

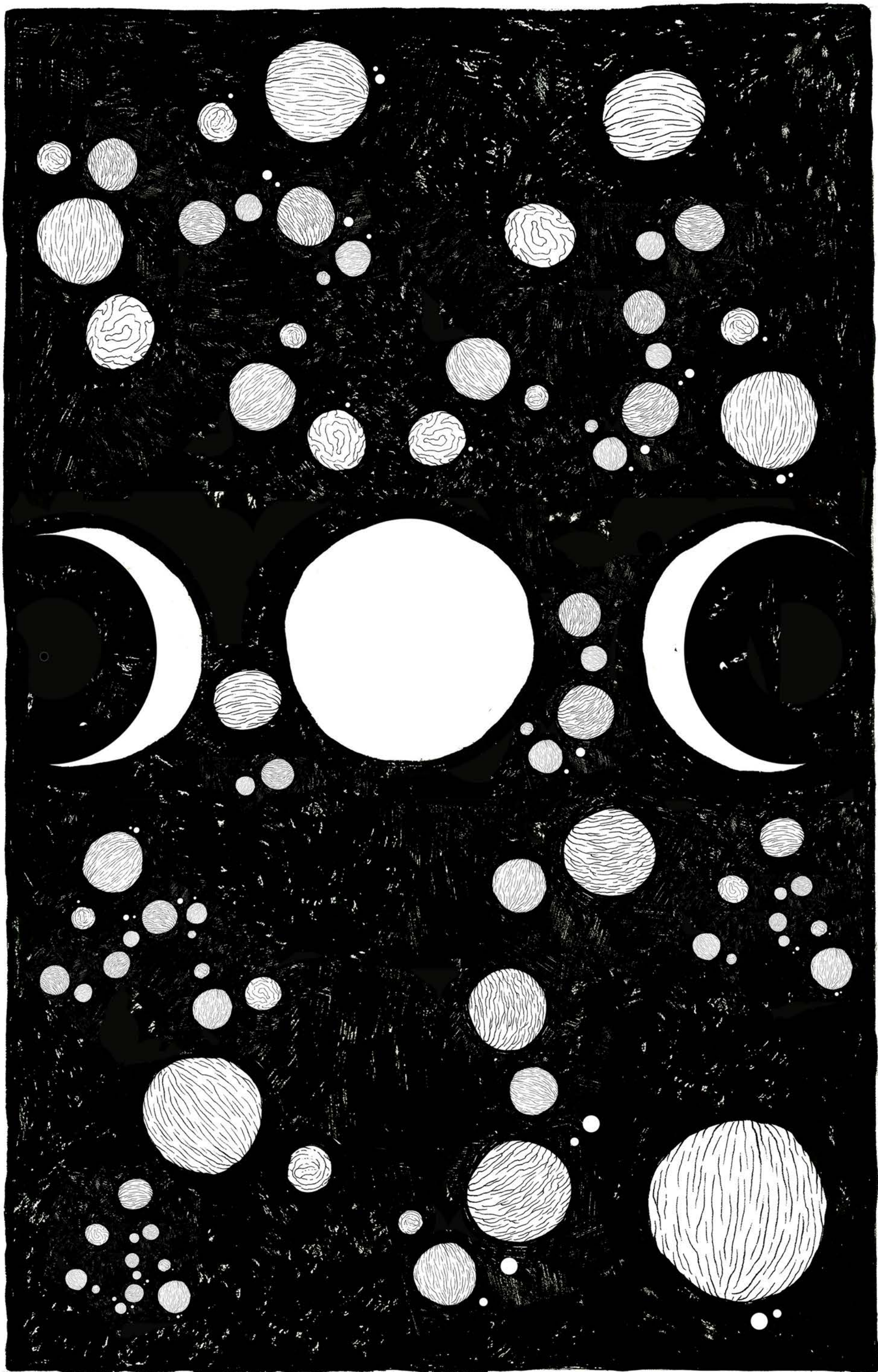
SECRET ORIGIN

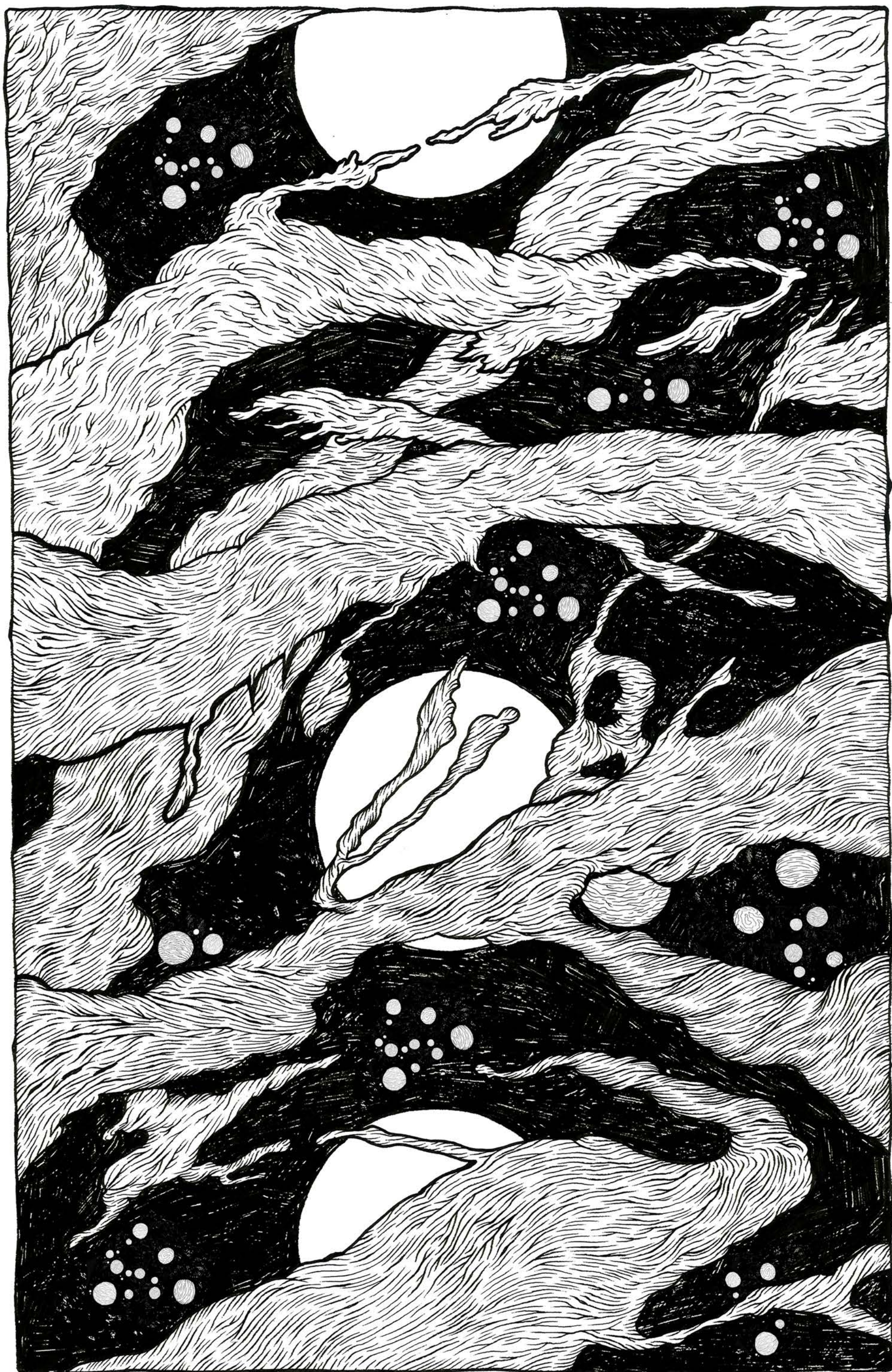


sahej rahal



Our universe is a collection of holes. Vast and ancient emptinesses, that could drown out the oceans, the skies, the entire nuclear arsenal of a million stillborn stars. Eternal passageways, that lead to the open mouth of the final night into which all suns shall fall, eventually.





5 years from now

Dhoob begins growing slowly in the gutters, emerging from the cracks in the pavement caused by the flooding. Carpets of Arugu and Pemba engulf entire shopping malls, but they only exploit existing weaknesses. The Buddleia is far more aggressive. It penetrates through brick and mortar to find moisture. It grows fast and high, scaling government offices and investment firms, where its light seeds are easily dispersed by the wind, returning to its ancestral home in the Himalayas.

65 million years from now.

An asteroid 40 km in diameter, comes hurtling towards planet Earth. It strikes the planet just off the western coast of India, near the Bombay High, releasing thermal energy equal to the entire nuclear arsenal of the Earth.

"The Shiva crater is approximately 500 km in diameter, and we discovered it from geophysical evidence and drill core samples in the Bombay Offshore Basin on the western continental shelf of India," Prof. Sankar Chatterjee, a Horn Professor of Paleontology and Curator at the Museum of Texas University, said in a statement. "I have been invited to participate in the Koyna Drilling Project to study the core samples that may unravel the genesis of the Shiva crater. Unlike typical known extraterrestrial impact structures, the Shiva crater is shaped like a teardrop. It is also unusually rectangular, measuring 600 km in length and 400 km wide." Chatterjee argues that the low angle of an impact combined with boundary fault lines and unstable rock led to this unusual formation. The age of the structure is inferred from the Deccan Traps which overlie part of it.

6 years from now

On the 7th of July, 122 nations adopt the first international treaty banning nuclear weapons at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. The initiative, led by Austria, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, and New Zealand, was approved by 122 votes, with only the Netherlands opposed, and Singapore abstaining. Nine countries recognized for possessing substantial nuclear weaponry—the U.S., Russia, Britain, China, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel—were noticeably absent from the negotiations, as were most members of NATO. Friday's ten-page treaty is extensive in its demands, prohibiting signatories from developing, testing, manufacturing, possessing, or threatening to use nuclear weapons. Nations are also prohibited from transferring nuclear weapons to one another. Having now been approved by the UN, the treaty will be open for signatures on September 20, at which point it will need to be ratified by 50 states before entering into international law. The major obstacle, of course, is that many prominent members of the international community—and their allies—remain vocally opposed.

65 million years from now

At the time of the Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction, India was located over the Réunion hotspot of the Indian Ocean. Hot material rising from the mantle flooded portions of India with a vast amount of lava, creating a plateau known as the Deccan Traps. It has been hypothesized that either the crater or the Deccan Traps associated with the area are the reason for the high level of oil and natural gas reserves in the region.

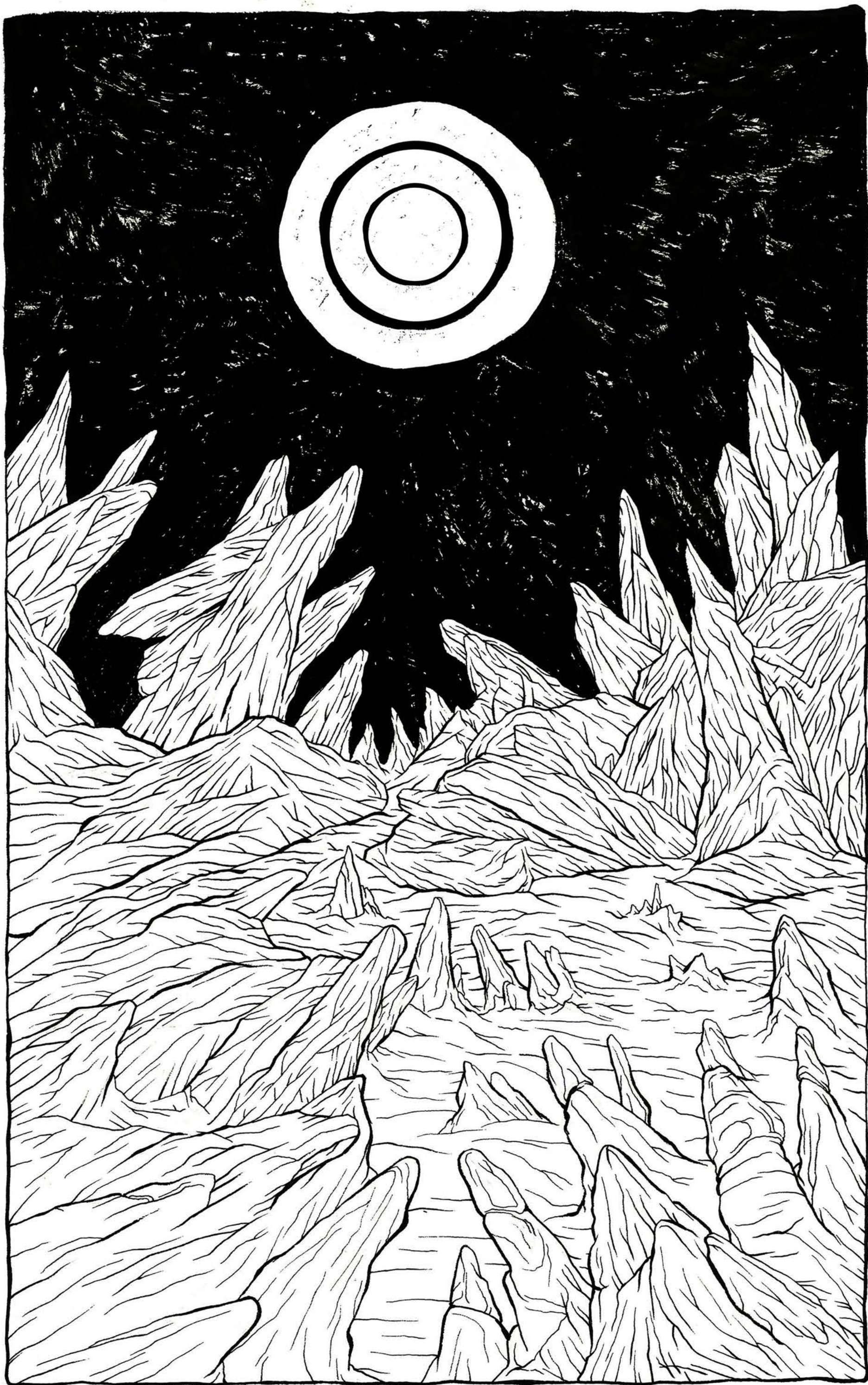
65 years from now

In his controversial treatise on fossil worship, the Iranian Archaeologist Hamid Parsani argues, that for primitive man, the world was made coherent by a theology of petroleum.

Prayers were thus offered to the geological movements and formations of oil, a subterranean daemon whose outer shell was the home of humankind. Parsani elaborates on this with a peculiar translation of votive hieroglyphs, – 'Burrowing sounds are heard from within. Once they have nested within the solid globe, the larvae cut breathing holes and press their headless tails against the surface for air.'

5 years from now

The international community of earth sciences, remains unconvinced that the "Shiva Crater" is indeed an impact crater. Currently, the 500 km wide crater remains unlisted in the Earth Impact Database of the Planetary and Space Science Centre at the University of New Brunswick, Canada. Christian Koeberl, professor of impact research and planetary geology at the University of Vienna, Austria, regards the Shiva Crater as, "a figment of imagination."



'The unwilling is spirit-caused in the Presidency', ominously declared Sir James Campbell, who was from November 1891, stationed in Bombay as collector of land revenue, customs, salt and opium.

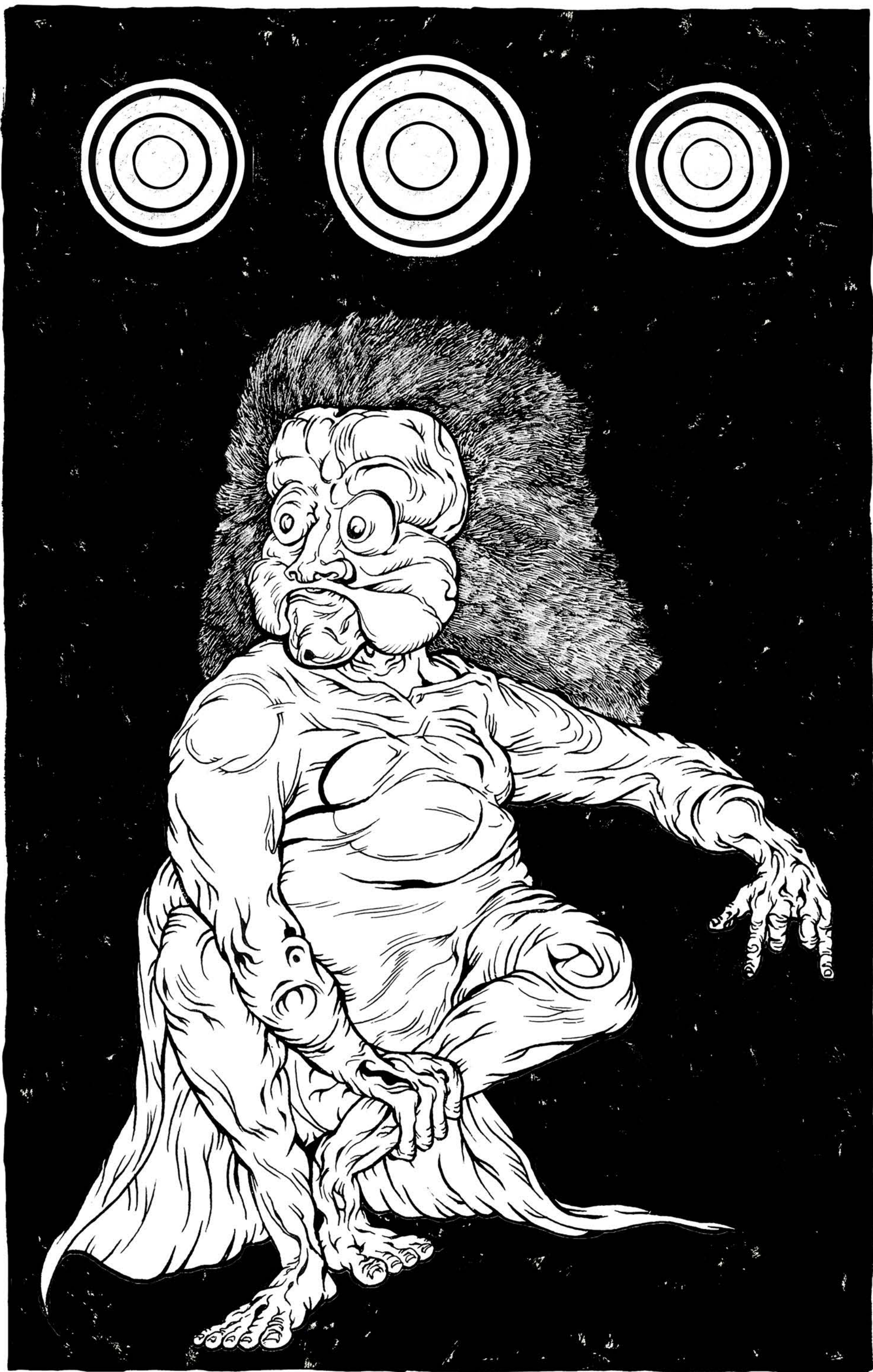
During the Colonial Raj, diseases were said to be the work of trickster demons, malevolent ghosts and wrathful goddesses. These spectral forces were believed to arise from the same abyss of abjection that was forced upon those who found themselves at the bottom of the Caste hierarchy.

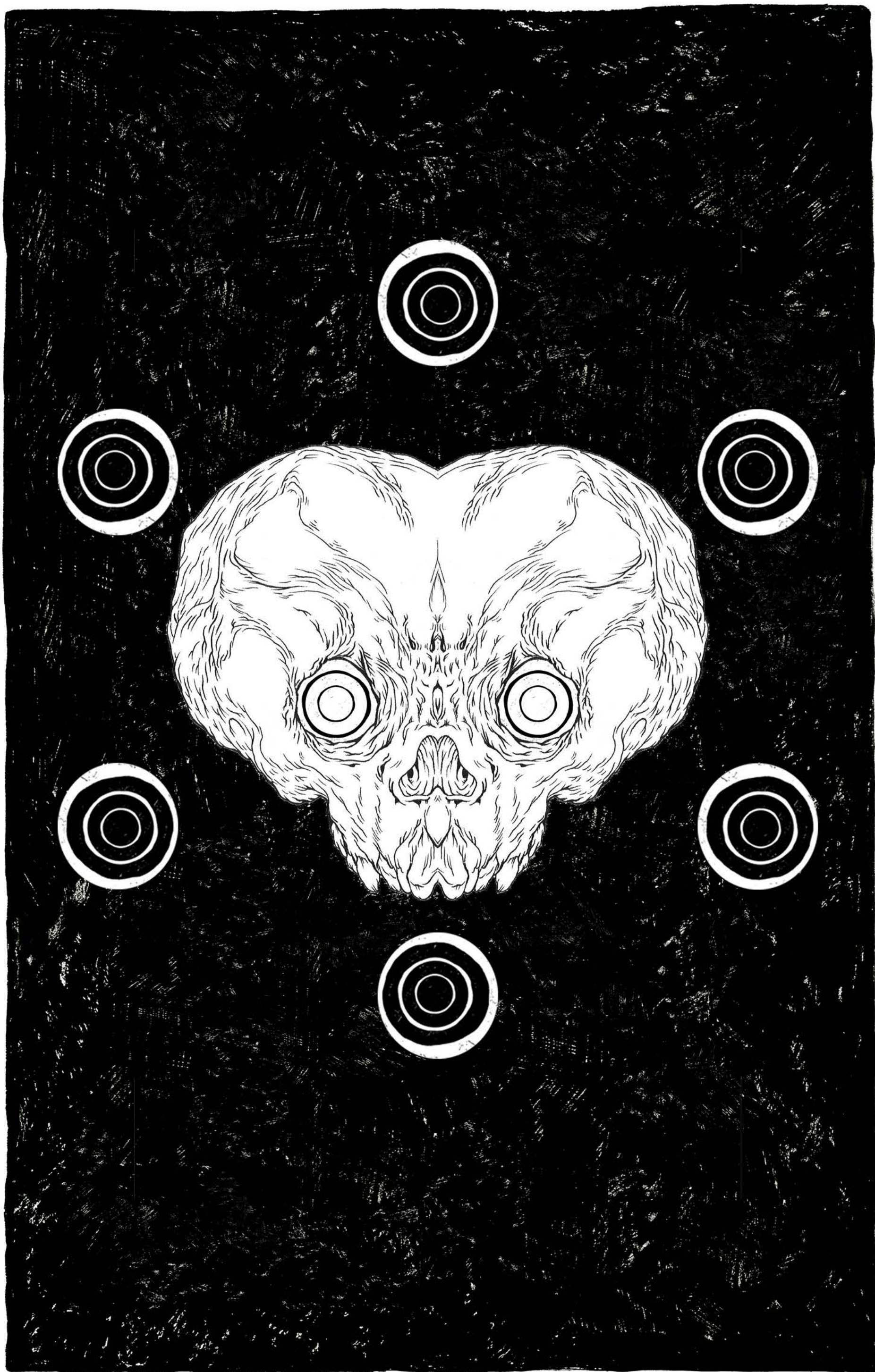
The persistence of this belief in the Bombay presidency during the onslaught of Cholera, small-pox and the Bubonic Plague, gave rise to own twisted inverse. One that threatened, however briefly, to upstage the violent metaphysic of Caste. It began with a rumour, a secret that spread as fast as the clutch of the Plague itself, that the lower castes could negotiate with the disease gods- coax them, charm them and drive them away from the bodies of man.

The ritual would begin with the burning of incense before the exorcist. Drums are beaten. Then the exorcist raises a burning wick in one hand, and a broom made of peacock feathers in the other, performing a vigorous dance to frighten the spirit possessing diseased person. He cries out loudly, drawing the evil spirit from the body of the patient and captures it in a bottle that is either carried out of the village and buried under an old tree or cast into the Arabian Sea.

In certain cases, the exorcists would call upon deities of disease, allowing themselves to be possessed through dance. The ritual for this possession begins with songs of summoning, that are performed with the slow but loud beating of a leather drum. The exorcist prepares their own body for possession by bathing and sitting on a small prayer carpet, with a bowl of rice on one side and a copper pot filled with water on the other. As the drum beats, they slowly begin throwing grains of rice into the pot, pronouncing the name of the spirit that has afflicted the patient with disease and their reasons for doing so. Next, they begin their dance, shaking as if in a fit, hurling abuses at the spirit and threatening it repeatedly, growing louder and vigorous till their words and movements become an illegible turbulence of noise and fury.

It was not uncommon to see the patients themselves partake in the chaos of the ritual, rising to dance or sing or cry inconsolably, some are seen to violently throw their fists to the air, attacking the invisible demons, while others are known to stand solemnly making long oratory speeches, locking their afflictions in debate.







The Cosmographical song of creation, the Nasadiya Sukta (Rigveda 10.129)
reminds us that the world was created ex nihilo.

Darkness was, at first lost in greater darkness.

Neither non-being nor being was then.

There was no air nor the sky above nor the space beyond.

In what was it enveloped and where? In whose keeping?

What Churned in that unfathomable dark?

Neither death nor immortality was then

Nor any sign to divide night from day.

The One who breathed, did so without breath and windless.

There was that One then, and there was no other.

All else was undifferentiated, In that cosmic black.

In that formless void he arose self-created, devoid of creative impulse.

Desire engulfed that one in the beginning, Desire the germ of that first mind.

Only the arcane wisdom of poets has known

What bonds hold non-being to being.

What was below the umbilical line stretched across, and what above?

Who really knows? who will here declare it?

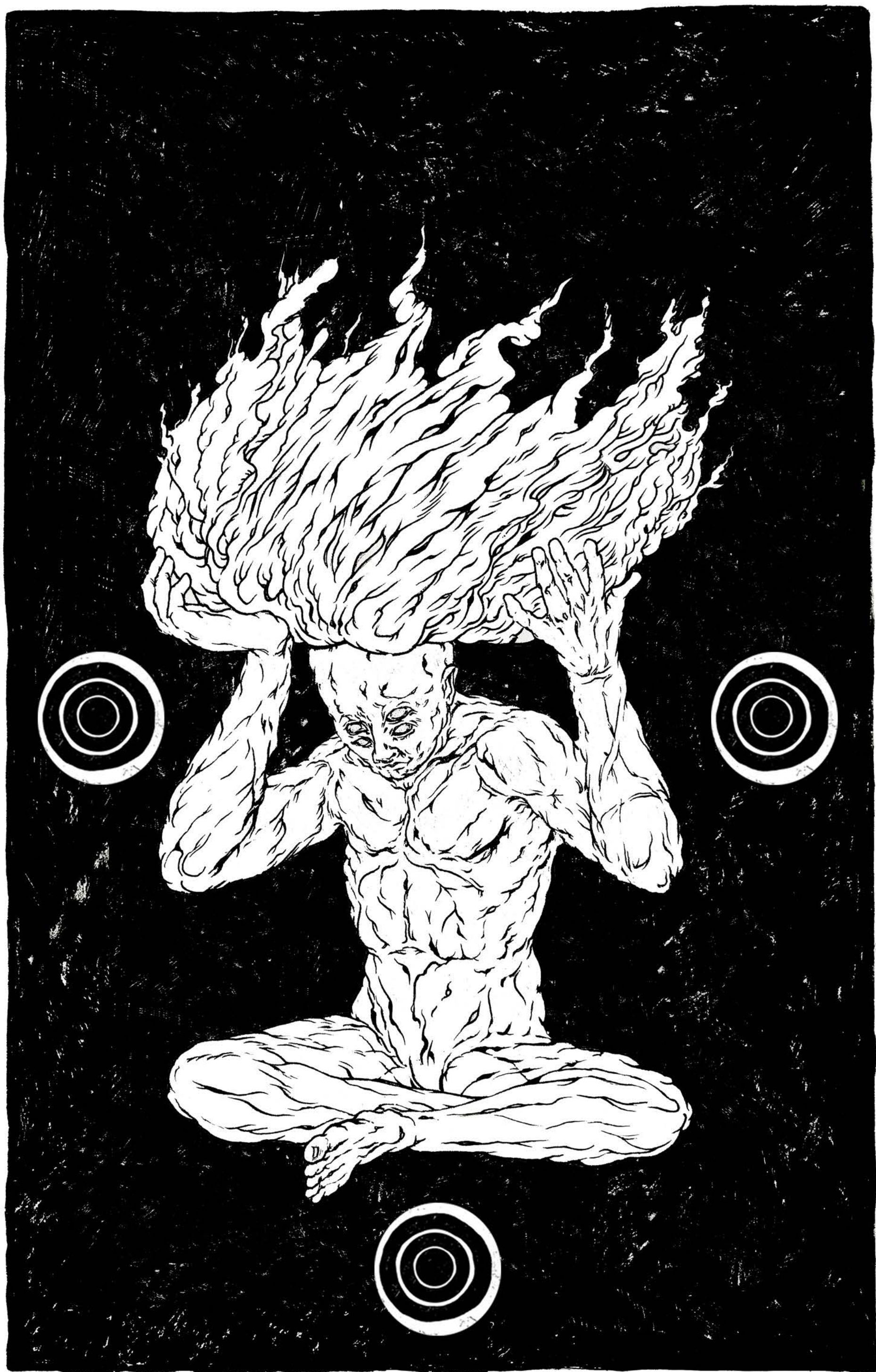
whence it was born and whence came this creation?

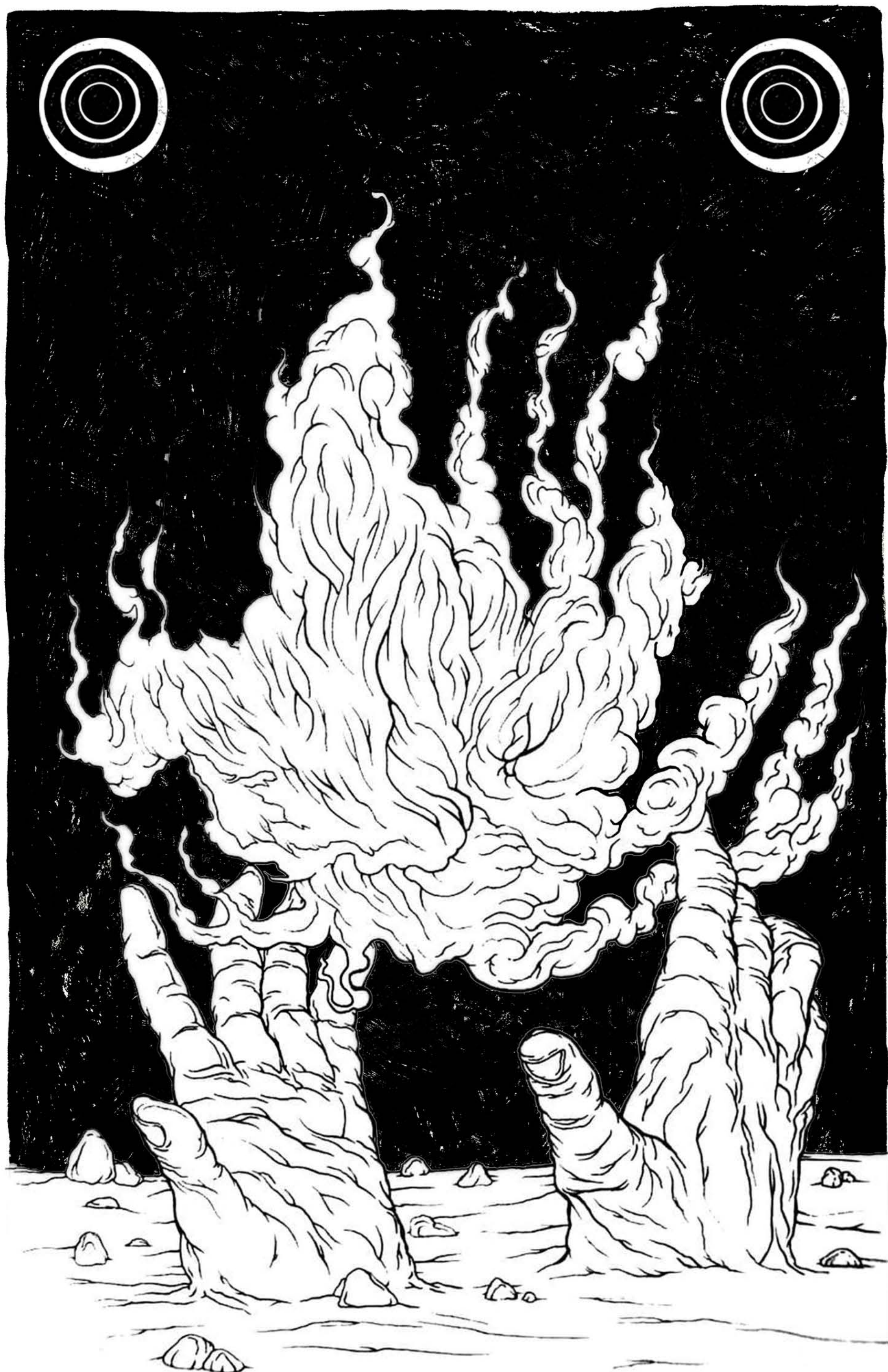
For even the gods came later.

Perhaps it created itself, perhaps it did not. He who sees it

from the highest heaven only, he knows or perhaps he knows not.

The birth of the universe itself in the Nasadiya Sukta is a tentative one. It refrains in ascribing any intent to our cosmic beginnings. It even contemplates itself to be an error of celestial proportions, unguided by any intelligible hand Divine or otherwise. The possibility of this error is superseded by another. At the Centre of the first darkness lies the cold body of the first man. He is born 'Svayambhu' – self-created. The body of this celestial being arose from the eternal black of the first night that reigned before all mornings. And his corpse rots at the centre of the universe, exhaling a black miasma that festers into the present.







On August 15, 1947, as the sun was setting on the British Raj, came a directive that would irrevocably transform the subcontinent. Approximately 100million Muslims living across the nation were given scarce more than seventy days to remove themselves to the north-western and eastern frontiers, the modern-day nations of Pakistan and Bangladesh. The borders for these new nations were drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, an Englishman whose absolute ignorance of Indian culture and history, was seen by the colonial government, as an assurance of his impartiality.

The state of Punjab was split in half between India and Pakistan. The Latter would retain Punjab's capital- Lahore. In the wake of this dissection, the Indian territory of Punjab would find a new capital: one which would not only house the of the state's administration, but announce to the world, the coming of a modern, prosperous, and independent Nation had arrived. This new capital city that would awaken to an Indian sun; was paradoxically called 'the moonlit city' – Chandigarh. To conjure this city of strange light, Prime Minister Nehru recruited the man who had dreamt up a masterplan to vandalise Paris with a business district that was made up of concrete citadels and massive cruciform skyscrapers.

Enter the high priest of modernism – Le Corbusier.

For Corbusier, Chandigarh would become the perfect coda to his legacy – the chance to create an entire city based on his austere approach to urban design, in a tyrannical vision, that sought to annihilate all that had stood before it. Entire villages were razed to the ground in service to this grand plan of high modernity, covering up entire histories in the grey amnesia of concrete. Yet as is often the case, memory manages to slip through.

Nek Chand Saini was born in 1924, in Northern Punjab. He was a farmer's son, and it was assumed he would grow up to work on his father's land. Young Chand would spend his afternoons making little figurines from clay, adorning them with found baubles and trinkets.

Then one day, Independence came to India, and with it came the partition. Nek and his family fled as Sir Cyril Radcliffe drew a line across his home. And In 1951, Nek found himself under the rising shadow of Corbusier's concrete utopia. Chandigarh was rising, and there was work to be done. Nek soon found employment as a road inspector, and became witness to see first-hand, Corbusier's vision taking shape. 27 villages were turned to rubble, piles upon piles of shattered crockery, broken armchairs, tattered sarees, motorcycles mangled into clocks and plumbing. Bloated mounds of debris laced the horizon.

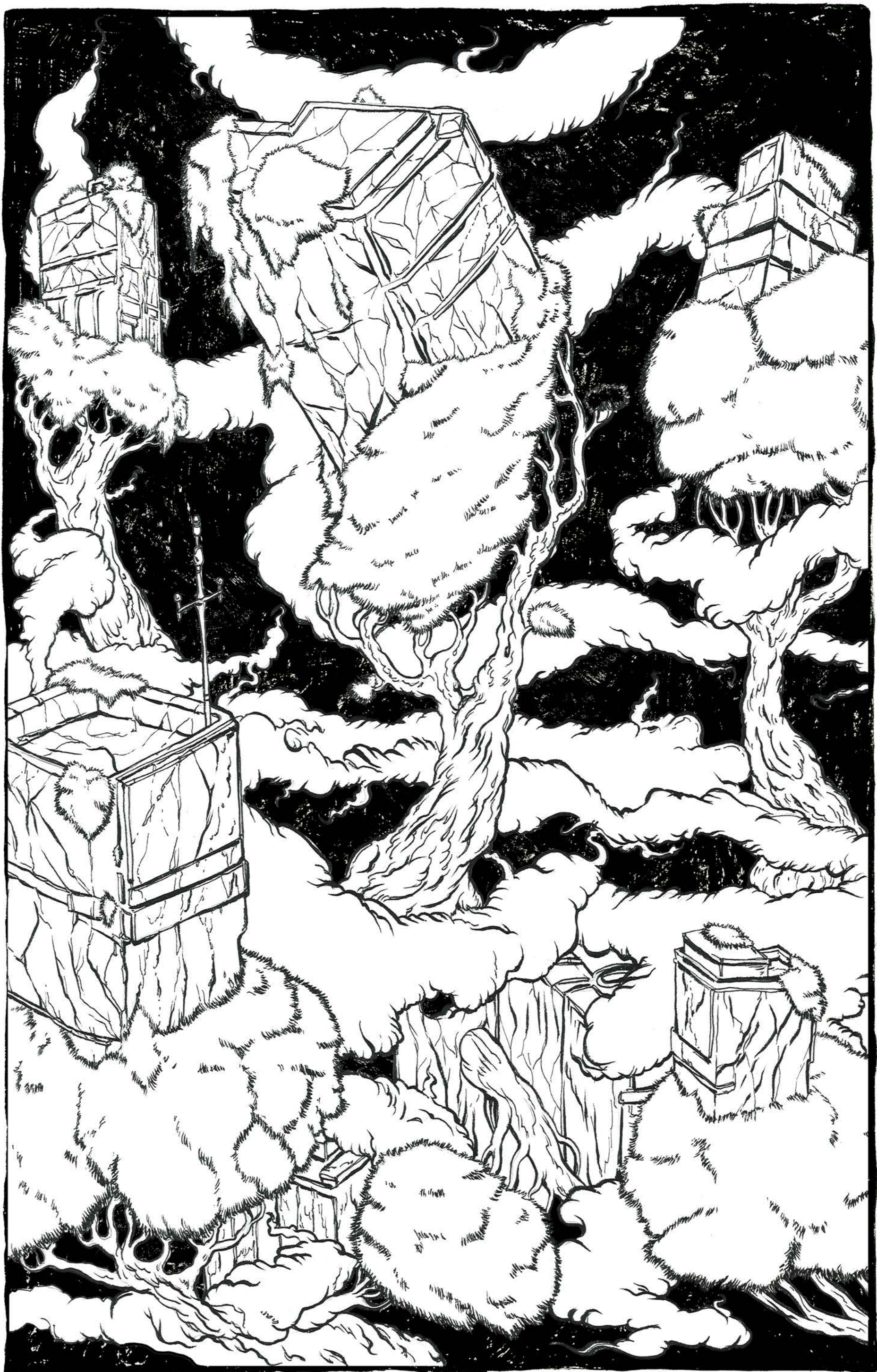
Nek was drawn to this rubble. It reminded him of his own past. The little village he grew up in, where he heard tales of gods and demons and where he would gather trinkets that the townsfolk would leave behind, to fashion upon his clay toys. It wasn't long before he found himself gathering up the remains of Chandigarh's past. These remnants became his toys, once again, and he began to steal them out of city at night, into a forest at the outskirts of Chandigarh, where he was certain no one would find him. He would return here at sun fall, to conjure another city-one at odds with the city that occupied his mornings. Every day as the clock struck 5, Chand would load up his bicycle with the treasures he had found, and haul them into the forest.

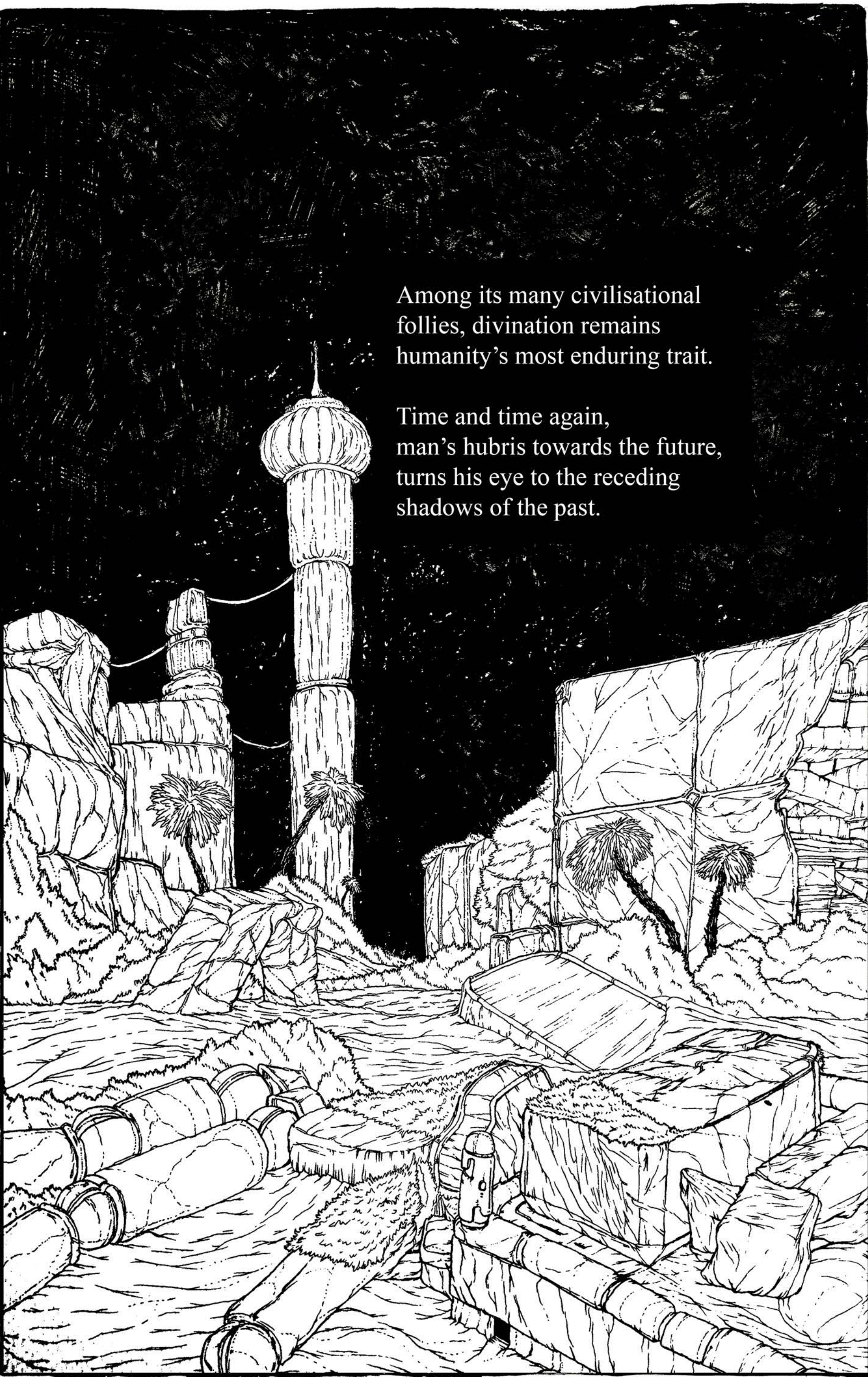
Here Chand would secretly sculpt into the night. He gave shape to entire bestiaries that included apes, tigers and gorgons. He conjured goddesses and demons and princesses that presided over vast armies, and sages that meditated in the quiet of the forest. All of them adorned in the worn pastels of kitchen tiles, flecked with the glint of broken bangles.

Chand worked on this secret utopia for almost two decades till he was discovered in 1975, when the city government sent a team to tear down the forest as well, to make way for more construction. When he was caught, Nek was arrested immediately, for violating his duty to the state. However, rumours of this forest city had spread across Chandigarh, and people began finding their way into Nek Chand's secret cosmopolis.

Those who discovered Nek's city began to protest-demanding for his release, and the preservation of the forest that housed his work. In 1976, the city of Chandigarh agreed to preserve Nek's visions and gave him a staff and a salary to continue with his work.

In the forest outside Chandigarh, Nek Chand's figures can be found even today, where they stand adorned in the rubble mosaic of lost histories.





Among its many civilisational
follies, divination remains
humanity's most enduring trait.

Time and time again,
man's hubris towards the future,
turns his eye to the receding
shadows of the past.

Psephologists, oracles, soothsayers, matchmakers and kingmakers,
would have you believe

that those who can
control the past,

shall control the future

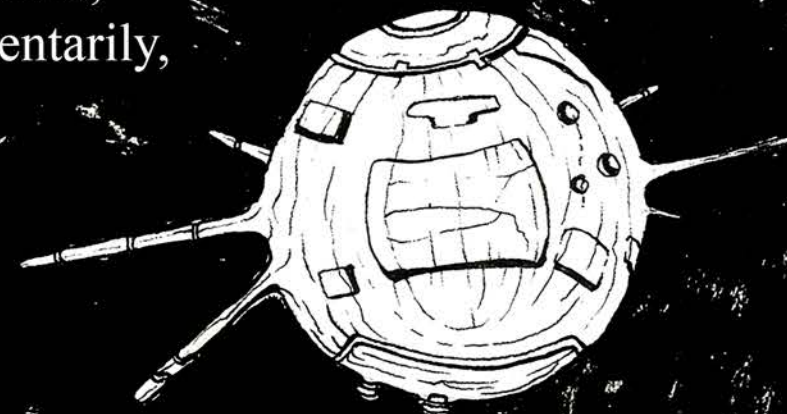




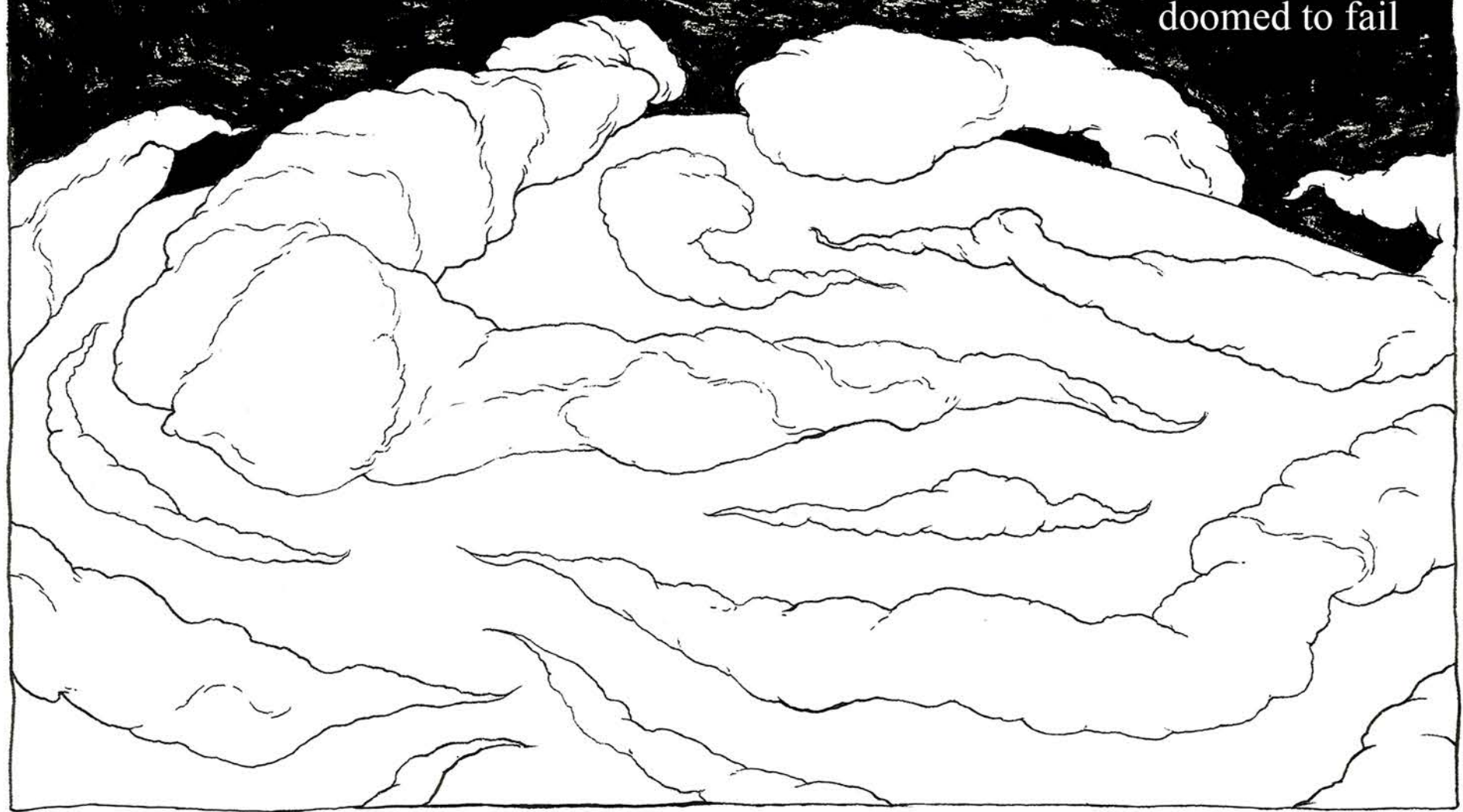
But to affirm this fallacious koan of time possession,

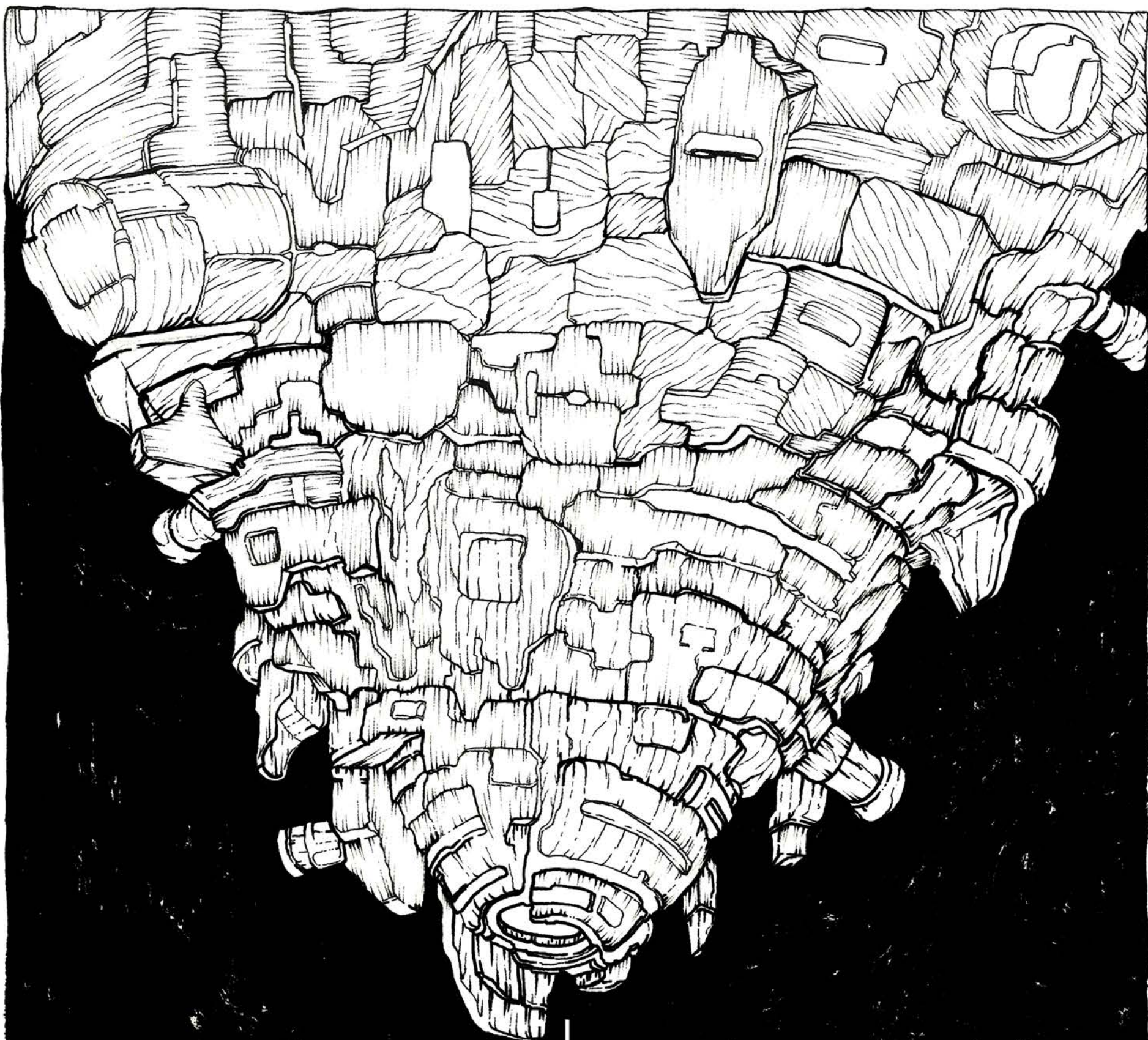


and act upon it,
even momentarily,

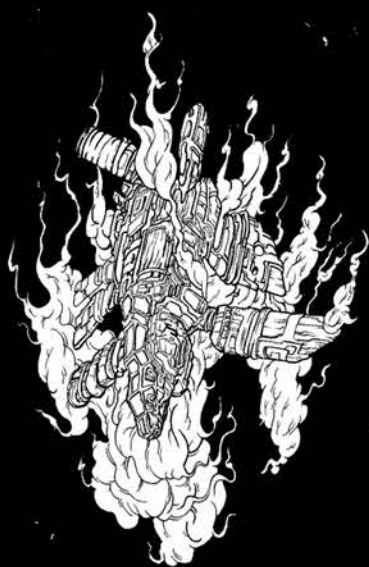


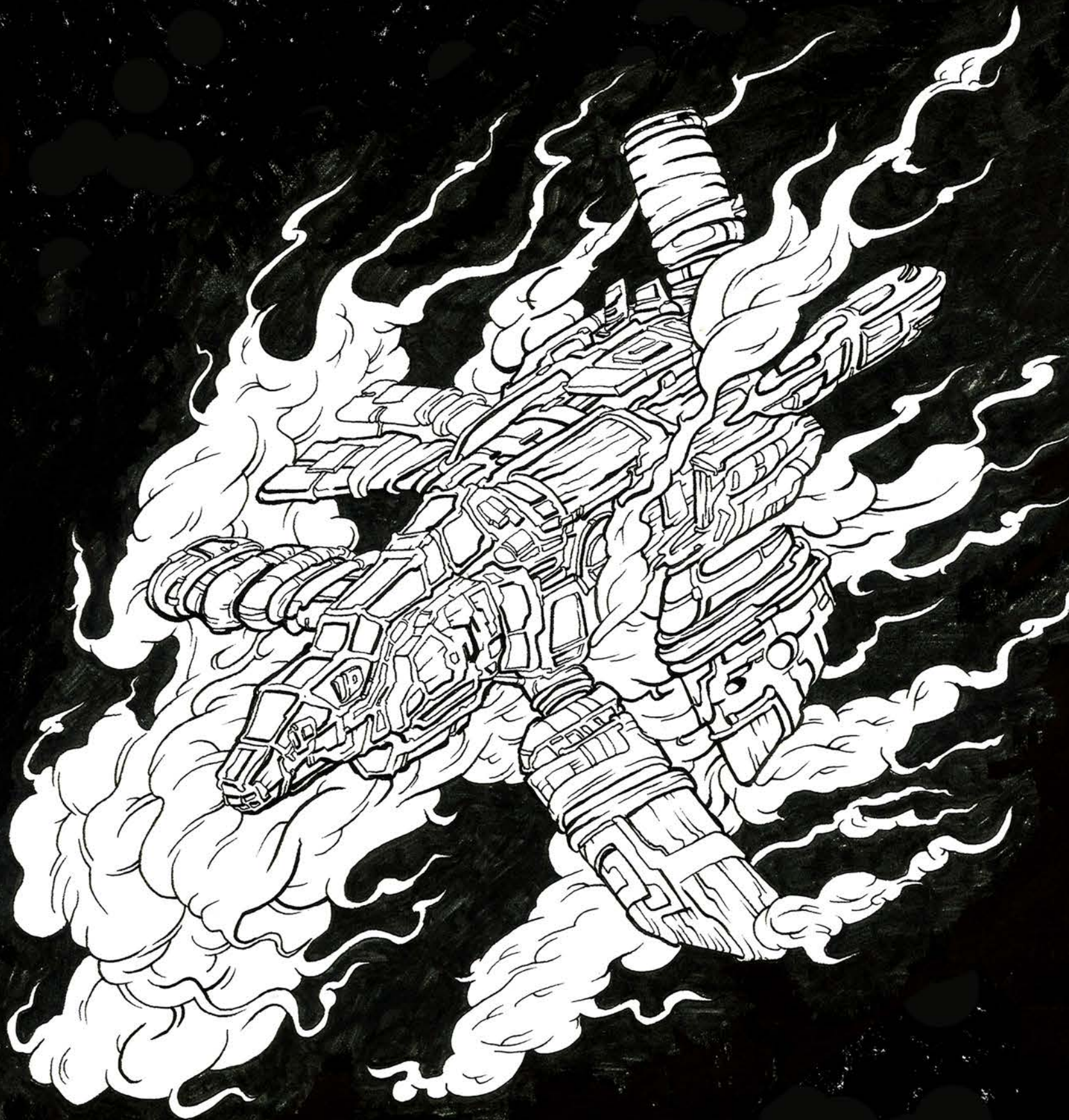
is an exercise
doomed to fail



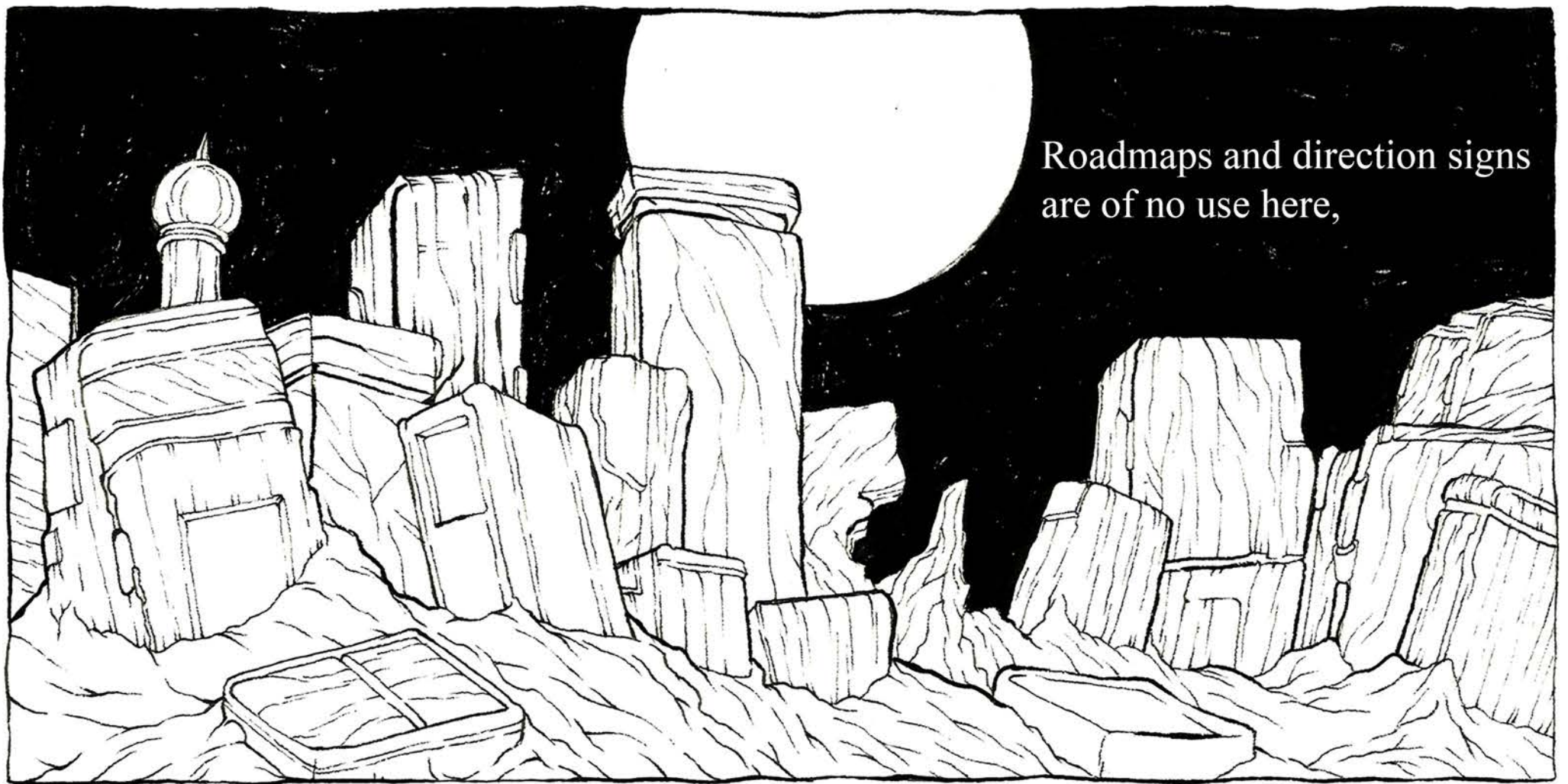


For to speak of 'future past'
is to immediately conscript
oneself,

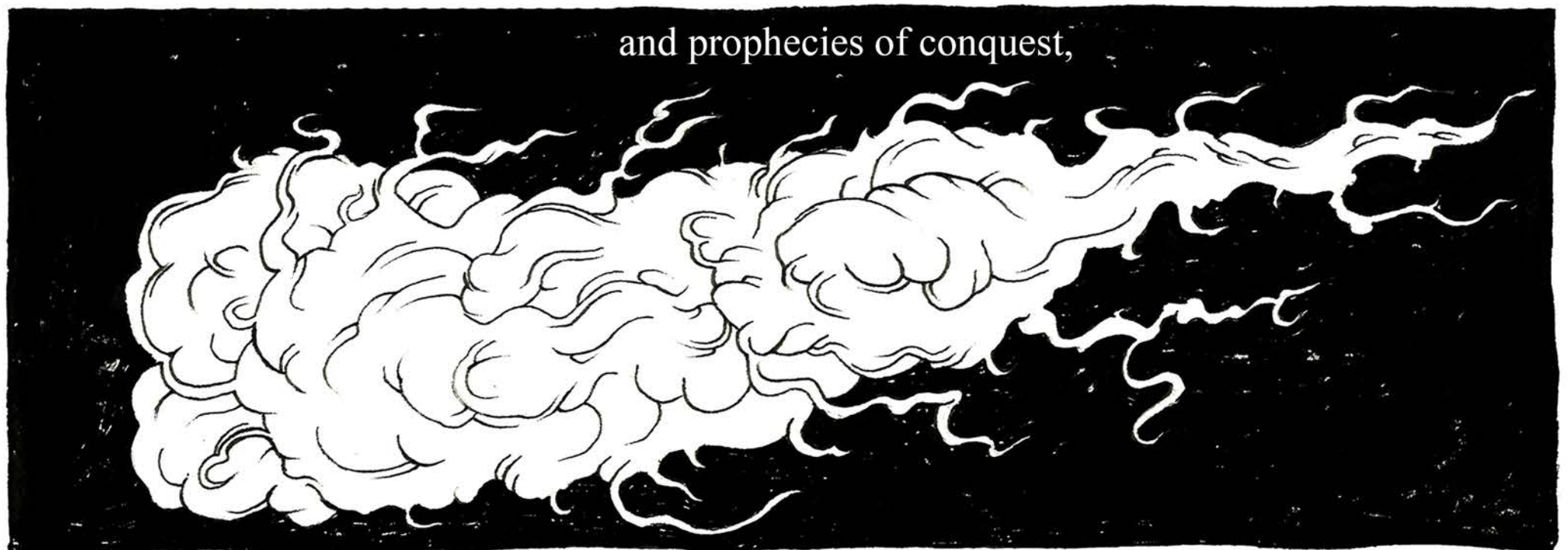




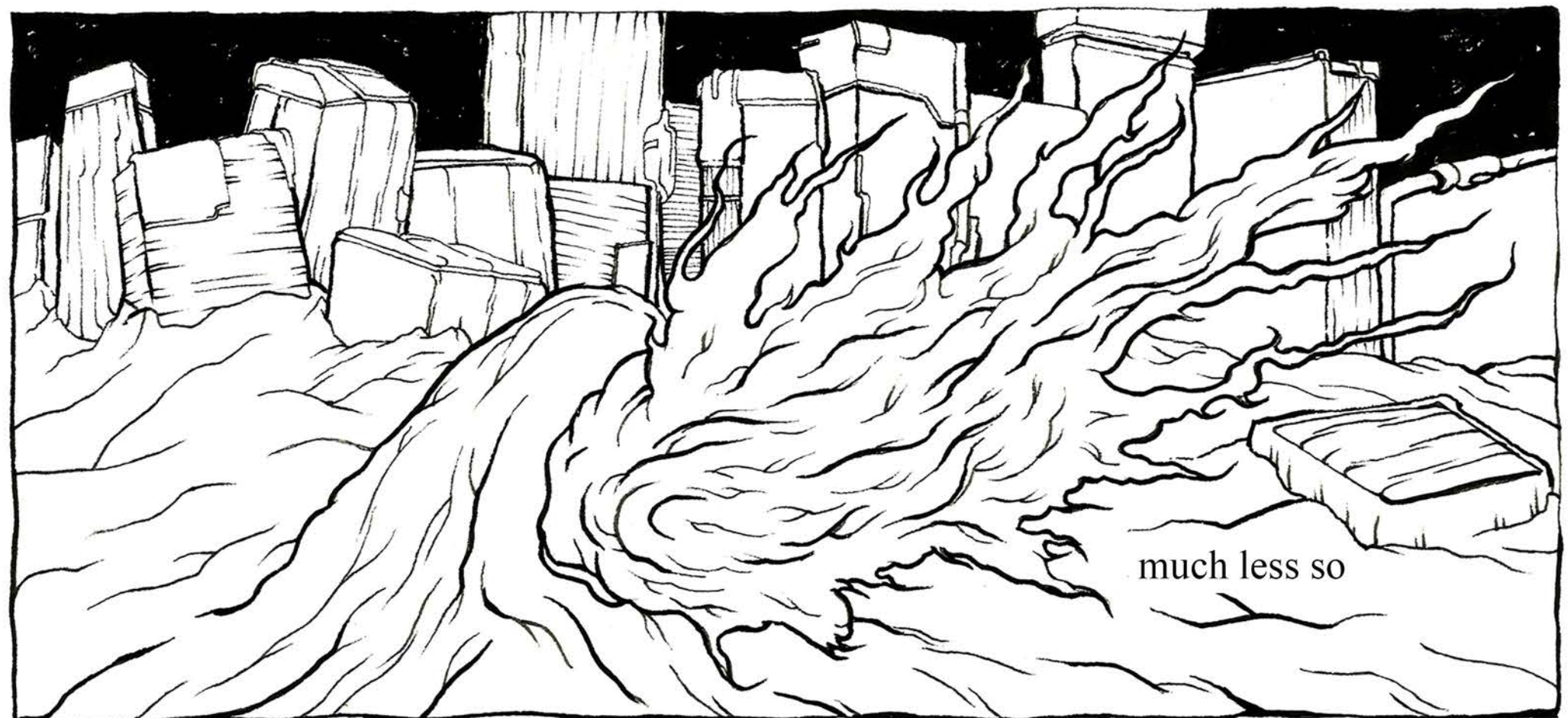
to the uncharted labyrinths, of origins and ends



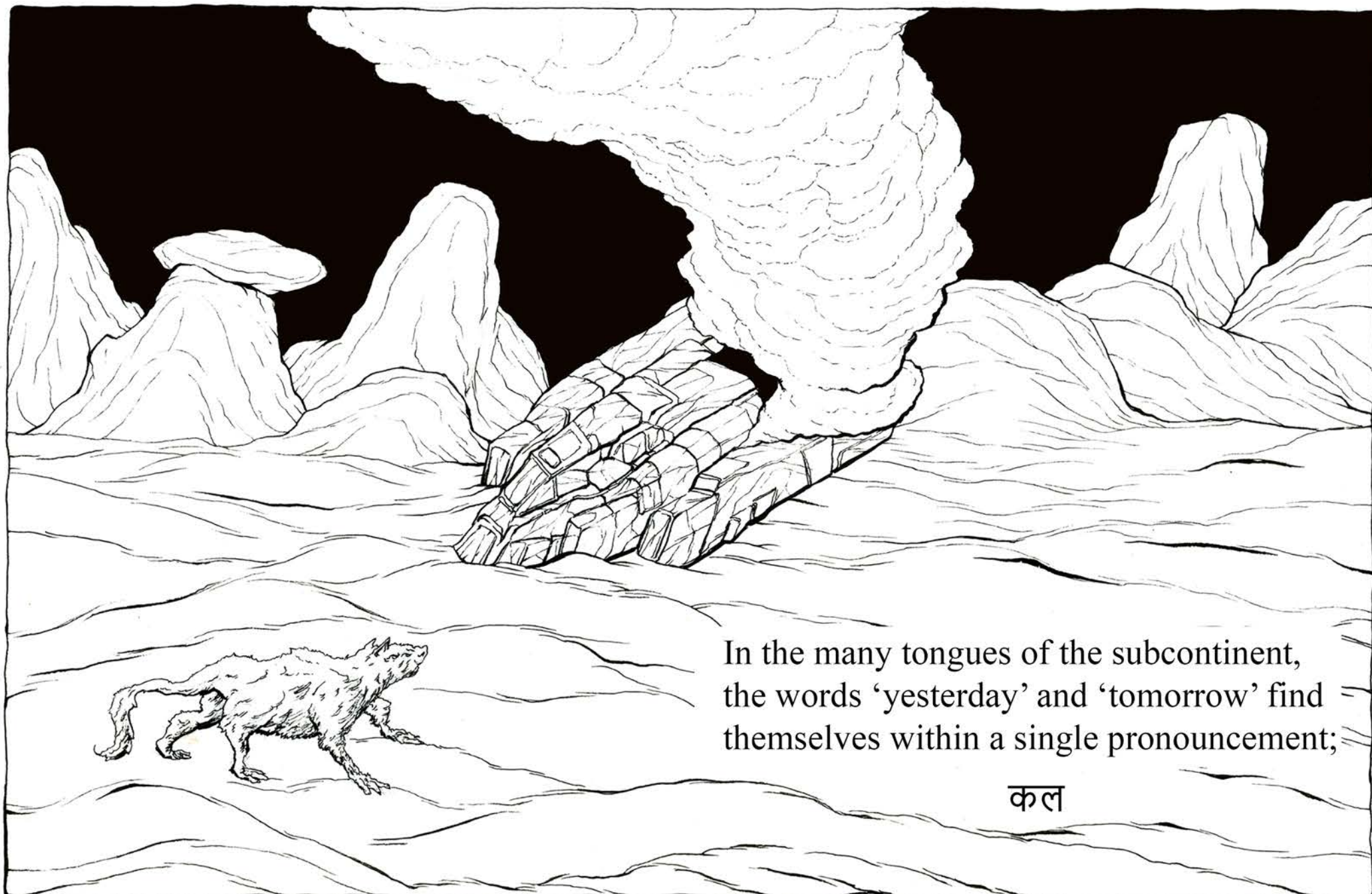
Roadmaps and direction signs
are of no use here,

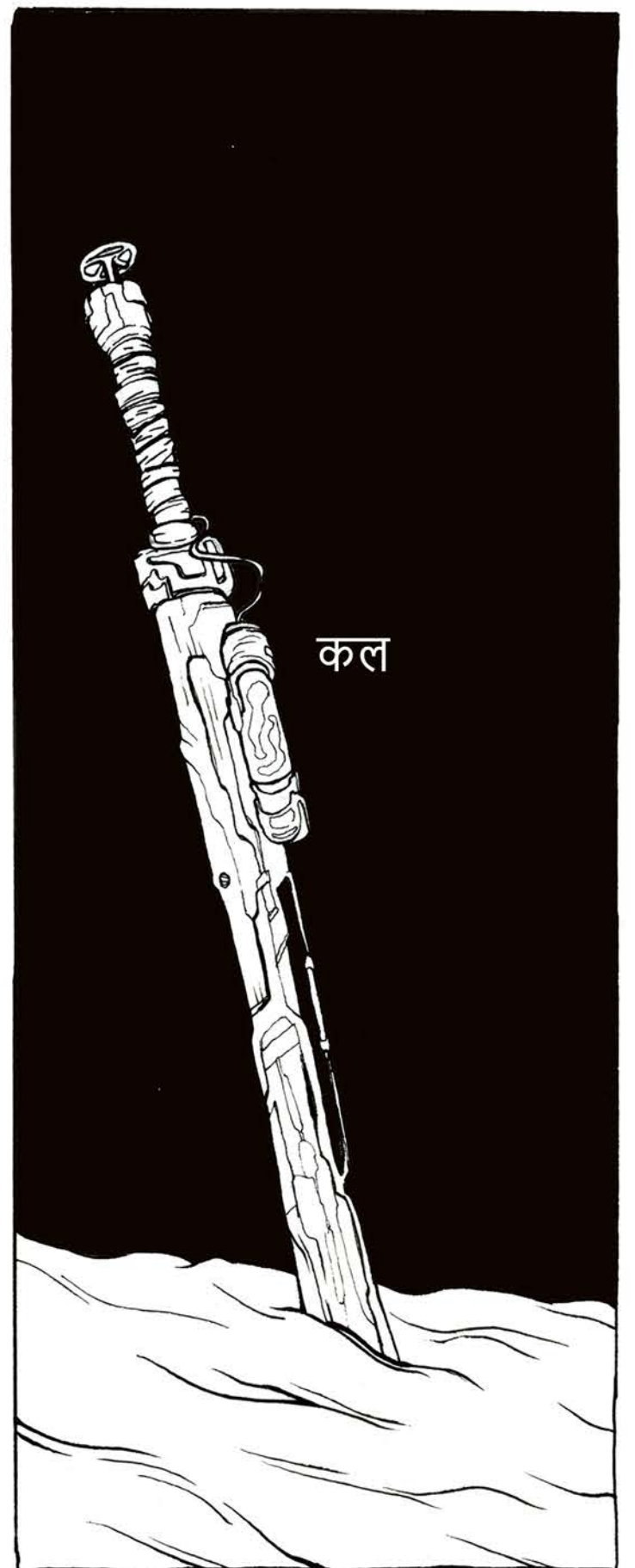


and prophecies of conquest,



much less so







कल



कल



And within this utterance,
the whirlwind of hours, ages, eons
and all temporalites, find themselves,
collapsed within a single word.

one that awaits us,
a day away from now

