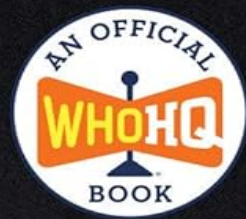
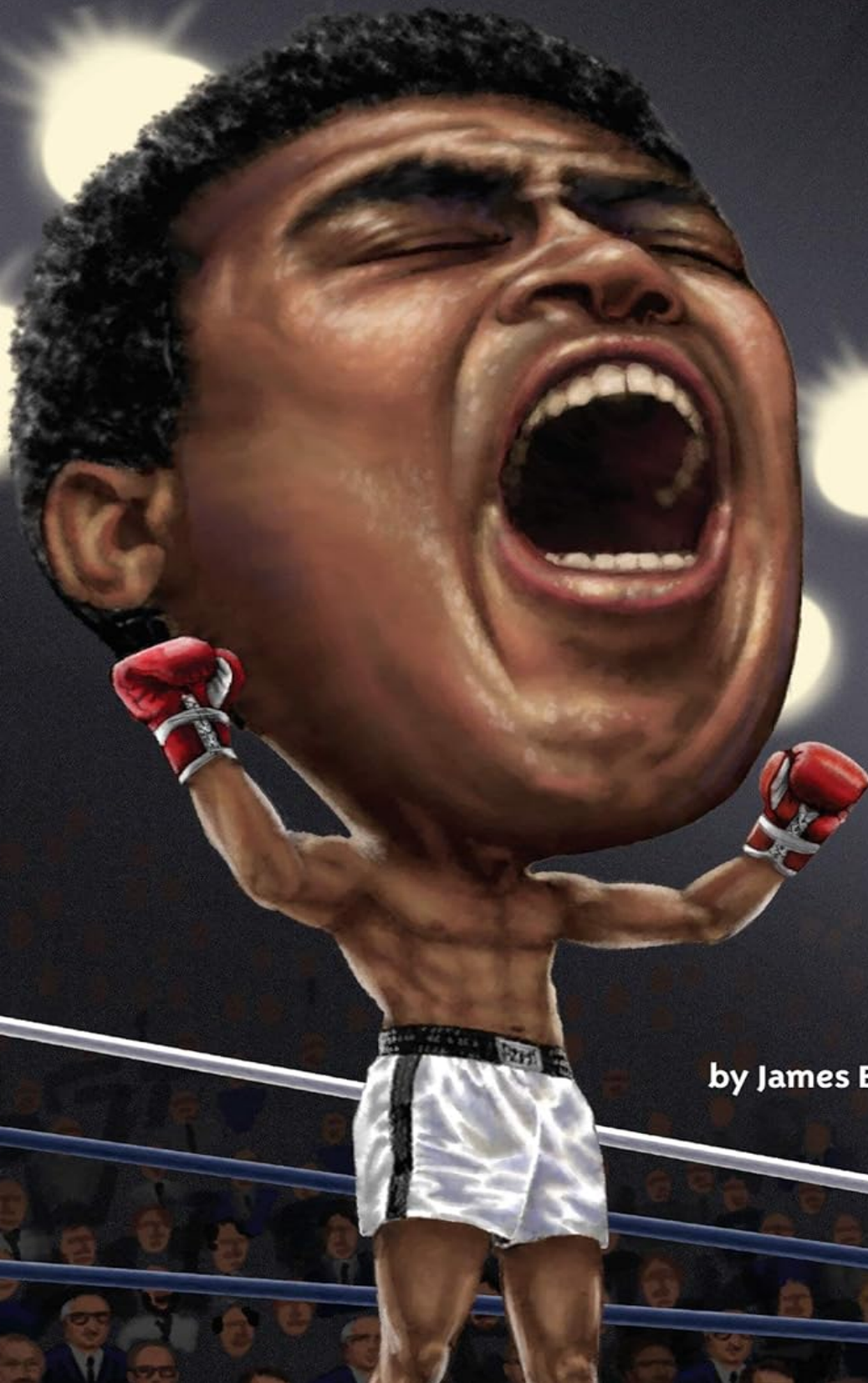


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Who Was Muhammad Ali?



by James Buckley Jr.

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Illustrated by Stephen Marchesi and Nancy Harrison

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Who Is Muhammad Ali?



To Conor and Katie: Think of Ali when you need
courage of your convictions—JB

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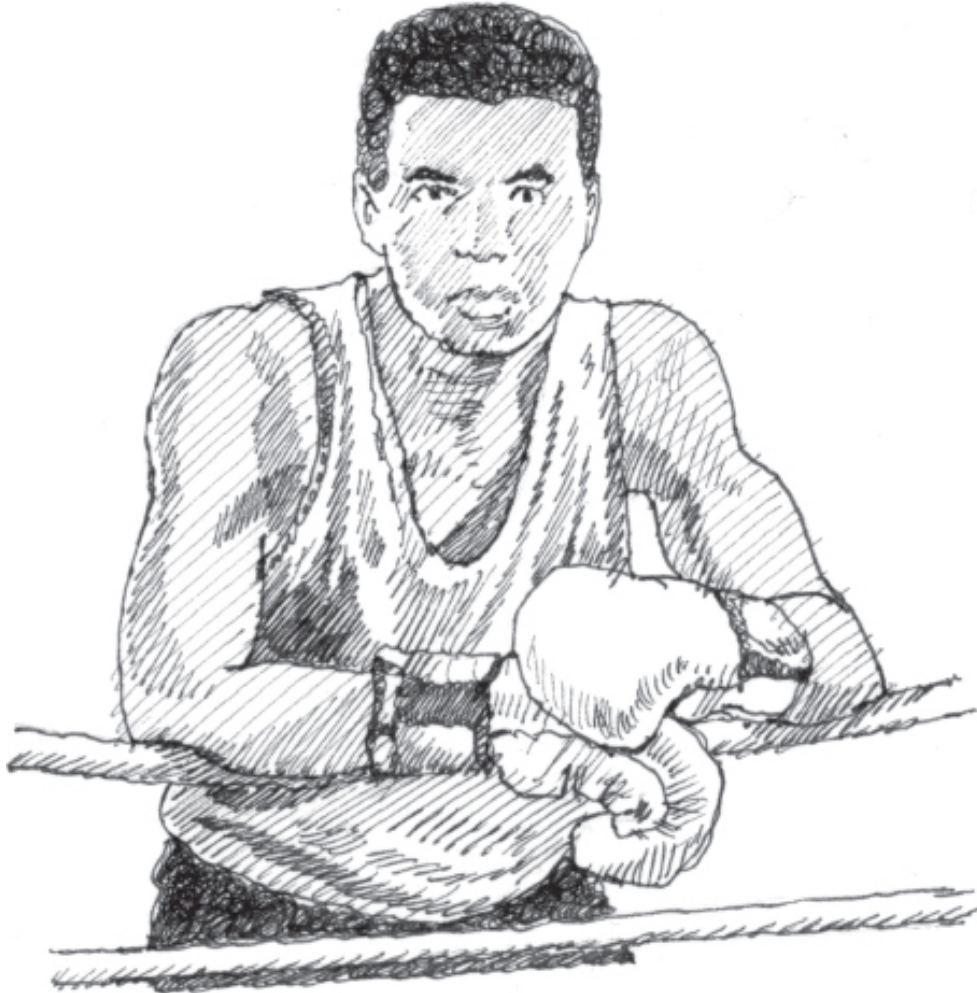
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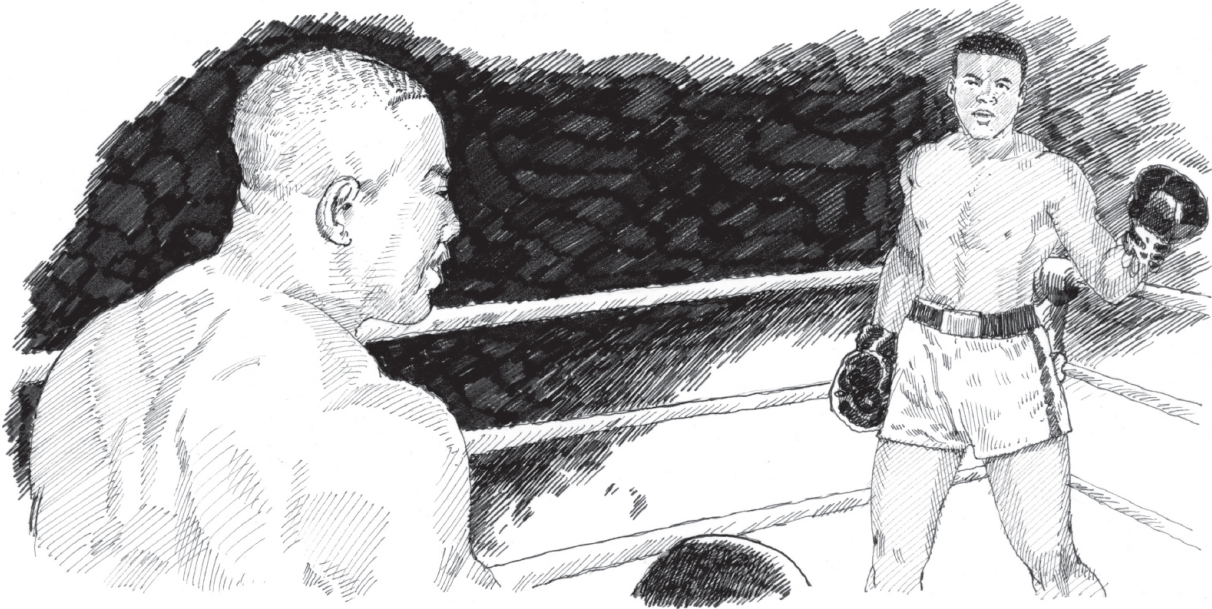
Cassius Clay liked to shock people. He was a boxer who liked to brag about how great he was. He liked to show off to get attention and sometimes spoke in poetic rhymes. And he liked to win.

But he was only twenty-two years old. He had never fought for the world heavyweight championship—the most coveted title in boxing. He was considered to be fast, but not quite tough enough.



Sonny Liston was the champion. He had held on to his championship title for nearly two years. He was powerful, experienced, hard-hitting, and

fierce. Many other boxers were afraid to get into the ring with him.



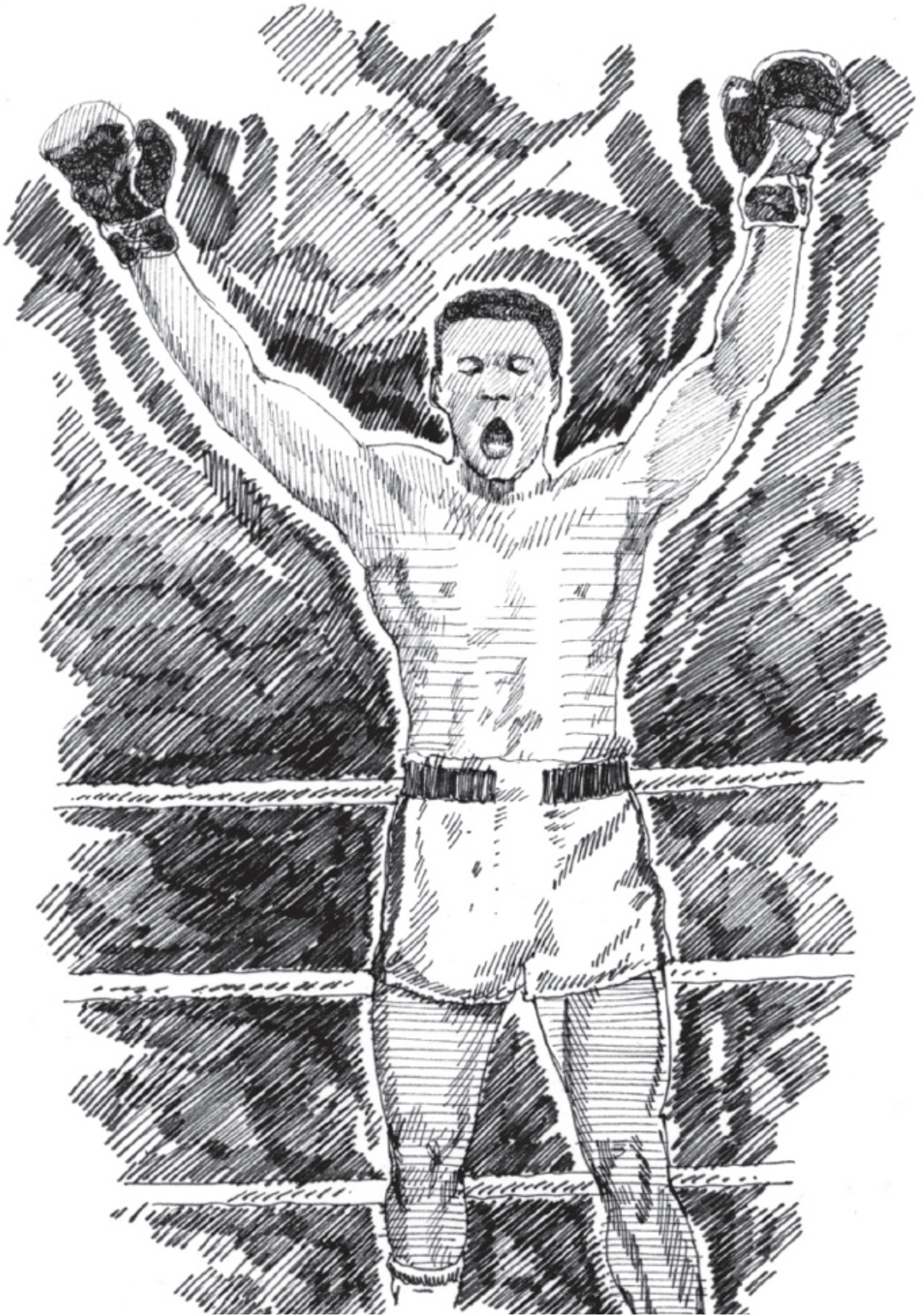
On February 25, 1964, a boxing match took place in Miami Beach, Florida, between the “Louisville Lip”—as Clay was known—and the powerful champ, Liston.

Once the fight began, Liston tried to overpower Clay. But Cassius moved quickly and danced away from the big man’s punches. As the rounds went by, thirty-two-year-old Sonny Liston grew tired. His legs felt heavy. Clay, meanwhile, continued to move with grace and speed, darting in to hit Liston again and again.

After six rounds, Liston was worn out. He could not come out to meet Clay for the seventh round. The fight was over! Cassius Clay had won!

Clay erupted from his own corner and leaped onto the ropes around the ring. “I shook up the world!” he shouted as people filled the ring to celebrate. “I shook up the world!” By defeating Sonny Liston, Clay became the heavyweight boxing champion of the world.

Soon after, Cassius Clay shocked his family and the world again when he changed his religion from Christianity to Islam, and his name to Muhammad Ali.



As the years went by, Ali would be a champion time and again. He would go on to surprise people, both in and out of the ring. Through it all, he would show the same unique style and courage he had shown in 1964. After his big win against Sonny Liston, he yelled out to the crowd, "I am the greatest!"

In the years that followed, he proved it.