HAWK AND ANIMAL #3

Climb the turnbuckle high/
Take two falls out of three/
Blackout for local TV
--"Southwestern Territory",
The Mountain Goats

ROB STURMA
BILLY TUGGLE
BEAU WILLIAMS
W. TODD KANEKO
STEPHEN MEADS
GUILLERMO REBOLLO-GIL
DAN SULLIVAN
MYLES YATES

FreezeRay PRESS

SPRING 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dan Sullivan
Everyone Wants To See Yokozuna Get Body Slammed

Myles Yates
Eddie Kingston on if he believes wrestling is real

FOREWORD

The Forbidden Door has been opened!

Regardless of what companies you support or what shows you watch/talk about/pay for, it may be one of the healthiest periods in professional wrestling in a long time. We're never going to get back to true Monday Night Wars level of popularity, but WWE isn't the only game in town anymore and we're all a little better for it. I personally have to subscribe to a credo of moderation, as it would be easy to spend 20 hours a week or more just consuming new content from independent promotions alone (and/or get caught up in discourse/wrestling rumors/smarks who "well actually" every last bit of fun out of this artform we love so).

But what I absolutely will do is solicit poems about it.

Back in 2009, I had a strange poem "audition" for TNA Wrestling based on a slam piece I'd written about hardcore legend Mick Foley (it's on YouTube in several incarnations) wherein I basically wrote one of the deep-voiced announcer intros to introduce the PPV. And in studying past ones, I realized that whoever the hell wrote/writes these have a little poet buried in them as well. The most effective wrestling promos marry the best part of dramatic monologue and slam poetry into words that get asses in the seats and get us ready for combat. So you can imagine when I found out that OTHER people wrote about pro graps too. And breathtakingly so! It's what made me, so many years ago, start a Tumblr blog called Hawk and Animal based on this niche of a niche, the pro wrestling poem…

I'm really psyched it's been well-received as a side project and that we're unleashing our third issue and that the quality of the work has stayed outstanding. I wanna use Tony Schiavone precision and Mauro Ranallo gusto in praising these poems but I'm going to let you tag in and get your read on.

…and maybe someday we'll put these poems on real paper.

Do I have your attention now?

--Rob Sturma
AKA Slim Reaper
AKA The Velvet Smog
AKA Rat Bastid

ROB STURMA

Iron Mike Sharpe is Canada's Best Punk Song

Iron Mike Sharpe is one of my favorite wrestlers.
If it moves, he'll punch it.
If it doesn't move, he'll kick it.
- Lord Alfred Hayes

Canada's greatest friggin' athlete--
Put a black band on his arm to compete--

Iron Mike Sharpe
Iron Mike Sharpe

Jobber to the stars but only on TV
Gave Saito and Gorea the 1-2-3 (at various house shows)

"Iron" Mike Sharpe
Iron "Mike" Sharpe

Taught Nova, Crowbar and Charlie Haas--
debuted on TV with Captain Lou as his boss--

Was documented by various of his colleagues at the time
to have had obsessive compulsive behavior and was subsequently called Mr.Clean as a rib--
Poor guy barely got a chance to get over, not like Sam Houston or Ivan Putski did --

(smoky vocal breakdown)

in 1992 when I was on spring break from college,
I woke up and turned on
WWF WRESTLING CHALLENGE
wherein the tag team High Energy was wowing the crowds
with their matching black and white checkered suspenders
and their lime green hammer pants;
Koko B Ware and Owen The Rocket Hart were ready for
tag team action, and who should be their opponents
but resident jabroni
THE BROOKLYN BRAWLER
and none other than the
Loudest Living Jobber In Syndication...

It took Man Mountain Rock to get him off TV--
He'll never just be a jobber to me--
If I were a wrestler, I'm pretty sure I'd be--

"IRON" MIKE SHARPE
"IRON" MIKE SHARPE

Iron Mike Sharpe
"Iron" Mike Sharpe

BILLY TUGGLE

Mask vs. Mask

1.
The gimmick, basic
wrestler loses match,
Stipulation: banned for months
no "legit" promoter will book them
Nemesis takes bragging rights
Hero banished

One Christmas,
Dusty Rhodes' American dream
fell to the cult of Kevin Sullivan,
running Florida roughshod

One promoter unretired as an enforcer
only to eat the pin in a
Mid-Southl main event

A grudge followed Bruiser Brody around the planet
but got him banned from the world of Texas

Mysterious hooded combatants
suddenly arrive to avenge our heroes
Restore honor and underline
western hero complexes

2.
In Latin America, especially Mexico
estrellas de lucha libre
carry tradition of mystique
La mascara extends legacy,
is practical for privacy

Japanese masked wrestlers
characters passed on for generations
created in parallel media dimensions
still requires a promoter's favorite
to carry the mantle

Sometimes, generic name and mask
Protect guys just doing the job
Of selling superstars on TV

Some masks have gained more value
than main event trophy belts
Are as pop-culture popular with
rock bands and trick-or-treaters
What do we romanticize hiding?
What is this fetish of hiding-from?
Is the mask protecting them or us?

3.
Gimmick:
Two masked rivals-
no time limit, no disqualification, fight to the finish
Loser must unmask

Angle:
Masked Wrestler is suspected to be suspended hero under the hood
Wins World Championship but must unmask in order to keep it

Angle:
Nemesis of suspected suspended hero offers cash bounty for their unmasking

Angle:
The bet....
Mask vs. Mask
Mask vs. Title
Mask vs. Hair, a car, manager, a career

4.
Maybe a competitor submitted to early, turned tail too quick
Broke the wrong rules,
fell victim to a corrupt referee
Had to hide face to save face
Maybe the mask covers what we fear
to do in the light
Straying outside the lines, taking rules as suggestions
and calling it "altruism" or "a living"
Or even just like... "Screw it"

The mask can deflect too much light
Refracts "wrong and right"
Just enough shadow
for a role model to hide a handful
of brass knuckles

5.
The gimmick:
Champion goes on rampage
protecting best buddy from nemesis
with a baseball bat
suspended 90 days...

My name is the Midnight Rider
I come from Diablo Canyon, Colorado
I come in violence
In vengeance of the common man; the son of a plumber
I have come to rain havoc on anyone in my path
On horseback or horsepower
With this bull-rope or empty hands
Whether on the mountain top with all the pretty gold
Or out by the bunkhouse- taped fists, shit-kickers and whatever you can grab and swing
Understand this is less wins-and-losses
than it is chaos
That's why the mask...
You put hard times on Dusty Rhodes and his family
so now you gon' get harder times from the Midnight Rider!
We might not make it back
The mission is revenge and restitution
Don't ask about the mask
You wouldn't ask the moon about its dark side, understand?
Let me reassure you:
Dusty Rhodes is NOT the Midnight Rider
But I do believe that there is a little Midnight Rider
in all of us

BEAU WILLIAMS

Rungs

According to the 1994 Intercontinental law of physics, if you walk
under a ladder, you will become the undisputed champion over heartbreak.

You will break bones and Sweet Music will tie its leg in a knot for you.
The crowd will cheer and the Bad Guy, dawned with Razors, will drip gold.

When I was too little, my birthfather sat me in front of the television, and we would watch
the gospel according to Vince. Massive leg drops, blown out hair, and steel chairs

built to bash giants: Hallelujah, Hallelujah. He left before I learned it was a fix.
I had trouble with storylines and began to associate Bad Guys with champions.

I've since taught myself to root for God and The Rock and other faces
but I don't cry as much when they turn heel. Legend grants seven years bad luck

to fools who dare walk under ladders. They would place them near tombs
so the spirits could climb out and up into the afterlife. To stand under one

was to prevent this and how sweet a power to hold over the dead.
My birthfather's destiny hung in the sky on a hook. Watch the souls battle up the bent ladder,

then fall, climb, fall; watch a Bad Guy take the gold and leave and leave nothing
but an empty ring and the childlike pop of thirty-thousand screams.

Over The Top Rope

Viper got her nose split open.
She tossed the skinny girl across ring.
The woman with whom I intend to go grey
can't strip her eyes from the action;
clings to me, the holy way
a tassel cling to tights.

A giant woman bellows as another woman soars.
The arc her sequined body makes across the air
is all the grace an angel takes
when banished from the heavens.

It's here
I see my lover's collar bone in 80 years.
How mapped a freckled field it lays.
How I would gladly know this land until my
body's just a body. 'til my voice is thin as
angel wings or blood across a mat.
Over the jeers, she yells to me
how she would absolutely be a wrestler someday

as she cracks her knuckles in my face.

W. TODD KANEKO

ASK TERRY GORDY WHO HE IS

> *I may not be the best wrestler in the world, but I got two*
> *good fists and two good feet and let me guarantee you*
> *this—I'll stick these feet right here where the sun don't shine.*
> *—Terry 'Bam Bam' Gordy, professional wrestler*

I am not a half-nelson or head scissors,
not any shape a man makes with his body
as he battles out of the clinch. I am the red
sky settling on the Tennessee valley,
whole herds of cattle suddenly in flight.

I am not the chicken wing, not the butterfly
or clover leaf. I am knuckle and jawbone.
My boots are stitched from panicked leather,
from the lariat's wistful flight. I am the longhorn
mutilation, the butcher's apron at day's end.

One day I will be the winter lavender,
the flock oblivious to skyscraper and flight path.
You will be the tavern after hours, the tattoo
parlor left inkless after a funeral. I will be the boat
lost in the Gulf of Mexico, you the ocean.

Don't call me omoplata or anaconda
choke—instead make those grunts of oxen
at one with their yoke, that rattle
hovering over a dead man's lips.
I will always be the graveyard romp,
boot stomp and mouse bones. The whisper
of lightning. The bullwhip splinter.

Ask the ambulance driver who I am.
You already know my answer.

[first appeared in The Normal School]

FLYIN' BRIAN PILLMAN
IS THE BRIGHTEST STAR

> *I'm the brightest star to ever step foot on God's green earth. While you crown a King of the Ring, the leader of the new revolution ascends to his throne. I'm gonna rape, pillage and plunder this entire federation.*
>
> *—Flyin' Brian Pillman, professional wrestler*

A man can be lord of the fight,
conqueror, reaver, champion of morning
or avatar of chaos. There is no such thing
as royalty, no lion's beard, no eagle's flame.
There is only the way my body corkscrews
through the air, the velocity of a mortal
man's fury colliding with the night.

A man can make a living playing
the heel, priest of the cheat, more chicken
than chickenhawk until nothing
remains but a flurry of down and
a knavish grin. Until I touch the ground
my arms and legs winched loose,
a distant tornado, a car crash.

There is no such thing as villainy,
only the ugly side of desire, hot
in all our chests. A man can own anything
he is willing to ransack, can lay waste
to anything he is willing to sacrifice.
There is no such thing as majesty
because there is the cowbird, the hyena,
my body as it arcs gorgeous toward sunset,
as it changes color to match the sky.

[first appeared in The Pinch]

SWEET AND SOUR LARRY SWEENEY
DON'T PRETEND NOTHING

> *You won't see no Larry Sweeney up on high pretending to be king. No no no … because we got something you ain't got. We got the crown jewel, baby—the ICW/ICWA Texarkana Television Title!*
>
> *—'Sweet and Sour' Larry Sweeney, professional wrestler*

You won't see no prayers on the wing
pretending to be sparrows. No—because
the sky can't contain the majesty
of what I got. You won't see no mountain

lions prowling the backwoods because
I only fight on television, no gunshot
breaking the silence of night because
I got the peacock's fiery temper. Why do battle

when you can strut through a combat
zone, the constellations sprayed
across your jacket? Why fear the eagle's
cry when you can lip sync along
with the thunderclap? No—you won't

see me pretending to be a champion,
playing defender of the crown
to bingo hall and gymnasium.

Instead, believe that a man can live long
after his ghost has forgotten how people
once chanted his name. Believe in my brass

knuckles and sex appeal, the way
a man can invent his accolades, fabricate
his pedigree. Believe that a boy can wrestle
a man to the ground and steal his championship,
his sham reputation. I got something you don't.

All we both gotta do is believe.

[first appeared in The Pinch]

WHERE BOBO BRAZIL LIVES

> *Do you know where I come from? I come from a little small town by the name of Benton Harbor, Michigan. Do you know what street I live on? I live on Tough Street. Do you know where I live? At the very bottom of that street. But I don't go around bragging about how tough I am.*
>
> *—Bobo Brazil, professional wrestler*

You can learn a lot about a man
by knowing where he comes from.
Here is a town where men throw
hammers and drive forklifts,
where bowfins once prowled for crayfish,
ospreys preening in the reeds.
Here is a washing machine, a tractor,
a boarded up factory and decay
laid out on a four-mile grid.

In my neighborhood, no one cares
about the color of a man's skin, just
the weight of his knuckles, the velocity
of his temper. Boys use the lightning
to build a fire. Girls spark cigarettes to life,
bloom red in the dark, then exhale
smoke to cloak all our worries about
the mortality rate where we live.

You can learn a lot about a town
by tracing the contours of a man's body.
Here is a cauliflower ear, a split lip,
a bruised tailbone and a fist raised
toward Heaven. We endure street fights

and flowers, heartbreak and kidney
punch—then a man crying on the lawn
surrounded by police radio chatter.
Everyone needs someone to root for,
someone to lift them up. You know where I live.
My house is at the bottom of the street.

[first appeared in The Pinch]

DAVID VON ERICH EXPLAINS THE RULES

> *I learned a lot about how to face these other guys who break rules [...] I never have been one that really likes rules because rules kind of hinder a man and hold him back. It's really better for me when I don't have rules.*
>
> *—David Von Erich, professional wrestler*

Rules are what separates a man
from the meat he eats. We can tangle
like beasts, you and me—get all thumb
and eye socket for the henhouse, all
shameless choke hold for the shambles.

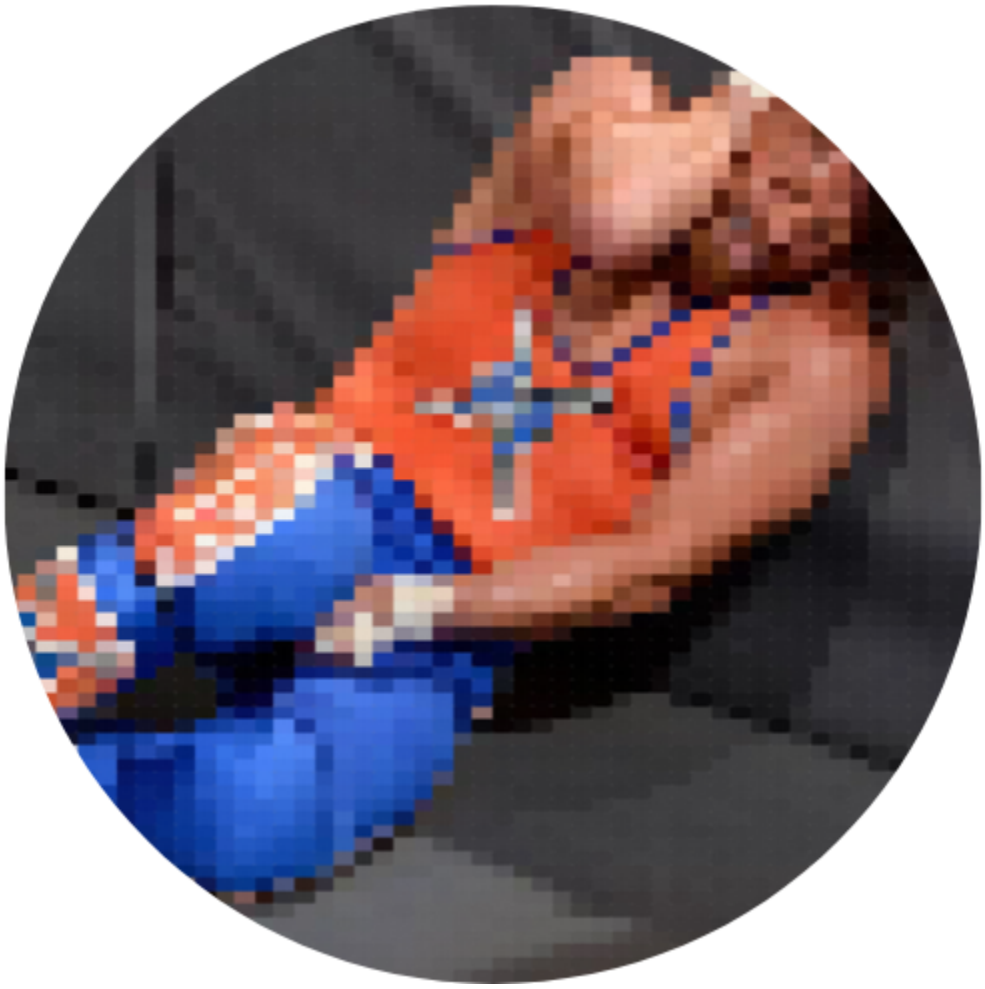
When two men go at it all fireworks
and pistol whip, when two dudes
are done jawjacking and collide
all knuckles for claw in the boneyard,
the rules will blur into a flurry
of rabbit punches and country twang,
a spray of blood and flailing limbs.

It's not for love of skyscraper or handshake
or the Texas state flag that I live to be
the babyface. It's that the back burn is good
for the brush fire, that a man can't snuff out
a flame with his fingers without plunging

everyone into darkness. What makes a man
is not the blood staining his chaps,
not his will to go all monkey wrench
and brass knuckles in a feud. I can
pack a boot knife, tie a man down
with bull rope, pummel him with a cow
bell—I can be the bad guy, but we don't
always have to do things the easy way.

[first appeared in New South]

STEPHEN MEADS



SYCHO JUSTICE LEG MONSTER

1. There exists in the world a video
of 6'9" Sid Justice aka Sycho Sid
aka Sid Vicious (the wrestler) in a match
jumping from the middle rope and well...
landing badly. One leg catching
317lbs of meat and just folding
in the middle of the shin
where there is no leg fold.
And I know this was not an intended outcome
but it is a real thing
that happened in a world
where reality is always in question.

2. Sycho Sid's leg snaps!
"Did you ever ask me if I wanted to come down from the top? Cause that just ain't how I was built. I'm from anywhere I damn please and I go wherever the hell I want as long as it's up! I worked Hogan! Main event! Wrestlemania! So I know a thing or two bout dropping a leg! I worked opposite Dusty Rhodes. Headlining the WCW man. I gave Shawn Michaels boyhood dream his first nightmare. Ask Vader what it's like to have that kind of weight on you all the time. Then some reporter asks you if what you do is real and see if you stay out of prison. I worked Undertaker! Main event! Wrestlemania! Five years later. I was built to stand apex in this business! The very top. So no, I will not go gentle. Think you can just crash back to the midcard and walk it off? I ain't ready to go nowhere yet! I worked! Every! Big! Man! Main! Event! You think being broken is gonna break me? Just wait 'til it's you up top and see if you can stand it!"

3. I am in the broken well of the internet again.
Preserved here with this 30 second ode to human insanity, to the unreality of bodies.
This miniature documentary about how even monsters
are fragile things. A Planet Earth scene of predator
become prey. Victim of its own hubris.
And of course I want to show off! Peacock
to the world how alive I am or terrifying
I'm not. Only fascinated by carnage, only grim
spectator still haunted by this giant man's leg splitting.
Rigid thing gone putty and blood
a feast of the worst type of failure.
I don't really even need to watch the video ever again. But I will
and see if each time
I don't
break.

Real Facts About Life for Curt Hawkins

Note: at the time of this writing professional wrestler, Curt Hawkins' win/loss record is 0-190. It is its own record in the WWE and has become a piece in the fabric of the character.

Presumably the most notable thing about famous gladiators
is that they all had stunning win/loss records.
Logical, since more often than not etching a notch
in the loss column in a to-the-death environment
would be the end of your win/loss record.

Presumably the same is sort of true of knights,
wherein the knights of no renown
probably died a lot more often
than those whose deeds helped stitch
the tapestries of song we remember them by.

By contrast in the modern day
in combat sports and things that pretend
to be combat sports like wrestling
seeing the loss column become a beast
unto itself has got to be laudable
look how many deaths a gladiator
would have had to survive to attain
the losing streak of an MVP or a Curt Hawkins.

In as much, losing becomes the art,
bringing its own kind of specter
to the arena. The ghosts of every match
you lost pile upon themselves,
writhe in the embrace between the mat
and the shoulder-blades, and then walk off
into the back to haunt another locker room
in a different town. Perhaps Curt shows up to work
simply to see if tonight will play out the skip
in his record, 190 losses and counting
190 ways to be have been beaten, 190 days afterwards where he showed up again.

Society was built by a whole lot of people
with good win/loss records: warriors
who didn't die in battle, gladiator-slaves who won their freedom

but in the modern combat of sport of life
it's important to praise the loser.
Life has the all-time best win/loss record
more of us drop to it every day,
even dis-corporeally, I, personally
am running up loss numbers to life daily
that would shame even Mr. Hawkins,
so praise

be to every pinfall! Every tap out!
Every countout! Every KO! Every disqualification!
Every time the result went the other way,
every time the door hit you on the ass
on the way out! Every time the lights dimmed
and you were still in the building! Praise! You were still in the building!
Praise all the empty seats in the arena!
Praise the silence that made space
when you lost again! Every loss,
every botch, every hurt, praise the missed cues
praise the kickout that came one second too late!

And praise the people who cheered
even though they knew you weren't there
too win the big one, or any one.
Praise any one who understands
what losing is and stands by you
through the loss in that.

There is always loss in that. Curt Hawkins
still knows how to smile after 190 defeats.
Still walks around the backstage grinning,
that's a fact. I still know
what a smile is. Praise.
Praise. Praise.

Hardcore Comedy Legend...

In the late 90's/early 00's
hardcore legend wrestler Mick Foley
become notorious for dumping
bags of thumb tacks across the ring.

His matches would end with both wrestlers
become human pincushions their flesh
pocked with shiny metal tacks,

just awful stuff. You won't see it
today, in the WWE, but independent
wrestling across the globe,
still goes to that same crazy well,
just last year, hardcore comedy wrestler
Grado, had a match where he dumped a bag
of Doritos across the ring
before hitting a 3/4 neckbreaker
the kind of maneuver that really chips
away someones sense of pride.

My mom used to ask me sometimes
how I could watch something both
willfully violent and obviously stupid
and now I would ask her, how can you
love me mom, when I can say the same
for myself? I have a sort of bipolarity

in my head, always teetering
between violence and absurdity.
I am never entirely certain
of the bumps I will take each day
will it be chips or thumb tacks?

Is my brain cracked today or pierced?
Look, the chip thing was funny,
it was supposed to be, it was a comedy match
and sometimes I tell people wrestling
can be funny and they look at me like
what's the joke? I am trying to tell
if everything I say has that same quality
worry that when I become a human pincushion
later all poked full of pain filled metal

that they will wait for me to explain myself.

I am constantly having to explain myself.
Hey mom, the other day in wrestling
match with my brain we opened a bag of chips
and it was a wild thyme! But to be clear
in a different match I opened up several holes
in my head and I still had to go to work
still had to do my job, people

act like I don't have to do the work
of living within the constant flux
like the fear of pins or tacks
isn't its own kind of chip
away at my stability. After a match

between Cactus Jack and Triple H
ended with a hellacious bump into thumb tacks
both men had to be escorted out of the ring
with assistance from the refs and ringside help
and the audience applauded their efforts.

If only someone would applaud my efforts.
Don't you see all the tacks? I know
I did it to myself! But there's so many
stuck in me, fucking everywhere,
and they don't really shine up close
they are just a temporary stop-gap
before I start
bleeding.

But You Know Wrestling Is Fake Right?

And like I know it's fake.

I know it's fake. I know
it's fake. I know it's fake.

But I also found it at a time
where it wasn't fake to me...
and also I got into at a time
when the lines between fantasy
and reality were really dissipating

like the Rock moved from WWE
to Hollywood and he was still
the Rock for years. And Twitter

and Instagram and Facebook
and celebrities are more real

and life is more fake, unbelievable
in the extreme as every day

acting governing bodies ignore
sound scientific evidence to wage war
on reason and intelligence

and still people often suggest I'm stupid
for liking an obviously fake thing

that presents as a real thing.
But like I know it's fake

I just want to like some things
that aren't smart. But don't hurt
like everybody, just occasionally
some of the wrestlers because
oh yeah, it's also fucking real
asshats. So yeah, it's fake.

and I know that.

Opening Gambit

(after AJ Moyer)

The Handshake

What a show of respect. The squaring of the ceremonial circle. A bow before tea. An equalizer. A humbling. Cleaning the slate. A true athletic contest scheduled to begin!

Collar and Elbow

These wrestlers mean business. Each palm a study in reflexiveness. Each tendon a supple slipknot ready to slide free the body. Each second frames the outline of such a clumsy, such a graceful dance, one made up of neck snaps and elbows.

Test of Strength

And isn't just? A series of knuckles caressing each other. Every one a lip-smack kiss. Standing in the ring bending like the necks of twin swans. Arms popping like twin Stallones. Usually no one goes over the top.

Kick to the Mid-Section

Almost a low blow. What a dirty trick. Stomp below the belt. There is rarely a belt. Only a mosh-pit waiting to be taken over.

Wild Haymaker

And more than anything it is clear these guys just want to tear each other apart.

Knife Edge Chop

Woo! Because if at first there is no opening why not cleave one into existence? Carve your name into chest meat. Into history. Technical danger engine. Never trust someone with knives for arms right?

Showboating

To beat the man, you've got to be the man.

Quick Pin

Because there are endings even in beginnings. And why not get it done quick? Get it done first. Hold that scrabbling writhe to the mat and get that 3-count and leave with your music uninterrupted and a whole crowd that loves you because you were smart or

hates you because you were too smart and isn't that just as good, no? Either side of the coin is still money in your pocket. Walk it off. You can start again tomorrow.

GUILLERMO REBOLLO-GIL

A primer on being son to a father

The Young Bucks & Kenny Omega vs
PAC & Rey Fénix & Pentagon Jr.
[AEW, 1/2/20]

Pentagon Jr.'s catchphrase is *zero miedo*.
I try to apply it to my everyday life and feel
like it's okay to lie to myself
from time to time.

Omega's my favorite, though.
He was once notorious for wrestling a nine-year-old girl.
My son turned two this year.

I wonder how old Omega was when he first stepped into the ring.
I had just turned fourteen when I threatened my dad
with a baseball bat to get him to leave.

A biography of five men

Barry Windham & Dustin Rhodes
vs. Cactus Jack & Abdullah the Butcher
[WCW, 5/24/92]

The match ended in a double count out.

Cactus Jack later wrestled as Mankind and Dude Love, lost an ear,
became world champion.

Dustin became famous as Goldust.
Posted on Twitter last year:

Sick of this Trans fobia crap.
My son is Trans and it saddens me
to see so many
hateful people on the attack.

Wrestling has always been transphobic,
on the attack. Still, a man can turn
himself into almost anything inside the ring.

Windham was forever the cowboy—
Black boots, plain black trunks.
Oh well.

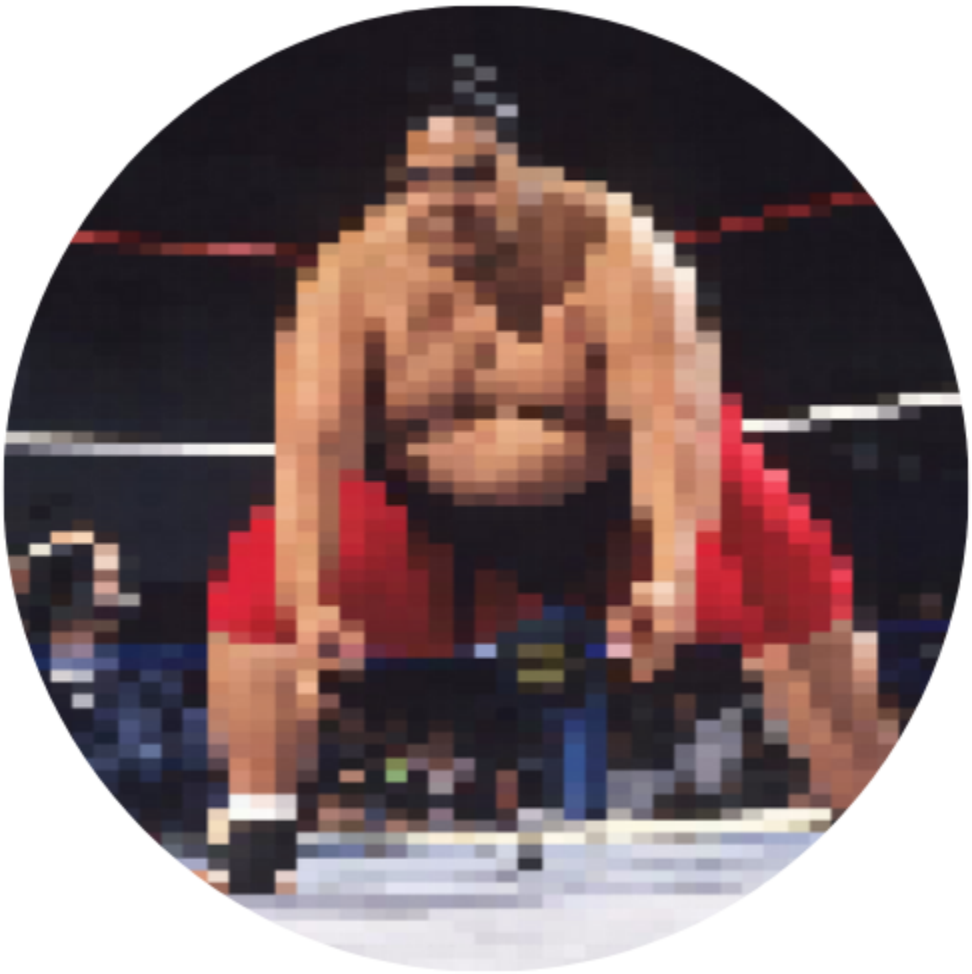
Abdullah was straight out ruthless, picking
at his opponent's forehead with a fork
whenever the referee's back was turned.

I would have been like

Dude, let him stare at us.
Don't know about you but whenever
I get pushed into a corner
I'm not looking to escape.

If I look at myself closely now, I see where I was wrong
as a boy, experimenting heavily with substances
illegal in the ring—
salt, talcum
powder, foot cream—
to see if any of them blinded you for real.

DAN SULLIVAN



Everyone Wants To See Yokozuna Get Body Slammed

Yokozuna's real name is Rodney. He's Samoan, not Japanese.
He enters the side of the ring slowly, lifting all the weight
of his right leg onto the canvas. No one here has to know
he was never a real Sumotori, but assigned an image
Hulkamaniacs could pour their heat onto. Something more

other. Hulk Hogan stomps & spits*, I fear no man, no beast*
evil, brother. Ten thousand fans roar like a monster
truck engine & chant for Hulk in his red underwear.
Yokozuna then lifts his left leg. It takes time. Two actors
in kimonos hand him yellow bouquets & bow.

Yokozuna is a word for sumo rank, not a name.
the fattest pro-wrestler in history at 568 lbs., nearly
twice Hulk's 308 with 24 inch pythons. Hogan has come
long way since he played Thunderlips. It's 1993 now
& Rocky Balboa might be the only fighter more American

than Hulkster but that doesn't matter at King of the Ring.
Here, Hulk is President. He gestures to the audience,
hand up to one ear as if to say, *I can't hear you. I can't hear*
you. I can't hear you. He yells into the camera, the ether,
middle distance, middle America, something in proximity

to truth. He is hopped up on the same thing as the crowd,
an energy built from hot dogs & righteousness. A slow
burning shakuhachi smokes its way through loudspeakers
& hushes the arena. Yokozuna is looming. He consumes
the dark corner. Hulk is steadfast under this shadow.

This is how the Real American sees himself – underdog
to a threat without language, only the nuclear menace
of mass. When the bell rings, they tie up arms, bounce off
ropes. The television color commentator says, *Look*
at all the Japanese photographers. The last time I saw this

many Japanese people I was at Benihana's. Yokozuna
tosses Hulk across the ring. Knee drop, phantom punch,
clothesline. *Every time he throws Hogan down he thinks
he's throwing America*. Head-butt, elbow smash, leg crash.
The announcer cries, *Oh! Yokozuna slams Hogan violently!*

as if this violence is *different*. Hulk is on the ground
convulsing. Everyone expects this. Hulk has to almost lose
before he can win. Hulk is on his knees but what's that
look on his face? A turning tide? The furrowed brow
of patriotism? Snarled lip of survival? He is back up.

Throws three swift punches, the crowd counts each one
in unison. Yokozuna lands facedown. Just three taps from
referee & America can win but first, Hogan signals
body slam to the audience & they erupt. Suddenly, a phony
photographer's prop camera malfunctions & sparks

blind Hogan. In a flash, Yokozuna taps out Hulk & takes the
belt with him. The audience turns white. They collect
their jean jackets, leave half-eaten plastic trays of tortilla chips
& nacho sauce under flipped-up seats, plod confused down
arena stairwells, snap their kids into car seats & drive away.

MYLES YATES

Eddie Kingston on if he believes wrestling is real

When they say I'm trapped in the belief that this sport is as real as I am
I wonder who they are? I wonder if they ever been in a fight
Ever clenched a fist with a forced reckoning to make someone stay down
I wonder that when I speak about the gear I sold,
If they believe that I just burned it, took the ashes, planted them
Watering with tears and sweat that speak in a liquor tongue
Waiting for the growth of a money tree with enough branches
To stoke a fire that will burn a mortgage down
I wonder what lives they live,
If they're American dream products, believing
Perfectionism is the hero to the evil of capitalism
Not knowing they are tag team partners.
I wonder how they dealt with outcomes,
Not knowing what hurts more,
The wringing of limbs, a slammed body, the concussion
Or knowing that after that, you still lost
All this speaking of confidence of never quitting
Be melted by the heat of words of saying "I quit"
Not being able to stop a three-count because the body has had enough
When they ask how do I speak this reality,
Becoming a poet I never was
I would ask them if they have seen what's outside of the mirror or
The wasteland of the inside that is being neglected from having to do the work
The work is not the roleplaying, the work is not maintaining the storyline
The work is tying the bandages around the hand to prepare for the blood that will come
The work is the inner demons delivering a shoot on how you really act behind doors
The work is shooting the truth out of one's mouth before the bullet calls it a home
And forcing oneself to not sell the beauty of this action.
I was never meant to be a salesman for positivity
I only kept going because the negativity put me over with the crowd
Because they believe it is not real, and it is my job to prove them wrong
I may be tired of making stars but I will make them just to wish upon them
And make you see that there is nothing fake about what I do.

ROB STURMA is a guy who really misses Lucha Underground.

BILLY TUGGLE is a teaching artist, poetry slam champion, and HipHop culturalist. He once faced down the Road Warriors & Superpowers in the parking lot before the Bunkhouse Stampede**.** Billy is also a member of the Professional Wrestling Writers Guild. FB/IG: Backpackfiles

W. TODD KANEKO is the author of the poetry books *This is How the Bone Sings* (Black Lawrence Press 2020) and *The Dead Wrestler Elegies* (New Michigan Press 2020). He is co-author with Amorak Huey of *Poetry: A Writers' Guide and Anthology* (Bloomsbury Academic 2018), and *Slash / Slash*, winner of the 2020 Diode Editions Chapbook Prize, which will be published in 2021. A Kundiman Fellow, he teaches at Grand Valley State University and lives with his family in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

STEPHEN MEADS, originally a Bay-based poet, now living and performing in Portland, has been performing spoken word for over seventeen years. He has featured at slams all across the country – from Portland, Maine to Honolulu, Hawaii. Stephen stormed IWPS in 2013, 2014, 2017, and has competed in NPS five times with various teams. He has been featured on Drunk in a Midnight Choir, SlamFind, Write About Now, and Button Poetry, and he occasionally contributes to the web-site Nailed. Stephen eats a lot of pizza, is the champion of pro-wrestling factoids, and hates writing poet bios. More information about Stephen can be found at https://www.facebook.com/whoisthespirit

GUILLERMO REBOLLO-GIL (San Juan, 1979) is a poet and sociologist. His poems have appeared in Fence, Mandorla, The Acentos Review and Caribbean Writer. His book-length essay Writing Puerto Rico: Our Decolonial Moment (2018), a careful consideration of the potentialities of radical thought and action in contemporary Puerto Rico, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in their New Caribbean Studies Series. He belongs to/with Lucas Imar and Ariadna Michelle. Happily so.

DAN "SULLY" SULLIVAN holds an MFA/MA from Indiana University. Recent or forthcoming publications include Guernica, The Chicago Reader & Allium. His first book of poems, 'The Blue Line Home' was published by EM-Press in 2014. "Respect the Mic: Celebrating 20 Years of Poetry from a Chicagoland High School", edited by Hanif Abdurraqib, Franny Choi, Dan "Sully" Sullivan, and Peter Kahn is forthcoming in 2022 from Penguin Workshop.

MYLES YATES (he/him) is an African American poet residing in Orlando, Florida. He is focused on making poetry that is rooted in music, memory, and the melody in between. Can find his work on FreezeRay Poetry, The Blunt Space, and Variety Pack.

HAWK AND ANIMAL WILL RETURN

FreezeRay PRESS