfamiliar championship belt with ornate gold plating and crimson accents.

Angus Skaaland:

"What title is THAT?"

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I... I honestly don't know."

Astrid slowly lifts a microphone toward her lips.

Astrid Reichert:

"Congratulations, fish named Sunny. You struggled to beat somebody I beat easily months ago. Very vell done."

She gives a slow, sarcastic clap.

Astrid Reichert:

"A round of applause for ze..."

That cold sneer spreads across her face.

Astrid Reichert:

"...joy socket."

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Astrid begins walking slowly down the aisle. Every step deliberate, every bit of body language controlled.

Astrid Reichert:

"But do you remember vhat I said last time I addressed you? Zat I vould return ven I vas bulking?"

She pats the championship belt around her waist.

Astrid Reichert:

"I am bulking now. Und it is going very vell."

Astrid unfastens the belt and casually hands it to a ringside attendant without breaking eye contact with Sunny.

Astrid Reichert:

"As such, I intend to continue. So unfortunately for you, Sunny-fish, I vill be preparing you now."

Point of Review

She flexes her right forearm, contemplates it briefly, then looks back up.

Astrid Reichert:

"Not fried. I do not need ze calories. Instead, I will behead you und fillet you."

Astrid tilts her head slightly.

Astrid Reichert:

"How does zat sound?"

Sunny's jaw tightens. She knows exactly what kind of danger is walking toward her, but she still refuses to back down. Slowly, she removes the ICW Women's Championship from her shoulder and sets it carefully in the center of the ring between them.

Then she points directly at Astrid.

A challenge.

Cross the line.

The crowd erupts.

RRRRRAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!

Astrid looks down at the championship belt.

Then back up at Sunny.

That smile widens. Her tongue snakes out of her mouth, licks along her upper teeth.

Astrid Reichert:

"Ah. You are as intelligent as you are svelte, Sunny-fish."

Astrid steps forward.

Astrid Reichert:

"Very vell."

She slides smoothly under the bottom rope.

Sunny is on her instantly.

Forearm.

Point of Review

THWACK!

Another.

THWACK!

Then a headbutt.

THUD!

The crowd explodes as Sunny drives Astrid backward across the ring trying desperately to defend her space after the brutal match she already survived.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Sunny's fighting for dear life now!"

Astrid absorbs the blows with that same cold expression.

Then suddenly she drops backward.

Guard pull.

In one smooth motion she latches onto Sunny's good arm with both legs, twisting and trapping it against her body before Sunny can even understand the position.

Angus Skaaland:

"What in God's name--"

Sunny tries to yank free--

--but the arm doesn't move.

Astrid's legs cinch tighter, hammerlocking the limb into place with horrifying control while her tattooed right arm -- The Python -- snakes around Sunny's throat.

The arena noise changes instantly.

OOOOOOOOHHHHHHHH!!!

Sunny kicks her legs wildly trying to find leverage, but Astrid's body positioning keeps her completely smothered. Sunny claws desperately at the choking arm with the injured limb, but the damaged arm can't generate enough force to break the grip.

Point of Review

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Schlechte Nacht!"

Astrid barely even looks strained.

She casually flexes her free left bicep and, while maintaining it, checks her fingernails with bored disdain.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"She's trapped the good arm! Sunny can't defend herself!"

Angus Skaaland:

"No no no no--"

Sunny's movements start slowing.

The crowd is howling in outrage now.

BBBBOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!

BBBBOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!

And Astrid just keeps squeezing. Her smile grows just a little bit wider, and she licks her teeth.

Sunny's legs finally stop kicking.

Her hand slips weakly away from Astrid's arm.

Then she goes limp.

OOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHH!!!

Security rushes toward the ring immediately as the referee drops beside them shouting for Astrid to release the hold.

Astrid lets go the instant she's satisfied.

Sunny collapses flat onto the mat unconscious beside the championship belt.

Astrid rises calmly before security can even reach her. She brushes invisible dust from her gear, waves security aside dismissively with one hand, then turns and swaggers back up the aisle with slow predatory confidence while "Requiem (The Fifth)" swells through the arena once more.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Fans, for better or for worse, and in Sunny's case clearly for worse, Astrid Reichert is back in ICW. And

Point of Review

what a statement to make, leaving the champion unconscious in the ring on pay per view."

Angus Skaaland:

"Reality check, Robbie. Astrid choked out Duchess fucking Vaughn clean as a bean. And Duchess got kicked out of the women's division! Is Sunny gonna be able to stand up to the Baroness? If Sunny can't, does anyone else even have a fighting chance?"

Inside the ring, referees and security kneel around Sunny checking on her as the show fades onward.

An interview derailed

Backstage, Ryan Caudil stands with Graysie Parker.

Ryan Caudil: "Good evening wrestling fans, I'm here backstage live with the inaugural Iron Crown Champion, Graysie Parker. Graysie, in just a couple hours you step into the ring with a chance to win that title back. Across from you? Eric Dane Junior, Kirsty McKinney, and of course the man who took the title from you, Todderick Davenport III."

Graysie Parker: "Let me stop you right there, Ryan. Toddy-boy isn't the problem and he never has been."

She shakes her head.

Graysie Parker: "He's not the threat here."

Ryan Caudil: "If I may venture a guess -- you're talking about McKinney, right?"

Graysie Parker: "Exactly."

A humorless grin crosses her face.

Graysie Parker: "She's been a thorn in my side since literally the day she showed up in this business. You know Ryan, I was paying attention while she ran through the roster."

She taps the side of her head.

Graysie Parker: "But I was paying attention before that, too. I know her history. I know her connection with Andrews. I proved last week that those mat wrestling tricks she's been beating people with aren't gonna work on me so easily."

She squares her shoulders.

Graysie Parker: "I know this is a different environment. The stakes are higher."

Point of Review

A beat.

Graysie Parker: "But I'm ready."

Another beat.

Graysie Parker: "I'm fuckin' ready."

Todderick Davenport III: "You don't sound ready."

The camera widens.

TD3 strides into frame with Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington flanking him.

Todderick Davenport III: "You sound distracted."

He adjusts his jacket.

Todderick Davenport III: "Seeing as I'm the man who took this belt off you, it does seem to me like I'm deserving of a lot more respect from you than I'm getting."

Graysie Parker: "You would think that, wouldn't you?"

Without even looking at him, she turns back to Ryan.

Graysie Parker: "Ryan, I've been brushing up on my mat skills. I've been working on blocking the bulldog choke. It doesn't need a fancy name, Kirsty."

She rolls her eyes.

Graysie Parker: "I've been scouting cradles and escapes."

Todderick Davenport III: "Excuse me, I'm right here."

Graysie turns just long enough to look at him.

Graysie Parker: "Hi."

She immediately turns back to the camera.

Graysie Parker: "And I don't have to beat you on the mat, Kirsty. I just have to keep my shoulders off the mat long enough to hit you."

Point of Review

A grin appears.

Graysie Parker: "You're lucky none of those goats you wrestled as a little kid headbutted you."

She points at her own forehead.

Graysie Parker: "Because you sure couldn't handle it when I did."

Todderick Davenport III: "It's so cute how your strategies seem to begin and end with beating your head against a wall."

Ryan Caudil: "Graysie, it sounds like you're implying that Kirsty is something of a one-trick pony."

Graysie Parker: "I'm not implying a damn thing. I'm saying it."

She folds her arms.

Graysie Parker: "This ain't Olympic wrestling. This is pro wrestling. And I've already proven I can make her play my game."

Her expression hardens.

Graysie Parker: "Tonight, I'm going to finish things with her and send her running back to the amateur mats."

Eric Dane Jr.: "You really think Kirsty McKinney is the biggest problem in the match?"

Eric Dane Jr. walks into frame.

TD3 groans audibly.

Todderick Davenport III: "And now nepotism enters the scene."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Oh shut up, Tod. You don't know what's going on either."

He waves him off, then his attention shifts to Graysie.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Either of y'all ever even looked at the big picture lately?"

Ryan Caudil: "What do you mean?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Do any of you pay attention to anything?"

He throws his hands up.

Point of Review

Eric Dane Jr.: "We've got these board meetings, interviews behind closed doors, they were supposed to tape the damn things but they didn't, and now we've got this."

Graysie Parker: "Eric, what the hell are you talking about?"

Ryan Caudil: "Yeah, what are you talking about?"

Junior looks from one face to the next.

Then shakes his head.

Eric Dane Jr.: "None of you've figured it out yet?"

He starts counting on his fingers.

Eric Dane Jr.: "The delays. The reviews. All this talk about boards of directors."

Another finger.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Cito, and then Andrews."

He gestures broadly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Everything that's been happening right in front of you?"

Silence.

TD3 looks annoyed that somehow this conversation has stopped being about him.

For the first time, Graysie is paying complete attention.

Ryan Caudil: "Figured what out?"

Junior closes his eyes.

Takes a breath.

Then lets out a disgusted sigh.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Exactly."

He turns and stalks away.

Point of Review

Graysie Parker: "Eric?"

She starts after him.

Graysie Parker: "The fuck you talkin' about, boy?"

She disappears down the hallway after him.

TD3 throws his arms up.

Todderick Davenport III: "Excuse me! As the champion--"

Ryan Caudil: "Fans, we've got another match coming up. Back to ringside with you, Robbie and Angus!"

Todderick Davenport III: "But I--"

The feed cuts away mid-sentence.

Duchess Vaughn vs Jesse Collins

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Folks, up next we've got a young man trying to prove he still belongs in the fight, and a newcomer to the Television Division looking to make an example out of somebody. Jesse 'Iron Kid' Collins laid down this challenge himself after weeks of Duchess Vaughn shadowing him backstage, and tonight he gets exactly what he asked for."

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah, and I think the kid might regret it before this thing's over. Jesse Collins has got heart, nobody's denying that, but Duchess Vaughn ain't some cruiserweight hotshot he can outrun for fifteen minutes. That's a nasty, nasty human being lookin' to plant a flag in the TV division."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And don't forget why they're here in the first place. Duchess got moved up because management figured the women's division wasn't big enough for somebody that dangerous."

Angus Skaaland:

"Tonight ain't about rankings or revenge. This is Duchess Vaughn trying to establish territory."

"Doin' This" by Luke Combs hits, and the crowd immediately comes alive.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Point of Review

Cito Conarri:

"The following contest is set for one fall, with a fifteen minute time limit! Introducing first... from Birmingham, Alabama... weighing in at one-hundred and eighty-five pounds... Jesse 'Iron Kid' Collins!"

Jesse "Iron Kid" Collins bursts through the curtain already moving, slapping hands down both sides of the aisle. There's no elaborate posing, no manufactured swagger -- just pure nervous energy and adrenaline. Jesse points toward ringside fans yelling encouragement at him, nodding hard, feeding off every ounce of support he can get.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And listen to this crowd for Iron Kid! Birmingham's own looking to bounce back tonight after coming up short against Todderick Davenport the Third back on Heart of Dixie."

Jesse breaks into a sprint the last few steps, slides under the bottom rope, and pops to his feet in one motion. He climbs the nearest turnbuckle, throwing both arms into the air as the crowd roars back at him.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:

"I'll say this for the kid -- he ain't scared. Maybe he should be, but he ain't."

Jesse hops down, bouncing on the balls of his feet, throwing a few quick shadowboxing combinations to stay loose. His smile fades a little as he looks toward the entrance ramp, mentally preparing himself.

"Shutdown" by Skepta slams through the arena speakers, blunt and ugly. The cheers instantly turn to boos.

BBBBBOOOOOOOO!!!

Cito Conarri:

"And his opponent... from Brixton, South London... weighing in at one-hundred and seventy-eight pounds... the Concrete Queen... Duchess Vaughn!"

Duchess Vaughn storms through the curtain already running their mouth. No posing, no pacing on the stage -- just an immediate march toward the ring, thick South London accent barking over the music as they point at fans along the aisle.

Duchess Vaughn:

"Shut your mouths! Every one of you!"

BBBBBOOOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And here comes the Concrete Queen. Six feet tall, one-hundred and seventy-eight pounds, and already one

Point of Review

of the most dangerous competitors anywhere in Iron City Wrestling."

Duchess keeps moving, jawing nonstop. One fan leans too far over the barricade shouting insults and Duchess abruptly stops dead in their tracks, turning to get nose-to-nose with him before security quickly intervenes. Duchess laughs cruelly and wipes their boots on the apron before climbing inside.

Angus Skaaland:

"See, I like that. These fans been begging to get yelled at all night. Watch the body language. Duchess ain't playing to the crowd, they ain't trying to look cool -- they're hunting."

Duchess stalks across the ring, eyes locked squarely on Jesse now. The trash talk dies down a little as they size him up. Jesse stares back, jaw tight but refusing to back away. Duchess tilts their head slightly, almost amused.

Duchess steps forward until they're nearly chest-to-chest with Jesse before the referee quickly wedges himself between them. Jesse keeps bouncing on his toes, trying to fire himself up. Duchess just smirks coldly now, eyes narrowed, almost insultingly calm.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Jesse Collins asked for this fight. We're about to find out whether heart and resilience are enough against somebody as physically dangerous as Duchess Vaughn."

Angus Skaaland:

"Heart keeps you standing. Sometimes that's all it does."

The referee gives final instructions. Jesse nods immediately, eyes focused. Duchess barely acknowledges him, still staring at Jesse over the referee's shoulder.

The bell rings.

The bell rings and Jesse Collins is out of his corner instantly, bouncing on the balls of his feet as Duchess Vaughn stalks forward with that same cold, unimpressed expression. Jesse fires the first shot with a quick standing dropkick to the chest. Duchess stumbles backward with a broad-armed windmill sell, more surprised than hurt, and Jesse immediately follows with another dropkick that sends them staggering into the ropes.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Iron Kid wasting absolutely no time! He knows if Duchess Vaughn settles into their kind of fight, this gets dangerous in a hurry!"

Jesse hits the ropes again as Duchess steps forward swinging a massive big boot. Jesse ducks underneath it by inches, rebounds again, and drills Duchess with a running dropkick right to the chest that finally knocks

Point of Review

them flat onto their back.

The crowd surges to its feet as Jesse scrambles to the nearest corner. He climbs in one smooth motion, clapping overhead to pull even more noise out of the Foundry before launching himself into the air--

--and Duchess catches him.

Not gracefully. Violently.

Duchess snatches Jesse out of midair in a crushing bearhug and immediately squeezes tight enough to stop his momentum dead. Jesse's eyes go wide as Duchess shakes him violently side to side like they're trying to rip the fight out of him by force.

Angus Skaaland:

"There it is! That's the danger right there! One mistake and Duchess gets hands on you!"

Jesse starts hammering both fists together against Duchess's head in frantic bell-clap shots, trying to break free. Duchess snarls, shifts their grip, and suddenly plants him into the canvas with a thunderous spinebuster.

THWHAMM!!

Jesse bounces hard off the mat as Duchess rolls over into the cover.

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

Duchess pushes up to one knee immediately, staring around the arena with visible irritation already creeping across their face.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And that look tells the whole story. Duchess Vaughn thought that might already be over."

They grab Jesse by the wrist and yank him violently back to his feet. Jesse barely gets upright before Duchess jerks him inward and nearly takes his head off with a short-arm clothesline.

KRAAACK!!

Another cover.

ONE!

Point of Review

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

This time Duchess exhales sharply through their nose and traps Jesse's arm against the mat before he can roll away. They start hammering brutal short punches into his ribs, each one digging deeper than the last as Jesse curls instinctively under the punishment.

Angus Skaaland:

"Ohhh, those body shots are nasty. Duchess ain't punchin' to score points, they're tryin' to break the kid down!"

Duchess shifts their weight, pulls Jesse partially upright by the trapped arm, and drives a vicious knee smash into the side of his head.

THWACK!!

Jesse spills sideways across the canvas, clutching at his ribs and jaw as Duchess rises back to their feet. The Concrete Queen looks out into the crowd with open aggravation written all over their face, one hand spread slightly.

Duchess Vaughn:

"What's this, then? Why'm I still 'ere?"

Duchess Vaughn drags Jesse Collins back up by the wrist and immediately folds him across their knee with a savage pendulum backbreaker. Jesse cries out, arching backward in pain, but Duchess doesn't let him fall. They keep hold of him, yank him upright again, and drive him down across the knee a second time even harder than the first.

THWACK!!

This time Duchess keeps him there.

One hand pressed over Jesse's knee. The other grinding against his jawline as they wrench him backward over the knee, turning the backbreaker into a cruel stretching submission. Jesse kicks and squirms, boots scraping uselessly against the canvas as Duchess leans down near his ear.

Duchess Vaughn:

"Stay down already, ya lit'le muppet."

Angus Skaaland:

"Duchess Vaughn's enjoyin' this now. That's bad news for Jesse Collins."

Point of Review

Duchess abruptly tosses Jesse aside like they're offended he's still conscious. Jesse rolls onto hands and knees coughing hard, one arm wrapped around his lower back, and Duchess immediately grabs him again before he can recover. They whip him hard toward the buckles--

--Jesse hits chest-first with a sickening thud.

WHAMM!!

Before he can even slump properly, Duchess charges from behind and drives a brutal running knee into the small of his back, lifting him violently upward out of the corner before he spills awkwardly across the middle rope.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Everything Duchess Vaughn is doing now is aimed at slowing Jesse Collins down! You can already see that movement starting to disappear!"

Duchess grabs Jesse by the back of the neck and hauls him through the ropes onto the apron. Jesse's barely upright when Duchess starts hammering clubbing forearms and chest smashes into him against the turnbuckles, each shot echoing through the Foundry as the crowd groans louder and louder.

THWACK!!

THWACK!!

THWACK!!

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Duchess Vaughn:

"This your boy, yeah!? This who you lot came to see!?"

Duchess hooks Jesse under the chin from behind and casually slings him backward into the ring like a sack of laundry. Jesse tumbles across the canvas clutching at his chest and ribs as Duchess steps through the ropes after him, still muttering insults under their breath.

Jesse tries to crawl away. Duchess catches him by the cheek with a pair of sharp disrespectful slaps.

SMACK!!

SMACK!!

Duchess Vaughn:

"Look at me when I'm talkin' to ya."

Duchess hooks Jesse into the pumphandle position--

Point of Review

RRRAAAHHH!!!

--but Jesse slips out the back before they can lift him.

The crowd explodes as Jesse immediately starts firing looping haymakers into Duchess's jaw and chest, wild desperation punches thrown with everything he has left behind them.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Collins fighting back! Jesse Collins refusing to stay down!"

Jesse lands another shot. And another. Duchess finally stumbles half a step backward as the crowd rises with every swing.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Jesse hits the ropes looking for momentum--

--and Duchess nearly takes his head off with a vicious big boot.

KRAAACK!!

Jesse flips sideways from the impact and crashes to the mat in a heap as the entire building suddenly goes dead quiet.

Angus Skaaland:

"Ohhhh God. He walked right into it."

Duchess Vaughn stalks forward again as Jesse Collins struggles on hands and knees, still trying to force himself upright despite the punishment piling up on him. Duchess grabs him from behind and snakes both arms under his, wrenching him backward into a crushing full nelson.

Jesse immediately starts thrashing.

His boots kick wildly against the mat. His shoulders twist and buck as he tries to pry space open between Duchess' forearms and his neck.

Duchess Vaughn:

"Just stay still for once!"

Duchess shakes him violently, then shifts their grip, dragging Jesse down into The Tower Bridge instead. The nelson clutch folds Jesse awkwardly backward against Duchess' body, neck and shoulders trapped tight as Duchess leans their weight down into him.

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"That's ugly right there. Jesse Collins is gettin' folded in half!"

Jesse still won't stop fighting.

He claws at Duchess' wrists. Kicks his legs. Twists his hips, trying desperately to create space as the crowd stomps and rallies behind him.

LET'S GO JES-SE!

LET'S GO JES-SE!

Duchess snarls in frustration and yanks him violently back upward--

--a little too violently.

Jesse suddenly flips through the motion, twisting out of Duchess' grip mid-pull and spiking them face-first into the mat with a desperate reverse facebuster on the way down.

WHAMM!!

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Both competitors spill apart across the canvas.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Collins countered it! Jesse Collins found an opening!"

Jesse forces himself up first, wincing hard through the pain in his back and ribs before throwing himself into a standing moonsault across Duchess' chest.

ONE--

Duchess shoves him off before two.

But Jesse's already moving.

He hits the ropes again, adrenaline and crowd noise carrying him forward as the Foundry comes alive around him--

RRRAAAHHH!!!

--and Duchess suddenly explodes upward from their knees with a savage rising lariat.

Point of Review

KRAAACK!!

Jesse flips completely over from the impact before crashing to the mat in a heap.

The crowd dies instantly.

Angus Skaaland:

"GOOD LORD."

Duchess rises breathing hard now, eyes narrowed with real irritation instead of smug amusement. They grab Jesse by the throat with one massive hand and haul him bodily off the mat.

Duchess Vaughn:

"You just don't learn, do ya?"

A stiff headbutt blasts Jesse square in the face.

THUNK!!

Jesse goes limp long enough for Duchess to hook him and drive him violently into the canvas with a sit-out powerbomb.

THWHAMM!!

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

The Foundry erupts again.

RRRAAHHH!!!

Duchess sits frozen for half a second in complete disbelief before slamming both palms against the mat in fury.

Duchess Vaughn:

"COUNT FASTER THEN!"

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Jesse Collins kicked out again! Duchess Vaughn cannot believe it!"

Point of Review

Duchess turns toward the crowd now, jawing furiously at the fans nearest ringside.

Duchess Vaughn:

"You cheerin' this!? Look at him! He's finished!"

They turn back and slap Jesse hard across the face once.

SMACK!!

Then again.

SMACK!!

Duchess Vaughn:

"Stay down, ya lit'le idiot!"

Duchess drags Jesse back up and hooks him into the pumphandle--

--but Jesse slips out behind them again.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Before Duchess can turn around, Jesse fires a sharp dropkick right between the shoulderblades.

Duchess stumbles forward hard into the ropes. They whirl around immediately with a furious snarl and charge--

--and Jesse drops flat, yanking the top rope downward.

Duchess spills over the top rope to the floor.

The crowd explodes.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Jesse doesn't hesitate.

He slings himself through the ropes with a running dropkick to the outside while hanging onto the top rope for balance, blasting Duchess backward into the barricade.

Then, before the crowd can even fully react, Jesse skins the cat back into the ring in one fluid motion.

Robbie Ray Carter:

Point of Review

"What agility by Iron Kid!"

Jesse vaults upward onto the top rope, lands briefly on the middle rope facing outward--

--and launches himself into a corkscrew bodyblock to the floor.

KRAAASHHH!!

Both competitors crash violently against the ringside mats, but it's Duchess Vaughn who flips completely head over heels from the impact as the Foundry absolutely loses its mind.

RRRRAAAAHHHHH!!!

Jesse Collins is the first one moving again.

Barely.

He crawls onto the ring apron using the ropes for leverage while Duchess Vaughn slowly pushes upright near ringside, still shaking the cobwebs out after the corkscrew bodyblock. Jesse sees the opening and starts running down the apron as fast as his battered body will let him.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Iron Kid's still coming!"

Jesse leaps--

--and drives both knees into Duchess' chest with a flying meteora off the apron.

THWACK!!

Both competitors crash hard against the floor again, but Jesse forces himself up first this time, feeding off the roar of the crowd as he desperately shoves Duchess back under the ropes.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Jesse climbs the turnbuckles slowly now, exhaustion visibly setting into every movement. He pauses at the top just long enough to steady himself before launching into The Foundry Dive--

--but Duchess catches him.

The entire crowd gasps.

Duchess catches Jesse across their shoulders in midair and immediately drops him spine-first across their

Point of Review

knee with another brutal backbreaker.

KRAACK!!

Angus Skaaland:

"Oh no. No no no!"

This time Duchess doesn't release him.

They keep Jesse bent backward across the knee and wrap one massive hand around his throat, squeezing hard while leaning down into his face.

Duchess Vaughn:

"Still think this were a good idea, mate!?"

The referee immediately starts counting.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

FOUR!

Duchess finally lets go with an aggravated shove that dumps Jesse across the mat in a coughing heap.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Come on now! Duchess Vaughn pushing that five count as far as they possibly could!"

Duchess grabs Jesse again, hooks the arms, and starts setting him up for the cradle DDT--

--but Jesse suddenly starts hammering desperate bodyshots into Duchess' ribs.

One.

Two.

Three.

Not clean punches. Survival punches.

Duchess' grip loosens just enough.

Jesse lunges forward and drives them backward into the corner with a desperate spear that rattles the buckles.

RRRAAHHH!!!

Point of Review

Before Duchess can recover, Jesse explodes upward into a tornado DDT out of the corner.

WHAMM!!

Both competitors hit hard, but Jesse immediately throws an arm across the chest.

ONE!

TWO!

THR--NO!

Duchess kicks out at the last possible instant.

The Foundry erupts.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That was it! Jesse Collins almost had them!"

Jesse stumbles backward to his feet, chest heaving violently now. He scuffs his boots against the canvas, trying to fire himself up as the crowd rises around him.

LET'S GO JES-SE!

LET'S GO JES-SE!

Duchess starts getting up.

Jesse charges.

Steel City Slingblade!

The snapping slingblade spikes Duchess into the mat and sends the crowd into another frenzy.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Jesse doesn't even stop moving. He hits the ropes again, adrenaline carrying him forward as he throws himself into one last desperate burst--

--and Duchess nearly caves his skull in with a spinning uraken.

KRAAAACK!!

Point of Review

The sound echoes through the building.

Jesse crumples instantly.

The crowd noise fades into horrified mutters and scattered boos.

Angus Skaaland:

"Jesus CHRIST. I remember when she concussed Flip D with that backfist!"

Duchess doesn't even talk now.

Breathing hard, eyes burning with fury, they snatch Jesse upright and spike him directly into the canvas with the cradle DDT.

THWHAMM!!

ONE!

TWO!

--and Duchess pulls him up.

BBBBBOOOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Oh come on!"

Duchess immediately snakes an arm around Jesse's neck and traps him in the cobra clutch.

Duchess Vaughn:

"Was it worth it?"

Jesse weakly struggles, barely able to stay upright now.

Duchess suddenly spins.

One rotation.

Two.

The cobra clutch big swing leaves Jesse's legs flailing helplessly before Duchess violently hooks the bottom leg with their own, wraps the other leg across Jesse's body, and drops backward into the fully trapped Garrison Lock.

Point of Review

RRRAAAHHH--

The crowd noise dies in real time as everyone sees the full hold sink in.

Jesse is trapped.

One leg grapevined.

Body pinned.

Neck twisted sideways.

Nowhere to go.

Duchess cranks backward viciously.

Jesse tries to fight it for a moment, hands clawing weakly at Duchess' arms--

--and Duchess drives two sharp headbutts into the back of his skull.

THUNK!!

THUNK!!

Duchess Vaughn:

"Tap."

Duchess leans back even further.

Jesse Collins taps frantically against the mat.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

The referee dives in immediately.

DING DING DING!

Cito Conarri:

"Here is your winner by submission... the Concrete Queen... Duchess Vaughn!"

Duchess finally releases the hold a second later, breathing hard as Jesse curls onto his side clutching at his neck and ribs.

Then Duchess grabs a fistful of his hair and grinds his face harshly against the canvas before finally standing up to a storm of boos.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Point of Review

Worth it, though?

Jesse Collins rolls weakly beneath the bottom rope clutching at his neck and ribs, coughing hard as he tries to gather himself on the floor. A medic hurries over immediately, crouching beside him and carefully prodding at the side of his neck while Jesse winces and nods through gritted teeth.

Inside the ring, Duchess Vaughn paces like a caged animal.

They keep rubbing the side of their own head where Jesse's desperation offense connected earlier, still breathing heavier than they want to admit. The boos rain down from every side of the Foundry now, but Duchess barely seems to hear them. They glance down at the little huddle forming around Jesse -- referee kneeling beside him, medic checking the neck, Collins still trying to wave off help despite barely sitting upright.

Duchess sneers.

Then spits down at them from inside the ring.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Oh come on, that's unnecessary."

Angus Skaaland:

"Duchess Vaughn wanted to make a statement tonight, Robbie. I'd say they accomplished that."

Duchess wipes their mouth with the back of their wrist and steps up onto the bottom rope, leaning over the top. They beckon for a microphone, and receive one from the timekeeper.

Duchess Vaughn:

"That what all this got ya then!?! Neck all knackered up, medics rubbin' on ya, crowd cryin' for ya--"

They point down toward Jesse with open disgust, and laugh harshly.

Duchess Vaughn:

"Worth it though, yeah!?"

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Duchess drops back to the mat and stalks toward the ropes, still talking the entire way, gesturing wide for the fans.

Duchess Vaughn:

Point of Review

"Lit'le idiot nearly got himself crippled tryin' to play hero for you lot!"

They step onto the apron and glare out at the crowd again.

Duchess Vaughn:

"That's your problem! Every single one of ya! You cheer people for gettin' hurt and call it heart!"

They wave dismissively toward Jesse.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Jesse Collins stood up to somebody bigger, meaner, and more experienced tonight. There's no shame in that."

Angus Skaaland:

"No shame, maybe. But there's definitely pain."

Duchess hops down to the floor and starts stalking up the aisle, still ranting over their shoulder at the crowd.

Duchess Vaughn:

"Keep cheerin' for idiots who won't stay down! See where it gets 'em!"

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Duchess disappears through the curtain still muttering angrily to herself while behind them Jesse Collins finally manages to pull himself upright with the medic's help, the crowd giving him an appreciative ovation for surviving the fight.

RRRAAAHHH!!!

Catching up

The camera opens somewhere in the backstage hallway.

Kirsty McKinney is walking with a duffel bag slung over one shoulder. Dressed in a T-shirt and jogging shorts, she looks less like a future World Title challenger and more like somebody trying to get from Point A to Point B without being bothered.

Naturally, that proves impossible.

The New Untouchables are loitering nearby. And Jeff Andrews is sitting on a crate nearby, trademark green and yellow mesh John Deere trucker's cap pulled low over his brow.

Point of Review

The moment Daniels sees Kirsty, he lights up.

Jeffrey Daniels:

"Kirsty! Hey! This is the coolest night ever!"

Kirsty stops.

Daniels is already talking too fast.

Jeffrey Daniels:

"You've got your first Iron Crown Title shot! Me and Lee are teaming with Jeff Andrews! Like, actual Jeff Andrews! This is historic!"

LSR:

"Objectively speaking, it really is. Years from now people are gonna look back on tonight and--"

Jeffrey Daniels:

"--and say wow!"

LSR:

"Exactly."

Kirsty blinks.

She looks tired.

Not physically.

Mentally.

The way somebody looks when they're trying to focus on a major match and keep getting interrupted by enthusiastic idiots.

Kirsty McKinney:

"Yeah. It's... really awesome."

Daniels beams.

LSR nods proudly.

Kirsty's attention shifts to Andrews.

Kirsty McKinney:

Point of Review

"You came back?"

Andrews looks up at her.

Jeff Andrews:

"You sound surprised."

Kirsty McKinney:

"I am."

She shifts the duffel bag slightly.

Kirsty McKinney:

"I heard all your stories about Dane. They told me how you said if they took this job they were dead to you."

She gestures vaguely toward the New Untouchables.

Kirsty McKinney:

"And now you're here."

Andrews shrugs.

Jeff Andrews:

"Well, perspectives change, I guess."

A beat.

Jeff Andrews:

"Something wrong?"

Kirsty's expression hardens slightly.

Not much.

Just enough.

Kirsty McKinney:

"A little, yeah."

Another pause.

Kirsty McKinney:

"You bailed on me, and when you come back it's for them?"

Point of Review

Daniels and LSR immediately stop smiling.

Andrews doesn't.

He thinks about the question for a second.

Then answers.

Jeff Andrews:

"You haven't looked like you needed even a little bit of help since the minute you got here."

He jerks a thumb toward the New Untouchables.

Jeff Andrews:

"They did."

Kirsty's brow furrows.

For her, that's practically a dramatic emotional reaction.

The answer clearly isn't what she expected.

Privately, it sounds backwards. In her experience, in sport wrestling, coaches spend their time polishing the stars while everybody else fights to get noticed. Not the other way around.

Kirsty McKinney:

"I... see."

An awkward silence settles over the hallway.

Finally, Kirsty glances toward Daniels.

Kirsty McKinney:

"Jeffrey, you looked... alright against Graysie the other night."

Daniels nearly levitates.

Jeffrey Daniels:

"Thanks!"

He points at himself.

Jeffrey Daniels:

Point of Review

"And if I could hang with her like that, there's no way you can't beat her!"

Andrews immediately cuts in.

Jeff Andrews:

"She's not the one you need to worry about the most."

Kirsty looks back at him.

Jeff Andrews:

"Generational wars are one thing. But guys like Davenport know how to hold onto status symbols."

Kirsty snorts.

Kirsty McKinney:

"You think TD3's the threat?"

She shakes her head.

Kirsty McKinney:

"He's just a soft-handed rich boy who bought his way into the business."

A faint grin creeps across Andrews' face.

Jeff Andrews:

"Bought his way in?"

He chuckles.

Jeff Andrews:

"Sounds like somebody's a little fonder of the business than she's letting on."

Kirsty tilts her head.

Just a little.

Then shakes it.

Kirsty McKinney:

"I gotta go get ready for my match."

She starts walking again.

Point of Review

Kirsty McKinney:

"Good luck against the James Gang, guys."

Jeffrey Daniels:

"Good luck!"

LSR:

"Go win the thing!"

Kirsty raises a hand without looking back.

Then disappears around the corner.

Daniels watches her go.

And keeps watching.

And keeps watching.

Like an extremely optimistic puppy.

Andrews notices.

Of course he notices.

He shakes his head.

Jeff Andrews:

"The more things change, the more they stay the same, I guess."

LSR looks over.

LSR:

"What does that mean?"

Andrews stands up.

Jeff Andrews:

"It means we gotta go get ready for our match."

He starts walking.

Jeff Andrews:

Point of Review

"C'mon."

LSR follows.

Daniels takes one last look down the hallway Kirsty disappeared through.

Then hurries after them.

Fade out.

Lowlife Larry Edwards (c) vs Jack Havok

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Up next, the Iron City Wrestling Television Championship. Jack Havok has spent months insisting that title belongs to him. Tonight, he finally gets his shot at champion Lowlife Larry Edwards."

Angus Skaaland:

"These two have been trying to kill each other since Season One. If you're expecting a wrestling match, you're a more optimistic person than I am."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Jack Havok looked unstoppable from the first minute he drove into ICW. He put Edwards on the shelf, he put Clovis Black on the shelf, he laid waste to a bunch of kids just trying to get a foot in the door. But Edwards came back, and he turned the trick, and Jack Havok's spent all of Season 3 seething."

Angus Skaaland:

"And meanwhile Edwards decided he wasn't gonna act like the TV Title was Jack Havok's property. He's been doing the Fighting Champion thing. Took down Preston Price earlier in the season, took down Marcus King two shows ago. But after that match with King? Havok decided he was done watching."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"He beat Edwards down, dropped the TV Title on his face, and said he was coming for his property. And what did Edwards do?"

Angus Skaaland:

"He laughed, Robbie."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And meanwhile, I don't know how many of our fans have been following along with the Board Reviews, but Jack Havok's review - I don't think he could've done more damage if he'd tried. Absolutely unrepentant."

Angus Skaaland:

Point of Review

"Who knows how much longer we'll be in Birmingham? Who knows how much longer we'll have jobs? Blame Jack Havok. Well mostly blame the corporate dipshits who don't know good wrasslin' when they see it, but also blame Havok."

The opening riff of "Seek and Destroy" blasts through the Foundry.

BBBBBOOOOOOOO!!!

Cito Conarri:

"The following contest is set for one fall, with a fifteen minute time limit, and is for the ICW Television Championship! Introducing first, the challenger. From Detroit, Michigan, weighing two hundred and forty-five pounds... JACK! HAAAAAAAAAAAAVOK!!!"

Nothing happens.

The music keeps playing.

No Havok.

Cito glances toward the curtain.

Still no Havok.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Hold on a second. We don't see Jack Havok, and I'm being told there's some sort of disturbance backstage. Can we get a camera back there?"

Angus Skaaland:

"It's probably Havok."

The broadcast abruptly cuts away from the entrance aisle to a shaky handheld camera somewhere in the backstage area.

Jack Havok is storming down a concrete hallway like a man possessed.

CRASH!

A stack of plastic crates goes flying as he kicks through them without breaking stride.

Jack Havok:

"WHERE IS THAT YELLA BASTARD?!"

A frightened production technician flattens himself against the wall. Havok grabs him by the front of the shirt

Point of Review

anyway.

Jack Havok:

"WHERE'S EDWARDS?!"

The technician squeaks something unintelligible.

Havok shoves him away and keeps moving.

CLANG! CLATTER!

A bundle of metal pipes scatters across the floor as he hurls them aside. Security personnel follow several steps behind, careful not to get close enough to become targets. One is already speaking urgently into a radio while another looks around the hallway.

Angus Skaaland:

"Called it."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"This is exactly what management was worried about."

Jack Havok:

"LARRY! GET OUT HERE!"

The shouting stops.

Not gradually.

Instantly.

Havok freezes in the middle of the hallway.

The camera operator nearly walks into him.

For a moment the only sound is the rattle of rolling pipes somewhere down the corridor.

Then there is another noise.

A distant commotion from farther down the hall.

The camera swings shakily in that direction.

At the far end of the corridor stands Lowlife Larry Edwards.

Point of Review

The Television Championship is buckled backwards around his waist, the faceplate turned inward against his stomach. Larry doesn't say a word. He simply points down the hallway at Havok, eyes wide and unblinking, his face twisted into that familiar bug-eyed grimace.

For a second neither man moves.

Then Havok explodes forward.

Jack Havok:

"THERE YOU ARE! SONOFABITCH!"

Larry charges too.

Security scatters.

Production assistants dive for cover.

The two men meet in the middle of the hallway and immediately start throwing punches.

THWACK!

THWACK!

THWACK!

Neither man even attempts a wrestling hold. They simply stand toe-to-toe and unload on each other with savage hooks and clubbing forearms. Havok drives Larry backward into the wall. Larry answers with a forearm that snaps Havok's head sideways. Havok fires back with another punch. Larry shoves him into a stack of equipment cases.

Random Security Guy:

"Get Dane on radio! Ask for instruction!"

The Television Championship comes loose and skids across the floor.

Neither man notices.

Referee Donna King does.

While security scrambles to stay clear of the fight, she darts in, scoops up the championship belt, and immediately backs out of range again.

Meanwhile Havok and Larry continue hammering each other, stumbling over debris and crashing through

Point of Review

anything unfortunate enough to be nearby.

The match hasn't officially started.

At this point, nobody appears particularly concerned about that fact.

The fight immediately spills farther down the hallway.

Neither man has any interest in wrestling. Havok and Edwards trade punches at point-blank range, each shot accompanied by sharp hissing grunts as they try to batter the other backward. Havok rams Larry into a concrete wall. Larry answers by driving Havok shoulder-first into a stack of storage crates. Plastic explodes across the floor. Havok comes back with a boot to the gut and another right hand. Larry fires one right back.

The hallway is already a disaster zone thanks to Havok's earlier rampage. Pipes are scattered across the floor. Broken crate lids and loose equipment are everywhere. The footing is awful, but neither man seems interested in slowing down long enough to care.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"This match hasn't even officially started and they're already trying to knock each other unconscious!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Good. Saves time."

The camera shakes as the fight drifts farther down the corridor. Havok grabs Larry by the back of the head and slams him face-first into a stack of road cases. Larry answers with a forearm that nearly takes Havok's jaw off. They clinch for a moment, each trying to shove the other into the nearest hard object.

That's when Eric Dane Sr. arrives.

The ICW owner takes one look at the situation and immediately starts issuing orders.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Keep them away from production! Block that hallway! Move, move!"

Security reacts instantly.

A team peels off and races toward the intersection ahead of the fight. They form a double line across the production corridor, shoulders turned and heads lowered, creating a human wall that seals off the route without getting directly between the wrestlers and ringside.

One overeager security guard tries to hustle into position, steps on one of the pipes Havok threw earlier, and promptly goes head over heels onto his back.

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"He's hardcore! He's hardcore!"

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Will you stop?! Did you see how focused Havok and Edwards are on each other? They didn't even acknowledge the boss!"

Larry and Havok continue slugging each other as they stagger toward the intersection. Neither seems to have any awareness of Dane's containment effort.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Donna!"

Referee Donna King looks up from the Television Championship belt she's still carrying.

Eric Dane Sr.:

"Stay with 'em! Let 'em fight! And for the love of God, keep out of their way!"

Donna nods immediately.

The two wrestlers finally crash into the security wall.

The line holds.

Havok slams Larry into the braced security personnel. The line bends, absorbs the impact, and forces the fight away from the production corridor and towards the corridor to ringside, exactly as intended.

Both men simply start swinging again.

Punches fly over shoulders.

Security personnel stumble aside.

The fight spills past the intersection and surges straight toward the curtain.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"They've got them headed toward ringside!"

Angus Skaaland:

"I don't think anybody's got anything!"

Havok lands a right hand.

Point of Review

Larry answers with one of his own.

The curtain explodes outward as both men burst through it and into the entrance aisle.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

The Foundry erupts.

Fans leap to their feet as the Television Champion and his challenger come brawling out of the backstage area and directly into the crowd's sightline, still throwing punches.

Angus Skaaland:

"I haven't heard no bell. Just sayin'."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Oh for heaven's sake, Angus."

Fans jump to their feet as Havok immediately takes control. A right hand rocks Larry. Another follows. Havok grabs a handful of Edwards' arm and shoulder and sends him hard into the guardrail.

KRA-KANG!

The steel rattles violently.

Before Larry can recover, Havok charges.

Riot Kick!

The running boot catches Edwards flush and sends him tumbling over the guardrail into the front row seating area.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Havok has completely taken over this fight!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Good! If you're gonna start a riot, commit to it!"

Security personnel immediately move to keep fans back as Havok steps over the guardrail after him. Larry is trying to pull himself upright when Havok grabs him by the head and waistband and physically drags him halfway back over the rail.

The champion is still tangled in the barrier when Havok hooks the head.

Point of Review

Detroit Destruction!

THWACK!

Edwards spikes face-first into the aisle floor.

Havok immediately rolls him onto his back.

Donna King drops into position.

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

RRRAAAHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Edwards is still in this one!"

Angus Skaaland:

"And I guess this is falls count anywhere again? Par for the course when Jack Havok's involved, really."

Havok slams both fists against the mat in frustration. He hauls Larry upright and immediately drives a headbutt into his forehead.

THWACK!

A second follows.

THWACK!

Edwards staggers backward, barely staying on his feet.

Havok doesn't give him a second to recover.

He grabs a handful of Larry's shirt and hurls him farther down the aisle toward ringside. Edwards stumbles, catches himself for half a second--

--and gets nearly decapitated by another Riot Kick.

KRA-KOOM!

Point of Review

Larry flips awkwardly onto his side and crashes against the ringside area.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"How much more can Edwards possibly take?"

Angus Skaaland:

"More than most people, apparently."

Havok drags him up again.

Larry throws a weak punch.

Havok barely acknowledges it.

He grabs the champion around the waist, lifts him, and drives him chest-first across the ring steps with a brutal flapjack.

KRAAANG!

Edwards collapses beside the stairs.

For the first time all match, he doesn't immediately start fighting back.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I'm serious, Angus. At what point do you stop this? Edwards can barely defend himself right now."

Angus Skaaland:

"Ask Larry Edwards that question and see what he tells you."

Havok grabs a fistful of hair and trunks and shoves the champion underneath the bottom rope. Larry rolls into the ring on instinct more than awareness.

The challenger follows him inside.

For the first time all night, the fight is actually contained by the ropes.

Havok stands over the battered champion, breathing hard.

Then he turns and starts climbing.

The crowd noise changes immediately.

OOOOOOOOHHHHH...

Point of Review

One turnbuckle.

Two.

Three.

Havok reaches the top rope.

And stops there.

Angus Skaaland:

"...I don't think I've ever seen Jack Havok do this."

Larry is still trying to push himself up from the canvas as Havok balances on the top turnbuckle, staring down at him.

For the first time all match, even Havok seems to be making this up as he goes.

Havok launches himself from the top rope.

And immediately regrets it.

The moment his boots leave the turnbuckles, Larry Edwards surges upward and drives a fist into his stomach.

THWUMP!

All the air leaves Havok's body at once. He lands awkwardly on his feet, doubled over, and Larry finally gets the opening he's been searching for all night.

The champion starts firing. One chopping body shot, then another, then another. The machine-gun barrage drives Havok backward across the ring as Larry unloads everything he has left into the challenger's ribs and stomach.

THWACK! THWACK! THWACK!

Havok tries to answer with a punch, but Larry beats him to it. A spinning backfist snaps Havok's head sideways.

SMACK!

The challenger stumbles. Larry follows with a sloppy enzuigiri that catches more shoulder and jaw than temple, but it lands hard enough to stagger Havok into the corner.

Point of Review

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Edwards is still in this thing!"

Angus Skaaland:

"I told you! You gotta kill this guy before he stops moving!"

Larry charges.

Barroom Blitz!

Punch after punch crashes into Havok's face and body. The barrage ends with a vicious headbutt that leaves both men reeling.

THWACK!

Larry grabs Havok's wrist and sends him hard across the ring.

The challenger hits the opposite corner.

Larry follows.

Kitchen Sink!

The knee drives straight into Havok's midsection and folds him in half. Before he can collapse, Larry hooks the head and plants him with a snap DDT.

THWACK!

Cover.

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Larry immediately tries to keep the momentum rolling. He drags Havok upright and starts setting for the Iron City Slam.

Point of Review

Havok fights.

One elbow.

Then another.

Then another.

The hold breaks.

Havok yanks Larry back toward him by the wrist and swings for a short-arm clothesline.

Larry ducks underneath.

Turns.

Lowlife Lariat!

KRA-KOOM!

Both men crash to the canvas.

The crowd comes alive.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"For the first time tonight, Jack Havok is on the defensive!"

Angus Skaaland:

"And look at Larry! He knows it!"

Larry drags himself back to his feet and reaches for the double underhooks.

The crowd recognizes it immediately.

OOOOOHHHHHH!

He's trying for the Dumpster Fire Driver.

Havok recognizes it too.

Before Larry can secure the hold, Havok drops his hips and explodes upward with a back body drop.

Point of Review

Larry sails over the top rope.

He manages to catch himself on the apron.

For about half a second.

Havok is already charging.

Riot Kick!

KRAAANG!

The running boot catches Larry flush and sends him crashing off the apron into the guardrail.

The challenger follows him outside.

Ignoring Edwards, Havok swings at the fans, then yanks up a section of guardrail. The security guards immediately rush into position between wrestler and fans as Havok, ignoring them, sets the section of guardrail so it's draped over the ring apron on one side and the guardrail on the other.

The moment Larry starts trying to pull himself upright, Havok is already grabbing him.

One arm around the waist.

One around the shoulder.

The crowd collectively realizes what's coming.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"No!"

Havok explodes backward.

Exploder Suplex!

Larry flies through the air and crashes spine-first across the top of the guardrail.

KRAAAAAAAAAANG!!!

The barrier folds and rattles violently beneath the impact.

Edwards lies on it, chest heaving, breathing shallowly, arms stiff.

Point of Review

HOLY SHIT! HOLY SHIT! HOLY SHIT!

Angus Skaaland:

"...Okay, that one might've done it."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I don't know how much punishment one human being can take!"

Havok doesn't waste a second.

He drags the limp champion back under the bottom rope, slides into the ring after him, and immediately goes looking for a weapon.

The crowd starts booing before he even finds it.

A steel chair appears from ringside.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Come on, Jack! You don't need this!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Apparently he thinks he does!"

Larry is on hands and knees, still trying to recover from the Exploder onto the guardrail.

Havok raises the chair.

KRAAAANG!

The shot catches Edwards across the back and shoulders, flattening him immediately.

Havok throws the chair aside and hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Point of Review

Havok stares at Donna King.

Donna simply holds up two fingers.

The challenger slams both hands against the canvas and immediately heads for the corner.

Larry is barely moving.

Havok hits the ropes.

Outlaw Stomp!

THWACK!

He drags Larry back up by the head.

Hits the ropes again.

Outlaw Stomp!

THWACK!

Another cover.

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Edwards survives again!"

Angus Skaaland:

"I don't know how!"

The frustration is becoming visible now. Havok grabs Larry from behind and immediately snakes an arm around the face and neck.

Havok Lock!

Point of Review

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Havok rolls sideways when he applies that STF variant of his. Less of a neck crank and more of a choke. He's got it sunk in tight!"

Larry's body twists violently as Havok cranks his wrist and shoulder closer together with his free arm.

Donna drops to check.

Larry refuses.

Havok pulls harder.

The champion reaches backward blindly.

Nothing.

No ropes.

No escape.

Then Larry's fingers find Havok's face.

The eyegouge lands.

Havok jerks instinctively.

Not enough to break the hold.

But enough.

Larry wedges both hands underneath Havok's grip, pries the hands upward away from his throat--

--and bites.

Jack Havok:

"AAAGH!"

The crowd explodes.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Havok jerks backward, clutching his hand.

Point of Review

Larry immediately rolls away.

Angus Skaaland:

"Now that's veteran wrestling!"

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That is absolutely not veteran wrestling!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Veteran fighting, then!"

Enraged, Havok launches himself at the champion. Wild stomps, punches, forearm, no strategy anymore. Just violence. Larry covers up and absorbs what he can until Havok finally drags him upright by the head.

Double underhooks.

Chaos Theory!

KRA-KOOM!

Larry lands square on the back of his head.

The crowd groans.

OOOOOHHHHHH!

And for a moment it looks over.

Havok could cover.

He doesn't.

Instead he rolls out of the ring.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Cover him!"

Havok ignores him.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"What IS that man doing now?!"

The challenger is already dragging a table from beneath the ring.

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"Oh no."

The table slides inside.

Havok sets it up in the corner.

The crowd noise rises.

OOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHH...

Angus Skaaland:

"We've seen that table before. Havok prefers it wrapped in barbed wire, but he's got that corner DVD he likes putting people through it with."

Larry can barely stand. Havok can. That's the difference, at least for now. The challenger drags Edwards upright and hauls him onto his shoulders.

Jack Havok:

"THIS WHAT YOU WANTED, EDWARDS?!"

The crowd immediately understands.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Don't do this!"

Havok screams in Larry's face. Then charges.

At the last possible moment, Larry slips off the back.

Havok turns.

Double underhooks.

Dumpster Fire Driver!

THWACK!

Both men crash to the mat.

The crowd detonates.

RRRAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!

Point of Review

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Oh my GOD! Edwards slips loose! Edwards counters!"

Neither man moves for a second. Then Larry starts crawling. Not toward a cover.

Toward the chair.

The same chair Havok used earlier.

The champion grabs it, pulls himself up with the ropes, smacks it into the ring to fold it up tight, and drops it right next to Havok's head.

Angus Skaaland:

"Is this crazy bastard gonna pull this out somehow?"

Running on fumes, almost leaning on Havok as he does so, Edwards hooks one arm, then the other.

The crowd rises as one.

OOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"No way!"

Dumpster Fire Driver!

KRAAAAAANG!!!

Havok's head and shoulders crash into the steel chair.

Both men hit the mat.

Larry drapes himself across the challenger.

Donna King slides into position.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

RRRAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

Point of Review

The bell rings.

For a moment neither man moves.

Larry remains sprawled across Havok's chest, breathing hard, barely conscious.

Donna retrieves the Television Championship and kneels beside him.

The champion survived.

Barely.

But he survived.

Cito Conarri:

"Here is your winner, and STILL ICW Television Champion! LOWLIFE! LARRY! EEEDDDWARDS!

Edwards doesn't celebrate in the ring.

He doesn't have enough left for that.

The Television Champion simply rolls underneath the bottom rope and collapses onto the floor at ringside.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Two medics immediately kneel beside him. Larry is clutching at the back of his neck with one hand and the Television Championship with the other. His face is twisted in pain. Every movement looks difficult.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I don't know how this man is still moving."

Angus Skaaland:

"I don't either."

Donna King hands the title back to its owner.

Lying flat on his back, Larry raises the belt into the air.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

The crowd roars.

Point of Review

After a moment he manages to roll onto one side. Then onto a knee. Then finally drags himself upright using the guardrail. Fans reach over the barrier, patting his shoulder and back as he leans heavily against the steel.

Larry raises the championship properly this time.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I honestly think this qualifies as an upset. Jack Havok dominated huge portions of this match. Larry Edwards somehow survived it."

Angus Skaaland:

"Somehow is doing a lot of work there."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"If I'm Larry Edwards, I'm getting checked into a hospital after this. I'm serious."

Inside the ring, Jack Havok finally stirs.

The challenger rolls onto his knees.

Then drives his forehead into the canvas.

One, two, three times.

And a fourth time.

THWACK!

The last one is hard enough that Havok actually staggers when he rises. Still wobbly, still half out of it, Havok stumbles through the ropes and drops to the floor. He stumbles towards the announce table, leans against it as he trips, and suddenly reaches out and snatches the ring bell off the timekeeper's table.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Oh no."

Havok is already moving. The fans who were right there to see it start booing, but nobody else is paying attention. Not the other fans, not Larry, and not security.

Havok races around the corner of the ring, clutching the bell with both hands.

Edwards turns just in time to see him coming.

Point of Review

CLANG!!!

The ring bell crashes into the side of Edwards' head.

The champion crumples.

BBBBBOOOOOOOO!!!

Before Havok can even think about a second shot, three security guards hit him from behind.

A fourth joins them.

Havok struggles for a moment, but the fight is gone from his body. He exhausted that thirty minutes ago.

Zip cuffs appear.

Within seconds the former challenger is restrained and being dragged away toward the backstage area, still cursing, still trying to get one more shot at Edwards.

Meanwhile Larry isn't moving.

Blood is running down the side of his face.

One medic immediately drops beside him.

Another looks toward the entrance.

Medic:

"Gurney! Now!"

The crowd noise changes.

A stretcher is wheeled out.

OOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHH...

The medics carefully fit a neck brace around Larry's head and shoulders while preparing to move him.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"This has gone too far."

Angus Skaaland:

"It went too far before the opening bell. But it just keeps going, I'll agree to that."

Point of Review

Larry immediately starts arguing. He insists he can walk, but can't even sit up - he just rocks a bit and flails. The medics push him back down.

Eventually they get him loaded onto the gurney despite his loud objections.

Realizing he's lost that battle, Larry reaches up, tears the neck brace off, and spikes it onto the floor.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:
"Now that's Larry Edwards."

The medics begin wheeling him up the aisle.

Larry raises the Television Championship one last time.

The crowd rises to its feet.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Then Angus notices something.

Angus Skaaland:
"Hold on."

The camera cuts toward the balcony.

Ricky Dale Cash is standing there, applauding enthusiastically.

Beside him stands Preston Price.

Arms folded.

Perfect posture.

Watching from behind his shades, smiling like the cat with the canary.

This is normal for Price, except there's something just a little bit off.

A tension that the flashy, smug young superstar doesn't usually carry.

Robbie Ray Carter:
"The number one contender's up there looking... intense, Angus."

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"He may not be a madman like Havok, Robbie, but he knows an opportunity when he sees one. And the Television Champion being rolled out on a gurney two weeks before a title defense is an opportunity."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Maybe. But if tonight proved anything, it's that writing off Larry Edwards is a dangerous mistake."

The final image is Preston Price watching from above as Larry Edwards disappears through the curtain, battered, bloodied, barely able to move--

--but still Television Champion.

Pic-a-nic

Down in the parking lot, in the area reserved for ICW competitors and personnel, parked in a prominent spot, sits the Gluck Truck.

A pristine white Ford F-350 with oversized tires. An American flag and a Gadsden flag flutter from mounts in the bed. The truck is spotless, polished to a shine that suggests either its owners take care of it with the same dedication they bring to everything else, or that its owners are rednecks who just really love their truck.

A midnight blue 1987 Camaro pulls into the space beside it.

The engine rumbles to a stop.

Out step Steel Thunder and Neon Blaze. The Night Riders.

Blaze takes one look around.

Neon Blaze:

"I don't see 'em."

Thunder rises up on his tiptoes and peers through the truck's windows.

Steel Thunder:

"They ain't in there."

Blaze grins.

Neon Blaze:

"Alright."

Point of Review

He rubs his hands together.

Neon Blaze:

"Operation Balanced Lunch is a go."

Thunder walks back to the Camaro and opens the rear hatch. Inside sits a picnic basket.

A real one. Red checkered lining and everything.

Thunder lifts it out, sets it on the Camaro's hood, and opens it. Inside is a collection of squeeze bottles that would make a county fair vendor proud.

Ketchup.

Mustard.

Barbecue sauce.

Relish.

Several things whose exact purpose is questionable.

Neon Blaze: (giggling)

"This is gonna be so friggin awesome."

Thunder stares into the basket.

Then at Blaze.

Then at the truck.

Steel Thunder:

"I'm still not sold on this one, Blaze."

Blaze is already squeezing ketchup onto the side of the truck.

Neon Blaze:

"Heh."

A second line joins the first.

Neon Blaze:

"Heheheh."

Point of Review

Thunder folds his arms.

Steel Thunder:

"Blaze."

No response.

Blaze is now trying to write his name in ketchup.

Steel Thunder:

"Blaze."

Still nothing.

Blaze runs out of ketchup and immediately reaches for a bottle of barbecue sauce.

Steel Thunder:

"BLAZE!"

Blaze finally looks up.

Neon Blaze:

"What?"

Steel Thunder:

"You sure this is a good idea?"

Neon Blaze:

"Ch'yeah. Why?"

Thunder gestures toward the truck.

Steel Thunder:

"You're messin' with a redneck's truck."

A beat.

Steel Thunder:

"They'll get pretty mad."

Blaze looks genuinely confused.

Neon Blaze:

Point of Review

"No duh. That's what we want, right?"

He returns to his work. A thick line of barbecue sauce joins the ketchup.

Neon Blaze:

"Mad is stupid. Stupid is easy."

Another line.

Neon Blaze:

"Tonight, petty vandalism is going to win us the Iron City Tag Team Championship."

Thunder considers this.

Unfortunately, it makes a certain amount of sense.

Steel Thunder:

"Not sure you've thought this all the way through, bro."

Blaze smirks.

Neon Blaze:

"You scared?"

Thunder looks at the truck.

Looks at Blaze.

Looks at the picnic basket.

Looks back at Blaze.

Blaze holds up a bottle.

Neon Blaze:

"Mustard?"

Thunder sighs.

Steel Thunder:

"...Gimme the spicy brown."

Blaze lights up.

Point of Review

Thunder takes a bottle of mustard and begins laying neat lines across the hood of the truck.

For one of the first times since arriving in ICW, a smile appears on his face.

The Night Riders admire their handiwork.

Then both men freeze.

Somewhere behind them, from entirely too close a distance, comes the unmistakable sound of extremely angry Mississippi.

A small commotion starts somewhere across the parking lot.

Neon Blaze freezes.

Slowly turns his head.

Then grins.

Neon Blaze:

"Hold up, Steel."

He points.

Neon Blaze:

"Musclebound redneck dipshits incoming. Seven o'clock."

Thunder squints in the indicated direction.

Steel Thunder:

"How do you know?"

Neon Blaze:

"I got family from Apple Valley."

A beat.

Neon Blaze:

"I know rednecks."

Sure enough, the commotion grows louder.

Blaze nods to himself.

Point of Review

Neon Blaze:

"Pass the mayo."

Thunder hands him a squeeze bottle without question.

At this point the operation is fully underway.

Blaze holds the bottle at a height and angle that suggests he is emotionally twelve years old.

Before squeezing, he glances over his shoulder.

Thunder studies the truck critically.

Steel Thunder:

"Brown's not workin', I don't think."

He rummages through the picnic basket.

Steel Thunder:

"Should've gone with French's Yellow."

A fresh bottle appears. Thunder nods approvingly and applies several bright yellow stripes across the windshield.

From somewhere nearby comes the unmistakable sound of a door slamming open.

Thunder notices immediately. He tilts his head slightly, adds two more careful lines of mustard, then tosses the bottle aside and turns around.

Blaze stays focused on his work.

Power-walking across the parking lot come Carlton Gluck and Chapps Gluck, followed by an increasingly concerned collection of security personnel.

Carlton is moving with purpose.

Chapps is moving with confusion.

Not confusion about what happened.

Confusion about why.

His eyes move from the truck.

Point of Review

To the Riders.

Back to the truck.

Then to the picnic basket.

Then back to the Riders.

As though somewhere in this scene there must be a missing piece of information.

There isn't.

Carlton comes to a stop a few feet away.

His voice is entirely too calm.

Carlton Gluck:

"The hell are yew boys doin' to mah truck?"

Blaze slowly turns around. The most punchable smirk in the history of professional wrestling is stamped across his face.

He thrusts his hips forward just enough that the symbolism is unmistakable, then squeezes the mayo bottle.

Sppplut.

A thick white line splatters across the passenger-side front tire.

Silence.

Carlton takes a deep rumbling breath.

Beside him, Chapps, looking more confused than angry, continues studying the scene like a detective confronted with a crime so stupid it defies conventional reasoning.

The picnic basket.

The condiments.

The Camaro.

The truck.

Point of Review

The Night Riders.

His eyes narrow.

Chapps Gluck:

"...What in th' hell is y'all tryin' ta do here anyway?"

Neon Blaze looks genuinely offended by the question.

Neon Blaze:

"What're we tryin' to do?"

He gestures broadly at the truck.

Then at Carlton.

Neon Blaze:

"Make you doofuses mad. Obviously."

Steel Thunder:

"Looks like it worked on your brother."

Chapps glances sideways.

Carlton is still trying to push through security.

Still blinking hot sauce out of his eyes.

Still looking entirely too interested in homicide.

Chapps Gluck:

"Bro, don't do it."

Blaze's grin somehow widens.

Neon Blaze:

"Worked like a charm, dude."

He points at Carlton.

Neon Blaze:

"The smart one's so mad the dumb one's givin' orders."

Point of Review

Thunder nods approvingly.

Steel Thunder:

"Can't wait to see how that plays out in the ring."

He points at the increasingly strained security line.

Steel Thunder:

"You security geeks better make sure they make it to the match, though."

A shrug.

Steel Thunder:

"We can't take their titles if they're not there."

Carlton starts walking forward.

Not charging.

Not running.

Just steadily advancing.

Like a loaded truck rolling downhill with no brakes.

Security immediately starts moving backwards.

Before the situation can become truly catastrophic, Chapps steps directly into his brother's path.

Chapps Gluck:

"Don't do it, bro."

Carlton keeps pushing.

Chapps Gluck:

"Yeah, it'd be funny to make scrap outta that sissy little clown car, but then you go to jail."

Carlton Gluck:

"Move."

Carlton pushes harder.

Chapps plants his feet.

Point of Review

Chapps Gluck:

"And then they don't get their shot tonight."

Another shove.

Chapps Gluck:

"So they get it again."

Another shove.

Chapps Gluck:

"And they got time to pull more shit."

Carlton Gluck:

"Chapps, git out of mah WAY!"

Chapps Gluck:

"You know what they didn't think about?"

Carlton keeps leaning forward.

Security is now less restraining him than simply surviving the experience.

Chapps Gluck:

"That they gotta wrestle us tonight."

A beat.

Chapps Gluck:

"All we gotta do is wait a little bit, bro. Just wait for the match. Do what we do already."

Then he slowly turns his head.

Looks directly at Blaze.

Directly at Thunder.

Chapps Gluck:

"And afterwards?"

The smile disappears from his face.

Chapps Gluck:

Point of Review

"We put what's left of 'em in the fuckin' trunk."

For the first time since the confrontation started, Carlton's pushing eases slightly.

He's still leaning forward.

Still glaring.

But he's listening.

Also, the smirk on Blaze's face fades just a little bit.

Chapps Gluck:

"We ain't no dumbass rednecks, bro."

He points at the Riders.

Chapps Gluck:

"They're gonna learn."

Finally, Carlton stops pushing.

One of the security guards visibly sags with relief.

Carlton raises a sausage-sized finger toward the Night Riders.

Carlton Gluck:

"You boys better get yore affairs in order. You ain't survivin'. You just been given a reprieve."

Blaze blinks.

Neon Blaze:

"A what?"

He looks at Thunder.

Neon Blaze:

"Steel, you understand what the hell he said?"

Thunder shrugs.

Steel Thunder:

"Not a thing. Pretty sure he mad, though."

Point of Review

The Night Riders slap five.

Carlton stares at them for half a second.

Then turns.

Grabs a metal trash can.

And with a roar tears it clean off its mounting bolts before hurling it across the parking lot.

The trash can slams into a wall with a deafening KRA-KOOOM!

The Night Riders stop smiling.

Just for a second.

Then they quickly decide discretion is the better part of valor and retreat toward the Camaro.

Behind them, Carlton is still trying to get loose.

And Point of Review's Tag Team Championship match has suddenly become a whole lot more personal.

Cash makes it happen

Backstage, Ryan Caudil stands with Ricky Dale Cash, Sammy Starr, and Preston Price.

Ryan Caudil:

"Fans, I am backstage with Ricky Dale Cash, Sammy Starr, and the new number one contender to the Television Title, Preston Price. But before we talk championships, I have to ask. The three of you have spent the last several months at each other's throats. What changed? Especially you, Sammy? Why, after everything you've been put through, would you align with them?"

Ricky Dale Cash grins.

He raises The Cash Stick and waves it vaguely through the air.

Ricky Dale Cash:

"Don't yew trouble yerself over why Sammy done what he done, mah boy. CASH..."

He points the stick toward the camera.

Ricky Dale Cash:

Point of Review

"...is the answer. Cash is always the answer."

Preston Price:

"Cold. Hard. Cash."

Sammy Starr:

"The Superstar knows success when he sees it, baby! And maybe I'll give you a little credit -- a man doesn't always want to share the spotlight. It's only human, baby."

Preston Price:

"Show me a man who don't love it, I'll show you a man who ain't a man."

RDC nods approvingly.

Ricky Dale Cash:

"But sometimes, Ryan mah boy, well let Ricky Dale Cash correct himself, the spotlight is always worth fightin' for."

He places a hand over his chest.

Ricky Dale Cash:

"But sometimes, yew just have to open up a little bit and share, and yew'll end up with a bigger share."

He gestures grandly toward Starr and Price.

Ricky Dale Cash:

"And that's what m'boys and I've got right here now. An Alliance based on the thing that truly matters."

Preston Price:

"Cash."

Sammy Starr:

"Cash."

RDC raises The Cash Stick skyward.

Ricky Dale Cash:

"Cash."

A dramatic pause follows.

At least Ricky Dale Cash believes it's dramatic.

Point of Review

Ricky Dale Cash:

"And then, mah boy, yew don't need to say anythin' about Primetime here losin' to Edwards before, because that was then, and the stage has changed!"

Ryan Caudil:

"If I can interrupt, Mr. Cash, I saw you and Price watching Larry Edwards get stretchered out of the arena and laughing. I think maybe your confidence isn't entirely because of this new alliance you're talking about."

Preston Price:

"Ey, I waited til he said he didn't need no neckbrace."

Price shrugs.

Preston Price:

"Stop buggin'."

Ricky Dale Cash:

"Think what yew will, Ryanmahboy, Lowlife Larry Edwards is about to become Low Down Larry Edwards, and Primetime Preston Price is gonna become YORE next Iron City Television Cham-pee-yahn!"

He jabs the Cash Stick toward Price.

Ricky Dale Cash:

"And that ain't all, either! Tell 'em boys!"

Sammy Starr:

"I'm tellin' you, baby, Cash is opportunity! And we just might be lookin' for a pair of guys to join up with us, help grow that spotlight, and bring that cash in hand over fist!"

Ryan blinks.

Ryan Caudil:

"Wait, are you telling me you're trying to build a stable?"

Ricky Dale Cash:

"Ah said what Ah said, Ryanmahboy."

He spins the Cash Stick in one hand.

Ricky Dale Cash:

"Now if yew'll ex-kyoos us, the soon-to-be future Television Champion has preparedarations to make."

With that, RDC gestures grandly with The Cash Stick and heads off down the hallway.

Point of Review

Price lingers a moment.

Preston Price:

"Cash pays out."

He thumps Ryan on the chest just hard enough to be rude, then struts off after Cash.

Starr remains for a moment longer.

The Superstar flashes Ryan a double finger gun.

Sammy Starr:

"Cha-ching, baby."

Then he follows the others out of frame.

Ryan watches them leave.

Still looking slightly confused.

The camera cuts away.

The James Gang vs The New Untouchables & Jeff Andrews

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this one has been spiraling for months. The New Untouchables came into ICW treating this place like a joke, and ever since the James Gang arrived in Season Two, these two sides have been on a collision course."

Angus Skaaland:

"Collision course? Hell, Robbie, these boys have been trying to kill each other since the James Gang walked through the damn door. Zeke and Zeb think Daniels and Lee are poison, Daniels and Lee think the James Gang are office stooges, and somewhere in the middle of all that sits Jeff Andrews and Eric Dane Senior still carrying around thirty years of hate."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And it all exploded at our last event. The New Untouchables attempted to put Storm & Thunder through a massive tower of tables after their match, the James Gang intervened, Cherry Mae James confronted Jeff Andrews directly... and before it was over, Dane Senior had signed this match for Point of Review."

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah, and Cherry Mae slapped the taste right outta Andrews' mouth. I damn near had a heart attack. I

Point of Review

thought we were about five seconds from a homicide on live television."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Well tonight there's nowhere left to hide. Six people, one ring, and for the first time ever Jeff Andrews officially teams with the New Untouchables inside an ICW ring."

The opening riff of "Children of the Grave" by Black Sabbath hits and the crowd erupts instantly.

RRRRAAAAAHHHHH!!!

The James Gang steps onto the stage together without posing or theatrics. Zeke James leads the way down the center, broad shoulders squared and eyes locked forward beneath the arena lights. Zeb paces beside him with restless energy already bouncing through his frame, jawing toward the camera and pointing down toward the ring while Cherry Mae walks between and slightly behind them, grinning wide like she's heading toward a bar fight she's been waiting all week to have.

Angus Skaaland:

"Now THAT'S a trio that believes what they're saying, Robbie. No matching dance routine, no trying to go viral, no irony poisoned bullshit. They came here to fight."

Zeb slaps hands on the way down the aisle while Zeke ignores the crowd entirely, his attention fixed ahead toward the ring. Cherry Mae points toward somebody yelling from the front row and shouts something back with a laugh before hopping onto the apron in one smooth motion. Zeb vaults onto the apron beside her while Zeke climbs the steps deliberately, entering last.

Inside the ring, the dynamic is obvious immediately. Zeb paces. Cherry Mae bounces on the balls of her feet, leaning over the ropes and shouting toward the entrance. Zeke plants himself dead center and waits.

The lights dim.

Then "Catarax" by Reveille explodes through the building.

The reaction is immediate and vicious.

BBBBBBBBBOOOOOOOO!!!

Daniels bursts through the curtain first, hyped up on the noise immediately, throwing his arms wide and shouting something back at the crowd while walking backward down the stage. Beside him, LSR emerges slower and calmer, expression tight with focus tonight rather than smug amusement. There's still arrogance there, but less performance than usual. Less trolling. Both men glance back instinctively--

--and then Jeff Andrews steps through the curtain behind them.

Point of Review

The boos deepen instantly.

BBBBBBBOOOOOOOOOOO!!!

No pyro. No dramatic pause.

Just Andrews in the green-and-yellow mesh cap and the old black leather jacket, walking with the same steady pace he's carried for decades. Daniels keeps jawing at the crowd while backing down the aisle, but Andrews never looks at them. His eyes stay on the ring.

On the James Gang.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Listen to this reaction. Birmingham has not forgotten Jeff Andrews."

Angus Skaaland:

"Neither have I. And I'm tellin' you right now, Robbie, the dangerous part about Jeff Andrews was never when he was screaming. It was when he got quiet."

Halfway down the aisle Daniels turns, saying something animatedly to Andrews while pointing toward the ring. Andrews answers without breaking stride, only a few words, and Daniels immediately straightens up and refocuses. LSR notices it too.

That catches Angus' attention.

Angus Skaaland:

"Huh."

The three reach ringside together. Daniels hops onto the apron and springboards over the ropes into the ring while LSR slides in beneath the bottom rope, rising smoothly to his feet.

Andrews takes the long way.

He walks up the steps.

Steps through the ropes.

Then stops.

For a moment the six stand across from each other without moving. Zeke at the front. Andrews opposite him. Zeb already twitching with impatience. Cherry Mae staring directly at Andrews again without an ounce of hesitation. Daniels bouncing in place. LSR watching everything.

Point of Review

No one backs up.

The crowd grows louder.

RRRRAAAAAHHHHH!!!

Cito Conarri:

"The following contest is a trios tag team match! It is set for one fall, with a 30 minute time limit!"

He gestures toward the corner of the James Gang.

Cito Conarri:

"Introducing first... Hailing from the Great Smoky Mountains, and weighing in at a combined six hundred and thirty five pounds! the team of Cherry Mae James, Zeb James, and Zeke James... THE JAMES GANG!"

RRRRAAAAAHHHHH!!!

Cito gestures across the ring.

Cito Conarri:

"And their opponents... first, both hailing from Baltimore, Maryland, and weighing in at a combined weight of three hundred ninety-one pounds! JEFFREY DANIELS! LEE SCOTT ROTHLESBERGER... THE NEEWWWW UNTOUCHABLESSSS! And their tag team partner!

BBBBBBBOOOOOOOOOO!!!

Cito Conarri:

"Hailing from Deadman Crossing, Ohio, and weighing in at two hundred sixty four pounds! The King of the Bittermen! JJJJJJEFF! ...AAAAAAAANNDDDDREEEWSSS!!!

BBBBBBBOOOOOOOOOO!!!

The introductions end.

The bell rings and Zeb James comes charging out of his corner like he'd been waiting all day for it. Jeffrey Daniels tries to meet him head-on, ducks a clothesline, and springs up for a cutter. Zeb catches him in midair and shoves him hard into the ropes instead. Daniels rebounds straight back into a huge jumping clothesline that turns him inside out and sends him sprawling across the canvas.

RRRAAHHH!!!

Zeb wastes no time celebrating. He bounds to the nearest turnbuckle and starts climbing. Daniels scrambles back to his feet and charges after him, but Zeb plants a boot in his chest and knocks him back into the ring. A

Point of Review

heartbeat later Zeb launches himself from the top rope. Daniels rolls clear at the last instant, and Zeb crashes hard enough to bounce back to his feet before immediately turning around and looking for more.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"No feeling-out process whatsoever from either of these teams."

Angus Skaaland:

"I'd be more surprised if there was. These six have been trying to kill each other for months."

Daniels quickly dives for his corner and tags Lee Scott Rothlesberger. LSR vaults over the ropes in one motion and springboards off the middle strand, catching Zeb with a flying hurricanrana that sends him tumbling across the ring. Zeb is up almost immediately, but LSR is already moving. A dropkick catches him square in the chest and knocks him backward into the James Gang corner.

Cherry Mae practically falls through the ropes for the tag.

RRRAHHH!!!

LSR circles cautiously as Cherry Mae stalks forward. He feints high, she drops low, and suddenly he's hopping on one foot while she clings to his ankle. The crowd laughs as Cherry Mae keeps chasing the leg, finally dragging him to the mat with a big ankle pick. She immediately dives for The James Gang Initiation, but LSR shrimps backward, slips behind her, and locks his hands around her waist.

He tries for a German suplex. Cherry Mae flips through and lands on her feet behind him. Now she's the one reaching for a waistlock. LSR breaks her grip before she can get it cinched and snaps off a pele kick that catches her clean on the side of the head. Cherry Mae stumbles backward into her corner and slaps Zeke's hand.

The oldest James brother steps through the ropes to a loud ovation.

LSR wastes no time. He fires a superkick.

Zeke catches it.

The crowd roars as Zeke stands there holding the leg, glaring down at him. LSR glares right back. Then Zeke milks the moment just a little too long.

THWACK!

LSR's enzuigiri catches him flush on the side of the head.

OOOHHHHH!!!

Point of Review

LSR lands, scrambles away, and tags Jeff Andrews.

The reaction is immediate.

A mixture of boos, angry shouts, and uneasy anticipation rolls through The Foundry as Andrews steps onto the apron and takes his time entering the ring. He doesn't rush. He doesn't posture. He simply steps between the ropes and looks across at Zeke.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Jeff Andrews finally enters this match."

Angus Skaaland:

"And I still can't believe I'm lookin' at it. After DEF. After everything else. Fifteen years later and Jeff Andrews is standing in an Eric Dane Senior ring. That's a strange sight, Robbie."

Zeke doesn't wait for another invitation. He steps forward and cracks Andrews across the chest with a chop. Andrews answers with one of his own. Another from Zeke. Another from Andrews. The two big men stand in the center of the ring trading heavier and heavier shots as the crowd rises with each exchange.

YEAHHHH!!!

The pace starts to change. Andrews begins mixing open-hand strikes into the exchange, his rhythm quickening. Another chop. A slap. A second slap. Zeke absorbs them and keeps firing back. Andrews suddenly plants his foot and starts to turn his hips for a superkick--

--but Zeke ducks underneath it.

In one motion he rises with a hand around Andrews' throat and starts setting up a chokeslam.

The crowd erupts.

Andrews immediately grabs Zeke's wrist, tears the hand free from his throat, and violently throws the arm aside.

Both men take a step back.

Neither breaks eye contact.

The crowd buzzes as the staredown hangs in the air.

Cherry Mae immediately leans through the ropes with her hand extended, demanding the tag. Daniels and LSR both point toward her corner and start laughing, encouraging Andrews to give her exactly what she wants. Zeke doesn't even look at her. He grabs Andrews' wrist, twists into a tight armwringer, and drags him

Point of Review

toward the James Gang corner before tagging Zeb back into the match.

Zeb comes in hot. He climbs to the middle rope and crashes down with a double axehandle smash across Andrews' shoulder blades, then follows with a flurry of roughhouse punches that drive the veteran backward. Andrews covers up and absorbs them while Zeb builds momentum, finally hitting the ropes and launching into a big springboard attack that catches Andrews clean and knocks him to the mat.

RRRAHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I was expecting a one-man wrecking crew from the way you've talked about him."

Angus Skaaland:

"He's almost fifty, hasn't wrestled regularly in years, and he's always been a slow starter sometimes. Don't stop worryin'."

Zeb grins and heads for the turnbuckles again. This time Lee Scott Rothlesberger has seen enough. He slips out of his corner, races across the apron, and drives a superkick into Zeb's knee before he can launch.

THWACK!

Zeb collapses awkwardly onto the top turnbuckle.

BOOOOOOOO!!!

The reaction is immediate. Cherry Mae is through the ropes before the referee can even yell at anybody. Daniels jumps into the ring from the opposite side. Zeke follows a second later. Suddenly nobody is interested in tags or legal competitors anymore.

Cherry Mae goes straight for Andrews.

She sprints across the ring and blasts him with a seated front dropkick that knocks him backward into the ropes. Before she can follow up, Zeke barrels past her and takes over the fight, hammering Andrews with forearms and driving him toward a corner. Cherry Mae doesn't complain. There's plenty of trouble to go around.

LSR climbs onto the ropes and starts lining up something nasty on the stranded Zeb. Cherry Mae spots it immediately, races across the ring, and launches into a sunset flip powerbomb that yanks him off the turnbuckle and drives him into the canvas.

YEAHHHH!!!

Daniels charges in to help his partner and gets a surprise waiting for him. Zeb comes flying across the ring

Point of Review

with a wildly uncontrolled crossbody that looks like he only decided to attempt it halfway through the jump. Somehow it works anyway, wiping Daniels out and sending both men tumbling through the ropes.

With Daniels suddenly isolated, Cherry Mae pounces. She snatches his ankle before he can escape and yanks him off balance with another ankle pick. Daniels lands flat on his back and immediately finds his legs tied together as Cherry Mae threads them into a leglace.

The crowd starts laughing as Cherry Mae rolls him once.

Then again.

Then a third time.

Daniels flails helplessly while Cherry Mae keeps the hold intact and rolls him around the ring like an oversized tumbleweed.

RRRAHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Daniels may not appreciate this, but the crowd certainly does."

Angus Skaaland:

"I don't know what in the hell she calls that, but I'd be embarrassed too."

Cherry Mae keeps Daniels tangled up and rolling across the canvas while the crowd howls with laughter. Daniels finally manages to stop the rotation long enough to look completely miserable about the whole experience.

Then Jeff Andrews steps into the ring.

He doesn't announce himself. Doesn't yell. Doesn't posture.

He simply reaches down, grabs Cherry Mae by the head from behind, and drives his foot into her back with a vicious spinal tap.

THWACK!

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

The laughter vanishes instantly.

Before Andrews can do anything else, Zeke crashes into him from behind with a clothesline that sends both men sprawling. He immediately grabs Cherry Mae by the arm and rolls her under the bottom rope to safety.

Point of Review

Unfortunately for Cherry Mae, safety isn't what she wants.

She's halfway back through the ropes before the referee gets between them and points toward Zeke. The second she left the ring, lucha rules made him the legal competitor.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Angus, how many times have you seen somebody take a kick from Andrews and decide they wanted more, not less?"

Angus Skaaland:

"...not very many."

Zeke seems perfectly happy being one of them.

He drags Andrews back up and immediately clotheslines him over the top rope and down to the floor. The crowd roars as Andrews lands on his feet and turns around just in time to see Zeke dropping to all fours in the middle of the ring.

Zeb is already running.

He plants a foot on Zeke's back, launches himself to the top rope, and then explodes outward in a huge plancha that wipes Andrews out at ringside.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

The New Untouchables decide they've seen enough of that.

Daniels and LSR sprint toward Cherry Mae and fire off a synchronized double superkick. Cherry Mae drops flat to the mat and both boots whistle harmlessly over her head. She pops back up as LSR spins for another kick.

She ducks that one too.

LSR nearly falls into Daniels as Cherry Mae surges forward. A belly-to-belly atomic drop folds Daniels in half and leaves him staggering in place. Before he can recover, Cherry Mae scoops him up and slams him back-first into the canvas.

YEAHHHH!!!

Daniels rolls around clutching his lower back while Cherry Mae turns her attention toward LSR.

That turns out to be a mistake.

Point of Review

LSR has already recovered.

He springs into the air and snaps around with the Inverted Superkick.

THWACK!

Cherry Mae spins with the impact and crashes to the mat.

The crowd groans as LSR immediately points toward Daniels and starts directing traffic, the New UTs finally finding an opening to take control.

LSR wastes no time capitalizing.

He dives into a cover while Daniels plants himself between Cherry Mae and the rest of the James Gang.

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

Cherry Mae throws a shoulder up and immediately tries to scramble away. LSR catches her before she can get far, hoists her across his shoulders, and drops her hard into the turnbuckles with a modified Samoan Drop. Daniels is already moving. He climbs the ropes in one smooth motion and comes off the top with a split-legged moonsault.

THWACK!

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

YEAHHHH!!!

The New Untouchables stay on her.

Daniels drags Cherry Mae upright and starts reaching for the Charm City Crossface. The hold never gets established. Cherry Mae immediately snakes an arm around his head and locks up a front facelock instead. Daniels' eyes widen as he realizes he's just given her exactly what she wanted.

Then he adapts.

Point of Review

Instead of fighting the hold directly, Daniels bridges backward into a Northern Lights Suplex and launches her across the ring.

OOOOHHHH!!!

He rolls through to his feet, takes two quick steps, and crashes down with a jumping legdrop across her chest.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That's the most focused we've seen Daniels in months."

Angus Skaaland:

"Funny what happens when he quits tryin' to be cute."

Daniels finally turns toward his corner and reaches for Andrews.

Andrews simply shakes his head.

No.

Daniels doesn't argue.

He tags LSR instead.

The crowd buzzes as LSR immediately drags Cherry Mae back to her feet and starts setting up the Neo Untouchadriver. For a second it looks like they've got her trapped.

Then Cherry Mae starts squirming.

A shoulder slips loose.

A leg comes free.

Suddenly she's behind him.

LSR turns around just in time to get caught in a backslide.

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

Point of Review

LSR rolls through and pops back to his feet.

Cherry Mae is already gone.

RRRAAHHHH!!!

She dives across the ring and slaps Zeb's hand.

The Foundry comes alive.

Zeb explodes through the ropes like he's been shot out of a cannon.

Daniels gets flattened by a wild clothesline.

LSR gets flattened by another.

Zeb turns and immediately takes a swing at Andrews on the apron. The shot catches Andrews clean enough to knock him off the edge and down to the floor.

YEAHHHH!!!

Now Zeb is really feeling it.

He hits the ropes, looking for another victim.

And runs straight into a trap.

LSR fires an enzuigiri from one side.

Daniels launches a ganmengiri from the other.

THWACK!

THWACK!

The sandwich kick catches Zeb from both directions and folds him up where he stands.

OOOOHHHHH!!!

Zeb crashes to the mat as the New Untouchables immediately move in, determined to turn his burst of momentum into another opening.

Daniels immediately sprawls across Zeb for the cover while LSR springs toward the James Gang corner.

Point of Review

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

Zeb powers a shoulder up, but the New Untouchables are already moving. LSR drives a dropkick into Zeke on the apron before the big man can enter the ring. Zeke manages to keep his footing by hanging onto the top rope, but the interruption buys the New UTs exactly what they want.

Daniels drags Zeb up by the head and starts unloading with a series of exaggerated spinal taps, each one delivered with just enough extra swagger to make the crowd hate him for it.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

He hits the ropes, cartwheels for absolutely no reason, and slides back in with a forearm that catches Zeb flush across the jaw.

THWACK!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"The New Untouchables have found their rhythm."

Angus Skaaland:

"Unfortunately."

Daniels immediately transitions into an armwringer and yanks Zeb toward the corner before tagging LSR. LSR climbs to the middle rope, springs to the top, then launches himself into a corkscrew Fameasser that spikes Zeb face-first into the canvas.

OOOOHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:

"WHY DID THAT REQUIRE A DOUBLE JUMP AND A SPIN?! FREAKIN' NOOTS!"

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Still, it's amazing agility from the New Untouchables."

Angus Skaaland:

"Nuh uh, it's stupid. They're stupid. You're stupid."

LSR pops up grinning and turns dramatically toward Andrews. He extends both arms like he's introducing royalty and begins backing toward the corner.

Point of Review

Andrews reaches out.

Tags him.

And steps through the ropes before LSR finishes grandstanding.

The crowd buzzes as Andrews immediately gets to work.

No theatrics.

No posing.

Just violence.

A Kawada kick catches Zeb in the ribs. Another lands against the shoulder. A third drives into the side of his head and knocks him to one knee. Andrews grabs him from behind, traps both arms, and drives him into the mat with a reverse full nelson slam.

THWACK!

Cherry Mae is practically climbing through the ropes at this point. Zeke has one hand hooked around her shoulder to keep her in place, while his other grips the top rope hard enough that his knuckles have turned white.

Andrews sees none of it.

He backs into a corner and waits.

Zeb staggers upright.

Andrews fires.

THWACK!

The superkick lands flush.

OOOOHHHHH!!!

He hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

Point of Review

--BROKEN UP!

The New Untouchables try to cut off the rescue, but Zeke finally explodes into the ring. One clothesline wipes out Daniels. A second sends LSR tumbling backward.

RRRAAAHHHH!!!

Cherry Mae is already airborne.

She launches from the apron and crashes down with a leaping kneedrop across Andrews' chest.

YEAHHHH!!!

The crowd erupts as Andrews rolls onto his side clutching his ribs. Cherry Mae immediately reaches for him again, but Andrews catches her by the head and tries to sling her bodily out of the ring.

Cherry Mae hangs onto the ropes.

The referee steps between them before she can re-enter.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Cherry Mae argues. The referee argues back.

Andrews takes advantage.

The second Zeb gets back to his feet, Andrews blasts him with a vicious kenka kick that sends him crashing back to the mat.

THWACK!

The veteran doesn't celebrate. He simply turns back toward the fallen Zeb as the New Untouchables regroup around him, determined to keep the James Gang's momentum bottled up.

Andrews drags Zeb upright and starts hooking him up for the Mind Eraser. For the first time in several minutes, Zeb stops trying to escape cleanly and simply starts swinging. Short body shots hammer into Andrews' ribs. Another catches him in the stomach. Andrews keeps his grip. Zeb plants his feet and starts throwing wider punches, rough haymakers with no technique behind them except stubbornness.

On the apron, Cherry Mae is nearly coming apart at the seams.

TAG ME!

Point of Review

Zeke isn't yelling. He's too busy trying not to explode. Sweat pours down his face as he leans over the top rope, one hand extended toward Zeb.

Andrews finally decides he's had enough.

A sharp open-hand slap cracks across Zeb's face.

THWACK!

Another follows.

Then a third.

A spinning sole butt snaps Zeb's head backward.

OOOOHHHH!!!

Andrews hits the ropes.

The crowd rises.

Then Zeb does something incredibly stupid.

And somehow effective.

He leaps upward and throws his legs around Andrews' head for what might generously be described as a hurricanrana. There's no elegance to it. No precision. No grace. It looks like Zeb suddenly remembered he has legs and decided to weaponize them.

Somehow it works.

Both men tumble through the ropes and crash to the floor together.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I don't know if Zeb James meant to do that."

Angus Skaaland:

"Neither do I, but it sure counted!"

LSR immediately circles around the outside of the ring and grabs at Zeke's ankle before the big man can enter. Zeke jerks his leg free and nearly drags LSR into the apron with him, but the delay is enough.

Point of Review

Only a second.

But that's enough time for Cherry Mae to make herself legal.

She practically launches herself through the ropes.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Daniels is first.

German suplex.

THWAMM!

Daniels folds up and crashes onto the back of his shoulders.

Before he can recover, Cherry Mae snatches his head and fires off a headscissors takedown. No squeeze. No hold. No wasted motion. She releases immediately and pops back to her feet.

LSR charges in.

Superkick.

Cherry Mae ducks underneath it.

Jab.

Jab.

Body hook.

Uppercut.

The combination staggers him backward.

A dropkick catches him square in the chest and sends him sprawling.

YEAHHHH!!!

The crowd is roaring now.

Andrews slides back into the ring and immediately throws a kenka kick.

Point of Review

Cherry Mae ducks that too.

The veteran lands on one foot.

Big mistake.

Cherry Mae catches the ankle.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

She yanks.

Andrews crashes onto his back from a perfectly timed ankle pick.

The roof nearly comes off The Foundry.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"She got him!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Replay. Instant replay. Immediately. Who the hell's running production anyway?"

Cherry Mae dives on top of him and starts throwing punches as fast as she can. Andrews covers up, absorbing the barrage while trying to create space. Another shot lands. Then another.

Finally Andrews abandons the exchange altogether and bails out of the ring.

YEAHHHH!!!

Cherry Mae rises to her feet in the center of the ring, pointing after him while the crowd roars its approval. For the first time all night, Jeff Andrews looks like the one being forced to regroup.

Zeke wastes no time capitalizing on the opening Cherry Mae has created. Daniels tries to re-enter the fight and immediately finds himself scooped off the mat. Zeke muscles him high into the air and drives him down with a thunderous spinebuster that rattles the ring.

THWACK!

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Daniels wisely decides he's had enough of that exchange. He rolls under the bottom rope and retreats to the floor, clutching his back while trying to recover. Unfortunately for him, the James Gang has already spotted him.

Point of Review

Cherry Mae and Zeb both back about halfway across the ring. One gets the feeling that they've probably practiced this before.

They run forward and launch at the same time.

Cherry Mae shoots through the middle rope and wipes out Daniels with a suicide dive while Zeb sails over the top rope with a wild tope that crashes directly into Andrews.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

The crowd comes alive as both James siblings land on top of their targets and the fight spills across ringside.

Back inside the ring, LSR suddenly realizes he's alone.

Zeke whips him into the turnbuckle and follows him in, crushing him against it with a Stinger Splash.

OOOOHHHH!!!

Then the opposite corner.

Another Stinger Splash.

YEAHHHH!!!

LSR stumbles out looking completely lost.

Zeke points toward the turnbuckles and signals for the finish.

The crowd knows exactly what he's thinking.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

LSR doesn't wait to find out.

As Zeke reaches for him, LSR desperately rakes the eyes.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Zeke recoils just long enough.

Just enough.

Superkick.

Point of Review

THWACK!

Wheel kick.

THWACK!

Zeke staggers but doesn't fall.

He throws a haymaker.

LSR ducks underneath it.

Spinning sole butt.

THWUMP!

Now Zeke is reeling.

LSR plants his feet and fires one more superkick.

THWACK!

This time the big man goes down.

OOOOHHHH!!!

LSR stands over him breathing hard. For a moment he just stares at Zeke.

Then he wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and shakes his head violently, clearing the cobwebs.

Angus Skaaland:

"Oh what the absolute fuck, why did he have to find his Wrestler Dignity now of all times?"

There's something just a little bit different in Lee R.'s posture as he walks to his corner. Daniels scrambles back onto the apron and immediately receives an assertive tag.

The New Untouchables aren't wasting time grandstanding this time. Lee grabs Zeke and applies the standing headscissor and a waistlock. Daniels climbs to the top rope.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"It looks like the New Untouchables are thinking Untouchadriver!"

Daniels braces his feet as he gets ready to jump.

Point of Review

He never gets the chance.

Zeb appears behind him seemingly out of nowhere and shoves him forward. Daniels crashes awkwardly into the ring and rolls away to the apron. The crowd erupts as Zeb climbs after him, looking to turn the tables completely. As this happens, Zeke back body drops himself free of LSR, who also rolls aside.

Then Andrews appears.

THWACK!

The superkick catches Zeb on the turnbuckle.

OOOOHHHH!!!

Zeb slumps where he sits. Andrews climbs immediately, wraps his arms around him, and launches both men off the middle rope with a belly-to-belly suplex.

THWACK!

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

The impact shakes the ring.

Andrews rolls through to his knees--

--and eats a Big Boot from Zeke.

THWACK!

YEAHHHH!!!

The veteran flips inside out and crashes to the canvas.

Cherry Mae is already moving.

She sits across Andrews' shoulders, snatches up the ankle, and rolls backwards into the James Gang Initiation!

The Foundry comes completely unglued.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:

Point of Review

"WAIT A SECOND! WAIT A SECOND! We know Andrews is weak to blood chokes! Could Cherry Mae actually do it here?!"

Robbie Ray Carter:

"She's got it locked in! Leg across the carotid, his leg trapped! Can he brute force it? Make it to the ropes?"

Andrews immediately tries to pry the grip apart.

Can't.

Cherry Mae keeps squeezing.

Can't break it.

The crowd rises as Andrews starts kicking his free leg against the mat. The two wrestlers turn, and turn a bit more, and finally he drapes his ankle across the bottom rope.

The referee calls for the break.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Cherry Mae reluctantly releases.

At the same moment LSR launches himself off the top rope and drills Zeke from behind with a missile dropkick that sends the big man stumbling through the ropes to the floor.

The chaos continues.

Cherry Mae drags Andrews back toward center ring and heads for the turnbuckles. She climbs quickly and launches into the Hilltop Knee Drop.

THWACK!

ONE!

TWO!

--BROKEN UP!

OOOOHHHH!!!

LSR dives across the ring at the last possible second.

Point of Review

The crowd groans.

Zeb doesn't.

He reaches through the ropes, grabs LSR by the ankle, and yanks him bodily out of the ring.

The two immediately start trading punches at ringside.

Zeb tries to get back into the match.

LSR won't let him.

The fight spills toward the barricade as both men completely forget about wrestling and focus on beating each other up.

Inside the ring, Cherry Mae grabs Andrews by the wrist and starts pulling him upright.

The shift in Andrews' body language is the first thing visible. When Jeff Andrews starts feeling surly, he gets violent.

And right now he's clearly feeling surly.

He smacks her arms away and unleashes a barrage of machine gun chops.

THWACK! THACK! thwackthwackthackthwack THACK!

Angus Skaaland:

"Oh no. Oh no."

Andrews grabs a handful of hair and begins unleashing Kawada kicks into her head. When he stops and lets go, she's reeling. His lip curls in a disgusted grimace.

And then he takes a step back and fires a superkick.

She ducks.

YEAHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Cherry Mae James just took some big shots from one of the best strikers in the game and she's trying to fight him head on!"

Cherry Mae plants her feet, fires off a jab, and dances back. Another jab.

Point of Review

Another jab!

Andrews throws a wild open hand shot.

Cherry Mae slips it!

The swing whistles past her close enough to ruffle her hair, but she fires another two jabs, and then a cross that actually snaps the bigger man's head back!

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Cherry Mae goes low to the body now, hammering a punch deep into Andrews' right ribs, aiming for the kidney.

But she doesn't disengage fast enough.

THWACK!

Andrews folds her up with a karate knee.

A barrage of alternating open hand slaps.

A spinning back chop.

An enzuigiri.

Cherry Mae crumples first to her knees, then to her hands and knees. She starts to collapse the rest of the way, but Andrews pulls her back to her feet, and fires off a superkick.

THHWAACKK!

The kick connects flush, and Cherry Mae is knocked flat. Andrews lowers his head, shaking it blearily. He touches his cheek - it's been cut open slightly. He looks at his hand.

Angus Skaaland:

"This is - Robbie, I don't want to call this match anymore."

Meanwhile, Cherry Mae rolls over on her side. Blood trickles from her mouth.

The building falls into a strange hush.

Andrews kneels beside her, grabs her under the chin, and pulls, gently but firmly, until she's upright onto her knees.

Point of Review

For the first time all match, he actually speaks.

Jeff Andrews:

"This what you wanted?"

Cherry Mae locks eyes with him for a second.

Two seconds.

Three.

Then spits a red loogie directly into his face.

RRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Andrews doesn't react.

He simply wipes at his cheek.

Then snaps a short superkick into her jaw while she's still kneeling.

THWACK!

Cherry Mae collapses backward bonelessly.

Andrews flops down across her and hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING DING DING!

Jeff Andrews rolls off of Cherry Mae and sits for a few seconds. He wipes his jaw again, and slowly stands.

The New Untouchables are jubilant. Daniels is jumping around with his arms over his head. LSR is doing his best Kai Scott Pope Spin Pose with a smile threatening to rip his face in half.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Jeff Andrews picks up a brutal win for his team in a meatgrinder of a match and the kids couldn't be happier. He doesn't look happy, though."

Point of Review

Angus Skaaland:

"....."

Andrews stands, yanks on LSR's wrist, nearly unbalancing him, and immediately starts leaving the ring. LSR looks at him, pokes Daniels, and the New UTs follow him.

Just in time.

Because as they slide out of the ring, Zeke slides in with a chair.

The referee leaps away from Cherry Mae as Zeke rampages in a slow circle, stony fury etched on his face, the chair raised as a warning not a threat.

Meanwhile, Zeb has slid back into the ring to kneel next to and wrap his arms around his baby sister.

Angus Skaaland:

"Robbie, I don't think you understand how bad everything just got."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Angus, I absolutely do. I've been watching southern wrestling for longer than a lot of our fans have been alive. I know how family feuds turn into blood feuds. And I know what Cherry Mae meant to her brothers. Just because Jeff Andrews didn't have any choice but to throw the match or cross the line at this point, doesn't mean he didn't cross a line. And the New UTs might not understand, but I think Andrews absolutely does."

Cherry Mae's arms are moving. She's pushing Zeb backwards. Zeke also kneels next to her. Two medics are in the ring, but they're giving the James Gang a respectful berth.

Cherry Mae rolls over to her hands and knees, then slowly, a bit unsteadily, climbs to her feet. One of those superkicks opened her up badly. Blood has spread across her forehead and cheeks enough that it's hard to identify the source. She wipes blood off her face and then off her hand onto her tshirt, and she pushes Zeb back again.

RRRAAAHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"...that's one tough woman."

Nobody says anything for a second.

Cherry Mae turns toward the entrance.

Then begins walking.

Point of Review

Not quickly.

Not dramatically.

Just under her own power.

Head held high.

Her brothers follow at her heels. Zeke's fists are balled up, his knuckles white.

Angus Skaaland:

"She is. She ain't done by a long shot. But her brothers are going to want vengeance. Vengeance, Robbie, not payback. If this situation was already burning, Andrews just threw napalm on it."

Cherry Mae never looks back.

The last image of the match is the youngest James sibling disappearing through the curtain, battered, bloodied, and unbowed.

No pleasure

Backstage, Ryan Caudill stands ready with microphone in hand.

Beside him, the New Untouchables are practically vibrating with excitement.

Daniels is grinning ear to ear. LSR isn't much better. The two keep talking over each other, throwing celebratory gestures and slapping hands while a visibly less enthusiastic Jeff Andrews stands nearby. A small white dressing covers the cut on his cheek.

Ryan Caudill:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm joined by the winners of tonight's trios match. Jeffrey Daniels, Lee Scott Rothlesberger, Jeff Andrews... congratulations on your triumphant victory."

Daniels lights up.

Jeffrey Daniels:

"Thank you! Thank you! Huge win! Massive win! Monumental win! The James Gang have done nothing but bully us and persecute us since we got here, Ryan, but the shoe's on the other foot now and that foot throws a pretty mean superkick if you know what I'm saying."

LSR:

"And your personal congratulations means so much to us, Ryan. It really does."

Point of Review

Daniels nods vigorously.

Jeffrey Daniels:

"You know what the best part is? Everybody said we couldn't hang with them. Everybody said we'd get run over. Well how'd that work out?"

LSR:

"Pretty good, actually."

Daniels points at him.

Jeffrey Daniels:

"Pretty great!"

LSR:

"Teaming with Andrews really brought out the best in us tonight."

Jeffrey Daniels:

"Absolutely."

LSR:

"You know, Ryan, I wasn't gonna humblebrag about it..."

Daniels immediately starts laughing.

LSR:

"But I totally took down Zeke."

Jeffrey Daniels:

"You totally took down Zeke!"

LSR:

"I totally took down Zeke! Weeks! Weeks of getting grabbed by the throat and pushed around and treated like a child and tonight? What now?!"

The two slap hands.

Behind them, Andrews touches the dressing on his cheek with one finger and winces.

The New Untouchables don't notice.

They've moved on to a brief, wildly off-tempo air guitar duet.

Point of Review

Ryan clears his throat.

Ryan Caudill:

"Mr. Andrews. Your first documented match in six years and--"

Jeffrey Daniels:

"And he hasn't lost a step!"

LSR:

"Not one!"

Jeffrey Daniels:

"Because of course he hasn't. He's Jeff freakin' Andrews."

LSR:

"An honor. A genuine honor."

Ryan waits.

The New Untouchables eventually stop talking.

Ryan Caudill:

"Mr. Andrews, you picked up the winning fall for your team after a brutal combination on Cherry Mae James. What exactly was going through your mind? And do you think what happened tonight ends this feud... or escalates it?"

For the first time, the New Untouchables quiet down.

Andrews takes a moment before answering.

Jeff Andrews:

"...she's fiery."

A pause.

Jeff Andrews:

"She really wanted that fight."

Daniels immediately jumps back in.

Jeffrey Daniels:

"And she got it, bro!"

Point of Review

LSR starts nodding.

Jeffrey Daniels:

"You superkicked her jaw outta her jaw! I bet she'll think twice before gettin' in your face again, right?"

Andrews slowly turns his head.

The look he gives Daniels drains the excitement right out of him.

Daniels trails off.

The hallway suddenly feels a little quieter.

Jeff Andrews:

"Shut up, Jeffrey. It ain't no pleasure in life."

The jubilation visibly drains out of Jeffrey Daniels. He stares at his mentor, confused, unsure what to say.

Andrews turns and walks away.

Daniels looks from Andrews, to LSR, and back again, and then quickly, quietly hustles after Andrews.

LSR pulls himself together. Stamps a grin back on his face. He throws an arm around Ryan's shoulders.

LSR:

"We won!"

Ryan immediately finds himself trapped in what LSR apparently considers a celebratory hug.

A second later comes the noogie.

Ryan Caudill:

"Hey--"

LSR:

"WE WON!"

LSR gives Ryan one final ruffle of the hair before jogging after his partner.

Ryan straightens his tie, fixes his hair, then exhales.

Ryan Caudill:

"The New Untouchables seem extremely proud of themselves tonight, justified or no."

Point of Review

He glances down the hallway Andrews disappeared into.

Ryan Caudill:

"On the other hand, Jeff Andrews appears to be in a completely different headspace. I don't know what's going to happen next week, but I don't think this is over by a long shot."

Ryan looks back toward the camera.

Ryan Caudill:

"And judging by that reaction, I don't think he does either."

A beat.

Ryan Caudill:

"Robbie. Angus. Back to you."

The Brothers Gluck (c) vs Night Riders

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Up next, the ICW Tag Team Championship is on the line. The Brothers Gluck captured those titles from the Rich Young Grapplerz at Heart of Dixie, then immediately backed up their words by giving Top Notch Team a title shot and beating them clean in the middle of the ring."

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah, and now everybody wants a piece of 'em. The Night Riders fought through Urban Ninjaz, then cheated their way past ALEXANDER, and now they're standing in line for a title shot. I don't particularly like their chances, but I'll give 'em this -- those boys know every dirty trick in the book."

Cito Conarri:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the following contest is scheduled for one fall, with a 30 minute time limit and is for the ICW Tag Team Championship!"

The opening riff of "Blue Highway" by Billy Idol echoes through The Foundry as neon lights sweep across the entranceway.

Cito Conarri:

"Introducing first, the challengers. Hailing from The Blue Highway, and weighing in at a combined four hundred and seventy-seven pounds! NEON BLAZE! STEEL THUNDER! The NIIIIIIIIIGHT... RIIIIIDDEERRSS!!"

The crowd immediately responds with a chorus of boos as Neon Blaze steps through the curtain in mirrored shades and a bright neon jacket that looks like it escaped a 1987 music video. Beside him, Steel Thunder

Point of Review

emerges with far less enthusiasm, jaw set and eyes fixed on the ring.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

Blaze throws a karate pose toward the crowd and points finger-guns into the audience, immediately earning another round of abuse for his trouble. Thunder simply sneers and keeps walking. The challengers move at a deliberate pace, milking every second of their entrance while Blaze jaws with fans along the barricade and Thunder occasionally stops to admire his own striking hand after throwing a mock palm strike into the air.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"The Night Riders have become one of the most effective teams in the division over the last several months. They're not the biggest team, they're not the strongest team, but they know exactly how to make every match ugly."

Angus Skaaland:

"They're professionals, Robbie. Crooked professionals, but professionals. You don't stay alive in this sport as long as they have without learnin' a few things."

At ringside, Blaze hops onto the apron and strikes another exaggerated martial arts stance while Thunder climbs the steps and enters through the ropes. The two men meet in the center of the ring, throwing synchronized poses toward the hard camera.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

The boos continue as Blaze demands applause and receives the exact opposite.

Then the arena lights dim.

A low guitar growl rolls through the building.

"The South is Rising" by The Sign of the Southern Cross thunders from the speakers.

The reaction is immediate.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Cito Conarri:

"And their opponents. Hailing from the Mudflats of Mississippi, and weighing in at a combined five hundred and ninety pounds! They are the reigning, and defending, ICW Tag Team Champions! CARLTON! CHAPPS! The brrRRRRRROTHERRSS... GLLUUUUUUCCK!!!"

The Foundry erupts as Carlton Gluck steps through the curtain. Calm. Unhurried. Comfortable. Behind him comes Chapps Gluck, already shouting before he fully clears the entranceway, throwing his arms wide and

Point of Review

feeding off the crowd's energy like a man who has just discovered caffeine.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Carlton smiles faintly and starts down the aisle, slapping a few outstretched hands along the way. Chapps is a different story entirely. He bounces from side to side, yelling toward the crowd, pointing at signs, pounding the guardrail and generally behaving like someone who has been told to contain his excitement and taken it as a personal insult.

Angus Skaaland:

"Listen to this place! Alabama loves these boys."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And the feeling is mutual. The Brothers Gluck have become one of the most popular acts in Iron City Wrestling, and they're backing it up in the ring. Since winning those championships, they've looked nearly unstoppable."

Carlton climbs the ring steps and wipes his boots carefully on the apron before entering. Chapps takes the stairs two at a time, slaps the apron with both hands, then throws his arms wide again as the crowd roars.

Inside the ring, Carlton settles into his corner. Chapps paces like a caged animal, bouncing on the balls of his feet and glaring across the ring at the challengers.

The contrast could not be clearer.

One brother looks like a veteran heavyweight preparing for work.

The other looks like he is about to start a bar fight.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Carlton nods toward the crowd.

Chapps throws both fists into the air and shouts something unintelligible toward the front row.

Across the ring, the Night Riders exchange a glance.

The champions look ready.

The challengers look wary.

And for the first time all night, Neon Blaze is not smiling quite as much.

Point of Review

Carlton Gluck and Neon Blaze step through the ropes to start things off. Blaze immediately drops into an exaggerated karate stance, bouncing lightly on his feet as he circles. Carlton just stands there. Calm. Patient. Waiting.

Blaze finally commits, snapping a quick roundhouse kick toward Carlton's ribs.

Carlton catches it.

The crowd roars.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Before Blaze can hop away, Carlton yanks him forward, scoops the standing leg, and dumps him to the canvas. Blaze immediately rolls through, only for Carlton to follow, trapping him in a cradle.

ONE!

--KICKOUT!

Blaze scrambles free. Carlton stays attached. Another roll.

ONE!

--KICKOUT!

Blaze twists away again. Carlton follows him through a third amateur sequence, rolling seamlessly from one control position into another. The challenger finally decides he's had enough, diving for the ropes and wrapping both arms and a leg around the middle strand like a man trying to survive a hurricane.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Carlton backs away with a small grin and raises both hands.

Carlton Gluck:

"Y'wanna try Chapps?"

The crowd immediately explodes.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Across the ring, Chapps throws both arms in the air and starts shouting.

Blaze glances between the two brothers.

Point of Review

Then, with all the confidence of a man making a terrible decision, he points toward the opposite corner.

Chapps immediately storms through the ropes.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I don't know if that's the choice I'd have made."

Angus Skaaland:

"Robbie, that may be the worst decision Neon Blaze has ever made, and he's wearing neon in public."

Blaze squares up.

Chapps grabs him.

The entire building comes unglued.

Blaze is ripped off the canvas and hurled halfway across the ring with a massive German Gluckplex.

KRA-KOOM!!!

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

To his credit, Blaze somehow lands on his feet.

To his credit, Blaze also immediately realizes he's in danger.

The challenger doesn't even pretend otherwise. He turns and dives for his corner, slapping Thunder's hand so hard it nearly echoes through the building.

Thunder enters with considerably less enthusiasm than Blaze had shown moments earlier.

The larger Night Rider tries a different approach.

A sharp solebutt catches Chapps in the stomach.

Then Thunder makes the mistake of locking up.

Chapps immediately ducks underneath, circles behind, and secures a tight waistlock.

Thunder plants his feet.

It doesn't help.

Point of Review

Chapps drags him backward to the mat.

Thunder builds his base and starts climbing.

Chapps returns him to the canvas.

Thunder gets up again.

Chapps returns him to the canvas again.

The crowd starts laughing as Thunder repeatedly finds himself hauled back down like an unruly steer.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"People focus on the personality with Chapps Gluck, but make no mistake about it, this man can wrestle."

Angus Skaaland:

"Can wrestle? Robbie, the boy got kicked out before we ever found out how good he actually was."

Thunder finally manages to scramble toward the ropes, but Chapps stays glued to him, riding his hips and dragging him back into the center of the ring. The Night Rider manages a brief escape, only for Chapps to spin behind him again and drive him forward with another mat return.

The crowd is eating it up.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Eventually Chapps abandons the ride altogether, hauling Thunder to his feet and whipping him hard into the Gluck corner.

Thunder hits chest-first.

Carlton immediately tags in.

The brothers exchange a glance.

The crowd knows exactly what's coming.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Carlton bends forward.

Chapps takes off.

Point of Review

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Oh no..."

Thunder's eyes widen.

Blaze is already moving.

The instant Chapps leaps toward Carlton's back, Blaze dives through the ropes and crashes into the pile before the Gluck Truck can connect.

The referee immediately jumps between them as Thunder tumbles from the corner and spills out to the floor.

Blaze follows him.

The Night Riders don't say a word.

They simply backpedal up the aisle a few steps, regrouping while the Glucks stand in the ring staring them down.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:

"That right there is called survival instinct."

The challengers take a moment to collect themselves.

Inside the ring, the champions look entirely unbothered. The Glucks simply wait.

And for the Night Riders, that might be the most unsettling thing of all.

The Night Riders take their time getting back onto the apron.

Then they take a little more.

Thunder leans against the barricade rubbing his back. Blaze paces in a circle, loudly objecting to something only he seems to understand. Inside the ring, Carlton simply waits while Chapps paces behind him, shouting increasingly creative encouragement toward the challengers.

The referee finally starts counting.

ONE!

Point of Review

TWO!

THREE!

The Night Riders exchange a glance.

FOUR!

Only then does Thunder reluctantly slide back into the ring.

Angus Skaaland:

"They've had enough amateur wrestling for one evening."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"They're trying to slow this match down, Angus. Right now everything is happening at the Brothers Gluck's pace."

Thunder circles cautiously as Carlton steps forward.

The Night Rider plants his feet and fires a shoulder tackle.

Carlton barely moves.

Thunder hits the ropes and tries again.

Same result.

The crowd starts laughing.

Thunder scowls, takes a breath, and throws everything he has into a third attempt.

Carlton absorbs it without taking a step backward.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Thunder stares.

Carlton shrugs.

Then Carlton hits the ropes himself.

THWAAACK!!!

Point of Review

Thunder gets flattened.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

The bigger man rolls across the canvas and immediately starts searching for the ropes.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Steel Thunder is a powerful man in his own right, but he's giving up a tremendous amount of size and strength in this matchup."

Angus Skaaland:

"Most people don't shoulder tackle Carlton Gluck and stay standing, Robbie."

Carlton reaches down to haul Thunder back to his feet.

A blur of neon appears from the outside.

SMACK!!!

Blaze drives a kick into Carlton's back.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

Carlton lurches forward.

Thunder immediately capitalizes.

THWACK!!!

A stiff palm strike snaps Carlton's head backward.

Thunder freezes in a martial arts pose, admiring his striking hand while the crowd rains boos down upon him.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

He quickly tags Blaze.

The smaller Night Rider springs through the ropes and goes straight to work on the arm. A stomp drives into Carlton's elbow. Another follows. Blaze drags the arm into position and drops a sharp elbow across the joint before pulling the arm upright against the mat.

STOMP!!!

Point of Review

The crowd groans as Blaze drives his boot down onto the exposed elbow.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Smart strategy from the challengers. If you're going to fight a man like Carlton Gluck, you'd better start taking pieces away."

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah, because fightin' him whole ain't workin'."

Blaze slips away before Carlton can get his hands on him and quickly tags Thunder back in.

Thunder immediately secures the arm and starts twisting.

The crowd begins to buzz.

Carlton knows exactly what's coming.

Thunder transitions smoothly from the armwringer into position for the Flying Hammerlock.

OOOOOOHHHHH!!!

The challenger starts to lift.

Carlton suddenly drops his weight.

Thunder's grip shifts.

Carlton rotates underneath the pressure, steps through, and reverses the leverage.

The arena explodes.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Before Thunder can recover--

KRA-KOOOOM!!!

Country Strong Gluckplex.

Thunder flies.

Not far.

Point of Review

Not gracefully.

Just violently.

The challenger crashes onto his back and immediately grabs at the canvas as the crowd comes unglued.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Beautiful counter by Carlton Gluck!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Steel Thunder doesn't usually go for rides like that! That's a grown heavyweight gettin' launched around!"

Carlton rises first, grabs Thunder by the wrist, and sends him hard into the Gluck corner.

Thunder hits chest-first and slumps against the turnbuckles.

Tag.

Chapps is already moving.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Carlton muscles Thunder up onto the middle rope.

Chapps steps in and wraps him up.

Then he throws.

KRA-KOOOOM!!!

The middle-rope belly-to-belly Gluckplex launches Thunder halfway across the ring.

The crowd leaps to its feet.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Chapps rolls over and hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

--KICKOUT!

Point of Review

Thunder barely gets the shoulder up.

The Night Riders survive.

For the moment.

Thunder stumbles upright just in time to find Chapps waiting for him.

The younger Gluck brother drives a boot into the stomach, hooks the arm, and starts lifting for the Gluckbuster.

The crowd rises.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Thunder's eyes widen.

Then he does the veteran thing.

He goes straight to the eyes.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

Chapps recoils, grabbing his face as Thunder scrambles free and dives toward his corner.

Tag.

Blaze springs through the ropes.

The Night Riders immediately go to work.

Blaze hits the ropes.

THWACK!!!

A missile dropkick catches Chapps square in the chest.

The impact rocks him backward.

It doesn't drop him.

The crowd cheers.

Point of Review

Blaze looks less encouraged.

He charges anyway.

Another kick.

Another quick strike.

Then he spins.

Neon Lights Out.

Chapps catches the leg.

The entire building erupts.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Blaze freezes.

"Oh no."

Angus Skaaland:

"That's the face of a man who knows he's made a mistake."

Chapps yanks him forward, hooks both arms, and drives him into the mat with a fisherman's Gluckbuster.

KRA-KOOOOM!!!

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

The champion hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

Thunder dives across the ring.

--SAVE!

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

Point of Review

Now everybody's moving.

Carlton comes through the ropes.

Thunder starts throwing forearms.

Chapps grabs Thunder.

Thunder grabs Chapps.

Blaze grabs whoever happens to be available.

For a few seconds the match devolves into a full-fledged donnybrook.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"The referee's losing control here!"

The official finally manages to wedge himself between the teams and starts forcing bodies apart.

While everyone is distracted, Blaze quietly slips into a corner.

And starts untying a turnbuckle pad.

The crowd sees it immediately.

BBBBBOOOOO!!!

The referee doesn't.

By the time order is restored, the exposed steel bolt is waiting.

Thunder rolls to the apron.

Blaze points dramatically at Chapps.

Then charges.

A whip toward the corner.

Chapps reverses.

Blaze hurtles toward the exposed turnbuckle--

Point of Review

--and catches himself at the last second.

The crowd groans.

OOOOOOHHHHH!!!

Chapps sees the opening and charges.

Blaze sidesteps.

CLANG!!!

Chapps crashes face-first into the exposed steel.

The entire building winces.

OOOOOOHHHHH!!!

Chapps staggers backward, both hands immediately going to his face.

For the first time all match, he looks genuinely hurt.

Blaze looks like a man who just escaped execution.

Angus Skaaland:

"He found one! He finally found one!"

Blaze waits.

Chapps slowly turns around.

THWACK!!!

Neon Lights Out.

This time it lands flush.

The crowd gasps.

OOOOOOHHHHH!!!

Blaze dives into the cover.

Point of Review

At the same time, Thunder throws himself at Carlton and wraps him up.

ONE!

TWO!

THR--

--KICKOUT!

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

The Foundry explodes.

Blaze throws both hands onto his head.

Thunder stares at the referee in disbelief.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Chapps Gluck survives!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Those boys needed a miracle and they got about ninety percent of one!"

The Night Riders don't waste time arguing.

They immediately drag Chapps toward the corner.

Tag.

Thunder enters.

The challengers begin setting up their backbreaker-and-elbow combination.

Thunder muscles Chapps across his knee.

Blaze climbs.

The crowd starts buzzing.

OOOOOHHHHH!!!

Then Chapps starts moving.

Point of Review

At first it's subtle.

A shift.

A push.

Then another.

Thunder's expression changes.

The hold isn't getting more secure.

It's getting worse.

Chapps is forcing it apart.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Wait a second--"

Blaze freezes on the ropes.

Thunder tries to adjust.

Chapps keeps pushing.

The champion slowly forces Thunder's arms farther and farther apart.

Blaze starts frantically directing traffic from the ropes.

Nothing is working.

Thunder refuses to let go.

Chapps refuses to stay trapped.

The whole mess stumbles backward into the ropes.

THWACK!!!

Blaze gets launched crotch-first across the top turnbuckle.

OOOOOOHHHHH!!!

Point of Review

The crowd erupts.

Thunder turns just in time for Chapps to grab him.

Rebel Proud Gluckplex.

KRA-KOOOOM!!!

Thunder folds up and crashes onto the mat.

Blaze is still stranded on the top rope trying to recover.

Chapps looks up.

The crowd starts buzzing.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"No way."

Chapps explodes upward.

THWACK!!!

The dropkick catches Blaze square in the chest and sends him flying off the top rope.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Blaze crashes to the floor.

The Foundry comes unglued.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"A man nearly three hundred pounds should not be able to get that high!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Robbie, I have stopped askin' what Chapps Gluck should and shouldn't be able to do!"

Thunder is still trying to figure out what part of Alabama he landed in when Carlton reaches his corner.

Tag.

The building explodes.

Point of Review

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Carlton steps through the ropes like a man who has just arrived to collect a debt.

Thunder staggers upright.

THWAAACK!!!

Clobbersaurus.

The lariat nearly turns him inside out.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Thunder crashes to the mat and immediately starts rolling toward safety.

Unfortunately for him, Blaze has chosen that exact moment to re-enter the ring.

Unfortunately for Blaze, Carlton notices.

THWAAACK!!!

A second Clobbersaurus folds the Night Rider in half.

The crowd is losing its mind.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Carlton Gluck is cleaning house!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Somebody tell the Night Riders this ain't mandatory!"

Blaze stumbles toward the ropes trying to escape.

Carlton catches him.

The crowd rises.

Blaze starts kicking.

Starts pleading.

Point of Review

Starts regretting several life choices.

Carlton doesn't seem particularly interested.

He hoists Blaze backward.

Then launches him.

KRA-KOOOOM!!!

The German Gluckplex sends Blaze crashing throat-first across the top rope before he tumbles back into the ring.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

For a moment, both Night Riders are down.

The Brothers Gluck stand tall.

Carlton points toward Chapps.

The crowd erupts again.

Tag.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

The brothers take a moment to soak it in.

Not showboating.

Not taunting.

Just two men who know exactly what comes next.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I think the Night Riders have reached the end of the road."

Angus Skaaland:

"Robbie, I think they've reached the end of several roads."

Thunder struggles back to his feet.

Point of Review

Carlton immediately scoops him up onto his shoulders.

The crowd recognizes it.

The reaction starts building.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Blaze sees it too.

He scrambles toward the center of the ring.

Too late.

Chapps is already moving.

He hits the ropes.

Launches.

And wraps himself around Thunder's head.

KRA-KOOOOM!!!

Gluckensteiner.

Thunder spikes into the mat.

The arena comes unglued.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

Chapps rolls through and hooks both legs.

At the same moment, Blaze throws himself forward for the save.

Carlton steps directly into his path.

Front facelock.

Sprawl.

Blaze is trapped.

Point of Review

Nowhere to go.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

The bell rings.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"That's it! The Brothers Gluck retain the ICW Tag Team Championship!"

Angus Skaaland:

"The Night Riders threw every trick they had at 'em, Robbie. Every shortcut, every cheap shot, every dirty little idea they could think of."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And it still wasn't enough."

Chapps releases the pin and immediately throws both arms into the air.

Carlton lets Blaze go and reaches down to help his brother back to his feet.

The Foundry roars its approval.

RRRAAAHHHHHH!!!

The Night Riders survive longer than most.

They find openings.

They land shots.

They even create a moment of doubt.

But when the dust settles, the result never truly feels uncertain.

The Brothers Gluck stand in the center of the ring, championships held high above their heads.

And the reign rolls on.

Point of Review

Iowa calling

Backstage, Graysie Parker has her feet propped up on one of the large equipment trunks scattered throughout the arena. She's in the middle of a set of decline pushups, moving with steady rhythm and complete focus.

Eric Dane Jr. rounds a corner, spots her, and slows to a stop.

Graysie very obviously pretends she hasn't seen him.

Eric Dane Jr.:

"You looking to tire yourself out?"

Without breaking stride:

Graysie Parker:

"You looking to distract me?"

Eric Dane Jr.:

"Yeah, if you'd listen to me!"

Graysie deliberately knocks out five more reps.

Then five more.

Only then does she push herself upright and climb to her feet.

Graysie Parker:

"Eric, this is gettin' ridiculous."

She wipes her hands on her gear.

Graysie Parker:

"I don't know what's up your back, but you're in this title match too. You should be focused on it, not on..."

She makes a face.

Graysie Parker:

"Aura building, or clouting, or whatever you'd call it."

Eric Dane Jr.:

"Aura farming, and I'm not. Look--"

Point of Review

Graysie Parker:

"Do you have something to say, or not? Say it, or quit wasting my time."

Junior's jaw clenches.

His hands ball into fists.

Then finally:

Eric Dane Jr.:

"WE'RE MOVING TO FUCKING IOWA!"

That gets Graysie's attention.

Graysie Parker:

"What?!"

For a moment neither says anything.

Graysie looks shocked.

Junior looks like he's been carrying this around all night.

Graysie Parker:

"How the--"

She points at him.

Graysie Parker:

"Eric, I swear to God, if you're fucking with me right now, then--"

Eric Dane Jr.:

"It was right before the show started. My dad, Cito, fuckin' Jeff, and Toddy's dad. They were all talking about the reviews."

He throws his hands up.

Eric Dane Jr.:

"You ever heard of BlackRock Holdings?"

Graysie Parker:

"No."

Point of Review

Eric Dane Jr.:

"Yeah, well, turns out they own The Foundry and they're kicking us out."

Graysie folds her arms.

Then slowly shakes her head.

Graysie Parker:

"Eric, unless we're moving to Iowa before this title match, this ain't the time to deal with it."

A beat.

Graysie Parker:

"And I'm not sayin' I believe you anyway."

Eric Dane Jr.:

"God DAMMIT, I'm not making this up!"

Graysie just shrugs.

That somehow makes him even angrier.

Eric Dane Jr.:

"The fuck won't you listen for?"

He points down the hallway.

Eric Dane Jr.:

"Do you want me to go get Kirsty and ask her to tell you? 'Cause I bet you'd listen if she told you."

That lands.

Graysie stiffens.

Immediately.

Graysie Parker:

"First, you can take her name the FUCK outta your mouth when you're talkin' to me."

She steps closer.

Graysie Parker:

"Second, start takin' this match seriously and go bother somebody else."

Point of Review

Another step.

Graysie Parker:

"Seriously. Go. Now."

She points down the hallway.

Graysie Parker:

"I've got a title match."

Junior says nothing.

Instead he leans against the wall, trying to look irritatingly casual.

The effect is ruined somewhat by how stiff he is with anger.

Graysie stares at him for a second.

Then shakes her head.

Graysie Parker:

"Oh, grow the fuck up."

With that, she turns and walks away.

Junior remains where he is.

Alone in the hallway.

Still angry.

Still unheard.

Still staring after her as Point of Review's main event draws closer.

Todderick Davenport III (c) vs Graysie Parker vs Kirsty McKinney vs Eric Dane, Jr.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Ladies and gentlemen, it all comes down to this. The Iron Crown Championship -- or as Todderick Davenport III insists on calling it, the Trust Fund International Championship -- hangs in the balance tonight in a four-way dance. Graysie Parker wants the title she never truly lost. Eric Dane Jr. wants to prove his name belongs in this business on his own terms. Kirsty McKinney wants to demonstrate that she is the most

Point of Review

dangerous pure wrestler in Iron City Wrestling. And the champion? TD3 has spent months manipulating every angle, every contract, every opening he could find to stay on top."

Angus Skaaland:

"And now the bill's come due. See, TD3's whole thing is control. Control the boardroom, control the referees, control the pace, control the narrative. But tonight he's locked in there with three people who do not behave rationally. Graysie'll fight him in a parking lot if she has to. Dane Jr's liable to jump off the damn balcony. And Kirsty McKinney? Robbie, I genuinely don't think that woman likes anything."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"This crowd has been electric all night long, but listen to this building right now. This is what a main event atmosphere sounds like in Iron City Wrestling. Take it away, Cito!"

Cito Conarri:

"The following contest is your MAIN EVENT OF THE EVENING!"

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Cito Conarri:

"It is a four way dance, set for one fall, with no time limit, and it is for the TRUST FUND INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP!"

BBBOOOOOO!!!

Cito Conarri:

"Introducing the first challenger! Hailing from Amherst, Massachusetts, and weighing in at 149 lbs! This is KIRSTYYYY... MMMCKIIIIIIINNNEEYYYY!!!

The lights dim slightly as the opening groove of "In Walks Barbarella" rumbles through the arena. The reaction is immediate and divided -- not hatred, not admiration, but the wary recognition reserved for someone unpleasantly effective.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

(kirr-sty! kirr-sty!)

Kirsty McKinney steps through the curtain with the same expression she'd wear walking into a DMV. No theatrics. No playing to the crowd. Just cold eyes and irritated focus. She briefly scans the arena like she's already annoyed by the noise, then starts toward the ring at a measured pace.

Angus Skaaland:

"And there she is. Human cigarette ash."

There's an unusual tension in the crowd around her now. A few months ago she was just another outsider

Point of Review

attached to the New Untouchables circus. But then people saw her dismantle opponents. Saw her grind down trained wrestlers like she was processing livestock. Saw her nearly tear through Graysie Parker before TD3 robbed everybody of a finish.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"You can hear it in the stands, Angus - Kirsty McKinney is the furthest thing from popular. But she's got an incredibly unique toolkit in the ring, she's put in the work and won matches. The fans respect her, and it shows."

Kirsty slides under the ropes smoothly, rises to her feet, then immediately drops into a pair of deep squats near center ring. A shoulder roll. A dismissive flick of hair from her eyes. That's it. Ceremony complete.

She leans into the corner, arms folded, already looking irritated that there are still three more entrances.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Kirsty McKinney may not care whether these people love her, hate her, or fear her. But they've learned to take her seriously."

Angus Skaaland:

"You know what TD3's real problem is tonight? He can bribe people, manipulate people, out-politic people. Kirsty McKinney doesn't seem psychologically reachable enough for any of that nonsense."

The arena abruptly darkens again before the swaggering beat of "Dead Man Shuffle" crashes through the speakers.

RRRRAAAbbbboooAHHHHH!!!

An eruption of cheers, with a smaller pocket of boos, cuts through it immediately.

Cito Conarri:

"And the next contender! Hailing from Birmingham, Alabama, and weighing in at 210 lbs! EEERRRIC... DAAAAANNNEE....JUUUUUUUUUNIORRR!!!

Eric Dane Jr. steps through the curtain in the sequined robe, chin high, expression calm in a way that somehow reads even cockier than outright arrogance. He pauses at the top of the ramp, letting the reaction wash over him.

There are signs everywhere.

"ERIC'S KID."

"BETTER THAN THE OLD MAN."

"NOT MY DANE."

Junior ignores all of them.

Point of Review

Instead, his eyes lock straight on the ring -- specifically on Kirsty McKinney.

The crowd buzzes at the tension immediately.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"You can feel it. Kirsty McKinney humiliated this young man in her debut, and I don't think Eric Dane Jr. has forgotten a second of it."

Angus Skaaland:

"Well good. He shouldn't. Embarrassment builds character."

Junior starts down the aisle with deliberate swagger, slapping a few hands but never fully breaking focus. Halfway down the ramp he flashes a smirk toward the hard camera, then suddenly bursts into a sprint and vaults onto the apron in one motion.

RRRRAAAHHHH!!!

He slingshots over the top rope cleanly, landing light on his feet before throwing the robe open wide toward the hard cam.

Kirsty doesn't even clap sarcastically. She just stares at him with faint annoyance, which somehow seems to irritate him more.

Junior tosses the robe aside and backs into the opposite corner, bouncing lightly on the balls of his feet.

Angus Skaaland:

"See, this idiot right here? TD3 thinks he understands him because they're both rich kids in different ways. But Dane Jr's got a little bit of his old man in him, and that makes him dangerous because sometimes self-preservation just exits the equation entirely."

The first notes of "Sweet Home Alabama" hit and the building absolutely detonates.

GRAY-SIE!

GRAY-SIE!

GRAY-SIE!

Cito Conarri:

"Their opponent! Hailing from right here in Birmingham, Alabama, and weighing in at exactly 150 lbs! She is the inaugural Iron Crown Champion! SHE... IS... GRAAAAAYSIEEEE.... PAAAAAARRRRKKKEERRR!!!

Purple-and-gold lights sweep the arena as Graysie Parker steps through the curtain, jaw set, eyes burning. Unlike the others, she actually pauses and absorbs the reaction for a second.

Point of Review

This is her city.
Her building.
Her people.

And in her eyes tonight, that title already belongs to her.

She raises one fist overhead and the noise somehow climbs even louder.

RRRRAAAHHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Listen to this ovation! Graysie Parker was the inaugural Iron Crown Champion, and many people believe she never should have lost that title in the first place."

Angus Skaaland:

"TD3 turned that belt into a tax writeoff with side plates."

Graysie marches toward the ring with purpose, not taking her eyes off TD3's empty corner once. Junior watches her closely. Kirsty's eyes narrow.

Sliding under the ropes, Graysie rises and immediately climbs the middle turnbuckle, throwing a fist high into the air again as the crowd erupts around her.

Then she drops down and looks from Dane Jr, to Kirsty, and back again.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Graysie's been involved in a start and stop situationship with Jr for a few years now, and she and Kirsty - well, we don't need to recap the Dane Sr/Jeff Andrews drama again. The tension's there, the girls only just got their business started last week, and-"

The lights in the building shift to gold.

"Lifestyle" booms through the arena as champagne-colored spotlights sweep the crowd.

The boos begin instantly.

BBBBBBBBBOOOOOOOOO!!!

Cito Conarri:

"And the champion! Hailing from Mountain Brook, Alabama, and accompanied to the ring by the RICH YOUNG GRAPPLERZ! He is the reigning TRUST FUND INTERNATIONAL CHAMPION... TODDERICK! DAAAAVENPORT... THE THIIIIIIIIIRRRRRDDDD!!!

Point of Review

Todderick Davenport III steps through the curtain in an immaculate designer coat, Iron Crown Championship resting arrogantly over one shoulder. Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington flank him like junior executives accompanying a CEO to hostile negotiations.

TD3 pauses at the top of the ramp with a smug smile that visibly tightens when he sees all three challengers already waiting inside the ring.

Especially Graysie.

Especially Kirsty.

He raises the title high anyway.

BBBBBOOOOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"For all the controversy, all the manipulation, all the complaints -- Todderick Davenport III has survived every challenge put in front of him."

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah, usually with outside interference and enough legal terminology to kill a horse."

TD3 saunters toward the ring slowly, talking with Jacobs and Darrington as though this is all beneath him. But every few seconds his eyes dart toward the ring again.

Calculating.

Measuring.

Reconsidering.

Junior smirks openly at him from inside the ropes.

Graysie looks ready to fight immediately.

Kirsty just looks annoyed that TD3 is taking this long to get to the ring.

TD3 steps onto the apron cautiously and enters between the ropes, immediately backing toward his corner while the Rich Young Grapplerz remain outside at ringside.

The referee moves to keep the competitors separated as TD3 removes the championship from his shoulder, glaring across the ring at the three people who have spent months tearing holes in his carefully constructed system.

For the first time all night, the magnitude of the situation visibly settles over the arena.

Point of Review

Four wrestlers.
Four philosophies.
One championship.

And absolutely nowhere left to run.

From Graysie.
To Kirsty.
To Dane Jr.

Calculating.

Measuring exits.

DING DING DING!

All three challengers explode forward at once.

Todderick Davenport III instantly backpedals, panic flashing across his face as Eric Dane Jr. reaches him first. Junior lunges with a running forearm smash that catches TD3 flush across the jaw and sends him stumbling sideways into the ropes.

RRRRAAAHHHH!!!

TD3 doesn't even try to answer back. He immediately bails under the bottom rope and hits the floor running. Junior follows without hesitation.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"And the champion wants no part of this immediately!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Smartest decision he's made all season!"

The moment TD3 escapes, Graysie Parker abruptly changes direction. Instead of pursuing the champion, she grabs Kirsty McKinney by the arm, yanks her around violently, and starts firing heavy right hands straight into her face.

THWACK!
THWACK!
THWACK!

RRRRAAAHHHH!!!

Point of Review

Kirsty absorbs the first two shots before immediately dropping levels, arms shooting toward Graysie's hips. Graysie sprawls hard, widening her base and clubbing downward across the back of Kirsty's neck with ugly forearms before dragging her upright again by the head.

Another haymaker snaps Kirsty sideways.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Forget the championship for a moment--these two wanted each other!"

Angus Skaaland:

"No matter how much bad blood and how little respect these two women have for each other, Robbie, Alpha recognizes Alpha."

Kirsty shoots again, faster this time, catching one leg and driving forward. Graysie hops backward on her free foot, hammering down across the shoulders while fighting to stay upright. Kirsty turns the corner anyway, trying to force the angle--

--but Graysie twists behind her instead, snakes both arms around the waist, and launches her backward with a huge German suplex.

WHAMMMM!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Kirsty folds hard across the mat--

--and immediately sits back up.

The crowd noise spikes.

Angus Skaaland:

"Ohhhh no. Don't start this shit already."

Graysie's eyes narrow. She keeps the waistlock.

She drags Kirsty back up.

Another German coming--

--but this time Kirsty hooks a leg around Graysie's, blocks the lift, and rips herself around behind into a waistlock of her own before launching Graysie high and hard with a German suplex in return.

WHAAAMMMM!!!

Point of Review

BBBBBOOOOOOOO!!!

Now it's Graysie who snaps upright instantly, breathing hard, eyes burning.

Neither woman looks impressed.

Neither woman backs up.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"This has broken down into something far more dangerous than a traditional four-way!"

Graysie lunges first, trying to re-secure the waistlock for another throw, but Kirsty drops her weight low and blocks it. Kirsty immediately attempts her own rolling German sequence--

--and Graysie kills it before it starts, throwing her hips backward and tearing at the grip with both hands.

The two women violently handfight for position, forehead-to-forehead, twisting and wrenching at wrists and fingers instead of exchanging strikes now. No theatrics. No crowd play. Just ugly positional fighting.

Outside the ring, Eric Dane Jr. vaults off the apron with a flying knee that catches TD3 against the barricade.

KRA-KOOM!!!

RRRRAAAHHHH!!!

TD3 crumples against the rail, clutching his face as Junior lands on his feet and instantly rolls him back toward ringside by the head.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Dane Jr. is all over him!"

Junior sprints forward again, and leaps clean off the ringside steps into a flying sideways knee that crushes TD3 against the barricade a second time.

WHAMMM!!!

The Rich Young Grapplerz immediately rush forward, grabbing Junior by the arms. Yanking him away from TD3, Darrington scoops Junior up in backdrop position, Jacobs jumps to the ring apron--

--and the referee sees it instantly.

Official Steve Stripes storms across the ring, pointing furiously toward the aisle.

Point of Review

Referee Steve Stripes:

"NO! OUT! BOTH OF YOU! GET OUT OF HERE!"

The crowd erupts.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Jacobs throws his hands up in disbelief.

Darrington starts arguing immediately.

And his lack of focus lets Dane roll backwards off his shoulders!

Dane lands on his feet, dropkicks Darrington between the shoulderblades. Darrington lurches forward, crashes into Jacobs' knees, and the Rich Young Grapplerz end up in a pile at ringside.

Referee Steve Stripes:

"I SAID OUT!"

Angus Skaaland:

"OH, THANK GOD! We've got ourselves a referee with functioning eyesight! And hey, Junior made it easy for security!"

Security pours out from the back, corralling Jacobs quickly, Darrington with a bit more trouble. The Rich Young Grapplerz continue protesting, but Stripes refuses to budge, threatening disqualification immediately if they don't leave.

Still slumped against the guardrail where Junior left him, TD3 looks horrified.

Inside the ring, Kirsty and Graysie are still locked in a vicious handfight. Kirsty finally secures wrist control and tries to spin behind--

--but Graysie catches the other arm and violently shoves her backward into the corner instead.

Kirsty immediately turns her shoulder inward and starts fighting for inside position again, forehead grinding against Graysie's jaw as both women claw for leverage.

And that's the exact moment Eric Dane Jr. slides back into the ring. TD3 is down outside. The Rich Young Grapplerz are being ejected. And Junior sees Graysie tied up with Kirsty in the corner.

A grin slowly spreads across his face.

Eric Dane Jr. explodes forward.

Point of Review

He plants one foot on the middle rope, vaults sideways through the air, and spikes Kirsty McKinney out of the corner with a snapping rope-assisted DDT that drives her head violently into the mat.

KRA-THWHAMMM!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Junior just launched himself into that DDT!"

Kirsty tumbles sideways from the impact, rolling toward the ropes while Graysie instinctively resets her footing, chest heaving, eyes immediately narrowing at Junior instead of thanking him.

Junior rises with a grin already spreading across his face. He points at himself with both thumbs and gives Graysie an exaggerated little nod like he's expecting applause.

Graysie responds by shoving him hard in the chest.

Not playful, not teasing.

A real shove.

The grin drops instantly.

Angus Skaaland:

"Ohhh, he wanted that."

Junior's expression sharpens. He rolls his shoulders once, then snaps forward with a lightning-quick enzuigiri aimed at the side of Graysie's head.

Graysie barely turns with it, absorbing most of the impact off the shoulder instead of the jaw.

Junior lands on his feet immediately, spins through, and fires a jumping wheel kick.

Graysie catches it.

The crowd erupts.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Junior twists with the captured leg before Graysie can dump him, backflipping free and landing cleanly on his feet.

Point of Review

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Graysie Parker knows exactly what he's trying to do here!"

Junior rushes back in immediately, springing upward with a flying headscissors attempt--

--but Graysie plants her feet and simply refuses to move, clamping her arms around his legs.

She swings him up towards her shoulders, but Junior follows the momentum, slipping over her head, rolling down her back and landing on his feet behind her instead of crashing awkwardly to the mat. He instantly rebounds off the ropes again, leaps into a flying forearm--

--and Graysie catches him out of midair against her chest.

RRRRAAAHHHH!!!

Angus is already laughing.

Angus Skaaland:

"Boy, she is way too strong for this!"

Graysie prepares to launch him with an overhead belly-to-belly, but Junior quickly hits a double ear slap. She drops him and staggers, he lands on his feet again and immediately throws a jumping knee strike toward the head.

This time Graysie partially catches that too, smothering the impact against her shoulder before shoving him backward across the ring.

Junior lands on his back but takes it rolling, comes back up to his feet, and smirks again despite himself.

Because none of his offense is working cleanly.

But none of Graysie's power offense can quite catch him either.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"This is fascinating! Dane Junior knows all the angles to avoid those throws, but Graysie's power and balance are shutting down his strikes!"

Junior bursts forward again, feinting high before trying to slip around into another flying scissors--

--and Kirsty McKinney suddenly blasts straight through him with that snapping corkscrew forearm smash.

THWACK!!!

Point of Review

BBBBBOOOOOOOO!!!

Junior crashes hard onto his back.

Kirsty barely even looks at him afterward. Her eyes stay locked on Graysie as she rolls one shoulder and says something off-mic, but everybody can read the implication.

"You're welcome."

Graysie responds by slapping her directly across the mouth.

SMACKKK!!!

The building erupts.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Kirsty's expression changes instantly.

Not embarrassment.

Not shock, either.

Offense.

She immediately drops levels and blasts forward with a brutal power double-leg attempt, driving through Graysie's hips--

--but Graysie sprawls backward just enough to catch the head and neck, throwing her arm under the throat and locking on a guillotine choke.

The crowd noise spikes again.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Graysie's trying to fight fire with fire - she's trying to outwrestle Kirsty!"

Kirsty freezes for half a second.

Then her face twists into genuine anger.

Angus Skaaland:

"Ohhhhhh and she does NOT like that."

Point of Review

Kirsty immediately starts clubbing downward across Graysie's ribs and back with ugly, short punches while forcing herself upward instead of accepting the entanglement.

The hold loosens.

Graysie tries to cinch it tighter anyway--

--and Kirsty snarls something audible enough for the front rows to hear.

Kirsty McKinney:

"You're trying to guillotine me this early in the match?"

She falls forward so hard her feet leave the mat and she goes horizontal in the air before they land.

Kirsty McKinney:

"Fuck. You."

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Kirsty McKinney is furious!"

Kirsty hammers another clubbing shot into the ribs, tears her head partially free--

--and Graysie abruptly kicks upward with both legs, shoving Kirsty backward across the ring before the choke can fully break down into a scramble.

Kirsty stumbles back a step.

Graysie rises immediately.

And now the two women just stare at each other. No crowd play, no theatrics.

Just fury.

Junior pushes himself back upright nearby, shaking out the cobwebs from the forearm. He looks from Kirsty... to Graysie... then suddenly steps directly between them.

The crowd buzzes in confusion.

Even Graysie looks briefly annoyed instead of violent.

Junior doesn't say anything.

He just points.

Point of Review

Everybody turns.

Outside the ring, Todderick Davenport III is standing near the barricade again, completely recovered now, watching the other three tear each other apart with a smug little grin creeping back across his face.

Then he realizes all three of them are looking directly at him.

The grin disappears instantly.

Angus Skaaland:

"Should've kept those checks rolling in Toddy-boy, I might've pretended to be sympathetic."

All three challengers slowly back away from the ropes at the same time.

No one says a word, but the message is obvious.

Get in here.

Outside the ring, Todderick Davenport III looks deeply offended by the very concept. And by 'offended', we mean 'existentially terrified.'

Robbie Ray Carter:

"TD3 has spent this entire match trying to let the other three destroy each other!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah well unfortunately for him, they all graduated object permanence."

The crowd starts buzzing louder as TD3 cautiously climbs onto the apron. He keeps his eyes moving between all three challengers, trying to judge which one's coming first.

It's Eric Dane Jr.

Junior bursts forward immediately, sprinting across the ring with another flying strike in mind, but TD3 finally catches somebody overcommitting. He drops low, catches the arm, and launches Junior over with a fast arm drag that sends him tumbling across the canvas.

BBBBBOOOOOOOO!!!

TD3 scrambles up quickly, trying to capitalize before anyone else reaches him--

--but Kirsty McKinney is already on him.

She crashes into his back, arms instantly locking around the waist as TD3 desperately starts fighting the grip

Point of Review

before she can secure control. He throws elbows backward, twisting violently, trying to peel her hands apart before she can flatten him out.

Too late.

Kirsty drags him to the mat anyway. Not with a dramatic slam, just ugly efficiency. She hooks the waistlock tighter and rides straight onto his back, chest glued to him while dragging him backward across the canvas like she's trying to physically repossess him.

Angus Skaaland:
"Oh, TD3 is in HELL now."

TD3 thrashes wildly, trying to roll free before Kirsty can fully establish the ride, but she stays attached to him like a parasite, constantly adjusting her hips and grip every time he shifts position.

Then Graysie Parker grabs both of them.

The crowd noise rises instantly.

Kirsty's still clamped around TD3's waist as Graysie muscles both competitors upright at once. Kirsty refuses to release the hold, still trying to drag TD3 backward into control even while Graysie powers them upward.

And then Graysie simply launches both of them.

German suplex.

On both.

WHAAAAAAAAAMMMMMMM!!!

The building absolutely explodes.

HOLY SHIT!
HOLY SHIT!
HOLY SHIT!

Robbie Ray Carter:
"GOOD GOD ALMIGHTY!"

TD3 bounces away in a heap, clutching the back of his neck while Kirsty rolls partly onto her side, momentarily stunned.

Graysie doesn't hesitate.

Point of Review

She immediately drops onto Kirsty from behind, planting her knees on the mat right behind Kirsty's arms, blocking the shrimp, while working her hands under Kirsty's chin.

Angus Skaaland:

"Did you see that Robbie? Graysie dropped them both, but she went after Kirsty, not TD3. No hesitation. And now she's threatening a Graysie Lock!"

It's not that big of a threat yet. Graysie's got her weight planted to keep Kirsty in place, but she can't really build the leverage to crank back on the hold, and Kirsty's turn it into a nasty little hand battle, going after Graysie's wrists every chance she gets. But it's uncomfortable, and the look on Kirsty's face is pure frustration.

Across the ring, Junior has already recovered. He grabs TD3 by the head and hair, dragging the champion upright before whipping him into the corner, following up with a spinning heel kick that leaves the champion slouched forward, hanging from the ropes. In one motion Junior sets him on the top rope.

The crowd realizes what's coming immediately.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"No no no, he's not thinking about this already!"

Junior jumps to the perpendicular middle rope--

--and then back the other way, snatching TD3 mid-air with a huge triangle jump top-rope frankensteiner that sends TD3 flipping violently across the ring.

WHAMMMMM!!!

The arena erupts.

Junior rolls through to his feet immediately. He spins, arms extended, soaking in the cheers, then turns--

--and points to the top rope.

The roof nearly blows off the building.

RRRRAAAHHHHHHH!!!

As Graysie continues trying to hook the Graysie Lock on Kirsty, Junior jumps and spins in one fluid motion, landing on the top rope facing the ring.

Point of Review

Graysie plants a nasty elbow into Kirsty's head, seizes control of one wrist, hooks it over her leg.

Junior jumps.

SHOOTING STAR PRESS!

KRA-KOOOOOMMMM!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHHHH!!!

The crash, the roar, and then Steve Stripes diving to the mat for the cover--

ONE!

Graysie's head snaps around.

TWO!

Graysie immediately shoves both hands straight into Kirsty's face, smashing her forehead into the mat to keep her down for half a second longer before exploding upright and diving across the ring.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"GRAYSIE SAW IT!"

THR--

Graysie crashes into the pile barely before the three-count.

WHAMMM!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHHHH!!!

Junior rolls away clutching his ribs in disbelief while TD3 lies sprawled on the canvas gasping for air.

And back near the ropes, Kirsty McKinney slowly lifts her face off the mat where Graysie planted her.

Her expression is murderous.

Eric Dane Jr. pushes himself back upright first, still clutching at his ribs after the Shooting Star Press. Across from him, Graysie Parker rises more slowly, eyes immediately narrowing as she sees him looking her way.

For a second it almost looks like they're about to start arguing again.

Then Kirsty McKinney starts moving toward them.

Point of Review

Junior suddenly bursts forward--

--and at the last possible second plants a hand on Graysie's shoulder, vaulting over her entirely. Using the extra height from Graysie's frame, he swings through the air and snaps Kirsty over with a flying slingshot headscissors.

WHIP-THWHAMMM!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Kirsty tumbles across the mat, immediately trying to roll back to her feet--

--but Graysie is already waiting for her.

She catches Kirsty under the arms and launches her halfway across the ring with a huge Biel throw.

WHAMMM!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"What power!"

Kirsty crashes hard, stumbles upright near the ropes--

--and Junior rebounds off the far side, leaps sideways, and catches her with another flying headscissors that finally sends her tumbling out over the top rope to the floor.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

For the first time all match, Graysie and Junior are briefly working in sync.

Which means neither of them notices Todderick Davenport III rising behind Graysie.

The champion lunges forward suddenly, dropping low and yanking Graysie face-first into the bottom turnbuckle with a nasty drop toe hold.

BANGGG!!!

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Angus Skaaland:

"And there's the rat!"

TD3 scrambles upright immediately, dragging Graysie up by the arm before she can recover. He hooks the hold quickly, plants his feet, and spins through into Hostile Restructure near the center of the ring.

Point of Review

WHAMMMMM!!!

Steve Stripes drops for the count.

ONE!

TWO!

Graysie kicks out hard at two-and-a-half.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

TD3 slaps the mat in frustration.

Outside the ring, Junior has completely lost interest in what's happening inside.

Kirsty's trying to rise near the steel steps when Junior suddenly comes flying off the ringside stairs with a running cannonball that crushes her backward into the barricade.

KRA-KOOOMMMM!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Eric Dane Junior has wanted payback for The Iron Way for months!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Yeah and now he's finally getting it, he's forgotten there's a title match happening!"

Junior grabs Kirsty by the wrist and violently Irish whips her toward the steel steps. She slams back first into them and collapses there.

Angus Skaaland:

"That's not Greco-Roman!"

Junior immediately breaks into a spring and launches himself at Kirsty feet first, driving both boots straight into the side of Kirsty's head and smashing the other side against the steel steps.

KRAAANGGG!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"If Kirsty McKinney is an ice queen, that dropkick just sent slush flying all over ringside! What impact!"

Point of Review

Kirsty collapses sideways, clutching her head. She's down hard.

Back inside the ring, TD3 is already trying to capitalize again.

He slips behind Graysie and snakes an arm around the head and neck, trying to drag her backward into the Money Clip. Graysie plants her feet instantly, muscles straining as TD3 desperately tries to cinch the hold tighter.

It goes nowhere.

Graysie's arms ripple with the effort, but don't move.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"TD3 can't get her under control!"

TD3 abandons the hold immediately and drops into a quick schoolboy instead, grabbing a handful of tights as he rolls through.

ONE!

TWO!

Junior slides into the ring desperately--

--but Graysie kicks out on her own a split second before he can break it up.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

TD3 scrambles backward on all fours, breathing hard now as Graysie and Junior both stare him down.

TD3 comes to an internal conclusion that he has to act, and now. He darts forward, crashing into the rising Graysie with a running knee, flattening her. Before he can fully recover, Eric Dane Jr. explodes back into motion..

A boot, an Irish whip into the corner. TD3 staggers out--

--and a dropsault catches TD3 flush in the chest, blasting him right back into the turnbuckles, leaving him hanging from the top rope by his elbows.

WHAMMM!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Junior lands on his feet already moving, following up with a flying Superman elbow that cracks directly

Point of Review

across the jaw.

THWACKKK!!!

TD3's head is snapped back, and the only reason he doesn't collapse is Junior's weight pinning him in the corner. Graysie is slowly rising, trying to clear her head.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Junior's pouring it on now!"

Junior shoves TD3 towards the center of the ring. Fluid as ever, he spins as he leaps to the top rope, posed to leap off.

The crowd rises with him.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Junior launches.

Flying crossbody--

--but TD3 suddenly yanks Graysie Parker directly into the flight path while scrambling sideways out of danger.

Junior collides violently with Graysie in mid-motion.

KRAAASHHHH!!!

BBBBBOOOOOOO!!!

Graysie absorbs the worst of it, crashing awkwardly to the mat underneath Junior while TD3 instantly capitalizes. He snatches Junior upright by the head, hooks both arms, and spikes him down with Executive Decision.

WHAMMMMM!!!

Steve Stripes dives into position.

ONE!

TWO!

Graysie lunges desperately across the mat and barely breaks the pin in time.

Point of Review

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

TD3 slaps the canvas once in frustration--

Then suddenly realizes something.

He has momentum.

The champion rises quickly now, feeding off the opening. He stomps Graysie hard in the ribs before turning and blasting Junior with a boot to the side of the head. Back to Graysie. Back to Junior.

Stomp.

Kick.

Stomp.

Kick.

The crowd noise turns ugly fast.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Angus Skaaland:

"See? THIS is who Todderick Davenport the THUUURD really is. Soon as he thinks he's safe, he starts acting like he's king of the world again."

TD3 grabs Graysie first and throws her out under the bottom rope to the floor. Then he wheels around and catches Junior with a hard Irish whip toward the opposite side of the ring.

Junior rebounds hard--

Except that's the ramp side.

And Kirsty McKinney is standing there now.

The second Junior reaches the ropes, Kirsty grabs both legs from the floor and violently yanks him straight out of the ring. Before his feet can even touch the ground she snakes both arms around his waist from behind, locking him up tight while he thrashes wildly trying to peel the grip apart.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Kirsty caught him!"

Junior kicks and twists frantically, but Kirsty just keeps walking. Slowly. Deliberately. Dragging him backward toward the entrance aisle with that crushing waistlock still attached.

Point of Review

The crowd starts rising in anticipation. Not cheering, not precisely booing either. Just reacting.

Junior frantically punches and claws at her clenched hands--

--and Kirsty, deceptively gracefully, suddenly plants her feet and bridges backwards, planting him with a horrifyingly emphatic German suplex directly onto the edge of the entranceway.

WHAAAAAAAAAMMMMMMM!!!

RRAAHHBBBOOOO!!!

The back of Kirsty's own head smacks violently against the thin edge of the protective padding near ringside.

Junior lands almost entirely on the exposed concrete aisle beyond it.

The impact noise is sickening.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"GOOD LORD!"

Junior rolls onto his side clutching the back of his neck and shoulder while Kirsty slowly pushes herself upright nearby, jaw clenched from the collision.

Angus Skaaland:

"I've almost never seen anything like that before, Robbie. And when I have? Huge dudes doing it. That woman isn't human. Don't let the ice confuse you, she's a sadistic fucking mutant."

Kirsty McKinney climbs back into the ring slowly.

Not cautiously. Slowly.

Todderick Davenport III is already backing away before she's even fully upright.

And suddenly the dynamic has completely changed.

TD3's the champion.

TD3's the one with allies.

TD3's the one with the political power.

But standing across the ring from Kirsty McKinney, none of that seems to matter very much.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Hot Toddy looks like a hyena that's been cornered by a lioness!"

Point of Review

The crowd buzzes uneasily as Kirsty stalks forward without hurry, shoulders loose, eyes fixed entirely on TD3. Her expression isn't rage.

It's contempt.

The implication is obvious.

"You're gonna fight me now. Right, champ?"

Angus Skaaland:

"See, this is the problem. TD3 understands wrestlers. He understands rich kids, hotheads, politicians, sharks, manipulators. Kirsty McKinney's just... some kind of... sport wrestling elemental or something."

TD3 keeps circling, trying to create space, trying to think his way out of this situation--

--and then abruptly lunges forward with an eye rake.

BBBBBOOOOOO!!!

Kirsty's head jerks backward just long enough for TD3 to yank her forward by the wrist into a short-arm forearm smash that cracks across the jaw.

THWACKKK!!!

Kirsty stumbles sideways.

TD3 instantly follows with a snapmare takeover--

--but Kirsty hangs onto the head on the way over, rolls straight through with the momentum, and suddenly traps TD3 in a tight scarf hold pin before he even realizes what happened.

Steve Stripes dives into position.

ONE!

TWO!

TD3 panics immediately, thrashing wildly underneath her. He finally manages to slither one shoulder loose at two-and-a-half before scrambling backward across the mat in shock.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

Point of Review

"Kirsty nearly caught him!"

TD3 gets back to his feet looking genuinely rattled now.

Because he really thought he had her.

And somewhere in the crowd, a chant starts bubbling up from a smaller cluster of fans.

kirsty's gonna kill you!

kirsty's gonna kill you!

Not loud. Not dominant. But audible.

Angus audibly groans on commentary.

Angus Skaaland:

"Aw shit, not this again. Robbie, when has the fans chanting that a girl's gonna kill somebody ever led to anything good in the history of wrestling? Ever?"

TD3 snarls and swings a wild haymaker out of frustration--

--and Kirsty instantly half-nelsons him straight to the mat. Violently. She drives him chest-first into the canvas, immediately threads her legs and hips into a brutal power stack, and starts turning him over onto his shoulders before he can even orient himself.

TD3's body folds awkwardly underneath her. One lower leg kicking helplessly, hands flailing, nowhere to go, the rest of him wrapped up like a tree covered in ivy.

Steve Stripes drops again.

ONE!

TWO!

Eric Dane Jr. dives into frame at the absolute last second and crashes into Kirsty to break the hold before the count can reach three.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Junior JUST saved the championship for TD3!"

Kirsty rolls through the collision quickly, immediately coming back up throwing heavy punches at Junior while

Point of Review

TD3 sprawls nearby clutching at his midsection and gasping for air.

Junior fires back instantly.

Now it's a different kind of fight.

Junior wants chaos.

Kirsty wants damage.

Junior's throwing quick combinations and frantic strikes while Kirsty answers with heavy-handed soupbones and ugly clubbing shots that sound like somebody beating meat with a hammer.

THWACK!

THUD!

SMACK!

RRRRAAAHHHH!!!

Junior ducks one forearm and fires a superkick--

--and Graysie Parker suddenly comes flying over the top rope from the floor with a huge double clothesline that wipes both of them out simultaneously.

KRAAAASHHHH!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"What a move, and she takes them both out! Since when in the hell could Graysie fly?!"

Angus Skaaland:

"First time I've ever seen it out of her, Robbie, but she's got so much strength in the upper body, in the back and shoulders, and she didn't springboard, she launched herself with her arms and let physics finish the move for her."

Graysie Parker rises first.

Slowly.

Breathing hard.

Hair hanging in sweaty strands across her face.

But for the first time in a long time, she looks like the one in control.

She flexes both biceps hard, looks up at the ceiling, and lets out what can only be described as a primal roar

Point of Review

of adrenaline.

RRRRAAAHHHHHHH!!!

TD3 is dragging himself upright using the ropes.

Eric Dane Jr. is just rolling under the bottom rope, still feeling the aisle German.

Kirsty McKinney is only halfway back to one knee.

And Graysie sees it.

The opening.

The crowd starts rising as she grabs TD3 by the head and hauls him upright. TD3 throws weak little shots to the ribs trying to stop her, but Graysie simply muscles him into position, hooks both arms--

--and plants him with a brutal Butterfly Bomb.

WHAMMMMMM!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHHHH!!!

TD3 bounces and rolls onto his side gasping.

Graysie doesn't even cover.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"She's not wasting time!"

Junior's just getting back to his feet when Graysie grabs him too. He tries to fight the setup with quick punches and frantic elbows, but Graysie bulldozes straight through them, traps the arms--

--and drills him into the mat with a second Butterfly Bomb.

KRAAASHHHH!!!

RRRRAAAHHHHHHH!!!

Junior folds up from the impact clutching at his spine while Graysie immediately turns toward the final remaining threat.

Kirsty McKinney.

The crowd buzz changes instantly.

Point of Review

Not excitement. Tension.

Graysie grabs Kirsty and tries to pull her into position for the Graysie Driver, but Kirsty immediately refuses to surrender the far arm. Graysie tries to muscle through it anyway, straining harder for the setup--

--and loses control of the near arm completely.

Now the two women are chest-to-chest, grabbing desperately at each other's wrists and shoulders trying to regain leverage. Kirsty palms a hand across Graysie's face and starts driving her backward.

Graysie immediately grabs a fistful of hair in return.

The crowd noise gets louder, but weird. Uneasy.

Both women are yanking at each other's heads now, forearms grinding into faces, shoulders digging inward as they violently shove and jockey for position.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"This almost looks like a catfight!"

Angus immediately cuts him off.

Angus Skaaland:

"As much as I'd love to scream 'CATFIIIIIGHT,' no. See the way their legs are set? See where their shoulders are aimed? They're trying to do damage. Never seen this in professional wrestling before. They're literally wrestling dirty properly."

And Angus isn't joking anymore. Not even slightly.

Kirsty suddenly lowers her hips and drives forward harder. Graysie's back hits the corner.

The crowd reacts instantly because everybody can see it now:

Kirsty is overpowering her.

Just for a second, but just enough.

Kirsty keeps grinding forward, one hand pressed against Graysie's temple while the other one hovers right at the base of the neck, uncomfortably close to the windpipe--

--and Graysie suddenly changes tactics.

She boots Kirsty to stun her, grabs a double handful of her hair and violently yanks her inward.

Point of Review

HEADBUTT.

THWACKKK!!!

RRRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Kirsty stumbles.

Graysie yanks her forward again.

Another headbutt.

THWACKKK!!!

This time Kirsty's legs visibly wobble.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"Those headbutts again! A direct callback to their fight last week!"

Graysie jerks Kirsty inward a third time, then abruptly sidesteps and spins behind her instead.

The crowd gasps.

Because suddenly Graysie's arms are threaded under both of Kirsty's.

Full nelson.

And before Kirsty can fully react, Graysie violently forces her downward to the mat and rides onto her back with the hold still locked in tight.

RRRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

Angus Skaaland:

"OH MY GOD!"

Kirsty immediately starts bucking and twisting underneath her, but Graysie keeps the nelson cinched while forcing her chest-first into the canvas with ugly riding pressure.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"I've never seen Graysie Parker do this in my life!"

Angus Skaaland:

"She isn't just turning Kirsty's game against her. That's super illegal in sport wrestling, and completely legal here! And I bet Graysie's strong enough to get a tap from a nelson!"

Point of Review

Graysie keeps cranking back on the full nelson, face twisted with effort. She pulls back so hard that Kirsty actually rises to her knees, bent almost double, forehead still pressed, almost held, into the canvas, while Graysie bears down with every ounce of strength she has.

Then Graysie shifts her weight.

The crowd immediately reacts.

Because now she's trying to transition.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"She's going for the Graysie Lock!"

Graysie releases the downwards pressure on the nelson just long enough to yank backwards on Kirsty's arms, draping them over Graysie's now bent knees, dragging her backward into the Steiner Recliner-style full on Graysie Lock--

--and for a split second it actually looks like she has it.

RRRRAAAHHHHH!!!

But she's too high on the back.

She never got the hips trapped.

Kirsty suddenly gets one knee underneath herself. That's enough.

The entire balance of the hold changes instantly.

Angus Skaaland:

"No no no no--"

With Graysie still perched on her shoulders, Kirsty stabilizes, then stands up.

The building was already exploding. It explodes even more.

BBBOORRAAHH!!!

Graysie's eyes widen. Meanwhile, Kirsty's expression now is different from anything we've seen tonight. Ever, really. Not cold. Not contemptuous. Not smug.

Angry.

Point of Review

Really angry.

She releases Graysie's legs, switches her grip to the hips, takes one step backward--

--and violently lifts Graysie before swinging her down, driving Graysie face-first into the mat with a beautiful front electric chair drop.

KRAAAAAA-THWHAMMMMM!!!

The sound is sickening.

RRRRRAAAHHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"GOOD GOD!"

Angus Skaaland:

"Graysie actually beat Kirsty on the mat, and then Kirsty spiked Graysie with a power move! They're evolving in real time, but at this rate one of them might not make it through the match! Or both!"

Graysie sprawls out motionless for half a second before instinctively trying to crawl.

Kirsty doesn't give her the chance.

She grabs Graysie immediately, drags her into position, and threads the legs and arms together with frightening speed.

Angus Skaaland:

"Shear Cradle! SHEAR CRADLE!"

Kirsty rolls the hold over and spreads her arms wide against the canvas for leverage and stability, face twisted into an openly furious grimace now as she squeezes the hold tight, folding and compressing Graysie's body awkwardly..

Steve Stripes drops into position.

ONE!

Graysie kicks her legs violently.

TWO!

She twists harder. Her face turns red from pressure and effort.

Point of Review

But she can't get free.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"She's trapped! New champion! We're about to have a new champion!"

TWO AND A HALF!

Graysie's face is turning red now, panic and strain finally showing through.

TWO POINT NINE!

Graysie bucks frantically; her shoulders don't even wobble. The crowd is losing its mind.

BBBBOOOOOOO(raah)OOOOOOOO!!!!

TWO POINT NINE NINE--

KRAAASHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"ERIC DANE JUNIOR WITH THE SAVE! SHOOTING STAR PRESS! Right across Kirsty McKinney's back, and the pin is broken!"

It wasn't pretty. Kirsty wasn't well positioned for it. Junior has to awkwardly twist himself mid-air just to reach her. The rotation comes out crooked. He lands at an angle across her back and shoulders.

But the hold breaks apart.

RRRRAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!

Everybody collapses in different directions.

Kirsty clutches the back of her head, rocked from the unexpected force of a 210 pound man landing on her unexpectedly.

Junior, doubled over, staggers to his feet, nursing his ribs, or maybe his shoulder, it's hard to tell.

As for Graysie--

Graysie looks humiliated.

Red-faced.

Gasping for breath.

Point of Review

Hair hanging across her eyes.

Then she suddenly surges upright.

She grabs Kirsty.

Hooks the pumphandle.

This time Kirsty can't stop it.

And Graysie absolutely spikes her with the Graysie Driver.

WHAMMMMMMMMM!!!

The building detonates.

RRRRAAAHHHHHHH!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"SHE GOT HER!"

Junior moves in. He steps around Graysie, grabs a handful of Kirsty's hair to bring her back up again.

And Graysie takes exception. She spins him around, body checks him, and whips him towards the ropes, head down, aiming to throw him from the ring. She immediately turns back to Kirsty.

But Junior didn't go all the way out of the ring. Slipping through the ropes, bouncing his knees off the top just before he spills to the apron, he's rolled back to his feet by his own momentum, bolting back towards the two women--

--and CRASHES into Graysie, blasting her directly in the face with the Star Destroyer!

THWACKKKK!!!

The audience gasps in shock.

Angus Skaaland:

"IS THIS JUNIOR'S MOMENT AFTER ALL?! He just leveled-!"

Graysie collapses sideways, stunned from the impact. Dane sprawls over her body--

--and before Stripes can even drop for the count, TD3 comes out of nowhere, grabbing him by the hair and the waist of his tights and slings him under the bottom rope and out of the ring.

Point of Review

Junior crashes hard onto the floor.

TD3 turns.

Looks at Graysie.

Looks at Kirsty.

Calculates.

Graysie just absorbed a Star Destroyer, a trademark.

Kirsty just took consecutive finishers.

Decision made.

TD3 dives onto Kirsty from behind. With the woman still barely conscious from the two finishers, he places her arms over his knees as though he were about to go for the Graysie Lock instead - and then just leans forward, rolling her into a pinning combination.

Robbie Ray Carter:

"NO! Not like this! That spoiled little brat is gonna steal another one!"

Steve Stripes drops into position one more time.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!!!

DING DING DING!!!

BBBBBOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!

Todderick Davenport III doesn't wait for his hand to be raised very long.

The second Steve Stripes presents the championship belt, TD3 practically snatches it away and bails from the ring before anybody else can fully recover.

BBBBBOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

Point of Review

"He stole it! He stole it again!"

TD3 sprints halfway up the entrance aisle clutching the title belt against his chest before finally allowing himself to slow down. At the top of the ramp, the Rich Young Grapplerz come flooding out to meet him.

Jacoby Jacobs grabs him first in a screaming hug while Darian Darrington pounds both fists against TD3's shoulders, laughing in disbelief. TD3 is yelling something unintelligible back at them, adrenaline completely overriding coherence.

Then Darrington scoops him up onto his shoulders like they've just won the Super Bowl.

BBBBBOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!

Inside the ring, Eric Dane Jr. is still on the apron.

He hasn't moved.

One hand gripping the top rope.
The other clutching at his own head.

The realization is slowly sinking in now.

He had it.

For one second, he had it.

And then he didn't.

Angus Skaaland:
"That boy is gonna replay that knee in his head for months."

Junior looks from TD3 celebrating on the ramp... back toward the ring... and finally down at Graysie Parker.

Which turns out to be a mistake.

Because Graysie is awake now.

Barely.

She's on hands and knees near center ring, hair hanging over her face, chest heaving as she slowly lifts her head toward him.

The look in her eyes is murderous.

Point of Review

Not confused.

Not emotional.

She knows exactly what happened.

Junior instinctively takes half a step backward on the apron.

Nearby, Kirsty McKinney is trying to sit upright against the ropes, one hand pressed against the side of her head while she fights to regain her equilibrium. Her expression is distant and furious all at once, like her body hasn't fully caught up to the fact that the match is over yet.

And up on the stage, Todderick Davenport III raises the championship overhead while seated on Darrington's shoulders.

The Rich Young Grapplerz are celebrating.

The crowd is livid.

BBBBBOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!

Robbie Ray Carter:

"An absolute war! Graysie Parker and Kirsty McKinney nearly tore each other apart! Eric Dane Junior damn near stole the show! And somehow, SOMEHOW, Todderick Davenport the Third slithers out with the title again!"

Angus Skaaland:

"That's the worst part, Robbie. The little bastard survived. This whole match was supposed to expose him. Instead he just learned how to survive even uglier people than him."

TD3 throws one arm into the air from Darrington's shoulders, screaming triumphantly while boos rain down from every side of The Foundry.

And with Graysie glaring daggers at Junior from the ring below, the final image of Point of Review is the smug champion nobody wants still holding the gold above his head.

Point of Review

Show Credits

Segment: "Lousy reviews" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Segment: "Welcome to Point of Review" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Match: "Preston Price vs Marcus King vs Eli Dresden vs Cole Marksson vs Sammy Starr vs Riley Cross" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Segment: "A Champion's reception" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Match: "Sunny Holliday (c) vs Celestina Cruz" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Segment: "Return the Baroness" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Segment: "An interview derailed" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Match: "Duchess Vaughn vs Jesse Collins" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Segment: "Worth it, though?" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Segment: "Catching up" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Match: "Lowlife Larry Edwards (c) vs Jack Havok" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Segment: "Pic-a-nic" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Segment: "Cash makes it happen" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Match: "The James Gang vs The New Untouchables & Jeff Andrews" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Segment: "No pleasure" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Match: "The Brothers Gluck (c) vs Night Riders" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Segment: "Iowa calling" - Written by oldlinejeff.

Match: "Todderick Davenport III (c) vs Graysie Parker vs Kirsty McKinney vs Eric Dane, Jr." - Written by oldlinejeff.

Results Compiled by the eFed Management Suite