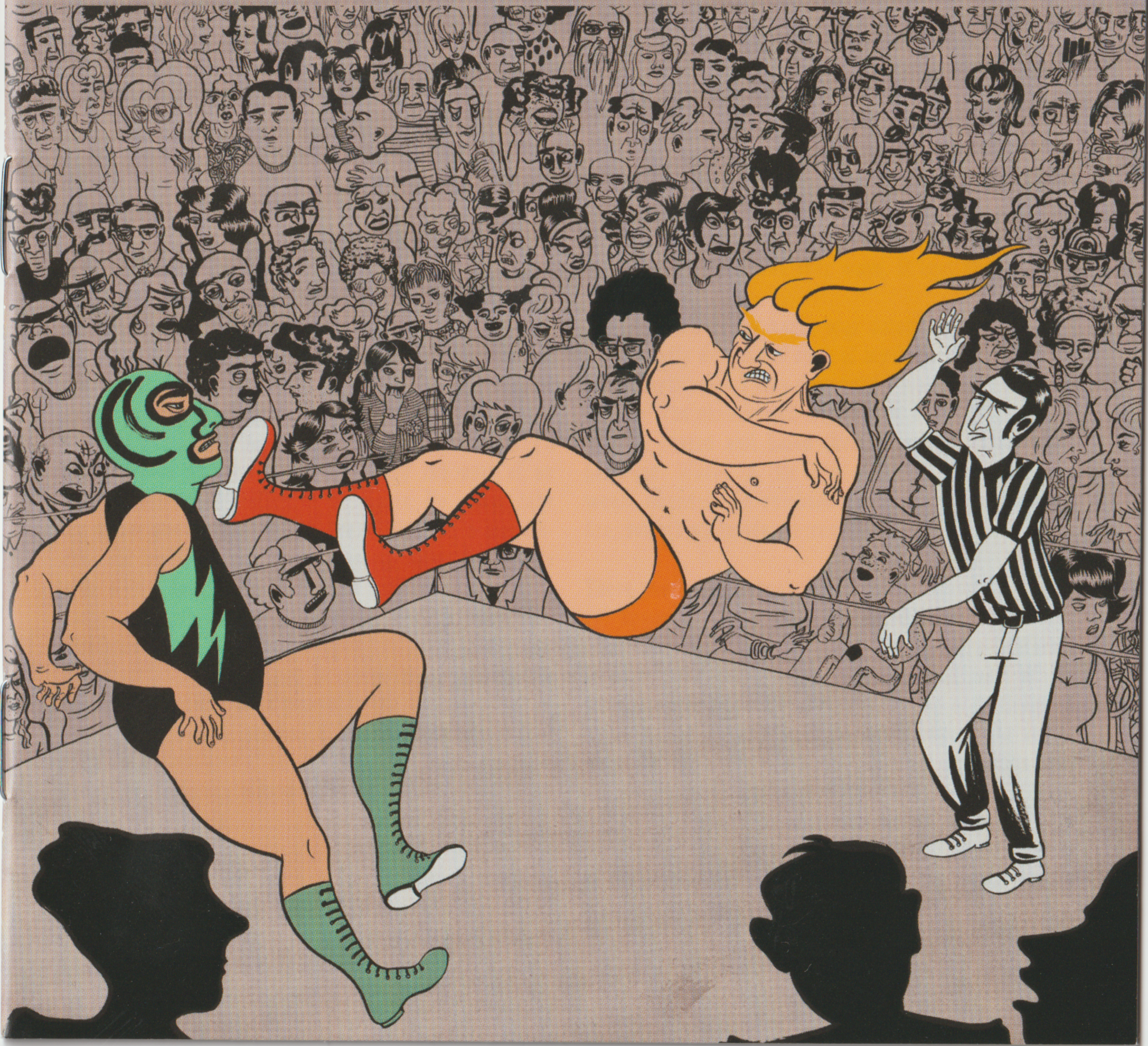
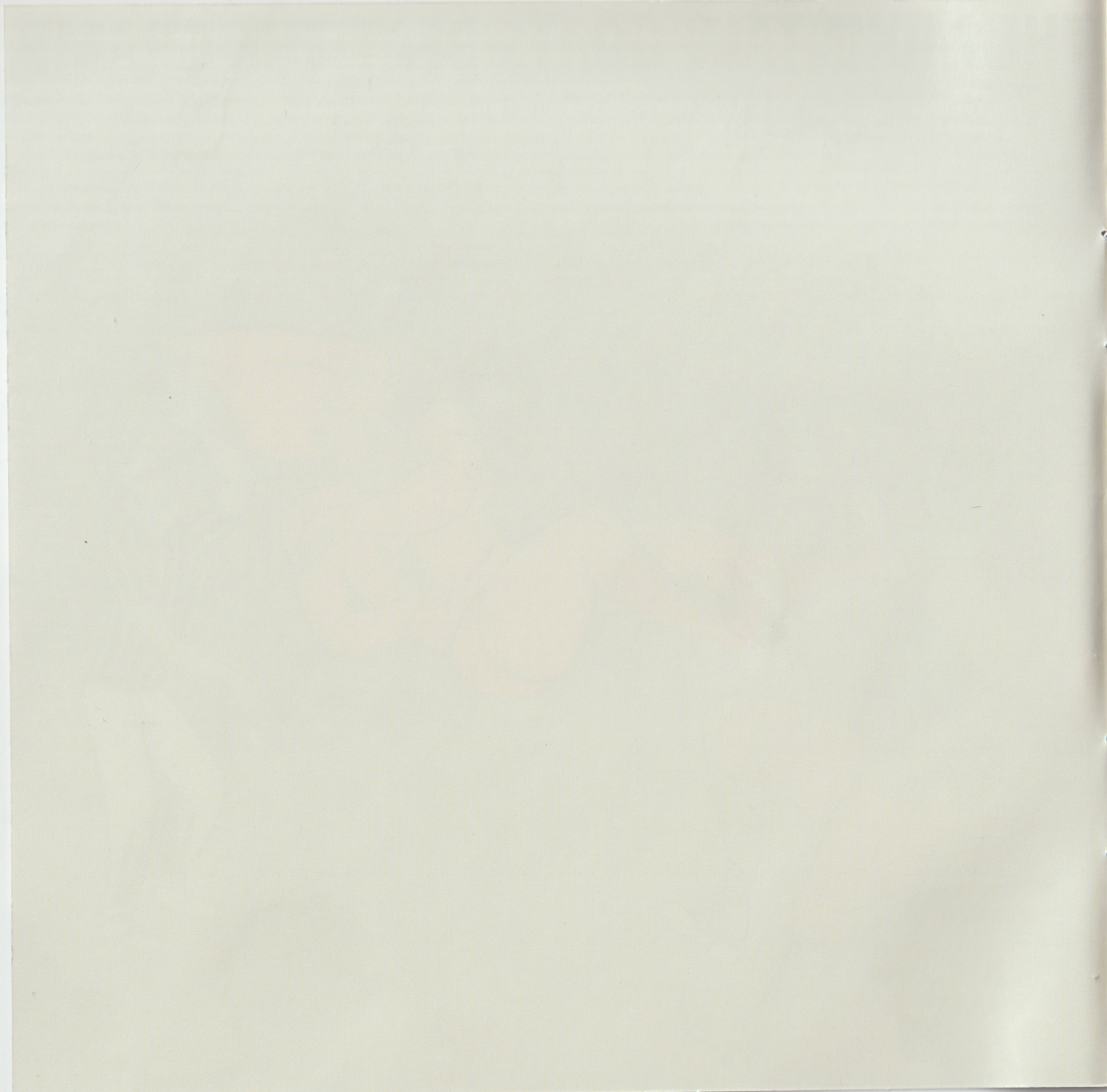


THE MOUNTAIN GOATS BEAT THE CHAMP





THIS RIGHT HERE IS AN ALBUM ABOUT PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING,

which I used to watch twice a week on the UHF channels on a black and white TV in a place on Piedmont Avenue that we rented from a dude named Arnold Pan.

My stepfather's father had been a wrestling promoter in Indiana in the '40s and '50s. It's always a challenge for me to state simply what things were like between my stepfather and me, because there were few sweet spots that didn't end up getting polluted or corrupted by the dynamic of abuse, but in wrestling we had a point of contact: in many ways, he was a child who'd never grown up, and he liked to play the part of an antagonistic older brother at the fights. He would take me to see the matches at the Grand Olympic, a magnificent old building then going to seed: roller derby was also a big deal there. After the building got sold, it hosted punk shows for a while. It's a church now. My stepfather — Mike — would cheer the heels loudly and unapologetically, sometimes to the point of getting into heated altercations with people in the seats nearby. He would be the only person in the building applauding Eddy "the Continental Lover" Mansfield, who was, for one brief, forgotten moment, the most hated heel in all southern California.

Wrestling became big business in the '80s; the regional territories, which had been a relatively small-stakes game, were folded into national promotions. Prior to this consolidation, professional wrestling was a cheap

ticket for a working family. If you went mid-week, the Wednesday night card would set you back five bucks. There were no frills and no pyrotechnics. The only merchandise for sale was the program, printed in one color on a single page folded four ways. It cost one dollar.

The situation in my house was deteriorating badly and permanently during the span of my hyper-fandom, which lasted from when I was nine until I was maybe thirteen. My life was chaotic and frightening. I did not cheer the heels. I feared and hated them. I wanted to see them punished. When, in the heat of battle, the good guys would abandon the rulebook in order to fight fire with fire, something inside me responded primally.

These were comic-book heroes who existed in physical space. I was a child. I needed them, and, every week, they came through for me. The southern California territory was not a major franchise, and most of the wrestlers who inspired fanatical devotion or froth-lipped anger at the Olympic were no-names beyond the southwest. In 1982, the southern California promotion was sold to Vince McMahon, and that was the end of that. During my teenage years, it was music that would save my life, but this album is for Chavo Guerrero, Sr., master of the moonsault, on whom I pinned my hopes when I was very young.

—John Darnielle, Durham, North Carolina

SOUTHWESTERN TERRITORY

small screen July evening view
up and down Grand Avenue
where the legends get made
out with the boys brigade
part of the motorcade

flew home from Texas last night
slept on the flight
work like a dog all day
born to chase cars away
die on the road some day

I try to remember what life was like long ago
but it's gone, you know?

*climb the turnbuckle high
take two falls out of three
blackout for local TV*

stand in that cold empty hall
wait for your name to get called
burn like hillsides on fire
in the squall of the ringside choir
high as a wire

nearly drive Danny's nose back into his brain
all the cheap seats go insane



keep my eyes open and try to think straight
no one drives on the 60 this late
I feel like the last person alive
Francisquito to Glenshaw Drive

I try to remember to write in the diary
that my son gave me

*climb the turnbuckle high
take two falls out of three
blackout for local TV*

THE LEGEND OF CHAVO GUERRERO

born down in El Paso where the tumbleweeds blow
to the middleweight champ of all Mexico
dad fought many bloody battles and he raised
four sons
Chavo was the oldest one

old man Gory could pop like a live grenade
raised his boys in the way of the trade
Hector and Mando – young Eddie G
but Chavo meant the most to me

look high, it's my last hope
Chavo Guerrero coming off the top rope

he came from Texas seeking fortune and fame
rose pretty quickly to the top of the game
defender of the downtrodden, king of the hill
tag team champion with Al Madril

before a black and white TV in the middle of the night
I'm lying on the floor, bathed in light
telecast in Spanish, I can understand some
I need justice in my life. Here it comes

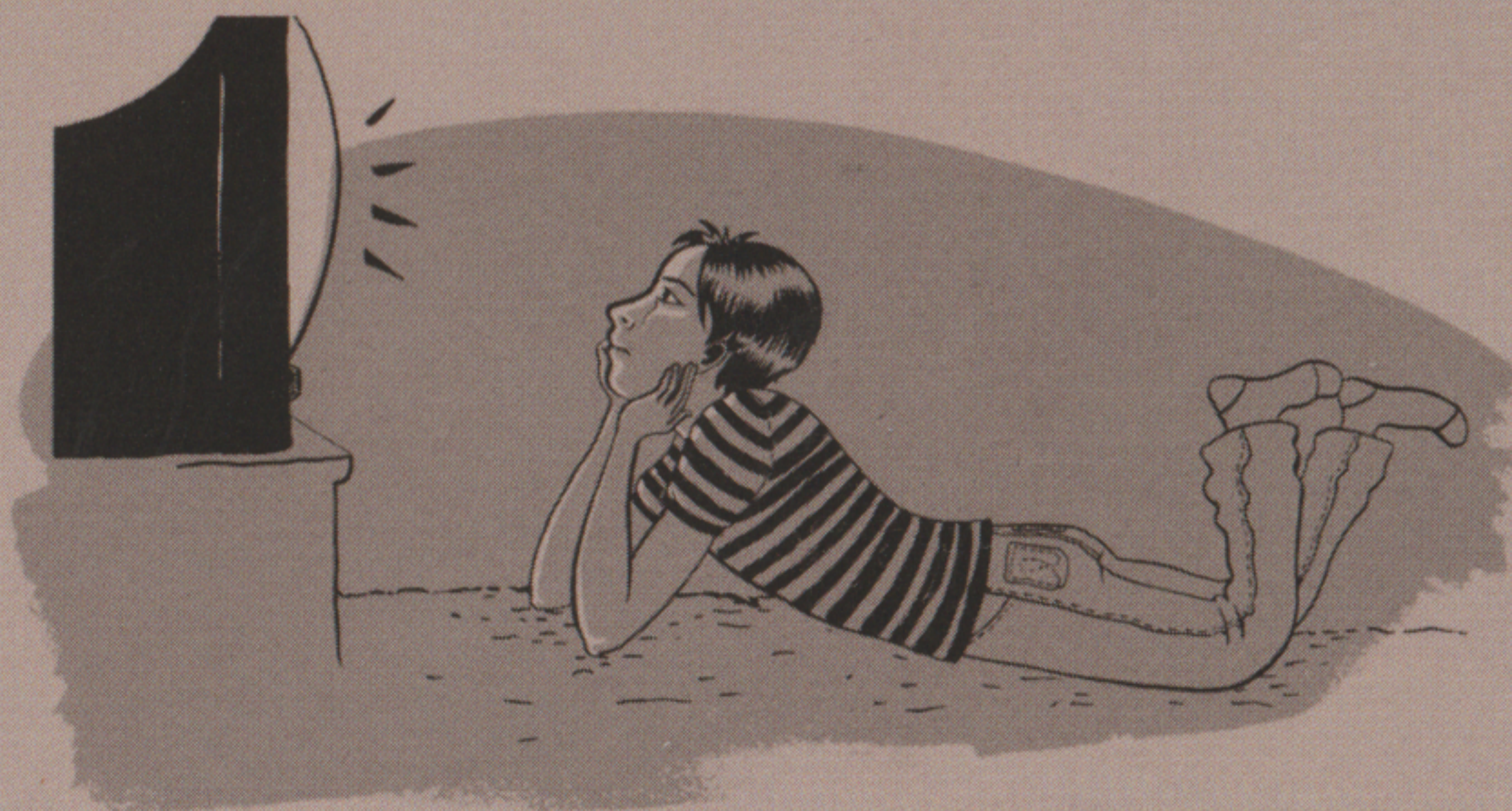
look high, it's my last hope
Chavo Guerrero coming off the top rope

Red Shoes Duggan holding his arm high, all out
of breath
I hated Chavo's enemies, I would pray nightly for
their death
descending like fire on the people who deserved it most
almost completely unknown outside of Texas and the
west coast

he was my hero back when I was a kid
you let me down but Chavo never once did
you called him names just to get beneath my skin
now your ashes are scattered in the wind

I heard his son got famous and he went nationwide
coast to coast with his dad by his side
I don't know if that's true, but I've been told
it's real sweet to grow old

look high, it's my last hope
Chavo Guerrero coming off the top rope



FOREIGN OBJECT

whipped like a dog, down on the cards
square in the spotlight sweating real hard
all soaked in blood like a newborn babe
sharp thing hidden in my hand shaped like an astrolabe

*gonna stick you in the eye with a foreign object
gonna poke you in the eye with a foreign object*

march through the red mist, never get my vision clear
learn to love this kind of atmosphere
strike funny poses, keep my weapon hand low
whip my head around a little, get blood on the front row

*gonna jab you in the eye with a foreign object
gonna stab you in the eye with a foreign object
foreign object, foreign object, foreign object*

sink my teeth into your scalp, take a nice big bite
save nothing for the camera, play the angles all night
one of these days my legs'll both snap like twigs
if you can't beat 'em make 'em bleed like pigs

*gonna jab you in the eye with a foreign object
gonna stab you in the eye with a foreign object
foreign object, foreign object, foreign object*



ANIMAL MASK

18-man steel cage free-for-all
through the noise I hear you call
for help
you can't protect yourself

frog mask and yellow cape
so desperate to escape
I came to you
hands wrapped in adhesive tape

*that was when we were young and green
in the dawning hours of our team
some things you will remember
some things stay sweet forever*

seen you backstage once or twice
animal gimmick pops real nice
elbow sweep and tiger dance
little extra fighter's chance

hold on I cried I'll be right there
pull your mask down through your hair
they won't see you
not until you want them to

*that was when we were green and young
battle cry rising from your tongue
some things you will remember
some things stay sweet forever*

CHOKED OUT

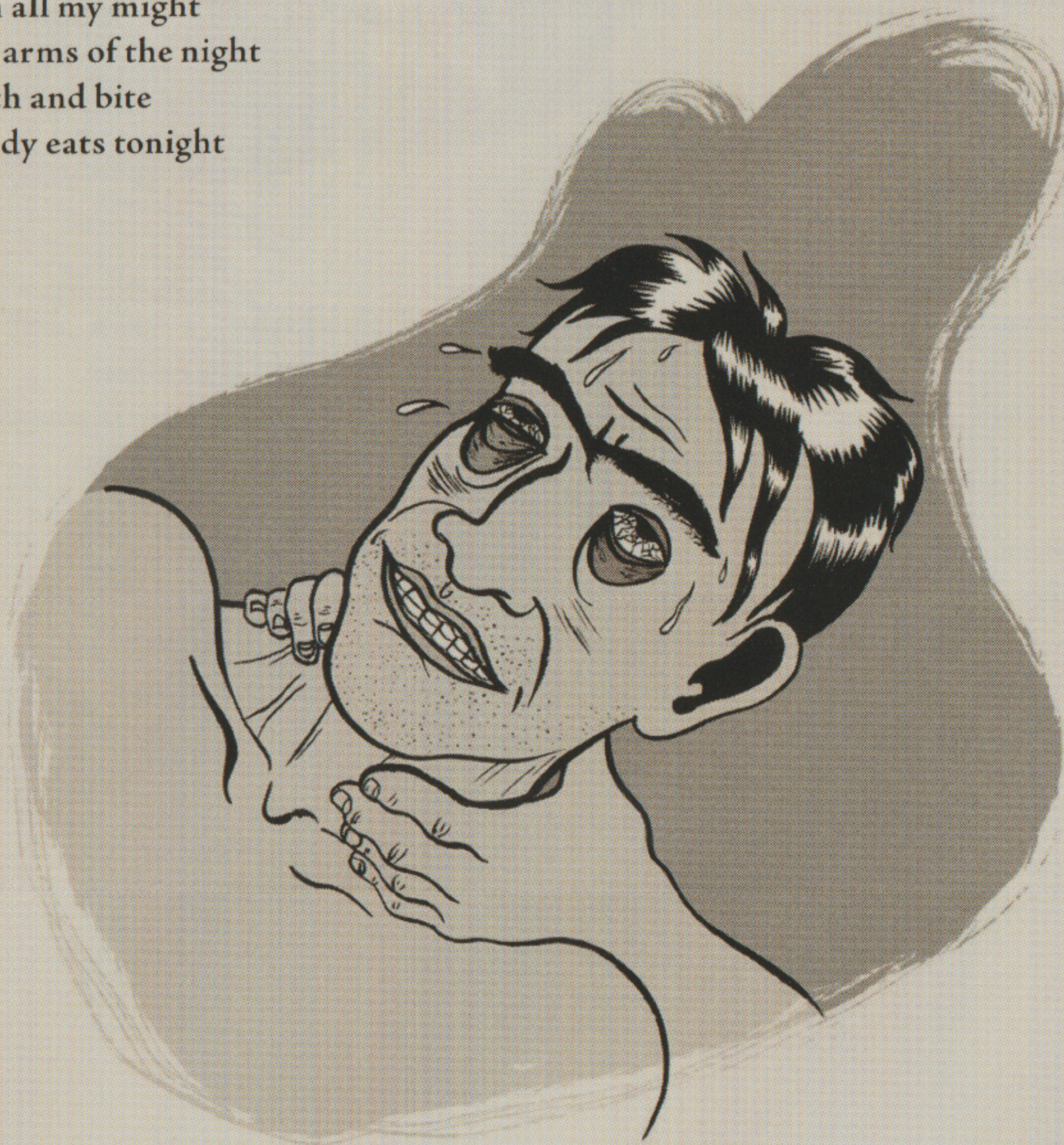
diamonds in the firmament
all reserves completely spent
someone set up the oxygen tent
everybody here's real proud to present

\$200 take-all purse
half-nelson to suplex reverse
worried look on the face of the ringside nurse
at one for once with the universe

I stretch and strain with all my might
drift off into the velvety arms of the night
kick and claw and scratch and bite
fire up the grill, everybody eats tonight

no brakes down an endless dark incline
most of the boys won't ever cross this line
if they all want to die dead broke that's fine
everybody's got their limits nobody's found mine

crowd screaming like hounds in the heat of the chase
all the colors of the rainbow flood my face
I lift right off into space
I can see the future, it's a real dark place



HEEL TURN 2

get stomped like a snake
lie down in the dirt
cling to my convictions
even when I get hurt
be an upstanding well-loved man about town
in your child's mind that's how it goes down

*but I tried
the losing side
I don't want to die in here
I don't want to die in here*

drift down into the new dark light
without any reservations
you found my breaking point
congratulations
spend too long now trying to play fair
throw my better self overboard, shoot at him when he
comes up for air

*come unhinged
get revenge
I don't want to die in here
I don't want to die in here*

stay good under pressure
for years and years and years
President of the fan club
choking on his tears



let all the trash rain down
from way up in the rafters
I'm walking out of here in one piece
don't care what comes after

*drive the wedge
torch the bridge
I don't want to die in here
I don't want to die in here*

FIRE EDITORIAL

Two blinded in Detroit!
Something must be done.
Jaws dropping at ringside
in the blood tide
when the fireball hits.

Down Indiana way
make 'em check their guns.
Real tears when it's over
smell the sulfur
when the dark vault splits.

*Lord of the hidden pocket knife
tawdry dreams all come to life.
Save yourselves.
Save this town, save everything not nailed down.*

War in Ontario!
Dead before the bell.
Crushed hopes of the young breed
all the best bleed,
all the proud boys break.

*Who'll stand before the flood?
Who will mop up all the blood?
Who, alone?
Skin, bone, steel, stone
swim or drown.
Save this town, save everything not nailed down.*



STABBED TO DEATH OUTSIDE SAN JUAN

the winter's wet, and the summer's hot
take a match in Puerto Rico – why not

power and adrenaline flowing like amber
from the recesses of the earth, put on your waders

and twitch when the water runs high sometimes
twitch when the tide ebbs low

see the sights, maybe go downtown
sometimes you get some heat, sometimes it follows you around

when the blade hits the bone, everybody hears it sing
shower-room full of people, no-one hears a God damned thing

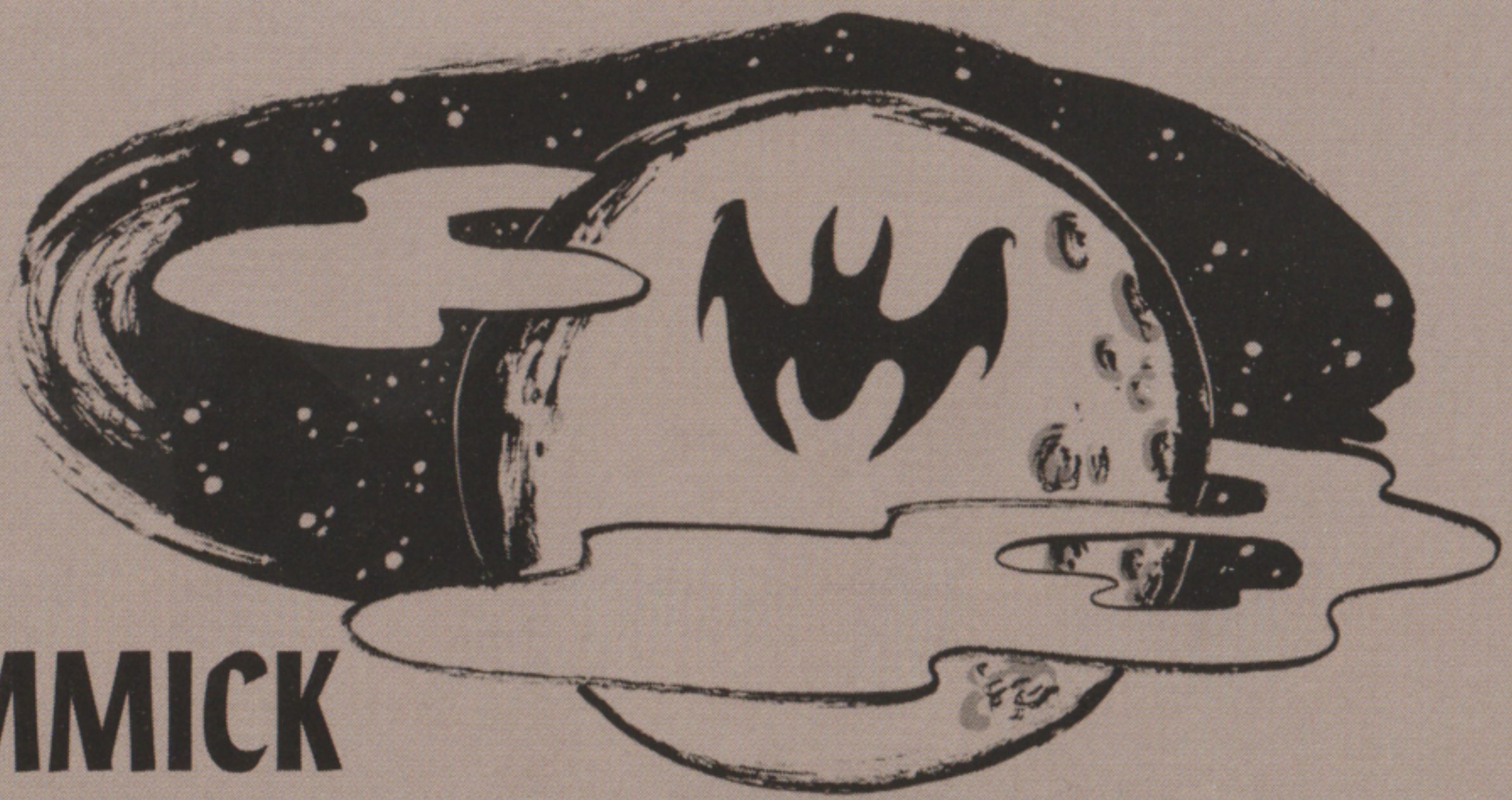
twitch when the current runs wild sometimes
twitch when the contact howls

all that racket out there in the arena
I'm on a stretcher – here come the cleaners

and the sky goes dark and there I am
climbing down the Hertzsprung-Russell diagram

drop from the top of my tall steel cage
drop to the concrete floor





WEREWOLF GIMMICK

I was not there for rehearsal, I don't need it any more
when I show up just in time to pop you can clear the goddamn floor
empty out the locker room, let me find my space
let him who thinks he knows no fear look well upon my face
nameless bodies in unremembered rooms
know how a man becomes a beast when the wolfbane blooms

sail past all the grasping hands, floodlights white and hot
bring my vision into focus, find out what I've got
some sniveling local babyface with an angle he can't sell
full werewolf off the buckle like an angel straight from hell
nameless bodies in unremembered rooms
run howling through the carnage when the wolfbane blooms

half the city sound asleep and safe inside their beds
get lost inside my thoughts and nearly tear his face to shreds

blood pooling on the canvas as the atmosphere gets hushed
bring your heroes to the wolf's den, watch them all get crushed
get told to maybe dial it back backstage later on
everyone still in this building right now: dead before the dawn
nameless bodies in unremembered rooms
the pure at heart go putrid when the wolfbane blooms

LUNA

all gone, all gone
watching it go up out front on the lawn
stay on my feet somehow
I'm strong now
stuck there, no air

head high, head high
tongues of fire that reach up for the sky
rise through the smoke
the dust of the grave
I will be saved

*pause in mid-stride
pause in mid-stride
and ride*

burn hard, burn hard
smoldering pieces landing in the yard
trace names in ash
big names, old friends
and dead ends

those last few frames
go down so fast
crawl through the flames and end again in flames at last

stay free, stay free
invisible armies march by night for me
stay on my guard
burn hard
rage on

all gone

*pause in mid-stride
pause in mid-stride
and ride*



UNMASKED!

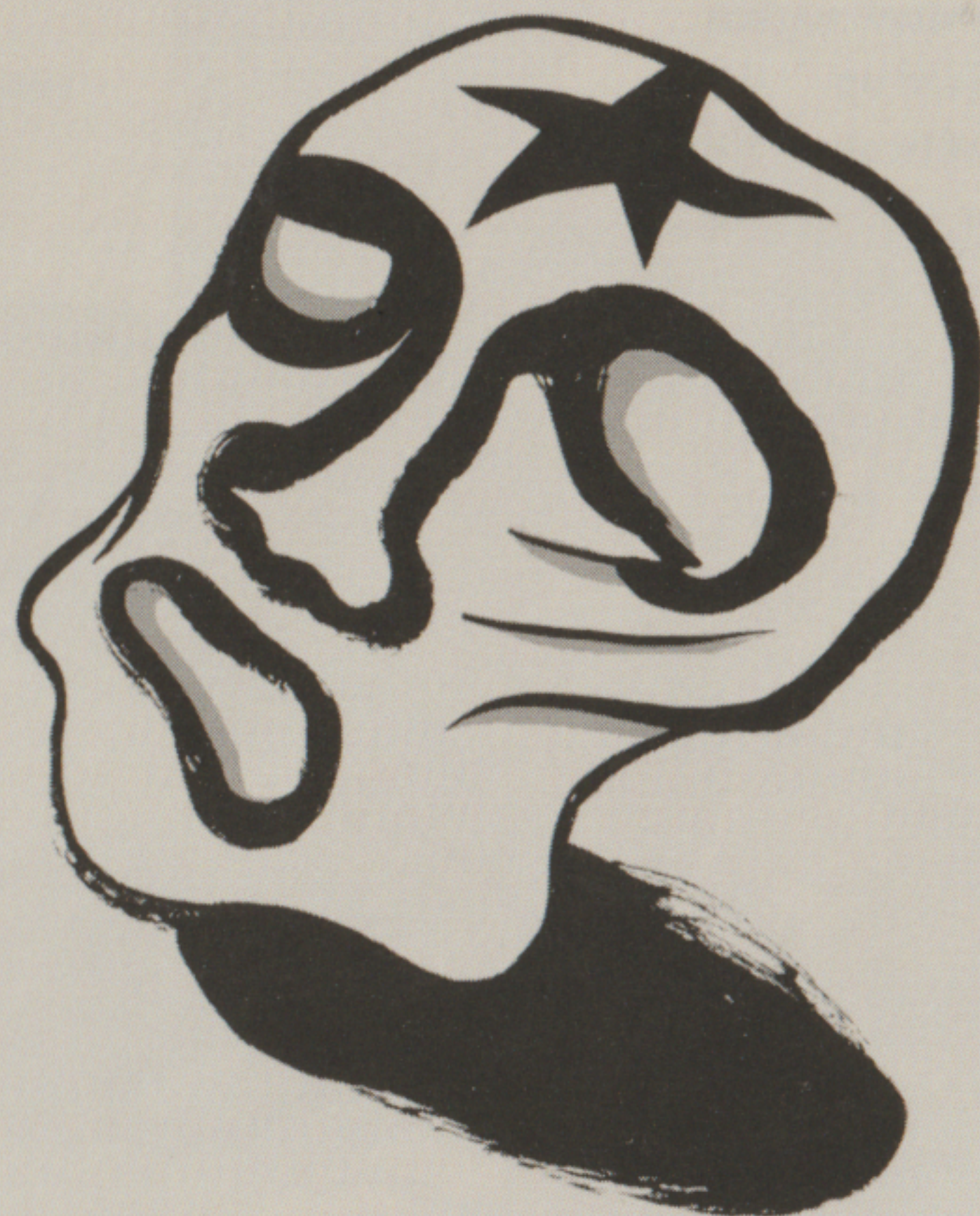
rain beats down, down on the outer walls
down on the skylight, where the streetlights
shine like unquenchable coals
I'm up high, trying to say goodbye
the only way I know how
crude and graceless
peeking through the eyeholes
seeing the real you

*and just after midnight,
when it feels like it's getting late,
I will reveal you.*

crowd's half-gone, just a few hangers-on
come to see me finally tear through the stitching at last
and you don't care, you look almost relieved down there
like you're free, like you can breathe now
like they've sawn off your cast
just one more sleeper to see through

*and by way of honoring
the things we once both held dear,
I will reveal you.*

cast of thousands
we were the real two
and when I'm alone
before a mirror late at night
I will reveal you.



THE BALLAD OF BULL RAMOS

drive a great big truck
when I'm old, when I'm old
haul the wrecks down to the wreckyard
help the boys unload

keep my hair nice and long
because I can, because I can
any of my old friends who have no place to turn to
they know to call me any time they come through

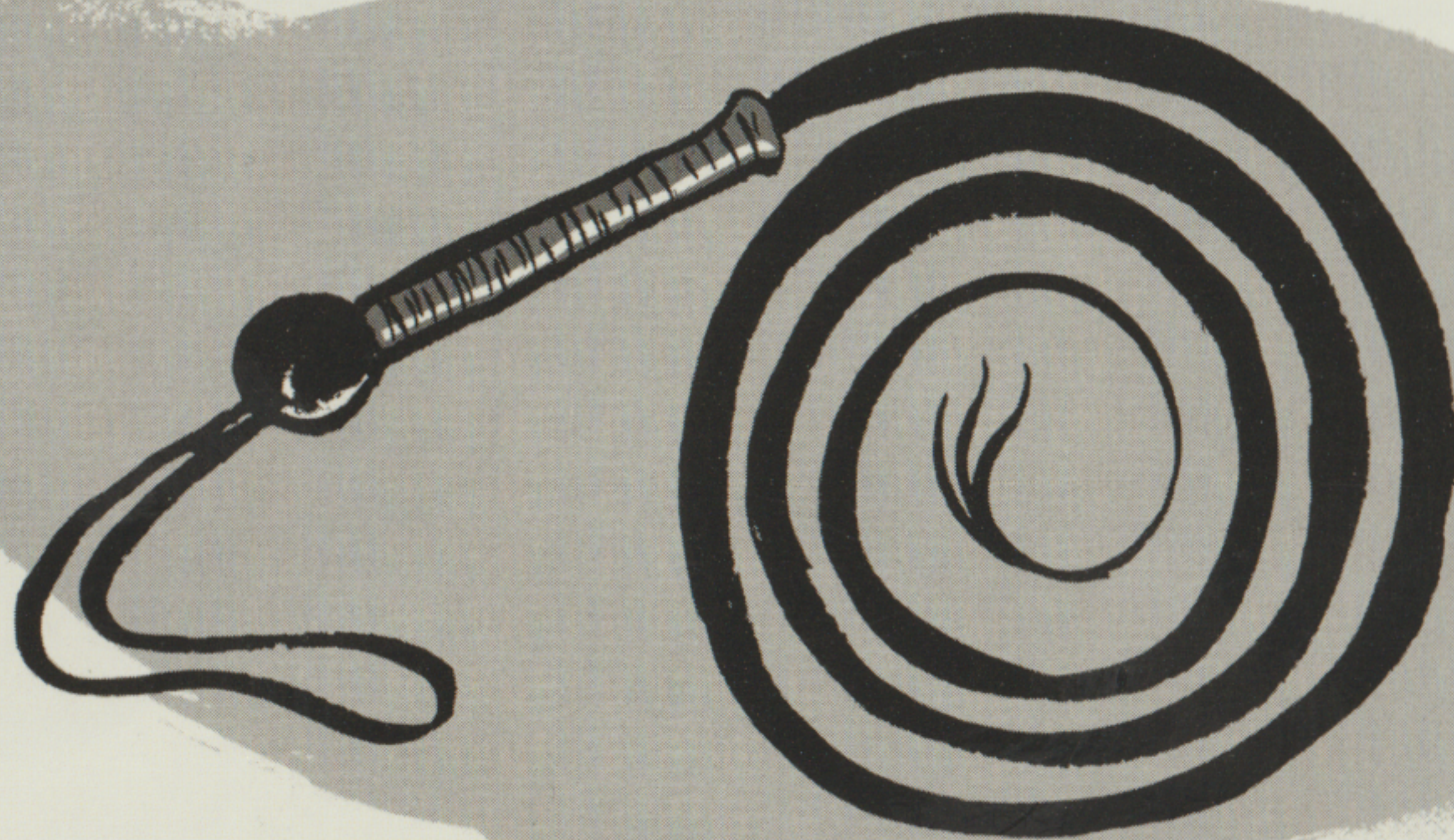
*never die, never die
stand with a bullwhip in my hand
and rise, rise
in the desert sand*

work days, work nights
finally get laid up
by a piece of broken glass
on the floor of the shop

and the doctor recognizes me
as the operating theater grows dim
aren't you that old wrestler with the bullwhip
yes sir, that's me, I'm him

get around fine on one leg
lose a kidney, then go blind
sit on my porch in Houston
let the good times dance across my mind

*never die, never die
stand with a bullwhip in my hand
and rise, rise
surrounded by friends*



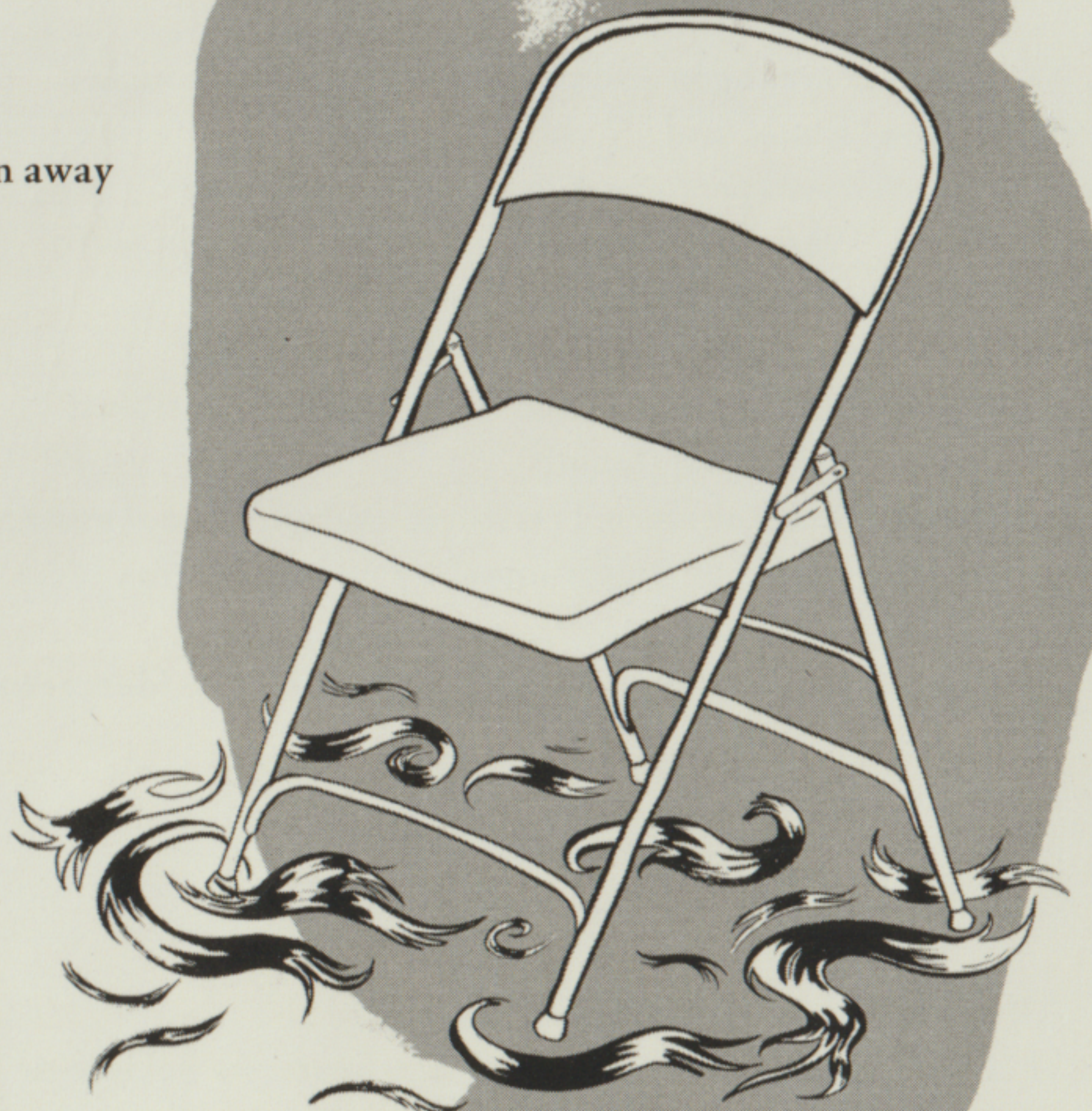
HAIR MATCH

you'll be maybe lunging for the bad guy's hip
no-one anticipates the sunset flip
the referee and your opponent will hold you there
and we're going to bring in a folding chair

we'll stipulate that there will be no cameras filming
but of course there will be several in the building
and if by chance somebody hits "record"
and stands real still somewhere back behind the soundboard

cheap electric razor from the Thrifty down the street
two guys down around your ankles so you'll stay put in your seat
buzzing razor held aloft and just about to strike
I loved you before I even ever knew what love was like

some people leave before it's over; most of them stay
some flinch or grimace while they're watching – some turn away
out in the parking lot you look up at the stars
and all the cheap cars



Guitar, piano and keyboards: John Darnielle
Bass and additional guitar: Peter Hughes
Drums and percussion: Jon Wurster

Woodwinds arranged and performed by Matt Douglas
Strings on "Luna" and "Stabbed to Death Outside San Juan"
arranged and performed by Erik Friedlander
Organ on "Werewolf Gimmick" and "Stabbed to Death
Outside San Juan" by Phil Cook
Backing vocals on "Luna" by Phil and Brad Cook
Steel guitar on "Animal Mask" and "The Ballad of Bull
Ramos" by Nathan Golub
Guitar on "Southwestern Territory" and additional guitar
on "The Ballad of Bull Ramos" by Austin Nevins

Additional production on "The Legend of Chavo Guerrero"
by Scott Solter

Front cover and all illustrations by Leela Corman
Graphic design by Rob Carmichael, SEEN

All lyrics and music by John Darnielle
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