

The Mute Places

Oranjetic, the popular speech of the citizens living and the dream tongue of the citizens dead, has a thousand songs for the orchards and the streams and the delights provided by the Hedonic Satisfaction Ministry (Hesam). But it has no songs for the mute places, the places fallen away from the Garden Path, the places sunk to corruption and slow decay.

The ministers and magisters who must deal with such despondent places have a word for them: *süjgje* (hush-where). The mute places. Places that no longer speak.

The voices of the gods, the whispers of the noösphere, may be stilled in the hushwheres, but to the old-minded the stones still have dirges to share.

Silent Approach

Draw closer to the mute place. Feel your aura pale.

1. No small creatures. First no midges. Then no flies. Then mice, even birds disappear.
2. The day-stars fade, the fast-stars slow, the sky grows grey like dead god-screen.
3. Cold leaches from ground and sky. Frost flowers blossom in shadow and crack.
4. Eyes water, depth drains away, all grows flat. Voices, reasons, dreams.
5. Coiling ironthorns, warning vines sprouted from the soil itself by the power of the Builders. "Away!" they seem to say.
6. The ground becomes glass. Sand, rocks, buildings, rails, roads give way to scratched translucence.



Here, Now, Somber Monument

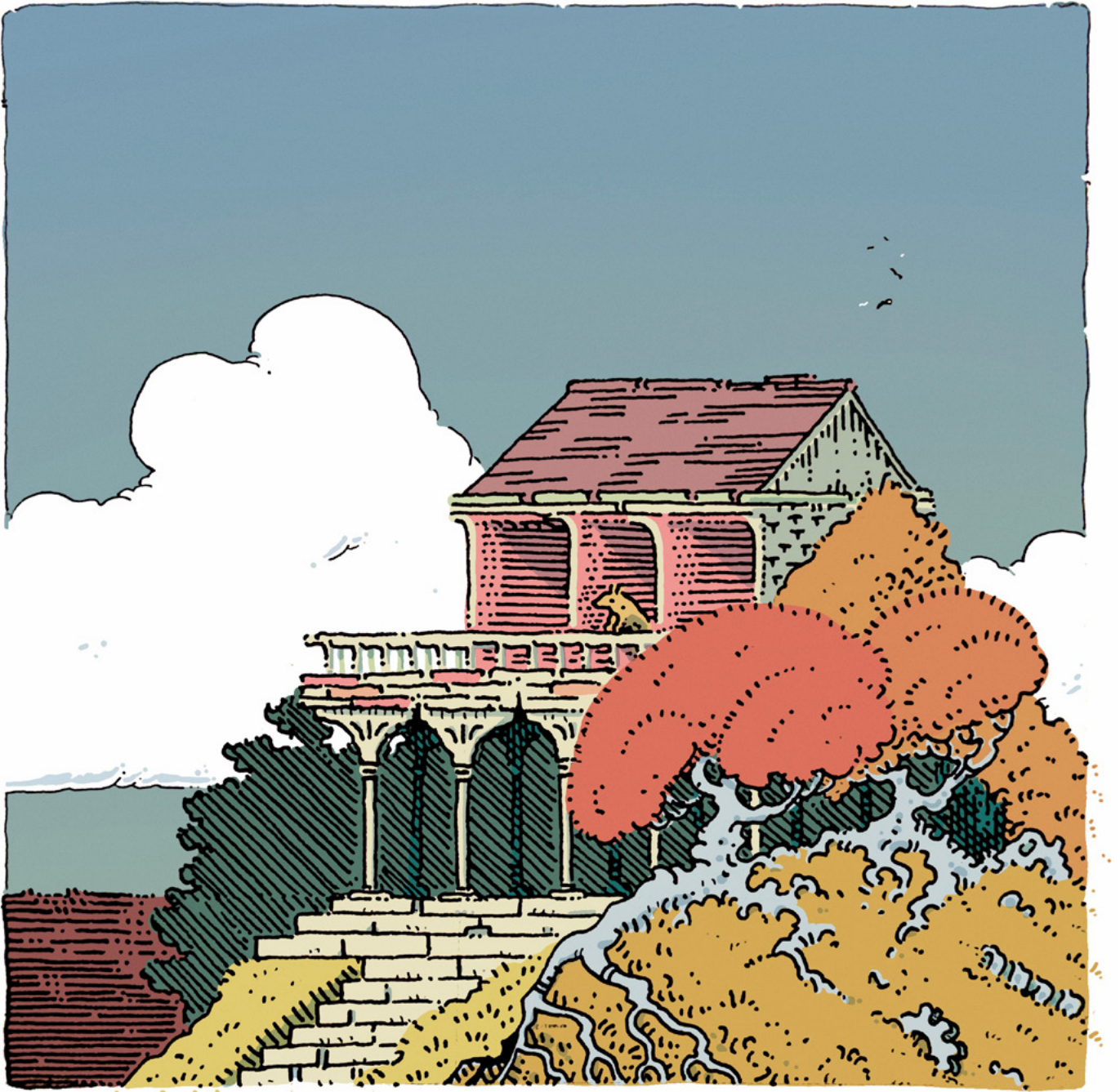
It surrounds you, clusters in, drawn by your words, your vitality, your malleable nature. Feel your aura shrink.

1. Houses and halls insubstantial as ghosts, flickering echoes of past lives, trapped beyond the veil of Error.
2. Ominous tumuli cloaked in heather and hellflower. The wights of a lying age bound in torture tombs. They cannot be released, they are but lessons against the hubris of man.
3. Bricks. Boulders. Shells of sandstone. Bars of rustless metal. Contorted parts. Destruction preserved in amber time. More lessons.
4. Silent plazas. Pretty porticos. Memorable mosaics. Abandoned autogolems. Living dust to scour every surface, polish and preserve for masters never to be seen again.
5. Gardens of rutile roses. Parks of olivine oaks. Towers of carnelian corpses. A decayed visitor center. Posters commemorating a petrifying plague.
6. Sigil-warded, sign-posted, sarcophagus-entombed. A great square mountain. Within, they don't say but one suspects, an autofaber. A rogue creation machine. A false god.

They Call This Place Home

Life, says the poet, finds a way. Feel your aura flicker.

1. Ghosts, living ghosts. Naked ka-ba sentiences, unbound from the gift of flesh, they suck vitality from the bonds of this place.
2. A radiation of rabbits, grown bold and rat-like, with grasping hands and snarling eyes.
3. Ground vultures, huge and therapod in proportion. Immune to the dark aura, they wait for visitors to drop into inevitable catatonia.
4. Dog-sized ants, pack-individuals as smart as a human when assembled.
5. Falschers, golems of man-flesh perfect in every way, save without spirit or mind. They perform their routines, reproduce, and self-repair in the crystal cabinets prepared for them by long-dead masters.
6. Recusers who abandoned the path of humanity long, long ago. Shaggy and protean, they seek a means of further uplift in this place.



THE ANCIENT LICH KNEW THEIR
WORDS WERE SWEET NECTAR,
BUT NONE CAME TO HEAR THEM.

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Sweet Honey Traps

(Fende Swadumelite)

It's not just the Orange Land that is dotted with ghost orchards and hollow plantations and robot cottages, but they are most common there.

The weary traveler follows a sign, spots hearthsmoke, and expects a bed and bath, rest and repose. Lights welcoming wink, tended trees and furrowed fields invite.

Closer, figures go about their duties, smells tempt the palate, the circle of life seems unbroken.

Yet something rings hollow. No spirit stirs. No mind inquires. Men and beasts alike are false, machines of flesh, programmed to simulate social life. Survivors of masters gone to futility, dead to ennui, died out while the gods looked away.

Still, the biomachines continue. Ceaseless as the suns.