

## *PALOOKAVILLE – Season One Treatment*

### **Series Title: Palookaville**

*Overview:* Toledo, Ohio. 1976. A crippled economy is destroying the once vibrant cities of the American factory belt. Professional wrestling, a household fixture in the 1950s, has seen its popularity plummet to an all-time low. In this world of dead-ends and disappointments, a struggling promoter and a charismatic ex-convict are about to get a second chance, when a television station provides them a stage on which to shine.

### **Central Characters:**

Robert “Buck” Buchanan (45) is a professional wrestler, promoter, and co-owner of the Toledo-based Midwest Wrestling Alliance. Buck appeared regularly on national television during wrestling’s heyday in the 1950s, and remains a local celebrity in the Toledo area. The diminished popularity of wrestling has taken its toll on Buck’s personal life. A preoccupation with his struggling career, coupled with a series of affairs, led to a divorce from his first wife, Dee Dee, and after her death from cancer, left him on non-speaking terms with his eldest son, Chris. A second marriage and a second son have provided him with a chance to do better, but his disappointments as a wrestler, a promoter, a husband and a father have left him feeling painfully inadequate. Try as he might, he can’t seem to stop repeating the same mistakes, over and over.

Mitchell “Mitch” Coe (25) is a recently paroled ex-convict, fresh off a two-year stretch in the Mansfield State Correctional Facility for punching a police officer. At his trial, Mitch maintained that the officer had been harassing him, but the blow left the officer temporarily in a coma and Mitch was found guilty. The son of a prominent evangelist, Mitch had a strict conservative upbringing, and it was his family’s hope that, like his brother Jim, he would follow his father into the ministry. Charismatic, athletic, and strikingly handsome, Mitch has always attracted women and trouble. He has a hard time with authority and can’t always control his anger. After his arrest, he was completely disowned. Steroids have given him an impossibly perfect physique, and when he gets the chance to wrestle on television, the same charm that might have made him a preacher will serve to make him a star.

Chris Buchanan (20) is Buck Buchanan’s eldest son, although the two haven’t spoken since Chris’s mother died of cancer two years ago. His father’s fame and subsequent struggle were a large part of Chris’s childhood. Although he would occasionally travel with his father to wrestling matches, his strongest memories are of Buck’s absence. Buck would leave for weeks at a time, but his fame provided a constant source of teasing from other kids. Chris got into countless schoolyard fights with kids who called his father “a phony”. He eventually attended the University of Toledo on a wrestling scholarship, but dropped out

after losing interest in both wrestling and academics, secretly entertaining a dream of becoming an actor. He lives with his girlfriend, Kelly, and works nights at a local slaughterhouse.

***Supporting Characters:***

Luther Smith (30) is a gentle introvert who lives with his mother, but wrestles under the questionable stage persona of the cannibal savage, Chief Kongo.

Ruby Darrow (40) is the much younger wife of Buck's business partner, Ed. Ruby is ultimately responsible for the television deal that turns the company around.

Danny "Tough" Russell (30) is a strongman, a bully, and one of Buck's leading wrestlers. On his farm, he keeps a private zoo full of lions, tigers and wolves.

Valerie Buchanan (35) is Buck's second wife. A fulltime nursing student, she's Buck's biggest supporter, but won't stand by and watch his work destroy his life.

***Episode One:*** After Buck Buchanan's 8-year-old son Bobby sees him get into a very real fistfight with a wrestler named Tough Russell, Buck's wife Val gives him an ultimatum: If he doesn't quit wrestling, she's taking their son and leaving him. Buck tries to quit the business, but realizes how important he is to the other wrestlers, and ultimately chooses wrestling. As she said she would, Val takes Bobby and leaves. Buck tries to reconnect with his eldest son Chris, but Chris turns him away. Ruby Darrow, the wife of Buck's business partner Ed, sets up a deal to secure a weekly television timeslot for their company, the MWA (Midwest Wrestling Alliance). Unable to find a job, Mitchell Coe meets Scooter, a member of the Outlaw motorcycle gang, and agrees to ride along as backup on a drug-related shakedown, but runs away from the scene before it escalates to gunfire. Luther Smith faces heavy criticism -- first from African American wrestler Willie Carter, and then from his own mother -- for his offensive in-ring persona: the cannibal savage, Chief Kongo. Luther defends himself, saying the persona makes him feel like a warrior. Later, he learns that he's losing his factory job.

***Episode Two:*** Ruby invites Buck to a meeting with the television programmer, outlining their vision for the weekly broadcast. Buck tries to explain that they don't have the personnel to produce a weekly show, and Ruby sends him out to recruit whatever personnel he needs. Mitch meets and befriends Rose, the cute girl living with her abusive boyfriend in the room next to his, and the two seem to hit it off. Later, when Mitch hears her being beaten, he kicks in their door to help her, but Rose surprises him by siding with the boyfriend. Val meets with Chris, explaining that she and Buck have separated, and asks him if he'll spend time with Bobby. When the two brothers meet, Chris sees a great deal of himself in the boy, and his hostility towards Buck softens.

**Episode Three:** In his quest to recruit personnel for the television program, Buck meets with Chris again and offers him a spot with the promotion. Chris adamantly refuses the offer, mistakenly thinking that Buck wants him to wrestle. When Buck says that he wants him to be a referee, Chris agrees. Mitch runs into Rose again, and she tells him that her boyfriend has left her. It comes up in conversation that Mitch needs a job, and she tells him that she can find him one. Mitch takes the job, as a janitor in a retirement home. There he meets an orderly, Bruce "Mad Dog" Cutler, who happens to be one of the wrestlers in Buck's promotion. Cutler urges Mitch to try his hand at wrestling. Luther Smith and Willie Carter take jobs working on a garbage truck.

**Episode Four:** The MWA puts on its first televised show, with terrible results. The matches are dull, there are multiple technical difficulties, and no one seems to tune in to the broadcast. Part of their deal stipulated that the show could be cancelled after only three weeks if results are poor. Buck worries that they're off to a bad start. During the show, Tough Russell proves to be terribly inarticulate on camera, and when the show is over, he takes out his frustration by bullying Luther in front of the other wrestlers, breaking Luther's spear over his knee. Chris tries to calm him down, and Tough lashes out at him too. Mad Dog Cutler urges Buck to meet with Mitch, but Buck is preoccupied with the show and brushes him off. Mitch and Rose become lovers, and move in together. On his way to work, Mitch thinks he sees Scooter on the streets and worries that the Outlaws might come after him for running out on them.

**Episode Five:** At work on their garbage route, Willie Carter is struck by a car and killed, while Luther watches, helpless to stop it. Traumatized, Luther takes some food to Willie's widow to console her, and the two strike up a friendship. Buck meets with Val and tells her that he thinks he's made a mistake: The television program is bound to fail, and worse than that, he's driven her away from him. She assures him that she believes in him, and urges him to stick it out. After repeated brush-offs by Buck, Mad Dog Cutler goes directly to Ruby and convinces her to meet Mitch. She arranges a meeting that brings Buck and Mitch together for the first time. From their first encounter, it's crystal clear that Mitch is going to be a star.

**Episode Six:** Buck teaches Mitch to wrestle, but finds that, as strong as he is, he's not particularly coordinated. Buck decides that Mitch might be better off flexing his muscles for the camera and relying on very simple moves. There's serious pressure from the network affiliate, threatening to cancel the program if ratings don't improve. Ruby makes it clear that she's thinking of bringing in other wrestlers from Detroit. Buck knows that the move would mean dropping some of their current wrestlers, and begs her not to do it. Chris learns from Bobby that it was Tough Russell who beat up his father in the first episode, and demands that Buck let him wrestle him on that week's broadcast. Unaware of his reasons, Buck is surprised by Chris's decision to become a wrestler, but agrees. In the ring, Chris throws out any pretense of a staged match and gives Tough a very real, very vicious beating, right in front of a television audience. Except for the

other wrestlers, no one knows that they're watching a real fight. The fans love it, and the show is their most successful yet.

**Episode Seven:** Mitch makes his first on screen appearance, calling himself "Jesse James Dean". His articulate speech and physique are mesmerizing, making him an instant hit. The show's ratings skyrocket. Walking on the streets with Rose, people recognize him and imitate his character. Rose loves that he's getting this attention. Among the other people watching when the episode airs is Scooter, who gets an idea of how to find Mitch. Humiliated by the public beating he took from Chris, Tough begins to take on a smaller and smaller role within the company. He starts drinking and taking out his frustrations on his wife. Luther spends more and more time with Willie's widow, stepping up as a father figure to their daughter. When the little girl tells him that she loves him, it's clear to Luther that her mother loves him too. That week, as he's preparing to wrestle, Luther announces that he won't be wearing the make-up anymore, that he no longer wants to wrestle as Chief Kongo.

**Episode Eight:** Chris, Buck, and Ruby attend a wrestling show in Detroit, under the pretext of "borrowing" some experienced wrestlers from the neighboring promotion in an attempt to bolster ratings. While there, Ruby speaks with a scout from the popular New York-based WWWF, and she extends an invitation for the scout to attend one of their shows in Toledo. Putting the pieces together, Buck assumes this means that she's planning to sell one of his wrestlers to the much bigger company. Because the MWA is quickly becoming Mitch's show, Buck assumes that it's Mitch she has in mind. Back in Toledo, two members of the Outlaws come to Mitch's room when he's away. They frighten Rose by trying to break into the room. Tough's humiliation continues as the fans begin to mock him, every time he appears in the ring as well as on the streets. By now he's drinking steadily.

**Episode Nine:** Worried about the Outlaws, Mitch tries to confide in Buck that he needs help. He tells him that he wants to leave Toledo, but can't. Buck cuts the conversation short, mistaking Mitch's words as a sign that he wants to leave the company, and further fueling his suspicion that Mitch is going to sign with the scout from New York. Mitch pays a surprise visit to his own father, apologizing with genuine remorse for the grief he's caused their family. The elder Coe doesn't accept the apology, and Mitch leaves, criticizing him for his stubborn hypocrisy. After spending more time with Bobby, Chris talks to Val about how things are going in the promotion, and asks her to come back to his father. Tough Russell continues his downward spiral. On his farm is a private zoo where he keeps lions, tigers and wolves. Shamed and humiliated, he gets drunk and attempts to commit suicide by climbing into the tiger's cage. Instead of mauling him, the tiger treats him as gently as a faithful pet.

**Episode Ten:** The scout from the WWWF comes to one of the MWA shows. Buck gets furious when he hears that they have in fact come to sign one of his wrestlers. He confronts Mitch about it, accusing him of ingratitude. Mitch is hurt

by the accusation. He assures Buck that the scout never offered him a contract, and he can't believe that Buck would even suggest that he might betray him like that. He tells Buck to go to hell and storms out of the arena. When Mitch gets to the deserted parking lot, Scooter and the two Outlaws are waiting to attack him. They beat him savagely and seem to be on the brink of killing him when Tough Russell suddenly appears, sees what's happening, and comes to Mitch's rescue. After the show is over, Buck tells Chris that he feels terrible about the unfair way he treated Mitch. Chris reveals that it wasn't Mitch the scout had come to sign, but him. He's signed a contract and will be leaving for New York in a few days. Buck is heartbroken, but Chris hugs him and tells him that it's something he simply has to do. When Buck gets home, he discovers that Val and Bobby have come back.