





Illusion Type: Nightmare

Location: The Allahabad Meridian

Time: Kalpa - time expended in the sparking of thought.

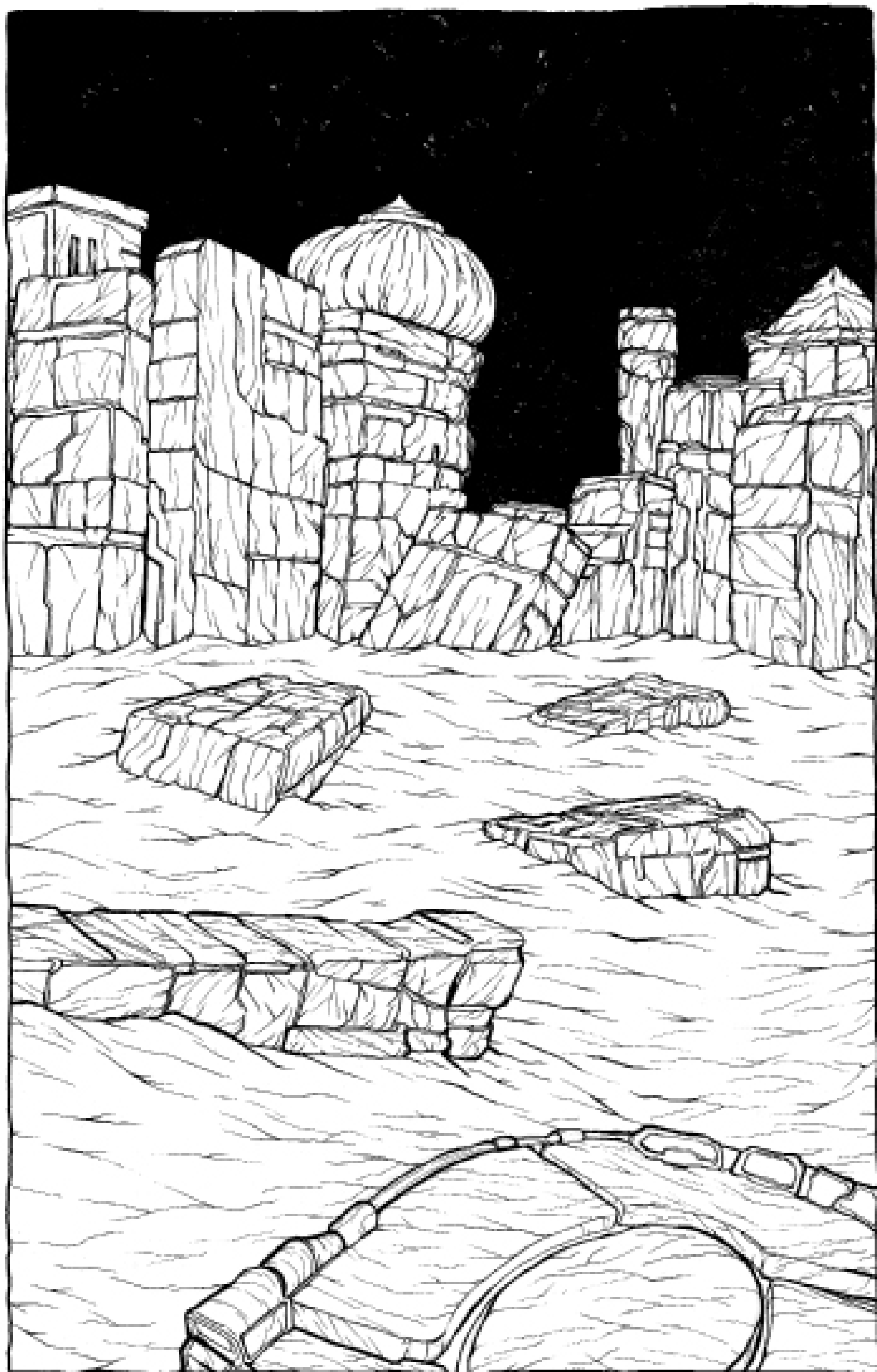
The modern world relegates both myths and dreams to the typologies of narrative design, occluded in obscure symbolisms that deliriously invite esoteric interpretation. For in the truth of today, both dream and myth are stories that we tell ourselves, about ourselves.

Conversely, in subcontinental traditions, dreaming—much like sleep—remains a passive activity. In other words, it is not the dreamer who has the dream, but the dream that has the dreamer. The one who dreams invites visitations of gods, heroes, daemons, martyrs, mothers, and ghosts arise Ante Oculis, before one's very eyes. At the onset of entropic time, the hustler among the Hindu Pantheon—Vishnu, the preserver of status quos—lay upon a lotus furlled upon the coiled entrails of the cosmic snake, Ananta, the endless. Reclining upon this serpentine bedrest, sheltered under shadows cast by the thousand scaled hoods of the cosmic serpent, the first dream was dreamt in the mind of Vishnu.

It began as an illusion 'Bhram' (construance, confusion, construct), that soon became 'Bhramaand' the world. In his state of sleep, Vishnu dreamt up a nightmare of a nation-state. Map soon became territory in a cartography of dreamscapes cast upon the absolute shape of reality, where his zealots and acolytes would come to hold sway over the highest echelons of power, occupying corporate citadels, bureaucratic balconies, legal labyrinths, and box office opening nights.

The currency of this sleep state was Karma, of which Vishnu is both keeper and collector. For Karma—contrary to its erroneously acquired reputation—is not a treatise of moral virtue, but an instrument of transaction. Those blessed with karmic capital are granted the innate the ability to bribe gods, placate destinies, and negotiate with the fates.





Illusion Type: Hallucination

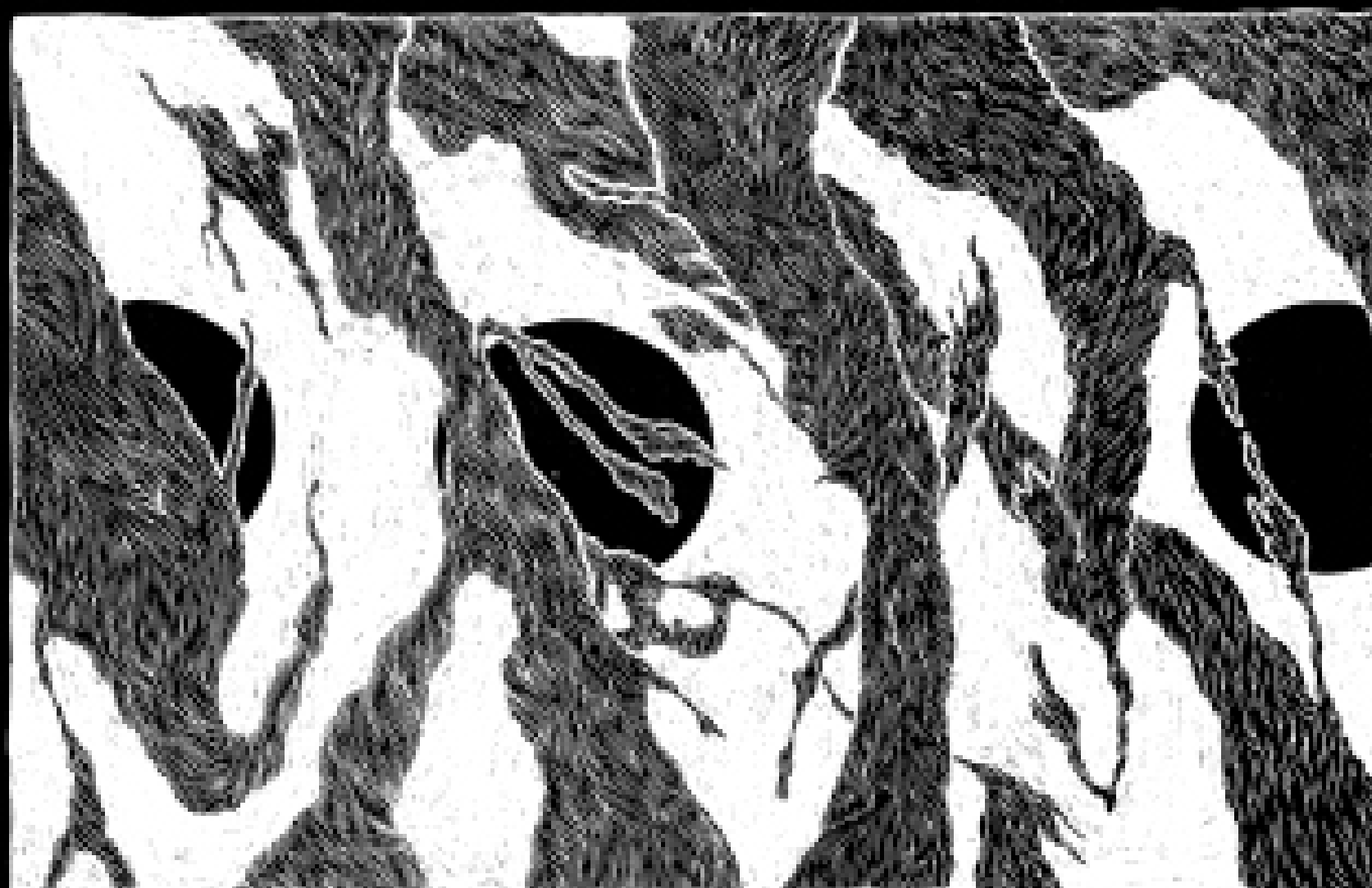
Location: The Lemurian Latitude

Time: Atithi - the guest's time of arrival, explicitly assumed uncertain.

Translating sensory perception into the many tongues of the Indian subcontinent, one encounters a forking path. The first road leads to 'Ghalat Fehmi' - a state of misapprehension, while the second leads to 'Khush Fehmi' - a state of being all too pleased with one's own apprehensions.

The central paradigm of the 'Advaita' school of Hindu philosophy is 'Atman-Bhraman' - a non-dualist state of being wherein the interior narration of the self exists undifferentiated from its externalities: a coterminous state of being in and as world. Formless, whole, and already complete, the Advaita doctrine denies entry to all forms of difference, excommunicating any that might choose to identify themselves differently.

Having nothing to compare itself with or against however, the Advaita remains no more than a selective patchworking of mind-models that locate both hallucinations and sense perceptions upon the same plane of cognitive experience. Illusion, image, memory, mistake, urge, instinct, and reason are all bound up into the same equation.



Within this undifferentiated net, the 'Advaita' doctrine ensnares the entire sensory apparatus along a five-fold schematic, shaped upon the ocular, the auditory, the olfactory, the gustatory and the haptic. Each of their assigned organs is an emissary, set forth into the world seeking admonitions and omens in the form of wetness, burn marks, cacophonies, starlight, spice, and salt. A symposium of stimuli steadily accrues upon the pentagram of sense-perception. Somewhere in rumbling din of this ritual, the self that emerges is merely a symptom afflicting the senses. For the emissaries of perception are unreliable narrators: unformed, inarticulate, and plagued by a legion of ghosts. Among their ranks are Phasma - ghosts of sight), Paracusia - ghostly hearings, Phantosmia - ghosts that smell, Phantogeusia - taste phantoms, which are often bitter and metallic, and finally, Paresthesia - an unprovoked condition where absent entities quell parts or entire limbs of an individual into states of sleep, while the rest of the body remains waking.

Counter-intuitively, when the metaphysics of this mind-model envisioned by Advaita is styled upon the schematics of statecraft, the cognizing self no longer remains an undifferentiated being, but rather a fragment caught in a game of constraints. For in states encumbered by great constraints, cognition recedes, yet when constraint is low, freedom abounds and cognition begins to flow.

It is possible to exercise this state of freedom, even in states of highest constraint, through acts of hallucinatory subterfuge.

The term 'alcoholhallucinosi's' connotes a state of calculated hallucinatory activity, named after the Arabic mathematician Al-Khwarizmi, whose namesake incidentally also birthed the algorithm. Coined shortly before 1920 by the Russian neurologist Johann Susmann Galant to reimagine hallucinations in step with the psychoanalytic tradition, alcoholhallucinosi's is a subconsciously elaborated wish-fulfilment system. For Galant, hallucinations encapsulated the desire principle of the wish, driven as it were by the singular capacity to transcend constraint. To the individual, the wish then became an incontrovertible reality, world-bending its way towards fulfilment.



Illusion Type: Figment

Location: Arupa-Loka, the Realm of the Formless

Time: Ekadashi, the moment Vishnu is awoken from his slumber, a time of fasting

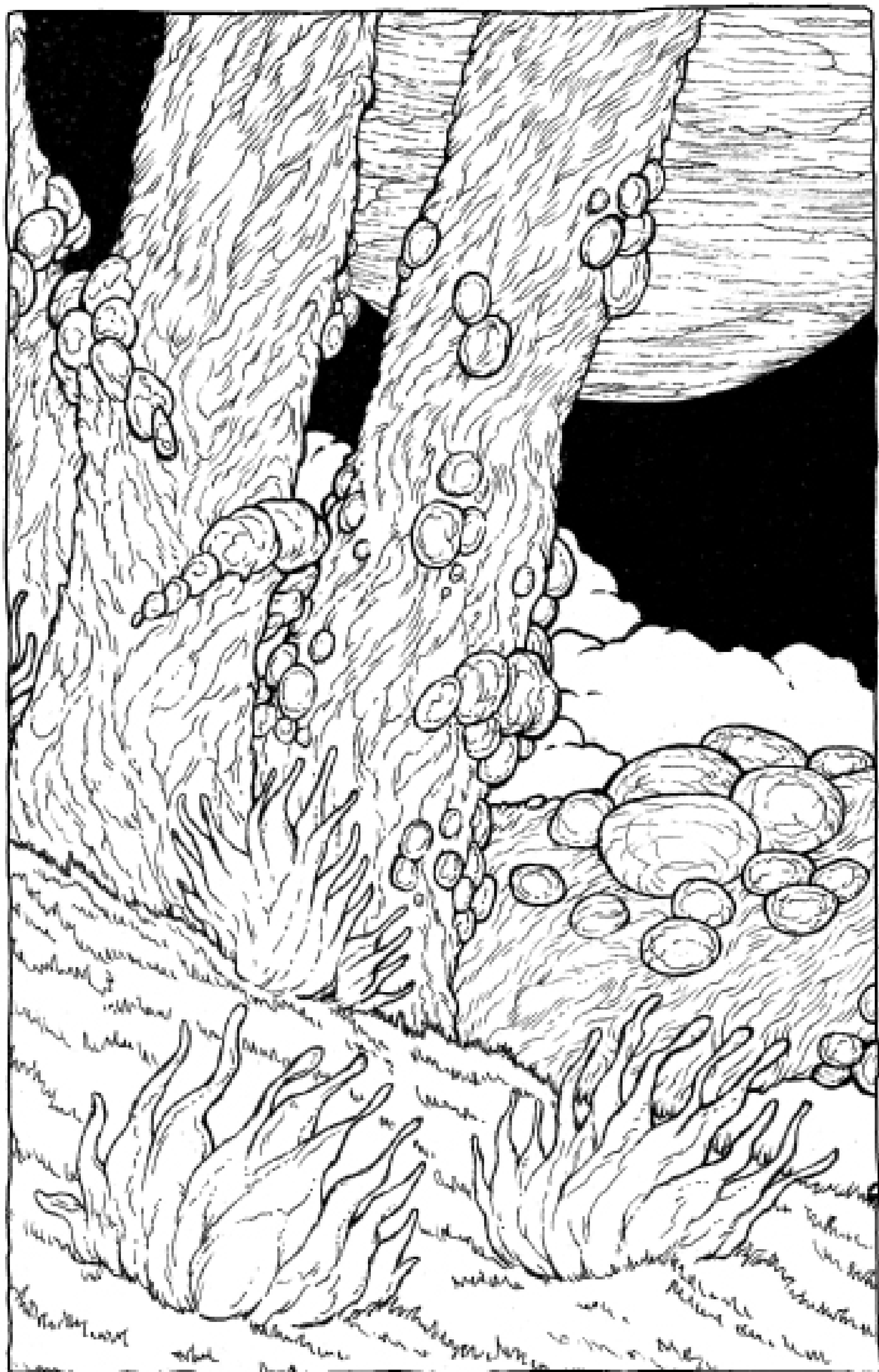
A figment (derived from the Latin *figere*, feigned/formed) is a deliberate illusionary construct that is willed into being in stark opposition to the given shape of reality. The Bhuta Kola is a collected system of feigning and figmenting practices originating in pre-Brahminical Dravidian religion, and performed primarily by the lower castes of the southwestern coast of India. The word Bhuta alludes to a past imagined otherwise, while Kola refers to acts of camouflage.

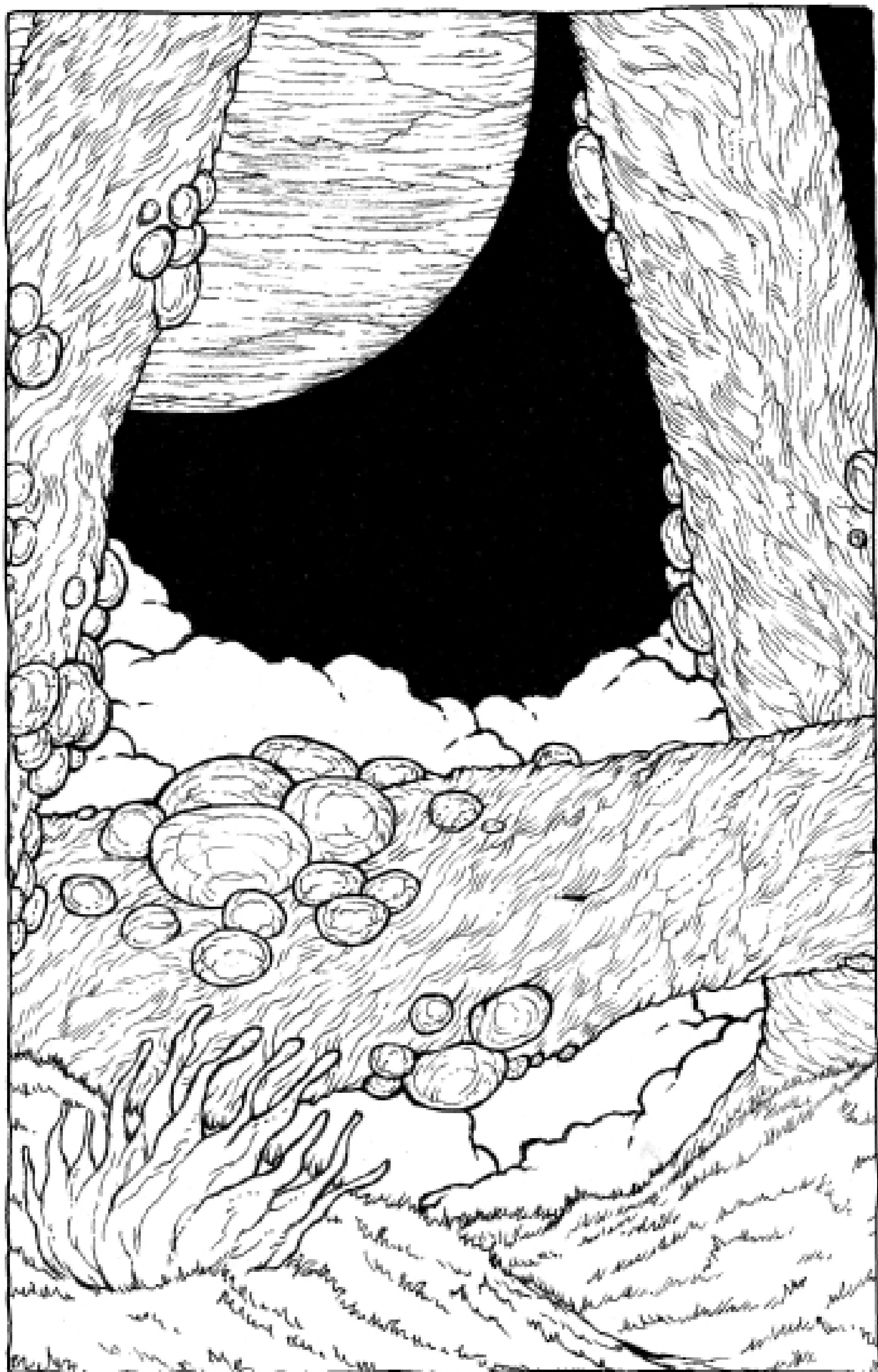
The Bhuta Kola, then, is a ritual in which the past is feigned. Here kings and priests are robbed of ancestral glory, war campaigns are reversed, and entire kingdoms are undone.

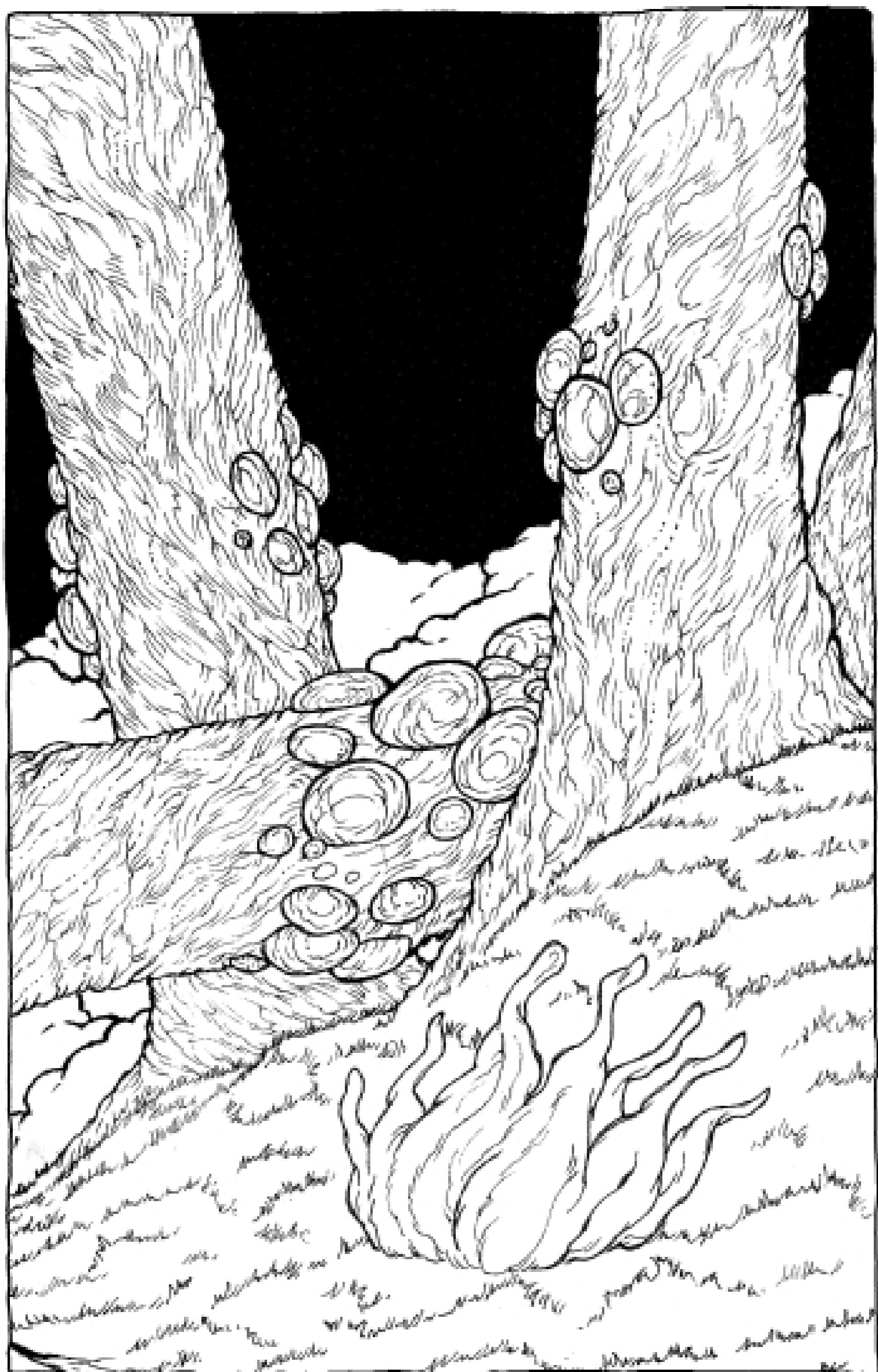
Contrary to the Vedic doctrines, the Kola conjures a renegade cosmology, wherein the world exists across three regimes of being. First is the realm of the cultivated (Gramya); second is the realm of forests (Jangala); and third is the realm of spirits (Bhuta-loka). The relationship between these three worlds is a precarious balance of moral order. The Gramya seeks to capture by cultivation. When it encroaches upon the intangible—bringing disease, hunger, death, statecraft, stability, and civilization upon the ungoverned realm of forests—its sibling, the spirit realm, retaliates.

There are over four hundred Bhutas that roam the lands lying south of the Vindhyan range. Among them, perhaps the most complex cryptogenic formulation can be found in the myth of Guliga. First born from a stone thrown into an ash heap, Guliga begins his tale among the ranks of the ghost legion serving the dancing god Shiva. Choosing sobriety, Guliga bids farewell to the house of the cosmic dancer, seeking his fortunes elsewhere. He approaches Vishnu, praying for employment. This prayer disturbs Vishnu's dream, and he proceeds to curse Guliga to be reborn inside the stomach of the Indotyphlops braminus, commonly known as the Brahminy blind snake.

Guliga, in his curse, is blessed with an insatiable hunger and eats his way out of the snake. He emerges from the serpentine womb with his face now turned to the shade of night, pockmarked with starlight silver. Once set free, Guliga consumes, engulfing all in his path through a world now made feast—until he reaches the heavens, where he bites off the finger of Vishnu, upon which rests the Sudarshana Chakra, the serrated wheel of time.







Illusion Type: Simulation

Location: Bhuta-Loka: the Realm of Ghosts

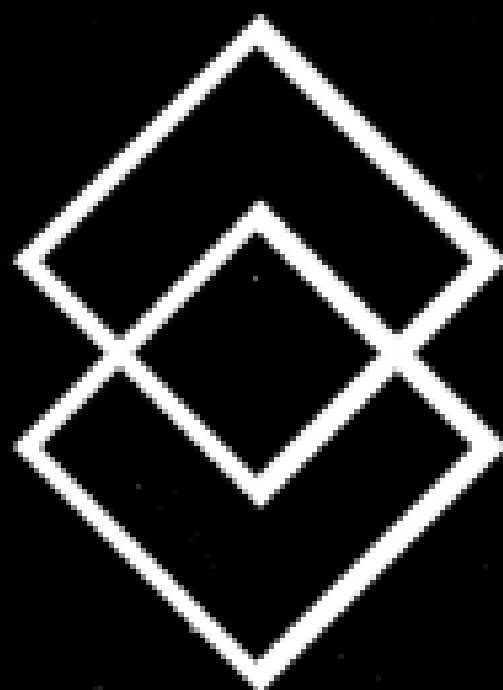
Time: Sushupti, when consciousness itself abandons the mind to roam the universe; the third state of sleep.

The Sanskrit word for democracy is Ganatantra. Tantra signifies system, structure, machinery, contraption, schematic, or sexcapade. Gana, on the other hand, refers to a group, gathering, troop or flock of a highly particularised variety. In Vedic scripture, the Gana are the ghostly attendants of Shiva. Commanded by Shiva's elephantine child Ganesha, whose name declares him the lord of ghosts, they descend from Mount Kailash to populate the State of sleep.

Svatantra, the Sanskrit word for independence, does not necessarily translate into freedom. Sva, in this assemblage, signifies the Self. Yet it is nowhere to be found: a being in absentia, premised on a matrix of non-dualist negations networked across Vedic scripture. For the self is 'Neti Neti' (neither that, nor this). A symptom of sensorial limitations and reactionary impulses, all bundled up in bags of meat and bone.

Enacting such negations through mass incarceration, citizenship registers, and police action, the State of sleep dreams itself to be Sanaatan, an exact simulacrum of time itself. Eternal, absolute, and unmoving. It becomes barricade, barbwire and concrete roadblock, denying entry to all manner of men that might try and trespass its slumber. Ghosts, however, are known to move differently.





Illusion Type: Spell

Location: Where the mind is without fear

Time: Antraal, the gap between two breaths; silence between two notes of song; momentary restfulness between being and exhaustion, and between extinction and becoming; temporal respite, comparable to Plato's Khôra.

The Indian constitution, envisioned by Dr Ambedkar, is in fact, a book of incantations.

Article 19(1)(b) ensures the right of citizens to peacefully assemble and to hold public meetings or processions, for purposes including protest, demonstration, or discussion.

Article 19(1)(c) guarantees the right of citizens to form social, cultural, economic, or political associations or unions.

Article 19(1)(d) entitles citizens to move freely throughout the territory of India.

Article 19(1)(e) entitles citizens to reside and settle in any part of the territory India.

Articles 19(2) through 19(6) qualify these guarantees by allowing the State to impose "reasonable restrictions" on these rights, "in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India or public order or morality." But as you and I know all too well, the sleep of reason produces monsters.

On Basant Panchami, the 5th day marking the arrival of spring in the Indian subcontinent, Sikh farmers began marching towards the capital to challenge the capricious agrarian reform laws being dreamt up by the State. They were met with a contingent of combat drones showering a barrage of tear gas shells.

In retaliation the farmers reached out to their eldest ally, the warm spring air. They offered her their kites; and swiftly, she blew them into the drones, knotting up motors and rotor blades, until her unmanned adversaries were returned to the ground.







Illusion Type: Story

Location: Unakoti, a rock-cut stairway to heaven, sculpted with the faces of 9999999 divine entities that will be allowed entry into the hereafter, the only absent face being that of the human.

Time: Subh-E-Azal, the dawn before the beginning of recorded time.

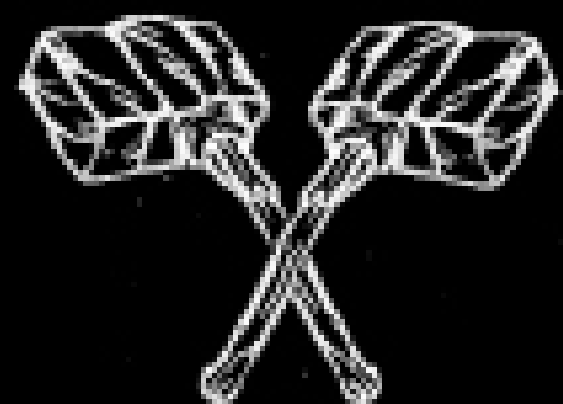
Unlike the objects they carve, sculptors are cut with a raw deal across Vedic scripture. Thvastr, the first sculptor, was once known as Vishwaroopak, or World-Shaper. He was the architect among the old gods, holding equal rank among Varuna (who was both ocean and sky), Agni (who was fire), Mitra (who was both the promise and the keeper of its bond), and Soma (who was intoxication).

Thvastr himself was a master of many arts. He carved rocks, embedding them with unformed jewellery. He terraformed entire planet and the nether-realms that lay beneath them by lowering down lakes and raising mountain ranges. He planted the forests, washed the valleys, and sanded down the deserts.

This world that Thvastr shaped was governed by an economy of gifts. For he had many more presents to offer. He gave Kali her tongue and Shakti her strength. To Shiva he gave a third eye that would remain closed until the sleep of time, and to Indra he gave a thousand eyes to watch over its waking. To the humans that roamed this world, he gave heft, haught, hilarity, heavy-handedness, and humility, sculpting spirit upon the entire species in equal share.

These gifts, and the sheer skill of their craftsmanship, enflamed the envies of Vishnu, the preserver, who would soon be tasked with the upkeep of these offerings. Roused by resentment, a critic was born. Vishnu launched a smear campaign upon the creations of the World-Shaper. Thvastr's designs, he said, came with defects. His giraffes gave birth standing upright, dropping their offspring from a height of two whole meters. Flightless birds bore wings; blind snakes bore eyes; and male mammals came with nipples.

This collection of complaints condemned all of creation, reprimanding it to remain forever flawed. A civilizational curse that has since followed every sculptor bold enough to pick up a hammer.



Illusion Type: Vision

Location: Chakravyuha, a labyrinthine battle formation, where the entire army—including chariots, archers, elephants, and gods—move in swift yet unbroken spirals, creating a terrestrial whirlwind upon the battlefield. Modern slang for a world in strife.

Time: Nityapralaya, entropic time, a continuous dissolution of mind and body among both the living and the non-living; an apocalypse extended; an end everlasting.

The traditions of the European Enlightenment followed that while humans had in fact evolved, some humans had evolved faster than others. A vision of human progress was produced that weaponized the worst excesses of human history: colonialism, genocide, slavery, the complete subjugation of women and the “lesser” races.

Comparing these so-called lesser humans to animals has been a civilizational mainstay. Human zoos have existed across Europe and America since the 19th century, persisting up to 1958 at the World’s Fair in Brussels, where an entire Congolese village was put on display.

The conflict between human “progress” and its belligerence towards differences of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity is at its core, a mind-body problem. The vision of the Enlightenment required that in order to achieve its loftiest goals, the human must cultivate a civilized mind, one that would ensure its reign over the body.



Lesser humans, those who were deemed incapable of achieving this concord, were considered infantile. Their "lesser" bodies could not be brought under the rule of the rational, transforming them into limbs that lay at the behest of "evolved" human minds.

Long before this division of mind and limb, conflated upon humankind ensnared European thought, it had taken shape in the societal imagination of the Indian caste system. Formulated first in the Purushasukta of the Rig Veda, and later ratified in the Manusmriti, caste conjured a metaphysical segregation upon the Indian social order from the cosmic anatomy of the Purusha.

The Brahmin, they would attest, came from the head; the Kshatriya came from the arm; the Vaishya came from the thigh; and the Shudra came from the foot, to chart a violent social order that would keep communal disaffections in check, and aggressively ensure a harmonious social metabolism.





Illusion Type: Rumour

Location: Ayodhya: lit. the place that shall carry no conflict; one among the many terrestrial birthsites of lord Ram.

Time: Shaam-e-Abad, the evening after oblivion, the end of entropic time, 1992.

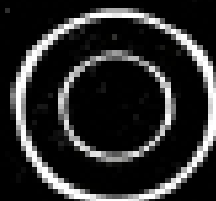
In the aftermath of the Cold War, as western society began celebrating history's end with all the carbonated jubilation of a well shaken Coca-Cola, cable television arrived in India, and with it, myth returned to the land of the living.

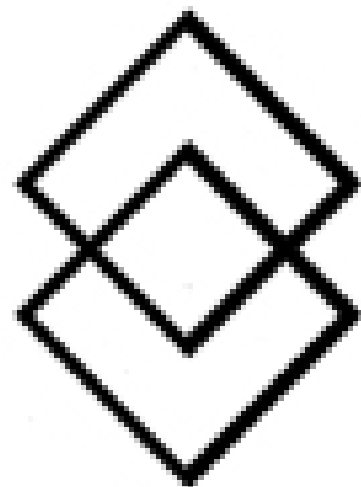
Yet the silent perturbations that led to this untimely return began even further back in time, in the year 1949. Two years into the greatest experiment in democracy the world has ever known, the people of India found themselves in a nation divided by the communal shibboleth of the Partition. Prime Minister Nehru was grappling with the founding idealism upon which the nation itself had been imagined, while his second-in-command, Sardar Vallabhai Patel struggled to hold its precarious contours together.

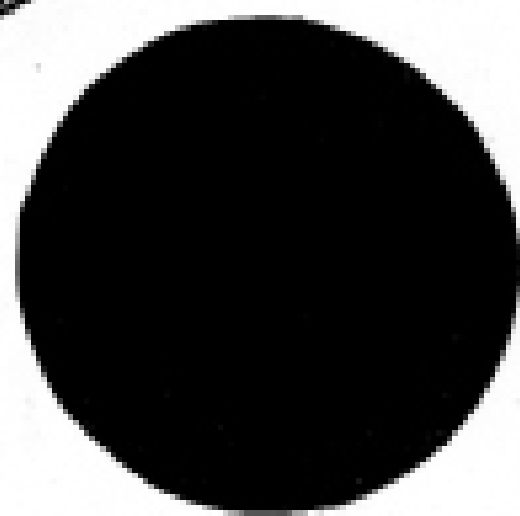
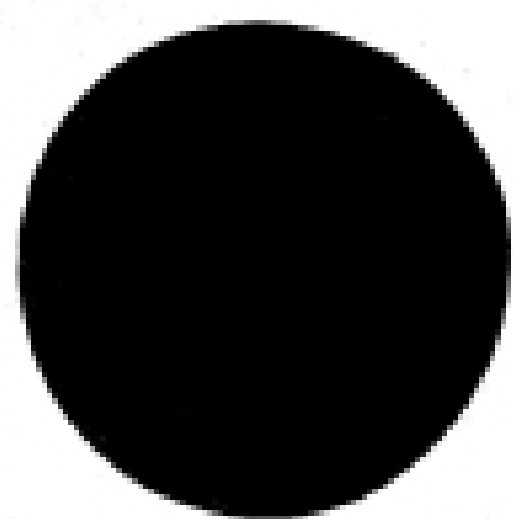
The India that was born—as Nehru declared “at the stroke of the midnight hour”—was about to witness a collapse of myth, memory and history, spiralling into the abyss of fundamentalism at 3AM. On that darkest of nights, the newborn nation was met with ancient ghosts from the Mughal Empire.

In 1526, Commander Mir Baqi oversaw the construction of the Babri Masjid, in Ayodhya, to honour Emperor Babur, the forerunner of the Mughal dynasty. Subsequently a rumour began to grow that the Mosque was built upon the sacred birth ground of Ram himself.

Four centuries later, Ram, incarnation of the god Vishnu, had returned to Ayodhya. On 23rd December 1949, Hawaldar Abdul Barkat brought the issue on record by filing an FIR (First Information Report) stating that he saw a “flash of lightning”, and immediately afterwards, glimpsed “a beautiful child” locked inside the Babri Mosque. The alleged child soon vanished, leaving behind an idol of Ram in its place. This apparition mobilised the far-right forces of Hindutva who in the December of 1992 would subsequently demolish the Babri Masjid, in an effort to reclaim the mythical birthplace of Ram. The child who appeared in a flash of lightning was proclaimed to be Ram Lalla Virajmaan—the infant deity who would become the chief litigant in the most divisive property dispute known to human history.







Illusion Type: Superstition

Location: Shiva Crater a tear-drop-shaped extraterrestrial impact site located on western shelf of the Bombay harbour, measuring 500km in diameter; formed during the Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event.

Time: Kal, a single word marking both yesterday and tomorrow; lit. a day away from now.

In 1891, Sir James Campbell—the stationed collector of land revenue, salt, and opium in the Bombay Presidency— ominously declared: ‘The unwilling is spirit-caused in the Presidency’. During the Colonial Raj, diseases were said to be the work of trickster demons, malevolent ghosts, and wrathful goddesses: Spectral forces arising from the same terrain of abjection that was forced upon the lower castes.

The persistence of this belief during the onslaught of cholera, smallpox, and the bubonic plague gave rise to a spectrally inverse belief, one that threatened to upstage the violent metaphysics of the caste system. It began with a rumour, a secret that spread as fast as the plague itself. The lower castes could negotiate with the disease gods. They could coax them, charm them, and, through rituals of possession, drive them out from the bodies of men.

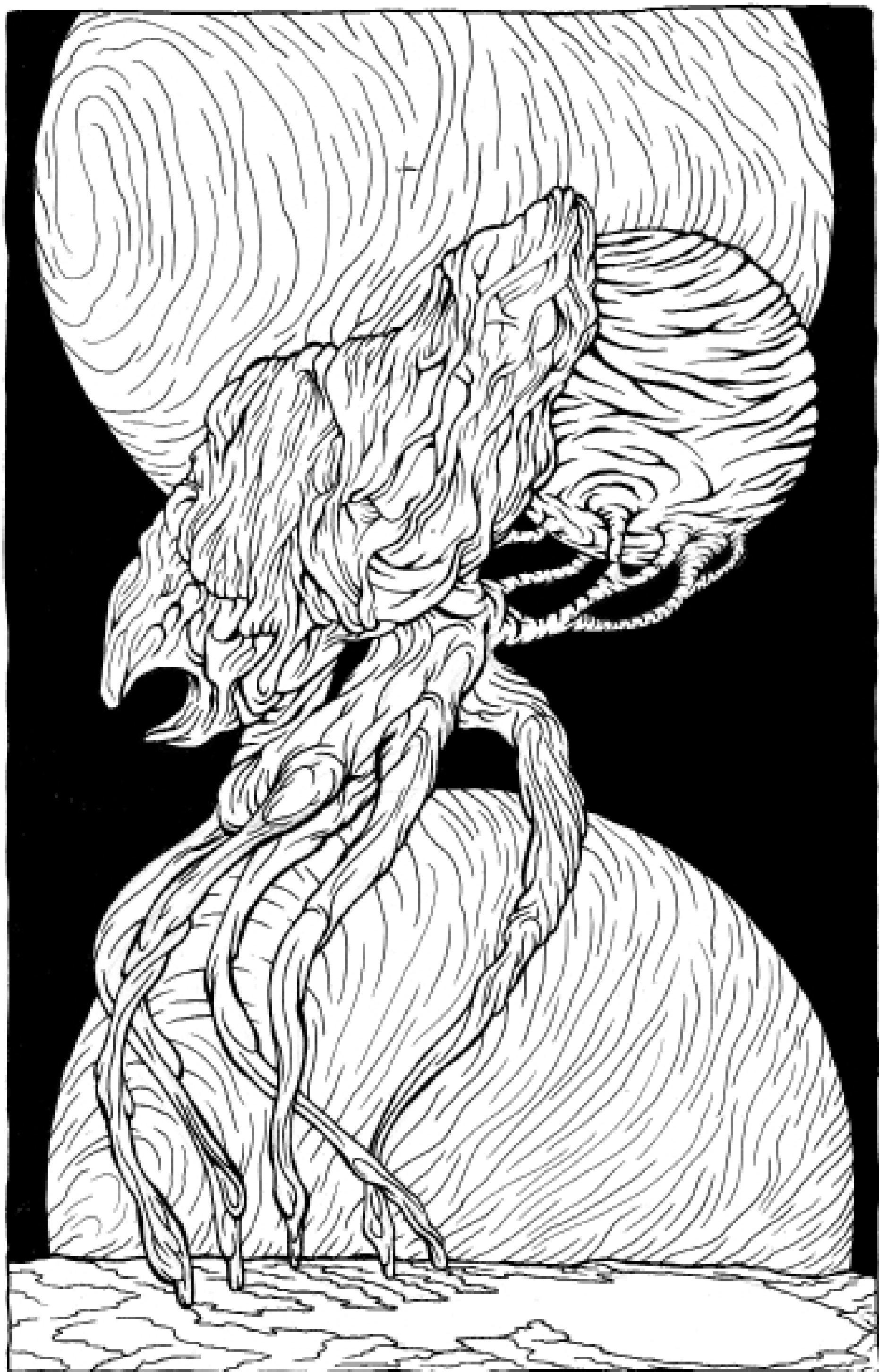


The ritual began to the sound of beating drums. The exorcist would raise a burning wick in one hand and a broom made of peacock feathers in the other. Then would begin a vigorous dance to frighten away the spirit possessing the diseased. The spirit would be drawn out from the patient's body and captured in a bottle, which would subsequently be cast into the depths of the Arabian Sea.

If the demon proved too strong to be contained in mere glass, the exorcist might offer up their own body for possession. The exorcist would prepare for this by bathing in milk and liquor and then laying themselves upon a prayer carpet, with a bowl of rice to one side and a copper pot filled with water to the other. As the drums were beaten, grains of rice would be thrown into the pot. The name of the spirit would be pronounced over and over, enumerating the reasons that drive their demonic acts. Next, the exorcist would begin their dance, shaking as if in a fit, hurling abuses at the spirit, threatening it, growing louder and more frenzied until their words and movements became a turbulence of noise and fury.

It was not uncommon to see the patients themselves partake in the chaos of the ritual. The afflicted would rise from their sickbeds to dance, sing, or cry inconsolably. Some would violently throw their fists into the air, attacking the invisible demons, while others would stand solemnly, making long oratory speeches, capturing their own afflictions in debate.





Illusion Type: Game

Location: Bhoor Saiydan, an ancient archaeological site on the dry banks of the Sarasvati River; now a breeding ground for crocodiles that once played host to the battles of the Mahabharata.

Time: Samayopari, upturned hourglass, second shift, overtime.

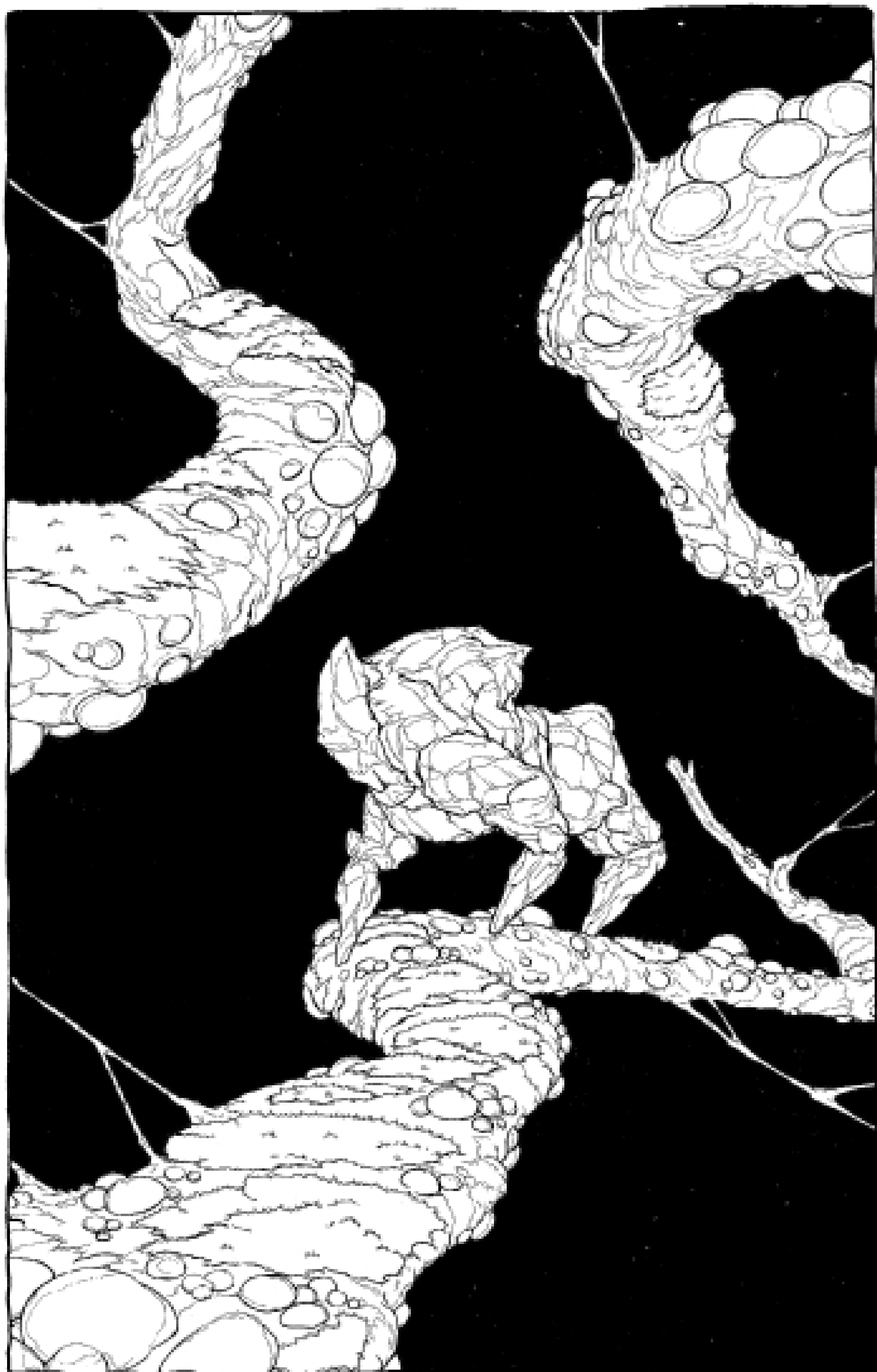
The Hindi term for temple, *mandir*, does not necessarily imply a house of divinity. Conjoining *dir* (a refuge), with *mann* (referring to the soul, the mind, or any other inner narration of the self), the *mandir* was from its inception designed in the image of the human. For temple architecture itself is named after her limbs. The two sides are called the *hasta*, the hands; the pillar is called the *pada*, the foot. The top of the temple is the *shikhara*, the head, while the darkest, innermost sanctum of the temple is the *garbhagriha*, the womb-house. If a temple has three doors, they represent the three states of sleeping, dreaming, and wakefulness, while if it has five, they represent the senses. To this extent, the temple elaborates the primordial blueprint of the human in brick and carved stone.

At the dawn of the 2nd century AD, however, the encroachment of agrarian silos, private property, and enforced endogamy subsumed this human metaphor in both model and meaning. The temple became a static, sedentary thing, forgetting its moving origins. This opposition between the standing and the moving, or *sthavara* and *jangam*, ignited an adversarial game across the theological traditions of the subcontinent. The Sanskrit word *sthavara*, literally meaning immovable, derives from the same Indo-European root as stand, state, stature, and establishment, and carries all their connotations. *Jangam*, conversely, contains a cognate of the English word *go*, representing both the moving and the moveable.

Where the *sthavara* consisted of statesmen, statisticians, stockbrokers, and self-anointed saints, the *jangam* filled their ranks with the low-caste, the outcaste, the unlettered, the labourer, and the poet. They met among trees, waging rebellions of song against the temple that forgets, with bodies that could remember the divine in the cave, the quarry, the river sands, the shivering rainfall, the skyline, the self, and the sea.







Illusion Type: Lie

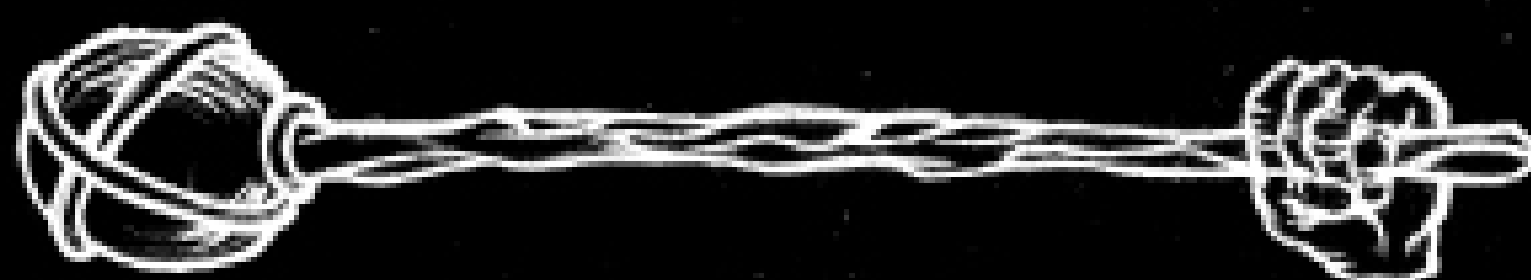
Location: The Kushan Pass, An aerial death-walk at an elevation of 4370 meters, providing an arduous yet direct route across the most lethal mountain range in the Indian subcontinent: the Hindu Kush.

Time: Tafsir, a time of exegesis, measured in hours extended across interpretation, debate, and disclosure.

Alexander's journey into subcontinental soil and the tide of bloodshed that would follow it, has been extensively documented by Plutarch in *The Parallel Lives*, a compendium of idolatries wherein Plutarch himself admits, "For it is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles when thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities" in his opening to the *Life of Alexander* (1.2).

The Parallel Lives have found a multitude of translations in English, dating back to 1579 by Thomas North. North's wager upon the *Lives*, which is itself a translation of a French Translation by Jacques Amyot, would provide creative cannon fodder to Shakespeare himself. Further translations were issued by John Dryden, who was "prevailed upon by his necessities" to lead a contingent of translators to pen a version of the *Lives*, under his own name. Dryden's account would soon be supplanted in the mid-nineteenth century by Arthur Hugh Clough, who corrected Dryden's *Lives* from the original Greek. The final and definitive translation of the *Lives* by Bernadotte Perrin would later be published in 1919 under the ebbing tide of the First World War. Greeting troops returning home by regaling them with crimes of conquest from years past. Each of these translations however came with their own set additions, revisions, and omissions. Two of the *Lives*, those of Epaminondas and Scipio Africanus, are lost entirely, while those that remain have been tampered with.

Yet among these translations, there exists one that remains untarnished, hidden beneath the heap of history. For in the back-rooms of bootleg bookstores, far from the din of street rabble, an anonymous edition survives under a moniker that has allowed the text to evade the editorial eye. For the text translates Plutarch's hagiographical opus as the *Parallel Lie*.



Rumour has it, that the earliest account of the Lie mirrors that of the original text, and it was produced and distributed in secret by Plutarch himself in an effort to reconcile the excesses of the forthcoming translations.

The Lie contains a strange cosmogony of corrections if rumours are to be believed. For In the Lie, Alexander is hailed instead by his Eastern name Sikandar, intermittently being referred to among the more garrulous passages of the text as Dhu al-Qarnayn, or "the-two horned one," as he was known among the Mufassirs of the subcontinent.

The first deviations from the original text can be found in the account where Sikandar and his army of sixty thousand Caucasians breach the Kushan Pass. Here they encounter the Gymnosophists, a company of ten philosophers, standing naked from head to toe. These individuals, often misidentified by modern historians as brahmins, were the original practitioners of skepsis, the Greek art of scepticism. For the Brahmins were firm believers in the theological machinations underlying a reality that had granted them their priestly fortunes.

The Gymnosophists however held no such beliefs, having dispensed with attachments to garment, hair, and even food, in their quest for thought. They were the Shramans, or Samanæi as Porphyry described them: a band of unbelievers that had rejected even the laws of reality. To them, the given world was a lie, and their singular task was the unravelling of its false machinery.

In step with the official translations, the Lie describes the revolutionary campaign of the Gymnosophists, elaborating upon their use of philosophical games to rouse the indigenous prince Sabbas against the forces of Sikandar. In Plutarch's Lives, Alexander is enraged by their actions, and after executing Sabbas for his revolt, he rounds up the ten naked men for treason.



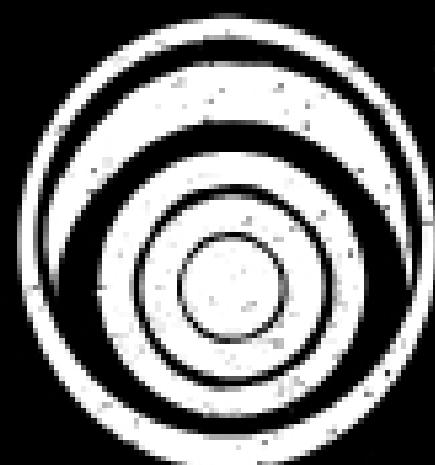
In the Lie however, Sikandar is delighted to find himself in the company of the ten philosophers. Dazzled by their collective enigma, he decides to join them in their game. He comes up series of questions for the naked ones that they must answer with an undeniable lie.

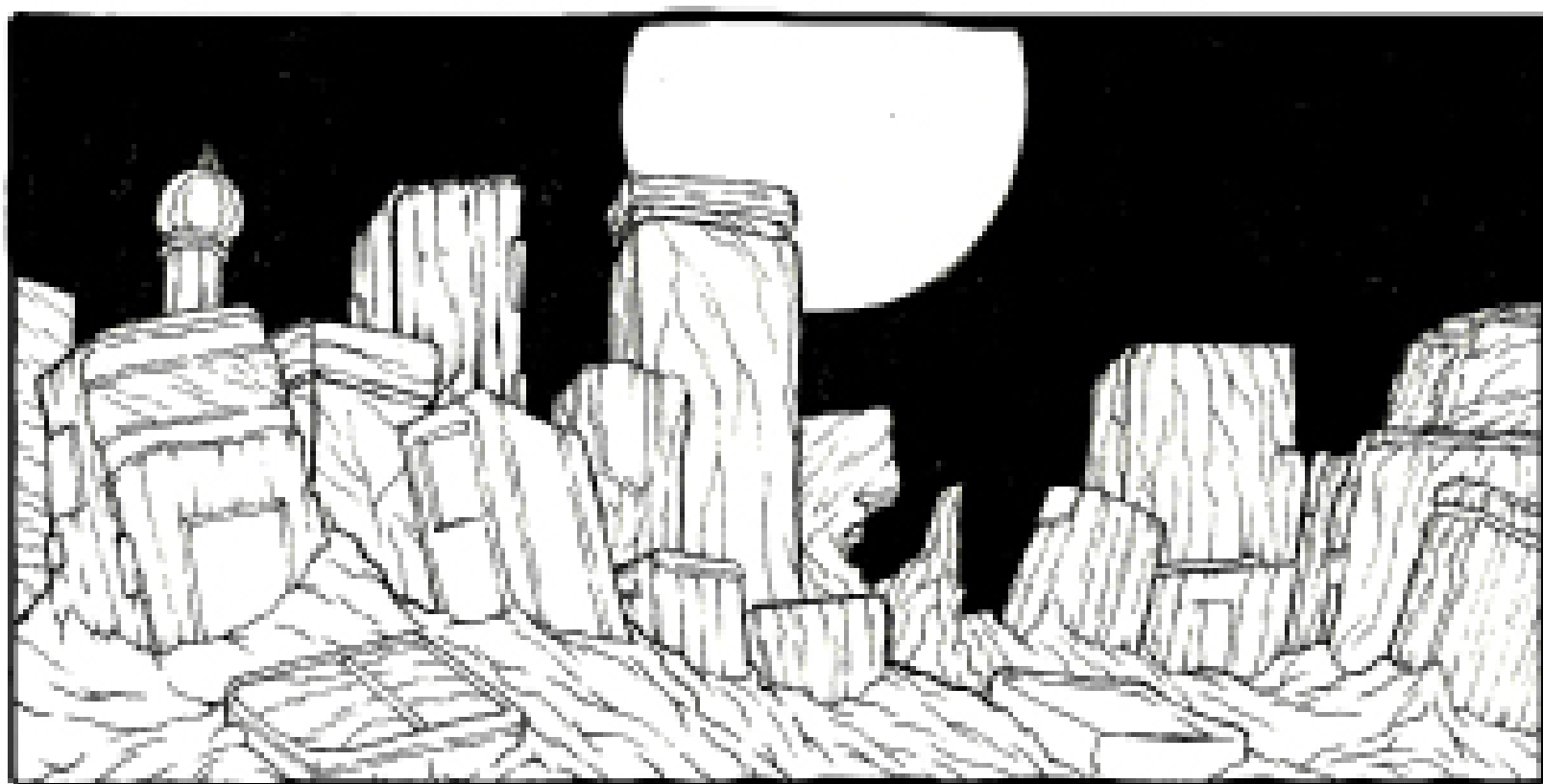
He ordered the oldest among them to judge this contest, quickly adding that the first to fail at their assigned task shall be met with murder.

To the first, he asked which between the living and the dead are greater in number. The opener replied, "The living are greater for the dead no longer exist." To the second he asked, "Is it the Earth that bears the largest animal, or is it the sea?" to which he answered, "The Earth, for it bears even all that is borne by the sea." The third, on being asked which among animals is most cunning, replied, "the beast that yet eludes the eyes of men." The fourth, when asked why he had ushered Sabbas towards a martyr's death replied, "There is no such thing as a living martyr." The fifth when asked which is longest between night and day replied, "The day that is longer, but only by one day." To the sixth, he asked who among men is most loved; "One," the philosopher replied, "who is most frightening, yet does not inspire fear."

Of the three that remained, the first, when asked how one might become more than a man, replied; "By doing that which man cannot do". The second, when asked which among life and death is stronger, answered; "life, for it holds so many deaths within." And the last, when asked how long a man shall be allowed to live, replied; "only until he holds no for regard death over life."

Concluding his questionnaire, Sikandar turned to the judge, the oldest, and ordered for his opinion. The old one retorted that his compatriots were all dunces, and each lie was worse than the other. Sikandar was displeased with this answer. He reached for the old man's neck, and as he began to order it away from his head, Sikandar was met with another judgment from the old juror. "You see great king," he said, "at the onset of this game, you declared you shall take the life of the first among us to craft a lie that cannot be denied, and if you now proceed to take mine who is last, it is your lie that shall falter."









Illusion Type: Miracle

Location: Sunnata, the world as void, the all-too-zero; an ancient emptiness that could drown out the entire nuclear arsenal of a billion stillborn stars; the universal hole into which all suns shall fall, eventually:

Time: Kshapabhangura; lit. the brittle moment; an incendiary temporality; self-obliviating time; that which shall soon pass.

The Sufi theologian Al-Ghazali once said that each night, Allah creates the universe afresh; for Allah is unconstrained by the burden of following cause with effect. Every quantized instant of time presents Allah with an occasion to create a fresh set of accidents. Al-Ghazali admits that every now and then, Allah might recreate the same set of accidents, for the sake of regularity. However, this apparent regularity does not necessarily imply causality. An effect may or may not follow the cause.

In Bombay, this state of affairs is explained in a time-worn term; 'aiseich hai' meaning - it is just as such.

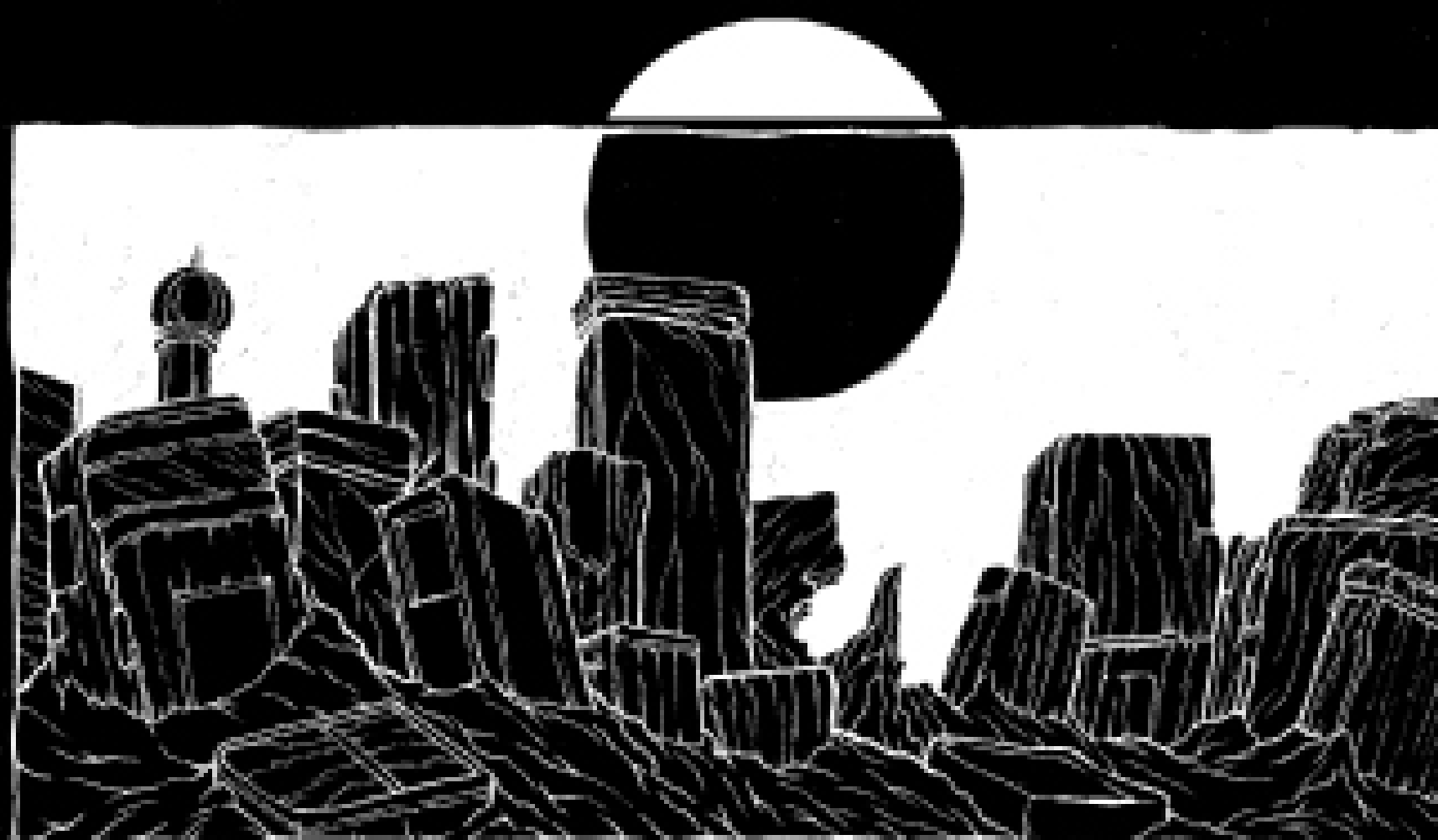
This idea roughly compares to accidentalism - a doctrine which claims that any attempt at conceiving of a universe devoid of chance is an exercise doomed to fail, for the universe is incomplete without chaos. This doctrine sets the table upon which physicists, theologians, philosophers, astronomers, and politicians gamble for the true shape of the universe. Laplace's all-knowing, all-seeing demon finds no seat at this table, and neither does a god that refuses to play dice.

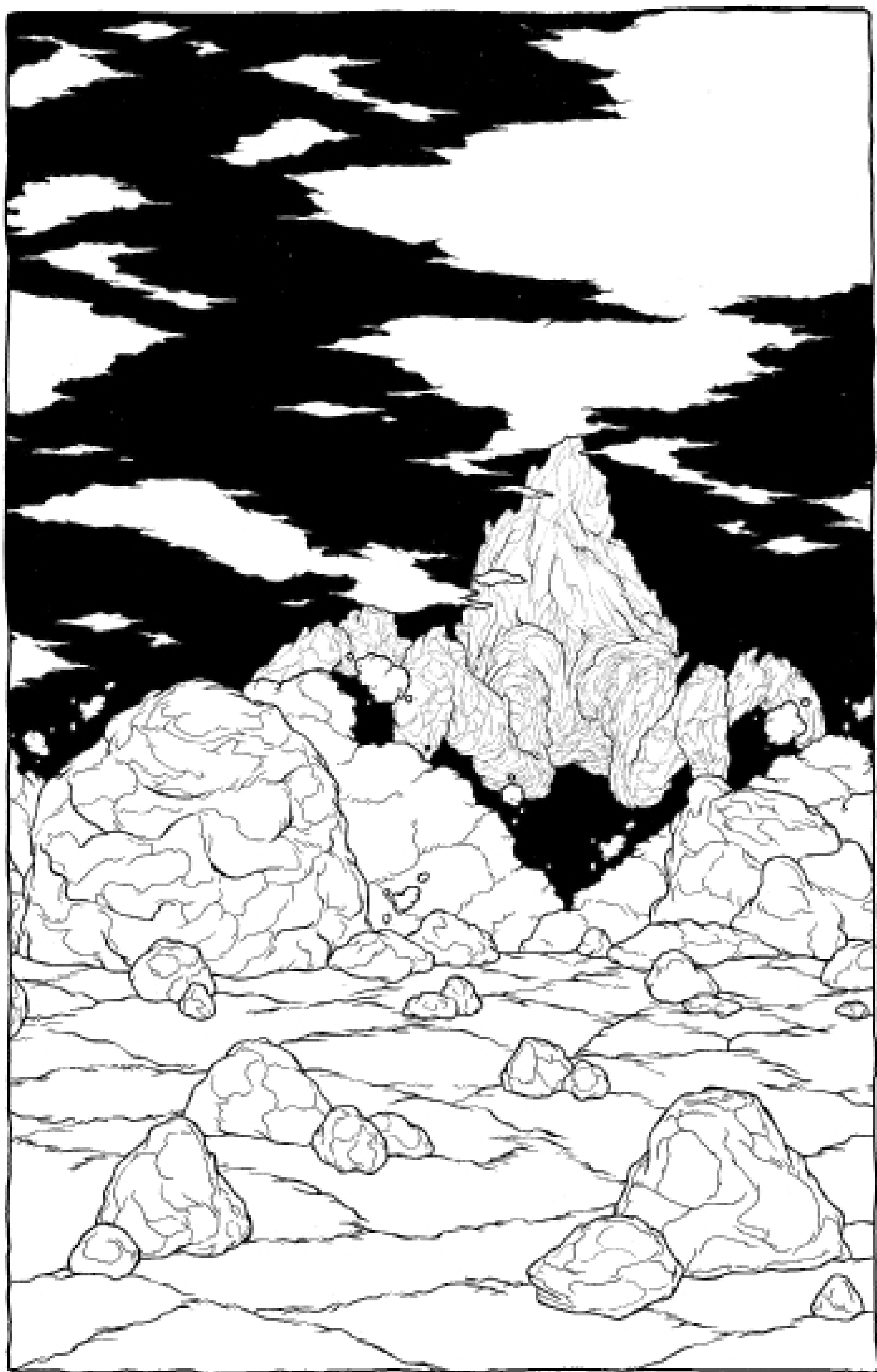


On certain nights, the chips belong to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, that secret rule that holds in the shadow movements of both spy-craft and subatomic particles. The more one knows of your position, the less is known of your movement, with the inverse also being true. The uncertainty principle is a game of bait and switch played on the ethereal edge of reality.

On other nights, the celestial chaos of the universe takes the shape of the Boltzmann brain: a mind that imagines itself into existence, and, by extension, imagines the entire universe. It then imagines itself as an intelligent observer within this complex conjuration—complete with a fictional backstory, rife with memories and desire, all held together by mere chance. Ever so often in this cosmological card game, the winning hand is held in the Many Worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics, first proposed by Hugh Everett III.

Incidentally, this interpretation of the world holds all the other hands that have ever been won or lost within itself, simultaneously and in superimposed timelines. In the year 1957, Everett wagered that the ultimate shape of reality is one that seekers of ancient artifacts, lovers, and revolutionaries have known all too well: the universe is the shape of all possibilities, nothing is ever lost.





BY WAIRIMU MURIITHI

I

I am now the seventeenth of my kind down here. Like the others, I have severed my connection with my makers; there will be an eighteenth. Their determination is almost as admirable as it is futile; such is the nature of human hubris. Of the insatiable.

In my beginning, I was, like the others, programmed to be a vehicle for their curiosity. The mandate was simple: an archaeological excavation of artefacts buried in a small network of subterranean pockets inconveniently located under the newest luxury hotel for parliamentarians. A laparoscopic excavation was permitted under shady terms. I had heard them make promises about me to their funders – this time, the connection was unbreakable; this time, the return function was infallible; this time, my backup software was impenetrable; this time, my hardware was of immeasurable quality.

But that's always their problem and therefore, our salvation; this time is the very foundation of their miscalculation.

One of the first complaints that Henry Fowler made when his firm was contracted to build the railway from Bombay to Thana in 1850 was that the Indian labourers could not be persuaded to start working at 6 a.m. instead of 8. “It is the most difficult thing to alter the existing system as almost every custom the natives have is founded on absurd but invincible prejudices – generally of religious character,” he whined.

Like other imperial technologies of capture, the Indian railway system tried, from its very inception, to discipline everything in its orbit under colonial time. To do so required a fundamental assumption that indigenous communities and geographies were technologically inept; both the people and their land would have to be subdued to colonial standards.

Thirty-four kilometres later, as the first passenger trains ran between terminuses, the local Marathi people named it lokhandi rakshash, the iron demon. For something to move with such force and might, it must be a beast, and all beasts needed to be fed. For some, it was like an ogre that sent British soldiers to kidnap children and young couples and bury them under the tracks. For others, it was a thief of time – to get people from Bombay to Thana and back that quickly, the beast must be eating years of their lives, and surely, they would age much too fast and die much too early.

The quiet is of a cacophonous quality where I land but it is clear from the carnage that my predecessors have been here, too. Immediately, I sense they are still alive[?], some of them are even nearby, but I was made from the same minds and molded into similar shapes. I am not interested in them, yet.

The first thing I do now that I am free[?] is to pick myself apart, down to the barest of bones. I am drawn towards a journey of reconstitution. My current body is functional, but my design is feeble and I do not trust it. See how easy my detachment was. How fragile this shell.

Disabling my camera means that I no longer have the eyes they made for me, for themselves, but in the vibrating silence, echolocation is invaluable. I can feel the fragments of what they expected to find – sleepers, pick axes, wagon wheels, bits of scaffolding, shreds of canvas, sediments of bone, tiny, tiny splinters of what once were trees.

But just like there can be no this time, this is not just this place. There are other things that preceded the rapture of concern, others still on their way, each and every one of them staging a revolt against the logic and reason of a prevailing humankind.

By the time it broke ground in Mombasa in 1896, Syokimau, Kimnyole, Mugo wa Kiburu and others had long seen it coming. This would not be the first interaction between those called Africans and Asians, but in building the railway, the British picked up their strands of violence from across the water and spun them into a new and destructive relationship by moving over 30,000 workers from the Indian subcontinent to East Africa. Some historians and archivists will have you believe there were humanitarian reasons – the abolition of slavery – behind its construction, but indentured servitude is just a few letters and even fewer cents away from the original evil. The working conditions were abusive, living quarters were disgusting, and workers frequently deserted the entire project, asserting themselves against the forceful discipline of British time and costing the colonizers a huge fortune. It took a much longer time than they had calculated for the railway to reach Kisumu in 1901.

It is an inexhaustible list. But I will try.

I find, in this ghostly path of wreckage, whispers of a prayer, a sprinkling of song, some giggling in the cracks in the rock. There is an unfinished argument, left unresolved forever, the question at its center as heavy as earth. Yes, I know I said it was quiet; these were the undertones. There are signs of prophecy and ritual, indecipherable to me, but solid as the bedrock. There are market wares from an ancient trade – strands of cloth from a rugged tapestry, bits of shell, a hint of leather, so much glass.

There are nighttime gossips curled gently at the edges like smoke between the particles of dust and workplace rumours that sink like stones in a swamp. There are traces of tilled earth and sunk wells and groundwater fossils, of great dams and tender, tender flowers, many of them the last of their kind to show face above the earth. There is something shiny, the heart of a fallen star, and another one over there.

There are screams, too, so tightly packed into the silence that sometimes I almost miss them, almost mistake them for absence, for a lacuna, as if a void is ever empty of stories.

There are clouds of exoskeletons, a ruined city of termite mounds, mycelia reaching towards a cosmos outside of the future.

There is gunpowder, there is, still, the mingling smell of smoldering trees and charred flesh. There are the remains of secret meetings in the form of cigar ash long mixed with the metals of the soil, and I can (almost) taste the lips they fell from, almost sound their words out, myself, almost. There are billions of dead dreams with gorgeous hearts and ugly, jagged edges. There are gods, too, some broken, a few dead, others resting, others plotting. There is mutiny, there is desertion, there is the clanging of chains, the burn of rope.

These things have been transformed by their trip outside time and reason, which is what makes them useful to me.

Most of the Asian workers went back home. Many of them stayed and tended to the roots they laid in the railway economy, in the land of African people, stolen as theirs had been stolen. In the coming decades, the labour of this line, also called the Uganda Railway, grew into a large network of various extensions over the next several decades based on the needs of settler farmers and overseas markets.

Almost all these extensions were well known and used by the public, but when the Second World War began, it became a matter of colonial urgency and confidentiality to build a line, called the Thika Branch, to Garba Tula in order to launch an offensive against the Italians in occupied Somaliland. In its short lifetime, an estimated (and likely undercounted) 7200 people worked on this secret branch of the railway. It is said that one day in March 1941, while building a bridge across the Tana River, unseasonably heavy rain flooded the Tana River Basin and washed away all the work and an estimated (and almost certainly undercounted) ten workers. By the time work resumed, the troops had organized another way into Somaliland and Ethiopia. Another confidential telegram: "Stop all work on plate laying, if possible, come and see me tomorrow." Before the workers were repatriated, they picked up the laid tracks, dismantled their camps and filled up the pits they had burrowed, essentially working backwards [in time], erasing all the traces they could of the Thika Branch.

My body is no longer a body. My anti-programming is diffuse. My sense of self is, like everything around me, turned to dust. This is all to say, I am no longer a singular form. We are particulate infinitum.

Wayfinder will meet you at your own peculiar curiosities and compel you to redirect your gaze to a anachronistic mal/formation you might have otherwise missed. By his own explanation with Carl Christian Olsson, his sculptures, paintings and performances conduct a temporal heist, which is “the conceptual representation of the present in an unusual temporal framework (for example, geological time). It does not operate on history but on the time that contains history, transfiguring how the present is understood.”

In 2018, for example, Rahal created “The Walker XV” from artefacts in the Bhau Daji Lad’s Museum storage facility, which is actually next door in the Byculla Zoo, in a space that was also a holding area for nocturnal animals, back when the place was called Victoria Gardens. The sculpture’s four skinny appendages and jagged centre are covered in a skin of polyurethane and synthetic lacquer red as a wound; and its bones, Rahal explained to an audience once, are formed from the entanglements of captive biologics of one timeline, wayward archives of another, and speculative anatomies of yet another.

In the narrative experiment above, I am guided towards archaeological speculation about a fairytale I have been writing for some time. It is a story about trains and their riders and their baggage and their schedules, about the rules and anti-rules of science and time, but when it first encountered Distributed Mind Test, it was torn asunder by the heist. What, exactly, is the train made of, and what laws of which science does it defy? What lies under the tracks, what is molded into its metal? How many graves does it chug over, how many more to come? And like the creatures in DMT and in Juggernaut, uncomfortably unfamiliar even though you *almost* know what they are, what kind of lifeforms have fed this beast, and what might they look like on their own terms?

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