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Fluxion Metamorphosis: The Castle of Birds as an Oral Computer

by Peter Duchemin

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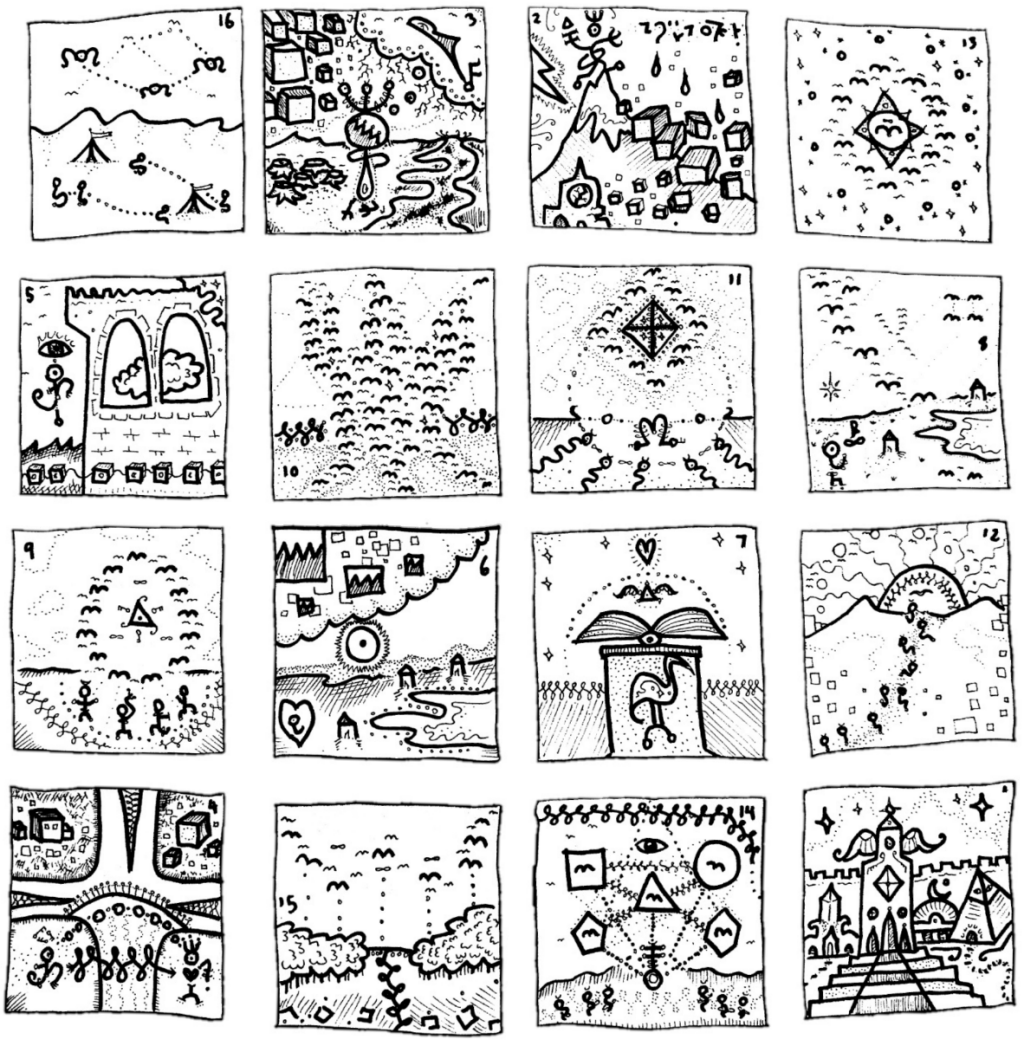


Figure 1- *Castle of Birds Dürer Square.* A synthesis of the key moments of the story arranged as a nonlinear, magical tableaux.

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For additional commentary and accompanying technical and visionary imagery visit: Fluxion Metamorphosis Images: A Commentary | Trans- States.

Abstract

This article examines the idea that a channelled poetic narrative might become rich enough, structurally speaking, to support complex memory work and skilful inter-textual associations. The essay outlines the experience of channelling a neo-rhapsodic work, the layers of structure that have been added to that work in its process of being textualised, and the ethos that the work supports. The work points towards a vision of the future that is inspired by Hesse's Glass Bead Game (1972 [1943]),[1] Gebser's Ever Present Origin (1984 [1949/1953]),[2] and Frank Herbert's Dune (2006 [1965]).[3]

In addition to the introductory essay, the full text of the monologic oration, The Castle of Birds, is given, along with a rich array of illustrations meant to deepen understanding of the "text". Enough information is given in both text and artworks to supply the diligent explorer with enough clues to draw considerably more out of the work than is immediately obvious, simply by experimenting with its mode of imaginal organisation. Such play is recommended.

A live performance of the Castle of Birds, performed in 2019 at Trans- States: The Art of Revelation, may profitably be watched to supplement the experience of this essay, story, and illustrations.[4]

Keywords

Fable, Mentat, glass-bead-games, Storytelling, Failsafe-Orality,

[1] Hesse, Hermann. *The Glass Bead Game*. Penguin Books, 1972.

[2] Gebser, Jean. *The Ever Present Origin*. Ohio University Press, 1984.

[3] Herbert, Frank. *Dune*. Hodder Paperback, 2006.

[4] Peter Duchemin, *The Castle of Birds* (video), Trans- States: The Art of Revelation, 2019, access date February 13, 2022, https://youtu.be/aCTZL77ON7Y.

Should a *Butlerian Jihad* (see editorial endnote) ever be necessary, the *mentats* who inherit the task of knowledge preservation may need to use oralisation strategies that have been gleaned from a reverse engineering of contemporary digital culture. They might seek to compose stories that themselves, by means of special structural features, allow for rich mnemotechnic surface area and dense pattern compression. A baker's dozen of such stories would deploy an array of interacting frameworks upon which vital knowledge-sets may be associated, compressed, and preserved in the social memory. A failsafe orality. An oral computer. A glass bead game. A bird castle.

In September of 2019, at the *Trans- States: the Art of Revelation* conference in Northampton, UK, I debuted *The Castle of Birds*—a work that I had been developing for over a decade at the time, but which I had yet to perform live before an audience.

It is easy enough, perhaps, to view *The Castle* as wholly a fable—as a story seeking simply to impart an esoteric viewpoint, however, it is more than that. I understand the work to be a speech act in the *pragmatic* sense. The play—its reception, development *and* performance—constitute a practice with an inner dimension as rich as its surface. This chapter will shine some light on the story, the contemplative techniques it supports, and the long-view ethos that it instantiates. The illustrations are my own and act as tools for the work's auxiliary role as a mnemonic *loci* system.

The Castle of Birds was a received text, although it was only written down ten years after its first reception. In 2006, in *Bielsko-Biała* Poland, I attended the *International Festival of Puppetry Art* in which one of the featured performances, Birds, was presented by Polish theatre group Voluptarius.[5] It featured industrial music, a large tractor-like machine, and a wordless magical drama:

[5] Niczewski, Paweł. "Birds." Performed by Voluptarius at IFPA (International Festival of Puppetry Art). Bielsko Biała, 2006.

> *A man, clearly inspired and at the helm of his great machine, drove it into the centre of the Bielsko-Biała old town square where he drew (in powder) an enormous magickal circle—a ring of power about 45 feet in diameter. The ritual performance carefully carved out this sacred space in the centre of the old city, and the protagonist proceeded to light several oil-drum hearths within it. Next, a trio of brilliantly costumed stilt-birds brought to him a gift: they offered him a great bushel of dancing, pearl-white helium balloons, which he festooned upon his great machine (now in the centre of the circle), such that they hovered over the scene, as hundreds of people watched. Following the bird's exit, there was a shift in tone. Three more sinister figures—men and women in leather S&M aesthetics—encroached upon the circle. The circle held. With vivid techniques of mime, and accompanied to a frenzied noise-techno drone, the trio pushed against the invisible bubble of the magick circle—and were kept at bay by the gesticulating magus in his pearl-crowned machine. They pushed and he resisted—back and forth as the play and music grew more intense. They circled and slunk—beleaguering his resolve, draining his resistance—a dance that drew on for many moments, until at last—besieged in his circle, the magician collapsed upon the frame of his machine as the sinister intruders burst through the barrier (made to visually "pop" by the mime-work). The circle burst into flame. The antagonists gleefully and mockingly decimated and violated the sacred space. They pulled down the balloons and tore them apart as the harried sage lay prone on his apparatus. One by one the dreams broke until a just single balloon remained. The musical and dramatic tension was almost unbearable. Then—like storm clouds breaking—the relief came. Out of the side streets of Bielska-Biała, the three great birds strode, 12 feet tall apiece, shining with color—and they drove the interlopers a-scatter, leaving our hero haggard-yet-triumphant—forged by the ordeal and still holding onto his last, precious balloon. They took their bow and exited.*

I was left with a frustrating sense of unresolved tension. The release was incomplete.

> *The whole cast returned for the encore. They took their bow. And then...*

> *... the Mage took one last look at the crowd, bowed deeply, and upon rising, released—CAST—his last balloon into the cloudless sky, and they left.*

I stood there watching that balloon soar into the blue for twenty minutes or more in silence, until it was totally gone from view.

In the 45 minutes that followed I conceived *The Castle of Birds*, which came to me like a jewel, spontaneously crystalizing—complete in itself. It felt as if it was already written from beginning to end, and I had just plucked it out of the aether. To crown this moment, a particularly mysterious song, "The Riddle" that I had long forgotten from my childhood spontaneously played on the radio of the cafe I was sitting at, sending shivers down my spine. [6]

I relate this story to convey how the *Castle of Birds* was received—in a naive mode of mind, in a receptive, aesthetic, and liminal mode. I did not, for example, know at the time that the spectacle I had witnessed was a tribute to Aristophanes' *The Birds*, and that the Magus was none other than ***Peisthetaerus*** himself (though named "Dobromir" in the festival literature). [7] I had no idea what a "cloud-kookoo-land" was. Indeed, I studiously avoided learning more about the show itself for almost fifteen years and only actually read the Aristophanes play well after my performance in Northampton—though I now acknowledge the parallels. *The Castle of Birds* hovered in my soul for ten years before I ever wrote it down. It felt like a prophecy—of my own intellectual and spiritual development, and more generally—of metamorphoses of mind and thought that can be seen in the broader culture. It felt like a direct, rather than a mediated conveyance of a tale that is older than I could have known. In the years following its reception, I lived through it, and it lived through me.

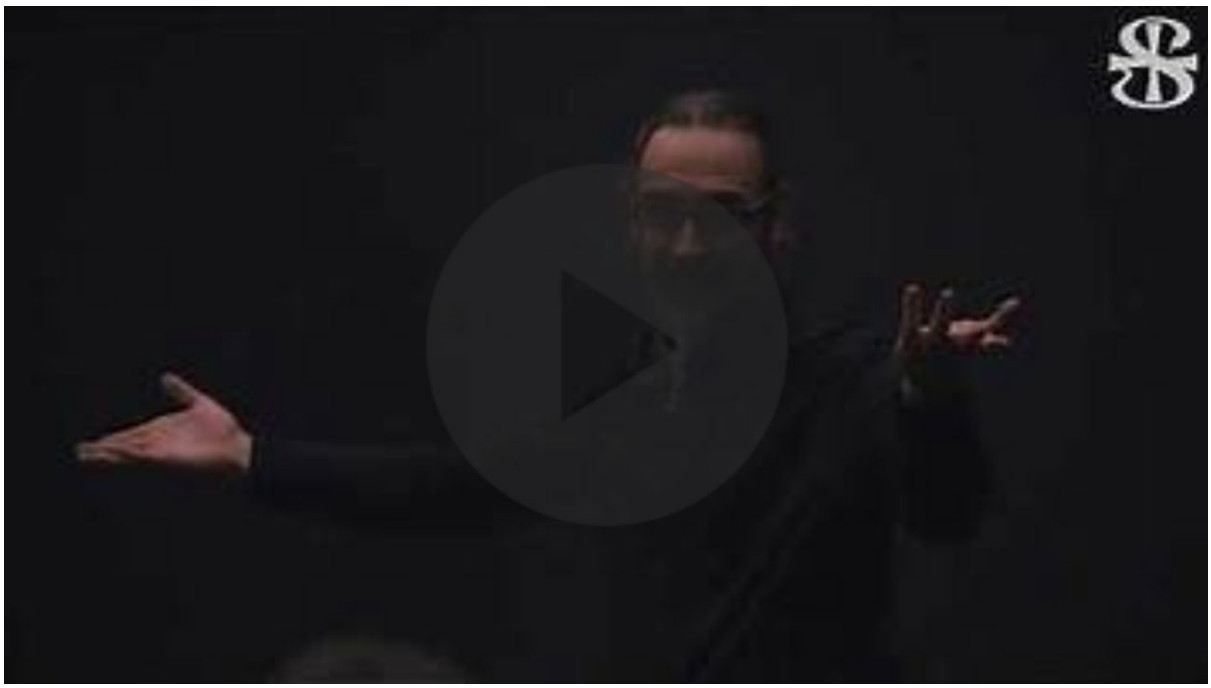
[6] Kershaw, Nick. "The Riddle." *The Riddle*. MCA, 1984

[7] Aristophanes, *The Birds and Other Plays*. Penguin Books, 1978.

By the time I did transcribe it, in 2016, by my own judgement I had already gone through *three* of the metamorphoses entailed in its program and was on the verge of triggering the fourth.

Author's Note: At this point, I recommend that you watch the Castle of Birds before continuing.

***The Castle of Birds* (2019, 33 min)**



The story initially depicts a fundamental state of enmeshment with the world—the **Wanderers**. This state of enmeshment is usurped by the reception of literacy into a culture based on the dichotomy of inside-outside in fixed relation—The **Temples**. The flaws of that second order eventually become exacerbated and lead to the pathological metamorphosis—the cynical calling of the **Cubes**, which finally culminates, as the cubic apocalypse breaks—only at the last minute—into the **Bird Castles**: an emergent synthesis of the architectural and the organic that releases a refrain of the wander-state.

"In the end, as in the beginning, the people were wanderers, like the birds". The text's conclusion is *ouroboric*—it references its beginning.

For me, these stages mapped onto my childhood prior to engagement with esotericism (wanderers), my engagements with esotericism (temples), my academic and analytical dissection of esoteric thought-patterns (cubes), and... everything post 2019 has been bird-castles.

The following are some reflections on the more esoteric implications of the work.

Notably, the whole text can be read as an *incantation*. It began in orality and only passed through literacy in order to be recovered as a memorized and performed bardic work—it is an oration. Nor, in practice, is the text fixed, or rigid. To do it justice, it must be drawn off the page, into the heart, and be then told—and told in a way that is sensitive to context. Lines evolve; stanzas change—scenes are adapted. *The text recorded in this journal is not the final text—there is no final text.* That is not what *the Castle of Birds* is for. It is meant to be alive, and to be a practice. Text is intermediate. The commitment-to-heart of *the Castle of Birds* is itself a major task. Before performing it live at the *Trans-States* conference, I had put several hundred hours into the script, to the point where I could begin to depart from it in performance.

The Castle of Birds seeks to push literacy through itself from fluidity into rigidity and back into fluidity. That is what it is about, and that is what it embodies as a practice. *Fluxion metamorphosis*. It began as a freeform story. It became scripted. The script was memorized. The memorization carried mnemonic baggage and erected a temple in its own right—and yet the performance of the work continuously transcends the script, transcends the temple that the script's architecture carries, and makes a statement about storytelling as a pattern-preserving technique-ology that transcends even the story.

The Castle of Birds is not so much "about" its "contents" as it is a *performative utterance*: a practical re-engagement of orality on the far side of literacy. During the story's process of development, it became indexed to a memorial palace built around an array of visualizable cubes.

It is important at this stage to note that mnemonics has a mode proper to magical thinking (i.e. the doctrine of signatures; chains of similarity and likeness, etc...), as well as a mode more appropriate to ratiocinative thought (i.e. dialectical ordering structures; general-to-specific frames; arbitrary assignment of contents to framework, etc..). The system that *the Castle of Birds* was organized into has features of *both* the rational and mythopoeic mnemonics—both sides of the *Bruno/Ramus* debate. For instance, when the text was prepared, it was organized into 88 groupings. These groupings were cross-indexed to the 88 modern constellations in an order that has nothing to do with mystical likenesses between the themes of the text and the constellations. It is simply a convenient way of calling the constellations to mind, while at the same time ensuring that while the story is being told outwardly, inwardly, a stellarium is being simultaneously conjured!

Similarly, the 88 parts of the story are assigned to the 88 days of the orbit of Mercury using an esoteric calendar I developed in 2003 called the Thoth Count—which preserves names and associations to the days in order to affect a running memorialization of things that are useful to know—much like how the French Revolutionary calendar named its days after technologies. BUT—this indexing of story-to-calendar-to-constellation *itself* serves as a hub into which several esoteric systems have been connected, including the Enochian watchtowers of Dr. Dee, and the major arcana of the Tarot.

A series of 88 images were divined through visionary meditations that also became associated to this calendar, and to this story, and to the Tarot—even though they are not necessarily related to each other's contents. The structure itself is the framework that carries the different sets of memorial content: *including the Castle*. The methods of memorialization are hybrid.

The *armature* upon which I have internalized the work refers to an extensive correspondence system centered around the Mercurial orbit but also extending from there into a far vaster array composed of an orrery of nine such planetary calendars. This is meant to show us one possible strategy for how we might consider orality itself as a still-viable strategy in the contemporary hypermediated context.

Using orbital periods as memory palaces, we can convert a system's worth of celestial movements into a polycalendrical program of contemplation. In other words, if we deploy shared temporal frameworks which host target knowledges socially—a deployment which *experimental calendrics* affords us—then rhapsodic stories such as *the Castle of Birds* may become the means by which these deep thought-worlds are initially conveyed. The act of learning such a tale *by heart* is an apprenticeship to the very knowledge sets that these narratives are intended to preserve.

A Glass Bead Game—a Universal Knowledge Index—a ***Castle of Birds***.

The Castle of Birds is a flagship—or proof of concept—for the idea of a **failsafe orality.** The story was not, of course, designed on purpose to be interfaced with the calendars and the larger frames of this knowledge index. The process of integration of these different aspects was gradual. Part of the story's suitability for this integration is, I would argue, directly due to the fact that as much design as there clearly is in its structure, that design was grown, not built—but it was grown under the contemplative *aegis* of the story itself!

A failsafe orality is emergent, not artificed. The design elements are an intermediate phase between its initial and final naivety: wanderers on either side of the narrative's arc. It evokes the process without being consciously designed to evoke it. It just happened.

The *Castle of Birds* is therefore first and foremost a story, a fable, a prose-poem, a script for a one-person rhapsodic oration.

In this form it speaks for itself. It is about successive metamorphoses of the soul—not unlike those accounted for in Gebser's, *The Ever Present Origin*—metamorphoses that pass through efficient and deficient phases of expression, and which depict shifting relations between change and stasis that culminate in an integration of the two. This integration restores the polar tension to its origins, like an ouroboros—but having developed an expanded nature in the course of alienation. The parallels here were unintentional but striking.

The Castle of Birds itself exemplifies the process by which it has been given associations, broken up, carved into cubes, and ultimately reconstituted such that it carries a mnemotechnic network. The methodology is therefore part of the message: *that stories can deposit memory loci which may be used to store ideas in visualizable arrays, and that those ideas which it stores need not be associated by means of "likeness": **they can simply be put there because they fit.***

This raises the possibility of an *oeuvre* of such tales—Bardish prose-poems practiced so as to be pronounced in performance but also explored in deep ways as to how they might become repositories of knowledge—occult, scientific, artistic, literary, cosmographic, calendrical—it is not so important the specifics of such content. What *is* important is that the story becomes a kind of *orally transmittable computer* that, when practiced in a community for whom the association-conventions are also known, supports a failsafe orality.

Generalized into a methodological principle, and accepting that "bird" is a metaphor for *a unit of information remembered by persons*, then the story lives up to its titular promise:

The Castle of Birds is a blueprint for A Castle of Birds.



I - *The Temples*

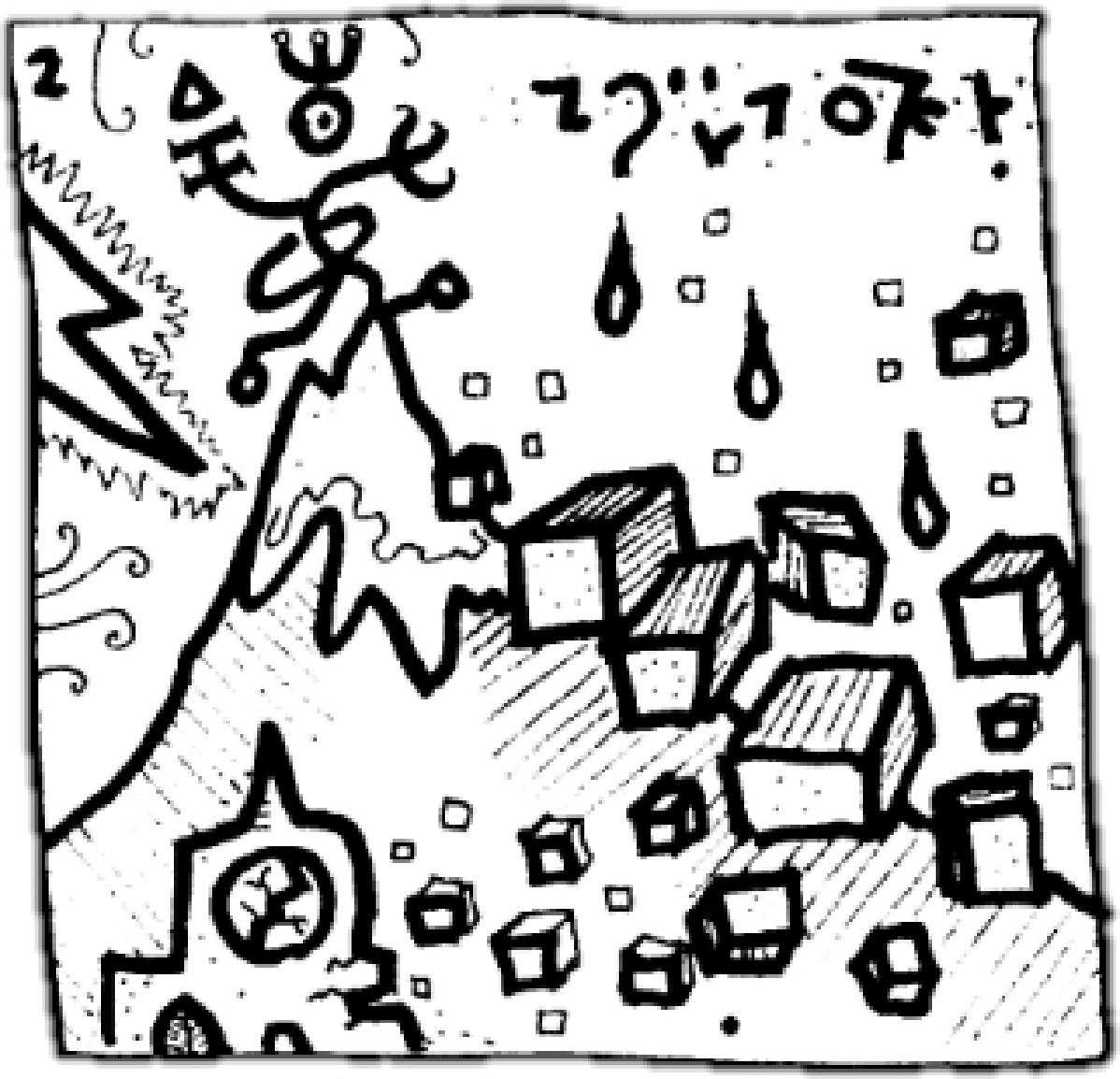
1. The first people were wanderers like the birds. They moved across the world, alongside the seasons. They ate from the land and sea. They made their clothes from the fur-backed beasts that they would hunt and capture, and this was so for countless moons.

2. For countless moons this was so, until one day a young wanderer had a dream. In this dream, a spirit of the air appeared and whispered a magic word. It drew the word in sand with a gleaming feather. This is how writing was born.

3. As the people wrote, they stopped wandering. They built libraries and temples and lived nearby. They began to count the years, and as the years went by they lost their old stories and songs.

4. The temples became magnificent and began to issue laws. The libraries were full of laws, and codes, and rules and lists. Eventually a time came when it was against the law to wander. And in that time the people forgot the stars.

5. In the time of temples, the written word was like a god, and in the time of gods, the wanderers turned inward and forgot the world. It was a time that was wonderful and terrible. So many temples were built, so many books were written. The old ways were forgotten and the heavens seemed flat.



II - *The Magician*

6. In the time of the temple's triumph, there lived a magician of great power, who through long study in the most ancient libraries learned of a secret, terrible word. A word which would change everything.

7. Seeing as laws were treated like gods, and that the old ways of wandering were lost, he grieved for the world and burned with anger. Atop a lonely mountain, at the heart of a brewing storm, he screamed the frightful word in hopes that it would restore what had been lost by bringing change back into the frozen world of books and towers. He did not expect the terrible result.

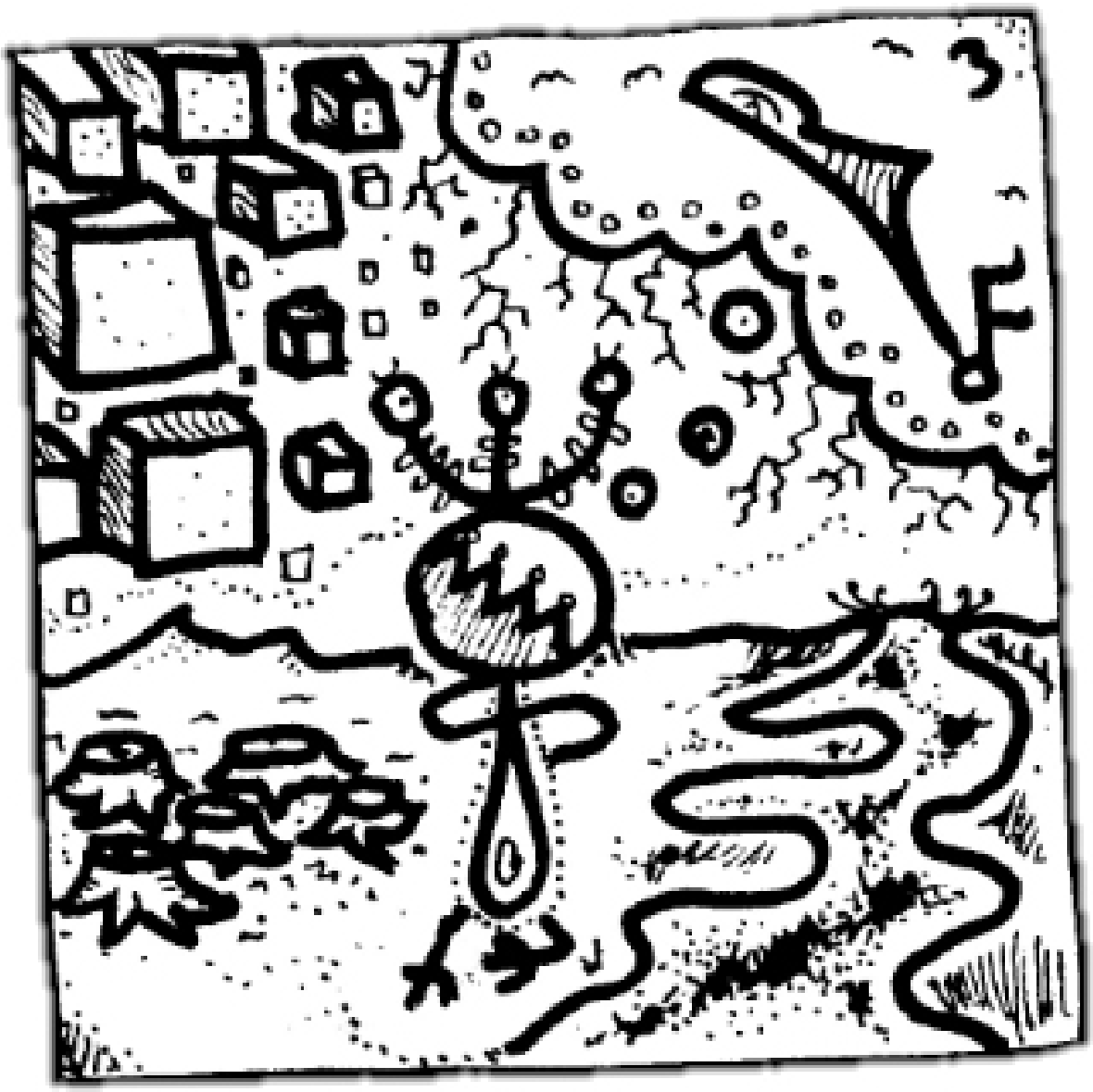
8. The world transformed overnight. As if out of nowhere, new ideas sprung. As if out of nowhere, societies changed. Language changed. People changed. So swift and so sudden were the changes, that everything familiar began to collapse.

9. Cities were disrupted as new architectures emerged. What was once considered beautiful became ugly, and what was once considered ugly became beautiful, and all the world fell in love with cubes.

10. Flat. Grey. Featureless. Within a short period of time—just a few years—more and more cubes were built. Buildings, toys, vehicles. Soon everything was made of cubes.

11. Even the old buildings, the old spaces were dismantled and re-arranged. Cubes were transported from place to place, city to city, carried on the backs of the people who treasured them.

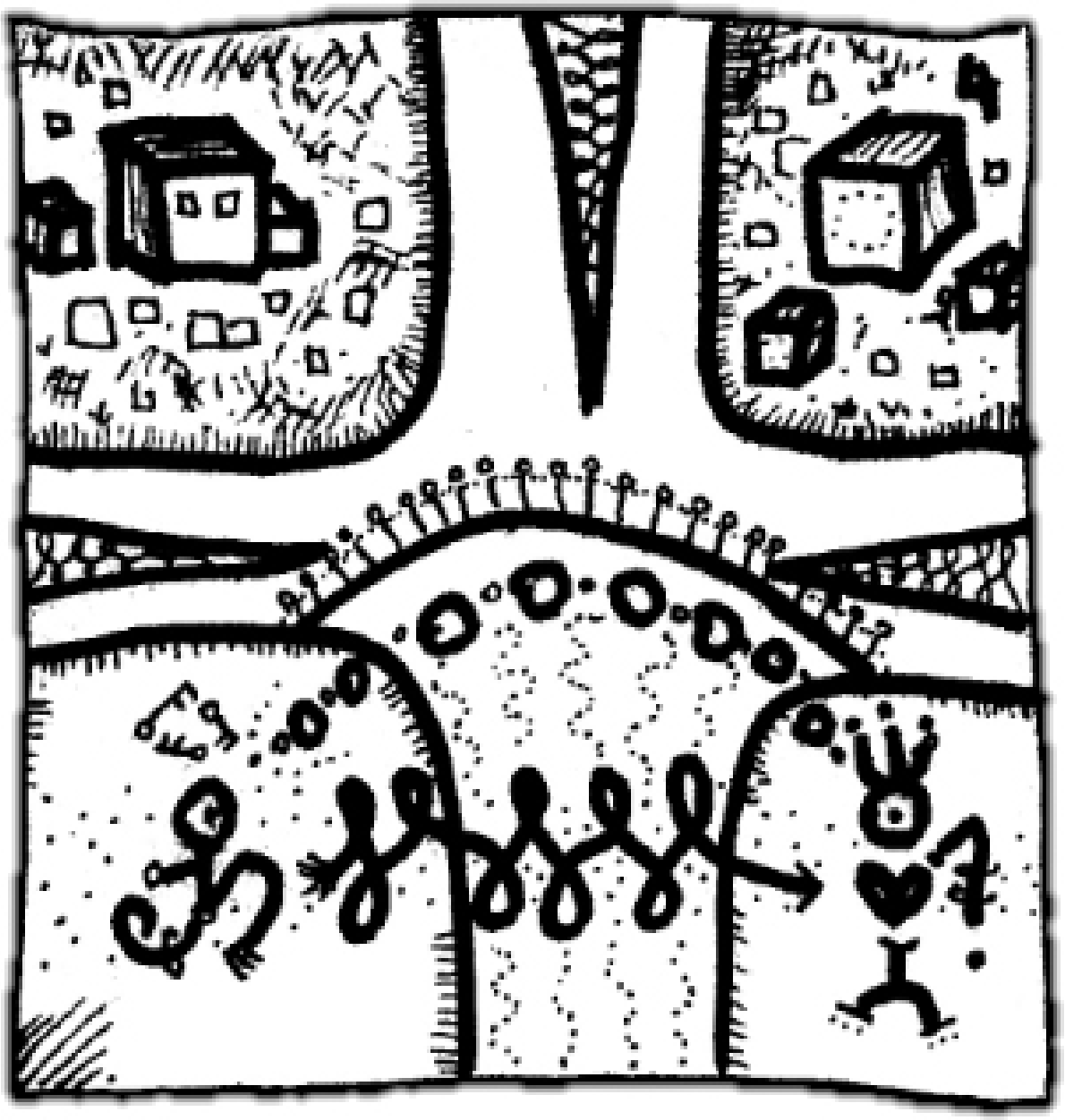
12. And so it was that the world changed from a place of standing temples to a place of wandering cubes. And there was no happiness.



III - *The Aftermath*

13. The mighty magician was filled with remorse. He began to look for a way to undo the damage that he had caused. But the libraries were gone, broken into cubes and divided amongst a hundred cities. A hundred times a hundred. He went to the forests to think, but the trees had been cut down, and the forests were silent. He went to the rivers to rest, but the rivers were dirty with waste.

14. The cubes rose up and swallowed the world. In his heart, the magician took responsibility. As the green of the world died and the grey cubes spread everywhere, the great wizard dreamed. In his dreams he spoke with a messenger from a time not yet, who gave him a new word, written on his breath with a dancing feather. That morning, he spoke the word, but nothing happened. The cubes continued to grow. That evening, he spoke the word again, but nothing happened. The cubes continued to spread. Every morning, and every evening he spoke the words, but nothing ever happened, so he gave up in despair.

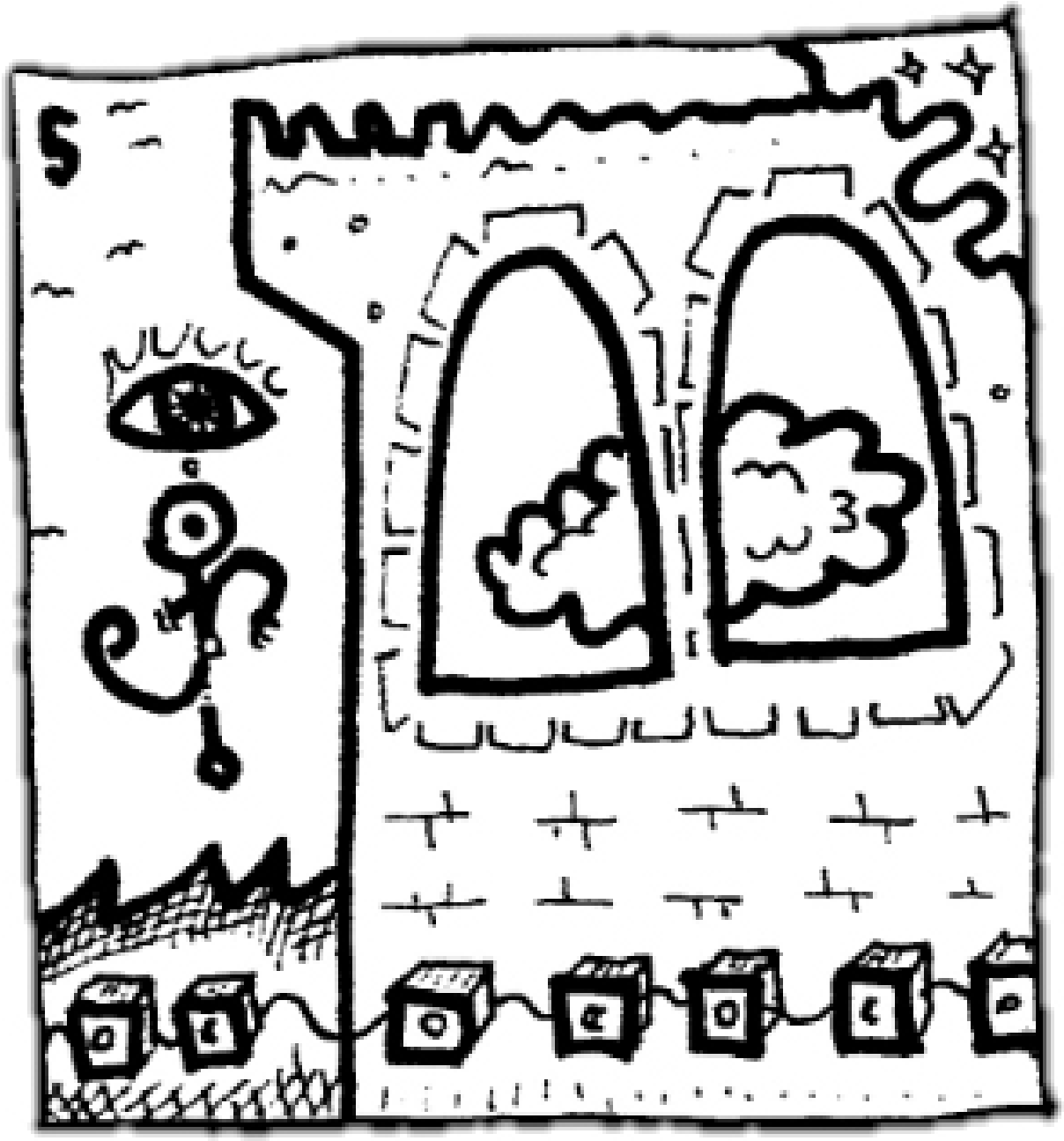


IV - *The Crossroads*

15. On rolled the seasons, and soon the mighty wizard was all but forgotten. After three decades, there was no word. One day, however, a young man was carrying his cube from one cube to another. He passed through a crossroads, where many travelers traded cubes before moving on. There he saw an old, old man, leaning up against the side of a cube.

16. He had been told not to pay attention to the ones who fall, who drop their cubes. He had been warned that to give them time, any time at all, would be to risk being pulled down himself. But he was kind, and so he approached the elder. The aged man asked for some food and although he only had enough for himself, tucked away in one of his cubes, he split it and they shared the ration together.

17. After they were finished, the old man smiled a toothy smile, leaned over, and whispered into the young one's ear. He then winked, turned around, and hobbled off around the corner of a cube. The young man followed, turned the corner and looked, but the old man was gone. He was astonished. He did not understand what the old wizard had said to him, so he shrugged his shoulders and went on his way.



V - *The Dreams*

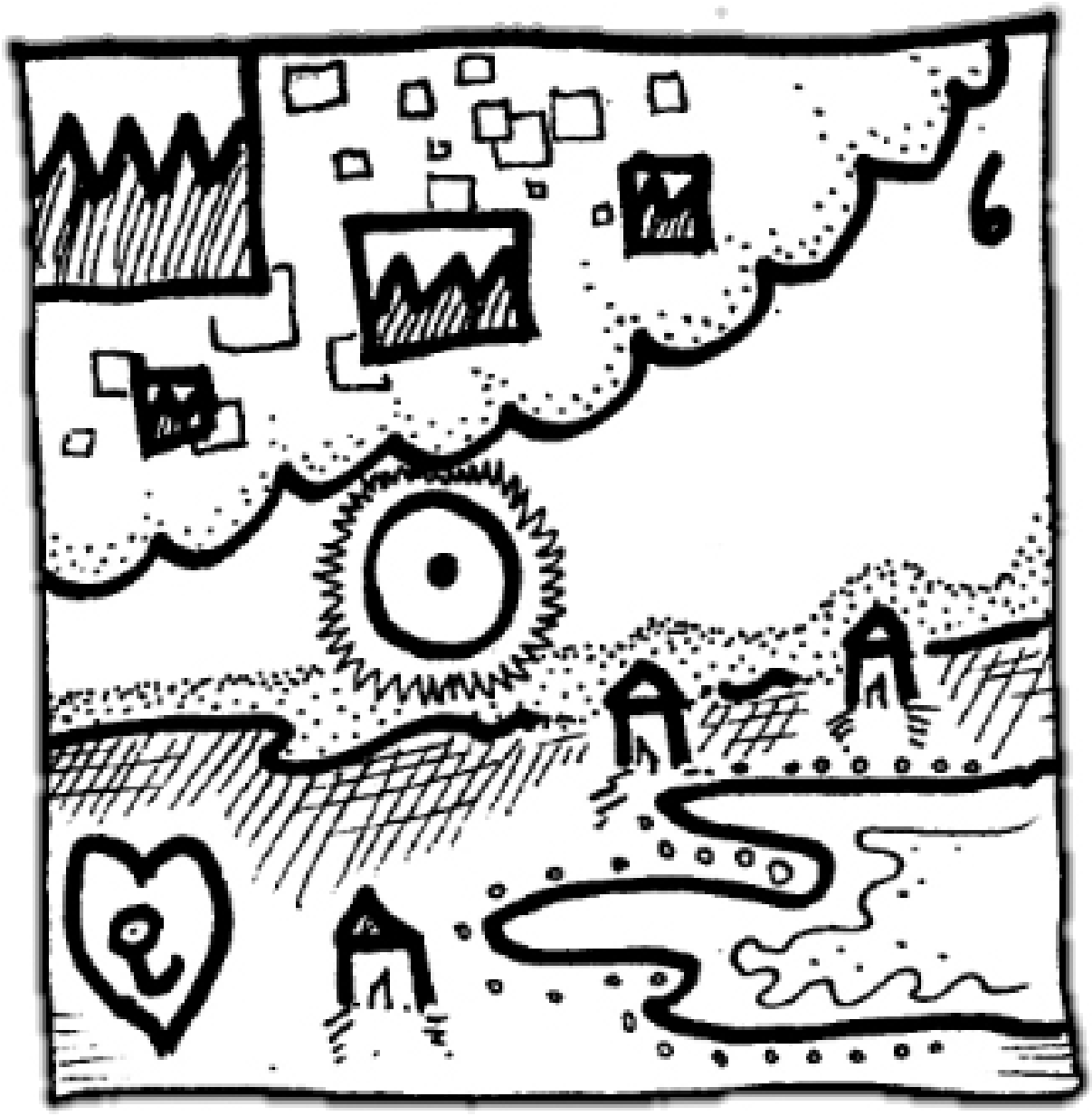
18. Years went by and the young man had strange dreams. In them he saw great castles filled with rooms. In the rooms were enormous windows, and looking out of them, it seemed as if he were three miles up, soaring above the clouds.

19. But every day he awoke, and every day just like everybody else, he carried cubes full of cubes through cubes full of cubes to cubes full of cubes in exchange for cubes full of cubes.

20. Night after night, dream after dream. Day after day, cube after cube. He forgot the word the wizard had told him and yet, somehow, he lived inside of it.

21. Time passed, as it does, and the world became greyer. Forests retreated and disappeared. Streams turned brown, clogged, and dried. Creatures who once lived there seemed to vanish from the world.

22. Once great lakes became mere ponds. Worn-out fishing boats stranded in sand-dunes, miles and miles and miles from water. The cubes thrived and the world died, and yet still he dreamed of flying castles.



VI - *The Child*

23. Even in such times, people love. Soon enough after, a young woman man crossed paths with the young man, and together they had a child.

24. She was a little girl name Sophia. In the world into which Sophia was born the forests were gone, the creatures had fled, and the waters had parched and gone foul.

25. She grew up learning about the old temples from reading the scraps of books that had been salvaged here and there from when the libraries were dismantled.

26. She loved castles. There were no castles left. There were no forests, no libraries. No lakes, but puddles.

27. Soon enough the young family was forced to settle by a puddle that had once been a lake. There was a scattered community here, living in corrugated tin shacks, caked in dust. They lived off of muck and weeds, and rare, scavenged rations. The place was called Oasis, but Oasis was dying.

28. Sophia dreamt each night of great, ravenous cubes bearing down upon her. Blotting the horizon, crowding out the sun. Monstrous cubes closing ever in, hungry to devour every last thing left.

29. Her father tried to comfort her by telling her stories about magic and about mystery and about beauty. But still, she was haunted by these nightmares.



VII - *The Book*

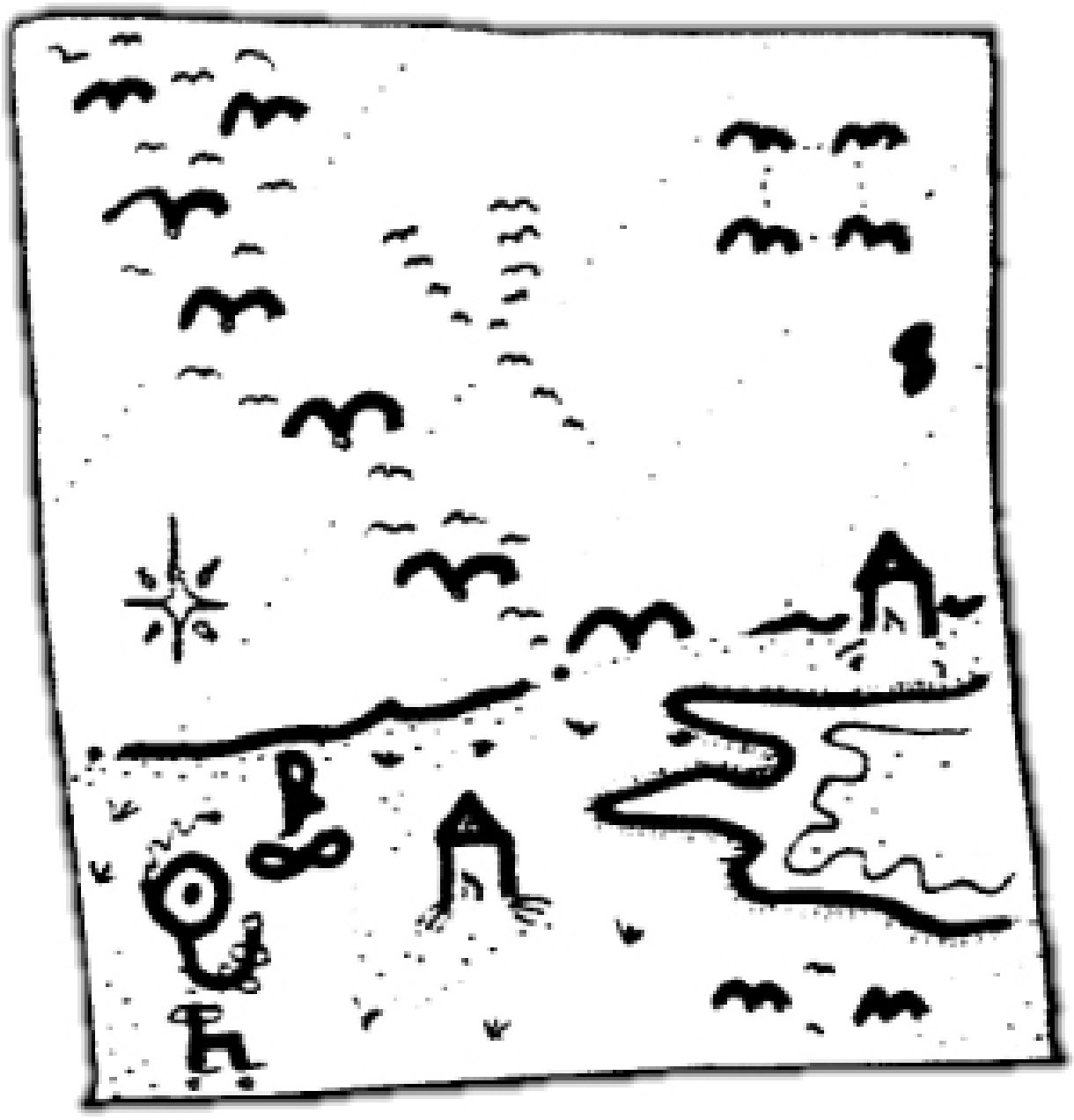
30. One night in sleep, the young father visited a dream-room that he had long forgotten. In it was a beautifully carved wooden altar, and on that altar was a book. On the cover of the book, all inlaid in gold, was the image of a heron.

31. He went towards it and picked it up. It was both heavy and light at the same time. It opened, like a flower in his hands.

32. As the pages fanned the air, he could feel a wind in his hair. There was only a single word in the whole entire book: a single word which flew off the page, and into his heart. It flew into his heart, and he immediately awoke.

33. He remembered the word that the wizard had told him. He realised that this word is what had changed his dreams and allowed him to visit sky-high castles every evening. This was what had allowed him to remember magic.

34. He knew it was his responsibility to tell it to Sophia so that she too could fly in the dream castle. So that morning as the three of them walked by the water, he told them both about the word which he had recalled from his dreams.



VIII - *The Starlings*

35. They were passing the shore of the oasis. It was a small pond that had once been a mighty lake, surrounded by tall trees. Now it was dry, and the mud around it was cracked like a spider's web. There were just a few grasses living there, poking their stunted heads out of the dust that shrouded the pitiful and scanty huts.

36. Suddenly Sophia cried out in delight and pointed.

37. Look! There was something extraordinary:

38. A small flock of birds had alighted in the grass.

39. There were about thirty starlings there.

40. The three of them gathered around to witness this rarest of rare sights.

41. And then it happened.

42. Sophia spoke the word.

43. She spoke the word directly to the birds.

44. She spoke the word and four little birds took flight in a perfect square.

45. Four starlings took flight together, keeping exact distance between.

46. Four corners at equal angles. A perfect square.

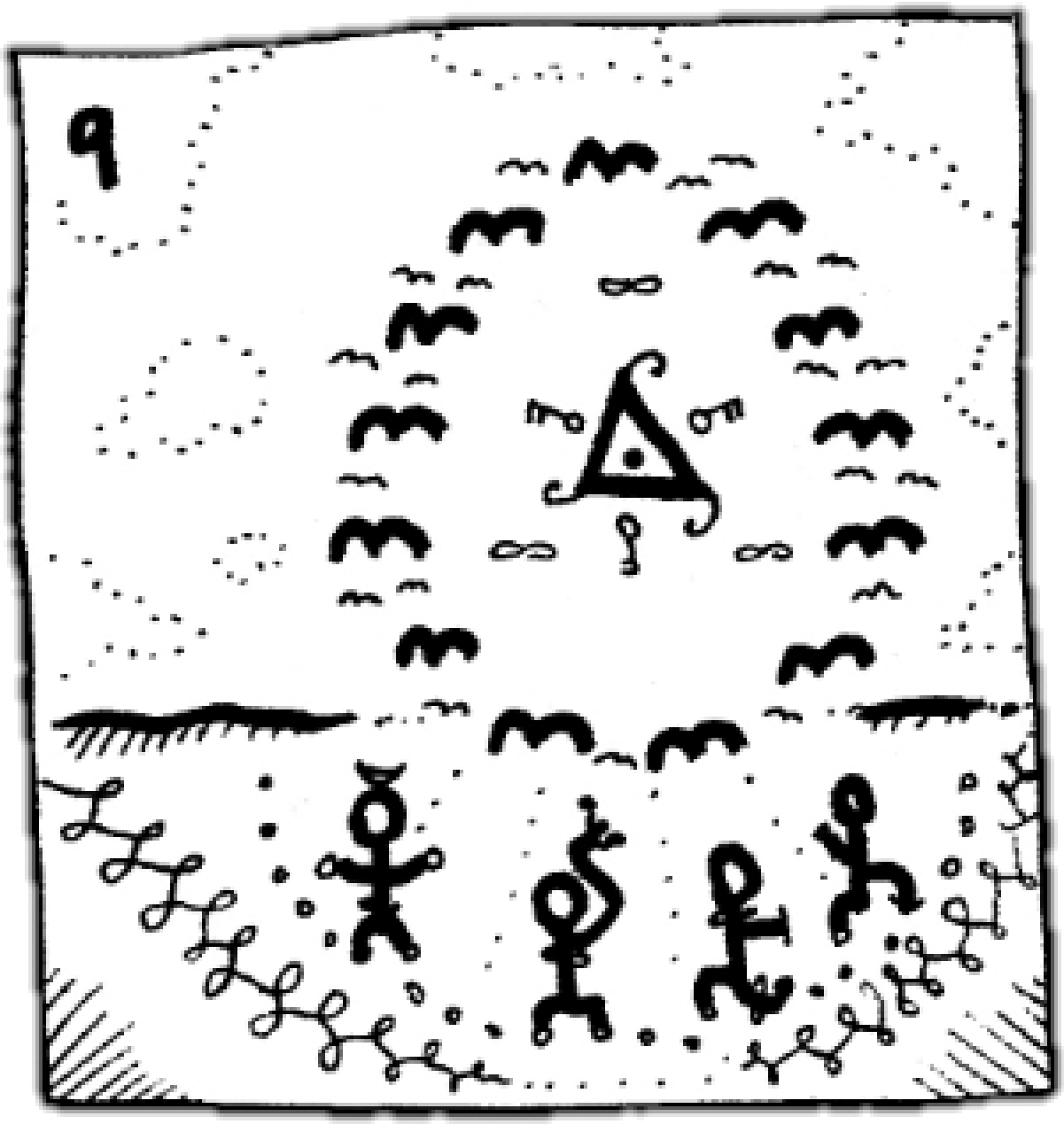
47. Her parents were astounded and she spoke the word again, but this time she re-arranged the sounds

48. Immediately, the birds all changed into a new formation: a y-shape. She spoke the word again, and four more birds joined this strange flock, flying, it appeared, in perfect geometrical symmetry. And so it began.

49. That afternoon the three of them spoke the word, turned it around, backwards, upside down… And every time, the birds responded.

50. Sometimes more birds joined. Sometimes the flock changed its shape in flight. Sometimes the birds executed precise maneuvers.

51. But always, always, they danced, as if in perfect symmetry, as if they occupied points on a grid.



IX - *The Architects*

52. And then evening fell. That night, there were dreams. New dreams and strange dreams. Sophia and her family dreamt together of wandering through castles: immense, spacious, ancient.

53. Looking out the windows, they could see the ground from far above, they could see the clouds, and they could see the birds.

54. Looking out the windows of the dream castle they were seeing through the eyes of the birds.

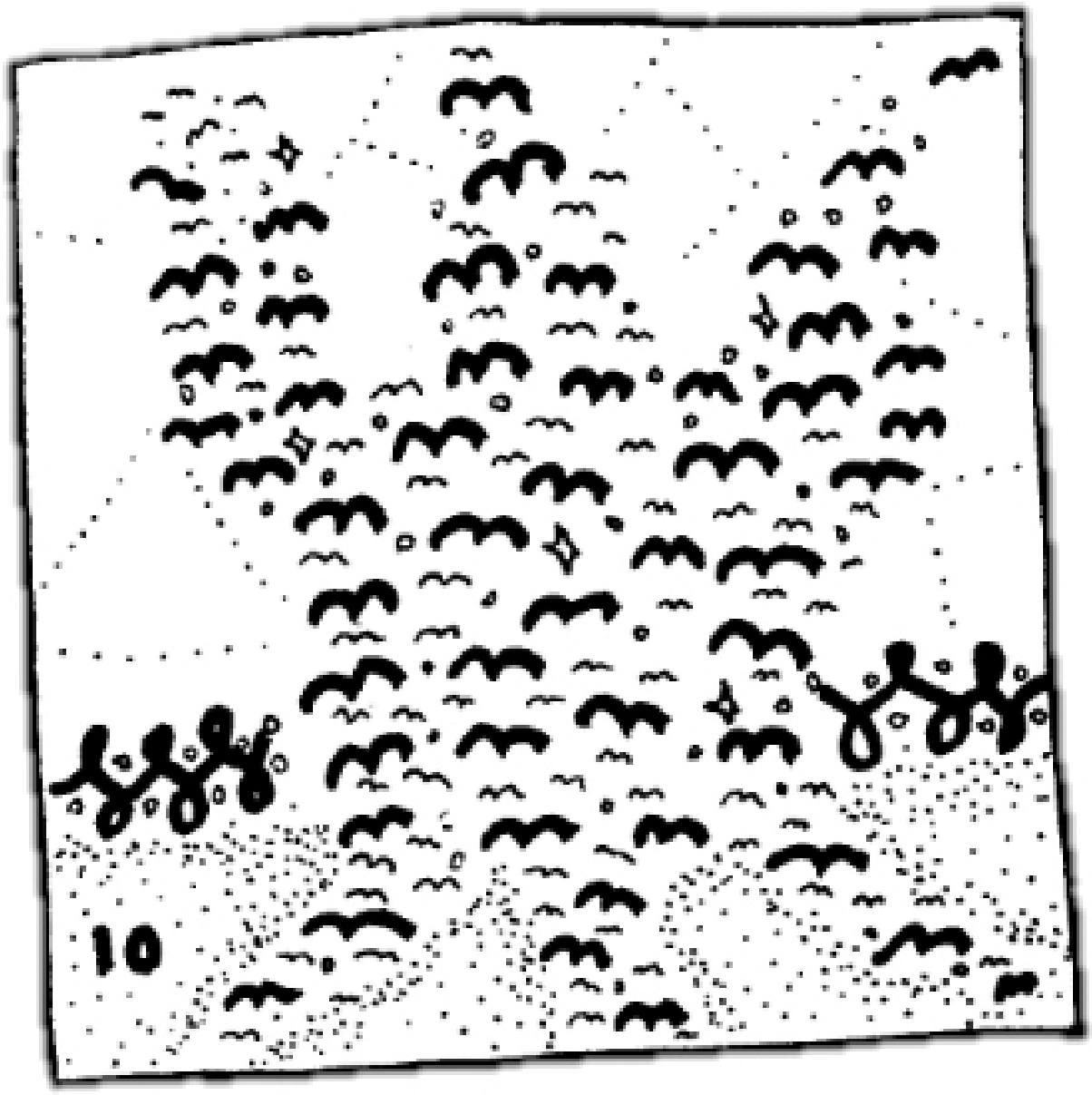
55. In the morning, their Oasis had more visitors. There were twice as many birds as before. Starlings, crows, egrets, pigeons, even a pair of ducks. And so they spoke to the birds, and the birds flew up high in the air and into formation.

56. Changing the order of the sounds changed the order of the flock, and so they spoke to the birds, and learned how to shape their flight.

57. At first it was simple. Out of living birds, they sculpted a great, perfect circle. They broke it into a spiral, they spread it into a sphere. The flock swayed and swooped, soared and dove, but always, always in formation. A sphere of birds.

58. They learned how to make a cylinder, and a cone, and a pyramid. They learned how to make blocks like bricks and round, Roman arches, as they remembered from the lost books.

59. All day long they built these flying miracles and more birds came. And some people, too, cautiously watching from a distance.



X - *The Castle of Birds*

60. And that night there were dreams. They met each other in the sprawling chambers of impossible castles alongside those others who had come to watch.

61. Out the windows could be seen many flocks. Hundreds of thousands of living birds of all kinds, gathering in dancing, airborne murmurations.

62. Far below, they could see a broken, dying landscape, cut through with straight lines and carved into cubes.

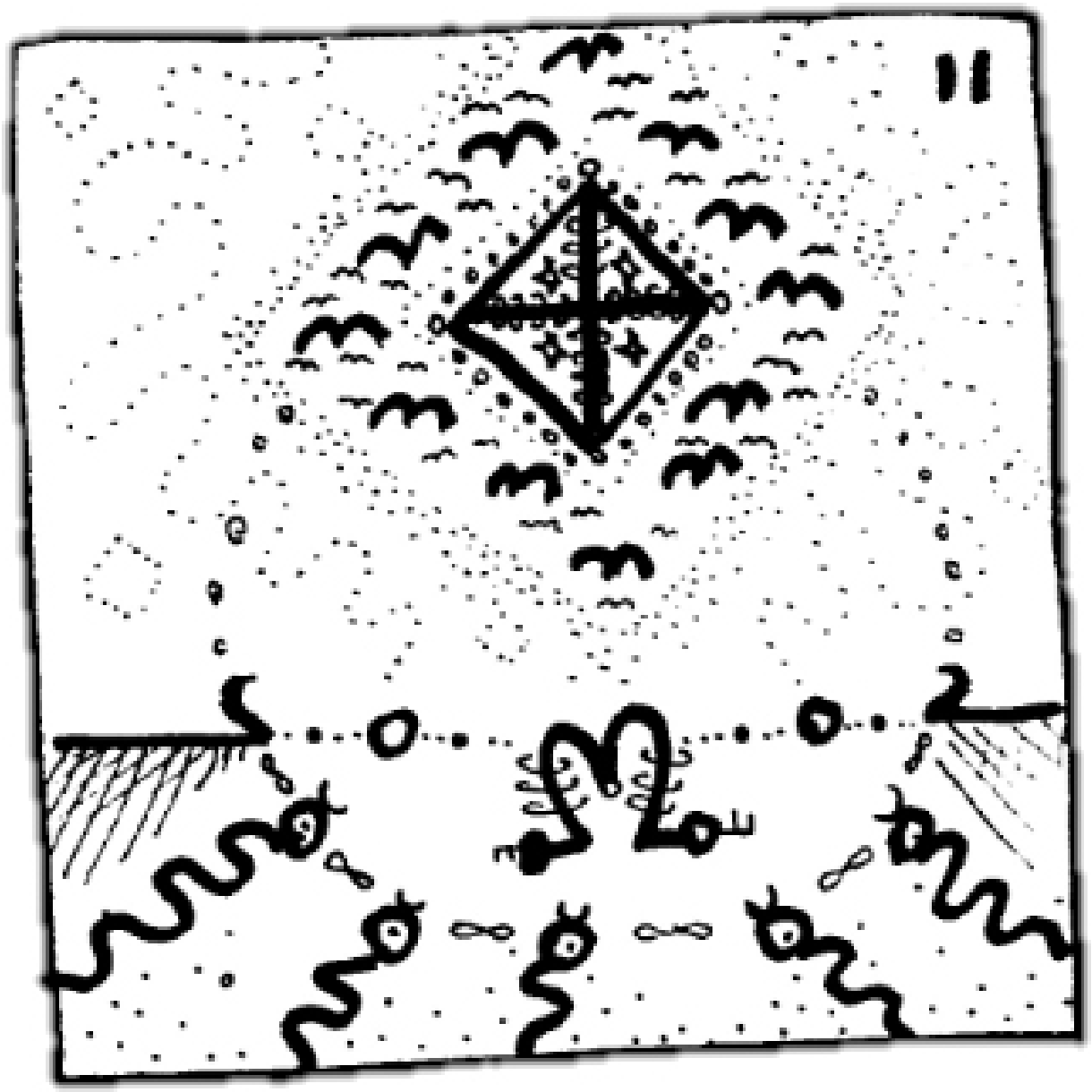
63. In the morning of the third day they visited their pond, to find that others had already arrived. A small crowd had gathered to witness the miraculous flyings. And there were more birds.

64. Ten thousand birds were gathered in this small space, waiting. On the horizon, there were more coming. All through the day, more and more came. Wave after wave of birds.

65. Sophia and her family talked to them, coaxing them into sculpted flight. They spoke to the birds, and the flocks moved together and moved apart in columns, hallways, towers, and walkways… windows and doors, spiral staircases, and vast, vaulted chambers.

66. And when the others who were watching saw this they approached and asked to be taught: taught how to forge the flight of living birds, with nothing but language.

67. And so Sophia shared her magic word and together, by a dry oasis, through trial and error, and by cooperation and experiment in the ruins of a dying world of cubes, they built a castle out of birds.



XI - *The Collective*

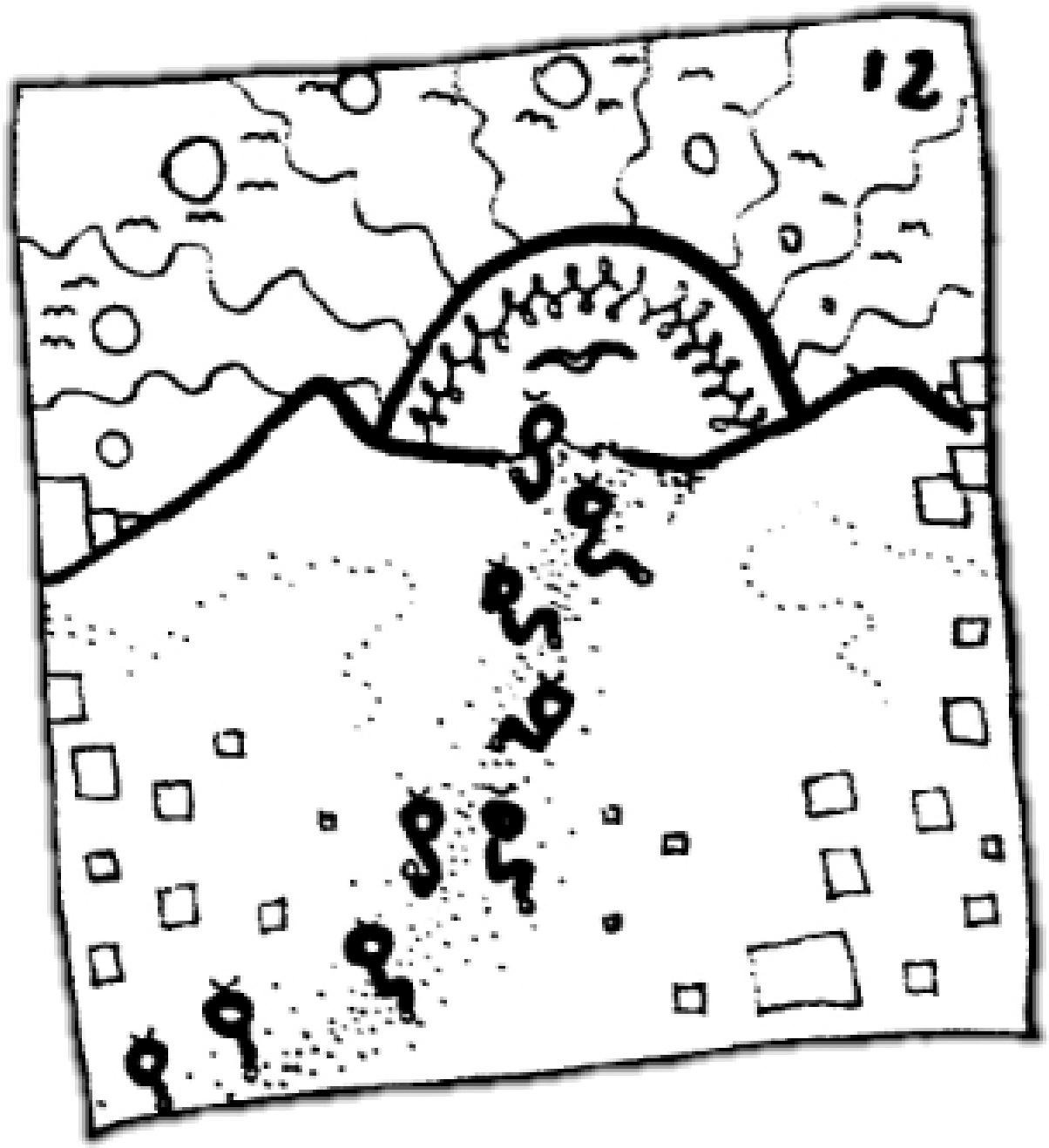
68. The castle was magnificent. It was built of nearly seventy thousand, living, flying birds.

69. It soared through the air, catching currents, dodging obstacles and yet even when birds had to veer out of position in order to adjust to some disturbance, they always found their way back into a coordinated flight—each one's location exact and proportional, as if the pattern had never been altered.

70. And so, as sunset yawned across the sky, on the evening of the third day, the whole community who had come together and woven this house of flesh, feather, and word, went home to rest.

71. And they dreamt. They dreamt of thousands of castles. Millions. Flocks of birds, living temples, spreading across the world. Inside were all the rooms and chambers, halls, statuary, décor, and ornamentation of the richest temples. Outside was the pulse of wings.

72. They explored these castles together, recognizing the rooms that each had built, the touches that each had given. In the morning, they remembered everything commonly for they had all been there together in truth.



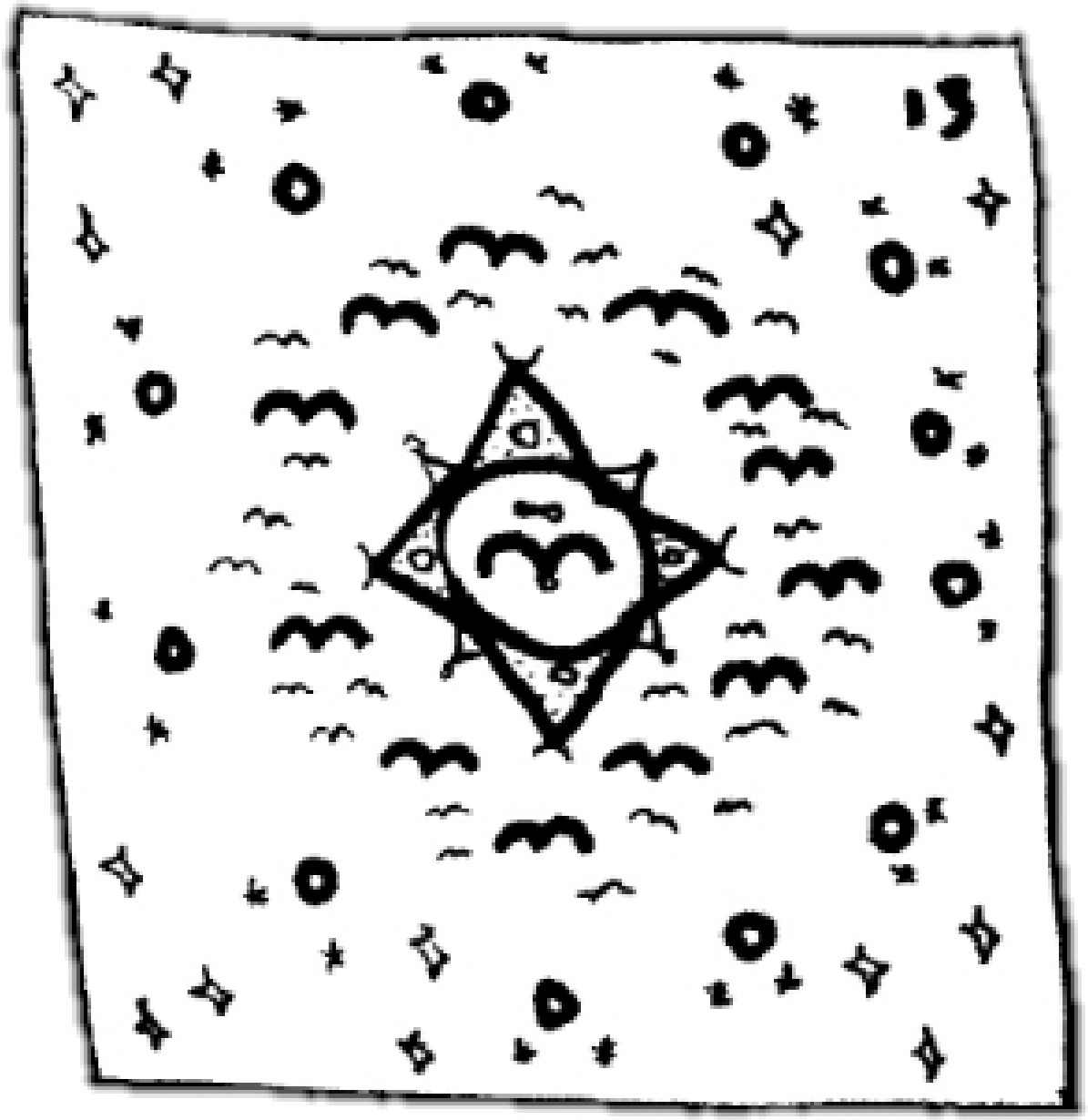
XII - *The Pilgrims*

73. But on the morning of the fourth day, there were no birds at the pond. And the next day, there were no birds at the pond. And the next day and the next day and the next day. Two moons went by, from new to full, but there was not a single bird.

74. One day a group of ragged, hungry pilgrims arrived from elsewhere. They told the people of Oasis that they had seen a castle of birds flying across the sky and they had dreamt that very night and every night since, of seeing the world from high above.

75. What is more, they could remember the dreams, which they all shared as one. Each time, they dreamt themselves flying... travelling across miles and miles and miles, pursued by the relentless advance of the faceless cubes, to this place, to this pond. So, desperate and starving, they took heed and made the long and arduous journey. The next day, more such travelers arrived. They had the same story. And the next day, still more. And more, and more, and more until there were a thousand or more refugees camped out by the Oasis. Waiting.

76. And they waited, and they waited, and they waited. As they stood watching the sky, one by one, they gave up to darkness and despair. Like candles being snuffed, they sat. One by one the lights of hope extinguished. All the stars went out, until there were only three left.



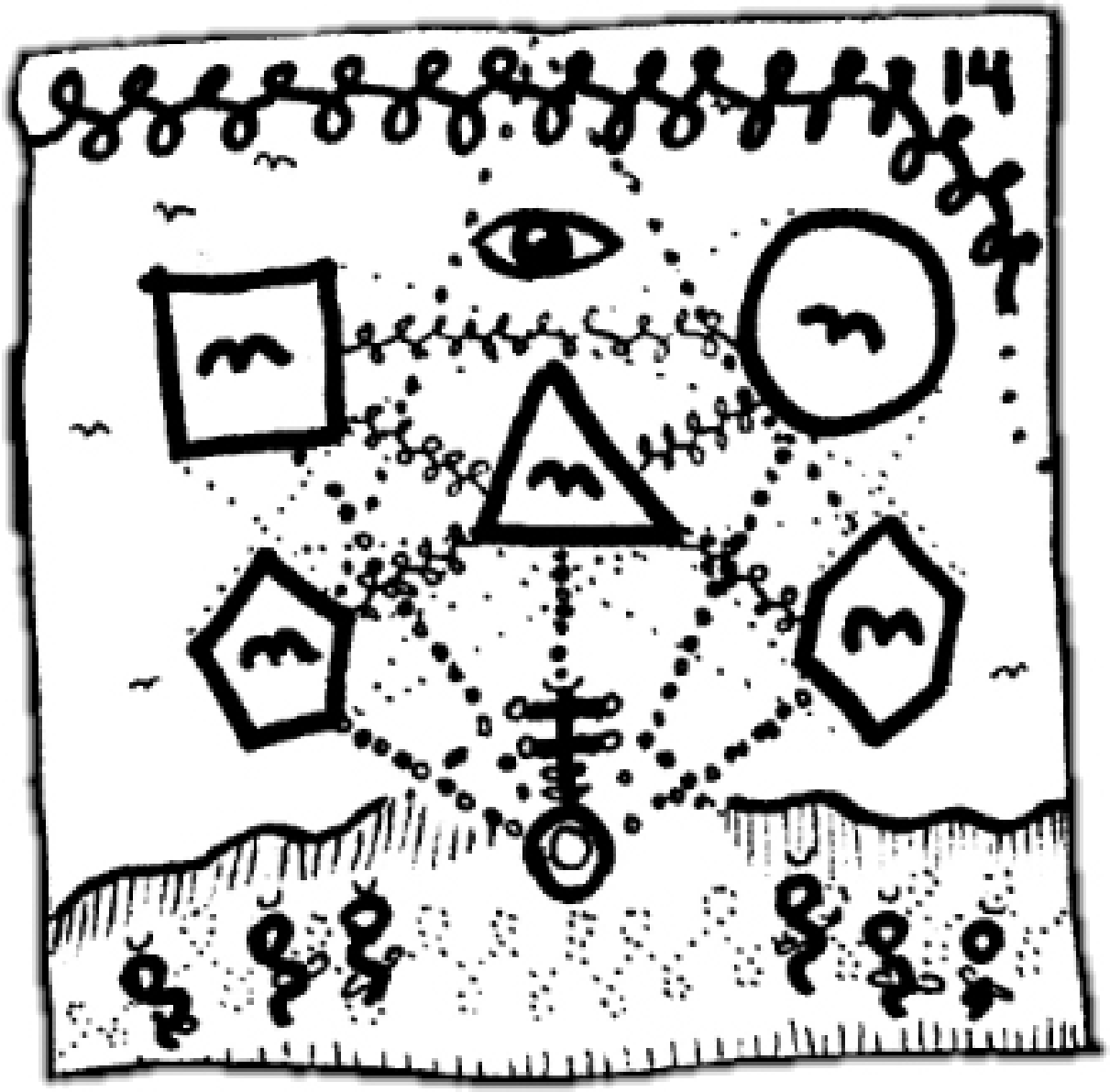
XIII - *The Return*

77. And then the birds all came at once. Hundreds of thousands, maybe more. All kinds. They carried with them fruits and seeds of every variety. They flew in a great ring of twelve castles with a massive, living citadel at its heart: a fortress with the highest towers and walls, impossibly stretching.

78. It was covered in turrets and walkways, and steep, conical spires, like needles toward heaven. Its innermost passages themselves flowed with birds-in-flight, circulating like blood. It was a living, breathing, avian metropolis. From miles and miles and miles, the people could hear the thunderous pulse of a million wings.

79. The great, and astonishing flock flew high overhead, and then swooped down into a dive. The castles around the ring began to weave in and out in a hypnotic knot. A braid of living, breathing, magic.

80. They dove down and swooped up, always pulsing with perfect symmetry and coordination. They shed seeds like rain, wherever they soared.



XIV - *The Exchange*

81. For a whole week, the birds remained, and even more joined them, day by day. As the people grew to know one another, they shared the different ways of saying the word. As more and more people came to learn the remarkable magic that made the birds fly effortlessly in form, they shaped the many different flocks in many different ways.

82. Instead of parapets, they built domes, instead of Roman arches, Gothic. Pillars, buttresses, minarets. As many flocks as there were, there were as many different temples reborn into flight. What had been dismantled by the cubes was reborn into the birds.

83. And after a week, the people of Oasis watched the sky as a thousand temples took flight in all directions, leaving behind the seeds that they had brought with them… which had already begun to sprout.

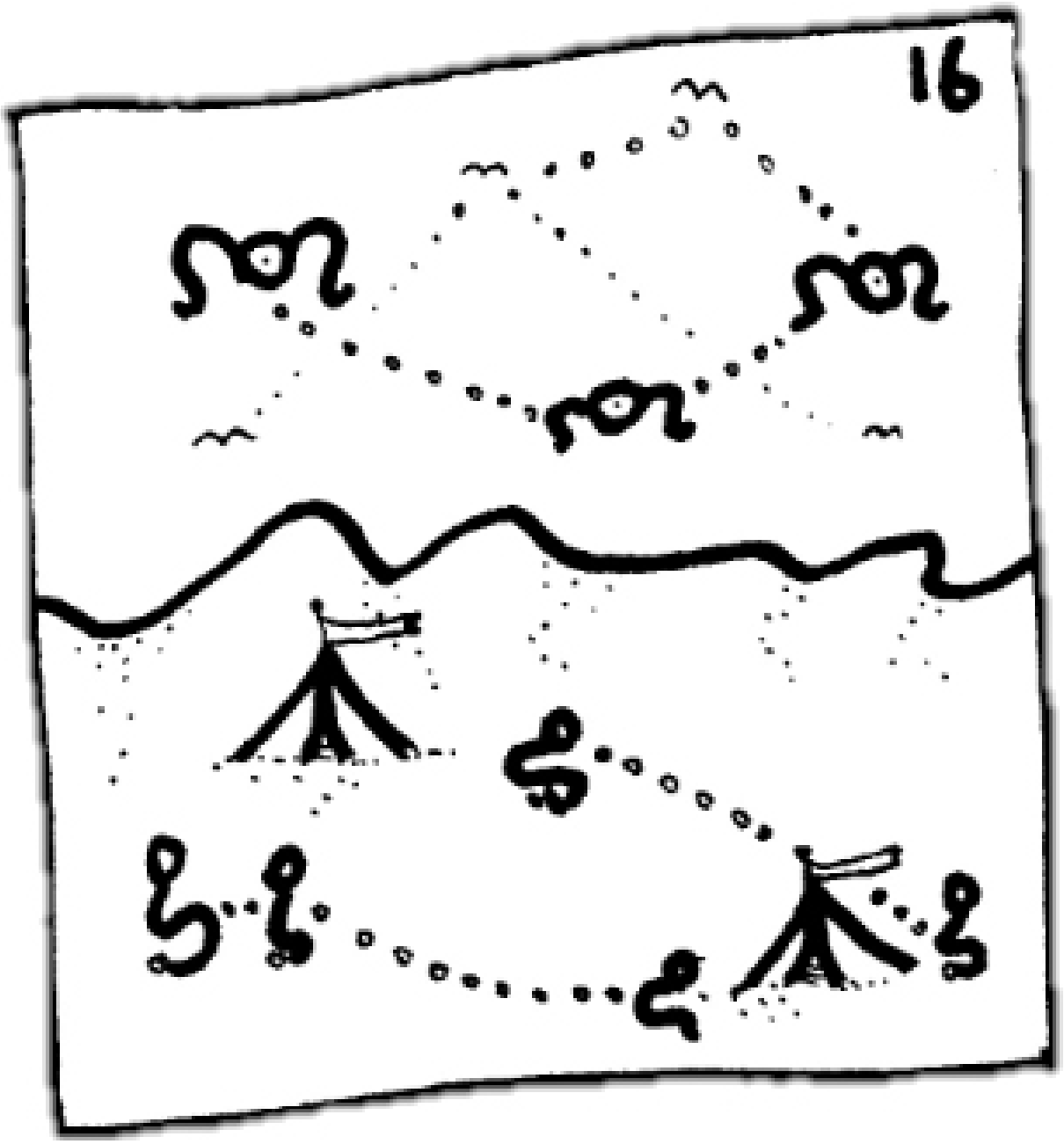


XV - *The Recovery*

84. In time, the people dispersed, like the birds, to their own homes. The plants began to grow again. Years passed. Decades. The word spread.

85. The castles flew, and with them, they brought seeds. Every season, the world grew greener, and the cubes were left behind, rotting into the dirt, like cast-off crutches, like worn out shells.

86. The earth reclaimed them, as it grew green again. The waters reclaimed them, as they grew strong and deep again. The beasts which began to flourish took them as their homes and as the cubes faded back into the flesh of the world, the scars and wounds; the terrible rifts—wastelands—voided from nature by the sharp and straight, were slowly and imperceptibly knitted back together.



XVI - *The Wanderers*

87. In a generation, it was mostly restored. In two generations, the world was abundant and green. In three generations, the people and the birds had become one in soul in a world that had become one in body. The people became wanderers again, and the birds themselves were the living homes of thought and dream: living houses which flew miraculously in form and kissed the world with seeds.

88. In the end, as in the beginning, the people were wanderers, like the birds.

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Endnote

Upon reception of this piece, Monad's editorial team undertook a discussion as to the suitability of including the term "Butlerian Jihad" in this publication. We were reluctant, at first, to allow the use of this term, given common contemporary western misunderstandings of the word Jihad. However, after lengthy discussion with the author, we decided to allow for the inclusion of this term. The following is a summary of the argument made by Duchemin:

It would be dishonest to change the wording from the original text of *Dune*, even though the word "jihad" has taken on controversial meanings since the novel's publication—meanings not intended by Frank Herbert. He used the term in its broader, positive sense of "struggle" (against machine domination), not in the modern sense of "holy war" against the West. Herbert drew from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions in his work, focusing on their common ground.

We should not let the fear of ignorant readings limit our language. Might it not be wiser, strategically speaking to try to keep neutral uses of controversial terms in circulation as much as possible, to prevent their full co-optation by extremists? We are often taught to erase such terms based on one negative interpretation becoming dominant, as if all other meanings are "ruined." This is part of a two-pronged colonialism: first, symbols are taken from their native contexts (like Islam, or Buddhism) and repurposed; then, after conflict, all versions—including original cultural ones—are banned. This punishes the original cultures, who are included in the censorship due to ignorance.

The idea that words like "jihad" are irredeemably tainted is itself colonial, because it accepts the Western, extremist reading as the only valid one. Meanwhile, the word "crusade" is still used freely, despite being offensive from a Muslim perspective. This shows how Western voices are positioned as arbiters of meanings that aren't theirs to control.

The answer isn't to retreat from contested terms but to amplify their nuance. Nuance helps resist extremist meanings. By promoting alternative and culturally grounded uses of such words, we can educate the public, empower those cultures, and reduce the term's extremist power. Ultimately, if we keep retreating from "stained" terms and symbols, we allow cultural richness to be claimed by extremists. Instead, we should preserve and promote these symbols in their deeper, positive senses—as acts of both counterterrorism and counter-colonialism.

Peter Duchemin is a verb. These works are transactions. Experiences varying from interdisciplinary doctoral studies in continental philosophy, active art production, advanced proprioceptive learning, experimental calendrics, enjoyment of unorthodox musicks, circus activities, and mirth are all evidenced in the phenomenological encounters we might expect to experience in relation to this particular expression of human play, the "being", biographised in this short statement.

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