

# "To Identify New Areas in which Research is Needed, and to Stimulate Such Research" -- A Foreword

DAVID E. BEARD

Founded less than a decade ago, the Professional Wrestling Studies Association has grown, slowly, steadily, into an interdisciplinary powerhouse. In taking professional wrestling as the core of its mission, the Association is making more and more important inroads both into the critical analysis of professional wrestling and into the critical interrogation of the impact of professional wrestling on American and global culture.

The mission of the society begins with the study of professional wrestling as a phenomenon. We seek “to gather from all relevant fields of study, and to disseminate among its members, current knowledge of professional wrestling, broadly construed.” This has included critique of wrestling as a performance, analysis of wrestling as a semiotic system, economic and sociological analysis of wrestling as an industry or as a sport. We have engaged analysis highlighting gender, race, and other intersectional identities. And we have engaged in comparative sociology, examining wrestling alongside other sports and alongside other performing arts (e.g., in Claire Warden, et al, “When was the Last Time that You Heard of Ian McKellen Blowing out His Knee? The Performance and Practice of Risk in British Professional Wrestling,” available here).

As a scholarly society, we have also identified critical vocabularies that are unique to professional wrestling. These critical vocabularies are potentially of value for unpacking dimensions of the culture outside wrestling. (See this journal’s special issue on “kayfabe,” collected here.). For example, while “kayfabe” is a term of art among professional wrestlers, it’s also a useful metaphor for unpacking human behaviors in other arenas, as Ben Cattaneo’s use of “kayfabe” in professional consulting. (Cattaneo is interviewed elsewhere within this issue.)

Professional wrestling studies, then, entails the close analysis of professional wrestling through diverse disciplinary and intellectual lenses.

In this issue, we want to expand our scholarly work by looking at the impact of professional wrestling on the arts and media. Focusing on fiction, games, and graphic novels (comics), we are opening the door to the study of wrestling as a cultural force.

In our first section, we interview **Craig Davidson**, a Canadian author who has published work under both his name and the pen names Patrick Lestewka and Nick Cutter. Davidson has graciously given us permission to reprint an excerpt from his 2013 novel *Cataract City* (a shortlisted nominee for the 2013 Scotiabank Giller Prize). *Cataract City* is one of the colloquial names for Niagara Falls, Ontario, and the book opens with some young boys, watching Bruiser Mahoney wrestle. In an interview, Davidson shares the impact professional wrestling had on his life and work.

In our second section, broadly themed around games, we talk first to **Ben Cattaneo** and **Robert Earl Stewart**. Cattaneo works as a consultant in decision studies; Stewart is a poet, memoirist, and journalist. Together, they invented a wrestling roleplaying game in their teenage years. Stewart wrote about that experience in an essay originally published in *Canadian Notes & Queries*, reprinted here by permission of the author. Then, in two interviews, Stewart and Cattaneo talk about the formative power of pro wrestling on their lives as authors, podcasters, and entrepreneurs.

**Nathan D. Paoletta**, designer of the contemporary and popular indy roleplaying game *World Wide Wrestling*, offers us a different entrypoint in pro wrestling. Unlike our first three creators, who discovered professional wrestling as children, Paoletta was introduced to wrestling while an adult, and he immediately saw the opportunities possibly in a roleplaying game. We reprint a section of the rules from *World Wide Wrestling* by permission of Paoletta, who is the game’s designer and publisher.

Importantly, Paoletta’s game is not merely a way to reconstruct Wrestlemania in your livingroom and in your imagination. Unlike video games, which offer the player the promise of wrestling as your favorite wrestler, in *World Wide Wrestling*, the players create the wrestler, the promotion, the world.

In our third section, we interview three comics creators (**Von Allan**, **Max Riffner**, and **Joanne Starer**). **Von Allan** never

once depicts wrestling in his comics, but in *The Road to God Knows*, the child in a family that struggles with a parent's mental illness escapes the sadness of life by watching the action in the ring. I am touched, myself — recognizing in *The Road to God Knows* the escape that professional wrestling also brought me as a child.

Family dynamics are also at the core of **Max Riffner's** *The Crippler's Son*. In his interview, Riffner recounts his formal education in comics studies, noting that wrestling, like Greek drama, is filled with emotion, pushing the passion out into the cheap seats. His own work in comics was transformed when he began to pull that kind of emotion into his storytelling.

**Joanne Starer** is not only a comics creator; she was once a promoter in professional wrestling. Her *Total Suplex of the Heart* explores women in professional wrestling from up close. In her interview, she talks about the roles of both comedy and social justice in her work.

Taken together, then, this special issue of the journal opens a door, creates an invitation, to our readers. Consistent with our mission, we invite works, we always will, that take professional wrestling as its object of study. But we also invite our readers (scholars, journalists, and professionals attached to professional wrestling as a community) to explore the reverberations of wrestling in literature, comics, games, and other media.

We invite book reviews of the novels, comics, even books of poetry that are inspired by professional wrestling. We invite analyses of the board, roleplaying, and video games that invite players to inhabit and create the worlds of professional wrestling. After all, it is part of our mission to identify new areas within the subject of professional wrestling in which research is especially needed, and to stimulate such research. Christopher Dickinson's introductory essay, on the intersections between wrestling, media, and culture, is a first step in stimulating such research — we invite you to take the second.