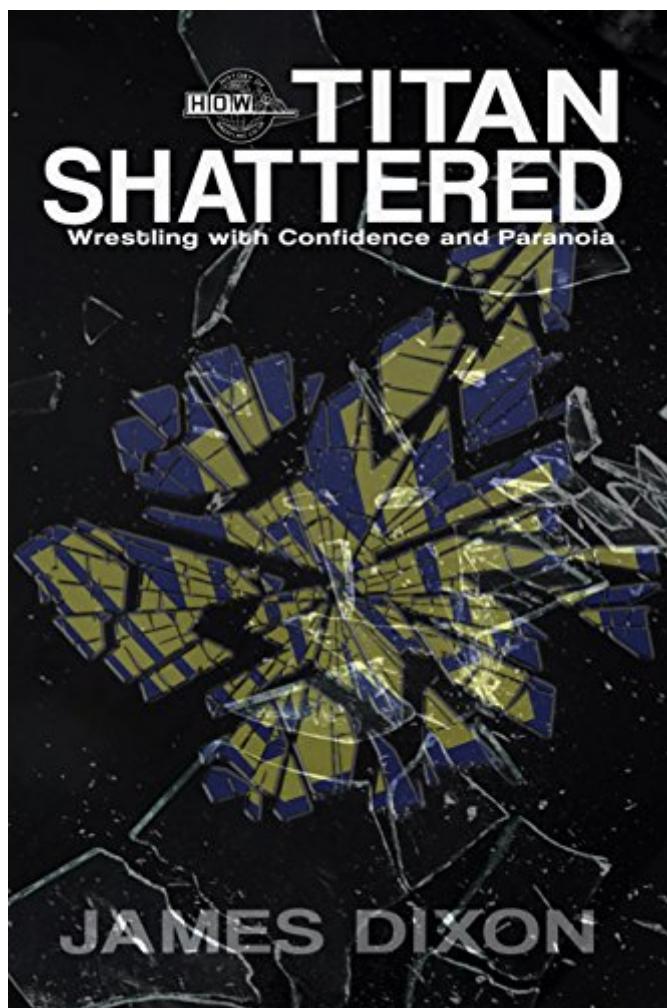


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Titan Shattered: Wrestling With Confidence And Paranoia



Synopsis

The highly anticipated sequel to best-selling *Titan Sinking* After enduring a turbulent year in 1995, Vince McMahon was looking to rebuild his sinking empire in 1996. He had high hopes for a new World Wrestling Federation flag bearer, Shawn Michaels - the man he was looking to as the leader of the WWF's 'New Generation'. With Michaels supported by a strong cast of established characters, some old faces, and an influx of new blood, McMahon fully expected the WWF to dominate rivals WCW in the burgeoning Monday Night War. It did not work out that way. *Titan Shattered* tells the behind-the-scenes story of the WWF's tribulations in 1996. It was a year where paranoia threatened to destroy the WWF, where decades-old industry traditions were broken, and where Vince McMahon fully abandoned his wrestling principles in pursuit of the almighty dollar.

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Customer Reviews

James Dixon has done it again and produced an engaging and informative look at a key period in wrestling history. Just as he did with his book *Titan Sinking: The Decline of the WWF in 1995* where he explored what was arguably the World Wrestling Federation's (WWF) most woeful year, he examines 1996 in his new book *Titan Shattered: Wrestling with Confidence and Paranoia*. As the

title suggests, it focuses on the WWF but it also looks at its archrival World Championship Wrestling (WCW) as well as Paul Heyman's upstart promotion, Extreme Championship Wrestling (ECW). 1996 was one of the most pivotal years in professional wrestling. As I noted in my book *Wrestling's Greatest Moments*, 1995 marked the beginning of the Monday Night War. While opening shots were fired when WCW launched its own Monday night wrestling program to compete directly against the WWF's Monday Night RAW, it was in 1996 that WCW began a seemingly unstoppable blitz against the WWF. The acquisition of key WWF players Scott Hall and Kevin Nash was bad enough for the WWF but when Eric Bischoff teamed them with Hulk Hogan to form the New World Order (nWo), things got even worse. The book does a great job of documenting Vince McMahon's stumbles and fumbles at taking the lead in the Monday Night War. Failures included the loss of key players such as Scott Hall and Kevin Nash, an inability to market new talent, as well as a surprising case of sticker shock after signing Bret Hart to a high priced contract to keep him from going to WCW that eventually led to him leaving. Despite some stumbles, 1996 offered glimmers of hope. Vince McMahon hired several WCW castoffs two of which would end up being two of the promotion's greatest stars. Others proved helpful in unexpected ways, proving the adage that sometimes it's better to be lucky than good. One star would have to fight hard with McMahon to emerge as a top star while another would have to give up his reservations about McMahon's direction for him. Steve Austin came into the WWF with the albatross gimmick of "The Ringmaster". Austin had worked in WCW as "Stunning" Steve Austin, winning over fans as one half of the heel tag team "The Hollywood Blonds" (the other half being Brian Pillman). Like several rising WCW stars, Austin fell out of favor when Hulk Hogan arrived in WCW and he was summarily dismissed after an injury sidelined him and Eric Bischoff decided he wasn't worth keeping around. A brief stint in ECW won Austin over with Internet fans as he mercilessly mocked WCW in a series of unforgettable promos. Upon arriving in WWF, Austin was teamed with "The Million Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase with DiBiase managing him and awarding his "Million Dollar Belt" to Austin. With DiBiase serving as Austin's mouthpiece, Austin had no time to show off his mic skills. Then in a stroke of luck, DiBiase decided to join WCW, leaving Austin without a manager. Austin seized his opportunity and adopted his now legendary "Stone Cold" persona. Another stroke of luck saw that year's planned "King of the Ring" winner Hunter Hearst Helmsley booted out of the top spot after the infamous "Curtain Call" in Madison Square Garden (an incident which Dixon covers thoroughly in the book). Austin got the spot and began an amazing run

to the top. Another WCW star that found great success in the WWF was Mick Foley. Mick Foley had defied a non-traditional look and established a reputation as Cactus Jack, an insane bump taker and tough brawler in WCW who was willing to put his body on the line every night in order to get over with the fans. Given the WWF's penchant for repackaging established wrestlers into their own creations (sometimes with disastrous results such as when Terry Taylor became the Red Rooster), Foley was skeptical. Granted, not all transformations were disastrous (Case in point, the Undertaker). Others took time for the wrestler to find his way (such as former WCW World champion Ron Simmons who was initially packaged as the gladiator Farooq Asad but eventually got over as a member of the Acolyte Protection Agency). Foley reluctantly took McMahon's direction (tweaking the Mankind character including coming up with his name) and thanks in part to a great introductory program with the Undertaker, he went over. Two other acquisitions would eventually lead to a turnaround for the WWF but at the time, no one could have possibly imagined how they would play out. When the WWF signed Marc Mero (aka Johnny B. Badd in WCW) they got the unexpected bonus of his incredibly attractive wife Rena. McMahon had hired Mero after seeing him play a Little Richard style character in WCW. Unfortunately WCW owned the rights to the "Johnny B. Badd" character thus McMahon went with a boxing gimmick for Mero. The plus side was that when he saw how incredibly sexy Mero's wife was, he saw a chance to duplicate the success of the WWF's resident sex symbol, Sunny and renamed Rena Sable. Another unexpected success was the long and winding road that saw wrestler Brian Pillman make his way into the WWF. The story of "Loose Cannon" Brian Pillman is told all the way from his incredible bamboozling of Eric Bischoff into releasing him from his contract to his surprise signing with the WWF, the infamous gun incident on RAW, as well as the racially charged comments that almost led to a showdown with ECW's New Jack. Pillman's story is one that proves the saying "truth is stranger than fiction" and Dixon does an expert job describing it. The WWF also saw the arrival of a talented wrestler with a great pedigree and tremendous potential. However the way the WWF pushed him nearly destroyed his career. Rocky Maivia, a third generation wrestler was seen as a great addition to the WWF. The WWF got behind him and gave him a monster push. Unfortunately it backfired (much like the WWE's recent monster push of Roman Reigns) and the fans soon turned on him, astonishing the WWF. Maivia would eventually win over fans as "The Rock" but in 1996, this seemed inconceivable. Dixon does a good job of pointing out how Vince McMahon cried foul over business practices that he had employed a decade earlier to destroy many territories. When WCW began signing his top stars from under his nose, McMahon was furious; despite the fact that he'd

done the same thing to competitors a decade earlier. Vince's desperation led to some questionable lawsuits against WCW (Interesting enough though, one of the lawsuits enabled Vince McMahon to purchase WCW at a fire sale price when the company went under). Dixon also shows how McMahon eventually created the wrestling monopoly that he predicted WCW owner Ted Turner was committed to establishing. One of the things that I particularly enjoyed about this book was how Dixon examined what was going on at the time for undercard workers such as Bob Holly. The picture painted in *Titan Shattered* is that the WWF was not a fun place to work at. One misstep could lead to an aspiring wrestler being shown the door as seen in an anecdote where a new worker remarked to the Undertaker about his dead man gimmick. As Dixon argues in his book, Vince McMahon was willing to do just about anything to boost business. He signed the notoriously flaky Ultimate Warrior to a deal, an expensive arrangement that he would regret when the Warrior bailed on the WWF after a short began making trouble backstage. McMahon tried to get Randy Savage and Hulk Hogan to return to the WWF when their contracts with WCW were close to expiring. Not surprisingly, neither man returned and opted to resign with WCW. Dixon suggests that McMahon may have balked at re-signing Savage when he learned of the alleged affair between "The Macho Man" and Stephanie McMahon. While I am still skeptical about Dixon's claim that Randy Savage had a scandalous dalliance with a young Stephanie McMahon, I at least give him props for establishing the basis for the allegation (Dixon details this in his previous book *Titan Sinking*). None of these desperation moves could compare to when McMahon announced the return of Razor Ramon and Diesel to the WWF. The announcement had everyone in the industry talking. It even led to Eric Bischoff having WCW attorneys review Hall and Nash's contracts, discovering that there was a possible loophole in which they could return to the WWF.

Bischoff's mistake led to Hall and Nash signing a contract with a hefty signing bonus. When the time came to deliver, the WWF failed miserably. While the WWF did indeed own the rights to the name and likenesses of Razor Ramon and Diesel (which was the basis for the WWF suing WCW when Hall and Nash appeared in characters similar to their WWF incarnations), they did not have Hall and Nash to play them. Not since the producers of *The Dukes of Hazzard* brought in new Duke Boys (who were billed as cousins to Bo and Luke) was there such a TV stumble. No one was buying the new versions of Razor and Diesel, despite the WWF's continued push. Not even a heel turn by announcer Jim Ross could help get the two men over. *Titan Shattered* does a great job of exploring stories that you may have heard about but never got the details on. One particular interesting one is the look at Vader's troubled time in WCW after the arrival of Hulk Hogan. Vader was a monster heel in WCW but his stiff style led to management scaling back a program

with Hulk Hogan. A proposed pin fall win over Hulk Hogan for the WCW strap on Monday Night Nitro was vetoed by the Hulkster. Things didn't help when Vader's bad boy image was damaged due to a backstage altercation with Mr. Wonderful's Paul Orndorff. Dixon recounts how Orndorff nearly beat Vader to death (and likely would have except for prior injury limiting Orndorff's strength in one arm). Vader's subsequent tenure in WWF was even worse as a communication error led to him being forced to return too soon after a surgery, limiting him in the ring. Backstage politics only hurt him further and a WWF title win over Shawn Michaels was nixed after he fell out of favor with the powers that be. In the end, Dixon's thesis is that Vince McMahon sacrificed his integrity to survive the Monday Night War. He signed Bret Hart to an expensive contract then regretted it, harming his relationship with Hart. He began changing the tone of the WWF from a kid friendly program to one geared more towards adults with a lot of T&A and edginess. Frankly, McMahon has always done whatever he thought would put money in his coffers so while I agree with Dixon that Vince drastically changed the WWF style at the time, I don't think that the WWF's transformation was anything to be surprised by. McMahon has shown that he will do whatever he feels is necessary to survive (case in point, his toning down the '90s Attitude Era's style into a more family-friendly style) and the '90s Attitude Era was a case of doing whatever was necessary to win. Using the same well documented research that he employed in *Titan Sinking*, Dixon relies on interviews, books, and other sources (one particular source he relies a lot on is *The Wrestling Observer*). While one could argue that you could just watch the interviews or read the articles, this book provides a great summary of this crucial year in wrestling. While things seemed desperate in 1996, the year was a turning point for the WWF. The emergence of '90s Stone Cold Steve Austin and Mick Foley coupled with the focus on sexy characters such as Sable would lead to the '90s Attitude Era, when no holds were barred either in the ring or with Standards and Practices (despite USA's protests for the WWF to tone down their contract, rising ratings would overrule any moral platitudes). *Titan Shattered* is an excellent book if you want a good survey of the WWF in 1996. If you like backstage stories, this is the book for you. My only complaint is with the book's price. The paperback version is \$21.43 on for a 266 page book. By comparison, Daniel Bryan's 319 page book *Yes!* runs for \$17.76 for the hardcover. If you own a Kindle Fire, I highly recommend you get the Kindle edition as it's only \$4.99 (free if you have Kindle Unlimited). James Dixon's work is a breath of fresh air for an industry that gets lackluster coverage for the most part and I look forward to a sequel covering 1997.

This book is fantastic if you are the type of fan who is into every nuance of the wrestling business. It's full of credible information, it's well-researched, and the first-hand sources are a boon more often than not. I loved the first book, and I am eagerly awaiting a book about 1997 and hopefully every year through the early 2000s, at least. That said, this book is not incredibly well written, and occasionally skews toward the biases of its previously mentioned sources. There are a few areas where the author gives more background on a subject than is necessary, or gives background on a subject in the middle of giving background on a previous subject, tossing you down a rabbit hole, to the point where you aren't sure what you are reading about anymore. I enjoy all of the background and the effort given to cramming as much wrestling history into the book as possible, but sometimes it was hard to keep up.

Vital reading if you're interested in this era of wrestling but rather amateurish writing. Tries to string together a narrative but it's functionally a series of vignettes. There is a wealth of good information in here and the level of research shows. If you're not familiar with wrestling then this is going to be a difficult read but if you're a smark, or just knows what that means, than this book is for you.

Another fascinating look at the history of the WWE during some of their toughest years. I wasn't watching wrestling as it aired during this period, though I have since watched all the RAWs and PPVs from this era (thanks WWE Network). This book provided a great insight into what was going on behind the scenes. My only real issue with the book is that sometimes it seems like the writer is buying in to the story line during a match and not looking at a match objectively. Regardless, I hope he continues to put out these books. I'd love to read about the late 90s - early 2000s WWE. I'd also be up for a behind the scenes book like this on WCW.

Outstanding. James Dixon does it again in his follow-up to the also outstanding Titan Sinking. Included are numerous exclusive interviews with a variety of people involved with WWF and pro wrestling on a whole in 1996, pulling back the shade on all the stories we saw on TV, as well as what happened behind the scenes, including shedding light on long-standing rumors. A must-read for any wrestling book fan.

This book brings excellent contextualization to the wrestling you watched in 1996. This book is even valuable to those that read the wrestling observer and/or the Torch at the time as this puts that insider information in perspective and a framework that was not possible while things were running

100 miles per hour at the time. I was a huge fan (but not a newsletter reader at that time). I learned so much that I didn't realize was occurring. I read this book (similar to *Titan Sinking*) as quickly as possible because I ate up the words as quickly as possible. I had never understood why Ahmed Johnson was getting such a big push and then basically disappeared until I read the book. My one quibble with the book as the look back at the history of the UWF and UWFI. Going all the way back to the UWF history was a bit awkward and once things were thrown back to 1996 and the NWO, it just didn't seem to fit. I've seen others tie the UWFI-New Japan invasion into the NWO in a smoother way. Looking forward to 1997 and beyond (as well as, hopefully, 1994 and later!).

Good overview of the WWF in 1996 and how it lead into the Attitude Era. I did enjoy his first book on 1995 a bit better but this one is still very good if you are interested in the subject.

I loved this book and the other ones James Dixon has written about the WWF. The best compliment I can give is that when he releases a new book, I jump all over it. I am pleasantly surprised to learn stuff I never knew before even though I have been following wrestling closely since the mid-80s.

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