

SAMMY SALAMI

"Ollie into the shadows.
Grind through the ghosts.
This city's secrets don't stay buried."

SKATE OR SOUL

By Dave Alto

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By

Dave Alto, Ph.D

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Chapter 1

Book 1: The Mural Prophecy

The Ramp at 3:33

The first time Sammy Salami saw the ramp, it wasn't there.

He was grinding the rail behind Mi Tierra Market at 3:17 a.m., headphones blasting Bad Bunny, when the alley lights flickered. One blink—empty asphalt. Second blink—a perfect wooden half-pipe rose from the cracked ground like it had always belonged. Fresh cedar smell, still wet with dew. No trucks, no crew, no footprints. Just the ramp and a single spray-painted glyph on the coping: a jagged **3:33** in dripping crimson.

Sammy killed the music. His board clattered. "No manches," he whispered.

He knew every inch of East L.A.'s skate spots. This one didn't exist on any map, not even the secret Google Doc his crew kept. Yet here it was, glowing faintly under the sodium lamps, humming like a phone on vibrate.

His phone buzzed. **Abuela (3:18 a.m.):** *Mijo, the spirits say don't ollie over the cemetery after dark... also, bring milk.*

Sammy snorted. Typical. Abuela Rosa believed every alley had a ghost and every ghost wanted *leche*. He thumbed back: **Sammy:** *It's a ramp, not a graveyard. Chill.*

He rolled closer. The ramp's curve was *sick*—smooth transition, no flat bottom, just a steep drop that begged for speed. Someone had tagged the underside with Aztec symbols: a smoking mirror, a serpent eating its tail. The paint looked wet.

Sammy glanced at his watch. 3:29.

A dare formed in his chest. One run. Just to say he did it.

He dropped in.



3:33 a.m.

The world *tilted*. Not the ramp—*reality*. The second his wheels kissed the wood, the alley vanished. No market, no dumpsters, no stars. Just a tunnel of neon glyphs spinning around him like subway graffiti on fast-forward. His board felt weightless. The ramp stretched into infinity.

Sammy carved hard, instinct overriding panic. He popped an ollie—and the glyphs *screamed*. A woman's voice, layered with a thousand others: “**¡Regresa lo robado!**” *Return what was stolen.*

He landed. The ramp spat him out.

3:34 a.m.

Sammy tumbled onto the same cracked asphalt, but the ramp was gone. His board lay split in half, wheels still spinning. A single cedar splinter stuck out of his palm like a thorn.

His phone exploded.

Jules (coder girl): *Dude where are you the livestream cut out*

Marco (DJ): *Bro your tracker just blinked in Oaxaca, Mexico??*

Luz (runaway poet): *Check the splinter. NOW.*

Sammy yanked it free. Etched on the wood: **TLALOC WAS HERE.**

Later That Morning – 7:42 a.m.

The crew met at Tía Lucy's taco stand. Sammy's palm was bandaged; the splinter sat in a Ziploc like evidence.

Jules pushed her glasses up. “Tlaloc. Aztec rain god. Symbol of fertility *and* vengeance. Someone's pissed.”

Marco spun a record on his portable deck. “Or someone’s *trolling*. Ghost ramps don’t just pop up, homes.”

Luz traced the glyph in hot sauce on a napkin. “This isn’t a prank. Look—same crimson as the 3:33 tag. Real blood mixed with spray paint. I ran a chem scan.”

Sammy’s stomach flipped. “You *stole* my blood?”

“Borrowed,” Luz corrected. “You were asleep.”

Abuela Rosa shuffled over with a tray of *café de olla*. “*Mijo*, you rode the *rampa maldita*? My cousin Chuy did that in ’78. Came back speaking Nahuatl. Still thinks he’s a jaguar.”

Sammy groaned. “I’m not turning into a cat.”

“Yet,” Jules muttered, typing furiously. “Okay, legend drop: every 33 years, Tlaloc’s ramp appears to collect a debt. Skaters who ride it vanish for three days. Return... changed.”

Marco stopped the record. Scratch-scratch. “Three days? That’s tomorrow.”

Day 1 – The Search

They hunted the alley at dusk. Nothing. Jules hacked traffic cams—blank frames from 3:17 to 3:34. Marco interviewed *abuelos* at the senior center; they all knew the story but swore the ramp moved.

Luz found the first mural.

On the side of the abandoned pupusería: a fresh painting of Sammy mid-ollie, board glowing, eyes white. Beneath it, in dripping crimson: **ONE DEBT. THREE RIDERS.**

Day 2 – The Second Rider

Word spread on skate TikTok. A kid named **Rico**—14, fearless, desperate for clout—posted at 3:15 a.m.: *Found the ramp. Watch me send it.*



The livestream cut at 3:33. Rico's board appeared on eBay an hour later, listed by "Tlaloc Treasures."

Sammy's crew staked out the alley. At 3:30, the ramp shimmered into existence. Rico dropped in. Same neon tunnel. Same scream.

Sammy lunged to stop him—too late.

The ramp vanished. Rico's sneakers lay in the dust, soles smoking.

Day 3 – The Return

Rico stumbled out of the alley at sunrise, barefoot, speaking fluent Nahuatl. He painted a mural in three minutes flat: a calendar stone with **two empty slots** beside Sammy's face.

Translation (via Jules' app): **"The third rider chooses. Return the mask. Or the city drowns."**

That Night – 3:00 a.m.

Sammy stood alone. The ramp hadn't appeared yet. He clutched the splinter like a ticket.

Jules' voice crackled in his earpiece. "Mask of Tlaloc—stolen from the barrio museum in 1992. Currently in a private collection downtown. Owner: **Victor Vega**, real estate developer. Wants to bulldoze our block for luxury condos."

Marco: "Classic. Steal culture, erase history."

Luz: "The ramp's a warning. Vega's digging under the mural wall tomorrow. If he breaks the seal..."

Sammy rolled his shoulders. "Then I ride. Get the mask. End this."

3:33 a.m. – The Final Run

The ramp materialized, taller now, pulsing. Sammy dropped in.

The tunnel roared. Glyphs became *faces*—ancestors, skaters, his own abuela at 17, board in hand. They whispered: “**Choose.**”

Sammy carved a perfect 360. At the peak, a vision: Vega’s bulldozer cracking the earth, water flooding the streets, murals washing away.

He landed. The ramp opened like a mouth.

On the other side: a rooftop in downtown L.A. The mask sat on a pedestal, glowing turquoise. Vega’s security lasers crisscrossed the air.

Sammy smirked. “Amateurs.”

The Heist

Jules hacked the lasers. Marco blasted a reggaeton beat to mask the grind. Luz painted a decoy mural on the opposite wall—Sammy’s face, mid-kickflip, drawing guards away.

Sammy ollied the gap, snatched the mask, tucked it under his shirt. The rooftop *shuddered*. Tlaloc’s voice boomed: “**Debt paid. But the city remembers.**”

Dawn – Back in the Alley

The ramp dissolved into cedar dust. Rico blinked, English returning. “Did I... win?”

Sammy handed Abuela the mask. “Return it to the museum. Tell them it *walked* back.”

Rosa kissed his forehead. “*Mijo*, you brought milk too?”

He laughed, exhausted. “Next time.”

Epilogue – One Week Later

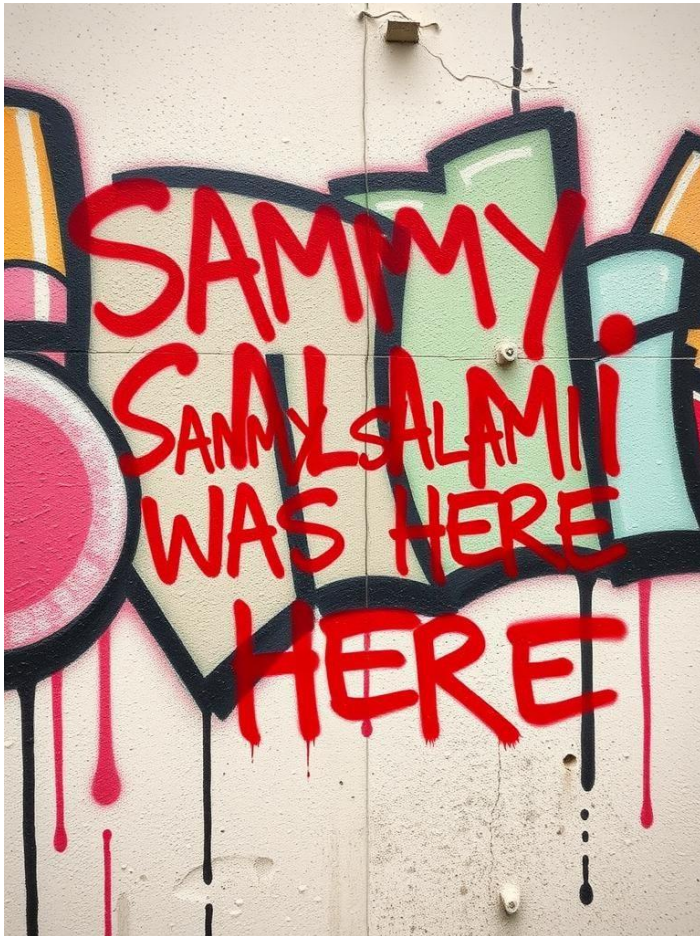


The murals stopped bleeding. Vega's project hit "mysterious delays." The crew celebrated with *tacos al pastor*.

But at 3:33 a.m., Sammy's phone buzzed.

Unknown Number: *New ramp. Subway tunnel under 6th. Bring the crew. The city's not done with you.*

Attached: a photo of a fresh tag on the museum wall. **SAMMY SALAMI WAS HERE.** In dripping crimson.



To be continued...

Chapter 2

Book 1: The Mural Prophecy

Bleeding Tag

The tag appeared on a Tuesday, dripping like it had a pulse.

Sammy was skating home from summer school—geometry, the only class he hadn't bombed—when he cut through the alley behind El Sereno Rec Center. The wall had been blank that morning, just sun-bleached cinder block. Now a fresh mural screamed across it: his own face, mid-kickflip, eyes rolled white. Below, in thick crimson strokes:

SAMMY SALAMI OWES ONE DROP.

The paint wasn't dry. It *moved*. A bead detached, rolled down the wall, and hit the ground with a wet *plop*. Real blood. Sammy smelled the iron before he saw the puddle.

He snapped a pic. Sent it to the crew group chat.

Sammy: *Wall's bleeding. Again.*

Jules: *On my way. Don't touch it.*

Marco: *Bet it's pig blood. TikTok prank.*

Luz: *It's human. Type O-neg. Same as yours, Salami.*

Sammy's stomach lurched. He backed up, board under arm. The blood kept coming—slow, deliberate, like the wall was *crying*.

4:17 p.m. – Tía Lucy's Taco Stand

The crew huddled around Jules' laptop. She'd scraped a sample into a vial and run it through her portable spectrometer (a gift from her bio-hacker uncle).



“Confirmed,” Jules said, pushing her glasses up. “Your blood, Sammy. Exact DNA match.”

Marco whistled. “Ghosts got your 23andMe?”

Luz traced the mural photo on her tablet. “Not ghosts. *Brujería*. Someone’s using your essence to anchor a curse. Classic *sangre y tinta*—blood and ink. The wall’s a message board.”

Abuela Rosa slid over with a plate of *al pastor*. “*Mijo*, you anger a *bruja*? Maybe that girl from the skate park? The one with the purple hair?”

“*Abuela*, I don’t even know her name.”

“Names are power,” Rosa muttered, crossing herself. “Eat. You’ll need strength.”

Sammy bit into a taco. The spice burned, grounding him. “So what’s the debt? First the mask, now blood. Someone’s keeping score.”

Jules spun the laptop. A city map glowed with red pins. “I cross-referenced disappearances. Three skaters in the last month. All rode mysterious ramps. All left blood murals. All vanished for exactly three days.”

Marco leaned in. “And returned?”

“Speaking Nahuatl. Painting prophecies. Then poof—normal again. Like nothing happened.”

Luz tapped the screen. “Except the murals stay. And they’re connected. Look.”

She zoomed. The murals formed a spiral across East L.A.—starting at the rec center, ending at the old **Cementerio Evergreen**.

Sammy swallowed. “The cemetery. Where Abuela said not to ollie.”

Rosa nodded. “*Exacto*. The dead don’t like noise.”

Night 1 – The Stakeout

They camped the rec center wall at midnight. Jules brought drones. Marco brought *cumbia* beats to keep spirits calm. Luz brought *velas* and a bag of *copal*.

Sammy brought his board.

At 1:11 a.m., the wall *rippled*. Paint bubbled. A new line appeared beneath the first:

SECOND DROP. FIND THE BONE.

The blood pooled faster now, forming arrows pointing east—toward the cemetery.

Jules’ drone caught heat signatures: a figure in a hoodie, spray can in one hand, *machete* in the other. Face obscured by a glowing **Tlaloc mask**.

Marco cursed. “That’s the mask we returned!”

“Or a copy,” Luz said. “Symbols replicate when the curse spreads.”

Sammy grabbed his board. “We follow the blood.”

Night 2 – The Chase

The arrows led through alleys, over chain-link fences, under the 710 freeway. Each mural they passed bled fresher—Sammy’s face aging, eyes hollowing. The final tag waited at Evergreen’s rusted gate:

THIRD DROP. DIG WHERE THE JAGUAR SLEEPS.

The gate creaked open on its own.

Inside, moonlight carved the tombstones into teeth. The crew rolled silent. Jules’ drone buzzed overhead, feeding night-vision to their phones.

They found the spot: a fresh mound beneath a stone jaguar statue. Dirt still loose.

Marco started digging with his hands. “If this is a body—”

“It’s not,” Luz cut in. “It’s a *message*.”

Sammy’s shovel hit wood. A small cedar box, same grain as the ghost ramp. Inside: a human finger bone, painted with the same crimson glyph. And a Polaroid—Sammy asleep in his bed, taken *tonight*.

His blood ran cold. “Someone was in my room.”

Night 3 – The Bruja

They took the bone to **Doña Clara**, the neighborhood *curandera*. Her shop smelled of sage and *yerba buena*. She examined the bone under a blacklight.

“*Hueso de traidor*,” she rasped. “Belonged to a thief who stole from the dead. The curse wants balance. Three drops of the *chosen*’s blood to wake the jaguar spirit. Then it judges.”

Sammy’s voice cracked. “Judges what?”

“Who pays the final debt.” Doña Clara handed him a *limpia* egg. “Rub this on your heart. Break the chain.”

The egg cracked in his palm—black yolk, reeking of rot.

Doña Clara crossed herself. “Too late. The third drop falls at dawn.”

Dawn – The Cemetery

The crew returned at 5:57 a.m. The jaguar statue’s eyes glowed crimson. The ground trembled.



Sammy stepped forward. “Take me. Leave my friends.”

The statue *roared*. Vines erupted, wrapping Marco, Jules, Luz. The bone in Sammy’s pocket burned.

A voice—not Tlaloc’s, but *older*: “**You returned the mask. Now return the thief.**”

The Polaroid in the box wasn’t Sammy asleep. It was **Victor Vega**—the developer—standing over a grave, holding the bone like a trophy.

Jules gasped. “He’s the original thief. Dug up the cemetery in ’92 for his first condo.”

Luz’s vines loosened. “The curse isn’t after you, Sammy. It’s using you to *find him*.”

The Confrontation

They tracked Vega to his downtown penthouse—same rooftop where Sammy stole the mask. He was hosting a gala: investors, champagne, a glass case displaying the **finger bone** as “Aztec relic.”

Sammy crashed the party on his board, grinding the marble railing. Guests screamed.

Vega smirked. “The skate rat. Come for your trophy?”

Sammy held up the cedar box. “This belongs to the dead. Return it, or the jaguar collects *you*.”

Vega laughed—until the windows *shattered*. Vines poured in, jaguar-shaped shadows leaping from the murals on the walls. The bone flew from its case, embedding in Vega’s hand.

He screamed as crimson glyphs crawled up his arm.

Resolution

Police found Vega at dawn, babbling Nahuatl, painting murals on his cell walls. The bone vanished. The bleeding tags stopped.

Doña Clara cleansed the cemetery with *copal* smoke. Abuela Rosa left *pan de muerto* at the jaguar statue.

Sammy's crew ate *churros* at sunrise.

Marco raised his cup. "To not being cat food."

Jules: "And to DNA evidence."

Luz: "And to the dead staying dead."

Sammy's phone buzzed at 3:33 a.m.

Unknown Number: *Debt balanced. But the jaguar still hungers. Next: the subway that runs backward.*

Attached: a subway token, stamped with a glowing **peace sign** made of thorns.

Sammy pocketed it. "Round three."

To be continued in Chapter 3: Ghost Crew...

Chapter 3

Book 1: The Mural Prophecy

Ghost Crew

The challenge came in the form of a flyer taped to the rec center's half-pipe at dusk. Thick cardstock, neon ink, skull wearing a flat-brim.

MIDNIGHT DEATH RACE Los Muertos MC vs. Sammy Salami & Crew Alley 6 – Bring wheels or bring a coffin. Winner takes the block. Loser feeds the jaguar.

Marco peeled it off and sniffed. "Smells like *copal* and motor oil."

Jules scanned the QR code. A grainy video loaded: five riders in skeleton masks, boards glowing electric blue, carving impossible lines through a tunnel that shouldn't exist under East L.A. Their leader—tall, lean, voice distorted—pointed at the camera.

"We ride for the dead. You ride for the living. Midnight. Don't be late, *Salami*."

Luz crumpled the flyer. "*Los Muertos MC*. Motorcycle club turned ghost crew. Been snatching skaters for months. They leave the boards... never the bodies."

Sammy cracked his knuckles. "Then we don't lose."

8:42 p.m. – War Council at Tía Lucy's

Abuela Rosa set down a tray of *tamales* and a bottle of *agua de Jamaica*. "*Mijos*, the dead don't race for fun. They race for *souls*. My cousin Chuy lost to them in '78. Came back... hollow."

Marco spun a record backward. "Hollow's better than dead."

Jules projected a map on the wall. “Alley 6 is the old storm drain under the 10 freeway. Collapsed in the '94 quake. City sealed it. But thermal sats show activity—cold spots moving at 40 mph.”

Luz traced a route with her finger. “Entrance is a manhole behind the pupusería. We drop in, race to the central chamber, tag the ghost wall. First tag wins.”

Sammy nodded. “And if we lose?”

Rosa crossed herself. “Then the jaguar eats well.”

11:11 p.m. – The Drop-In

The manhole cover lifted with a crowbar and a prayer. The crew descended rungs slick with moss. Jules’ headlamp cut through darkness thick as *mole*. The air tasted of rust and wet stone.

At the bottom: a concrete canal wide enough for two boards side-by-side. Graffiti glowed—skulls, roses, the same **peace-thorn** symbol from the subway token. Their wheels echoed like gunshots.

Marco’s voice bounced. “Feels like a tomb.”

“/s a tomb,” Luz whispered. “Hundreds died when the drain flooded in '33. The Ghost Crew are their *champions*.”

Sammy rolled ahead. “Then we give them a race they’ll never forget.”

Midnight – The Starting Line

Five riders waited under a single flickering bulb. Skeleton masks, LED wheels pulsing blue. Their leader—**El Capitán**—revved a board that *hovered* an inch off the ground. No trucks. No gravity.



“Three laps,” his voice crackled through a modulator. **“First to tag the jaguar mural wins. Cheat, and the dead drag you under.”**

Jules whispered in Sammy’s earpiece. “Their boards are modded with electromagnets. They’re riding the rebar grid like a rail.”

Marco grinned. “Then we ride *smarter*.”

Luz slapped a sticker on Sammy’s deck: a tiny *milagro* charm shaped like a jaguar. “For



luck. And speed. ”

The bulb exploded. Darkness.

GO.

Lap 1 – The Gauntlet

The tunnel lit up in strobes of blue. Los Muertos shot forward, boards humming. Sammy’s crew followed.

First obstacle: a collapsed section—jagged rebar teeth. The ghosts *phased* through. Sammy’s crew had to grind the wall, sparks flying. Marco’s tail scraped; he ate concrete but popped back up.

Jules’ voice: “Left tunnel ahead—flooded. Ghosts are taking it.”

Luz: “We take the catwalk. Higher risk, faster line.”

They oiled onto a rusted maintenance ledge twenty feet up. The catwalk swayed. Below, water rushed black and fast.

Lap 2 – The Trap

Halfway across, the catwalk *groaned*. Bolts popped. The ghosts had sabotaged it.

Sammy saw the break coming. “Bail!”

They jumped as the walkway collapsed. Marco grabbed a pipe, swung like Tarzan. Jules deployed a drone parachute—landed soft. Luz painted a quick glyph on the wall; the falling metal *froze* mid-air, forming a ramp.

Sammy landed the impossible—360 over the wreckage, sticking the landing in the flood tunnel. The ghosts were ahead, but slowing. Their glow flickered.

Jules: “They’re tied to the storm drain’s ley lines. Water disrupts the signal.”

Sammy grinned. “Then we bring the rain.”

Lap 3 – The Final Stretch

The central chamber opened like a cathedral—vaulted ceiling, jaguar mural thirty feet high, eyes glowing crimson. A dried-up fountain in the center, cracked stone.

Los Muertos circled the fountain, building speed for a final tag.

Sammy’s crew burst in. El Capitán pointed. “**NOW!**”

The fountain *erupted*. Water shot skyward, forming a liquid half-pipe. The ghosts rode it, phasing through the stream.

Sammy saw his shot. “Marco—beat!”

Marco dropped a portable speaker. Reggaeton blasted—*Gasolina* at 180 BPM. The water *vibrated*, breaking the ghosts' rhythm.

Jules hacked the LEDs. Ghost wheels stuttered.

Luz painted a final glyph on the fountain lip: **PAZ**.

Sammy dropped in.

He carved the water pipe like glass—impossible speed, impossible height. At the peak, he ollied, board glowing with the *milagro* charm. Mid-air, he tagged the jaguar's eye with a single crimson stroke.

SAMMY WAS HERE.

The mural *roared*. The ghosts' masks cracked. Faces underneath—kids, not monsters. Teens who'd lost the race years ago, trapped in service.

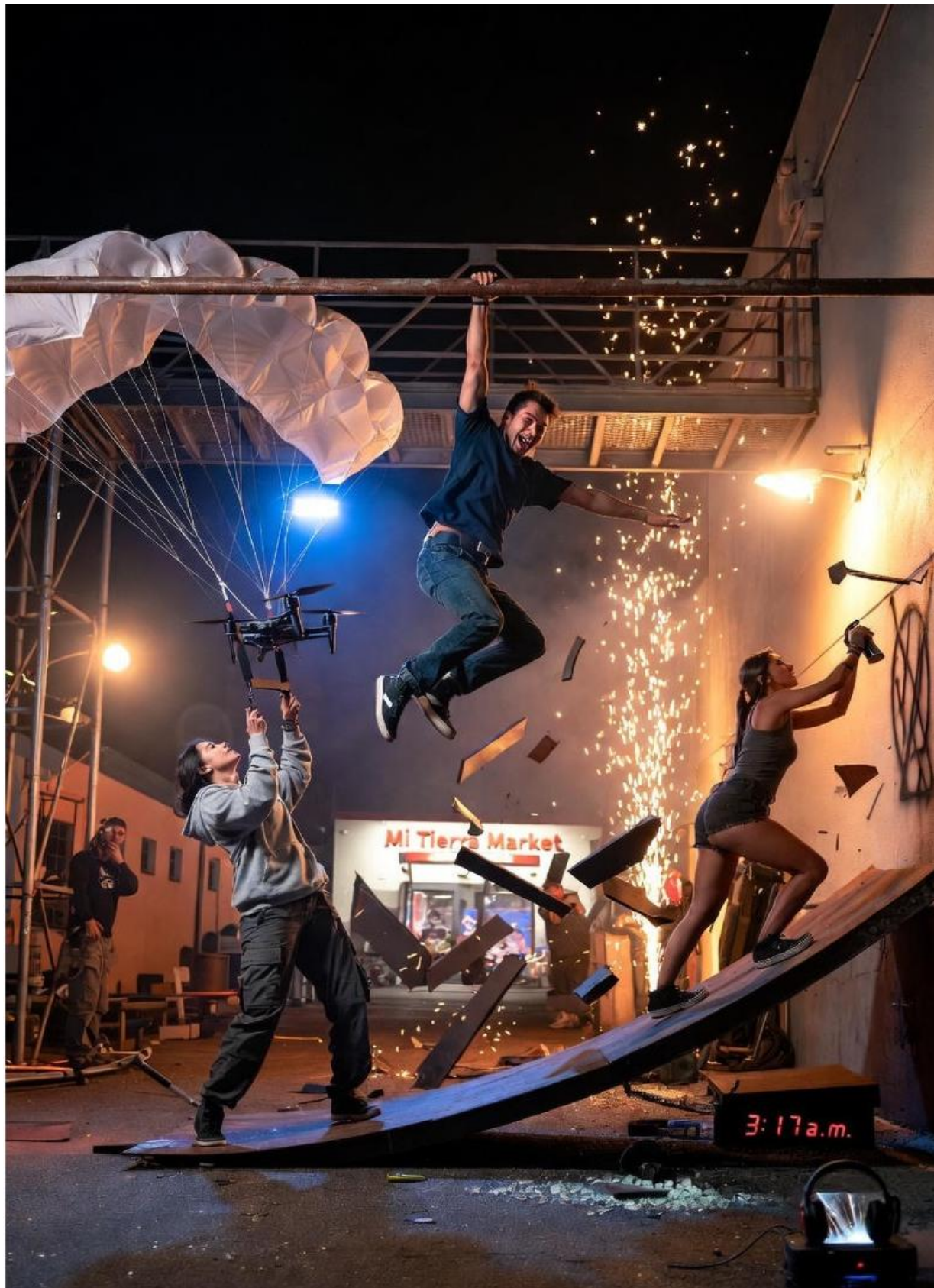
El Capitán's voice broke, human now. "You... freed us."

The water collapsed. The chamber flooded to their knees. The ghosts dissolved into mist, boards clattering empty.

3:33 a.m. – The Aftermath

The crew climbed out as dawn painted the sky pink. The manhole sealed behind them, smooth concrete.

Jules checked her phone. "City records just updated. The storm drain collapse? Officially 'never happened.'"



Marco kicked a pebble. “Ghosts got a better PR team than us.”

Luz held up the *milagro* charm—now cracked, jaguar eyes dark. “They’re at peace. For now.”

Sammy’s phone buzzed.

Unknown Number: *Race won. Block safe. But the jaguar’s teeth marks remain. Next: the subway token burns at 6th & Boyle. Bring milk.*

Attached: a photo. The jaguar mural—Sammy’s tag glowing, but now with **fang marks** around it.

Abuela Rosa waited at the curb with a gallon of *leche* and a smile. “*Mijo*, you win a race with the dead, you bring breakfast.”

Sammy took the milk. “Next round’s on me.”

To be continued in Chapter 4: Subway Backward...

Chapter 4

Book 1: The Mural Prophecy

Subway Backward

The token arrived in a manila envelope slipped under Sammy's bedroom door at 3:33 a.m. No stamp. No address. Just the subway token—brass, warm to the touch, stamped with a **peace sign made of thorns**. On the flip side: **6TH & BOYLE – ENTER AT LAST CALL.**

Sammy rolled it between his fingers. The thorns *pricked*, drawing a bead of blood that soaked into the metal and vanished.

His phone lit up.

Jules: *Platform 13 doesn't exist. Metro map ends at 12.* **Marco:** *Last call's 2:17 a.m. We got 14 minutes.* **Luz:** *Token's a key. Blood activates it. Aztec tlachialoni—mirror portal.*

Abuela Rosa's voice drifted from the kitchen. "*Mijo*, the milk's for the dead. Don't drink it."

Sammy pocketed the token. "Wouldn't dream of it."

2:03 a.m. – Boyle Heights Station

The station was deserted, fluorescent lights buzzing like dying flies. The crew rolled down the escalator—boards silent on rubber.

Platform 12: **RED LINE – NORTH HOLLYWOOD**. Platform 11: **PURPLE LINE – UNION STATION**. Between them: a rusted gate marked **13 – SERVICE ONLY**.

Jules jimmied the lock with a hairpin and a prayer. The gate swung open on silent hinges.

Behind it: a staircase spiraling down, walls dripping with condensation. Graffiti in reverse—letters backward, colors bleeding upward.

Marco read aloud: “*‘El que entra al revés, sale al derecho.’* He who enters backward exits upright.”

Luz traced the words. “Nahuatl riddle. Means time flips.”

Sammy pressed the token to the turnstile. It *clicked*. The gate dissolved into mist.

2:17 a.m. – Platform 13

The platform was wrong. Tracks ran *upward* into a tunnel ceiling. The train arrived *backward*—cars in reverse order, windows black. Doors opened with a hiss that sounded like “*Bienvenidos...*”

Inside: seats upholstered in jaguar pelt. No ads. Just mirrors on every surface—reflecting the crew, but **older**. Sammy at 30, scarred. Jules with gray streaks. Marco missing an arm. Luz... pregnant.

The doors sealed. The train lurched—*upward*.

The Ride

No stops. No announcements. Just the clack-clack of wheels on impossible rails.

Jules’ laptop glitched. “GPS says we’re under the L.A. River... in 1992.”

Marco peered out a window. The city rushed by—backwards. Palm trees un-growing. Billboards rewinding: “**VOTE FOR REAGAN**” → “**DISNEYLAND OPENING SOON**” → “**WELCOME TO PUEBLO DE LOS ÁNGELES**”.

Luz clutched her stomach. “The mirrors are *memories*. The train’s feeding on regret.”

Sammy’s reflection aged faster. Wrinkles. Gray beard. Then—*gone*. The mirror showed an empty seat.

The train screeched. A sign flashed: **NEXT STOP: THE DAY YOU LOST HER.**



The Day You Lost Her

The doors opened onto a sunlit skate park—1992. Sammy was eight, watching his mom lace up skates she'd never use again. Cancer took her six months later.

Young Sammy looked up. "You gonna ride with me, *mijo*?"

Adult Sammy's throat closed. "I... can't."

The train hissed. Doors started closing.

Luz grabbed his arm. "This is the test. Face the regret or stay trapped."

Sammy stepped off.

The Choice

The park dissolved into a tunnel of light. His mom stood at the end, 28 and healthy, board in hand. "*Mijo*, the dead don't want your guilt. They want your *future*."

She handed him her old deck—cedar, same grain as the ghost ramp. "Ride forward. For both of us."

Sammy dropped in. The tunnel *flipped*. He carved a perfect line—past every regret, every mural, every debt. The board glowed with the subway token's thorns.

He landed back on the train. Doors sealed. The mirrors showed the crew—*present day*.

3:33 a.m. – The Exit

The train slowed. Platform 13 again—but *forward*. The gate now read **EXIT TO 6TH & BOYLE – PRESENT DAY**.

They spilled out as the station lights flickered on. The turnstile spat the token back—now cold, thorns dulled.



Jules checked her watch. “We were gone 3 minutes. Not 3 hours.”

Marco laughed, shaky. “Time travel diet. Lost 20 years, gained abs.”

Luz held up the cedar deck. “Your mom’s board. It’s... *real*.”

Sammy ran his fingers over the grip tape. Faded sticker: “**SKATE OR DIE – LOVE, MAMÁ**”.



Dawn – The Rooftop

They climbed to the roof of the pupusería. The city sprawled—murals glowing faintly, connected by silver threads. The jaguar’s fang marks pulsed.

Jules overlaid her map. “The threads form a *calendar stone*. Five points. We’ve hit four: ramp, blood, race, regret.”

Marco pointed. “Fifth’s the cemetery. Center of the stone.”

Luz’s voice was quiet. “The prophecy. *When the fifth rider returns what was stolen, the city drowns... or rises.*”

Sammy gripped his mom's board. "Then we ride to the center. Together."

His phone buzzed.

Unknown Number: *Final debt. Cemetery at eclipse. Bring the cedar heart. Or the jaguar swallows the sun.*

Attached: a photo. The jaguar mural—Sammy's tag now *cracked*, a cedar splinter embedded in its chest.

Abuela Rosa's text followed: **Abuela:** *Eclipse at 6:42 a.m. Bring milk. And your mother's board.*

Sammy looked at the crew. "We end this at dawn."

To be continued in Chapter 5: Mural Prophecy...

Chapter 5

Book 1: The Mural Prophecy

Mural Prophecy

The eclipse began at 6:42 a.m. sharp, the moon sliding over the sun like a black coin. Evergreen Cemetery went dark, tombstones casting long shadows that pointed to the jaguar statue like accusing fingers.

Sammy stood at the center, mom's cedar deck under one arm, gallon of milk in the other. The crew formed a circle: Jules with her laptop open to a live satellite feed, Marco spinning a slow *cumbia* beat to keep the rhythm of the living, Luz painting final glyphs in *copal* smoke.

The jaguar's eyes ignited crimson. The ground *cracked*. Vines erupted, weaving a perfect calendar stone twenty feet wide—five points glowing where their adventures had bled: ramp, tag, race, subway, heart.

A voice rolled like thunder: **“THE FIFTH RIDER RETURNS THE CEDAR HEART. CHOOSE: DROWN THE CITY IN TEARS... OR WASH IT CLEAN.”**

6:45 a.m. – The Choice

Sammy stepped onto the stone. The cedar splinter in the jaguar's chest pulsed—*his* splinter, from the ghost ramp. The board in his hands hummed, recognizing its twin.

Jules' screen glitched. “City water mains are spiking. If the jaguar floods—”

“—the barrio drowns,” Luz finished. “Gentrification by tsunami.”

Marco stopped the record. Silence.

Sammy looked at his mom's sticker: **SKATE OR DIE – LOVE, MAMÁ**. He understood.



“Not drown,” he said. “*Cleanse*.”

He slammed the cedar deck onto the stone. The splinter flew from the jaguar, embedding in the board’s heart. Light exploded—gold, not red.

The Cleansing

Water burst from the cracks—not destructive, but *pure*. It rose in gentle waves, washing murals clean of blood, filling cracks in the streets, quenching the parched roots of jacaranda trees.

The jaguar statue *cracked* down the middle. Inside: a seed. Luz caught it—small, warm, pulsing like a heartbeat.

The vines retracted. The eclipse ended. Sunlight speared through.

7:03 a.m. – The New Mural

Where the calendar stone had been, a single wall rose—fresh concrete. The crew’s hands moved without thinking.

Jules coded glowing circuits into the paint. Marco sprayed soundwave patterns that played *cumbia* when you rolled past. Luz wrote poetry in Nahuatl and Spanglish. Sammy tagged the center: **CALLE OSCURA – WE RIDE FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.**

The jaguar seed sprouted in Luz’s palm—a tiny cedar sapling. She planted it where the statue had stood.

Abuela Rosa poured the milk at its roots. “For growth, *mijo*.”

One Week Later – The Block Party

The barrio threw a *fiesta*. Tacos, lowriders, kids skating the newly smooth streets. Victor Vega’s condos? Permits revoked—city cited “mysterious flooding.” His murals now decorated the rec center, labeled “**Community Art – Do Not Remove.**”



Sammy's crew sat on the pupusería roof, watching the sunset paint the new mural gold.

Jules closed her laptop. "Satellite shows no more cold spots. The dead are quiet."

Marco raised a *horchata*. "To not being jaguar chow."

Luz touched the sapling tattoo she'd gotten on her wrist. "To new roots."

Sammy's phone buzzed—3:33 p.m., not a.m.

Unknown Number: *Debt paid. City rises. But every story needs a sequel. Look under the new ramp. Same cedar. Same blood.*

Attached: a photo. The rec center half-pipe—freshly rebuilt, a single crimson glyph on the



coping: **3:33**.

Sammy smiled. "Season two starts tomorrow."

He ollied off the roof, landing clean. The crew followed.

The city wasn't done with them. But they weren't done with the city.

THE END... FOR NOW.

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