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SWERVE

ISSUE ONE



The fights are fake, but the bullets are *real*.

SWERVE

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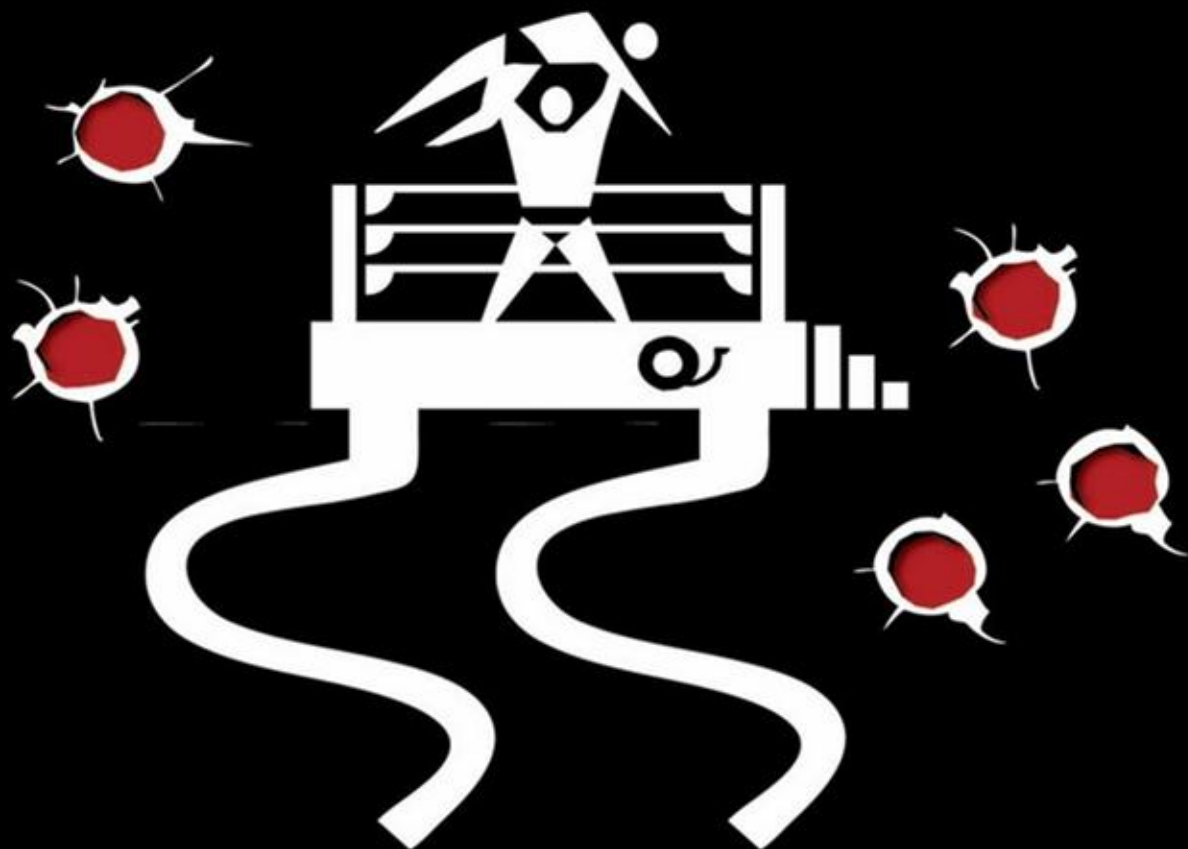
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SWERVE



To papa, for inspiring my dream. I love you.
To my family, for the undying love and support.
To Jon, for providing me this great journey with Eric and company.
To Sean, for the wonderful insights.
To friends who continue to hang on in good and bad times.
To my God, all glory be yours.

-Dexter

To mom, my first and most appreciative audience;
Jason, without whom there would be no *Swerve*;
Sean, for showing me it could be done;
Matthew, for being my sounding board;
Chris, for adding such a kick-ass cherry to our sundae;
Dexter, for being a great collaborator and an even better guy;
And most of all to Dani; maybe we'll be swerved by the finish, but
you were always the face and I was always the heel. I love you.

-Jon

PROLOGUE
SAN ANTONIO, TX
1972



LET
ME TELL
YOU WHAT
A SWERVE
IS.



OH,
YOU THINK
YOU KNOW ALL
ABOUT OUR
BUSINESS.

ENOUGH TO
THINK YOU COULD
COME IN HERE AND
START CALLING THE
SHOTS. WELL, NO
WAY. NOT BY A
LONG SHOT.

YOU'VE
BEEN
SWERVED.



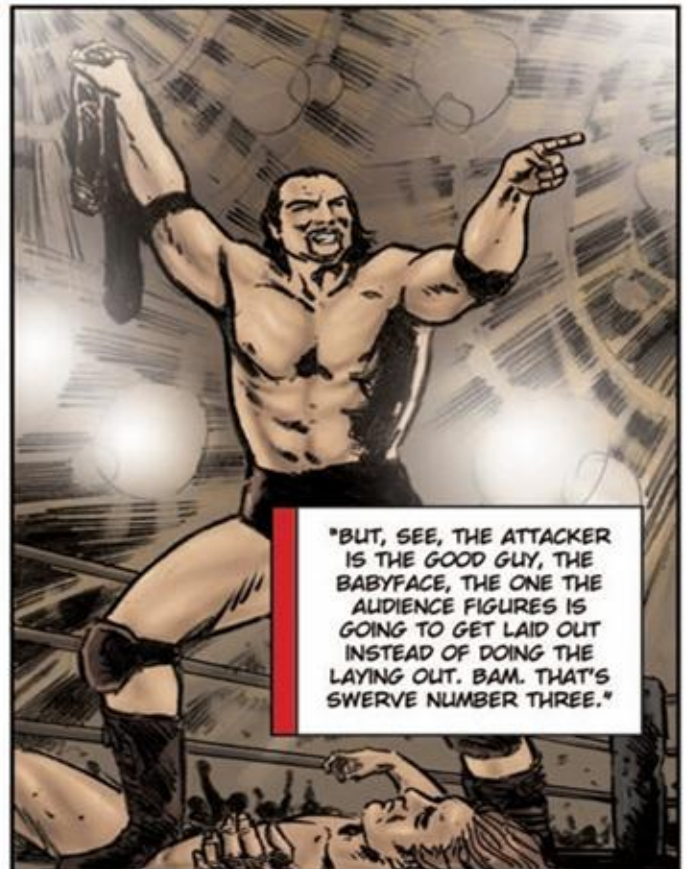
"SEE, A SWERVE IS WHEN
YOU SET UP ONE SURPRISE
THEN DELIVER ANOTHER."

"SAY YOU GOT THIS HOT TAG
TEAM AND THEY START ARGUING
FOR, LIKE, WEEKS AND WEEKS.
EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT'S
COMING, ONE OF THEM IS GOING
TO TURN ON THE OTHER."


"BUT THEN, BAM!, THEY WIN THE
BIG MATCH AFTER ALL. THAT'S A
SWERVE. SWERVE NUMBER ONE."




"BUT THEN, BAM!, ONE
OF THEM ATTACKS HIS
BUDDY AFTER ALL.
SWERVE NUMBER TWO."




"BUT, SEE, THE ATTACKER
IS THE GOOD GUY, THE
BABYFACE, THE ONE THE
AUDIENCE FIGURES IS
GOING TO GET LAID OUT
INSTEAD OF DOING THE
LAYING OUT. BAM. THAT'S
SWERVE NUMBER THREE."




"LET ME GIVE YOU ANOTHER
EXAMPLE OF A SWERVE. SAY YOU
GOT THIS GUY, A BUSINESS MAN.
HE BUILT HIS BUSINESS WITH
NOTHING BUT DETERMINATION AND
BLOOD AND SWEAT.



"I MEAN, HE'S BUILT THIS
WHOLE LITTLE EMPIRE
FOR HIMSELF, YOU
KNOW? HE'S PROUD OF
IT. HE'S EARNED IT.




"EVENTUALLY, HE DIVERSIFIES. HE
ALREADY HAS THE EMPLOYEES, SO
HE STARTS PUTTING THEM TO
USE. NOW HE'S REALLY MAKING
MONEY. LOTS OF IT.




"BUT WITH THAT KIND OF
MONEY COMING IN, HE'S
GOT TO BE SMART. REAL
SMART. YOU GOT TO CLEAN
THAT KIND OF CASH.


"BUT, HEY, IT'S NO PROBLEM. THERE'S LOTS
OF CASH IN THIS BUSINESS, SO THE BOOKS
ARE EASY TO COOK. SO MAYBE YOU START
SELLING MORE NACHOS THAN YOU USED TO,
UNLOADING SOME MORE T-SHIRTS AND STUFF.




"SO HE BUILT THIS WHOLE DAMN OUTFIT WITH HIS OWN BRAINS AND HARD WORK, BUT SOME COCKY LITTLE SHIT COMES ALONG AND TRIES TO CUT HIMSELF INTO THE BUSINESS.



"SEEMS THIS KID'S DAD DIED, LEAVING HIM ALL THE LITTLE ARENAS AND FIELDHOUSES HE OWNED -- WHICH COVERED ABOUT HALF THE STATE.



"NOW IF OUR HERO CAN'T RUN SHOWS IN THESE JOINTS, HE LOSES HALF HIS TICKET SALES, HAS HIS BOYS OUT THERE MAKING DELIVERIES HALF AS OFTEN, HAS HALF AS MANY PLACES TO CLEAN HIS CASH.



"SO IT'S EITHER LOSE HALF HIS REVENUE OR LOSE **NEARLY** HALF OF IT TO THIS PUNK.



"BUT LIKE I SAID, THIS GUY IS SMART. HE PLAYS ALONG WITH THE PUNK.

"HE GIVES HIM CASH,
BLOW, CHICKS.
PARTIES WITH HIM.
EARNS HIS TRUST."



"BUT ALL THE WHILE HE'S
JUST BIDDING HIS TIME, JUST
GETTING THE KID CONFIDENT,
COCKY. GIVING HIM A FALSE
SENSE OF SECURITY."



"HE LEARNS HIS ROUTINE,
WAITING FOR THE RIGHT
TIME TO SNATCH THAT
LITTLE ASSHOLE UP."



"HE SWERVES HIM."





★ CHAPTER ONE ★
THE CURTAIN JERKER
★ ★ ★

('kər-tən jerk'-er) *noun*: 1. an unpopular professional wrestler who performs in opening bouts 2. the first bout on a professional wrestling show

WRITTEN BY
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SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
1976

THIS KIND OF
WRESTLING, IT'S
OLD-FASHIONED
STORYTELLING.

SOME FOLKS
WOULD TELL YOU
IT ISN'T COOL OR
MODERN.

BUT THIS KIND OF STORYTELLING,
IT'S ALL ABOUT TRADITION.
THAT'S ONE OF THE THINGS THEY
ACTUALLY TEACH YOU. MOST OF
IT YOU GOT TO FIGURE OUT AS
YOU GO ALONG.

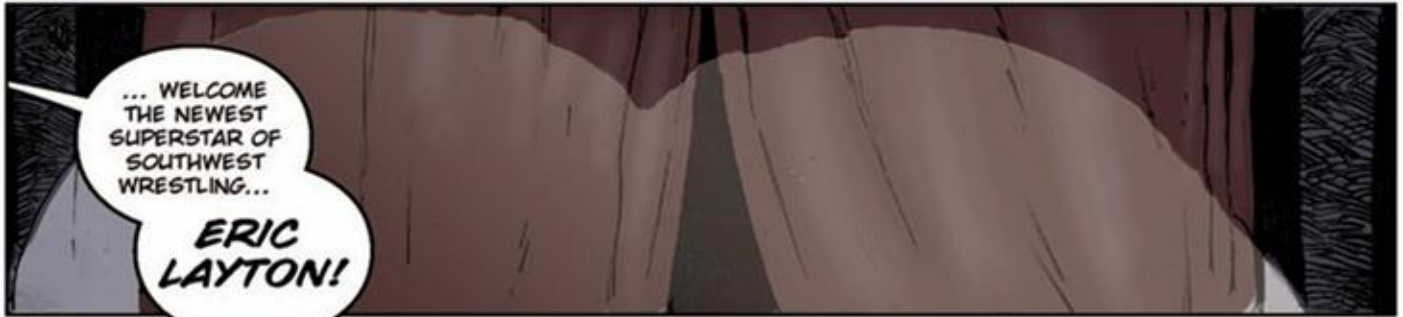
LUCKILY, JOE THOMAS, AN
OLD-SCHOOL RING VET, HELPED
ME WHEN I GOT LOST IN THE
WACKY WORLD OF WRESTLING.

SEE, THE CROWD'LL
START CHANTING "BORING"
DURING THE SLEEPER, BUT
FUCK THEM. IT'LL GET THEM
WORKED UP FOR WHEN THE
BABYFACE STARTS HIS
COMEBACK.

AM I
TELLING YOU
STUFF YOU
ALREADY
KNOW?

WELL,
I HAVE BEEN
TRAINING UP IN
DALLAS FOR
ABOUT A MONTH
NOW.

HEH. KID,
YOU GOT NO IDEA
WHAT IT TAKES TO
PUT A MATCH TOGETHER.
NOT YET. BUT DON'T
WORRY. I'LL TAKE CARE
OF YOU TOMORROW
NIGHT.







MR.
FRANK?



HEY,
THERE'S MY
GOLDEN BOY!
COME ON IN.
AND CALL ME
TONY.

OH. OK.
TONY.

TONY FRANK RAN
SOUTHWEST WRESTLING,
ONE OF TWO DOZEN
REGIONAL TERRITORIES IN
THE NATIONAL ALL-STAR
WRESTLING LEAGUE.

THEY WORKED HARD
TO RECRUIT ME FOR THEIR
CIRCUS, SAYING ALL THE RIGHT
THINGS AND NEVER TELLING ME
ABOUT GUYS LIKE FRANK...

...AND THEY SURE NEVER
TOLD ME ABOUT GUYS
LIKE DOGHOUSE REILLY.



REILLY WAS FRANK'S ENFORCER,
A LEGIT TOUGH GUY WHO BEAT
DOWN ANYONE THAT CROSSED THE
COMPANY LINE... AND ANYONE HE
JUST FELT LIKE HURTING.

UHM...
MR. SCHMIDT
UP IN THE DALLAS
OFFICE ASKED ME
TO GIVE THIS
TO YOU.



OH, HEY,
THANKS,
KID!

UHM...
TONY? I WAS...
WELL I WAS
WONDERING ABOUT
MY PAY FOR
TONIGHT.



THE NEXT EVENING
LAREDO, TX



SO WE'LL
START WITH ME
WORKING YOUR ARM
OVER FOR AWHILE,
THEN -

CHANGE
OF PLANS.



KID
AIN'T GOING
OVER?

KID AIN'T
WORKING YOU.
HE'S WORKING
ME.



WHAT
WAS THAT?
WHAT DOES THAT
MEAN? I HAVE
TO WRESTLE
HIM?

YEP.



WHY
WOULD HE
CHANGE THE
CARD LIKE
THAT?

PROBABLY
WANTS TO
ROUGH YOU UP
A LITTLE. SHOW
YOU HE'S
BOSS.



WE'LL LET
HIM TRY. HE MAY BE
SOME FREAK WITH A
GLAND PROBLEM, BUT
I CAN TAKE CARE
OF MYSELF.

WHAT, YOU
GOT A DEATH
WISH, KID? YOU
PISS HIM OFF AND
HE'LL SHOOT ON
YOU. WHATEVER
HE DOES OUT
THERE...

"...DON'T FIGHT BACK."

RING THE BELL!

DING
DING!
DING!

OK, KID,
START IT
OFF.

WHEN YOUR OPPONENT
DOESN'T WANT YOU TO
LOOK GOOD, YOU AREN'T
GOING TO LOOK GOOD.

HE'LL NO-SELL*
EVERYTHING YOU
HIT HIM WITH.

AND, OF COURSE, THERE'S
THE OBVIOUS WAY HE CAN
MAKE YOU LOOK BAD...

OR HE WON'T
COOPERATE WITH
YOU, MAKING YOU
LOOK WEAK.

*REFUSE TO ACT HURT.



...HE CAN JUST
PLAIN HURT YOU.

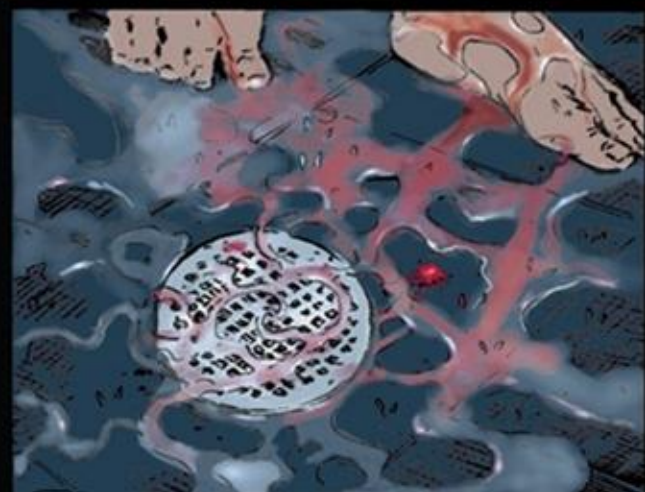


WHEN A GUY GOES INTO
BUSINESS FOR HIMSELF
LIKE THAT YOU CAN DO
TWO THINGS...



...YOU CAN
JUST TAKE IT...

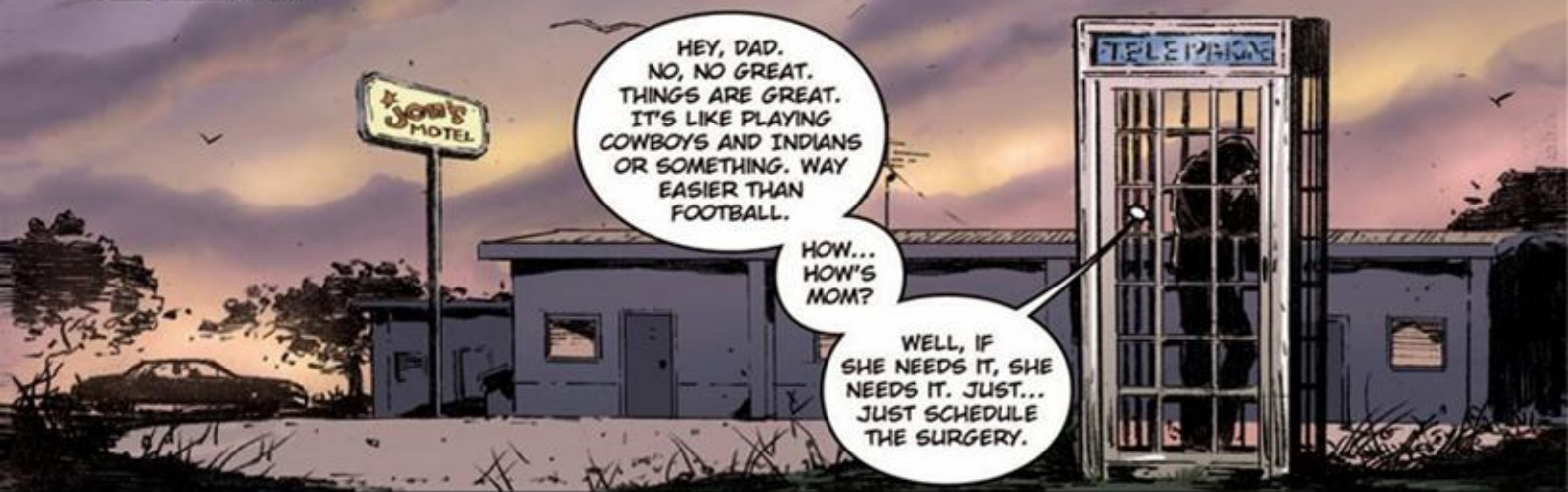








THE NEXT DAY



HEY, DAD.
NO, NO GREAT.
THINGS ARE GREAT.
IT'S LIKE PLAYING
COWBOYS AND INDIANS
OR SOMETHING. WAY
EASIER THAN
FOOTBALL.

HOW...
HOW'S
MOM?

WELL, IF
SHE NEEDS IT, SHE
NEEDS IT. JUST...
JUST SCHEDULE
THE SURGERY.




DAD, JUST
TELL DR. KLAUSE TO
SCHEDULE THE SURGERY,
OK? I'LL HAVE THE MONEY
IN NO TIME AND HE SHOULD
JUST SCHEDULE THE
SURGERY, OK?



LOOK, DAD,
I GOT TO GO
NOW. NO, IF SHE'S
SLEEPING, JUST LET
HER BE. JUST TELL
HER I SAID HI AND
I LOVE HER.








HEH. YEAH,
THE MONEY GETS
BETTER. YOU JUST GOT
TO STICK AROUND LONG
ENOUGH TO MAKE PAYING
YOU GOOD WORTH
THEIR WHILE.


WORTH
THEIR WHILE.
THEY PROMISED
ME FIVE HUNDRED
A NIGHT.

SURE
THEY DID. THIS
BUSINESS IS ALL
ABOUT PROMISES.
BUT THERE ARE
NO CONTRACTS,
ARE THERE?



WHEN YOU
WERE A FOOTBALL
STAR, THEY WOULD
DO ANYTHING TO GET
YOU. IT WOULD GIVE
THEM CREDIBILITY
AND PUBLICITY.

NOW
YOU'RE JUST AN
EX-FOOTBALL STAR.
WHY PAY YOU MORE
THAN THEY HAVE TO?
YOU STICK AROUND,
THE MONEY WILL
START COMING
IN.



YEAH, BUT
I... I NEED
MONEY...

...A
LOT OF
MONEY...



...NOW.



HOW BAD
YOU NEED
THIS MONEY,
KID?

BAD.

CAN
YOU GET
YOUR HANDS
DIRTY? CAN YOU
HANDLE A
GUN?



YES.



WELL
ALL RIGHT THEN.
WASH THOSE DOWN.
THEN WE'LL TALK
BUSINESS.

DON'T
WORRY, KID.
YOU'LL START
PULLING DOWN
SOME SERIOUS
CASH REAL
SOON.

HE WAS RIGHT. I DID
START MAKING MONEY.
BUT I SHOULD HAVE
JUST STUCK TO
WRESTLING...



...BECAUSE I FOUND
MYSELF KILLING A
COMPLETE STRANGER A
COUPLE MONTHS LATER...



...AND GETTING
INTO SHOOTOUTS
WITH RIVAL
GANGS...



...AND BEING
CORNERED WITH TWO
BULLETS LEFT AND
THREE GUYS
LOOKING TO KILL ME.

WORST OF ALL, I
KNOW THAT IF I'D
HAVE JUST KEPT TO
THE STRAIGHT AND
NARROW...



...JOE MIGHT
STILL BE ALIVE
TODAY.



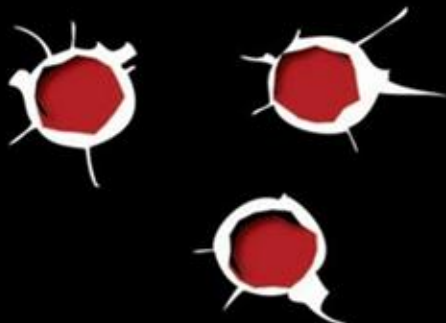
The fights are fake, but the bullets are *real*.

SWERVE

SAN ANTONIO, 1976: ERIC LAYTON, desperate for cash, left college behind to dive into the world of pro-wrestling. From there, it was an easy slide into the underbelly of the "rasslin'" biz, where the box office and concession stand bake for an easy way to launder drug money.

Eric wanted out, but he had seen and done too much. They would never let him walk away, so he went into business for himself, hoping to make enough quick cash to sneak away and buy a new identity.

When Eric is pinched by the police and forced to flip on his boys, he is stuck between the cops and the crooks - and the idea that he will escape with his life is looking less realistic than a pro-wrestling match.



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ACTION

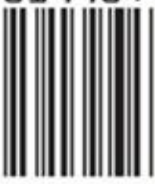
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