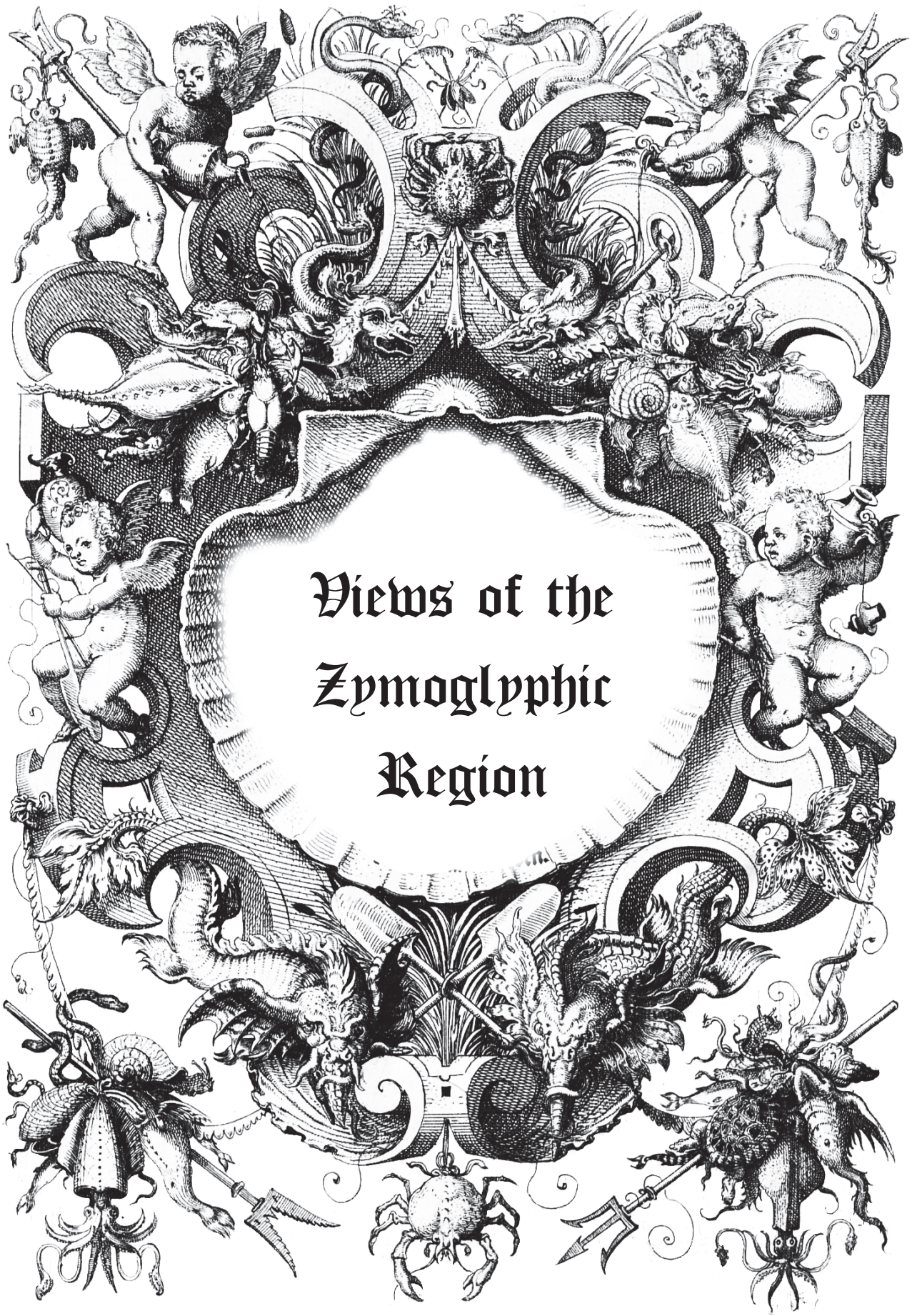

Views of the Zymoglyphic Region

Views of the Zymoglyphic Region
First edition, third revision - August 1, 2013
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A publication of **The Zymoglyphic Museum**
Visit the museum at **www.zymoglyphic.org**
Selected prints from this publication are available through the museum's online shop

The Zymoglyphic region is an intriguing area of the world known to us today primarily through the artifacts preserved in the collections of the Zymoglyphic Museum. The museum's staff has received questions from time to time about the exact nature this enigmatic region, and this publication is an attempt to present a visual record of it.

The region was able to stay hidden from the rest of the world for a long time, enveloped in the thick mists that surround the area. Its isolation resulted in both the evolution of unique life forms and unusual cultural practices. Explorers did sometimes manage to make landfall, bringing with them skilled artists to record the wonders they found there. These images give us some idea of what the area looked like.

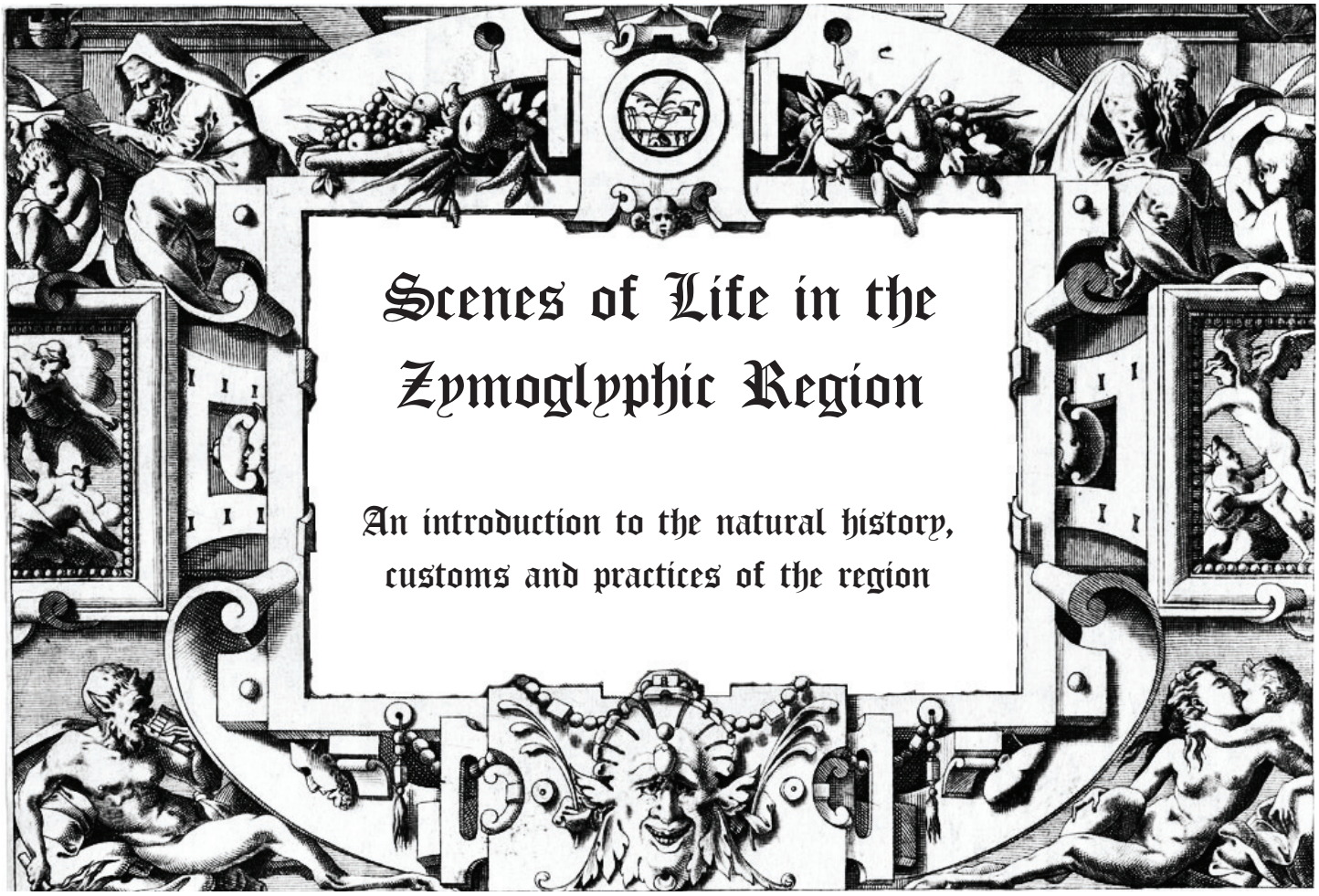
The accuracy of what was recorded has been brought into question, however. Deviations from reality have been attributed to the cultural biases of the image makers, tropical fevers, and a peculiar gas produced by the notorious hallucinogenic fungus that populates the swampier areas of the region. Some artists may simply have suffered exhaustion from trying to distinguish reality and fantasy.

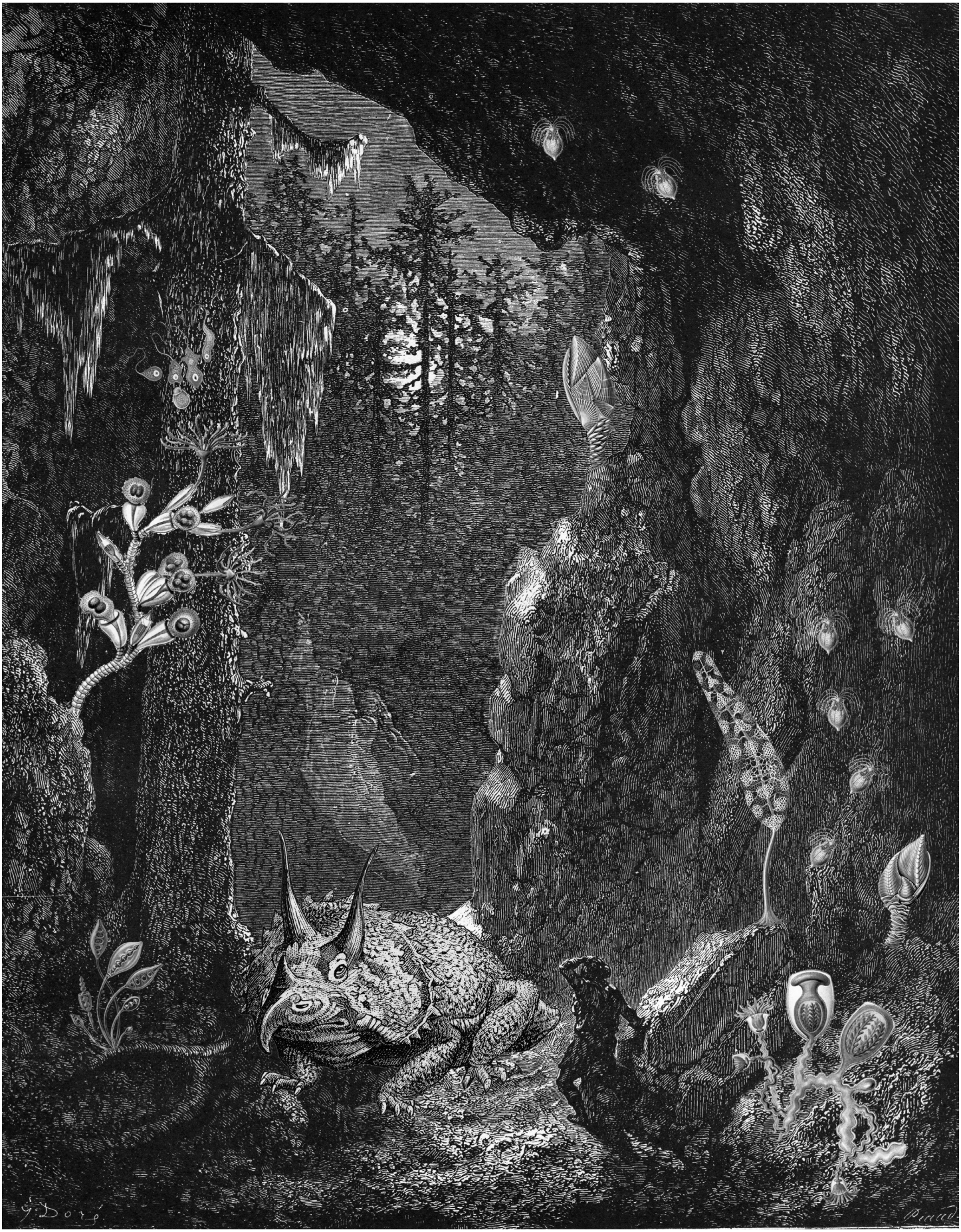
The first section of these records shows the natural history of the area and scenes of daily life in its villages, woods, and jungles, beginning with the wet, humid, lowlands where Rust Age customs still hold sway, moving through the mountainous uplands, and finally entering the buzzing capital city at its center. The images in the second section are from the records of expeditions to some of the more remote wonders of the region. The last section focuses on the works of one individual, an alchemist working in the Zymoglyphic tradition of transforming ordinary materials into transcendental images.

IN the history of science the collector of specimens preceded the zoologist and followed the exponents of natural theology and magic. He had ceased to study animals in the spirit of the authors of the Bestiaries...His primary concern was to make a census, to catch, kill, stuff, and describe as many kinds of beasts as he could lay his hands on.

Like the earth of a hundred years ago, our mind still has its darkest Africas, its unmapped Borneos and Amazonian basins. In relation to the fauna of these regions we are not yet zoologists, we are mere naturalists and collectors of specimens...Like the giraffe and the duck-billed platypus, the creatures inhabiting these remoter regions of the mind are exceedingly improbable...A man consists of what I may call an Old World of personal consciousness and, beyond a dividing sea, a series of New Worlds - the not too distant Virginias and Carolinas of the personal subconscious and the vegetative soul; the Far West of the collective unconscious, with its flora of symbols, its tribes of aboriginal archetypes; and, across another, vaster ocean...the antipodes of everyday consciousness.

-- Aldous Huxley, *Heaven and Hell*, 1956


Scenes of Life in the
Zymoglyphic Region
An introduction to the natural history,
customs and practices of the region


G. Doré

On the preceding pages:

Flying Creatures of Various Sorts

The Zymoglyphic region is home to a number of unusual airborne creatures, including winged hominids. Creatures whose ancestors' progress on the ground was impeded by the rampant vegetative growth on the jungle floor have evolved a variety of ways to flap, float, glide, or hop from one place to the next, some even carrying their homes with them.

The Evolutionary Cul-de-Sac

Due to its isolation and rugged topography, the Zymoglyphic region contains pocket ecosystems where species that have gone extinct elsewhere survive and even thrive, and where unusual life forms found nowhere else in the world have evolved. In this moonlit canyon, a traveler is startled at the approach of an ancient reptile, illuminated by a pulsating cloud of luminescent cave dwellers.

On the facing page:

The Harpies' Nest

Harpies are a winged hominid species endemic to the rain forests of the region's tropical lowlands, often roosting in its upper canopy. They are unpopular with the local populace (for reasons unknown) and cause considerable consternation when discovered.

On the following pages:

The Woodland Academy

An informal gathering of plein-air scholars and researchers meets in an idyllic setting near a waterfall to exchange ideas and work on esoteric theories.

LOUIS SARGENT

ARITHMETICA

On the facing page::

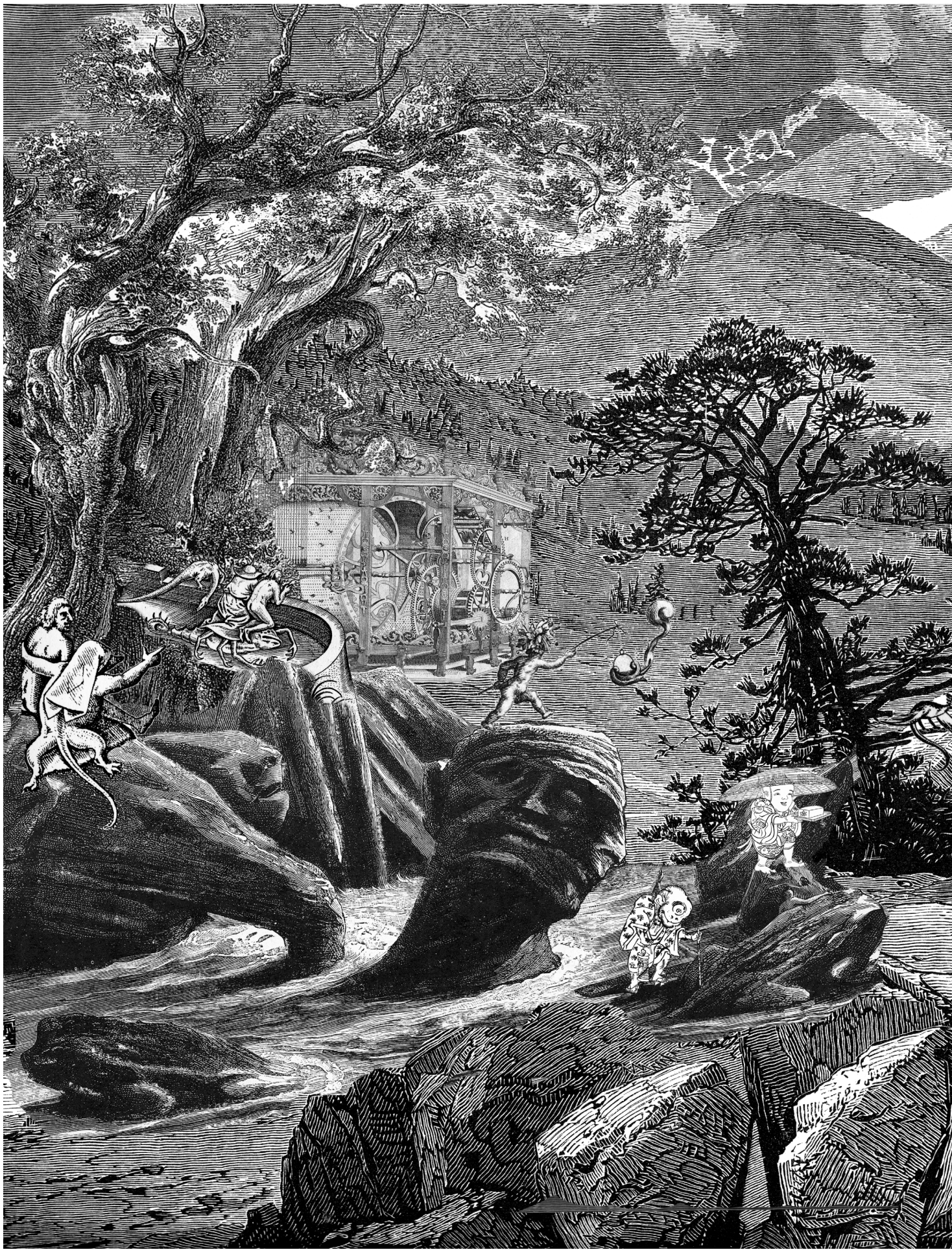
The Moonlight Adventure

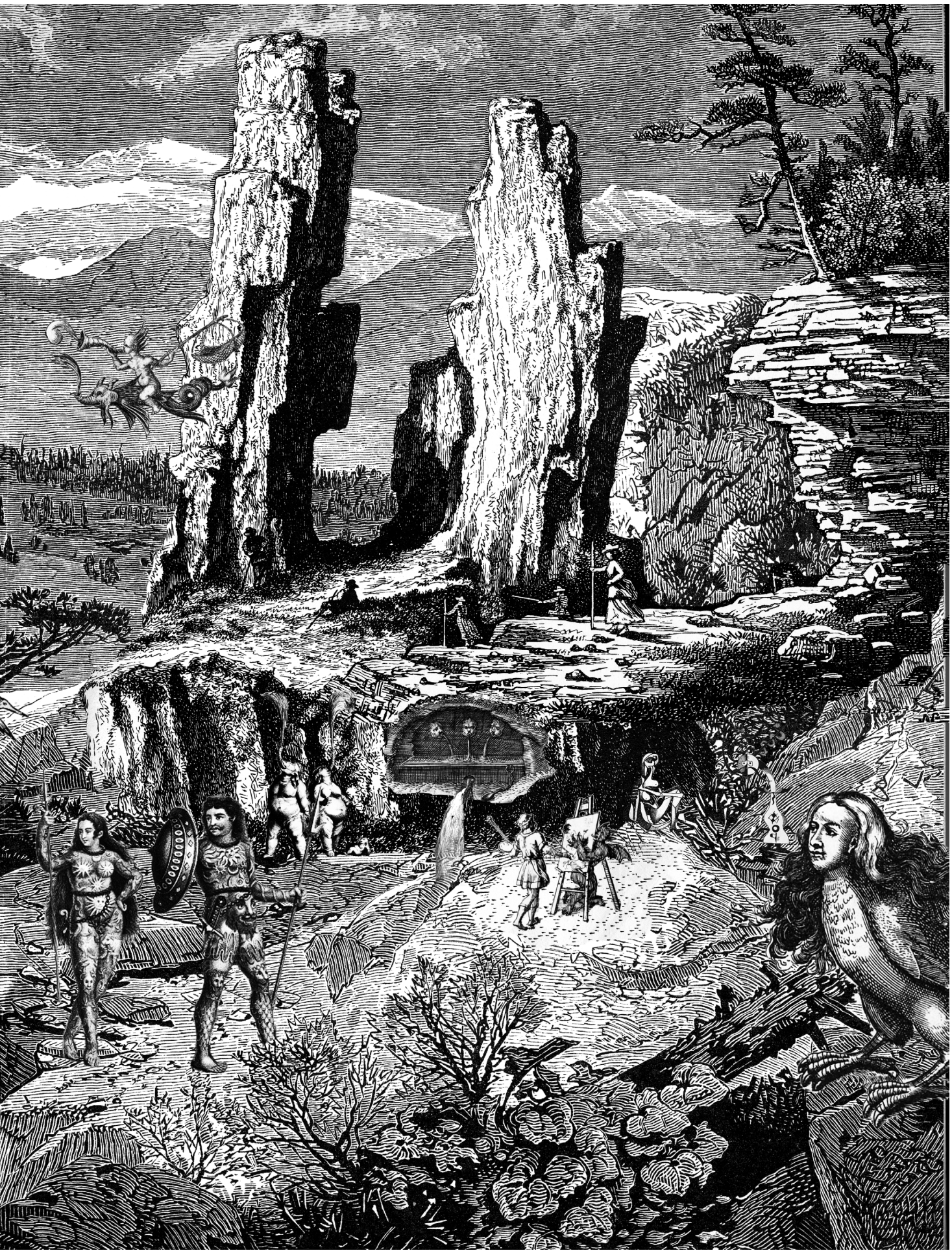
Children are encouraged at a young age to explore the wonders of their natural environment.

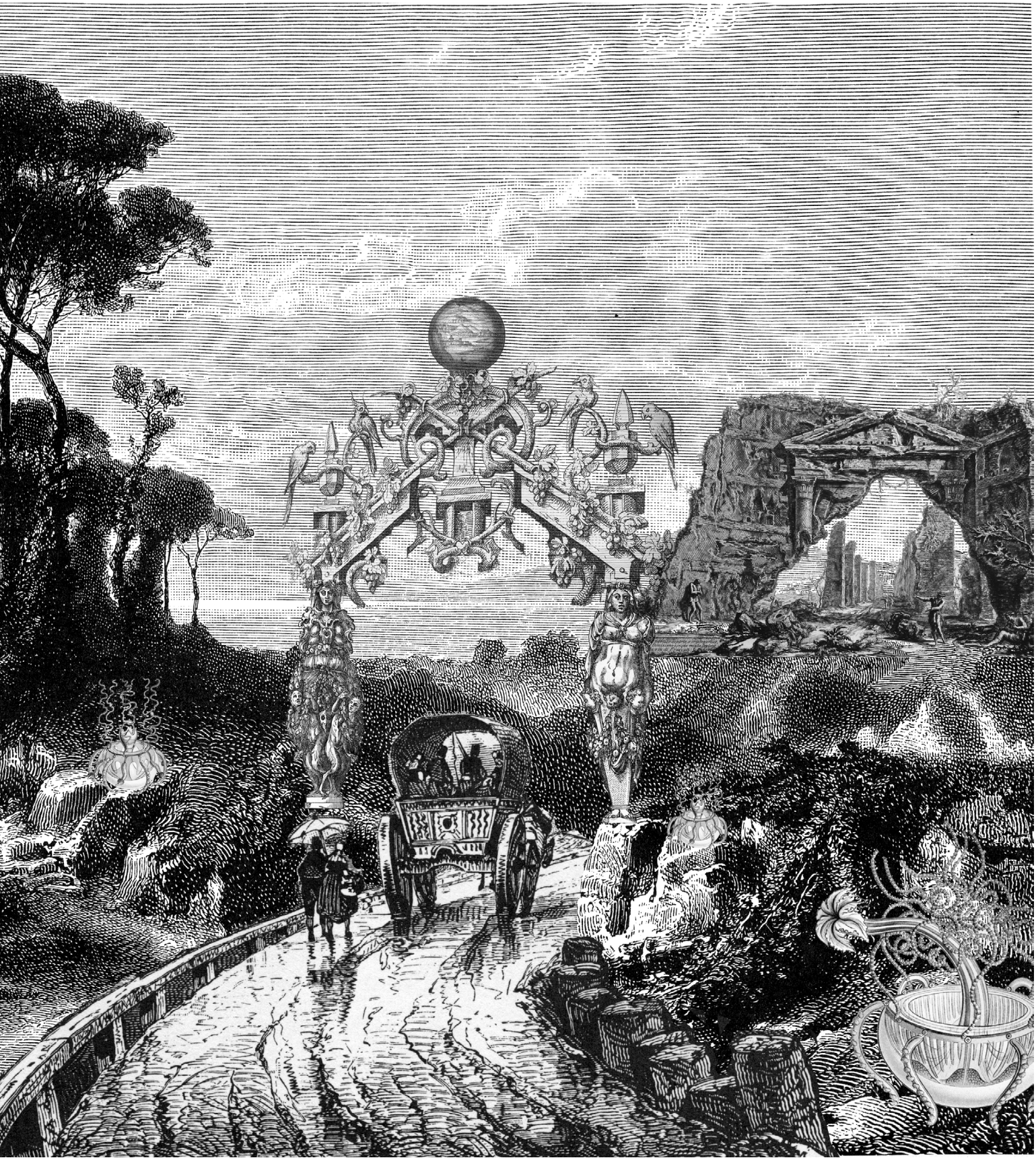
On the following pages:

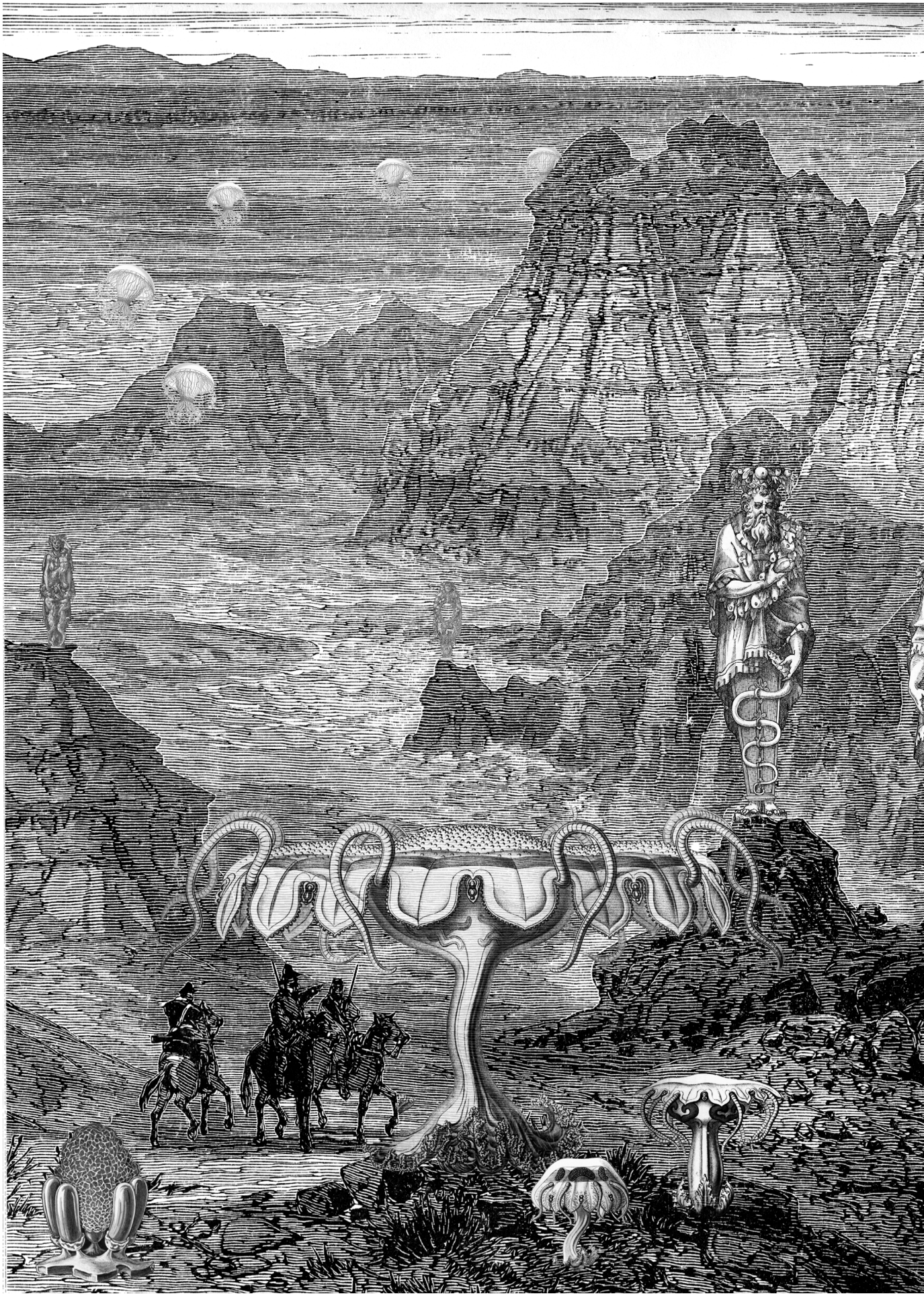
The Academy at the Beach

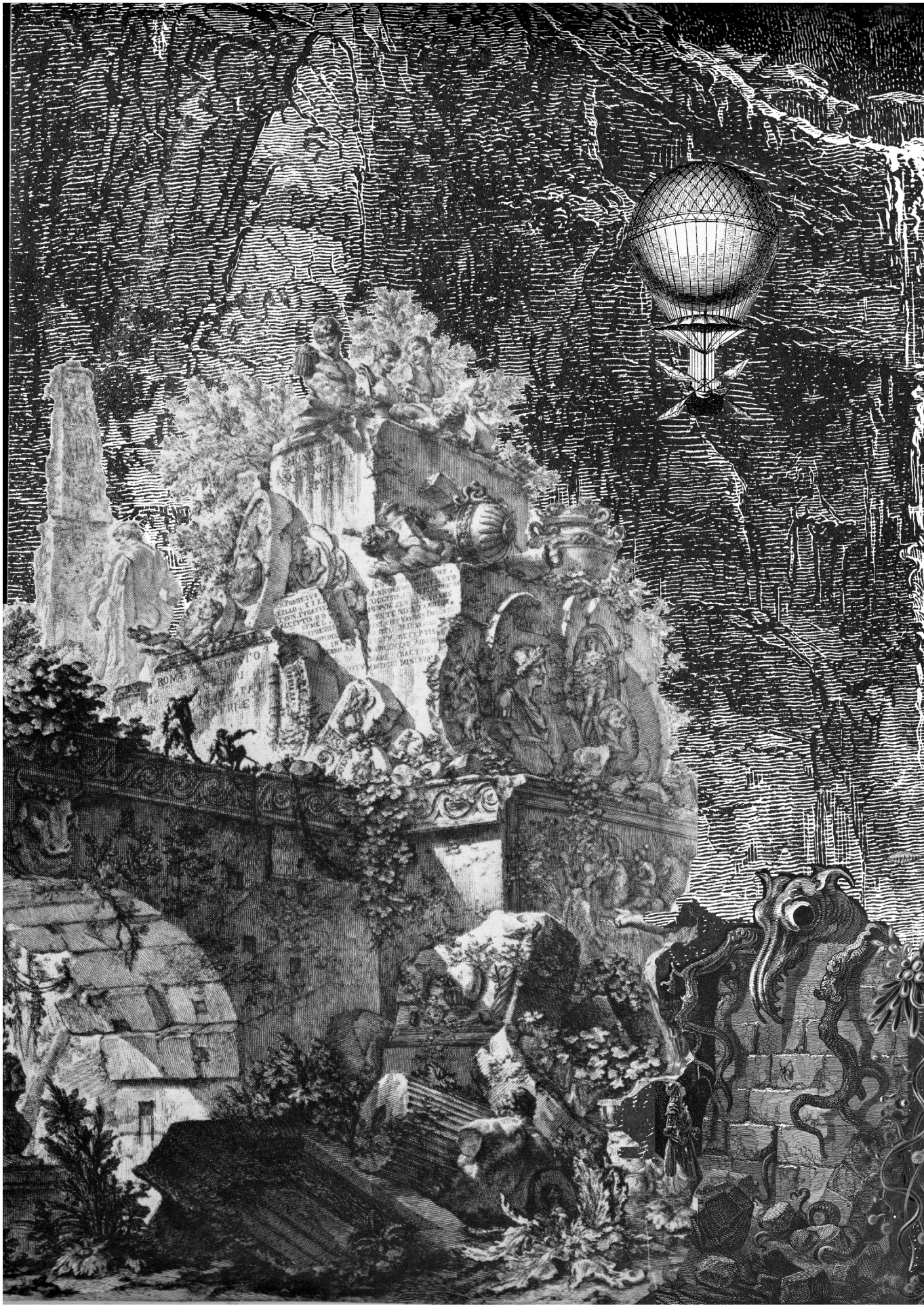
Another popular spot that inspires philosophical discourse is the academy's library at the beach (with a detail shown below)

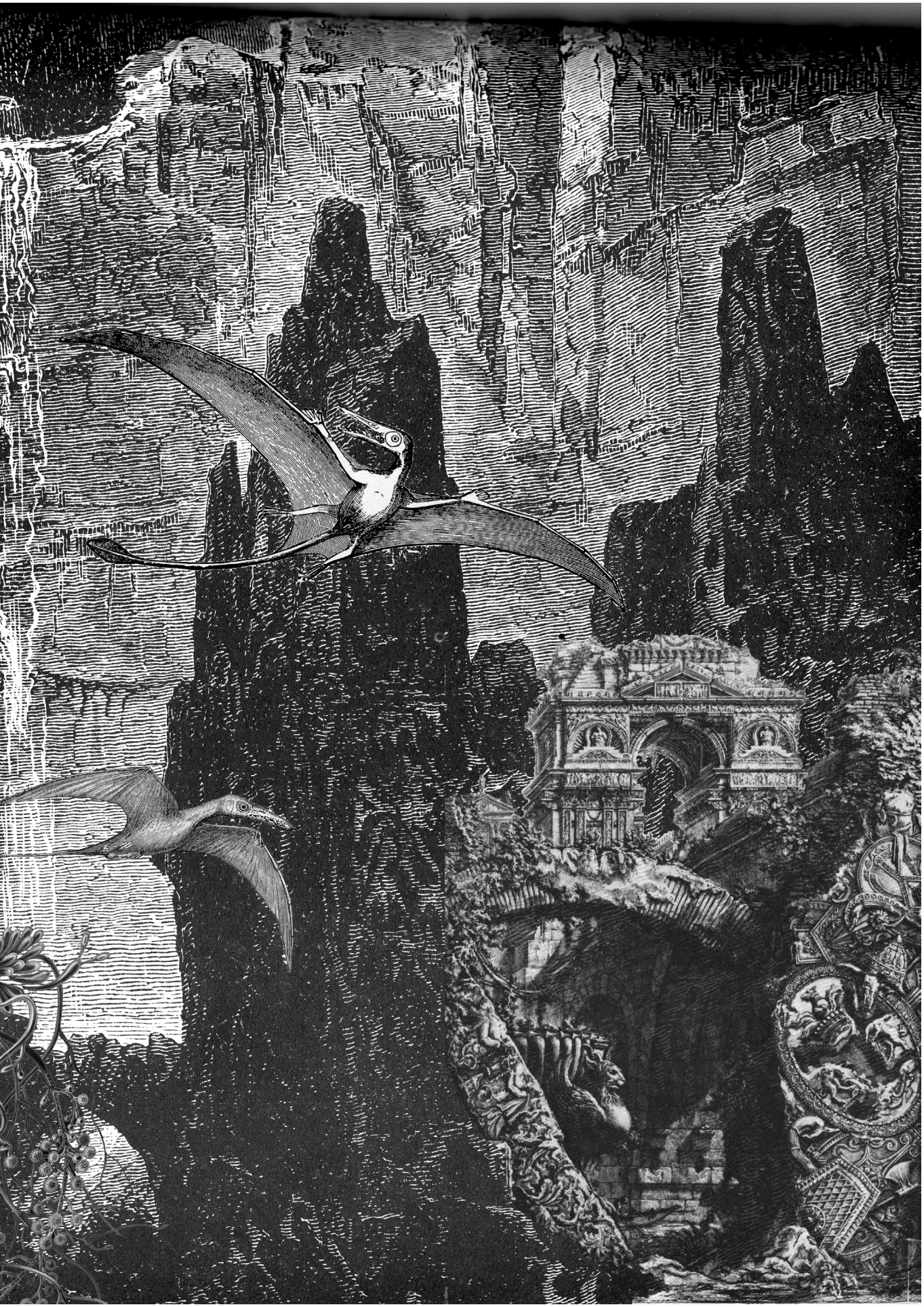












On the preceding pages:

The Highland Meadow

This meadow is popular with visitors from all over the region, especially couples and plein-air painters. Many come to see the interesting rock formations (significant to some as ancestor figures); others warily eye a newfangled contraption whose cogs and gears might be a harbinger of change with the coming of the Modern Age. A regenerative fountain is available for thirsty travelers.

The Pilgrimage

Pilgrims from the lowlands and tourists from the city head past the famous Fish Village en route to the ruins of an ancient temple.

The Valley of the Stone Giants

An expedition to a remote desert region finds some enigmatic statues. Legends abound in the area of stone giants who come to life during certain seasons.

The Lost City

In a remote mountain valley, a balloon expedition finds the mysterious remains of a massive city complex, apparently built by people who abandoned the area long ago for unknown reasons.

On the facing page:

The Shaman's Vision

After an arduous trek up a sacred mountain, a shaman is rewarded with a mysterious vision eclipsing the Sun.

A Death in the Canyon

A traditional death ritual involves summoning the spirits that normally lie dormant within rocks and trees.

Life Along the
Great River

C. GAUCHARD

On the preceding page:

The Primordial Swamp

In the hot, humid lowlands, the river is wide, still, and meandering, in places disappearing into ancient tunnels and aqueducts. Its waters nourish a lush, dense jungle, buzzing with life. A traveling couple listens intently as one of the denizens of the swamp tells the tale of his ongoing transformation from a terrestrial creature to an aquatic one. The telling is punctuated by the backdrop of buzzing insect activity.

On the facing page:

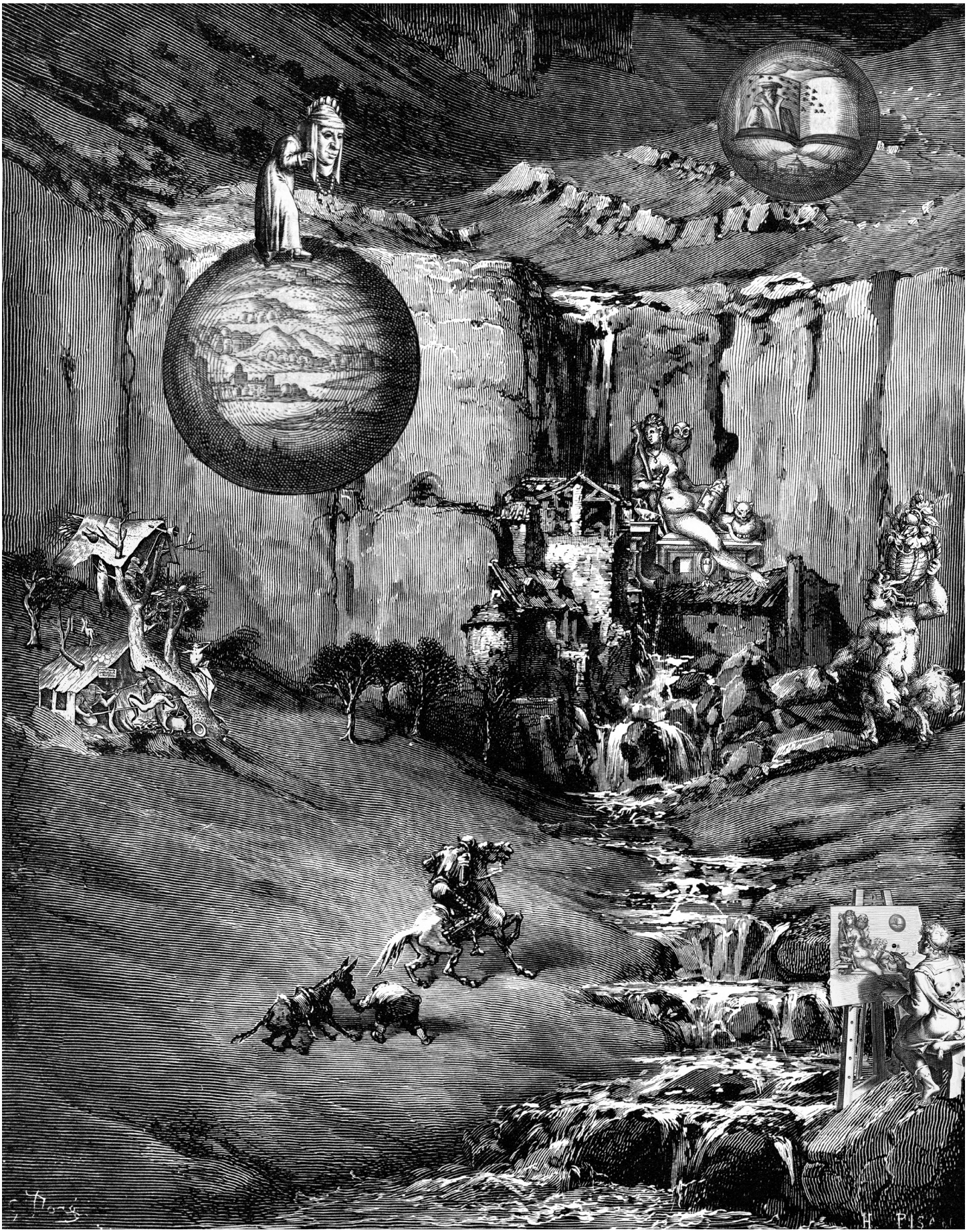
Book People

Paper books rot quickly in the humid swamp, so some of the inhabitants have taken to using their bodies as a medium of literary expression. Their written language is a pictorial one, a complex arrangement of symbols and patterns.

On the following page:

Arcadian Revels

At higher elevations, the river flows through temperate forests, providing quiet backwaters ideal for a dip or a revel. The woodland inhabitants dress in clothing assembled from the forest.



On the preceding pages:

The River Adventure

While the people of the swamps and forests live rather nomadic lifestyles, the people of the upper river lead more settled lives. They do get restless, however, and a common rite of passage is to take a trip down the river to explore the lowlands, which they see as more primitive but nevertheless fascinating.

The River Goddess

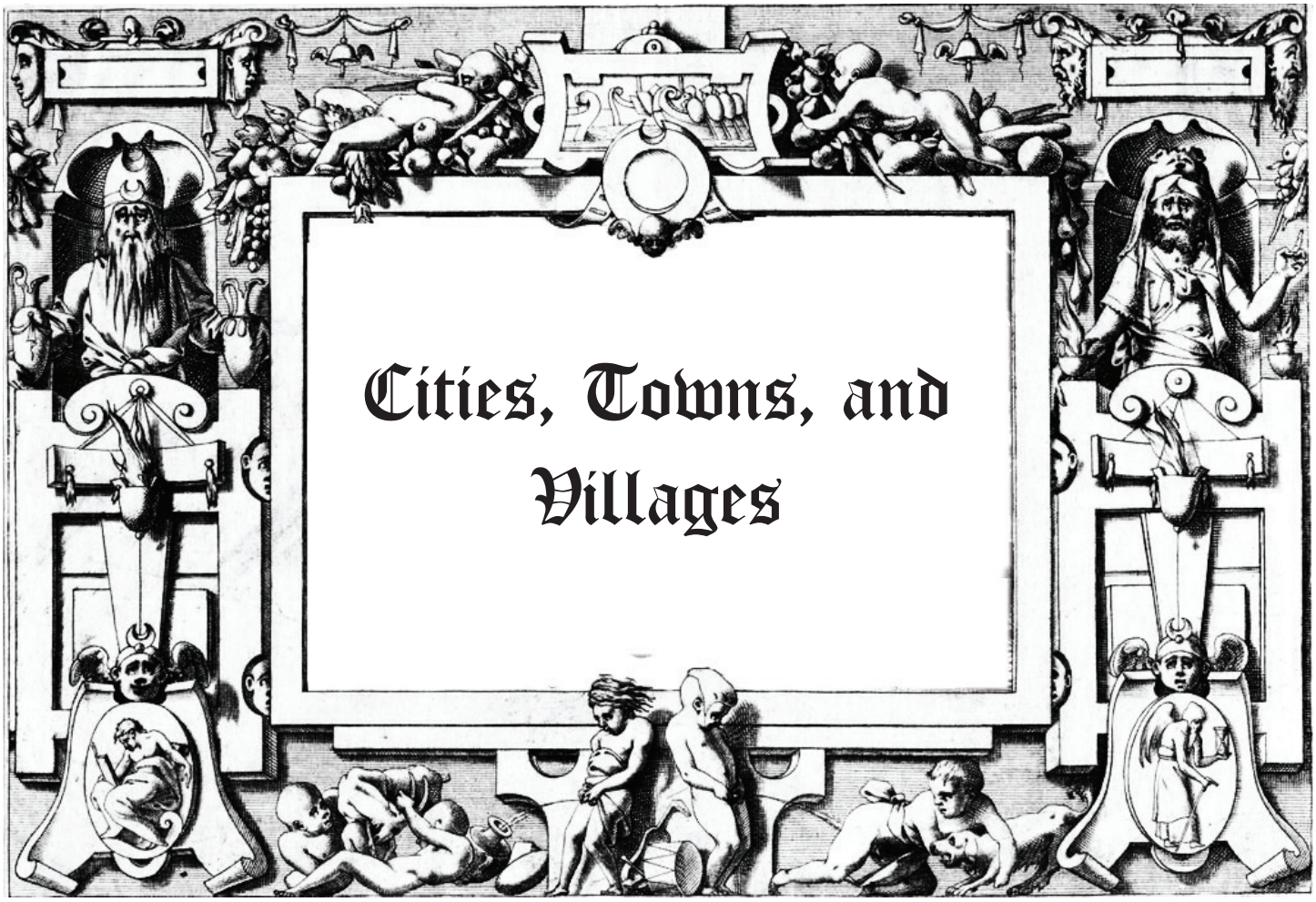
While most people of the river village prefer the idyllic downstream trip to the tropical lowlands, some head upstream to seek the source of the river. At the higher elevations, the river becomes rough and fast, and is presided over by the River Goddess whose song can be heard in the symphony of the rushing waters and the rhythm of the lapping waves

The Mountain Portal

An elaborate portal in a remote mountain valley is believed to have magical effects on those who find it.

The River Source

The hardy souls who complete the journey into the mountain source of the river are rewarded with extraordinary visions



Cities, Towns, and Villages

On the facing page:

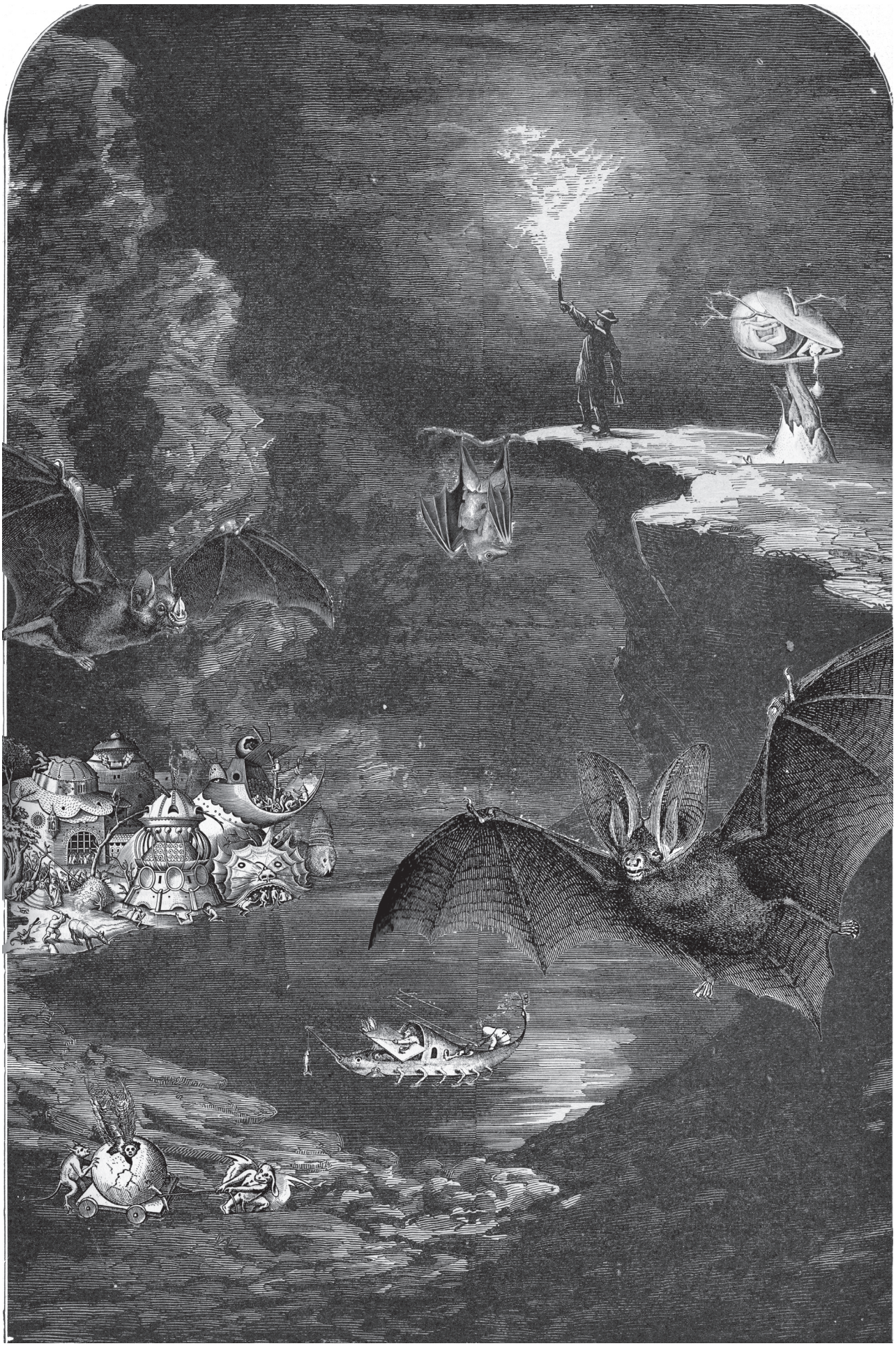
The Troglodyte Village

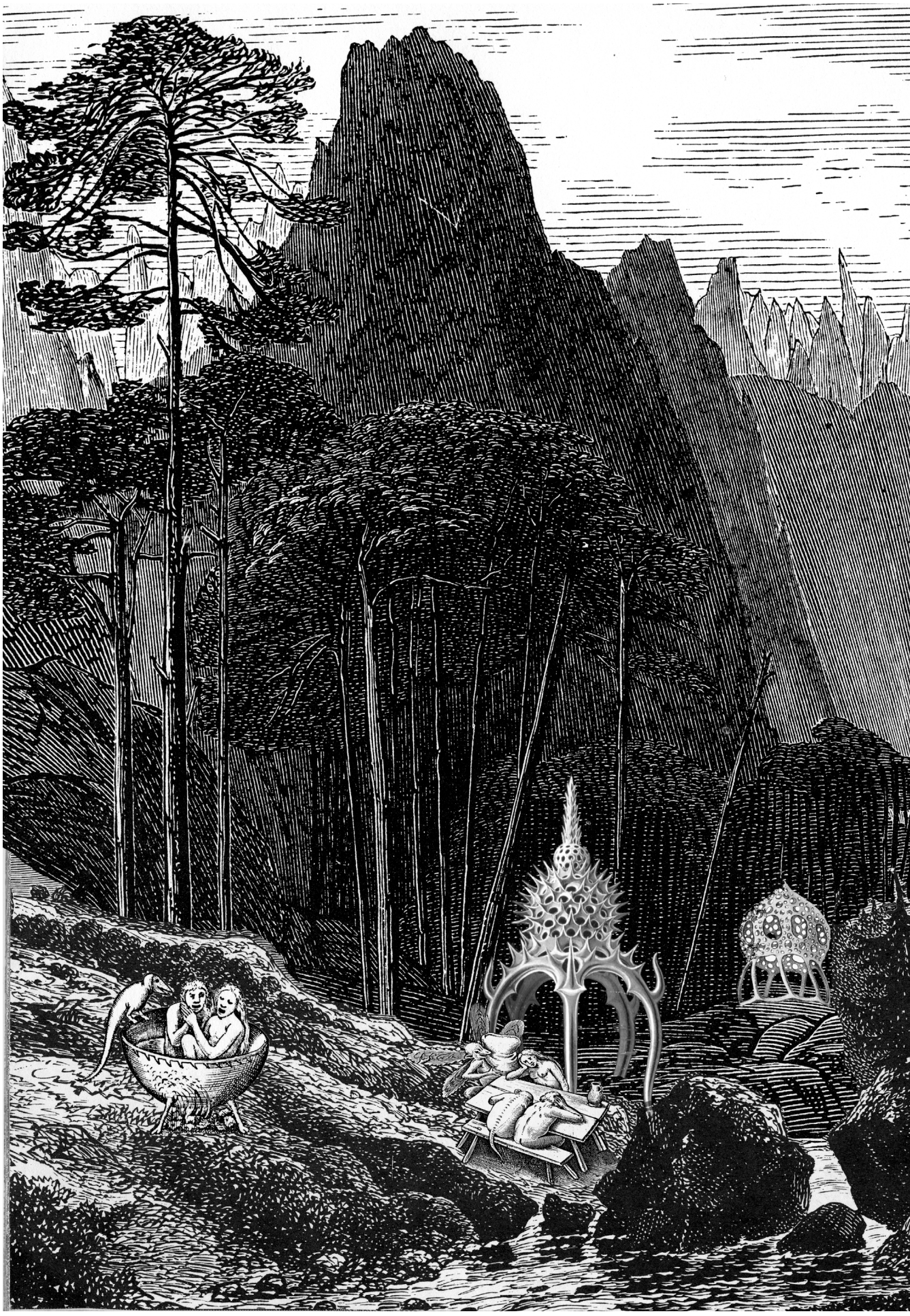
A huge cavern contains a tiny village, presided over by giant bats.

On the following pages:

The Village in the Mountains

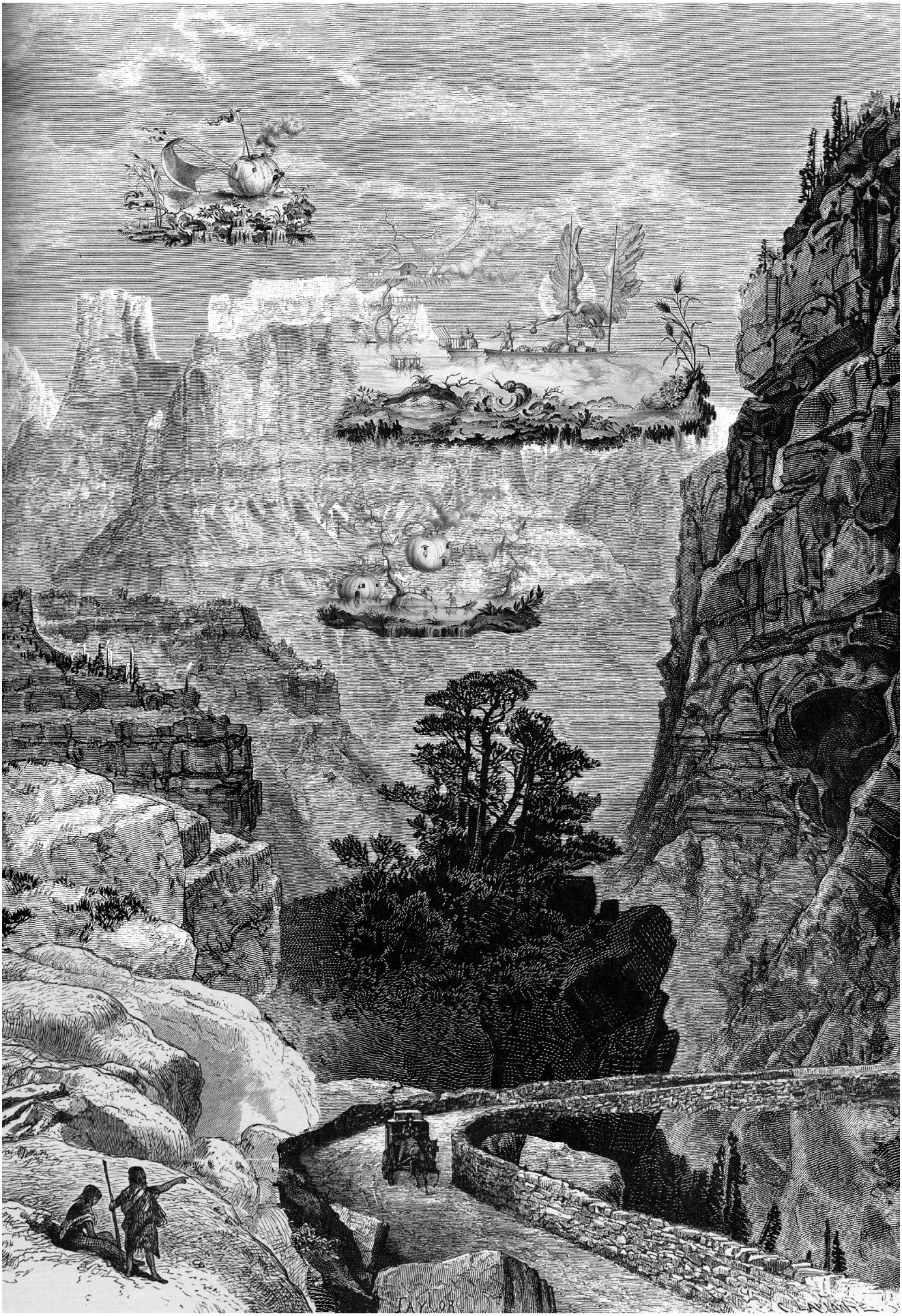
Isolated villages such as this one still celebrate their exuberant traditional festivals, ignoring the incursion of curious tourists from the city in their flying machine.





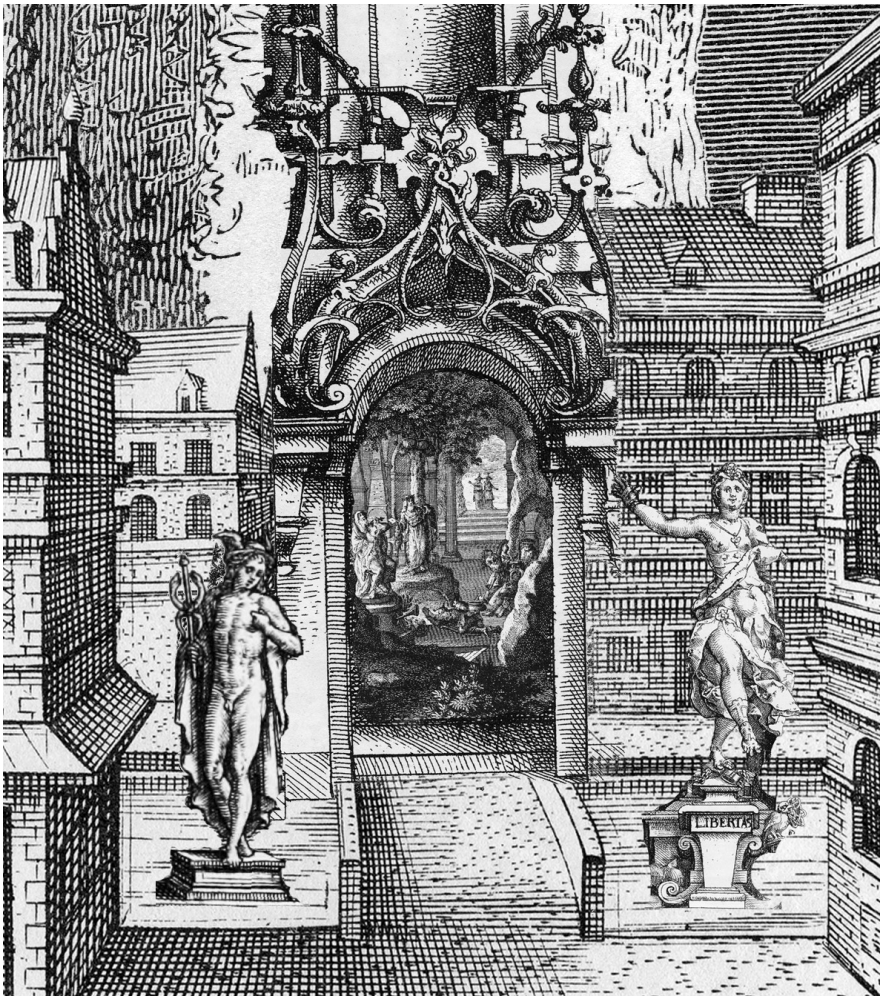
The Floating Village

A loose, mobile community of island-like habitations takes advantage of the strange gravitational anomaly in this remote canyon.



The Town by the Rock Spire

A quiet suburb of the capital city. The main plaza leads to an entrance into the towering monolith (detail below).



On the following pages:

The Artists' Cavern

Artists find inspiration in these underground structures beneath the town. A pair of sculptors create idealized views of themselves, an assemblage artist shows her latest creation to the group, and a writer ponders how to describe it all.

MUSEUM

On the preceding pages:

The Town Museum and the Temple

The museum is across the street from the local temple, which sponsors community events such as masquerades and parades, as well as hosting a plein-air school.

Inside the Town Museum

The local town museum features the usual array of dioramas, curiosities, and orientalia. Showcased in this museum:

a diorama of fetal skeletons and preserved organs

a mermaid tank

a large piece of coral that resembles a surrealist sculpture

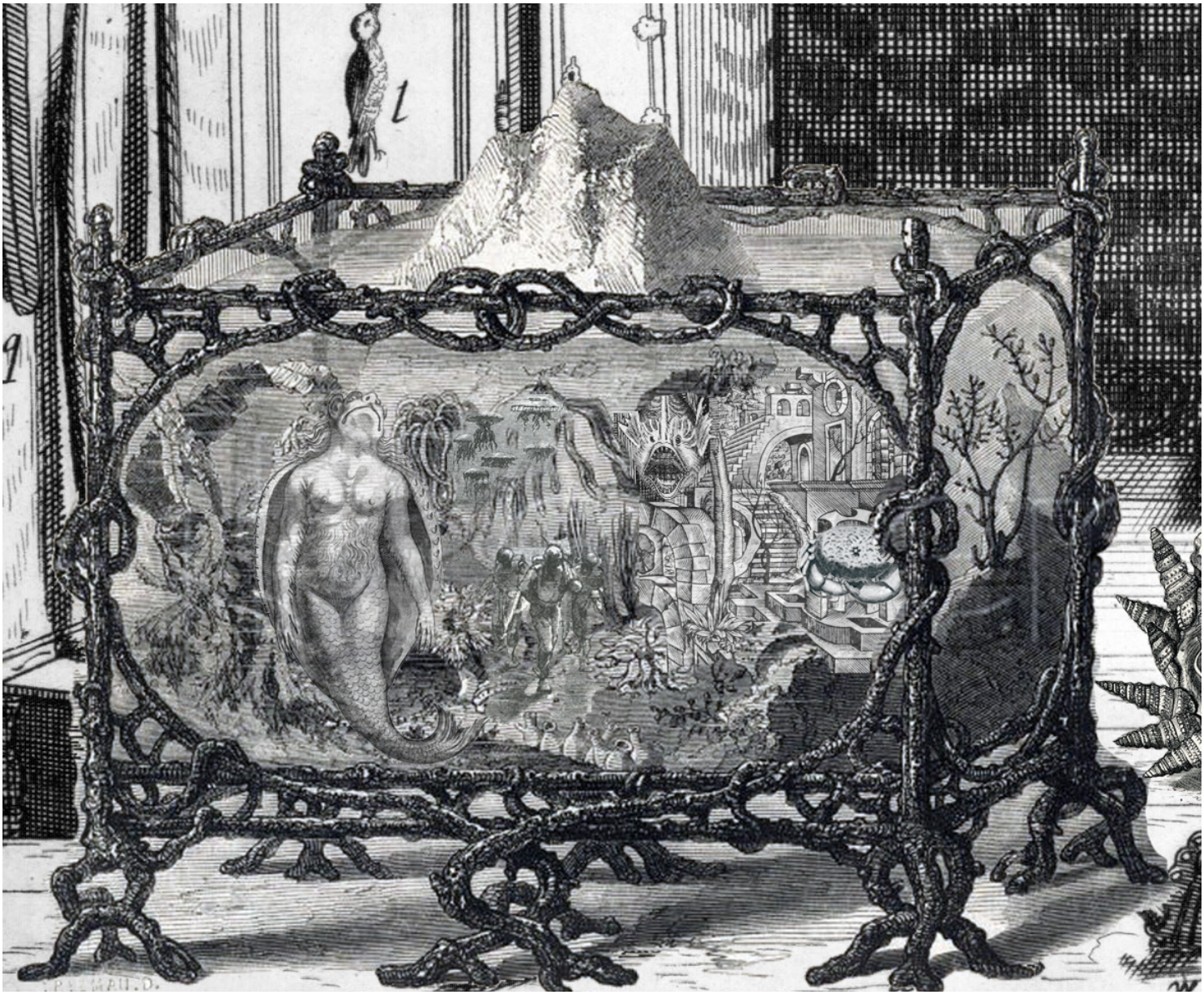
a giant decorator crab (endemic to the Zymoglyphic region) that contains an entire ecosystem on its exoskeleton

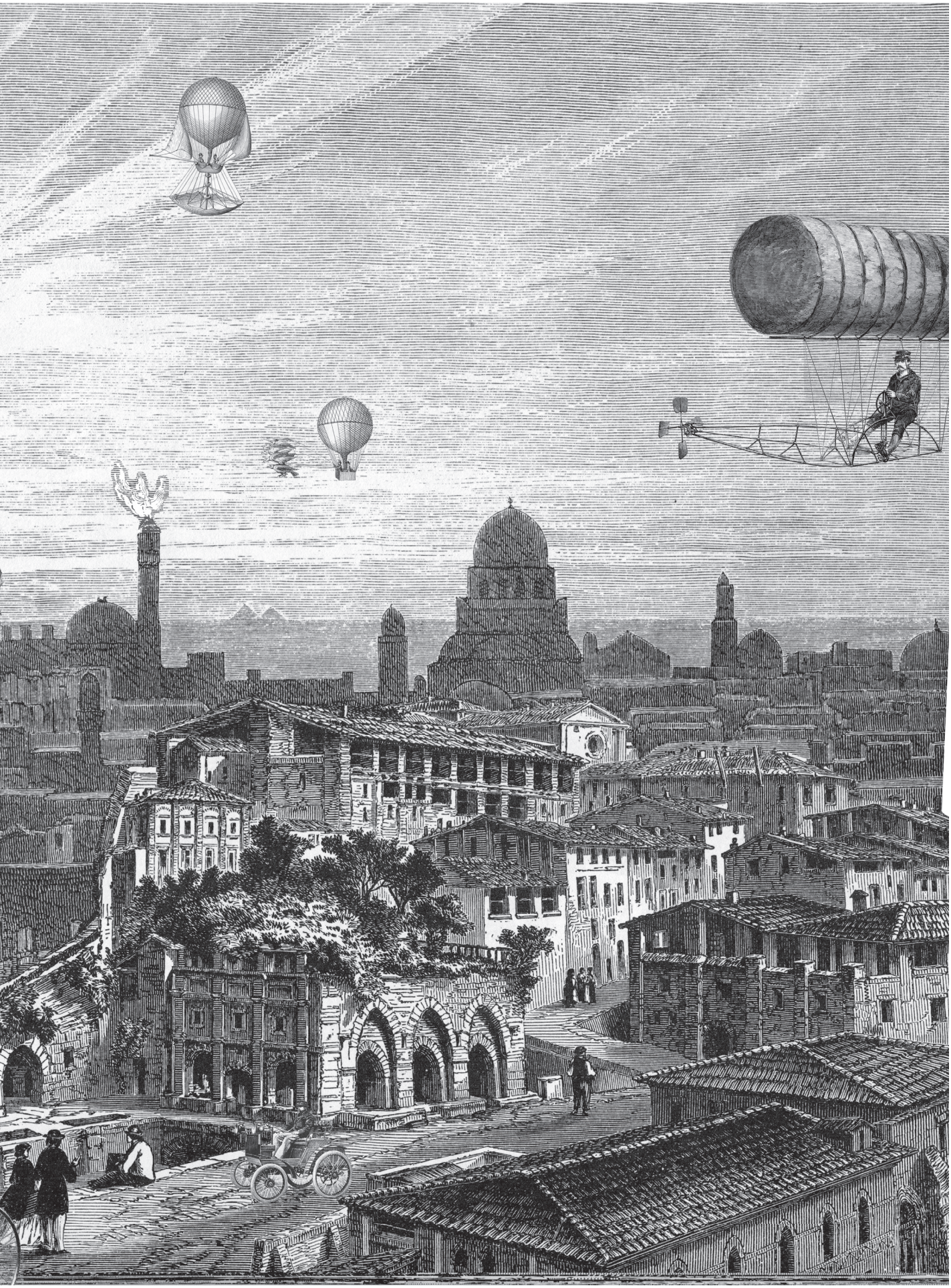
various dioramas, assemblages, specimens, and artifacts

On the facing page:

The Mermaid Tank

The museum's aquarium is home to a mermaid as well a tiny village with a stairway to another world reputed to be a miniature world within the tank





On the preceding pages:

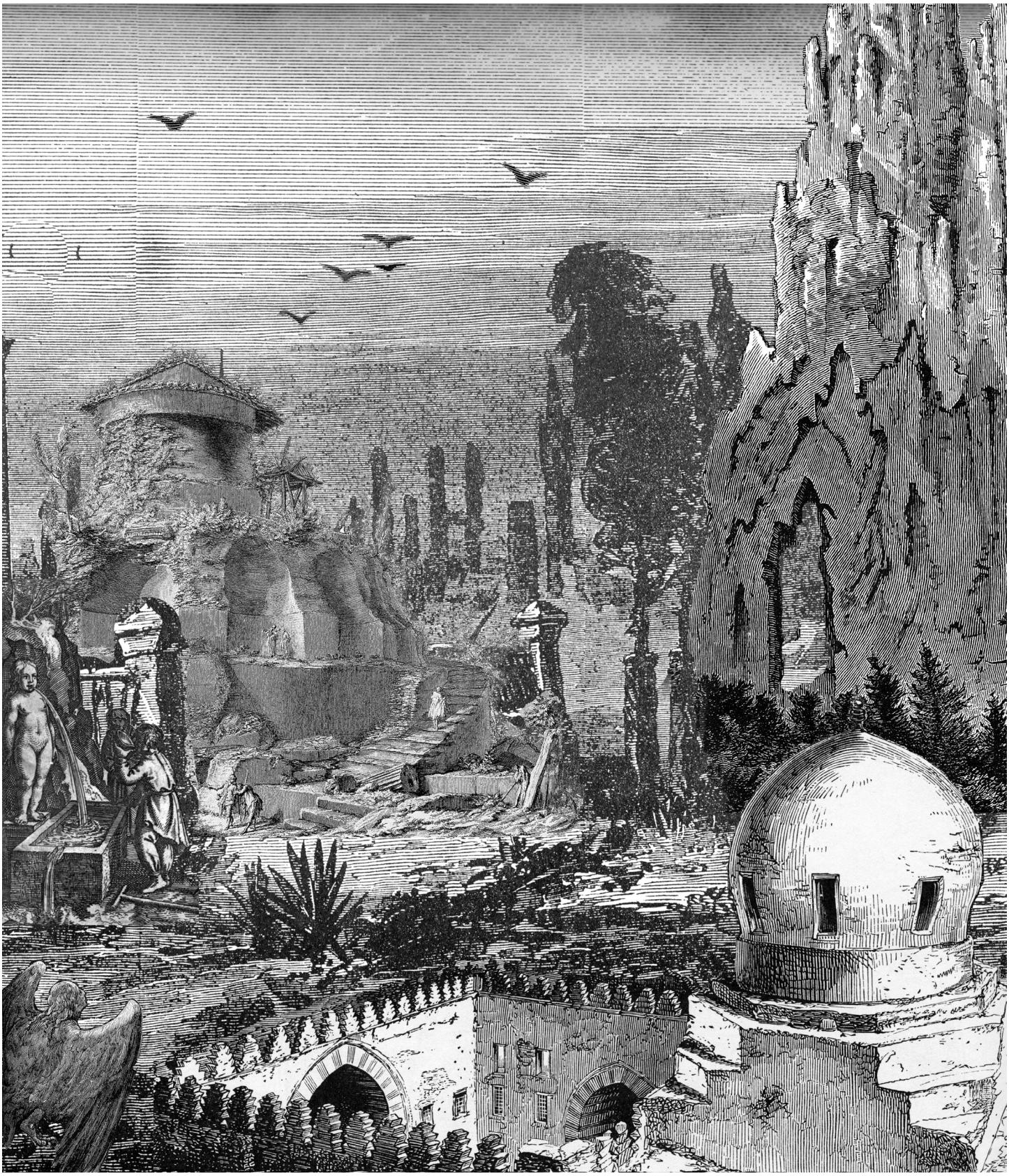
The Capital City

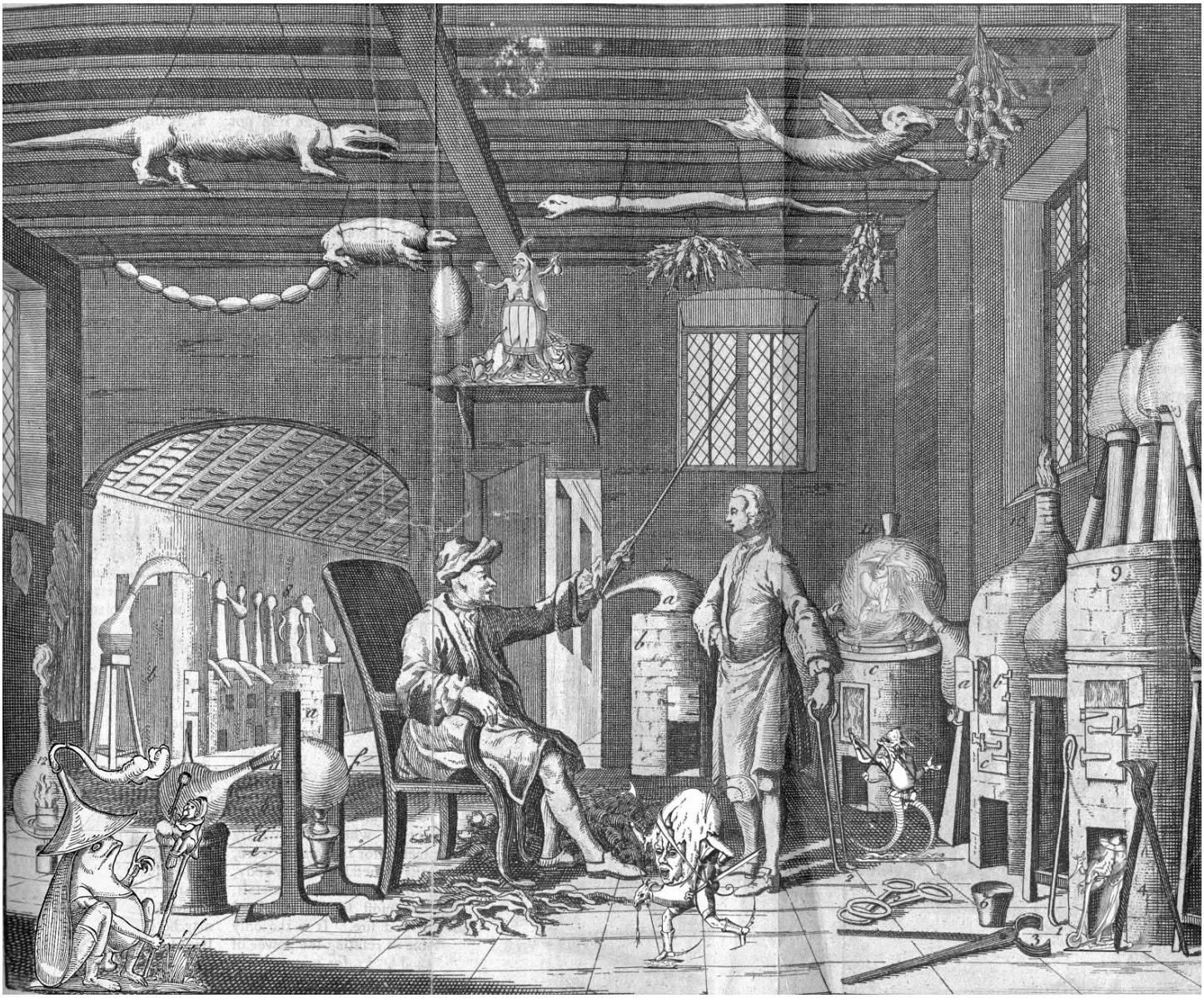
The capital city occupies a central place in a vast plain in the arid uplands. It is a buzzing metropolis of skewed perspectives and the latest transportation technology.

On the facing page:

The Decayed Sector

Some parts of the city have become so dilapidated as to be tourist attractions. This one is reached by an underground passage and features a refreshment stand.





The Alchemist

On the preceding pages and the facing page:

The Alchemist's Library

In the heart of the capital city are its library and associated alchemy lab. Alchemists apply the practical knowledge in their books to unlocking the secrets of physical matter. One fellow works on the creation of special lenses that provide a helpful perspective.

The Alchemist's Field Laboratory

Working in a remote village, an alchemist has set up an elaborate laboratory. He seeks the philosopher's stone through a combination of chemistry experiments and esoteric imagery.

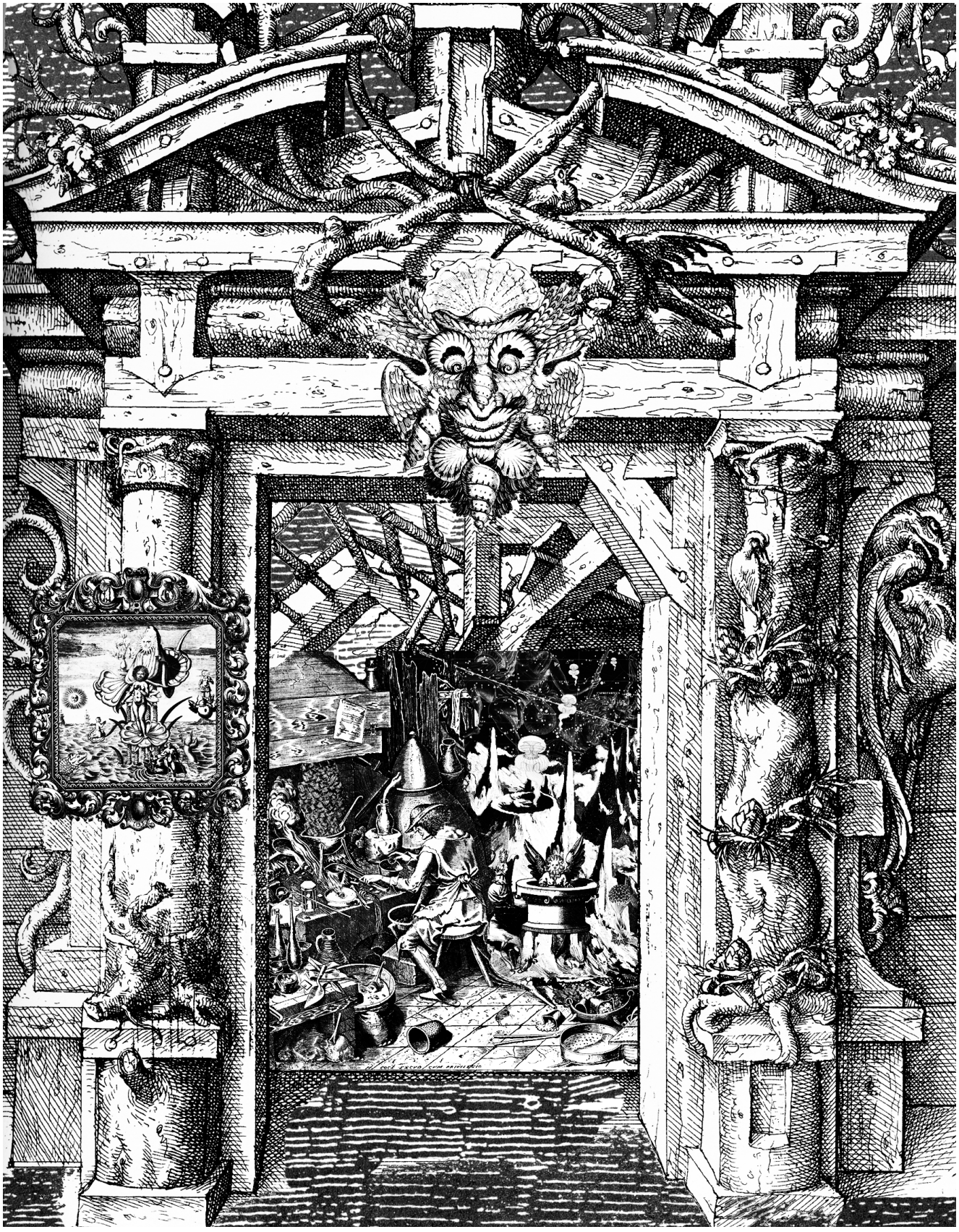
On the facing page:

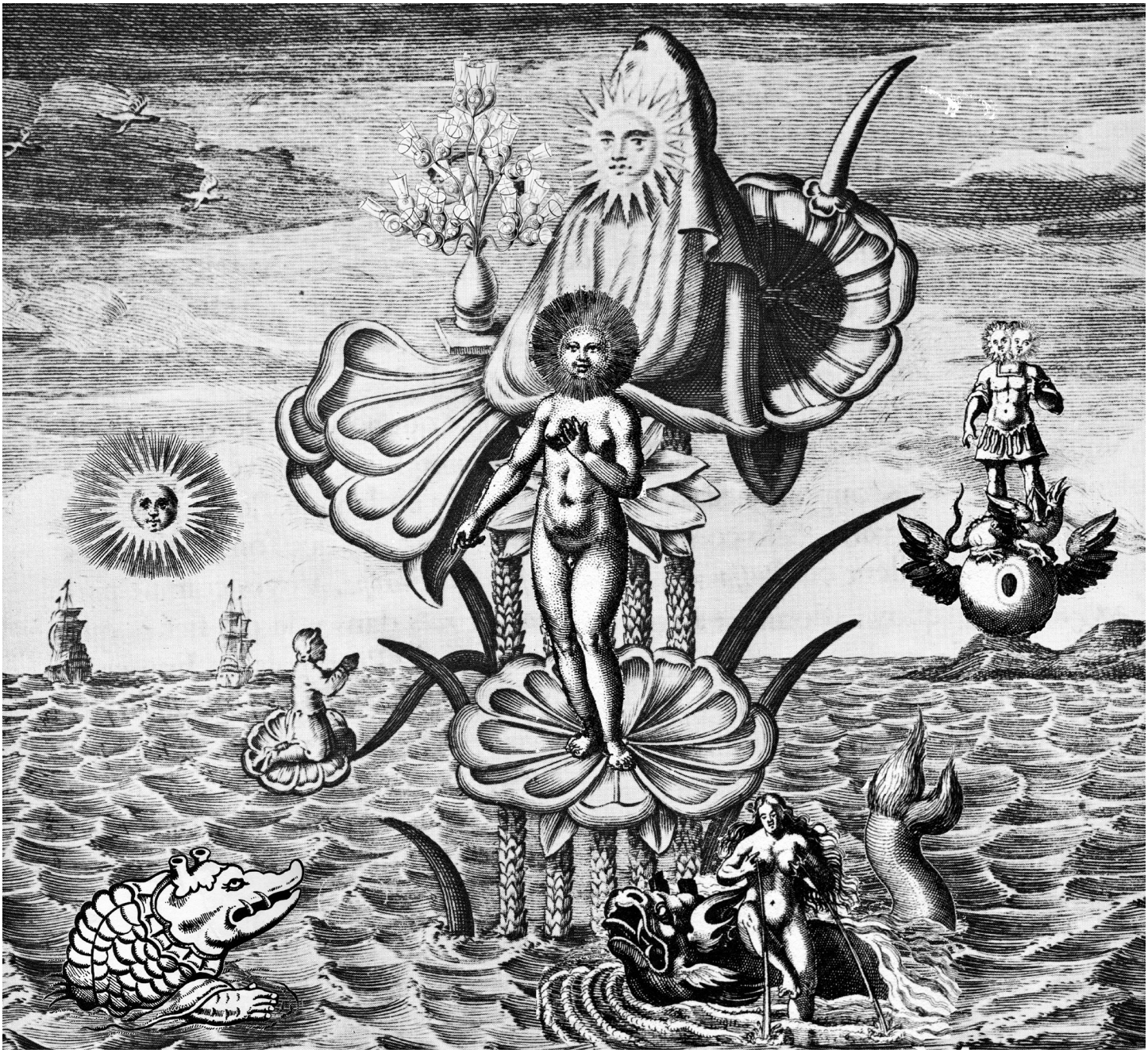
Doorway to the Alchemist's Laboratory

On the following pages:

The Alchemist's Vision of the Sea

The Alchemist's Vision of the Moon





MARCH
FEBRUARY
JANUARY
CAPRICORNUS
Norma Nitidiana
Sinda
Scheat
Deneb Algedi
Fluvius

Final Visions

On the preceding pages:

The Angel's Announcement

The end of the Age of Wonder was heralded by a set of cosmic vision thst indicated the end of days

The Philosopher's Viewpoint

Learned mena and women gather to make sense of the strange portents in the sky

On the facing page:

The Cosmic Voyage

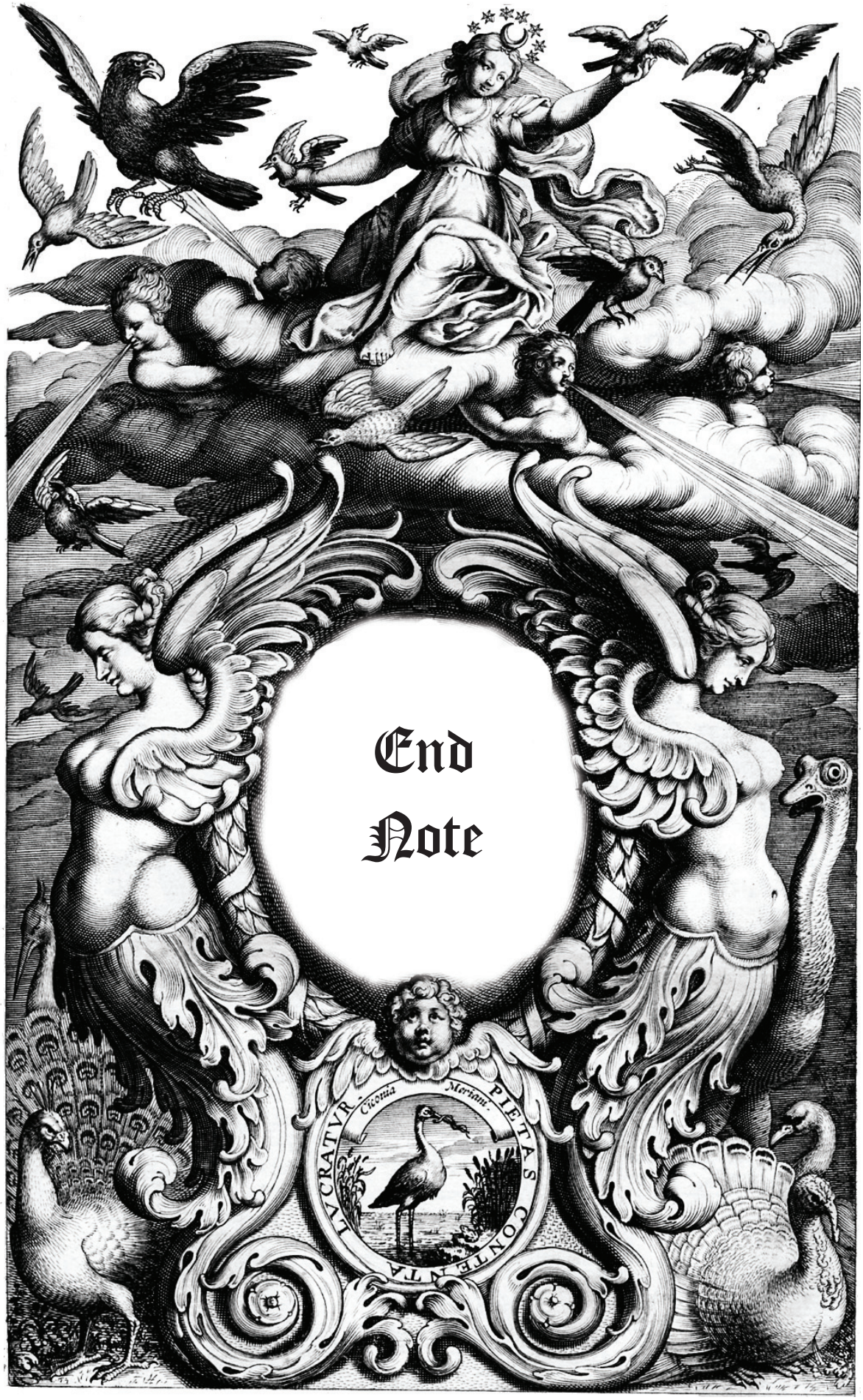
Some choose to leave to find a better world

On the following pages:

The Dreaming Spires

Final conflagration and hope for renewal

Ursa Major
Lynx
Telescopium
Herschelii
Præsepe
Gemini
Castor
Pollux
Auriga
CANCER
ECLIPTIC
JUL.
AUGUST
Leo
Tegmine
Canis Minor
Procyon
Hydra


End
Note
LVCRATVR
Ciconia
Meriam
PIETAS
CONTENTA

NOTE ON THE SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THE COLLAGES IN THIS BOOK.

Historical overview - Images from an Age of Wonder

The images used in these collages, with a very few exceptions, come from European and American sources spanning the four centuries between the Renaissance and the dawn of the Modern Age at the beginning of the twentieth century.

As ships were sailing out from Europe for exotic lands, books as we know them today were becoming practical. Movable type provided the text and engraved plates provided the images. The plates might be copper, wood, or steel. Images were also produced using woodcuts, lithographs, and etchings. Engravings were the commonest means of illustrating printed material such as books and newspapers until they were replaced by the widespread adoption of photography. Engravings give the whole 400-year span a single look and are characteristic of the era.

Landscapes

The backgrounds in the collages generally date from the 19th century, as the Romantic notion of the "picturesque" influenced landscape representation in European and American art. Gustave Dore (1832-1883) lavishly illustrated oversize versions of the Bible, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Don Quixote*, and many other literary classics. One book in particular that provided many backgrounds for these collages is Chateaubriand's *Atala*, a romantic tragedy written in 1801 and set among the Indians of the New World. Dore's illustrations for it depict a primeval America of eerie dark woods, ancient gnarled trees, vast rivers, and tropical oases.

Creatures

Early European printed books contain a wide variety of interesting creatures with which one can populate an alternative natural history. There are demons and strange chimeras descended from the drolleries that inhabited the margins of medieval texts, and griffins, winged cherubs, and pagan deities from classical and Christian mythologies. Bestiaries of the time include fanciful descriptions of mermaids and other strange humanoids from distant places.

Even as close scientific observation of the natural world banished the more questionable creatures from the natural history texts, the development of the microscope and underwater exploration revealed new types of creatures just as fascinating. Much of the flora and even a bit of the architecture in these views were provided by the work of Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), an artist/scientist noted for his detailed depictions of plants and animals as art forms in his book *Kunstformen Der Natur* (1904).

Emblem books

Emblem books were popular in the 16th and 17th centuries. Their format was a single image on a page, generally a complex engraving with an allegorical meaning, paired with a text on the facing page that was the verbal version of the image. Allegory removes the necessity for a picture to be literal, and when such an image is removed from its original context, it tends to be mysterious and evocative.

Alchemy

Enigmatic imagery was a vital component of alchemy, right alongside the physical retorts and chemicals processes. The quest for the philosopher's stone was as much, if not more, a symbolic spiritual quest as a seeking for the physical transformation of materials. Alchemical imagery encoded much of this process in a multi-layered iconography which was intentionally opaque to the uninitiated.

Architecture and design

The Italian renaissance, mannerist, baroque, and rococo styles all used a profusion of decorative imagery on buildings, in fountains, on statuary, and on the printed page. Grotesquerie in particular uses swirls of foliage that contain figures, heads, and chimeras, in hallucinogenic profusion.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) exemplifies the 18th century fascination with an idealized, classical past. In his *Veduti di Roma*, the classical pillars and domes of ancient Rome are shown decaying and covered with plant life.

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