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PART ONE PACO's
Descent



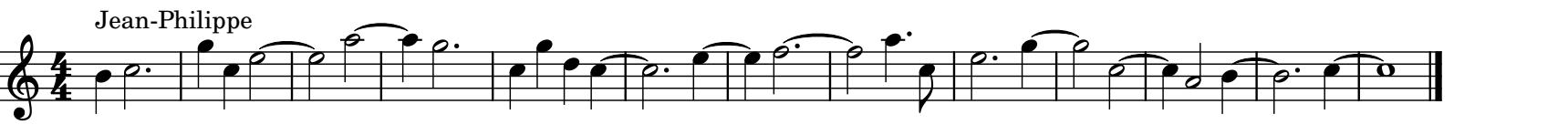
CAST LIST

Colorado



A musical score for 'Colorado' in 4/4 time. The staff consists of eight measures. The first measure has eighth notes. The second measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The third measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fourth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fifth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The sixth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The seventh measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The eighth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note.

Jean-Philippe



A musical score for 'Jean-Philippe' in 4/4 time. The staff consists of eight measures. The first measure has eighth notes. The second measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The third measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fourth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fifth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The sixth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The seventh measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The eighth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note.

Paco



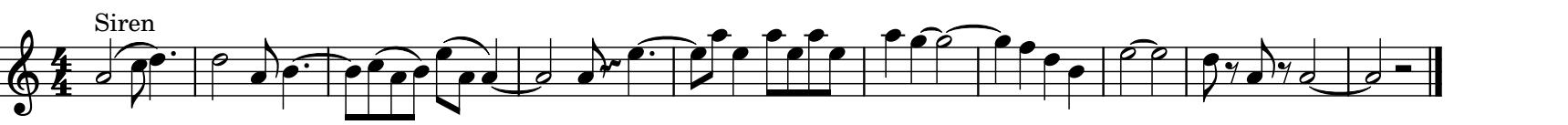
A musical score for 'Paco' in 4/4 time. The staff consists of eight measures. The first measure has eighth notes. The second measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The third measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fourth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fifth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The sixth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The seventh measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The eighth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note.

The Red Duster



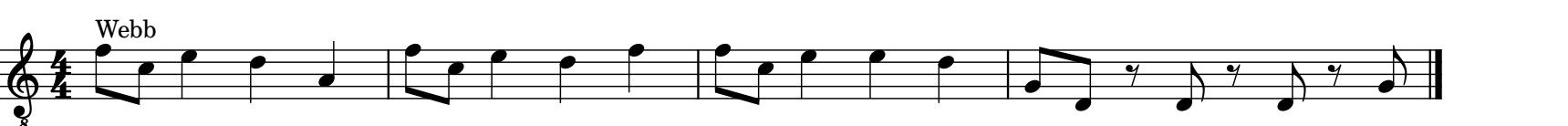
A musical score for 'The Red Duster' in 4/4 time. The staff consists of eight measures. The first measure has eighth notes. The second measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The third measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fourth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fifth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The sixth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The seventh measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The eighth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note.

Siren



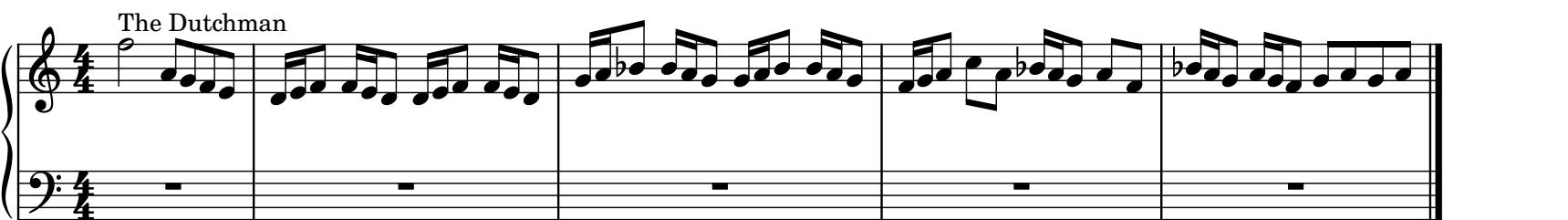
A musical score for 'Siren' in 4/4 time. The staff consists of eight measures. The first measure has eighth notes. The second measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The third measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fourth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fifth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The sixth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The seventh measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The eighth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note.

Webb

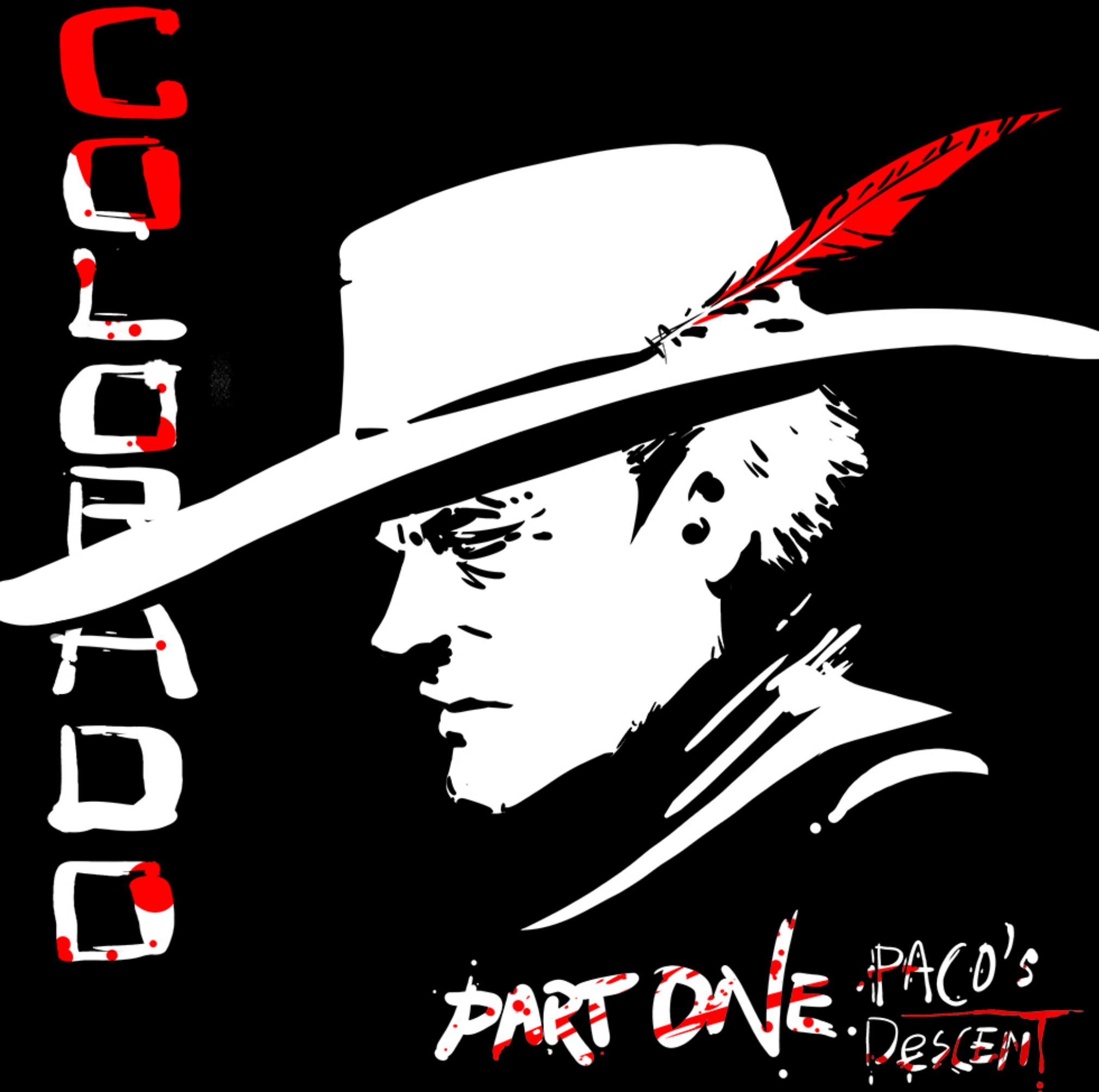


A musical score for 'Webb' in 4/4 time. The staff consists of eight measures. The first measure has eighth notes. The second measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The third measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fourth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fifth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The sixth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The seventh measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The eighth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note.

The Dutchman



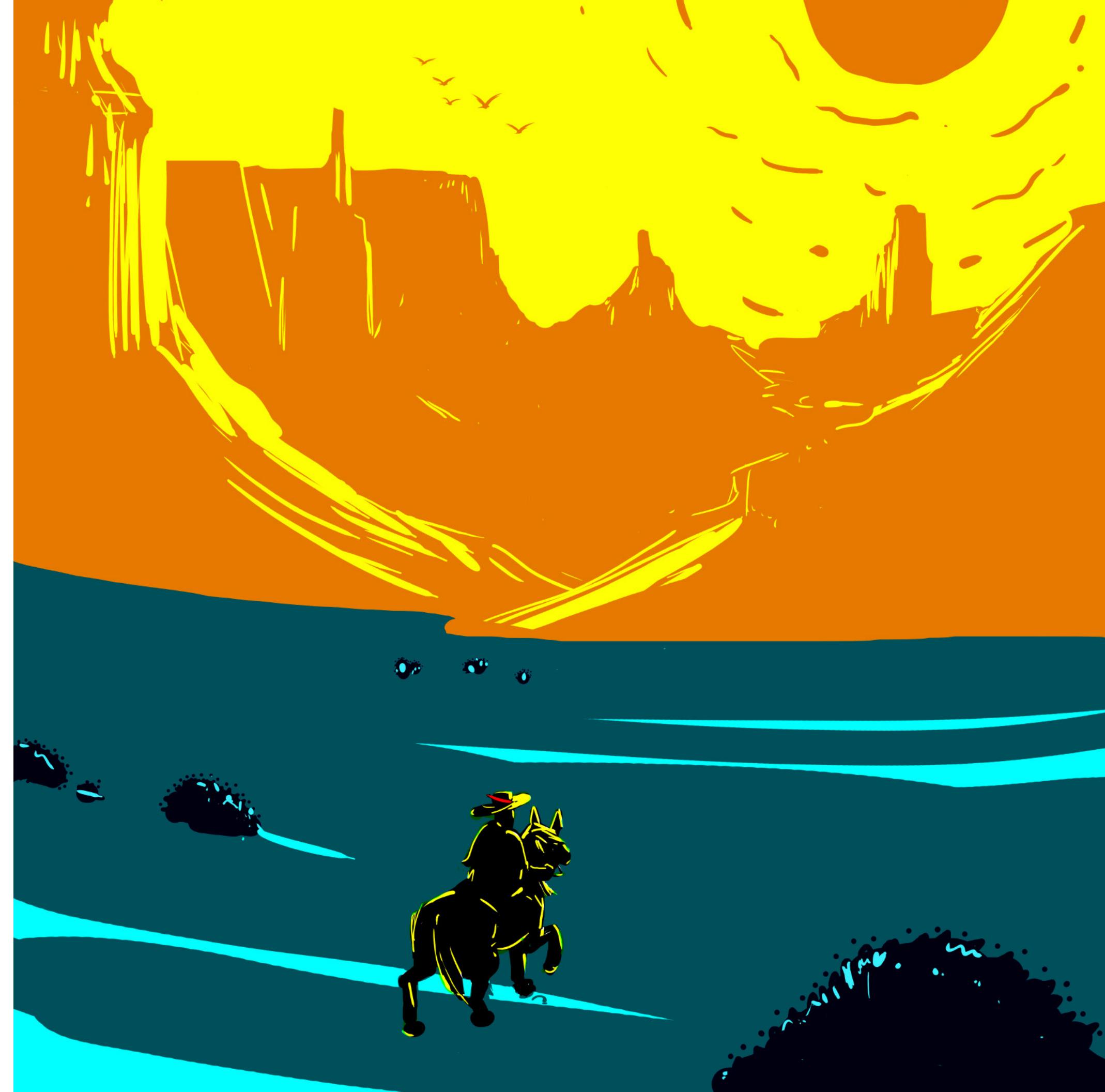
A musical score for 'The Dutchman' in 4/4 time. The staff consists of eight measures. The first measure has eighth notes. The second measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The third measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fourth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fifth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The sixth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The seventh measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The eighth measure has eighth notes followed by a quarter note.





This is a book meant to be read at a slower pace. The illustrations and words are few, but set to accompanying music. The music is just long enough that you don't have to rush to turn the page, so take your time. Most likely you'll finish reading before listening.

There are parts of the story in the songs if you hit it just right. And of course the music is in the story. It's a short enough story. It should take about an hour to get through, depending on how finnicky your record player is. So let's go on . . .



COLORADO, START.



dirty tan duster draped across a thin frame, perched atop a pale horse, ambles across the prairie. It's slow to begin, but just as many other days before, the man named Colorado must start on his way.

Colorado finds himself staring at the sun, stuck but forever moving.

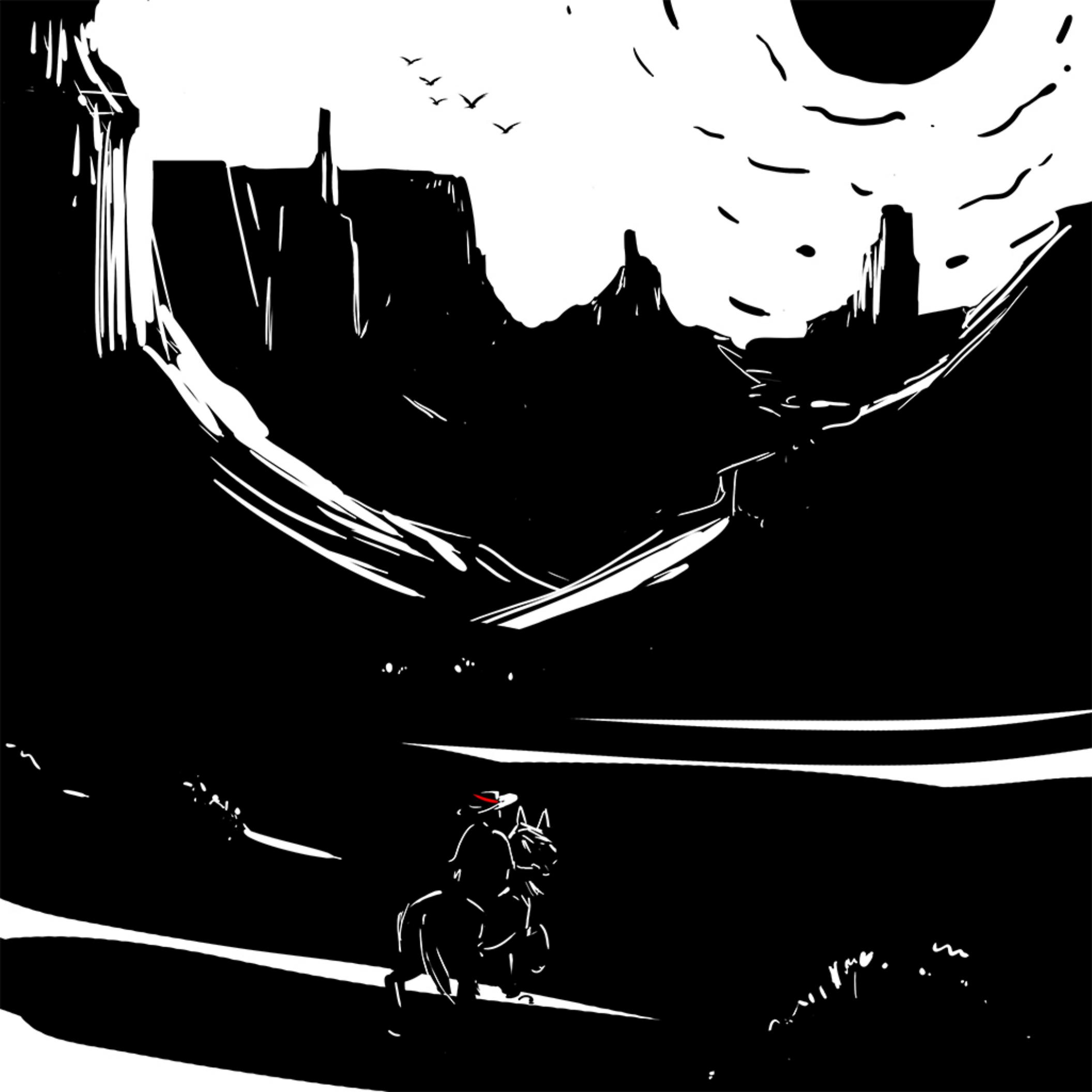
With a red feather sewn into a threadworn hat flopped over his eyes, Colorado is a queer sight, bobbing up and down like a crippled bird.

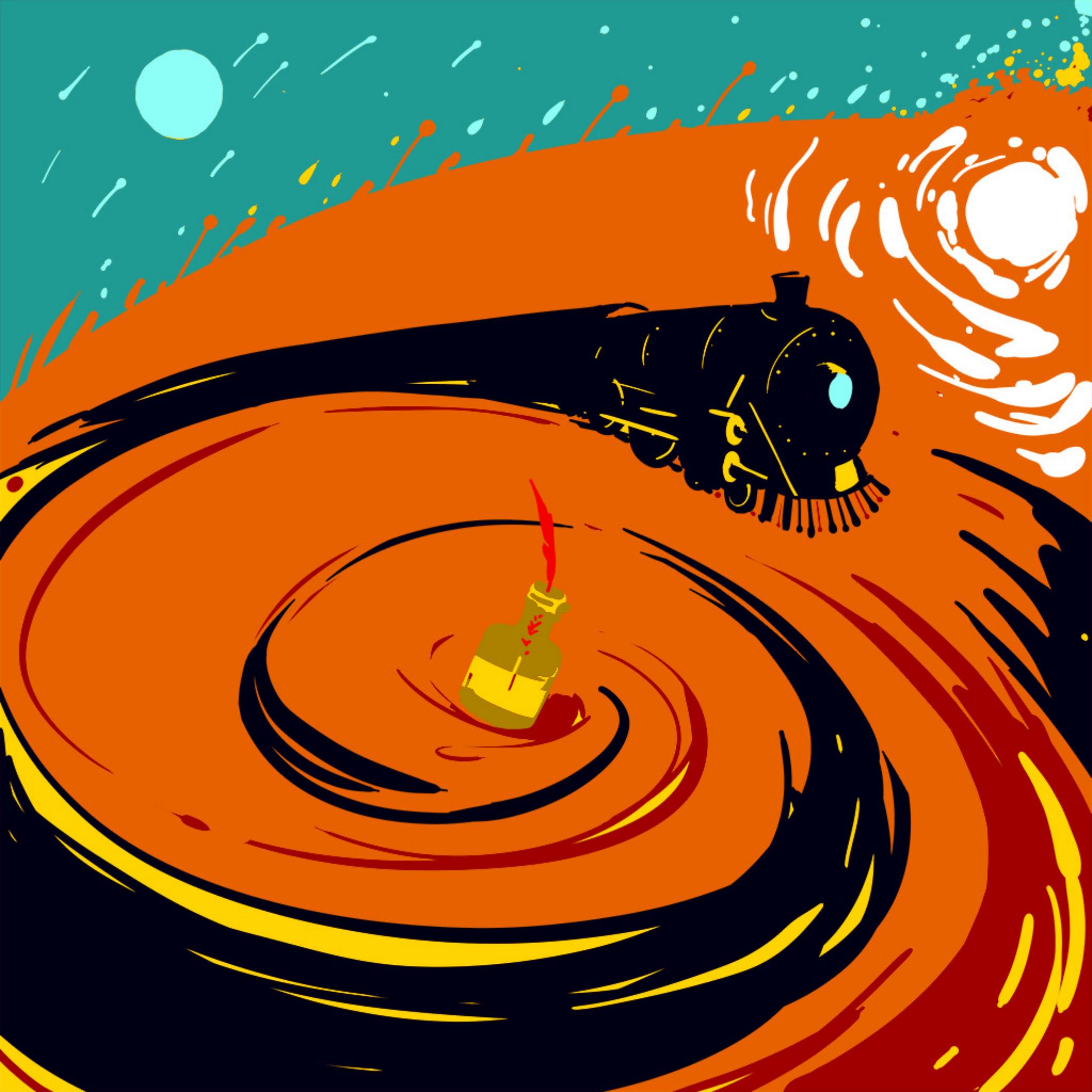
There are noises, even here on the open plains, and Colorado flinches at every one, hearing gunshots in the roadrunner and

crow cries. One step at a time, even if the sound of his feet on sagebrush reminds him of bones snapping.

Smells, too, haunt the prairie: smells like lingering blood from a wounded animal. He stops, straightens his neck, looks to the shadowed nooks and crannies. He slides by them, dodging invisible ambushes and malevolent guns doubtlessly tucked away just out of sight.

A winding path will save him, so a winding path he takes, snaking across the dry earth so that none could follow. When he reaches the settlement, parched and sore, he is ready to burn away the bad memories with a cigar and drown it all with whiskey before heading off, train ticket in hand





CAN'T STOP



olorado can't stay long. He boards train after train, which forever take him to the next city he can't stay in.

He hears the steam whistles howl their secret language: "Problem with brakes." "Repeat." "Problem with brakes." "Cannot hear you. Repeat." Even trains have their troubles, he muses.

He's tried to kill his own troubles that linger in his skull. In the saloon, sitting alone, there are survivors from those attempts that haunt his dreams, stuck in his head like burrs.

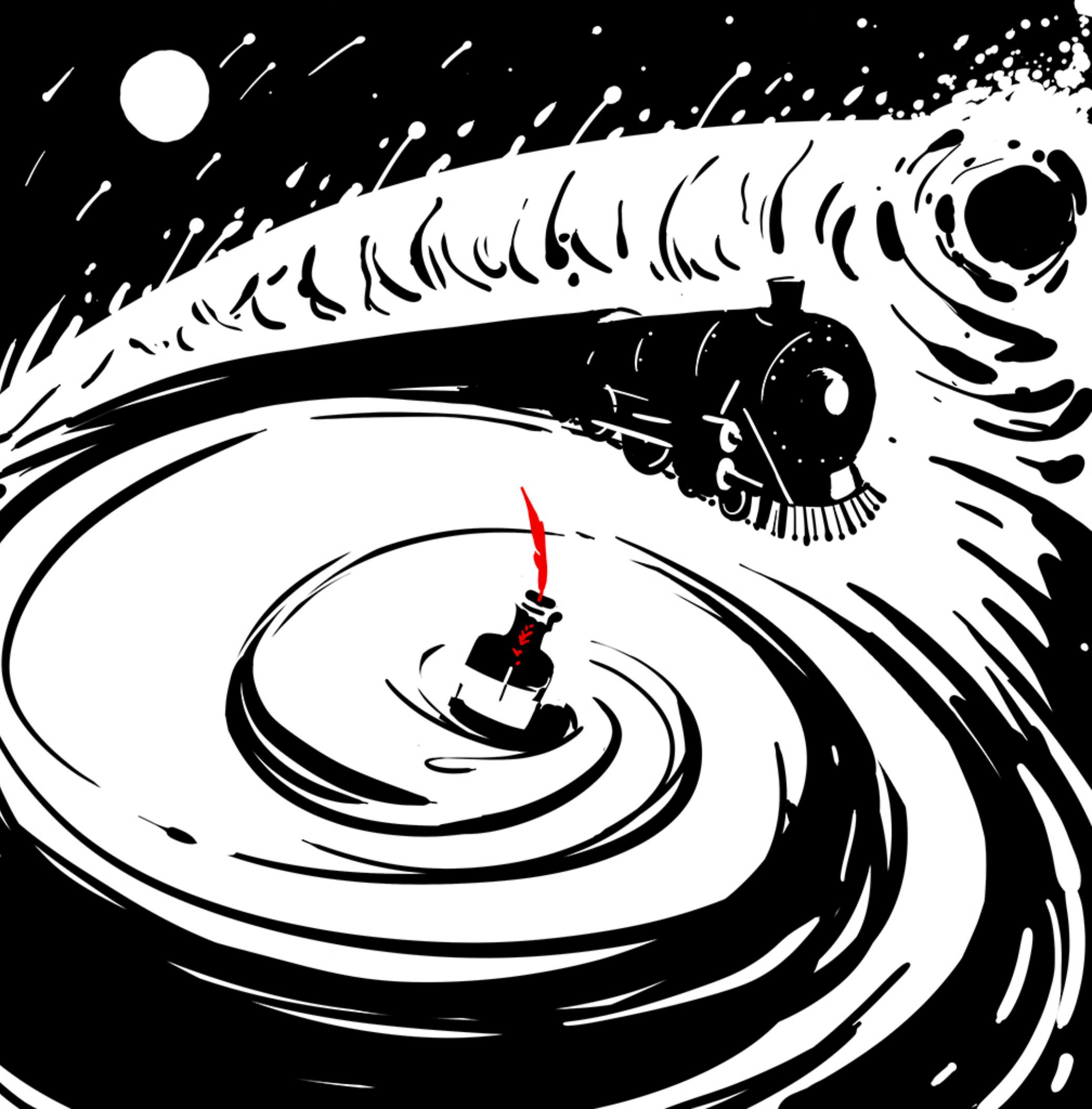
Firewater floods through his brain, drowning them all. It's amazing the things that whiskey will let you forget.

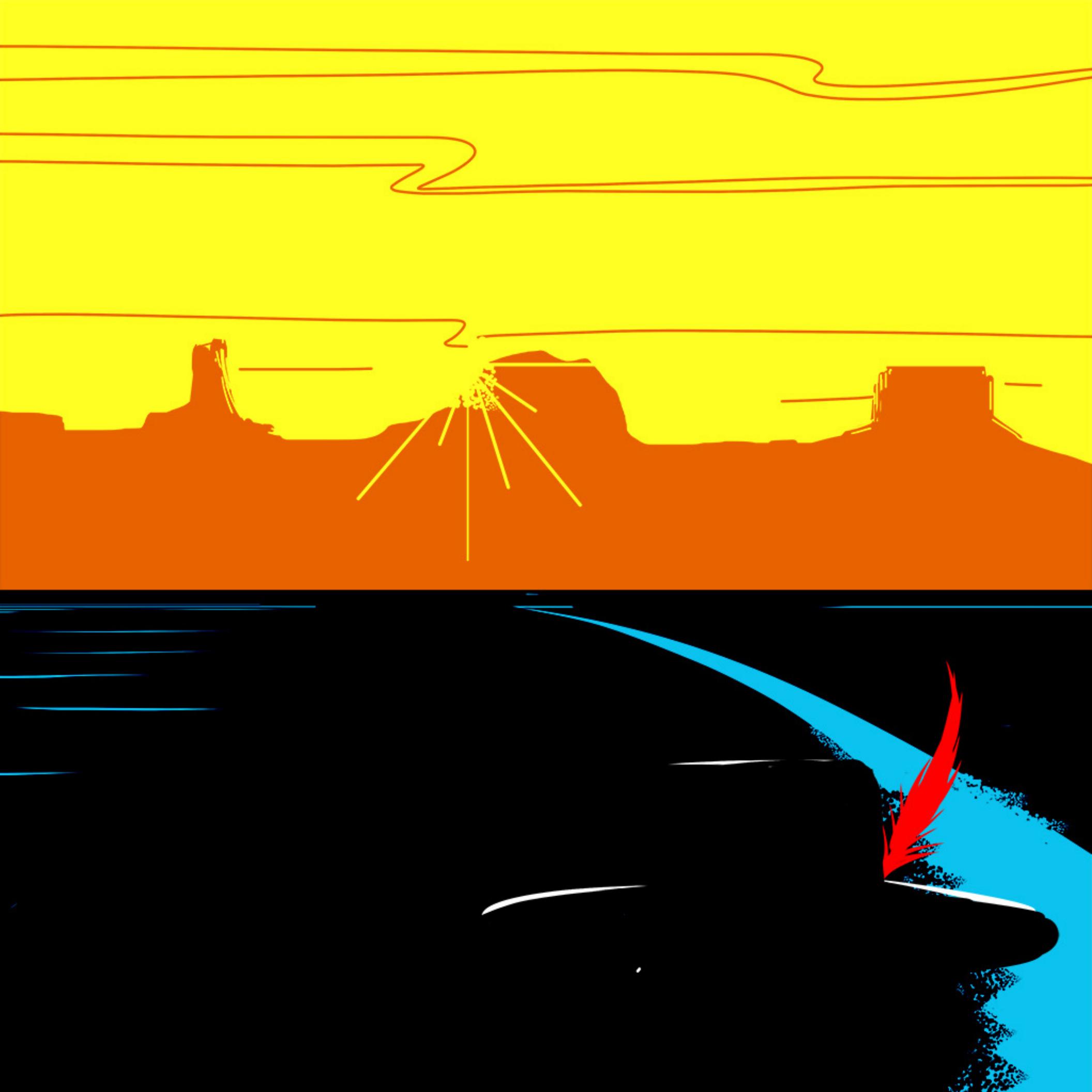
He's nice to the saloon girl and ignores how poorly she's

painted her face. They spend a night together, and she asks him not to pay, but he give her his last. He'll get it back somehow, even though he's never proud of what he does to get it. Every stop brings more flood, less thought, less food. A torrent pounds against him, making it hard to move.

He doesn't even know where he is when he gets a big break. He can't even remember what the big break was. It wasn't a job. It was a flurry of sounds he cannot comprehend. He's not sure what happened. He can only tell you there was blood, and crying, and the sound of crows. He remembers the taste of vomit.

Ten days later he walks out of that nameless town with a deed to land, a bag of seed, some fertilizer, and one last ticket.



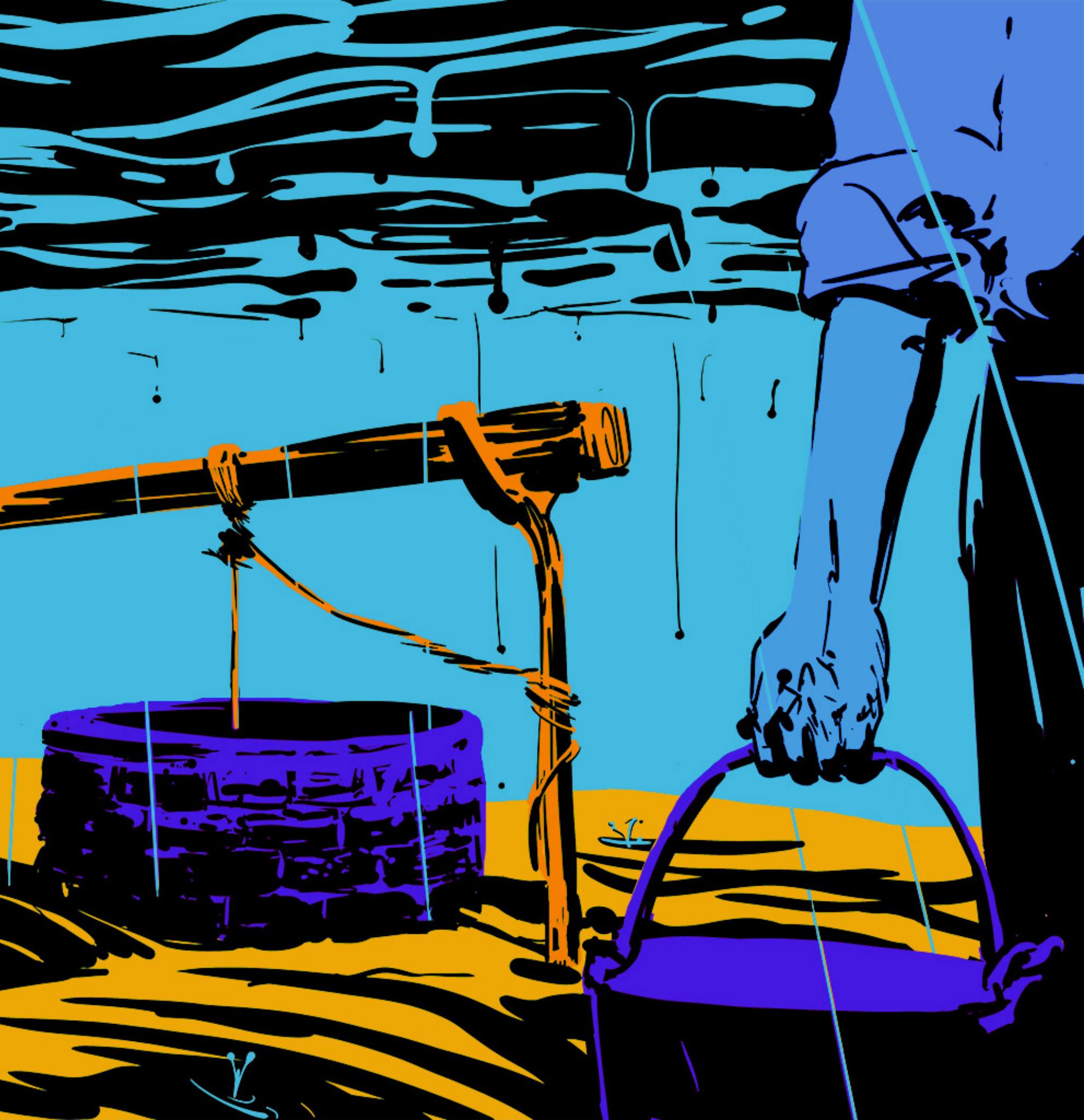


D E S O L A T I O N



I t doesn't matter how many times you're tricked, it still feels rotten in your gut. A dry and barren stretch of land lays out before Colorado's eyes as the train sails away. It takes him an hour to find the house promised with the deed.





W A T E R



ays of work brings drips of reward, then a deluge. The well gives up its bounty, first muddy, then clear.

The water goes into the farmer, then the land. Into the farmer, then the land. A cycle begins and renews itself.

Colorado imagines a snake, refreshed of its own flesh eternally. If blood were water, he might have had more clean clothes and less bad memories.





MEETING P A N



olorado works his land. The dawn light burns better than cigars, and water floods his skull fuller than whiskey ever could. The seeds are growing, the land is fresh, and rain falls from light clouds when the sky isn't cobalt blue.

It's raining, and he feels droplets and mists. In the rain, he closes his eyes, shovel in hand, disturbed from meditation only when he hears the faint trill of pan pipes in the distance.

The hills have many secrets, and he sees a silhouetted form at the top of one, now, blowing on pipes and behaving quite like a man. He blinks, and the shadow is gone. He blinks again, and a man is beside him and the pipes are louder.

At first the man looks like a Native, and he's dressed like an Apache or Comanche—but not one or the other, and his patchwork clothes are too clean for the dusty plains. Across his head there is a band of cloth the same red as Colorado's cap feather, giving the farmer the start of a chuckle. The guest's pipes are plaintive, but when he ends his song, his smile is strong.

"I am Jean-Philippe," the Fake Indian says, and for a second his teeth seem sharp. He bows almost sarcastically.

Colorado stifles his smile.

"I'd have expected an Apache name."

"One name is just as good as the other, is it not? And I've grown attached to this one." He looks up, still bowing.

"If any name's good, I'll call you Pan."

"I would prefer you choose your own name, and I choose mine. That is how it usually works, yes?"

His too-clean smile makes something in Colorado's stomach feel like lead and something else feel light. He doesn't shoo his visitor away, but does get back to shoveling until the Fake Indian speaks again.

"It is also the custom to offer your name to another once he

gives his own. That I am very sure of."

"I'll give you my name, Pan, if you can get me a shovel that doesn't rust."

Jean-Philippe smiles very wide, now.

"Ah, yes, yes. I have one of those. Its price is more than a name, though. You will have to furnish me with seamless boots. You can pay with your name now, and once I get these boots, you will have a fine shovel."

Colorado stops digging. This time a small smile breaks free from his control.

"All right . . . it's Colorado, though I didn't quite choose it. You'll get your boots later, when I get my shovel."

Colorado listens to his guest's laugh, and the pan pipes renew.

The strange visitor returns many times. Each time, Colorado asks for his shovel, telling Jean-Philippe his boots are on their way. Jean-Philippe replies in turn that the shovel is almost ready, and he's just waiting for some boots to travel up the hills to get it.

It is a strange thing, to get accustomed to loneliness. It is a stranger thing still to realize you didn't like it after all.

Colorado begins to question many things. Sometimes, when he looks out the corner of his eye, he sees Jean-Philippe as something else: something that he remembers from books on the undersea. But when he turns around, there is a flicker of shadow and then that Fake Indian smile.

Often, the things he says are strange and full of portent. Other times, when Jean-Philippe doesn't speak at all, Colorado finds himself talking about things he'd long buried. He does it without realizing it.

Sometimes, Pan leaves gifts. Other times, he takes things without asking. Colorado doesn't mind. It's never something worth missing.

Late at night, after many months of this, Colorado is once again woken by pan pipes. He exits his bed and grabs his hat.





Meeting the Family / Paco's Lament / Dimension Cry



In the hills of any remote place, there are secrets that no man has seen or touched. Colorado's farm, as remote any, harbors its share of secret-fertile hills.

He's led by the hand, unable to see farther than a few inches in front of his face. Once in a while he feels a squeeze, and Jean-Philippe leads him left or right, or in some direction that feels like it's at a right angle to any cardinal point.

"In these hills, there is a family," Jean-Philippe half-whispers. "I call them my own. We are all very old . . . very tired. And very close." He hesitates before continuing. "You have been a blessing, you know. I hope they will call you family, soon."

The first structures Colorado sees are ramshackle and threaten to fall down just from his looking at them. Large shadows flit about, followed by slithering shape and bright eyeshine.

In the firelight, some are not as well-disguised as Jean-Philippe. Some have skin. Others have fur, or scales. They have four arms, six arms, wings. They have twenty eyes or no eyes at all, and they all look at him with curiosity, peeking through the gaps of wood and dangling keepsakes.

It takes Colorado several moments to process the sight. He reaches for a gun that isn't there, but feels another squeeze on his hand and relaxes.

"You are not scared, I hope."

"I'd hate to threaten our rapport by lying. On the other hand, I'd prefer not to be rude to your family."

He tenses up again when he feels the hand leave his and watches as Jean-Philippe darts off at an odd angle. He returns a second later, and Colorado resumes breathing.

"My brother, Paco," Jean-Philippe says, and he ruffles the hair of a boy Colorado had not seen previously.

Paco is much like his older brother. He smiles in the same way, and there is something in his tone that seems older than the hills that surround them. But when he speaks, Colorado is struck by an immediate difference in tact.

"Have you seen many die?"

Colorado does not answer.

"What's it like out there? You've managed to make engines, finally. Why are you using water and coal, though?"

Once more Colorado does not answer. He furrows his brow and reaches for a hat that he just now realizes is no longer there. Paco guffaws, the floppy bolero hanging over the boy's face as his sharp teeth shine.

"Have you heard of the Red Duster?"

When he says the words, Colorado can feel the air stiffen, and he turns to find others are looking at him.

"He can leave. He's going out there, doing what we can't."

"What is it he does?" Colorado grabs his hat back, and Paco doesn't try to stop him.

"He goes around and sees more than dirt and brown plants, for one. And I bet he sees a lot of blood. His coat's stained with it, you know. That's how he got his name."

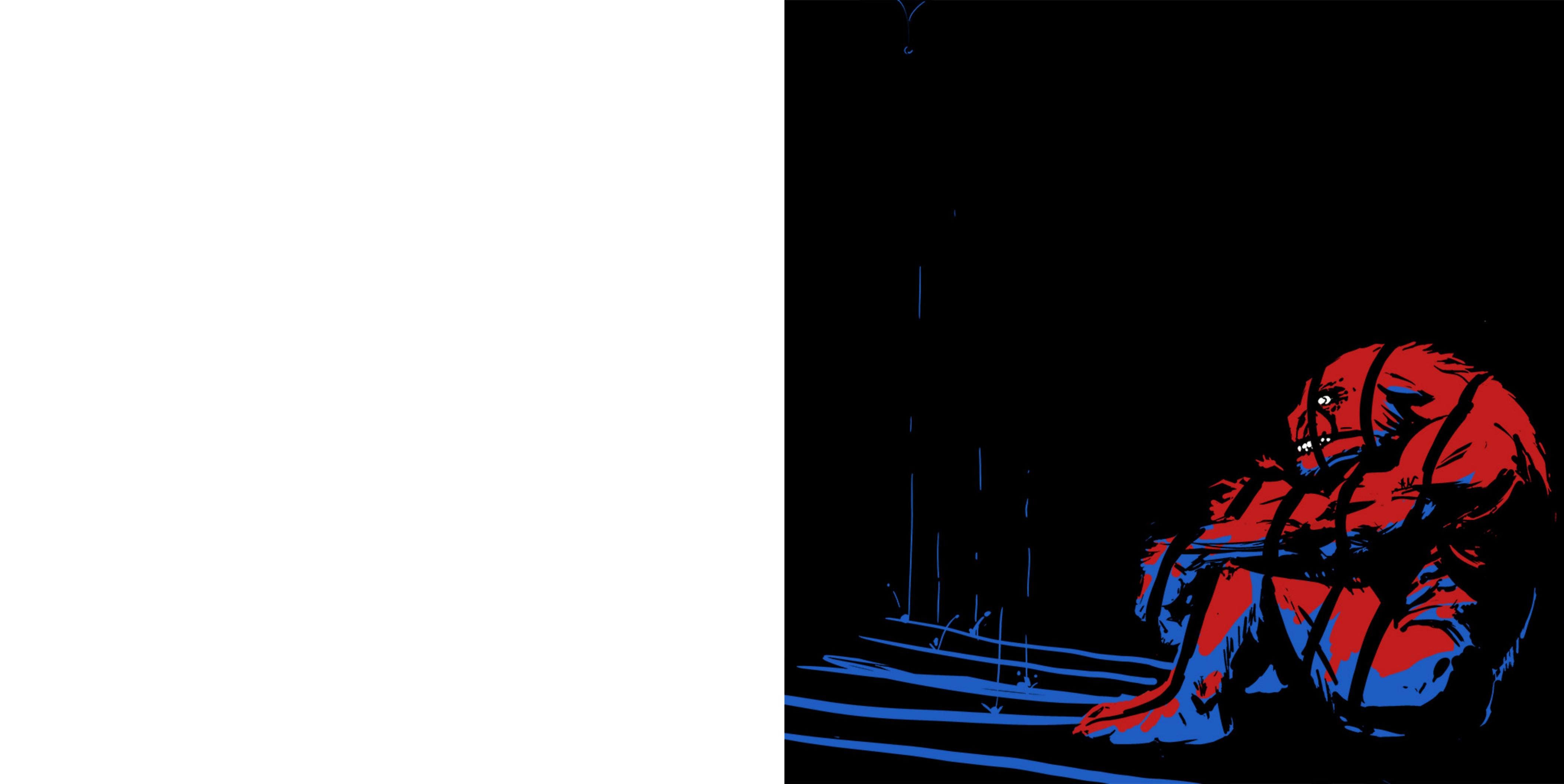
At this, Paco is physically removed by his older brother, leaving Colorado with the fire and with curious eyes that bore into him.

He turns and sees Jean-Philippe's shadow as the Fake Indian returns. For a brief second there is a backwards cuttlefish in place of a head, and Colorado remembers the flickering shadows he saw back on his farm. He wonders if he minds it.

Before he can say another word, Jean-Philippe's hand is on his shoulder, leading him wordlessly to the center of the shantytown.

The chanting begins as the family makes a circle.





PAIN OF THE RED DUSTER



The Red Duster will tell you he is a Yoth. He will not tell you what that means, but will instead direct you to behold his form: immense, muscled, top-heavy, and misleadingly lupine. His sharp teeth glisten wherever there is light.

There is very little light here.

Back home, before the crunch, there was Mother and infinite possibilities. Now he lives where looking sideways gives him a headache. Different rules for a reality he can barely walk in.

The Red Duster will tell you he is a freedom fighter. He will tell you he never killed a soul that didn't try to hurt him first. Years ago, he believed it.

Now, he waits. He knows the passage of time by the dripping water in his cell. Outside, his Siren plots his rescue with those still loyal to the cause.

Inside, his heart twists in on itself. Alone for so long, his pulse now belts out a strangled tune. It mingles with the drops

of water, forming an anthem of loneliness.

He once had a life. Now he has begged for scraps for so long it has left permanent marks on his body.

He once had a brother. Now the judge of Red City has an exotic rug with eyes that used to be so gentle.

He once had a wife. Now the sheriff has a monster to keep away the rabble; a monster with a long scar along her scalp and a dented skull where they scooped out her memories.

Now there is no one left. No one and nothing but himself. He sings it to the walls, justification for what is to come to pass.

He hears his Siren and her plan—the crack of stone and metal wrought by clawed hands against the walls that bind him.

When he is released, his pain will flow through the land.





DRUMS FROM A MURDERED UNIVERSE

Drums swirl around Colorado with increasingly strange rhythms, tracing a path from serene to violent.

Curiosity turns to wonder at the forms around him.

Wings. Limbs like forking branches. Eyes stacked like cordwood. He can see the fur and skin more clearly now as disguises are shed completely. He is family, after all.

He hears his Pan laugh, and Colorado is told a story:

Before this universe there was one where things were very different. Reality was an infinite plane warmed by the fire they called Mother. Mother traced the land until it forgot it was eternal, and folded in on itself in one big crunch.

Before that there may have been one just like this one or different than both: when armageddon falls on this reality, a new world will bounce back.

"We survived. We slipped through a hole in the apocalypse.

It was very difficult, but . . . maybe you can, too, if you are tenacious."

Colorado feels a lump in his throat and sees his Pan's smile flicker. He starts to say something several times before Jean-Philippe takes his hands and cuts him off. "But now is the time for celebration, yes? For the family has grown by one!"

There is a woman with two mouths that begins to sing.

Jean-Philippe joins in and Colorado hears three voices from his mouth. He can smell a steam engine burning coal on his breath.

Paco is howling and dancing. His head is a backwards octopus with stunted arms. He has no eyes.

Limbs entwine and bend, shadows in the firelight. He feels Jean-Philippe's hands, hears his laugh, feels that something inside his stomach turn from lead into something light.

The drums have become so fast they've turned beat into note—percussion becomes tone.

He turns and no longer feels five fingers on his arm but four. Sharp teeth drip with light as the same laugh comes from the Fake Indian's throat, lips barely moving. The top of his face is an expanse of smooth white, like Paco's. Colorado feels himself embraced, and the laughter comes from his own throat.





Laying with PAN



