

SP

Now, after several decades, when the *Bildung* was finally reduced to uniformly-sized fragments and organised into classifications of matter—clay brick, lignite, coal, timber, plastics, resins, glass, steel, cadmar aggregates, plus all collected 'alien' material—the wreckage was strategically deposited in the last of the flowing Mercury-deltas. Each Deposit Point was subject to heated debate in terms of how the course of Mercury-Gel would be affected by the intrusion of material. It was not certain whether the interventions would succeed at points where the depth was above a certain threshold or whether maintaining the curvatures of the various tributaries were the more important concern. Nonetheless, once decisions were made (actually a compromise of corporate responsibility whereby all combinations of known material were infused equally with the 'waste' of unknown origin), the results were carefully monitored. With the passage of time, the wreckage began to lose much of its identifying characteristics—most traces of colouration, any logos or design features that could still be traced back to human interference—were dissolved by the corrosive flow. Soon, further debris from the immediate environs began to accrete at each site, with more and more material gathering according to the magnetic season. As a result the dumping sites began to increase in size. As the initial Deposit Points carefully avoided making contact with existing outcrops, the initial growth of the sites moved vertically, at an exponential rate. Yet as the years passed it was also recorded that the structures were self-generating laterally, yet were not moving toward the shore as might have been expected. Instead, the sites were beginning to elongate down the deltas, thought to be following the hidden articulations of the submerged landscape. It was not known whether the structures were influenced by the movements of the Mercury-Gel in which they grew, like bacteria in agar. The sites became ever taller and longer as they moved into the deeper altitudes of the deltas. They began to flare and widen only as the depths of the Gel-Seas fell away beneath them.



For longer than he can remember the Mayor of Bargello has been bothered by a recurring dream in which he is on the steps of a brightly lit restaurant. There are no handrails. The thick-piled carpets are not secured sufficiently. He feels them move under his feet. The steps are far too narrow for a man of his size. Attempting to find a safer way he turns and climbs at an angle. Still he fears his legs will slip away from under him. With every inch he is more precariously balanced.

Where is his stick? His assistants have abandoned him purposefully again so as to watch from a distance and mock him when he falls. If only The he can make it to the top he will be able to steady himself and rest for a moment before taking his table. There is a party this evening. Now the predicament of the steps is forgotten and he is at the centre of the restaurant's company, the guest of honour. In a master-stroke of improvisation and to the delight of all he gets to his knees. The Mayor of Bargello crawls under the table. He can barely contain his delight. But now removed from the company he is privy to their malicious comments. The murmuring of his detractors comes to the fore. His happiness is replaced by fury.

But how can he reappear? What expression can he wear? The tree-line extends to vanishing points at both extremes, as does the pasture shown green after rains in a country of vast fields with few features to break regular geometries. The shutter finds a narrow rectangle of sky and here, its powerful promise of veracity not withstanding, the technology is most vulnerable. To look at the top third of the picture, at blue sky and clouds, is to press with the eyes on a surface more malleable than celluloid. It is to add what a lens will not show. Songs present it better, if with a measure of nostalgia, when they use the plural 'skies' to indicate the diversity of identities, the great variety of life. Then again, in so far as nostalgia denies the singular struggles of most lives the songs fail. Beyond the tree-line, one great arch of sky radiates over an ochre earth.



LA

It was here, on the Littoral Strips that emerged several centuries after the initial project was initiated, that settlements were established. These were rudimentary communities at first, even though the technology was available for much more advanced constructions and provisions to be made available. This was a sensible precaution: the Strips were considered a preparatory stage for more advanced plans being developed behind the scenes. The project was cosmopolitan in outlook, with individuals sourced from volunteer pools of all genders and races, chosen finally through a trial process that is still subject of much criticism. As you can see, the first structures were, neatly enough, thatched cabins fashioned from a metal framework embedded in the Strip's far headland—Bargello Point—combined with fibrous shards of Gel-Mica harvested from the shores on the Western Edges. The shards were dried on open ground all along the Strip before being woven into immensely strong panels, indents and coverings. After initial construction, the shelters were levered off ground level—which was still subject to unpredictable colloidal flooding—and could combine together to form complex conglomerates of cantilevered and co-dependent forms. The communities that became established here were not subject to external conditioning at this point and operated largely by collaborative scavenging. They showed no adverse effects in relation to their environment.

Variiegated patterns record how water has drained. It will not return. A few rotted and dried carcasses make anguished shapes. The great arch of the sky is held on four pillars pointing to the curvature of the Earth. Over the pillars, flapping: a mesh of glassy filaments, a spun awning, the great arch of the sky. From the pasture through the trees out into the wastes, Cadmar rides. His man has returned with news. The prince's brother is dead. Cadmar signals his resolve, mounts his horse and makes a line from farmed land across the threshold into the desert. The night will overtake him.

With his speed he sends bandits into narrowing circles. Around his neck is slung a casket. A dagger is his weapon. He will make an incursion, find his brother's body then carve out the heart. One day, returning to their homeland, Cadmar will bury his brother on the slope, in the high grass. And their stories will be passed on. It will be said that in the cultural history of every army and every band of soldiers there is the legend of a man who, on his own, comes to count for the whole. In different eras and different parts of the world the details vary but in each case the stories are driven by the same paradox: the hero is one soldier amongst others and at the same time barely contained by military regimentation. One fighter is so big that the mere sight of him sends enemies running. Another, it is said, wins the battle single-handedly through sheer cunning in the dead of night while his comrades sleep in their beds. Although the stories are apocryphal they feed back into military strategy.

Trainees are told of the hapless recruit sent into undergrowth to prove his powers of concealment. Feeling pleased with himself that he alone has not been found, he stands and promptly falls. His shoelaces have been tied together. Carver has been keeping his spirits up by reciting stories. He steps into the clearing. Robbed of his last vestiges of energy he will allow this place to make the decision. In any event there is no safe place to spend the night. This clearing will do. He should offload his equipment. Despite its weight he stands a moment longer, then relaxing his neck looks down to consider his boots.

