

PILED RIVER DEPT.

VIVE LA LUTTE LIBRE

From pipe dream to pipe bomb: hardcore wrestling and Quebec

BY ADAM LEITH GOLLNER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARLOS & JASON SANCHEZ

It's Monday night in Laval. Outside Bar Le Skratch, a half-hour drive outside of Montreal, goggles and surgical masks are being handed out to people waiting to get in. A sheet of paper taped to the door flutters in the cold wind, like an inscription on the gates of Hell. "The Internet Wrestling Syndicate (IWS) will not be held responsible for any injuries sustained while watching the event. Such injuries include: cuts and minor lacerations, bruising, broken bones, trophy shots to the gonads, burns due to fire, burns due to electricity, and, last but not least, heart attacks."

That's *outside* the ring. What will happen *in* the ring is another matter. It's "Fans Bring The Weapons" night, and the audience is brandishing a crude arsenal of homemade weapons for the wrestlers to use. Calling themselves "soldiers," these fans are hungry for blood—and the modern Quebec wrestling scene will soon give them what they want.

Founded in 1998, the IWS attracts thousands of fans with the sheer insanity of its live performances. To use the federation's own words, it is "the only truly innovative, sexually appealing and realistically violent show in the country." A unique triangulation indeed.

Inside the bar, the excitement mounts. Aficionados compare objects of destruction: cheese graters, panes of

glass, baseball bats wrapped in barbed wire and even razor blade-coated bottles full of vinegar and salt. The most impressive of all, though, is a twelve-foot cross made out of neon light tubes covered in thumbtacks and mousetraps.

"What we do is very extreme," explains the federation's owner and president, PCP Crazy Fucking Manny. "The IWS is for hardcore fans who want to watch the ring literally explode. We have explosives attached to the ropes, barbed-wire matches, neon tubes getting smashed in wrestlers' faces, thumbtacks on the ring mat. We have pyro going off, roaring crowds and babes doing hot oil wrestling at halftime. We give fans an 18+ show other federations just can't do. People who don't like WWE [World Wrestling Entertainment] like us."¹

BARELY LEGAL

Because there is no athletic commission in Quebec regulating hardcore wrestling, it's the only place in North America where the IWS can exist.

The last time this sort of violent entertainment surfaced here was in 1996, when the International Fighting Championships (IFC) held no-holds-barred cage matches in Kahnawake. Following numerous arrests that made national headlines, the provincial government, ever at the vanguard, passed groundbreaking legislation fully legalizing this type of combat in 1998.²

Whether the wrestling activities of Manny and his hordes will have similar ramifications on the judiciary system remains to be seen. For now, the IWS is enjoying widespread underground notoriety. Groups of violence lovers (most of them barely legal themselves) make the pilgrimage to IWS shows from all over the United States, Ontario and Quebec, and countless more log on to the federation's weekly Web casts. Relative newcomers like the Hardcore Ninjaz, two young brothers who started out doing moves like the Japanese Nutcracker and the Pearl Harbor at wild shows in their Fabreville backyard, have, thanks to the IWS, become high-flying celebrities on the suburban wrestling circuit.

Even aging wrestlers have joined the league to taste some of their former glory. As one half of The Quebecers, Pierre-Carl Ouellet won the WWF tag-team championship belt three times in the early 1990s. "IWS is number one right now," says Ouellet.³ "And if one of the Ninjaz does a moonsault from the second rope and lands on a bunch of girls in the second row, there won't be any lawsuits. Why? Because the audience here just knows how it works. Wrestling is really, really a part of Québécois culture."

While Canada has always produced its share of world-class wrestlers—the Hart brothers, "Rowdy" Roddy Piper, Killer Kowalski—Quebec has been a



The Green Phantom

breeding ground for the craziest ones of all. This province's long and illustrious wrestling history is studded with legends like Maurice "Mad Dog" Vachon, André the Giant, Gilles "The Fish" Poisson and Tom Pouce (a little person notorious for fighting bears in the ring).

"When I was young, wrestling was on TV every Sunday morning at eleven," recalls Ouellet, now thirty-five. "It was church or *Sur Le Matelas*, and 95 percent of kids chose wrestling. We grew up with it. Local heroes like Dino Bravo and Rick Martel have always been part of the culture here."

Historically, the motifs of wrestling have resonated throughout Quebec society, in labour struggles, linguistic struggles, religious struggles and even the struggles to digest *casse-croûte* poutines. The French word for "struggle" is

actually the exact same as the word for "wrestling": *lutte*. *La lutte souverainiste* is how politicians refer to the separatist movement. This homonymous overlap typifies the symbiotic relationship between wrestling and Quebec independence.

CATHOLIC BLOOD

Wrestling venues themselves serve as signifiers—matches often take place in church basements. Churches have traditionally been sites of conflict for Quebecers: one of the early battles in the war for sovereignty was over the right to attend church in French. The fact that bloody wrestling matches are now staged in these spaces reflects an even larger cultural phenomenon: a plunging rate of church attendance in a province that once prided itself on its piety. As the priest in Denys Arcand's recent film,

Les Invasions barbares, says, "And at a very precise moment—in 1966, in fact—the churches emptied out suddenly, in just a few months. A very strange phenomenon, that no one was ever able to explain."

The modernizations brought about by the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s have affected Quebec more significantly than its failed attempts to separate from Canada. French is now a necessary language for business and the linguistic river down which both anglophone and immigrant children flow into schools and, later, the job market. Although Quebec has not become its own country, the reality is that, socially, it has become increasingly distinct.

This is, after all, a strange and mysterious place. How else to explain this province's unlikely fascination with

¹ Thanks to what is now called World Wrestling Entertainment, pro wrestling has achieved massive popularity over the past two decades. Better known under its previous moniker, the World Wrestling Federation (WWF), Vince McMahon's \$350-million-per-year operation was forced to change its name in 2002 after the World Wildlife Federation won a protracted legal case concerning the use of the initials "WWF."

² The IFC rules have since become the official rules for no-holds-barred fighting in Quebec. Some holds are now banned, and disqualification occurs after any combination of three fouls, including violations such as biting, eye gouging, groin techniques and fish hooking of the mouth. Since the sport's acceptance as a legitimate form of entertainment, IFC events have been witnessed by millions of viewers the world over on the federation's television network. (The IFC's first major video release was a bestseller in the United States, reaching #17 on Billboard's Recreational Sports Video chart.) The IFC is the first native-owned company in the inter-

national sports television industry and is linked to a First Nations casino-consulting business called CalHolding Inc. The "special services" section of CalHolding's Web site explains that, alongside the IFC, the company offers covert surveillance (with "identification of suspicious activity"), negotiating services for tribes, and VIP protection services, with a staff that includes a graduate of "FBI Hostage Rescue School [and] US Secret Service VIP Protection School."

³ "I've been in love with this business since I was twelve years old," says Ouellet about his start as a wrestler. "Like every Canadian, my dream was to play hockey. But at the age of twelve, I got shot by accident with a pellet gun in my right eye while playing cowboys and Indians, so the hockey dream fell apart. We actually weren't using pellets, we were using pick-up sticks. I was hiding behind the counter and my friend got me right in the eye. I pulled the stick out and the blood came out big time. Right then I decided to become a wrestler. At the age of sixteen I was in the ring; by the age of nineteen, I was on the road all over the country."



Sex Exxxpress

country and western music and with all things medieval?

“The audience acts differently in Quebec, but I don’t know why,” shrugs Ouellet. After considering it for a moment, he adds, “I guess going to a wrestling show makes people live the emotions that they’ve kept inside them all week.”

PENETRATING INSIGHTS

A little-seen film from 1971 entitled *Continuons le combat* sheds more light on the role wrestling plays in Quebec society. The first film by renowned filmmaker Pierre Falardeau (who went on to make *Elvis Gratton* and the controversial *Octobre*), it consists of images of Quebec wrestlers accompanied by the director’s sociological voice-over. The film views wrestling as a ritual that helps spectators come to grips with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. “If we let ourselves be penetrated by wrestling,” says Falardeau, “we will see that wrestling is trying to speak to us about Québécois society.”

The October Crisis⁴ was in the air when Falardeau conceived his documentary, and the opening scenes of the film are highly charged: protesters in the streets chant “SOS FLQ! Continuons le combat!”

Intellectuals like Falardeau believed that wrestling was a symbol of their people’s struggle. “Wrestling is a ritual,” narrates Falardeau, meditating over images of entranced fans in smoke-filled arenas. “Rituals bring us into the world of symbolism . . . They make us understand things at once—that is their power.”

Continuons le combat insinuates that Quebecers’ disappointments at not achieving independence are avenged through the melodrama of wrestling. The spectacle offers separatists a taste of victory, a glimmer of freedom, as a subsumed bloodlust finally bursts to the surface. “In life,” explains Falardeau, “French Canadians are heroes; in wrestling, we are the champions. The world champions.” Not only can the neon cross of subservience be smashed, it can

be smashed in the face of the oppressors. Now that it’s covered in thumbtacks and mousetraps, all the better.

Falardeau seems to conclude that wrestling is a dissipation of valuable political energy, and thus a hindrance to the fight for emancipation.⁵

But is it?

WELCOME BACK, FLQ

Over the past year, some “hardcore separatist wrestling” developments have had repercussions that transcend the boundaries of mere pastime. Calling themselves the Syndicat de Lutte Internet (SLI), wrestlers Damian and Le Viking, alongside their coach Fred La Merveille, have become a main draw at IWS events.

“It all started in January 2003,” explains Damian. “We were fighting racist matches as [a tag-team called] the Angry Aryans, where we would fight black guys like Face of Death. After one match Manny decided we needed a new gimmick. He told us to get on the mic and say, ‘Look, we don’t hate blacks, and we don’t hate Jews. That was just what the IWS wanted us to say. Who we really hate the most is English Quebecers!’ So I went on and I said I hate anglophones, and the crowd freaked out. When we got on the mic in French, it was the first time the French people in the audience were able to get involved.”

“It’s literally insane,” says PCP Crazy Fucking Manny. “Since January, tons and tons of French fans have been pouring into our shows. We started out as an English fed, but now we’re half and half. The pro-Quebec crowd is going up against the pro-English crowd. Half the crowd will sing that song they sing on St. Jean Baptiste day, and the other half will sing ‘O Canada.’ I’ve never seen anything like that. They aren’t fighting, but the flags are waving. It’s the most successful gimmick since Gorgeous George first came out of the closet.”

“It turns out that there were a bunch of FLQ members in the crowd,” recalls Damian. “After the show, they told us to remember what René Lévesque said, and that we needed to say it on the mic. It was pretty weird that people

would take it so seriously, but a lot of them did. They took it way more seriously than the Aryan thing because they knew that was just a gimmick. Even though we said, ‘Come on, it’s just a show, have fun and calm down,’ some of these French people really believed what we were saying. I thought it was a good gimmick, but I never realized it would become so huge.”

What came next was beyond anyone’s expectations.

People started spray-painting FLQ slogans on the sides of buildings after matches and posting the photos on the IWS chat board. This past October, several IWS fans were among a group of seven young men arrested in Baie d’Urfé, an anglophone suburb of Montreal. After taking a chainsaw to the town hall’s flagpole, the suspects were apprehended and discovered to be in possession of homemade pipe bombs.

The men claimed to be linked to convicted FLQ founder Raymond Villeneuve. Now the leader of the Mouvement de libération nationale du Québec, a group that has threatened bloodshed should Quebec ever be partitioned, the sixty-year-old Villeneuve has denied any involvement in the Baie d’Urfé events. In interviews after the arrests, however, he suggested that, as the dream of a sovereign Quebec slips further into the realm of the unreal, the struggle for independence will become more violent.⁶ “There is no limit,” Villeneuve stated. “The Algerians, the Palestinians, they kill themselves because they are occupied.”

“So two of our fans spent a month in jail for their FLQ activities,” says Damian. “They’ll be at our next show. Their friends sent me emails saying I need to get on the mic to ‘help the prisoners of war.’ Sometimes they take it really seriously. English people just boo me—it’s nothing fancy like the French.”

“People just love it,” gushes Manny. “When the Liberals ousted the Parti Québécois by winning the elections, the SLI got in the ring and started crying, ‘It’s a sad day in Quebec.’ People were chanting ‘Restons fort’ [‘Remain strong,’ the PQ’s slogan] like crazy. It’s great that we can do this all in fun. Sure, some guys are spray-painting



Hardcore Ninjaz

‘FLQ’ on the sides of buildings, but it’s just a joke.”

Although some might counter that there are no jokes in the subconscious, the story resonates eerily with Falardeau’s *Continuons le combat*. (None of the IWS fighters interviewed had ever seen, or even heard of, the documentary.) Adding to the oddness is the fact that a new wrestling federation has appeared calling itself the FLQ—the Fédération Lutte Québécoise, or, as its tagline puts it, “La Fédération qui dérange au Québec!”

“The IWS is mainly an English fed,” says Pierre-Carl Ouellet. “And even though some people chant ‘En français, en français,’ they don’t really care whether it’s in English or French.”

REDHEADED MEXICAN ARABS

Perhaps another reason fans accept the IWS is its multiculturalism. Greek, African, First Nations, Middle Eastern: the IWS ranks are as diverse as the average Montreal classroom. One of the federation’s stars is El Generico, a

nineteen-year-old redheaded Arab who fights as a masked Mexican.⁷

Quebec has changed in the past thirty years, and wrestling has changed right along with it. Ever since then-premier Jacques Parizeau blamed the separatist defeat in the 1995 referendum on the “ethnic vote,” it’s been clear that there are more than just *maudits anglais* and *francophones purselaines* living here. Parizeau’s ill-advised comments showed how out of step he was with the new Quebec: in trying to draw on the old tradition of demonizing minorities, he became an instant fossil.

“Wrestling used to be quite racist in Quebec,” says Sunny War Cloud, a Native veteran of the circuit who wrestled around the world during the 1980s and today fights with the IWS. Although Sunny claims that he himself was not a victim of this xenophobia, he also concedes that he wasn’t able to wrestle very often in Quebec and was forced to make a living in other territories. “There was no room for me

⁴ Compared to the brutality in places like the Basque region and Northern Ireland, the struggle for independence in Quebec has been a quiet affair. Feelings of impotent rage that, in other societies, have led to death and carnage, here have been suppressed—with one exception: in October of 1970, a radical cell called the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) kidnapped the British trade commissioner, James Cross, and the Quebec labour minister, Pierre Laporte. Previously, the FLQ had been responsible for over two hundred bombings as well as numerous bank robberies. As a result of the kidnappings, then prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act and brought in the Canadian army, sealing off all bridges to the island of Montreal. Cross was eventually freed, but Laporte’s strangled body was found in the trunk of a car at the St. Hubert Airport parking lot.

⁵ IWS wrestler Damian agrees that wrestling is therapeutic for the audience: “A lot of people have always gone to shows just to say bad things to the bad guys. They come to cheer for the heroes, and they scream at bad people because it’s a *défolement* [letting off steam]. It’s like healing, you know? It finally feels good to say all

the bad things that build up inside of you. You get bad news during the day, and you go to the wrestling match to lay all your bullshit, all your frustrations on the wrestlers, and then you don’t feel bad anymore. You feel good after the match.”

⁶ Villeneuve has been predicting this moment since at least 1997, when he told the Montreal Mirror, “It’s true that I said ‘Canadians, go home.’ And it’s true that I said that partition leads to war, confrontation and bloodbath. And it’s true that last year I said that if Quebec ever found itself in a particular situation—though I admit that I never adequately defined what that situation would be, which is all for the better—I said we’d burn their homes, their cars and their stores with Molotov cocktails. Molotov cocktails are wonderful, extraordinary instruments. They do more damage than a tank, and they’re easier to transport from place to place. And there’s not an army in the world that can stop the widespread sale of gasoline.”



PCP Crazy Fucking Manny

here, so I needed to go elsewhere. Germany, Japan, South Africa.”⁸

“In the eighties, people were more racist in general,” suggests Manny. “Hulk Hogan used to battle ‘savage jungle monsters’—black men with tribal face paint and spears. Society changed and we aren’t racist anymore. Wrestling just went with the flow.”

THE NEW VIOLENCE

In old-school wrestling, the story was all-important, with good guys (“baby-faces”) going against bad guys (“heels”). Fans cheered for their babyface heroes and spewed vitriol against the heels, who were often visible minorities.

Fans in Quebec now worship violence above all else, as IWS shows like “Praise the Violence” testify. Instead of a fear of strangers being played out, wrestling today is a glorification of how current affairs are out of control. “People still boo the bad guy and cheer the good guy,” explains Manny, “but if a match is insane they cheer for both. Even if somebody is a heel and gets the living shit kicked out of him, the audience will stand up and applaud and give them respect. They appreciate the

violence much more than the good guy/bad guy thing.”

This new breed of wrestling has come a long way from Sunday morning fun for the whole family. Now it is adults-only shows held at night in dumpy bars and clubs like Le Skratz, Wally’s Pub or Le Medley. Gone are the days when four thousand people turned out every Monday night at the Paul Sauvé arena and fifteen thousand people attended monthly WWF shows at the Montreal Forum. The WWE only comes to Montreal twice a year now, and there are never any Quebec wrestlers in the championship bouts anymore.

Dozens of smaller federations have rushed in to fill the vacuum, providing excessive do-it-yourself alternatives for fans tired of an increasingly corporate WWE’s clichés.

Cuyon County, just across the border in Ontario, is Universal Wrestling Association (UWA) territory. At Cuyon’s annual fair, beyond the cotton candy and the Ferris wheel, the headline event in the ragtag ring is midget wrestling: the Infernal Colonel vs. Funny Boy. Explains UWA co-booker Mark Andrews, “Midgets are what

people want to see.” These diminutive fighters are also, on occasion, pitted against children, as in a recent match between the 244-pound thirteen-year-old Mad Max and the 113-pound adult Little Broken.

Other regional treats include humans battling live bears, or performances by very young fighters, such as eight-year-old “Bone Crusher” or ten-year-old Cédric Rougeau, the fourth generation of an illustrious Quebec wrestling family.⁹

Particularly harrowing is a new phenomenon called bum fighting. It consists of homeless people fighting each other and getting beaten up by skinheads, as well as being subjected to degradations such as “milkings” (in which an unidentified liquid gets poured over their heads). Last year Montreal entrepreneur Adam Guerbuez released a bum fighting video called *Crazypricks Disturbing the Peace*. Although their Web site was subsequently shut down, Guerbuez and his associates allegedly sold thousands of copies of the video.

This sort of maverick outsider aesthetic may be shockingly amoral, but it is proof that not everything has evolved in this now multicultural scene. Certain forms of discrimination still fester in wrestling entertainment. Quebec may have been the first place in Canada where women had access to legal abortions, but the role of women in wrestling remains one of sexual objectification, from pornographic hot oil shows to erotic grappling.¹⁰ Midgets don’t exactly relish the gig. And shouldn’t there be some sort of legislation regarding drugged bears being forced into matches in church basements?

KIDDIE PORN

“A lot of kids think they can make it big by hurting themselves,” says fifteen-year-old James McGee, who, along with partner Mike “Ice” Daponte, also fifteen, has been in backyard wrestling since he was eight years old. Using mattresses and rope to build wrestling rings in their backyards, preteens stage amateur shows for tiny

audiences consisting of their hockey buddies and a few appalled grown-ups (perhaps even a friendly neighbourhood pederast or two). These demented performances are often far more painful than anything ever attempted by “professional” television wrestlers, as the *Best of Backyard Wrestling* video series amply demonstrates (“I’m horrified” was Oprah’s reaction).

Why are suburban kids creating training camps in their own backyards and jumping off their roofs onto flaming trampolines? For the adrenalin rush? Celebrity? A glimpse of God? “We did it because our goal is to become professional wrestlers,” says McGee.

Once teens like McGee and Daponte tire of the broken bones, they either quit wrestling or start training regularly (at places like Jacques Rougeau’s wrestling school, located in a flea market on Highway 401). Training involves lots of practice matches and bumping drills, like the “full blast,” in which the wrestlers jump up as high as they can, kick their legs out and throw themselves down back-first—thirty-five times in a row.

Manny runs a school as well. Doubling as the production office for Internet porn company Wild Rose Productions¹¹ during daylight hours, the IWS training academy is a port-hole into another dimension. Seeing scrawny fifteen-year-old kids get piledriven by four-hundred-pound men in spandex is strange enough; seeing it while dozens of televisions stream porn in the background is literally dizzying.

The kids, however, seem to be enjoying their wrestling classes. “To us IWS is better than WWE—you can quote me on that,” says McGee, wiping the sweat off his brow.

“All our followers have the same attitude as the fed: fuck authority,” says Manny. “They come see us because they’re getting the real deal. We go all the way. It’s not us versus the other feds in Quebec—it’s us versus the world.”



Commissioner Joseph Fitzmorris

REALITY HURTS

It’s this messianic fervour that compels the wrestlers to endure so much pain in the ring. They aren’t doing it for the money—can you really attach a dollar figure to having all your hair ripped out in three fistfuls or being pummelled by an overweight assailant with a staple gun? They’re doing it because they believe.

“We love the pain,” says Manny. “When you have all the fans screaming and you know it’s coming, you don’t even feel it. You have such an adrenalin rush that you’re able to ignore it. You just keep going.”

At a recent match, an IWS wrestler was set on fire. “We had four fire extinguishers on him within seconds, but I imagine that was pretty painful for him. We played it up like he got burned to a crisp, but it still must have hurt.”

IWS wrestlers like the Ninjaz, Sex Exxxxpress, Beef Wellington and “The Natural” Big Steve Royds have had their share of stitches, major cuts, dislocated shoulders, concussions and run-of-the-mill lacerations. “It just goes to show that it’s real,” cont-

inues Manny, himself missing two front teeth from the time IWS Commissioner Fitzmorris hit him in the face with a chair. “No matter how many people think it’s fake, you can’t fake concussions, you can’t fake your teeth flying into the crowd and you can’t fake thumbtacks being stuck in your skin. My back is like a railroad map of scars.”

Whether people even care if it’s fake or not, they are turning out in droves to see these shows. As Roland Barthes explains in his essay on wrestling in *Mythologies*, “what matters is not what [the public] thinks but what it sees.”

It’s hard to say whether wrestling will be able to regain its status as the opiate du jour of the Quebec masses. Although the separatist hope seems to have dimmed, this province’s history has proven that the pipe dream can become the pipe bomb. Quebecers certainly appreciate the entertainment value of fighting, but do they still believe that their unique society is worth fighting for—worth dying for?

continued on next page . . .

⁷ Here, like elsewhere in North America, ironic racism has become a way of showing friendship and camaraderie. Wrestlers affectionately call each other “nigga” or “French pig.” “I like being insulted,” explains Damian. “Fag” is a common word that people scream out. When I fought in . . . the Angry Aryans, people used to call me a ‘fucking Jew.’ Now they call me a ‘fucking frog,’ but I like that. It’s part of the business. If you don’t like it, you don’t like wrestling. It’s funny racial jokes, but not in a bad way. Our audience is mature enough to understand that it’s a game.”

⁸ While hospitalized for a year (“J’ai stoppé for one year parce que j’avais des problèmes de cocaïne” is how he puts it), Sunny War Cloud missed his chance to wrestle in the WWE. “If I wasn’t sick in the hospital with my cocaine problem, I would’ve been in the WWF—but they took Tatanka instead. Tatanka is a copy of me.” Drug abuse is rampant in wrestling. One promoter from Two Mountains interviewed for this story said that Jake “The Snake” Roberts’ 2001 contract stipulated that crack be provided immediately upon his crossing the Quebec-US border.

⁹ Cédric’s father, Jacques “The Mountie” Rougeau, won numerous championship bouts in the WWF and, with Pierre-Carl Ouellet, made up the tag team The Quebecers. Cédric’s great-uncle, Jean “Johnny” Rougeau, also a pro wrestler, at one point worked as a bodyguard for Parti Québécois leader René Lévesque.

¹⁰ Self-described “erotic wrestler” Geneviève Fleury charges clients two hundred dollars an hour to grapple in a ring in her apartment. Fleury uses “acrobatic maneuvers to make you submit” and everything else in her repertoire to otherwise “fulfill your wrestling needs”: “The goal of this one is to show you that I can dominate you easily with my strength and body to make you submit . . . I could start with a head scissor, or I could lift you and carry you.” As Fleury puts it, “The man who enjoys sado-maso in general appreciates this type of wrestling.”

¹¹ That Danny Cox, the proprietor of Wild Rose Productions, also co-owns the IWS, as one fan site puts it, “the worst kept secret in Canada.” Local Internet porn stars like Elsa Bangz and “President” Seska work overtime during between-match hot oil performances.

"A fantastic Canadian hybrid"

—SEATTLE WEEKLY

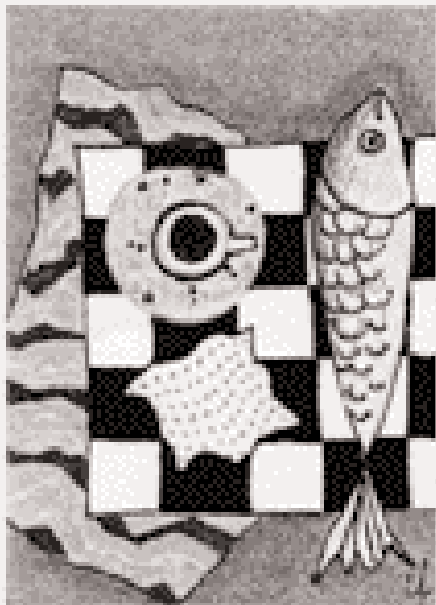


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THROUGH BROKEN GLASS, DARKLY Backstage at Bar Le Skratz, the wrestlers nurse their many wounds, discussing the evening's highlights.

"I'm always gonna love 'Fans Bring the Weapons' night," says Beef Wellington, shaking his head. "Seeing a grown man whipping a TV at another man's head is really crazy."

"When you get hit with something like that, you bleed like crazy," affirms four-hundred-pound Dru Onyx, who recently won the IWS Move of the Week for a spinning DDT face-first into thumbtacks.

"I got choke-bombed onto a table with seventy light tubes and everything just shattered," laughs Manny. "My back was pissing blood. Thank you, fans! The creativity when these soldiers bring in weapons is amazing. It's six hundred people holding their weapons with pride. It's just totally barbaric."

At one point, "The Natural" Big Steve Royds started beating a fan with one of the weapons that the fan had brought. "Don't throw things in the ring," he warns. "It can have dire consequences."

During one of the first ever IWS matches, an errant flying Slush Puppy nearly paralyzed Sex Exxxpress. "He was stretchered out," reminisces Manny. "There was blood everywhere. We were in total shock because we thought he was dead. As soon as we left the show, reality hit us."

The ritualistic relationship between knowing it's a game and pretending it's not has been turned on its head by the IWS. Ultimately, Manny's enterprise is proof that the real revolution is not political—it's cultural. Hardcore wrestling is just another way Quebec maintains its distinct identity despite the tidal waves of homogenization on all sides.

In fact, this magical province seems to be getting stranger and stranger.

"We're not going to stop," concludes Manny. "No matter how many people tell me this is a bullshit dream, we're going to keep on giving the fans what they want: complete craziness."

Inside the bar, dust from smashed light tubes hangs in the smoky air as "Fans Bring The Weapons" night draws to an end. The neon cross, its irradiant symbolism neutered, has been reduced to a few shards and some floating, invisible particles. **✶**



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