

# WRESTLING

A JACK RENO NOVEL

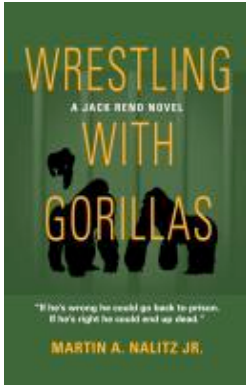
# WITH

The word "GORILLAS" is written in a large, orange, blocky font. The letters are partially filled with the black silhouettes of three gorillas. One gorilla is positioned behind the 'G', another behind the 'O', and a third behind the 'S'.

# GORILLAS

**“If he’s wrong he could go back to prison.  
If he’s right he could end up dead.”**

**MARTIN A. NALITZ JR.**



*The world of infomercials doesn't sound that exciting; but add politics and organized crime and it becomes lethal. With two beautiful women and a boatload of cash on top of that, it's natural that Jack Reno would end up in the middle of it. If that's not enough, when his prison buddy, Choice, is shot, then arrested, somebody has to run his criminal enterprise in the middle of a gang war. Can Reno do it? If he makes a mistake, he could go back to prison. If he does everything right, he could end up dead. Wrestling with Gorillas-A Jack Reno Novel*

## **Wrestling with Gorillas**

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# **Wrestling with Gorillas**

Marty Nalitz

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ISBN 978-1-62646-428-5

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2013

First Edition

*"It does not matter how slowly you go so long as you do not stop."* **Confucius**

*"Lord I don't even want the cheese anymore, just let me out of the trap."*-**Uncle Bob**



# 1

My Uncle Bob used to say when you're wrestling a gorilla you don't get to quit when you're tired, you can only quit when the gorilla is tired. He formulated this world view as he did most of his others, from the experience of being a legendary car salesman. Some said the best that Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania had ever seen.

Like all his other observations I came to realize the truth in this one as that old gorilla wore me down time and again; three ex-wives, and seven years in prison for starters. (Interesting that I put the ex-wives before prison.) I was in kind of a downtime emotionally and that always led me to wax philosophical.

Through a weird quirk of fate it seemed like all at once just about every woman I had ever been the least bit involved with had gotten engaged. Not only that, just about all of them seemed to feel the need to call or somehow make sure I knew this. Even Julie Hayes, a delightfully treacherous beauty that I had fractured a series of S.E.C. laws for had gotten engaged to a pretty-boy wide receiver for the Denver Broncos. She ran around in circles like that because of the money I had made for her through the breaking of these laws, plus she was good-looking enough to make the football star drop a country-western singer. I figured if he lasted three months with her his hands would be shaking so badly he wouldn't be able to catch a beach ball, let alone a football. By then his trademark long dark hair would be coming out in clumps and he'd be reduced to rubble. A skid mark on the highway of love. He might have been tough enough for pro football but it takes a special breed of man to hang with a woman like Julie.

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If that wasn't enough Kat, my third ex-wife, had gone and married a geek. I didn't care, of course. Meant nothing to me personally, even if she was the only woman in my life I never cheated on. Well, there was one time, but it was right before I knew I was going to prison so that doesn't really count. Anyway, she up and married a doctor who didn't know what Auld Lang Syne meant, when she'd had a guy, me, that knew all five verses to the song! As I said, no skin off my nose, just a poor decision on her part.

That wasn't all. I was just going through a period of my life when suddenly women were beginning to view me as...safe. Keep in mind, I am a recovering scoundrel. Lived a life of deceit and manipulation that eventually led me to prison for white-collar crime. I'm not proud of that and have moved on to a different more respectable life, but it was bothering me that so many women viewed me as nothing more than "friend" material.

It didn't strike me as unusual when I met a comely young lady and on our second date somehow managed to convince her to give her old boyfriend another chance. She kissed me on the cheek.

Met another woman who called me four nights later to bail her out of jail. Given my history that didn't bother me too much, but she kept insisting that I not let her parents know. "Just please don't tell my folks, okay...Remember, my Mom and Dad can't know about this, okay?" I had no idea who her parents were.

The last straw was a beautiful brunette that my hairdresser, another friend, fixed me up with. We went to lunch and everything just clicked. I looked forward to seeing her again soon. Two days later she called in tears and asked if I would take her poor little dog in to be put to sleep. Even though I thought I was being pranked I did it. She was really



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good looking. She couldn't see me that night because she was too distraught. The next day she told me she could never see me again; I'd always make her think of poor little Muffy. She did hope someday we could be friends though.

This was a different kind of slump; I was meeting beautiful women, just not closing the deal, as my Uncle Bob would have said. I could actually point to the moment when this started.

Not too long ago I suddenly found myself mixed up, to one degree or another, with three different women. Thanks to the internet they were all from different parts of the country. To a guy that seems so perfect when you first think about it, but believe me, it's not.

Nancy, an old flame from just after college, had tracked me down through one of the social media outlets. We'd had a fairly torrid relationship back in the day, slowed down only slightly by the fact that I was married to ex-wife number one at the time. Like so many women she had aged maddeningly well and looked, if anything, better than I remembered her. I must confess I had remembered her too. She was coming off a divorce and the internet makes it way too easy to track old friends down.

Then there was Billie Jo, southern beauty I met through another social media site. She was from Arizona, just close enough to make a couple of trips back and forth for each of us. It was very nice, but she had one passion in life, American Idol. She could, and did, go on at length about the hijinks of the various judges, few of whom I recognized. Billie Jo was never slowed down or discouraged by this.

Finally, Becky, a Colorado lady. We met the good old-fashioned American way; I picked her up at a hockey game. Becky loved horses and lived in an area that allowed her to keep one. In other words, what us city slickers would call

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“the country.” Living as I did, in the inner city, this was kind of a conflict. But she was gorgeous and liked hockey, a lethal combination. I saw her regularly, but, it being the twenty-first century we mostly communicated by various forms of social media.

All beautiful, kind, witty charming women, none of whom knew about each other. Story of my life.

I was finding myself spending more and more time on the phone, texting and e-mailing, three of my least favorite activities outside of prison. A guy had to be careful also; one night I sent an e-mail intended for Nancy to Billie Jo and right after that I texted a response to Becky for something Billie Jo wrote me. The situation wore on me pretty heavily; I was grouchy, wasn't eating, even quit watching American Idol. Okay, I never watched American Idol in my life, but, it was still time to take a stand.

One night I came home from work determined to handle the entire thing. I had fifteen minutes before I had to be somewhere, so I was going to call Billie Jo and set things right; I liked her plenty, but I was my own man. I had to be me, to paraphrase Sinatra. We could remain friends if she wanted, but the romance was over. I would do this quickly, compassionately and surgically. Then I'd move on to Nancy and Becky.

I dialed Billie Jo's number with my speech ready. Seventy five minutes later I was still on the phone with her, saying, “Uh huh...uh huh...” I was also trading e-mails with Nancy, back in Pittsburgh, in which my responses were basically, “Uh huh...uh huh...” If that wasn't enough I was trading texts with Becky in which I was texting, “Uh huh...uh huh...” It being texting I probably could have answered-uhuh, or something like that. No matter, I was being whipped by three different women in three different forms of social

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media at the same time. It was like the ancient Greek gods had morphed into modern internet gods and were spending their days tormenting me, personally.

I eventually got out of all three situations, but this was the point where I suddenly became every woman's "friend." Something had to change; I needed to get some edge back in my life, get back on the horse. Maybe I'd start wearing an eye-patch or something.

This wasn't just the way my day was going, but the entire year had been going like this. I was beginning to think I needed to have an intervention with myself. It was really starting to annoy me to the point I thought it would consume me.

Then I found out that Choice had been shot.

Some years earlier I had started my own hedge fund, coming across an iron-clad way of making money. To make it work best I needed a substantial stake, so I set about rounding up investors. As my successes mounted it got easier and easier to get the money. It probably also started the clock running to the day I went to prison for securities fraud.

I didn't run a fashionable Ponzi scheme or anything like that. What the state knew was that I had gotten somebody to invest money in my fund after I took a big hit due to the events of September 11, 2001. They also knew I had not told him about that big loss, which is the textbook definition of securities fraud. What the state didn't know was how I had always made money prior to that. If they had, the biggest problem in my life would have had nothing to do with women because I would probably never know the pleasure of female companionship again.

The state, in its wisdom, put me away with a twenty year sentence which seemed harsh to me. It was largely through the efforts of an Assistant District Attorney named Ruth Thromberg that this happened. Once it did I went on my merry way to prison where I became an inmate rep, the inmate who goes into a disciplinary hearing with another inmate charged with some violation. These violations could be fairly simple things-not going back to their cell unit on time, having a book from another inmate, or the more glamorous ones such as fighting, and, well, use your imagination.

I also learned to do legal paperwork for other inmates and even got certified as a paralegal through a correspondence course. While working on an appeal for an

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older Hispanic inmate I realized that he had a very simple case to win. The state had done everything short of beating a confession out of him.

Ruth Thromberg had been in the news about that time, taking her legendary career fighting crime and putting out her shingle as a firm specializing in criminal defense and appeals.

Figuring I had nothing to lose I wrote Ruth, sent her a summary of the man's case wondering if she might pick it up. To my surprise she not only did, but wrote me back a nice letter, making it a point to ask if I knew of anybody in the man's bloodline that might offer a retainer.

The retainer didn't come together, but after she won his appeal I heard she also socked the state for a large settlement on his behalf.

Not long after that she came to see me in prison with a wild, far-fetched idea; she would see what she could do about getting me an early parole, in return I would go to work for her as a paralegal. Her definition of paralegal being someone (me) that would beat the bushes of convicted felons in prison to find others that she could represent and fleece the state or other attorneys. As an afterthought she would also get those men out that we won cases for.

It had worked. It got me out of prison after seven years, made her a big pile of money on the two or three cases a year we pursued, and also got me out of prison, which I may have already mentioned. This is how I came to work for a growing, high-powered, well-connected law firm. How I came to know Choice was another matter.

### 3

Every prison has a series of “hustles” going on at any given time, some lucrative and some very lucrative. The highest level of hustle in any prison is either the “store” or the poker table. I was in four different facilities with Choice and he ran the stores and tables in all facilities. Choice had it down to such a science that he kept running them after he left those facilities.

Prior to going to prison Choice was a well-known inner-city figure in Denver. What the newspapers always called a “colorful” character. According to my Uncle Bob, colorful meant they knew you were a crook but just couldn’t ever prove it. Choice had his fingers in every colorful activity possible in the ‘hood; he was a pimp, a loan shark, and bookie among other things. Of course he also had legitimate businesses set up as fronts for these enterprises, and other semi-legit businesses set up to launder the profits. He was always looking for an angle or a profit, no matter where he was. It was inevitable that he and I would run into each other and develop a camaraderie. In prison I was considered legitimate.

Choice had many scrapes with the law-no way to be colorful without that. Nothing serious had ever stuck though, until the state hit Choice’s bookkeeper with a series of drug charges. From there it was a simple negotiation to persuade the bookkeeper that it was probably better to give the state all the testimony they wanted about Choice’s businesses. Or he could do twenty five years in prison himself on drug charges. Turned out it didn’t take long at all. The bookkeeper flipped and Choice got sentenced to two hundred forty years in

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prison. Yes, two hundred forty, five consecutive forty eight year sentences.

When I first met him one of the things that impressed me was the way he did his time. I confess getting a twenty year sentence kind of got in my head. Two hundred forty years would have done a real number on me. But Choice always acted like he was going home tomorrow. He ran a lot of his street enterprises from prison and developed even more while he was there. Plus his prison hustles made him pretty serious money.

Most prison stores exist because you get to order your commissary items once a week, but a lot of times you run out of what you want before the next order day. So, if you have to have a candy bar, you go to the store. Most stores will charge you back double what you got-buy one candy bar you have to pay two back. There will usually be some discount for bulk. Choice ran his different. At his stores no matter what you got you paid the interest in stamps, always cheaper than food.

Then he would start a poker table in the pod where the coin of the realm was, guess what? Stamps. Choice would stake guys that wanted to play, charging yet more interest.

He had it worked out so well that in every joint we were in he had a store and at least one poker table in every pod. When he left the facility he kept them running using the middle management he had put in place. Choice always said you had to have a black guy and a white guy running things, it was the best way to keep peace.

Anyway, he went on his merry way, getting wealthier in prison than most would ever dream of getting on the street. Somewhere along the line he won an appeal, and his five consecutive sentences got changed to five concurrent sentences; in other words they all ran together. Now his two

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hundred forty years changed to forty eight. Still a lot, but no hill for a climber.

Then one day, he won another appeal and he was out. I never asked him but rumor was that he also took a big settlement from his original attorney.

Choice and I left prison just about the same time. He as a totally free man with a pocket full of money, me on parole as an indentured servant to another great capitalist, Ruth Thromberg.



Ruth started her legal career in the Public Defender's office. It's low-paying and has long hours mostly dealing with people who are guilty of a crime and bitter about it. On the plus side if you have aspirations to make a career as a trial lawyer it's not bad, because you see a ton of cases and can spend a lot of time in the courtroom actually arguing cases. She took to it and became very well-known and feared by the prosecutors. So feared, that after ten years of getting mostly shady people out of trouble, the DA made her an offer she couldn't refuse-substantially more money, her own office and an assigned parking space. She sold out in a flash.

Her trademark zeal and growing network of connections made her an instant hit. Ruth, for some reason, was able to transform the same passion she had for defending people in trouble to making sure they stayed in trouble. The only thing she didn't like was fewer opportunities to go to trial.

When she and I met, her as a prosecuting attorney, me as a miscreant in county jail jumpsuit and handcuffs, Ruth made it clear she desperately wanted me to go to trial. That was a typical DA bluster, but I knew nobody wanted my case to go trial.

Prosecutors hate taking white-collar criminals to trial; it's long, tedious work that is often hard to incite a jury with. Most ordinary citizens will gloss over pretty quickly at the mention of a forensic accountant, but that is usually the star witness of a white-collar case. I knew she didn't really want to go to trial.

On the other hand, I didn't either. First, I was guilty, there was no getting around that. Second, if I went to trial there was always the chance the state would uncover far more

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about the way I did business than I wanted them to. Before I was arrested I had made a name for myself by picking thirty nine stock winners in a row. Many people wondered how and I wanted them to keep wondering.

The last reason I wasn't going to trial was because it became clear to me that my attorney was a buffoon. *Mea culpa* there as well, I hired him. It became obvious to me that he was in way over his head and I figured Ruth had to see it too, or would shortly after a trial began. So I cooperated and pled guilty.

Pleading guilty and cooperating, I came to understand, was the biggest mistake any defendant in the criminal justice system could make. The state had actually done a screening of me before sentencing and recommended probation for me, based on my lack of violence or substance abuse, and my seeming ability to get another job. In spite of this my cooperation got me twenty years in prison.

In any event I became one of the many feathers in Ruth's cap. A few years later, she moved on from the government and opened her own firm, Meyers-Thromberg. I have no idea who Meyers was; I heard he was a retired federal judge, but in three years with the firm had never seen him nor heard anything about him.

Ruth went along making a new name for herself until our paths crossed again. After she hired me I did the job she hired me for, making the firm steady, sometimes spectacular bucks.

I was even able to play rainmaker. It was one of the firm's deepest darkest secrets that I had brought on a few of the biggest clients we had, a steady source of revenue. In most firms that would have been a big boost for my career. Not so in this case, because one of the clients was Choice.

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He enlisted our firm shortly after we reunited outside of prison. Our firm offered a lot to an upscale clientele. We were now heavily involved in all aspects of corporate law and attracted some of the rich and famous of the Denver area. But, in the end what attracted Choice to our firm were the connections Ruth had all around the criminal justice system. He figured next time he got arrested she could take care of everything quickly.

Choice was definitely “ghetto-rich.” He had all the bucks but had gotten them in a way most law firms would rather not be associated with. I noticed as our firm grew Ruth seemed to lean more and more away from Choice, but I knew she would never drop him as a client. She’d never walk away from the large retainer he paid us every month. Even if he did always pay it in cash.

I had brought in other business that in some ways was a little more respectable. Except they were guys I had also met in prison.

James Wesley MacPherson was a young kid I met in the joint. He grew up on a ranch in southern Colorado, had everything about the cowboy life down. Then, as a teenager, somebody introduced him to meth and he ended up with a long sentence. You could see early on he had a gift for cowboy poetry and things like that, but when he did get out after fifteen years who knew he would become Wesley Mack, hottest country singer of the past few years. I took pride in noting that I was there when he wrote such hits as, “Can’t taste the gravy (when there’s heartache on my plate),” “How can I remember the face I can’t forget?” And the song that really shot him to fame, “I’m gonna miss all the things we’ll never do.”

As a country-western singer prison time just put him in the elite company of guys like Johnny Cash. Our firm

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handled all his business affairs and had helped him set up his foundation helping inmates that just got released.

The biggest feather in my cap though, the one Ruth would never look down on, was Patrick Papidopolous, or 3PO, as he was known in prison. He wasn't another singer, that's what he went by. He may have been an ex-con but he now had enough dough that he didn't need to worry about anything from the past.

Patrick had managed restaurants around Denver, mostly of the chain variety. He eked out a decent enough living until he got himself mixed up with a waitress, who it turned out had two passions in life; one, was crack, the other was getting pregnant about every nine and a half months like clockwork. Neither of these habits sat well with Patrick's wife by the way. In supporting the waitress's habit and children Patrick drained every penny out of his family's accounts, including retirement. That was when his wife started noticing. To try and replace it Patrick decided to rob a few banks, because he had heard that if you get less than twenty five thousand the FBI wouldn't even chase you. He got away with it twice, got caught the third time because the teller just flat didn't believe he had a partner in the car whose finger was on the trigger of a bomb strapped to Patrick's body.

Once they caught him Patrick found out he hadn't gotten away with the other two either. He also found out it wasn't the FBI that cared, it was the state of Colorado. By going in saying there was a bomb strapped to his body he changed it from bank robbery to using a deadly weapon among other things. Which is how we came to be acquainted.

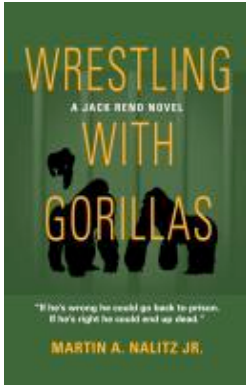
While in prison Patrick and I talked many times about his real dream-getting rich through infomercials. When he got out Choice (naturally) bankrolled him to start, and an empire was born.

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You didn't even have to be watching TV late night and you were sure to stumble across commercials for "Patrick Papidopolous's Perfect Prison Pancake Process," "Patrick Papidopolous's Perfect Prison Pickle Process," or his biggest seller, "Patrick Papidopolous's Perfect Prison Polish and Primp Pal." He had come across this little robotic thing that went back and forth across your floors vacuuming them, or polishing the tiles all by itself. You could run it while you weren't around and convince people of how much time you were saving them. Personally, I was still waiting to see what effect they might have on the family dog or cat.

I didn't think any of them were worth a hoot, but my Uncle Bob had always said that when it comes to sales it was all about selling the sizzle and not the steak. Patrick Papidopolous's Perfect Prison Products perfectly proved this point. Sorry, couldn't resist.

3PO-you see the reason everybody called him that-had called me and said he needed to talk to me about something urgently, so I had a late meeting with him. First I had to go and see Choice though.



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