

THE*NIXED REPORT

UNIX AND OVERLOOKED POP CULTURE | Volume 03 Issue 01

Conspiracy Theories

- Why They Spread, Plus...
- A Look at Linux Mint 20
- Pro Wrestling in the Era of COVID-19

A Look at Linux Mint 20

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Special points of interest:

- Distrust leads to conspiracy theories.
- This magazine can be copied and shared with others; please do so.
- Want a free issue? Write for us.

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From the Editor's Desk

Welcome to the first issue of a new volume of the magazine. After the 2016 election, I set the website aside due to what I saw all of us being overwhelmed with negativity. The year 2017 and 2018 came and went. That negativity never truly went away, but something else was missing.

Instead of enjoying things in life, I observed people either finding offense at something for no reason or outright dismissing legitimate concerns about what is happening in today's world?

This has happened across the so called "political spectrum."

In this issue, we go back to our roots by looking at Linux Mint 20, an easy to use operating system that uses the Linux Kernel. That piece is followed up by the very thing that has been a theme throughout 2020; conspiracy theories.

Make no mistake that though some topics that will be covered are fairly dark and heavy at times, we don't take ourselves too seriously. I've seen the downsides from being angry and in crisis mode too often.

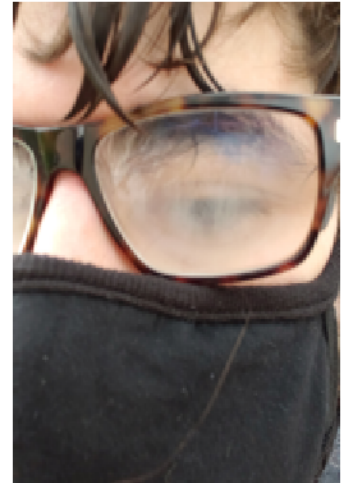
Besides, if nobody is having fun with this, then why bother? That's why Stephen Kelley also has an amazing piece on the state of Pro Wrestling in the COVID-19 era.

Though the purpose of this magazine is to cover Unix-like/Unix-compatible operating systems, technology, and pop culture that has a cult following while being misunderstood, the tools being used are also mainstream. Free and Open Source Software will still be used when appropriate.

I hope you enjoy the first issue of the third volume. Entertain yourself, educate yourself, and empower yourself.

Also, try not to take yourself so seriously!

—Thomas Holbrook II | Editor in Chief



The controversy behind masks is an opportunity to explore this issue's cover story.

A Look at Linux Mint 20



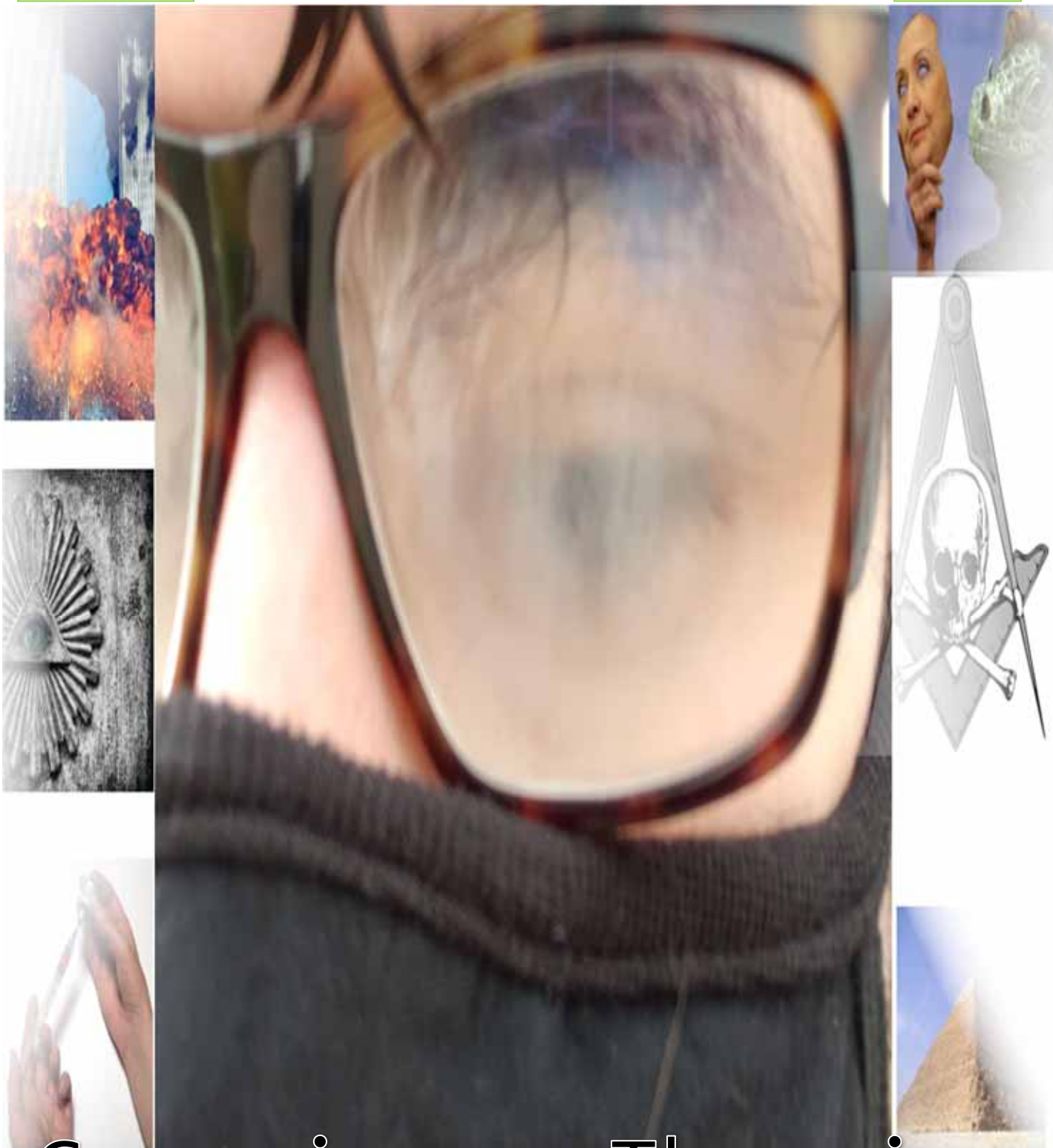
The default desktop environment is Cinnamon, an alternative to GNOME 3.

Linux Mint is an alternative operating system to Windows. Though it uses a lot of free and open source software, it also allows for easy access to well known apps like Google Chrome, Steam, and even Microsoft Teams. I downloaded version 20, codenamed Ulyana, and installed it on my Librebooted ThinkPad T500. It has an Intel Core 2 Duo P8400, 8 GB of DDR2 memory, Intel X4500M graphics, a 512 GB SSD, and plenty of ports to shake a stick at. Though the device originally had Trisquel 8.0 installed on a mechanical hard drive, I upgraded to an SSD for better performance.

I purchased the system itself with Libreboot already flashed to the system. This means that all the hardware, including the wireless adapter, uses non-proprietary drivers and does not rely on proprietary firmware. In spite of the system's age, it runs the desktop environment well. Hardcore gaming is not suggested, but a variety of productivity related tasks are not out of the question. A few things of note is that choosing a reliable mirror for updating the system is important, because they do fail from time to time.

Also, if you are one who relies on Ubuntu's SNAP packages, Mint disabled them due to Clem Lefebvre's disagreement with the Ubuntu developers on how they operate. The option does exist to re-enable them. Over the next couple of issues, I will do an in depth review of Ulyana.

This will include testing on a variety of systems that are bit older and in virtual machines. So stay tuned for next issue when I look at the Cinnamon desktop environment first.



Conspiracy Theories

COVID-19 has augmented the flourishing of conspiracy theories. Many thoughts behind the controversial ideas exist, but why do they become viral? An uncomfortable truth needs to be told in order to fully understand them.

Conspiracy theories have permeated the culture of the United States ever since its inception. From the British Crown to UFO's, there has always been that uneasy feeling that something was off kilter and that a group with a hidden agenda was always lurking in the shadows.

There has been a lot of discussion behind the psychology of conspiracy theories and theorists. While it is commonly suggested that the need for understanding, consistency, and a need to belong are common reasons behind the belief in such things, there is one thing left undiscussed.

The Internet and newer technologies can make things spread faster, but the stereotype of those being less educated being more likely to believe conspiracy theories is a dangerous suggestion. It implies that those without a college education tend to be less intelligent.

There is the common theme of the human condition that is often ignored. Though we can see the how in many cases, the why is often left out in the cold.

In terms of life, trust is so easy to lose and difficult to regain. Combine that concept with the building of credibility, and things start to make sense. Upon reflection of the last several decades, one might see why conspiracy theories gain ground.

Losing Trust

Well established venues have done little to help their case. From plagiarism to outright fabrications, credibility can easily take a hit.

One example of this is when John Markoff wrote articles about computer hacker Kevin Mitnick. If one were to completely believe what Markoff wrote, one would have believed that Mitnick was a cyberterrorist.

Markoff started the rumor that Mitnick was on the FBI's Most Wanted List in the 1990s. While Mitnick was on a **US Marshal's poster**, the FBI had no interest in him. He also wrote a piece in the New York Times in which he repeated the claim that Mitnick broke into a bank's computer network for the purpose of writing a fake press release involving "bad loans."

As revealed by Lewis DePayne in the film Freedom Downtime, it was human error as opposed to malicious intent. Mitnick had nothing to do with the incident in question. When the makers of Freedom Downtime interviewed Markoff himself, he seemed to be stunned by how much time Mitnick spent in solitary confinement while in prison.

The exaggerated stories from Markoff was far from the beginning of Mitnick's troubles, but it did significantly contribute to the violation of his civil liberties. Rather than face



further abuse by the prison system, Mitnick pled out so that he could be released from prison sooner.

In addition to individual lives being impacted by shoddy reporting, entire destinies of sovereign nations can be impacted as well. Not long after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Saddam Hussein was accused of having weapons of mass destruction and that his regime was linked to Al Qaeda.

Jon Schwarz of The Intercept wrote a piece explaining how the Iraqi government was simply not aware of any WMDs that were left over from the Iraq/Iran war. Even the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, otherwise known as the 9/11 Commission, revealed that Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11.

Hussein and Al Qaeda were enemies. Hussein's control of Iraq was secular by nature, something that Al Qaeda opposed. Any group that Hussein got involved with was a group that he had control over. He would not hand over weapons that would have been used against a nation he controlled.

Daniel Benjamin tried warning of these things with an Op-Ed in the New York Times in September of 2002, but the words of an experienced American diplomat and journalist were all but ignored.

During various operations in Iraq, it was revealed that Fox News was a biased media organization. There was a clear cheer-leading for overthrowing Saddam Hussein. The entire course of Iraq's destiny was altered. Then it came out that the basis for doing so was false.

There was also the Jayson Blair scandal where numerous items he published for the New York Times were plagiarized or outright fabricated. The icing on the top of the cake was Brian Williams who also fabricated stories about his media coverage.

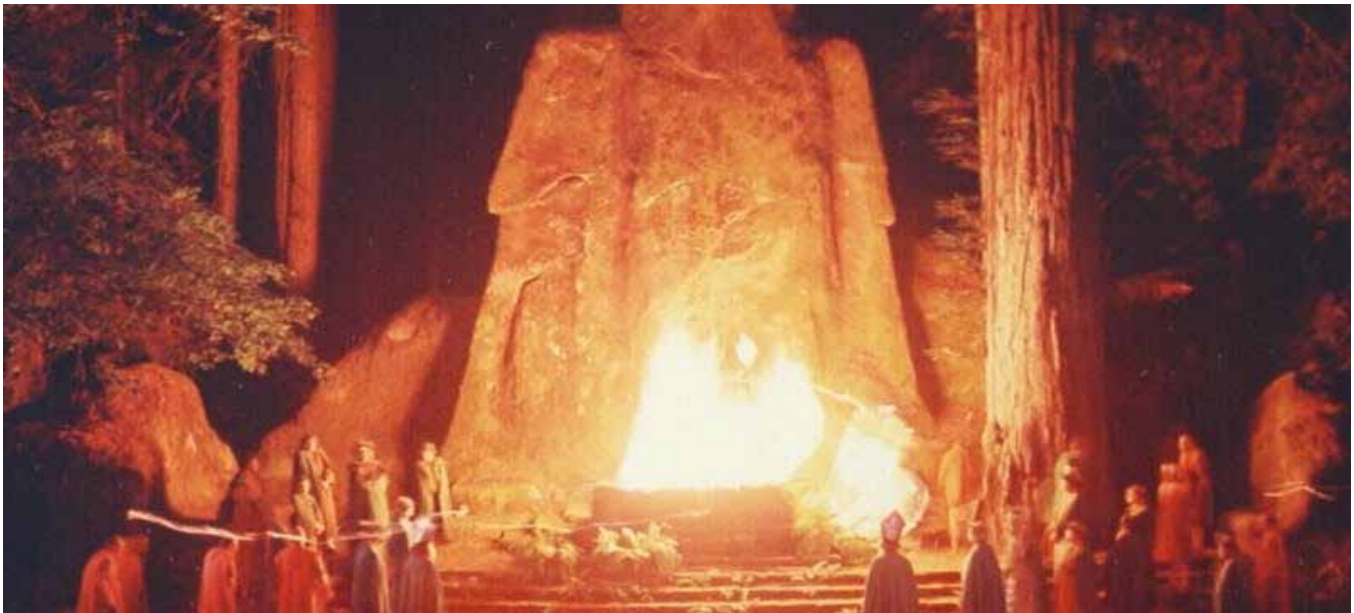
Enter the Renegades

When enough distrust builds, other venues are sought after. The Internet made things easier in that regard, but it was far from the main distribution channel for a long time. More traditional outlets such as radio and television were utilized.

Public access TV throughout various cities and municipalities allowed for independent shows to air. For radio, independent networks slowly built through a variety of means including micro-broadcasting.

Those two technologies are how Alex Jones got his start. He had a public access TV show before focusing most of his time on the radio. He would make radical statements, such as accusing George W Bush of being a trojan horse to destroy "real conservatism."

He was also vehemently opposed to Bill Clinton. His rants about the "New World Order" and "Illuminati" would normally be enough to turn off some people. Things began to change when he managed to infiltrate The Bohemian Grove, a private redwood forest that hosts several influential people from multiple walks of life with Mike Hansen and British film maker Jon Ronson.



The activities in this gathering have bordered on the bizarre. To the outsider, The Cremation of Care is messed up. An effigy of a child is symbolically sacrificed to a giant owl statue. From Jones's point of view, it was a ritual about not having a conscience.



This was during the summer of 2001, in which Jones also declared in a segment of his public access TV show that an attack on the country was coming. He claimed hijacked aircraft were going to be used and that it would be blamed on Osama bin Laden.

Then 9/11 happened.

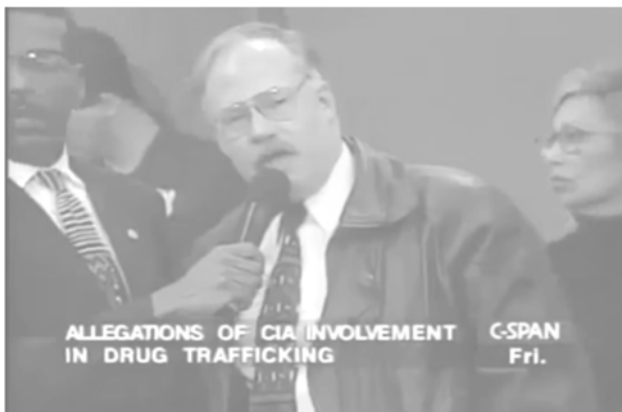
In 2004, Jones pointed out the fact that both Presidential candidates were literally family. They even attended the same fraternal group at Yale. For years, he spoke out against legislation such as the Patriot Act and militarization of the police.

He referred to Democrats and Republicans as two sides of the same coin. For a time, he appealed to those against military action in Iraq as well as legislation such as the Patriot Act. His audience was a crucial factor in Ron Paul's 2008 campaign for US President.

When he published films on DVD, he would beg for people to make copies and give them away. He has since changed his marketing strategy and relies on selling nutritional supplements and other products via e-commerce to bring in income while relying on audio and video streaming to expand his audience.

Jones was not the only one insinuating that the truth about 9/11 was being kept from the public. Radio talk show host William Cooper also insinuated that there would be a major attack and that it would be blamed on bin Laden. Cooper would die in November of that year.

Though Jones would be a pariah and Cooper seen as the most dangerous talk show host in America by a sitting American President, other personalities would also emerge.



Michael Ruppert, a former LAPD narcotics detective, also accused the government of a coverup regarding the tragic event. He too was no stranger to controversy.

One of his more famous moments was when he confronted then CIA Director John Deutch regarding allegations of CIA drug trafficking. This was after Gary Webb wrote a series for the San Jose Mercury News in 1996. The timing allowed him to build credibility with his From The Wilderness newsletter.

Though Jones and Cooper would seek more creative ways to get their message out, Ruppert attempted the more traditional route of established media channels and venues. Portions of his book *Crossing the Rubicon: The Decline of the American Empire at the End of the Age of Oil* can even be found on the CIA's website.

[www.cia.gov > library > abbottabad-compound > F69387...](http://www.cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound/F69387...) PDF

Crossing the Rubicon - CIA

Advance Praise for. **Crossing the Rubicon.** Astounding! Alarming! ... And yet at last, with this --
Mike Ruppert's beyond-courageous offering -- we gain sight of the ...

cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound/F6/F693879994199D612C64EE9A4666E8EE_Crossing_The_Rubicon_Part_1.pdf

Of course, the individuals in question were far from being prophets preaching a new gospel. Cooper changed his viewpoint on UFO's, Jones embarrassed himself during a special "Y2K" broadcast, and Ruppert's business prospects fizzled to the point where he chose to end his own life.

None of that matters in terms of conspiracy theories gaining credibility. The component that is often missed is the lost in trust in established media venues and special experts. When that happens, the theorists have an opening.

The accuracy does not have to be most of the time or even half of the time. If they turn out to be right often enough and market themselves as true rebels that appeal to multiple demographics, they gain an audience regardless of what platform they use.

For example, the reason why Jones is a household name is his insistence that people give away copies of his DVD releases for free. They were never region protected. He did viral marketing before it became cool.

The flow of information, whether it is good or bad, is the key factor. While newspapers chose online paywalls just to read articles, those who marketed themselves as renegades would often provide an easier way to access their media.

Turning Things Around

Whether traditional venues can turn things around depends on a few factors. The first is being better at admitting to and correcting mistakes that have been made in the past. The second will entail better education on topics that are not initially understood, a challenge for publications that are literature in a hurry. The final key factor will be whether they can adapt to more modernization.

Advertising will have to evolve as it is not as effective in the current era while making content more readily available at an affordable price. Possibilities can include tipping-hat/tipping-jar style with Patreon, Subscribestar, and LibrePay being prominent examples. Such a method of obtaining revenue may be challenging at first but could be worth it if credibility is built with quality content.

Furthermore, the content needs to be affordable. Teasing a try out for one US dollar for the first two months before upping the price nearly \$80 for the rest of the year may not be the best way forward. Any price between \$12-\$19 per year would be more reasonable, especially given the current state of the economy in the United States alone.

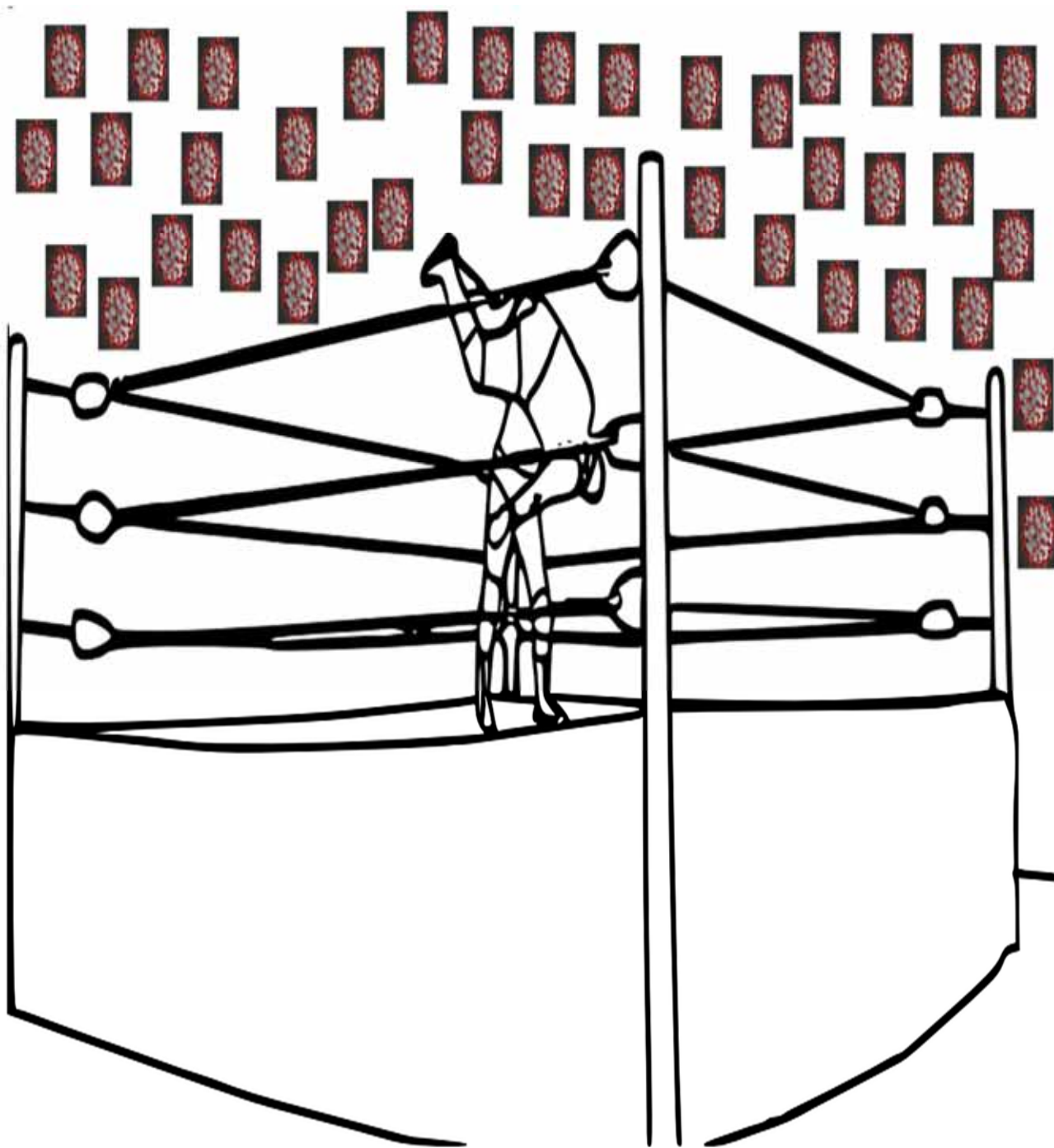
The quality and variety is another key factor. If too many are unsatisfied, they won't read, watch, or listen to what a venue publishes for a long time. At the same time, standing on some principles is not to be taken lightly.

Finally, the recognition that objectivity in the truest sense is a piece of the puzzle that can no longer be ignored. We do not live in a vacuum and we are not clones of each other. Bias will always exist regardless. Disclosure in the beginning will do more to build credibility, especially if the balance of the content is fair as opposed to one sided.

In other words, all of this will take time and effort. When trust is lost, it will take even more to gain it back. At some point, the theorists will lose ground, but if the so called "Fourth Estate" does not get its act together, we will all be in more danger than ever before.

Trust is so easy to lose and so hard to regain.

Let us hope that new media venues of higher quality can fill the void and that established venues eventually learn their lesson.



The State of Pro Wrestling in 2020

By Stephen Kelley

2020 Has been an interesting year for live entertainment. Things that many take for granted, such as live theater, live music, or sports have been utterly disrupted due to the seemingly over-bearing shadow that is the Covid-19 global pandemic. Suddenly, an ill-advised (i.e. ignoring the pandemic) tour by Smashmouth and Trapt (nobody's top choices for music) is everyone's top summer tour by sheer default. People are watching things like Japanese Baseball or marble races on ESPN. Crazy times indeed. Early in the year, most college sports seasons were scrapped, The Summer Olympics have been delayed, and a few things like NBA Basketball and MLB Baseball have started to come back; albeit with altered schedules, no fans or very few, and constant news of players becoming infected. But there was one sport deemed far too important, too essential, to be cancelled. Believe me, it the realiest sport of them all; Pro Wrestling!

All kidding aside, it's truly crazy that WWE, AEW, and even Impact Wrestling have stayed on the air throughout the duration of the pandemic. Let's discuss the how's and why's and see how everyone is doing. We'll discuss where each company stands, what they have been doing to keep Covid-19 at bay, and the overall state of each brand.



National Wrestling Alliance (NWA) – This has been an especially tough year for the Billy Corgan (of Smashing Pumpkins fame) owned revival of classic 1980's style studio wrestling. They have been plagued with shutdowns, talent drain, and scandals in recent months. There were rumors of an end for the company as recently as June 2020, that is until Billy Corgan set the record straight:

"A quick note about the National Wrestling Alliance, which I fought for, and won ownership of a few years back. We are NOT shutting down. So please disregard any and all rumor to effect. The @NWA is not and will not be for sale, and those talent who are under contract remain under contract for a reason: which is that we at the NWA are trying to figure out a way to provide our great fans with wrestling content in a very, very tough environment. And, most importantly, keep our talent safe and the standard of production you've come to expect from us at a high level. Anything less, in my opinion, is unacceptable. So yes, appreciate the interest, appreciate the chatter, but don't appreciate the unsourced rumors and speculation."

While nowhere as big a success as All Elite Wrestling, when it comes to new wrestling companies, NWA filled a definite niche for lapsed wrestling fans and new fans alike. When the shutdowns started to solidify, The NWA were mere weeks away from their next Pay-Per-View event: the 2020 Crockett Cup Tournament. Keep in mind, that NWA is not televised on any sort of national TV. It's currently ONLY showcased on YouTube and relies entirely on merch sales and PPV buys. Billy's no miser, but he can't prop it up that long. In addition to said tournament, the event was set to feature NWA World Heavyweight Champion Nick Aldis defending the championship against Ring of Honor (ROH) representative Marty Scurll – one of the first real olive branches between the two companies to show that all bets are off, and anyone can work together in 2020. Nick Aldis was also scheduled to face former ROH champion PCO at Supercard of Honor XIV on April 4, 2020 – another cross-promotional bout.

During this time, several prominent NWA wrestlers “jumped-ship” such as former NWA Television Champion Ricky Starks and veteran brawler Eddie Kingston – both recently signing on at All Elite Wrestling (AEW). A lot of this is largely due to the pay situation over at NWA. Prior to Covid, most talent could work indies to make ends meet and were essentially using NWA to elevate their booking costs. With few indie bookings, this situation is no longer very feasible for many. The NWA still have some wrestlers under contract, but it turns out they aren't making a ton of money at all. According to a recent article going around from Fightful.com (which now is pay-gated for some reason), former NWA star Ricky Starks turned down an offer from the NWA for \$1,000 a month. Zicky Dice was offered \$250 a month to sign with NWA, but he initially passed on it, signed it later, and then left the company anyway. It will be interesting to see who is left in the NWA when the dust settles.

On June 18, 2020, Dave Lagana resigned as Vice President of NWA after allegations of sexual assault were made public. Due to this and a concern for safety, the NWA has not aired any new episodes of NWA Powerrr since May 12th, 2020. Lagana has since denied these allegations, so it will be interesting where they go from here moving forward. It does appear that in early September [NWA will be partnering with FITE TV](#) to feature some weekly PPV events, but not every single week ala NWA-TNA (Now Impact Wrestling) when that company first started. This new initiative seems to be the brainchild of David Marquez, who seems to be taking Lagana's position.





Image found on [Ringside News](#).

Ring of Honor Wrestling (ROH) – In a time that feels like decades ago in Covid time, back in the dark ages of February 29, 2020 Ring of Honor held a show called Gateway to Honor at the Family Arena in St. Charles, Missouri. This sadly turned out to be the promotion's last show for months because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic as ROH decided to cancel all events and TV tapings, including the 18th Anniversary Show and Supercard Of Honor. In its place, ROH has been airing "best of" episodes in their normal time slot, usually hosted by a wrestler discussing why they've picked the matches being shown. This is a good way for fans to perhaps see what ROH has had to offer in PPV events of the near past, but has made any buzz they had going pre-Covid completely die off. As of late, TV taping has resumed, but no fans will be allowed in the venue. [According to their website, several Covid protocols have been outlined for this period.](#)

"Two weeks prior to the tapings, talent and referees are required to undergo the first NMT (nasal mid-turbinate) molecular PCR swab test and that within three days of the event, talent and referees will be required to undergo a second NMT molecular PCR swab test. Those tested must be immediately isolated/sequestered after undergoing the second test, with separate hotel accommodations and separate eating arrangements required for participants, who must remain isolated until arriving at the event to work. On the day of the event, or in the case of the wrestling activity spanning more than one day, on the last day of the individual engaging in competition or participation, talent and referees will be required to undergo a third NMT molecular PCR swab test, with the third test being required for contact tracing being conducted by and being documented by the commission who consider contact tracing to be essential to reducing the spread of COVID-19."

Ring of Honor was one of the many companies rattled by the #Speakingout abuse reconciliation movement that called out many professional wrestlers for a toxic culture involving grooming, sexual misconduct, and worse. Their recently appointed head-booker Marty Scurll was named as a possible abuser, an allegation that he made a statement on and apologized, while maintaining that he felt he was largely innocent. Due to this, and the pressure from the fall-out, he was removed as head booker. It appears that longtime ROH wrestler, and former head booker, Delirious has once again taken the mantle.

The Wrestling Observer Newsletter reports:

“Hunter Johnston (Delirious) is back as the head of creative. Marty Scurll, who had been head booker, is technically on hiatus with no ROH responsibilities pending a human resources investigation of the claims made against him. Johnston has been the sole creative force as far as formatting, producing and organizing television since the investigation started.”

Since Marty Scurll won't be booking the show it's reasonable to assume that he will also be absent from the tapings as a performer.

Impact Wrestling - I think that since 2002 many people have been waiting for the eventual demise of the company now called Impact Wrestling. Once considered a direct competitor to WWE, and perhaps the number two company in the US for a time, things have changed a bit, but its still pumping out content and attracting an increasing fanbase after numerous TV channel changes put the company's future in jeopardy multiple times. Now sitting on AXS TV, Impact Wrestling has been around for 18 years now, double the amount of time that ECW and WCW existed, and just as long as WWE has been called WWE.



Impact was the hardest hit by the aforementioned #speakingout movement – large numbers of their roster including significant wrestlers such as Joey Ryan, Michael Elgin, and Dave Crist were accused of misconduct. Covid-19 trapped some of their wrestlers in other countries including their current champion, Tessa Blanchard, who has been accused of abandoning her job and holding the title for ransom. Tessa faces her own allegations of racism in the previous year, coincidentally. Impact Wrestling's parent company, Anthem Sports & Entertainment, released a statement saying they were reviewing the allegations. Soon after, Joey Ryan would release a statement without addressing specific allegations; It was later revealed that Ryan and Crist's contracts were terminated, while Elgin was suspended. On June 26, Impact Wrestling announced Elgin would be removed from all future programing; he later denied the allegations made against him. On July 18, Ryan also released a video denying almost all the allegations made against him. Who knows if we'll see any of the aforementioned wrestlers again any time soon, if ever?

This all sounds really bad for Impact, right? Not so fast. In a topic I will discuss later, WWE released a ton of people due to Covid-19, many of which were “poached” by WWE to stifle competition. Recently, some of these employees have started to come back, such as EC3, Doc Gallows, Eric Young, as well as guys like Karl Anderson, and Heath Slater. This very well could be a new beginning for the company as fan involvement is up again, and the company seems to be moving past the darkness and into the future.

Impact never halted production during Covid-19 and has been on top of Covid testing seemingly. While no formal statement has been issued, a few wrestlers have talked about their experiences in interviews, such as this one from Impact Wrestling star [Ace Romero in Wrestlezone](#).

“For starters, they recommend to us about two weeks before the tapings to self-quarantine and then for the tapings itself, we have our own hotel rooms. Usually, we double up but we’ve been having our own hotel rooms,” Romero said, “which has been great. We get our temperature taken, we get our blood oxygen level taken, a bunch of more sciency-stuff that I don’t even know about. They take these measures, [use] gloves, the anti-bacterial stuff, all that stuff, EMTs. They take all of the measures and after tapings, they make sure to check in with people to see how we’re all doing. I always feel safe, I never feel worried about coming to work and being at risk.”

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Major League Wrestling (MLW) – Much like ROH, MLW suspended any new shows back in May and has not have any new content for a while. They have been showing episodes of “classic” shows cut with footage from the past years of the promotion, especially during the post ECW time where a lot of talent needed a place to go and MLW was the perfect place. Not having steady work has led a handful of stars that worked for various other feds, even AEW, to seek release. One of the more high-profile cases being Brian Pillman Jr., who works for AEW on their YouTube show AEW Dark.



"I've been actively trying to request my release and free myself of the obligations of MLW," he said. "Again, no hard feelings but they have obligations towards me too. They have to have so many shows take place in order for my end of the contract to be valid too. So, I think that would also free them up of some responsibility. I think it would be a win-win situation if they released me."

That said, MLW appears to be on the cusp of coming back as the company's owner Court Bauer had a job listing in late August looking for a "Covid-19 Compliance Officer":

"The health and welfare of our athletes, crew and staff is very important. This new position will provide the league with insight, strategy and guidance as we strive to deliver the best practices in safety measures for the restart. The medically certified COVID-19 compliance officer is educated in the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, disinfection, social distancing, CDC, local, and state guidelines, and other information related to preventing the spread of infection on a film production set. This person is responsible for safety compliance and enforcement of rules."

Fingers are crossed that they come back very soon.

New Japan Pro Wrestling (NJPW) – New Japan is slowly starting to recover from the Covid-19 lockdown, during the worst parts of the pandemic, NJPW ceased all operations for a bit, slowly opened back up without any fans in the audience. Being a country that actually took the pandemic seriously, Japan has slowly been re-opening lately and fans were able to start returning to shows this summer. Granted, NJPW is running at a smaller capacity than usual, but it's something. When attending one of these shows, fans need to adhere to the following precautions, taken from a [press release](#).



When at the venue attendees must:

- Make a legal declaration that they are complying with this policy (including the list of pre-screening described above).
- Wear a mask that completely covers one's mouth and nose. – Consent to a temperature check (body temperature must be below 37.5).
- Disinfect hands with alcohol spray, etc.
- Submit one's name, home address and contact details.
- Record the time of visit.

Perhaps one of the bigger issues they are facing is that a large portion of their roster is trapped outside of the country due to various travel bans. Jon Moxley, most notably, won the IWGP United States Championship for a second time at Wrestle Kingdom 14 in January 2020. His first reign was cut short due to a travel issues resulting from a notoriously bad typhoon, in his second reign he has only had one defense since winning. Moxley successfully defended the championship against Suzuki at The New Beginning in Osaka in February. On August 1, Moxley surpassed Kenny Omega as the longest reigning IWGP United States Champion, time will tell if NJPW forces him to vacate the title or if they let him hang in there. Considering the belt was designed for their expansion into the US market, everything seems stalled at the moment.

Despite this, things have moved forward, The Bullet Club, once seen as this era's cool faction ala the Horsemen or NWO, is usually comprised of gaijin (foreigners) but the travel bans have created a vacuum to be filled by prominent Japanese wrestlers for the first time. Guys like Gedo (who is also the head booker), Kenta, Dick Togo, and Evil have recently joined the ranks. Evil, also having become the current IWGP Heavyweight champion, is currently NJPW's top rising star and interim leader of the Bullet Club (since Jay White is trapped outside). Seen for a long time as a mid-carder, "The Covid Push", has helped his career immensely.



ARCADIAPOD
100% NERD STUFF

Stephen Kelley's Website can be found at arcadiapod.com. Article continues on the next page.



World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)- Oof – I’m going to be very honest – this hasn’t been a good year for WWE for many reasons. I am going to try my best not to let my bias show here when discussing this, but I want to lay this out in the open. I have largely stopped watching WWE for many reasons; the product, the politics and business practices of Vince McMahon, my disdain for his partnership with Saudi Arabia, and the quality of those accompanying Saudi PPV shows. And much more. I had been a subscriber to WWE Network since day one, and had to cancel that back in May due to the fact that I simply wasn’t gaining any enjoyment from it. Perhaps 2021 will be better, but for right now Vince and I are taking a break.

Prior to Covid, Vince McMahon was on the top of the world – he was about to enter WrestleMania season – perhaps their biggest time of the year and a huge windfall for revenues. Then Late March happened, and the United States largely shut down – Vince naively claimed that WrestleMania was going to happen anyway come hell or high water until he literally had to be shutdown by the State Governor of Florida. After this a month or so of near silent, frankly depressing, and lifeless wrestling shows started. Even WrestleMania was mired by this, with a highpoint being the popularity of “Cinematic Matches” beginning. While not the first time WWE has employed pre-taped wrestling matches, the ones at ‘Mania were perhaps their best so far. “The Boneyard Match”, starring the Undertaker vs AJ Styles was hailed as an instant classic, and while more divisive, the “Firefly Funhouse Match” between Bray Wyatt and John Cena was as close to David Lynch meets the final episodes of Neon Genesis Evangelion that we’ll ever get from a wrestling show.

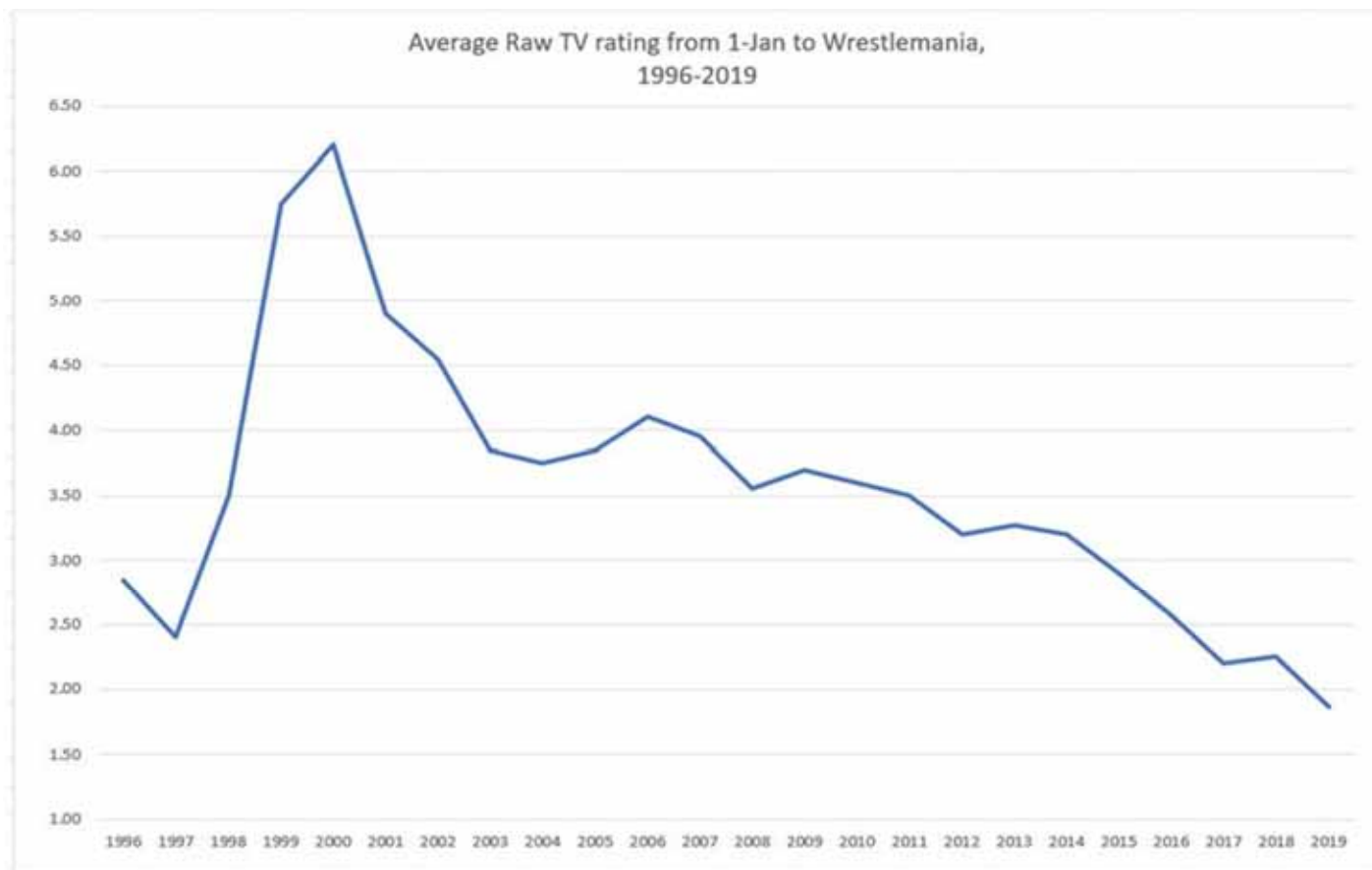
That isn’t to say that “cinematic matches” are always good, as others such as the Street Prophets Vs Viking Raiders, or Money in the Bank were seen as pretty rough in comparison.

Amid calls to shut WWE down for the pandemic, Vince pulled some powerful strings in Washington and was confusingly deemed an essential industry as “we believe it is now more important than ever to provide people with a diversion from these hard times”. I love wrestling, and am glad it wasn’t 100% cancelled, but rolled my eyes at the silliness.

On April 15, WWE announced a series of cuts and layoffs in response to the pandemic, including releasing a number of performers (Karl Anderson, Kurt Angle, Aiden English, EC3, Epico, Luke Gallows, Curt Hawkins, No Way Jose, Sarah Logan, Mike Kanellis, Maria Kanellis, Primo, Erick Rowan, Rusev, Lio Rush, Zack Ryder, Heath Slater, and Eric Young), three producers (Dave Finlay, Shane Helms and Lance Storm), referee Mike Chioda, and multiple NXT/Performance Center trainees and staff. WWE executives also took a pay cut, and the company has also suspended construction on its new headquarters for at least six months.

With the news that WWE made its literal most profitable year ever, largely due to not having the costs of touring to worry about, the firings caused significant backlash. Right after this, it was revealed that WWE was covering up a MASSIVE Covid-19 outbreak involving upwards of 30-40 WWE staff. It was revealed that WWE was basically not testing in any way, and even banned masks on TV because Kevin Dunn, the longtime Director of RAW, felt "they look stupid. This was leaked by a number of wrestlers and McMahon was forced to protect his stars more under threat of a forced shutdown.

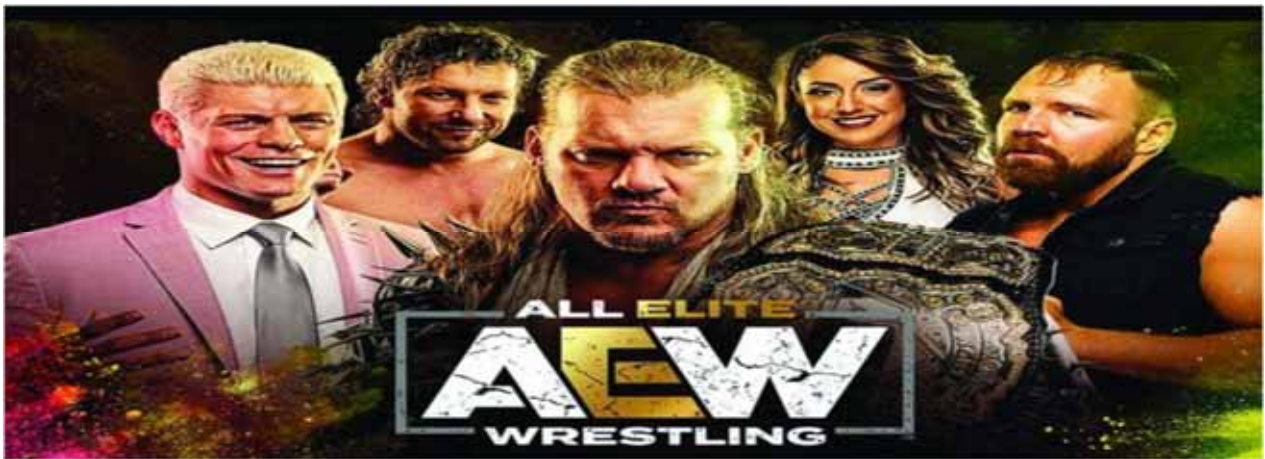
In a time when TV ratings are slowly climbing back up, the ratings for both WWE Monday Night RAW and Friday Night Smackdown are at record lows. Largely due to stale writing, nonsensical booking, and an over-reliance on nostalgia, WWE has basically lost every single demographic except the male over 50 demographic – the one that advertisers do not care about in any way. RAW also achieved its literal worst rating ever recently, like worst rating since the show started. Not good.



Perhaps the biggest casualty of The Covid Era is the wholesale destruction of NXT (WWEs much loved and regarded developmental show) in order to fail at stopping competition. According to popular Wrestling commentator, Dave Meltzer "Vince McMahon and the USA network were both aware that had WWE NXT not debuted on Wednesday against AEW Dynamite, it would have drawn a lot more people. Instead, NXT was put against AEW in order to drive AEW out of business. However, when AEW and TNT came to a three-year deal earlier this year, Vince McMahon realized that they were not succeeding in ruling out AEW. This came as a surprise to everyone concerned, including executives in TNT. The idea of moving to another night was shut down at that time. However, with NXT regularly losing to AEW when it comes to the Wednesday Night Wars, they might make a decision on moving WWE NXT away from competing with AEW on Wednesday nights."

NXT is rife with nonsense booking, and "hot-shotting" Championship matches and gimmicks, once removed for PPV shows, to TV in a dizzying attempt to pop ratings. As the late WCW found out nearly 20 years ago, this does not work, and ultimately alienates the audience. In the AEW section shown below, I have included head-to-head ratings for NXT and AEW, dubbed "The Wednesday Night Wars" by fans.

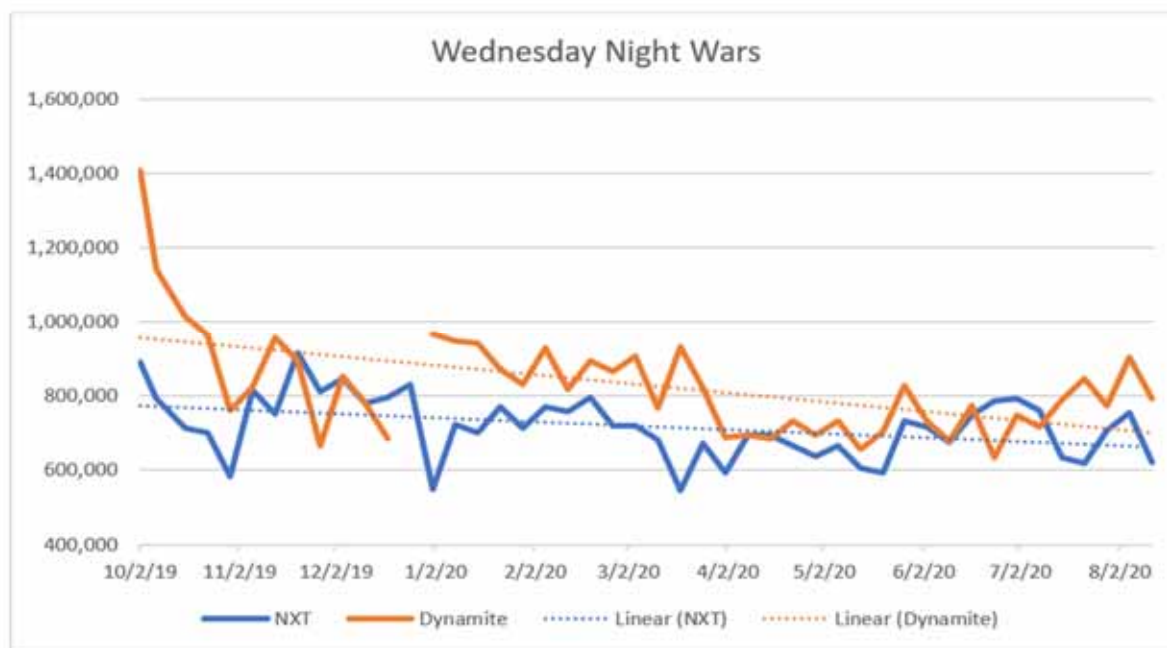
There are calls for Vince to step down, or a re-structuring of the booking by fans, but I have a feeling the only way Vincent K. McMahon steps away from his job is in a pine box sadly.



All Elite Wrestling (AEW) – I attended the second-to-last live AEW Dynamite episode in February – at that time, it was right before the AEW Revolution PPV and it seemed like they were unstoppable. Little did we all know, that a mere few weeks later AEW would be having to tape two months of programming all at once the day before a lockdown with 30% of its staff gone. These frantic tapings were to have something...anything to air and keep their TV contracts alive. In the long term, this was both a good and bad thing for AEW, as their ratings did crash with a few weird silence-filled near stage theater styled shows, and a loss of live merch revenue. They got super creative and may have unintentionally brought about the next wave of new stars for their company and drew the audience away from WWE in waves. Having only 30% of their roster was bad – very bad. Some international stars are still stuck overseas today, and others had illness concerns and stayed at home for a time.

As I mentioned, AEW had to fill time with somebody, so they hired a ton of local independent talent to take part in tapings as wrestlers and as “The audience” to create the illusion of a crowd at shows. These performers would hoot and holler as a crowd would and it broke the deafening silence ruining the shows. This was later something WWE borrowed from AEW. The new influx of talent created a new direction for AEW Dark, their free YouTube Show. Previously, Dark was a 30 minute or less show that showcased a couple of Dark Matches taped before AEW Dynamite. Now each episode is upwards of an hour in length with some going for as long as two full hours. Dark has started to have its own storylines, and has helped others finally gain prominence. The Dark Order, for example, was forced to add new members when both Evil Uno and Stu Grayson were trapped in Canada. Now led by Brodie Lee, The Dark order dominates both shows.

All Elite Wrestling has been using COVID-19 Rapid Tests for on-air talent, production members and venue employees while they tape at Daily's Place in Jacksonville. According to Tony Schiavone, once talent tests negative, they receive a yellow wristband, followed by a blue one after their temperature checks. Both bracelets are required to be admitted, and Tony Khan has also said anybody who works backstage or around the ring is tested each week. After the two months of shows taped in Georgia, AEW announced that it would relocate future episodes of Dynamite to a venue called Daily's Place in Jacksonville, with only essential personnel being allowed to attend. Later in the summer small crowds have been allowed to pepper into shows, helping the feels of the show immensely.



Note on the above chart: Not shown are recent episodes where AEW climbed back up to over a million viewers, something that shocked the wrestling media outlets.



Most notable is the demographic shifts between AEW and WWE, I mentioned before that WWE is mostly watched by males 50+ years of age. AEW however, is watched by men and women, young and old, and most importantly dominates WWE in the 18-49 demographic, something that has led Chris Jericho to call himself "The Demo-God".

So what's on the horizon? AEW has toys at Walmart now, and a videogame on the horizon. If WWE doesn't shape up, they may have helped nurture the development of their biggest foe in decades as AEW has gone from being seen as the show that can barely beat NXT in ratings to being fairly close to WWE Monday Night RAW all of a sudden. 2021 will be an interesting year for sure.

So, there you have it. These past since months have been rough for everyone, but it seems like we all might be clawing our way out from under Covid-19. I didn't talk about a few companies such as ones in Mexico or Europe, because that would be an entire book by itself. 2020 has shown that creativity is king when it comes to wrestling fans, and that the once unsinkable ship might very well hit that proverbial iceberg if nobody captains the ship correctly. Here's hoping these smaller companies start banding together in 2021 (An All In 2 PPV would be amazing) and maybe it will force WWE to do something truly different.

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A Favor to Ask and a Preview of the Next Issue

We could spend a countless amount of money on ads to promote this magazine, but we know of a better way. We are doing the opposite of many established publications and asking if you would be willing to share copies of this with your friends and family free of charge? This will help us get the word out and expand our operations to entertain, educate, and empower the people.

Ok, so more for fun than anything, but you get the idea.

In the next issue will be a more in depth look at Linux Mint 20. It is an operating system that has a balance of stability and features. In theory, it can be installed on older systems to give them more life. Most general use cases will be evaluated in order to determine how effective it is as a solution for those who may not be willing to empty their wallets just for a Windows license.

With Halloween season on the horizon, it is appropriate that we cover a topic that is somewhat scary to say the least. That is all that will be said on that for now. As for any other articles, artwork, and more, that is up to you!

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