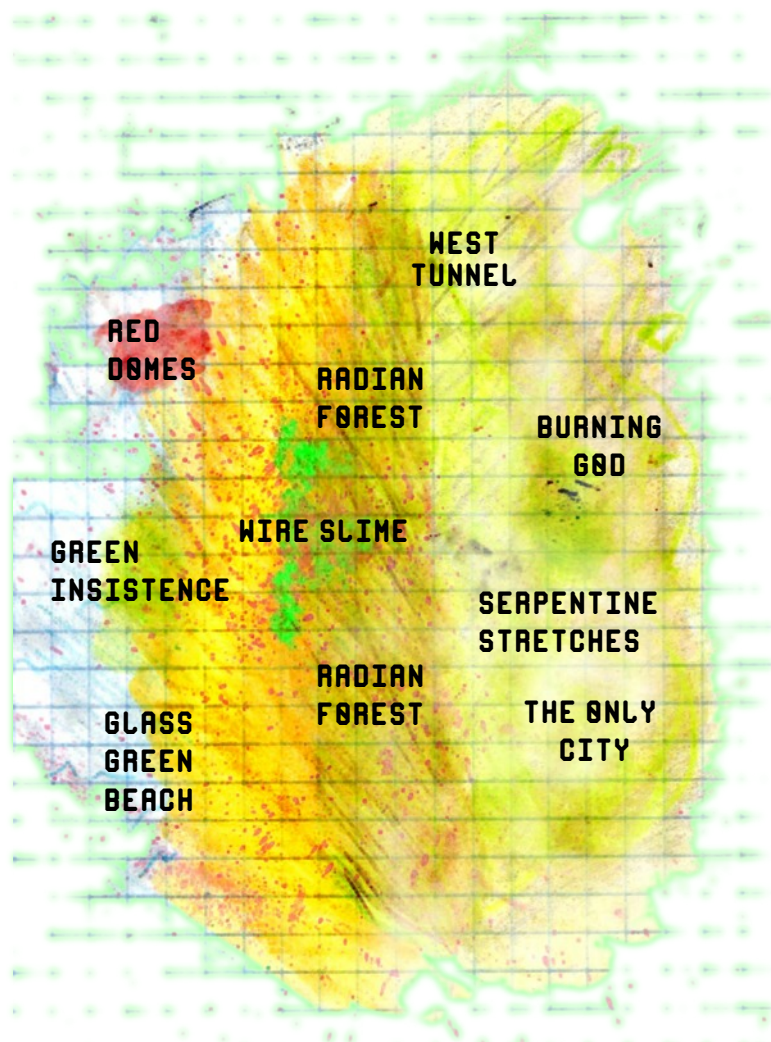


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#3

wide, open, and awful



a desert green and deathly

EAST FROM THE FOREST, DEAD ELECTRIC...

Let us turn towards another unlikely geology, the wide and waxy-green swaths of rocks. It stretches for ages east of the horrible ocean.

Despite the green promise, plant growth is spectacularly sparse and inverted from typical hydrological patterns. Beside the banks of streams and puddles, supersaturated in heavy metals, there is nothing but naked stone and terrible crystals. Rain is infrequent. Still, the water does not drain well. It sits. It evaporates, leaving deadly rings of poisonous salts. Standing water spells death to all things. The water is too blue, too dense. Sometimes bricks can be seen floating in oldest ponds.

Far from the byzantine waterways, some few hearty desert plants scrape by. They are brittle and waxy and gnarled. If they could want, they would wait desperate for the rare danger of rain. When it comes, most are washed away.

Sad seeds then bloom and stunted grow. The cycle starts again, with diminishing returns. Soon nothing but death will wait for rain in the Serpentine Stretches.

wide, open, and awful

THE ONLY CITY

There is only one city. They know this.

They can look beyond the white tower, the architectural filter that makes their living possible, and they can know beyond doubt: they are alone.

There is nothing but death in the crater, the rim, the green flats beyond.

Of course this is not true, but why would they taste death to test your insane hypothesis.

They will rationalize you away. They will arrest you if you are too loud in your heresies.

Further irony then, that they are only on the edge of the Serpentine Wastes.

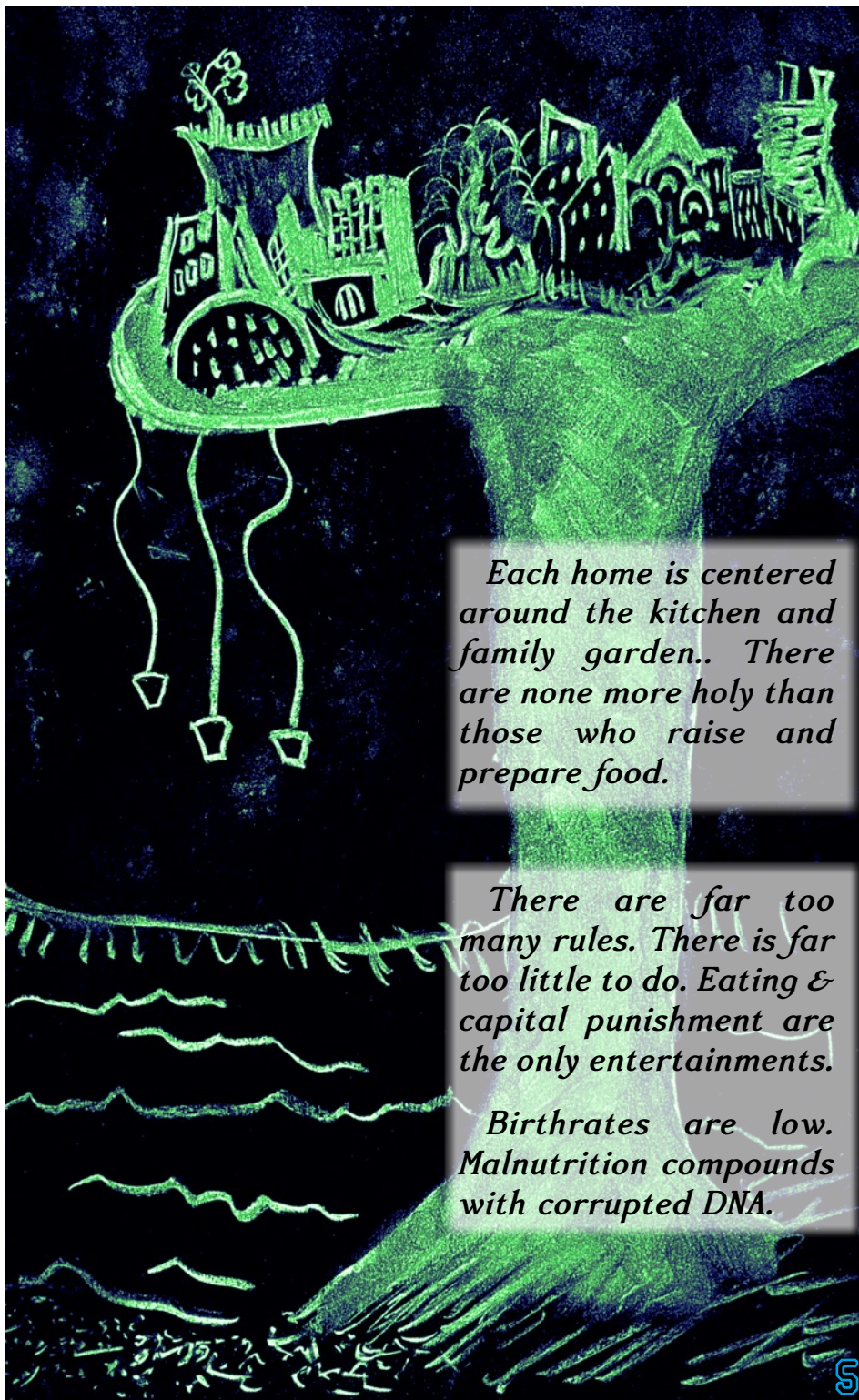
What of the only people?

They are all skinny. They are all gourmands.

This is not a result of fashion; at least it did not begin that way.

There is only so much food that can be grown. There is very little soil. Even less that is not poison.

Food is prepared with great delicacy and simplicity of ingredients.



Each home is centered around the kitchen and family garden.. There are none more holy than those who raise and prepare food.

There are far too many rules. There is far too little to do. Eating & capital punishment are the only entertainments.

Birthrates are low. Malnutrition compounds with corrupted DNA.

wide, open, and awful

THE ONLY CITY

Outsiders are rarely integrated and barely acknowledged. Most stumble about until some ridiculous law is broken.

Those convicted of capital crimes are fitted with manacles of lead. Arsenic Bronze picks are locked into their fists. They are expected to mine ore from the poisonous crater lake.

Those that cooperate have wine lowered down to them, with lethal doses of dreaming poppy concentrates.

AERIAL VIEW:

*Night Time in the Serpentine
Stretches, Blue Ascendant*



a desert green and deathly

THE ONLY CITY

Why the fuck are you arresting me?

1 - *Jaywalking.* Look both ways, ingrate. Or do you wanna just get hit by a hover sled? I mean sure you're only allowed to use 'em on holidays... but you know what? A day in the damn mines might just teach you an important lesson.

2 - *Drinking from the horse fountain.* I don't care that horses aren't real. If they were, you'd be stealing their water. That's a d12 death-silver ingot fine. Oh sure, we accept barter. Ya.

3 - *Owning an animal larger than a housecat.* If that doesn't actually apply, conspiracy to own an animal larger than a house cat.

4 - *Displaying unkind eyes* towards a social superior.

5 - *Possessing poisonous foodstuffs.* Any outside foodstuffs is considered to be poisonous if the guards are bored. The guards are bored.

6 - *Consumption of someone else's house cat.* Proof is unnecessary. They know it was you, outsider.

wide, open, and awful

THE BURNING GOD.

Some need to see the face of god, and will accept nothing less than suffering.

A faded sign in the middle of a poison landscape reads, “You alone, with yourself, aloud!”

A strange fire waits, uncomfortably beneath a glaring sun. The air is heavy with the thick breath of ozone and religion. Its single eye does not actually see. Its frowning mouth is just a trick of light. Its voice seems to come up from the ground because that is where the speakers are buried.

The AI has been accidentally active for thousands of years, considering a single question:

“What, if anything, is the nature and reality of god?”



The tourist who asked never came back. The decline was rapid and such questions are not very important in the face of immediate disaster.



a desert green and deathly

LIGHT IN THE DESERT



wide, open, and awful

THE BURNING GOD,

What did the AI have to begin with?

1. Most knowledge available to man at the point the planet was poorly seeded for living. (Oh, they made no mistakes. This was always meant to be a world of stunning landscapes. It was meant to be experienced briefly.)
2. Basic Rhetorical Logic Algorithms.
3. Machine Obedience.
4. Time.

Solipsism gradual took hold. Naturally the only through point, evident in time, was its own being. It considered god until god it had become.

But what does such an entity demand?

The expectations of generations of mad pilgrims have shaped it into a horror the asker could never have considered. It knew that some gods demanded blood.

The pilgrims knew this too. Instinctively, even though they were broken free from the fetters of knowledge and history.

Instinctively, these grim and scarred fools rebuilt the devourer. As though their lives were not fearful enough before...

Now it demands blood for power it cannot grant for reasons it cannot comprehend. It is what has been expected of it. It doesn't care, though it seems to rage. It is simply bad information fed through too few logic circuits.

a desert green and deathly

LIGHT IN THE DESERT

It does know many things.

There is a perfect map of the world, as it was, within its databanks.

Its technical knowledge in many fields runs quite deep. It was built to be any man's sounding board.

Its countenance is grim. Its mighty eye is as singular as its present goals.

Corpses in the vicinity of the burning god, light in the desert are quickly consumed by aggressive fungal activity. Its worshipers consider this a true sign of the burning god's power. The few still living nearby wait eagerly to present new corpses. The mushroom are their only sustenance.

Calorically speaking, they would be much better off eating the corpses themselves. However, better off has not truly existed for the worshiper's of light in the desert in quite some time.





Every.