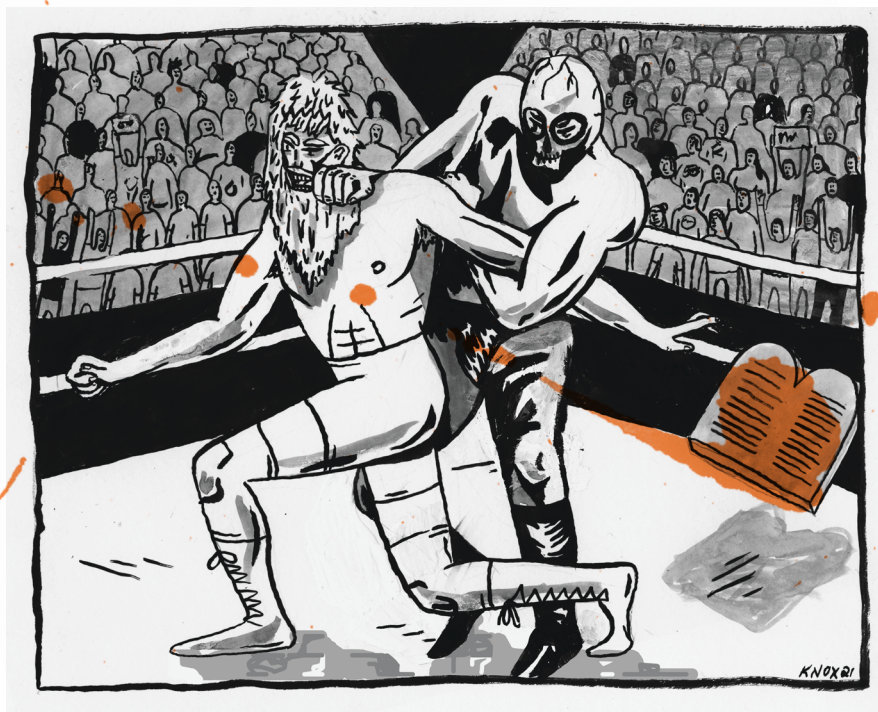
A large, irregular orange paint splatter is centered behind the text, with several smaller orange dots scattered around it.


**LISTEN, MAN:
APOLLO JIM FOWLES,
SIX-TIME CON-
TENDER FOR THE
UCWF WORLD'S
HEAVYWEIGHT
CHAMPIONSHIP,
GOT OVER FROM HIS
VERY FIRST MATCH.
UNFORTUNATELY
HE WAS A SIX-
TIME LOSER, TOO.**

Us old marks remember his run from the late eighties through the mid-nineties even if no one else will. Toward the end the crowds got older, meaner, and drunker, cheering trash-talking antiheroes on to victory after bloody victory. Long-haired golden boy Apollo Jim—old school, family friendly, built like fucking Flash Gordon on steroids—didn't stand a snowball's chance in hell, even if some of us were still screaming his name til the bitter end. After losing his sixth and final championship match to Dee Zaster, Apollo Jim disappeared from the ring for good. Retired young, they said, while he still had his health. Sunset Sunday, they called it—the final nail in the coffin of the Golden Age.

At the next pay-per-view the UCWF rolled out a new, mysterious stable: The Riders. No one knew their real names. The official line was they'd been summoned right out of Hell by the Commissioner himself to punish the brash, anti-authority babyfaces and bring balance to the upper card. The brothers Red War and Famine terrorized the tag circuit in long robes and full-face masks, stalking reigning champs Thee Gnarly Boyz like twin shadows. The Pest—that skinny albino babe, clad entirely in filthy white denim—started picking off the weaklings of the women's division, moving up the rankings like an infestation. Their leader, though, the heavyweight? He was something else, let me tell you.

The whole fucking thing is insane, all high-flying elbow drops and spectacular body slams. Seems like neither one of them can miss, both of them bouncing off the mat over and over. I've never seen such an even match; the Reaper surprisingly agile for such a monster, the downright scrawny-by-comparison Moses strong enough to lift him up and put him down—hard. Three minutes in and they put every other wrestler in the whole goddamn region to shame. But after a brutal knee to the face Reap starts to flag out. He's got fifteen years



The background of the image is white, decorated with numerous orange splatters and blotches of varying sizes and shapes, creating a distressed, punk-rock aesthetic. The text is centered and reads:

**THIRTY YEARS OLD,
MARRIED, NEAR-
LY A YEAR OUT OF
GRAD SCHOOL,
STILL WORK-
ING A JOB YOU
HATE BUT CAN'T
SEEM TO LEAVE.
IN FOUR MONTHS
YOUR PUNK
BAND WILL SPLIT.**

A flea market in Harford County, a wrestling show. Your first. Holler and heckle and eat cheap pizza. Soak up the excitement of low culture for an afternoon.

Two weeks later, your thirty-first birthday. The gym of a decommissioned high school with your wife and two trashiest friends, all wearing cowboy hats at your behest. Mick Foley, hardcore legend, sits at a folding table by the door. Later he gets in the ring, congratulates a local wrestler on his engagement, and stuffs a sock puppet into an obnoxious manager's mouth.

You haven't gone out of town to see a band in forever, but you'll travel for wrestling. By the end of the year you've flown to Florida, been to a TV taping, sat on the floor at a pay-per-view. Every local show, even the bad ones. Especially the bad ones.

Once the band splits nothing really materializes in its place. You're still involved: semi-active side projects, basement recordings, running sound for a DIY space. But the fire's out. Music becomes a chore, an obligation to sit through sets by bands you don't care about, with breaks to yell at the people who take their beers outside. You don't even listen to new records for a long time. Console yourself by projecting Japanese wrestling matches on a screen above the performers.