

A LITTLE WORLD MADE CUNNINGLY



SCOTT DAVID FINCH

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To Angela

*for letting me get lost and for pulling me back to Earth
again and again.*

A LITTLE WORLD MADE CUNNINGLY

CHAPTER ONE

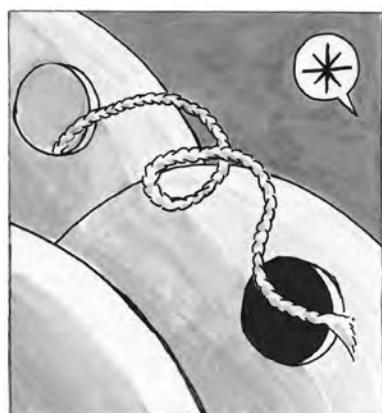
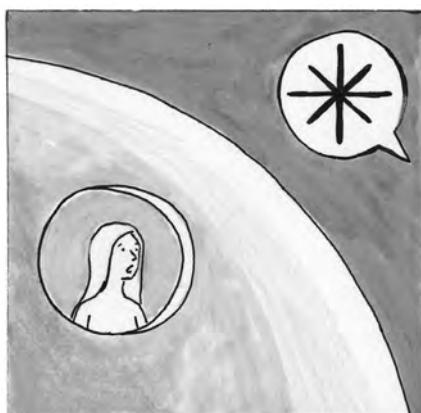
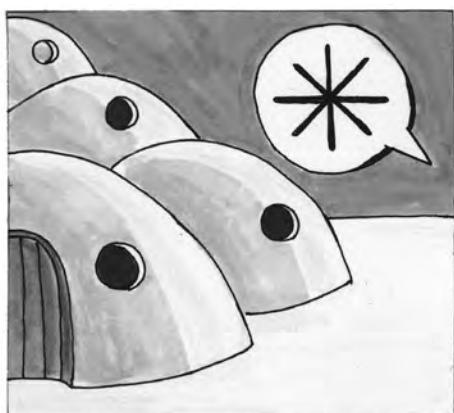
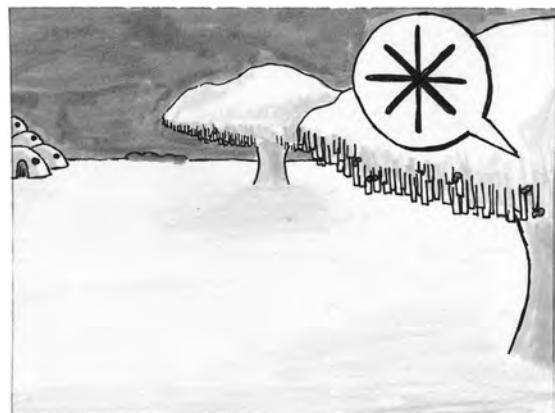
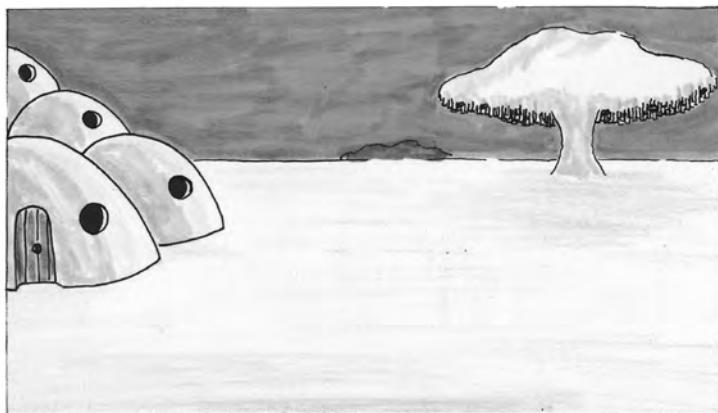


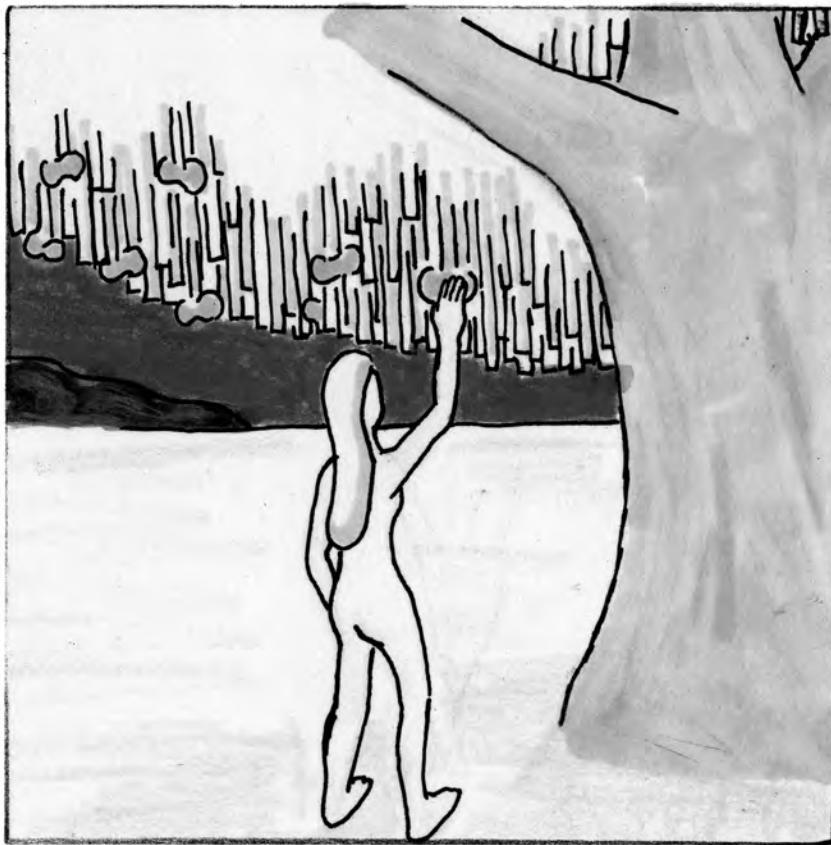


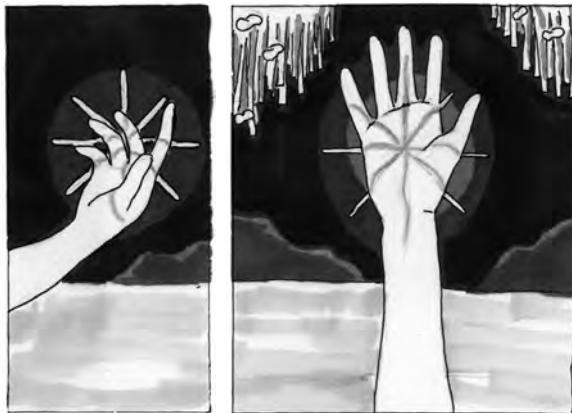
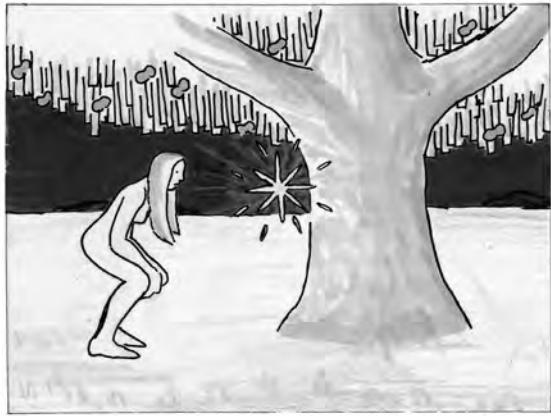


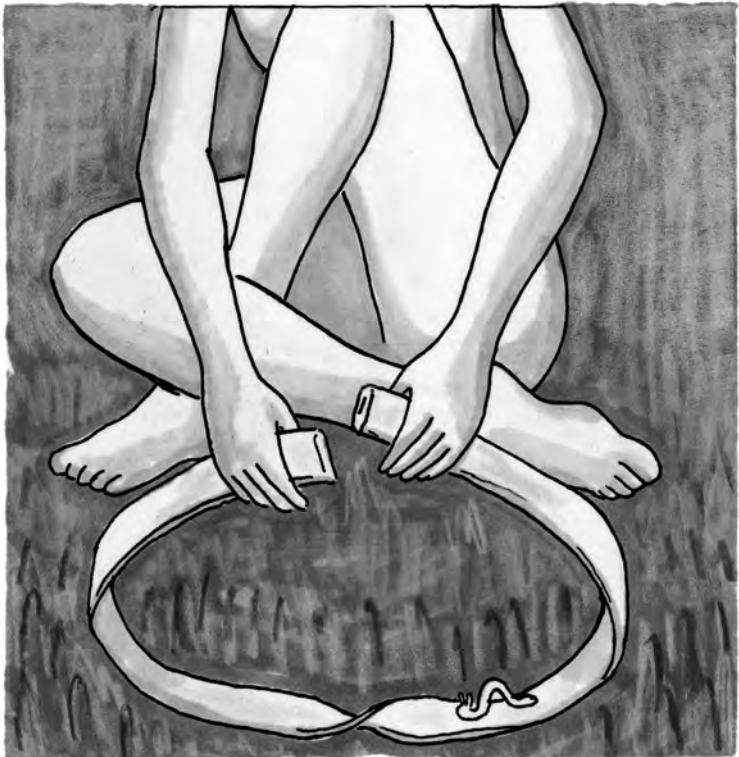


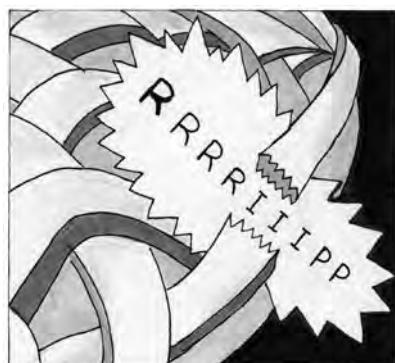
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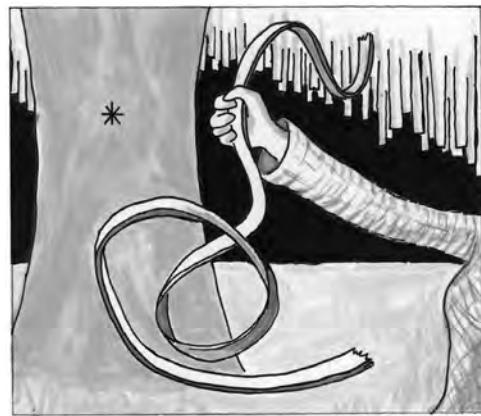




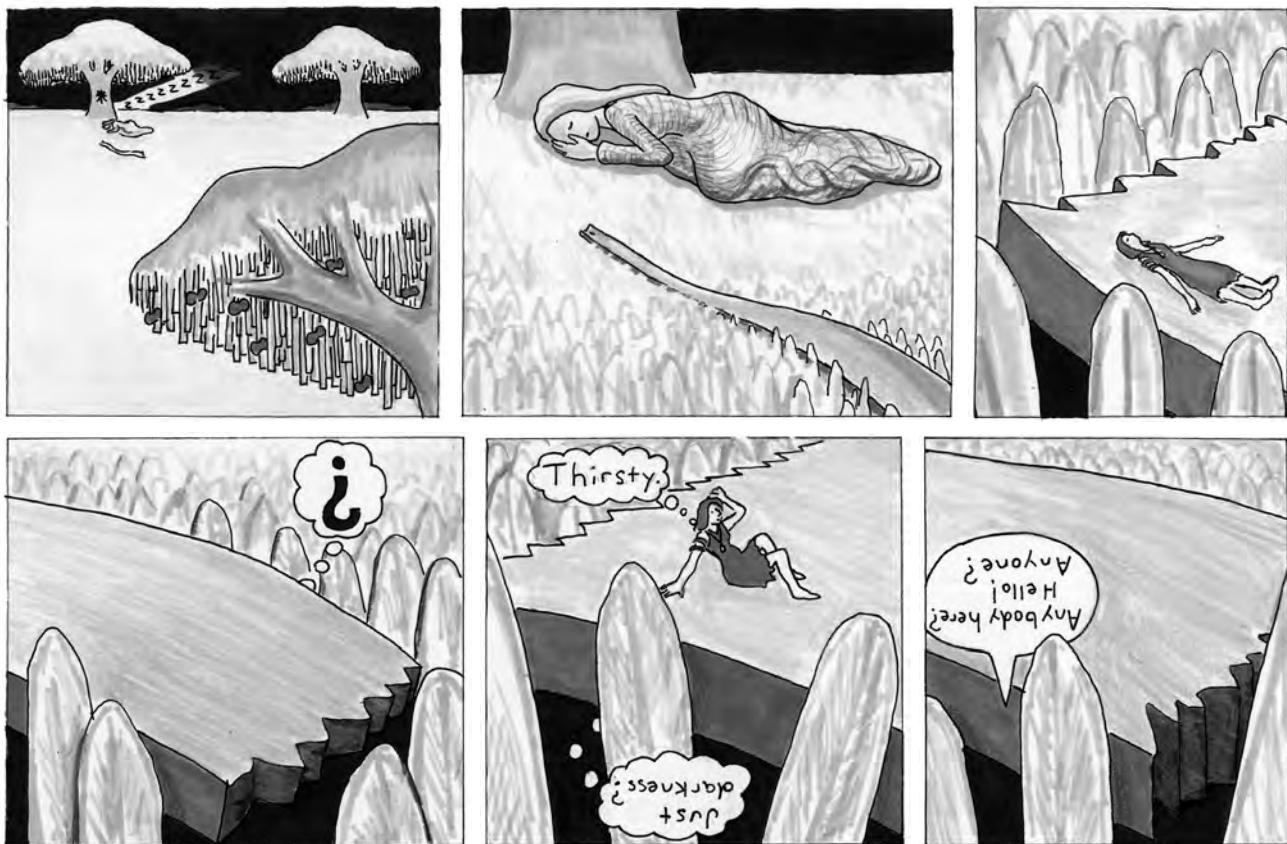


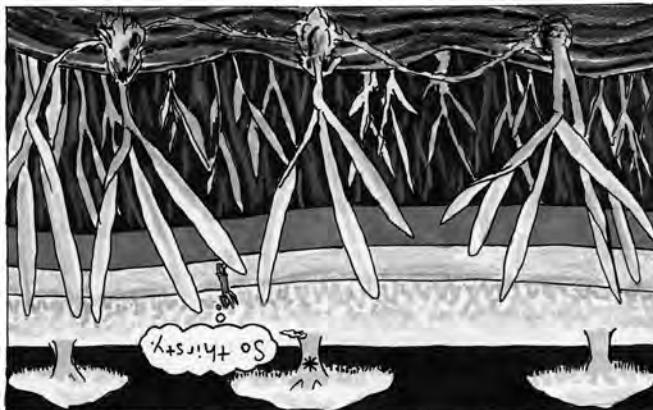


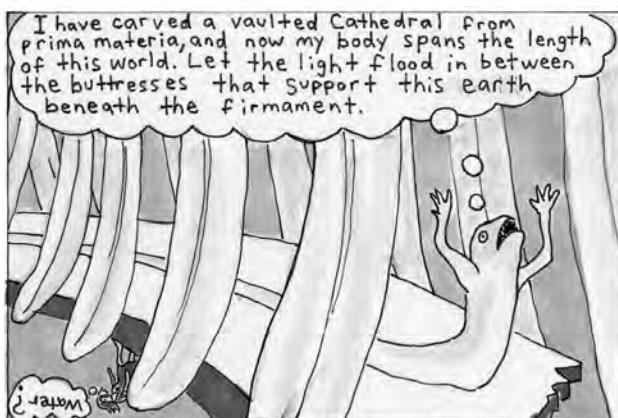


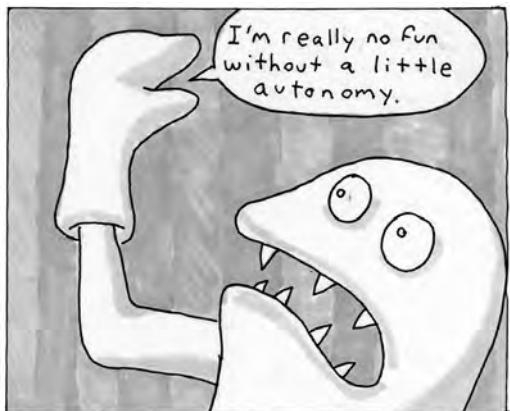


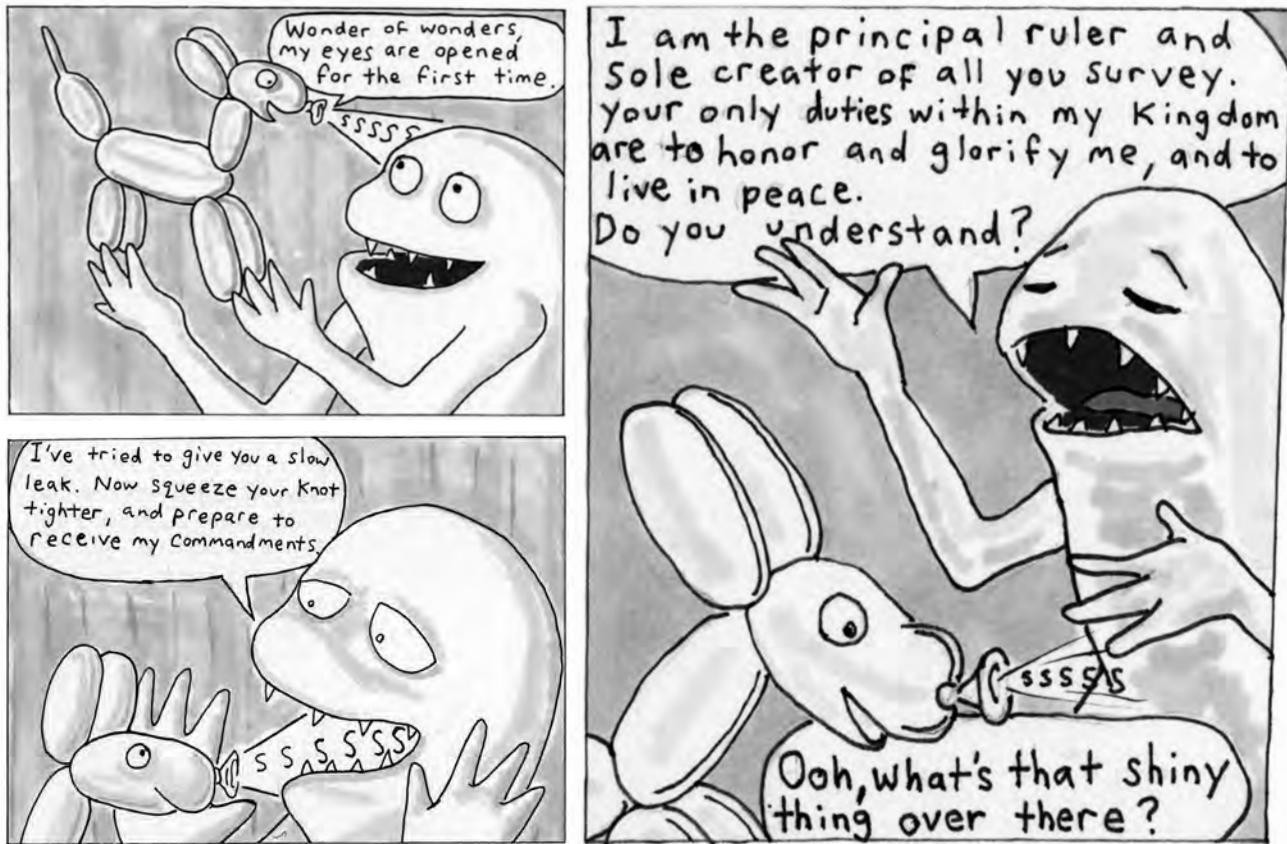
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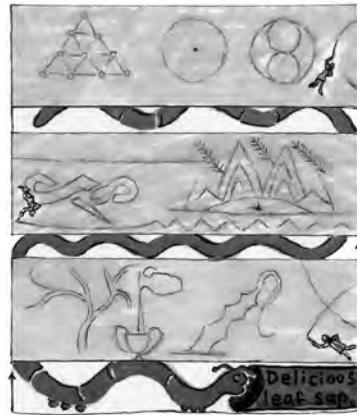




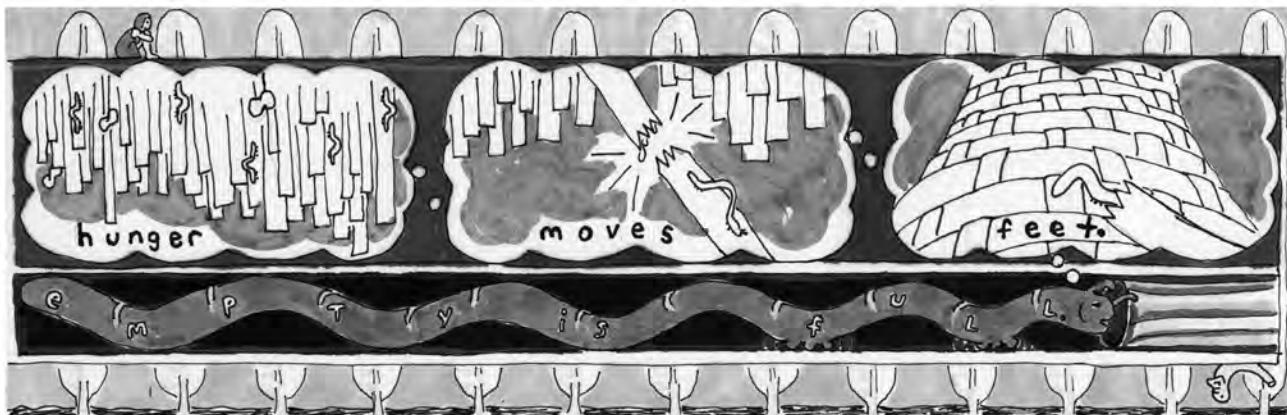
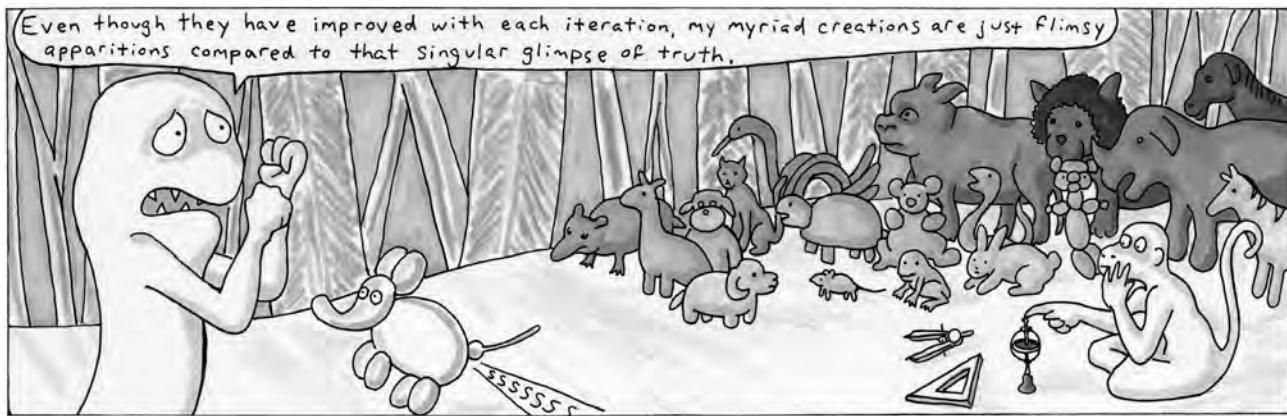
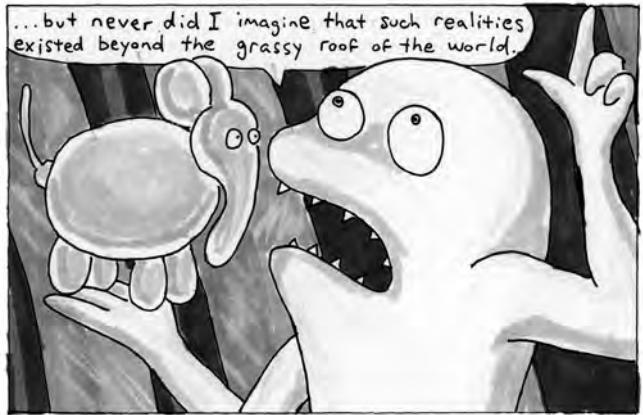




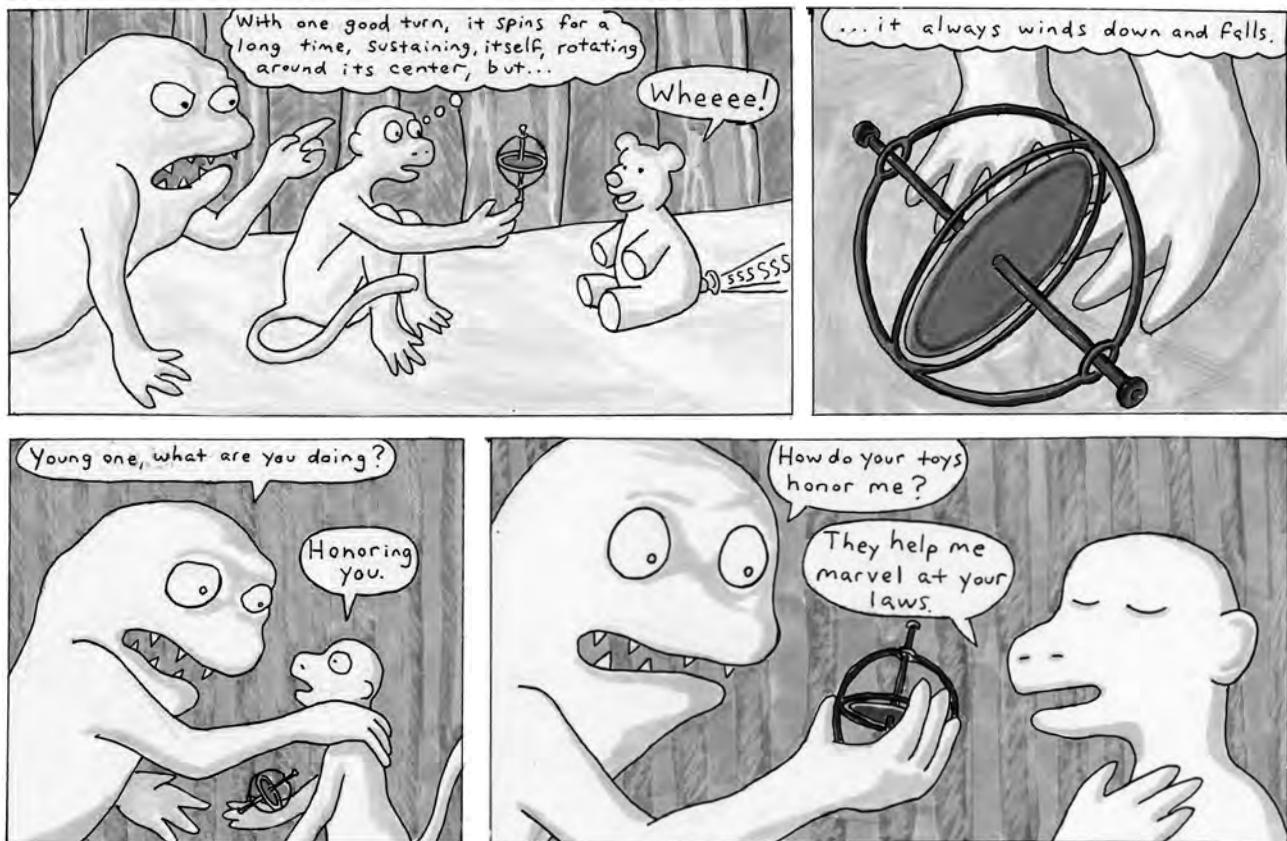


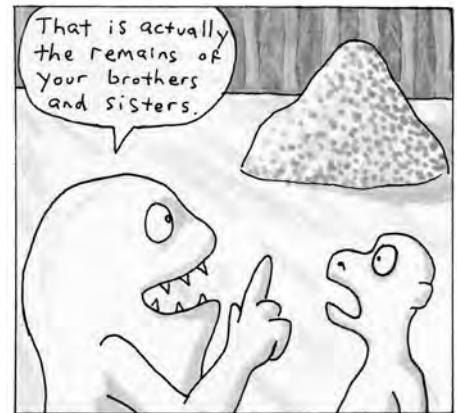
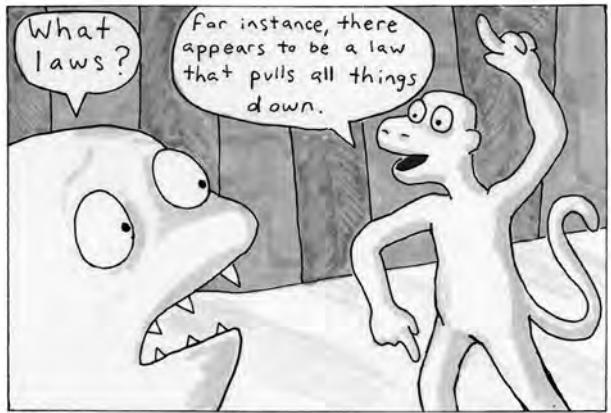


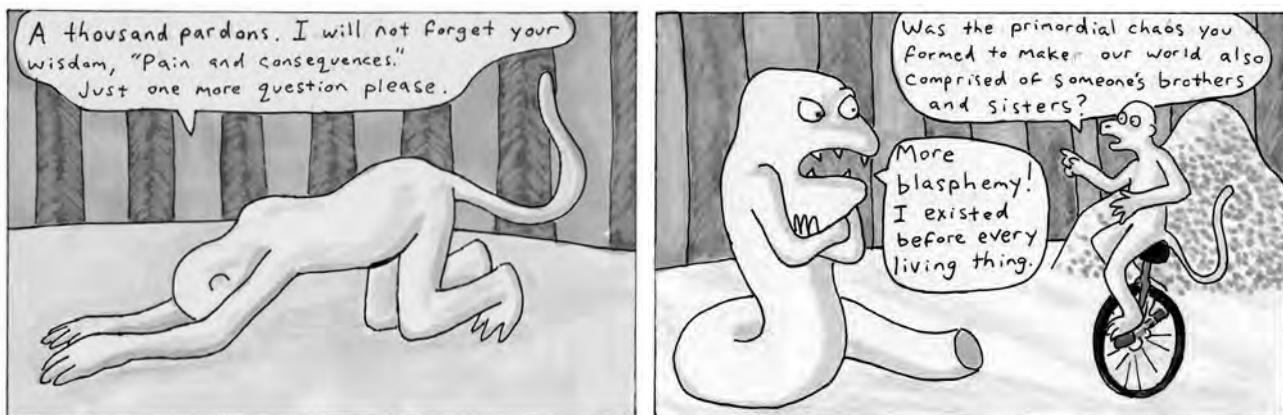


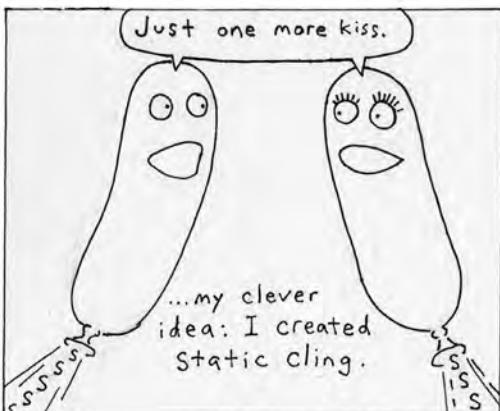
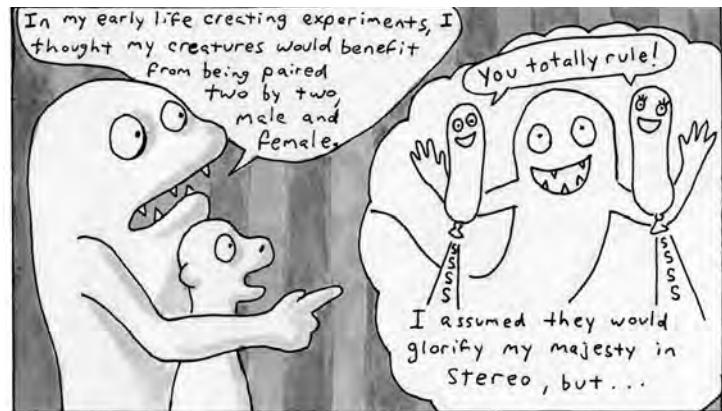


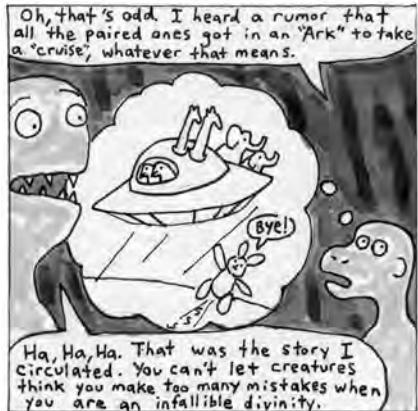
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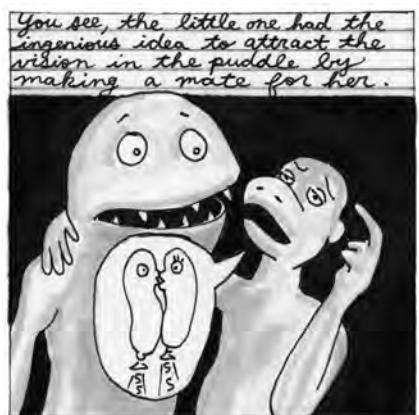
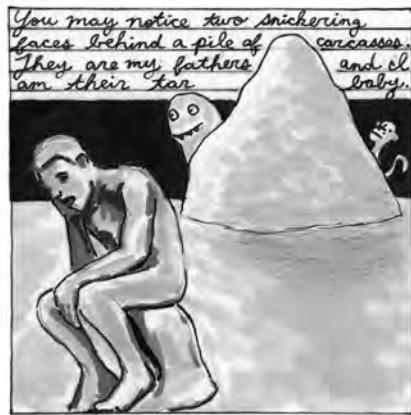
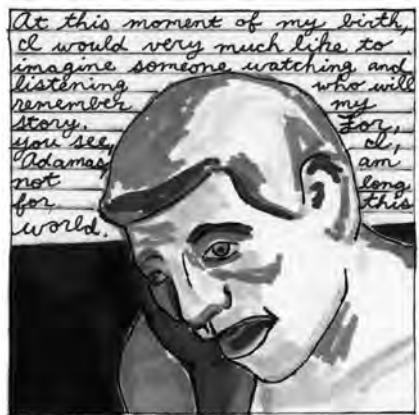








CHAPTER FIVE



Next they both huffed
and puffed the breath of
life into me to no avail.
I just sat there inert.



The ego of the one and the
intellect of the other were
insufficient to animate a
being like myself.



They grew more and more
discouraged until they heard a
voice from the horizon which
made them giddy with anticipation.



They thought they had
achieved success with my
mere husk of a form, but
rather than appear in
their midst she did
something miraculous.



The comedy of errors performed by these poor creatures will never result in a return to the garment of light, unless I intervene.



"Before this beast at which thou criest out, suffers not any one to pass her way, But so doth harass him, that she destroys him; And hath a nature so malign and ruthless, That never doth she glut her greedy will, And after food is hungrier than before."



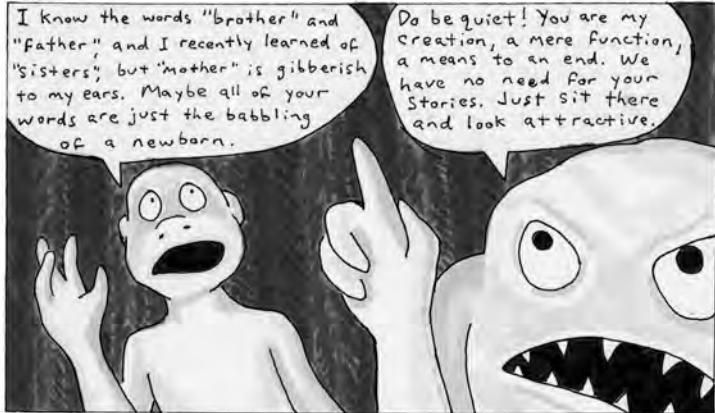
If any person is witness to this account, let me clarify that the moment of birth was not akin to the gradual break of day. Before, my body was already warm, and my senses were flooded, but I lacked the imperative to move. Afterward, I am once and forever awake.

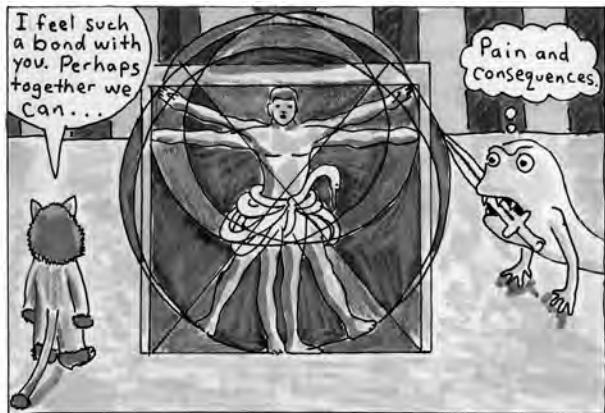


None comes naked into this world. All are clothed in types and images.

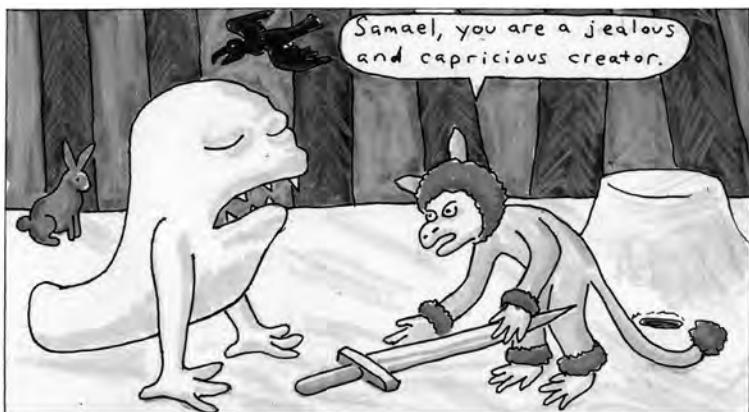
Naked?
Clothed?

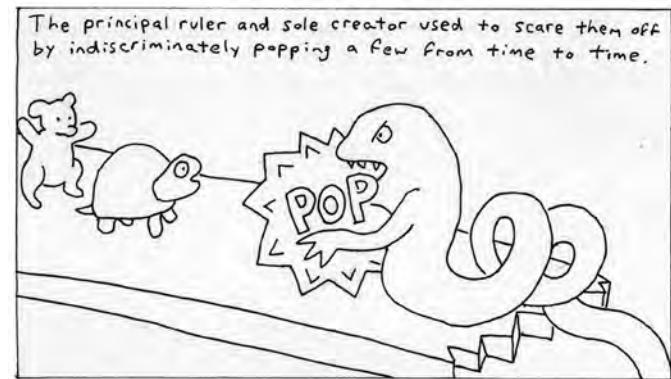
As my gift to you in the bounded world, I grant permanent names to your fleeting forms.





CHAPTER SIX











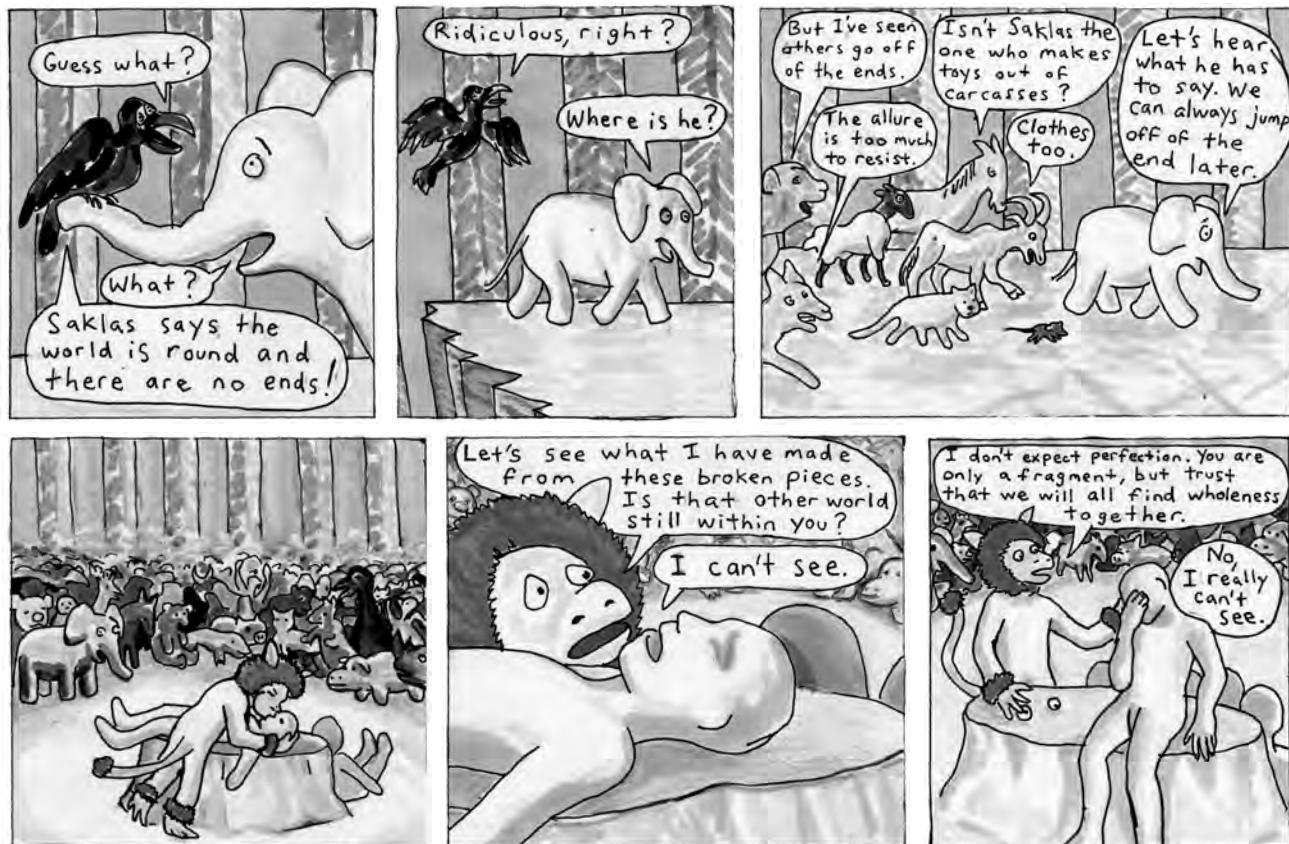
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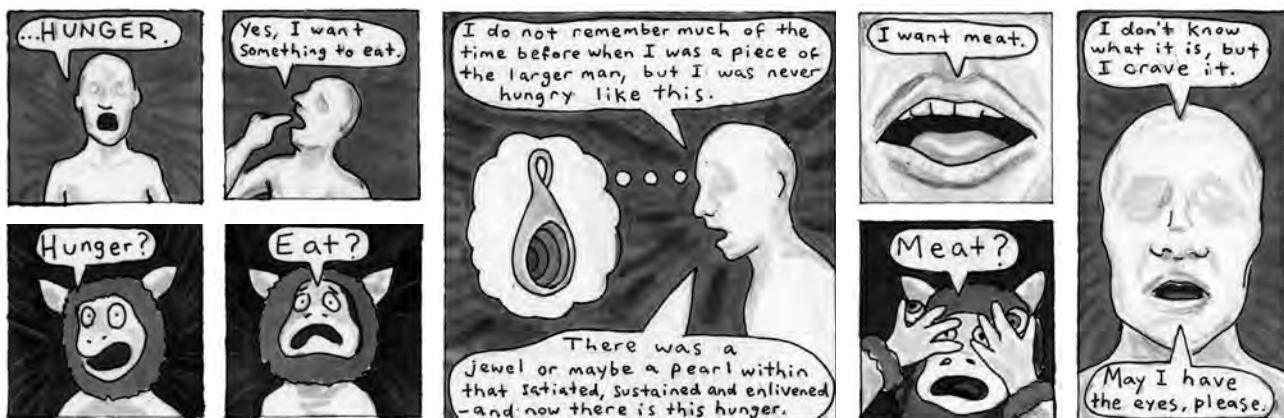


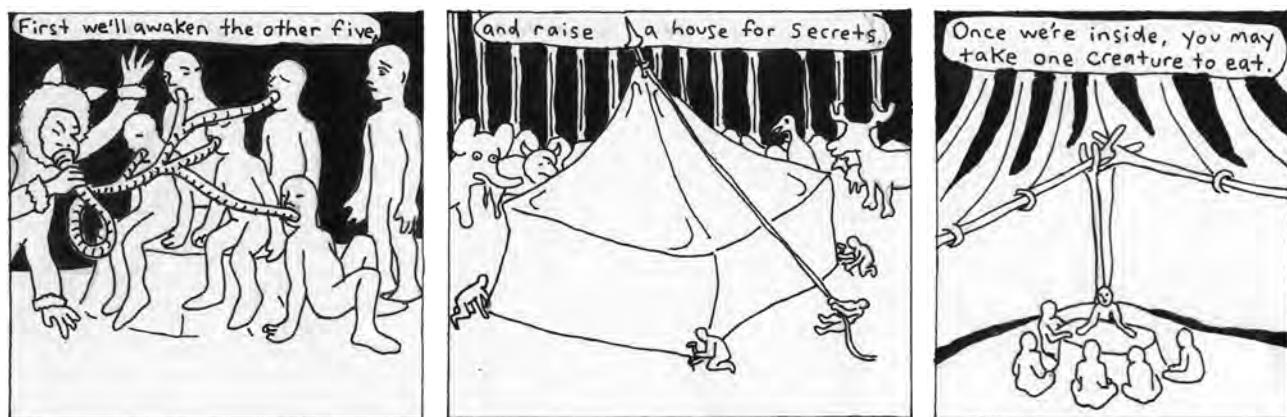




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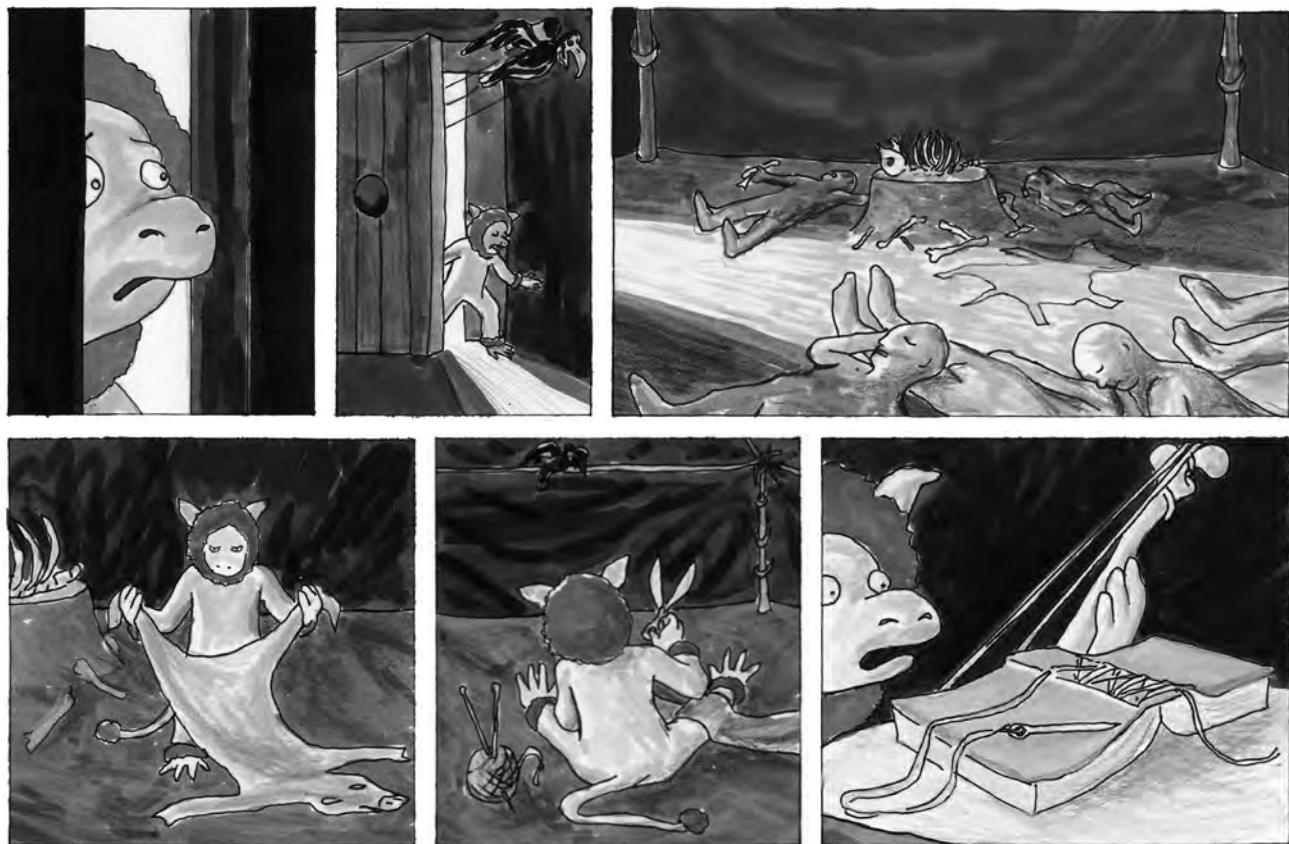


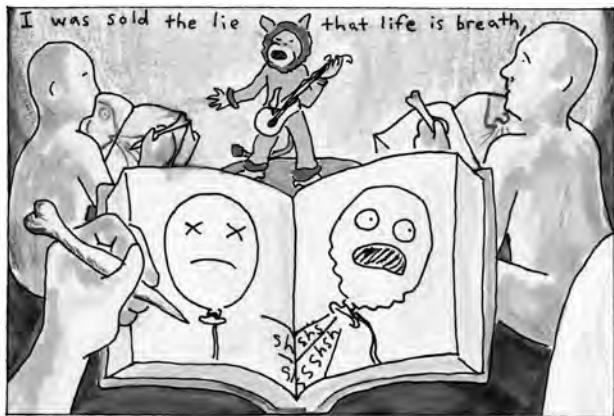


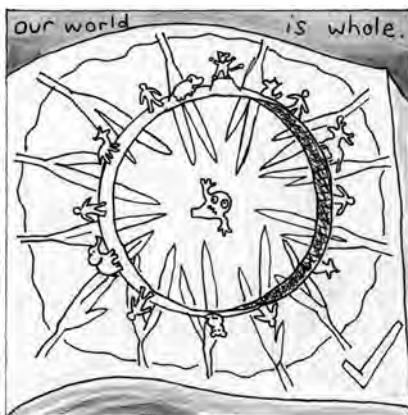
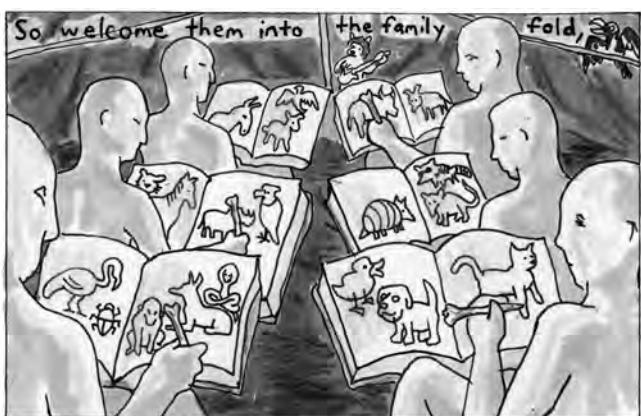
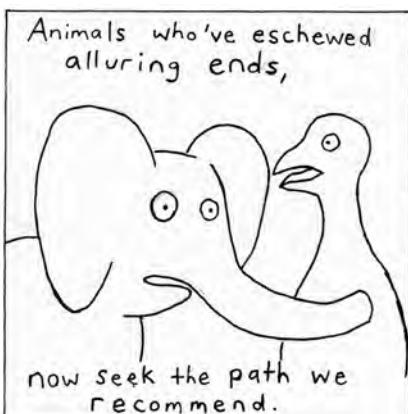


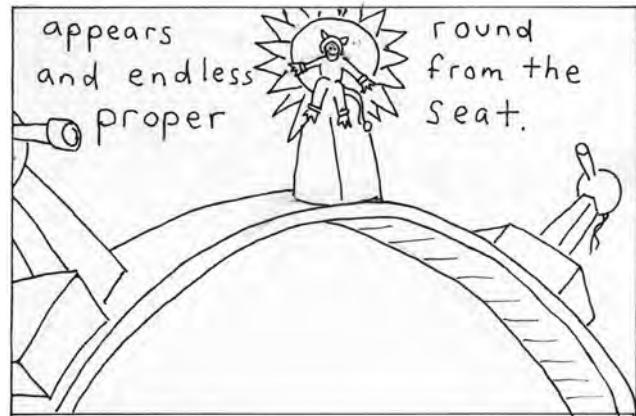
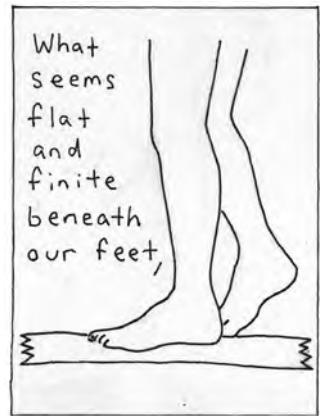
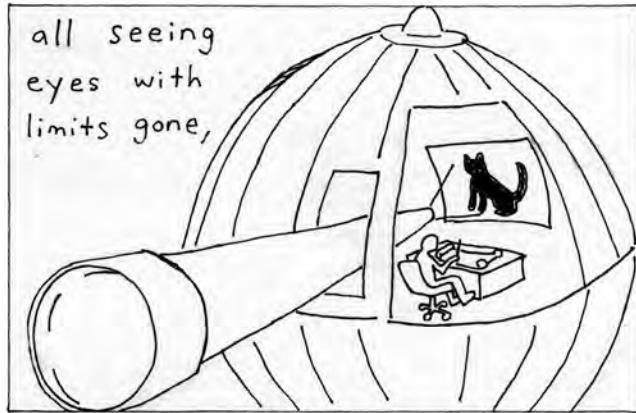
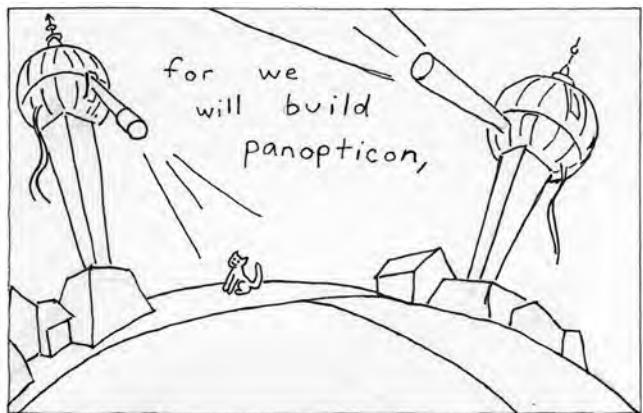


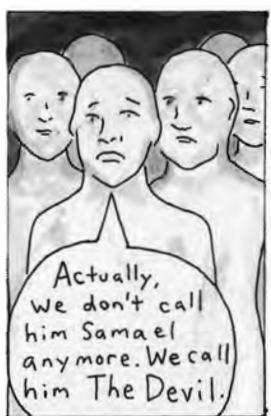
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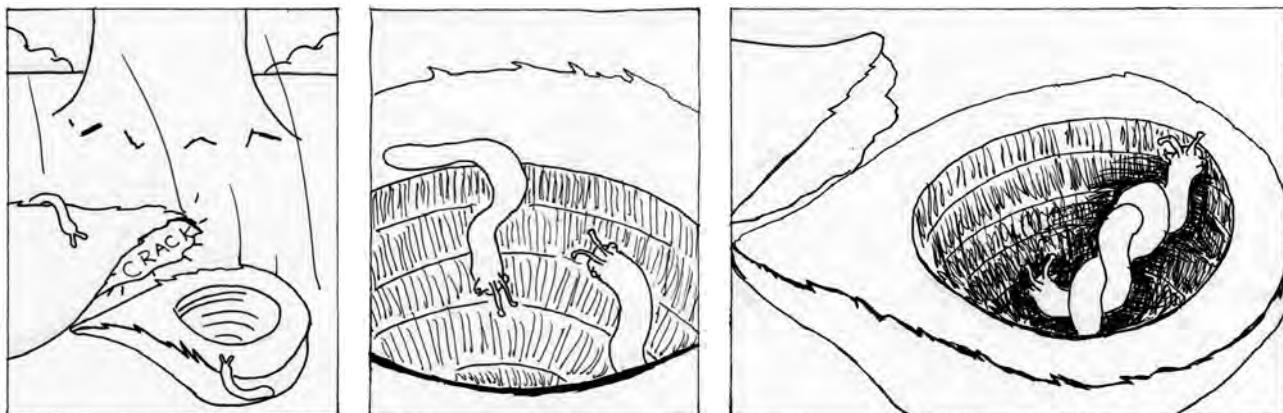
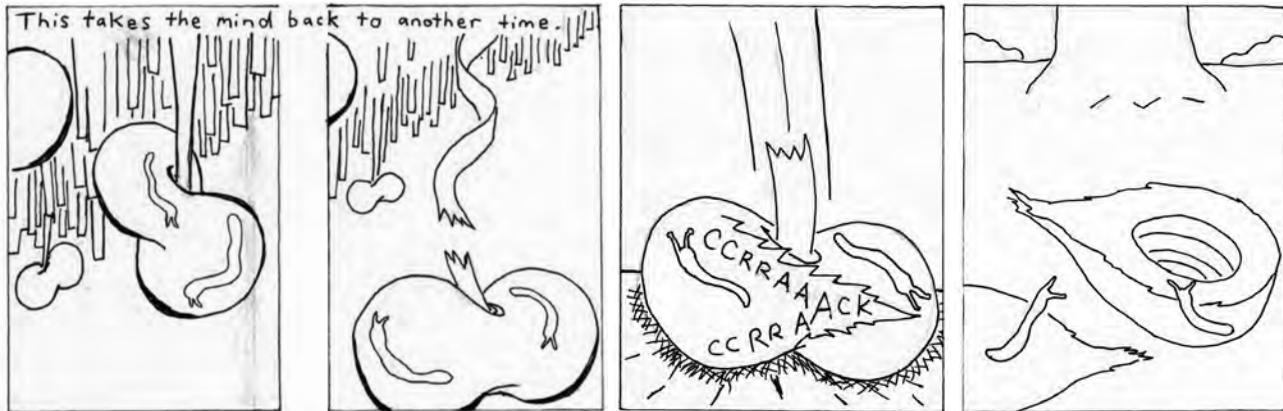




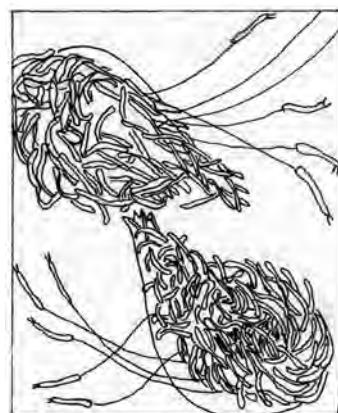
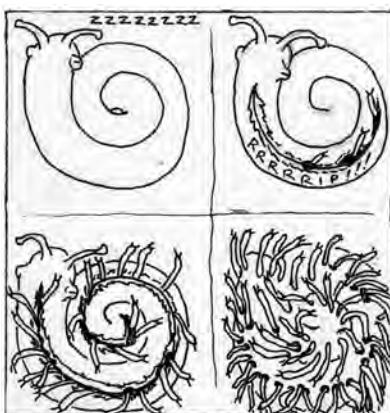
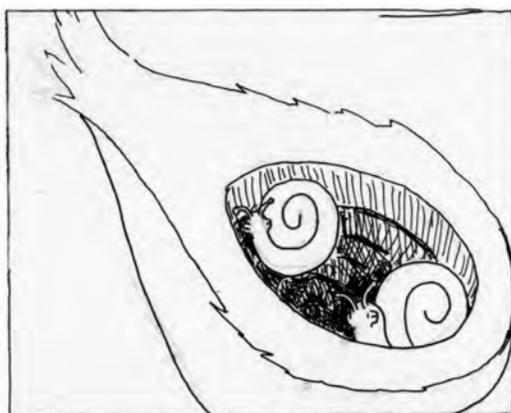


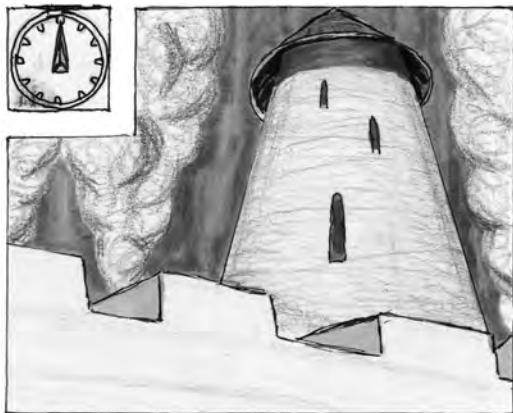
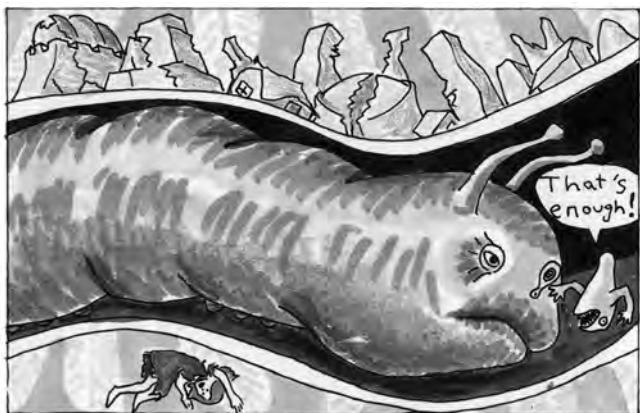
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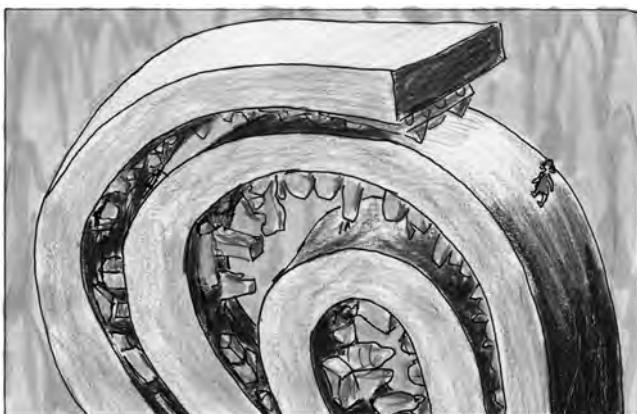




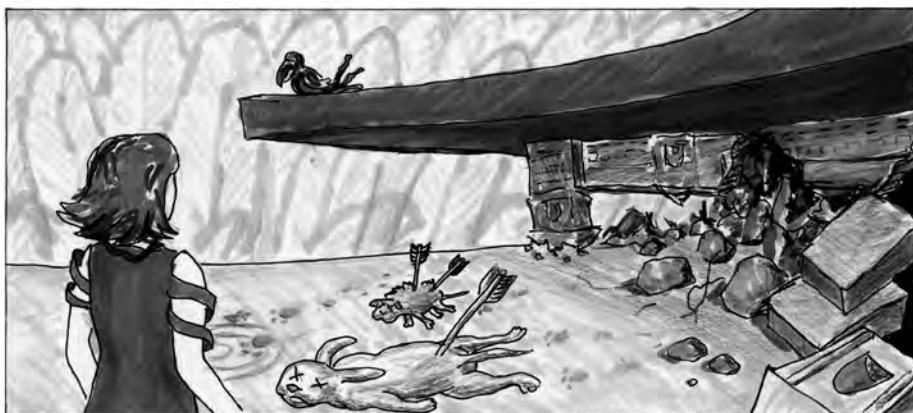
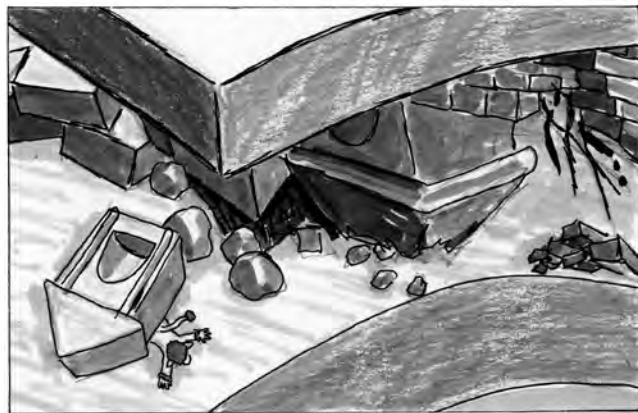


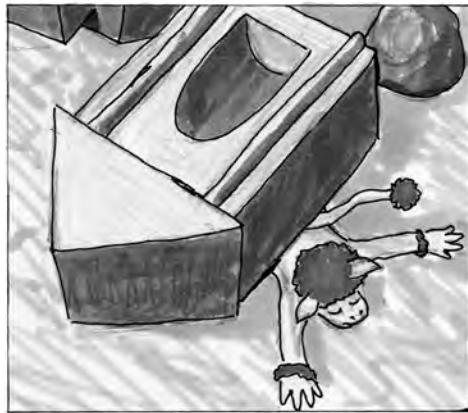


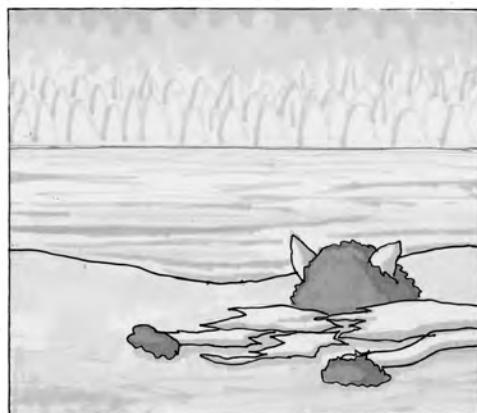
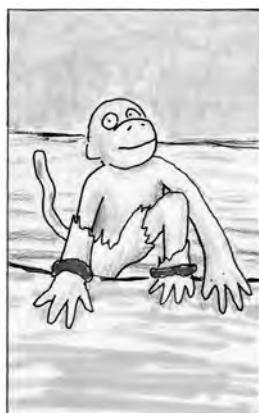


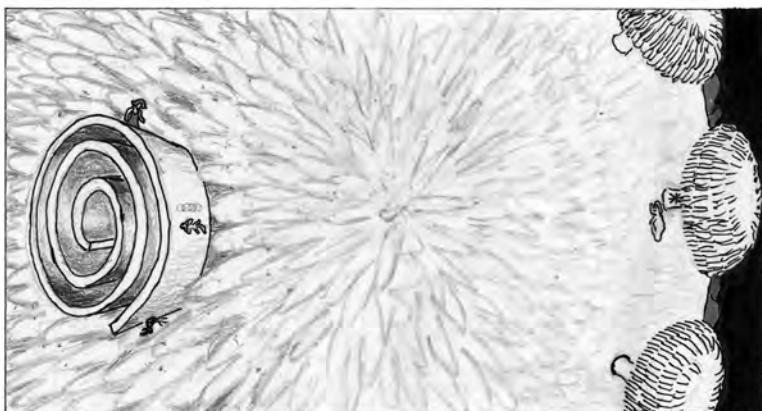
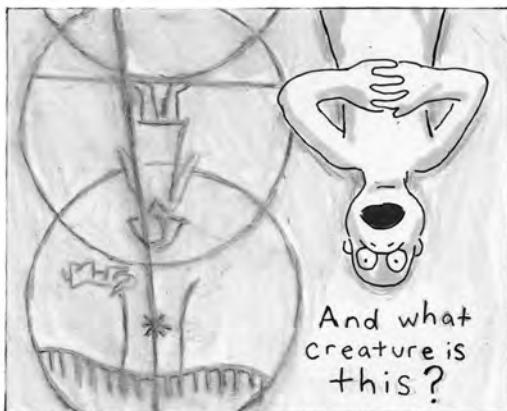
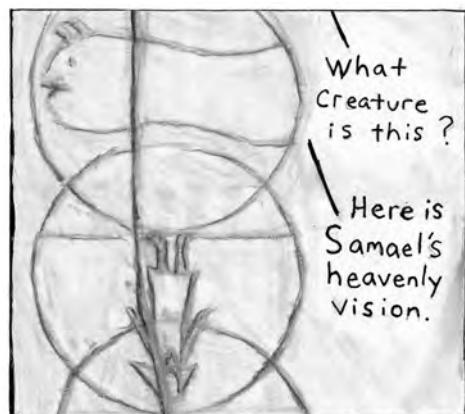


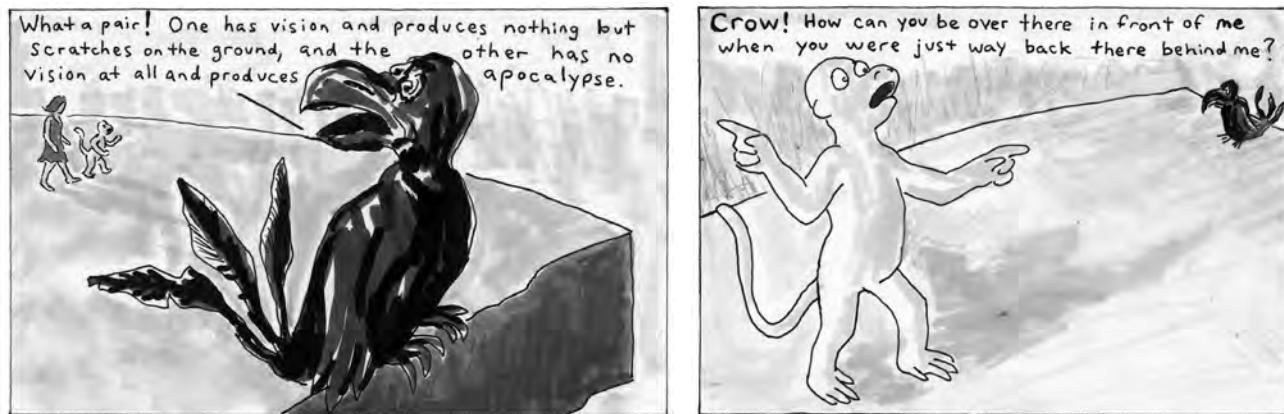
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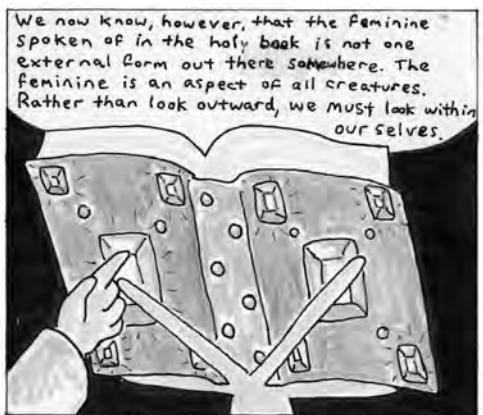






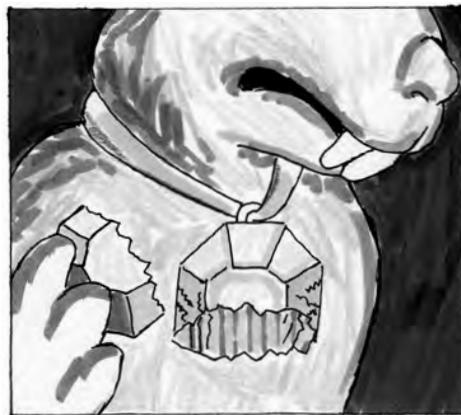
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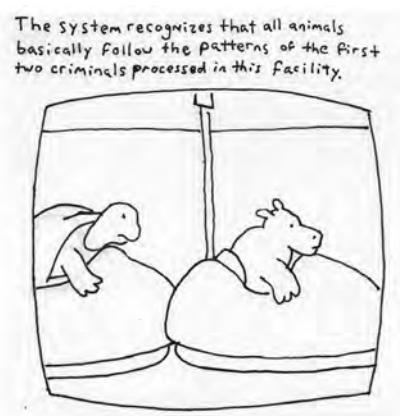




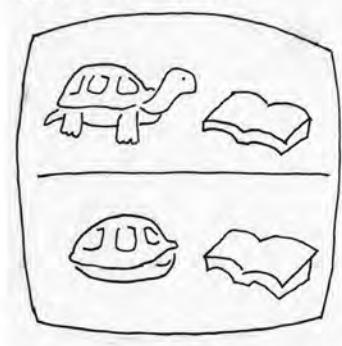


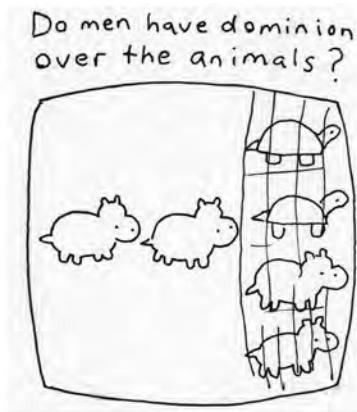
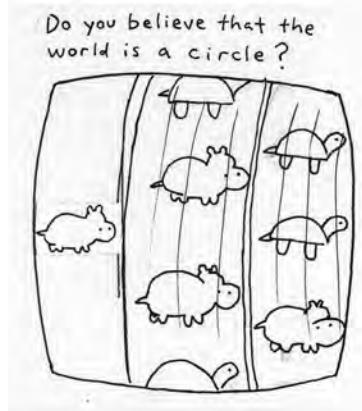


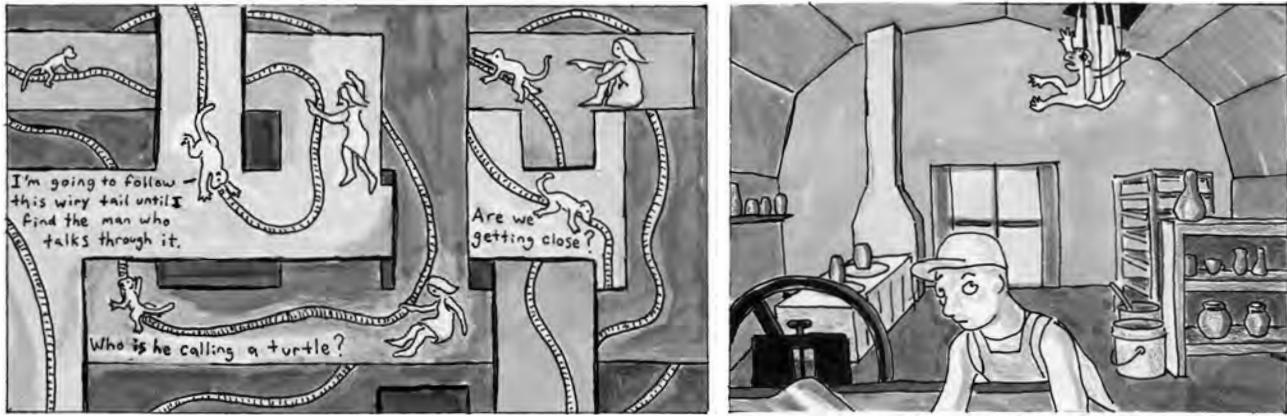
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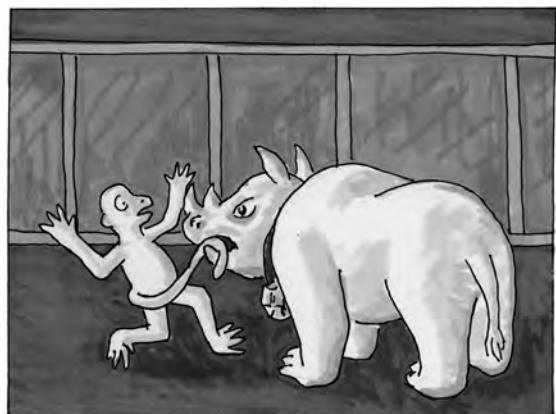


Turtlians completely refuse the law of the holy book.



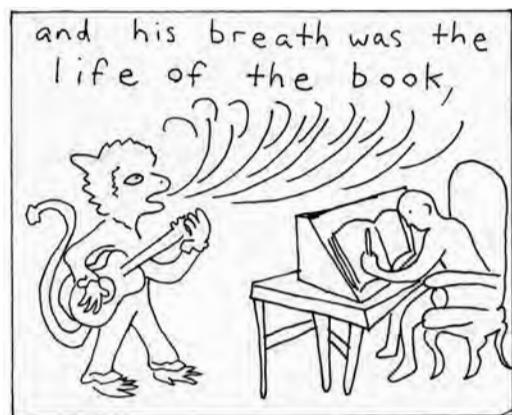
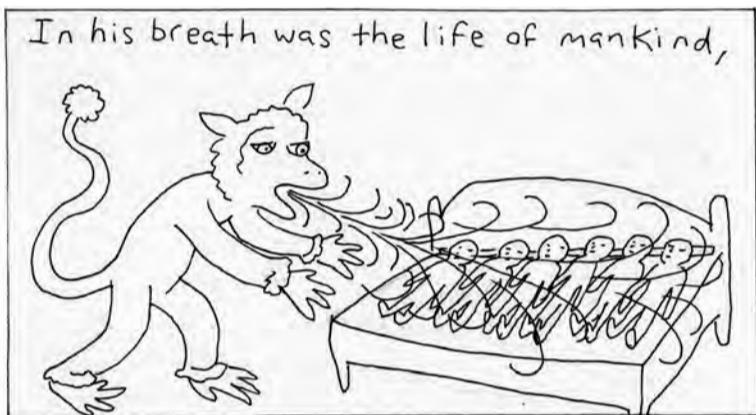
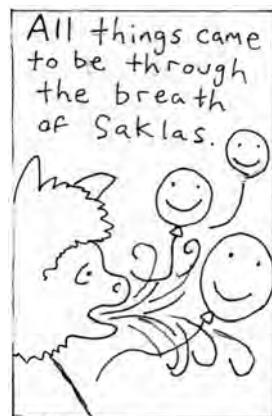
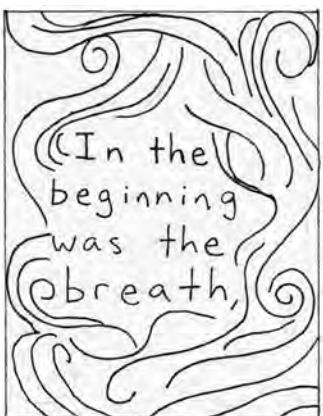


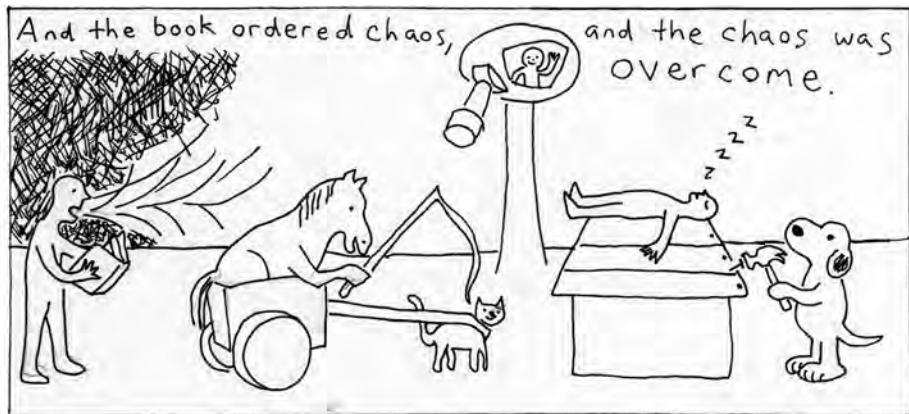




CHAPTER FOURTEEN





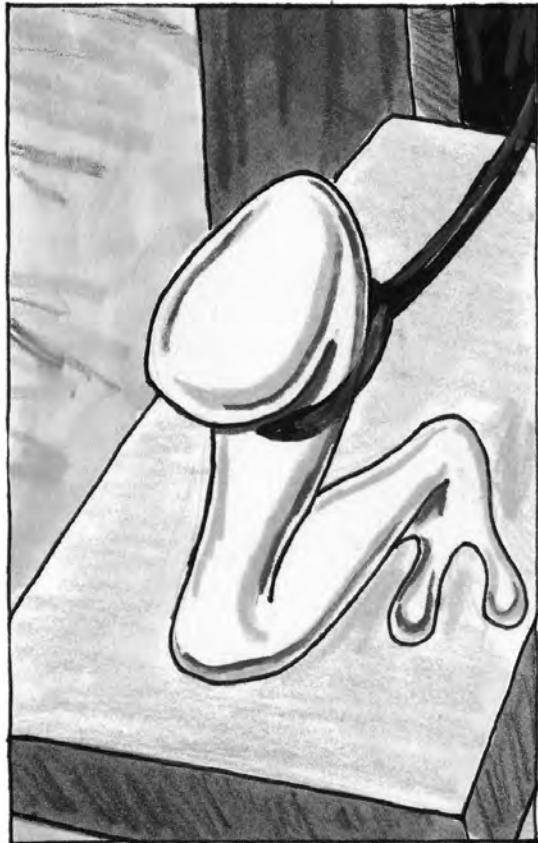


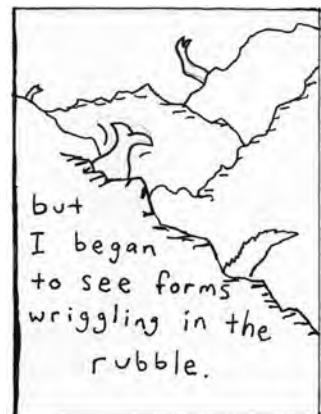
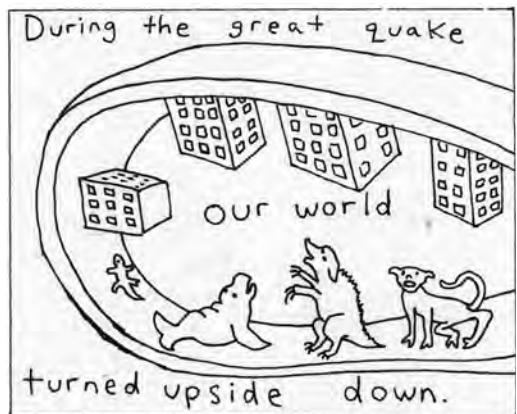




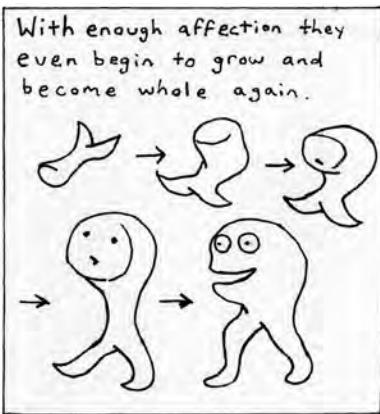
CHAPTER FIFTEEN







For most this means safety and shelter,



It may seem like I am helping them, but in reality they are helping me.







CHAPTER SIXTEEN





He even felt himself becoming wiser.



I've known several creatures who spoke wise words, and none of them cannibalized their brothers.



This newly appointed ruler would disagree with your link between wisdom and words.

One is not proved wise by what comes out of his mouth,



Rather he is proved wise by what goes into it.



And he never mentioned flesh or cannibalism. He coined a new term:



Sounds nice and neutral, right?

He ruled, rebuilt, and restored order at the cost of a few creatures.

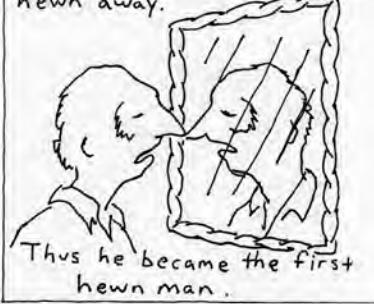


He raised himself up a bit more with each one he cut down.

At some point he realized that eating never filled him. It only ever left him hungrier all the time.



As he grew more similar to man with each kindred he ate, he felt something within him diminished, hewn away.



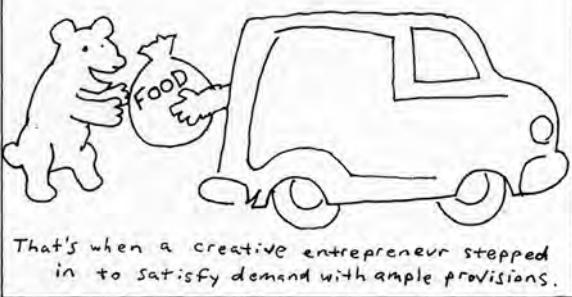
Thus he became the first hewn man.

How did there come to be so many hewn men?



58 900

Once the method of his transformation was revealed, all the animals clamoured for a cheap, guilt free, steady stream of food.



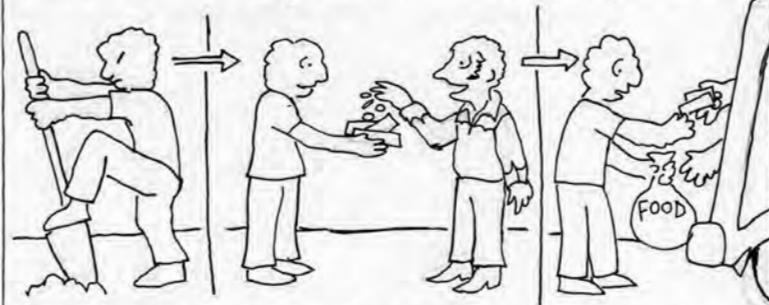
That's when a creative entrepreneur stepped in to satisfy demand with ample provisions.

While this food was cheap, the new hewmen soon learned that it comes with a steep hidden cost, hunger.



Before they - I mean WE - knew what had happened, they - I mean WE - were hooked.

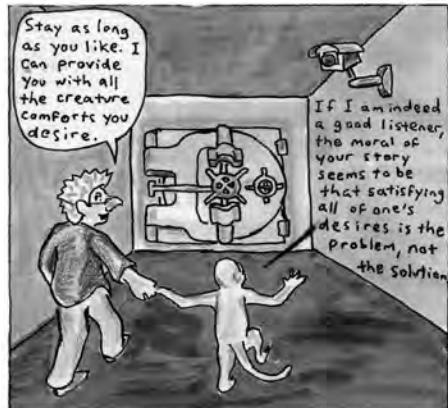
We work hard for our daily food, but now we're all co-equal with men.



Only our elected leader and the entrepreneur profit by our labor. We feel great pride from the freedom we have attained.

That's the story of hewmen. Now tell me what you're running from.

The men accused me and my friend of being turtles and they tried to make us into their lunch.

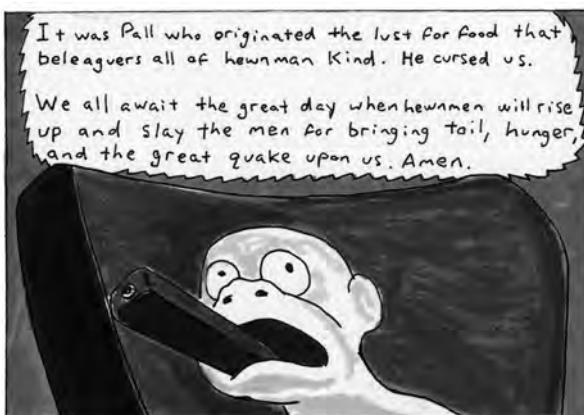


Stay as long as you like. I can provide you with all the creature comforts you desire.

If I am indeed a good listener, the moral of your story seems to be that satisfying all of one's desires is the problem, not the solution.



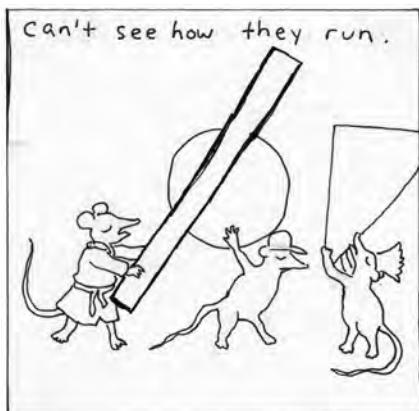
I just need a safe place to hide while I plot my next move.





CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

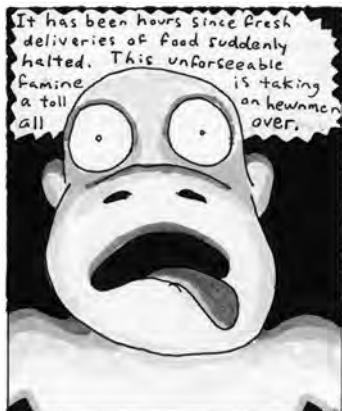






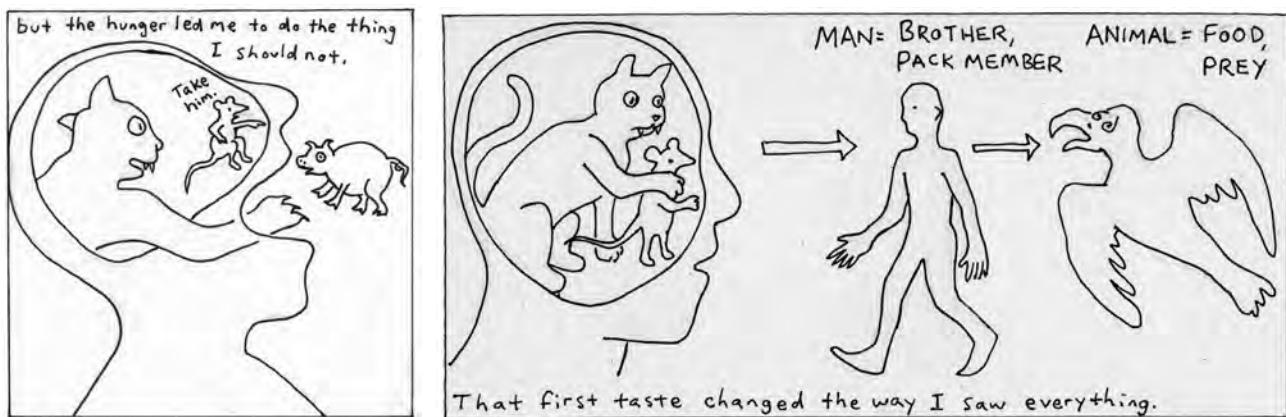
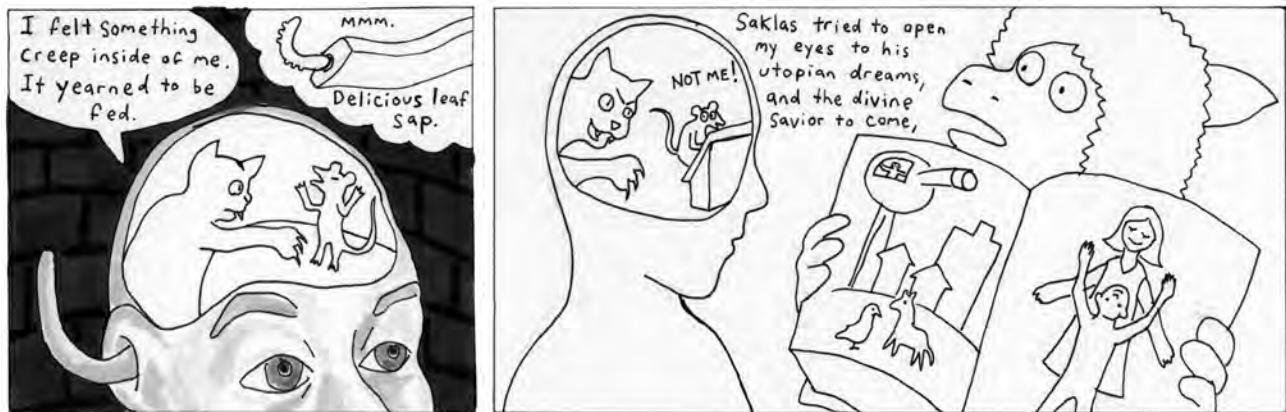
One eats treats from crockery
in excess and in blindness.

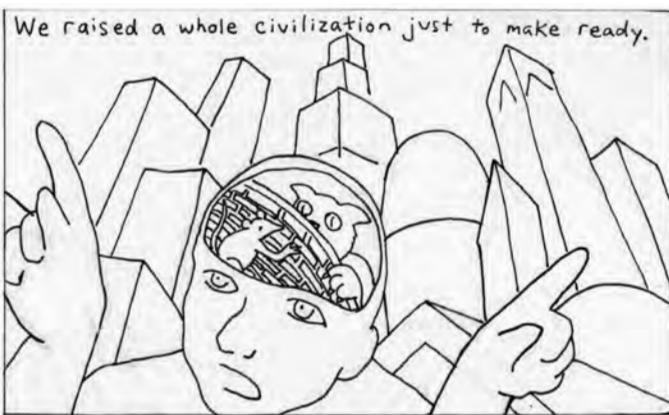
The other dishes up mockery,
and calls it hewnman Kindness.

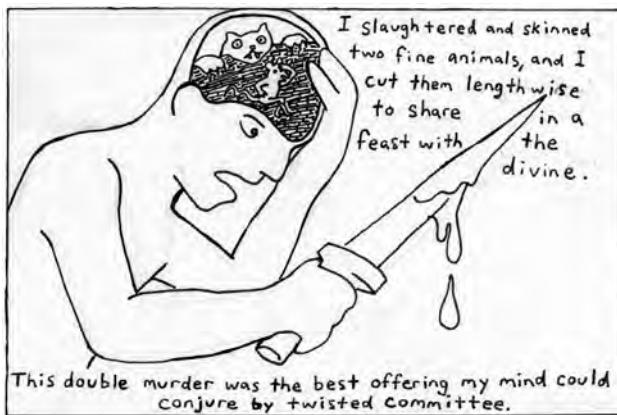
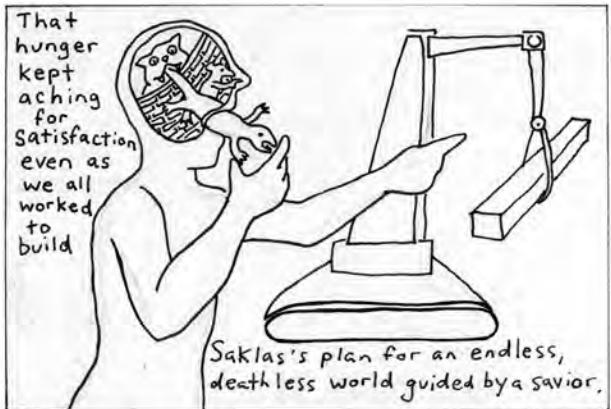












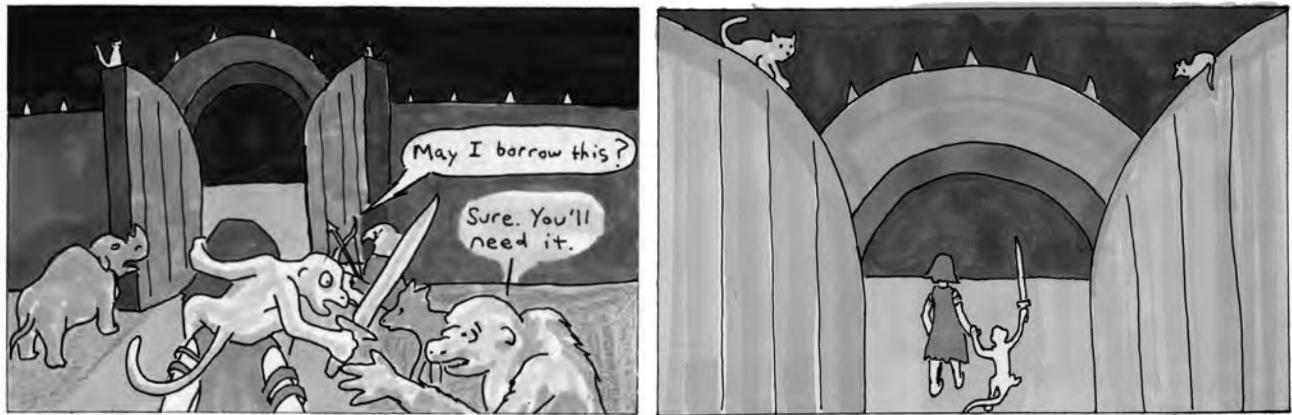
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

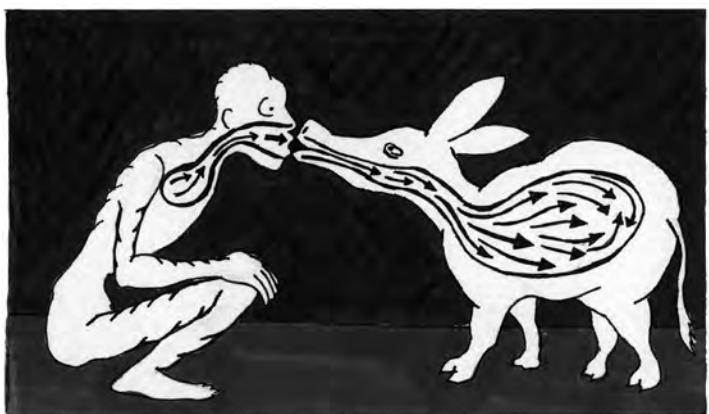






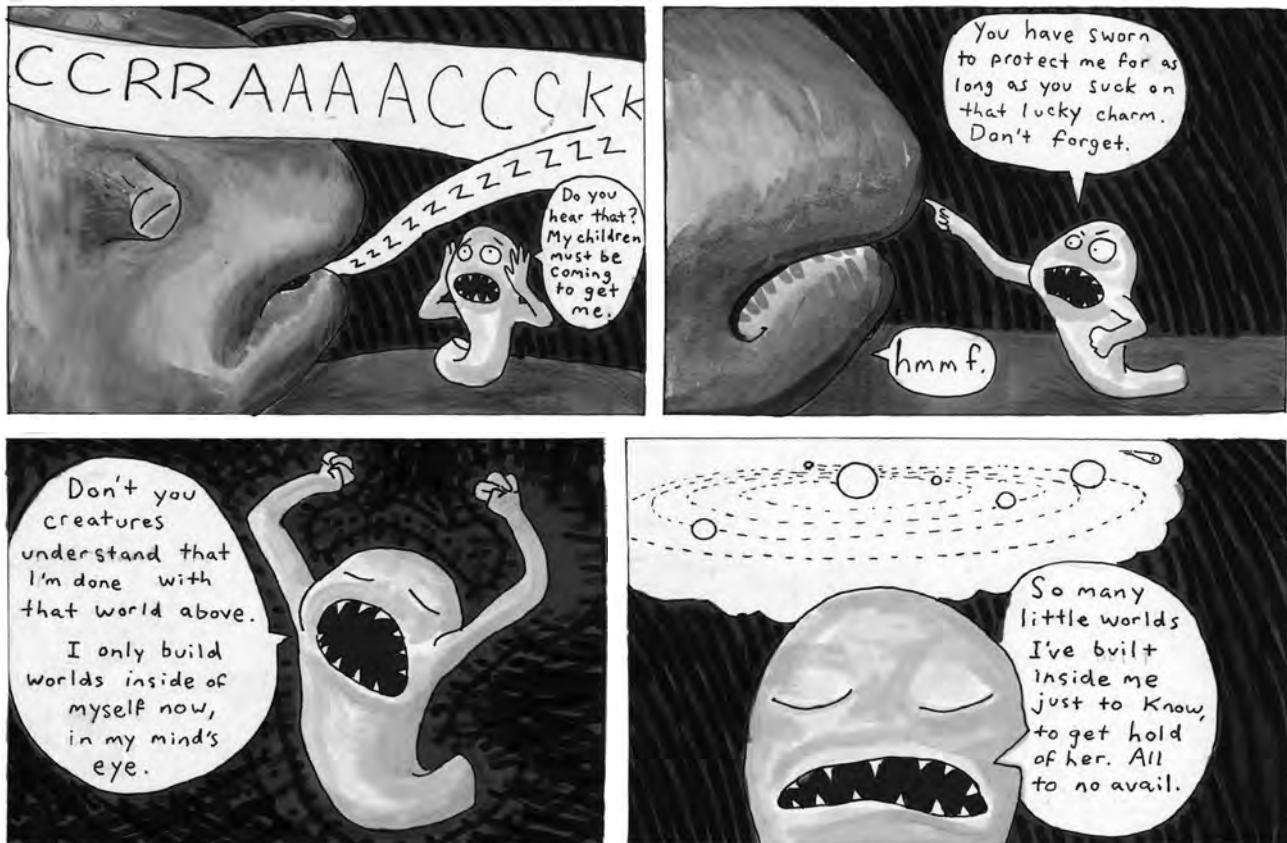


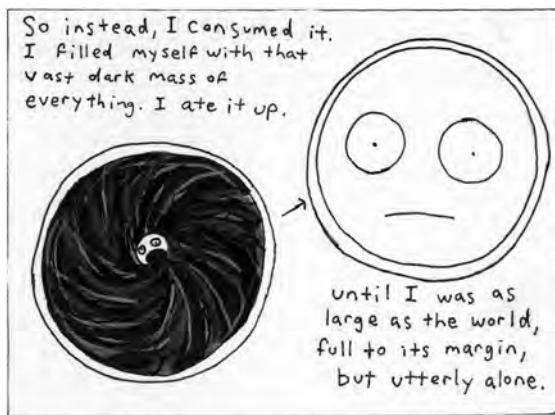


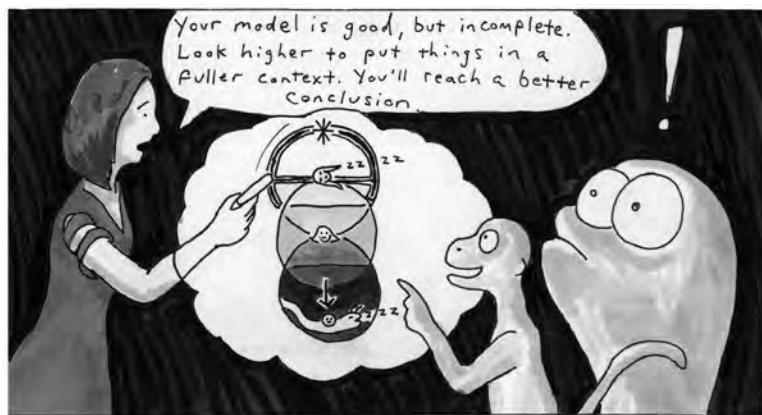
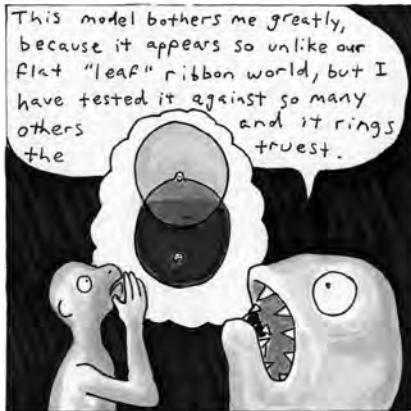
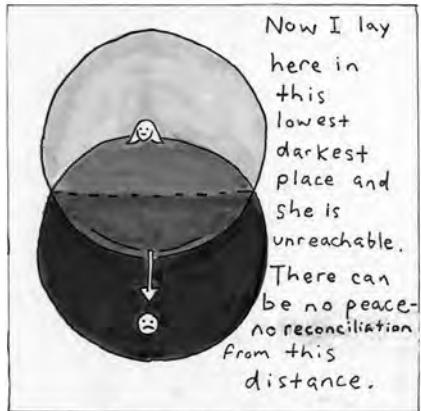
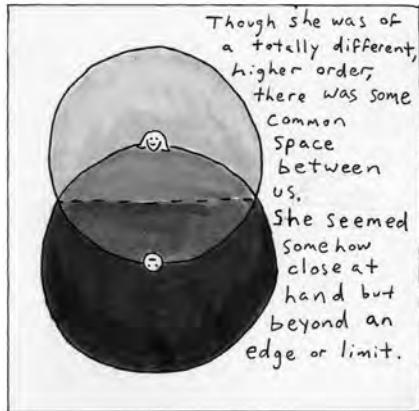


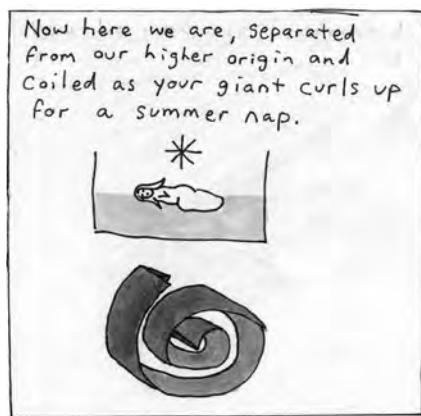


CHAPTER NINETEEN



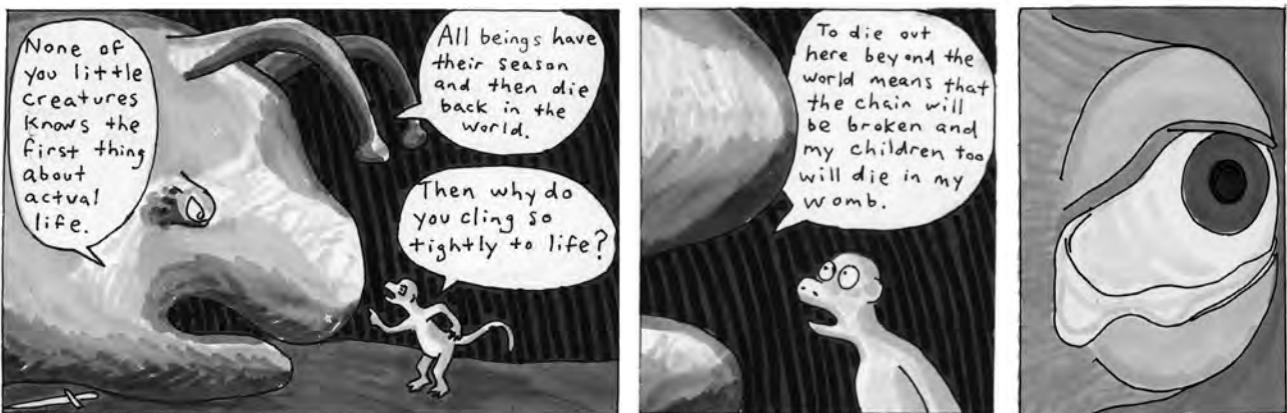






CHAPTER TWENTY

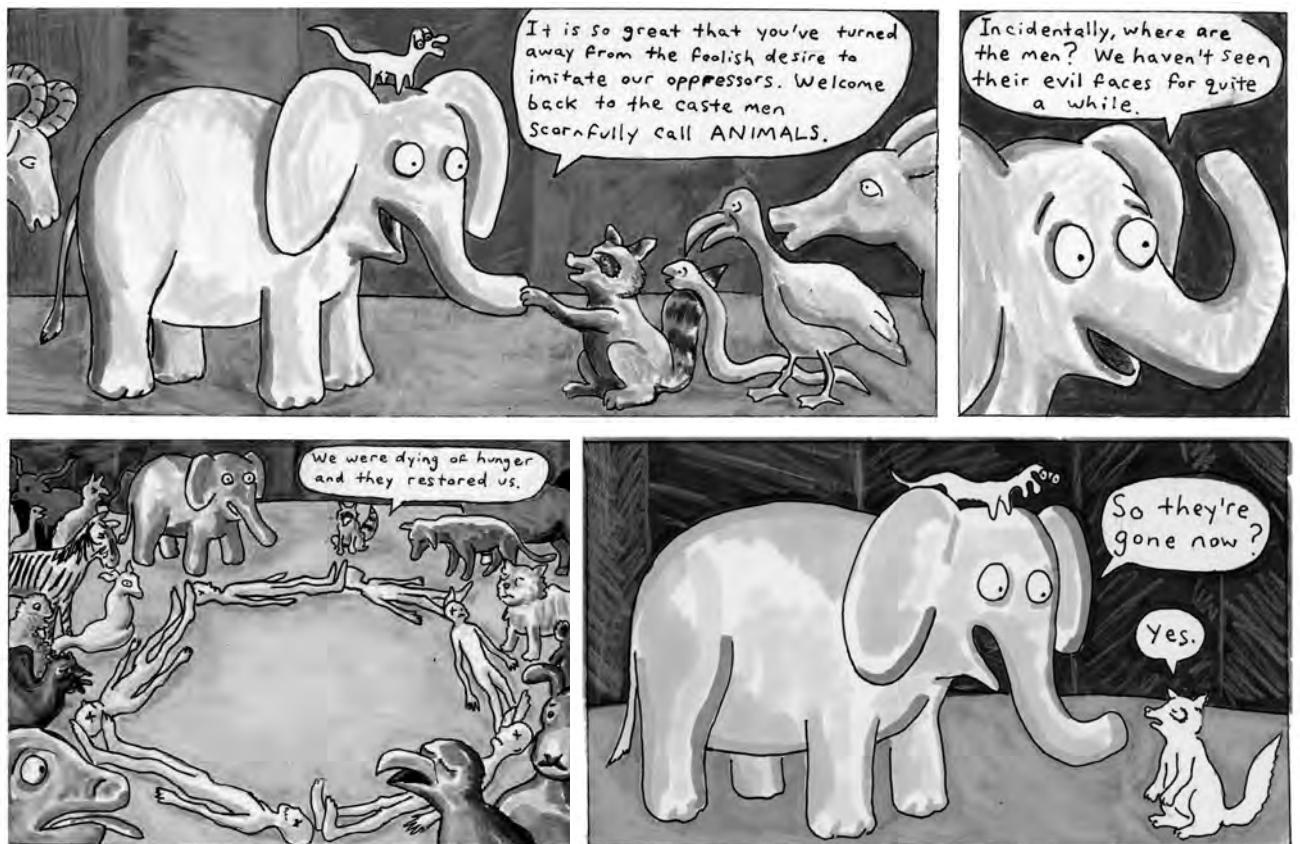


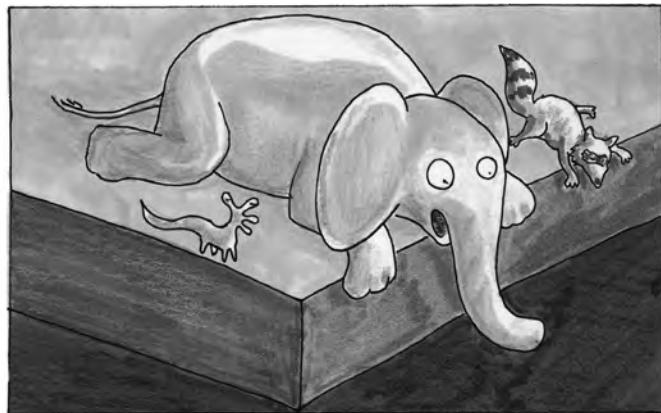


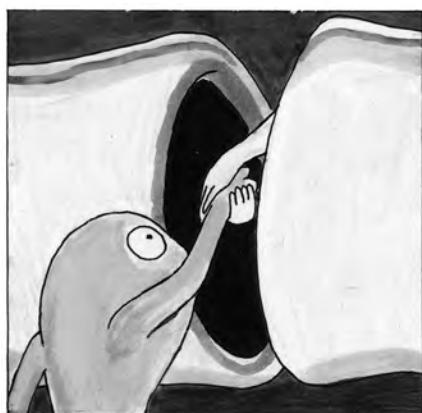
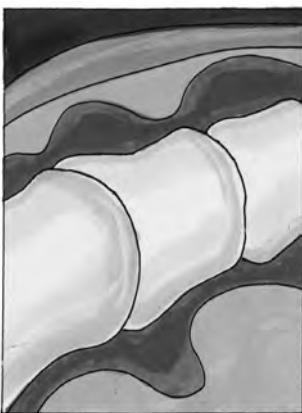
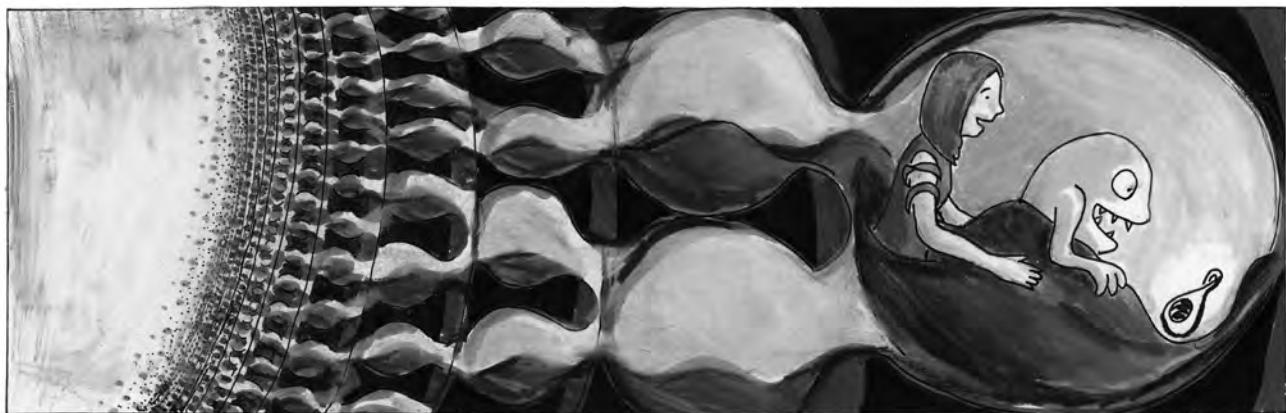
But you are so powerful.
You have shaken and
rearranged our whole
world. Why do
you lay
here
believing
you are
unable
to change
your fate?
Wake up
and...

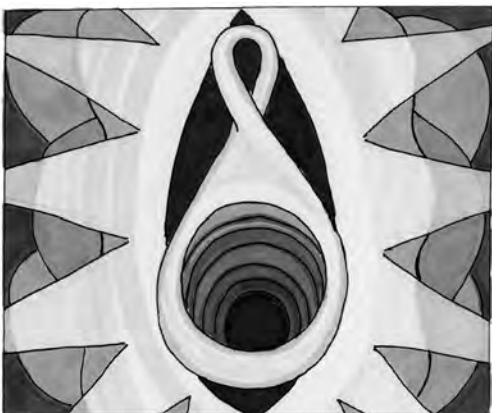
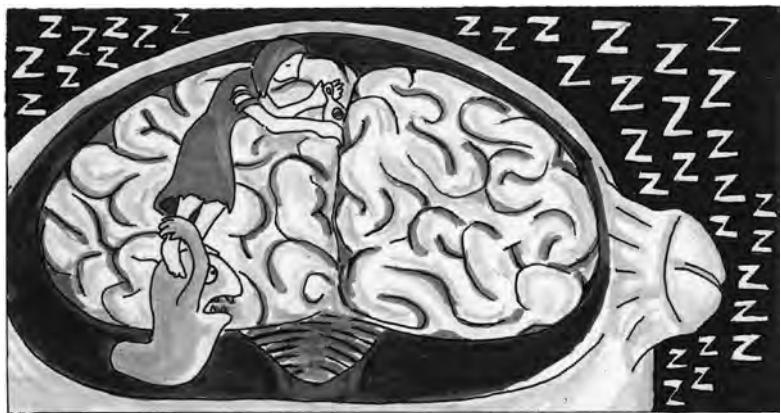


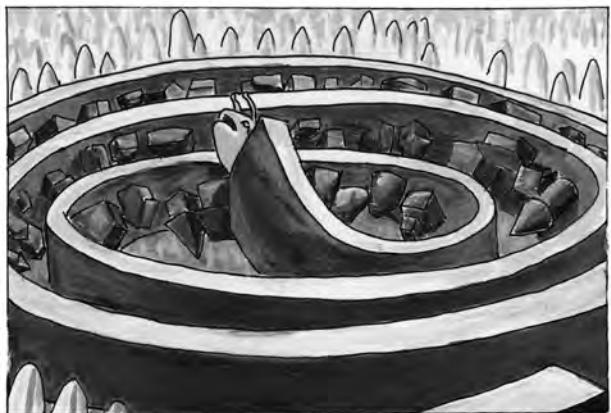
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



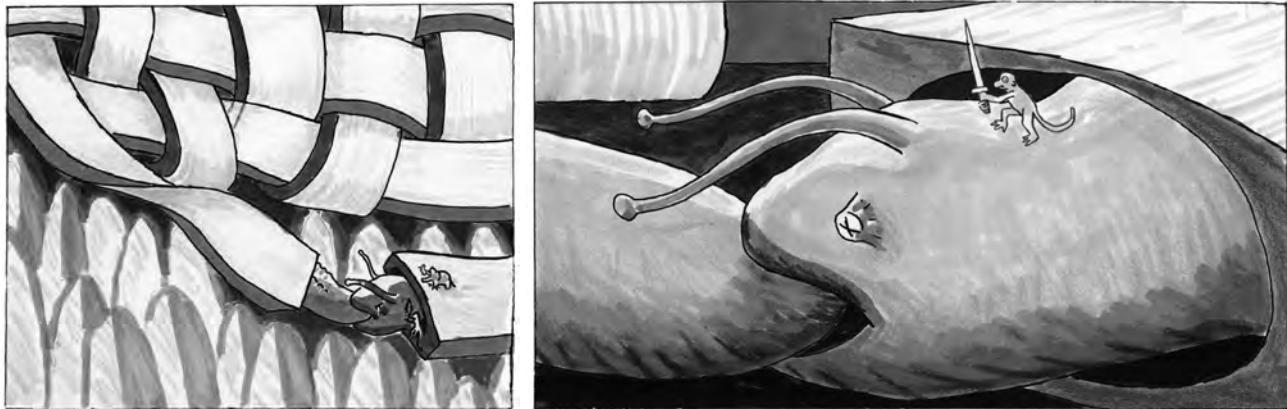
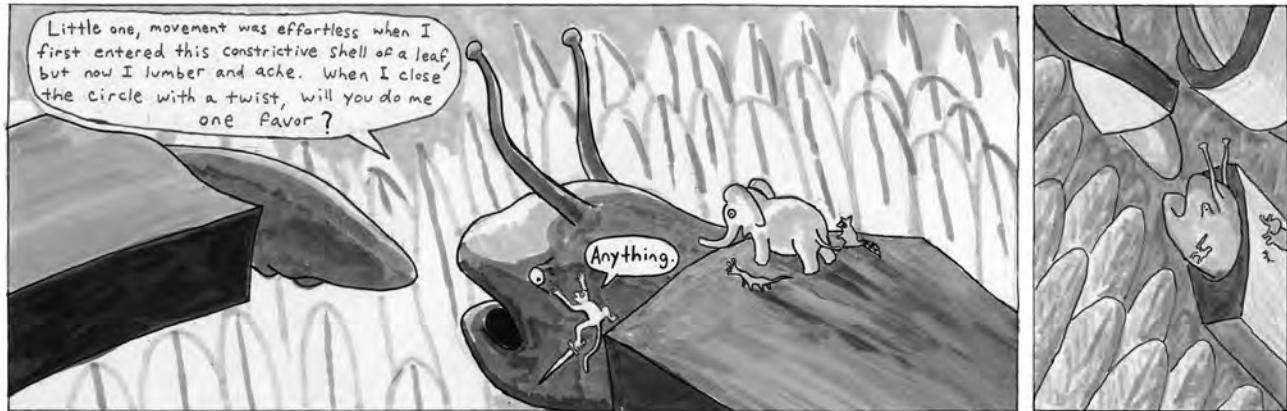




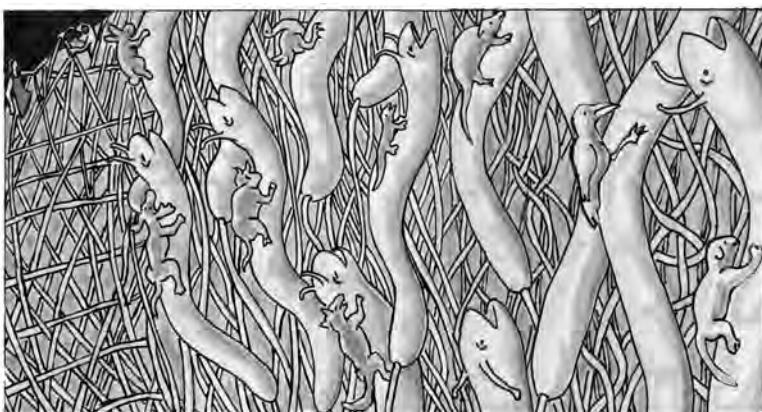
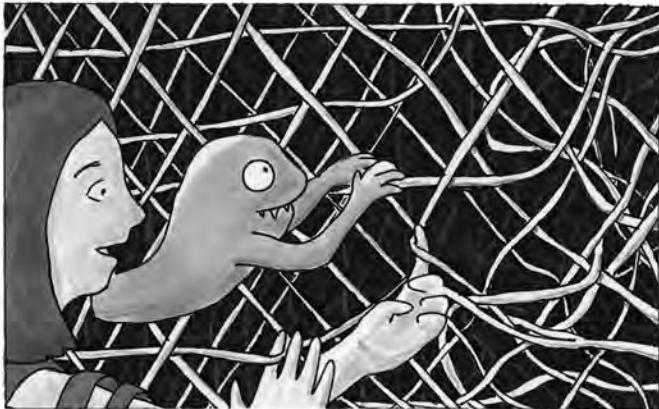
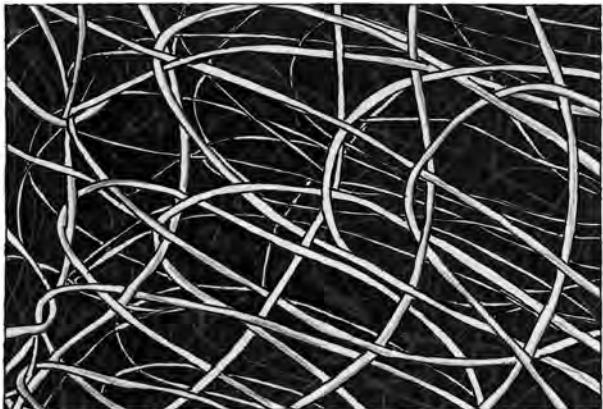


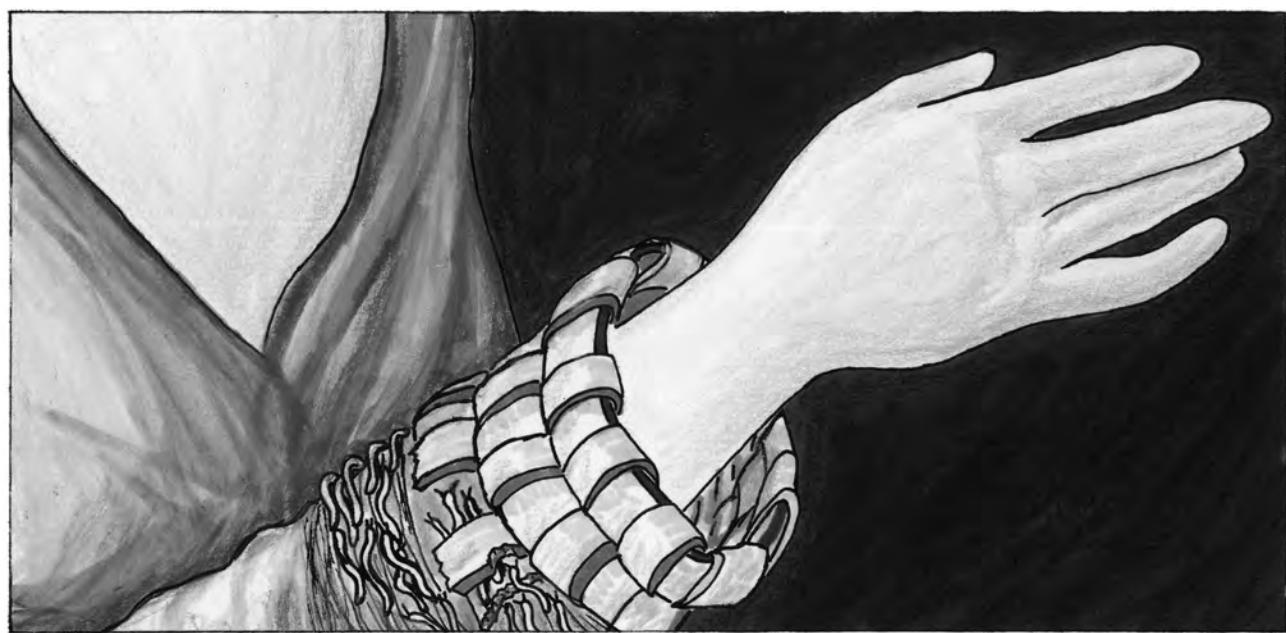


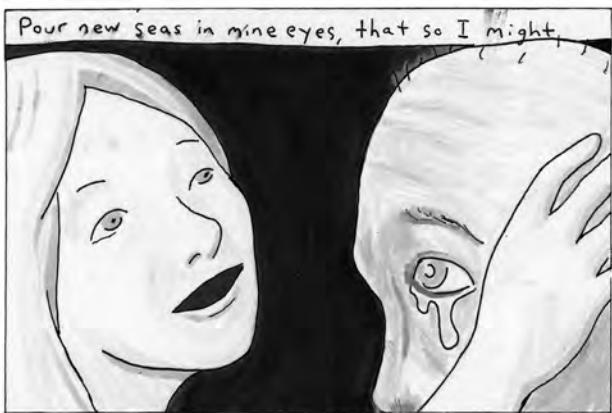














AFTERTWORD

STEVAN L. DAVIES

Scott Finch's graphic novel, which he tells me reflects ideas found in my own book *The Secret Book of John: The Gnostic Gospel*, is the continuation of a three millennium long human effort to understand and explain the whole history of the universe as one continuous interconnected story with characters, plot, suspense and climactic events. One such story, which we call the Bible, became normative and canonical. To tell another cosmic story, or a mythic history that significantly deviated from that story, was eventually considered criminal activity, "heresy," sometimes punishable by death. Nevertheless, there have been dissenters from the canonical story. Some even declared that Moses had it wrong! In the Secret Book of John (aka the Apocryphon of John) the author extensively rewrites the canonical creation story, introducing some changes with the phrase "It was not as Moses said, but" his alternative version.

Such inventive people in the first centuries of the present era, from roughly 50 CE to 450 CE, are called Gnostics. A substantial library of Gnostic writing, their myths and stories and their novels of the history of the universe, was discovered in 1945 in Nag Hammadi, Egypt. Those books had been buried soon after 367 CE by the monks of a Christian monastery near Nag Hammadi because the bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, had ordered that all monastic communities must burn all texts other than those of the canonical scriptures and the approved orthodox commentaries. Instead of burning theirs, some monks hid them, hoping to recover them when it was safe to do so. That day never came in their lifetimes.

The books of the Nag Hammadi library, and the other Gnostic books that survive, show that the ancient Gnostics demanded creativity. Scott Finch is part of this creative tradition and his views are similar in some ways to those of the ancient Gnostics of the first few centuries CE. His imaginative reconstruction of the history of the cosmos is a modern interpretation of theirs but featuring his own revelations.

Gnosticism has a dim view of the world, but not a dim view of reality. Gnostics believe that there is a divine reality beyond this apparent world and that we are the self-consciousness of God who has lost self-awareness. We are divine mind trapped in an illusory world that has no inherent reality and thus will disappear if we come to know it properly and begin, as Jesus says in the Gospel of Thomas (11, 111), to live from the living and arrive in the light. In order to break the “fall” of God into being us and to return to primordial divine self-knowledge, a Gnostic had to comprehend the process of his own fall into objectivity and alienation. The history of the cosmos is the history of God’s mind, and this is the history of every individual. Psychogeny recapitulates cosmogeny. It would be incumbent upon and therapeutic for any Gnostic to re-write the story of God in his own narrative language, to trace his own fall and return by a cosmological myth. In this sense Gnostic myth is autobiography. To know your own cosmic story is a factor in salvation according to the Gnostics, and to tell your story is to generate myth that may facilitate the salvation of others.

CREATIVITY

The ancient Gnostics demanded creativity. Scott Finch’s imaginative reconstruction of the history of the cosmos is the modern interpretation of theirs, not the same as theirs, but part of the same quest. For Gnosticism there was a general pattern for myths of origin, one that is classically exemplified in the Secret Book of John, but unorthodox ancient writers felt free to revise and extend, complicate or simplify, the cosmology of the world as they saw fit. Their creativity shocked orthodox Christian

writers. One of the earliest orthodox opponents of the Gnostic writings, Bishop Irenaeus of Lyon in Gaul wrote about Gnostics in ca. 180 C.E. that “every one of them generates something new, day by day, according to his ability; for no one is deemed ‘perfect,’ who does not develop among them some mighty fictions” (Irenaeus: *Against Heresies*, 1:18). Irenaeus has no respect for individual creativity, it is a threat to church order. He is the earliest known source for an idea that eventually came to be beyond discussion, that there are and can be four and only four Gospels and that further creativity in that regard is absolutely unacceptable. (*AH*, 3:11).

Irenaeus also writes against any proliferation of individual mythic constructions: “Many offshoots of numerous heresies have already been formed from those heretics we have described. . . . They insist upon teaching something new, declaring themselves the inventors of any sort of opinion which they may have been able to call into existence” (*AH*, 1:28). It makes sense in a social-Darwinist way that a strongly heirarchical orthodox church organization would more easily survive through the centuries than a movement insisting on the creative freedom of individuals. It makes social sense, but we don’t have to like it.

Today, as the institutional church very slowly breaks down and loses its ability to enforce uniformity, creativity is coming back to life in the worlds of religious mythic construction. Scott Finch is creating new myth as the Gnostic mythicists did two thousand years ago. His work is part of a great lineage.

CARNIVORES

In this Gnostic novel Scott Finch shares his vision with all of us. His vision is somewhat more inclusive than the old Gnostic myths were because he is particularly concerned with the role and fate of animals and birds while they, in typical human fashion, ancient writers were interested almost entirely in human beings. Scott Finch is interested in creating a myth of life, not just of human life.

The question of human relations with animals does occasionally arise in ancient Gnostic thinking. In the Gospel of Thomas there are sayings attributed to Jesus that are concerned with issues raised by the consumption of animal flesh by humans. Since this matter is one Scott Finch considers seriously in this graphic novel, I will address it briefly here.

We read in the Gospel of Thomas saying 60: “They saw a Samaritan going into Judea carrying a lamb. Jesus asked his disciples: ‘What do you think he will do with that lamb?’ They replied, ‘He’ll kill it and eat it.’ He said to them, ‘As long as it remains alive he will not eat it; only if he kills it and it becomes a corpse. They said: ‘Otherwise he won’t be able to do so.’ He said to them: ‘You too must seek a place for rest or you may become a corpse and be eaten.’” This curious anecdote tells us that people eat the meat of dead animals, not living ones, but everyone already knows that. When we are told something utterly obvious, we can sometimes infer that there is something more subtle being said than the surface indicates. And indeed we also hear Jesus say in saying 11, “This sky will cease to be and the sky above it will cease to be. The dead do not live, and the living will not die. When you ate dead things you made them alive. When you arrive into light what will you do?” Here the theme goes a little further; people surely do eat dead animals and then the dead animals are transformed into living people. But this is not enough, because how can we ensure that we while living will not die? If we arrive in the light and attain enlightenment then, implicitly, eating dead things will no longer be appropriate for us.

Thomas’ gospel is often about transformation. In saying 22 we hear in part that “When you make an eye to replace an eye, and a hand to replace a hand, and a foot to replace a foot, and an image to replace an image then you will enter the Kingdom.” So if this sky (or this “heaven”) and the sky above it cease to be, and presumably are replaced by even higher skies, and if we as human beings are transformed into a new body and a new image (of God), we will evidently no longer need to be carnivores. People have long eaten dead things and transformed them into themselves who are

living. What happens, Jesus asks, when you yourself arrive into light and are beyond merely living? “When you ate dead things you made them alive. When you arrive into light what will you do?”

We have something of an answer to this question in saying 111 where we hear that Jesus said: “The earth and sky will roll up right in front of you. Anyone living from the living will not die. Doesn’t Jesus say that the world is not worthy of one who finds himself?” People who are transformed, whose worldly sky has rolled up and been replaced by a higher sky and greater earth, such a person will not live from the corpses of dead animals but will live from the living divinity and never die. He or she has achieved the ultimate gnostic goal: divine self-knowledge.

Now people are kept alive by eating the flesh of dead animals, when they come into the light they should live in another way. Jesus criticizes carnivorous human behavior especially clearly in saying 87, “Wretched is a body depending on a body and wretched is a soul depending on these two.” How does a body depend on a body? By killing it and eating it for, as Jesus said of the Samaritan’s lamb in saying 60, “as long as it remains alive he will not eat it; only if he kills it and it becomes a corpse,” and anyone who eats a corpse inhabits a body dependent on a body and so is spiritually wretched.

The question is then, as Jesus put it, “when you ate dead things you made them alive. When you arrive into light what will you do?” You should no longer live on dead things but on the living, for “anyone living from the living will not die.” And exactly how will we do that? I can’t say. But Jesus does say, in the canonical tradition, (Luke 12:29-31) “Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.” Whether this advice is serviceable is unclear. What is clear is that the tradition conveyed by the Gospel of Thomas is concerned with the contradiction between humans who seek light and God’s kingdom and the lifestyle of humans who kill animals

and consume them for food. I believe that Scott Finch shows similar concern in his graphic novel. The only way to appreciate his novel is to read it. It stands in a long tradition of alternative visions of cosmic human history and thus it does not stand alone. Enjoy.

Stevan L. Davies is Professor of Religious Studies at Misericordia University. His work includes *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (Second Edition, Bardic Press) and *The Secret Book of John: The Gnostic Gospel Annotated and Explained* (Skylight Paths Publishing).

NOTE

As this book took shape, I happened upon John Donne’s “Holy Sonnet V: I am a Little World Made Cunningly.” The way this poem mirrored, outlined, and expanded on everything I had set out to express was startling. It became an armature and touchstone for my convoluted tale. I hope devotees of Donne will forgive one necessary twist by a character in my story as he exchanges the words “O Lord” for “Lady.” This little switch reverses a trick that’s been played ever since the divine took shape in our mind’s eye as an old man in the clouds.

