

**ABERRANT**



**A Sourcebook Detailing the  
XTREME WARFARE FEDERATION**

# XWF: Blood Money

From *Details's* OpNet site, 5/12/08

They came from all over the Five Boroughs and beyond: Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New England. It would not surprise me if some came from across the continent or even across the world.

We are LIVE, ladies and gentlemen, from Madison Square Garden, always THE indoor sporting arena in America, now with an exponentially increased seating capacity since Enrikssen redesigned the place in '05. Lucky for us, for they are, to coin a phrase, hanging from the rafters tonight.

87,996. For what is essentially little more than an exhibition show. The rich, the poor, the old and the very young, the highbrows and the lowlifes, white, black, brown — hell, probably green and purple, too. We've already got confirmed sightings of DJ Faiz, Senator Giuliani, and The Great One Himself, Rocky Elizondo, complete with aging diva/sugar mama Madonna in tow. I hear that none other than It-couple Lydia Divine and Katie Holmes are watching this show from the Garden's VIP box.

Tonight we are guests, fans, "marks" (the old carny term by which XWFers refer to anyone not in "the business"), hype-drunk thralls in the hands of the Xtreme Warfare Federation's franchise-masters and willing fodder for their promotional juggernaut. The atmosphere is part carnival, part burlesque, part Roman orgy. Cardboard signs spouting Magic-Marked, often misspelled slogans ranging from the worshipful to the obscene decorate the Garden like a peacock's plumage. Lines of fans use their bodies as canvases to spell out favored combatants' *noms de guerre*; others ape their heroes, dressing in "authentic" ring attire, with results ranging from the "not bad" to the "Jesus, put your shirt back on NOW!" Knots of hooting men gorge on flaccid nachos and 36-ounce cups of pisswater beer, befouling the air with their expulsions, occasionally breaking out into a Greek chorus of "Show your tits!" as whorishly dressed "ring rat" groupies or (God help them!) ordinary young ladies scurry by. Small children charge heedlessly through the puddles of beer and vomit, some shrieking out various contenders' copy-righted pleasantries like "Step into my jungle, bitch!" or, for the intellectually inclined, "My vocation is your castration!" while ramming their younger siblings' heads and extremities into nearby guard rails.

And everywhere, like kudzu, the shirts: dark green, camouflage patterned, the front bedecked with a simple, stylized "biohazard" logo, the back emblazoned with the slogan "I've Been Cored™." Sources say Baron gets a percentage of every shirt sold.

Tonight, the fans are in the midst of witnessing the most controversial athletic contest in the history of the planet, a series of matches in which an average jab could kill an African elephant and the competitors unleash more energy, more raw force in seconds than the typical baseline athlete expends in a lifetime.

In between, they BUY: banners and shirts and caps and cups, posters and disks and masks and dolls, Frisbees and stickers and jackets, a Mammon's hoard of made-in-Guatemala markups, all bearing the stylized, spin-doctored and (you'd better believe) trademarked likenesses of the XWF's top-dollar ass-kickers. By buying into the XWF attitude, the franchise, the image, you hope to become an avatar of something greater than yourself. Like an ancient Babylonian praying to his Baal, you can use your credit card to worship the XWF "gimmick" without knowing anything of the person behind the slogan. Beyond this pervasive attitude, the vicarious, atavistic brutality (or vitality?) of an era long lost to data and downsizing and dotcoms, the XWF warriors offer little of substance — though in fairness, this could be said of most novas, or most public figures, for that matter. Even the names convey only a masturbatory fascination with larger-than-life, ritualized violence. Raja Ravana. Maxx Mauler. Compton Inferno.

Tonight's card, thus far, has hit on all the requisite cylinders (a pre-HC reference for you kidz out there). Three of these matches were undercard, preliminary matchups, featuring freakishly muscled lumps of (wink, wink, nudge, nudge, mite-riddled) flesh



flailing at each other in grotesque parodies of action. These "rising nova superstars" (come on, Bartlett, we all know they're mitoids, just admit it; it's not as if most municipalities are going to let a little thing like the Justice Department derail *your* revenue gravy train) obligingly beat the living dogshit out of each other to the, umm, polite applause and catcalls of the arena. You can slap all the million-dollar labels you want on it, I know drunken-Labor-Day-picnic brawling when I see it. The crowd got into it enough, and I must admit to a certain adrenaline buzz when Ballz Mahoney III power-bombed The Polyp through the hood of a '74 El Dorado that was incongruously lying in the midst of the spidery arena superstructure.

Hey, the semi-main featured actual by-God novas: billed as "an epic fight to advance in the Silver Circle contention hierarchy" or something. The marquee says this is Marco "The Brazilian Anaconda" Mateiro against Mariko Yukiko. The "smart" fans say the Silver Circle matchups are often the best, and I think I agree with them. I say "I think" because the Anaconda was throwing about 400 punches a second while twisting his body into some kind of fractal pattern and Yukiko was springing off the superstructure so fast it was like watching one of those balls you buy out of the machine in front of the grocery store. I checked out the slo-mo replays, and there were some definite Golden Gloves-style combos and some serious hang time on Yukiko's 5490° rib-wrecker, but then, I got to thinking, "If I have to watch the freakin' screen to see the fight, why did I pay for a ticket instead of watching it for free at the sports bar?" Fortunately for Bartlett, Flair and Co., the other 87,995 marks aren't as discriminating as I, and so, the cash flow is safer than FireFox's undies, yes indeed.

But now, as they say, it is Time. Next up, the main event, the big-money match, the drawing-power spectacle that (as they say in the biz) "puts asses in seats." The pyros crash, the rockets shriek, klaxons announcing a sacrifice.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this next match is a special challenge match for the XWF Black Circle Heavyweight Title...."

XWF combatants and fans alike use the term "pop" to describe the audience roar of approval upon the entrance of a particularly beloved ring warrior. The more popular the fighter, the louder the pop. Even in the Nova Age, when miracles and marvels are ours for



the viewing, there is little in the world more awe-inspiring than nearly 90,000 fans erupting in a simultaneous pop.

"Introducing first.. the challenger! He weighs in as heavy as secret sin and hails from [here the announcer's voice drops into a menacing baritone] The Ninth Circle of Hell! He is the Master of Fire and Brimstone, the Lord of the Damned, the King of Unending Torment! Ladies and gentlemen, introducing... EL! DIABLO!"

El Diablo saunters — well, lumbers his way out. He's, oh, six-seven, built like the proverbial brick shithouse and masked. Even from my vantage point, I see the distinctive stigmata of mite abuse: hose-pipe veins, blotchy skin and nary a bulge in the, umm, package area. The mask, a knock-off of beloved youth-culture thug Mefistofaleez's signature accouterment, fails to hide his Neanderthal brow. If he survives this match, or the next three, he will eventually succumb to the 10-count of his overtaxed heart. The crowd lustily boos; they know this guy's a scrub who got lucky.

Or very, very unlucky, depending on your point of view.

I can guess the story. This kid is young, stick-your-hand-on-a-hot-stove foolish, wants to be a nova so bad it hurts and thinks he's Rocky Balboa. "Special challenge match," my ass. Just for those readers unfamiliar with the business practices of the XWF: "El Diablo" doesn't have a hope in hell. Pitting a mitoid against Core is like pitting a Pokemon against Godzilla. The XWF suits know it's a house show; they want to send the fans home happy, they "generously" offer this "promising" lunkhead a title shot, Core plays with him, smokes him in 2:37, and the bridge-and-tunnel data-apes haul their broods back to Schenectady, talking about what a great, epic title defense it was.

El Diablo capers around the arena, soaking up the boos like a cheap, disposable tampon. His mask twitches; I guess he's trying to leer menacingly, or maybe he's having a heart attack already. I think he screams out something like "Core's goin' down!" but through the mask, it comes out approximately "Khrehh guhh deuuhhh!" The crowd's jeers die down, and an expectant, electric silence grips the place.

And then, it happens.

I am a child of the '80s and grew up banging my head — again, don't ask, kidz — to *Ride the Lightning*, and so, my aged pulse quickens when the first strains of entrance music — skew flavor-of-the-month Ryypitilique's cover of Proklamationn's remix of dear old two-



oh retro but still by-God-ass-kicking Metallica classic "Enter Sandman" — reverberate throughout the Garden.

And at that moment, as the entire gargantuan edifice shakes like a Tinkertoy structure amid a roar like a ground-zero Overkill detonation, I understand the true meaning of the term "pop."

"Ladies and gentlemen, now making his way to the Combat Zone... he weighs in at 282 pounds and hails from Brooklyn, New! York! City!"

I had forgotten: Baron's a hometown boy, too. The 87,996 fans vocally remind me of that fact.

"...he is the reigning champion of the sport and the master of the Core Meltdown™. Ladies and gentlemen, your..." (Here the crowd, in warbly drunken, adrenalinized "unison," joins the announcer's spiel:)

"...X! W! F! Heavyweight Champion of the Wooooorrrld..."

"DUKE!

"CORE!

"BAROOOONNN!"

That last syllable, chanted by 90,000 voices and echoed, no doubt, by millions upon millions in front of monitors in dens and living rooms and sports bars and less wholesome establishments across the entire by-God world, is an implacable summons, like a god ordering his avenging angel to earth.

Fog. Strokes. The bass line. The crowd leans forward.

*Say your prayers, little one...*

And there, as phosphorus flames blast in twin columns to the heavens, He emerges, to a pop that I fear will send Manhattan into the sea.

*Don't forget, my son...*

Psychologists can analyze this, sociologists can argue it, pundits of all stripes can deride it. Depending on whom you ask, the XWF is a barbaric orgy of violence unworthy of a civilized society, a panderer selling lowest-common-denominator pap to cretinous, testosterone-addled teens and the emotionally retarded adults they will become, the dry rot on the leprous corpse of a decadent, media-numbed, postindustrial, postmodern,



postcaring, postfeeling, downloaded, wired-for-convenience society so devoid of any real soul that it has to elevate clown-gods to beat the shit out of each other simply to satisfy its stuporous concern that at least someone, somewhere, is doing and feeling something real.live, even if it is rage and fear.

*To include everyone...*

All these things are, to some extent, true. It does not matter. To these 87,000-plus, there is one God and His name is Core. They shriek hymns to him. They beseech him to smite the infidel, to let them, for just one night, throw the lightning with him and be as kings. Some, I believe, would die for him.

El Diablo, tonight, just might do that.

Core pauses, standing beneath the entrance to the Combat Zone. His head tilts to the lights, the blazing plasmatic orbs gazing upon infinity, or perhaps just evaluating the T-shirt sales. Then, raising his massive arms over his head in an age-old gesture of defiance and supremacy, Core roars like some ancient tyrannosaur sizing up his prey, and the Garden bellows back in a sort of mating call.

And as a spray of white-hot plasma blazes from his mouth, illuminating the entire arena, I stand up with the other 87,995 and scream my damn lungs out and stamp my feet and howl for blood.

OK, Bartlett. You got me. I am a mark.

Let's get it on.



## Locker-Room Conversation, 10/23/07

"You want me to be what!?!?"

"Look, the creative staff has put a great deal of effort into grooming you for stardom, and we feel that this alter ego is the perfect marketing package for the unique talents you bring to the organization."

"But, I mean, this... costume.... It's... so... weird...."

"What it is, my dear Mr. Crenshaw, is a one-way ticket to notoriety. When you don your war mask, your battle persona, you cease to be a mere mortal. In the eyes of the millions... and millions... of XWF fans everywhere, you become an incarnate deity, an icon of worship."

"It's just... The Polyp? I mean, isn't that like something that grows on your ass or something?"

"Polyp,' dear boy, is derived from the French '*poulpe*,' which translates into the English 'octopus' or 'squid.' Don't you see the sucker marks molded into the latex? You are... a mighty creature of the oceanic abyss, a great kraken come to wrap your implacable limbs around your foe and slowly crush him into defeat!"

"Well, does it... I mean, it's fuchsia, for Crissake! People will think I'm, like, a fag or something--"

"Mr. Crenshaw, that is an insensitive, intolerable and, frankly, very two-oh remark on your part. The XWF does not tolerate slurs directed at ethnicity, creed, or sexual orientation, and as a representative of this company, you will damn well remember that!"

"Now, the fact is, Mr. Crenshaw, you are under contract to the XWF, and its creative team has determined that it is in the company's best interest that you assume the identity, trademarks and character of The Polyp, complete with tentacle headgear, suckers, catchphrase and, yes, that glowing POLYP logo on the seat area."

"Mr. Crenshaw, the bottom line is that we can take that 15 pounds of XWF intellectual property that you hold so gingerly in your callused, post-Information-Age-reject, service-industry-scarred hands, and we can slap it on any of dozens, if not hundreds, of eager, star-struck mitoids. To wit, there is nothing in the equation of your being that we cannot reproduce via the fortuitous union of a common Star Lord's barista and a syringe in the ass. Now, do you want to be in the show, or do you want to be back out *there*, watching the XWF from the dubious comfort of whatever hovel your minimum-wage job affords you... at least until you have to hock your obsolete junkheap of a computer to pay for more mite?"

"Good. I thought you'd agree. Break a leg... superstar."





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# N terview

## N! Man on the Street N!terview

What is your opinion of the Xtreme Warfare Federation?



\* Jamie Burnham, junior-high-school student: Dude, Triple M kicks ass! XWF is the kewlest [CENSORED] ever 'cuz, like, Superbeast is a bad-ass mofo.... "STEP INTO MY JUNGLE, [CENSORED]!!!!!"

• Martika Curtis, editor: It's just the latest mantra in the age-old tyrannical litany of racist, sexist, homophobic penis-people brainwashing our children with their phallogentric, oppressive culture of violence. We all know it's fake, and this Core character is an offensive caricature of the African-American male as violent rapist-thug. Why do you think he's always fighting in cage matches? — the fascist promoters want to create the popular mindset that black men should be behind bars.



• Melinda Olson, homemaker: Well, last week, Superbeast came to the local shopping mall for an autograph session, and he stayed until every one of those kids got their toy signed. He was very sweet to my little boy, and he told all the kids that working hard and staying in school are more important than being an XWF superstar.



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• Derek Wong, real-estate developer: Bread and circuses. Keeps the hoi polloi entertained and the novas busy. I even let my kid watch it, as long as she keeps her grades up. It's a great motivator.



• Andrew "Skew" Parker, T2M representative: It's, like, all right if you've got a spare 12-pack and nothing better to do, I guess. Anyway, that [CENSORED]'s all staged, and if I were in there against Core, I'd just wrap the whole [CENSORED] arena superstructure around his [CENSORED] [CENSORED] and drill the [CENSORED] into the center of the earth, and then, they could really call him Core.

• Juanita Barlow, high-school principal: How can we expect our children to respect themselves and others if they're constantly seeing their "heroes" batter and brutalize each other? The XWF is just another building block in our so-called "culture" of apathy, desensitization and incivility.



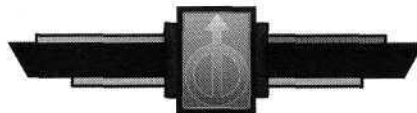
## Conversation during the filming of a clip from *Monday Mega-Massacre*, 4/24/08

- Production Manager: OK, now, Superbeast, we want you to lurk in that alley over at stage right, and when Core walks-
- Superbeast: Hey, you checked this shit out, right? Like, no homeless dude's hanging out in there all drunk and covered in his own shit and-
- Core: Yeah, 'cuz you don't want some bum givin' you a preliminary ass-whoopin' before I blast you through the roof at the pay-per-view!
- Superbeast: Oooh, you're so butch and manly, Core! I feel so... moist...
- Production Manager: Focus, please, gentlemen! Remember: We're setting up the grudge match of the millennium here, and we need this clip to convey hate, vengeance and primal rage! Okay, now, Core, you walk stage left in front of the alley, and then, at that point, you, Superbeast, pounce on him and smack him with the dumpster....
- Superbeast: Which one? There are a bunch of dumpsters in here....
- Production Manager: The one with the red tape on it....
- Superbeast: Gary, how many times do I have to tell you, I'm colorblind while I'm morphed!
- Core: Man, there better not be no actual garbage in that thing! 'Cuz I don't want to get a bunch of nasty-ass rancid food and shit all over me.
- Production Manager: It's clean, Core.
- Superbeast: You sure this crap will work? I mean, a camera just happens to be here as I ambush Core?



Yeah, yeah, I know, the marks'll eat it up. Okay, Duke, I'm *lurking* in the alley, waiting to *pounce* on you, handsome!

- Core: You just keep your claws above the waist, Robby, this ain't no damn porno.
  - Superbeast: Yeah, I know; *those* motherfuckers can really act. Hey, Gary, can we get some theme music or something for this? Yeah, like maybe that "smack-my-bitch-up" jigga-jigga-WHOMP soundtrack from *Hardballs* or some shit?
  - Core: Damn, Robby, settle your ass down. And, like, take some of that Mauler prize money and get yourself a ho or somethin' 'cuz you starting to scare me.
  - Production Manager: All right, let's do this! Places, everyone. Lights...
  - Core: And don't be shootin' on me or takin' no cheap shot either, Robby, 'cuz I don't wanna have to really hurt you till it's time.
  - Production Manager: Camera...
  - Superbeast: Don't worry, bro, I ain't kickin' your ass till I'm paid for it.
  - Production Manager: Action!
- [scene is shot]
- Production Manager: Okay, that's a wrap. Great sell of the dumpster shot, Core — I thought you were dead! Steele, a little less emoting next time.
  - Superbeast: Hey, that shit works on the skew-metal kids, it'll work on the marks. Anyhow, if that's it, I'm dorming down and hitting the showers. Oh, yeah, Duke, remember that Juggz place I was telling you about? They got one here in town, right next to the convention center. Great microbrew, no waitresses under 36DD, and it makes those plates of hot wings in the "Nova" size. Wanna grab a few plates?
  - Core: Hell yeah! I ain't had nothin' to eat all day. Hook me up.
  - Production Manager: Whoa, whoa, whoa, you can't do that, you guys are BITTER ENEMIES now! If the N! barracudas see you guys eating together...
  - Core: Get the damn stick out yer ass, Gary, I always wear my special sunglasses!
  - Superbeast: Yeah, they're like Clark Kent's magic glasses, so everyone lookin' at him thinks he's some 150-lb.wuss!
  - Core: I'll stick my 150-lb. wussy boot up your hairy baboon-lookin' ass at the pay-per-view, white boy! Now hurry the hell up, I'm hungry!



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N!nterview with "Stone  
Badass" Lance Stryker,  
04/17/08

• N! Reporter: Mr. Stryker, rumors have circulated in recent weeks about you taking a role as a guest contender during next month's XWF pay-per-view *Hong Kong Karnage*. Do you have any response for---

• Stryker: Hell yeah, son, I gotta response for whatever [CENSORED] artists are goin' around talkin' smack about the Stone Badass! Do I look like a damn cartoon to you, son? Do I look like Core or Mauler or one of them other mite-injectin', pumped-up, fake-ass faggots that goes out there and rolls around in his damn underwear so that a bunch of fat OpNet turds can sit around and jack off? If Core wants to take off his little makeup and come out from inside his little arena and bring his little Core Melt-down to Tanzania or Macedonia or Kashmir or some other place where real men do real fightin' for a livin', then the Stone Badass will be happy to shove the sole of my boot straight up his ass and stomp a mudhole in his \$40-million-a-fight intestines, and that's all I got ta say about that!

So in answer to yer little question, son, the Stone Badass is a real-life elite and not one'a them fake XWF nancyboys, and I wouldn't use a damn XWF contract to wipe my ass, and that's a damn fact!





# ABERRANT: XWF

## The Language of Violence

Since the early 20th century, the business of professional wrestling has evolved its own unique terminology, much of which has been incorporated into the XWF.

- **angle** (noun): An issue, real or scripted, between XWF competitors. ("See, the angle is that Maxx Mauler steals Core's girlfriend, and Core's pissed, so they have a lot of heat going into the pay-per-view.")

- **book** (verb): To schedule a match between two (or more) XWF competitors. The person who schedules matches is referred to as the booker.

- **OQ** (noun, verb): Disqualification, disqualify.

- **face** (short for "babyface") (noun): A combatant generally perceived as a "good guy" by the public at large; the fan favorite in a match.

- **Finisher** (noun): A move or quantum attack that is considered particularly devastating and often results in a KO for the attacker. Finishers generally have special names (Core Meltdown, Mauler Bomb, etc.). Maxed-out powers often fall in this category.

- **gimmick** (noun): The "character" an XWF fighter creates for herself, if any.

- **heat** (noun): 1) Crowd response, good or bad. Having a great deal of heat is seen as a sign of being over and, thus, marketability. 2) Bad blood (real or scripted) between competitors.

- **heel** (noun): A combatant generally disliked and perceived as a "thug" or "bad guy" by the public at large.

- **jobber** (jabroni, scrub, ham-'n'-egger) (noun): A fighter of inferior skill or power who loses the majority of his or her bouts. In the XWF, jobbers are typically mitoids.

- **mark** (noun, verb, adjective): In its broadest sense, a mark is any XWF fan or other outsider to the business. Specifically, the term often refers to rabid, "goober" fans or fans of a particular fighter. ("The marks were lined up around the block to get an autograph of Core." "Yeah, whatever, I'm a mark for Ravana myself." "Damn, that crowd marked out when Superbeast walked in!")

- **over** (adjective): Popular with (or despised by) the XWF fanbase, and thus, generally perceived as a

potential main-event attraction. ("Damn, Core is way over with the New York crowd!")

- **pop** (noun, verb): Crowd response to a fighter, entrance or move. ("Did you hear the pop Superbeast got when he walked in?" "The crowd popped huge for the Core Meltdown.")

- **shoot** (noun, verb): A fight or interview that is not scripted out in advance, that is "real." Most important XWF matches are shoots.

- **work** (noun, verb): A prescribed interview, comment or match designed to generate interest in an upcoming show. ("Nah, Core doesn't really wanna kill Mauler for stealing his ho — that whole angle's a work." "Yeah, well, they sure worked me.")

## History

The XWF first body-slammed its way into the public eye on September 30, 2004 at Madison Square Garden's infamous *Manhattan Meltdown* pay-per-view. However, the blueprint for the organization was drawn up well before, in the real and scripted combat spectacles of the 20th century.

Fighting events have long been intertwined with American pop culture. Boxers like "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano and George Foreman slugged their way to national adulation. During the '60s and '70s, a dark-horse contender by the name of Cassius Clay metamorphosed into global icon Muhammad Ali, thrilling audiences in televised bouts like *The Rumble in the Jungle* and *The Thrills in Manila*. In the '70s, a classic underdog story of a pug from Philadelphia gaining a once-in-a-lifetime shot against an Ali-like World champ launched the career of Sylvester Stallone. In the late '80s and '90s, men like Mike Tyson and Evander Holyfield commanded as much as \$70 million for the winner's purse in their bouts.

Boxing's sleazy "sister" sport, the scripted exhibition of professional wrestling, likewise became big business in the late 20th century. During the 1980s advent of cable television, the World Wrestling Federation, under the guidance of owner Vince McMahon, expanded its product from a regional to a national and, then, a global, audience. Playing on post-Vietnam America's need for heroes and exploiting the popularity of movies like *Rocky 3* and *Rambo: First Blood Part*

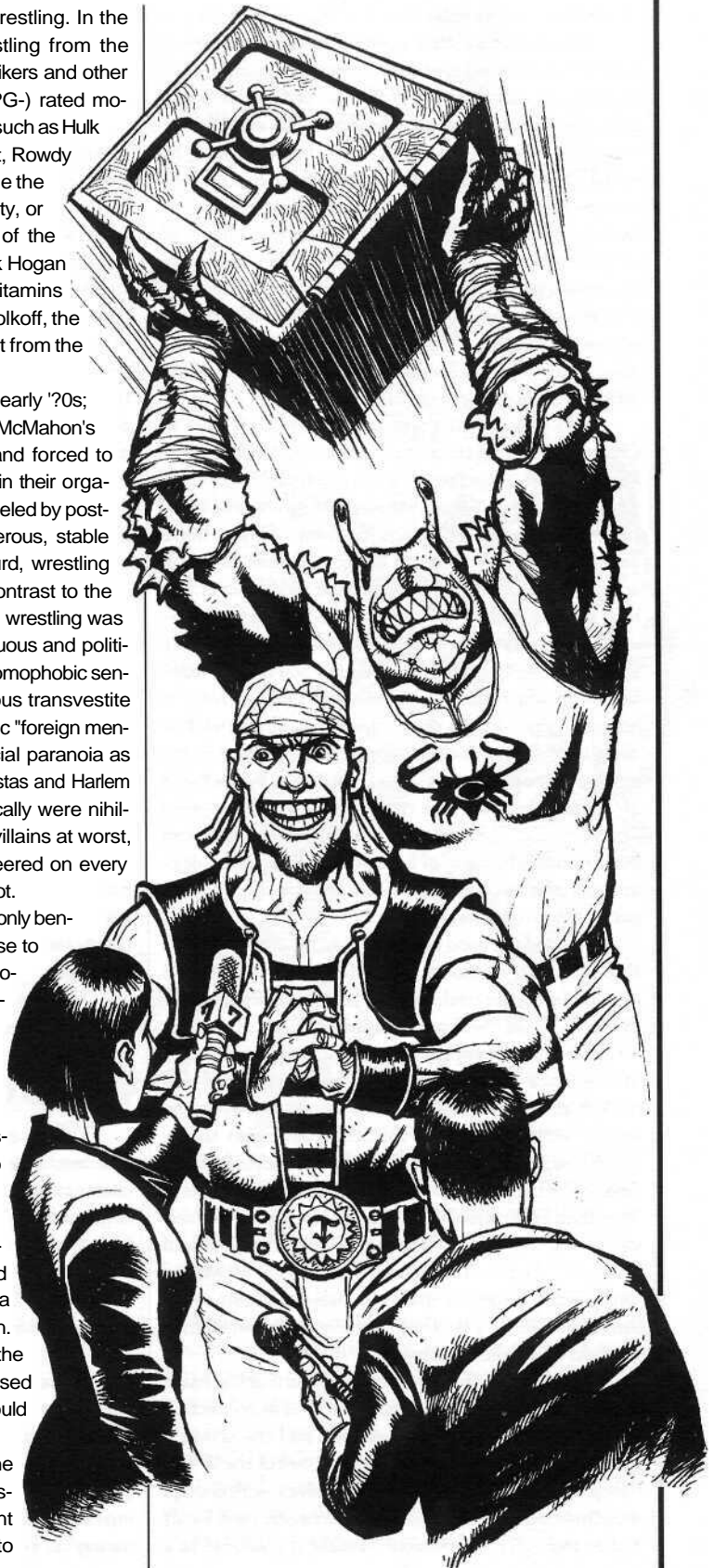
2, McMahon reinvented professional wrestling. In the process, McMahon transformed wrestling from the seedy purview of trailer-park dwellers, bikers and other lowlifes to a larger-than-life, G- (well, PG-) rated morality play. Grotesques and bodybuilders such as Hulk Hogan, Big John Studd, Andre the Giant, Rowdy Roddy Piper and The Undertaker became the embodiments of Good, Evil, Greed, Vanity, or whatever concept best fit the needs of the script. When jingoistic Ubermensch Hulk Hogan "trained hard, said his prayers, took his vitamins and vanquished "evil Russian" Nikolai Volkoff, the American public gained a symbolic outlet from the tension of nuclear proliferation.

Wrestling suffered a decline in the early '70s; the Cold War had thawed, while Vince McMahon's "American heroes" were subpoenaed and forced to testify about rampant steroid abuse within their organization. However, during the mid-'90s, fueled by post-Cold War ennui and a suddenly prosperous, stable society's need for a theater of the absurd, wrestling became wildly popular once more. In contrast to the "apple-pie" image of the '80s WWF, '90s wrestling was by turns risqué, brooding, morally ambiguous and politically incorrect. The WWF pandered to homophobic sentiment with the outrageously androgynous transvestite character of Goldust; in place of the classic "foreign menace," promoters played on domestic racial paranoia as embodied in such menaces as The Gangstas and Harlem Heat. The "heroes" of the '90s ring typically were nihilistic antiheroes at best and straight-up villains at worst, but the fans of the *fin de siècle* age cheered on every gang beating, sneak attack and chair shot.

Nor was professional wrestling the only beneficiary of this age. The '90s saw the rise to prominence of various "shootfighting" promotions, most notably the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), a series of mixed martial-arts tournaments that gained a largely undeserved reputation for brutality. Ironically, as the decade unfolded, the shootfighter leagues cross-pollinated with the cinematic circus of pro wrestling: Noted UFC competitor Ken Shamrock adopted an alter ego in the WWF, while perennial shootfight contender David "Tank" Abbott intimidated foes with a calculatedly obnoxious persona as bombastic as any pro-wrestling villain.

Then came March 23, 1998, and the *Galatea* explosion. The world of televised combat, as with any other medium, would never be the same.

The novas made their advent on the global stage, and global culture was transformed. Throughout the entertainment world, "adapt or die" became the motto



of the day. "Sports entertainment" was no exception.

Many novas and their quantum powers bore strong resemblance to the superhero comics that had been perennially popular since the 1930s. Accordingly, it wasn't a great imaginative leap to envision, and ultimately promote, nova-versus-nova spectacles. In fact, it was the initial Utopia response to the *Galatea* crisis that planted the seeds for the nova shootfights of later years. Many novas, confused and disoriented by their eruptions, fled Utopia and local authorities alike in search of anonymity; others were actively repulsed by Utopia's intervention efforts. Some of these novas went underground, where they were contacted by shady and often exploitative "agents" in exchange for sanctuary from government or Utopian intervention teams.

This phenomenon was particularly pervasive in China. Here, the large population and repressive People's Republic administration combined to produce a nova refugee populace that was both sizable and fearful of the government's plans for them. Many of these refugees ended up in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Bangkok and Singapore, where underground bloodsports had long proliferated in the underworld. Seeing opportunity, criminal promoters took the refugee novas under their wing, setting them up in brutal and bloody massacres in which the novas would destroy dozens of baseline opponents at once. The novas, of course, became celebrities, albeit underground ones. Most noteworthy of the promoters was a Thai citizen by the name of Yai Lokampang, who ran the first nova-vs.-nova "cockfighting" pits. His prize find was an American expatriate by the name of Louis Martin Freeman, a devastating plasma-wielder who proved virtually unstoppable in one-on-one combat.

The underground shoot leagues' reputation spread through word of mouth and Internet (later OpNet) newsgroups; tape traders made fortunes selling videos of the illegal proceedings. Meanwhile, in the States, interest in mainstream sports was withering in the light of the Nova Age. Baseball, football, basketball and hockey all took massive revenue losses. Networks no longer wanted to pay for the broadcast rights to any but the major events of the conventional sports leagues. One of the biggest losers was Vince McMahon's World Wrestling Federation. Compared to the exploits of novas, wrestling was seen as hopelessly mundane and "two-oh." As the 21st century dawned, the McMahon family finally sold their shares to Houston investor William Blair ("B.B.") Bartlett, bowing out of what they considered a dead enterprise.

Bartlett had other plans. He had heard of the Asian nova shootfights, and he wasted no time in contacting Lokampang. Together, the two men laid the groundwork for an empire to be built on the ashes of the WWF: flashy, as big and bold as novas themselves, with enough shootfighting legitimacy to keep it dramatic (and legal) and enough glitz and glamour to make it palatable to a

mainstream First World audience. Taking a cue from the now-defunct Extreme Championship Wrestling, Bartlett dubbed his promotion-to-be the Xtreme Warfare Federation, or XWF.

This was Bartlett's dream, and he risked his father's financial empire on the startup. To fill out his Executive Committee, Bartlett recruited Lokampang, as well as three others of varying expertise. Countess Isabella Bercaru, a European debutante with connections to the International Olympic Committee, gave the sport some athletic legitimacy and provided valuable connections to global magnates. Dr. Jocelyn Silva, a management consultant who had formerly held a position in Project Utopia, was recruited to smooth over the enterprise's almost inevitable conflicts with that organization. Finally, to run the day-to-day affairs and provide the "face" of the XWF, Bartlett contacted legendary retired wrestler "Nature Boy" Ric Flair, offering the multiple-time champ a job as CEO. Having had past problems with other CEOs, Flair relished the opportunity to "be the boss," and the Executive Committee was complete.

Bartlett banked everything on that first pay-per-view, bringing in a host of novas and celebrity guests from around the globe. The day after, the numbers bore out Bartlett's business savvy; the PPV had pulled in a mind-boggling 32.7 rating, and a new cultural phenomenon had been born. Since then, under the guidance of the Executive Committee and fueled by the drawing power of awe-inspiring and marketable novas like Duke "Core" Baron, Maxx Mauler and Rob "Superbeast" Steele, the XWF has been an unstoppable financial machine. Racked almost monthly by some scandal or another, riddled with shady dealings and ties to organized crime, the XWF simply takes any controversy and uses it as fuel for ever-higher ratings.

One suspects, in fact, that B.B. Bartlett wouldn't have it any other way.

## Structure

Fundamentally, the XWF exists to promote shoot matches between novas, who compete for money and championship titles. Everything about the corporation is geared toward this end. The company is based in Stamford, Connecticut and headed by the Executive Committee. Under the Committee are the departments of Creative, Marketing (both in charge of characterization), Public Relations, Legal, Human Resources/Talent Acquisition, Financial and Administrative.

Novas work with the XWF on an independent contractor basis. Typically, a nova signs a contract guaranteeing a certain amount of money (in the low sevens or thereabouts) to work a certain number of dates (typically 20 or so a year, with the understanding that injuries might reduce this figure and that "no work = no pay"). The real money comes in the form of prize

purses, which are set up by the Committee and vary depending on the status of the combatants. A match between relative unknowns might merit \$100,000 or so, while a title fight for the Black Circle championship might have a \$50 million purse. Purses are typically split 75 percent/25 percent between the winner and loser. Note that while individual purses are often lower than in late 1990s boxing, novas' accelerated healing means they typically can fight many more times a year than even the toughest baseline fighter, so there is ample opportunity for a nova to get rich beyond his wildest dreams — if he's tough enough to take it.

Currently, the XWF has 24 novas under full-time contract, with about an equal number "dropping by" for occasional series, one-shot contracts, etc. The XWF loves "celebrity death match" bouts, in which a nova luminary from another field (novox, TV/movies, city franchise, DeVries, etc.) is persuaded to enter the arena for a one-shot match.

## The Circuit

Although the XWF hosts numerous cross-promotional specials and (tax-deductible) charity work, the bottom line still comes from the fighting events. Three tiers comprise the total circuit, and a combatant's status generally determines where on the circuit she competes.

At the apex of the circuit are the pay-per-views: six per year, featuring the cream of the crop and drawing US ratings in the 20s and above. The *Havoc in Havana* pay-per-view, held in June, is a perennial classic and is complemented by December's year-ending *Manhattan Meltdown*. Pay-per-views are held around the globe, and cities compete to host the events the way they used to vie for the Olympics. It is at the pay-per-views that the most important matches — title fights, grudge blowoffs, celebrity bouts — occur.

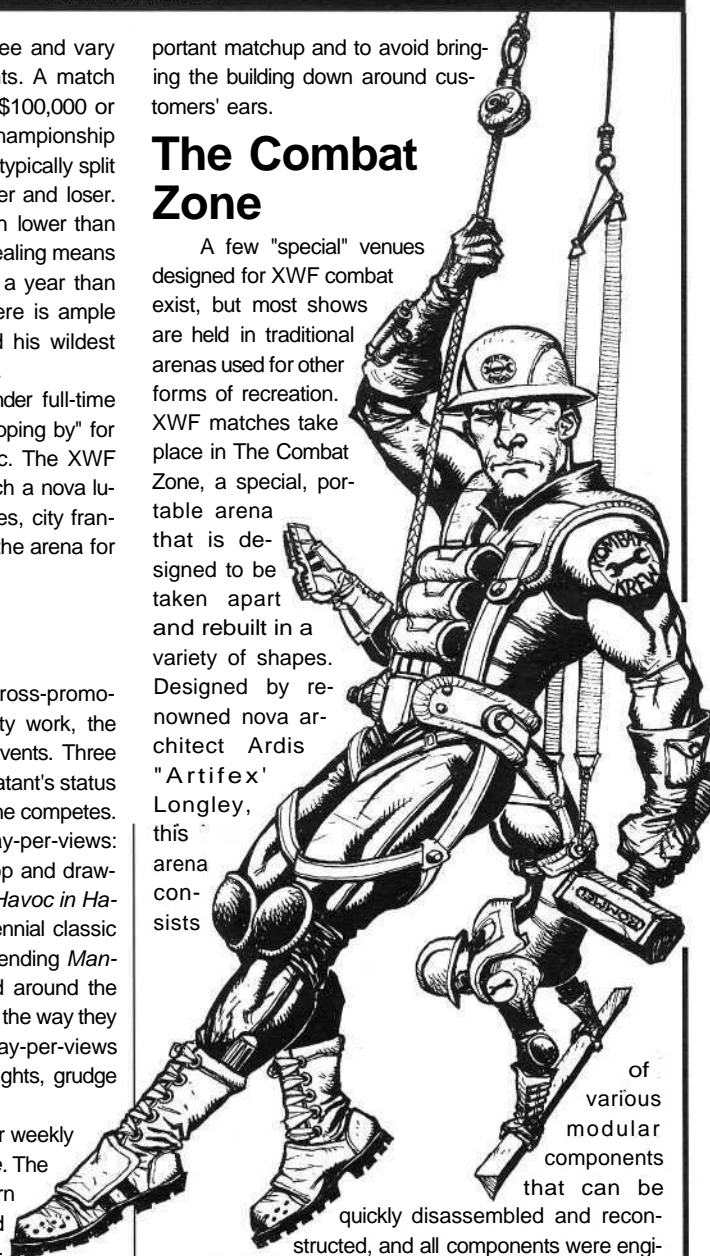
The XWF also broadcasts a one-hour weekly prime-time show, *Monday Mega-Massacre*. The show is broadcast via NI!, at 9PM Eastern Standard Time over conventional and OpNet channels. "Triple M," as its fans refer to it, occasionally features title bouts, but more often focuses on the up-and-coming contenders, with jobber bouts and copious interviews thrown in as filler. The XWF would like to feature more big-name fights on Monday nights, but they don't want to risk excessive injury to their big-money pay-per-view draws, and they aren't about to give away too many PPV matchups for free.

At the bottom rung of the XWF circuit are the "house shows" — nontelevised events occurring at venues around the world. House shows are typically held in major cities, to make the gate revenue worthwhile, and tend to feature lower-tier stars. Combatants at house shows often hold back from fighting at full power — both so as not to spend themselves before a more im-

portant matchup and to avoid bringing the building down around customers' ears.

## The Combat Zone

A few "special" venues designed for XWF combat exist, but most shows are held in traditional arenas used for other forms of recreation. XWF matches take place in The Combat Zone, a special, portable arena that is designed to be taken apart and rebuilt in a variety of shapes. Designed by renowned nova architect Ardis "Artifex" Longley, this arena consists



of various modular components that can be quickly disassembled and reconstructed, and all components were engineered to be both light and durable. A built-in computer allows the arena to keep track of elapsed time, warn combatants about rules violations and even throw up vitrium panels between combatants if a ring doctor determines the match should cease.

The arena is typically set up in the midst of a larger stadium: an "arena within an arena." The typical arena shape consists of a one-level, fenced-in structure with vitrium panels providing simultaneous visibility and protection. For super-agile, flying or other combatants, the structure is often varied. And, for those omnipresent "gimmick" matches, a variety of special components — electrified fences, firepits, opening and closing trapdoors, rows of spikes — can be used to customize the arena. Within the confines of the Combat Zone, novas



can smash, blast or soar away, confident that the viewing public is safe from harm.

Still, no precautions can fully safeguard against the fallout from a nova-fight, and show attendees are warned that the XWF is not liable for any accidental injuries to bystanders that occur as the result of a bout (this has been upheld in the US by the Supreme Court, and similar decisions have been handed down in most First World countries).

The Combat Zone is set up and reconstructed between matches by a unit of special ring workers known as the Kombat Krewe. The Krewe are highly skilled, almost fanatical about their job; they have turned the construction of the arena into an art form. Arena construction is open to the public viewing, and, sometimes, provides nearly as much of a spectacle as the subsequent matches. Krewe members deftly swing along cables, flourish their tools in the manner of a Benihana chef, monkey up the superstructure to precarious heights and otherwise provide as much entertainment as possible for the eager marks.

## The Rules

Much as with its pro-wrestling antecedent, the XWF has few rules and guidelines, most of which still tend to be liberally ignored by fighters, fans and promoters alike.

Essentially, the only barred move is the eye gouge, due to the risk of permanent injury. As well, no foreign objects may be brought into the arena, though makeshift weapons constructed from the arena surface itself are acceptable. Biting is not only permissible, but (in the case of freaks like Superbeast) expected. Lethal attacks are acceptable, subject to the restrictions noted below; however, Disintegrate or other aggravated attacks are forbidden, and novas with such powers are not allowed to compete.

Combatants leaving the confines of the Combat Zone itself have until a five-count (made by the Combat Zone's computer) to reenter the ring or be disqualified. This allows, for example, a leaping or flying combatant to make an attack whose trajectory takes her outside the CZ's ceiling, but the combatant cannot hover out of reach without being DQed. A combatant will also be disqualified if he or she receives outside interference from a colleague, though telepathic assistance is nearly impossible to check for. Disqualified combatants lose, of course, and a title can change hands on a DQ, so such occurrences are rare.

Most preliminary matchups have a 15-minute time limit. Semi-main and number-one contendership matchups typically go to 30 minutes, and all title matches are no-time-limit bouts. Battles are to knockout or submission; unlike old-style 20th-century wrestling, pinfalls are not counted, though a combatant immobilized for longer than 30 seconds is generally considered to have effectively submitted. Matches that go to the time limit are generally considered draws, though matches between

## Is It Real, or....

Well, that depends. At heart, the XWF is a shootfight league. Most nova-level matches are not scripted or pre-determined, and a title contender must legitimately defeat the reigning champion.

That having been said, the XWF knows that entertainment is the name of the game. A technically sound grappling clinic between two stone-faced nova pancrase masters, while fascinating to aficionados of the martial arts, does not draw in the "marks" as much as a five-minute slugfest between two larger-than-life badasses who "hate each other's guts." People remember Ali because he was "the Greatest," sure, but his wit and braggadocio had as much to do with his fame.

To ensure maximum entertainment value (and revenues), the XWF Creative Department is in charge of inventing "angles" and "gimmicks" for its employees. Angles are "issues" — alliances, grudges, betrayals, romances and other soap-opera fodder — between two or more combatants. They are largely fictitious, though, fighting being what it is, some angles are quite real, and the XWF is all too eager to exploit any real bad blood between its employees. Angles are often set up in interviews and vignettes broadcast on MMM; some of these might involve a nova being "sneak-attacked," run over, dumped in gasoline and set on fire or otherwise abused by the combatant he'll be facing on the next show or PPV. These incidents, of course, are all (well, mostly) staged.

Once fight day rolls around, though, the fight itself is a shoot; may the best nova win. Well, usually. Sometimes, two novas will work a scripted match for a house show or charity event rather than risk injury before a big PPV. Then, too, the company knows when a particular nova is a money-maker, and it will sometimes pay off a less-popular contender to take a dive for the cash cow.

Novas willingly participate in this charade; two competitors who respect and even like each other behind the scenes might well vilify each other in prematch interviews, convincing the marks that they're ready to kill each other when they step into the Combat Zone.

combatants with very similar styles can be judged on points. One or more paraphysicians sit at ringside, and they have the authority to stop a fight (awarding the match to the opponent) if one combatant appears to be at risk of serious injury (has taken sufficient lethal damage to reduce her to Maimed on the Health chart).

Novas with lethal attacks typically compete in the Red or Black Circles only. Tor Fjellanger is very wary of booking lethal-attack wielders, and the Executive Committee typically pairs lethal fighters against each other (in a "live by the sword" philosophy). The XWF is a violent world, but the Committee does not want its paid-for franchises to die or suffer lasting injury if it can be avoided. Deaths can and do occur, however, and all combatants (including and especially mitoids) are required to sign liability waivers.

## Combatants

The ranks of XWF novas include everything from martial arts masters to bare-bones brawlers. One factor is paramount: The combatant must be able to put on a good show. Both her personality and powers must be geared toward making an exciting match. This trait, far more than the nova's actual ability, is the key to getting hired and marketed in the XWF. Novas who lack flash and panache, or at least a rugged badass charisma, tend not to be hired or to languish in the undercard, regardless of their ability to fight.

For example, a nova who surrounds herself with a devastating Immolate quantum field might well be a credible contender, but it's not entertaining to watch her stand there for 30 minutes while her bare-knuckle opponent tries to figure out a way to affect her. Likewise, a nova with the ability to control others' brainwaves might well be able to make an opponent submit with a glance — but that's not what a pay-per-view audience wants to see. Nothing affects the bottom line more than an audience chant of "BORING!", and so, novas with "subtle" powers or low-key personalities aren't generally sought by the promoters.

Generally speaking, Mega-Strength, Dexterity and Stamina, Armor, Force Field, Quantum Bolt, Flight and similar flashy powers will get you noticed.



## Jobbers

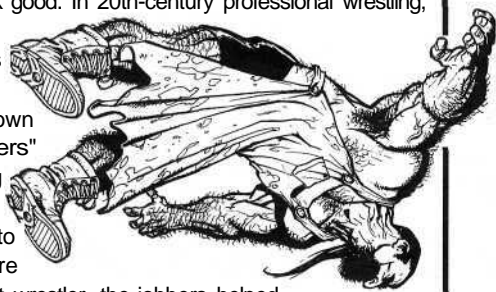
It is an old wrestling truism that every circuit needs its scrubs: the guys whose purpose is to make the real stars look good. In 20th-century professional wrestling, these hapless souls were known as "jobbers" by "doing the job" (losing) to a more prominent wrestler, the jobbers helped build interest in that wrestler.

Although the XWF bills itself as promoting non-scripted, no-holds-barred, nova-vs.-nova competition, this is not strictly true. While only a small percentage of bouts are outright faked, the XWF knows better than to run the risk of one of its nova superstars injuring him- or herself at a house show or other non-main-event bout. Then, too, novas willing to risk injury or death in the XWF are relatively few and far between. And so, the XWF maintains a pool of "jobbers" — dime-a-dozen preliminary fighters who can (sort of) look good in the arena but who can't hold a candle to the true novas on the circuit.

Jobbers are typically mitoids, snared through the web of Yai Lokampang and his Heaven Thunder connections. The XWF recruits such characters, using B.B. Bartlett's political clout and Jocelyn Silva's Utopia connections to get authorities to (thus far) look the other way. Typically, the XWF's Creative Department packages its recruited mitoids with ostentatious names, gimmicks and costumes designed to show off their chemically enhanced physiques. Indeed, the scrubs oftentimes have more outlandish personas and attire than the novas themselves, to detract from their rather bread-and-butter combat abilities (and, if the mitoid dies, the gimmick can simply be given to another scrub).

They are then, more or less, thrown to the wolves. Some mitoids battle each other in preliminary and undercard matchups, while "lucky" scrubs might get to battle an actual nova at a house show or other smaller venue. Due to the relative sparsity of novas, XWF shows often feature more mitoid matchups than nova vs. nova superfights; the public isn't typically even aware of the difference, so long as one of the "superdudes" does something cool like lift a car during the fight.

Generally speaking, novas try to take it easy on the jobbers, realizing that they need a supply of such opponents to pad their records. Nonetheless, a jobber's career is usually short-lived, as they tend to wind up maimed, crippled or dead. Ironically, the most common cause of jobber "permanent countout" is not injuries from fights, but cardiac arrest, as their systems collapse under the constant infusion of mite.



A few jobbers manage to survive (if not necessarily win) several bouts. These guys actually gain a small modicum of recognition, becoming minor characters in the XWF circus and being paid accordingly. Indeed, the OpNet hosts several OpNet sites and fan clubs devoted solely to "Butcher" Moretti, a tough-as-nails mitoid whose loud mouth and 0-36 win-loss record combine to make him a minor cult celebrity (he has the honor of having his spectacular four-second loss to Core memorialized in the intro clips of *Monday Mega-Massacre*).

## Championship Circles

Obviously, not all nova combatants are of equal ability. Nova A might be a whirlwind of destruction among baselines but be completely unable to penetrate the tank-shell-bouncing skin of Nova B. Accordingly, the XWF Executive Committee has declared three levels, or "circles," in which fighters may contend: the Silver, Red and Black Circles. A nova is assigned to a circle depending on her relative power level, as determined by a battery of tests and the quantum-sensing abilities of Tor Fjellanger. Generally, novas stay in one particular circle. However, if computer simulations and Fjellanger's intuition indicate that a particular combatant would have at least a fighting chance against a more "powerful" foe and (more importantly) the XWF promoters think it's a money matchup, the Executive Committee will usually make the match.

Within each circle, rankings based on win-loss record (and, unofficially, on considerations such as marketability) determine the relative position of combatants. Rookies start at the bottom and must work their way up the contendership ladder. To gain a title shot against the champion, a contender must scale the ranks until he gets a shot at the number-one contender, then must beat the number-one contender to get a title shot.

At least, this is the theory. In practice, the Executive Committee can and does make matches that they think will be interesting and revenue-generating, regardless of relative positions in the rankings. This sometimes leads to unscrupulous behind-the-scenes feuding, as a nova low on the contendership scale publicly badmouths or even ambushes the champ. Though the nova typically suffers a huge fine for doing this, the public often gets so interested in the bad blood that the Executive Committee declares a title shot for the upstart, in hopes of increasing pay-per-view buyrate. More than one nova punk has rocketed to main-event status in such a fashion.

### Silver Circle

Not all XWF combatants are monstrous brutes capable of juggling tanks. As the "lightweight" division

of the XWF, the Silver Circle hosts matches that, despite lacking the raw force or firepower of higher circles, provide some of the circuit's most spectacular displays of nova ability. Warriors of the Silver Circle can't necessarily lift a battleship, blast through that battleship or survive the aforementioned battleship being dropped on their head.

Nonetheless, they are most dangerous. Although seen by some of the more mouth-breathing fans as less "badass" than monsters like Core, Silver Circle combatants are often among the most skilled fighters, as they tend to rely on speed and ability over brute force. The Silver Circle division has played host to breathtaking aerial duels, contests of blinding super-speed and displays of inhuman martial prowess.

The Silver Circle Champion is considered the number-one contender to the Red Circle Champion's title and may challenge for it at any time. However, if the Silver Circle challenger loses, she must forfeit her championship and must work her way through the contendership ranks once more. For this reason, intercircle challenges take place only rarely.

In game terms, Silver Circle combatants rarely inflict more than 15 health levels of damage with an attack.

### Silver Circle Champion: La Arana

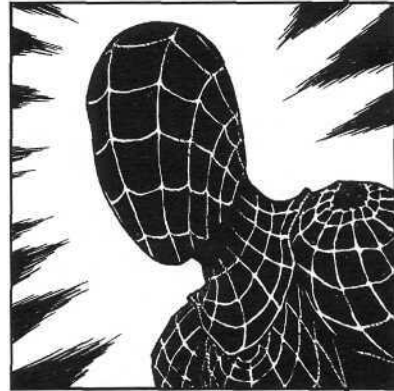
No one has seen the true face of Mexican contender La Arana, "The Spider." As swift and silent as the legendary ninja, La Arana can envelop a foe in shadow, close in and defeat the foe with a flurry of strikes without him getting a single shot in. Never speaking, she conducts all business through her manager.

La Arana slight of build but deceptively strong and blindingly fast. She wears a full black eufiber bodysuit and featureless mask, the whole adorned with silver "spiderweb" strands.

Notable Traits: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Mega-Strength 1 (Quantum Leap), Mega-Dexterity 4 (Accuracy, Enhanced Movement, Physical Prodigy, Rapid Strike), Mega-Stamina 3 (Durability, Resiliency), Holo 1, Shroud 2, Athletics 5, Martial Arts 5

### Red Circle

The "middleweight" range of XWFers, Red Circle fighters can throw and take nastier quantum punches than their Silver Circle counterparts but lack the sheer force of the Black Circle "heavies." The Red Circle



Champion is considered the number-one contender to the Black Circle championship and may challenge for the title, subject to the same restrictions as the Silver Circle champion.

In game terms, Red Circle fighters tend to inflict/withstand somewhere in the 15-20 health level range, with some exceptions on either side. This division is probably the most eclectic in terms of power levels and matchups, and this fact produces some of the most interesting contests on the circuit, as two fighters with completely different sets of quantum powers test their skills against each other.

## Red Circle Champion: Raja Ravana ("The Demon King")

No one knows the origin of this enigmatic competitor, who dominates the Red Circle with a diverse arsenal of raw strength, grappling skill, speed and fiery breath. A popular competitor, Ravana also involves himself in the burgeoning Mumbai film industry, where

he has been the villain/antihero in several action-adventure flicks.

Raja Ravana is rumored to have a human form, but no one has ever made any believable claim to have seen it. When fighting, filming or making public appearances, the Demon King appears as an imposing 6'6", red-skinned behemoth, with four sinewed arms, blazing red eyes and a ruby embedded in his brow.

Notable Traits: Mega-Strength 3, Mega-Dexterity 2 (Enhanced Movement), Mega-Stamina 1 (Adaptability, Durability, Regeneration), Mega-Wits 1 (Quickness), Armor 3, Body Modification: Extra Limbs, Quantum Bolt 3, Teleport 1, Arts (Acting) 2, Martial Arts 4, Dormancy 5

## Black Circle

This is for the true tanks: the guys who can lift buildings, blast through a fortified bunker or crush diamonds in their bare hands.

As the heavy hitters of the circuit, Black Circle combatants are among the most idolized, "household name" novas, despite the fact that they often substitute raw power for fighting skill. The Black Circle champion is considered the champion of the entire XWF, along with all the perks and responsibilities that entails.

In game terms, contenders seeking entry into the Black Circle should be able to routinely inflict and/or take 20+ health levels of damage.

## Black Circle Champion: Duke "Core" Baron

The most dominant figure in the sport, Core is arguably the most popular XWF combatant of all time. Born in a working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn, Core (then Louis Freeman) was a difficult child to control and left home at an early age. Learning to fight gave him a degree of discipline, and a stint in the Navy gave him some useful job skills, but Freeman was just too stubbornly individualistic to fit into a barracks or corporation.

His eruption left him confused, and his military time had made him less than trustful of the US government's goodwill, so when the intervention

teams came for him, he fled the country. Hooking up with Yai Lokampang, Freeman became a fixture of the shootfighting circuit and later the XWF. Core is a rough-hewn, intimidating fighter, as elemental and uncontrollable as the plasma he wields, but will go out of his way to counsel troubled youths as best he can.

Notable Traits: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 5, Mega-Strength 3, Mega-Dexterity 1, Mega-Stamina 4, Boost (Strength, Quantum Bolt) 4, Force Field 3, Immolate 3, Quantum Bolt 4 (Extra: Supercharge), Intimidation 5, Martial Arts 5, Quantum 4



## Other Noteworthy Contenders

### Rob "Superbeast" Steele

Nova with No Heart... Lord of the Dead... Corpsegrinder... these sobriquets and many more are given to feral XWF warrior Rob Steele, better known as the Superbeast. Relatively new to the XWF scene, Superbeast has slashed and clawed his way through the contenders' rankings, even gaining a couple of title shots at Core himself.

Out of the arena, Steele appears as any other baseline, albeit one with striking, rugged good looks and a perpetual two-day stubble. When preparing for battle, though, Steele accesses his quantum matrix, transforming himself into a savage, monstrous, semihuman man-beast. In this form, Steele uses his inhuman strength, athleticism and wicked tusks to rend his competition into submission.

Steele's brash charm and looks have made him immensely popular, and he is one of the XWF's most prized





draws. A singer of passing ability, Steele (in human form) sidelines as the frontman for a skew-metal band named (conveniently enough) Superbeast; the band's two albums, *Korpsgryndrr* and *Lord of the Dead*, sold respectably, though most critics

believe this was due to Steele's XWF rep rather than on their musical merits.

Notable Traits: Mega-Strength 4 (Quantum Leap), Mega-Dexterity 3 (Catfooted), Mega-Stamina 5 (Resilience), Armor 3, Claws 3, Athletics 5, Brawl 5, Perform 2, Dormancy 5

## Christine "The Terminatrix" Jesensky

This malevolent creature claims to represent the Teragen, though no known Teragen have substantiated her boasts. A shrieking fury in the ring, Jesensky alternates between the Red and Black Circles; she has had one title fight, though she lost. She gives a hell of an interview, claiming that she does battle in the XWF as a means of punishing those novas who would prostitute



themselves for the baseline masses; skeptics note that she cashes her prize checks like the rest.

In the ring, Jesensky stands nearly seven feet tall, with rough gray skin; a wide, sharklike mouth filled with pointed teeth; long barbed claws; and blank, staring black eyes. The promoters, and most of the other combatants, fear her and give her a wide berth. The baseline public finds her fascinating, though, and Jesensky "puts asses in seats," so she is tolerated for now.

Notable Traits: Mega-Strength 3 (Crush), Mega-Dexterity 3 (Accuracy, Rapid Strike), Mega-Stamina 4 (Adaptability, Regeneration), Claws 3, Disrupt 2, Brawl 5, Intimidation 5

Meiinda Guzman

At the age of 27, Meiinda Guzman is already an XWF icon. It is not for her size — she is a petite 5'3" — nor for her raw power — she commonly competes in the

Silver Circle division. Her win-loss record is not the greatest, though it is quite good. However, she is unique among the XWF's fighters in that she "ran the Triple Crown," which is to say that in 2007 she won the Silver Circle championship, used her number-one contender status to challenge for the Red Circle championship, won it, immediately challenged for the Black Circle championship and, in a stunning upset, defeated the reigning champion. Guzman's reign did not last long (she was dethroned during her second title defense), but nonetheless, the feat has forever earned her legendary, almost godlike, status among XWF contenders and fans alike. Considered the "Upset Queen," Guzman has made a career out of beating foes against whom, on paper, she shouldn't stand a chance.

Notable Traits: Mega-Strength 1, Mega-Dexterity 2 (Accuracy), Mega-Stamina 4, Mega-Charisma 1 (Dreadful Mien), Density Control (Increase) 1, Luck 5, Willpower 10

## The XWF Executive Committee

The true "big boys" of the XWF, the Executive Committee are the top managers and decision-makers of the promotion.

### B.B. Bartlett

Growing up in Houston, Texas, as the son and heir apparent to the Bartlett banking and consulting empire, William ("Billy") Blair Bartlett had a keen love of sports and a keener eye for "bidness." In high school, "B.B." was a standout athlete, lettering in football and winning several wrestling trophies; when he wasn't studying at his daddy's knee (in the process learning more about investment banking than most MBA grads twice his age), he was hitting the gym or the field in preparation for a pro football career. However, despite his lofty birth, B.B. just wasn't quite NFL caliber, and he languished in the second string at the University of Texas.

Bitterly disappointed, B.B. focused his considerable energies on his studies, with the result that he graduated summa cum laude from Harvard's MBA program. Moving back to Houston, B.B. voluntarily took a position as an entry-level business analyst for Bartlett Consulting, then worked his way through the firm's ranks on merit alone (or so he likes to tell his lovers and drinking buddies).

B.B. always had a true Texan's love of "rasslin"; he grew up on the old World Class Championship Wrestling, and as a college student avidly followed the WWF, WCW and ECW. During the wrestling boom of the late '70s, B.B. invested a considerable sum of money into the World Wrestling Federation IPO, buy-



ing enough shares to gain a position with the McMahon family on the WWF's Board of Directors. After the turn of the Nova Age, the public, hungry for novas, grew bored by the artificial theatrics of the WWF, and the company's stock nosedived. But where the McMahons saw ruin, Bartlett saw opportunity. Buying out the McMahons' shares, B.B. became the sole owner of the World Wrestling Federation in 2000. From there, he built the XWF empire and is the Chairman of the Executive Committee.

Bartlett is your classic "ruthless businessman"; to him, "bidness" is like sports, and both are like war. A Texas drawl and laconic manner conceal a steel-trap mind; if Bartlett sees a competitive advantage, he will run you over, nova or baseline, like a '78 Steelers blitz.

## Countess Isabella Bercaru

No one knows much about the deliberately cryptic Countess Bercaru or her claims to nobility. She first surfaced in the 1970s, as part of International Olympic Committee tyrant Juan Antonio Samaranch's coterie of hangers-on. A jetsetter and debutante, Bercaru has connections to the rich and famous everywhere. She has taken several of the XWF beefcakes

as lovers/pawns, using them in various underhanded and typically petty power plays.

The other members of the Committee find the Countess' affections grating, but her connections with world leaders and glitterati are invaluable. As a one-time lover of Teragen spokesperson Count Orzaiz, Bercaru is the XWF's meal ticket in the European and African markets.

## Yai Lokampang

Formerly a small-time promoter, Yai Lokampang ran bloody, underground pitfighting competitions in turn-of-the-century Thailand and Malaysia. When the nova boom hit, Lokampang saw the possibilities and quickly began promoting illegal nova-versus-human

or nova-versus-nova death matches. Expanding his operation to Japan, Lokampang hooked up with and ultimately managed the powerful nova Louis Freeman; the cagey promoter knew a meal ticket when he saw one. Of course, the Nakato and Heaven Thunder Triad came looking for their cut, and Yai readily joined the latter, seeing it as a powerful source of connections and favors.

When the XWF began consolidating and legitimizing the shootfight leagues, Lokampang quickly assimilated his stable of fighters, most notably Freeman (now known as Duke "Core" Baron) into the division.

Recognizing Lokampang's familiarity with shootfight promotion, as well as his knowledge of the expansive Asian market, B.B. Bartlett offered Lokampang a seat on the Executive Committee.

Next to Flair, Lokampang is the most "hands-on" promoter; he keeps the mite coming and is invaluable in planning overall operations strategy. Still, Bartlett distrusts Lokampang and has warned him on several occasions to keep his blatantly illegal dealings separate from the XWF — at least separate enough to keep the Justice Department at bay.

## Jocelyn Silva

A former Utopia employee, Jocelyn Silva maintains close ties with the Project. She is invaluable to the success of the XWF, as Silva's connections enable the company to maintain smooth and harmonious relations with Utopia's administration. Additionally, Silva's international connections serve the XWF in good stead when negotiating with venue owners for pay-per-view and TV broadcasts. Silva monitors the condition and treatment of XWF employees, keeps Utopia properly apprised of the XWF's operations and handles joint XWF-Utopia public-relations efforts.

In reality, Silva is a member of Project Proteus. Acting on orders from Director Thetis herself, Silva ensures that XWF novas adhere to vigorous training regimens, which allows the Project to constantly monitor the novas' vital signs, quantum-expenditure rates and other vagaries of their bodies. Sometimes Silva, acting through intermediaries, sends a particularly talented fighter out to do a "small errand" in exchange for a title shot or makes sure that a potentially troublesome nova is prematurely pushed into a



more prestigious (and likely injurious or fatal) match against far superior competition.

## **Ric Flair ("The Nature Boy")**

To be the man, you gotta beat the man! And as far as the XWF is concerned, acting CEO "Nature Boy" Ric Flair is still "The Man."

Ric Flair is as old-school as they come; he was a mainstay of pro wrestling from the 1970s through the late '90s, where he "walked the aisle" in his trademark sequined robes, accompanied by a bevy of "lovely" ladies, to the strains of "Thus Spake Zarathustra." More often than not, he walked back victorious, bearing one of the over 15 recognized World titles that he held during his checkered career. A classic wrestling "heel" or bad guy, Flair was nonetheless

loved around the world for his work ethic, showmanship, panache and, well, flair. When the XWF Executive Committee needed an acting chief executive and public spokesperson, they approached the ex-champ. Already a successful manager of several gyms, Flair took to his more extensive duties with aplomb.

Today, Flair is a white-haired patriarch approaching 60, yet still walks with a champion's poise and presence. As acting president of the XWF, Flair routinely contends with some of the most godlike presences and colossal egos on the planet, yet backs down from no one. ("I was goin' 60 minutes with Ricky 'The Dragon' Steamboat when you were a quantum-powered stain in your daddy's briefs, boy! Now put down my Lear Jet — and not a scratch on it, or I'll fine the quantum right outta yer ass --- and pack your bags for the Seattle show like I tell ya! And just for that, yer ridin' Coach! Woooo!")

## **N'dolu Nyala ("The Power Monger")**

Hailing from the war-torn territory formerly known as Sudan, N'dolu Nyala apparently erupted in the early 21st century. Receiving military training, Nyala first served his nation as a soldier, then became an elite, then forsook that life for the glamour of the XWF.

Entering the circuit in 2005, Nyala made a brief splash, but his powers (the ability to supercharge his quantum matrix, thus boosting his strength, durability, speed and reaction time) were not on the level of the heavy hitters like Core; moreover, while his military background had made him a good fighter, the true

pros left concepts like "good" in the dust, and Nyala with them. Accordingly, Nyala's win-loss record began to drop, his time in the XWF's infirmary began to rise, and he retired from active competition at the end of the year.

Resigned to a job in the XWF's PR department or, worse, pimping himself to a toy company, Nyala's fortunes changed when he discovered that he could augment the quantum matrix of other living beings. The Executive Committee was elated; Nyala's powers, coupled with whatever shit-for-brains baseline losers and wannabes stepped up to the plate in search of glory and fortune, provided an endless stream of disposable scrubs.

Today, Nyala (dubbed the "Power Monger" by XWF employees) is an important executive in the XWF's recruitment and training programs. Under his guidance, the XWF marketing division runs ad campaigns — normally word-of-mouth, but also on appropriate electronic forums — directed at "appropriate" target markets (gym rats, weekend warriors, baseline shootfighters and boxers, nova enthusiasts). These ads promise a "drug-free" chance at becoming a "nova-class" XWF combatant, along with all the fame and fortune that entails. Applicants are directed to an XWF training facility, where they endure an arduous military-style regimen of weightlifting, squats, cardiovascular exercises and other conditioning. Ninety percent of applicants drop out of the program on the first day. The "survivors," in the best shape of their lives, go on to receive basic training in wrestling, boxing and/or karate, and the best of these are used as grist for the Power Monger's augmentation techniques.

Generally speaking, Nyala's powers enable him to augment another living being's quantum matrix; the level of this augmentation depends on the health of the being in question. An adult of normal physical fitness might be boosted to the level of an Olympic weightlifter/gymnast/sprinter, while an extremely fit individual undergoing the Power Monger's treatment might find herself capable of lifting 10 tons or so, with correspondingly superhuman reflexes and/or durability.

## **Tor Fjellanger**

One of the most highly paid nova employees of the XWF, Oslo native Tor Fjellanger has no combat experience and has never stepped inside an XWF arena. Nonetheless, Fjellanger is instrumental to the organization's continued function. An investment banker by trade, Fjellanger erupted in 2004 and gained the power to register and evaluate novas' quantum signatures with uncanny accuracy. Contracting his services through the DeVries Agency, Fjellanger came to the attention of the nascent XWF, who bought out his contract and offered him a position as XWF talent scout and evaluator.





Fjellanger was instrumental in the creation of the different XWF divisions, as he used his quantum-reading powers to evaluate the relative power levels of the XWF's nova contenders, then assigned them to appropriate circles. Now, in addition

to evaluating potential new talent, Fjellanger supervises matchups and booking decisions, making sure that all combatants are healthy and of reasonably equal ability. Though not a trained physician, Fjellanger's diagnoses of combatants' quantum signatures have helped immeasurably in the treatment of injuries.

## New Combat Maneuvers

- **Submission Hold:** A variant of a Hold or Clinch, the Submission Hold is designed to cause an opponent such excruciating pain that she submits, or "taps out." The attacker makes a normal Hold roll, but at +1 difficulty. Each turn the attacker maintains the Submission Hold, he may roll Brawl or Martial Arts against the victim's Resistance. If the attacker scores more successes than the victim, the victim loses one point of temporary Willpower for each success above her Resistance successes. When the victim is reduced to zero Willpower, she submits to the hold and concedes victory.

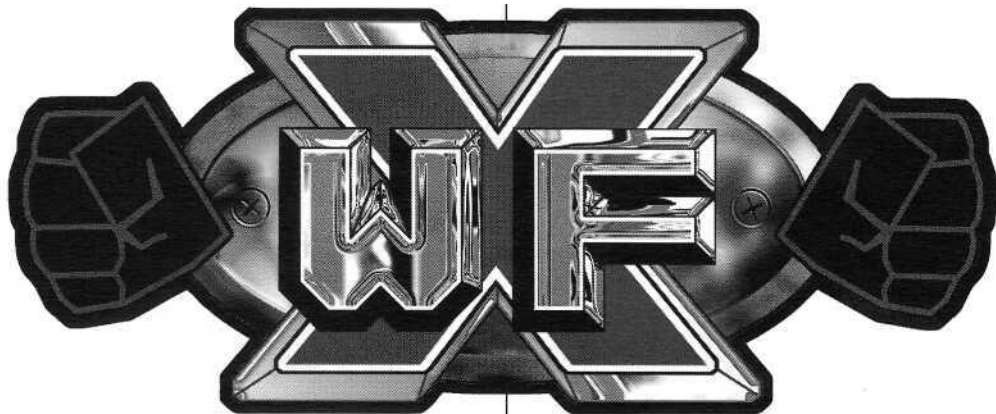
A Submission Hold may be escaped normally, or countered. To counter, the defender rolls Brawl or Martial Arts instead of Resistance; success indicates the defender escapes and traps the opponent in a Submission Hold of her own; however, failure on the countering roll means the defender does not receive a Resistance roll to resist the submission effects this turn.

Willpower points lost from a Submission Hold are regained at the rate of one per five minutes.

- **Aerial Splash:** This maneuver may be performed only by a fighter with Quantum Leap, Flight or a similar power. The fighter jumps into the air, then crashes down on top of her foe. This maneuver is treated as a Tackle and is made at +2 difficulty, but the fighter adds +2 dice of damage for each point of Mega-Strength (if using Quantum Leap) or Flight (if using that power), plus an additional two dice for each level of Density Control (Increase). If the fighter misses, she lands on the ground, takes half the damage she would have dished out had she successfully executed the move and is considered Knocked Down.

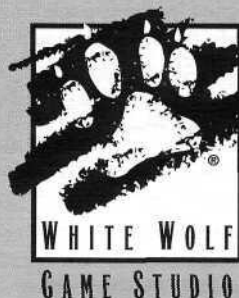
Showy fighters often incorporate twists, flips or other flourishes into their splashes; the champion in this regard is Silver Circle fighter Mariko Yukiko and her 5470° Explosion Death Press.

- **Piledriver:** This broad category may also be used to simulate any of a number of moves that drill an opponent on his head, such as the brainbuster or DDT. To execute a Piledriver, the attacker must engage the target in a Hold, then immobilize him for a full turn. On the following turn, the attacker may make a Brawl roll, resisted by the opponent's Might. If the attacker succeeds, the victim is spiked on his skull, knocked down, suffers Str +4 damage and is considered to have only half normal Stamina (round up) for purposes of determining whether he is Dazed (**Aberrant**, p. 249).



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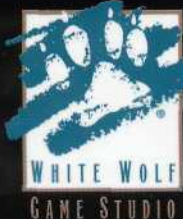


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