



**SECRETS**



Silence is golden

- Stage 1 -

Remove the outside world from your senses and delve in to your imagination.

You are a child leaving the four walls known to you as home and are venturing into the wilderness. You are in a part of nature where great oaks tower above a carpet of ferns and daffodils. Where the sound of a stream mingles with the song of a robin red breast and the air is filled with the scent of morning dew. In the distance, backed by a rising sun, stands the silhouette of a young girl. She is a moon child gypsy known to you as Tsura and is waiting for you at the point where the stream to your left becomes a river that leads to the sea. You approach her with confidence in your stride and a smile on your face.

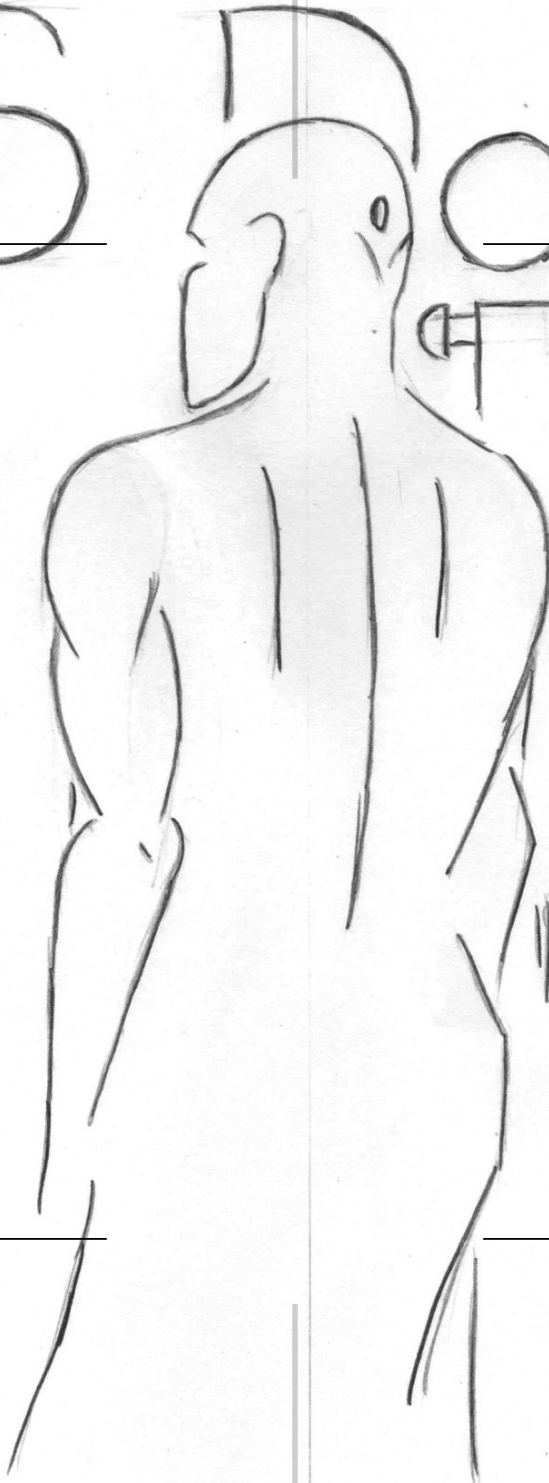
She has a strand of her long red hair between her fingers. It has a purple bow tying it tightly towards the end, making the tip point and curve like a paint brush making a stroke. In her other hand is a short blade that she uses to cut the strand free from her head before placing the shiny lock in your palm.

She clasps your hand with both of hers then pulls you towards her as she steps back towards the river. As you approach the bank she lets go of your hand, circles around behind you and gently pushes you to the water's edge. Her arm appears from behind you and points towards a section of water which is calm and black as night. She whispers that the answer to everything is there, that only the brave shall dive into these deep dark waters and that only the honest shall survive.

You wade slowly in to the water and feel a chill rise through your limbs with each step you take. It is cold but you feel comfortable. So comfortable that you close your eyes and dive in to the void.

N

M S O S S E R



In jest

- Stage 2 -

The hum of a hard disc drive kicks in at the push of a button. A screen flickers to life and a password is typed in through a mechanical keyboard. Programs load up, a modem beeps and you wonder if this is some kind of dark illusion or a harsh reality that you haven't come to terms with yet.

You think back to the first time you met Tsuru and how it felt like two forces of nature had been brought together through destiny. You had run away in to the wild to find peace with nature and there she was, sitting under a tree with a tarot card in her hand and a question on her lips.

"Who are you?" She inquired

"Nobody" You replied

"Well sit with me and we shall see what paths nobody can take."

You sat on a large root that protruded from the ground and she told you a tale of innocence in search of wisdom. She then pushed your leg aside and buried the tarot card under the root upon which you were seated.

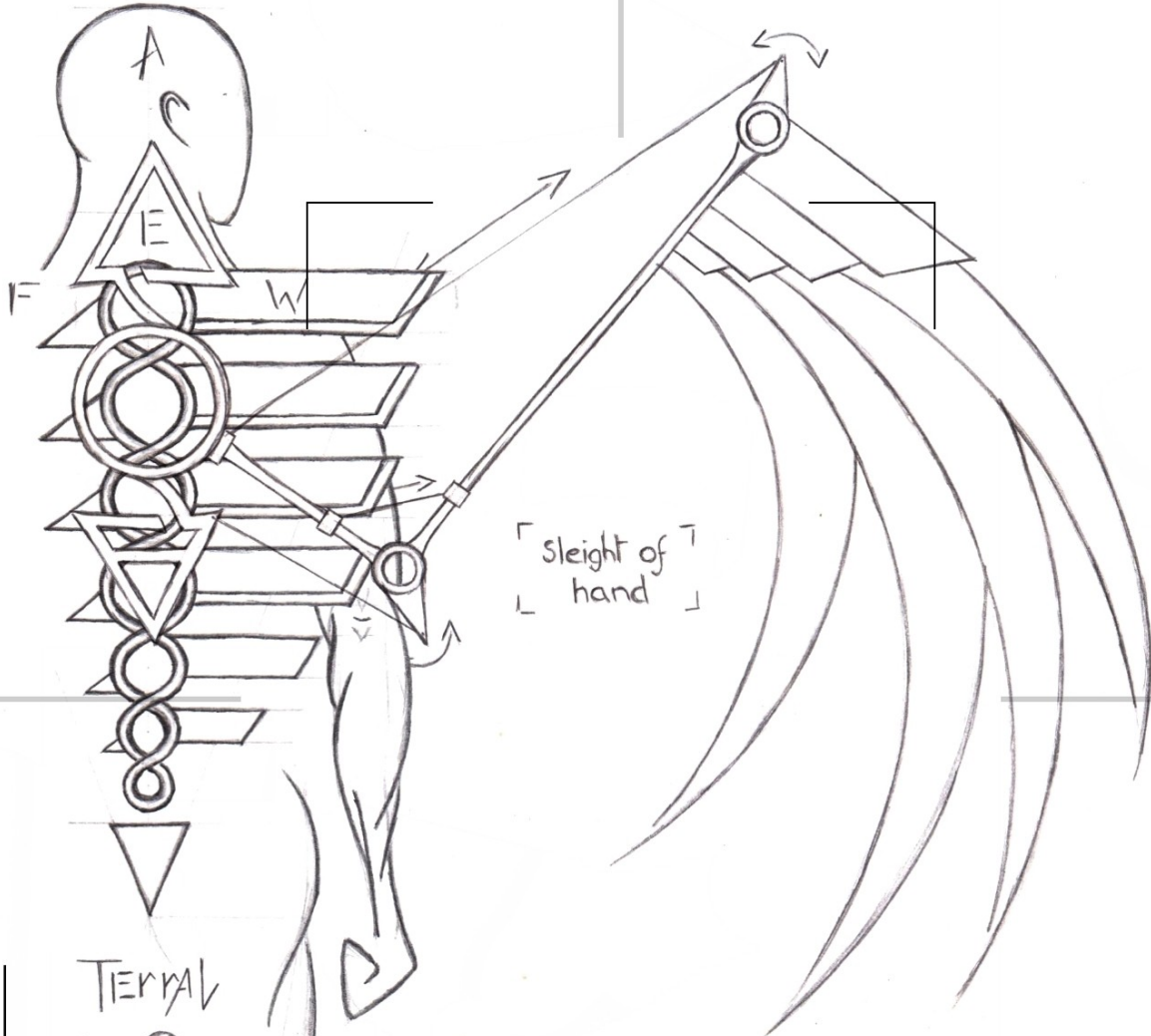
"This tree has 22 roots" she said "come back and find me here when the sun rises. I will be here when you need me and gone when you don't. I am Tsuru and you must remember that nobody stays silent forever."

With a finger to lip she rose and left as a gentle breeze moved her red locks in to the sun light like the ripple of a flame.

An email alert brings you back to the screen. You open it and find an offer for fool's gold that has been chained to everyone you know. A reminder that the electronic world that surrounds you is the devil's playground. A place where innocence is easily lost and very nearly impossible to find. You open a menu, the cursor hovers above the words: Shut Down but the hard drive keeps humming.

I

- BROKEN WING -



「sleight of hand」

「Hand of fate」

TERRA

SECRET I SEGMENT

Magic man

- Stage 3 -

Days have been lost. Every sunrise is a stroll with solitude and a curious mind. Thoughts juggle memories, questions are answered by hope while everything around you feels surreal.

Do you know who you are? Do you know what lies beyond the limitations of your senses? Do you care?

There are so many means of escape. Choose your poison and alter that chemistry until the world appeals to your perceptions. Dive deeper in to the illusion. Sprout gills from your neck and breathe in each and every fantasy that fuels your heart with desire. Enter the deep sleep and capture what your mind hides during those long hours awake. You are the key to all you will ever achieve but you must rise from your slumber. You must stop dreaming with open eyes and look beyond. Search for the cogs that power the machine, enter the source to become the source. For the answer to that question you have so often asked yourself is quite simply: You...

One

Two

Three

Tsura is peering through you. She is holding a card next to her face. The image on the card appears to be moving, mutating, then gone, revealing an index finger pointing towards the heavens. You look up and drown in an ocean of sky blue.

II

Zj  
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BE

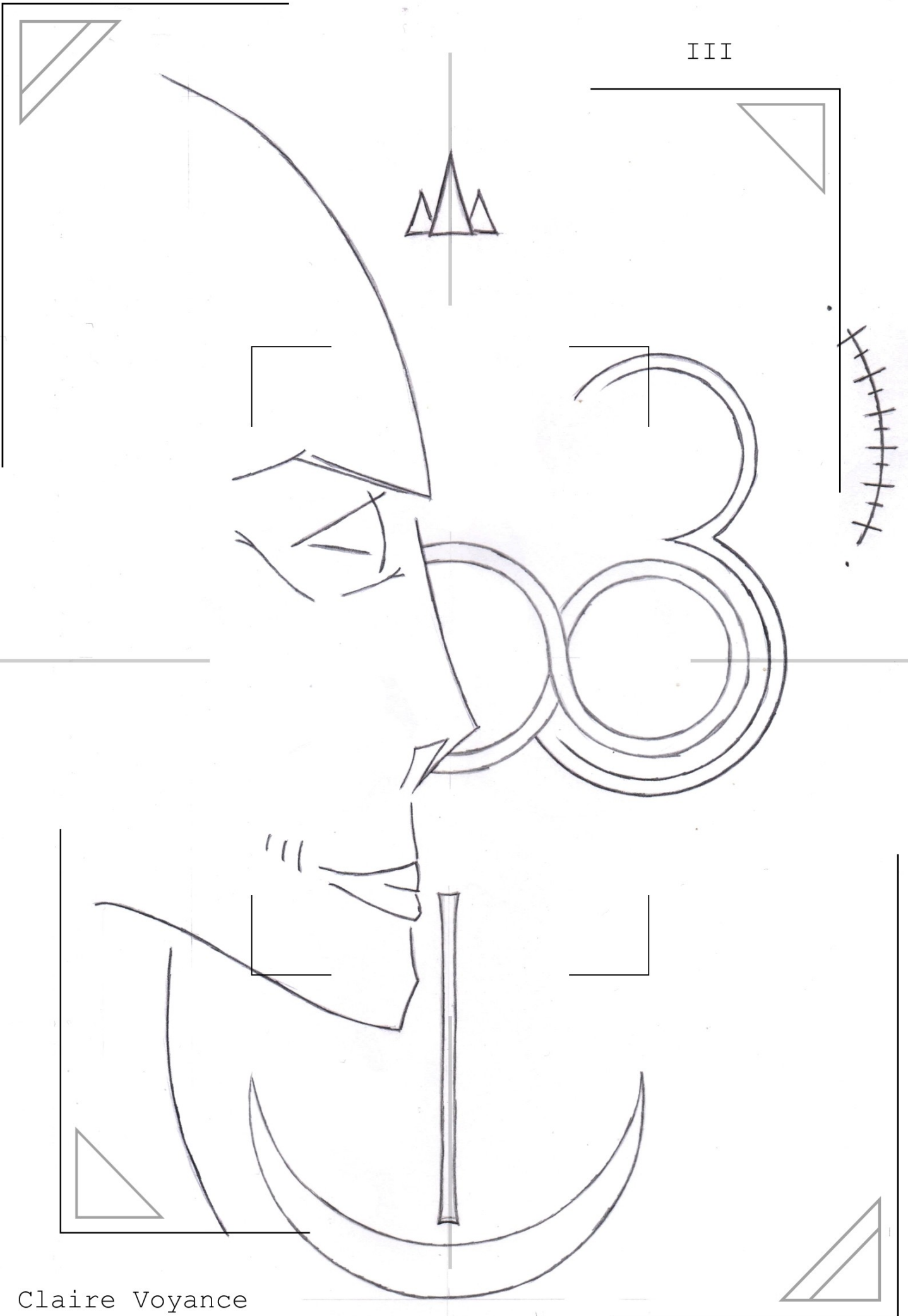
Zhi Jing



The local village was buzzing with gossip after a young runaway had returned in a near death state. The child had been carried to the village doctor by a young girl who simply disappeared after delivering the child. It was assumed that she had carried the child as no one else was seen at the time but some questioned the strength of the young girl. How could a child carry another of similar age for any distance? Some talked of witchcraft as the description of the girl did not fit any of the village children and ancient beliefs often spoke of woodland spirits abducting offspring. A local loon declared it to be the work of the painted tribe that watched the village with a wary eye. The doctor on the other hand reckoned the girl was one of the gypsies who lived near the woods north of the local loch. They liked to keep to themselves and she probably thought that they'd be accused if anything happened to a young villager. She no doubt had help bringing in the child but had let her helpers get away unseen before ringing the doorbell.

The child had lost consciousness due to exposure and dehydration and was now under the care of the doctor's part time assistant. She was a slight and slender woman originally from the Far East who had been adopted and brought up by a local farmer and his barren wife. She had studied nursing at the nearest city and had returned to where she considered home upon qualification. There was not one rock, tree or stretch of water in the area that she did not know about as she had spent her childhood roaming the wilderness studying its flora and fauna. Observing the child she noticed a slight swelling on the right shoulder that resembled the number eleven in shape. She smiled and whispered: "I know where you have been child but I shall note this down as a nettle sting."

III



You're awake. Your mouth is dry and the corner of your lips feel glued together. An overhead light is making it difficult to get your sight into focus so you blink slowly then squeeze your eyelids shut. Your body feels a slight chill but your hands are warm as if someone is holding them. You can hear the voices of women as if they are talking to you. You try to move but your strength is lacking. Then you feel a squeeze to your left hand and your eyes pop open. There are two women, one standing either side of you. The one on your left looks Asian and slightly less familiar than the one on the right. Her eyes are so dark that you can't make out her pupils, yet you feel them scrutinise you intensely.

The woman on your right is called Clara, or at least you think that is her name. She's the one who looks after you, a mother of sorts financed by the State. Her piercing blue eyes have a conflicting look of concern and relief with maybe a hint of anger. She squeezes your right hand then turns to the other woman to inquire when you can be taken home.

"PC Simons wants to ask a few questions before that. Just to make sure there was no foul play. You know what he's like: Nothing ever happens here so he tries to pretend that he's useful."

Clara nods before replying:

"Well I suppose he has his uses. Just a shame we haven't figured out what they are yet."

They share a laugh, then their eyes return to look down upon you. Clara rubs your shoulder then says: "We nearly lost hope. You were gone for days but Zoe here kept our spirits strong by reassuring us that you had just lost your way and would be back with us soon."

You look at Zoe and can't help but think that that is not her name.



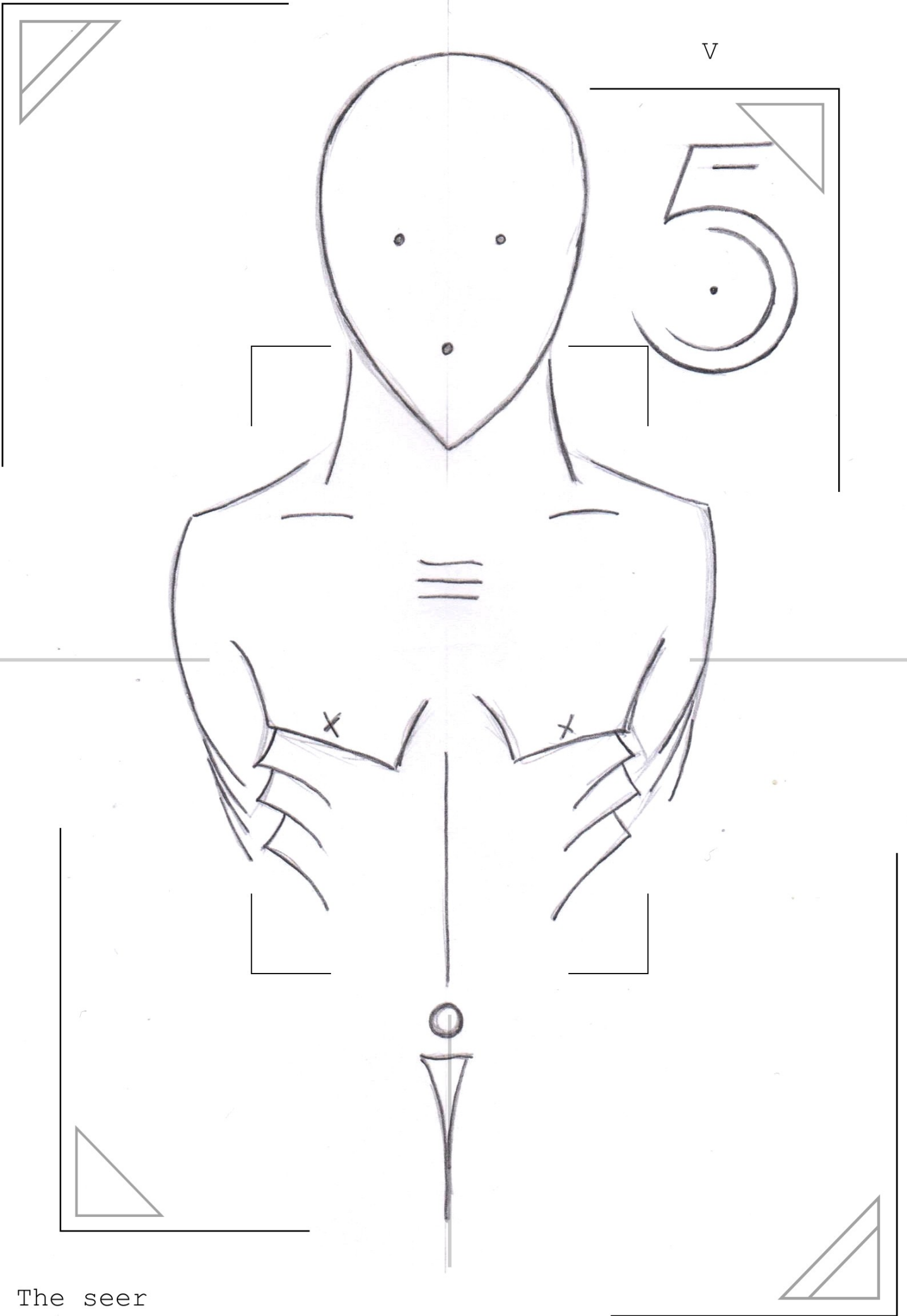
*De pire Empire*

Police constable Simons was looked upon as a bit of a harmless joke among the local villagers but a handful knew him as a tool for the local Lord. The sort of tool used to pressure people in to silence or oversee fatal accidents. He was however, as many men are, more of a victim of circumstance than of the evil within.

He had started out with good intentions, wanting to head to the big city and sweep the streets clean of crime. His eagerness drove him into situations he did not fully understand while shaking hands with the wrong people in the right places. Eventually he was involved in one scandal too many and was demoted to village plod.

He took it on the chin at first as deep down he felt that he had only been trying to do the best for society but had not been smart enough to use the rules in his favour. He had to learn his lesson and then get back in the saddle to become who he knew he could be.

The Lord had other plans for him though, courtesy of some compromising photos from a drunken night and a phone book full of connections. Simons was destined to be another under thumb cop patrolling the wilderness until the Lord called him in to do his dirty work. Generations of men had found themselves in that sort of situation and Simons was no crack in the mould. So, with no other path to take he accepted his fate and walked down to the local doctor's practice. All he had to do was put a few questions to a lost and found child then head back to the station. As long as there were no calls from the Lord or one of his minions during this light schedule then life wouldn't be so bad.



The seer

- Stage 7 -

The doctor sees you to the door of his practice with a friendly hand on your shoulder. Outside there is a collared man standing with a gaunt face. Behind him is a small black car with chromed hubcaps and the styling of a museum exhibit. His hand gestures you closer and as you approach he introduces himself as Father Burroughs. Handing you a hardback book he points to his car and tells you to get in the old clapper.

"Clara asked me to pick you up as she has a house full of children just now." He announces. You both get in to the car and it nearly starts first time. The second try is not so healthy so Father Burroughs turns the ignition key back then places both of his hands on to the steering wheel. "She's died on me before you know. We'll just sit here for a little while and let her old engine cool."

There's a moment's silence before Father Burroughs continues:

"That book you're holding. Do you know who wrote that book? Man wrote that book. Man wrote it with the Lord guiding his hand. You hold on to that one. I have others."

A hand reaches for the ignition and the old clapper splutters to life. With a crunch of gears you take to the road and Father Burroughs beams a yellow grin.

The road feels longer than it should as Father Burroughs quizzes you about your little incident. You tell him that you can't remember much and that you reckon that you must have fallen and bumped your head while on your morning stroll.

Eventually you arrive at those four walls called home but as you get out of the car Father Burroughs grabs your arm and says:

"Nobody stays silent forever."



- III<sup>2</sup>
- VI<sup>2</sup>
- IV<sup>3</sup>
- V<sup>1</sup>
- IX<sup>2</sup>
- I<sup>1</sup>



*From blossom to seed*

Never let me go



Four great white walls crowned with grey slates form a shelter from the elements. In the centre of one of the walls stands a large green door with an ornate brass handle. You turn the handle and enter the abode. In one room you can hear children at play. In another you can hear a woman weeping. You walk down a corridor towards the sound of tears then enter a room with a black stove and copper pans hanging above it. The woman is seated at a round table with her head bowed and her hand clutching a letter. You inquire if she is Clara. Her face lifts towards you and confirms your query. You ask her what has happened and she explains that her husband is no longer with us. Killed in action she says.

Your mind starts to wander. You can't put a face to the man. His name eludes you. You begin to doubt ever meeting him. Who was this father of sorts paid by the State?

Clara interrupts your thoughts by telling you that she never wants to talk about it again then asks you to leave her in peace for a while. You do as she bids and head out in to the wilderness.

You stroll up to the great oaks at the back of the house then snuggle in between two large roots protruding from the earth. You gaze down at the stream flowing into the river and try to empty your mind.

A familiar voice echoes behind you: "He's not dead you know. We are not at war these days. What conflict could have killed him? Besides he never was a soldier. No, the truth is he ran away years ago. That's why you can't remember him. You never met him and you don't know his name because Clara never told you. That old letter she was holding is from him. It makes her feel ashamed, betrayed, because that letter explains why her husband left her for another man.

VII



VR cruising

You're on a dating website wondering why the hell you are. Surely a bit of will power could get you out into the real world to meet strangers and make them friends? That's what people used to do but then again times were different back then. If you hadn't had so many disappointments in your life then maybe, just maybe, you could find the strength to try again.

Instead, you scroll through profiles, faces, descriptions, hobbies, star signs, favourite music, films, books, photos, pet photos, food photos, feel good quote photos until you say: Bugger this! And pour yourself a large drink. One window closes, another opens on to a social network. You scroll through profiles, faces...You have another drink. A friend pops up in a chat box saying "HI" followed by a yellow splodge with a stupid looking grin. You say "HI" back and add a dancing monkey. They ask you how you are doing. You lie, they lie back and add a yellow splodge wearing a pointy hat and blowing a party horn. You need more drink. You say so to your friend, They say they'll join you. You drink, you chat, you drop unconscious then wake up hours later with a hangover. You read some of the stuff you posted across the internet during the night and start to cry. You have an inbox full of messages from friends asking if you're alright. You reply with a lie, they lie back and add a green splodge chewing confetti then add HAHA.

You switch your phone off, venture in to the bathroom for a piss and a shower then come out for a bowl of cereal and a mug of coffee.

You're two spoonfuls in to your flakes and milk when you think out loud: "What a trip that was!" You pick up your phone and switch it back on. A friend pops up in a chat box saying "HI" followed by a squirrel eating a nut.



A news report pops up on the screen with a series of announcements:

The last couple of wars that were shut down last year have been moved to other countries where there is more stuff to shoot at and more stuff to steal. The countries in question pose a threat to shareholders' end of the year bonuses and must therefore be dealt with swiftly.

Drink your soda!

Captain Clown from Point and Laugh Island has declared war on crime and shall be ordering all thugs to wear red noses and flappy shoes.

Eat your burger

An internet poll has shown that Angry Cat is more popular than Fanny Fuzz and is considering a career in politics. The owner of Angry Cat chose not to make a statement at this point in time.

Have more fries

Man declares that he will go on hunger strike until the State allows him to marry his talking dog. The dog has been able to communicate thanks to a brain transmitter connected to a loud speaker. His first words in court were that he was sick of people calling him dog and insisted that his name was Susan.

Try the dip

You walk towards a window and look outside. The streets are empty. You look at the screen then outside once more. It's time to get out of here.

IX



Solitaire

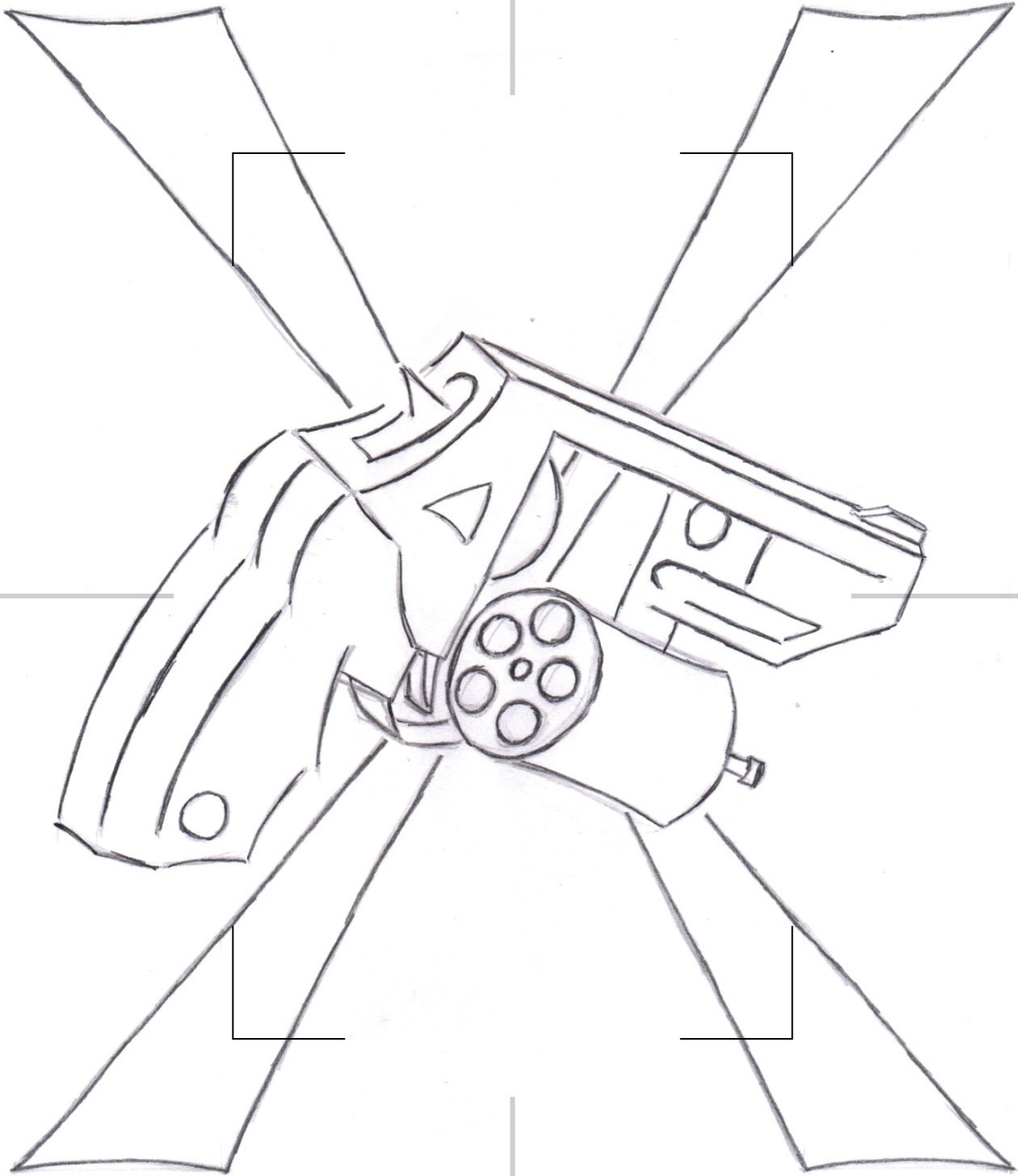
You return to the source. The great oaks are still standing but the house stands empty. Leaves of multiple hues float in the wind and carpet the ground. The air is cold and the river is silent and freezing over. Wrapping your arms around your chest you start to search for fallen branches that could make a camp fire. Once you have a few bundles of wood you build a stone circle near Tsura's oak. Finally you collect some dry moss and twigs then set them alight.

As the flames start to grow you can feel the blood return to the tips of your fingers. You hunker down and make yourself comfortable.

After a few hours pangs of hunger remind you of human necessity. The daylight is fading, the river has no fish, the trees bear no fruit and you haven't seen a wild animal never mind thought of a way to catch one. You decide to rough it out regardless and go and gather some more wood for the fire while there is still light.

The morning greets you with a crisp frost and a smouldering fire. You are curled up in the roots of Tsura's oak and have no recollection of moving there. Looking at the skinny wisps of smoke coming from your fire a few meters away. You decide that the first thing to do is rekindle the flame. You are cold and hungry and feeling very much alone. You are beginning to feel that this was all a pointless exercise, just some wistful fantasy that has no conclusion but your spirits lift with the flames and you start to think about the day ahead. You know that you will have to go to the village to get some food but you wonder what the inside of the house looks like now. Rubbing your hands by the fire a little voice at the back of your mind keeps saying: "That green door is still open."

X



Five empty chambers

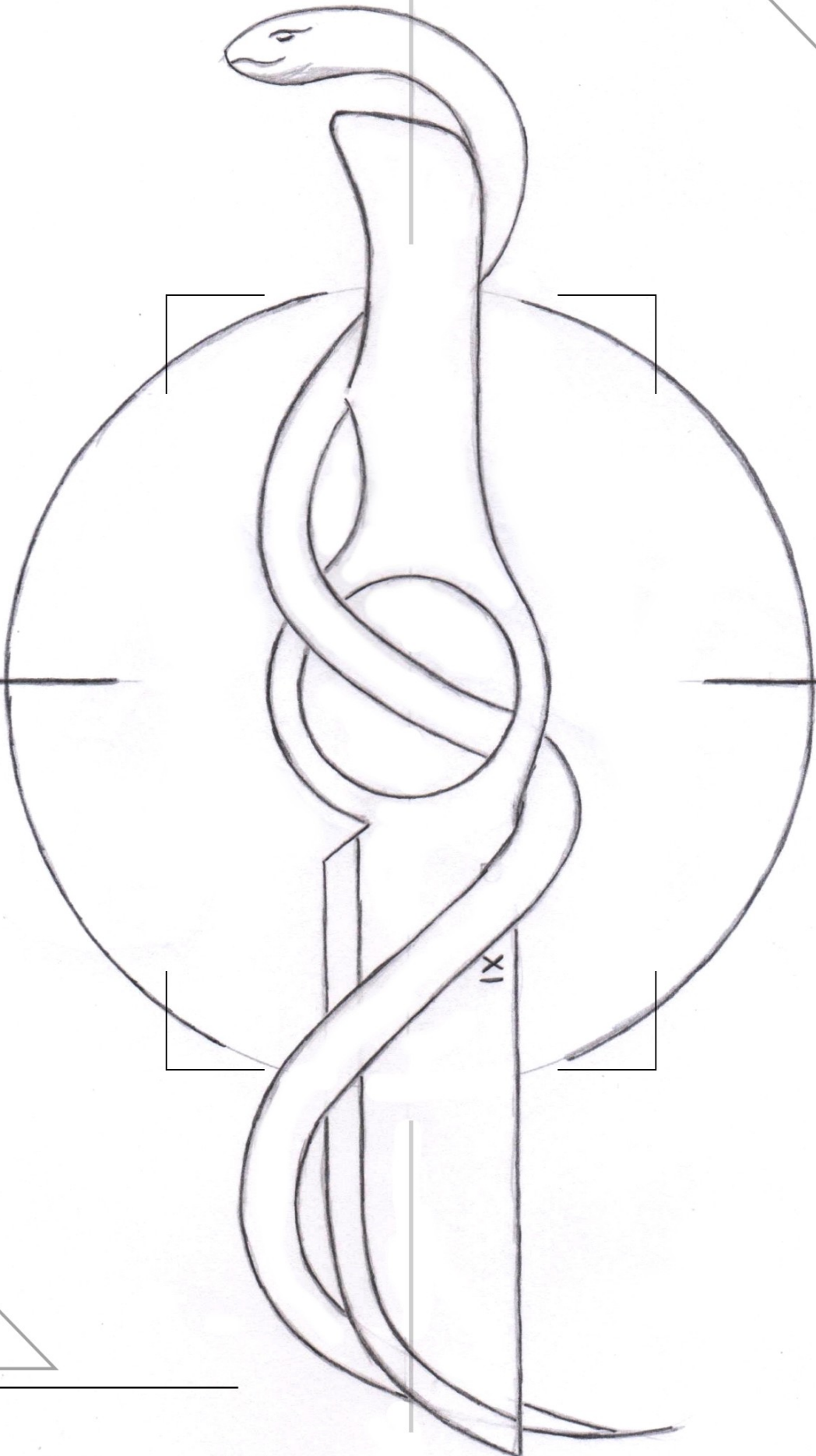


Home is where you lay your head. That's what Tsuru used to say while running her fingers through my hair with my head upon her lap. You were gone by then. Moved away to foreign shores with a knife in your pocket and adventure in mind. I, on the other hand had decided to go home. Life had brought me ill fortune and left me with not much more than the clothes on my back and enough pennies for a ticket out of Hell. I was about the age you are now when I returned and Tsuru greeted me with a warm embrace. She was a lot older than you thought she was as a child. The two of us used to race around these hills as soon as we learned how to walk. We lived in the woods when our families didn't bind us to chores and we spent every breathing moment that we could together. Those were happy times - An age of innocence. But the day came when her father announced that she was to be married. She was still a child, we both were, but her father had a suitor and the family agreed that it was best for her. Besides it was tradition.

Upon hearing the news I told her that we should run away but she asked me what we would live on. So I told her that I would go and make my fortune then come back for her. She smiled then tied a bow in her hair saying that it represented our love the time we were apart. I got myself an apprenticeship the following week then left for the big city.

She never did get married. They found her hanging from that great oak tree that you're so fond of. I was barely gone a day and her spirit left her body but I found her again upon my return and they found my body hanging from that very same tree. So now you are wondering why you didn't see her last night and the answer is that we are at peace now and your fortunes are to be found elsewhere.

XI



Scales of the reptile

Death is the only certainty that we have. We get our one way ticket the day we are born and it is up to us to make the most of the journey.

She is without prejudice or spite. Bringing balance when life starts to devour itself and break the cycle of nature.

She is our only real fear and that fear often becomes the tool of men. Whether it is with a promise of afterlife or with a threat to your existence. The fear of Death gives leverage to those manipulating the living.

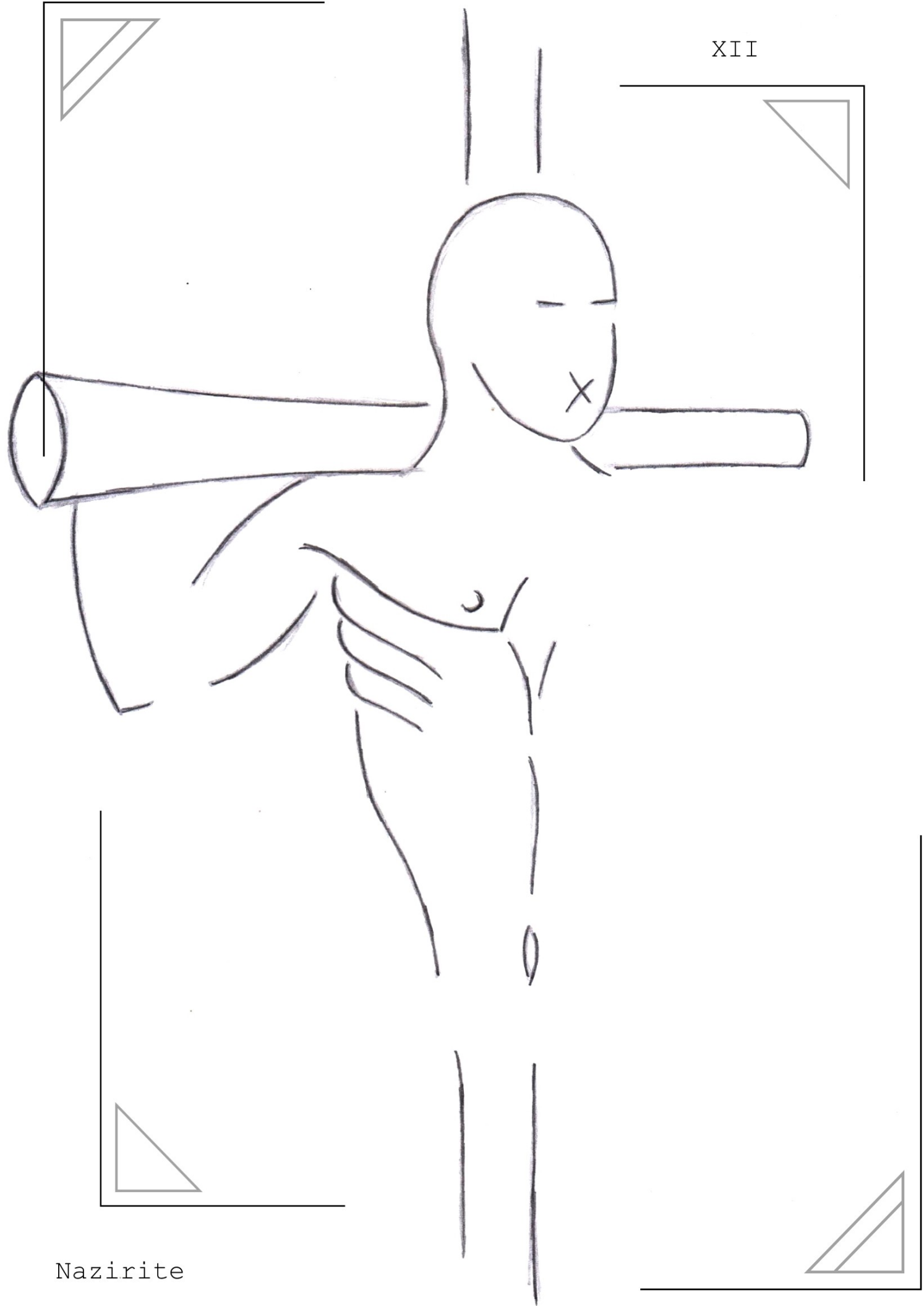
So be fearless and accept Death. For she is the one who takes away the pain when life is broken beyond repair. She is the one who can guide you out of danger as she whispers: "I am close, take the other path."

You are walking away from the trees and towards an empty house. Ivy has crept up the once pristine white walls giving the impression of cracks where it's stalks twist and turn. The windows are dull and framed with grime and flaking green paint. The large front door is blistered and warped. It's ornate brass handle is now tarnished and brown.

You grasp the handle but it will not budge. Thinking there must be some kind of mistake you try again while using your shoulder to push against the door. You take a step back feeling rather confused as you are convinced that the door should be open. As you ponder the situation you hear a drone of a male voice inquire if it can help you. You turn around and see Father Burroughs standing there. He hasn't changed a bit. He still looks ancient. You explain who you are and he beams those yellow teeth at you.

"I remember you child. Clara isn't here any more. Why don't you come with me to the Temple. We're just about to celebrate the execution."

XII



Nazirite

Somewhere between the wilderness and civilization stands a tower built by the faith of men. At its pinnacle are search lights and a neon sign forming the word "Believe" in garish pink. The main entrance is reflective glass guarded by shaded men in dark suits. They open the doors for those who approach and greet them with the title of Sir or Madam.

The main hallway has scenes of torture, maiming and mass murder on every wall. It is the history of men of faith depicted in all its gore and glory. Statues appear to be skinned alive with their eyes to the heavens and an index finger pointing towards the elevator.

The next floor is crowded with women covered from head to toe in scarlet robes. Only their bare crotches are visible to the naked eye as they kneel, arms outstretched with their foreheads pressed to the floor. They are prostrate before a large marble penis that has its scrotum nailed to a platform and is held aloft by a score of naked boys. The penis appears to be ejaculating on to a ceiling ornate with row after row of buttocks. The next floor is crowded with old men drinking red wine and masturbating one another. A priest stands at the alter trying to sacrifice a lamb with his erection while chanting glory be thy name. The Lord above bangs on the floor and tells him to take it down a notch.

The third floor is for the devout only. One must prove one's faith with a stable bank balance and a substantial selection of gold credit cards. Then they may enter the realm of the Lord.

It is here that the mother dies for your sins as the fruit of life is cut from her womb in true Roman tradition. The infant is then placed with a good family and considered by the Order to be a blessed child of our Lord.



You walk with Father Burroughs to the entrance of the Temple but decide not to enter. Instead you take the path that leads to the village and hope there will be some place open that sells food. Pulling your phone out, you switch it on and are surprised to see that you receive a full reception within the area. You type the name of the village into a search engine then start looking for any mention of bars, restaurants or shops in the area. A place called The Rampant comes up where heavy drinking and greasy food seem to be its badge of honour. It also mentions live music, theatre and tarot reading at weekends which hopefully means that it's open on Sundays.

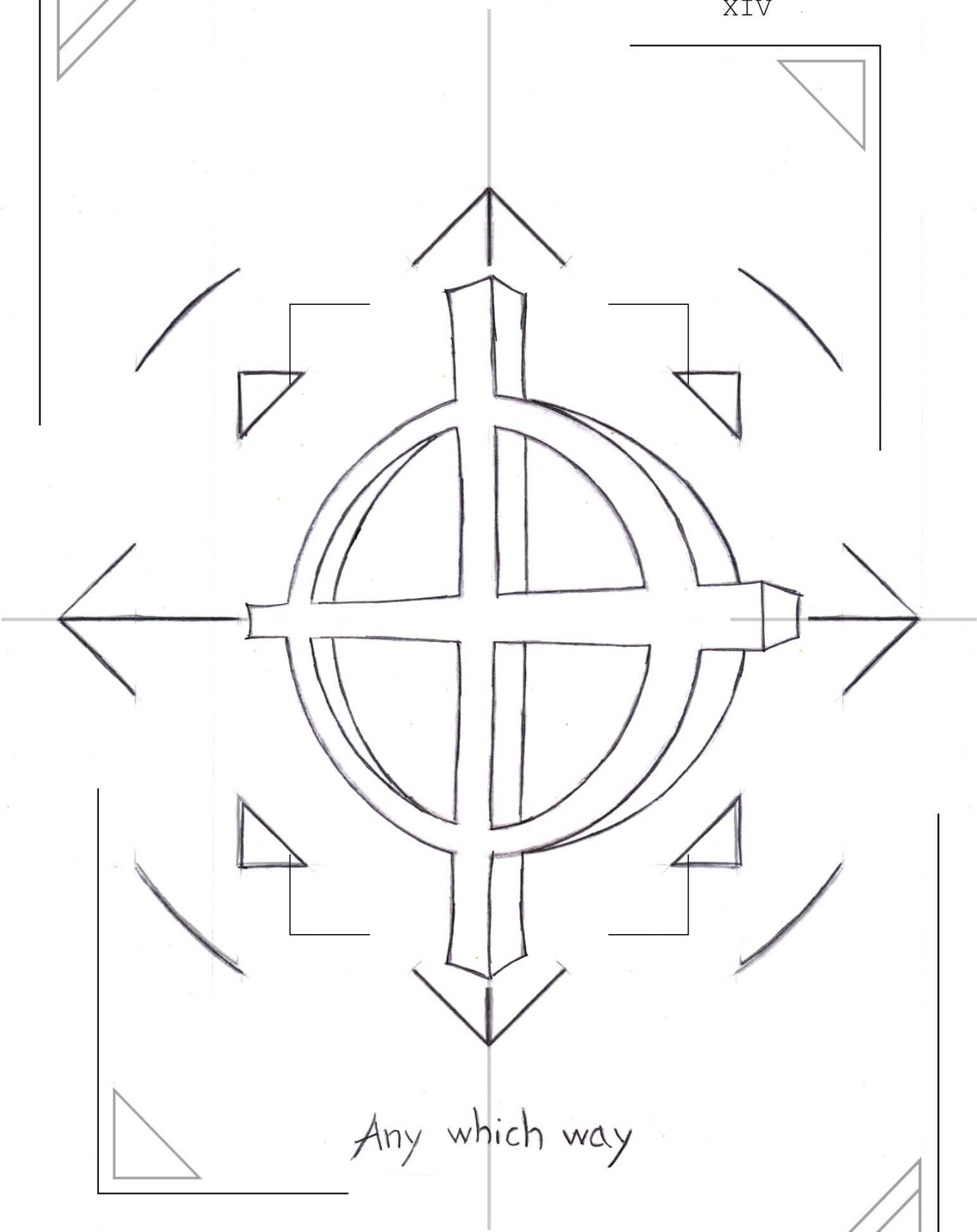
After an hour and a half of walking you feel dead on your feet but you have arrived at destination. The Rampant can't be missed with its bright green facade and golden lion hanging above its entrance. You scan the dimly lit venue as you approach the bar. It's furnished with dark wood and has symbols carved in bone hanging from just about every wall or door.

"Don't let the artwork scare you!" Says the bartender. "That's the handiwork of our good witch Zora. You can buy one if you like. I'm sure she'll throw in a tarot reading for free."

You smile in acknowledgement but turn the subject to food.

A few minutes later you are faced with something that looks like it may have been a pie once upon a time. It's swimming in a sea of peas, chips and some sort of brown liquid. The barman reaches across the counter, pats you on the shoulder and says: "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger!" You pick up a fork and wonder if he is quoting German philosophy or a Hollywood action film.

XIV



*Any which way*

A golden moment



You are fighting with peas in brown sauce when a tarot card is slapped down on the counter in front of you. It has the word "Temperance" written on it and is accompanied by a redhead saying:

"Buy me a drink and I'll read you your fortune!"

As the peas win the war against you and your fork you get drinks for the both of you then leave the bar for a quiet corner.

The redhead introduces herself as Zora but you had guessed that already. You sit opposite one another at a small round table upon which you place the drinks. She is wearing a deep red gown embroidered with gold knot work from which she produces a deck of cards. She places the cards on the table then pulls a purple ribbon from her sleeve before lifting her hair up and tying it back.

The ribbon distracts you, making you stare intensely at her hair, face then neck. She is wearing a thick leather collier with a silver triskelion in its centre.

"The necklace isn't for sale" she says "but I can make you one."

She picks up the cards, spreads them on the table and asks you to pick two.

Your eyes move from the triskelion, to the cards, to her dark eyes then back to the cards.

"Go on..." She whispers

You pick a card with each hand then turn them over one after the other. The first card says: The Lovers. The second card says: Death. You peer into Zora's face but she is gazing at the cards in silence.

Her hand reaches up to the back of her head then her hair comes tumbling back down as she takes the purple ribbon, places it upon your cards and mutters: "You're a ghost come back to haunt me"

XV



SIRIS  
PROGRAM 015

Worm

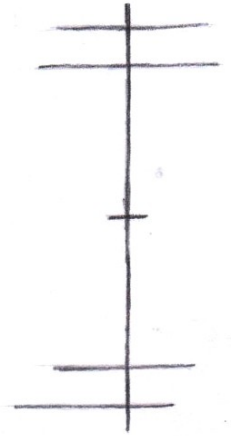
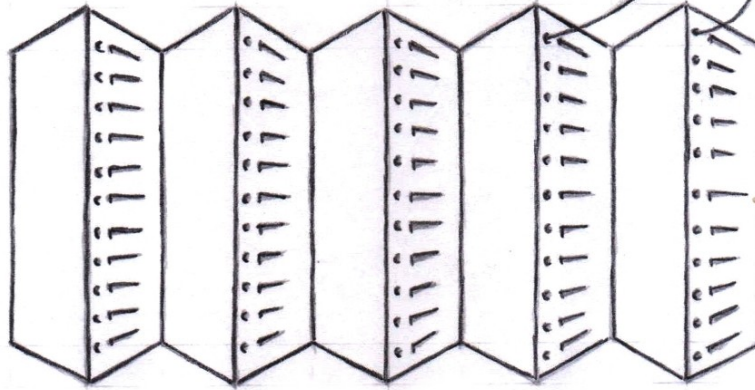
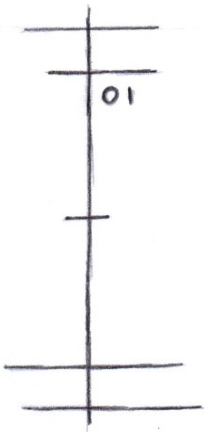
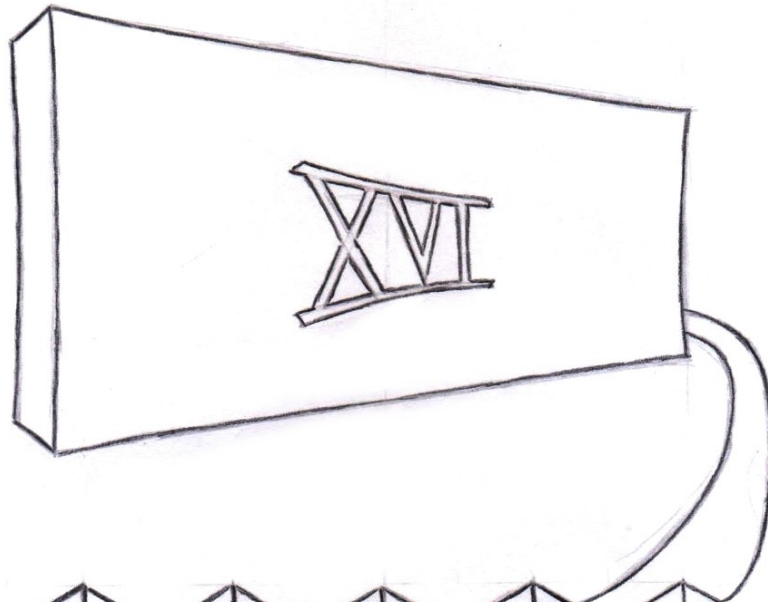
"The program has been developed within the utmost secrecy and even if its origins remain obscure to us, we fully understand the functioning of this technology and most importantly we understand its full potential.

The Iris Operating System is going to revolutionize communication and information sharing. We have taken nanotechnology to realms that our competition can't even begin to conceive and for the first time in human history have brought computer and genetic code together. We have built machines so small that they can be injected in to the blood stream. Machines that are so efficient that they can build smaller versions of themselves. We are reaching a point where we will be able to modify and repair genetic code simply by thinking about it.

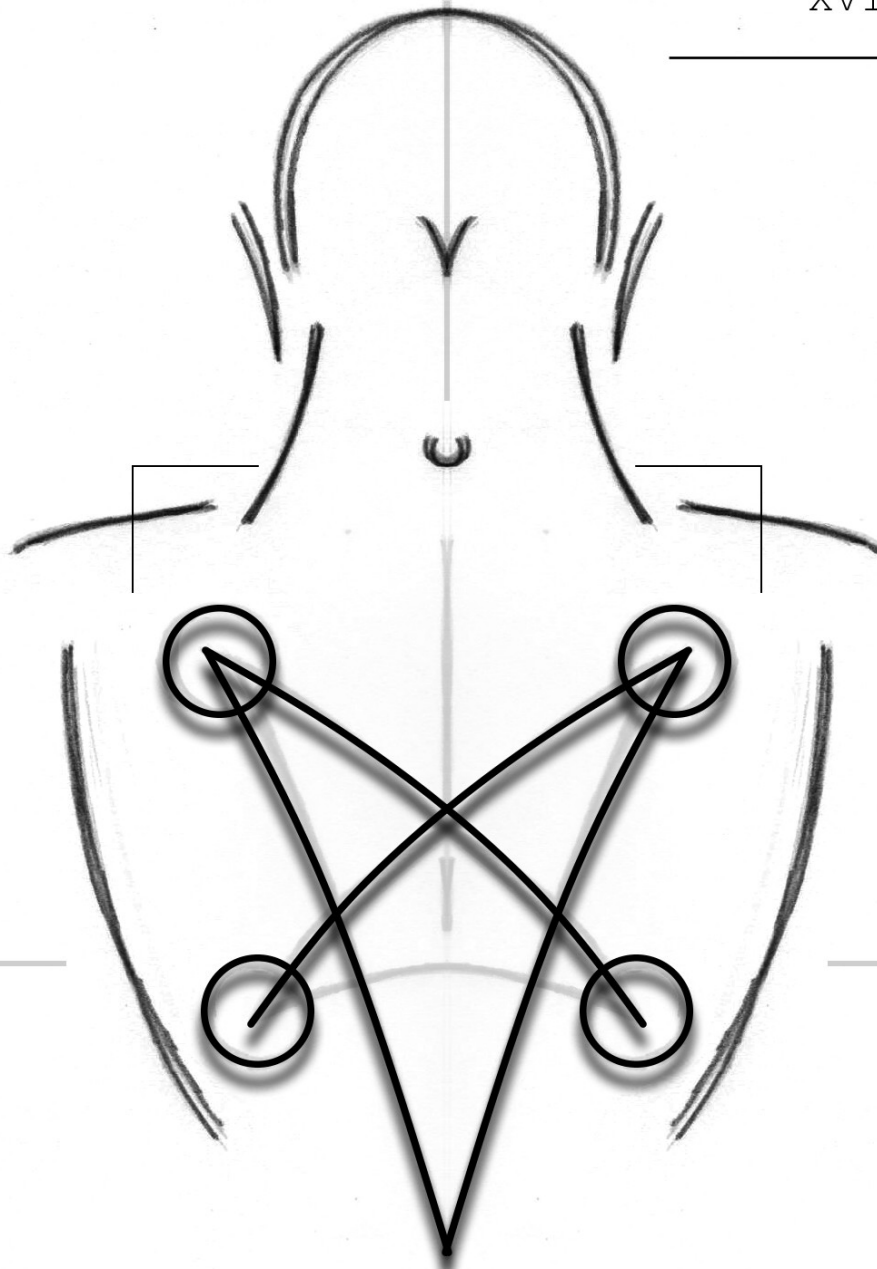
Of course this research requires a lot of funding and this is where the Iris OS comes in. OSIRIS enables users to not only use any electronic device but to be an electronic device. Maybe that needs a bit of rephrasing but that is the thinking behind it and thought is where the power is at. No more hand held devices required or ear pieces or mini cams. Your mind becomes the emitter and receiver for everything. You see something you like and want to remember well. OSIRIS records it for you through your senses and allows you to send it through to friends and family. You can also share your experiences in real time with anyone you want. No switches, screens or batteries to recharge. You are your smart phone.

For the financial point of view we shall set this up with a yearly upgrade system and a set life span of 5 years on all older systems.

This is the future people so let's make this happen."



You wake up with 15 messages in your head. 3 vocals, 5 worded, 4 visuals, 2 adverts for MINDWARS the game and 1 from Headfuck.com. You forgot to deactivate Osiris before nodding off and your dreams have been streaming online for the past eight hours. You could always watch them back but that novelty wore off days ago. Instead you connect to "Tarot Card of the Day" to see what the future has in store for you and up pops number 5: The Pope. He has Father Burroughs mug and you think to yourself: "That guy sure gets around." You hear a beep in your ear and a voice asking if you would like to send that thought to a friend. You decline and hear a second beep in your other ear: "Would you like to report this man to the authorities?" You hesitate and the voice continues: "This man has over 16 million reports against him but he is a public figure. Would you like to report this man to the authorities?" You decline and "Tarot Card of the Day" takes you on a mental trip of the Temple. Within the Temple you can see and hear the prayers of those present as long as they have share activated and are not having ideas deleted by the authorities. All Osiris users sign an agreement upon injection that allows it to modify thoughts of individuals that overstep the boundaries of social norms. The old system used to allow all thoughts as long as they weren't streaming. Oversteps were simply covered by a white square but the Network found that were affecting the flow of the stream. So they updated their terms and agreements and we all let them keep our minds on the right path. The Temple then became the best place to connect to understand what the right path is exactly. Father Burroughs explains it to you: "We have brought the Faith in to a new era and this has brought peace to mankind."



"Captain Clown from Point and Laugh Island has declared a state of emergency following an explosion at the Temple of Osiris. He announced that this was obviously the work of terrorists working for the Yellow Star Corporation. As they have been at war with Osiris over sixteen patents that Osiris claims to own and that Yellow Star has commercialised.

Father Burroughs has...

You hear a beep in your ear then a voice announces that Osiris has been disconnected from the Network. You get out of bed, look out the window and see people venturing out in to the streets. You decide to join them as you realise that you can't even make a cup of coffee until the Network reconnects.

Outside people are talking and wondering what is happening. You start talking with one guy who says that he still has an old mechanical motor car that he could use to drive up to the Temple. He thinks that there might be more information about what is happening there. You ask if you can join him, he accepts and you jump in to a old black clapper with chromed hubcaps. Then set of on what feels like a bit of an adventure.

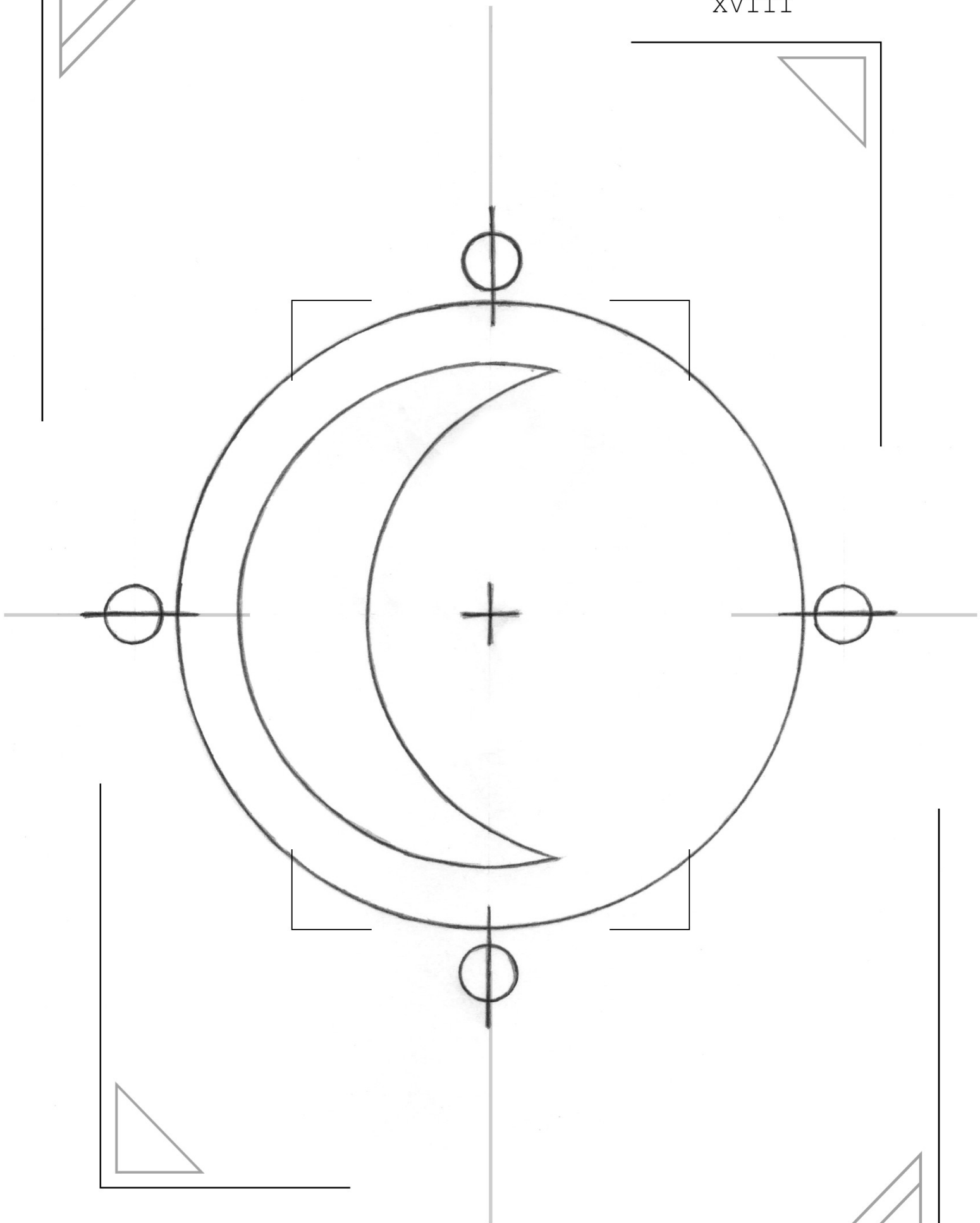
You arrive within visual distance of the Temple when you are stopped by the Authorities. They run a quick head scan over you for ID then inform you that you can't go any further.

"Yellow Star people" says a member of Authority.

"We found a bit of one not far from the explosion. We identified him as one of theirs. I can see this ending with a buy out, but anyway, nothing for you two to worry about. You head on home and I'm sure Osiris will reconnect before the day is out."

Your chauffeur turns the car around and you head back towards the city.

XVIII



A distant companion



You didn't want to go straight back to the city so you got your chauffeur to drop you off at the Rampant bar. It's dark outside and Osiris still hasn't reconnected. You're sipping a drink and feeling liberated. It feels like old times as the bar has not changed a bit since the last time you were in. You talk with the bartender about the situation and he explains that the village never bothered with the Network.

"Some people like to move with the tide but we preferred to sit on the shore and watch the waves."

He tops up your drink and you ask him if he knows of any place where you can spend the night. He tells you that he won't be closing anytime soon and that he has a sleeping bag in the storeroom that you can use later on.

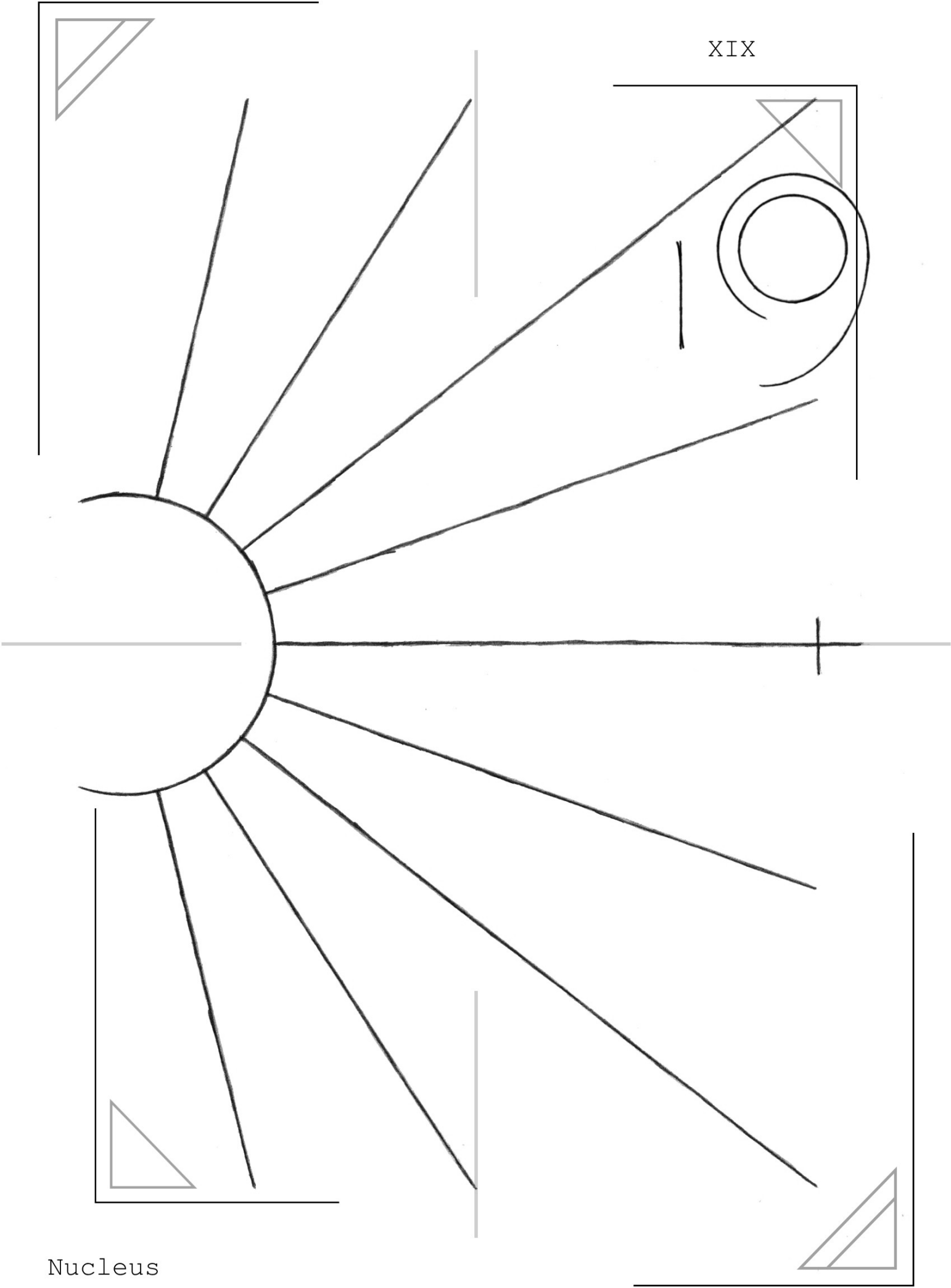
He seems a lot more intelligent than you remember him being. You chat through the night and he tells you all the village gossip and then fills you in on what happened to Clara:

"She was running about the hills naked with a black hood over her head. She kept screaming that they were the devil but we never found out who she meant by they. Father Burroughs brought her in then the white coats came and she was never seen nor heard of again. The house has been empty since."

You ask about her husband but he tells you that when he came to the village and set up the pub he was already gone.

"Another soldier who went to war and never came back as far as I know. There is one rumour that he went in to the Temple and never came back out but you hear plenty of weird and wonderful tales around these parts. There's even one about a child who was taken by the spirits in the woods and then returned with a number tattooed on one arm."

XIX



Nucleus

The light of day stirs you from your slumber. You're lying on the floor of the Rampant with a green army sleeping bag draped over you. As your eyes gain focus you see Zora seated across from you smiling.

"My ghost has returned to haunt me!" She declares "but it looks like strong caffeine is required to fully resurrect this one."

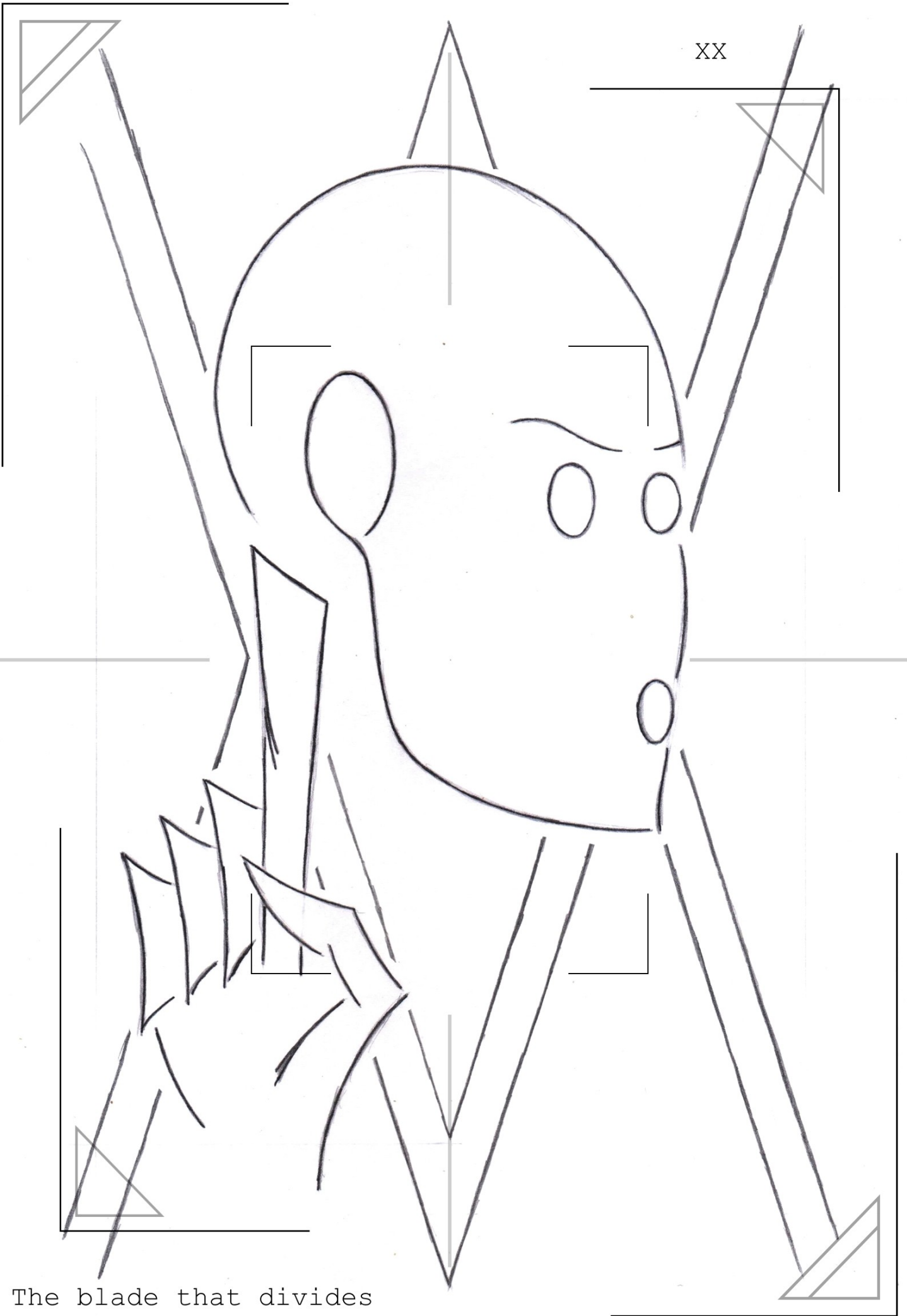
You hear the barman laugh and rattle cups while telling Zora how you were talking one minute then fell off your stool the next. Then he walked around the bar to see if you were alright and found you snoozing like a baby.

"Well!" Says Zora "as Osiris is still down I think you should stay with us a while longer. Get some coffee in you then we can take a stroll up by the old house you used to stay in."

You're feeling too hazy to question anything and just do as you're told.

After your second coffee Zora grabs your hand and pulls you outside. You set off on the long walk towards the old house and Zora starts explaining to you that we are and always have been connected. Our spirits have roamed the Earth for thousands of years passing from one vessel to the other in search of old soulmates. Our minds are far beyond the limitations of technology yet for some reason we choose to limit ourselves.

She talks the whole journey and continues to do so when you arrive at the house. You stop at the front door but she grabs your hand again and pulls you in the direction of the oak trees at the back. She's telling you that she had to disconnect you from Osiris as you approach the oak where you used to meet Tsura. Looking up at the branches she says that you won't be hanging around long then she stops abruptly, pulls a tarot card from her sleeve and shows it to you. You look and see a star.



XX

The blade that divides

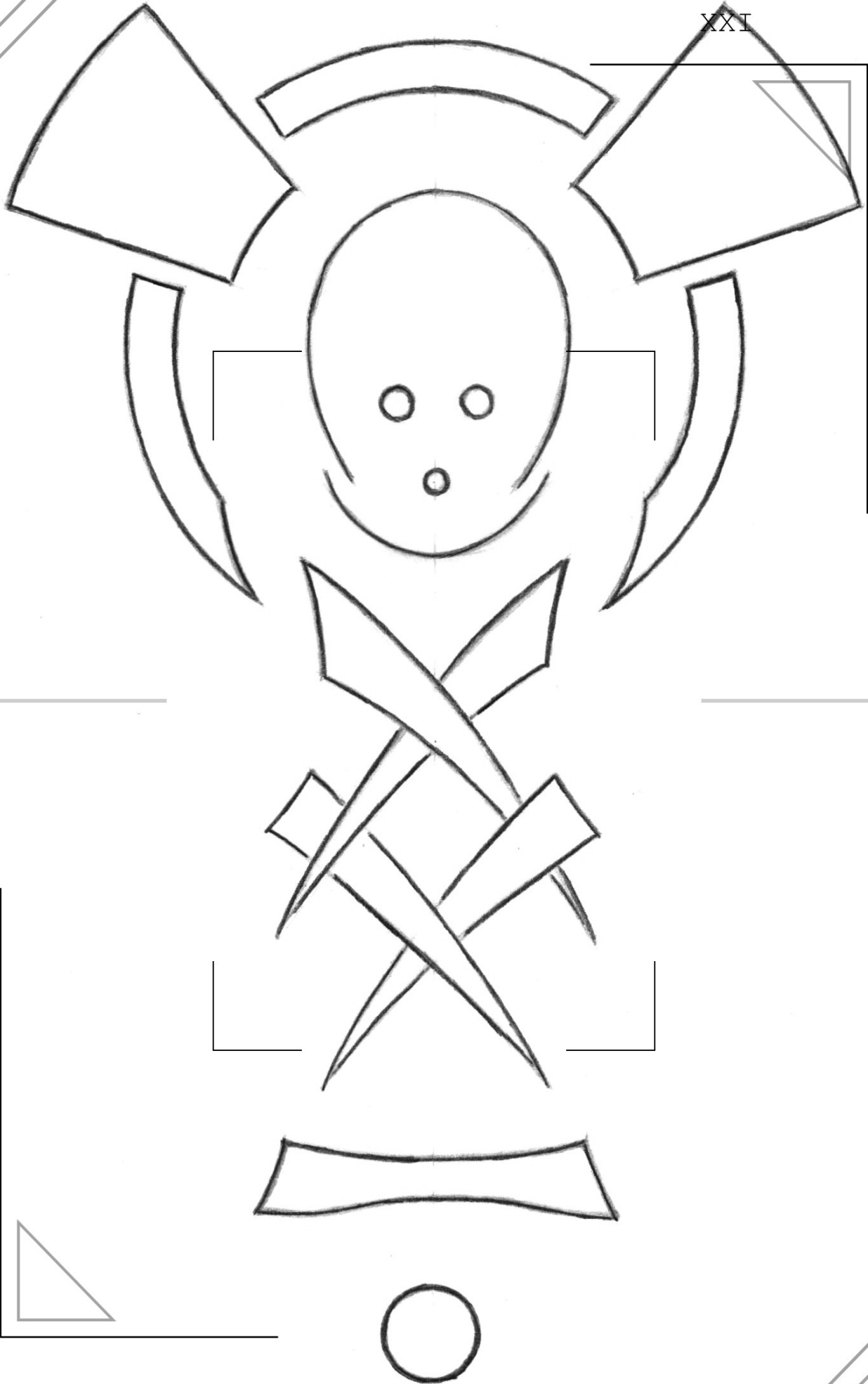
From as far back as I can remember the world has been a disturbing mix of extreme violence and civility. One side telling you to fight for what is right and the other talking about peace while ignoring the blood on its shoes. I have often felt conflicted when discovering that some of the most violent men have the most gentle hearts. While some of the most peaceful ones have the most twisted minds.

Human nature is full of contradictions and yet is so predictable. It thrives to survive yet kills the environment on which it depends. It desperately seeks love while hating others who find it. It screams for personal freedom yet joins a gang at the first chance it gets and no matter what you do. It will condemn you for giving it what it wants.

Now I have spilt my fair share of blood. I have let rage, lust, envy and greed pour through my every nerve and sinew but there was always a line I would not cross. Something inside me that held me back from going that step too far. It is by that line that I define Humanity. Crossing it makes you a beast. Not knowing it is there makes you dangerous.

Mankind has so far to go both mentally and spiritually yet the clock is ticking. The future is finite and only a connection of great minds can enlighten the animals that drive us all towards the brink of extinction. Everyday is a battle that must be fought but you must know what you are fighting for and why.

Introspection is just the starting point. The loss of Ego is a step and not an end. Your place within the social structure is not written in stone. You must be flexible and remember that you are part of a whole and as important as the other parts. No more but no less.



The apple of my eye

- Stage 23 -

You are lying on your back gazing at the sky. Tsura is close by watching you peacefully. All sound around you feels like a song as you gaze in to the blue and empty your mind.

It has been a long journey but this is just the beginning. You can see the world with newborn eyes. You can feel your heart pump life through your veins. Air fills your lungs and reminds you of just how alive you are as you feel everything from a gentle breeze to a blade of grass.

Tsura rises and places the final card upon your chest.

"It's the World." She says "You are the root to this one and it's up to you what you make of it.

You sit up and take the card between your fingers then feel a sudden sadness.

"I know."

Tsura lays her hands upon your shoulders

"I have seen your future and I am truly sorry but remember this: Once all is said and done you will be the light that shines like no other."

She crouches down and kisses your cheek softly then returns to her feet. It is time for you to part ways once more. Your eyes are still on the card as you bid her farewell and listen to her walk away.

In the distance you hear her voice one last time as she says:

"I'll see you on the other side."

