Crossing Lines: Crossing Lines 2026

Promotion: Championship Wrestling Federation
Date: October 16, 2026
Location: The O2 — London, UK

Results

The Initials That Bleed Forever

Segment

The broadcast begins not with music, fireworks, or even a view of the arena.

It begins with a voice.

JIM GUNT: “Twenty-six years.”

A pause.

JIM GUNT: “That's a long time to do anything.”

The screen shows a close-up of a hand placing an old CWF event ticket onto a wooden desk. The paper is worn at the edges, the ink fading. A date from the company's early years is visible, though the camera never lingers long enough to make out the details.

JIM GUNT: “Twenty-six years of packed arenas and empty buildings. Of champions who became legends, legends who became memories, and memories that somehow found their way back through the curtain when nobody thought they'd ever see them again.”

Another ticket lands on the desk.

JIM GUNT: “Twenty-six years of people promising that tonight would be the night everything changed.”

A third ticket.

JIM GUNT: “And now, here we are.”

The camera pulls back.

The desk belongs to an empty office. There are photographs on the walls, championship plaques on shelves, and a large CWF logo mounted behind the chair. A framed photograph of the company's earliest days sits beside a much newer picture of the Wrestle Fest V main event. Between them, someone has placed a photograph from the 2326 era: a reminder of a future that should never have existed, and a history that nobody in CWF can simply erase.

The chair is empty.

On the desk, beneath the tickets, lies a single sheet of paper.

At the top, in bold type, are the words:

LAST CALL — DECEMBER 11, 2026

The camera holds there.

Then the sound of a telephone ringing breaks the silence.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

The shot changes to an empty CWF hallway. The telephone is sitting on a production crate, its receiver connected to nothing. It rings again.

And then, from somewhere beyond the camera, a man's voice speaks.

J. RISH: “You weren't supposed to find out like that.”

The telephone stops ringing.

The screen cuts to black.

For the first time, the opening music begins—not the bombastic theme of a wrestling event, but a restrained instrumental arrangement built around a slow, steady drumbeat. As it builds, footage begins to appear in fragments.

Jaiden Rishel standing alone in the CWF office after legally reclaiming the company.

Angelica, once known as the Hacker, staring down at a championship in the aftermath of Digital Aftershock.

The Sheriff removing the disguise that concealed the face of J. Rish, the man Jaiden believed had died in a car accident all those years ago.

Jaiden's face as the truth becomes impossible to deny.

The shot freezes before he can speak.

MIKE ROLASH: “You know, Jim, I have spent a very long time learning to keep my mouth shut when the camera is rolling.”

JIM GUNT: “That's debatable.”

MIKE ROLASH: “And yet, somehow, this company has managed to produce a story so complicated that even I don't know what I'm supposed to say.”

The footage continues showing The Hacker's reveal as Angelica. The Amoralists. The collapse of the future that had swallowed CWF whole. The return to 2026. The company reclaimed. The man who thought his father was dead discovering that the man behind the Sheriff badge was very much alive.

MIKE ROLASH: “J. Rish founded CWF. He helped create HVW. His son spent years believing he'd lost him. And now he's back, wearing a cowboy hat and a badge, running around Texas like he owns the place.”

JIM GUNT: “He may have had a hand in creating both companies, Mike, but he doesn't own this one. Jaiden Rishel does. And whatever personal questions remain between father and son, Jaiden has made his decision about CWF's future.”

The screen changes to Jaiden standing behind his office desk, the CWF logo behind him.

JIM GUNT: “He's taking the company through its final months. Three more editions of Infernalia. One final event. Last Call, December eleventh.”

MIKE ROLASH: “Which means we have four shows left after tonight, and I still haven't figured out whether I'm supposed to buy a Christmas present for the man who ruined my life or the man who might have ruined my life in a different timeline.”

JIM GUNT: “You could start by buying yourself a personality.”

MIKE ROLASH: “I had one. The company changed ownership.”

The music swells as the montage shifts away from the personal revelations and toward the ring. A series of images

flashes across the screen: Caledonia standing victorious after a hard-fought battle; Danny B raising the World Heavyweight Championship; MJ Flair and Wade Moor exchanging blows; Jared Holmes holding the Paramount Championship aloft; Christian Patrick with the Chaos Championship; Adam Hansen and Lex Collins standing together with the CWF Tag Team titles.

Then the footage stops on a single image.

Danny B and Caledonia, standing on opposite sides of the ring during the final moments of Infernalia 13.

JIM GUNT: “And that brings us to tonight.”

The screen splits into two halves. On the left, Danny B stands with the World Heavyweight Championship. On the right, Caledonia stares back at him.

JIM GUNT: “The Ripper has spent weeks insisting that the world has conspired to keep him from the recognition he deserves. Two Golden Intentions victories. A championship won from Gordy King at Wrestle Fest V. And a growing list of people who have found a way to get under his skin.”

MIKE ROLASH: “To be fair, Jim, Danny B could find a conspiracy in a complimentary breakfast. Give him a free croissant and he'll wonder why it wasn't a full English.”

JIM GUNT: “But Caledonia has beaten him. Her husband, Dan Highlander, has beaten him. And at Crossing Lines, she gets another opportunity to do something nobody can accomplish with a three-count.”

The image changes to the words:

I QUIT.

JIM GUNT: “Tonight, the World Heavyweight Championship will be defended in an I Quit match. There will be no disqualification to hide behind, no count-out to escape through, and no victory by pinfall. One competitor must force the other to say the words.”

MIKE ROLASH: “And if Danny B is right about everyone being against him, he's about to find out just how lonely it can get when there are no excuses left.”

The montage begins moving faster. Dangerous Dan's face. Jace Parker Davidson's glare.

The Regulators standing with their championships. Fire & Ice and Unstoppable Force. An empty fourth space in the match graphic.

Mark Carlton looking toward the entrance ramp. The many faces of Mia Rayne flickering across the screen.

Christian Patrick's Chaos Championship. Paul Freedom! grinning beneath the lights.

Jared Holmes adjusting his jeweled mask. MJ Flair standing across from him.

The final image is the CWF World Heavyweight Championship, hanging alone in the center of the screen.

Then the image fractures into six separate pieces.

Each piece shows a different match graphic.

Each piece represents another fight.

And every one of them leads to the same date.

OCTOBER 16, 2026.

The music cuts out.

For a moment, the screen shows nothing but the Crossing Lines logo.

Then the logo expands, filling the screen in silver and crimson.

CWF CROSSING LINES

RIVALRIES END. ENEMIES ARE BORN.

The arena feed cuts in and the O2 Arena is already shaking. Thousands of fans fill the building, waving signs, chanting, and standing shoulder to shoulder beneath the enormous lighting rig. The camera sweeps over the crowd, catching handmade signs that reflect both the night's matches and the strange, bittersweet reality of the final months of CWF.

One reads: “26 YEARS. ONE LAST RIDE.”

Another: “J. RISH OWES JAIDEN THE TRUTH.”

Another: “CALEDONIA WILL NOT QUIT.”

And, held high above the floor, a sign that simply says: “DON'T LET IT END.”

Pyrotechnics fire across the stage in a wall of silver, red, and gold. Flames shoot upward as fireworks cascade from the rafters, and the Crossing Lines logo bursts onto the massive video wall.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

The crowd rises to its feet as the camera races down the ramp, circles the ring, and finally settles at the commentary desk, where Jim Gunt sits upright with a stack of notes in front of him and Mike Rolash is already waving at a fan holding a sign that appears to depict him as a cartoon peacock.

JIM GUNT: “LONDON!”

The response is deafening.

JIM GUNT: “WELCOME TO CWF CROSSING LINES!”

The crowd erupts again.

JIM GUNT: “We are live from the O2 Arena in London, England, and tonight, the Championship Wrestling Federation brings you one of the most consequential events in its twenty-six-year history!”

MIKE ROLASH: “Listen to this place! London has turned out in force, Jim! I haven't heard a building this loud since the last time somebody told me I was being replaced.”

JIM GUNT: “That was last Tuesday.”

MIKE ROLASH: “And I have been loud ever since.”

The crowd laughs as the camera pulls back to reveal the full arena.

JIM GUNT: “Six matches are scheduled tonight, and every one of them has something significant at stake. We begin with Dangerous Dan against Jace Parker Davidson, a match that could have enormous implications for both men as CWF moves toward its final event.”

MIKE ROLASH: “Dangerous Dan has been on a rough stretch lately, Jim. He has been beaten, battered, and pushed to the edge. He's even said that his next loss in CWF will be his last. I don't know if that's a threat, a promise, or a cry for help, but Jace Parker Davidson is not the man I'd want to meet when my career is hanging by a thread.”

JIM GUNT: “And then we have the CWF Tag Team Championship Alliance Standard Match. The Regulators—Adam Hansen and Lex Collins—defend against Fire & Ice, Unstoppable Force, and a mystery team whose identity remains unknown.”

MIKE ROLASH: “Four teams, one championship, and absolutely no guarantee that the champions will even know who

they're fighting until the bell rings. I love it. Nothing says professional wrestling like not knowing who's about to ruin your evening."

JIM GUNT: "The mystery surrounding that fourth team has brought speculation from CWF, HVW, UPRISING, and beyond. We could see familiar faces. We could see new ones. We could even see someone we thought we'd never see again."

MIKE ROLASH: "Or it could be four people who wandered in from the wrong entrance. It happens. This is London. The traffic is terrible."

JIM GUNT: "Next, a deeply personal grudge match. Mia and the Menagerie—every personality that has shaped Mia Rayne's life, including Amelia and Loki—against Mark Carlton."

The crowd responds to the names.

JIM GUNT: "Mark Carlton has been drawn into a conflict that is as unpredictable as it is dangerous. Tonight, he won't simply be fighting one opponent. He'll be facing a collection of identities, each with its own history and its own reasons to fight."

MIKE ROLASH: "I struggle to manage one personality before my morning coffee, Jim. Mark has signed up to deal with the entire committee."

JIM GUNT: "Then we have the CWF Chaos Championship. Christian Patrick defends against Paul Freedom!, with the stipulation to be announced at showtime."

MIKE ROLASH: "Which means Christian has spent the last two weeks preparing for a match without knowing what kind of match it is. Very reassuring for the champion."

JIM GUNT: "The Chaos Championship was created to embrace the unpredictable, and tonight, it may live up to its name more than ever."

MIKE ROLASH: "I just hope the stipulation isn't something that requires me to get involved. I have a strict no-contact clause with anything involving Paul Freedom!"

JIM GUNT: "You have a no-contact clause with the catering staff."

MIKE ROLASH: "And look how well that's worked out."

Another round of laughter rises from the crowd.

JIM GUNT: "The CWF Paramount Championship is also on the line. Jared Holmes defends against MJ Flair, a former two-time CWF World Champion who has fought her way back into contention and now has the opportunity to reclaim championship gold."

MIKE ROLASH: "Jared calls himself the Peacock King. MJ Flair has made a career out of proving that reputations don't win matches. And if Jared thinks that jeweled mask is going to protect him from a woman who has already conquered this company twice, he might want to invest in a helmet."

JIM GUNT: "And then, in our main event, the CWF World Heavyweight Championship will be defended in an I Quit match. The Ripper, Danny B, puts the title on the line against Caledonia."

The crowd erupts at the announcement.

JIM GUNT: "Their history is already complicated. Caledonia defeated Danny B shortly before Wrestle Fest V. Danny went on to win the World Championship from Gordy King, but the questions surrounding his reign have never stopped. Caledonia's husband, Dan Highlander, then defeated Danny at HVW's Crown of Legends. Now the two meet again, with the World Championship and their pride on the line."

MIKE ROLASH: “And Danny has made it very clear that he wants Caledonia to quit. Not lose. Not tap out. Not get counted out. He wants to hear her say it.”

JIM GUNT: “Caledonia, meanwhile, has made it equally clear that she's not afraid of him. And after their final confrontation on Infernalia, both competitors know exactly what's waiting for them in London.”

The camera zooms toward the ring.

JIM GUNT: “Six matches. Seven championships and title implications woven throughout the card. Representatives from our affiliate promotions. The possibility of unexpected appearances. And the knowledge that every event from here on out brings us closer to December eleventh.”

Jim takes a breath and looks directly into the camera.

JIM GUNT: “CWF has given us twenty-six years of moments. Tonight, it gives us another one.”

MIKE ROLASH: “And, Jim, for the record, if anybody from management is listening, I would like to formally request that my contract be extended beyond December.”

JIM GUNT: “You have a contract?”

MIKE ROLASH: “I have a very convincing-looking piece of paper.”

JIM GUNT: “That explains a great deal.”

The crowd laughs again as the arena lights dim slightly as the Crossing Lines logo fills the screen.

JIM GUNT: “London, the wait is over. The road to Last Call continues tonight, but before CWF reaches its final chapter, there are rivalries to settle, championships to defend, and questions that can no longer be left unanswered.”

Jim rises slightly from his chair, his voice growing stronger.

JIM GUNT: “For twenty-six years, CWF has been a place where the impossible became possible, where the forgotten found their way back, and where the past never stayed buried for long.”

The camera cuts briefly to the stage, then returns to Jim.

JIM GUNT: “Tonight, we find out what happens when the past finally catches up with the present.”

Mike adjusts his headset and leans toward the camera.

MIKE ROLASH: “And if the past is anything like J. Rish, I recommend we all keep our car insurance up to date.”

JIM GUNT: “Mike.”

MIKE ROLASH: “What? The man has a history of dramatic entrances.”

Jim shakes his head, smiling despite himself.

JIM GUNT: “Ladies and gentlemen, this is CWF Crossing Lines!”

The crowd roars.

JIM GUNT: “AND WE ARE UNDERWAY!”

The Crossing Lines logo fills the screen one final time.

CWF CROSSING LINES

October 16, 2026 — The O2 Arena — London, England.

The opening match graphic appears.

OPENING MATCH

DANGEROUS DAN vs. JACE PARKER DAVIDSON

The camera swings toward the entranceway as the first competitors prepare to make their way to the ring. The final stretch of CWF begins in London.

Dangerous Dan vs. Jace Parker Davidson

Match

The opening bell of Crossing Lines has yet to sound, and already the O2 Arena is on its feet. Thousands of fans pack the London venue, their voices rolling across the arena as the camera sweeps over signs, waving flags, and a crowd ready to see CWF begin its final stretch of events. The match graphic appears across the screen, showing Dangerous Dan on one side and the imposing, eyepatched figure of Jace Parker Davidson on the other. Beneath their names, the stipulation hangs over the contest like a threat: DANGEROUS DAN’S CWF CAREER IS ON THE LINE.

Jim Gunt: “Welcome to Crossing Lines, everybody! We are live from the O2 Arena in London, England, and what a way to open this monumental night! Dangerous Dan has been part of CWF for years, he has held championships here, he has won Golden Intentions, and he has given this company some unforgettable moments. But tonight, Mike, all of that history could come to an end before we even reach our second match!”

Mike Rolash: “I would have opened with a nice video package, maybe a celebrity appearance, a little champagne. Instead, we're kicking things off with a man who has publicly announced that the next time he loses a CWF match, he's going to pack his bags and go home. That's a lot of pressure to put on the opening contest, Jim.”

Jim Gunt: “And his opponent is no stranger to pressure. Jace Parker Davidson has spent more than fifteen years making a career out of winning under circumstances that would break most men. He's a former HVW No Limits Champion, a two-time Hall of Famer elsewhere, and a man who has made a name for himself by doing whatever it takes to get his hand raised.”

Mike Rolash: “He's also got an eyepatch, and a mean streak a mile wide That is a pretty complete package if you ask me.”

The lights around the O2 Arena begin to dim, and the opening notes of “Enemy” by Imagine Dragons roll through the building. Red and blue lights flash across the stage as the crowd rises in anticipation. Dangerous Dan emerges through the entranceway, his expression focused, his eyes moving across the enormous audience. His brother, Crazy Chris, walks alongside him, offering a few words of encouragement before Dan turns toward the ring.

Dan takes a moment to absorb the reception. He has been through championship victories, humiliating defeats, and enough twists in his career to fill several lifetimes. The cheers are loud, but he doesn't immediately play to them. He looks down the long aisle toward the ring, then glances back at Chris, who gives him a firm pat on the shoulder.

Jim Gunt: “Look at Dan's face, Mike. He's not treating this like another match on the card. He knows exactly what he's risking tonight.”

Mike Rolash: “I should hope so. He announced the retirement stipulation himself. It's a little late to pretend he didn't read the fine print.”

Dan starts down the aisle, slapping hands with the fans along the barricades. A few reach over to touch his shoulder as he passes, and he acknowledges them with brief nods. At ringside, he pauses to look up at the CWF logo hanging above the entrance side of the arena. His eyes linger for a moment before he turns and climbs the steel steps.

He enters the ring, climbs onto the nearest turnbuckle, and raises both arms as the crowd answers with another surge of noise. Dan brings his hands together above his head, then drops to the canvas and turns toward the hard camera. He mouths a few words along with the final refrain of his music before backing into his corner. Crazy Chris remains at ringside, leaning over the barricade and shouting encouragement as Dan rolls his shoulders and waits.

Joey Garcia: “Ladies and gentlemen, the following contest is scheduled for one fall! Introducing first, from Smithville, Tennessee, weighing in at two hundred and twenty-five pounds… DANGEROUS DAAAAAN!”

The applause rolls on, but Dan's attention shifts toward the stage as his music fades. A few seconds of silence follow before a burst of smoke spills across the entranceway. The lights drop, and a voice cuts through the darkness.

“CAUSE I'MA, I'MA… VILLAIN!”

“VILLAIN” by Ekoh and Vin Jay erupts from the speakers. Jace Parker Davidson steps through the smoke, the former HVW No Limits Champion wearing his black eyepatch over his damaged right eye. He pauses on the stage and gives the London crowd a crooked smile as the boos begin. He doesn't appear bothered by the reception. If anything, he seems pleased that the audience has already decided what it thinks of him.

Jace raises his arms as pyro fires along both sides of the stage, then lowers them and runs a hand through his hair. He exchanges a few quiet words before he starts down the aisle. Davidson walks with a deliberate confidence, his eyes fixed on the ring and his opponent. There is no wasted motion, no detour to acknowledge the crowd. He has come to make a statement in his CWF debut, and he intends to do it at Dan's expense.

Jim Gunt: “What a debut this could be for Jace Parker Davidson. A win over a decorated CWF veteran on a major pay-per-view, and he would have done it by ending that veteran's career.”

Mike Rolash: “It's almost too convenient. Jace gets a big win, Dan gets to leave wrestling, and everybody gets to stop listening to Dan announce his retirement every time he loses a match.”

Jim Gunt: “That's a pretty heartless way to look at it.”

Mike Rolash: “It's a pretty practical way to look at it. And if Jace is as smart as everyone says he is, he'll recognize that Dan has a lot more to lose tonight than he does.”

Jace reaches ringside and steps onto the apron. He enters the ring and kneels in the center of the canvas and spreads his arms in a theatrical pose, drawing another round of boos. He rises and looks across at Dan, who has already stepped out of his corner.

Joey Garcia: “And his opponent, making his CWF debut tonight! From Denver, Colorado, weighing in at two hundred and fifty-four pounds… THE VILLAIN… JACE PARKER DAVIDSON!”

Jace's smile widens as he hears his introduction. Trent Robbins steps between the two men and delivers his final instructions, making it clear that he will not tolerate either competitor ignoring his commands. Dan nods and backs away. Jace does the same, though he waits until Robbins turns slightly before making a show of wiping his boots on the canvas, as if the official's instructions have bored him.

Jim Gunt: “There's the bell! Dangerous Dan's CWF career is on the line, and we are underway at Crossing Lines!”

Dan circles cautiously, keeping his hands up. Jace doesn't rush him. The larger man studies Dan's footwork, shifting his weight and watching for any sign of a preferred angle. Dan feints toward the left, then reaches for a collar-and-elbow tie-up. Jace catches him with a sharp knee to the midsection before the lock can settle, doubles him over, and clubs him across the upper back with a forearm. Dan staggers toward the ropes, and Davidson follows with a second forearm that sends him chest-first across the top strand.

Jim Gunt: “Jace Davidson wasting absolutely no time! He catches Dan coming in and immediately takes the fight to

him!”

Mike Rolash: “That's what experience looks like. Dan wanted to feel him out, see what kind of wrestler he was dealing with. Jace has decided that the best way to answer that question is to hit him in the back of the head.”

Robbins orders Jace away from the ropes. Davidson raises both hands, backing off just enough to satisfy the referee, then steps back in and drives a boot into Dan's ribs as he tries to straighten. Jace pulls Dan away from the ropes by the wrist and whips him across the ring. Dan rebounds, ducks beneath a clothesline, and turns back with a quick forearm to the jaw. The shot catches Davidson cleanly, but Jace barely gives ground. He answers with a brutal body shot, then a short elbow that drops Dan to one knee.

Davidson grabs Dan by the back of the head and drags him upright. He snaps him down with a heavy snapmare, then drives a knee between his shoulder blades before hauling him back up again. Dan tries to swing, but Jace catches the arm, twists behind him, and plants a boot against the back of Dan's leg. The veteran drops to one knee, and Jace drives a forearm into the back of his neck, sending him face-first to the mat.

Jim Gunt: “This is exactly the kind of physical punishment Jace Parker Davidson is known for. He isn't just throwing strikes to look impressive; he's attacking the back, the neck, the legs. He's taking away the parts of Dan's game that allow him to fly around this ring.”

Mike Rolash: “And he's doing it without breaking a sweat. Dan's got a lot of heart, but heart doesn't stop a two-hundred-and-fifty-four-pound man from dropping an elbow into your spine.”

Jace rolls Dan onto his back and drops into a cover, hooking the near leg.

ONE!

TWO—

Dan kicks out. Davidson immediately grabs a handful of hair and pulls him into a seated position, ignoring Robbins' warning. He places a forearm across Dan's face and wrenches backward, using his weight to keep Dan from getting his feet beneath him. Dan reaches for the ropes, but Jace drags him away from them and transitions into a grounded head-and-arm hold, pressing his knee against Dan's shoulder to limit his movement.

The crowd tries to rally behind the former Paramount Champion, chanting his name as he works to turn onto his side. Jace keeps his grip tight, then uses a sudden shift in leverage to roll Dan onto his stomach. He steps over the legs and pulls back on one of Dan's ankles, twisting it while keeping his other hand braced against Dan's lower back.

Jim Gunt: “Davidson has changed targets now, and Dan is in trouble. He has been unable to establish any rhythm offensively, and every time he tries to move, Jace has another answer waiting for him.”

Mike Rolash: “Dan's used to creating space. He needs a little room, a little momentum, and then he can turn a match around in the blink of an eye. Jace is making sure he gets none of those things. It's a very rude way to introduce yourself to a new company, but it is effective.”

Dan grimaces and reaches forward, inching toward the ropes. Jace leans back, forcing him to crawl on his elbows. The veteran stretches a hand toward the bottom strand, but Davidson releases the ankle just long enough to pull him backward by the waist. He rolls Dan onto his back and drives a knee into his abdomen before folding him into a tight cover.

ONE!

TWO—

Dan gets a shoulder up. Jace's expression tightens before he nods once and pulls Dan up by the wrist. He whips him toward the corner, follows close behind, and crushes him with a running forearm. Dan stumbles out of the turnbuckles,

and Davidson hooks him around the waist, lifting him just enough to drive him down with a hard spinebuster. The ring shakes on impact. Jace doesn't bother to pose; he rolls Dan onto his side and immediately traps him in a grounded chinlock, one arm under the jaw and the other locked behind the head.

Jim Gunt: “Spinebuster from Davidson, and right back to the hold! He is deliberately refusing to give Dan any chance to build momentum!”

Mike Rolash: “He's treating this like a job. There's a problem in front of him, and he's working through it. No speeches, no staring at the crowd, no wasting time. I hate how much I respect it.”

Dan fights to his knees, forcing Jace to adjust his grip. Davidson plants his feet and wrenches the hold tighter, but Dan drives an elbow into his ribs. Once. Twice. A third elbow loosens the grip enough for Dan to push up to his feet. He turns, shoving Jace toward the ropes, and follows with a sudden burst of offense—a forearm to the jaw, a second to the chest, and a sharp kick to the midsection. Davidson tries to answer with a clothesline, but Dan ducks and springs off the ropes.

Jim Gunt: “Dan's out of the hold! Dangerous Dan finally has some room to move!”

Dan rebounds with a leaping snap hurricanrana, using Jace's forward momentum to send the larger man flipping onto his back. The crowd explodes as Dan rolls through to his feet. Davidson rises unsteadily, and Dan charges in with a running clothesline that finally knocks him down. Dan hits the ropes again, leaps, and drives a knee into Jace's chest before rolling into a cover.

ONE!

TWO—

Jace kicks out, but Dan is already moving. He grabs Davidson by the wrist and pulls him toward the corner. Jace tries to shove him away, only for Dan to plant a boot against the middle rope and spring backward into a diving DDT. The move spikes Davidson onto the canvas, and the O2 Arena rises as Dan hooks the leg again.

ONE!

TWO—

Davidson gets a shoulder up at the last moment.

Jim Gunt: “That was close! Dan has found the openings he needed, and suddenly Jace Parker Davidson is the one struggling to keep up!”

Mike Rolash: “Don't get carried away. Jace has been in fights where the other man brought a weapon, a grudge, and a personal invitation to his funeral. A couple of high-flying moves aren't going to scare him off.”

Dan gets to his feet, breathing harder now, but the energy from the crowd seems to carry him forward. He waits for Jace to rise and catches him with a kick to the stomach. Dan hooks the head, swings around, and plants him with a Twist of Fate. Davidson hits the mat, and Dan drops beside him, looking toward the turnbuckle. He knows he needs something decisive. He knows that a near fall is not enough—not with his career on the line.

Dan climbs the ropes, one hand gripping the top strand as he steadies himself. The crowd begins to rise in anticipation. Jace rolls onto his side, then onto his stomach, trying to pull himself away from the corner. Dan launches from the ropes with a diving elbow aimed at the back of Davidson's neck—but Jace moves at the last possible instant. Dan lands hard on the canvas, and the impact sends him rolling onto his side.

Jim Gunt: “Dan misses! Davidson was playing possum, and that may be the opening he was waiting for!”

Jace is up before Dan can recover. He catches the veteran as he rises and drives a knee into his ribs, then whips him

into the ropes. Dan rebounds into a massive spinebuster that leaves him flat on his back. Davidson drops beside him and hooks the leg with both arms, putting his weight across Dan's chest.

ONE!

TWO—

Dan kicks out. Davidson doesn't argue the count. He simply sits up, exhales through his nose, and pulls Dan toward the center of the ring.

Mike Rolash: “There's the difference. Jace doesn't need to panic when a move doesn't finish the match. He just finds the next thing that might.”

Jim Gunt: “But Dan has survived everything thrown at him so far, and the crowd is right behind him. Every second that goes by, this building is getting louder!”

Davidson grabs Dan's right arm and twists it behind his back, then drops his weight across the shoulder to force him down. Dan tries to crawl forward, but Jace threads his arm around Dan's head and cinches in a tight grounded submission, dragging the veteran's upper body backward while trapping one of his legs between his own. The hold is ugly, practical, and difficult to escape. Dan's face tightens as Jace pulls back, and Robbins drops beside them to ask whether he wants to submit.

Dan shakes his head immediately. He plants a palm against the canvas and tries to push himself upright, but Davidson leans into the hold, dragging him back down. Dan tries again, this time getting one knee beneath him. Jace adjusts, using his long reach to lock Dan's head against his chest. The crowd claps in rhythm, trying to help the veteran find another gear.

Jim Gunt: “Dan is fighting with everything he's got, but Davidson has him trapped. This is a dangerous position to be in when your opponent is as methodical as Jace Parker Davidson.”

Mike Rolash: “Dan needs to stop trying to win the match and start trying to escape the hold. That's how submissions work, Jim. You don't win an argument with a man who's got your neck in his arms.”

Dan finally gets to his feet, still bent forward with Jace clinging to him. He drives backward into the corner, forcing Davidson's back into the turnbuckles. The impact loosens the grip, but Jace refuses to let go. Dan slams him into the corner a second time, then a third, and the hold finally breaks. Davidson staggers out, and Dan catches him with a desperate forearm to the jaw.

Dan stumbles away, sucking in a breath, and Jace follows him. The Villain swings a heavy elbow, but Dan ducks beneath it and turns behind him. He catches Davidson around the waist, attempting to lift him for a German suplex. Jace blocks the lift with a wide stance and drives an elbow backward into Dan's ribs. Dan keeps his grip, trying to muscle the larger man backward, but Jace stamps down on his foot and wrenches free.

Davidson turns with a knee aimed at Dan's stomach. Dan catches the leg against his side, keeping Jace balanced on one foot. He tries to shove him away, but Jace hops forward, swinging his free leg to regain his footing. Dan pivots to avoid the incoming strike, and the two men collide awkwardly in the narrow space between them.

Dan's shoulder catches Jace's chest as Davidson tries to turn. Their momentum carries them sideways, and Dan instinctively reaches out to keep himself upright. His forearm catches Trent Robbins squarely across the upper body, sending the referee stumbling backward. Robbins' feet tangle beneath him, and he crashes to the canvas, striking the side of his head on the way down.

Jim Gunt: “OH! TRENT ROBBINS IS DOWN! Dan was trying to keep Jace from getting back at him, and the referee has been caught in the collision!”

Mike Rolash: “That's not ideal! Especially when you're trying to win a match and the only man authorized to count to three is currently seeing stars!”

Dan immediately drops to one knee beside Robbins, calling out to him and tapping his shoulder. He looks genuinely alarmed, checking to see whether the official is responsive. Jace, meanwhile, backs into the ropes and takes a second to assess the situation. He sees Dan's attention fixed on the referee and the recognition comes to him immediately. He steps in behind Dan, grabs him by the shoulder, and yanks him upright. Dan turns, still trying to understand what has happened, and Davidson drives a vicious knee into his midsection. He hooks Dan's head, pulls him forward, and snaps him down with a brutal DDT.

Dan hits the canvas hard. Jace rolls him onto his back, then stands over him with the confidence of a man who knows exactly what he has done. He backs away two steps, measuring the distance, and bursts forward with The Beheading—a running elbow strike that crashes into the side of Dan's head and neck. The impact sends Dan sprawling onto his back.

Jim Gunt: “THE BEHEADING! DAVIDSON JUST DROVE THAT ELBOW INTO DAN'S NECK! HE COULD HAVE HIM HERE!”

Jace drops into the cover, hooking Dan's leg and pressing his chest across the veteran's shoulders. He looks toward Robbins, waiting for the count.

Nothing.

Davidson turns his head. Robbins remains down, one arm stretched across the canvas. Jace slaps the mat once in frustration and looks toward the official, then toward Lexus. He pounds the canvas again, demanding a count that isn't coming.

Mike Rolash: “You have got to be kidding me! He hit the move, he's got the cover, and now he's got to wait for the referee to remember what year it is!”

Jim Gunt: “There is no count! Jace has every right to be furious, but he cannot declare himself the winner. The official has to be able to make the decision!”

Jace rises from the cover and steps over Dan, gesturing sharply at Robbins to get up. When the official doesn't respond, Davidson bends down and grabs him by the front of his shirt, giving him a rough shake. Robbins groans, but his eyes remain unfocused. Jace releases him with a disgusted shove and turns back toward Dan, who has begun to stir.

Davidson pulls Dan upright and traps him against his chest. Dan tries to fight back with a weak forearm, but Jace absorbs it, drives a knee into his stomach, and hooks him for the Godslayer. He lifts Dan into position, rotates him through the devastating maneuver, and drives him down onto the canvas. Dan bounces off the mat and rolls onto his side, clutching at his neck.

Jace looks down at him for a moment, then glances toward the fallen referee. He knows he has Dan beaten. The only question is whether Robbins will wake up in time to make it official.

The crowd begins to stir with a different kind of noise. It starts as a commotion near the entrance-side barricade, a few scattered boos and shouts that grow louder as people rise from their seats. Jace turns toward the disturbance, annoyed at first, then visibly irritated when he sees a group of figures moving through the audience and climbing over the barricade.

Jim Gunt: “Wait a minute! What is going on over there? We've got people coming through the crowd!”

Mike Rolash: “Oh, no. No, no, no. I recognize those colors, and I recognize those faces. This is not what this match

needs right now."

The first to reach ringside is the HVW World Champion, "The Diamond Princess" Danielle Page, her championship held high as she marches toward the ring with the cold confidence of someone who believes the entire building should make way for her. At her side is Christopher $t. James, his expression twisted into a sneer. Close behind them are HVW Territory Champion Queen Bianca Davis, Simple Simon, and Max Walker. The five members of HOSTILITY move with purpose, and the boos become deafening as they surround the ring.

Jim Gunt: "HOSTILITY! Danielle Page has brought a full contingent of her group here to Crossing Lines! Christopher $t. James, Queen Bianca Davis, Simple Simon, Max Walker—what business do they have interfering in this match?"

Mike Rolash: "The kind of business that usually ends with somebody getting hurt and Danielle Page telling the world it was all part of her master plan!"

Jace stands near the ropes, staring down at the group. His irritation gives way to a sharp, calculating look. He gestures for them to get in the ring, as if daring them to try. Davidson has never been a man who backs away from a fight, and even with Dan down behind him, he squares his shoulders and waits.

Danielle steps onto the apron and climbs through the ropes. The others follow, spreading out around Jace. Davidson immediately swings at Christopher $t. James, catching him with a forearm that sends him stumbling backward. He turns and drives a boot into Max Walker's midsection, then shoves him into Simple Simon. The crowd erupts as Jace begins throwing punches, refusing to let the numbers intimidate him.

Jim Gunt: "Jace Parker Davidson is fighting back! He's taking on HOSTILITY by himself, and he's not giving them an inch!"

Mike Rolash: "He's got five people in that ring, Jim! Five! That's not a fight; that's a committee meeting with violence!"

Queen Bianca lunges at Jace from the side, but he turns and catches her with a hard forearm across the chest, forcing her back into the ropes. Danielle tries to grab him from behind, and Davidson throws an elbow that catches her on the shoulder. He turns to Christopher $t. James and lands another shot, then drives Max Walker down with a short clothesline. For a brief moment, the Villain has the ring in chaos, and the fans are roaring at the sight of one man refusing to fold.

But HOSTILITY has the numbers, and they know it. Simple Simon grabs Jace around the waist from behind, holding him in place long enough for Christopher $t. James to drive a knee into his ribs. Max Walker follows with a heavy right hand, and Danielle catches Davidson with a forearm to the jaw. Jace stumbles, but he stays on his feet, swinging wildly enough to force the group to give him space.

Bianca steps forward and drives her shoulder into Jace's midsection, pushing him backward. Davidson catches himself against the ropes and lashes out with a boot that catches her in the chest. He turns to fight off Christopher, but Max Walker clubs him across the back. Simple Simon grabs Jace's arm, and Danielle steps in with a vicious strike that sends him down to one knee.

Jim Gunt: "They are overwhelming him! Davidson is trying to fight them all off, but HOSTILITY are working together, and they have finally managed to bring him down!"

Mike Rolash: "That's what happens when you mistake being tough for being invincible! Jace has fought some ugly battles in his career, but even he can't fight five people at once while a referee is unconscious!"

Jace tries to rise, swinging a forearm into Max Walker's stomach and shoving Simple Simon away. He gets one foot beneath him, but Christopher $t. James kicks his leg out from under him. Danielle grabs Davidson by the back of the head and drives him face-first into the mat. Jace rolls onto his side, trying to protect himself as the group continues the beating.

The Villain still refuses to lie still. He reaches for the ropes, pulling himself up enough to throw another punch at Christopher. The strike catches its mark, but Bianca immediately stomps down on Jace's arm. Max Walker clubs him across the back, and Simple Simon helps haul him upright. Danielle steps in front of Davidson and says something directly into his face before driving him back down with another hard shot.

Jace drops to the canvas, and for the first time since the bell rang, he is unable to get back up immediately. He rolls onto his stomach and tries to push himself onto his elbows, his good eye fixed on the group surrounding him. HOSTILITY stand over him, satisfied with the damage they've done.

Jim Gunt: “This is disgraceful! Jace Davidson came here to make his CWF debut, and HOSTILITY have turned this match into a five-on-one assault!”

Mike Rolash: “Disgraceful, yes. Surprising? Not even slightly. Danielle Page doesn't walk into a building unless she thinks she can leave with something. Tonight, apparently, what she wants is to make a statement at everybody else's expense.”

Danielle looks down at Jace, then turns her attention to Dangerous Dan, who remains sprawled nearby. She gives Bianca a brief nod. Queen Bianca grabs Dan by the shoulder and rolls him toward Davidson, positioning the barely conscious veteran across Jace's chest. The crowd erupts in furious boos as Bianca shouts toward the corner where Trent Robbins lies.

Queen Bianca Davis: “SIMON! GET THE REFEREE UP! NOW!”

Simple Simon immediately drops beside Robbins and begins shaking him by the shoulder, shouting for him to wake up. Meanwhile, Christopher $t. James gives Jace one final kick to the ribs before stepping back. Max Walker and Bianca retreat toward the ropes, and Danielle Page stands over the scene with her HVW World Championship clutched against her side, watching to make sure the damage has been done.

Jace's arm moves weakly beneath Dan's weight. His face is twisted in pain, and his good eye follows Danielle as she turns toward the ropes. Davidson tries to lift his shoulder, but he cannot get free. Dan remains draped across him, barely aware of where he is or what has happened.

Jim Gunt: “They're putting Dan on top of Jace! Danielle Page is trying to steal this match for Dangerous Dan, and she's doing it after her group has beaten the life out of Jace Parker Davidson!”

Mike Rolash: “I don't think she's doing Dan any favors. If he wakes up and realizes how he won this match, he's going to have a lot of questions. Of course, if he wins, he gets to keep his career. That may be the only question he cares about tonight.”

Simple Simon finally manages to get Robbins moving. The referee rolls onto his side, blinks several times, and tries to push himself upright. Simon backs away quickly, then slips through the ropes to rejoin HOSTILITY. Danielle and the others are already leaving the ring, stepping down to the floor as the crowd's fury follows them up the aisle.

Before they can get far, a fresh wave of cheers breaks out from the opposite side of the arena. Vera Vega and Griffin Hawkins appear at ringside, sprinting toward the ring with their eyes fixed on HOSTILITY. Vera points directly at Danielle, shouting for the group to get away from the ring. Griffin climbs onto the apron, making it clear that the fight is not over if HOSTILITY wants to continue it.

Jim Gunt: “Here come Vera Vega and Griffin Hawkins! They are not going to let HOSTILITY stay in this ring a second longer!”

Danielle backs up with a contemptuous smile, motioning for her group to keep moving. Christopher $t. James shouts something back at Griffin, but Max Walker pulls him along. Bianca holds up her Territory Championship as she retreats, while Simple Simon follows Danielle toward the aisle. Vera and Griffin advance far enough to drive the group

away from the ring, but they don't stop to chase them into the crowd. Their attention returns to the two men lying on the canvas.

Inside the ring, Trent Robbins crawls toward the cover, still shaking the cobwebs from his head. Dan is draped across Jace, his arm lying over Davidson's chest. The official looks at the position, checks that both shoulders are down, and begins the count.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

The bell rings.

For a moment, Dan doesn't move. He lies across Jace, breathing heavily, still unaware that the match has ended. Robbins reaches for his arm and gives him a gentle shake. Dan rolls onto his back, blinking up at the arena lights. The referee raises his hand.

Only then does Dan seem to understand.

Joey Garcia: “Here is your winner… DANGEROUS DAAAAAN!”

The O2 Arena explodes. The sound is immediate and overwhelming, thousands of fans rising to their feet as Dan sits up and stares at Robbins. He looks toward the timekeeper, then toward the crowd, and finally down at Jace Parker Davidson, who remains on the canvas beside him. Dan's expression shifts from confusion to disbelief, and then to an enormous, almost boyish grin.

Jim Gunt: “HE WON! DANGEROUS DAN HAS WON THE OPENING MATCH AT CROSSING LINES! HIS CWF CAREER CONTINUES!”

Mike Rolash: “I don't think he even knows how he did it!”

Jim Gunt: “It doesn't matter how it happened in the record books, Mike! Trent Robbins made the count, the bell rang, and Dangerous Dan has survived! After everything he said about retirement, after telling the world that his next loss would be his last, Dan has just secured another victory in CWF!”

Dan slowly gets to his feet, and Robbins raises his arm once more. Dan looks out across the audience, his smile growing as the fans chant his name. He pumps his fist, slaps the top of the turnbuckle, and lets out a roar of relief. Crazy Chris is at ringside, applauding wildly and shouting toward his brother. Dan leans over the ropes to embrace him, then turns back toward the crowd, who continue to celebrate the victory.

“DAN-NY! DAN-NY! DAN-NY!”

Dan climbs the nearest turnbuckle and raises both arms, soaking in the cheers. He looks as though a weight has been lifted from his shoulders. For a man who came into the arena believing he might be wrestling his final CWF match, the realization that he gets to keep going has hit him all at once. He pounds his chest, points to the CWF logo above the ring, and shouts along with the fans.

Jim Gunt: “Listen to this place! Dangerous Dan came to London with his entire CWF future hanging in the balance, and he is leaving this opening match with a win! The former Paramount Champion is still here, Mike! He's still got a future in this company!”

Mike Rolash: “He's still got a future, and he might want to buy Danielle Page a thank-you card. I'm not saying he should send her flowers, but maybe a nice fruit basket. She did just have her group beat his opponent senseless and place him in a winning position.”

Jim Gunt: “Dan had nothing to do with that attack! He was barely conscious when the count happened!”

Mike Rolash: “I'm not blaming him. I'm just saying that if I were him, I'd be very careful about celebrating too loudly around the people who made it possible.”

Dan's smile fades slightly as he finally notices Jace Parker Davidson lying near his feet. Jace has rolled onto his side and is trying to push himself up, one hand pressed against his ribs, dragging himself up with the ropes. His good eye remains fixed on the aisle where HOSTILITY disappeared.

Dan turns to look in the same direction. He sees Vera Vega and Griffin Hawkins still standing at ringside, watching the departing group. He looks back at Jace, then at the crowd, and the smile returns as the realization sinks in that whatever happened during the final seconds, the official has declared him the winner. His career is safe for another match.

Jace reaches the ropes and pulls himself into a seated position on the apron. He doesn't look at Dan. He doesn't look at the referee. His stare remains locked on the aisle, his jaw clenched as he watches the place where Danielle Page and HOSTILITY vanished. The Villain has made his CWF debut, and he has been left beaten, cheated, and robbed of a chance to finish the match on his own terms.

Inside the ring, Dan climbs the turnbuckle again, raising his arms as the crowd's cheers wash over him. The camera catches his expression: relief, joy, and the renewed determination of a man who has been given another chance to keep fighting. At ringside, Jace finally turns his head toward the ring, watching Dan celebrate with a look of pure fury.

Jim Gunt: “Dangerous Dan survives! The Villain's CWF debut ends in chaos, and HOSTILITY have made their presence felt here in London. We have no idea what Danielle Page was trying to accomplish, but we know this much: neither of these men is going to forget what happened tonight.”

Mike Rolash: “Dan gets to stay, Jace gets a reason to hate half the people in this building, and HOSTILITY gets another night of attention. Somehow, I suspect Danielle Page is perfectly happy with that arrangement.”

Dan stands tall on the turnbuckle, pumping his fist as the crowd continues to chant his name. Jace remains outside the ring, battered and furious, his gaze following HOSTILITY's exit. The first match of Crossing Lines has ended, Dangerous Dan's career is still alive, and the night has already become far more complicated than anyone expected.

Jim Gunt: “Crossing Lines has only just begun, and Dangerous Dan is still a CWF wrestler! What a way to open the show!”

The camera lingers on Dan celebrating in the ring, then cuts to Jace Parker Davidson glaring toward the entrance with Lexus beside him. The Villain's first night in CWF may not have ended the way he wanted, but the look on his face makes one thing clear: this is not going to be the last time he has something to say about HOSTILITY.

The Answers He Was Never Given

Segment

The camera cuts backstage following Dangerous Dan’s hard-fought victory in the opening match of Crossing Lines. The roar of the O2 Arena carries through the corridors of the London venue as the broadcast transitions to the sleek, darkened office of CWF CEO Jaiden Rishel. The Heir to CWF sits behind his desk, dressed in a dark designer jacket over a black shirt, his attention divided between the live monitor displaying the arena and a stack of paperwork he has barely touched.

On the monitor, Dangerous Dan is making his way up the entrance ramp, having secured his CWF career for another

night. Jaiden watches him for several seconds before leaning back in his chair and letting out a quiet breath.

Jaiden Rishel: "You know, for a guy who's spent a good portion of his career making my life difficult, Dangerous Dan has a remarkable talent for making me proud of him when it counts."

Jaiden gives a faint, almost reluctant smile.

Jaiden Rishel: "Congratulations, Dan. Seriously. You've earned another night here, and I'm happy to see you still fighting. We've had our disagreements. We've had our history. But when somebody walks into this company and puts everything on the line just to keep doing what they love, I'm not going to pretend I don't respect that."

His smile fades as he glances toward another monitor, where footage from the earlier stages of Crossing Lines is cycling through the evening's highlights. Jaiden leans forward, resting his forearms on the desk.

Jaiden Rishel: "Now, with that out of the way, I have a message for a certain group of people who apparently think that because they've made themselves comfortable over in Heroes & Villains Wrestling, they can just wander into my building whenever they damn well please."

His eyes narrow.

Jaiden Rishel: "HOSTILITY. Let me make something perfectly clear. This is not your show. This is not your federation. And not one of you was invited to be here tonight. I don't care how many championships you hold over there, how many people you have under your thumb, or how important you think you are. You're guests in a building that belongs to CWF, and I expect you to conduct yourselves accordingly."

He pauses, tapping a finger against the desk before his expression becomes noticeably more complicated.

Jaiden Rishel: "And apparently, I'm going to have to have a conversation with my..."

He stops. The word seems to catch in his throat.

Jaiden Rishel: "...father."

Jaiden looks down at the desk, shaking his head slightly as though he still hasn't quite come to terms with the fact that he can say that word and mean a man he watched the world mourn. When he looks up again, the frustration in his expression has been replaced by something more personal.

Jaiden Rishel: "You know what the funny thing is? For years, I thought I understood everything there was to know about that man. We had our differences. We had our arguments. There were things we said to each other that neither of us can take back. And then I got a phone call from him in Portland, Maine, telling me the world was about to end, and I didn't listen."

He swallows, his eyes briefly drifting toward the floor.

Jaiden Rishel: "Then came the accident. The gunshots. The footage. The grave. The future he warned me about becoming the world we were forced to live in. And I spent all that time believing my father was dead, only to find out he'd been standing right in front of me under a cowboy hat and a fake face."

Jaiden lets out a humorless laugh, rubbing his hands together.

Jaiden Rishel: "Now he's alive. He's running another wrestling company. He's calling himself The Sheriff. And apparently, he's got an entire lifetime of explanations that he still hasn't given his own son."

He leans closer to the camera, his voice growing firmer.

Jaiden Rishel: "And after what happened in Beeville, Texas, last Saturday, I think we've all heard enough promises about answers that never actually come. He was standing in that ring, finally explaining what happened in Portland, finally getting to the part where he might tell us why he disappeared and why he became The Sheriff..."

Jaiden's jaw tightens.

Jaiden Rishel: "...and then Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca walked through the curtain and everything stopped."

He sits back, staring directly into the lens.

Jaiden Rishel: "So here's what I want you to understand. I'm not asking for answers anymore. I'm not waiting for another convenient moment. And I'm certainly not going to let another person decide when I'm allowed to know the truth about my own family."

He rises from his chair and straightens his jacket.

Jaiden Rishel: "Dad, you wanted to warn me about the future. You wanted me to understand what was coming. Well, I'm here. I'm listening. And now it's your turn to listen to me."

Jaiden steps around the desk, his expression hardening into the familiar determination of the man who took ownership of CWF and brought it back from the ruins of 2326.

Jaiden Rishel: "You owe me the truth. About Portland. About your disappearance. About the Sheriff. And about whatever the hell Lorenzo DeLuca thinks he knows."

He turns toward the office door, then pauses and looks back at the camera one final time.

Jaiden Rishel: "And one way or another, I'm going to get it."

The camera holds on Jaiden's expression for a moment before fading away, leaving the promise hanging in the air as Crossing Lines continues.

The Regulators (Adam Hansen & Lex Collins) © vs. Fire & Ice (Dean & Seth Moxley) vs. Unstoppable Force (Billy & Tyler Anderson) vs. ???

Match

The arena is still buzzing from the opening contest as the camera cuts back to the ring, where the usual ropes and turnbuckles have been joined by four flag stations positioned around ringside. Each station holds a rolled banner bearing the colors and insignia of one of the competing teams. Suspended above the center of the ring is a heavy steel flag mount, its empty hooks waiting for the team that can outlast three others long enough to claim the CWF Tag Team Championships. The champions' banner is displayed beside the ring, while the other three stations are marked with the names of the challengers. It is an unusual setup for a CWF event, and the London crowd has been studying every piece of it as officials make one final inspection.

Jim Gunt: "Welcome back to Crossing Lines, and if you thought that opening match was an unconventional way to start this pay-per-view, just wait until you see what we have in store next. The CWF Tag Team Championships will be defended under Alliance Standard rules, a format that originated over in Heroes & Villains Wrestling and is making its first appearance here in CWF."

Mike Rolash: "Which means we're borrowing an idea from another company and putting four teams in a ring with flags, ladders, and a rulebook that basically says, 'Good luck, everybody!' I'm sure this will be a calm, orderly affair."

Jim Gunt: "There are no ladders involved, Mike. Let's at least get the rules right before you start complaining."

Mike Rolash: "I was trying to make it sound more dangerous. You're ruining the presentation."

Joey Garcia steps into the ring, microphone in hand, as the crowd's attention shifts toward the championship match's unusual arrangement.

Joey Garcia: "Ladies and gentlemen, the following contest is the Alliance Standard Match, scheduled for one fall, and it

is for the CWF Tag Team Championships!"

The crowd cheers as the championship belts are held aloft at ringside. Joey gestures toward the four flag stations.

Joey Garcia: "The rules of this contest are as follows: each team has a designated banner positioned at ringside. To win, both members of a team must retrieve their banner, bring it into the ring, attach it to the flag mount above the ring, and successfully keep it raised while the referee conducts a ten-count. If the banner is removed or the team is unable to maintain control before the count reaches ten, the count is stopped and the match continues. There are no disqualifications, and temporary alliances and double-teaming are permitted. The first team to complete the ten-count will be declared the winner and the CWF Tag Team Champions!"

The crowd reacts loudly as Joey lowers the microphone. It is a simple objective, at least on paper. In practice, every team must fight through three other teams, secure its banner, get it into the ring, and then defend a stationary target while everyone else tries to pull it down.

Jim Gunt: "You can't win this by pinfall or submission. You have to create an opening, secure your flag, and then defend it long enough to finish the count. Even if you get your banner attached, the other teams can still stop you."

Mike Rolash: "And the team that spends all its energy trying to be clever might discover that the team that simply punches everybody in the face has a pretty good strategy, too."

The familiar opening notes of "Wanted Dead or Alive" by Bon Jovi hit the speakers. Red light washes over the entrance stage as Adam Hansen steps through the curtain in his cowboy hat and vest, the CWF Tag Team Championship secured around his waist. He gives the London crowd a hearty "YEEHAW!" before turning to slap hands along the barricade. Lex Collins follows, carrying himself with his usual quiet intensity, his own championship over his shoulder. Adam plays to the crowd on the way down, while Lex studies the four flag stations and the overhead mount as if he is already mapping the quickest route between them.

Jim Gunt: "The champions have had a difficult road to London. Lex Collins has been through a brutal No Limits Championship match over in HVW, and Adam Hansen has been recovering from a punishing Texas Death Match. Neither man is arriving here at one hundred percent."

Mike Rolash: "They've got two belts between them, though, Jim. That's a pretty good way to make yourself feel better. And look at Lex. He isn't even pretending to enjoy himself. I think that man considers smiling an unnecessary expenditure of energy."

Adam climbs onto the apron, scrapes his boots, and flips over the top rope into the ring. Lex steps through the ropes behind him. The two champions confer briefly, Adam pointing toward their banner station while Lex nods once. Their celebration is short. They know the belts will not be retained by pinning one of the challengers; they will have to keep moving.

The arena's lights dim as "Heartless" fills the building. Dean and Seth Moxley emerge to a mixed reaction, both men looking toward the flag mount before turning their attention to the champions. Dean rolls his shoulders and paces down the ramp with a restless intensity, while Seth walks a little more deliberately, his eyes moving between Adam and Lex. The brothers climb into the ring, exchange a few words, and split to opposite corners.

Jim Gunt: "Fire & Ice have the experience and the chemistry to make this work. They don't need to spend the entire match trying to take out one team. They just need to find the right moment to get their banner into the ring."

Mike Rolash: "And then they need to survive nine seconds of everyone else trying to ruin their lives. Ten, if you count the first one. I don't make the rules, Jim. Well, not these rules."

"Don't You Wish You Were Me?" by Chris Jericho blasts through the speakers, and Billy Anderson strides onto the stage with a confident smirk. Tyler Anderson follows to a more measured reaction, his attention fixed on the ring. Billy's

expression has changed in recent months; the easygoing charm that once defined him has been replaced by something harder, and his eyes never leave the other competitors for long. Tyler still carries himself with the instincts of a sportsman, but he knows better than to underestimate what his brother has become. They enter together, Billy already jawing at the Moxleys while Tyler quietly takes stock of the champions.

Jim Gunt: "Unstoppable Force brings a tremendous amount of power to this match, but the question is whether Billy and Tyler can keep their attention on the objective when things get chaotic."

Mike Rolash: "Billy's attention is fine. He knows exactly what he's doing. Tyler's the one who still thinks everyone is going to play fair. It's a lovely quality in a person. It's a terrible quality in a match where everybody's allowed to gang up on you."

The lights shift again as a strange, swampy melody rolls through the arena, followed by a burst of green and purple light. The crowd looks toward the stage, unsure who to expect. A ripple of laughter and surprise spreads through the building as ‘Madame’ Colette LaVieille and ‘Madame’ Cosette LaJeune step through the curtain, dressed for the occasion and looking entirely too pleased with themselves. Colette carries a small cloth pouch in one hand, while Cosette gives the London audience a playful wave and blows a kiss toward the ring. The words BAD JUJU appear on the screen behind them.

Jim Gunt: "Well, there's our mystery team! Bad Juju, coming all the way over from HVW!"

Mike Rolash: "Oh, this is wonderful. The Regulators have to deal with three established teams, and now we've got two Cajun sorceresses who apparently believe the flag mount is going to surrender if they glare at it hard enough."

Jim Gunt: "Their record in HVW suggests you shouldn't underestimate them."

Mike Rolash: "I don't underestimate anyone. I simply prefer my supernatural threats to come with an instruction manual."

Colette and Cosette make their way down the ramp, flirting harmlessly with the crowd and then with the competitors. Cosette winks at Adam, who gives her a good-natured nod before turning back to the match. Colette leans toward Lex as she reaches ringside and murmurs something he clearly has no interest in hearing. Lex simply points toward the ring. Colette giggles, while Cosette pats her partner's shoulder as if to remind her that there is, in fact, a wrestling match to be won.

The referee checks all four teams, confirms the banners are in their proper stations, and makes sure the flag mount is secure. All eight competitors are in the ring now, spread out and watching one another. There is no traditional opening lockup to be had here. Everyone knows that the moment the bell rings, the first team to reach its banner will have an advantage.

DING DING DING!

The bell barely finishes ringing before all eight wrestlers scatter.

Dean Moxley and Billy Anderson collide near the ropes, trading forearms with enough force to make the crowd wince. Seth Moxley charges at Tyler, who sidesteps the first swing and answers with a sharp right hand before attempting to send Seth across the ring. Meanwhile, Adam Hansen drops beneath a wild strike from Colette and reaches for the ropes, only for Cosette to dart around him and spring into a running kick that catches him against the shoulder. Lex Collins is already out through the ropes, heading straight for the Regulators' banner station.

Jim Gunt: "Everybody is moving at once! Lex Collins is the first man out of the ring, and the champions are looking to secure their banner before the other teams can organize!"

Lex grabs the rolled banner and turns toward the apron, but Seth Moxley breaks away from Tyler and sprints toward

him. Lex ducks a clothesline, drives an elbow into Seth's ribs, and uses the brief opening to slide beneath the bottom rope with the banner tucked under his arm. Seth follows him inside, reaching for the fabric. Lex pulls it away and drives a stiff elbow into Seth's face, forcing him to stumble backward.

Mike Rolash: "That is one way to keep somebody from borrowing your property. Lex doesn't even look annoyed. He looks like Seth has interrupted him while he's doing his taxes."

Lex tosses the banner toward Adam, who catches it and starts toward the flag mount. Before he can get there, Billy Anderson barrels across the ring and cuts him off with a spear that sends both men crashing to the canvas. The banner slips from Adam's grasp and skids toward the ropes. Tyler sees it and moves to retrieve it, but Cosette darts between him and the fabric, dropping low and sweeping his legs out from under him. Colette scoops the banner up with an exaggerated gasp, holding it against her chest as if she has just discovered a priceless treasure.

Colette LaVieille: "Oh, look, darling! A flag! It wants to come home with us!"

Cosette LaJeune: "Everything wants to come home with us."

Cosette winks at Tyler, who looks from her to the banner and back again with an expression that suggests he has no idea how to respond to either statement. Colette starts toward the flag mount, but Lex catches her by the wrist before she can get there. He doesn't wrench her arm or waste time arguing. He simply turns her away from the mount and uses a short hip toss to send her rolling across the mat. Cosette immediately launches herself at Lex with a flying forearm, catching him across the jaw and forcing him to stagger into the corner.

Jim Gunt: "Bad Juju nearly stole the champions' opening! Colette had the banner, and if she and Cosette could have attached it, the entire complexion of this match would have changed."

Mike Rolash: "They've got a very good strategy. Distract everybody with flirting and witchcraft, take the flag, and hope nobody notices until the referee is counting. I'm not saying it's foolproof, but it is certainly more interesting than most business plans."

At ringside, Dean Moxley has managed to shove Billy over the top rope and follows him out through the ropes. They trade punches beside the barricade as Seth and Tyler continue fighting in the ring. Tyler catches Seth with a running forearm and follows with a short-arm clothesline, then turns toward the Andersons' banner station. Billy sees his brother's movement and shouts for him to get the flag. Tyler reaches the station and grabs their banner, but before he can climb onto the apron, Dean rushes him from behind and drives him chest-first into the edge of the ring.

Tyler drops to one knee, still holding the banner. Dean tries to pull it away, but Tyler keeps a firm grip on the fabric and answers with a back elbow to the jaw. He rises, swings Dean around, and sends him shoulder-first into the ring post. Tyler slides beneath the bottom rope with the banner in hand, only to find Billy already back in the ring and standing in his path.

Billy Anderson: "Give it here. I'll take care of it."

Tyler Anderson: "We're supposed to do this together."

Billy Anderson: "Then keep up."

Billy snatches the banner from Tyler and marches toward the mount. Tyler follows, clearly irritated, but before they can reach it, Adam Hansen storms in with a big boot that catches Billy square in the chest. Billy drops the banner and stumbles backward. Tyler steps between them, trying to get his brother back on his feet, only for Lex to grab the flag and pull it away from all three men.

Jim Gunt: "That tension between Billy and Tyler is costing them precious seconds. They have the banner, but they can't seem to agree on who should be carrying it!"

Mike Rolash: "That's family, Jim. You spend your whole life with someone, and eventually you find out you can't even agree on how to hold a piece of cloth."

Lex holds the banner just out of Billy's reach, then folds it and shoves it against his chest before striking him with a sharp forearm. Billy answers with a wild swing that Lex avoids by a narrow margin. Lex pivots, catches Billy in a headlock, and drives him down with a snap sit-out uranage. Adam is back on his feet by the time Lex rises, and the champions exchange a quick glance. Adam points toward the mount while Lex clears their path with a hard elbow to Tyler.

Adam takes the banner from Lex and climbs onto the second turnbuckle, reaching upward toward the flag mount. The crowd rises as he stretches for the hook, but Seth Moxley grabs Adam's boot and pulls him down. Adam lands awkwardly on the mat, dropping the banner again. Seth turns to retrieve it, only for Dean to catch him from behind and spin him around. The brothers begin arguing over who should have taken the opening, and Adam uses the distraction to drive both of them backward with a pair of heavy forearms.

Jim Gunt: "The champions were inches away from getting their banner attached, and Fire & Ice have stopped them! This is the difference between a normal tag team match and Alliance Standard. You can do everything right, get into position, and still have three other teams waiting to tear it away."

Mike Rolash: "You could have the flag halfway up the pole and somebody would still come along to tell you that you're doing it wrong. It's the most accurate depiction of teamwork I've ever seen."

Across the ring, Colette and Cosette have recovered and are now working together against Tyler Anderson. Cosette lands a quick kick to the thigh, then another to the ribs, forcing Tyler to turn toward her. Colette slips behind him, hooks an arm around his waist, and throws him forward into Cosette's cutter. The crowd reacts to the crisp combination, and Cosette immediately rolls toward the ropes, blowing a kiss to Tyler before getting back to her feet.

Colette turns toward the flag mount and beckons her partner over. Cosette glides across the ring, and the two women exchange a conspiratorial look before moving in opposite directions. They don't have their banner yet, but they have realized that every other team is so occupied with fighting that a coordinated attack might clear the way to their own station.

Colette slips through the ropes and hurries toward Bad Juju's banner. Lex sees her and starts after her, but Cosette catches him with a running knee to the midsection. She follows with a Russian leg sweep that sends him onto his back. Colette snatches up their banner and raises it triumphantly, only for Billy Anderson to charge across ringside and grab the fabric from the other end. Colette refuses to let go.

Colette LaVieille: "You can't have that! It's ours!"

Billy Anderson: "Then hold on tight."

Billy yanks the banner hard enough to pull Colette forward, then releases it at the last possible second. Colette stumbles into the ring apron and drops to her knees. Billy rolls the banner into the ring, where Tyler picks it up and holds it away from his brother.

Tyler Anderson: "You can't just take everybody's flag!"

Billy Anderson: "I can if nobody can stop me."

Tyler stares at him for a beat, then shoves the banner into Billy's chest and walks away. Billy watches him go, visibly annoyed, before turning just in time to catch Adam Hansen's running forearm. The impact sends Billy stumbling toward the ropes. Adam charges again, but Billy catches him around the waist and powers him up for a fallaway slam. Adam lands hard, rolls toward the ropes, and pulls himself up by the middle strand.

Lex Collins re-enters the fray, driving a knee into Billy's side before following with a series of compact punches. Billy absorbs the first few and swings back, but Lex ducks under the last one and snaps him down with a headlock driver. The crowd applauds the precision, but Lex doesn't have time to capitalize. Seth Moxley catches him with a running boot that sends him stumbling into the corner, then follows with a pop-up powerbomb that rattles the ring.

Jim Gunt: "Seth Moxley just took Lex Collins out of the equation, and Fire & Ice have a chance to seize control!"

Dean has recovered at ringside and reaches for their banner. He grabs it from the station and slides back into the ring, where Seth is already clearing space. The brothers exchange a nod. Dean moves toward the mount while Seth intercepts Adam with a spear that drives the champion into the canvas. Dean begins to climb the turnbuckles, banner in hand, looking to use the height to attach it to the mount.

The crowd roars as Dean reaches upward, but Cosette suddenly appears on the apron and grabs the back of his boot. Dean kicks free, nearly losing his balance, and Cosette drops to the floor with an exaggerated gasp. Colette hurries over to her, takes her hand, and helps her to her feet. The two share a brief, dramatic look, then turn their attention back to Dean.

Cosette LaJeune: "How rude!"

Colette LaVieille: "Absolutely unforgivable."

They both blow kisses toward Dean. He shakes his head in disbelief, then turns back toward the mount. That moment of irritation is enough for Lex to get to his feet and catch Dean with a hard forearm to the back. Dean loses his grip on the banner and falls backward onto the mat. Seth rushes in, but Adam Hansen catches him with a snap powerslam. The champions are back in the thick of it, and the ring has become a tangle of bodies, flags, and half-formed alliances.

Mike Rolash: "I have to admit, Jim, Bad Juju might be the most effective team here. They haven't won anything yet, but they've managed to make every single person in this ring angry at them."

Jim Gunt: "That's not the same thing as being effective, Mike."

Mike Rolash: "Tell that to the four people trying to hit them."

The next several minutes descend into controlled chaos. Every team takes a turn gaining the upper hand, and every opening is shut down almost as soon as it appears. Tyler Anderson catches Seth with a piledriver near the center of the ring, but Dean breaks up the follow-up by driving Tyler into the corner. Adam Hansen uses a big boot to knock Dean off balance, then lifts him into a fallaway slam that sends him sliding toward the ropes. Lex attempts to secure the Regulators' banner once more, but Billy intercepts him with a spear that nearly folds him in half.

Billy turns toward the flag mount, but Tyler catches his shoulder and points toward their banner, which has been left near the opposite corner. Billy brushes him off and steps over Lex instead, looking to take out Adam before anyone can stop him. Tyler shakes his head, retrieves the banner himself, and heads toward the mount. For a moment, the Andersons have a clear path. Tyler reaches the turnbuckles and starts to climb, but Billy finally notices and charges across the ring, apparently intent on helping.

Instead, Billy's rush knocks Tyler's footing loose. Tyler drops onto the mat, still holding the banner, and glares at his brother.

Tyler Anderson: "Are you trying to help me or stop me?"

Billy Anderson: "I'm trying to win!"

Tyler Anderson: "Then stop getting in my way!"

The crowd reacts to the argument, but the opportunity vanishes when Dean Moxley pulls Tyler backward and Seth takes the banner from his hands. Fire & Ice move toward the mount together, only to be met by the champions. Adam

catches Seth with the Turnpike Powerbomb, while Lex pulls Dean into a short-arm elbow and follows with a knee to the ribs. The champions are fighting with the urgency of men who understand that every failed attempt makes their next one more difficult.

Adam and Lex reclaim their banner and work their way toward the mount. Adam holds off Billy with a series of heavy forearms while Lex climbs, banner raised above his head. The crowd begins counting along before the official can even start. Lex reaches toward the hook, gets the banner over the mount, and manages to secure one end.

Jim Gunt: "The Regulators have it! Lex has their banner on the mount!"

The referee begins the count as Adam braces himself beneath Lex, holding the other teams at bay.

Referee: "ONE!"

Dean grabs Adam around the waist and tries to pull him away.

Referee: "TWO!"

Adam elbows Dean in the face, but Seth rushes in and drags Adam down by the leg.

Referee: "THREE!"

Billy charges toward Lex, but Lex kicks him away from the turnbuckle. The banner remains attached.

Referee: "FOUR!"

Colette and Cosette rush in together. Cosette distracts Lex with a flurry of quick strikes while Colette climbs onto the ropes and reaches for the banner.

Referee: "FIVE!"

Lex catches Colette's wrist and forces her back down to the mat, but the movement pulls the banner crooked on the mount. Adam fights his way upright and shoves Seth into Dean, sending both Moxleys stumbling toward the ropes.

Referee: "SIX!"

Billy charges again, this time catching Lex with a shoulder to the midsection. Lex loses his balance and drops from the turnbuckle, landing hard on his feet. Billy tears the banner free and throws it into the center of the ring. The referee stops the count. The crowd groans as the champions' near-victory slips away once more.

Mike Rolash: "Six seconds! Six seconds away from retaining! I hope somebody has a very good reason for doing that, because I would be throwing a chair if I were Lex Collins."

Jim Gunt: "He doesn't need a chair, Mike. He needs his banner back."

Lex sits on the mat for a moment, breathing hard and holding his ribs. Adam crouches beside him and offers a hand. Lex takes it, gets to his feet, and immediately turns back toward the fight. The champions aren't finished.

Bad Juju, meanwhile, have finally secured their own banner. Colette holds it while Cosette clears the way with a running kick to Tyler Anderson. They exchange a quick glance, and Colette hands the banner to her partner before climbing onto the second rope. Cosette starts toward the mount, moving with surprising speed, but Billy catches her at the waist and lifts her away from the turnbuckles. She kicks her legs, trying to break free, while Colette rushes forward and strikes Billy across the back.

Billy drops Cosette and turns on Colette, his expression darkening. Cosette backs up with her hands raised, then slowly begins moving her fingers in a series of deliberate gestures, murmuring words beneath her breath. Colette, now back on her feet, recognizes what her partner is attempting and gives her an urgent look.

Colette LaVieille: "Cosette. No."

Cosette LaJeune: "Just a little something."

Colette LaVieille: "Not now."

Cosette ignores her, continuing the ritual with a flourish of her hands. Billy stands there for a moment, watching her with a deeply unimpressed expression. He glances at Tyler, then back at Cosette.

Billy Anderson: "Are you done?"

Cosette snaps her fingers, and after a matter of moments...nothing happens. She blinks, looks at her hands, and tries again with a sharper motion. Still nothing. Colette slowly closes her eyes and shakes her head, the expression on her face one of profound, familiar disappointment.

Colette LaVieille: "You did it wrong."

Cosette LaJeune: "I did not!"

Colette LaVieille: "You absolutely did."

Billy doesn't wait for them to settle the argument. He takes two running steps and unleashes a massive clothesline that catches both women across the upper chest. Colette and Cosette are knocked backward, and Billy's momentum carries all three of them over the top rope. The trio crashes to the floor in a heap as the crowd erupts. The banner slips from Colette's hand and lands just inside the ring, where Lex Collins immediately spots it.

Jim Gunt: "What a clothesline! Billy Anderson just took both members of Bad Juju over the top rope with him!"

Mike Rolash: "And the spell didn't work! I don't know if I'm more surprised by the clothesline or the fact that Cosette's magic has a failure rate."

Lex reaches for the banner, but Adam Hansen is already there. The two champions exchange a brief look, and this time there is no confusion about what needs to happen. Adam scoops up the fabric and clears the center of the ring with a hard shoulder block to Dean Moxley. Lex catches Seth with a sharp elbow and follows with a quick snap takedown, buying Adam the space he needs.

Adam begins climbing the turnbuckles, banner in hand. Billy is still on the floor recovering from the collision, and Tyler is busy trying to separate himself from Dean and Seth. For the first time in several minutes, the champions have a clear path to the mount.

Adam reaches upward, but Dean Moxley grabs the back of his vest and starts pulling him down. Lex sees it and rushes across the ring, driving a forearm into Dean's back. Dean stumbles away. Adam steadies himself and hooks the banner over the mount, securing the first end. Lex climbs the opposite turnbuckle and catches the other end, working it into place while the crowd rises to its feet.

Jim Gunt: "The Regulators are almost there! Both champions are on the mount, and the banner is secured!"

The referee looks up and begins the count.

Referee: "ONE!"

Dean grabs Lex's boot, but Lex kicks him away and holds on.

Referee: "TWO!"

Seth rushes toward Adam, only for Adam to drop from the turnbuckle and meet him with a big boot that sends him stumbling backward.

Referee: "THREE!"

Billy Anderson gets back into the ring and charges at Adam. Tyler catches him around the waist, trying to stop him from

breaking up the count. Billy elbows his brother and shoves him aside, but the delay costs him.

Referee: "FOUR!"

Lex drops from the turnbuckle and catches Dean with a stiff elbow, then drives him down with a short headlock takedown.

Referee: "FIVE!"

Tyler steps between Billy and the mount, trying to keep his brother from charging again. Billy pushes him away, but Tyler refuses to move aside this time.

Referee: "SIX!"

Adam gets between the Andersons and the mount, catching Billy with a forearm and forcing him to retreat toward the ropes.

Referee: "SEVEN!"

Seth Moxley tries to climb back toward Lex, but Lex meets him with a knee to the ribs and shoves him away from the turnbuckles.

Referee: "EIGHT!"

Dean gets to his feet and lunges toward the banner, but Adam catches him with a swinging neckbreaker that drops him to the mat.

Referee: "NINE!"

Billy makes one final attempt to charge through the champions. Lex steps into his path and catches him with a sudden right hand, while Adam braces himself beneath the mount and holds the banner steady.

Referee: "TEN!"

DING DING DING!

The bell rings, and the crowd erupts as the referee signals for the match to end. The banner remains secured above the ring. Adam Hansen and Lex Collins stand beneath it, battered and breathing hard, but still the CWF Tag Team Champions.

Joey Garcia: "Here are your winners, and STILL the CWF Tag Team Champions... THE REGULATORS!"

Adam raises his arms and lets out a triumphant yell. Lex doesn't waste time posing; he checks the banner one last time, then turns toward Adam and gives him a firm nod. Adam offers his hand, and Lex takes it, the two champions sharing a brief handshake before Adam raises their championship belts high for the London crowd.

Jim Gunt: "What a contest! The Regulators survived three very different teams, two near-victories, and a match where the rules made every second dangerous. They didn't win by pinfall. They didn't win by submission. They won by working together when it mattered most."

Mike Rolash: "And by letting the other teams spend half the match fighting each other. Never underestimate the power of watching your opponents make terrible decisions."

At ringside, Colette and Cosette are back on their feet. Cosette looks up at the flag mount with an expression of wounded disbelief, while Colette folds her arms and gives her partner a pointed look.

Colette LaVieille: "I told you the spell wouldn't work."

Cosette LaJeune: "It would have worked if he hadn't interrupted me."

Colette LaVieille: "You were casting it on a man who doesn't believe in anything but punching people."

Cosette looks toward Billy Anderson, who is still rubbing his chest after the collision. She gives him an indignant glare and makes a small, dismissive motion with her fingers. Colette catches her hand before she can try again.

The Anderson brothers continue arguing near the ropes, with Tyler pointing toward the banner and Billy waving him off. Fire & Ice regroup in the corner, frustrated after coming within seconds of seizing the match themselves. None of the challengers leave London satisfied, but the champions have done what they came to do.

Adam and Lex stand beneath the raised banner with the CWF Tag Team Championships in hand, their victory earned through grit, timing, and an ability to adapt to a match unlike anything else on the Crossing Lines card.

Jim Gunt: "The Alliance Standard has made its CWF debut, and the Regulators have proven they can survive it. Four teams, four banners, and only one team leaves with the championships."

Mike Rolash: "I'd say that was a successful experiment. Though next time, I would recommend a rule that says nobody is allowed to cast spells. Or argue with their brother. Or clothesline three people at once. Actually, let's just ban wrestling."

The camera closes on Adam Hansen and Lex Collins holding their titles beneath the secured Regulators banner as the crowd continues to cheer. Crossing Lines moves on, and the champions remain in control of the CWF Tag Team division.

What Are You Implying?

Segment

We cut backstage, where we see MJ Flair, Caledonia, and Eris sitting around. Each of them is holding a book, reading intently. Occasionally, one of them snorts with laughter.

MJ Flair: "Ooh, here I am! “You know, m’lady…”"

Eris: "Pff. Milady. Tell me he’s wearing a fedora!"

MJ Flair: “I recently spoke to Miss Flair. I am sure she was mistaken, but she seemed to be under the impression that the Chief had warned her to stay away for a little while. I couldn’t possibly believe she would have such an idea planted in her head.” … okay, weird grammar aside, is he talkin’ about me hangin’ up the boots and going back to school?"

Caledonia, reading on: "“Miss Flair and the Lady were known for not exactly getting along”… oh for fuck’s sake, after you beat me we had brunch!"

Male voice, out of shot: "I’m still on “the Esquire.”"

The camera zooms out to show Mark Carlton is also in the group.

Carlton: "Why would you have me as the weirdo tailing Cali everywhere when Eris is right there?"

Eris: "Hey!"

Carlton: "I’m sorry, are you or are you not a weirdo who follows Cali around?"

Caledonia: "Yeah, but then he couldn’t imply that we’re fucking."

Eris: "Well, he could…"

Caledonia: "He couldn’t imply that I’m fucking my cousin."

Eris: "He could have just made me your cousin…"

MJ Flair: "Yeah, but at that point would you really be you anymore?"

Eris: "Hey, #marielledonia got its moment in the sun, #eridonia deserves some love!"

Carlton: "…so is the shipping tag for us #carledonia or…"

MJ, Cali and Eris: "WHY DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?"

They read in silence for a little longer, and reach the end around the same time, all shutting their books.

MJ: "So is he a vampire, or…?"

Eris: "I can't tell. I think so?"

Carlton: "And the idea is that he's drinking you… and blaming me, because I'm… jealous of your husband? Because I want to fuck you and so I… murder you instead?"

Caledonia: "Look, this is clearly Danny Boy working out some shit."

MJ Flair: "Well, y'know, first novel, good on him for branchin' out?"

Eris: "I can't wait to read the parody pieces."

MJ chuckles.

MJ Flair: "And speaking of mediocre men with ludicrously high opinions of themselves… I gotta peacock to pluck."

Caledonia: "Good luck!"

MJ leaves.

Carlton: "I should go get ready too; god only knows what I'm in for."

He follows MJ out the door, shaking his head in thought.

Eris: "… think he's gonna make a move?"

Caledonia, idly leafing back through the book: Even leaving aside the fact that she'd kick his ass, her fiancé has access to a very impressive collection of knives. And Mark knows that.

Eris: "How're you feeling?"

Caledonia puts down the book and takes a deep breath.

Caledonia: "Well, Ripper says he honestly hopes I never quit… I'm ready to honor his damn wishes."

The End Times are about to have a reckoning…

Segment

We fade in on a cemetery as the rain falls down like we're in some epic ballad of Edgar Allen Poe. We see a small figure in a hooded robe carrying a torch. The figure walks with purpose between the headstones until she comes to an area that is unmarked. The figure points towards the muddy dirt and we see other figures come out of the shadows with shovels and start hurling the hallowed ground off of the spot. A voiceover begins...

“Everything has an ending. Everything has to end. The end of one thing is the beginning of another. Life is not an ouroboros despite what some with amortality think...”

The grave diggers start humming a tune...we can't really place it, but the familiarity is palpable...

“However, what kind of ending do we get? What kind of ending do we deserve? What threads of the weave of our stories get closure and conclusion.”

The figure starts humming along to the tune as well.

“Because sometimes they come back. Out of the woodwork. Out of the dirt. Out of the place you thought they were buried...just to rise again...”

The figure and the gravediggers stop as they hit something. The camera pans over and we see a black coffin. A familiar black coffin with the logo of “The Forsaken” upon it.

Hooded figure: “Die...die...die my darling...”

Gravediggers (calling back): “Don't utter a single word....”

The coffin starts to shake.

Hooded figure: “Die die die my darlingggggggg...”

Gravediggers (calling back): “Just shut your pretty eyes..”

The lid of the coffin flies open as purple light shoots out of it blinding us for a moment.

Hooded figure: “I'll be seeing you againnnn...”

The figure says, dropping the torch as figures come out of the coffin.

Gravediggers: “I'll be seeing you...”

The gravediggers call back as we see The Shadow standing with them looking rather cross and annoyed. On the other side we see Zach holding something in his hands. It's brown and beat up, but we know what it is. As the final figure comes out of the coffin with his back to the camera in a black suit. The white skin and the white hair of the pale man of the macabre...He's back..

“IN HELLLLL!!!!” calls out Ataxia as Zach hands him the burlap mask. Ataxia puts it on and all three turn to the small figure. The figure pulls back the hood...it's Chloe Hawkshurst! Ataxia starts to cackle maniacally as he holds up his left hand and we see his wedding band.

Ataxia: “...You didn't think this was going to end without us...now...where's my wife! AHHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHH!!!!”

The camera pans over to a headstone that reads: “Here Lies The Foresaken...For now...”.

Fade.

Mia & The Menagerie vs. Mark Carlton

Match

The sultry voice of Freddie Mercury and his opening lines of “Good Old-Fashioned Lover Boy” hits the loud speakers. The fans cheer, some of course boo, as Mark Carlton saunters out onto the stage, his three piece suit crisp. He straightens the cuffs under his jacket before Mike Rolash and Jim Gunt have a chance to say their piece.

Jim Gunt: “I’m honestly looking forward to our next contest. On one end, we have the down to Earth, by the book fighter in Mark Carlton.”

Mike Rolash: “You forgot boring.”

Jim rolls his eyes.

Jim Gunt: “Against not one, two, or even three opponents, in The Menagerie, but the physical body of Mia Rayne herself. It’s like a puppet controlled by three different puppet masters… At least from what I’ve picked up in recent

weeks."

Mike Rolash: "You forgot psychotic. Violent. Completely unhinged and I'm REALLY hoping my restraining order gets passed quickly. I've been on a wait list for… I've forgotten how long."

The song picks up and with a knowing smile, Mark Carlton grips his suit and rips it off, revealing his wrestling gear already laced and ready to go! Mike and Jim can only blink as Rolash tries to find the right words.

Mike Rolash: "That…. That was the… Probably THE most conservative male stripper move I've EVER seen."

Jim blinks, his gaze going from Mark Carlton sauntering to the ring, the crowd's fervor starting to pick up as he reaches it and rolls under the bottom rope.

Jim Gunt: "Mike… How exactly do you know what would be considered 'conservative' or not, in context to male strippers?"

It's Mike's turn to blink as he turns to his broadcast partner. He opens his mouth to respond, but thinks better of it, instead, turning his attention back to the ring, where Mark Carlton waits for whomever The Menagerie decided to start with.

Mike Rolash: "You get so caught up in details Jimbo. One of these days, it will come back to bite you, but for right now, all you gotta know is…"

Rolash is cut off by the opening lines of "Sweet Tooth" by Otep.

"I swear by my sin-loving soul…

I can taste your sins all over me…"

Jim Gunt: "All I gotta know is what?"

Mike holds a finger up to his mouth.

Mike Rolash: "Shhhh… The Menagerie are about to enter and I want to make sure I pay attention in case I have to hide."

The low bass pulses throughout the arena as a disheveled Mia Rayne shuffles onto the stage. Her hair is a messy rat's nest, her head is bowed, her shoulders slumped, and it looks like she's in desperate need of someone to find her power cord and plug her in. She shuffles to the top of the ramp and rocks her shoulders back and forth to the beat of the music. The lights go out as the beat begins to pick up and get more intense, strobe lights lighting Mia up, only with three distinct figures appearing behind her in the strobes.

Jim Gunt: "Yeesh… Talk about unsettling, The Menagerie looks to be in control of Mia, with no fight back for the former world champion."

Mike Rolash: "I don't know how to feel about this. On one hand, Mia looks like she's seen so many better days, like when Ataxia got dusted on their wedding day in 2326. I almost wish there was something that could be done to comfort her, to help her… But… She's also been responsible for my torture for the better part of a decade. Pranks, encouraging Ataxia, and let us not forget being hurled through space and time. I can't help but think that she's FINALLY getting what she deserves."

Jim Gunt: "You really have a hard time letting things go, don't you?"

Mike Rolash: "Still haven't forgiven my mom for making me miss the season finale of Power Rangers growing up, so I could be there when my sister was born, Jim. Now shush, can we focus on our jobs at hand, please?"

Mia's form rolls under the bottom rope, and remains slumped over on all fours. As the lights come on and return to normal, it's almost as if her body is pulled up by strings, as if she was nothing more than a puppet being controlled by

strings attached to an unseen puppeteer. Mike and Jim both share a collective shudder as they witness the eerie scene. For his part, Mark doesn't seem to notice, his eyes narrowing as he focuses on the task at hand, though his back stiffens ever so slightly. Mia's head is still bowed, her tangled web of hair hiding any and all of her face to anyone watching. Unsure of what else to do, Ian Ambrose, the lucky referee assigned this match, calls for the bell.

Mike Rolash: "So… We have a male stripper against the very definition of, 'Mom, I think that girl is crazy.' I'd say only in CWF, but I can't imagine what happens after we close and this… This madness is let loose upon the world."

Jim Gunt: "Let's just enjoy the time we have left and get me in touch with the lawyer that you're using for your restraining order. After witnessing everything Mia and The Menagerie are capable of, I feel like it's the least I can do to protect myself."

Mike nods as he and Jim get lost in staring into the ring, waiting for the action to start. Mike holds a fist up and Jim bumps it, solidifying their agreement for help with the restraining order. Carlton moves forward cautiously at the sound of the bell, ready for anything the body of Mia might throw at him as he presses forward. He ties her up, pushing her the few short steps into the corner turnbuckle! Ian rushes forward but isn't able to start his count before Mark pushes off of Mia, raising his arms and taking a few steps back.

Jim Gunt: "Not sure what to make of this. Mia hasn't moved, and isn't showing any signs of fighting back."

Mike Rolash: "This is why I find Mark boring and I can't stand him. If it were me, I would have already pulled out a bazooka and hit her with my best shot! What does Mark do? A tie up, push her into the corner, and let go as soon as… Oh shit!"

Mike is interrupted as Loki appears, launching herself out of the corner, grabbing Mark by the face, and forcing him to the ground in one quick move! She gets up and Mark quickly counters, sweeping her legs out from under her! He goes for the pin and Ian slides in for the count!

ONE!

Mia rolls a shoulder up lazily, almost as if it was pulled up as Mark and everyone at ringside can hear ethereal laughter from above. Mark looks down and Mia stares back at him, her eyes completely lifeless as she rolls out from under him and back to her feet, again, as if being pulled up by the strings of an invisible marionettist. Mark looks on, dubious, but an eyebrow raised at the phenomena that was, or is(?), Mia Rayne.

Jim Gunt: "Mark Carlton rising from his knees with ease…"

Mike Rolash: "Yeah, yeah, you're a poet and didn't know it. Come back when you talk the entire show in iambic pentameter."

Jim gives Mike the side eye as Mark feints an attack at the prone body of Mia, now leaning up against the ropes, an empty smile showing her dull teeth the only sign of any emotion coming from Mia. If one were to look closely, they might be able to see a tear in her eye as Mark feints again, gauging her response. She doesn't move though and only continues to watch a very interesting spot on the mat. Carlton goes to tie up, and again, she doesn't fight back, her arms are down, and… Mark doesn't care as he attempts to whip Mia to the other end of the ring! Mia doesn't stand for it though and collapses to her knees, sliding to the opposite side of the ring, and leaning back, her upside down face now looking Mark dead in the eyes.

Jim Gunt: "I've never seen Mia move like this. She's always been one to go in swinging, go out swinging, and even take some of the cleanest losses away from the victor by her bounce back."

Mike Rolash: "Mark has work to do for sure, but how much longer are we going to have to watch him beat someone who is essentially nothing more than a glorified ragdoll?"

Mark huffs, his frustrations getting the better of him as he tries to assess the situation. For her part, Mia has remained, her back arched, shoulders off her ground, her knees balancing the weight of her body with the top of her head as she continues to stare at Mark. He goes to move to the side, she turns to follow him. He moves in the opposite direction, her body moves so that she can remain staring at him. Again, the ethereal laughter echoes throughout the arena. He huffs again, charging at Mia, only for Amelia to kick her leg over, and launch herself at Mark with a mule kick!

Jim Gunt: “This is almost unfair. Mark is against four people essentially in a handicap match with no one to back him up.

Mike Rolash: “Almost?! I think Mark is probably THE most boring male strip… I mean wrestler on this roster! This IS unfair to Carlton and he should take it up with management as soon as he can… He… he….”

Mike turns to the side that Jim isn’t sitting on to find a lifesized replica of Loki sitting next to him. The mannequin turns its head toward him and he quickly falls silent, trying to hide his peripheral vision from the visage.

Mike Rolash: “I think it’s in our best interest… AND Mark’s if we just focus on the match in front of us. Oh look! Mark is getting back to his feet!”

Mark springs back up after his back hits the mat, his face a mixture of surprise and anger. Amelia bounced off of him and rolled a corner, out of harm’s way. She smiles brightly at Mark and beckons him to come get her. He rushes in, and connects with a massive clothesline, Mia’s body crumpling to the mat under him!

Jim Gunt: “Not only the numbers, but it’s as if The Menagerie WANT Mark to punish Mia as much as possible. I’m getting the feeling that they’ll let him do whatever he wants, as long as it’s Mia who is the one that’s taking the punishment.”

Mike Rolash: “This is truly one of those fantasy stories about a mere human fighting against a magical force. The human has no business in this fight, but he’s there, and he’s going to prove that he IS the one to get the job done…”

Mike leans forward in earnest, suddenly finding himself rooting even more for Mark Carlton. Jim looks at him dumbfounded.

Jim Gunt: “Male strippers AND you’re a D&D nerd? So much about you is starting to make SO much sense…”

Mark backs away as Mia falls to the mat, her breathing ragged as she is on all fours, her head snapping up to look at him in the eyes, the same lifeless smile still on her face. He is about to charge in again when something… SomeONE in the front row catches his eye. Eris sits, drinking from one of the biggest cans of beer that Mark had ever seen. They catch Mark’s eye and wink, setting the drink down and pulling a stick out, putting it in a hole that they create with the fingers of their other hand, and pulling the stick back out. They pick their drink up again and take another hefty swig as Mark understood… This time without the use of nameless pills in plastic baggies. He nods before strolling over to the still prone body of Mia. He crouches down and looks her in the eyes, giving her one of his most charming smiles he’s ever given anyone… Of course in his opinion.

Mia cocks her head to the side, a look of confusion crossing her face as with sudden urgency, Mark grabs her by the neck, pulling her to her feet, and shoving her roughly into the corner!

Jim Gunt: “Woah! That’s some kind of hostility that Mark has shown in a while!”

Mike Rolash: “That cord we were talking about earlier that it looked like Mia needed? I think Mark just stole it and plugged it into himself.”

Jim opens his mouth to question what Mike just said, but he doesn’t get a chance as Ian Ambrose rushes forward, ready to issue a count he was probably about to get shrugged off from anyways. He tries to pull Mark’s hands from Mia’s neck, but he doesn’t listen.

ONE!

Mark Carlton: “I know your game. I’m not playing. I came here to fight, and I KNOW there’s someone inside there that wants to get their hands on me!”

TWO!

Mia struggles, her face going suddenly red as Mark raises her up higher, her air supply being cut off. She slaps weakly at his arm.

THREE!

Mark Carlton: “COWARDS! You want to talk about all this power, all this knowledge you have?! Put up or shut up!”

FOUR!

Mia’s eyes flutter, her arms dropping to her side as Mark finally lets go of the hold, Mia’s body dropping back into the corner again. He backs off, Ian having to admonish him for not only not releasing his hold, but holding onto a blatant choke. He’s cut off by a shrill laughter that cuts through the air, like liquid nitrogen on a warm day. Mark pushes Ian out of the way as Amelia rushes him, jumping up onto him and raking at his face, eyes, head, and anything her fists and nails could get their hands on! Mark stumbles backwards and onto his back as Amelia holds his shoulders down with the full weight of her knees on his shoulders as she lays lefts and rights down!

Jim Gunt: “Mark called for it, and I guess The Menagerie are through playing games with him. Looks like former head of CWF, Amelia is first up.”

Mike Rolash: “I hope I don’t have to see all of them tonight…”

Mark shifts his weight and is able to throw Amelia off of him. He rolls to his feet, ready for her to charge again, only for Loki Synn to meet him with a short armed clothesline! She grabs him by the arm, and picks him up again, pulling him in close and smacking him with a forceful headbutt with her mask! It cracks, a chip of it falling away as she stumbles backwards, giggling slightly as Mark once again finds himself on his back from the impact. He doesn’t let that stop him though as he slaps the mat and stands right back up again, Eris cheering him on ringing in his ear. Loki cracks her neck, only for her image to flicker, Mark charging forward to find himself charging at Amelia, who takes him by the hand, using his momentum against him and spinning him in a circle, before letting go, the two of them falling to opposite sides of the ring, with Amelia’s childlike laughter, high pitched and haunting, ringing throughout the arena.

Mike Rolash: “What was that about no more games, Jimbo?”

Jim Gunt: “Well… How would YOU call this match?”

Mark once again rolls to his feet and he glances toward Eris, who once again pulls a stick out of a hole made from the fingers of their other hand. They nod at Mark who nods back. With no hesitation, he charges forward, leveling Amelia with a high impact clothesline as she is sitting up! He doesn’t inspect his handiwork as he maintains control, grabbing the body of now Mia, up to a standing position and lifting her up, hitting a brainbuster, immediately going for the pin!

ONE!

TWO!

TH…

Mike Rolash: “What the hell?!”

Jim Gunt: “How?!”

Loki reaches in from outside the ring, pulling Ian out. Ambrose argues with her, and she only cracks her neck before rolling back into the ring, getting to her feet, and hitting Mark with a penalty kick straight to his face! He rolls off the

body of Mia, who still lies prone and unmoving. He gets to his knees, before Loki runs forward and drops him back down with a shining wizard! The crowd responds to the crack of the impact of the move as it rings throughout the arena, and Mark crumples, but still refuses to give up as he once again gets to his knees.

Mark Carlton: “Ya know, for the ‘most vicious one of the bunch,’ you hit like a bitch.”

Loki snarls, lining him up for a diving clothesline, but as she runs in, Mark springs to his feet and surprises her with a spear! Loki rolls to her side, grabbing her midsection while Mark roars and gets to his feet. He looks to keep up the pressure, but is dismayed when the body of Loki oozes into the ring and Amelia reappears from behind him.

Amelia: “Boo.”

Mark swings, but Cheshire is there to catch the punch, twisting Mark’s arm, and back handing him with her other arm, letting him spin away from The Menagerie! The visage of Cheshire shimmers slightly, and Amelia reappears through it.

Amelia: “Enough fun, I think it’s time we…”

Mark doesn’t care as he charges in! Amelia is ready for him and tries to hit him with a clothesline of her own, only for Mark to duck underneath, hit the ropes, and attempt a blockbuster on Amelia! Mark grabs her head, leaping up and flipping over, driving her face into the mat with authority, but is once again dismayed to find Amelia standing in front of him, Mia the one lying on the ground after taking the amazing blockbuster that Mark just performed.

Amelia: “Right, you didn’t let me finish, and that’s just rude. As I was saying, I think it’s time we turn things up a notch. Ian! Honey, come along darling!”

Ian Ambrose jumps as his name is called and he walks over to Amelia before Mark can even try to stop him. Amelia smiles and coos, booping Ian on the nose.

Amelia: “I think it’s time we just throw the rulebook out the window. Make Ian’s job here a little easier, so he doesn’t have to remember so many of these… Pesky rules. What do you think Ian, why don’t we make this into a no limit, no disqualification match, shall we?”

Ian giggles as Amelia tickles him under the chin with a finger that has become more of a talon. Unable to form words, Ian can only nod, while Amelia maintains eye contact with Carlton.

Amelia: “Good Ian. Your only purpose here now is to count a pinfall or submiss…”

Amelia doesn’t get a chance to finish as Mark has heard enough, rushing across the ring and grabbing Amelia by the arm, before picking her up and delivering a massive t-bone suplex that shakes the ring! Mark fires himself up, getting immediately back to his feet, picking up Mia’s body, and delivering another German suplex that crumples her body!

Jim Gunt: “So Amelia turned this into a No DQ match, got Ian to sign off on it, and was immediately forced to eat her words by Mark, who has yet to touch a weapon.”

Mike Rolash: “Sounds about right. Unless Mark is gifted with another weapon like we saw on Infernalia, I doubt he’ll use one either. Serves Amelia right though, I hope she’s squirming every time Mark makes them eat their words. Wow… The Menagerie is confusing to talk about, with all the body swapping.”

Jim Gunt: “To that point, as of right now, it looks like Mia is the one that has absorbed all of the damage that Mark has thrown their way.”

Mia’s body slumps to the side as Mark gets up. He snarls, mounting Mia’s back and locking in The Gentleman’s Agreement!

Jim Gunt: “The Gentleman’s Agreement! A move that isn’t seen often enough in my eyes…”

Mike Rolash yawns loudly, interrupting Jim.

Mike Rolash: “Sorry Jim, but that move is boring as Mother Theresa in a brothel… Not to mention the name just implies boring. An agreement? No blood? No tears? We just get an agreement?”

Jim doesn’t have a chance to respond as Mia’s body rolls, coming to a stop as Mark won’t let her fully rotate. She rolls to the other side, her boot catching onto the bottom rope, and pulling the two of them closer. She rolls closer to the rope, and Mark can only grin.

Jim Gunt: “Didn’t Amelia JUST make this into no limits, no DQ’s? Why would she put her host into a predicament like this?”

Mike Rolash: “Maybe for the same reason that you are still sane after however many years we’ve done this. Did you not watch Mia’s acid trip of a promo? Camera with legs? Ring any bells? The more damage Mia, the host takes, the closer The Menagerie comes to getting what they want.

The two announcers are interrupted by audible clips. Their attentions snap back to the ring, as Amelia slips out of Mark’s grasp, swallowing a little silver key. Mark’s eyes go wide as he struggles, only to find his wrists cuffed together, with the bottom rope between him, completely immobilizing him!

Mike Rolash: “Based on my previous assumption, THAT is why Amelia made it into a no limits, no DQ match.”

Jim can only nod in agreement as Amelia laughs at Mark, but quickly finds herself heckled by Eris, who pours the contents of their beer over Amelia’s head! Mark roars, but can’t do anything as Loki appears and within the blink of an eye, has hooked Eris by the arm and dragged them over the barricade! With no hesitation, Loki rolls a bewildered Eris into the ring, only for Loki to sandwich them in the corner, handcuffing them into place, with their back to Loki! Mark again yells for Loki to come after him, but Loki only laughs in his face.

Loki Synn: “Oh… You Highlanders are fun to play with! You have your own little systems of motivation and good juju going, but if anyone were to disrupt those systems?”

Loki clicks with her tongue, while making a gesture with her hands, almost as if she was coiling rope.

Loki Synn: “Don't worry Mark, you’ll get yours, but there’s been a thorn in The Menagerie’s side since the beginning of this match that just… They need to be addressed. This… Being, is cheering for you Mark, and we’ve gotten the vibe that somehow, they’re giving you the will to succeed in this match…”

Mark glances toward the entrance ramp, only for Amelia to appear in his gaze.

Amelia: “Oh, are you looking for your cousin to come rescue you? Have you fallen that low Mark, that you need your champion of a cousin to come rescue you after you got in too deep? Did you honestly think that we didn’t think about this Mark? Chaos, as it seems, is usually the most fun when you plan for ALL the eventualities…”

She snaps her fingers and the door to Caledonia’s locker room appears on the tron. The camera zooms out to show a barricade placed in front of the door, a ribbon saying, “Not to open until Xmas,” attached. Pounding from the other side can be heard as the tron once again switches back to the ring. Loki has stopped working with her hands, and a metallic clinking echoes throughout the arena. She walks over to where Mark still lays, and trails the end of her chain wrapped in barbed wire over his face, down his body, and back away from him as he flails, trying desperately to kick at her.

Loki Synn: “I told you that you’d get yours Mark. First though, it’s time to teach the lesser beings what happens when they trifle in matters that don’t concern them. Pay attention Mark, because there will be a test.”

Without another word, she turns her back on Mark and whips Eris with the chain across their back! They grunt in pain, but only grimace, unwilling to give The Menagerie of crying out. Loki goes again, several times, and only stops to wind the chain back up in her hands before sending it out again to taste Eris’ blood.

Mike Rolash: “I’ve seen some shit Jim. Lots of it throughout my years in this business. This? This is just…”

Jim Gunt: “Reprehensible and gross?”

Mike Rolash: “Yeah, I guess. I’m torn though, because honestly, Loki had a point. Why is Eris getting involved anyways? I thought they hated Carlton?”

Loki only laughs, her attention now solely on whipping Eris’ back. Mark continues to struggle and Ian can only look on helplessly. Mark grunts as he tries to push the cuff on his right wrist down over his hand. The metal is tight enough that it begins to tear at his flesh, the more he pushes. He hears Eris’ grunts though and he only pushes harder. Finally, he hears the small *POP* of his thumb dislocating. With another grunt, he’s able to get the metal off from around his wrist, freeing himself. Rolling to his knees, he wastes little time, putting the empty cuff over the fist of his left hand, like a makeshift pair of brass knuckles. On Loki’s next backswing, he grabs the chain and wraps it around his arm, forcing Loki to turn around! Once she turns, he swings his fist with the cuffs on it, connecting right under Loki’s jaw! She flies backward, and Mark quickly heads over to Eris, quickly looking for a way to undo their cuffs. Mark catches movement on the floor to his right and sees Cheshire push a pair of bolt cutters to him, urging him to hurry as her visage starts to shake, Amelia and Loki taking turns trying to take control again.

Mike Rolash: “I have no idea what I’m watching.”

Jim Gunt: “Do you really think there will be a test at the end of this?”

Mark grabs the bolt cutters and frees Eris, thrusting them into their hands and telling them to go free Caledonia. Eris hobbles off, up the ramp and out of sight, as Mark whips around, just in time for Amelia to clock him on the side of the head with her skillet! Mark staggers, but to Amelia’s bewilderment, manages to stay on his feet. He shakes his head and swats the pan out her hands, pulling her in close and throwing her over him in a belly to belly suplex! The crowd erupts as Mia flies to the other side of the ring, her body still showing no signs of life, but obvious signs from the battle. Those with a keen sense of sight can see a small patch of bloodstained burlap starting to grow over her head. She moans, and twitches slightly, the first tell all sign that she is still alive. She stands, much like before, as if strings were pulling her up. Her head turns a complete ninety degrees and her expression starts twitching. Her lips move, but her eyes tell the real story.

She is winking at Mark.

Jim Gunt: “Since we’re on pay-per-view, I’m just going to come right out and say it. That’s FUCKING creepy.”

Mike can only nod and offer his fist for another shared fist bump between the two. However, due to the real life horror story playing out in the ring in front of them, they completely miss each other.

Mark watches Mia, her head and neck at an angle that would suggest she should at the very least be in a hospital bed and unable to move, but finally puts it all together. He nods, and rushes forward, grabbing Mia in a headlock, and pulling backwards, planting her head into the mat! Mark can’t capitalize though as Mia rolls away, covering her face, only to remove her hands to reveal the face of Cheshire. She nods at Mark and stands, bouncing on the balls of her feet, before going toe to toe with Mark. Cheshire takes a step forward, looking to engage, but freezes, Mark using the opportunity to kick at the leg that Cheshire has extended, forcing her into a split! She doesn’t make a noise, but instead raises her arms to block the incoming haymaker from Mark, pulling her legs up under her, and raising to a standing position from a squat. She spins her arm around Mark’s still outstretched arm, trapping it in her armpit. Mark goes to throw another punch with his free hand, but Cheshire does the same thing before laying in multiple headbutts onto Mark! She lets him go, but Mark recovers quickly and fires back with the Marquess of Queensbury!

Jim Gunt: “Woah! That punch came out of nowhere, and to be fair, Mark has won titles with that move!”

Mike Rolash: “I’m going to admit something to you Jimbo. The blood started rushing in my veins a little faster than before Mark surprised us with that punch!”

The punch catches Cheshire flush against her jaw and she crumples before Mark. He swoops in to make the pin making the cover…

ONE!

TWO!

THR…

NO!

Cheshire gets her shoulder up, but Mark doesn't stop! Like a man possessed, he mounts Cheshire's back, raining down hammer fists before locking in The Gentleman's Agreement once more! Cheshire reaches out futilely as Mark only constricts his limbs, tightening the hold. Her arm starts to falter, but doesn't fall quite yet. That was ok though as Mark only tightens the hold even more, restricting the blood flow to Cheshire's head. She gasps for air, her arms moving up to her mask to show her mouth. Mark shakes his head though and changes his grip long enough to push the mask back down and gag Cheshire's mouth with it! Carlton growls, once again tightening the hold on Cheshire's neck.

Jim Gunt: "Ok, so I see what you were saying with calling it 'The Gentleman's Agreement…'"

Mike Rolash: "I know, right?"

Jim Gunt: "But I have to admit that this is a lot more… Vicious, than even the hold that Carlton had on The Menagerie earlier in the match."

Mike Rolash: "Call the exotic animal expert Jim! We got a constrictor on the loose!"

Mark jerks Cheshire's quickly fading body back, forcing all the air out of her lungs. She struggles, but it's all in vain. Her outstretched arm reaches for relief no one else can see, and misses completely as her fists grasp for open air and then fall to her side. Ian runs up and lifts Cheshire's arm up, Mark refusing to even loosen the hold while Ambrose checks.

Her arm falls to her side and the fans start to get on the edge of their seats. Mark jerks Cheshire's limp body again, like a crocodile feeding on live prey. Ian waits for Mark to finish moving before lifting Cheshire's arm again and letting it fall to her side, still completely limp. The crowd begins to murmur, thinking that Mark's victory is in grasp, the tension palpable, thick enough to cut through with a knife as everyone holds their collective breath.

Ian lifts Cheshire's arm up again and it falls for a third time, but doesn't reach her side. Instead, it rises, defiantly, the arm shifting to one of frilled cuffs as Loki appears in Mark's clutches. Her arm is outstretched and she flicks off the world before an hourglass appears in her outstretched hand. It cracks, and the sand pours out, directly into Mark's face! He yells out, his eyes close to protect him from any more grit from getting in them. He coughs, dirt flying out of his mouth as he struggles to maintain his composure. His hands loosen ever so slightly and Loki manages to elbow him in the ribs before breaking free! Mark doesn't have any time to recover as Loki once again grabs at the air, a canvas bag appearing in it. She turns it over and thumbtacks rain down upon the mat.

Jim Gunt: "I could easily make a pun here, but I really don't see the point. This is turn…"

He doesn't get a chance to finish as Rolash gives him a hard slap upside his head!

Mike Rolash: "STAY OUT OF MY MATERIAL NOTEBOOKS!"

Loki grabs Mark by the boot, who was still trying to get all of the sand out of his eyes. He feels the thumbtacks under him and struggles, but with surprising strength, Loki throws him up by his leg into a powerbomb position, lifting him up high and then slamming him down upon the back of his neck and head! The crowd groans, Mark's quick brush with Lady Victory now seeming like a distant memory as Amelia shows up, shoving more tacks into Mark's mouth! She disappears and Loki reappears quickly laying in a heavy uppercut, as Carlton tries to spit out as much of the tacks as

possible before she makes contact!

Jim Gunt: “Carlton is probably lucky he didn’t bite his tongue there… Or lose some teeth…”

Mike Rolash: “Considering the circumstances, I’m not sure what kind of decision that was, I’m not sure how I’d react if I was in it, and I’m very glad I’m sitting here on this side of the desk!”

Mark rolls to his side, still trying to get up to continue the fight, but Amelia appears and jumps up, landing with all of her weight on his chest, driving him back down into the tacks! She laughs as she poofs out of existence, Loki appearing through the mist that she leaves behind, grabbing Mark by the arm, and hoisting him up on her shoulders! With no wasted movement, Loki jumps into the air, and falls down, right on top of Mark with a Samoan Drop! Mark still doesn’t stay down though and he once again rolls out of the tacks, gathering himself and making it to his feet. His vision is still blurry, but he can make out the shape of Ian still in the ring. He could hear though, and finally, he heard it…

"Jingle! Jingle!"

Mark turns and without hesitation, swings a fist as hard as he can in front of him, making connection with… Mia groans as she takes the fist to the side of her face. Mark growls in frustration, but Loki quickly appears behind him, picking him up and dropping him with a German Suplex! Loki hops to her feet, sauntering over to Mark, standing on his hand in a gesture of victory.

Loki Synn: “Close, but no cigar we’re afraid. No limits, means that we get to sit here and torture you for as long as we want Mark, I hope you realize the folly of your errors.”

Mark grunts, swinging his free arm toward Loki’s boot, only for Amelia to appear to hold him down.

Amelia: “Tsk tsk Mark! Now you get to be tortured, over and over again, and there’s nothing anyone here will be able to do about it. Consider this the nightmare that you’ll never forget for whatever remaining years you have left on this rock.”

She disappears and reappears, this time with a chair big enough to sit on top of Mark as he struggles underneath Amelia sitting on it. She ignores him and instead leaps off her high chair, delivering a stomp to his face!

Mike Rolash: “Dang… That’s not going to help with any lady problems Mark has been having.”

Jim Gunt: “How do you know about his dating life?”

Mike Rolash: “There’s an app for… Hey! There’s a match going on! What will happen next?”

Mark goes to recover, refusing to roll over, while Amelia and Loki take turns peppering him with hits, refusing to allow him a chance to recover. Suddenly, the sound of a tea kettle going off pierces through everyone’s attention as Cheshire once again appears out of nowhere, or more so, duplicates of her, herding Loki and Amelia away from Mark! Carlton scrambles to his feet as the wall of Cheshires surround the other two personas, shrinking in upon themselves, before disappearing from view. Mark blinks at where the other two Menagerie members stood only moments before, while the crowd and everyone in attendance did the same. Mark turns his attention to Cheshire, unsure what to do, but doesn’t have a chance to figure it out before Cheshire delivers a decisive knee, right to Mark’s chin! Mark rolls, now understanding that it was time to fight and everything else could make sense later.

Mark rolls to all fours, looking up, but Cheshire is immediately on him, kicking his arms out from under him, backing up, and as he pushes himself up again delivers a quick stomp to the back of his head, driving him right back into the thumbtacks he had worked so hard to get out of! Cheshire glides into the cover and Ian makes the count.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING DING DING!

Jim Gunt: "Well Cheshire comes out of this match victorious but that has to be one of the strangest things we've ever seen in CWF...and that says a lot."

Mike Rolash: "Mark had to fend off all the personalities of the Menagerie tonight, and in the end the mind of Mia Rayne was too much for him tonight."

Jim Gunt: "...You sound like you actually understand what just happened."

Mike Rolash: "Not a damn clue...let's move on with the show!"

Ensemble

Segment

Backstage, the two secret guest stars of the big Alliance Tag Team Championship match are seen still arguing about the events of the last match, and their particular downfall in it. The red-haired Madame Cosette is, however, able to stop the flow of irritable French emitting from her partner's mouth when she leans over and whispers something in Colette's ear, which causes her anger to devolve into a giggling fit. The shorter woman then leans over to whisper something of her own, and for a moment, the two highly-regarded professional athletes seem more like giggly schoolgirls gossiping about boys. They are still chuckling softly when Colette spots the camera person recording all this from some distance away, and signals to them.

COLETTE: "Hey! You! Come here!"

Reluctant at first, the technician is, however, assuaged when Cosette cuts in, in her usual gentle, playful tone.

COSETTE: "Come here! We are not doing you bad!"

Colette shakes her head, reinforcing the point, and the camera person is finally coaxed into coming closer. As they draw near, big, genuine smiles appear on each guest's face, as Cosette chirps:

COSETTE: "You see? All goes well! I am Cosette. Her, she is Colette."

The two shake hands with the technician before Cosette adds:

COSETTE: "And we want all simply to talk to Monsieur Lex and Monsieur Adam."

The two begin giggling again at the mention of the two members of The Regulators, and have to strive to compose themselves for the camera. Even still, Cosette cannot help herself from giving the lens a little finger-wave as she speaks up again.

COSETTE: "But first...salut, CWF! I am 'la magique et magnifique' Madame Cosette, 'avec la ravissante' Madame Colette...and all two, we are..."

The two women cry out the name of their team together.

BOTH: "Bad Juju!!"

Then, Colette seamlessly picks up from her partner.

COLETTE: "Ravished of meeting all of you!"

Cosette nods enthusiastically.

COSETTE: "And, Monsieur Lex, Monsieur Adam, felicitations for your victory!"

It is Colette's turn to move her head, though, in her case, she is shaking it in frustration.

COLETTE: "We have never of the chance with this match! At the least, this time here, no one is distracted and forgets to ring the bell..."

Colette gives her partner a quizzical look.

COSETTE: "Have calm, chère. This is of the past. Today, we wish good luck to Monsieur Lex et Monsieur Adam!"

The two actually give the Regulators a round of applause, which is undercut by a playful little wink and smirk from the red-headed half of the duo.

COSETTE: "But..."

The grin grows wider as Cosette points towards the camera.

COSETTE: "...we want also to say...like you know...'moi et Cosette', we want to gain belts of Champion all two, ensemble. We have say this in HVW the week last. And now that we are come here at CWF..."

The visitor winks again.

COSETTE: "...could be that we want to win also here..."

Colette looks up at her partner in surprise, but then smiles.

COSETTE: "So that Monsieur Lex, Monsieur Adam...make attention. Because could be that, avec Colette, we decide of making the CWF Tag Team Championships a little more 'magique'..."

The redhead swirls her hand through the air, a gesture matched, a moment later, by her partner, who also completes the sentence.

COLETTE: "'...et magnifique.'"

The two hold the pose for a moment, then begin to giggle like tipsy teenagers again. They manage to pull themselves together long enough to thank the cameraperson for their time – Cosette blowing them a kiss as they walk off – but, soon enough, the sound of their laughter is once again heard from somewhere off-camera. A moment later, a strange purple mist begins to drift in from somewhere nearby, quickly covering most of the immediate vicinity. It is still spreading as the camera switches off, and the feed cuts elsewhere...

Christian Patrick © vs. Paul Freedom!

Match

The purple-and-silver CWF Chaos Championship rests on a black pedestal near the timekeeper's table, its spinning centerpiece catching the arena lights as the London crowd continues to buzz after the previous contest. The lights sweep across the O2 Arena, passing over the thousands in attendance before settling on the championship itself. This is the title that was born out of Esmeralda von Krauss's bizarre House of Fun match at Wrestle Fest V, a championship that has already changed hands in an equally unconventional Inside Out Ladder Match at Infernalia 12. Two matches, two radically different rulesets, and now a third chapter in the strangest championship's short history.

The camera moves from the title to the ring, where something unfamiliar has been placed on a small black table near the steps. Two compact, helmet-like devices sit beside a pair of wristbands, each wristband fitted with a single conspicuous button. A technician in black clothing stands nearby, checking the equipment one last time while several officials inspect the ring and surrounding area. There are no ladders, no crates, no elaborate cage structures, and no hidden objects waiting to be revealed. Just a wrestling ring, two competitors, and equipment that the crowd has no reason to trust.

Jim Gunt: "Ladies and gentlemen, the CWF Chaos Championship is on the line once again, and if the history of this title has taught us anything, it is that we should never assume we know what we're about to see."

Mike Rolash: "I learned that lesson at Wrestle Fest V when a giant inflatable crow attacked Wade Moor. I learned it again in Paris when a championship had to be hung instead of retrieved. Tonight, apparently, we're going to learn whether two grown men can beat the living daylights out of each other without being able to see their own hands."

Jim Gunt: "That is a remarkably accurate summary of what we've been told."

Mike Rolash: "Thank you. I have my moments."

The lights dim as the opening of "My Name Is Human" by Highly Suspect rolls through the O2 Arena. Christian Patrick steps onto the stage, dressed in black trunks accented with pink, the fractured crown emblazoned across the back. The Chaos Championship is not on his shoulder tonight; he has no need to carry it out to remind anyone what he possesses. He stands beneath the stage lights, expression cool and unreadable, studying the ring and the equipment laid out beside it. There is no theatrical display, no exaggerated celebration. Christian simply walks toward the ring, carrying himself like a man who intends to solve a problem rather than participate in a spectacle.

Joey Garcia: "The following contest is scheduled for one fall and is for the CWF CHAOS CHAMPIONSHIP! Introducing first, the challenger... weighing 240 pounds, from Wichita, Kansas... THE FRACTURED HEIR... CHRISTIAN PATRICK!"

The crowd responds with a mixture of cheers and boos as Christian circles the ring, wipes his boots along the apron, and steps between the ropes. He approaches the equipment table and listens as an official explains the controls. Christian lifts the helmet, examines the lens mounted above its brow, then fastens it securely into place. He slips the wristband around his arm, presses the button once to test the connection, and immediately releases it when the spotlight snaps on. He looks toward the technician, receives a confirming nod, and returns to his corner. There is no smile, but there is a slight shift in his eyes. He is already thinking about how to use this.

Jim Gunt: "Christian Patrick is treating that equipment exactly as I would expect. He's checking the fit, understanding the mechanism, and making sure he knows what he's working with before the bell."

Mike Rolash: "And if he can figure out how to operate a light switch, Jim, I think we can safely say he's the favorite."

The arena lights dim again, and the energetic guitar chords of "Help Save the Youth of America From Exploding" by Less Than Jake burst through the sound system. A video package plays across the screen, showing Paul Freedom's career from his earliest appearances to his blood-soaked debut and his final match on the Pollo Road. The footage moves from bright, hopeful moments to brutal exchanges, missed opportunities, and flashes of the talent that have kept people believing there is something special waiting to emerge from The Asterisk. Paul appears on the stage, pauses beneath the video wall, and looks across the enormous London crowd. For a moment, he seems caught between the person he used to be and the wrestler he is trying to become. Then he shakes his head, grins, and sprints down the ramp.

Joey Garcia: "And his opponent, from Boston, Massachusetts, weighing 195 pounds... THE ASTERISK... PAUL FREEDOM!"

Paul slides beneath the bottom rope and pops up in the ring, immediately offering Christian a handshake. Christian looks at the extended hand, then at Paul's face. After a brief pause, he accepts it. There is no hostility in the gesture, only the quiet acknowledgement of two men who understand the importance of what is about to happen. Paul releases the handshake, gives the crowd a quick double peace sign, and turns toward the equipment. His grin falters slightly when the technician demonstrates the wristband's button.

Paul Freedom!: "Three times?"

The official nods.

Paul Freedom!: "Thirty seconds each?"

Another nod.

Paul Freedom!: "And after that, nothing?"

The official confirms it once more. Paul looks at the helmet, then at Christian, then back at the helmet.

Paul Freedom!: "Okay. That's a totally reasonable thing to do to two people."

Mike Rolash: "I appreciate his confidence. I do not appreciate the fact that he has apparently learned absolutely nothing about thinking before he speaks."

Jim Gunt: "Paul Freedom has never lacked enthusiasm. Whether enthusiasm is going to be enough in a match where visibility is a limited resource remains to be seen."

Paul fits the helmet onto his head and secures the wristband. He tests the connection with a brief press, producing a circle of light around himself, then quickly releases the button. He shakes his head as if trying to clear his thoughts, taps his forefinger against his temple, and backs into his corner. Christian watches him carefully, then looks up toward the lighting rig.

Joey Garcia receives a final signal from the officials and raises the microphone.

Joey Garcia: "Ladies and gentlemen, the following contest is a COMPLETE DARKNESS MATCH!"

The London crowd erupts with a mixture of cheers, confused shouts, and nervous laughter.

Joey Garcia: "When the bell rings, all arena lighting will be extinguished. No cell phones, flashlights, or other sources of illumination will be permitted. Each competitor is equipped with a specialized lighting device controlled by the wristband on his arm. Each competitor may activate his light a maximum of THREE times during the match. Every activation will illuminate the area surrounding that competitor for THIRTY SECONDS. Once all three activations have been used, that competitor's light will no longer function. This is a NO DISQUALIFICATION contest, and victory can only be achieved by pinfall or submission!"

The crowd grows louder as the implications settle in. The Chaos Championship is raised overhead by an official, its purple strap gleaming under the remaining lights. Christian stands in one corner, flexing his fingers and testing the fit of his wristband. Paul bounces on the balls of his feet, attempting to look relaxed while repeatedly glancing toward the button on his wrist.

Jim Gunt: "Three activations apiece. Ninety seconds of illumination for each man across the entire match, and they can spend those thirty-second windows whenever they choose. The moment the bell rings, this arena will be plunged into complete darkness."

Mike Rolash: "I want everyone to remember that I was not consulted about this. I was not asked to approve it. I was not given protective eyewear, a flashlight, or even a reassuring snack. If I get kicked in the head tonight, I am filing a complaint with somebody."

Jim Gunt: "You file a complaint every time the catering runs out of shrimp."

Mike Rolash: "And I have won every single one of those cases."

The referee checks both competitors one final time, confirms that their devices are secure, and retreats toward the ropes. Christian steps out of his corner. Paul does the same. The champion and challenger stand several feet apart, their helmet lenses dark, their wristband buttons ready beneath their fingers. The referee looks toward the timekeeper.

The bell rings.

DING DING DING!

Every light in the O2 Arena goes out.

The video wall dies. The stage lights vanish. The overhead rig disappears. Even the ringside lighting is cut, leaving the building in an almost impossible blackness. The roar of the crowd swells immediately, thousands of voices rising in a vast, disorienting wave. There is no visible ring, no visible referee, no visible opponent. Only the sounds of movement, the faint creak of the ropes, and the occasional shout from somewhere in the darkness.

Jim Gunt: "The match is underway! The entire arena is now in complete darkness!"

Mike Rolash: "I can't see you, Jim!"

Jim Gunt: "I'm sitting right beside you!"

Mike Rolash: "That's how dark it is!"

Inside the ring, Christian takes one measured step forward, then another, extending his hands cautiously. Paul moves in the opposite direction, arms raised, trying to locate the champion by sound. Their boots scrape across the canvas. Paul calls out a quick, uncertain "Hello?" and gets no response. He takes another step and bumps into Christian's shoulder. Both men instinctively grab for one another, and Christian immediately establishes a grip around Paul's upper body. Paul tries to turn out of it, but Christian's greater strength wins the initial struggle. The champion shifts his hips, wraps an arm around Paul's waist, and launches him backward with a release German suplex.

Paul hits the canvas with a heavy thud. The crowd reacts to the sound, unable to see the landing, and Christian turns toward where he believes Paul has rolled. He advances cautiously, reaches down, and finds only empty canvas. Paul has already crawled several feet away.

Jim Gunt: "Christian Patrick has made the first major move, and listen to the reaction! Nobody in this building can see what happened, but they certainly heard it!"

Mike Rolash: "I heard it, too. I also heard Paul make a noise that I am reasonably certain was a prayer."

Christian drops to one knee, feeling along the canvas for Paul's leg. Paul senses the movement and scrambles backward, but his heel catches the bottom rope. Christian finds his ankle and pulls him toward the center. Paul kicks frantically, catching Christian somewhere around the shoulder before twisting his leg free. He gets to his feet, takes a wild step, and swings a forearm through the darkness. The strike catches Christian across the jaw. The champion staggers, and Paul follows with a second blow, then a third, trying to use the sounds of Christian's movement to keep him in front of him.

Paul suddenly lunges forward and catches Christian around the head in a rough side headlock. He runs on instinct, takes two steps, and attempts to leap into his bulldog. Christian stops him in mid-motion by planting his feet and catching Paul around the waist. Paul finds himself suspended awkwardly for a moment before Christian drives him down with an over-the-shoulder gutbuster. Paul folds around the impact and rolls away, clutching his stomach.

Mike Rolash: "That was not a bulldog. That was a man discovering the floor at high speed."

Jim Gunt: "Paul tried to use his movement to create an opening, but Christian's strength has been the difference in these early exchanges. The question is how long either man can keep track of the other without using that light."

Christian rises and pauses. His head turns slightly toward the sound of Paul coughing and shifting across the mat. He reaches down to his wristband and presses the button.

A brilliant spotlight snaps on above Christian's head.

For the first time since the bell, the audience sees a portion of the ring. Christian stands near the center, his face

illuminated from above, while the beam spreads across the canvas around him. Paul is several feet away, trying to push himself up. The champion immediately closes the distance and catches him with a short-arm clothesline that drops him flat onto his back. Christian follows with a hard stomp to the thigh, then bends down and pulls Paul into a seated position.

Jim Gunt: "There it is! Christian Patrick has used his first activation!"

Mike Rolash: "And he used it to find Paul, hit him in the face with his arm, and stomp on him. A triumph of modern technology."

Christian hooks Paul's head beneath his arm and drives him down with a snap suplex. He rolls through the landing, maintaining control, and transitions into a grounded crossface, wrenching backward on Paul's neck and shoulder. Paul immediately reaches for the ropes, but he is not sure which direction they are in. He shifts his hips, searches with his boots, and finally manages to hook the bottom rope with his heel. The referee sees the contact in the light and orders Christian to release. Christian lets go immediately, but he doesn't waste the remaining seconds. He drags Paul away from the ropes, hauls him upright, and hammers him with a short forearm.

Paul responds with a headbutt that catches Christian high on the cheek. Christian recoils, momentarily stunned. Paul drops low, catches Christian's leg, and twists into a drop toe hold that sends the champion face-first to the mat. Paul scrambles over him, reaches for a schoolboy clutch, and hooks both legs.

Jim Gunt: "Paul has a cover!"

ONE—

Christian powers out before the referee can complete the second count, throwing Paul sideways. The light remains on, but the timer is running down. Christian grabs for Paul's wrist. Paul pulls away and lands a quick kick to the ribs, then another to the thigh. He backs toward what he hopes is a corner, but his shoulder strikes the ropes on the opposite side. He turns, confused, and Christian catches him with a Patrick Kick that snaps Paul's head backward.

The champion takes one final look at his opponent as the light begins to flicker. He has spent the first activation establishing control, but the thirty seconds are nearly gone. Christian moves in for another strike. Paul ducks beneath it, rolls away, and the spotlight abruptly extinguishes.

Darkness returns.

Mike Rolash: "And just like that, Christian's little sun has set."

Jim Gunt: "He has two activations remaining, and Paul has managed to make him spend one without allowing the match to end."

Mike Rolash: "A whole thirty seconds of light, and the only thing Christian learned is that Paul can kick him in the face."

Paul crawls away from the last place he saw Christian, moving low and slowly. Christian remains on one knee, trying to pinpoint the sound of Paul's breathing. He reaches forward, finds Paul's wrist, and pulls him toward him. Paul twists free and fires a double mule kick backward, catching Christian in the chest. The champion stumbles away. Paul hears the movement and lunges, grabbing Christian around the head in a loose front facelock. He attempts a snap suplex, but his footing is poor and Christian blocks it, wrapping his arms around Paul's waist. The two struggle, their boots scraping against the canvas as each tries to find leverage.

Christian wins the position and drives a knee into Paul's stomach. He turns him around and sends him into the ropes. Paul hits them awkwardly, rebounds, and runs directly into Christian's waiting arms. The champion lifts him and plants him with a high-angle spinebuster. The ring shudders beneath them. Christian drops across Paul's chest for the cover.

ONE!

TWO—

Paul kicks out.

Jim Gunt: "Two-count! Paul Freedom survives the spinebuster!"

Christian rises, breathing more heavily now. He reaches down, feels for Paul's shoulders, and pulls him to his feet. He starts to position Paul for another suplex, but the challenger suddenly drives a knee upward, catching Christian in the stomach. Paul follows with a stiff forearm and another headbutt. The second strike lands cleanly. Christian stumbles backward, and Paul rushes after him, attempting a bulldog. Christian shoves him away. Paul rebounds off the ropes and throws himself into a spinning kick, catching Christian across the upper chest. The champion falls to one knee.

Paul hears the impact and immediately tries to capitalize. He takes a running start toward where Christian is kneeling, leaps, and attempts a moonsaulting attack from a standing position. Christian rolls aside at the last instant. Paul crashes onto the canvas, rolls through, and pops up with a bewildered expression that nobody can see.

Paul Freedom!: "I meant to do that!"

Mike Rolash: "Of course you did! You meant to land on the empty ring! A revolutionary new strategy!"

Christian hears Paul's voice and moves toward it. He catches Paul around the waist from behind, lifts him, and drives him down with a release German suplex. Paul lands hard, but rolls away before Christian can follow. The two men spend several seconds circling one another in the dark, neither able to locate the other with certainty. Christian reaches out and catches a shoulder. Paul slaps the hand away and fires a quick kick. Christian blocks it, grabs Paul's ankle, and yanks him forward. Paul drops to his hands, twists his body, and sweeps Christian's supporting leg out from under him.

Both men hit the mat almost simultaneously.

Jim Gunt: "They are having to wrestle by feel now. Every grip, every step, every attempt to find an opponent is carrying a risk."

Mike Rolash: "This is what happens when you take two athletes, put them in a dark room, and tell them the answer is to punch each other. I'm pretty sure this is how most family reunions start."

Paul rolls toward the ropes and finds them with his fingertips. He pulls himself upright and feels along the top strand, searching for a corner. Christian rises across the ring, hears the ropes moving, and heads toward the sound. Paul senses movement nearby and quickly presses his wristband button.

His spotlight snaps on.

The light catches Christian mid-stride, just a few feet away. Paul immediately ducks beneath a swinging arm, slips behind the champion, and rolls him into a schoolboy clutch. Christian lands on his shoulders, and the referee drops beside them.

ONE!

TWO—

Christian kicks out hard, throwing Paul across the canvas. Paul scrambles upright and throws his arms wide in frustration, but the spotlight is already counting down. Christian rises and catches him with a short-arm clothesline. Paul hits the mat again, and Christian follows with an over-the-shoulder gutbuster, then steps away to create room. The champion watches the light's countdown and makes a deliberate decision not to rush for a pin. Instead, he grabs Paul by the wrist and drags him toward the center of the ring, away from the ropes.

Jim Gunt: "Paul has now used one activation of his own, and he nearly caught Christian by surprise. But the champion

is making sure this doesn't turn into a contest of lucky pins."

Mike Rolash: "I don't know, Jim. Lucky pins are how I pay my rent."

Christian pulls Paul upright and begins setting him for the Saito suplex he uses to prepare his most dangerous offense. Paul feels the grip tightening around his upper body and starts throwing elbows backward. The first catches Christian in the ribs. The second catches him near the jaw. Christian maintains the hold, but Paul stomps on his foot and manages to turn around. He drives a forearm into Christian's face, then scrambles away just as the spotlight flickers out.

Darkness swallows them again.

Christian immediately reaches for the wristband and presses the button for the second time.

His spotlight returns, illuminating both men near the center of the ring. Paul is still moving backward, and Christian steps after him with measured precision. He catches Paul with a hard forearm, follows with a short-arm clothesline, and then pulls him back to his feet. Paul tries to retaliate with a kick, but Christian catches his leg, sweeps it aside, and drives him into the canvas with All Rise, his uranage landing with a heavy thud.

Jim Gunt: "Christian Patrick is using the light to establish control again! He has found the rhythm he wants, and Paul Freedom is struggling to get out of it!"

Christian rolls Paul onto his back and hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO—

Paul kicks out once more.

Christian's expression tightens. He sits up, takes a breath, and studies Paul for a moment. He is not frustrated enough to become reckless, but the challenger has now survived several opportunities that might have ended another match. Christian reaches down and tries to pull Paul up by the arm. Paul suddenly swings his legs upward, catches Christian around the head, and rolls through, dragging the champion into a hurried cradle. Christian's shoulders hit the mat.

ONE!

TWO—

Christian kicks out, and both men scramble apart. Paul gets to his knees and immediately taps his forefinger against his temple, then remembers the audience cannot see him in the light's fading glow. He gives a little shrug anyway.

Paul Freedom!: "Still counts as a plan!"

Mike Rolash: "I don't think the plan has survived contact with the opponent, Paul!"

Christian lunges forward and catches Paul with a Patrick Kick. Paul drops backward, but Christian grabs his arm before he can roll away and pulls him into position. He turns him over, traps his legs, and applies an elevated Boston crab, sitting back and forcing Paul's spine into a painful arch. Paul cries out and claws at the canvas. The ropes are too far away. He reaches toward where he thinks Christian's leg might be, but the champion shifts his weight and tightens the hold.

Jim Gunt: "Christian has him trapped in the elevated Boston crab! Paul is in serious trouble here!"

Paul refuses to submit. He plants his palms against the canvas, pushes his upper body forward, and begins inching toward the nearest rope. Christian leans backward, trying to pull him away from it. Paul kicks his legs, manages to turn his hips, and suddenly rolls onto his side. Christian loses the angle. Paul twists free, grabs the champion's ankle, and yanks him off balance. Christian drops to one knee. Paul rolls away and scrambles to the ropes just as the light expires.

Darkness returns for the second time.

Jim Gunt: "Christian has used two of his three activations! Paul has used one! And the challenger has refused to give up!"

Mike Rolash: "I don't know whether that's determination or the fact that Paul hasn't fully processed what's happening to him, but either way, he's still here!"

Christian remains near the ropes, breathing steadily and thinking through his options. He knows he has one activation left after this. He also knows Paul has two. The champion slowly moves away from the ropes, listening. Paul is on the opposite side, dragging himself upright and trying to quiet his breathing. Christian takes two steps, pauses, then suddenly charges toward the sound of Paul's movement.

Paul hears the rush and drops flat. Christian sails over him, colliding chest-first with the ropes. Paul immediately scrambles behind him, grabs his waist, and attempts a schoolboy roll-up. Christian catches himself on his hands, refusing to be pulled down. He turns his hips and drives an elbow backward into Paul's forehead. Paul releases him and staggers away, clutching his face.

Christian turns, finds Paul by sound, and catches him with a Round the World spinning lariat. The blow sends Paul crashing to the canvas. Christian follows him down, hooks the leg, and covers.

ONE!

TWO—

Paul kicks out again.

Christian sits back on his heels. He has controlled most of the contest, landed the heavier offense, and forced Paul to spend one of his precious activations simply to escape. Yet the challenger continues to find a way to survive. Christian looks down at his wristband. One activation remains. He glances toward Paul, then presses the button.

The final spotlight from Christian's device ignites.

The light catches Paul struggling to sit up. Christian immediately advances, grabs him around the waist, and drags him into position. He drives a knee into Paul's abdomen, then lifts him into a Saito suplex, sending him crashing onto his upper back and shoulders. Paul rolls onto his side, visibly hurting. Christian doesn't give him time to recover. He hauls him upright, hooks the head and arm, and drives him down with a second heavy suplex.

Jim Gunt: "Christian is pressing the advantage! This is his final activation, and he appears determined to make it count!"

Mike Rolash: "He has ninety seconds of light in total, Jimbo, and he has decided to spend the last thirty making Paul Freedom regret every life choice that brought him here!"

Christian pulls Paul to his feet and begins setting him up for My Time Now. He gets Paul into position, locks his grip, and starts to lift him for the sheer drop brainbuster. Paul senses the movement and fights wildly, throwing a headbutt that catches Christian across the face. The champion staggers, but maintains enough control to try again. Paul drives another headbutt into him, then slips down behind his back and shoves him forward.

Christian catches himself on the ropes. Paul charges, catches him with a running forearm, and then leaps into a bulldog that drives Christian face-first into the canvas. Paul lands beside him and rolls onto his back, chest heaving. The spotlight continues to illuminate the ring, but both men are struggling to get upright. Paul pulls himself toward a corner. Christian crawls in the opposite direction, using the ropes to stand.

Paul reaches the turnbuckles and feels along the padding. He knows what he wants to do, but he has no guarantee that Christian is positioned where he needs him. He glances across the ring, sees the champion getting to his feet, and

starts to climb. Christian notices the movement and steps forward, but Paul throws himself backward with a desperate kick, catching Christian in the chest. The champion stumbles away.

Paul climbs to the second rope, then the top, and flashes his double peace signs. The crowd roars as the spotlight begins to flicker. Christian looks up and charges toward the corner. Paul launches into a corkscrew flipping neckbreaker, catching the champion as he approaches and sending both men crashing to the mat.

Jim Gunt: "PAUL FREEDOM WITH THE CORKSCREW NECKBREAKER! HE CAUGHT CHRISTIAN COMING IN!"

Mike Rolash: "The Asterisk just put his entire body on the line, and for once, he didn't land on the part of the ring that wasn't occupied!"

Paul rolls toward Christian and drapes an arm across his chest.

ONE!

TWO—

Christian kicks out, narrowly throwing Paul's arm aside.

Paul sits up, staring at the referee as though he cannot believe the count stopped. He shakes his head, takes a breath, and starts to crawl toward Christian again. The spotlight flickers one last time, then goes dark.

For the first time since the opening moments, neither man has a light remaining.

The O2 Arena is swallowed by complete darkness once more.

Jim Gunt: "THAT'S IT! Christian Patrick has used all three activations! Paul Freedom has two remaining, but neither man can see anything now unless Paul chooses to use one of his!"

Mike Rolash: "And Christian's last light went out while he was being pinned! You couldn't script that any better!"

Paul lies on his side, breathing hard. Christian is a few feet away, slowly pushing himself upright. Neither man can see the other. The crowd is deafening, but the two competitors can only hear the noise, their own breathing, and the faint sounds of the referee moving around them. Paul reaches for his wristband, hesitates, then pulls his hand away. He has two activations remaining. Christian has none. The temptation is obvious, but Paul knows the next thirty seconds may be more valuable than the last.

Christian rises first. He takes a cautious step forward and extends his hands. Paul does the same. Their fingers brush, and both men immediately grab for the other's arms. Christian wins the initial exchange, twisting Paul's wrist and pulling him into a standing side headlock. Paul struggles, tries to turn out of it, and eventually drops to one knee. Christian tightens the hold and drags him back to his feet. Paul drives a forearm into Christian's ribs, then another. The champion releases the headlock, and Paul attempts to spin away.

Christian catches him around the waist and lifts him for a German suplex. Paul feels the shift in weight and throws his legs forward, preventing the lift from being completed. He lands on his feet behind Christian, but the champion turns quickly and catches him with a short-arm clothesline. Paul crashes to the canvas. Christian bends down, finds his shoulder, and drags him upright.

The crowd can hear Christian's boots scraping across the mat as he positions Paul. He hooks the head and arm, begins to lift, and prepares to deliver My Time Now.

Jim Gunt: "Christian has him! He has Paul Freedom positioned for the brainbuster! If he can execute it, the championship may be staying right where it is!"

Paul senses the lift beginning. He twists his hips, throws an elbow backward, and slips free before Christian can raise him. The elbow catches the champion in the jaw. Paul stumbles away, but Christian reaches for him again. Paul ducks,

grabs Christian's arm, and pulls him forward into a sudden snap suplex. The impact echoes through the dark arena. Paul rolls through and tries to find Christian's shoulders, but he catches only an arm. Christian twists, kicks free, and scrambles away.

Paul gets to his feet and takes a few tentative steps toward the sound of Christian moving. He throws a forearm. It misses. Christian answers with a hard strike that catches Paul across the cheek. Paul staggers backward, then charges forward with a desperate headbutt. The two men collide, and both fall to their knees.

Mike Rolash: "I can't see a thing, Jim! I don't know who's winning, who's losing, or whether I've been talking into a water bottle for the last five minutes!"

Jim Gunt: "You're still talking into your microphone, Mike."

Mike Rolash: "Then I am performing my duties flawlessly!"

Christian pushes himself up and reaches for Paul. He finds him around the shoulders, pulls him close, and starts to turn him into the same finishing position once more. Paul realizes what is happening and reacts before Christian can secure the grip. He drives a knee into the champion's stomach, then another. Christian doubles over. Paul grabs the back of his neck and tries to turn him into a bulldog, but his footing slips and both men stagger sideways.

Christian catches himself and swings a forearm. Paul ducks beneath it, steps behind him, and suddenly shoves him forward. Christian stumbles into the ropes. Paul follows, grabs him around the waist, and rolls backward, using Christian's momentum to pull him into a tight schoolboy clutch in the center of the ring.

The referee drops down, feeling for Christian's shoulders before beginning the count.

ONE!

Christian twists his body, trying to roll free, but Paul keeps his weight pressed across the champion's hips.

TWO!

Christian kicks his legs, searching for leverage. Paul shifts with him, hooking one leg and pressing his own chest down across Christian's shoulders.

THREE!

DING DING DING!

The bell rings through the darkness.

For a split second, the O2 Arena seems to hold its breath. Then the crowd erupts in an enormous roar, the sound rolling through the building as the referee signals for the match to end.

Jim Gunt: "HE GOT HIM! PAUL FREEDOM GOT HIM! THE ASTERISK HAS DEFEATED CHRISTIAN PATRICK IN COMPLETE DARKNESS!"

Mike Rolash: "WHAT?! PAUL FREEDOM IS THE NEW CHAOS CHAMPION! HE JUST BEAT THE CHAMPION WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO SEE HIM!"

Jim Gunt: "Christian had him lined up for My Time Now! Paul escaped the brainbuster, survived the final exchange, and caught the champion with a desperate flash pin! That is the biggest victory of Paul Freedom's career!"

The crowd continues to roar as the arena remains dark for several more seconds. Paul stays on the canvas, barely moving, his arms spread wide as he tries to process what has happened. Christian sits up nearby, breathing heavily, his expression impossible to read in the darkness. Neither man can see the other, but the noise tells them everything.

Then the pyrotechnics erupt.

Brilliant bursts of gold, silver, and purple fire explode across the stage and along the entrance ramp, lighting the O2 Arena in successive waves. The crowd leaps to its feet as the arena lights begin to return, first illuminating the stage, then the lower bowl, and finally the ring itself. The video wall bursts into a celebration of purple-and-silver graphics as the words NEW CWF CHAOS CHAMPION appear across the screen.

Paul Freedom is still on his back in the center of the ring, blinking against the sudden return of light. He looks around at the crowd, then at the referee, then at Christian Patrick, who is slowly getting to his feet. For a moment, Paul appears to have forgotten the result entirely.

Paul Freedom!: "Wait. Did I—"

The referee points toward him and raises three fingers.

Paul's face changes.

He throws both arms over his head and lets out a shout of disbelief as the crowd answers with another tremendous cheer. An official retrieves the CWF Chaos Championship from its pedestal and climbs into the ring, carefully handing the purple-and-silver belt to the referee. The referee turns toward Paul, who has managed to sit up, and places the championship into his hands.

Joey Garcia: "Ladies and gentlemen, here is your winner... AND THE NEW CWF CHAOS CHAMPION... THE ASTERISK... PAUL FREEDOM!"

Paul stares down at the championship, running his fingers over the purple strap and the silver centerpiece. The belt's spinning plate catches the restored arena lights. He holds it close to his chest, then raises it overhead as the crowd continues to cheer. There is no carefully rehearsed pose, no practiced expression of triumph. Paul looks overwhelmed, almost unable to believe that the title is actually his.

Jim Gunt: "From the early promise of his career, through the setbacks and the missed opportunities, Paul Freedom has finally reached the summit! He has defeated the man who took this championship from Esmeralda von Krauss, and he has done it under rules unlike anything we've seen before!"

Mike Rolash: "I will admit it, Jimbo. I thought he was going to get himself hurt, get himself lost, or accidentally pin the referee. Instead, Paul Freedom just became the Chaos Champion!"

Christian stands several feet away, watching Paul celebrate. He looks toward the championship, then toward the crowd, absorbing the result. There is disappointment in his face, but no tantrum, no protest, and no attempt to take the belt back. After a moment, Christian extends his hand.

Paul notices the gesture and looks up. He immediately reaches out and accepts the handshake. Christian pulls him into a brief, firm clasp before raising Paul's arm high above his head. The crowd cheers louder at the show of respect, acknowledging the champion who has lost his title as well as the new champion who has earned it.

Christian Patrick: "You got me."

Paul shakes his head, still looking stunned.

Paul Freedom!: "I really thought you had me."

Christian Patrick: "I did."

Christian gives him a short nod.

Christian Patrick: "You found a way."

Paul looks down at the Chaos Championship again, then takes Christian's wrist and raises his arm in return. The two men stand together in the center of the ring, each acknowledging the other as the cheers continue to echo throughout

the O2 Arena.

Jim Gunt: "That is what competition is all about. Christian Patrick was a formidable champion, and he pushed Paul Freedom to the absolute limit. But tonight, in a match where sight itself became a resource, Paul found a way to survive and win."

Mike Rolash: "And somewhere backstage, somebody is going to have to explain to the equipment department why one of those little helmets is going to be returned with a dent in it. I have a suspicion Paul headbutted it at some point."

Paul laughs breathlessly, lifting the Chaos Championship once more. The pyrotechnics fire again along the stage, sending gold and purple sparks into the air as the camera pulls back to capture the full arena. Christian stands beside the new champion, his arm still raised, while Paul holds the belt overhead and looks out across the London crowd.

The Asterisk has finally found the light he needed—not from the device on his wrist, but from the victory that will define his career.

The CWF Chaos Championship has a new champion.

And his name is Paul Freedom.

The Champion Has Arrived

Segment

The Crossing Lines broadcast returns from commercial to the backstage loading area of the O2 Arena, where a sleek, expensive European luxury car rolls to a stop beside the production entrance. Its engine purrs for several seconds before cutting off. A production assistant glances at his watch. Another checks the time on his phone. The driver's door opens and “The Ripper” Danny B steps out, dressed for the occasion with the CWF World Heavyweight Championship draped over his shoulder. He adjusts the title, straightens his jacket, and surveys the loading area with the unmistakable expression of a man who believes the entire building has been waiting for him.

He is, of course, arriving only halfway through the show.

Danny B: "What? Traffic. It's London. Get over it."

He doesn't appear to be speaking to anybody in particular. Perhaps he's anticipating the criticism. Perhaps he's already sick of hearing it.

Danny strides through the backstage corridor, his championship catching the overhead lights. Ahead, Billy and Tyler Anderson stand near a production crate alongside Franklin Fredrickson, Dean Moxley, and Seth Moxley. Their conversation dies the moment they spot the champion.

Billy Anderson: "Look who finally decided to show up."

Tyler Anderson: "Careful. He's got a very important appointment tonight."

Franklin Fredrickson: "An appointment? I thought he was just here to tell everyone how important he is."

Dean Moxley turns away, pressing his lips together. Seth doesn't bother hiding his grin.

Dean Moxley: "Wouldn't want him to miss his own entrance."

Danny slows.

The five men suddenly discover fascinating things to look at in five different directions. Billy becomes particularly interested in the shipping label on the crate. Tyler coughs into his fist. Franklin whistles a few notes that sound suspiciously like Danny's entrance theme.

Danny stops dead in the corridor.

Danny B: "Something funny?"

Silence.

Danny B: "No, seriously. I want to hear it. Since apparently we've got a fucking comedy club operating out of the loading bay, somebody tell me the punchline."

Dean lifts both hands innocently.

Dean Moxley: "Nothing, champ. Just happy you made it."

Danny B: "Oh, I'm sure you are."

Danny steps closer, forcing the group to shift out of his path. He gives each man a slow, contemptuous once-over before continuing down the corridor, muttering under his breath about ungrateful little bastards and people who ought to spend less time laughing and more time winning something.

The group watches him leave.

Tyler Anderson: "He's in a great mood."

Franklin Fredrickson: "Must be all that championship gold weighing him down."

The laughter returns, quieter this time, as Danny disappears around the corner.

Unfortunately for the champion, his next encounter is waiting directly in his path.

Ian Ambrose, CWF's backstage interviewer, stands beside a branded Crossing Lines backdrop with a microphone in hand. The moment Danny approaches, Ian straightens and steps forward, hoping to catch a word with the World Champion before tonight's monumental main event.

Ian Ambrose: "Danny! Danny, can we get a moment? We're only a few hours away from your I Quit match against Caledonia, and there's been a lot of discussion tonight about your recent comments concerning—"

Danny B: "Not now, Ian."

Ian Ambrose: "Just one question about whether you're concerned that Caledonia's previous victories over you might—"

Danny wheels around so abruptly that Ian nearly steps backward into the wall.

Danny B: "Did I fucking stutter?"

Ian Ambrose: "I'm just trying to get your thoughts before the match."

Danny B: "My thoughts? You want my thoughts? Here's a thought, Ian. Maybe if every idiot in this building stopped asking me the same five questions, I might actually have enough peace and quiet to prepare for the biggest fucking match of my career!"

Danny grabs Ian by the collar and drives him backward against the concrete wall. The microphone slips sideways in Ian's hand. A nearby production assistant freezes, while a camera operator instinctively turns his lens toward the confrontation.

Danny B: "You want to know what I'm thinking about Caledonia? You want to know whether I'm worried? Whether I'm scared? Whether I'm losing sleep over the possibility that tonight might be the night I finally—"

Danny cuts himself off. His grip tightens for a moment before he shoves Ian away from the wall, releasing him with a disgusted shake of his head.

Danny B: "No. You know what? I'm done answering questions. I'm done explaining myself to people who have already

decided what they want to believe. And I'm done listening to everybody act like tonight is some fucking execution and I'm just waiting to have my head chopped off."

Ian straightens his collar, keeping a cautious distance. He raises the microphone again, though his confidence has clearly taken a hit.

Ian Ambrose: "Then let me ask you something different. You've talked a lot about Golden Intentions, about being overlooked, about people refusing to give you the respect you believe you've earned. But tonight, Caledonia has the opportunity to take that championship from you without needing a pinfall or submission. She only needs to make you say two words."

Danny's expression changes. The anger remains, but now there's something colder behind it.

Danny B: "You think I don't know that?"

Ian Ambrose: "I'm asking whether you understand what's at stake."

Danny slowly lifts the CWF World Heavyweight Championship from his shoulder. He looks down at the faceplate, running his thumb across the polished metal before turning it toward Ian.

Danny B: "Do you see this?"

Ian Ambrose: "It's the World Heavyweight Championship."

Danny B: "No, Ian. It's the reason every one of these people has an opinion about me. It's the reason they laugh when I show up late. It's the reason they whisper when I walk past. And it's the reason Caledonia thinks she can walk into London and tell me when my career is over."

He brings the title close to Ian's face, forcing the interviewer to lean back.

Danny B: "I've spent years being told what I can't do. I've spent years being told who I need to beat, what I need to prove, and how many times I need to do it before people finally shut their mouths. I won Golden Intentions twice. I beat the people they put in front of me. I became World Champion. And somehow, that's still not enough."

Danny lowers the championship and steps closer, his voice dropping to a quiet, dangerous intensity.

Danny B: "So here's what's going to happen tonight. Caledonia can hit me. She can break me down. She can drag me through every miserable second of that match and try to make me regret ever stepping into a ring with her. But if she thinks I'm going to hand her the satisfaction of hearing me quit just because the whole world wants to see it happen?"

He shakes his head and gives Ian a humorless smile.

Danny B: "She's going to learn the difference between a man who wants to be champion and a man who refuses to let anybody take it away."

Ian pauses, taking in Danny's words before cautiously lifting the microphone once more.

Ian Ambrose: "So you're saying there's no chance you'll quit tonight?"

Danny stares at him for several seconds. Then, unexpectedly, he laughs.

Danny B: "Ian, you're a nice guy. You really are. But sometimes I wonder if you actually listen to a single fucking word that comes out of my mouth."

He reaches over, gently pushes the microphone down, and pats Ian on the shoulder with patronizing sympathy.

Danny B: "You'll get your answer tonight. Everybody will."

Danny turns and begins walking toward the gorilla position. After a few steps, he stops and glances back over his shoulder.

Danny B: "Oh, and Ian?"

Ian Ambrose: "Yeah?"

Danny B: "Next time you want an interview, try asking me after I've won. I'll be in a much better mood."

He flashes a grin that doesn't reach his eyes and disappears around the corner. Ian stands alone in the corridor, microphone still in hand. He looks toward the camera, then down at the spot where Danny had held him against the wall.

Ian Ambrose: "Well... the champion has arrived."

He adjusts his collar one last time.

Ian Ambrose: "Whether he'll still be the champion when tonight is over remains to be seen."

The camera holds on Ian for a moment before cutting away to the Crossing Lines event graphics.

CWF WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP — I QUIT MATCH
“THE RIPPER” DANNY B (C) vs. CALEDONIA

Tonight. Crossing Lines. London, England.

A Crown Made of Yellow

Segment

The camera opens in a dimly lit corridor somewhere behind the curtain at London’s O2 Arena. The distant roar of the Crossing Lines crowd rolls through the concrete walls, punctuated by the occasional burst of pyrotechnics from the arena floor. At the end of the corridor, a gold-framed mirror rests atop a narrow dressing table, surrounded by scattered jewelry, bottles of expensive perfume, and a small collection of peacock feathers.

Before the mirror stands Jared Holmes, the CWF Paramount Champion, dressed in his yellow-and-blue Versace bathrobe. His jeweled mask rests beside him. He runs a hand through his shaggy blonde hair, inspecting his reflection with the concentration of a man who considers his own appearance an act of public service.

On the table, his championship rests atop a folded silk towel. Jared lifts the title and angles its faceplate toward the light.

Jared Holmes: "Look at that. Fucking gorgeous. Really, genuinely, almost offensively gorgeous."

He kisses two fingers and taps them against the gold, then drapes the championship over his shoulder. His reflection smiles back at him. Jared's smile gradually fades.

Jared Holmes: "You know what's funny about a mirror? Everybody thinks it's supposed to show you who you are. But it doesn't, does it? It shows you what you want to see. The version of yourself you've spent years putting together. The face you practice when you're winning. The face you wear when somebody tells you you're special."

He reaches for his mask, turning it between his hands. The emerald set into its forehead catches the light, bright and unnatural. For a moment, Jared seems transfixed by it.

Jared Holmes: "And sometimes, if you're really fucking lucky, you find somebody who looks at you and sees something else entirely."

He places the mask over his face. His eyes appear to glow emerald through the openings. He tilts his head, admiring the effect, before turning toward the camera.

Jared Holmes: "MJ Flair."

He says her name with a little laugh, as though the words themselves amuse him.

Jared Holmes: "Two-time World Champion. CWF royalty. One of those people who walks into a room and expects everyone to remember every single thing she's ever done. And, hey, fair enough! She's earned a lot of that. She's got the résumé, the history, the little scrapbook of victories she can pull out whenever somebody younger, prettier, and considerably better dressed comes along."

Jared raises a finger, his jeweled rings glinting.

Jared Holmes: "But there's a difference between being remembered and being relevant. There's a difference between having a legacy and having something worth protecting. And there's a very big fucking difference between being a former World Champion and being the person who walks out of Crossing Lines with MY Paramount Championship."

He removes the mask. His eyes are soft blue again. He sets it down carefully, then lifts the title from his shoulder and holds it before the mirror.

Jared Holmes: "I know what you're thinking, MJ. You think this is your opportunity to remind everybody who you are. You think if you beat me tonight, you get to walk away with another shiny object and another chapter in the story you've been telling about yourself for years."

His expression hardens.

Jared Holmes: "But I don't think you understand what happens when you step into a room with somebody who doesn't give a flying fuck about your story."

He sets the championship down and takes a peacock feather from the table. He rolls it between his fingers, watching its iridescent eye shift colors as he turns it beneath the light.

Jared Holmes: "I don't need to beat you because you're MJ Flair. I don't need to beat you because you used to be a World Champion. And I sure as shit don't need to beat you to prove that I belong here. I already have the gold. I already have the spotlight. And I already have a whole lot of people who would rather choke on their own tongues than admit that I'm the most interesting thing this company has put on television in years."

He lays the feather across the center of his championship.

Jared Holmes: "I need to beat you because people like you have spent your entire careers believing that everything in this business eventually belongs to you. Every championship. Every main event. Every fucking inch of oxygen in the room."

He leans closer to the camera.

Jared Holmes: "Tonight, I'm going to teach you that some things don't belong to legends. Some things don't belong to veterans. Some things don't belong to anybody who thinks the world owes them a goddamn encore."

Jared picks up his mask again, but this time he doesn't put it on. He simply holds it beside his face, looking at his reflection in the mirror.

Jared Holmes: "And when the bell rings, MJ, you're going to find out that the man behind the mask isn't nearly as nice as the man you've been imagining."

He flashes a smile, all teeth and cold confidence.

Jared Holmes: "Because you can call yourself a queen. You can call yourself a legend. You can call yourself the greatest woman to ever lace up a pair of boots. Hell, you can call yourself the second coming of fucking Christ if it'll help you sleep tonight."

He snatches the Paramount Championship off the table and slings it over his shoulder.

Jared Holmes: "But when you get in that ring with me, you're just another pretty little story that ends with my name at the top of the page."

Jared slips the mask back over his face. The emerald eye gleams as he turns toward the exit, pausing only long enough to glance at himself one final time.

Jared Holmes: "Let's see how good you look in the mirror when you've lost."

He saunters out of the room, the championship resting proudly against his shoulder. The camera lingers on the abandoned dressing table, where the lone peacock feather lies across the spot his title occupied moments before.
From somewhere beyond the door, Jared's voice rings out.

Jared Holmes: "And somebody better make sure there's champagne in my fucking dressing room! I'm not celebrating with the cheap shit!"

The door slams. The camera cuts to black.

“The Peacock King” Jared Holmes © vs. MJ Flair

Match

Jim Gunt: "This next match, it’s been simmering since before Wrestlefest."

Mike Rolash: "And it’s about to boil over. Mijjy has gotten too big for her britches and Jared is the one to suck her back down."

Jim Gunt: "He’s certainly done his share of that."

Mike Rolash: "And I’m going to tell him you said that right after he kicks Mijjy’s ass."

CUE UP: “obedear” by Purity Ring.

The lights dim, and silver, yellow, and blue strobes fill the arena. Yellow pyro explodes all around the entrance. A trapdoor opens at the top of the entrance ramp, and from below the stage rises the Peacock King himself, sitting, head down, unaffected by any of the noise around him.

Jim Gunt: "The Paramount Champion certainly knows how to make a spectacle!"

Mike Rolash: "He didn’t win that title via spectacle, Jim! He’s here to set things right!"

Jim Gunt: "There’s been rumors of turmoil in the House of Balloons the past few weeks, a win here, over the two-time former CWF World Champion, would go a long way to dispelling those rumors."

The Champion makes his way to the ring slowly and deliberately, his head down, obscured by the hood on his robe as well as his elaborate mask. Every now and then, the spotlights catch the robe just right, and an elaborate pattern of lights displays behind him, mimicking a peacock plume.

Mike Rolash: "A MAN!"

Jim Gunt: "…Do you need a minute alone?"

Mike Rolash: "…no."

Holmes slides under the bottom rope and creeps around the mat for a few seconds, before taking position in the center of the ring. Again, he sits down, head down, obscured by the hood on his robe, facing the entranceway.

CUE UP: “Wings” by ILUKA

No melodrama, no histrionics. MJ Flair walks out from the back, red and blue pyro shooting off behind her, with no

flinch or notice. She keeps her eyes focused on Jared Holmes, only half paying attention as she slaps a few hands.

Jim Gunt: "Flair is focused tonight!"

Mike Rolash: "Mijjy knows she’s getting her comeuppance here tonight, so she’s not making us wait for it."

MJ stops at the ringside area, and she stares into the top of Holmes’ head. She takes a lap around the ring per her usual, but instead of climbing to the top turnbuckle with an arm raised, she completes the lap, slides into the ring, and remains on her knees, staring at the Champ.

Jim Gunt: "Mind games."

Mike Rolash: "But who’s playing them on who?"

Joey Garcia: "Wrestling fans, this next contest is scheduled for one fall, with a sixty minute time limit, and it is for… THE CWF… PARAMOUNT… CHAMPIONSHIP!"

The fans cheer in anticipation of the penultimate match of Crossed Lines, as Flair pushes back up to her feet. She backs up, pressing herself into the top rope.

Mike Rolash: "And Mijjy blinks first!"

Jim Gunt: "I’m still not sure Holmes knows he’s playing."

Joey Garcia: "INTRODUCING FIRST… The challenger! From Warwick, New York…Weighing in at one hundred forty pounds…"

Joey Garcia, along with all of the O2: "EMM… JAY… FLAIR!"

Flair raises a hand in victory/appreciation, thanking the fans for their welcome.

Joey Garcia: "AND HER OPPONENT…"

Boos begin almost immediately; although Holmes finally looks up.

Joey Garcia: "From La Jolla, California… and weighing in at two hundred thirty five pounds…"

Slowly, Holmes rolls backwards, doing a reverse somersault to end up with a foot and a knee on the mat, from which he just as deliberately rises to his feet.

Joey Garcia: "He is the REIGNING… DEFENDING… SEE - DUBYA - EFF… PARAMOUNT… CHAMPION… THE PEACOCK KING… JAAAAAAAARED… HOOOOOOOOOLMES!!!"

Holmes pushes the hood from his head and allows his robe to fall open. He does not hold his title belt up like most champions would; he stands with the opened robe, forcing the entire arena to look at him wearing it.

DING DING DING!

Jim Gunt: "There’s the bell, and we’re underway! Champion taking his sweet time, however, removing his mask, robe, and sandals. He’s… is he actually going to make referee Patrick Young take the belt off himself?"

Mike Rolash: "Why should he, a Champion and a King, have to do it?"

Jim Gunt: "He took off his entrance props."

Mike Rolash: "Those are more valuable."

The referee, having removed the belt from around Holmes’ waist, shows it to the Champion, to the challenger, and holds it up in the air for the arena to see.

Jim Gunt: "Finally, we’re underway!"

The two athletes circle, as a dueling chant begins to rise.

“PEA-COCK-JE-RRY”

“EMM JAY EFF!”

Mike Rolash: "He hates that name, show some respect!"

Flair looks around the arena, nodding her appreciation - Holmes with a hard shove from behind! He splashes her in the corner! Head to turnbuckle! And again!

Jim Gunt: "A cheap shot by the Champion!"

Mike Rolash: "She took her eyes off him, Mijjy should know better."

Holmes whips her across the ring, and she hits the opposite corner with a thud!

Jared Holmes: "Say it again, Mijjy! What’s my name?"

Jim Gunt: "Peacock Jerry finally getting his hands on the origin of the name, and he’s looking to get his pound of flesh!"

Holmes pulls MJ out of the corner, and a knife edge chop! Another! He’s backing her up into the ropes again, and referee Young backs them up, but the Champion hooks her by the head, pulls her back… FLAIR WITH A REVERSAL SMALL PACKAGE!

ONE!

TWO!

KICKOUT!

Jim Gunt: "Just like that, the tide can change."

Mike Rolash: "Desperation reversal, Holmes is livid! A kick to Mijjy’s face while they’re both still on the mat! Do it again, Holmes!"

He does do it again. Another foot to the face of the rising MJ sends her tumbling into the bottom rope, at which point MJ springs forward and drives her fist directly into the Champion’s cheek!

Mike Rolash: "Cheap shot!"

Jim Gunt: "Seriously?"

The fans roar in excitement as Patrick Young gets between the two, and while MJ is showing a slight bruising around her eye, Jared Holmes shows a clear sign of a bright red cheekbone and blood beginning to trickle from his nose. He inches away on the mat, asking for a breather, but once Flair reaches her feet, Holmes steps back and tells the two to continue!

“PEA-COCK-JE-RRY”

“EMM JAY EFF!”

Flair with a handful of Holmes’ hair, Holmes with a punch to the gut! MJ lets him go but fires a boot into the side of his head, Caledonia style! She gets back on him and grabs him from behind with a release German suplex! She bridges,

ONE!

TWO!

T-KICKOUT!

Mike Rolash: "He didn’t win that title, and continue to hold onto it, by losing like that."

Jim Gunt: "Flair hasn’t won her own titles by succumbing to cheap shots, I think both of these athletes deserve your respect, Mike."

Mike Rolash: "…she’s not THE WORST wrestler I’ve ever seen…"

Flair rolls through, and she crossfaces the Champion, snapping his head to the side and knocking him back into the ropes again. MJ climbs to her feet, and drops a heel into Holmes’ stomach! The Champion rolls to the outside for a breather!

Mike Rolash: "Dumb choice on Mijjy’s part. This man is carved out of alabaster and therefore his abs protect him from harm."

Jim Gunt: "How did you get into sports broadcasting with no knowledge of anatomy?"

Mike Rolash: "My mom may have made a few calls."

Flair to the outside, hot on Holmes’ heels, and he responds by throwing the Paramount title belt at her! It gives her a moment’s pause to protect her face and catch it, giving him the chance to slide back into the ring.

Jim Gunt: "Referee count at three, Holmes back in! Can you believe him, tossing his Championship like it was nothing?"

Mike Rolash: "It got him the time he needed; if this was Mijjy you’d have praised it as smart strategy."

Holmes feeling the bruising on his face, he keeps the referee between himself and MJ until she grabs the middle rope, at which point he bounds off the opposite ropes and catches her with a dropkick out of nowhere!

Jim Gunt: "MJ FLAIR FLIES OFF THE APRON!"

There’s a loud impact sound through the feed as MJ half lands, half catches herself on the commentary table.

Mike Rolash: "Still feeling good about yourself?"

Holmes slingshots himself from the mat to the top rope, and he flies through the air to a series of flashbulbs, landing on top of Flair as she turns back to the ring!

Jim Gunt: "Say what you will about Peacock Jerry, but when you approach your career with the attitude of a cult leader, you’re going to try and grab photo ops."

Both athletes are on the floor, as the count hits two. MJ is on her knees, coughing from the impact between her opponent and the table, while Jared is on the floor with a hand on his sternum.

Jim Gunt: "This one started off heavy and personal, and it looks like the stakes keep going up!"

Mike Rolash: "Disrespect From Day One. I think these two would rather die in the ring than see the other get their hand raised."

Holmes rolls to his feet and looks around; he hears the referee count five and sees MJ finally straighten up. He gets himself back into the ring as his opponent turns around, and he sprints off the opposite ropes for a baseball slide! MJ CATCHES HIM! SHE BOUNCES HIS HEEL OFF THE CORNER OF THE RING!

Mike Rolash: "Disqualify her!"

Jim Gunt: "It’s a hazard of the trade when you insist on wrestling barefoot, Mike!"

The change in mood is palpable. Holmes actually cries out in pain when his heel - definitely bruised, possibly fractured - hits the corner of the plywood that makes up the wrestling ring. He rolls towards the corner, holding his foot in what appears to be agonizing pain.

Jim Gunt: "Flair reenters the ring, Patrick Young checking that the Champ can continue, and Holmes apparently says yes!"

Mike Rolash: "Jared could be dead, and he would still pop up and verbally deny Mijjy a victory."

MJ leans in and grabs Holmes' injured foot, and she drags him to the middle of the ring with an anklelock submission! Jared screaming in pain, scrambling for the ropes, but she pulls him back into the middle of the ring. The referee drops down to ask about a submission, but Holmes, agony writ all over his face, absolutely refuses.

Jim Gunt: "I think it's safe to say, at this point, there won't be any scientific chain wrestling in this match, Mike."

Mike Rolash: "If you want to punch someone in the dick, you don't lock up with them first, do you?"

Jim Gunt: "Fair, if crude, point."

Jared Holmes' face is a mask of pain and annoyance: pain from the lock that's punishing his already damaged foot, and annoyance at the referee in his face, asking him over and over if he gives up. He gets his palms flat on the mat and steadies himself - his face has turned a deep purple/red from the strain - and he sends his other foot into MJ's chest! She drops his foot, holding herself like the wind was just knocked out of her.

Mike Rolash: "Serves you right for wrestling with a pair'a tits."

Jim Gunt: "Was she supposed to leave them in the locker room?"

Holmes climbs to his feet, and even with a pronounced limp, grabs MJ from behind and lifts her up. Falcon arrow! He hooks a leg! ONE… TWO… Kickout!

Jim Gunt: "The tank is nowhere near empty for either one of these two right now, but every hit brings us a little closer."

Holmes climbs back to his feet - his limp is getting worse. HE pulls MJ up and sets her up between his legs, to a chorus of boos and the continued chant.

"PEA-COCK-JE-RRY"

"EMM JAY EFF!"

"PEA-COCK-JE-RRY"

"EMM JAY EFF!"

Jim Gunt: "We've seen this before; Jared setting up for the Song of the Hyades, but I wonder can he properly push off with his foot in the state it is?"

Mike Rolash: "You keep underestimating the Peacock King, and it's going to cost you."

Jim Gunt: "How?"

Mike Rolash: "….Shut up."

Holmes adjusts his footing and his grip, and he attempts to lift himself up to start the flip for the properly executed Canadian Destroyer - but he can't do it! MJ holds on tightly, and, she powers him up from dead weight to backdrop him over her head! It was about four inches off the ground that Holmes realizes he doesn't have control over the ascent and tries to loosen her grip. Stil, he lands on his shoulders and back, only for MJ to kick her legs out from under her and drop down, ass first, on his chest! SHe reaches back to hook a leg, ONE.. TWO…

Holmes hooks her shoulders with both legs and rolls her through! ONE… TWO…

MJ rolls through it and flips over with a modified small package! ONE… TWO…

Holmes powers through and rolls them twice, and drops to his knees with a backslide! Shoulders on the mat, ONE…

TWO… Flair catches her foot on the ropes, and the referee calls for a break!

Jim Gunt: "Jared Holmes to his feet, unsteadily, but he's stalking Flair from behind as she recovers… He locks on a sleeper! He's looking for the submission, or the knockout. He's got her locked in… it's only a matter of time!"

MJ claws at Holmes' forearm, expertly snaked around her neck, trying to escape. Holmes pulls her backwards into the middle of the ring and cinches tighter.

Jim Gunt: "Lest we forget, Caledonia had Flair in a similar predicament at Wrestlefest, but Flair had the height advantage and was able to power out. Jared Holmes stands a good seven inches taller and has the leverage! Patrick Young asking her if she quits - I think that's safe to say she doesn't - but she might start to fade at any second!"

Mike Rolash: "Save us some time and do it, Mijjy."

Flair inches her fingers under Holmes' forearm and is able to take one long ragged breath, before she stops struggling, and gets her feet underneath her. Patrick Young asks her again if she wants to quit; she doesn't answer, but she also pulls her hand away when he attempts to raise it to see if it drops.

MJ DRIVES THE HEEL OF HER BOOT ONTO JARED'S TOES! The Peacock King drops the sleeper and staggers backwards, falling to the mat!

"PEA-COCK-JE-RRY"

"EMM JAY EFF!"

"PEA-COCK-JE-RRY"

"EMM JAY EFF!"

Jim Gunt: "Creative escape for the challenger, and now Holmes is in a serious disadvantage with both feet separately injured! Flair with a scoop and a slam, and a snap legdrop! Cover!"

ONE!

TWO…

Kickout!

Mike Rolash: "Roll out and take the ten, Holmes!"

Flair scoops Holmes again and whips him into the ropes - he reverses, but drops to his knees due to he pain in his feet, and MJ comes off with a dropkick to the face! Another cover! ONE… TWO… THRKICKOUT!

Jared Holmes now showing severe bruising on his face, and he's starting to swell up. He rolls to his knees - Thumb to MJ's eyes as she tries to lift him! He hooks her head, DDT!

Jim Gunt: "This might be his last chance, he shouldn't waste it!"

Mike Rolash: "Come on Jared!"

Holmes limps backwards, and he runs with a standing shooting star press - MJ ROLLS OUT OF THE WAY! JARED FACE PLANTS! THe challenger kips up once again, and with a handful of hair she's not wasting time! Hooked from behind! MORNING STAR!

Jim Gunt: "She's holding him in place, braced across her knee! Holmes' head is pulled back, his back is pressed forward, and his feet are kicking out in vain, looking for a way out!"

Mike Rolash: "This isn't good, Jim! Mijjy is shorter but she's got longer legs, she's got all the leverage!"

Jim Gunt: "Holmes reaching for her hair, but she pulls his neck back down! SHe's keeping it just out of reach! They're

in the center of the ring and Jared’s feet are just off the mat enough to keep him from gaining solid footing!"

The referee goes back and forth. To the hold, to ensure it isn’t a choke. To the knee, to ensure there isn’t any foreign object. To Jared Holmes, to ask if he wants to give.

One minute passes.

Two minutes pass.

MJ Flair looks like she’s got herself steadied for the long haul, continually readjusting her center of gravity every time Holmes squirms.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

The fans explode in cheers as the bell rings and MJ drops the Peacock King to the mat.

Jim Gunt: "SHE DID IT!"

Mike Rolash: "GOD DAMN IT!"

Joey Garcia: "Here is your winner…

…and NEW…

CWF PARAMOUNT CHAMPION…"

Everyone in the arena joins in.

"EMM… JAY… FLAIR!"

The referee raises her hand while giving over the title belt, which she hugs to her face. The former champion, Jared Holmes, rolls out of the ring and is met by an attendant who helps him limp to the back.

Jim Gunt: "Hard fought victory for MJ Flair, Mike… one title has just changed via submission, will a second? We’ve got the I Quit match for the CWF World Title between Ripper, Danny B and Caledonia coming up next!"

Mike Rolash: "I’m depressed."

As “Wings” by ILUKA fills the arena, MJ straps the belt around her waist and steps right to the cameraman capturing the moment.

MJ FLAIR: "We ain’t hiding, we ain’t basking. We’re hitting the ground running at Infernalia 14. Dangerous Dan, you should’a been in the ring with me tonight, so if you want the first shot… just ask."

The scene fades away in preparation for tonight’s Main Event.

An Offer the Prince Shouldn't Accept

Segment

The camera returns backstage much later in the evening, following the stunning conclusion of the Paramount Championship match. On the monitor behind Jaiden Rishel's desk, replays show MJ Flair defeating "The Peacock King" Jared Holmes to capture the Paramount Championship. Jaiden watches the final moments with a small smile, briefly allowing himself to enjoy the sight of another championship changing hands on a night that has already delivered more than its share of surprises.

He reaches for a glass of water, takes a sip, and sets it down beside a stack of production notes. The smile fades as his attention drifts from the monitor. There is only one match left on the Crossing Lines card: the CWF World Heavyweight Championship "I Quit" Match between the increasingly unhinged champion, "The Ripper" Danny B, and the beloved former two-time champion, Caledonia.

Jaiden Rishel: "MJ Flair, Paramount Champion. That's one hell of a way to make a statement."

He nods toward the monitor, clearly impressed.

Jaiden Rishel: "Congratulations, MJ. You've earned every bit of that moment. And if the rest of tonight is anything like what's already happened, I think London is going to remember this show for a very long time."

He pauses, looking at the papers in front of him without really seeing them.

Jaiden Rishel: "Although, I suppose I should be concentrating on the main event instead of thinking about..."

He stops himself and exhales.

Jaiden Rishel: "...Portland."

Jaiden pushes the papers away from him.

Jaiden Rishel: "Every time I think I'm getting somewhere, something else happens. My father returns from the dead, reveals that he's been living under an entirely different identity, starts explaining what happened to him, and then Lorenzo DeLuca decides to show up and turn the whole thing into another mystery."

He shakes his head.

Jaiden Rishel: "Twenty-six years of running this company, and somehow the most complicated thing I've ever had to manage is my own damn family."

A knock comes at the office door.

Jaiden Rishel: "Come in."

The door opens, and in walks Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca, immaculate in his tailored suit, his familiar smile already resting on his face. He doesn't wait for an invitation to step inside. Instead, he strolls into the room with the leisurely confidence of a man who has never once considered that a door might be closed to him for a reason.

Jaiden's expression immediately turns cold.

Jaiden Rishel: "No. Absolutely not. Get out."

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "Ah, Jaiden. Always such a warm welcome. It reminds me of the old days."

Jaiden Rishel: "I said get out, Lorenzo. I don't know how you got past security, but I can assure you that if you don't turn around and walk back out of that door, they're going to help you."

Lorenzo doesn't move. Instead, he glances toward the doorway, where two members of the Family have quietly entered behind him.

The first is a broad-shouldered man with slicked-back hair, a dark suit, and a mustache that looks as though it has its own personal grooming budget. He introduces himself with an exaggerated nod.

Luigi "Two-Ties" Bellissimo: "Buonasera, signore."

Beside him stands a shorter, round-faced man wearing a suit that appears to be one size too small and a tie decorated with tiny pepperoni pizzas.

Enzo "Meatball" Marinara: "I brought-a snacks, but nobody wanted-a snacks."

Enzo looks down at the small paper bag in his hand, genuinely disappointed. Jaiden stares at the two men. Then he looks back at Lorenzo.

Jaiden Rishel: "Are you serious? You brought a guy named Meatball into my office?"

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "Enzo is a valued member of the Family."

Enzo "Meatball" Marinara: "I also do-a bookkeeping."

Luigi slowly turns his head toward Enzo.

Luigi "Two-Ties" Bellissimo: "You do not do bookkeeping."

Enzo "Meatball" Marinara: "I do some of-a the numbers."

Jaiden closes his eyes for a moment and takes a slow breath. When he opens them, Lorenzo is still smiling.

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "Now, Jaiden, I believe we can put the pleasantries aside. I have something rather important to discuss with you."

Jaiden Rishel: "Then discuss it with the people who invited you here."

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "Unfortunately, that would be nobody."

Lorenzo takes another step into the office, his expression becoming more serious.

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "This concerns your father."

Jaiden's face changes. The anger remains, but beneath it something more cautious begins to surface. Lorenzo notices immediately.

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "There it is. That little spark of curiosity. You can tell me to leave all you like, but the moment I mention the old Sheriff, you start wondering what I know."

Jaiden Rishel: "If you know something, you should have said it when you interrupted him in Texas."

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "Ah, but then I wouldn't have had the pleasure of watching him squirm."

Lorenzo adjusts one of his cuffs.

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "You see, your father is a very interesting man. He has a remarkable talent for telling the truth in a way that leaves out precisely the part that matters most. He did it in CWF. He did it in Portland. And I suspect he's doing it now in Texas."

Jaiden slowly rises from his chair.

Jaiden Rishel: "Be very careful where you take this conversation."

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "My dear Jaiden, I would never dream of speaking ill of your father without good reason."

He pauses, letting the silence grow.

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "But I have information about what happened to him. Information that I would wager my entire mansion the old Sheriff will never tell you out of his own mouth."

For the first time since Lorenzo entered the room, Jaiden has no immediate response. His gaze shifts toward the door, then back to the man standing in front of him. He knows Lorenzo well enough to understand that nothing this man offers comes without a price. But the possibility that someone else might hold the missing pieces of his father's story is impossible to ignore.

Jaiden Rishel: "Why should I believe a single word you say?"

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "You shouldn't."

Lorenzo's smile returns, smaller now, almost genuine.

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "You should listen. You should ask questions. And then and only then, you should decide for yourself whether the answers make sense."

Jaiden stares at him for several long seconds. His hand rests against the edge of the desk, fingers tightening around the wood. Finally, he exhales and gives a reluctant nod.

Jaiden Rishel: "Fine. Talk."

Lorenzo's smile widens.

Lorenzo Vittorio DeLuca: "Now we're getting somewhere."

Jaiden's eyes flick toward the camera. His expression changes instantly, the CEO's public face returning as he addresses the production crew.

Jaiden Rishel: "You know what? Get out. I think we need to have this conversation in private."

The camera operator hesitates for a moment, catching Lorenzo's pleased expression and the two Family members standing behind him. Enzo quietly lifts his paper bag.

Enzo "Meatball" Marinara: "Anybody want-a snack before we start?"

Luigi reaches over and gently pushes the bag down. Jaiden points toward the door without taking his eyes off Lorenzo.

Jaiden Rishel: "Everybody. Out."

The camera retreats into the corridor. The door begins to close, leaving one final glimpse of Lorenzo pulling a chair across from Jaiden's desk, his expression suggesting that he has been waiting a very long time for this conversation. The door shuts and the screen cuts to black.

“The Ripper” Danny B © vs. Caledonia

Match

The O2 Arena in London is already shaking before the final match of Crossing Lines is officially underway. The lights sweep across a sea of raised signs, waving flags, and thousands upon thousands of fans who have spent the evening waiting for the moment that will decide the future of the CWF World Heavyweight Championship. The championship itself sits at ringside, its gold reflecting the arena lights, a reminder of everything that is about to be fought over. There is no cage waiting around the ring. No elaborate contraption. No barricade of weapons arranged for the cameras. Just a wrestling ring, a referee carrying a microphone, and two competitors whose paths have reached a point where one of them will have to say two words they may never recover from.

At the commentary desk, Jim Gunt has set aside the usual excitement of a pay-per-view main event. He looks toward the ring with the expression of a man who understands that the next few minutes could define two careers.

Jim Gunt: "Twenty-six years of CWF history have led us to nights like this. We have watched championships change hands, careers begin, careers end, and rivalries burn so hot that the people involved have forgotten what they were fighting for in the first place. But tonight, Mike, there is no question about what this is about. The CWF World Heavyweight Championship is on the line, and one of these two competitors must be pushed beyond the point where they can continue. Not pinned. Not counted out. Not forced to submit with a hand raised. They have to look another human being in the eyes, with a microphone in front of their mouth, and say, 'I quit.'"

Mike Rolash: "And the truly beautiful part, Jim, is that the other person gets to decide when they've heard enough. I

mean, think about that. You can be in agony, you can be bleeding, you can be staring up at the ceiling wondering whether your legs still work, and then someone asks you a perfectly reasonable question. 'Would you like to quit?' And if you say no, they get to continue making your evening considerably worse. It's almost polite, really."

Jim Gunt: "There's nothing polite about what The Ripper has promised to do to Caledonia."

Mike Rolash: "Oh, I don't know. He's been remarkably clear about it. He's told her what he thinks of her, what he thinks of her family, and what he intends to do to her. That's practically a gentleman's agreement by today's standards."

The camera cuts away from the desk and moves through the crowd, passing signs bearing Caledonia's name, homemade drawings of the CWF World Heavyweight Championship, and fans wearing the colors associated with the Highlander family. The cameras catch several former CWF legends in attendance, including "MANMADEMONSTER" Shane Donovan. He smirks just a little as the camera zooms in on him, before it keeps moving to show Dan "The Hammer" Highlander further down the front row, standing with his hands resting on the barricade.

The two-time HVW World Champion is not wearing his wrestling gear tonight. He has come as a husband, not a competitor, and there is nothing casual about the way he watches the entrance stage. Beside him is Eris, Caledonia's longtime friend and former Bright Young Things tag team partner. They're on their feet already, clapping and shouting toward the stage, their eyes fixed on the entrance where their friend will soon appear. Dan turns briefly toward Eris. Neither needs to say much. They know what Caledonia has survived. They know what she has sacrificed. And they know exactly how much it would mean for her to walk away from London with the championship.

Mike Rolash: "Several CWF legends in attendance for this big main event, including Caledonia's own husband Dan Highlander. The man has been a champion in his own right, and he's got enough championship experience between himself and his wife to fill an entire trophy room. But there's one thing you cannot do in a match like this, Jim. You cannot climb through the ropes and save somebody you love just because you can't stand watching them suffer."

Jim Gunt: "And Dan knows that. He knows it better than anyone. This is Caledonia's fight, and he has to trust her to fight it."

Mike Rolash: "I wouldn't be able to do it."

Jim Gunt: "You wouldn't be allowed within fifty feet of the ring."

Mike Rolash: "That's not the point, Jim."

The arena lights dim. For a brief moment, the entire O2 Arena seems to hold its breath before the opening notes of "For I Am Death" by The Pretty Reckless tear through the speakers. The reaction is immediate, but it is not the kind of reaction reserved for a beloved champion. It is a mixture of boos, uneasy anticipation, and the unmistakable sound of a crowd that has come to see a dangerous man receive the consequences of his own actions. The Ripper steps onto the stage with the CWF World Heavyweight Championship resting across his shoulder. He does not throw his arms out. He does not bask in the lights. He simply stands there, staring at the ring as though the building has been constructed for the sole purpose of bringing him to this moment.

His eyes move across the audience, passing over the signs and the faces, until he finds the front row. Dan Highlander is standing directly in his line of sight. Ripper stops. For several seconds, the champion says nothing. He slowly lifts the championship from his shoulder and holds it up toward Dan, turning it slightly so that the gold catches the light, then he smiles. There is not a hint of happiness in the smile, however. It is the thin, unpleasant expression of a man who has found the exact person he wanted to upset.

Ripper points at Dan, taps the faceplate of the championship, and mouths something the cameras do not quite catch. Dan does not move toward him. He does not rise to the bait. He merely stares back with the calm, unyielding expression of a veteran who has spent too many years around men who believe intimidation is the same thing as

strength.

Mike Rolash: "Oh, that is lovely. Nothing says 'I'm completely comfortable with my position as champion' like spending your entrance trying to antagonize a man who isn't even in your match."

Jim Gunt: "The history between these two men goes far beyond tonight. Ripper has spent a great deal of his career in conflict with the Highlander family, and the more successful Caledonia has become, the more openly he has allowed that resentment to consume him."

Mike Rolash: "Resentment? Jim, he looks like a man who has been forced to share a restaurant table with somebody he doesn't like for twenty-six years."

Ripper starts down the ramp, walking slowly, his championship held against his side. Every few steps, he glances toward the front row again. He passes a fan holding a sign that reads CALI NEVER QUITS, and he stops just long enough to lean toward the barricade. He looks at the sign, then at the fan.

Ripper: "You should've brought a different one."

He keeps walking before the fan can answer. At ringside, Ripper rips the sign into shreds, a small smirk beginning to cross his face until he sees the other man at ringside. Ripper's face changes as he stares back at Shane Donovan, the "MANMADEMONSTER" staring a hole right back at him. Ripper paces over to him, jaw jacking words your grandma would never want to hear, and Donovan argues right back with him. Ripper shakes his head, backing away from Donovan as he clearly tries to focus on the task at hand. He turns back towards the ring and enters between the ropes, walks to the center and turns toward the hard camera. The crowd responds with a fresh wave of boos. He lifts his arms, not to acknowledge them, but to invite them to get louder. The more they jeer, the wider his smile becomes.

He mouths the words, "I love it," before lowering his arms. The champion's expression changes when the music fades. He looks toward the stage, and for the first time tonight, the smile disappears.

The lights fall again and the opening of "Day and Night" by Billie Piper rings out across the O2 Arena. The response is extraordinary. Thousands of people rise to their feet as Caledonia appears at the top of the ramp. The former two-time CWF World Champion stands for a moment, taking in the noise, one hand resting against her chest. There is no swagger in her entrance, no effort to look intimidating. She looks tired in the way that someone looks after a long journey, battle-worn but determined, carrying the weight of everything that has brought her here. The fans know her history. They know the years she spent away from CWF fighting battles that had nothing to do with championships. They remember her rise alongside Eris as part of the Bright Young Things, her remarkable singles run, and the way she has repeatedly returned to the ring when it would have been easier to remain somewhere safe.

And tonight, they know the man waiting for her has spent weeks trying to convince her that none of it matters.

Caledonia raises both hands, and the arena erupts again.

Jim Gunt: "Listen to this place! Listen to the response for Caledonia Highlander! This is what she means to these people, Mike. This is what happens when somebody earns the affection of a crowd instead of demanding it."

Mike Rolash: "Yes, well, affection doesn't stop a steel chain, Jim."

Jim Gunt: "No. But it might remind you why you're willing to stand in front of one."

Caledonia begins her walk down the ramp, touching the hands of fans along the barricade. She pauses when she reaches Dan and Eris. Eris reaches over the barricade and takes Caledonia's hand in both of hers, squeezing it tightly. Dan leans forward, and Caledonia turns toward her husband. They exchange a few quiet words beneath the noise of the crowd, too private for the microphones to catch.

Dan places a hand against the side of her face. Caledonia closes her eyes for a brief moment, leaning into the touch.

Then she opens them and gives him a small, determined nod.

Dan says something else, and this time the cameras catch the last two words.

Dan Highlander: "Come home."

Caledonia smiles through the emotion beginning to gather in her eyes. She squeezes his hand once more before turning toward the ring. Eris calls after her, clapping both hands above their head.

Eris: "Bring it home, Cali!"

Caledonia turns back long enough to point toward Eris, then resumes her walk. By the time she reaches the ring, the champion is leaning against the ropes, applauding slowly.

Caledonia climbs the steps and enters the ring. She does not acknowledge Ripper's mocking applause. Instead, she walks to the far corner and climbs onto the middle rope, raising both hands to the crowd. The reaction nearly drowns out her music. She turns to each side of the arena, giving every section a moment, before stepping down and moving toward the center of the ring.

Ripper walks directly toward her, but Caledonia does not retreat. The champion stops inches away from her face. He looks down at her, a cruel grin returning as he tilts his head.

Ripper: "Look at them. They think you're going to save the day."

Caledonia stares back at him.

Caledonia: "I'm not here for them to save me."

Ripper: "No. You're here because you can't stand the idea of somebody else being champion. You and your family. Always the same old story, always needing to be loved, always needing all the attention of the brass backstage. Always needing somebody to tell you how special you are."

Caledonia: "And you're here because you're terrified they might stop looking at you."

The crowd roars. For the first time, the smile disappears completely from Ripper's face. He leans closer.

Ripper: "You don't know a damn thing about me."

Caledonia: "I know you're going to have to quit before I do."

Ripper's jaw tightens. He steps back, laughing once under his breath, then turns away as though the conversation is beneath him. But his fingers flex repeatedly at his sides, and his eyes keep darting back toward Caledonia. The referee steps between them and asks for the championship. The official hands the belt to the timekeeper, then retrieves a microphone from ringside. He checks it, tests the sound, and holds it up between the competitors.

Jim Gunt: "The rules are straightforward. No disqualifications. No count-outs. The action can go anywhere in this arena. There is no pinfall victory and no submission victory. The only way to win the CWF World Heavyweight Championship tonight is to make your opponent verbally quit, and the referee will be asking that question whenever the opportunity presents itself."

Mike Rolash: "And that microphone is going to become the most important weapon in this match. Not because you can hit somebody with it, although I'm sure somebody will think of that, but because it gives the other person the opportunity to hear the words they desperately want to hear."

Trent Robbins turns toward Ripper.

Referee: "Are you ready?"

Ripper looks at him with theatrical impatience.

Ripper: "I've been ready since the day they put this belt around my waist."

The referee turns toward Caledonia.

Referee: "Are you ready?"

Caledonia nods once.

Caledonia: "I'm ready."

The referee looks between them, confirms both competitors understand the stipulation, and signals for the bell.

DING DING DING!

The fans are on their feet as soon as the bell sounds, and Ripper wastes no time himself, the champion immediately stepping forward and throwing a right hand. Caledonia slips to the side. The first punch cuts through empty air, and Caledonia answers with a sharp forearm to the jaw. Ripper staggers a half-step before firing back with an elbow that catches her high across the cheek. Caledonia absorbs it, turns her shoulders, and lands another forearm. Ripper answers with a short uppercut.

Neither wrestler circles nor waits to see what the other might do. The moment the match begins, they collide in the center of the ring, trading blows with the kind of urgency that tells the audience this is not going to be a match of cautious probing.

Jim Gunt: "And we are underway! Caledonia has no intention of giving the champion time to dictate the pace!"

Mike Rolash: "She's got a very simple strategy, Jim. Hit him until he stops talking. I believe it has some merit."

Caledonia drives a knee into Ripper's midsection, grabs his wrist, and pulls him forward into a short-arm strike. She follows with a second forearm, then a third, each one forcing the champion backward. Ripper tries to catch her with a chop, but she ducks beneath it and drives a kick into the outside of his thigh. Another kick lands just above the knee. Caledonia pivots and connects with a spinning backfist that catches him flush across the jaw.

Ripper stumbles into the ropes and Caledonia exhales a deep breath and charges forward. Ripper suddenly drops his shoulder and catches her with a sharp elbow to the stomach. He pulls her into a front facelock, turns his body, and drives her down with a snap suplex that leaves Caledonia scrambling to catch her breath. Ripper rolls through, drags her up by the wrist, and hammers a knee into her ribs. He follows with a second, then a third, before shoving her toward the corner.

Caledonia hits the turnbuckles hard, and Ripper charges after her, but she gets both boots up against his chest. He staggers backward, and Caledonia springs from the middle rope with a twisting crossbody that sends both competitors crashing to the canvas. She lands across him, rolls through, and immediately drives a forearm into his face.

Ripper tries to get away, but Caledonia stays attached to him, dragging him up by the arm and delivering a European uppercut that snaps his head backward. She follows with a second uppercut, then ducks under his next swing and traps his arm across her chest. For one brief instant, her positioning and the turn of her hips look unmistakably familiar to anyone who has watched Dan Highlander wrestle.

Caledonia pivots and throws Ripper with a belly-to-belly suplex. The crowd explodes into cheers and applause immediately.

Jim Gunt: "Belly-to-belly suplex! Caledonia has just used one of Dan Highlander's trademarks against the man who has made a career out of tormenting that family!"

Mike Rolash: "That's a rather personal family recipe, Jim. I imagine it tastes better when served cold."

Ripper rolls toward the ropes, his face twisting with anger. He looks toward Dan in the front row and sees the former

champion standing tall, clapping for his wife.

That is enough to make Ripper forget about his ribs.

He scrambles up and lunges toward Caledonia with a wild right hand. She ducks it, but Ripper changes direction, catches her by the back of the head, and drives her face-first into the top turnbuckle. Caledonia stumbles out of the corner, and Ripper hooks her around the waist, pulling her backward into a German suplex. He holds on, drags her up again, and delivers a second, this one landing closer to the center of the ring.

Ripper releases her and rises to his feet, breathing hard. He looks down at Caledonia, then raises his arms and shouts at the crowd.

Ripper: "CHEER FOR HER NOW!"

The audience answers with deafening boos. Ripper turns toward the front row, pointing at Dan.

Ripper: "YOU TOO! YOU THINK SHE'S BETTER THAN ME?"

Dan says nothing. He simply keeps his eyes on Caledonia. Ripper's expression hardens as he turns back to his opponent and kicks her across the ribs. Caledonia curls slightly around the impact. Ripper grabs her by the wrist and pulls her toward the ropes, where he traps her arm across the middle strand and drives a boot into her shoulder. The referee warns him that the ropes are not a boundary in this match, but Ripper ignores the warning. He wrenches the arm backward, using the cable to stretch her shoulder, then releases it only to deliver a short elbow directly into the joint.

Caledonia drops to one knee. Ripper grabs her by the chin and forces her to look up at him.

Ripper: "Say it."

He takes the microphone from the referee, crouches in front of her, and holds it near her mouth.

Ripper: "Do you quit?"

Caledonia is breathing sharply. She looks at the microphone, then at the champion.

Caledonia: "No."

She drives her forehead into his nose. The crowd erupts as Ripper reels backward, clutching his face. Caledonia pulls herself away from the ropes, shakes the pain out of her arm, and charges. She catches Ripper with a running knee to the jaw, then follows with a spinning enzuigiri that sends him stumbling into the corner.

Jim Gunt: "Such Is Life! Caledonia has turned this around in a heartbeat!"

Ripper drops into a seated position against the bottom turnbuckles. Caledonia backs into the opposite corner, measuring the distance. She charges, plants a foot on the bottom rope, and drives her knee into his chest. She grabs his wrist, pulls him upright, and snaps him forward with a sharp DDT that leaves him sprawled across the canvas. Caledonia does not go for a cover, knowing damn well she can't put Ripper away that way tonight.

Instead, she grabs Ripper by the ankle and drags him toward the ropes, forcing him to turn over. She hooks his leg and attempts to trap him in a figure-four variation, twisting the knee and ankle in opposite directions. Ripper immediately reaches for her face, clawing at her cheek as he tries to break free.

Caledonia shifts her grip and wrenches the leg again. Ripper slaps the canvas with his palm as the referee drops beside him, microphone ready.

Referee: "Ripper! Do you quit?"

Ripper snarls and tries to crawl toward the ropes, but Caledonia pulls him back by the ankle.

Ripper: "NO!"

Caledonia leans backward, increasing the pressure. Ripper's face contorts, and for a moment his hand hovers near the referee's microphone. He seems to consider the question, his eyes moving between the official and Caledonia. Then he spits in her direction.

Ripper: "You think this is going to make me quit? You're going to have to do a hell of a lot better than that!"

Caledonia releases the hold and rises, her expression suddenly cold.

Caledonia: "I was hoping you'd say that."

She drags Ripper toward the center of the ring and begins striking him with short, controlled kicks to the thighs and ribs. Every kick is deliberate. She is not trying to make a statement for the crowd; she is trying to weaken the champion, to make every movement more difficult than the one before it. When Ripper finally struggles to his feet, she catches his wrist and attempts another belly-to-belly suplex.

Ripper blocks it with a wide stance. He drives an elbow into Caledonia's temple, then another into her ribs. She releases his wrist, and Ripper takes advantage of the opening to catch her with a flapjack, sending her crashing chest-first onto the canvas.

He rolls her over and immediately traps her in a grounded headlock, grinding his forearm against her jaw while using his legs to control her hips. Caledonia tries to bridge, but Ripper shifts his weight and pulls her back down. She reaches for his wrist, attempting to pry his arm away from her throat, and he answers by driving a knee into her back.

The referee kneels beside them.

Referee: "Caledonia, do you quit?"

Caledonia's face is pressed against the mat. She struggles to turn her head toward the microphone.

Caledonia: "No!"

Ripper pulls the hold tighter.

Ripper: "Louder!"

Caledonia: "NO!"

The arena answers with a roar that seems to shake the ring. Caledonia plants both boots against the canvas and begins inching her body toward the ropes. Ripper tries to pull her back, but she uses the leverage to roll onto her side. Her elbow finds his ribs. Once. Twice. A third time, harder. Ripper loosens his grip just enough for Caledonia to turn into him and drive a knee into his stomach.

She pushes free, scrambles to her feet, and throws a right hand. Ripper ducks, catches her around the waist, and lifts her high. Caledonia struggles, kicking her legs as he carries her toward the ropes, but Ripper suddenly changes direction and hurls her over the top rope. Caledonia crashes to the floor beside the timekeeper's area in an absolute heap.

Jim Gunt: "Caledonia has been sent over the top rope, and she has hit that floor hard!"

Mike Rolash: "The good news is there are no count-outs. The bad news is that apparently there are no count-outs."

Ripper climbs out after her. He does not rush. He steps down to the floor and walks toward Caledonia with the cold, deliberate movements of a man who has decided the match is no longer about winning a championship. It is about making someone suffer for daring to challenge him.

He grabs a folding chair from beside the timekeeper's station and unfolds it with a sharp metallic snap. The crowd boos

as he approaches the former two time champion. She tries to get to her knees, but Ripper drives the edge of the chair into her midsection. She folds over, and he drops the chair across her back with a brutal swing. The impact echoes through the arena. Caledonia cries out, clutching at the floor, while Ripper stands over her and lifts the chair again.

Jim Gunt: "Ripper is using that chair to target Caledonia's back! There is no disqualification in this match, but that does not make what we're watching any less vicious!"

Mike Rolash: "No, Jim. It just means the referee has to ask her if she'd like him to stop."

Ripper swings again. Caledonia rolls away, and the chair crashes against the padded floor. She crawls toward the barricade, using it to pull herself up, but Ripper catches her by the hair and drags her backward. He shoves her against the barricade, then slams the chair into her abdomen once more.

Dan Highlander takes a step forward, but Eris catches his arm.

Eris: "Dan. Dan, wait."

Dan's hands tighten against the barricade. His eyes are locked on Ripper, and every instinct in his body seems to be telling him to climb over the barrier and get between them. But he looks down at Eris's hand on his arm, then back at his wife. Caledonia sees him. Even while bent over against the barricade, she lifts one hand toward him. It is a small gesture, barely more than a few inches of movement, but the message comes loud and clear.

"Stay back".

Dan freezes.

Jim Gunt: "Dan Highlander wants to do something. Every husband in this building understands what he's feeling right now. But Caledonia is telling him to trust her, and that may be the hardest thing he has ever been asked to do."

Mike Rolash: "The hardest thing he has ever been asked to do is probably listen to you for three hours, Jim, but I understand the sentiment."

Ripper notices the exchange. He looks from Caledonia to Dan and slowly turns the chair in his hands.

Ripper: "There he is. The great Hammer. Always standing there. Always watching. Always getting to be the hero."

He walks toward the barricade, dragging the chair against the floor until the metal scrapes loudly enough to cut through the crowd noise.

Ripper: "How many times have you had to watch somebody else clean up your mess, Dan? How many times have you had to sit there and watch your family get involved in things they can't finish?"

Dan leans over the barricade.

Dan Highlander: "This is between you and her."

Ripper's eyes narrow.

Ripper: "Oh, I know."

He turns back toward Caledonia and brings the chair down across her back again. The audience erupts in furious boos as Caledonia falls to one knee, one arm wrapped around her ribs. Ripper crouches in front of her, his face close to hers, and taps the chair against the floor.

Ripper: "Your husband can't help you. Your friend can't help you. Nobody can help you. It's just you and me, Cali."

He takes the microphone from the referee and presses it close to her mouth.

Ripper: "Do you quit?"

Caledonia raises her head. Her breathing is ragged, and she winces as she tries to straighten her back. But when she looks at Ripper, there is no fear in her eyes.

Caledonia: "You're going to have to ask me that a lot."

She swings her leg out and kicks the chair into Ripper's face. The champion stumbles backward, dropping the microphone. Caledonia uses the opening to grab the barricade, haul herself upright, and drive a forearm into his jaw. She follows with a second strike, then a third, forcing him backward toward the timekeeper's area. She catches his wrist, pulls him toward her, and drives a knee into his stomach before shoving him chest-first into the apron.

Ripper staggers away from the ring. Caledonia grabs the discarded chair, folds it, and swings it toward his ribs. Luckily for the CWF World Heavyweight champion, he blocks it with both hands. He twists the chair out of her grip and shoves her backward. Caledonia stumbles, catches herself against the apron, and tries to get back into position. Ripper raises the chair, but she slips beneath the swing and drives a kick into the back of his knee. He drops to one leg, and she immediately catches him with a sharp forearm across the back of the head.

Ripper falls forward against the apron. Caledonia grabs him by the hair and attempts to roll him under the bottom rope. He fights her, kicking his legs and grabbing at the apron, but she manages to get him halfway beneath the bottom strand before he suddenly reaches out and catches her wrist. He pulls her down, Caledonia's chest hits the edge of the apron, and she drops to the floor beside him. Ripper crawls toward the steel ring steps, using them to pull himself up. He reaches beneath the ring skirt and begins searching. The crowd's reaction changes as he drags something into view.

A length of thick steel chain.

Ripper pulls it free, lets it spill across the floor, and holds it up for the cameras. The chain rattles in his hands.

Mike Rolash: "Oh, I don't like the look of that."

Jim Gunt: "A steel chain. Ripper has found a steel chain, and knowing what he has been saying about Caledonia, I don't think he's looking for a way to make this match more comfortable."

Mike Rolash: "I would like to formally withdraw my earlier position that this man is merely jaded. I believe we have now moved into the territory of deeply unpleasant."

Ripper winds the chain around his right fist. He approaches Caledonia, who is still trying to recover beside the apron, and swings. Caledonia ducks just in time as the chain whistles over her head and strikes the ring post with a sharp metallic crack. She drives a kick into Ripper's stomach, then catches him with an enzuigiri that sends him staggering sideways. The chain slips from his hand and clatters to the floor.

Caledonia tries to capitalize. She grabs his wrist, turns him, and drives him backward into the barricade. She follows with a forearm, then another, before grabbing him by the head and attempting to ram him into the steel ring steps. Ripper blocks the impact with both hands. He drives an elbow into her ribs, catches her around the waist, and lifts her onto the edge of the steps. Caledonia struggles to get free, but Ripper pulls her forward and delivers a vicious DDT that drives her down onto the padded floor beside the steel.

Caledonia lies still for a moment.

Ripper rolls onto his knees, breathing hard, and looks at her with a strange, almost fascinated expression. He brushes his hair away from his forehead and begins laughing quietly to himself.

Ripper: "There we go. There we go. Now we're getting somewhere."

He crawls toward the chain and picks it up. The referee kneels beside Caledonia, microphone in hand.

Referee: "Caledonia, do you quit?"

She does not answer immediately. The crowd begins murmuring and chanting her name.

"CALI! CALI! CALI! CALI!"

Caledonia's fingers curl against the floor. She pulls one knee beneath herself, then the other. It takes several seconds before she can lift her head.

Caledonia: "No."

Ripper's laughter stops. He stares at her, the intensity in his eyes nearly boiling over like a tea kettle.

Ripper: "No?"

Caledonia: "No."

Ripper stands, gripping the chain so tightly that the links press against his palm. He looks toward the crowd, then back at Caledonia, and the anger that had been building behind his eyes begins to spill out.

Ripper: "WHY?"

The shout catches even the referee off guard.

Ripper: "WHY WON'T YOU JUST SAY IT?"

Caledonia struggles to her feet, leaning heavily against the ring apron. She is clearly hurt, her posture guarded as she protects her ribs, but she raises her chin and looks directly at him.

Caledonia: "Because you haven't beaten me."

Ripper swings the chain. This time it catches her across the upper back.

Caledonia cries out and drops against the apron, one hand clutching at her shoulder. Ripper strikes again, the links snapping across her side. The referee backs away to avoid the weapon, but remains close enough to ask the question as Ripper steps over Caledonia and drags her away from the ring.

Ripper wraps the chain around her forearm and pulls it tight, forcing her to turn toward him. He drives a knee into her ribs, then uses the chain to jerk her forward into a short, ugly headbutt. Caledonia stumbles, and he catches her around the waist, dragging her toward the commentary desk.

Jim Gunt: "This is getting more dangerous by the second! Ripper is using that chain to control Caledonia's movement, and he is striking her every time she tries to get away!"

Mike Rolash: "He isn't trying to wrestle her anymore, Jim. He's trying to make her regret ever walking down that ramp."

Ripper shoves Caledonia against the side of the commentary desk. He loops the chain around her wrist and pulls her arm across the tabletop, pinning it in place. He then grabs a metal chair from behind the desk and raises it.

The audience gasps as Ripper brings the chair down across Caledonia's trapped forearm. The sound of metal striking metal cuts through the arena.

Caledonia screams, jerking backward as the chain slips from the edge of the desk. Ripper drops the chair, grabs her by the back of the neck, and forces her to look at him.

Ripper: "Say it, you stupid bitch."

He picks up the microphone.

Ripper: "Say you quit, and I stop."

Caledonia is trembling from the pain. She looks down at her arm, then back at Ripper.

Caledonia: "You won't stop."

Ripper's eyes widen.

Caledonia: "You never stop. That's the problem with you. You keep hurting people, and you tell yourself it's because they deserve it. You keep losing pieces of yourself, and you blame everybody else for taking them."

Ripper's mouth opens, but no words come out.

Caledonia: "And you hate us because we still have something you can't take."

The crowd begins to roar before she even finishes.

Caledonia: "We still have each other."

Ripper's face twists with fury. He slams the microphone against the desk, then grabs Caledonia and drives her backward into the barricade. The chain falls to the floor between them. He pulls her away from the crowd and throws her into the ring apron, then follows with a knee to the midsection that leaves her doubled over.

Ripper grabs the chain and begins winding it around his forearm. He steps behind Caledonia, catches her by the shoulder, and pulls her backward into a standing choke, using the chain to press against the front of her throat. The referee immediately kneels beside them, microphone raised.

Referee: "Caledonia! Do you quit?"

Caledonia grabs at the chain, trying to create space between it and her throat. Ripper leans back, using his body weight to keep her upright while she struggles.

Ripper: "Say it!"

Her knees begin to bend.

Ripper: "SAY IT!"

Caledonia's hands tighten around the chain. She manages to turn her head just enough to look toward the front row. Dan is standing with both hands on the barricade, his face drained of color. Eris has one hand over their mouth, the other gripping Dan's arm. Neither is looking away.

Caledonia takes one desperate breath.

Caledonia: "No!"

She drives her heel down onto Ripper's foot and the champion's grip loosens for an instant. Caledonia twists, throws her elbow backward into his ribs, and drops her weight, slipping beneath his arm. She stumbles forward, gasping for air, but she does not stop moving. She grabs the chain as it falls from his forearm and yanks hard. Ripper is pulled forward and Caledonia turns and catches him with a brutal knee to the jaw.

The chain drops between them.

Caledonia snatches it up, loops it around Ripper's arm, and pulls him toward her. He swings a wild punch, but she ducks beneath it and drives her shoulder into his stomach. She catches his wrist and twists through, sending him crashing against the commentary desk.

The desk rattles, Jim Gunt and Mike Rolash scrambling away from their chairs as Caledonia drives Ripper across the tabletop. Ripper grabs at the edge, trying to hold himself up, but Caledonia strikes him with a forearm, then another. She pulls him upright and attempts to lift him onto her shoulders.

Ripper blocks the lift with an elbow to the side of her head. He shoves her away and leaps from the desk, catching her with a sudden Destin-knee that lands high across her chest and shoulder. Caledonia crashes backward against the

barricade, and Ripper lands on his feet, staggering but upright.

Jim Gunt: "Destin-knee! Ripper has found the opening he needed, and Caledonia has been driven back into the barricade!"

Mike Rolash: "That was the first genuinely smart thing he's done in about ten minutes, Jim. Don't tell him I said that."

Ripper grabs Caledonia and throws her over the barricade into the front-row seating area. The crowd parts in a panic as she crashes across two empty seats. Dan and Eris move quickly away from the immediate impact, but neither leaves the area. Ripper climbs over the barricade after her, dragging the chain behind him.

He steps into the space between the seats and approaches Caledonia. She is trying to get her feet beneath her, but the close quarters leave her little room to maneuver. Ripper grabs the chain, wraps it around her upper arm, and pulls her upright before driving her backward into the padded barrier separating the seating rows.

Caledonia cries out as Ripper leans close to her ear.

Ripper: "You want to be their hero? Fine. Let's see how much of you is left when they have to watch you quit."

He pulls the chain tight around her arm and twists, forcing her shoulder backward. Caledonia struggles to free herself, but Ripper shifts his grip and drives a knee into her stomach. She folds over, and he uses the chain to drag her into a narrow gap between the seats.

The referee follows, crouching beside them.

Referee: "Caledonia, do you quit?"

Caledonia grips the chain with both hands. Her breathing is ragged. Her shoulder hangs awkwardly, and every movement seems to cost her something.

Ripper waits. He watches her face, searching for a crack in her resolve. The audience has grown quieter, not because it has lost interest, but because everyone is waiting to hear her answer. Caledonia lifts her head.

Caledonia: "Ask me again when you've got the guts to look me in the eye without a weapon in your hand."

The crowd explodes into cheers. Ripper stares at her, stunned by the defiance, then he drops the chain. He takes one step backward, spreads his arms, and gives her a look of exaggerated disbelief.

Ripper: "You want me to fight you without a weapon?"

He laughs, shaking his head.

Ripper: "All right."

He lunges forward in a huff. Caledonia meets him with a forearm to the face. Ripper answers with an uppercut. Caledonia drives a knee into his ribs. Ripper catches her with a short-arm clothesline that sends her crashing across the seats. He follows her down, grabs her by the wrist, and pulls her upright before delivering a brutal spinebuster onto the padded floor between the rows.

The impact shakes the surrounding seats.

Caledonia curls onto her side, clutching at her back. Ripper kneels beside her, his chest heaving, and snatches the microphone from the referee.

Ripper: "Do you quit?"

Caledonia closes her eyes for a moment as the crowd begins chanting again.

"CALI! CALI! CALI!"

Ripper shouts over them.

Ripper: "DO YOU QUIT?"

Caledonia opens her eyes.

Caledonia: "No."

Ripper throws the microphone to the floor.

He stands and kicks one of the empty chairs out of his way, sending it clattering against the next row. He grabs Caledonia by the wrist and begins dragging her toward the barricade. She fights him, planting her free hand against the floor, but Ripper yanks her forward and hauls her back over the barrier into the ringside area.

He rolls her beneath the bottom rope. Then he follows, climbing onto the apron and stepping through the ropes with a purpose that has changed from rage to something colder.

Ripper is no longer smiling as he walks toward Caledonia, who is struggling to reach her knees, and grabs her by the back of the head. He pulls her upright and drives a knee into her stomach. He follows with a second, then hooks her around the waist and lifts her into a belly-to-belly position of his own.

Caledonia fights, throwing short elbows into his ribs. Ripper adjusts his grip and drives her down with a brutal fallaway-style slam, sending her skidding across the canvas. He crawls after her, catches her by the ankle, and drags her back toward the center of the ring. Then he lifts her into position. For a moment, the O2 Arena recognizes the setup before the commentary team can even speak.

Jim Gunt: "Complete Sin! He's looking for Complete Sin!"

Ripper hooks Caledonia's head and begins to turn through the Future Shock DDT, but she manages to plant a boot against the canvas and block the rotation. She twists her body, shoves him away, and catches him with a sudden superkick that lands squarely beneath his chin.

Ripper staggers backward as Caledonia drops to one knee, then rises with the help of the ropes. She takes a breath, steadies herself, and charges.

She catches Ripper with a running roundhouse, then grabs his wrist and pulls him forward into a spinning forearm. He staggers into the corner. Caledonia follows, leaps onto the top rope, and springs backward with a roundhouse that catches him across the head.

QUEEN'S GAMBIT!

Ripper falls forward out of the corner and crashes to the canvas.

Jim Gunt: "Queen's Gambit! Caledonia has hit it, and for the first time in several minutes, The Ripper is in serious trouble!"

RIPPER KILL SHOT!

Ripper catches her with the sudden RKO-style cutter, driving Caledonia face-first into the canvas. The arena falls into a stunned hush as Ripper rolls onto his back, staring at the lights. For several seconds, neither competitor moves. Then the champion turns onto his side and crawls toward Caledonia.

He drags himself to her, reaches for the microphone, and holds it close to her face.

Ripper: "Do you quit?"

Caledonia does not respond. The referee kneels beside her, gently touching her shoulder.

Referee: "Caledonia? Can you hear me? Do you quit?"

Her fingers twitch against the canvas. The crowd begins to rise as Caledonia slowly turns her head toward the microphone.

Caledonia: "No."

Ripper drops the microphone and sits back on his heels. His expression changes. He looks at Caledonia, then at the referee, then toward the crowd, as though he cannot understand why the result he has been trying to force into existence refuses to happen.

Ripper: "What the hell is wrong with you?"

Caledonia begins pulling herself toward the ropes. He rises, grabs her by the ankle, and drags her back to the center of the ring. Caledonia kicks at him, but he catches her leg and twists it sharply, forcing her onto her back. He drops across her and begins driving short elbows into her ribs.

The referee asks again.

Referee: "Caledonia, do you quit?"

She tries to turn away from the blows.

Caledonia: "No!"

Ripper delivers another elbow.

Ripper: "WHY WON'T YOU QUIT?"

He hits her again. The referee tries to move closer, but Ripper shoves him aside with his shoulder. The official stumbles into the ropes, catches himself, and immediately returns to his position.

Jim Gunt: "The champion is losing control! He is no longer thinking about the championship. He is thinking about the fact that he cannot make Caledonia give him what he wants!"

Mike Rolash: "He wants her to admit that he's right, Jim. That's what this has always been about. He wants her to tell him that he's the best, that the world is against him, that everything he's done was justified. And she won't give it to him."

Ripper grabs Caledonia by the hair and drags her upright. He shoves her against the turnbuckles, then backs away and charges with a knee aimed at her chest. Caledonia sidesteps at the last possible moment. Ripper's knee strikes the turnbuckle, and he stumbles into the corner. Caledonia catches him from behind and wraps her arms around his waist, sets her feet, and delivers a German suplex.

Ripper lands hard and rolls toward the ropes, but Caledonia does not let go. She drags him up again, catches him around the waist, and delivers a second German suplex. She releases him this time, falling onto her knees beside him, exhausted but still moving.

Jim Gunt: "Two German suplexes! Caledonia has found another reserve of strength, and she is using it to keep the champion from regaining control!"

Ripper crawls toward the ropes. Caledonia follows, grabs his wrist, and pulls him away. She tries to lift him into another suplex, but her back gives way beneath the effort. She drops to one knee, and Ripper takes advantage, striking her across the face with a short elbow.

He catches her around the waist and attempts a suplex of his own. Caledonia blocks it. She drives an elbow into his ribs, then another. She twists behind him and catches him with a short-arm clothesline, dropping him to the canvas.

Both competitors are down as the referee kneels between them, microphone raised.

Referee: "Ripper, do you quit?"

Ripper lies on his back, staring up at the lights. For a moment, his expression is blank, then he begins to laugh.

It starts quietly, barely audible beneath the crowd. He rolls onto his side and laughs harder, shaking his head as he tries to push himself upright. The referee follows him, asking again.

Referee: "Ripper, do you quit?"

Ripper suddenly turns and glares at him.

Ripper: "Get that thing out of my face."

He shoves the microphone away and crawls toward the ropes.

Caledonia is already moving.

She reaches the apron, pulls herself up, and steps through the ropes to the floor. Ripper follows her, limping slightly, and immediately reaches beneath the ring. He drags out a second weapon: a long, narrow steel rod wrapped in black tape.

The crowd responds with a wave of horrified boos.

Mike Rolash: "What is that?"

Jim Gunt: "I don't know, Mike, but I do not like the fact that he went looking for it."

Ripper turns toward Caledonia and holds the rod at his side. He approaches her slowly, his head tilted, as though he is trying to decide which part of her to target next.

Caledonia backs away from him, keeping her eyes on the weapon. She moves toward the timekeeper's area, then suddenly steps to the side as Ripper swings.

The rod strikes the ring post.

Caledonia catches his wrist and drives a knee into his stomach. She grabs the weapon with both hands and twists, trying to wrench it away from him. Ripper resists, shoving her backward, but Caledonia plants her feet and pulls harder.

The rod slips from his grip.

Caledonia swings it low, striking the side of his thigh. Ripper drops to one knee. She raises the rod again, but hesitates.

For a split second, she looks at the weapon in her hands, then at the man kneeling in front of her.

Ripper notices the hesitation and lunges forward and drives his shoulder into her stomach, sending both of them crashing against the barricade. The rod falls away. Ripper grabs Caledonia around the waist and attempts to lift her, but she catches the back of his neck and drives a knee into his face.

He stumbles away, clutching his nose. Caledonia turns toward the ring and begins moving back to the apron. Ripper catches her from behind and pulls her backward, hooks his arms around her waist, and lifts her off her feet. Caledonia struggles, throwing elbows over her shoulder, but he carries her toward the commentary desk and drives her down with a brutal back suplex onto the padded floor.

Caledonia lands hard. Ripper stays on top of her for a moment, breathing heavily. He rolls away, sits upright, and looks down at her.

Ripper: "You should've stayed away."

He leans forward, his voice dropping to a whisper.

Ripper: "You should've stayed away from me. Your husband should've stayed away from me. Your whole bloody family

should've stayed away from me."

He looks toward Dan again.

Ripper: "You all just keep coming back."

Dan is standing rigidly behind the barricade. His hands are clenched, his jaw set, but he does not cross the barrier. Ripper turns back to Caledonia.

Ripper: "And now look at you."

He picks up the microphone.

Ripper: "Look at what you've made me do."

Caledonia is breathing heavily, her eyes closed. Ripper presses the microphone close to her mouth.

Ripper: "Do you quit?"

There is no immediate response. Ripper waits as the crowd's chanting grows louder.

"CALI! CALI! CALI!"

Caledonia slowly opens her eyes.

Caledonia: "I didn't make you do anything."

Ripper's face freezes.

Caledonia: "You chose this."

She tries to push herself upright.

Caledonia: "You chose every bit of it."

Ripper stands and drops the microphone. He kicks the chair away from the desk, then grabs Caledonia by the back of her gear and drags her toward the ring. She struggles to free herself, but he pulls her to the apron and shoves her beneath the bottom rope.

Ripper climbs onto the apron and enters the ring after her. He walks to the corner and grabs the championship belt from the timekeeper's table, bringing it into the ring with him.

The crowd boos as he holds the belt up.

Jim Gunt: "Ripper has the championship in his hands. The referee needs to keep an eye on this, because although there are no disqualifications, this has become something far more personal than a championship contest."

Mike Rolash: "He can use the belt, Jim. He can use anything he can get his hands on. But the championship won't help him with the one thing he actually needs tonight."

Jim Gunt: "And what's that?"

Mike Rolash: "He needs Caledonia to believe he's right. And I don't think that's going to happen."

Ripper places the belt on the canvas and kneels beside Caledonia. He grabs her by the chin, forcing her to look at the gold.

Ripper: "This is what you want, isn't it? This is what all of you want. You want the belt. You want the cheers. You want the speeches about how you've overcome everything."

He gestures toward the crowd.

Ripper: "You want them to tell you you're special."

Caledonia looks at the championship, then back at him.

Caledonia: "No."

Ripper leans closer.

Ripper: "No?"

Caledonia: "I want you to stop."

The words are quiet, but the referee's microphone catches them. Ripper blinks.

For a moment, it seems as though he might finally hear her. That perhaps, beneath the fury and the years of resentment, there is still a part of him capable of understanding what he has become, then a sick laughter comes from deep within him.

Ripper: "You want me to stop?"

He shakes his head.

Ripper: "You don't get to tell me when to stop."

He stands, grabs Caledonia by the arm, and pulls her upright, then drives her backward into the corner and begins delivering a series of vicious forearms to her face and chest. Caledonia covers up, trying to protect herself, but Ripper keeps pressing forward. He grabs her by the throat, holds her against the turnbuckles, and shouts directly into her face.

Ripper: "SAY IT!"

Caledonia pushes against his wrist. Ripper releases her only to drive a knee into her stomach. He pulls her out of the corner, hooks her around the head, and lifts her into position for The Colour Red.

Jim Gunt: "He's looking for The Colour Red! If he hits this, Caledonia may not have anything left!"

Ripper turns through the Sister Abigail setup, but Caledonia twists free before he can complete the move. She shoves him away, catches him with a forearm, and follows with a kick to the thigh. Ripper stumbles, and Caledonia charges with a running knee.

He catches her.

For a heartbeat, the two struggle in the center of the ring, Caledonia trying to wrench herself free while Ripper attempts to regain control. Then Caledonia drops her weight, slips beneath his arm, and drives a sharp kick into the back of his knee.

Ripper drops to one leg and Caledonia catches his head and pulls him forward into a DDT.

The champion crashes to the canvas.

Caledonia rolls away, clutching her ribs. She looks toward the corner, then toward the floor outside the ring. She sees the scattered weapons, the broken furniture, the chain lying beside the barricade, and the wreckage of the battle that has brought them both to this point. Then she looks back at Ripper.

She knows he is not finished.

She knows that if she simply keeps striking him, he will find another weapon, another opening, another way to turn the match back into his own personal nightmare.

So she begins to move.

Caledonia rolls out of the ring and walks toward the timekeeper's area. She grabs a folding table and drags it toward the apron. The crowd begins to stir as she lifts it, unfolds its legs, and positions it on the floor near the corner.

She does not stop there.

She retrieves a second table and sets it directly on top of the first, carefully adjusting the legs so that the two tables sit stacked together.

Jim Gunt: "Caledonia is setting up something dangerous on the floor. Two tables, one on top of the other, just outside the ring!"

Mike Rolash: "That's a very tall stack of tables, Jim. The sort of arrangement that makes me want to take a long walk in the opposite direction."

Jim Gunt: "She knows what she's doing. She has spent her career taking risks, and she's going to need one of the biggest of her life if she's going to finish The Ripper tonight."

Caledonia checks the tables, pushing down on the upper surface to make sure the stack is stable. She takes a breath, then turns toward the ring.

Ripper is already standing.

He watches her through the ropes, his face twisted in disbelief.

Ripper: "What are you doing?"

Caledonia does not answer. She climbs onto the apron and steps back into the ring as Ripper charges.

Caledonia sidesteps him and catches him with a forearm. He staggers, turns, and throws a right hand. She ducks beneath it, grabs his wrist, and pulls him forward into a spinning enzuigiri. Ripper stumbles toward the ropes, and Caledonia catches him around the waist, attempting to lift him into another German suplex.

He blocks it.

Ripper drives an elbow into her ribs and shoves her away, but Caledonia comes back with a sharp knee to the chest. She catches his arm, twists through, and throws him with a belly-to-belly suplex that sends him skidding across the canvas.

The crowd roars as Caledonia rises, her face tightening with pain as she straightens her back. She moves toward Ripper, grabs him by the wrist, and begins dragging him toward the ropes.

Ripper resists, digging his heels into the canvas.

Caledonia pulls harder.

He suddenly lunges forward and catches her with a headbutt.

Caledonia staggers backward.

Ripper rises and throws a right hand. It catches her across the cheek, turning her head. He follows with a second strike, then grabs her by the shoulder and drives her into the ropes.

Caledonia rebounds.

Ripper attempts the Ripper Kill Shot.

She pushes him away.

He stumbles, and she catches him with a superkick that sends him crashing onto his back.

The arena erupts.

Jim Gunt: "Superkick! Ripper is down, and Caledonia has a chance to finish this!"

Caledonia does not hesitate. She grabs Ripper by the wrist and drags him toward the ropes. The champion struggles, reaching for the bottom strand, but Caledonia pulls him away and hauls him upright. She strikes him with a forearm, then another, before turning and driving him toward the ropes.

Ripper catches himself against the top strand.

Caledonia charges.

He drops his shoulder, but she jumps over him, lands behind him, and immediately catches him around the waist.

German suplex!

Ripper crashes to the canvas.

Caledonia keeps hold of him, rolling through and dragging him up again. She uses the last of her strength to pull him into position and throws him with another German suplex, this one sending him close to the corner.

The crowd is on its feet.

Caledonia crawls toward the ropes and uses them to pull herself upright. Ripper rolls onto his stomach, trying to push himself up, but she reaches him first. She grabs his arm and pulls him to his feet.

He swings a desperate elbow.

She ducks.

Caledonia drives her shoulder into his stomach, hooks his arm, and pivots through a final throw that sends Ripper crashing onto his back near the center of the ring.

He lies there, staring up at the lights. Caledonia stands over him, breathing hard, then she looks toward the corner.

The two tables are waiting outside.

Jim Gunt: "Caledonia is looking toward those tables. She knows what she needs to do, but she is going to have to get The Ripper into position first!"

Mike Rolash: "And he is not exactly volunteering to be placed on top of a pair of tables, Jim. I suspect that is going to require some persuasion."

Caledonia grabs Ripper by the wrist and pulls him toward the ropes. He resists, trying to hook his leg around hers, but she drives a knee into his stomach and forces him backward. She catches him around the waist and begins lifting him toward the top rope.

Ripper fights, grabbing at her shoulder and trying to drag her down with him. Caledonia loses her footing for a moment, and both competitors crash against the ropes. Ripper throws a short elbow into her face, then attempts to shove her over the top strand.

Caledonia catches the rope. She swings her leg over and lands on the apron. Ripper turns toward her, but Caledonia catches him with a forearm.

He staggers backward and she grabs his head and drives it against the top rope, then slips through the ropes and returns to the ring. Ripper reels backward, and Caledonia charges, catching him with a running knee that sends him stumbling toward the corner.

She grabs his wrist and pulls him forward.

Ripper tries to reverse the momentum, but Caledonia plants her feet and delivers a sharp European uppercut. He stumbles toward the ropes, and she follows with another forearm that sends him through the space between the top and middle strands and onto the apron.

Ripper clings to the ropes, trying to keep his balance.

Caledonia steps through the ropes after him.

They trade blows on the apron, the crowd rising with every strike. Ripper lands an elbow that catches her across the cheek. Caledonia answers with a knee to the stomach. He reaches for her head, but she ducks and drives a forearm into his ribs.

Ripper nearly loses his footing as Caledonia grabs him by the wrist and pulls him back toward the ring.

He resists. She strikes him again. He stumbles, then Caledonia catches him around the waist, leans backward, and throws him over the top rope.

Ripper crashes into the ring and rolls toward the corner. Caledonia drops from the apron to the floor, landing beside the stacked tables. She looks up at Ripper, then turns toward the audience.

The crowd is already standing, shouting her name. Caledonia points toward the ring, then she raises one hand toward the sky.

She is going to do it.

Jim Gunt: "Caledonia is going to the top rope! She is looking for Fall from Grace!"

Mike Rolash: "From that height? Onto a man who is lying on the canvas, with two tables waiting on the floor? Jim, if she hits this, I don't know how either one of them gets up!"

Caledonia climbs onto the apron and steps through the ropes. She moves toward the corner, pulling herself up one step at a time. Her ribs are clearly bothering her, and she pauses halfway up to catch her breath.

Ripper is still on the canvas.

He rolls onto his side, trying to recover, then looks toward the corner and sees Caledonia climbing.

His eyes widen.

He starts crawling toward her.

Caledonia reaches the top turnbuckle.

Ripper pulls himself up using the ropes and staggers toward her. He reaches the corner just as she begins to rise, grabbing her ankle and trying to pull her down.

Caledonia kicks him away.

Ripper stumbles backward.

She stands on the top rope, balanced precariously above the ring.

The entire O2 Arena is on its feet.

Jim Gunt: "She's up! Caledonia is up on the top rope! Fall from Grace!"

Caledonia looks down at Ripper.

He is struggling to stand, one hand against the ropes, his body battered by everything they have done to one another. For a moment, he looks almost vulnerable. Then he looks up at her, and the hatred returns.

Ripper: "Do it!"

Caledonia's expression hardens.

Ripper: "COME ON! DO IT!"

She takes one breath.

Then she launches herself into the air.

FALL FROM GRACE!

Caledonia rotates through the shooting star press, her body arcing above the ring before she turns toward the floor. Ripper stumbles out of the corner and falls backward through the ropes, landing across the stacked tables below. She crashes down onto him, the two tables explode beneath the impact.

Wood splinters in every direction as both competitors disappear into the wreckage. The crash echoes through the O2 Arena, and the crowd erupts into a deafening roar.

For several seconds, there is no movement.

The referee rushes to the floor and kneels beside them, microphone in hand. The camera catches the shattered tables scattered around the two wrestlers, Caledonia lying on her side, and Ripper sprawled beneath her.

Jim Gunt: "FALL FROM GRACE! FALL FROM GRACE FROM THE TOP ROPE THROUGH BOTH TABLES! OH MY GOD! CALedonia has just thrown everything she has into this moment, and I don't know how either of these two people can possibly continue!"

Mike Rolash: "I don't know how either of them can possibly stand, Jim! That was unbelievable! That was absolutely unbelievable!"

The referee leans toward Ripper.

Referee: "Ripper! Do you quit?"

Ripper's body shifts. He coughs, grimaces, and slowly turns his head toward the official. His eyes are half-open, his breathing labored. He looks at Caledonia, then at the microphone. For a moment, it seems as though he might finally be finished.

Then he forces a crooked smile.

Ripper: "Fuck you."

The crowd erupts with a mixture of shocked laughter and furious boos.

Mike Rolash: "Well, that answers that question."

Jim Gunt: "I cannot believe it! I cannot believe he is still refusing to quit!"

Caledonia rolls away from the wreckage, landing on her hands and knees. She is shaking, her breathing ragged, her face twisted with pain. She looks toward the ring, then down at Ripper, who is still struggling to move beneath the broken tables.

She has hit the Fall from Grace from the top rope, she has put him through two tables. She has given everything she has.

And he still refuses to quit.

For a moment, Caledonia bows her head.

The crowd continues chanting her name, louder and louder, trying to give her something to hold onto. Dan Highlander has both hands pressed against the top of the barricade, his face full of fear and pride. Eris is crying openly now, shouting encouragement through the noise.

Caledonia looks toward them.

Dan does not tell her to stop. He does not tell her to come home again.

He simply nods.

Caledonia turns back toward Ripper.

Something changes in her expression.

The exhaustion is still there. The pain is still there. But the uncertainty is gone.

She pushes herself to her feet.

Jim Gunt: "Look at Caledonia. Look at her, Mike. She has every reason to be done, and yet she is still looking for a way to finish this."

Mike Rolash: "Because she knows what happens if she doesn't. She knows that if Ripper leaves this building with that championship, he's going to tell himself that everything he's done was worth it. And she is not going to let him write that ending."

Caledonia bends down and begins clearing the broken table pieces away from Ripper. She moves carefully, each movement taking effort, but she refuses to leave him buried beneath the wreckage. She pulls him free and rolls him onto his back.

Ripper tries to swing at her, but his arm barely rises. Caledonia catches his wrist and pushes it back down.

Caledonia: "No more."

Ripper spits at her.

Ripper: "Go to hell."

Caledonia shakes her head.

Caledonia: "You first."

She reaches down and grabs the steel chain that lies near the remains of the tables. The audience's reaction changes immediately as Caledonia looks at the chain for a long moment. It has been Ripper's weapon throughout the match, the tool he used to hurt her, to humiliate her, to try to force her into saying the words he wanted to hear.

Now it is in her hands.

She turns toward Ripper and kneels beside him.

He tries to crawl away, but his body refuses to cooperate. Caledonia pulls him back toward the ring apron, using the chain to control his movement. She rolls him beneath the bottom rope, then follows him into the ring.

The referee moves quickly to clear a path.

Caledonia drags Ripper toward the center of the canvas.

He is barely able to stand, but he fights her, throwing a weak elbow into her shoulder and attempting to pull free. Caledonia absorbs the strike, catches his arm, and twists behind him. She drives a knee into his back, then forces him down to the canvas.

Ripper lands on his side and Caledonia drops beside him.

BED OF ROSES!

She threads her legs around his waist, locks her body scissors tightly around his midsection, and reaches forward to trap his upper body. Ripper struggles, trying to turn onto his stomach, but Caledonia shifts her hips and pulls him backward into the hold.

Then she takes the chain.

With deliberate care, she loops it around Ripper's neck, keeping the links positioned to tighten as she draws him backward. She secures the chain with both hands, bracing herself as she pulls, while her legs remain locked around his waist. The Bed of Roses becomes something far more dangerous than a conventional submission: the chain places pressure around his throat while her body scissors constricts his torso, leaving him struggling to draw a full breath.

Ripper immediately begins fighting.

He claws at the chain, trying to pull it away from his neck. Caledonia leans back, keeping her grip secure. He reaches for her hands, trying to pry them apart, but she shifts her weight and draws him tighter against her.

Jim Gunt: "BED OF ROSES! Caledonia has The Ripper locked in the Bed of Roses, and she has that chain wrapped around his neck! This is it! This could finally be the moment!"

Mike Rolash: "He has nowhere to go! He has nowhere to turn! And she is not letting go!"

The referee drops to his knees beside them, microphone in hand.

Referee: "Ripper! Do you quit?"

Ripper shakes his head violently. He tries to turn, but Caledonia's legs remain locked around his body. His fingers claw at the chain, searching for an opening, and he manages to pull one link away from his throat. Caledonia adjusts her grip and tightens the hold again.

Ripper gasps.

Referee: "Ripper, do you quit?"

He tries to speak, but only a strained sound escapes him.

Caledonia's face is streaked with sweat and tears. She is shaking from the effort, her damaged arm trembling as she maintains the hold. Every breath hurts. Every movement hurts. But she refuses to let the chain slip.

Caledonia: "It's over, Danny."

Ripper's eyes widen at the sound of his name.

Caledonia: "You don't have to do this anymore."

He thrashes, trying to pull himself forward. Caledonia shifts her weight and draws him back again.

Caledonia: "You can stop."

Ripper's face contorts with rage.

He manages to turn his head toward her, his eyes burning with a hatred that seems to have consumed everything else inside him.

Ripper: "I... hate..."

He struggles to finish the sentence as Caledonia holds on to the chain tighter and tighter. The referee moves closer, the crowd falling silent in anticipation.

Referee: "Ripper! Do you quit?"

Ripper's hand reaches toward the canvas. His fingers curl, then his arm drops.

For a moment, the O2 Arena seems to fall silent. The referee looks at Ripper's face, watching carefully, but the champion suddenly jerks back to life, throwing his head against Caledonia's shoulder and trying to break free.

Caledonia grunts with the impact but keeps the chain in place.

Ripper's eyes begin to change. At first, it is only a faint red glow behind his pupils, so subtle that the camera seems to catch it by accident. Then the color intensifies, brightening until his eyes burn with an unnatural crimson light.

Caledonia sees it, the referee sees it. The camera catches the red glow reflected in the steel links around Ripper's throat.

Jim Gunt: "What in the world—?"

Mike Rolash: "Jim, his eyes! Look at his eyes!"

Ripper begins thrashing with renewed, desperate strength. His hands claw at Caledonia's arms, his body twisting as though something inside him is refusing to let go. He tries to rise, but Caledonia's body scissors holds him in place. She leans back, keeping the chain taut, her face contorted with effort.

The red glow brightens as Ripper's mouth opens.

He screams.

Ripper: "I QUIT! I QUIT, YOU FUCKING BITCH!"

The referee immediately signals for the bell.

DING DING DING!

The sound cuts through the arena like a thunderclap as Caledonia releases the chain and rolls away from Ripper, collapsing onto her side near the wreckage of the tables that had been carried into the ring area. The referee kneels beside Ripper to check on him while simultaneously signaling toward the timekeeper.

The bell rings again.

Caledonia lies on her back, staring at the lights. For several seconds, she does not move.

Then her face crumples.

She covers her mouth with one hand, and the tears begin to flow.

Jim Gunt: "SHE DID IT! CALEDONIA HAS DONE IT! THE Ripper has quit! The champion has quit! Caledonia Highlander is the new CWF World Heavyweight Champion!"

The O2 Arena erupts. The sound is enormous, a wall of noise that seems to rise from the floor and shake the ceiling. Fans leap from their seats, waving signs and embracing strangers. Dan Highlander is crying openly at the barricade, one hand over his mouth, the other raised toward his wife. Eris wraps both arms around him, shouting and laughing through their own tears.

The referee checks Ripper once more before turning toward Caledonia. He reaches down and offers her a hand.

Caledonia takes it.

She gets onto her hands and knees, then slowly pushes herself upright. Her legs are unsteady, and she pauses to catch her breath, but she refuses to sit back down. The referee retrieves the CWF World Heavyweight Championship from ringside and carries it toward her.

For a moment, he stands in front of her with the title held in both hands.

Caledonia looks at it.

The gold, the history. The thing she has fought so hard to win, and the thing she has fought even harder to prove she deserves.

Her lower lip trembles as she reaches out with both hands and the referee places the championship in her arms. Caledonia pulls it against her chest and bows her head over the faceplate. Tears fall onto the gold as she holds it tightly, almost as though she is afraid it might disappear if she lets go.

Jim Gunt: "After everything she has endured, after everything that man put her through tonight, Caledonia has finally reclaimed the CWF World Heavyweight Championship! Two-time champion before this night, and now she has done it again on the biggest stage imaginable!"

Mike Rolash: "I have seen a lot of championship victories in this business, Jim. I've seen people celebrate because they proved somebody wrong. I've seen people celebrate because they made a fortune. I've seen people celebrate because they finally got their hands on the one thing they'd chased their entire lives."

Mike pauses, looking toward Caledonia.

Mike Rolash: "But this? This is somebody who has just fought through hell and come out the other side with the one thing nobody could ever take away from her. She never quit. And she made him quit."

Caledonia pulls herself toward the apron, using the ropes to get her feet beneath her. She looks toward Dan and Eris, who are both still standing in the front row. Dan is wiping tears from his face with the back of his hand, trying unsuccessfully to maintain his composure.

Caledonia raises the championship toward him.

Dan nods, his eyes shining as she mouths the words, "I did it." He answers with a nod and presses his fist against his heart. Eris is jumping up and down, clapping wildly, tears running down their face as they shout Caledonia's name. Caledonia turns toward them and lifts the title higher, and the crowd responds with another enormous cheer.

The referee guides Caledonia back into the ring. She steps through the ropes and walks toward the center of the canvas, the championship held tightly against her chest. The referee takes her wrist and raises her arm high above her head.

The crowd erupts again as Caledonia turns toward the hard camera, lifting the CWF World Heavyweight Championship over her head. Her face is wet with tears, but she is smiling now, a wide, disbelieving smile that grows as the fans continue to cheer.

Jim Gunt: "Look at her! Look at the champion! Caledonia Highlander has climbed the mountain once again, and she has done it in the most brutal, unforgiving environment imaginable!"

The camera cuts to Ripper, who remains outside the ring near the shattered table wreckage. He is only half-conscious, one arm draped over his stomach as he struggles to roll onto his side. The red glow in his eyes has faded, leaving him staring blankly toward the ring while officials remain nearby.

For once, there is no smile on his face. No mocking applause or sarcastic remark for the cameras. Only the exhausted, furious expression of a man who has been forced to say the words he spent the entire night trying to make someone else say.

The camera returns to Caledonia.

She turns toward the commentary desk and raises the championship again, drawing another deafening response from the London crowd. Jim Gunt is standing behind the desk now, clapping, while Mike Rolash has risen from his chair and is applauding with a rare lack of sarcasm.

Mike Rolash: "There are some people who spend their whole lives trying to prove they're the most dangerous person in the room. They want everybody to fear them. They want everybody to believe that if they push hard enough, hurt enough people, and refuse to back down, eventually the entire world will surrender."

Mike looks toward Caledonia.

Mike Rolash: "And then somebody comes along who refuses to surrender. Somebody who reminds you that being strong isn't about making everybody else break. Sometimes it's about being the last person standing when everything you love has been put through hell."

Jim Gunt: "Caledonia has been that person tonight. And now, after twenty-six years of CWF history, as we begin to look toward the final two months of this company's incredible journey, we have a champion who represents everything that makes this business worth fighting for."

Caledonia is still looking toward the commentary desk when the crowd's reaction changes. At first, it is only a ripple of surprise. Then a fresh wave of cheers begins to roll across the arena, coming from the entrance side of the building. Caledonia turns toward the stage. The camera follows her gaze.

MJ Flair is already in the ring.

She stands several feet behind Caledonia, holding the Paramount Championship against her side. Earlier tonight, MJ defeated Jared Holmes to claim the title, and the championship is still resting proudly across her shoulder. Her hair is damp, her face flushed from her own battle, and her eyes are shining with unmistakable emotion.

For a moment, neither woman moves.

Caledonia looks at MJ's championship, then at her face. MJ looks at Caledonia's World Heavyweight Championship, then back at her.

The realization seems to hit both of them at once.

They are standing in the center of the ring at Crossing Lines, both victorious, both carrying championships, both having survived battles that could have broken them.

MJ takes one step forward.

Caledonia's lips begin to tremble again.

MJ's expression softens, and she opens her arms.

Caledonia walks into them.

The two women embrace in the middle of the ring.

Caledonia wraps both arms around MJ, holding her tightly as the tears begin to fall again. MJ closes her eyes and presses her cheek against Caledonia's head, one hand resting against the back of her shoulder while the other keeps the Paramount Championship secure at her side.

The crowd rises to its feet. The cheers become louder and louder before high above the ring, the first pieces of confetti begin to fall. One handful becomes a shower. The shower becomes a storm. Confetti pours down from the ceiling of the O2 Arena, drifting through the lights and settling across the canvas, across the ropes, and over the shoulders of both champions.

Caledonia and MJ finally separate, but they remain close, each still holding onto the other with one hand.

They look down at their championships, then they look out at the crowd. The reaction is deafening as MJ lifts the Paramount Championship high above her head. Caledonia raises the CWF World Heavyweight Championship beside her.

Two women, two championships.

One extraordinary night.

Jim Gunt: "Look at this! Look at what we're witnessing! Caledonia Highlander, the new CWF World Heavyweight Champion, standing side by side with MJ Flair, the new Paramount Champion! Both women have fought their way through the biggest challenges of their careers tonight, and now they stand here together as champions!"

Mike Rolash: "I have to admit, Jim, this is quite a sight. The Ripper spent the entire night trying to make Caledonia feel alone. He tried to isolate her, tried to turn her family into a weakness, tried to convince her that nobody could stand beside her when things got ugly."

Mike watches Caledonia and MJ raise their championships again.

Mike Rolash: "And now look at the ring."

Jim Gunt: "A World Champion and a Paramount Champion. Two women who have earned every bit of what they're holding. And with the final two months of CWF ahead of us, with Crossing Lines now in the history books, we have to ask ourselves what comes next."

Caledonia turns toward MJ, smiling through her tears. MJ says something to her that the cameras do not catch, and Caledonia laughs softly, shaking her head as though she still cannot believe any of this is real. They turn back toward the crowd, both raise their championships higher. The confetti continues to fall as the camera cuts briefly to Dan Highlander and Eris in the front row. Dan has both hands raised above his head, cheering for his wife, while Eris is practically climbing over the barricade in excitement. The camera then returns to the ring, where Caledonia and MJ stand shoulder to shoulder, their championships gleaming beneath the lights.

Jim Gunt: "We have watched rivalries end tonight. We have watched new champions emerge. We have watched people reach the very limits of what they believe they can endure, and we have watched them find something inside themselves that carries them just a little farther. Crossing Lines has lived up to its name in every possible way."

Mike Rolash: "And the road ahead is going to be fascinating. The final two months of CWF are going to bring challenges, surprises, and probably a few people who will spend the next several weeks insisting that they should be the ones standing in that ring. But tonight belongs to these two women."

Jim Gunt: "The final two months of a twenty-six-year journey are before us. Last Call is waiting in December. There are still stories to tell, rivalries to settle, and championships to defend. But after what we have witnessed here in London, I don't think anyone can question what CWF means to the people who have given their lives to it."

The camera pulls back slowly, revealing the entire O2 Arena on its feet. Confetti fills the air, the fans are roaring, and the two champions stand at the center of the ring, each holding a title high above her head. For one last moment, the camera cuts to Ripper outside the ring. He is still recovering beside the shattered tables, staring up at the ring where Caledonia celebrates. The championship he carried into the arena is no longer his. The words he swore he would never say have been spoken. And the crowd that once watched him as their champion is now cheering for the woman who finally made him quit.

Then the camera returns to Caledonia and MJ.

They smile at one another, turn toward the hard camera, and raise their championships one final time as the O2 Arena reaches its loudest point of the night.

Jim Gunt: "For Caledonia Highlander, for MJ Flair, and for everyone who has been part of this incredible journey, thank you for being with us tonight. The road to Last Call continues, and if Crossing Lines has taught us anything, it's that the biggest moments in this business are still waiting to happen."

Mike Rolash: "And if you think tonight was the end of the story, Jim, you haven't been paying attention."

Jim Gunt: "Good night from London!"

The camera pulls back one final time as the confetti falls around Caledonia and MJ, both women holding their championships high, surrounded by a roaring crowd that refuses to let the moment end. The final image is the CWF World Heavyweight Championship raised beside the Paramount Championship, two gleaming symbols of victory beneath a storm of confetti.

Crossing Lines fades to black.

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