

HEELS

Episode 101: "*Kayfabe*"

by Michael Waldron

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In the world of professional wrestling,
the heroes are known as Faces.

The villains are Heels.

OVER BLACK

The SLAM of a body hitting the mat. An unruly CROWD EXPLODES, echoing the REFEREE's loud, slow COUNT--

ONE! TWO! THR--

CHEERS from the thrilled crowd -- a FACE has kicked out of a HEEL's pin, narrowly avoiding defeat. REVEAL:

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - NIGHT

A STYROFOAM CUP sails through the air, launched from the bleachers lining this sweaty, makeshift ARENA. It crashes to the ground, splashing cheap beer up onto a pair of cheap heels and the long legs they belong to--

STACI SPADE (29), spitfire Georgia peach, doesn't miss a beat. She nimbly swigs from a beer in one hand and a soda in the other as she weaves through the CROWD OF AROUND 300...

Sloppy rednecks in overalls, young men in cheap suits, old housewives, new housewives, cops, convicts, doctors, bums -- everybody is here, yelling down at the action in the ring.

Staci passes an EXPENSIVE DIGITAL CAMCORDER on a tripod, finally reaching the front row and her captivated son, THOMAS (8). He BOOS with the crowd. She hands him his soda and--

Starts CLAPPING. And WHISTLING. And HOLLERING. *She's the only one in the entire arena cheering for the HEEL.*

CAMERA TURNS and PUSHES FORWARD until, at last, we're

IN THE WRESTLING RING

Where JACK SPADE (31) prowls with lupine intensity. His black tights feature a playing card on either leg, the JACK OF SPADES. He's drenched in sweat, his Ultimate Warrior-inspired FACEPAINT rubbed almost completely off. His body aches, his chest heaves. But right now, standing over his opponent -- BIG JIM KITCHEN (24), a redwood of a man -- Jack is grinning.

Jack positions Big Jim for the JACKKNIFE, his reverse DDT finishing move. He looks at the VIDEO CAMERA and runs his thumb along his neck in a SLASHING MOTION--

But Big Jim BREAKS FREE and GRABS Jack by the throat. He lifts him up and DRIVES HIM BACK DOWN, a massive CHOKESLAM.

Staci looks away but Thomas can't take his eyes off the ring, where the exhausted Big Jim is now struggling toward Jack. The boy cheers him on... closer... almost there...

Finally, desperately, Big Jim drapes one arm over Jack's torso. The REF hits the mat and the crowd COUNTS ALONG--

ONE! TWO! THR--

Jack kicks out. The crowd GROANS in disbelief. Big Jim kneels and starts POWERFULLY SLAPPING THE MAT. The fans know what to do -- they STOMP THEIR FEET, transferring power to Big Jim.

Big Jim lifts Jack up again, but this time, in mid-air, Jack ESCAPES and SWINGS AROUND, FALLING BACKWARD. On the way down he HOOKS Big Jim's head and SLAMS IT into the mat. JACKKNIFE.

The crowd is gut-punched as Jack collapses onto Big Jim--

ONE! TWO! THREE!

THE BELL RINGS and Jack rises to celebrate. The fans GROAN in disgust -- they hate him. He finds Staci's eyes -- she smiles, relieved, but Thomas is still BOOING.

The Ref hands Jack the golden TITLE BELT, his belt. He takes it and, for no good reason, TOSSES the Ref out of the ring.

A scrawny MECHANIC guns a CAN OF DIP at Jack's head. Jack reacts lightning quick, snatching the Skoal missile out of thin air. He pops the top and throws in a pinch, then tosses the can back to the stunned fan.

Jack grabs a microphone. It HUMS to life and finally we hear him speak, with an eloquent, biting DRAWL--

JACK

Tifton, Georgia... This town makes me sick.

The crowd lets him have it. Jack spits onto Big Jim's boots.

JACK (CONT'D)

Did y'all actually think I'd lose to Big Jim -- *the Freak from the Creek*? You must be as dumb as you looking, and that's saying someth--

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN. **KENNY LOGGINS' "DANGER ZONE"** plays over the PA. Down by the ENTRANCE TUNNEL, a FOG MACHINE sputters and MALFUNCTIONS. Jack scowls. An awkward beat, then--

ACE SPADE (24), long haired hotshot that never stopped playing quarterback, races out of the tunnel. The crowd, especially Thomas, ERUPTS -- this is their hero.

Ace slides into the ring and DUCKS a punch from Jack. He spins and DRILLS Jack with his finisher, the SUPERKICK.

The crowd goes berserk as Jack is knocked over the top rope. He hits the ground carefully, with REHEARSED, CONTROLLED IMPACT.

CRYSTAL TYLER (19), Ace's "manager"/arm candy, a sweet kid hiding beneath too much glitter makeup, appears and hands him a MICROPHONE. They share a long KISS. The crowd loves it.

Jack backs down the entryway, rattled. Ace points at him--

ACE

Where you going, big brother? Why don't we settle this right here...
(leans into the crowd)
Tonight? Cause that's my best friend you just spit on. These are my people you been insulting. And that's my belt you're wearing.

JACK

You ain't ever gonna wear this strap, boy.

ACE

Look at you -- turning tail, backing down. Daddy'd be ashamed.

That stings, and Jack starts walking, slowly, BACK TOWARD THE RING. The crowd can't believe it -- *this might actually happen*. The noise is at a fever pitch...

When Jack stops.

JACK

... You know, two weeks from now we're back home in Duffy.

ACE

Any time. Any place.

JACK

Me and you, Main Event. You want the belt? Come get it.

BOOS as Jack turns and saunters toward the TUNNEL. Ace gets an idea. He calls after his brother, GOING OFF-SCRIPT--

ACE

Hey Jack...
(Jack turns, surprised)
Fuck you.

The crowd GOES WILD. Ace drops his mic and SHOOTS TWO FINGER GUNS INTO THE SKY, then mimes blowing smoke from the barrels.

Jack's eyes go instinctively to the CAMCORDER. He SNEERS at Ace, then casts a final glance toward Staci and Thomas before disappearing into the--

INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Jack passes through the shadows and emerges limping. He wears a weary, pissed-off look as he continues into the--

INT. STAGING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Ancient fluorescent lights flicker overhead. Over a dozen other WRESTLERS applaud as Jack enters. WILLIE DAY (late 40s), Jack's no-bullshit top lieutenant, hands him a beer. Jack drains half the can in one gulp.

WILLIE

The Freak from the Creek? White trash poetry. When'd you come up with that?

JACK

(distracted)

Just now. Goddamn fog machine screwed up again.

Outside, the crowd begins to CHANT: ACE! ACE! ACE!

JACK (CONT'D)

Did you hear him out there?

She nods. Jack SLINGS THE CAN against the wall. He drops his belt unceremoniously to the floor and reenters the--

INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Where he paces, waiting. After a moment Ace comes barreling into the tunnel, Crystal at his side. Big Jim follows behind. Ace shoves Jack good-naturedly--

ACE

Holy shit man, how bout that pop? Duffy's gonna *explode* when I win.

Jack doesn't say anything. A tense beat as Ace reads him--

ACE (CONT'D)

What? --What, you're pissed cause I said *fuck*? They loved it.

JACK
Kids come to these shows.

Ace can't believe this shit. The fans keep CHANTING HIS NAME.

ACE
Yeah. To see me.

JACK
You're in my ring -- you stick to
my script.

Ace just smirks. He trots past Jack and into the staging area, cocky as hell. Big Jim and Crystal follow awkwardly.

CAMERA holds on Jack. **THE FUTUREBIRDS' "AMERICAN COWBOY"** begins as he listens to the crowd outside:

ACE! ACE! ACE!

MAIN TITLES.

EXT. BACK ROAD - DAWN (2 WEEKS LATER)

Jack JOGS down a long, empty stretch of road, passing under a FADED BILLBOARD for the DUFFY WRESTLING ASSOCIATION (DWA). Two WRESTLERS are pictured facing off against one another:

WILD BILL HANCOCK, long hair and a handlebar mustache, holding a TWO-BY-FOUR, and TOM "KING" SPADE, a silver fox raising TWO FINGER PISTOLS to the sky -- just like Ace.

Between the two wrestlers is a towering LADDER. The billboard's tagline reads:

LADDER MATCH 3 LONG LIVE THE KING

Jack looks up at Wild Bill and Tom, but doesn't stop running.

EXT. AROUND DUFFY - ESTABLISHING - MORNING

Sunday morning in DUFFY, GEORGIA. Population: 20,000. Churches, strip malls, tiny houses with front porch swings. The Deep South in all its simple, sluggish grace.

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - MORNING

Okay neighborhood, modest one-story homes. AMERICAN FLAGS and BALD EAGLE YARD SIGNS herald the approaching 4th of July. LITTLE LEAGUE EQUIPMENT is scattered across Jack's UNKEMPT LAWN.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - THOMAS' ROOM - MORNING

An imaginative little kid's room. Walls covered in old school wrestling posters: Sting, Shawn Michaels, The Undertaker.

Staci rouses Thomas, who sleeps with a couple of GI JOE ACTION FIGURES. He rolls over in protest.

EXT. CLETA'S HOUSE - MORNING

A much older, much smaller house, tucked away at the end of a long dirt road. This is where Jack and Ace grew up.

INT. CLETA'S HOUSE - ACE'S ROOM - MORNING

CLETA SPADE (60s), a shell of the woman she used to be, enters a bedroom covered in sports trophies. She looks for Ace, but he isn't in bed. She's not surprised.

EXT. FIELD - MORNING

The end of an all-nighter. Good ol' boys and cute young girls are littered around a dying bonfire. An 18-year-old Ford Mustang is parked at the edge of the woods--

I/E. MUSTANG - CONTINUOUS

--And inside, a still-kinda-drunk Ace is fucking a girl about the same age. TRICIA, sexy white trash-chic, rides him in the back seat. She MOANS -- they're in the home stretch -- but then Ace's PHONE ALARM GOES OFF. Distracted, he reaches down into the floorboard, grasping for his jeans pocket--

SHE SWATS HIS HAND AWAY, and they just keep going... but that alarm is loud as fuck. Finally Ace grabs his jeans, opens the car door, and TOSSES THEM OUTSIDE. He slams the door and FLIPS AROUND so he's on top, in control. They both finish.

They catch their breath as the PHONE ALARM continues outside. Tricia passes Ace a STILL-LIT JOINT from the center console. He HITS IT and mimes the FINGER GUNS in her direction.

ACE

(re: the phone alarm)

I gotta get to the arena.

He collects what's left of his clothes and snags a to-go beer from the case in the passenger seat. She pulls him close.

TRICIA

When do *I* get to walk out to the
ring with you and play make
believe?

ACE

I reckon you're next in line... but
who says it's make believe?

They share a grin and a kiss, and he hops out of the car,
naked as the day he was born. He shimmyes into his britches
and jogs jovially off into the woods.

INT. GAS STATION CONVENIENCE STORE - MORNING

A shitty gas station, just off the interstate. Crystal
daydreams behind the register, gazing out the tiny window at
the big Georgia sky.

YOUNG TRUCKER (O.S.)

I'm worried about Ace.

Crystal is caught momentarily off-guard. A dopey YOUNG
TRUCKER stands at the counter. She stares at him--

YOUNG TRUCKER (CONT'D)

The match tonight. I'm rooting for
Ace, but Jack fights dirty.

And now Crystal slips into character, adopting a more
theatrical, swaggering tone--

CRYSTAL

Jack's time is over. This is Ace's
league now.

YOUNG TRUCKER

Tell him I said good luck.

(then)

Can I have the bathroom key?

A beat, then Crystal hands him the key. He walks out, giving
her the thumbs up. She goes back to staring out the window.

EXT. DWA DOME - ESTABLISHING - MORNING

An old domed movie theater on the outskirts of town, bought
by Jack's father long ago and converted into the local arena
and home of the DWA. When they aren't hosting wrestling
events, it's Christian rock bands and antique gun shows.

INT. DWA DOME - ARENA - MORNING

Willie steps into the dark arena, nursing a coffee and a hangover. The RING is center stage, barely visible. She flips a switch and the overhead lights BLAST ON, bright as the sun.

She winces, *no thanks*, and turns the lights back off. HOLD on the dark, empty ring.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Jack comes in from his run and drops his keys on the table, next to a BRAND NEW FOG MACHINE. It looks expensive (as far as fog machines ago). He pours himself six Advil and sticks his mouth under the sink to take them.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - JACK AND STACI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jack opens an old LAPTOP on his nightstand. The SCRIPT FOR TONIGHT'S SHOW is up. He scrolls down -- we see DIALOGUE, PRODUCTION ELEMENTS, and MATCH RESULTS before stopping at:

JACK VS. ACE

No ending has been written. Jack stares at his computer.

STACI (O.S.)

Needed to leave five minutes ago.

Staci stands in the doorway, stunning in her Sunday best. Jack doesn't even look up.

JACK

You're really making me go. *Today*.

STACI

Your momma was adamant. And I think we could use it. Thomas said he heard us fighting last night.

JACK

I heard my folks yell all the time.

STACI

Me too. Look how we turned out.

There's a lightness to their back-and-forth that makes it hard to tell when they're being playful and when they're actually pissed off.

STACI (CONT'D)
 Can you please just admit you
 shouldn't have bought a \$300 fog
machine without asking?

Jack finally spins in his chair--

JACK
 Baby. It's for the league.

STACI
 That's what you said about the
 microphones.

JACK
 Again -- what's the point of having
 wrestlers talk *if you can't hear*
them?

STACI
 Again -- what's the point of having
 wrestlers talk?

Jack can't even dignify this with a response.

STACI (CONT'D)
 I know you say you want me home
 with Thomas, but at this rate we're
 not gonna have a choice.

He turns back to his computer, not interested in retreading
 this path. Staci gives up and starts to exit, but--

JACK
 Staci--

She lingers, hoping for an actual apology.

JACK (CONT'D)
 (re: the script)
 --Who do you think should win?

Not what she wanted to hear. When Jack looks up again, she's
 gone. He refocuses on the computer. **JACK VS. ACE.**

I/E. BIG JIM'S TRUCK - TRAVELING - DAY

Big Jim drives through the country with his pregnant, Yankee
 transplant wife, MELANIE (23). They're in nice clothes.

MELANIE
 I can't believe he's making us
 drive all the way out here.

Big Jim doesn't respond. He just looks at her belly, smiling.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

What?

BIG JIM

You -- y'all. My girls.

Melanie relents, charmed. Big Jim leans over and kisses her.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - MORNING

Ace waits on the side of the road. Big Jim's truck rumbles up and Ace hops in the back--

ACE

You're a lifesaver, bro. Mom would've killed me.

Melanie notices Ace cracking a beer in the truck bed.

MELANIE

Hey -- not in the car, Ace!

ACE

This ain't a car, city girl.

Ace slaps the roof, good to go. The truck pulls off. Ace takes a gulp and leans back, staring up at the passing pine trees, not a care in the world.

I/E. JACK'S JEEP - TRAVELING - MORNING

Jack and his family ride in silence. Jack glances over at Staci, but she ignores him and does her makeup. He tries to make eye contact with Thomas in the rear mirror. No luck.

JACK

Excited for tonight?

Nothing. Jack stares ahead and keeps driving.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

The tiny community church. You can hear the organ from the gravel parking lot as the Spades hurry toward the entrance.

They reach the front door at the same time as Ace and the Kitchens. An odd, uncomfortable beat -- the brothers size each other up, like they're still in character.

Staci breaks the tension by hugging Melanie. Ace tousles Thomas' hair and enters first. Jack follows, annoyed.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

THE CHOIR sings "**PEACE IN THE VALLEY**" as the two trios immediately divert. Ace and the Kitchens sit on the right side of the aisle, next to Cleta Spade. Her eyes light up when she sees Ace.

Jack and his family hug the left side of the church, settling in an empty pew up front. FOLKS whisper, taking note of both Spade brothers -- this is like Ali and Frazier showing up to church together the morning of a fight.

Thomas looks back and catches his uncle's eye. Ace flexes and makes a strained Macho Man face. Thomas snickers and flexes back. Jack taps his son on the arm, making him face forward.

Cleta sees all this. Jack glances across the aisle and makes eye contact with his mother. She looks away, focusing on the CHOIR. Jack listens to the music but doesn't sing along.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The flock mingles after church. Everybody knows everybody, and they have forever. Ace and Big Jim emerge from the chapel, leading Cleta carefully down the steps.

BIG JIM

That was real nice.

CLETA

New pastor can't no more preach
than a cat.

ACE

Hey, but at least *I* made it, right?

CLETA

Yes, lord -- both my boys. Want
y'all to remember what's *really*
important when you're in that ring
tonight.

Ace kisses his mom on the head as they approach Staci and Melanie chatting. Jack is nowhere to be found. Ace hugs Staci and lifts Thomas up.

ACE

Dang kid, how much you weigh?

STACI
Say we've got a ballgame later,
Uncle Ace.

THOMAS
Our team sucks.

STACI
Where'd you learn that word?

THOMAS
Dad.

ACE
Think he taught me that word too.

THOMAS
Sorry...

STACI
I know he didn't teach you that
one.

LAUGHS. Melanie looks around.

MELANIE
Where is Jack?

STACI
Getting the car. He doesn't like to
be seen in public, much less being
friendly, the day of a match.

ACE
Especially not with yours truly.

MELANIE
(to Big Jim, making sure)
... That's "kayfabe", right?

BIG JIM
(nodding)
That's kayfabe.

ACE
Gotta keep up the act *allllll* the
time, even outside the ring...
(tongue in cheek)
So folks know it's real.

CLETA

Idiotic. Once, when Tom "broke his leg" in a match, he rolled around the house in a wheelchair for a month just so the boys would think it really happened.

More laughter. Ace tosses Thomas to Big Jim and the boys start play-wrestling.

MELANIE

(still wrapping her head around it)
But people know it's fake.

STACI

They do. I think.

MELANIE

.. So what's the point?

A group of CHURCHGOERS watch Ace and Big Jim, eager to catch a glimpse of their favorite local celebrities.

STACI

Them "believing", that makes them part of the show.

Cleta walks over and shoos away the gawking fans. Melanie turns to Staci.

MELANIE

Every time he gets in the ring it scares me to death. I don't know how you do it.

As Jack pulls around in the Jeep and HONKS, Staci shrugs--

STACI

Kayfabe.

EXT. DWA DOME - PARKING LOT - DAY

Crystal drives into the DWA parking lot on her muddy old DIRTBIKE. She looks up at the arena, excited.

INT. DWA DOME - ARENA - DAY

Three WRESTLERS are already in the RING:

DIEGO COTTONMOUTH (mid 30s), Cuban, sweet-faced and pot-bellied, fastens protective pads onto the rusted turnbuckles.

BOBBY PIN (26), 6'6, dumb as rocks but sporting an absolutely beautiful mullet, lies anxiously on the mat.

ROOSTER ROBBINS (28), black, a wiry smartass, is perched upon the top rope, playing on his iPhone.

ROOSTER

Remember *Glacier*, the blue ninja dude from WCW? He's on here.

DIEGO

I'm telling y'all, Twitter is the key to a fruitful wrestling career.

BOBBY PIN

How many followers you got, Diego?

DIEGO

(proudly)

36 as of this morning.

BOBBY PIN

Whoa. That's awesome.

ROOSTER

All these guys. They all got old.

(then, to Bobby)

Alright rook, here I come--

Bobby tenses, but stays still. Rooster leaps off the top rope and BUTCHERS AN ELBOW DROP. He lands painfully, driving his elbow into Bobby's side and slamming his shoulder on the mat.

ROOSTER (CONT'D)

You moved, dumbass! This is why you haven't won a match yet!

BOBBY PIN

I'm sorry, I don't know what I--

Crystal CALLS OUT from the last row of the bleachers--

CRYSTAL

It wasn't his fault.

The guys all look up, noticing her for the first time.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

You let your weight come down on your elbow. You gotta bring it down on your leg, then *lightly* drive your elbow into his side.

Rooster rolls his eyes.

ROOSTER

Well then, ring rat, if it's that easy why don't you come do it?

Without hesitation, she scampers down into the ring and mounts the turnbuckle. Bobby scoots closer to her--

CRYSTAL

You don't think I can jump as far as Rooster?

Diego chuckles as Bobby crawls back where he was. Crystal shoots a look that says *keep going, asshole*. Bobby obliges.

DIEGO

Careful there Crystal, this ring's older than you are.

Crystal LAUNCHES into the air and lands a PERFECT ELBOW DROP. Everybody, even Rooster, is impressed. Crystal KICKS HER LEGS AND SPRINGS UP, a la Shawn Michaels.

CRYSTAL

It's all about controlling your impact. You land the wrong way, you could really hurt yourself.

ROOSTER

Too bad you're a manager and not a wrestler.

Ouch. Before Crystal can respond, Jack enters, dressed in an old flannel and carrying a gym bag. Everybody stands up a little straighter. He nods to the gang, lost in his thoughts.

INT. DWA DOME - HALL OF CHAMPIONS - MORNING

Jack heads down the HALL OF CHAMPIONS, stopping to look at the CHEAPLY FRAMED PHOTOS of past DWA champions. A younger Jack is up there, still wearing the heel's scowl. So are the men we saw on the billboard, WILD BILL and TOM SPADE.

Wild Bill stands at the top of a LADDER in his picture, holding up his TWO-BY-FOUR and howling at the moon.

In his picture, Tom Spade submits a much bigger man with his KINGDOM COME scorpion hold. Tom wears a rascaly grin as his foe taps out, yelling in pain.

Willie appears behind Jack, sucking a screwdriver from an old DALE EARNHARDT BIG GULP (she's always carrying this thing).

WILLIE

Really got his goat that you
wouldn't use his finisher.

JACK

Guys tapping out always looks fake.
Guy gets pinned, who knows, he
really could be out cold.

WILLIE

Shall I make room for the kid up
here?

Jack peels away and heads for his office. She follows.

JACK

You think he should win?

WILLIE

Somebody's gotta, and Ace is the
one selling tickets. It'd behoove
us all to keep him happy.

JACK

The outcome will be in the best
interest of the overall narrative..

WILLIE

Whose narrative?

INT. DWA DOME - JACK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Jack opens his gym bag. He removes the TITLE BELT, then
presents Willie the NEW FOG MACHINE we saw in his kitchen.

WILLIE

How'd Staci take this?

JACK

She doesn't appreciate synthetic
fog the way we do.

Jack grabs a beer from his mini-fridge.

WILLIE

Toss me one, Dale Senior's dry.

He does. Willie pours the beer into her cup and they toast.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

So our ref quit.

JACK
Another one?

WILLIE
Twisted his ankle when you threw
him out of the ring.

JACK
He signed a waiver. I was in
character.

WILLIE
You're always in character. He
says it ain't worth the shitty pay.

Jack tips his drink to that sentiment.

WILLIE (CONT'D)
Speaking of, Charlie Gully shit on
us at another Florida Extreme
event. He keeps telling their fans
he's gonna run us out of business.

JACK
(not surprised)
Fucking hack. He thinks he
invented the idea of guys bleeding
in the ring.

WILLIE
Seems like he wants to bring back
the territory wars.

JACK
Tell him the 80s are over.

Willie looks around at the ancient office.

WILLIE
You could've fooled me.

JACK
He's a plastic fishing worm peddler
who had a mid-life crisis and
decided he wanted to be Vince
McMahon -- they got nothing we
don't.

WILLIE
Except a lot of plastic fishing
worm money.

(then, delicately)
The Dome needs fixing up. We
should be paying our guys more.

(MORE)

WILLIE (CONT'D)

And we been building to you vs. Ace for over a year -- after tonight, how do we keep folks coming back?

JACK

Let me worry about that.

A silence that isn't uncomfortable. These two have been at this together for a long time.

JACK (CONT'D)

You know how many views we've had since I put my match with Big Jim online?

WILLIE

Every promotion puts their shit online now--

JACK

Almost thirty thousand.

Willie takes this in, genuinely impressed.

WILLIE

.. Seriously? Jesus.

JACK

It's cause our shit's better. And as soon as I can get this second camera, and somebody to work it--

WILLIE

Another camera. You think a fog machine pissed off your wife?

Jack stands down, content to put a pin in this conversation. Willie rises and picks up a framed PICTURE on the desk -- Jack and his father, years ago. Jack is around Thomas' age, riding on Tom Spade's broad shoulders. They look happy.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Who do you think Tom would have win?

JACK

I don't care. He's dead.

She sets the picture down, facing away from Jack. She grabs the fog machine and exits. Suddenly fatigued, Jack leans back in his chair and takes a deep breath. He cracks another beer.

EXT. COUNTRY MART - DAY

Big Jim's truck is parked outside an old country market.

FARMER (O.S.)
Grew up watching your pop.

INT. COUNTRY MART - CONTINUOUS

Ace signs a John Deer hat for a middle-aged FARMER.

FARMER
He was my favorite.

ACE
Mine too.

FARMER
Thanks again. This'll mean
everything to my boy.

The Farmer smiles. They shake hands and Ace rejoins Big Jim, who has just finished signing autographs for a couple of LITTLE KIDS. The two friends peruse the drink aisle together.

ACE
Jack should let us charge for that.

BIG JIM
I don't mind it.

ACE
Tonight's sold out cause of *me*, and
I'm only making fifty bucks.

BIG JIM
More than most of the guys. I can
ask about hiring you back at Winn
Dixie.

ACE
I don't want to work at fucking
Winn Dixie, that's why I got fired.
(beat)
Tomorrow, when I'm champion, I'm
demanding a raise. Hundred a show.

BIG JIM
Are you for sure winning?

Ace smirks -- *obviously*. Big Jim pays for two Gatorades. Ace also throws down some CHEAP EYELINER. Big Jim glares at him.

ACE

What? I'll pay you back.
 (then, defensive)
 It's supposed to really help your
 eyes stand out on stage.

Big Jim shakes his head and pays for the eyeliner too. The Farmer gets in line behind the guys as Ace casually leans up against the CHEWING GUM.

ACE (CONT'D)

Banged Tricia Bell last night.
 (then)
 And this morning. Might have me a
 new manager.

BIG JIM

What about Crystal?

ACE

What about her? It's really a
 pointless job.

BIG JIM

Seems important to her.

The overweight and overworked clerk, HELEN COOPER (30), gives Big Jim his change. She rolls her eyes at Ace's bullshit.

BIG JIM (CONT'D)

Thanks Helen, good to see you.

Ace discreetly SNEAKS A PACK OF GUM into his pocket. He fist bumps the oblivious Farmer and starts to exit--

HELEN

Put it back, Ace.

Ace stops, reddening. He plays dumb, not turning around.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You steal shit every time you come
 in here. Only reason I ain't
 called the cops is cause your daddy
 was good to my family. Put it
 back.

Ace swallows hard. He backs up and sets the gum on the counter, then tries to leave without looking at anyone. He's halfway out the door when--

HELEN (CONT'D)

Tom would be ashamed.

Ace's eyes go cold. He steps back in and looks dead at Helen.

Ace
(measured)
Remember that time y'all came over to our house, for supper? When we were kids? I do. I was real little. Had to sit at my own table and just listen to you talk, and eat. Man did you eat -- scoop after scoop of casserole. I thought for sure you'd bust.

He approaches the counter. Other CUSTOMERS are watching.

ACE (CONT'D)
And you just *kept talking*, all night, about this puppy dog you'd found off the side of the road. How excited you were to keep it. Remember that?

He's leaning over the register. Big Jim tries to stop him--

BIG JIM
Ace, c'mon. Let's go--

ACE
Bout a week later, Mom told us your dog got loose, got hit by a car. And you know what ol' Tom said? "Probably for the best. That Cooper girl was just gonna eat it, anyway."
(smiles icily)
Goddamn, did we laugh.

The Farmer is aghast. Helen fights back tears. Ace GRABS THE GUM OFF THE COUNTER and Big Jim jerks him out of the store.

INT. DWA DOME - JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack stares at the script on his laptop. **JACK VS. ACE**. He minimizes the window, revealing his DESKTOP BACKGROUND: Jack, Staci, and Thomas at a Little League game.

He brings up the DWA's Facebook page and watches video footage of his match with Big Jim, fast-forwarding to the confrontation with Ace. The video's sound has been MUTED to omit Ace saying "Fuck you." The crowd starts their familiar chant: **ACE! ACE! ACE!** The fans really do love him.

Jack minimizes the video and reopens the script, on the precipice of a decision. He starts to type but is interrupted by his PHONE RINGING. He checks the caller ID and picks up--

JACK

How's it going, Mr. Cooper?--

Jack's face frosts at the answer. The chant continues.

INT. DWA DOME - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

More WRESTLERS have shown up. Everybody drinks beer and shoots the shit in the locker room. Bobby curls 60 pound dumbbells with ease while talking to Diego and Rooster.

BOBBY PIN

(bummed out)

Can't wait for you to whoop my ass tonight, Rooster. Y'all know I've still literally never won a match?

ROOSTER

Ain't about winning -- it's about *getting over*, with the crowd. Jack'll make the people love you.

DIEGO

Or hate you. I started out as the Venice Menace, since I'm Cuban but look Italian? Nobody gave a crap. They like, couldn't wrap their heads around it.

ROOSTER

Because it was retarded.

DIEGO

Then one night Jack hands me a mask, says I'm a Mexican luchador. *Diego Cottonmouth*. Now the fans can't stand me.

ROOSTER

Point is, Jack makes 'em care. *That's* how you get noticed by scouts from the big show.

DIEGO

And getting noticed is how you get the hell out of Duffy.

INT. DWA DOME - HALL OF CHAMPIONS - DAY

Crystal stands in the Hall of Champions, looking at all the pictures. Willie breezes past, taking down another drink in her Dale Earnhardt cup. Crystal hurries after her--

CRYSTAL

Hey, Willie, I was wondering -- is there a locker I could use?

Willie stops at the locker room door. She sizes Crystal up.

WILLIE

How long have you been his manager?

CRYSTAL

I'm not just a manager--

WILLIE

True, you're really more of an escort. How long?

CRYSTAL

Two months.

WILLIE

(does the math)

Yeah... sorry sweetie, knowing Ace, you should be gone any day now.

And with that, Willie blows into the locker room. Crystal watches as the door swings open, then shuts.

INT. DWA DOME - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Willie enters and WHISTLES for the guys' attention. Nobody gives a second thought to seeing her in the locker room.

WILLIE

Jack's got the card, everybody hustle up!

The wrestlers all drop what they're doing and head out. She SLAPS Bobby Pin's ass good-naturedly and he JUMPS a mile high.

INT. DWA DOME - ARENA - CONTINUOUS

Jack stands in the RING, beer in hand, going through the script. The wrestlers crowd around, looking up at him in quiet reverence. Crystal stands in the back, by herself.

JACK

... Diego over Rude Rudy, Rooster
over Bobby Pin--

Ace and Big Jim enter quietly through a side door. Ace ducks a kiss from Crystal, still caught up in what happened at the store. Jack makes hard eye contact with Ace, then continues--

JACK (CONT'D)

After intermission, y'all are all back out there for the Battle Royale. Big Jim and Diego are the last men standing, and Jim, just when it looks like he has you, you start pounding the mat, folks love that. Get a USA chant going too. You channel the crowd's energy and toss him over the top rope for the win. You're the star tonight.

The guys holler their support. Big Jim looks down, humbled.

JACK (CONT'D)

Then Ace and I bring it home, with Ace going down by pinfall.

A few hushed MURMURS as everyone turns to Ace. He manages to keep a straight face. Crystal squeezes his hand.

WILLIE

I got your full scripts, with finishes. Autographs are an hour before showtime, don't be late.

Ace stares daggers up at Jack--

EXT. DWA DOME - PARKING LOT - DAY

Jack walks toward his Jeep. Ace catches up with him--

ACE

How bout I just don't wrestle at all? What then?

JACK

Fine. I'll put Big Jim in the Main Event again. The Freak from the Creek's a fan-favorite.

Ace

Why are you doing this?

JACK

Florida Extreme's breathing down our necks. I have to subvert expectations, keep our audience engaged and invested.

ACE

What the fuck does that mean?

JACK

You beat me, where do we go from there? But if you lose -- the hero, defeated by the villain, has to start over and fight his way back to the top? *That's* an angle.

Jack calmly gets into his Jeep. Ace is fuming.

ACE

Folks are coming *tonight* cause they want to see me win *tonight*.

JACK

No. They're coming because they trust me to tell them a story better the ones they sit at home and tell themselves.

ACE

Dude, it's rednecks in tights pretending to hit each other. It's supposed to be *fun*.

JACK

Not at the expense of being good.

Checkmate. Jack cranks the Jeep and stares at Ace.

JACK (CONT'D)

Marty Cooper called me up. Said his daughter left work sobbing.

ACE

That's what this is about? Me hurting Helen Cooper's feelings?

JACK

In *public*, the day of a match. Folks need to believe you're a good guy.

ACE

They do.
 (then)
 I am.

JACK

Are you?

They hold each other's stare until Jack finally shuts his door and drives off.

INT. DWA DOME - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The locker room is empty, save for Big Jim. He tapes an ULTRASOUND PICTURE of his unborn daughter in his locker. Ace tears inside, breathing fire.

ACE

Can you fucking believe Jack?

Big Jim remains quiet. He doesn't look happy either.

ACE (CONT'D)

What? Now you're pissed at me too?

BIG JIM

I didn't say anything.

Big Jim shuts his locker and exits. Ace sits on a bench, all alone. A moment passes, then Crystal appears in the doorway, holding a copy of the SCRIPT.

CRYSTAL

It's just a belt.

Ace looks out past her, into the Hall of Champions.

ACE

Sure.
 (then, re: the script)
 How's it happen?

CRYSTAL

Calls for a half-hour match. An epic. Then--
 (reading)
 "Ace Superkicks Jack, but instead of pinning him, Ace trots around the ring, playing to the crowd. When Ace finally goes for the pin, Jack traps him with an inside cradle for the win."

ACE

Jesus. I could come up with something better than that.

(then, quietly)

It's bullshit. Dad leaves it all to him and I'm just... stuck.

CRYSTAL

I been watching matches here since I was little. Sometimes losing is the best way to win over a crowd.

Ace looks at her like that's the dumbest shit he's ever heard. She takes a different approach--

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

I was at your last football game, where you threw the pick to lose to us in overtime. I was like 15. And even though I already knew who you were, cause you were King Spade's kid--

ACE

(ahem)

And an all-district quarterback--

CRYSTAL

--There was something about seeing you down on the field after, alone, crying--

ACE

I wasn't crying--

CRYSTAL

Yeah you were. And that's when I knew -- that one day, somehow, I was gonna put on a spandex leotard and hit somebody with a steel chair for you.

They LAUGH. Ace rises and walks toward Crystal in the doorway. He feels a little better about tonight, and a little worse about this morning.

ACE

I wasn't crying.

(then)

Come in here.

CRYSTAL

I don't think I'm allowed in the locker room.

ACE

I'm the star of this league. And I
say you are.

She takes a step into the locker room. The door shuts behind her and they START KISSING -- until the door SWINGS BACK OPEN, drilling Crystal in the head--

CRYSTAL

Ow, motherfucker--

Diego, Rooster, and Bobby Pin enter. Crystal pulls away from Ace, embarrassed.

DIEGO

Oh shit, my bad -- are y'all -- did
we--?

ROOSTER

Jesus. It's so much like a porn.

ACE

(back in QB mode)

You wish you could see me fuck.

The guys cackle and head for their lockers. Ace looks back at Crystal -- the moment has passed. She hands him the script.

CRYSTAL

You should go over this.

He nods and she walks off, back down the Hall of Champions. Ace sits on the bench and stares at the script.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELDS - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Ancient browngrass ballfields. LITTLE LEAGUERS PLAY.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Jack sits next to Staci in the bleachers. He wears a Braves hat and sunglasses so as not to draw attention to himself, but a few of the PARENTS AND KIDS recognize him anyway.

Down on the field, Thomas steps into the on-deck circle. Staci offers her husband some boiled peanuts in a dixie cup, but his thoughts are clearly elsewhere.

STACI

You okay?

JACK
You know I hate that.

STACI
Well I hate it when you sigh and
clear your throat cause you're so
bored.

JACK
I'm not bored.

STACI
I am. Kids are boring. We're
boring. Eat a peanut.

They both smile, finally thawing. Jack grabs some peanuts as
Thomas comes up to bat.

JACK
(with some difficulty)
I'm sorry. I should've told you
about the fog machine.

STACI
Thank you.

JACK
... And so now, I'm *telling* you --
I have to buy another camera.

STACI
(way too loud)
Are you *shitting* me?

Parents look at them. Jack lowers his voice--

JACK
We've already got the best product,
now we just need the best
presentation, and--

As they start to argue, Thomas RIPS one down the third base
line. The crowd GOES WILD as he rounds toward second. Jack
and Staci don't realize until he's already slid into the
base. Staci stands and cheers. A moment later, Jack follows.

STACI
Can we just talk about this
tomorrow, please?

Jack relents, nods. Thomas takes off his batting gloves and
FIRES TWO FINGER GUNS INTO THE SKY, just like Ace. Jack looks
around at the crowd clapping and cheering for his son.

I/E. JACK'S JEEP - TRAVELING - DAY

Jack drives back to the arena, no longer in disguise, spitting tobacco into an old GATORADE BOTTLE. He stops at a red light and a MINIVAN pulls up beside him. He catches two young BOYS staring at him from the back seat, mesmerized. Jack does his signature THROAT SLASH and the boys look away, terrified but thrilled.

The light turns green and Jack hits the gas, actually allowing himself a smile.

INT. DWA DOME - ARENA - DAY

Jack enters the arena and finds it oddly empty, save for some CATERERS setting up barbecue on folding tables. Willie approaches, looking a little flustered.

JACK

The hell's going on?

WILLIE

We have a visitor.

INT. DWA DOME - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wrestlers crowd around a TV set, watching a homemade SEX TAPE featuring a burly older man having a threesome with two strippers on the deck of a riverboat casino.

MAN'S VOICE

--And I told 'em, y'all think
Hulk's sex tape is bad? Just wait
until you see mine, motherfuckers!

LAUGHS. The crowd parts, revealing WILD BILL HANCOCK (late 50s), the other wrestler from the billboard with Tom Spade. His still larger-than-life, but larger in the waist, too. He wears a gaudy suit and ridiculous rattlesnake boots.

Ace stands next to him, beaming. Crystal stands on her tip-toes at the back of the group, trying to see what's happening.

WILD BILL

There he is -- Jack Spade.
Nastiest heel I ever saw.

JACK

(turning on the charm)
I learned from the best.

WILD BILL
 I was only the best cause I had
 Tom...
 (then, re: Ace)
 ... Sort of like you two, I hear.

JACK
 Ace is a rising star, no doubt.

WILD BILL
 Too bad there ain't a ladder
 involved tonight.

JACK
 That was you and Dad's thing.

WILD BILL
 Yeah, and it killed. Those matches
 made my whole fuckin career.
 (then, to the group)
 Speaking of me being rich, barbecue
 I ordered for y'all is here.

The guys CHEER and head for the arena. Wild Bill grabs Jack--

WILD BILL (CONT'D)
 They can have the pig, but I need
 some turkey.

Ace watches anxiously as Wild Bill, Jack, and Willie exit.
 Crystal walks up and takes his hand.

INT. DWA DOME - JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack enters his office. Wild Bill stops Willie in the
 doorway.

WILD BILL
 Boys only, sweetheart.

Willie looks over wild Bill's shoulder -- Jack rolls his
 eyes, indicating that this isn't a battle worth fighting. She
 regards Wild Bill with disgust -- there's a history here.

WILLIE
 You got fat as fuck.

She exits, shutting the door behind her. Jack pours WILD
 TURKEY WHISKEY into a styrofoam cup, hands it to Wild Bill.

WILD BILL
 Brings back memories. You poured
 me and Tom a lot of these.

Jack grabs a beer for himself.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)
He always said you'd grow up to be
a beer drinker.

JACK
Whiskey makes me mean.

WILD BILL
Me too.

Wild Bill grins and throws back the Turkey. He orbits the office, picking up the picture of Jack and Tom.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)
Been what, two years? Goddamn.
Your mother doing any better?

JACK
We don't talk much.

WILD BILL
She don't blame you, does she? For
what happened?

No response. Wild Bill sits down across from Jack and resets--

WILD BILL (CONT'D)
How's the business?

Jack's face is cold. The pleasantries have been dispensed.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)
Christ, Jack, I know you think I
could've done more to help--

JACK
--Or done *anything*--

WILD BILL
--But I got bills too. Ex-wife.
Kid in some fucking hippie private
school. I did my time in Duffy.

JACK
Then why are you back?

Wild bill pours himself some more whiskey and puts his boots up on Jack's desk.

WILD BILL
Ace. I'm here to scout him.

A long beat. Jack stays quiet, the wind knocked out of him.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)

It's early in the process, but we think he's got what it takes to succeed at the highest level.

JACK

He's a *kid*. He's barely been at it a year.

WILD BILL

I know, and the way he connects with the crowd already? He's a natural. It's in his blood.

JACK

You haven't even seen him in the ring--

WILD BILL

We have -- thanks to you, those videos you put up online.

JACK

(reeling)

He won't leave what we're building here.

WILD BILL

I left. Came back this morning on a Learjet. How'd that work out?

JACK

You think I care about private planes?

WILD BILL

I think your brother will. Planes, limos, sold out stadiums... Didn't y'all do a show at the Golden Corral buffet last year?

JACK

There were 200 people there and it was better than anything y'all have done in a *decade*.

The room is silent. Wild Bill slides the whiskey toward Jack and adopts a softer tone.

WILD BILL

This place, Jack... it's a hobby. One of your guys leaving for the real thing, you should be proud of that. Cause it's honestly the best you can do.

JACK

Get out of my office.

Wild Bill doesn't move. He looks at the picture of Tom Spade.

WILD BILL

You really are so much like him.

Jack STANDS -- he won't ask again. Wild Bill just grins and finishes his whiskey, totally in control. As he rises--

WILD BILL (CONT'D)

My point exactly.

Wild Bill exits. Jack collapses into his chair.

INT. DWA DOME - HALL OF CHAMPIONS - CONTINUOUS

Ace and Crystal stand in the hallway, pretending not to eavesdrop. Wild Bill walks out and approaches Ace.

INT. DWA DOME - JACK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Jack hears a joyful HOLLER from outside as Wild Bill gives Ace the news. He eyes the Turkey on his desk, but doesn't drink. He grabs a copy of the script and stares at it.

JACK VS. ACE.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AROUND DUFFY - ESTABLISHING - DAY (LATER)

Daylight fades as the town closes up shop. Folks are piling into their trucks and heading to the arena.

INT. DWA DOME - ARENA - DAY

CLOSE on ACE'S FACE. He talks energetically to CAMERA:

ACE

So -- I backflip off the top turnbuckle, but you catch me mid-air and WHAM, Jackknife. Everybody thinks I'm done, *but I kick out--*

PULL BACK SLOWLY, REVEALING:

Ace stands in the center of the ring, Big Jim at his side. Crystal is perched on the ropes behind him.

ACE (CONT'D)

We trade punches until I catch you with a Superkick, and we both go down. I get up right before you and BAM, another Superkick.

REVEAL JACK AND WILLIE eating barbecue in the ring, opposite Ace and his posse. Jack does not look impressed.

JACK

That's it?

CRYSTAL

(protective)

No, there's more--

ACE

Right. You're down, but I don't pin you yet, cause *I don't want the match to end*. You get up and I nail you again. I start to go for the pin, but you wave me off -- you know you're beat, *but you don't want it to be over either*. You stand up, one last time, and smile. Shake my hand. We're brothers.

(lets that sit)

Then I hit a final Superkick, and pin you for the win.

Quiet as everybody digests this. Ace looks real proud of himself. Willie turns to Jack.

WILLIE

I don't hate it.

CRYSTAL

(eager)

And Jack -- if y'all play it right, it'll get the fans on your side going forward.

JACK
Who are you again?

CRYSTAL
You know who I am.

JACK
What makes you think I want the
fans on my side?

CRYSTAL
Nobody would expect it.

This lands with Jack, but Ace interrupts--

ACE
This is exciting, Jack. It's good.

Jack looks at Big Jim, who's been silent this whole time.

JACK
What do you think, Jim?

BIG JIM
(uncomfortably)
Feels like the end of something.

Ace glares at Big Jim. Jack takes note, then stands--

JACK
Exactly. It's a conclusion.

ACE
Well, yeah. If I impress Wild Bill
tonight, I'm gone.

JACK
I'm not.
(final)
Finish stays the same. You want to
win the belt, you can stick around
and earn it.

Ace looks at his brother.

ACE
Everybody else is happy for me.

He exits through the ropes. Big Jim and Crystal follow.
Willie turns to Jack as if to ask, *What now?*

JACK
We're alright. Even if he does go,
we've still got me, still got Big
Jim. It's fine.

They keep eating in silence. Willie drops her plate.

WILLIE
This barbecue's fucking awful.

INT. DWA DOME - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Ace enters, Big Jim behind him. Ace isn't happy.

ACE
(biting)
Thanks for the backup, bro.

BIG JIM
Jack shaking your hand? Nobody's
gonna believe that.

Ace stares at his friend.

ACE
You're just a sidekick. You know
that, right?

Ace grabs his stolen gum and storms off.

EXT. DWA DOME - PARKING LOT - DAY

Volunteers set up concession stands and parking cones. Fans
are already showing up to tailgate.

EXT. BEHIND THE DOME - DAY

Ace paces out back, smacking his gum. Crystal smokes a
cigarette on the steps.

CRYSTAL
We should go somewhere tonight,
after. To celebrate.

ACE
(petulant)
Celebrate me losing?

CRYSTAL
No, celebrate this opportunity.
What it means for us.

Ace stares at Crystal, thrown by her use of "us." A rented CADILLAC pulls up. Wild Bill rolls down the window.

ACE
Where'd you go?

WILD BILL
Had to pick up an old friend.

There's a TWO-BY-FOUR in the back seat, the kind Wild Bill was holding on the billboard. Ace grins like a little kid.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)
Now, where can we get a drink?

ACE
Us?

CRYSTAL
We got autographs pretty soon--

WILD BILL
When it comes to autographs, if you're not getting paid, you should at least be getting--

CRYSTAL
(eye roll)
Laid?

WILD BILL
I was gonna say drunk, but that works too. Come on, superstar.

Ace stares for the Cadillac but Crystal grabs his arm--

CRYSTAL
I just gotta grab my backpack.

ACE
(sotto)
I think he meant just me.

Ace pulls away from Crystal and gets in with Wild Bill. She remains outside as they drive off.

INT. DWA DOME - JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack sits at his desk, staring at the script. **JACK VS. ACE.** He can't stop thinking about what Crystal said. He gets an idea, stands up--

INT. DWA DOME - ENTRANCE TUNNEL - DAY

Willie talks with the seedy-looking replacement REF (20s).
The new fog machine is laid out in front of her.

REF
What's the rate?

WILLIE
20 dollars.

Jack enters through the open door--

REF
Charlie Gully paid me 25.

JACK
Then go back to Florida Extreme,
and get your face lit up by a
staplegun again.

Jack stares the referee down -- and indeed we see STAPLE
SCARS on his forehead. He exits. Willie flips on the fog
machine--

WILLIE
Let there be fog.

--But nothing happens. Jack shakes his head. Willie kneels
down to try and figure out what's wrong.

JACK
Worth every penny.
(then)
Have you seen Big Jim?

INT. DIVE BAR - DAY

Ace and Wild Bill are in a shitty dive, finishing their
second whiskeys. Wild Bill has his two-by-four up on the bar
and uses a POCKET KNIFE to scrawl something into the wood.

A few buzzed DRINKERS point and stare. Ace takes note,
feeling pretty cool to be out in public with Wild Bill.

ACE
(a little nervous)
So tonight, is there like, anything
specific you're looking for?

WILD BILL
Yeah, I'm looking for a college
girl to stick.
(MORE)

WILD BILL (CONT'D)
 (to the female BARTENDER)
 Two more, por favor.

As the Bartender pours their drinks, Wild Bill produces a money clip packed with CASH. Ace's eyes get big.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)
 (a la Indiana Jones)
 Fortune and glory, kid. Fortune
 and glory.

Wild Bill goes to pay, but the Bartender gestures to a couple of ROUGHNECKS down at the other end of the bar. They raise their glasses to Wild Bill.

BARTENDER
 They got y'all.

Wild Bill RAISES HIS GLASS BACK to the Roughnecks, then burps a particularly painful burp.

WILD BILL
 Fuck getting old.

He fishes a PILL BOTTLE from his pocket and washes down a PAINKILLER with liquor. He offers Ace the pills--

WILD BILL (CONT'D)
 Roxys. Good shit.

ACE
 (hesitantly)
 I shouldn't. Fucks me up too much.

Wild Bill hands Ace A FEW PILLS anyway.

WILD BILL
 That's the point.
 (beat)
 Senorita back at the arena, that
 your girlfriend?

ACE
 (quickly)
 Nah, just my manager.

WILD BILL
 Won't be needing either where you'd
 headed, if things work out.
 (then)
 For tonight, just do your thing.
 Need to see you tell a story in the
 ring, really work the crowd. This
 is your shot.

A young REDNECK and his GIRLFRIEND approach from behind--

REDNECK

Excuse us--

The wrestlers both instinctively look up.

REDNECK (CONT'D)

Holy shit -- *Wild Bill*. Could we get a picture? We're huge fans.

Wild Bill turns on his stool. Ace scoots out of the way--

REDNECK (CONT'D)

No no, you too, man. Y'all two together, that's so badass.

Wild Bill examines the Redneck's girlfriend with leering eyes. He points to her with his POCKET KNIFE--

WILD BILL

We'll take a picture with her.

Half an awkward beat, then the Redneck shrugs. His girlfriend poses between Ace and Wild Bill. Wild Bill GRABS HER WAIST and forces her onto his lap. Other patrons watch.

REDNECK

She don't need to be *that* close--

WILD BILL

(snarling)

Take the picture, boy.

The Redneck swallows hard and snaps a picture on his phone. His girlfriend pulls away and they HURRY OUT. Wild Bill goes back to carving the wood. Ace sits back down, unsettled.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)

Gonna tell your brother about that?

ACE

.. No.

WILD BILL

You hate him, don't you?

ACE

(beat)

We're different.

Wild Bill finishes the two-by-four. He blows off the dust and slides it over to Ace. Carved into the wood are the words: **"LONG LIVE THE KING"**.

WILD BILL
 "King Spade." Jack Spade, Ace
 Spade... Tom loved that stupid
 shit.

Ace plays with a STRAW, still mulling the question about
 Jack.

ACE
 Jack always drove me to school.
 This one morning, Dad was loaded--

WILD BILL
 (cutting him off)
 Don't tell me a depressing story.

Ace stops, embarrassed. He downs his whiskey, then--

ACE
 Jack's just always tried to protect
 me, I guess.

Wild Bill finishes his drink and gestures for TWO MORE--

WILD BILL
 So he could control you, keep you
 from getting what's yours. Like
 your daddy's belt.
 (burps again)
 Back in the day, guy got out of
 line, Tom and I'd make sure a few
 punches landed for real.
 (beat)
 That's the shit I like to see.

INT. DWA DOME - STAIRWELL - DUSK

Jack ascends the arena's old stairwell, stopping briefly to
 catch his breath. He continues out onto the--

EXT. DWA DOME - ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Big Jim sits on the ledge surrounding the dome, looking out
 at the Georgia pines brushing against the purple sky. Jack
 approaches--

JACK
 Willie said you come up here a lot.
 The view really worth the climb?

BIG JIM

Yes. And, you can see the lightning bugs.

Down below, tiny FIREFLIES illuminate the parking lot. Jack settles hesitantly onto the ledge. He throws in a dip and Big Jim lights a cigarette.

JACK

When I was real little, Mom wouldn't let me come to the shows here. But one night Dad had some friends over to watch the WCW pay-per-view, and I snuck out of my room for the Main Event -- Sting vs. Ric Flair, for the belt. It was amazing... all those people booing Flair and cheering for Sting, like he was a superhero.

BIG JIM

I hated Flair.

JACK

Everybody did. Mom made me go back to bed, but I hid my Fisher Price cassette recorder by the TV. Next day I played it all back -- Flair got cocky and Sting beat him with an inside cradle. The fans cheered so loud the arena was shaking.

Jack stares down into the trees, remembering.

JACK (CONT'D)

But the crazy thing was, after the match, Sting gets the mic and the first thing he says is, "Ric Flair is the greatest World Champion of all time." And the crowd doesn't know what to think -- these guys are supposed to be mortal enemies! But Sting broke kayfabe just to give Flair credit, cause he knew -- folks only love the good guys as much as they hate the bad.

The point of Jack's story dawns on Big Jim.

BIG JIM

You want me to turn heel.

JACK

(nods)

I'm out cold, bout to get pinned, but you run out and deck the ref, then chokeslam Ace. You're jealous, you're through playing second fiddle. You put my arm over him and the ref makes the count. After the bell rings, you start whipping Ace's ass, and I'm torn... *that's my brother*. So I Jackknife you and save him. Ace rides off into the sunset or whatever, but you and I pull a *double turn* -- now I'm the face, and you're the heel.

Big Jim is silent. He takes a long drag.

JACK (CONT'D)

Nobody will expect it.

BIG JIM

I don't want people to boo me.

JACK

They will, for a while, cause they'll see themselves in you -- someone who's made a mistake, who's trying to work things out--

BIG JIM

Yeah, but -- thing is--

JACK

But one day you'll turn back. Folks need to believe we can get better. Fix ourselves, and--

BIG JIM

I'm retiring.

This stops Jack in his tracks.

JACK

--What? When?

BIG JIM

After tonight. Baby's coming this month -- and Melanie's wanted me to for a while.

JACK

Why?

BIG JIM

If I stop wrestling, I can take on more hours at work. Maybe become an assistant manager one day.

(exhales smoke)

And she thinks it's dangerous.

JACK

Is that what you think?

BIG JIM

No. I love it.

(beat)

But I love her more. So.

JACK

Let me talk to her, I can--

BIG JIM

I got a family now, Jack. I can't do this forever.

Jack doesn't understand this, but he can't argue with it. He looks up at the sky, struggling to comprehend everything.

BIG JIM (CONT'D)

(earnestly)

I'll still turn bad, if that's what you need me to do.

JACK

... No. Don't worry about it.

Jack rises. Big Jim follows suit.

JACK (CONT'D)

Fans are really gonna miss you.

BIG JIM

I'm gonna miss signing autographs. That's my favorite part.

AN INSTRUMENTAL ARRANGEMENT OF "PEACE IN THE VALLEY" begins and continues over this next sequence:

EXT. DWA DOME - DUSK

We see shots from the AUTOGRAPH SESSION:

- The WRESTLERS sit at folding tables, signing tacky memorabilia for excited FANS.

- The longest lines are for Ace and Big Jim's empty seats. Big Jim appears and the crowd CHEERS. He waves and smiles.
- Crystal poses for pictures with some love-struck guys.
- Diego, wearing his luchador mask, signs with his Twitter handle: @DiegoWrestles.
- Swooning COUGARS surround Bobby Pin, who loves all the attention.
- Rooster flirts with some cute LADIES, pissing off their redneck boyfriends.
- Melanie sneaks up behind Big Jim, surprising him. He gives his wife a giant bear hug, lifting her off the ground.
- Staci and Thomas wait in line for Ace, like regular fans. Thomas looks around for his uncle. Staci searches for Jack.

INT. DWA DOME - JACK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Jack sits at his desk, drinking WHISKEY now, watching the autograph session through a window in his office.

Ace walks in. He sways slightly, all the booze catching up to him. But, for the first time, his claws don't seem to be out.

JACK

You're late. Fans are waiting.

Ace shuts the door and approaches the desk. Jack remains staring out the window. Ace speaks with raw, honest emotion--

ACE

I really want to win.

No response.

ACE (CONT'D)

My ending is good. It would work.

JACK

Your ending? Her ending.

This catches Ace off-guard. Jack turns to face Ace--

JACK (CONT'D)

It was Crystal's idea, right?

Ace changes the subject, which serves as confirmation.

ACE

After I make it big, I could come back. Help you, help the league.

JACK

You make it big, you won't see Duffy again until they bury you here. Which, the way you're headed, won't be long.

Ace absorbs this blow, keeps his cool--

ACE

I just want my picture on the wall. Next to you. And Dad.

JACK

(coldly)

He'd hate you for leaving. But he wouldn't be surprised.

Outside, the fans start a familiar CHANT, one that continues over the rest of the scene: ACE! ACE! ACE! Ace seems to feed off this, growing angry now--

ACE

Let me win.

Jack stands, get right in his brother's face--

JACK

No.

Ace looks out the window, over Jack's shoulder. He sees Staci and Thomas. The argument escalates rapidly from here--

ACE

Is this cause I made your kid laugh in church this morning?

JACK

Please.

ACE

Cause he cheers for *me* in the ring? Cause *they all* cheer for me?

JACK

They cheer for the character.

ACE

The character *I* play.

JACK
The character I created.

Ace SHOVES Jack. Jack stumbles backward, but holds his ground. Ace turns and exits, but heading into tonight's match, a dangerous physical line has been crossed.

Jack looks out the window and, after a moment, sees Ace appear outside. The crowd LOSES IT. Crystal goes to him, but he completely ignores her. Thomas runs into Ace's arms. Staci takes a picture of her son with Ace and Big Jim.

Jack pours another whiskey as the crowd's cheers build into--

INT. DWA DOME - NIGHT

The arena has transformed. The overhead lights are on and DWA flags have unfurled from the rafters. Excited FANS file in, filling the rickety bleachers.

Staci and Thomas take their seats on the front row. Staci sees Willie prepping the CAMCORDER a few rows up. The women exchange polite but distant nods.

INT. DWA DOME - HALL OF CHAMPIONS - NIGHT

Crystal faces the locker room. She braces herself, then strides confidently through the door--

INT. DWA DOME - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She enters into a tense pre-game atmosphere. The wrestlers are all getting dressed, and nobody seems to notice her. She smiles to herself and goes to Ace's locker. She looks in the mirror and starts applying her GLITTER EYELINER--

WILLIE (O.S.)
 The fuck are you doing?

Crystal spins, startled. She's face to face with Willie.

CRYSTAL
 --Just making sure Ace has everything--

WILLIE
 The locker room's for *wrestlers*,
 not groupies.

CRYSTAL
I can wrestle.

Willie looks around at all the huge men. She gestures to the GOBLIN BOYS, a couple of 350 pound oafs.

WILLIE

Against who? Them? Nobody wants to see that.

(then)

Go do you makeup in the ladies' room.

Crystal grabs her things and starts off, pissed. She turns back to Willie--

CRYSTAL

How come you're in here?

WILLIE

I belong here. You don't. Take that for the compliment that it is.

EXT. BEHIND THE DOME - NIGHT

Ace paces the back parking lot, making a PHONE CALL.

INT. CLETA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

THE PHONE RINGS in Cleta's house. She's PASSED OUT on the couch, still in her church clothes. There are pill bottles and a bottle of wine on the end table.

EXT. BEHIND THE DOME - CONTINUOUS

Ace hangs up. He takes out the PAINKILLER Wild Bill gave him, as well as a STRAW from the bar. He puts the Roxy in the straw and BITES DOWN on it, crushing the pill. Then he puts the straw to his nose and SNORTS.

Wild Bill approaches from behind, carrying the two-by-four. He holds it out to Ace.

WILD BILL

Long live the king.

Ace takes the two-by-four.

INT. DWA DOME - JACK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Jack stands in front of a mirror, putting the finishing touches on his FACEPAINT.

He drinks Wild Turkey from one styrofoam cup and spits tobacco into another. There's a KNOCK at the door, and Willie pokes her head in--

WILLIE

Five minutes.

JACK

How's the fog machine?

WILLIE

It's a fog machine.

Jack stares into his whiskey cup, defeated.

JACK

What would you do? If you didn't do this?

WILLIE

(no hesitation)

Tournament bass fishing. You?

A long, empty beat. Jack has no idea.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

You should say something to the guys.

INT. DWA DOME - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jack follows Willie into the locker room where, to their surprise, Wild Bill has just finished delivered a ROUSING SPEECH, Ace at his side. The wrestlers CHEER, all fired up.

WILD BILL

Anything to add, Jack?

Jack's wrestlers look to him. A beat, then:

JACK

Nope.

He turns and walks out. *WILLIE NELSON'S "GEORGIA ON MY MIND"* begins and continues over this next sequence:

INT. DWA DOME - ARENA - NIGHT

The arena comes alive, lit up by CHEAP SPOTLIGHTS and EVEN CHEAPER PYROTECHNICS. The crowd of almost 600 GOES CRAZY as the matches commence. We see shots from the show:

- Willie on the mic, riling up the crowd and introducing the wrestlers with theatrical charisma.
- Diego climbs the turnbuckle and waves a MEXICAN FLAG, infuriating the crowd.
- Staci and Thomas cheer from their spot on the front row.
- Rooster launches off the top rope and lands a PERFECT ELBOW DROP on Bobby Pin, just how Crystal taught him.
- Crystal tries to apply her glitter eyeliner in the packed women's restroom. There are wasted girls all around, including TRICIA, Ace's squeeze from the bonfire. Tricia spots Crystal and shares a knowing LAUGH with her friends.
- Ace and Big Jim sit on the same bench, getting ready in awkward silence. Big Jim tapes his forearms, Ace applies *his* eyeliner. Finally Ace offers an olive branch fist bump, and after a moment, Big Jim obliges.
- The Battle Royale RAGES, with ten guys in the ring at once. Big Jim kicks ass, tossing both Goblin Boys over the ropes.
- Thomas YAWNS. Staci checks her watch as he rests his head on her hip, trying to stay awake.

NOISE from the crowd echoes as the MUSIC SLOWLY FADES OUT, and we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DWA DOME - HALL OF CHAMPIONS - NIGHT

Jack stands alone in the Hall of Champions, swaying drunkenly. He puts on the title belt and stares at his father's picture.

Staci walks up behind him, holding a NOW-SLEEPING Thomas. Jack's bleary, bloodshot eyes light up a little.

JACK
Hey, what are y'all doing?

STACI
Just wanted to say good luck before we took off.

JACK
You're leaving?

STACI
This one's tapped out, couldn't keep his eyes open.

Her words barely register.

STACI (CONT'D)
 Heard about Ace. That's really
 great for him.

Jack says nothing. Staci touches his arm--

STACI (CONT'D)
 Are you okay?

JACK
 (no)
 Yeah, I'm fine.
 (then, re: Thomas)
 We should wake him up. This match
 is gonna be something.

Staci stares at her husband.

STACI
 Honestly, I'm not sure it's a good
 thing for him to see his father and
 uncle pretend to beat the hell out
 of each other.

We hear the crowd STOMPING ALONG as Big Jim SLAPS THE MAT --
 and now they begin to CHANT, signaling the imminent end of
 the Battle Royale:

USA! USA! USA!

JACK
 That's my cue.

STACI
 Okay. Be safe.

JACK
 I will. Love you.

STACI
 Love you.

They kiss. She smells the booze on him, but doesn't say
 anything. Out in the arena, the crowd GOES WILD as Big Jim
 wins. Staci and Thomas start off. Jack calls after them--

JACK
 Don't y'all want to know what
 happens?

VAN HALEN'S "DREAMS", Big Jim's music, begins to play. Staci turns and looks at Jack, her heart breaking for him, for his family. For *their* family.

STACI
It's not real, Jack.

They walk away. The song continues as Jack watches them disappear down the Hall of Champions.

INT. DWA DOME - ENTRANCE TUNNEL - NIGHT

Crystal waits in the entrance tunnel, alone. She looks out at the ring, where Big Jim is WAVING to his adoring fans.

Ace stumbles up, chomping gum, holding Wild Bill's TWO-BY-FOUR. Crystal looks at him.

CRYSTAL
Am I coming with you?

A beat -- then he shakes his head, *No*. Tears well in Crystal's eyes, but she holds it together.

Finally Jack joins them. They idle in silence until--

ACE
Fuck the belt. I already won.

Jack turns to his brother.

ACE (CONT'D)
I go wrestle the match of my life,
then it's like you said -- I get to
leave, and you stay here. Forever.
(beat)
Until you end up like Dad.

Before Jack can respond, Big Jim passes through, victorious, adrenaline pumping. He hugs Jack and Ace--

BIG JIM
I love y'all.

A sad, sweet moment passes, then Big Jim lets go.

THE HOLLIES' "LONG COOL WOMAN IN A BLACK DRESS" plays over the PA system as the NEW FOG MACHINE ACTIVATES AND FILLS THE TUNNEL, enveloping the four of them in thick, dark mist.

INT. DWA DOME - ARENA - CONTINUOUS

The crowd roars with BOOS as Jack emerges from the fog and strides down the entryway. Their jeers are LOUDER now, amplified -- almost as if, tonight, Jack's hearing them for the first time.

He enters the ring and gestures, begging the crowd for more. They oblige by screaming and swearing, projecting all their hate onto the elder Spade.

Jack looks at the CAMCORDER and starts to run his thumb along his neck--

But before he can, **KENNY LOGGINS' "DANGER ZONE"** kicks in. The crowd EXPLODES as Ace runs out of the tunnel, waving the two-by-four. Crystal follows, fully committed to her performance.

ON Jack as he takes in the booming cheers.

Ace jumps over the ropes and POINTS WILD BILL'S TWO-BY-FOUR DEAD AT JACK, taunting him. FIREWORKS GO OFF AS ACE SHOOTS HIS FINGER GUNS INTO THE SKY, oozing charisma, more than a superhero now -- a god.

ACE! ACE! ACE!

IN THE ENTRANCE TUNNEL

Willie, Big Jim, and the other wrestlers watch, excited. Like the fans, they've been waiting for this match forever.

DIEGO

Holy fuck this is gonna be awesome.

IN THE BLEACHERS

Wild Bill stands alone in the back row, listening to the crowd chant Ace's name. The kid's gonna be a star.

IN THE RING

Every single fan is on their feet, like the Super Bowl is about to kick off.

Jack stares across the ring at his brother.

ACE! ACE! ACE!

It's too much for Jack. He makes a decision.

THE BELL RINGS and the brothers square off.

Ace lunges to GRAPPLE WITH Jack, but Jack sidesteps and KICKS ACE'S FEET OUT FROM UNDER HIM. Ace lands HARD on his back.

With the speed of a much younger man, Jack threads his leg through Ace's and FLIPS HIM OVER ONTO HIS STOMACH. Still clutching Ace's legs, Jack LEANS BACK, causing IMMENSE PAIN in his brother's knees and spine.

This is the KINGDOM COME, Tom Spade's finisher -- and Jack has Ace locked in it for real.

Ace tries to break free, convulsing with all his strength in a desperate attempt to throw Jack off--

But Jack HANGS ON AND LEANS EVEN FURTHER BACK, applying *double the pressure*--

ACE HOWLS IN AGONY, A HIGH-PITCHED ANIMALISTIC WAIL--

The fans know there's no way this can be it...

ACE TAPS OUT.

ACE
STOP -- STOP, PLEASE--!

The Ref doesn't react. Jack YELLS AT HIM from the mat--

JACK
CALL IT!

The Ref WAVES HIS HANDS. THE BELL RINGS.

The match is over.

Just like that.

The crowd is dead silent, in disbelief. The match of the century lasted less than twenty seconds.

Jack releases Ace and rolls back to his corner. He stands, grabs his title belt, and RAISES IT IN VICTORY.

Ace remains on the mat, trembling. Shocked and humiliated. Betrayed.

Crystal has her hands over her mouth like she's just witnessed a murder.

IN THE ENTRANCE TUNNEL

Willie and the others are catatonic.

WILLIE
Goddamnit Jack.

Big Jim turns and disappears into the locker room, disgusted with this turn of events.

IN THE BLEACHERS

Wild Bill just grins, amused at the absurdity of it all.

IN THE RING

The crowd is still quiet...

And then, all at once, EVERYBODY STARTS BOOING.

THE DWA DOME SHAKES WITH BOOS. FANS SLING CUPS AND CANS AND BOTTLES AND GARBAGE INTO THE RING.

Ace looks around. They're not just booing Jack -- for the first time, they're booing him, too. They're booing this travesty of a main event, and the entire DWA.

Jack straps on his belt, accepting the consequences of what he's done. This was certainly an ending nobody expected.

Ace rises and approaches Jack, who makes no effort to defend himself. Ace KNOCKS THE LIVING SHIT out of his brother, splitting his eye open with a BRUTAL PUNCH--

Jack STAGGERS BACKWARD and tumbles out of the ring. When he finally gets to his feet, he and Ace share a long, pained look -- until a BEER CAN strikes Ace in the back of the head.

This sends Ace over the edge.

WHITE HOT TEARS BURST FROM HIS EYES, and he starts SOBBING. He tries to stop himself but can't -- the combination of pills, booze, and embarrassment is too much.

Ace cries openly and painfully, right there in the ring.

Many of the BOOS turn to LAUGHTER.

IN THE BLEACHERS

Wild Bill shakes his head, disappointed with Ace's breakdown. He EXITS THE DOME, having seen enough.

IN THE RING

Trash rains from the crowd as Jack turns and heads for the locker room, WALKING TOWARD CAMERA. Ace watches him go, his eyes filled with tears and hate.

This match -- this war -- has only just begun.

GREGORY ALAN ISAKOV'S "MASTER & A HOUND" plays. Jack continues down the entryway, moving further and further away from his brother.

FADE OUT.

