

## Kings and Queens of the Ring

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In the center of a pulsating Mexican arena, the battle of Good versus Evil ensues. Through a series of destructive aerial acrobatics, masked wrestlers of both sexes clash in a theatrical array of violence and humor. Colorful, passionate and punching - the show is an explosive look at gender issues in modern-day Mexico.

Their names: Bestia, Rambo, Marcela, Virus, and Sangre Azteca... Their passion: the fight. Their worst fear: to lose their mask. These luchadores (or fighters) train from an early age, often preferring the training room to the classroom. Competition is fierce- only the best make a living as full-time wrestlers. The rest survive through work as models, actors, soccer players and even administrative employees. One might even pass them in the street without a second glance, often blending with the crowd despite an intimidating muscular physique. However, when these fighters enter the wrestling ring, a spectacular ferocity is unleashed beneath the guise of a colorful mask. If this mask is removed, their true identity is revealed leaving the exposed luchador prey to a hissing crowd.

In Mexico, devoted fans regard Lucha Libre as a religion. A mix of sport, acrobatics and fantasy, this masked wrestling has earned its place as one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the country. Born out of poor districts, Lucha Libre penetrates several facets of society, from the streets to the elite. The most popular fights take place in arenas with tens of thousands of fans, specifically in Mexico City Arena. Competition to fight and remain there is hard; only the best compete at the top.

“¡Arriba los rudos!” shouts a scandalized crowd, meaning Long live the malicious ones! Here, we see dark Mr. Niebla, fur around his neck, peering out through the cat eyes of his black mask as he attacks his “good” adversary. It is a manichean fight embodied between the incarnations of good and evil: the evil *rudos* lewd, irreverent and disregarding of rules, and the good luchadores with more refined technique, as if floating on air, but equally aggressive.

“¡Mas!” (More!), “¡Mátalo!” (Kill him!) shouts the public now, as deafening trumpets sound. Men and women stand in their seats, howling with upright fists. After three rounds of a fight without rest, punctuated by displays of absurd cruelty, the referee whistles the end of the match. *Rudos* gained. And the losers, sometimes genuinely wounded, crawl away in defeat.

Once luchadores perfect the first skill of fighting-breaking a fall well-they take it to the next level. Apart from daily training, the best fighters create an image and maintain a character. Dressed in exuberant costumes, luchadores compete in a battle of imagination, armored by their choice of feathers, coloured masks, capes and spangles.

Their persona must invoke fantasies of the iconic “superhero” in order to impress their adversaries and enliven the crowd. Each fighter, whether man, woman, dwarf or exótico (homosexual), indeed cultivates their style, techniques and characteristics. For these seducers of the spotlight, a successful combat is hardly judged by simply winning or losing; rather, a triumphant luchador takes the crowd by charm, humor or even fear. An emotionally moved crowd is the trophy of a successful fight.