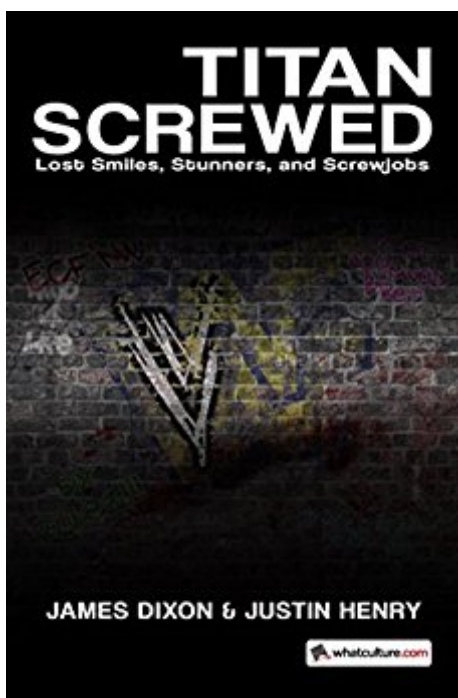


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# Titan Screwed: Lost Smiles, Stunners, And Screwjobs



## Synopsis

James Dixon, author of *Titan Sinking* and *Titan Shattered*, two detailed chronicles of the World Wrestling Federation's stories and backstage dealings in 1995 and 1996 respectively, pairs up with Justin Henry (*Fighting Spirit Magazine*, *WrestleCrap*) in compiling the third book of the series, *Titan Screwed: Lost Smiles, Stunners, and Screwjobs*. Continuing through the timeline of WWF history, *Titan Screwed* provides a comprehensive look at the World Wrestling Federation from January 1997 all the way through *WrestleMania XIV* in March 1998, covering every major element of the WWF's evolution into the vaunted and historic Attitude Era. Stories extensively detailed include the rise of Stone Cold Steve Austin, Shawn Michaels losing his smile, the heel turn of Bret Hart, WWF vs. ECW with Jerry Lawler pulling the strings, the death of Brian Pillman, Austin vs. Tyson, the seedy story elements that overtook WWF programming, the birth of the nefarious Mr. McMahon, and of course, Montreal: the build-up, the secret plotting, the match, the moment, and the aftermath in all of its incredible details. Exclusive author-conducted interviews for *Titan Screwed* include Ken Shamrock, Rob Van Dam, Jim Cornette, "The Patriot" Del Wilkes, Dr. Tom Prichard, Danny Doring, former ECW owner Tod Gordon, and more.\*\*\*Includes foreword from *WrestleCrap's* RD Reynolds\*\*\*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you're looking for a stylishly-written analysis of a key period in professional wrestling, look no further than *Titan Screwed*. *Titan Screwed* is a well-written sequel in the *Titan* series, building on the first two books but more than capable of being read by itself. Astute fans will know by the title that the year being reviewed this time around is 1997, the year of the Montreal Screwjob and arguably the turning point in the Monday Night War. Like the previous books in the series, it examines the happenings in World Championship Wrestling (WCW) and Extreme Championship Wrestling (ECW) in addition to the World Wrestling Federation (WWF). *Titan Screwed* shows the industry's progression through the year in terms of on-screen storylines as well as the always tantalizing backstage stories. Most fans have heard the story of the Monday Night War so many times that they think they have a good understanding of it. However, like any field of study, there's a general knowledge and then there's a deeper knowledge that comes with exploring the subject closely. Just as there are casual fans who know their favorite stars in a promotion and their finishing moves, there are more knowledgeable fans who can tell you a wrestler's entire history, the names of various moves being used, and the meaning and application of terms like psychology and heat. Likewise, with a discussion of the Monday Night War. One may understand the basics of what happened, but a book like *Titan Screwed* offers a chance to add depth and breadth to one's knowledge. Take this for instance. Conventional wisdom has it that WCW was killing the WWF in terms of TV ratings, house show attendance, and pay-per-views. Dixon and Henry paint a different picture, pointing out how 1997's pay-per-view buyrates were only negligible in difference. In terms of house shows, they argue that the WWF was selling more tickets than WCW and that the WWF was crushing WCW when it came to licensing and merchandising. Of course in terms of TV ratings, WCW was ahead, and Dixon and Henry point out how this drove a competitive Vince McMahon crazy to try a radical approach to changing his product. *Titan Shattered* showed the beginnings of McMahon's attempt to increase ratings by presenting an edgier product in 1996. By 1997, this was in full force but McMahon was still unsure of how to emulate the success of ECW. *Titan Screwed* takes a look at the WWF's late-night Shotgun Saturday Night program with Dixon and Henry pointing out how it was an "ECW Lite" that failed to catch on with more hardcore fans. The book continues the look at the escalating tensions between Vince McMahon and

two of his biggest draws, Shawn Michaels and Bret Hart. Both Michaels and Hart were tremendous wrestlers but clashes in personality and lifestyle were making things harder for them to work together and creating incredible headaches for Vince McMahon, who had to deal with them. On one hand, McMahon had to deal with Michaels, the man he envisioned as carrying the WWF standard. Michaels's charisma and undeniable skills in the ring made him a good candidate to be world champion. Behind the scenes, he was difficult to deal with. When it came time to do jobs, he seemed to conveniently suffer injuries. Backstage, he and his friends in the Kliq (Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, and Hunter Hearst Helmsley) made life difficult for anyone they didn't like. By 1997, Michaels's friends Hall and Nash were in WCW, leaving him to fend for himself. He was still playing games with other wrestlers, but he had no one to protect him. Bret Hart too was a fantastic performer (although not as charismatic) and beloved by WWF fans. Unlike Michaels, Hart was a loyal company man and he didn't play the backstage games as Michaels and his friends were notorious for (as Dixon has detailed in other books, Hart was asked to join the Kliq but refused, not wanting to deal with their party lifestyle or backstage antics). In Hart's case, he was loyal to a company that wasn't necessarily loyal to him. After WWF lost Hall and Nash, Vince McMahon was careful not to lose any more top stars. It's likely he felt he just couldn't afford to. McMahon decided to make sure Bret Hart stayed with the WWF so he signed him to an incredible twenty-year deal. Hart would be paid well, end his career with the WWF, and carry on as a good-will representative. Over time, McMahon seemed to regret his decision. For years, the story has been that McMahon couldn't afford the contract and told Bret to consider finding employment with WCW. Hart did sign, and as we shall see later, his departure was handled poorly, resulting in the Montreal Screwjob. Again, Dixon paints a different picture. He argues that McMahon wasn't hurting for money as he told Hart and could have kept Hart under contract. He even argues that Hart made last minute attempts to stay with the WWF as long as he'd be used right, only for McMahon to dismiss his overtures. Why then, did McMahon encourage Hart to leave? One possibility is the amazing rise of "Stone Cold" Steve Austin. In hindsight, it's incredible how Austin transformed from the career-killing "Ringmaster" character to the "Stone Cold" character that helped the WWF become a billion-dollar company. While there were other people involved in the WWF's rise to supremacy, the "Stone Cold" persona played a large part. Did McMahon feel that he no longer needed Hart? You'll have to decide for yourself. Towards the end

of the book, Dixon and Henry suggest that McMahon was more than happy to replace Shawn Michaels with “Stone Cold” Steve Austin after Michaels’ career-ending (or so was thought) injury that shelved him after WrestleMania XIV. One interesting story involves Austin’s injury at the hands of Owen Hart. Hart’s botched piledriver nearly ended Austin’s career (and it definitely shortened it). Dixon talks of how Austin wasn’t too happy with Owen Hart, not because of the accident, but because Hart never apologized for the incident. On a side note, I recently learned (from another book) that Austin injured a Japanese wrestler in the ring several years earlier with the exact same move that injured him. That’s one tidbit I would have liked to have heard about in this book. Dixon and Henry do an excellent job of showing the various players whose star was on the rise. Men like Mick Foley, Rocky Maivia, and Hunter Hearst Helmsley may have struggled at times, but they persevered, all of them eventually reaching the main event. Dixon examines Triple H’s transformation from his Greenwich blueblood character to the D-Generation X reprobate he’d find great success with. The authors make it a point to include Chyna’s importance in establishing Triple H as a star. Triple H would find himself in a sink-or-swim situation when he was forced to take over Shawn Michaels’ role as leader of D-Generation X. Just as before, the book provides a lot of interesting behind the scenes stories. For example, one story has it that the Undertaker was waiting in the Gorilla position at WrestleMania XIV during the “Stone Cold” Steve Austin vs. HBK match to ensure that business would be done in the time-honored tradition. While HBK had legitimately (and seriously) injured his back, he’d cried wolf so many times with injuries when it was time to do jobs that not everyone was sure if he’d drop the belt to Austin. Titan Screwd doesn’t limit itself to discussing important events in the WWF. There’s also a discussion of the infamous “slow three-count” by Nick Patrick during Hollywood Hogan vs. Sting main event at 1997 Starrcade. As the story goes, Patrick was supposed to make a fast count (insinuating he was on the take by Hogan) only for ringside spectator (and newly signed Bret “The Hitman” Hart) to intervene, protesting he wouldn’t see someone get screwed over like he’d been (referencing the Montreal Screwjob of course). What happened was that Patrick made a normal three-count, which made no sense for Hart’s protest. Dixon and Hart make a shocking revelation concerning the reason behind this. Rather than revealing it, I encourage you to get the book. I enjoyed how the book presents different points of view on situations. When

discussing Starrcade, they mention that Sting gave Hogan carte blanche to determine the match finish, even though Sting was supposed to win. Sting pointed out that Hogan had taken WCW so far that he was thankful for everything he'd done. Hogan has got his fair share of criticism over the years for making WCW into the Hulk Hogan Federation so it's interesting to see a WCW mainstay take on things. Just as before, the book provides a list of works referenced. Whether it's interviews, shoot interviews, books, newsletters, and videos, fans can verify the information themselves (except for the interviews) and see if they agree with Dixon and Henry's analysis of things. Now if they would only cite their sources (i.e. tell us where a particular piece of information is coming from in their references), they'd have the perfect wrestling book. Of course, a well-researched and cited book doesn't always translate into an enjoyable read. As much as I appreciated the voluminous research of Jim Wilson's book Chokehold, it remains the number one choice for insomnia relief. Fortunately, Dixon and Henry have developed an engaging style of writing that informs and entertains. Some people write so well that you don't mind reading a discourse on the history of the letter "C". In their case, they make an already fascinating subject positively delightful to read thanks to their style. Last year I noted my displeasure with the book's paperback price, noting that it cost \$21.43 for a 266-page book. By comparison, Daniel Bryan's 319-page book Yes! cost \$17.76 for the hardcover. This year, the 278-page paperback retails at \$21.04 at Amazon. Looking back, I realized I was wrong. The Titan books are published through Createspace, a publishing arm of Amazon. Last spring, I published a book through Createspace and learned a lot about the process, including pricing. First, you have to price the book higher than you might see other books if you want the book to get wide distribution. Second, although the book costs a bit more, it's a professional production through Amazon and Amazon. This isn't some hack mimeographing a book. This is a well-written and well-researched book that provides detailed and entertaining analysis of an important time in professional wrestling. If you're on a lower budget like me, get the e-book. If you're an Amazon Kindle Books member, you can read it for free. In any event, it's well worth having in your library. Kudos to James Dixon and Justin Henry for a well-written and well-referenced book that continues a detailed examination of a key period in wrestling history. Established writers should no longer rest on their laurels as Dixon and Henry are setting a very high bar when it comes to wrestling books, whether they're traditionally published or self-published.

In 1995 and 1996 the WWE struggled in the ratings war against WCW, getting beaten routinely. Gimmicks were often pointless. Creatively, despite a somewhat talented roster in 1996 with Shawn Michaels leading the way as WWF Champion, the WWF struggled to draw as a product. In June 1996 Stone Cold Steve Austin won the King Of The Ring Tournament and, largely because of his anti hero persona, became the hottest star in the wrestling business, setting off a chain of events that brought the WWF a wave of prosperity not seen since the 1980s and Hulkamania. Much like the first two books, it includes insider interviews detailing certain things that took place behind the scenes. WCW and ECW are also given significant space in the book and why not? Vince McMahon was in a fight for survival. Topics include Brian Pillmans death, Starrcade, the ECW invasion of Monday Night Raw, the escalating rivalry between Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels that was the result of many different problems, including a backstage fight that almost made Michaels quit the WWF, a blow by blow account of the creative process behind and execution of the Montreal Screwjob and finally, the complete rise of Stone Cold Steve Austin and the dawn of the Attitude Era. I learned so much and couldn't put the book down, finishing it in just two days.

This book is filled with unbelievable amounts of information from the time period of 1997 through Wrestlemania XIV in 1998. For anyone interested in this period of wrestling this should be a fun read. The focus is put on the WWF, but the writer also weaves into the narrative important events that include WCW and ECW's part of the WWF story. Nearly every angle is covered, complete with pertinent back stories and supportive quotes from those who were there. My biggest complaints are the obvious bias against the Kliq, a heavy reliance on Dave Meltzer quotes(he's not the only "insider" of the business, and if he was referenced, then why not other dirt sheet writers?), and some outright incorrect info(for example the writer spoke of WCW wrestlers with creative control in their contracts when it's been stated by former WCW executives that Hogan was the only one with such a clause in their contracts). These flaws force me to wonder how accurate the book is. I have no doubt that the majority of the book is true, but not knowing for sure takes away from enjoying the book 100%. Overall I did enjoy it more than not, and found parts of it fascinating.

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