

EGSM 015: Heroes & Heels (Wrestling)

Content warnings:

- Physical violence
- Graphic discussion of blood & injury (inc. self-injury)
- Innuendo & brief sexual references
- Discussions of: forced shaving, COVID-19 pandemic
- Mentions of: smoking & alcohol, death, razors & syringes, food, steroids & medication, plastic surgery & exercise, emetophobia

CALLUM

In fact, from what I've heard in real life he's actually quite a quiet and reserved person, like...

HELEN

He seems quite nice, yeah!

CALLUM

...he's extremely polite and so...

HELEN

Doesn't he have a tiny dog?

STEVE

Probably.

HELEN

Like a really...

CALLUM

I have no idea but I know he officiated a fan's wedding because he's like, that much of a nice guy.

HELEN

Aww!

[Show Theme - Intro]

HELEN

Hello friends and fans and welcome to Enthusifasm. This is the Rusty Quill podcast show where we talk about a few of our favourite things. I am your host Helen Gould, one of the best Rusty Quillers, and today we're talking about wrestling. And I am delighted to be joined by Callum, our CMO, and Steve and Cam from the Old Gods of Appalachia podcast. So everybody, why don't you tell us a bit about yourselves? Callum, would you like to start?

CALLUM

I probably do the most boring job at Rusty Quill, genuinely.

(laughter)

And also the most loathsome by far as well.

HELEN

Loathsome!?

CALLUM

Just simply by...you know, marketing, marketing guys are normally the villain, so, and I will try and play that role today. I can be the heel. That will be me!

HELEN

Okay, Callum Dougherty, resident villain. And next up, we've got Cam. Can you tell us a little bit about you?

CAM

I'm Cam Collins. I'm the co-creator of Old Gods of Appalachia. I write for the show and also do a little bit of voice work, which I'll be diving into again this week, as well as handle most of our back end technical duties. Other than actual audio production of the show.

HELEN

Wonderful. And last but not least...

STEVE

Yeah, hey family. I'm Steve Shell. I'm the other co-creator of Old Gods of Appalachia, and if you know the voice, I am the narrator and primary storyteller of the show and I do all of our narration, audio production, sound design, and most of the episode art that you see go out every other week. That's me as well.

HELEN

I didn't know you did the art as well!

STEVE

Yeah, we don't make a big deal out of that. I like playing, I've been splattering poo in Photoshop like a zoo monkey for twenty-something years.

(laughter)

STEVE

And um, yeah, the episode art. Now a lot of our merch art when you see that, we buy art from fans, we see cool fan art, we'll commission people...

CAM

And we both, we both also design it ourselves.

STEVE

Yeah, yeah.

CAM

I am the masterful designer of the famous honk shirt.

HELEN

Absolutely excellent shirt.

STEVE

Yes, the new fire breathing geese. Which I was on vacation when that episode dropped and involved the fire breathing geese, spoiler.

CAM

Yeah, you totally missed a lot of the reaction for a few days that that episode got.

STEVE

Yeah, so they're fire breathing geese, content warning: geese. We actually have a content warning of geese.

CAM

We literally have content warning geese.

STEVE

Actually, I think that content reads 'animal carcass devoured by monster comma geese'. Now the geese have nothing to do with either of those things. But yeah, the fire breathing geese design is Cam. We're both graphic designers. We've worked in arts through the years. I just started doing the episode art from the beginning and it's just kind of happened.

HELEN

Wonderful. Oh, and before I forget, I'm just going to do a round of pronouns. So my pronouns are she, he, and they. Callum, what are your pronouns?

CALLUM

He/him.

CAM

She or they.

HELEN

Cool. And Steve?

STEVE

He/him.

HELEN

So, onto our main topic of the day. Obviously we're talking about wrestling. Now I got into it as like a bonding thing with my dad, growing up, going to at the time smoky pubs and clubs and stuff like that. It's very bizarre to think that people were allowed to smoke inside for such a long time. So that was, for me, very much a childhood nostalgic thing. Would someone like to start with telling me how the rest of you got into wrestling? Does anyone wanna start us off?

STEVE

For me, it was my grandmother, my mamma Edith Marie. I was raised by her until I was 4 or 5 and then baby sat by her for every weekend going, you know, back into eternity and she lived in Norton, Virginia which is right on the Kentucky border near where Cam and I grew up way up on a place called Thacker's Branch and everybody up there watched wrestling. I really started paying attention to wrestling probably in the mid 80's and then rode it till the middle of High School, fell away for a while, and then came back in strong right around the Attitude era of Stone Cold Steve Austin, The Rock, and all that. Yeah, and for me, it's my memories with my grandmother, jumping up and down when Dusty Rhodes finally won the world title which is ironic seeing he

was the booker and was writing the story lines, or the first time they shaved somebody's head that deserved it. My mamma practically crying tears...

HELEN

They used to shave people's heads?

STEVE

Hair matches are a venerated tradition.

HELEN

What? Is this true?

STEVE

Callum, back me up. Yes?

CALLUM

Extremely. I mean it's like after losing your mask, the worst thing that could possibly happen to you would be losing your hair. And if you don't wear a mask in the first place, it's like the biggest dishonour that you could face is being shorn.

STEVE

It actually originates in Mexico. With the luchador tradition, like Callum said. The losing of your mask is like a big deal. But what if you're facing an opponent, or a villain or a hero that doesn't wear a mask? They have to put something on the line.

HELEN

I see.

STEVE

So like, they put their...and they would usually have luxurious locks. Hair versus hair matches were a big thing. But it was bonding time. Again, much like you and your dad I imagine, me and my grandmother it was something we did. And I mean it was...and we didn't have like, I never saw a pay per view on television, like even like, you know, paid for and watched it until Cam and I were in college and her mum...none of our parents would do it. They wouldn't believe we would pay them back, but we would have money upfront, and Cam's mum would let us go to the cable company, pay the fee, get the little decoder thing that was screwed on the back of your TV and we would sit in the living room of their home and watch me and my two best friends and Cam unwillingly, willingly...

HELEN

Wait, so Cam, you knew Steve in university?

CAM

Before, for me any way. I was a few years younger.

HELEN

Okay.

CAM

So I was still in high school at first, for a couple of years there, and then yeah, we've been friends since we were very young.

HELEN

Aww.

CAM

And yeah, so, Steve and several of our other friends would come to my mum's house. And then later, after we were grown, when I was the first one to actually have my own place, and so then they'd come to my house.

STEVE

Still with cash in hand!

CAM

With cash in hand! And, er, yeah.

STEVE

Still with cash in hand! We never left anybody hanging. I mean I watched the Montreal Screw Job, if you know what that is? I watched the Montreal Screw Job live on Cam's couch on a tiny little TV just like not understanding that I was seeing wrestling history going down. But it's been, if you're from Appalachia, you know, there's a reason Smoky Mountain Wrestling was the last territory promotion, and you know, the last stand alone of the territorial indies. And it was in East Tennessee and toured all throughout Appalachia. So like, pro-wrestling is, for me, and for growing up, you know as a little boy, as a little AMAB cis boy in Appalachia, that was kind of...that was the thing. You played

wrestling at school. You beat, you threw each other down the hill, you tried headlocks and...

HELEN

We're gonna have to...we're gonna have to come back to some of that because I only caught half of what some of the terms and names you were using which sounded extremely interesting. But please understand, I have not seen a wrestling match since I was about 13.

STEVE

Fair.

HELEN

Cam, how did you get into wrestling? Was it with Steve or was it from before that?

CAM

Yeah, oh yeah, Steve and some of our other friends were into it. I think my dad watched it a little bit when I was young.

STEVE

Oh really?

CAM

But then when I was older, you know, Steve and some of our other friends and yeah, they'd come over and watch at my house. So I haven't watched...other

than here and there, catching a few things, since, you know, the early oughts?
It's been a minute!

HELEN

Wow. And how about you Callum?

CALLUM

So my grandparents were really, really into wrestling at the time of Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks if that means anything to anyone?

HELEN

Yeah, my parents went to see them!

CALLUM

So they were legendary. And my grandparents on both sides liked it so much that naturally my parents had no interest. It was sort of like, you know, something that their parents liked, so naturally was the antithesis of cool. And therefore like as a kid...bearing in mind I grew up in the 90's so like WWF, WWE was on everything. So you played the video games and that sort of stuff but I never like watched it on TV. It was almost like, you know, something that we would just switch over to do something else because it's not what we did. And then it was actually when I was in university and being friends with all the straight edge kids at uni, all four of them...

(Group laughter)

...they were talking about going to a ICW show and ICW is like a, a Scottish promotion that's known for its sort of...well, was known in particular for its sort of like hardcore style and sort of like trying to throw back a little bit to ECW but also like very much being into its, like, indie roots. Yeah, so they invited me to a show, being like...being that they were all into wrestling and I was like no, like, like I was always of that side of like straight edge which if people don't know is like smoke free, alcohol free, drug free, and giant X's. And I also like, really like, messed with pacifism. And I was like "no, I'm not into this, this doesn't sound like something for me" and they were like "no, you need to come along because this is the most like hardcore punk thing you've ever seen is ICW." So anyway I reluctantly like joined them along for a show. Like we wait outside. I'm like "what is this," like this is this, this Riverside, which is a bar. It's sort of like small enough that like I've seen bigger like small punk rock shows before that have also kind of sucked, and I was like not really, you know, knowing what to expect. And anyway, about halfway through the show, I think it was Jack Jester versus Prince Devitt, who is now quite famous...

STEVE

Oh yeah!

CALLUM

...in the WWE NXT. And Jack Jester was threatening to throw him into the River Tyne. Now, you can't possibly actually do that, like you would die, like the undertow and there's like algae in there that like, if you survive the undertow you're probably gonna be poisoned and have to go to hospital. Any way, it was like...in that moment seeing that, I believed this man was going to commit homicide, throwing him into the river! And from that moment I was

just absolutely hooked. It's like, you know, I remember my hands shaking and my palms sweating because I was like...

(Group laughter)

...I was like alarmed and terrified and from then, at that minute on I was absolutely hooked and I went home and I think I purchased about 10 shows of ICW and just started like getting caught up straight away...

HELEN

Wow.

CALLUM

...and from that I fell in love with like live wrestling and stuff too.

HELEN

Yeah.

CALLUM

And like going to all the really small community centre shows and stuff like that around the, around the North East, because bizarrely this is a bit of a hub for wrestling, like...

STEVE

It is, yeah.

CALLUM

At least within England.

STEVE

Yeah, UK or BritWres has become like a huge thing in the past, like, three to five years to the point that WWE has launched a British developmental brand in NXT UK.

HELEN

Gosh!

STEVE

Just - I'm going to use a British term here - hoovering up all the local talent.

HELEN

Alright. So, I feel like I've had like a bit of a crash course in various wrestling terms because like, I don't know any of this history.

CALLUM

You missed one important one which is, which is blood would normally be known as colour.

STEVE

Colour.

CALLUM

There would be the idea of showing some colour.

STEVE

Or juice.

HELEN

What?

CALLUM

Yeah.

HELEN

Is this wrestling terms again?

STEVE

Okay, so if a wrestler bleeds. If it's predetermined that a wrestler is going to bleed in the match, he'll know that he's supposed to, as Cal said, show colour. Which means at some point in the match, he will take a razor blade that is hidden on his person somewhere...

HELEN

(Gasps)

STEVE

...and drag it across some place on their face, usually forehead, hairline, to bleed. And I grew up with it being called juicing.

CAM

Juicing, yeah.

STEVE

Like to get the juice. You know, if you intentionally set it up. But the more modern term now is colour. I think it's kind of evolved in...it sounds a little less perverse in a way, to show colour or to do colour.

HELEN

I don't know why it didn't occur to me that we're going to be talking about violence so much.

(Group laughter)

STEVE

Because you don't think it's real.

HELEN

I was like "wrestling, that's fun!"

CALLUM

Yeah, you don't think it's real but it's so real. And ECW in particular...

HELEN

Oh my God!

CALLUM

... sorry Steve. I wanted to mention this because ECW, there's a high chance that the colour that you see isn't just because someone self-razor-bladed...

STEVE

Yeah.

CALLUM

That the risk is a lot higher, so...

CAM

Not in ECW, no.

HELEN

Wow.

STEVE

What got me into wrestling as a kid was my grandma and I thought it was real, and I would tell everybody it was real. And then as I got older and figured out it was predetermined...I had some friends in college, in early college, Toby and Tim who wanted to be wrestlers. The fact they were 5'8 and 5'9 did not seem to deter that dream for them...

CAM

Not withstanding!

STEVE

...and they really smartened me up of how this works. This is how blading works for juicing or colour, this is how this works, and I became fascinated with the world behind the scenes and the internet was a thing now. And you could

read these web pages, these dirt sheets, and find out like “oh, well this wrestler who’s fighting this guy really hates him and doesn’t want to lose to him and may fuck with him...oh, sorry...may mess with him on the pay per view and that may not happen, or, like, this wrestler hates...” If you watch, for example, Shawn Michaels versus Hulk Hogan, from a few, just find that match from a few WrestleMania’s ago. It’s predetermined, Hulk Hogan decided he would win. He used his creative control. So every punch that he lands on Shawn Michaels, one of the greatest workers in the world, every punch, every kick, he sells it like he’s been shot. Because he’s basically giving a big middle finger to Hogan for exercising, for not wanting to put him over and do, you know, like let him win. So one punch, Shawn Michael flies across the ring like he’s been shot out of a cannon.

(laughter)

Like a body slam, he’s like, he’s in traction at that point. And he just over sells everything! That’s the stuff we signed up for.

HELEN

I see.

STEVE

We signed up to see the unscripted moments, the pettiness, the, you know, “oh my God was that an inside reference to such and such”, and at the time wrestlers were jumping back and forth between WCW and WWF and if a wrestler in WWF made a reference to “where the big boys play” in his promo, “oh my God, that’s a coded message that he’s going to jump to the other

channel!” And so that inside world became more interesting than the actual matches.

HELEN

I see. So it's a really...so it's a very meta narrative really?

STEVE

Oh, it's meta theatre is what it is.

HELEN

Mmm.

STEVE

It's like watching the play while you have a redacted version of the script and maybe a partial recording of directors' notes and you're trying to make sense of it like, like all at once. It's theatre, and it's theatre on a grand scale.

HELEN

Yeah. Cam, would you agree? Is that what brought you into it? Like are you interested in the theatre side or...

CAM

Yeah, actually like that made it a lot more interesting. Just talking about what was actually going on behind the scenes and all the inside gossip really.

HELEN

Mmhmm.

CAM

Cos let's be real, it's the gossip!

HELEN

So there were scandals and stuff then Cam?

CAM

Yes, yes. It's the gossip. I'm there for the hot gossip.

(laughter)

HELEN

Do you have a favourite?

CAM

Oh, do I have...do I have a favourite. I mean I always did like Mick Foley actually.

HELEN

I don't know who that is.

CAM

As wrestling actors go, he's quite good.

HELEN

Okay.

CAM

And the Undertaker.

STEVE

Yeah, the Undertaker he kind of got...he really lived the gimmick. There's a concept in wrestling called kayfabe.

HELEN

Yes, I wanted to ask about this, because Callum, you've just mentioned that.

STEVE

Kayfabe is an old carnival term meaning...pretending it's real, basically, the veil of illusion, you know. And in the old days the good guys did not travel with the bad guys. They could not be seen in public with the bad guys.

HELEN

Wow.

STEVE

You know, if you were supposed to be Texan, in public you better talk with a Texas accent, you know like if you're...

HELEN

Wow.

STEVE

...supposed to be keeping kayfabe. When they wanted to start being edgy, stuff started happening like WCW's show was live and WWE or F show was taped. WCW would give away the results of the taped show and tell everybody who was supposed to win. So they were breaking kayfabe.

HELEN

Oh no!

STEVE

And Mick Foley...

HELEN

Okay.

STEVE

Mick Foley who was Cactus Jack, Mankind, Dude Love, he was a bunch of different characters...

CAM

A bunch of different characters!

STEVE

...was scheduled to win their world title. And they announced that and laughed at it. And six million families in America changed the channel to watch that happen. And it shifted the tide of the competition between WWE and WCW forever.

HELEN

And I think we'll take a break there.

[BREAK]

HELEN

And welcome back. So if I can go back to this idea of kayfabe for a second. I'm trying to think of like, equivalents in other mediums. Like, would things like, I dunno like Daft Punk like always appearing with their helmets and stuff on. Is that a kind of similar concept, or...?

CALLUM

I suppose it's any situation where it's like the commitment to the character and not breaking the character outside of the performance. It's like an extension of it.

CAM

Yeah.

HELEN

Wow.

CALLUM

Kayfabe is...and the fact that in this sort of this day and age you can like, skirt around it, going back and forth between, you know, sometimes you're breaking kayfabe because you've got wrestlers sitting there playing Twitch and like just being people. And then on the other side of it like there's supposed to be like some supernatural character and then you know, like, people change

gimmicks in a way now like which are more dramatic. Where it's like it...there's an element of poking fun at the notion of it, but like...the further you go back, the more like the commitment to kayfabe and to an individual character was like extremely important and...

HELEN

Wow.

CALLUM

...it really heightens the experience and I suppose to a degree, like kayfabe also was like became a word for...like a little bit of more of like being in the know about wrestling. Like I suppose there's an important parallel to draw like...when you're a kid, or I mean, to be fair, I've just said I didn't like wrestling when I was a kid but like...people would go "you know it's fake right?" And it would be like a hurtful thing to say to a kid and sort of like to upset them and to ruin it for them because they're there for like the fact this is real. It's like it's this larger than life battle. But then when you're like older, you're like, you get in the know and it's sort of like, you know, a tap on the side of the nose and being like well, it's fake, but it's also, it's very real at the same time.

STEVE

Right.

CALLUM

And it's predetermined. Like, the person that was gonna win was always the person that was going to win but, it's part of a much more important story...

HELEN

Yeah.

CALLUM

...and you don't, it doesn't actually matter who wins at the end at that point. And like the kayfabe element of the story telling definitely feeds into that. The very fact that you hate this guy here and you want him to lose this important match, or you want him to lose the belt because he's a heel and that's how he is being portrayed and it's what you expect him to do off screen. It's that he's like, I don't know, some kind of really terrible villain who's irredeemable and on the other side the guy that he's fighting is, is you know an almost saintly like hero. Like he's a baby face. He represents like, everything that's good in the world and is also like aspirational and sort of like is, represents every conflict that you've ever personally lost, you know...

(laughter)

...or like wanted to win. That's kind of a little bit of what kayfabe is and like the commitment to playing out those roles when you interact with people. And particularly fans. It means an enormous amount. Probably be a good way to get at it but also like, it's a commitment to outside universe story telling as well as like the whole, the universe of wrestling, not just being the match, it's also the live show, it's also, it's the podcasts, it's the...it's even the dirt sheets that like Steve mentioned earlier on. It's like having a dirt sheet that's worked, because it's designed....

HELEN

I don't know what this means.

(laughter)

STEVE

A dirt sheet is like the Wrestling Observer, the Pro Wrestling Torch. They're...for the longest time they were these underground newsletters and they were guys who had inside information...

HELEN

Aha.

STEVE

Back in the day you had to call a 900 number...

HELEN

Ohh.

STEVE

...or pay a subscription fee for the year to get it mailed to you and you would get updates like "oh, so and so is dissatisfied with their contract with WWF and they're going to be talking to ECW in the spring." Or like "oh so and so divorced so and so and now they're sleeping with so and so." Or "plans are to turn this wrestler from a vampire into a robot." You know, like look out for the robot wrestler! So it's kind of this advanced insight...

HELEN

So like tiny tabloids.

STEVE

Yes.

HELEN

Or like...oh like that lady in Bridgerton!

CAM

Yes!

STEVE

Kind of, except for that they're fairly accurate. She was accurate too! But like they're fairly accurate, and they were called dirt sheets...

HELEN

Yeah.

STEVE

And like Stone Cold Steve Austin recently said in an interview, he was like "yeah look nobody wanted to admit they were reading them, but we were all reading them." And like your getting caught with them was like getting caught with contraband, you know, like...and so like the dirt sheets...but then you would have wrestlers who would pull off such outrageous kayfabe, they were so good at manipulating their character. Even the guys writing those were reporting things, they were saying like "Oh Brian Pillman is this loose cannon and he's going to do this, this, this" and he's even working, working means

fooling, he's working the dirt sheet guy. Like even the guy who thinks he knows the truth is reporting and that's the...speaking of Brian Pillman, Brian Pillman rest in power, when he was a member of the Four Horsemen and he was the worst member of the Four Horsemen, a group of wrestlers in WCW who were my favourites, and he was like the one that seemed to always mess up their plans or always step in and like it was always, he didn't care and he was just reckless and I'm like "God I hate that guy so..." and I realised, I just had this epiphany of like "oh, I'm supposed to hate him..."

(laughter)

...he's doing a really good job. I like him now!" You know, and it was just like that turnaround of like this is what a good...

HELEN

Yeah.

STEVE

There's another term I guess we should introduce Cal, the term of being a good worker.

CALLUM

Yep.

STEVE

And that's if you can have your violence in the match. You're safe, meaning you make it look like you're absolutely pulverising your opponent. It looks

super real, but your opponent isn't afraid for a second because they know you've got them, and they know that you're not actually going to hurt them or drop them on their head or do an irresponsible thing. Being able to work the microphone and convey your personality and your character in a way that's believable and not eyeroll-worthy. And then being able to, you know, convince everybody that what you're doing is legit and all, because that's where we are now.

CAM

Yeah.

STEVE

Now you're away from like Bob the Plumber or Duke "the Dumpster" Droese. Now its, people have names again. They're stupid names but they have names again. And they're expected to be those characters and like...but now WWE, like for example you mentioned Prince Devitt. What is Prince Devitt's real name?

CALLUM

I honestly wish I knew. I just remember Prince Devitt.

STEVE

Yeah, it's like something like...its McCork or something, it's like a very Irish Mc-Irishman name. Like, you know. But he goes in WWE by Finn Balor. A Celtic king and a Celtic monster, Finn Balor. And he even acknowledges like...oh Dermot, Dermot is his first name. He's like "yeah it's like, you know on the street I'm Dermot Mc-whatever his name is," he's like "but in the ring I'm Finn

Balor. And when I'm Finn Balor I'm the king, I'm the demon king." And he has a whole thing and he's an amazing worker. And he's a guy that can say that. He can say, "well you all know there's this, but here I'm Finn Balor." You can have wrestlers who are good enough in the ring, have the charisma that they can wink at the camera and be like, "yeah, no really I'm Mike Quackenbush in real life. But like, as a performer you see the work I do and you can respect that as well."

HELEN

Mmm. Is this all part of when I used to see like, The Rock yelling into a camera, like someone would be interviewing him and then he would like, be shouting into a...and that was part of the act...

CAM

Oh yeah.

HELEN

...of being The Rock?

CALLUM

It's like, I'm sure, in fact from what I've heard in real life he's actually quite a quiet and reserved person, like...

HELEN

He seems quite nice!

CALLUM

...he's extremely polite and so...

HELEN

Doesn't he have a tiny dog?

STEVE

Probably.

CALLUM

I have no idea, but I know he officiated a fan's wedding because he's like that much of a nice guy.

HELEN

Aww!

CAM

Yeah.

STEVE

Yeah, well there is a moment...there's a documentary called Beyond the Mat that came out like in 2000 that has a lot of behind the scenes thing. And they have The Rock, talking about The Rock's character and what he's supposed to do in the storyline, and it's very telling because you hear Dwayne Johnson, you know, who is The Rock, be like "well you know The Rock's going to come down here with the chair and he's going to like have Mankind handcuffed and he's not going to let him defend himself because you know that's the kind of piece of shit The Rock is." You know, so even Dwayne knew like this is a character

who is not me and, you know, and then you have wrestlers, but you have wrestlers who very much can kind of put their business out there on the line, like Finn Balor is sort of one of them. And the reason his name is Finn Balor and not Dermott McDevitt which is his name, is so WWE can trademark Finn Balor.

HELEN

I see.

STEVE

And own that. And when he goes somewhere else he has to use his real name, or go back to being Prince Devitt or whatever it is they're doing. You know, no one names their child Samoa Joe.

HELEN

Mmm.

(Laughter)

STEVE

No one names their child Roman Reigns. You know like...yeah, so it's just like, a good worker is somebody who can represent all the facets of pro wrestling and not give away the secrets, but at the same time can give away the secrets and it doesn't matter, because you still want to watch them.

HELEN

I see.

And that's another thi...you know and how well they sell the moves is another mark of, you know, being a good worker.

HELEN

Mmm.

CAM

Do you make it look like you're really hurt when you're just fine?

HELEN

Mmm.

CAM

You know? As well as, you know, looking like you're really beating someone when you're supposed to be winning. Like that's...you know, it's the theatre of it.

HELEN

So I guess maybe this whole thing of like, "oh wrestling is fake", that comes from people who view it as a sport, but actually it's theatre.

STEVE

Yeah, I mean it came out in the...I guess in the 80's or early 90's, when basically Vince McMahon who owns WWE wanted to stop being regulated by state athletic commissions, and he literally went on national television and said "Y'all, this is an entertainment product. Like the endings are predetermined.

This is a story, this is a soap opera. This isn't competitive." And in a lot of ways that was like a knife through the heart of every old schooler who defended the business, who gave their life and their comfort and their body to protect, you know, the hidden nature of pro-wrestling. And here's Vince, so he can not have to pay taxes on shows at the Meadowlands or Madison Square Garden. Him just admitting basically like hoping it gets blown to the wind and being like "no no no no no, you can't tax us that way, you can't hold us accountable for steroids and whatever because we're not really a sport. It's a show...

HELEN

Interesting.

STEVE

...are you going to drug test Broadway too? You know, and like, and that opened up a whole world of venues, stadiums. Like wrestlers still had to be medically cleared, you know to be safe to wrestle, but not by the state. Not by anything official, and by doing...and it happened just like he wanted it to. It was a blip on the news, pre-internet, for about a week, and then people were, and then everyone was "oh well I knew it, I knew it!" And then the people who watched it continued to watch it, the people who stopped stopped, and the new fans came as the industry chugged along and like I said, now you have a product in pro-wrestling in 2021 where people, smart fans, turn and tune in like "okay, cool, I'm going to watch Cody Rhodes wrestle a match against Shawn Spears and I don't think either of them one is actually going to beat the other, but man, those are two talented athletic guys who know how to tell a story. This should be a baller ass match." And if it doesn't happen that way, you're like "what was that, that was lazy, that was sloppy...

(laughter)

...like, what kind of booking, like who wrote that story?" you know? It doesn't follow like "oh Shawn Spears the bum he can't win a match", it's like "why is the office doing this to Shawn Spears? Why are they making him lose like 18 matches in a row...

(laughter)

...when they told us he was a golden god?" You know, it's just like, there's a different level of entertainment. And wrestling's in a terrible place right now.

HELEN

Oh?

STEVE

The pandemic has been...

HELEN

Oh of course!

STEVE

Yeah, because they're in studios wrestling in front of flat screens with fans on them, and they can dictate what the reaction is. They can pipe in the cheers and the boos. But, the pandemic's ending. And they're about to be in front of thousands or hundreds of fans again, depending on where they are. And I

have a feeling we're going to see some things change. I hope to God we see some things change, because I feel like we've been watching the same six episodes of Raw and Smackdown for a year and a half and it's just hard to care. As a fan, it's really hard to care. I'm just really curious to see what comes now that we can have people in arenas, hopefully when we can have people in arenas again, later in the summer or in the fall.

HELEN

So, building off that, you've talked about people cheering, booing, and how it's all down to like live audience reaction. What I'd be interested to know is like, do any of you have like a favourite reveal or like, moment where, you know, the reaction, or your reaction, was very intense to something happening on the, in the ring? I was going to say on the stage but...!

CALLUM

I might have mentioned this on the other Enthusiasm that I was on...

HELEN

Oh yes!

CALLUM

Hashtag pilot season! But I was moved to tears by a live wrestling show. And I don't mean like, of sadness; I mean it was such a moving and beautiful thing that I'd seen that I actually cried real tears. I wept.

HELEN

Aww.

CALLUM

Because I was that...just enamoured with what I was seeing in person.

HELEN

Are you comfortable saying what that was?

CALLUM

Oh yeah, of course. I really liked Chikara pro wrestling. We already mentioned Mike Quackenbush earlier on and the excellent promotion Chikara is sort of like his brainchild. And at the time, I got to see the current heavyweight, well the heavyweight champion of Chikara pro at the time, who is Princess KimberLee which is a Sailor Moon-esque gimmick of the wrestler KimberLee that she used specifically in Chikara pro. And she was wrestling with her stable; now stable is like a group of wrestlers who are like a team, like they're much more than just a tag team, which was King and, Queen and Court I think? And they wrestled against Hallowicked and his like, legion of like demonic creatures. It sounds like very comic book and sort of wild and the gimmicks in Chikara pro are, but I watched a match, that five on five match is the main event of this show, getting to see Chikara pro for the first time in person, because bear in mind, they've only played three times in person in the UK in like the last decade. And I just watched this match and it was just...seeing KimberLee beat down to the ground but then retain her, like retain her title against like the impend-...like the evil forces of Hallowicked and his legion. Just, I don't know. It just actually genuinely moved me to tears. It's like, it's hard to explain because it doesn't sound like a beautiful moment to anyone who wasn't there...

HELEN

I mean...

CALLUM

...but it was just such great wrestling and I was, I just, I don't know, I was just moved. I think I was moved that I got to see it, I got to see KimberLee with that belt, with that team in person and it just, I don't know. I cried for like half an hour.

HELEN

It sounds in principle like the reaction I got seeing Steve Rogers beaten up and bleeding and being knocked down, and then getting back up again.

CALLUM

Now imagine if you were there in person!

HELEN

Yeah.

CALLUM

While that happened!

HELEN

Yeah.

STEVE

I don't do in person wrestling. It's too cringe for me.

(laughter)

STEVE

The culture, the culture over here is just too, like...

CAM

Yeah.

STEVE

I remember in 99 my two buddies, Clay and Josh and I went to a spot in Tennessee to see Sabu, who is the, "the genocidal, homicidal maniac" and he's like festooned with barbed wire and flipping through chairs...

HELEN

Good grief.

STEVE

And it was him wrestling Tracy Smothers who is another southern legend over here who, RIP, rest in power Tracy. And they were wrestling in this gym and we were like...we paid 10 dollars to have like general admission seats and there was like almost nobody there...

HELEN

Aww.

STEVE

...so we scooted down to ring side. And yes, I paid 20 dollars to have a polaroid taken with Sabu, him doing the pose, you know the point up, but er, and with Bill Alfonso, it was great. But this tag team came out and they were local and they were like “yeahhh!” and then some people booed, and they’re like “Y’all shut up!” And they went to one side of the ring and they were pointing at somebody up in the stands, and literally the seven of us that were like sitting there all just looked back like “...there’s nobody up there, man.” It was just like, just...

(laughter)

“We’re out here. I was the one that complimented your mullet sir, you know, like it was me.” And then I watched Sabu and Tracy for the main event. Sabu sat Tracy on the top rope and went to go from the mat, springboard off the rope, head scissors into a hurricanrana. And the ring up close was clearly steel cables coated in garden hose. Like a sparkly yellow garden hose. And he puts Tracy on the top rope and he goes to springboard and both his feet hit the cable, and the ring goes (Steve makes a squeaking noise). And you literally see the fear on their faces for a second before he finishes the move real quick, and real low impact, and they stayed off the top rope for the rest of the match because it was clearly just so low budge and so just like, I...I can watch it on TV, I can walk away from it, I can go pee, I can get a drink, I can do whatever. I don’t need to be in a room full of people with three little kids who thinks someone is legit getting murdered...

(laughter)

...you know, and I'm sitting here complaining like "that drop toe hold was really sloppy." But for me, if there was an emotional moment, it was on TV. Daniel Bryan, arguably one of the greatest professional wrestlers to ever lace up a pair of boots. His real name's Bryan Danielson, so real clever ring name of being Daniel Bryan, debuted in a bunch of indie promotions as the American Dragon. And he was a kick boxing style wrestler, pale, like anti-tan. Like if he'd walked into a tanning bed it would have just been like pork rind. You know he just would have like, sizzled up to nothing, he'd have a bowl haircut, white tights, white boots you know, and he'd be...good Lord, it looked like he could murder you. He was just this kind of nondescript dude that could tie you in knots and just move so quick and hit you with his knees, and he was told multiple times "you're never gonna be anything big. You don't have the look, you don't have the body, you don't have...you're not that handsome, your charisma is good as an underdog but we can only beat you up so many times before people start believing you can come back." Well, he got to WWE. Actually got fired. Legit fired. And got brought back in when the fan response was so strong they wanted him back, and this was during the Occupy movement.

HELEN

Oh!

STEVE

When we were occupying Wall Street. And fans started occupying WWE Raw for Daniel Bryan, demanding he get title shots, demand...some of it was work,

some of it was extras. Some of it was legit fan response. And Daniel Bryan's chant became 'yes, yes, yes'.

HELEN

Aww. That's quite nice.

STEVE

And like you can do that in a stadium now. People will go absolutely buck wild for it, but he was not supposed to be in the main event at WrestleMania. But fan demand was...and I wasn't even following wrestling, but I knew him from the indies. And I knew I had to see that match. And I watched him win a triple threat match in a packed stadium. 50, 60,000 people. His huge beard. He's uglier than ever. White tights. White knee pads. White boots. With both world titles.

HELEN

Mmm.

STEVE

And 50,000 people are doing the yes chant. And I was like okay, I've got to watch wrestling again.

HELEN

Aww. Cam, who's, what's your, what's been one of your favourite moments?

CAM

I do not have like some...anything that's super emotional or anything like that.

HELEN

It doesn't have to be emotional. Just something you enjoyed.

CAM

I don't remember which pay per view this was, so Steve, help me. Do you remember back in the day, we got one of the pay per views, and I think the top billing was a match between Mankind and The Undertaker.

STEVE

Uh-huh, you're talking about Hell in a Cell?

CAM

It was so...yes, yes! That was it, it was Hell in a Cell and it was so good, and it was so fun. I mean they just, they did a great job. It was really fun.

STEVE

Mick Foley being tossed off of a 40 foot cave through a table...

CAM

Yeah.

STEVE

Broke out his teeth so they wrapped around and shot out his nostril.

HELEN

What? Sorry, no, that's not...is that physically possible?

CAM

Yeah! Like he legitimately got scarred.

STEVE

It happened.

CAM

But he just got up and kept, just kept going. It was just like...

STEVE

Yeah, we did watch Hell in a Cell at your house. That is very true.

CAM

Yeah, that was good, that was a good one.

STEVE

And that's a moment in history. That was, that's a moment in history. Like things happened in that match that were not supposed to happen.

HELEN

I see.

STEVE

Mick Foley's body was irrevocably changed forever. Yes, it was just one of the moments in...

CAM

He did a great job. It was a great match. It was so fun.

HELEN

Yeah? Do you have like a favourite wrestler as well Cam?

CAM

Oh yeah, Mick Foley, definitely. He's my favourite.

HELEN

Mick Foley. Okay.

CAM

He's so good. Of course, that's you know, that's one of them that's got to be a favourite. Favourite match for me.

HELEN

Is that like his wrestling name or...

CAM

That's his real name. Steve mentioned earlier, he's been Dude Love, Cactus Jack. He was Mankind for quite some time.

HELEN

Oh okay, okay. There have been a lot of names in this episode.

CAM

Yeah, he's played a lot of different characters over the years.

STEVE

He's famous for those three. They called them the three faces of Foley.

HELEN

So what I would like to end on is, what are each of you sort of looking forward to in the wrestling world? Cam I'd like to go to you first if that's okay. I can vamp for a bit if you need to think. But like I'm interested to know like, what, like I don't know what the schedules are, I don't know if there's like anticipated shows that are going to be coming up at the end of the year. I don't know if there are arenas and stuff. But I'd be interested to know like what you think is interesting and exciting that's coming up in the schedule. So, Cam, what do you think?

CAM

Oh gosh! I have no idea. I'm so far behind.

HELEN

Oh, I see!

CAM

I don't have a clue. Like the last time I saw anything was...my friends had a pay per view in February. So I have no idea. But I mean like Steve said, I think it will be interesting to see how things change once we...there are live audiences again, for sure. That should be pretty interesting.

HELEN

And what do you think Steve?

STEVE

So I'm really kind of interested to see...I agree with Cam, when the crowds come back what that's going to be like. But also I want to see where the dust settles. Can WWE write a progressive product that people actually buy into? Can AEW, their competition All Elite Wrestling, can they pick up pieces WWE have dropped and actually learn how to write stories and not just do the trash they've been doing. Because they're a company well founded and well-intended, but they just don't have the story telling or the writing experience that generations are laid into. So I'm really interested to see where the dust settles with all the releases, the pandemic, easing up enough for there to be crowds and then just to see whether what's there is worth watching or not.

HELEN

And how about you Callum?

CALLUM

On a personal note, I'm excited for October. Because that's the first show back as far as like, stuff that friends of mine are running and so on...

HELEN

Oh yes.

CALLUM

And then during that show, my girlfriend, Alex, who used to wrestle is coming back as an announcer during that show. So I'm particularly excited for that. And I'm probably going to get roped into taking some pictures or something like that. Because I used to photograph...

STEVE

I thought you were going to say taking some bumps and I was about to get excited.

(laughter)

CALLUM

But yes, excited for October for that. And then in the more immediate future I'm excited because after this call I'm probably going to go and watch some wrestling. So...

(laughter)

None of the product that's currently airing right now though. That's for sure.

HELEN

I think, well that is definitely all the time that we have. Thank you, listeners, for hearing my induction to a world that I'd forgotten about for about 20 years and did not know existed. And for now, it's goodbye from me; goodbye. And it's goodbye from them. Do you want to say goodbye everyone?

CALLUM

Goodbye.

STEVE

See you soon, family.

CALLUM

I'll see you later.

STEVE

See you real soon.

CAM

Goodbye, have a great day.

HELEN

(laughing) Have a lovely day.

[Show theme - Outro]

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[Show Theme – Outro Ends]

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Rusty Quill - EGSM015 – Wrestling

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