

SHADOW OF THE TORTURER
ROUGH GRAPHIC NOVEL TREATMENT



SHADOW OF THE TORTURER

*Rough Draft Comix Adaptation
by Mike Bennewitz*

*Original Text by Gene Wolfe,
May he please accept our appologies and appreciate our intent.*

Any reader of these pages should take note that these crude scribblings are a first attempt to imagine Wolfe's words panel by panel. Please forgive the hasty renderings of barely designed details... What matters in this pass is the nitty gritty of determining what needs to happen on each page, in each panel, in each caption. The artwork here is not intended for publication, but rather for the development of a greater work. Please bear with us.

Many Thanks to Jordon Flato for his able and generous assistance in performing these excruciations on the text.

It is possible I already had some presentiment of my future. The locked and rusted gate that stood before us, with wisps of river fog threading its spikes like the mountain paths, remains in my mind now as the symbol of my exile.

I Resurrection & Death

That is why I have begun this account of it with the aftermath of our swim, in which I, the torturer's apprentice Severian, had so nearly drowned.



The guard has gone.

We should go around.

And try to get through the barbican without a safe-conduct?

They'd send to Master Gurloes.

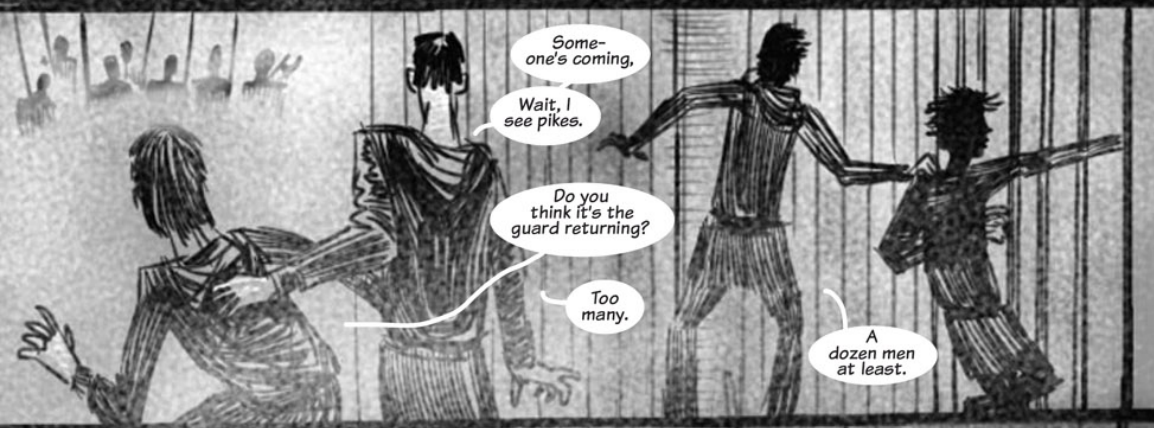




But why would the guard leave?

It doesn't matter.

Eata, see if you can slip between the bars.



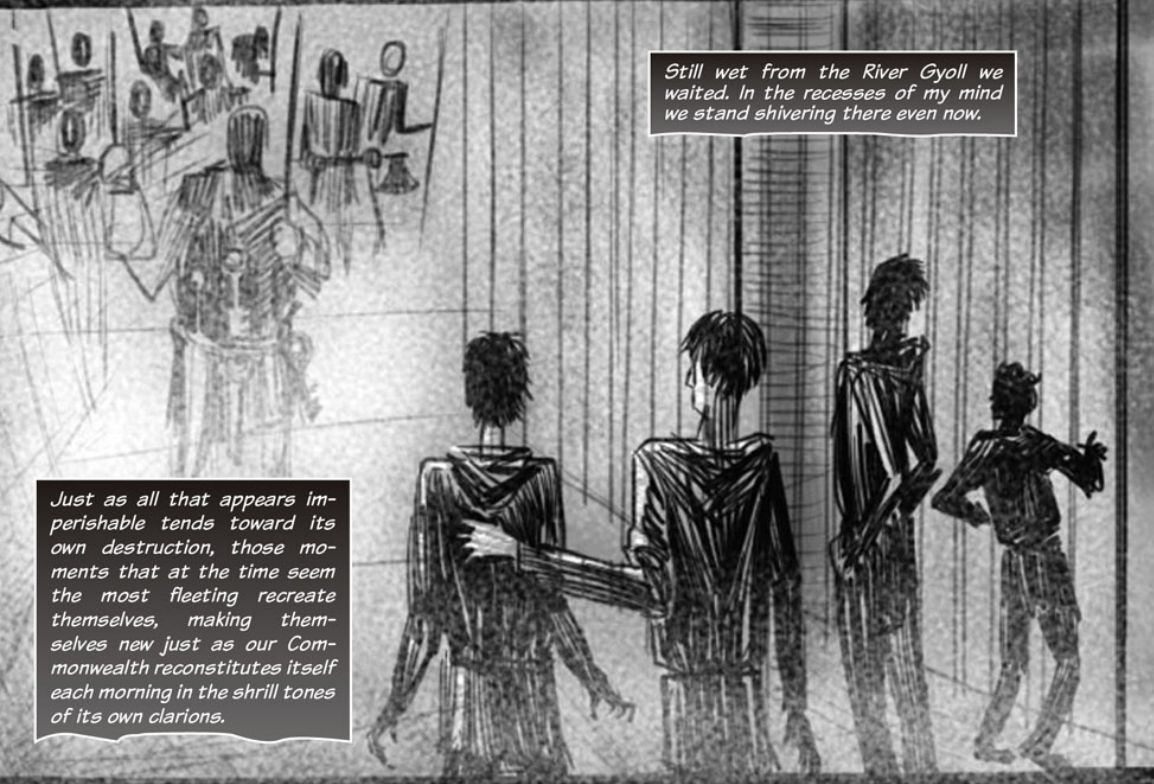
Some-one's coming.

Wait, I see pikes.

Do you think it's the guard returning?

Too many.

A dozen men at least.



Still wet from the River Gyll we waited. In the recesses of my mind we stand shivering there even now.

Just as all that appears imperishable tends toward its own destruction, those moments that at the time seem the most fleeting recreate themselves, making themselves new just as our Commonwealth reconstitutes itself each morning in the shrill tones of its own clarions.



We're waiting to get in, good-man.

Not until dawn,

You young fellows had better get home.



Goodman, the guard was supposed to let us in, but he's not here,

You won't be getting in tonight.

Who are you, goodman? You're not soldiers.

We're the volunteers, We come to protect our own dead.

Then you can let us in.

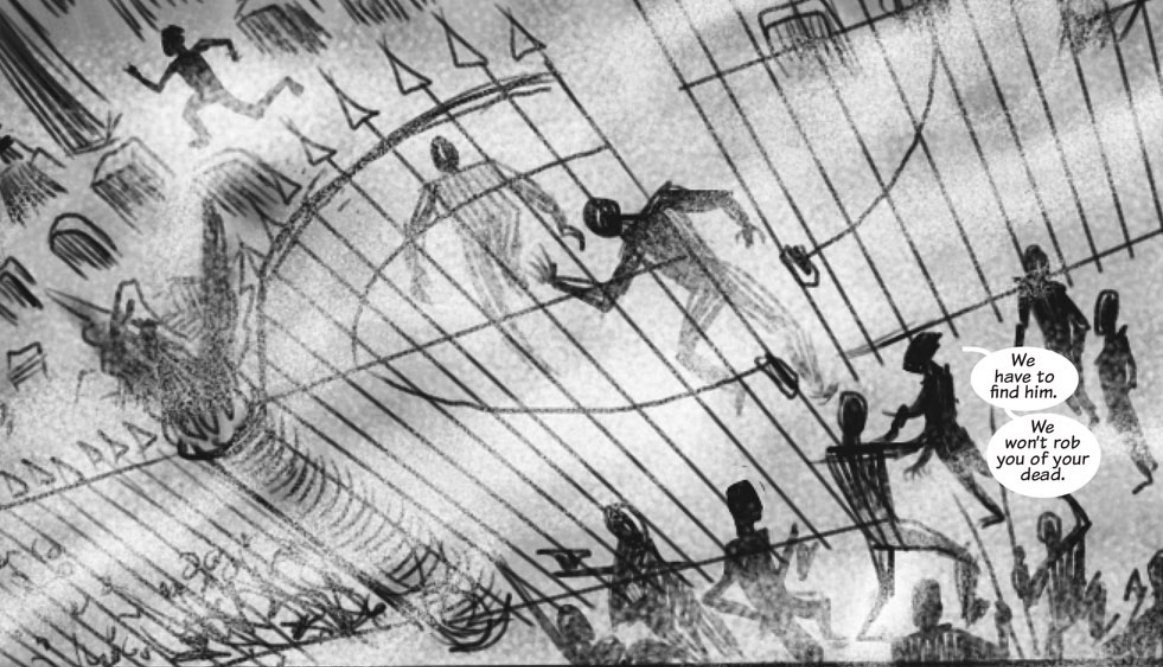


We let no one inside but ourselves.



!!!





We have to find him.

We won't rob you of your dead.

Why do you want to go in, then?

To gather herbs,

We are physicians' gallipots. Don't you want the sick healed?

You must know that certain simples attain their highest virtues when pulled from grave soil by moonlight.

I see.


Well we have to get him out,

GO FIND HIM!

Certain mystes aver that the real world has been constructed by the human mind, since our ways are governed by the artificial categories into which we place essentially undifferentiated things, things weaker than our words for them.

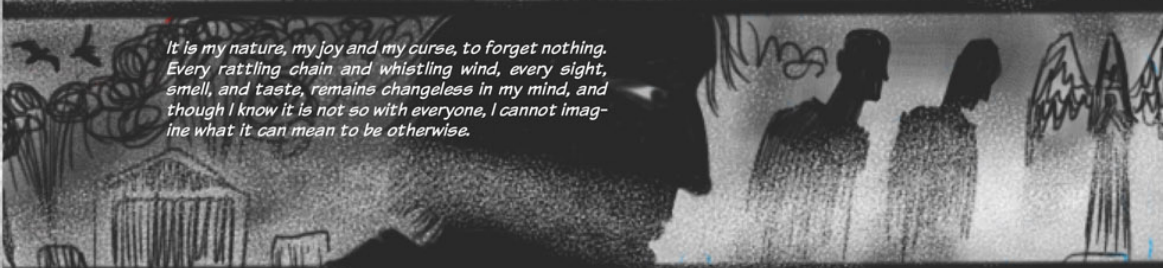


I understood the principle intuitively that night as I heard the last volunteer swing the gate closed behind us.




I'm going to
watch over my mother.
We've wasted too much time
already.


They
could have her a
league off by now.




It is my nature, my joy and my curse, to forget nothing. Every rattling chain and whistling wind, every sight, smell, and taste, remains changeless in my mind, and though I know it is not so with everyone, I cannot imagine what it can mean to be otherwise.




*Those few steps we took
upon the whited path re-
turning to the Citadel wall
rise before me now:*




It was cold and growing colder; we had no light, and fog had begun to roll in from Gyoll in earnest, bringing out the smell of the river water in my shirt, and the pungency of the new-turned earth.



I had almost died that day, choking in the netted roots; the night was to mark the beginning of my manhood.



Suddenly there was a shot, a thing I had never seen before, the bolt of violet energy splitting the darkness. Somewhere a monument fell with a crash.




Silence then . . . in which everything around me seemed to dissolve.

We began to run.

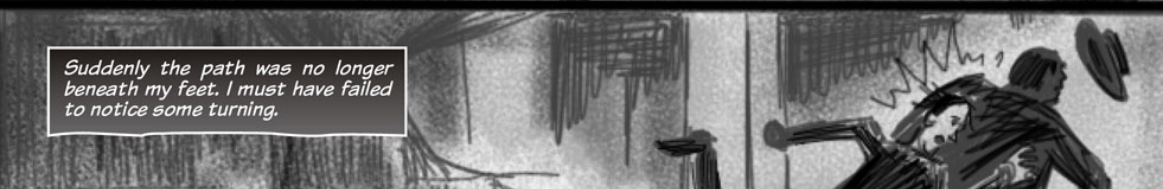


Men were shouting, far off.

I heard the ring of steel on stone



I dashed along an unfamiliar path, a ribbon of broken bone just wide enough for two to walk abreast.



Suddenly the path was no longer beneath my feet. I must have failed to notice some turning.

I swerved to dodge an oblesque and collided full tilt with a man in a black coat.



!?!



What was that?



Some-
body ran into
me.
Gone
now, whoever
he was.

Open
the lamp

They
would be on us
like a pack of dholes,
Madame.

They
will be soon in
any case -

Vodulus
fired. You must
have heard it.

Be
more likely to
keep them off.

I wish I
hadn't brought
it.

We
shouldn't need it
against this sort of
people.



More
rope.

How
is she?

Fresh
as a flower,
Madame. Hardly
a breath of stink on
her, and nothing to
worry about.





Now give me one end and you take the other, Liege, and we'll have her out like a carrot.

You didn't have to come, Thea.

How would it look to the others if I took none of the risks?



You see, just as I told you, Liege, Madame, nineteen times of a score there's nothin' to it.

We've only to get her over the wall now.

YOU THERE!



Hold them off, Liege.



I'll take care of this, and get Madame to safety.

Take it.



Guard yourselves!

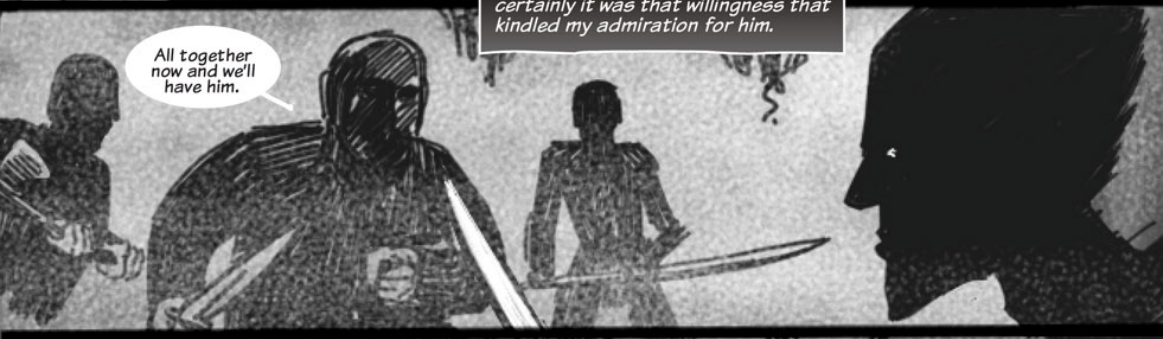


Who are you?


And what power of Erebus's gives you the right to come here and do something like this?

Perhaps it was Vodalus's willingness to die to protect her that made the woman seem precious to me;

certainly it was that willingness that kindled my admiration for him.



All together now and we'll have him.



Many times since then, when I have stood upon a shaky platform in some market-town square with Terminus Est at rest before me and a miserable vagrant kneeling at my feet,

I have recalled Vodalus at the graveside, and raised my own blade half pretending that when it fell I would be striking for him.



He stumbled.

In that instant I believe my whole life teetered in the scales with his.



I grabbed the ax almost by reflex.



Quite suddenly it was over.

The volunteer whose bloodied weapon I held was dead. The leader of the volunteers was writing at our feet. The pikeman was gone.



Who are you?

Severian. I am a torturer.

Or rather, I am an apprentice of the torturers, Liege.

Of the Order of the Seekers for Truth and Penitence.

I am a Vodalaris.

One of the thousands of Vodalaris of whose existence you are unaware.

It was a term I had scarcely heard.

Here.


We believe that we invent symbols.

The truth is that they invent us; we are their creatures, shaped by their hard, defining edges.


When soldiers take their oath they are given a coin, an asimi stamped with the profile of the Autarch.

Their acceptance of that coin is their acceptance of the special duties and burdens of military life - they are soldiers from that moment.


I did not know that then, but it is a profound mistake to believe that we must know of such things to be influenced by them.



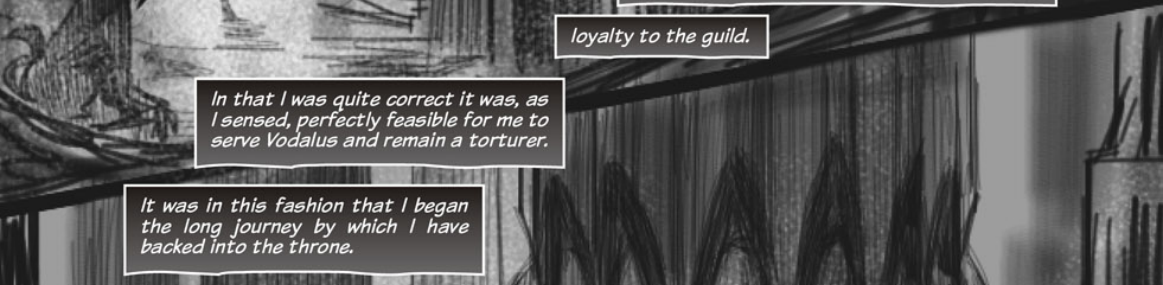
Thus I knew nothing, as the coin dropped into my pocket, of the dogmas of the movement Vodalus led,



but I soon learned them all, for they were in the air.




With him I hated the Autarchy, though I had no notion of what might replace it.



With him I despised the exultants who failed to rise against the Autarch and bound the fairest of their daughters to him in ceremonial concubinage.




With him I detested the people for their lack of discipline and a common purpose.



Of those values that Master Malrubins had tried to teach me, I accepted only one:

loyalty to the guild.



In that I was quite correct it was, as I sensed, perfectly feasible for me to serve Vodalus and remain a torturer.

It was in this fashion that I began the long journey by which I have backed into the throne.

II Seruian



Memory oppresses me.

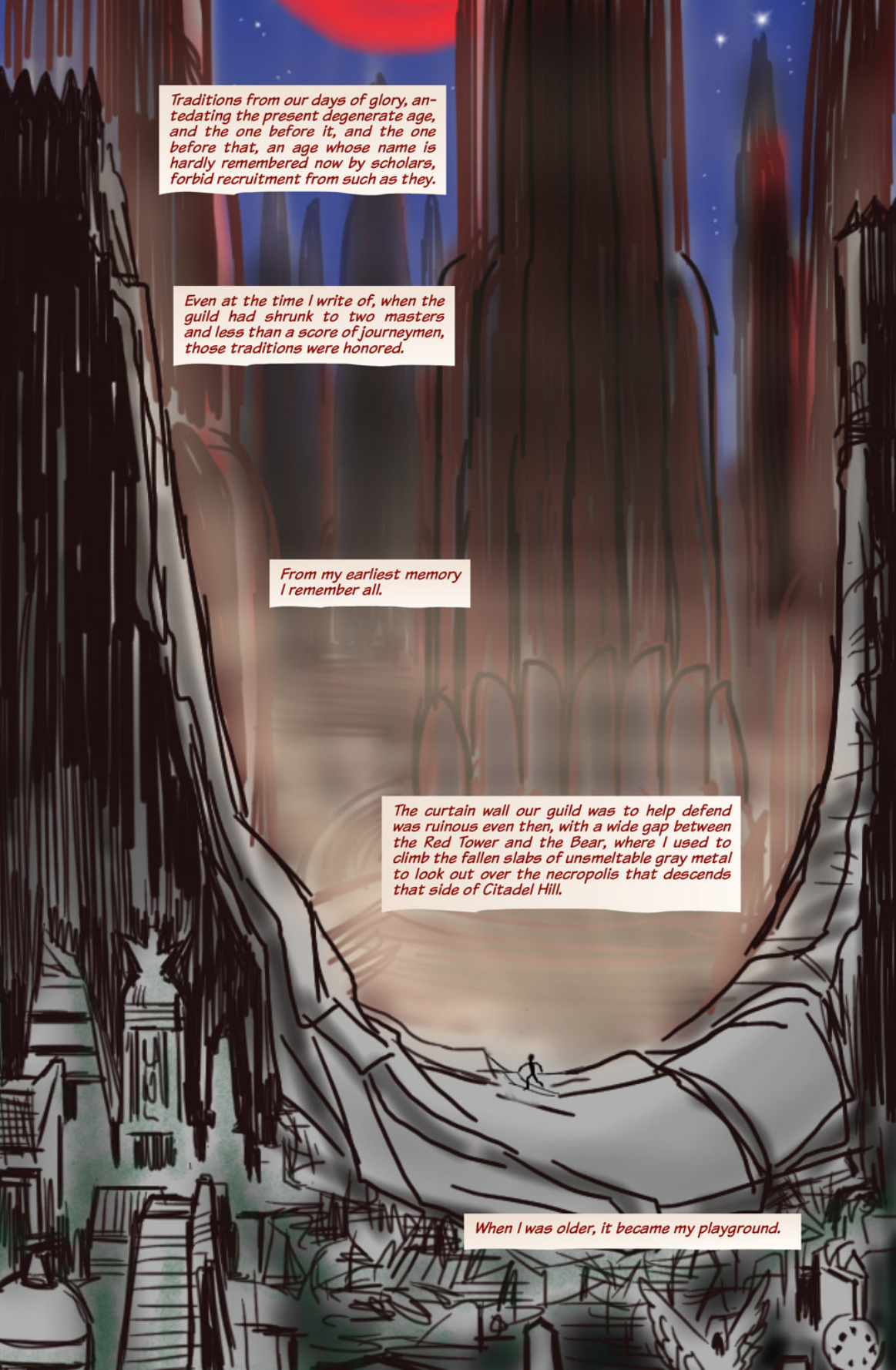
Having been reared among the torturers, I have never known my father or my mother. No more did my brother apprentices know theirs.

From time to time, but most particularly when winter draws on, poor wretches come clamoring to the Corpse Door, hoping to be admitted to our ancient guild.

Often they regale Brother Porter with accounts of the torments they will willingly inflict in payment for warmth and food; occasionally they fetch animals as samples of their work.

All are turned away.





Traditions from our days of glory, antedating the present degenerate age, and the one before it, and the one before that, an age whose name is hardly remembered now by scholars, forbid recruitment from such as they.

Even at the time I write of, when the guild had shrunk to two masters and less than a score of journeymen, those traditions were honored.

From my earliest memory I remember all.

The curtain wall our guild was to help defend was ruinous even then, with a wide gap between the Red Tower and the Bear, where I used to climb the fallen slabs of unsmeltable gray metal to look out over the necropolis that descends that side of Citadel Hill.

When I was older, it became my playground.



Our necropolis is said to be the oldest in Nessus.

That is certainly false, but the very existence of the error testifies to a real antiquity, though the autarchs were not buried there even when the Citadel was their stronghold, and the great families - then as now - preferred to inter their long-limbed dead in vaults on their own estates.

But the armigers and optimates of the city favored the highest slopes, near the Citadel wall; and the poorer commons lay below them until the farthest reaches of the bottom lands, pressing against the tenements that came to line Gyoll, held potter's fields.

As a boy I seldom went so far alone, or half so far.

There were always the three of us - Drotte, Roche, and I. Later Eata, the next oldest among the apprentices.



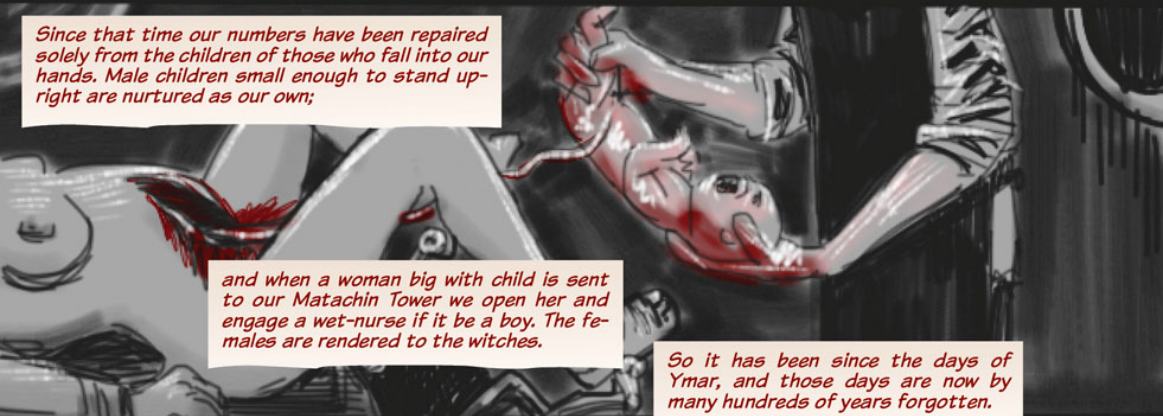
None of us were born among the torturers, for none are.



It is said that in ancient times there were both men and women in the guild, and that sons and daughters were born to them and brought up in the mystery.

Ymar the Almost Just, observing how cruel the women were and how often they exceeded the punishments he had decreed, ordered that there should be women among the torturers no more.

Since that time our numbers have been repaired solely from the children of those who fall into our hands. Male children small enough to stand upright are nurtured as our own;

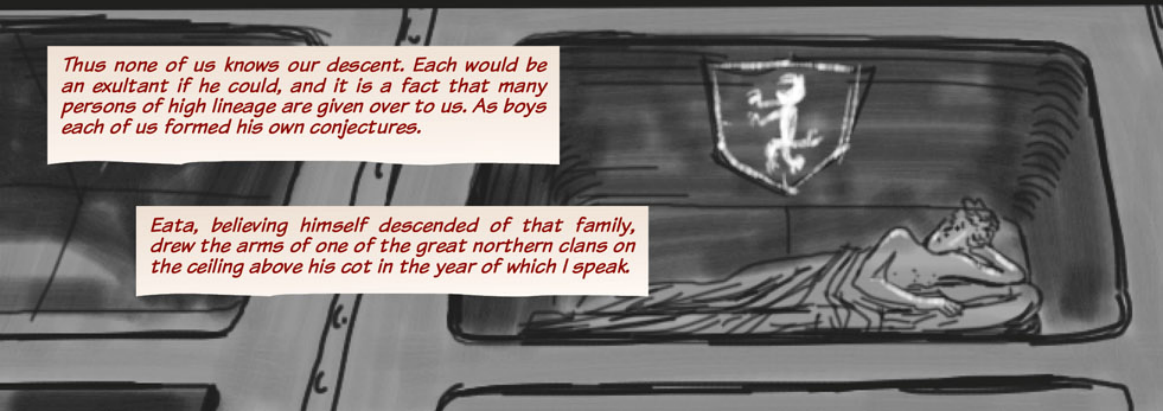



and when a woman big with child is sent to our Matachin Tower we open her and engage a wet-nurse if it be a boy. The females are rendered to the witches.

So it has been since the days of Ymar, and those days are now by many hundreds of years forgotten.


Thus none of us knows our descent. Each would be an exultant if he could, and it is a fact that many persons of high lineage are given over to us. As boys each of us formed his own conjectures.

Eata, believing himself descended of that family, drew the arms of one of the great northern clans on the ceiling above his cot in the year of which I speak.





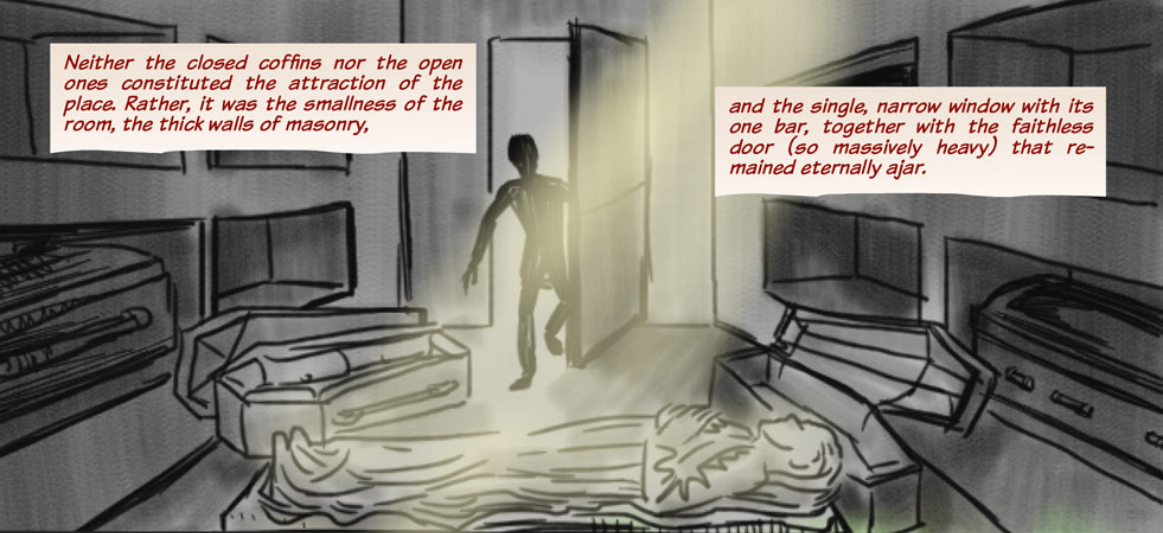
For my part, I had already adopted as my own the device graven in bronze above the door of a certain mausoleum.



They were a fountain rising above waters, and a ship volant, and below these a rose.

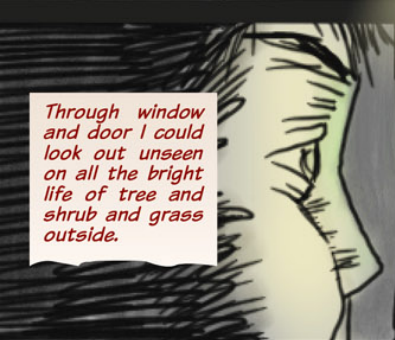


The door itself had been sprung long ago.

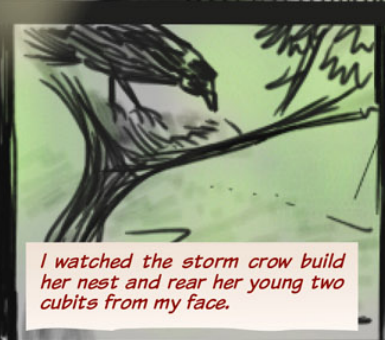


Neither the closed coffins nor the open ones constituted the attraction of the place. Rather, it was the smallness of the room, the thick walls of masonry,

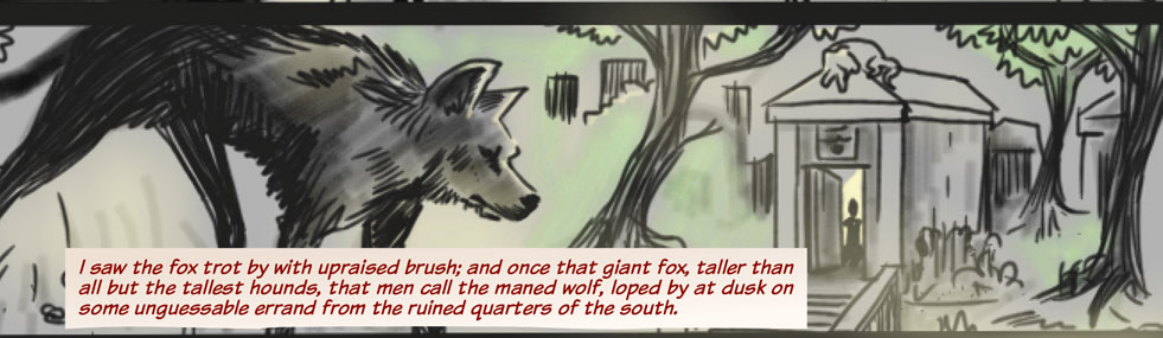
and the single, narrow window with its one bar, together with the faithless door (so massively heavy) that remained eternally ajar.



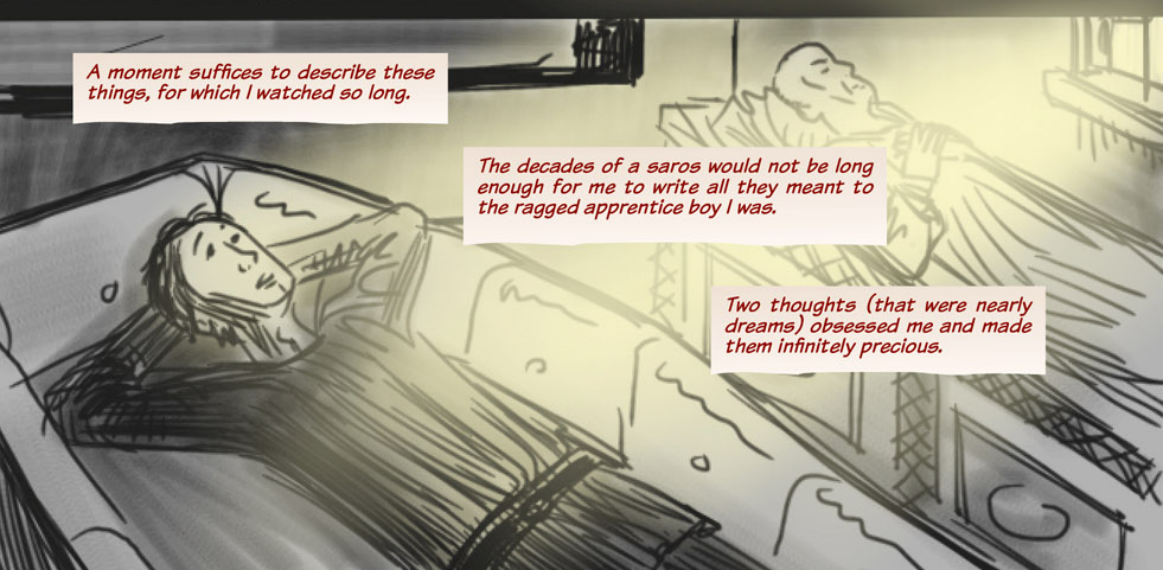
Through window and door I could look out unseen on all the bright life of tree and shrub and grass outside.



I watched the storm crow build her nest and rear her young two cubits from my face.



I saw the fox trot by with upraised brush; and once that giant fox, taller than all but the tallest hounds, that men call the maned wolf, loped by at dusk on some unguessable errand from the ruined quarters of the south.



A moment suffices to describe these things, for which I watched so long.

The decades of a saros would not be long enough for me to write all they meant to the ragged apprentice boy I was.

Two thoughts (that were nearly dreams) obsessed me and made them infinitely precious.

The first was that at some not-distant time, time itself would stop...

the colored days that had so long been drawn forth like a chain of conjuror's scarves come to an end, the sullen sun wink out at last.

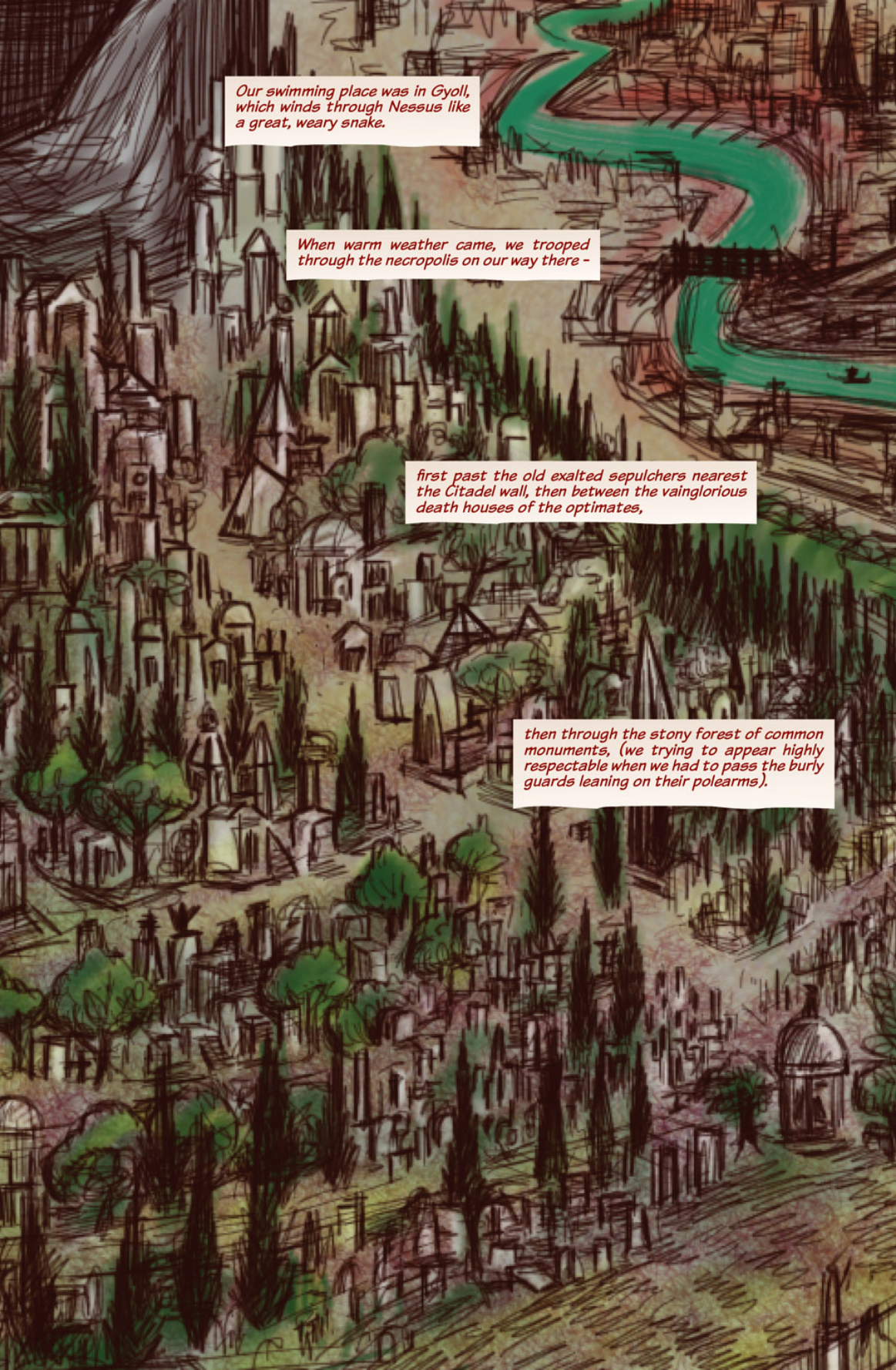
The second was that there existed somewhere a miraculous light that engendered life in whatever objects it fell upon, so that a leaf plucked from a bush grew slender legs and waving feelers, and a rough brown brush opened black eyes and scurried up a tree.

Yet sometimes, particularly in the sleepy hours around noon, there was little to watch.

Then I turned again to the blazon over the door and wondered what a ship, a rose, and a fountain had to do with me.

I had found a funeral bronze and cleaned it and set aright.

In the light that pierced the little window I examined his face and meditated on my own as I saw it in the polished metal. My straight nose, deep-set eyes, and sunken cheeks were much like his, and I longed to know if he too had dark hair.



Our swimming place was in Gyoll, which winds through Nessus like a great, weary snake.

When warm weather came, we trooped through the necropolis on our way there -

first past the old exalted sepulchers nearest the Citadel wall, then between the vainglorious death houses of the optimates,

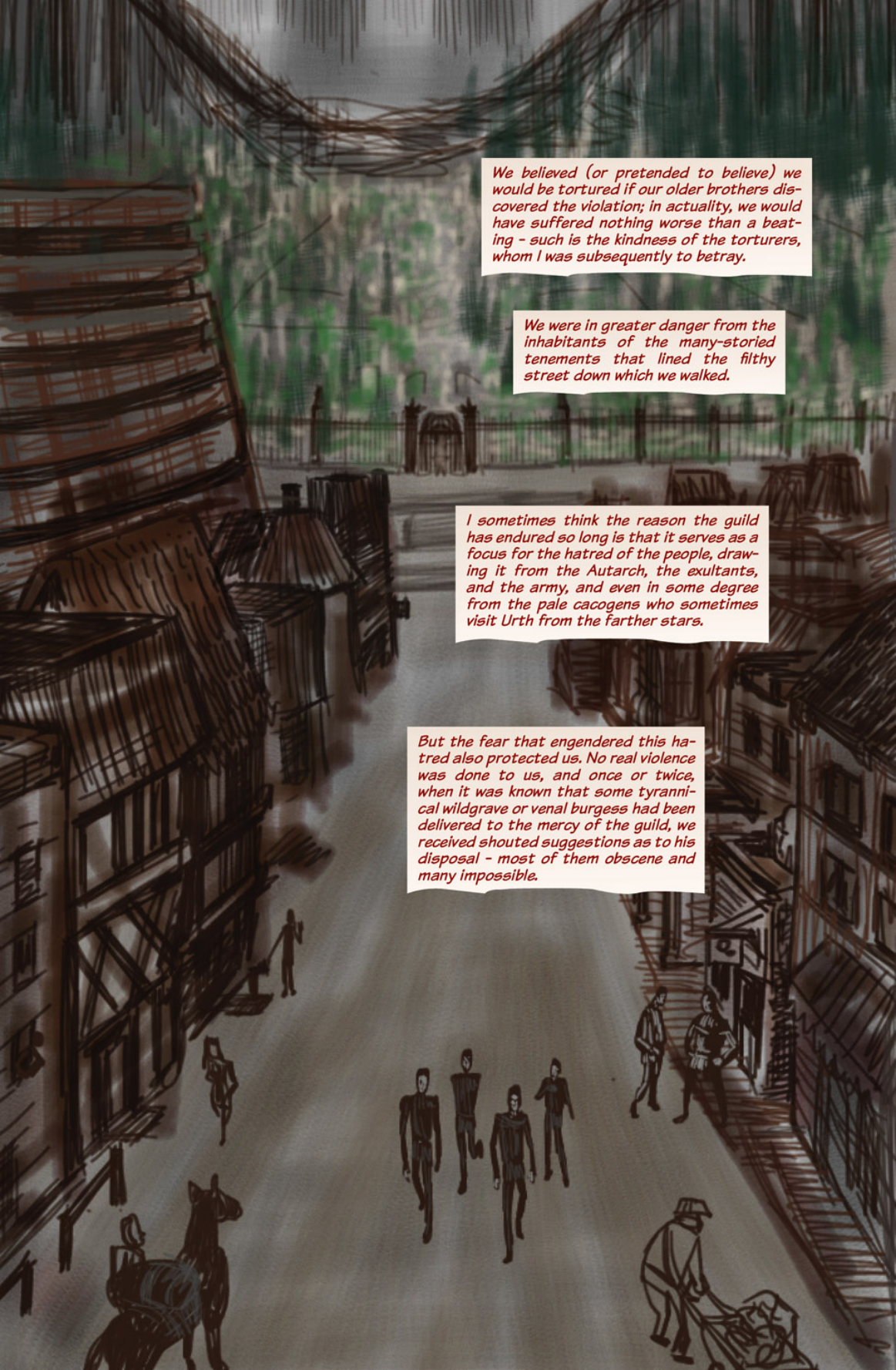
then through the stony forest of common monuments, (we trying to appear highly respectable when we had to pass the burly guards leaning on their polearms).



And at last across the plain, bare mounds that marked the interments of the poor, mounds that sank to puddles after the first rain.

At the lowest margin of the necropolis stood the iron gate I have already described. Through it the bodies intended for the potter's field were borne.

When we passed those rusting portals we felt we were for the first time truly outside the Citadel, and thus in undeniable disobedience of the rules that were supposed to govern our comings and goings.



We believed (or pretended to believe) we would be tortured if our older brothers discovered the violation; in actuality, we would have suffered nothing worse than a beating - such is the kindness of the torturers, whom I was subsequently to betray.

We were in greater danger from the inhabitants of the many-storied tenements that lined the filthy street down which we walked.

I sometimes think the reason the guild has endured so long is that it serves as a focus for the hatred of the people, drawing it from the Autarch, the exultants, and the army, and even in some degree from the pale cacogens who sometimes visit Urth from the farther stars.

But the fear that engendered this hatred also protected us. No real violence was done to us, and once or twice, when it was known that some tyrannical wildgrave or venal burgess had been delivered to the mercy of the guild, we received shouted suggestions as to his disposal - most of them obscene and many impossible.



At the place where we swam, Gyll had lost its natural banks hundreds of years ago.

Here it was a two-chain-wide expanse of blue nymphaea panned between walls of stone.

I never went again after the day on which I saved Vodalus.

It was because of the nymphaea.




When I think of my own death, or of the death of someone who has been kind to me, or even of the death of the sun,

the image that comes to my mind is that of the nymphaea, with its glossy, pale leaves and azure flower.




Under flower and leaves are black roots as fine and strong as hair, reaching down into the dark waters.

As young men we thought nothing of these plants. We splashed and floated among them, pushed them aside, and ignored them. Their perfume countered to some degree the foul odor of the water.

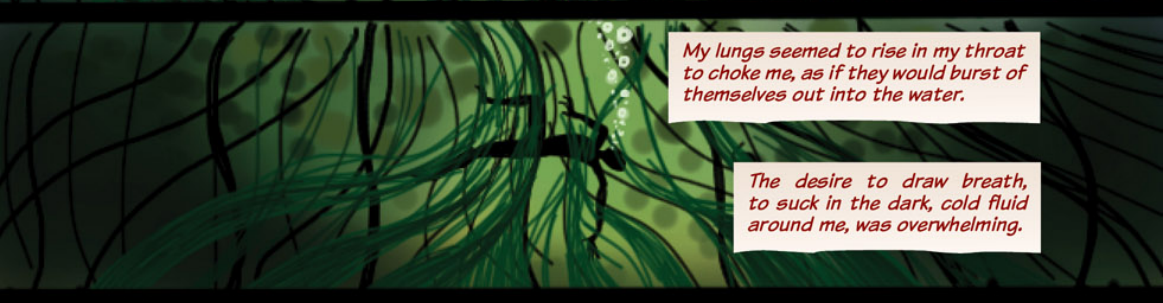


On the day I was to save Vodalus I dove beneath their crowded pads as I had done a thousand times.



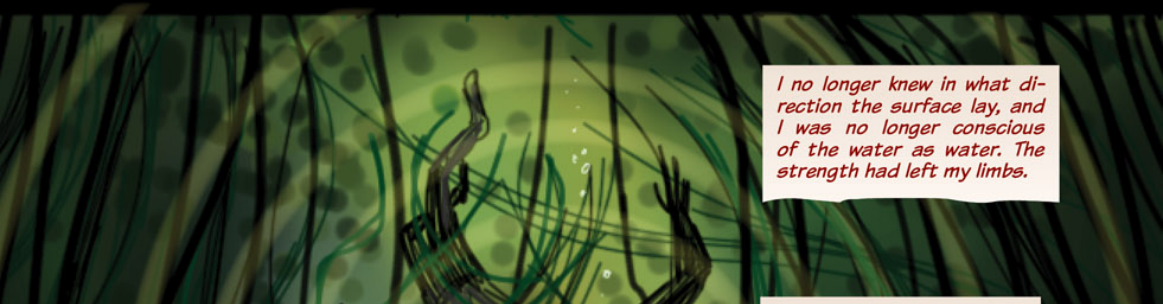
I did not come up.

Somehow I had entered a region where the roots seemed far thicker than I had ever encountered them before. I was caught in a hundred nets at once.




My lungs seemed to rise in my throat to choke me, as if they would burst of themselves out into the water.

The desire to draw breath, to suck in the dark, cold fluid around me, was overwhelming.




I no longer knew in what direction the surface lay, and I was no longer conscious of the water as water. The strength had left my limbs.

I was no longer afraid, though I knew I was dying, or perhaps already dead.




There was a loud and very unpleasant ringing in my ears, and I began to see visions.




Master Malrubius, who had died several years before, was waking us by drumming on the bulkhead with a spoon; that was the metallic din I heard.

I tried to call to him but I could make no sound.



I knew he was looking for me in the Old Yard below.


Yet he could not see far enough.



I lay in my cot unable to rise, in one of the cells below the examination room.


A woman cried but I could not see her, and I was less conscious of her sobs than of the ringing, ringing of the spoon.

Darkness closed over me

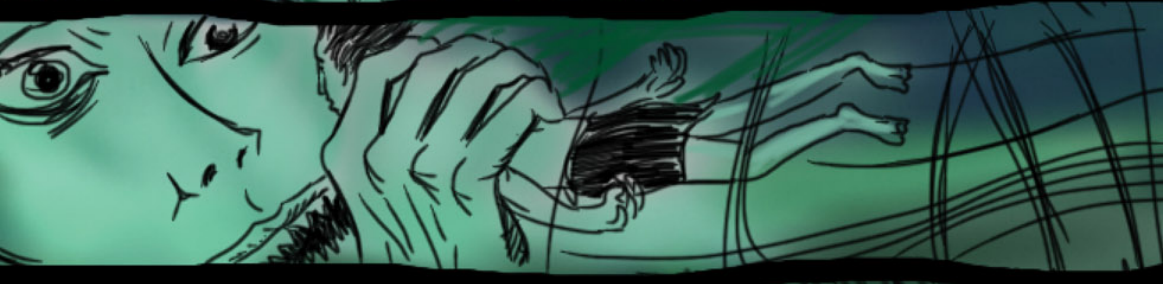


Out of the darkness came the face of a woman, as immense as the green face of the moon.

It was not she who wept - I could hear the sobs still, and this face was untroubled.



At once I became a fledgling in her hands



Her clawed hands flung me down into the blackness until at last I struck what I took to be the bottom mud -

- and burst through it into a world of light rimmed with black.



Still I could not breathe. I no longer wished to, and my chest no longer moved of itself.



The eyes around me again belonged to real people, the denizens of the riverside tenements.

A woman brought a bowl of some scalding drink that smelled of smoke.

Were you trying to do that? How did you come up?

He shot right out of the water!

We thought you'd come up somewhere else. That you were playing a joke on us.

I saw Marubius.

Who's that?

Used to be Master of Apprentices. He's dead.

Not a woman?

No, no, There are no women in our guild.



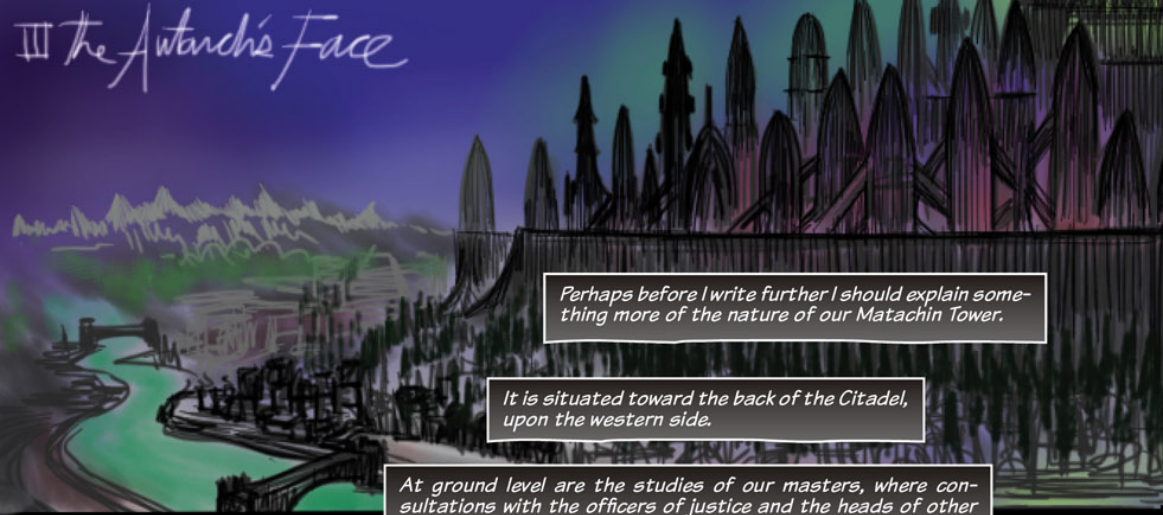
*it was so long before I was strong
enough to walk again that by the time
we reached the gate of the necropolis,*

*the statue of Night atop the khan
on the opposite bank was a minute
scratch of black against the sun's field
of flame,*

*and the gate itself stood
closed and locked.*



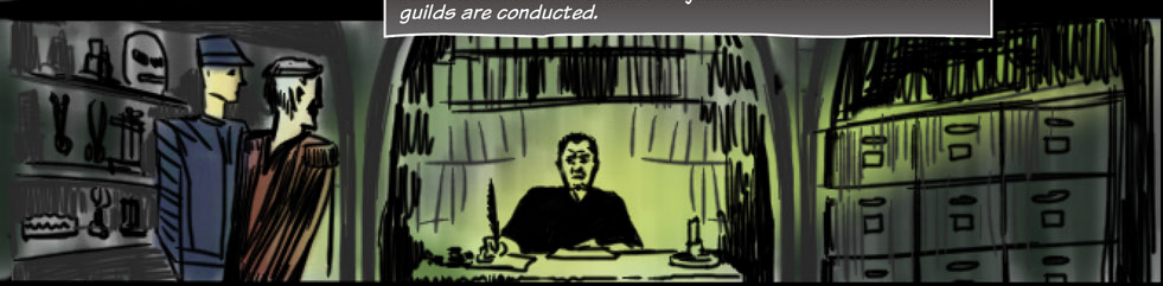
III The Antarch's Face



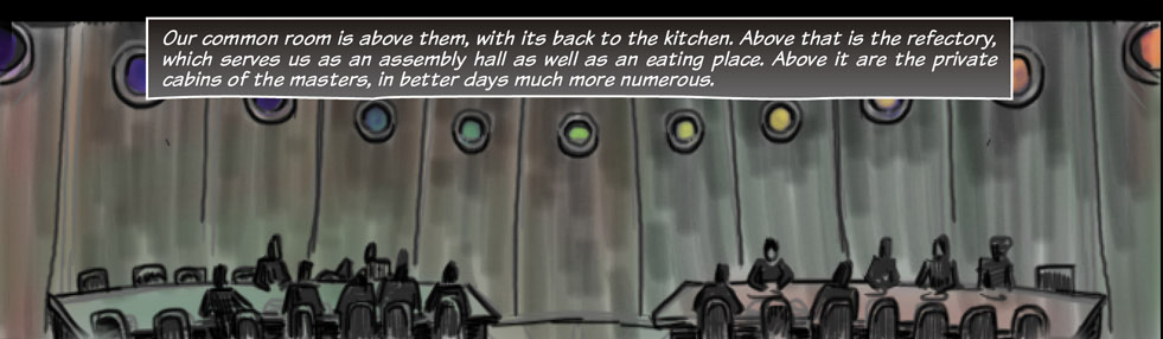
Perhaps before I write further I should explain something more of the nature of our Matachin Tower.

It is situated toward the back of the Citadel, upon the western side.

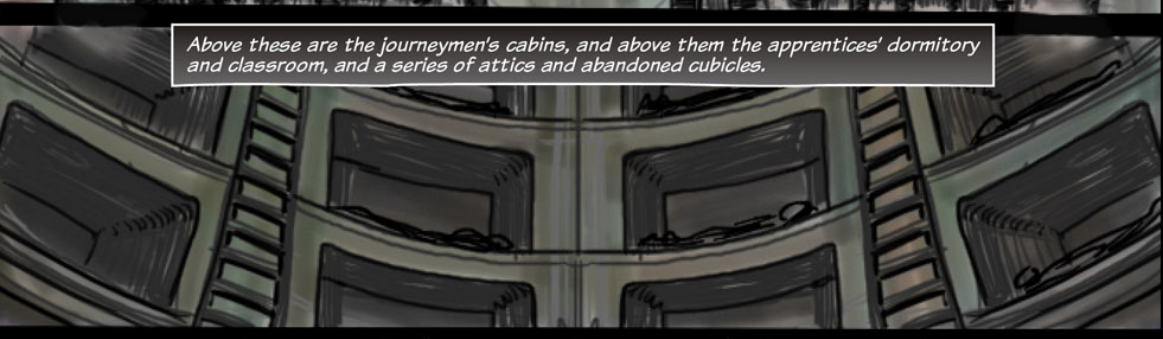
At ground level are the studies of our masters, where consultations with the officers of justice and the heads of other guilds are conducted.



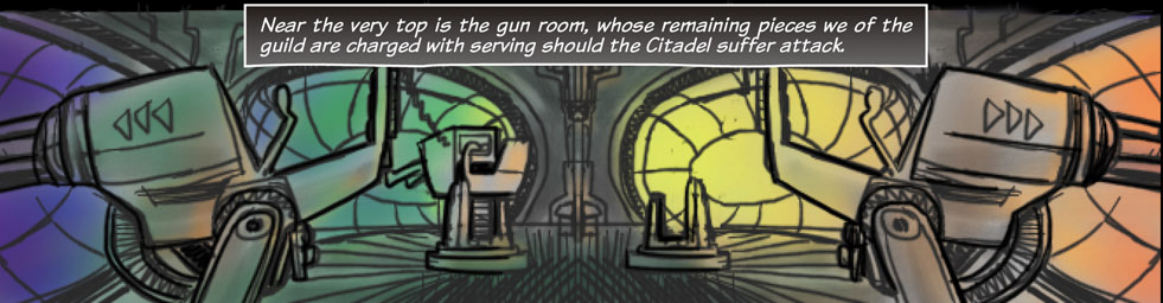
Our common room is above them, with its back to the kitchen. Above that is the refectory, which serves us as an assembly hall as well as an eating place. Above it are the private cabins of the masters, in better days much more numerous.

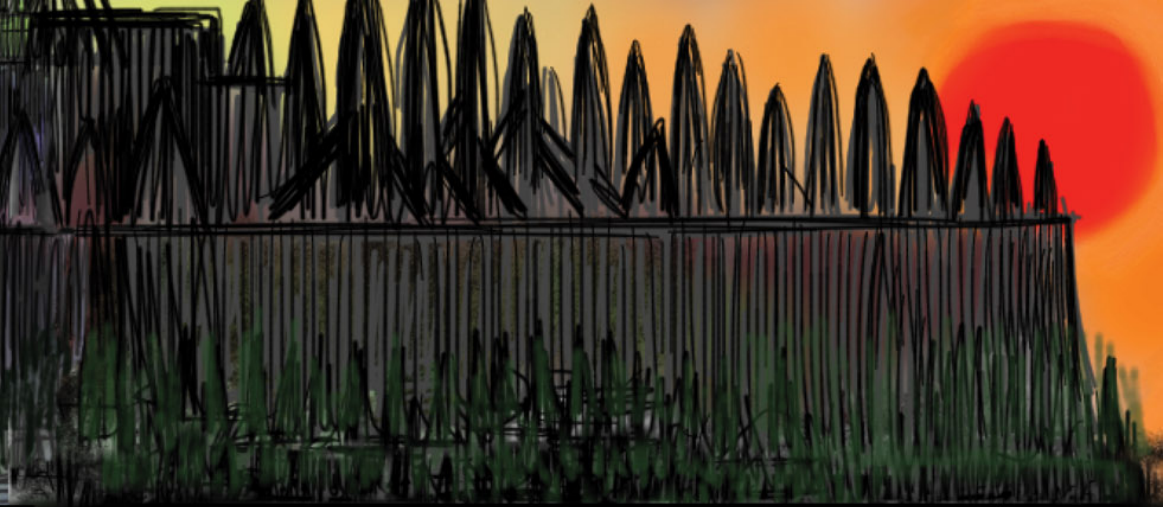


Above these are the journeymen's cabins, and above them the apprentices' dormitory and classroom, and a series of attics and abandoned cubicles.



Near the very top is the gun room, whose remaining pieces we of the guild are charged with serving should the Citadel suffer attack.

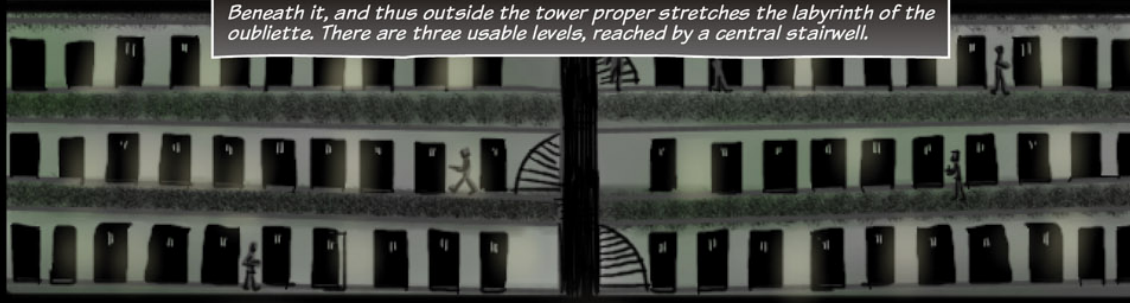




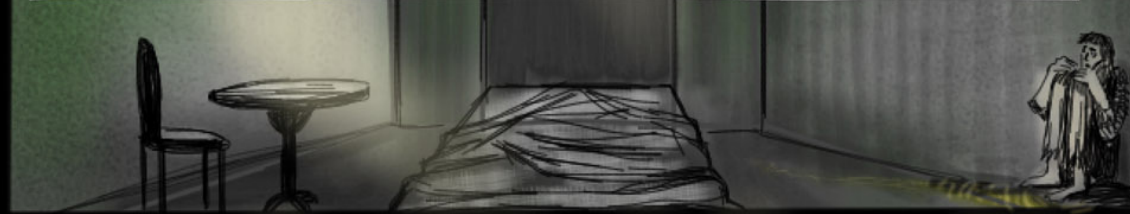
The real work of our guild is carried out below all this. Just underground lies the examination room, situated in the propulsion chamber of the original structure.



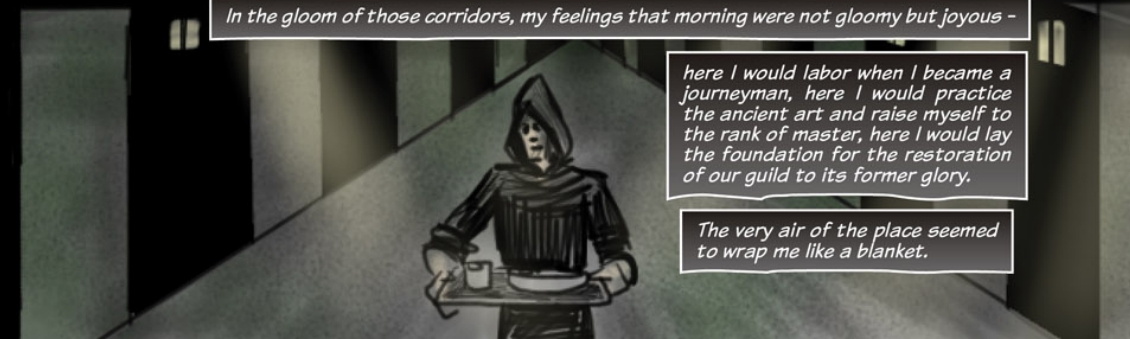
Beneath it, and thus outside the tower proper stretches the labyrinth of the oubliette. There are three usable levels, reached by a central stairwell.



The lights of the oubliette are of that ancient kind that is said to burn forever, though some have now gone out. The calls are plain, dry, and clean, equipped with a small table, a chair, and narrow bed fixed in the center of the floor.



In the gloom of those corridors, my feelings that morning were not gloomy but joyous -



here I would labor when I became a journeyman, here I would practice the ancient art and raise myself to the rank of master, here I would lay the foundation for the restoration of our guild to its former glory.

The very air of the place seemed to wrap me like a blanket.

It was midmorning of the next day before I thought to look at the coin Vodalus had given me.

After serving the journeymen in the refectory we had breakfasted as usual, met Master Palaemon in our classroom, and after a brief preparatory lecture followed him to the lower levels to view the work of the preceding night.

Here, we have something outside the routine of judicial punishment and well illustrative of modern technique.

The client was put to the question last night - perhaps some of you heard her. Twenty minims of tincture were given before the excruciation, and ten after.

The dose was only partially effective in preventing shock and loss of consciousness, so the proceedings were terminated after flaying the right leg, as you will see.


Half boot?

No, full boot. She is a strong-skinned maidservant. A simple circular incision was made below the knee, and its edge taken with eight clamps.

Careful work permitted the removal of everything between the knee and the toes without further help from the knife.

We gathered around Drotte, the younger boys pushing in as they pretended they knew the points to look for. The arteries and major veins were all intact, but there was a slow, generalized welling of blood. I helped Drotte apply fresh dressings.

I don't know. Only, oh, can't you believe I wouldn't tell you if I did? She's gone with Vodalus of the Wood, I don't know where.



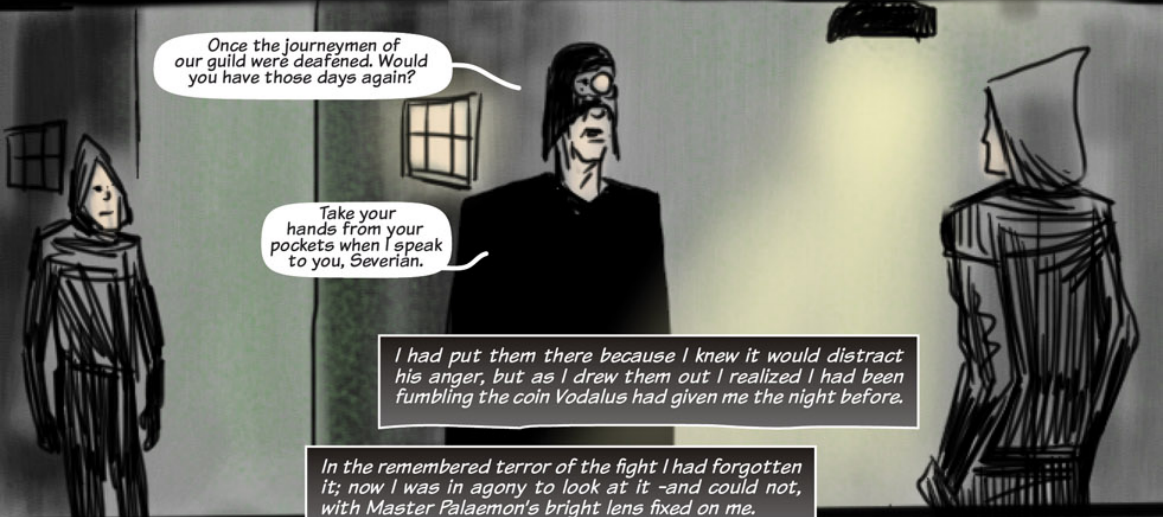
Outside, feigning ignorance, I asked Master Palaemon who Vodalus of the Wood was.

How often have I explained that nothing said by a client under questioning is heard by you?

Many times, Master.

But to no effect. Soon it will be masking day, and Drotte and Roche will be journeymen, and you captain of apprentices. Is this the example you'll set the boys?

No, Master.

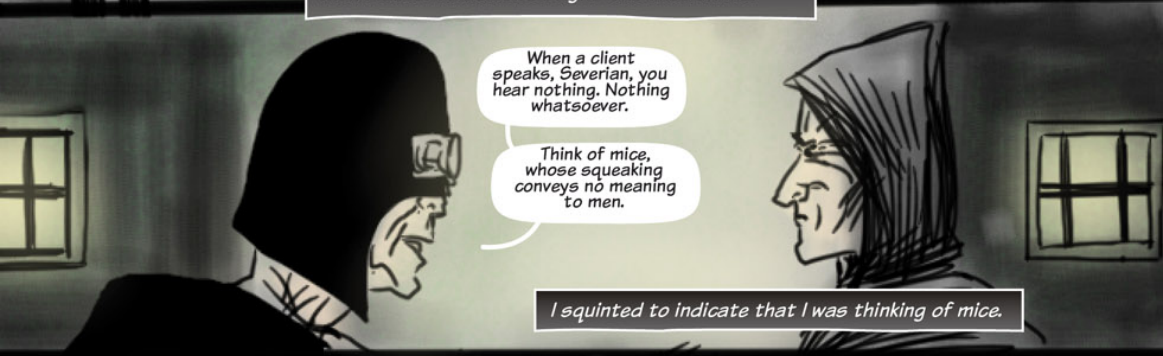


Once the journeymen of our guild were deafened. Would you have those days again?

Take your hands from your pockets when I speak to you, Severian.

I had put them there because I knew it would distract his anger, but as I drew them out I realized I had been fumbling the coin Vodalus had given me the night before.


In the remembered terror of the fight I had forgotten it; now I was in agony to look at it -and could not, with Master Palaemon's bright lens fixed on me.



When a client speaks, Severian, you hear nothing. Nothing whatsoever.

Think of mice, whose squeaking conveys no meaning to men.

I squinted to indicate that I was thinking of mice.



All the long, weary way up the stair to our classroom, I ached to look at the thin disc of metal I clutched; but I knew that if I were to do so the boy behind me would see it.

It was afternoon before I found privacy, hiding myself in the ruins of the curtain wall among the shining mosses, then hesitating because I was afraid that when I saw it at last the disappointment would be more than I could bear.



Not because I cared for its value. Though I was already a man, I had had so little money that any coin would have seemed a fortune to me.

My life in the guild was the only life I had known, and it seemed as drab as my ragged shirt in comparison with the flash of the exultant's sword blade and the sound of the shot echoing among the stones. All that might be gone when I opened my hand.

Rather it was that the coin was my only link with the night before, my only connection with Vodalus and the beautiful, hooded woman, my only booty from the fight at the opened grave.

In the end I looked, having drained the dregs of pleasant dread.

The coin was a gold chrisos. It was the first time I had ever touched a piece of gold. Brass orichalks I had seen in some plenty, and I had even possessed a few of my own. Silver asimi I had glimpsed once or twice.



But chrisos I knew only in the same dim way I knew of the existence of a world outside our city of Nessus, and of continents other than our own to the north and east and west.




At last I turned my treasure over, and then indeed I caught my breath; stamped on the reverse was just such a flying ship as I had seen in the arms above the door of my secret mausoleum.

It seemed beyond explanation - so much so that at the time I did not even trouble to speculate about it, so sure was I that any speculation would be fruitless.

Instead, I thrust the coin back into my pocket and went, in a species of trance, to rejoin my fellow apprentices.

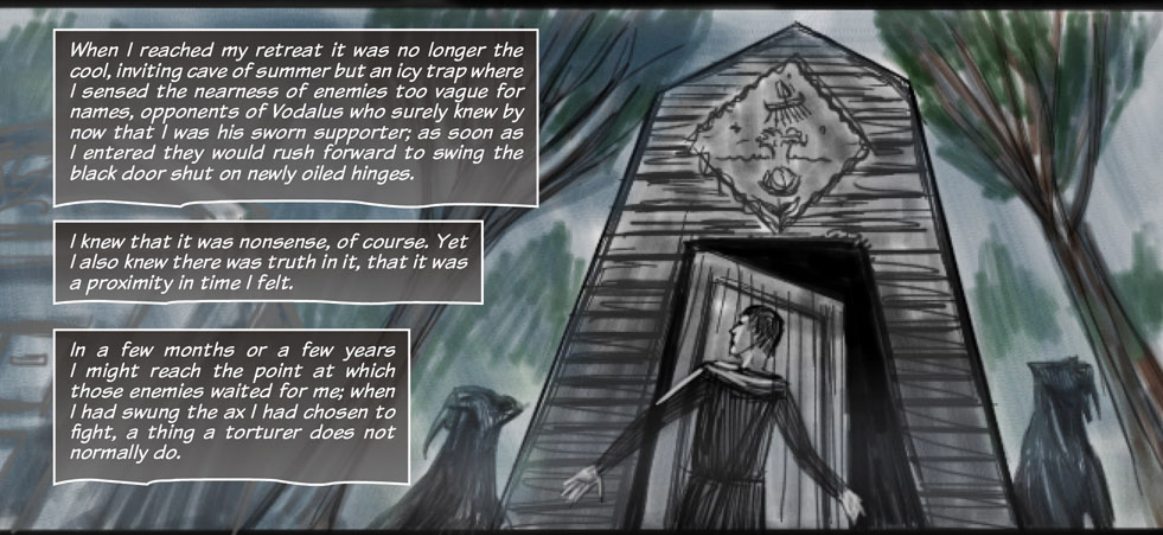
To carry the coin about with me was out of the question.





As soon as there was an opportunity to do so, I slipped into the necropolis alone and sought out my mausoleum.


The weather had turned that day.



When I reached my retreat it was no longer the cool, inviting cave of summer but an icy trap where I sensed the nearness of enemies too vague for names, opponents of Vodalus who surely knew by now that I was his sworn supporter; as soon as I entered they would rush forward to swing the black door shut on newly oiled hinges.


I knew that it was nonsense, of course. Yet I also knew there was truth in it, that it was a proximity in time I felt.

In a few months or a few years I might reach the point at which those enemies waited for me; when I had swung the ax I had chosen to fight, a thing a torturer does not normally do.



Where I put you, there you lie,
Never let a stranger spy,
Like glass grow to any eye,
Not of me.
Here be safe, never leave it,
Should a hand come, deceive it,
Let strange eyes not believe it,
Till I see.

Days passed, and the memory of my visit to the mausoleum remained vivid enough to dissuade me from making another to verify that my treasure was safe, though at times I longed to do so.



It is the nature of apprenticeship in our guild that, though easy at first, its burdens grow greater and greater as one comes to manhood.

At the age of six, the work begins. It is at first no more than running up and down the stairs of the Matachin Tower with messages, and the little apprentice, proud of being entrusted with them, hardly feels the labor.

As time progresses, however, his work becomes more and more onerous.



His duties take him to other parts of the Citadel - to the soldiers in the barbican, where he learns that the military apprentices have drums and trumpets and ophicleides and boots and sometimes gilded cuirasses.



To the Bear Tower, where he sees boys no older than himself learning to handle wonderful fighting animals of all kinds, mastiffs with heads as large as a lion's, diatrymae taller than a man, with beaks sheathed in steel.



And to a hundred other such places where he discovers for the first time that his guild is hated and despised even by those (indeed, most of all by those) who make use of its services.



Soon there is scrubbing, kitchen work and an endless succession of stacks of trays down the stairs to the oubliette.

I did not know it at the time, but soon this apprentice life of mine, which had been growing harder for as long as I could remember, would reverse its course and become less drudging and more pleasant.



In the year before he is to become a journeyman, a senior apprentice does little but supervise the work of his juniors. His food and even his dress improve. The younger journeymen begin to treat him almost as an equal, and he has, above all, the elevating burden of responsibility and the pleasure of issuing and enforcing orders.



When his elevation comes, he is an adult. He does no work but that for which he has been trained; and he is free to leave the Citadel when his duties are over, for which recreation he is supplied with liberal funds.

Should he eventually rise to mastership, he will be able to pick and choose such assignments as may interest or amuse him, and direct the affairs of the guild itself.

But you must understand that in the year I have been writing of, I was unconscious of all that. Winter (I was told) had ended the campaigning season in the north, and thus brought the Autarch and his chief officers and advisors back to the seats of justice.



And so, we have all these new clients. And more to come... dozens, maybe hundreds. We might have to reopen the fourth level.

Is he here? The Autarch? Here in the Citadel? In the Great Keep?

Of course not. If he ever came, you'd know it, wouldn't you? There'd be parades and inspections and all kinds of goings on.

There's a suite for him there but the door hasn't been opened in a hundred years. He'll be in the hidden palace the House Absolute - north of the city someplace.

Don't you know where?

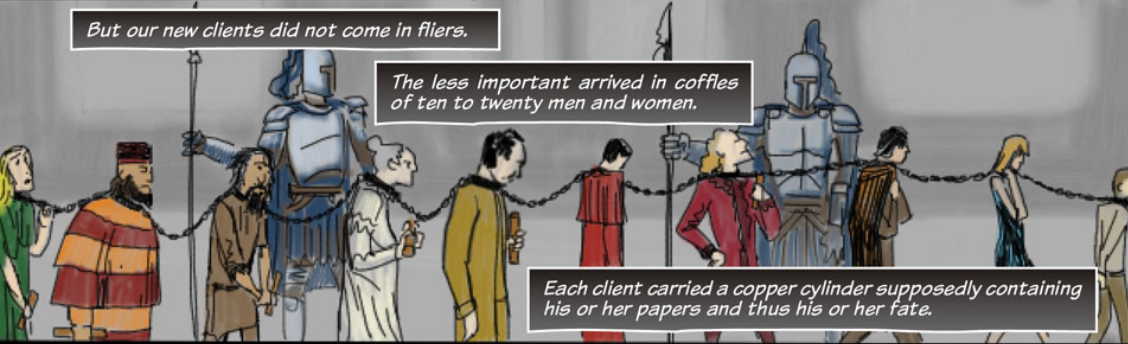
You can't say where it is because there's nothing there except the House Absolute itself.

Beyond the Wall?

It's where it is. To the north, on the other bank.

Far past it. Weeks, if you walked. The Autarch could get here by flier in an instant if he wanted to.

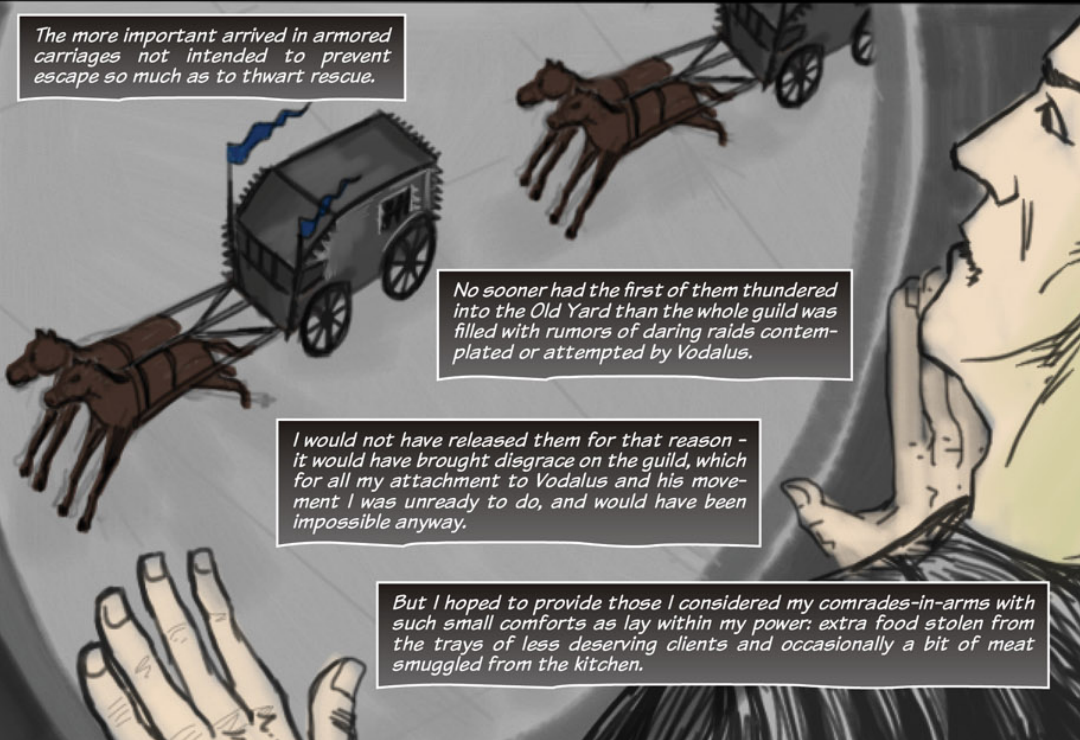
But our new clients did not come in fliers.



The less important arrived in coffles of ten to twenty men and women.

Each client carried a copper cylinder supposedly containing his or her papers and thus his or her fate.

The more important arrived in armored carriages not intended to prevent escape so much as to thwart rescue.



No sooner had the first of them thundered into the Old Yard than the whole guild was filled with rumors of daring raids contemplated or attempted by Vodalus.

I would not have released them for that reason - it would have brought disgrace on the guild, which for all my attachment to Vodalus and his movement I was unready to do, and would have been impossible anyway.

But I hoped to provide those I considered my comrades-in-arms with such small comforts as lay within my power: extra food stolen from the trays of less deserving clients and occasionally a bit of meat smuggled from the kitchen.

One blustering day I was given the opportunity to learn who they were. I was scrubbing the floor in Master Gurloes's study when he was called away on some errand, leaving his table stacked with newly arrived dossiers.



I hurried over as soon as the door had clanged behind him, and was able to skim most of them before I heard his heavy tread on the stair again.



Not one - not one - of the prisoners whose papers I had read had been an adherent of Vodalus. There were merchants who had tried to make rich profits on supplies needed by the army, camp followers who had spied for the Ascians, and a sprinkling of sordid civil criminals. Nothing else.



When I carried my bucket out to empty in the Old Yard, I caught the name Vodalus in the air -

- at that moment it seemed I was the only one who heard it, and suddenly I felt Vodalus had been only an eidolon created by my imagination from the fog, and only the man I had slain with his own ax real.

It was in this instant of confusion that I realized for the first time that I am in some degree insane.

It could be argued that it was the most harrowing of my life.

I had lied often. Now I could no longer be sure my own mind was not lying to me; all my falsehoods were recoiling on me, and I who remembered everything could not be certain those memories were more than my own dreams.





I recalled the moonlit face of Vodalus; but then, I had wanted to see it. I recalled his voice as he spoke to me, but I had desired to hear it, and the woman's voice too.



One freezing night, I crept back to the mausoleum and took out the chrisos again.



The worn, serene, androgynous face on its obverse was not the face of Vodalus.

There are encounters that change nothing.

Urth turns her aged face to the sun and he beams upon her snows; they scintillate and coruscate until each little point of ice hanging from the swelling sides of the towers seems the Claw of the Conciliator, the most precious of gems.

Then everyone except the wisest believes that the snow must melt and give way to a protracted summer beyond summer.

Nothing of the sort occurs. The paradise endures for a watch or two. Night comes, and all is at it was.

My finding Triskele was like that. I felt that it could have and should have changed everything, but it was only the episode of a few months, and when it was over and he was gone, it was only another winter passed and the Feast of Holy Katharine come again, and nothing had changed.

I found him where the keepers of the Bear Tower throw their refuse, the bodies of the torn animals killed in practice.

He was the smallest of those dead.





*I went over and put my hand on his head
- I don't know why.*



*He seemed as dead as the rest, but he opened
one eye then and rolled it at me, and there was
a confidence in it that the worst was over now -*

*- I have carried my part, it seemed to say, and borne up, and
done all I could do; now it is your turn to do your duty by me.*



If it had been summer, I think I would have let him die.

*As it was I had not seen a living animal, not so much as
a garbage-eating thylacodon, in some time. He licked
my hand, and I could not turn away after that.*



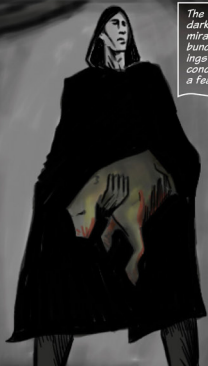
*But what to do with him! He would be dis-
covered in our dormitory before the candle
had burned a finger's width, I knew.*



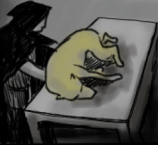
*I decided to carry the poor brute
into the quarters of our own gull.*



I borrowed a fuligin journeyman's cloak, draped it over him and went down to our Oublette below.




The hue fuligin, which is darker than black, admirably erases all folds, bunchings, and gatherings so far as the eye is concerned, showing only a featureless dark.




Thus I was able to avoid notice as we descended to the deserted fourth level of our Oublette




It was not a prepossessing place.



About half of the old lights still burned, but mud had seeped into the corridors until it lay to the thickness of one's hand.



A duty table stood where it had been left, perhaps, two hundred years before.



The whole thing fell at a touch



I laid my dog on a client's bed and cleaned him as well as I could with sponges I had carried down from the examination room.



In his last fight his chest had been laid open and his foreleg crushed to a pulp.



I cut it away after I had sutured up his chest as well as I could, and it began to bleed again.




I found the artery and tied it, then folded the skin under (as Master Palaemon had taught us) to make a neat stump.



Triskele licked my hand from time to time as I worked, and when I had made the last stitch began slowly licking that, as if he were a bear and could lick a new leg into shape.

There was no more strength in those arctother sized jaws now than in a skeleton's hands. His eyes held a certain clean madness.





That evening after serving the clients I carried two uneaten meal trays down to Triskele, wondering if he were still alive.

He was.

He drank one bowl of soup, but when I tried to feed him the bread I found he could not chew it enough to swallow;

I soaked it in the other bowl of soup for him, then filled the bowl again and again with water until both carafes were empty.



When I lay on my cot almost at the top of our tower, I thought that I could hear his labored breathing. Perhaps it was only the beating of my heart.

If I had found him a year, two years, before, he would have been a divinity to me - to us all.

Now I knew him for the poor animal he was, and yet I could not let him die because it would have been a breaking of faith with something in myself.

I had been a man (if I was truly a man) such a short time; I could not endure to think that I had become a man so different from the boy I had been.

I could remember each moment of my past, every vagrant thought and sight, every dream.

How could I destroy that past?

In a dream I walked through the fourth level again, and found a huge friend there with dripping jaws.

It spoke to me.





Next morning I served the clients again, and stole food to take down to the dog, though I hoped that he was dead.

He was not.



I fed him and as I was about to leave was struck by the misery of his condition.

He was dependent on me. Me!

He had been valued; trainers had coached him; he had walked in pride. Now he lived like a ghost. His very name had been washed away in his own blood.

The beast handlers of the Bear Tower have their own guild, and though it is a lesser guild than ours, it has much strange lore.

There exists between them and the animals they bring to the pits a bond much like that between our clients and ourselves.



Now I have traveled much farther from our tower, but I have found always that the pattern of our guild is repeated mindlessly (like the repetitions of Father Iniré's mirrors in the House Absolute) in the societies of every trade, so that they are all of them torturers, just as we.

All love that which they destroy.





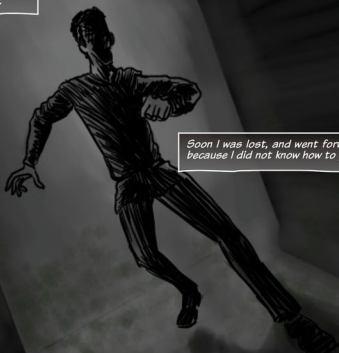
A week after I had carried him down, I found only Triakale's hobbling footprints in the mud.

He was gone, but I set out after him, sure that one of the journeymen would have mentioned it to me if he had come up the ramp.

Soon the footprints led to a narrow door that opened on a welter of lightless corridors of whose existence I had been utterly unaware.



In the dark I could no longer track him, but I pressed on nevertheless, thinking that he might catch my scent in the stale air and come to me.



Soon I was lost, and went forward only because I did not know how to go back.

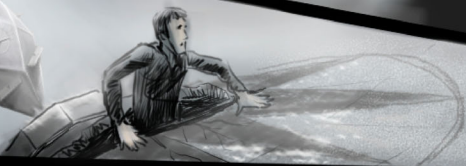
I have no way of knowing how old those tunnels are.



It comes to us from the very end of the age when the urge to flight, the outward urge that sought new suns not ours, remained, though the means to achieve that flight were sinking like dying fires.

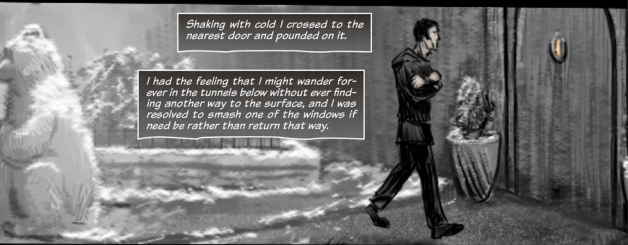
Remote as that time is, from which hardly one name is recalled, we still remember it. Before it there must have been another time, a time of burrowing, of the creation of dark galleries, that is now utterly forgotten.

However that may be, I was frightened there. I ran - and sometimes ran into walls - until at last I saw a spot of pale daylight beaming through a hole hardly big enough for my head and shoulders.





I seemed to be somewhere near the heart of the Citadel, where I had never been.



Shaking with cold I crossed to the nearest door and pounded on it.

I had the feeling that I might wander forever in the tunnels below without ever finding another way to the surface, and I was resolved to smash one of the windows if need be rather than return that way.

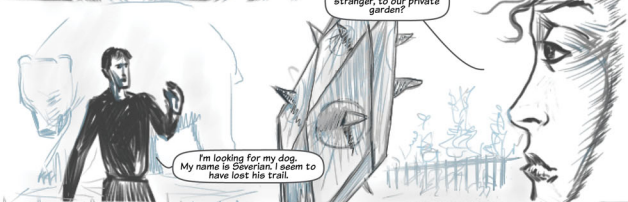


There was no sound within, though I beat my fist against the door panels again and again.



I had the vague impression that someone was watching me; and so it was.

What brings you here, stranger, to our private garden?



I'm looking for my dog. My name is Severian. I seem to have lost his trail.



I am Valeria.

We do not have your dog here. You may search, if you do not believe me.

I never thought you did.

I only want to go back where I belong, to the Matachin Tower, without having to go down there again.

You're very brave. I have seen that hole since I was a little girl, but I never dared go in.







I'd like to go in, I mean, inside there.



Wasn't it cold in the tunnels?



Not as cold as outside. Besides, I was running and there was no wind.




I see. How strange that they should come up in the Atrium of Time.

She looked younger than I, but there was an antique quality about her metal-trimmed dress and the shadow of her dark hair that made her seem older than Master Palaemon, a dweller in forgotten yesterdays.

Is that what you call it? The Atrium of Time? Because of the dials, I suppose.

No, the dials were put there because we call it that.


Before I left we talked a sentry's watch or more.



Her family occupied these towers. They had waited, at first, to leave Urth with the autarch of their era, then had waited because there was nothing left for them but waiting.


They were poor now, and their towers were in ruins. Valeria had never gone above the lower floors.

Some of the towers were built more strongly than others. The Witches' Keep is decayed inside too.



Is there really such a place? My nurse told me of it when I was little - to frighten me - but I thought it was only a tale. There was supposed to be a Tower of Torment too, where all who enter die in agony.

I told her that, at least, was a fable.




The great days of these towers are more fabulous to me. No one of my blood carries a sword now against the enemies of the Commonwealth, or stands hostage for us at the Well of Orchids.

Perhaps one of your sisters will be summoned soon.

I did not want, for some reason, to think of her going herself.


I am all the sisters we breed.

And all the sons.



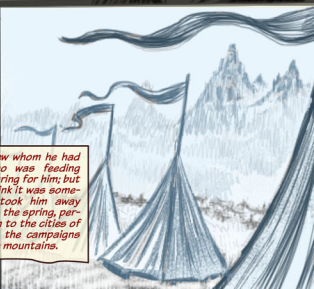
You see, you have found some comfort here. You are worried about your poor dog because he is lame. But he, too, may have found hospitality. You love him, so another may love him. You love him, so you may love another.

I agreed, but secretly thought that I would never have another dog, which has proved true.



I did not see Triskele again for almost a week. Then one day as I was carrying a letter to the barbican, he came bounding up to me.

After that I saw him once or twice a month for as long as the snow lasted.



I never knew whom he had found, who was feeding him and caring for him; but I like to think it was someone who took him away with him in the spring, perhaps north to the cities of tents and the campaigns among the mountains.