

**Theoretical Architecture In Nihei Tsutomu's BLAME!
& The Agency That Shapes Our Cities:**
An Exploration of The Comic Medium.

By

Kody Ferron

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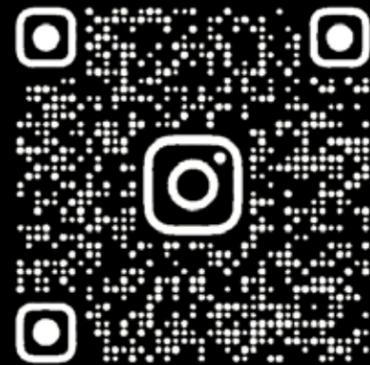
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ABSTRACT:

The core elements of this thesis are *drawing*, the *comic medium*, and *theoretical architecture*. Through an investigation of the *comic medium*, this thesis explores the architectural implications of a city, situated in a fictional world, without; orientation, time, or human intervention. By examining a work of theoretical architecture, the manga *BLAME!*, this thesis examines how the *drawn medium* critiques the agency that shapes our contemporary cities, shaped by the forces of expansionist, economy-based development.

Authored by the architecturally trained Japanese manga artist Nihei Tsutomu, *BLAME!* follows the story of a silent hero, Killy, as he meanders through the infinite expanses of a steel and concrete labyrinth known only as *The City*. This city, one built from the mind of a machine and developed without any comprehensible purpose, has expanded for tens of thousands of years beyond control. In this dystopian future, Nihei explores the theoretical architecture of a universe wherein expansionism alone drives the development of cities, and where the practical application of building has distorted beyond recognition.

The world of *BLAME!* is full of antagonists who stand as impediments to our heroes' cause. In this future, the will of a sentient machine governs *The City's* laws and executes its orders. Killy's journey, a pretext to scower the expanses of *The City*, is to find the *Net Terminal Gene*. The Net Terminal Gene is what stands between the inhabitants of *The City*, and freedom. Cibo, a highly decorated scientist from whom Killy finds help along his journey, may have the solution to halting the chaotic expansion of *The City*, and finding a way to escape it.

Through the use of drawing and narrative, Nihei Tsutomu explores the consequences of a city void of orientation, time, scale, human intervention, and natural phenomena. While the reality the artist/author explores may be a fictional, future dystopia, much of its story parallels the contemporary condition of the *growing development within our own cities*.

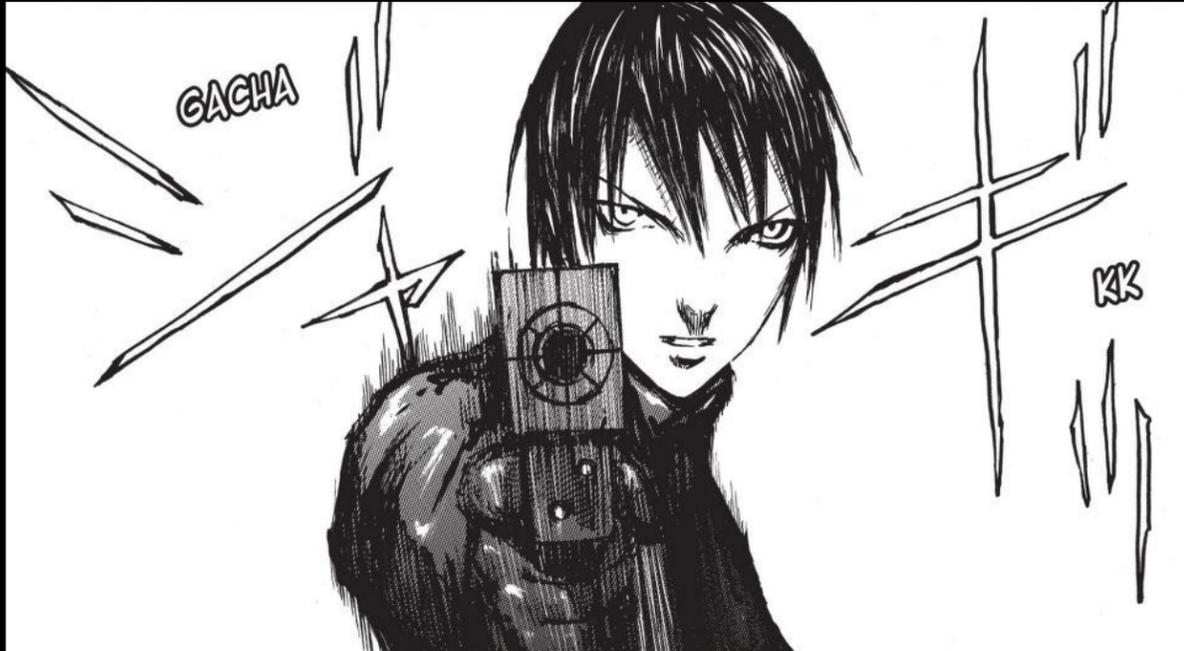


FIGURE 1: KILLY'S GUN - GRAVITY BEAM EMITTER

As part of this examination of *BLAME!*, I've created an architectural intervention as a response to Nihei's universe. Nihei presents his architectural discourse in the form of manga. Thus, any contribution to his body of work must exist within the comic medium. This intervention explores how, in the world presented by Nihei, one could reinsert human agency into a reality devoid of human characteristics. Using the methods that Nihei employed in creating his manga mega-series, I explore how the cities of our future may combat the forces that shape Nihei's dystopian world. Reestablishing orientation, time, scale, human intervention, and natural phenomena in Nihei's world are the milestones that I propose humanity must reach in order to reclaim their city.

Speculative architect Liam Young states, "Speculative architects mostly create narratives about how new technologies and networks influence space, culture, and community. They try to imagine where new forms of agency exist within the cities changed by these new processes."¹ Using the mass appeal of pop culture mediums, theoretical architects insert architectural theory into everyday life, and through narrative, host conversations regarding the future of our cities.

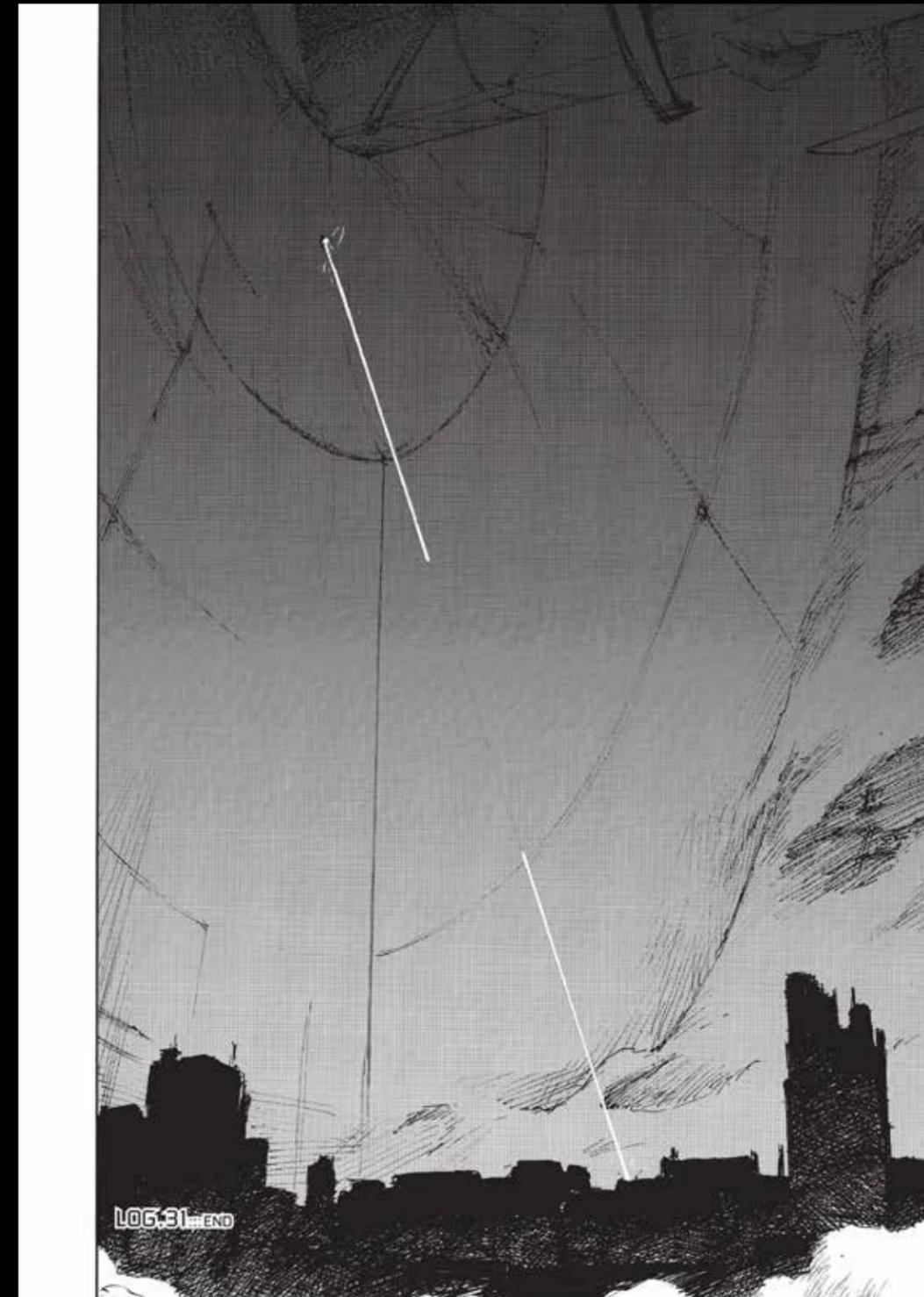


FIGURE 2: GRAVITY BEAM EMITTER BLASTS

¹ "What Is Speculative Architecture? FAQ by Liam Young," *Strelka Mag*, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://strelkamag.com/en/article/what-is-speculative-architecture>.

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To Thomas Lamarre, thank you for being such a valuable part of this process and for always bringing excitement, stimulating conversation, and engagement to my reviews.

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To my father, thank you for teaching me determination and tenacity, and to hold everything I do to the highest of standards. To my mother, thank you for teaching the patience and compassion I needed to make it through this year.

I dedicate this thesis to my wife. You are my everything, and your support has allowed me to do so many great things with my life, thank you.

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**THEORETICAL ARCHITECTURE
IN NIHEI TSUTOMU'S BLAME!**

**& THE AGENCY THAT SHAPES OUR CITIES:
*AN EXPLORATION OF THE COMIC MEDIUM.***

KODY FERRON



FIGURE 3: WHERE THE CITY CAN'T SEE

THEORETICAL ARCHITECTURE & DRAWING:

Liam Young, the pioneer of Speculative Architecture, asserts that speculative architects create narratives about architecture.² Using pop-culture mediums as Trojan horses, speculative architects insert discourse on architectural theory, the state of the field of architecture, and the future of our cities into everyday life.³ While Speculative Architecture may be a growing field of architectural media exploration, its roots are firmly grounded in the architectural tradition of *theoretical architecture*.⁴

Piranesi's *Le Carceri*, Circa 1750, uses a low viewpoint and diminutive figures to express the vastness of roman architecture.⁵ In these works, Piranesi illustrates impossible architecture full of spatial paradoxes.⁶ His works illustrates interior spaces so big that they more closely resemble exterior spaces, and blur the line between interior and exterior.⁷ Archigram, during the 1960s, "... acted against what they saw as a tediously conservative environment, not because of radical political sentiments, but because of the inability of art

and architecture to keep pace with the products, lifestyles, and machinery that were already part of daily life."⁸ Elliott Bishop's *The Sweet Proposal*, 2018, is an architectural thesis that explores the privatization of cities and the corporate control of employment, governance, housing and nutrition.⁹ These theoretical architects, among many others, offer a critical evaluation of contemporary architecture and the future of our cities. Theoretical architects, or *paper architects*, create architecture that challenges the way architects disseminate the discourse on architectural theory, and critique how architecture reflects the ways society develops their cities. They do this using the architect's tool of reasoning: *drawing*.

As the architectural practice is largely defined by the need to design inhabitable spaces, architects work and think *spatially*. Spatial thinking is the ability to understand, reason, and remember the spatial relations between objects or spaces.¹⁰ Architects use spatial thinking to design spaces for

the "human scale". "Designing to 'human scale' means design that is optimized for human use."¹¹ Human scale is based on the understanding that human beings **require certain spatial proportions** in order for our built environments to be comfortable.

Drawing is spatial thinking. Whereas mental visualization is the *intangible* ability to think spatially, drawing is the *physical* ability to think spatially.

Drawing for an architect is our best form of communication. Drawing allows us to hone our spatial thinking and communicate by showing, rather than telling. Drawing allows us to *imagine* and picture for ourselves how speculative, abstract worlds might exist in the future, and to effectively communicate architectural theory.

Some drawn media, such as the Western *comic book* or the Japanese *manga*, can allow architects to think *temporally*. Both the comic book and manga can be utilized to represent a serialization of architecture and narrative. The comic book medium is divided into *comic pages*, and further sub-divided into *comic panels*. Each comic panel represents a single

moment in time. Each comic page contains 1-9 panels. These panels, held together in series by the comic page, represent the passing of time. By serializing architecture, comics add a temporal dimension to it. *Time*, as a dimension of architecture, allows us to examine the patterns that emerge over the lifetime of a building. From that we can analyse why those

patterns emerge, and how their architectural significance might manifest in the real world.

Leon Battista Alberti understood drawing as the embodiment of architectural ideas, distinctly separate from the reality of its structure.¹² In otherwords, Alberti understood

that drawing could capture abstract and conceptual ideas that buildings could not. Drawing can inhabit *the impossible*, and *the impossible* allows architects to speculate on what may be *possible*. As the ones responsible for shaping our future and its cities, it is important that architects venture into the impossible, so they might speculate on the future.



FIGURE 4: PIRANESI - LA CARCERI

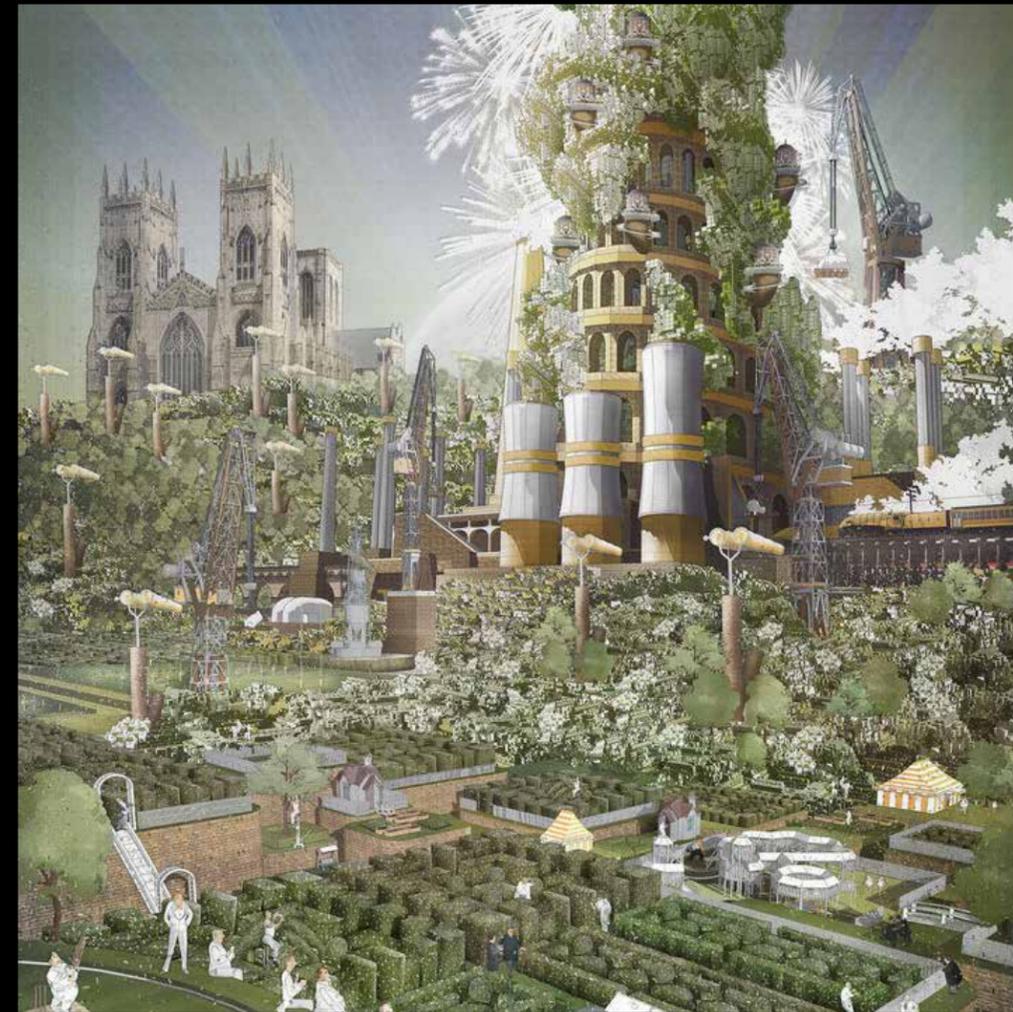


FIGURE 5: BISHOP - SWEET PROPOSAL

- 2 "What Is Speculative Architecture? FAQ by Liam Young," *Strelka Mag*, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://strelkamag.com/en/article/what-is-speculative-architecture>.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 "Giovanni Battista Piranesi | The Round Tower, from 'Carceri d'invenzione' (Imaginary Prisons) | The Metropolitan Museum of Art," accessed April 3, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/337725>.
- 6 "Piranesi, and His Enduring Influence," *the Guardian*, November 6, 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/nov/06/artsfeatures.highereducation>.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 "The Weirdest Architects of the '60s Were Right About the Future," *Bloomberg.Com*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-11-15/archigram-and-the-modern-city>.
- 9 Elliott Bishop, "The Sweet Proposal: A Cautionary Tale of the Corporate City" (Architectural Thesis, London, UK, The Bartlett School Of Architecture, n.d.), <https://www.elliottbishop.com/the-sweet-proposal>.
- 10 "Spatial Intelligence: What Is It, and How Can We Enhance It?," accessed April 21, 2021, <https://www.parentingscience.com/spatial-intelligence.html>.
- 11 Justin VannPashak, "Human Centered Cities Must Be Built at a Human Scale.," *Medium*, September 28, 2018, <https://medium.com/@jvannpashak/human-centered-cities-must-be-built-at-a-human-scale-a6c1336a0428>.
- 12 Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture as Drawing* (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1982).

BLAME!:

The comic book is a medium that leverages the architectural tradition of drawing as a means to tell stories. No culture has more fully embraced comic books than Japan, leading the world in the sales of manga¹³ (Japanese comics) and establishing this reputation through long running and immensely popular mega-series such as *Akira*, (8 years), *Naruto*, (15 years), and *Gintama*, (16 years).

Most Batman comics take place in Gotham City, a fictional city based on New York City's Manhattan.¹⁴ The pages of these western comic books are dominated by anatomy art: art that emphasizes the human body over background or setting. By contrast, much of manga, such as *Aposimz*, *Abara*, and *Akira*, places its emphasis on setting and background over the human body.

BLAME! is the title of a 6 volume manga mega-series written and illustrated by Japanese manga artist Nihei Tsutomu. The story follows our silent hero Killy on his meandering journey through the impossibly vast mega-structure known as *The City*. Set thousands of years in the future,

The City is virtually empty, being continuously expanded by robot builders, while humanity has all but disappeared.

Killy, the principal character, is the force that moves the reader through *The City*. As he searches for the Net Terminal Gene, the key to stopping *The City's* expansion, the reader is led to believe this particular genetic marker no longer exists. Consequently, our hero's purpose appears trivial, but upon closer examination, the author reveals a second, more significant narrative: *untethered expansionism and over-consumption may bring about the extinction of our cities as we know them*.

Nihei presents a future wherein an increasingly naive humanity has allowed technology to create a sterile, autonomous, and malevolent city whose only goal is to expand, consume, and as a final consequence eradicate all life within its borders. Nihei demonstrates this through the design of *The City's* physical boundaries, such as altering its geometry, scale, gravity, and *The City's* ontological characteristics such as time, and *The City's*

sovereign will, its vastness and emptiness.

Nihei presents his architectural critique in the form of a dystopian, cyberpunk-action manga, almost entirely devoid of expository dialogue. A heavy reliance on visual storytelling devices allows the author to present the architecture of this theoretical world as the true principal character. *BLAME!*, explores the future of architecture, and the future of our world.

¹³ "One Piece Manga Has 470 Million Copies in Print Worldwide - News - Anime News Network," accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/daily-briefs/2020-04-02/one-piece-manga-has-470-million-copies-in-print-worldwide/.158229>.

¹⁴ "Gotham City," Batman Wiki, accessed April 29, 2021, https://batman.fandom.com/wiki/Gotham_City.

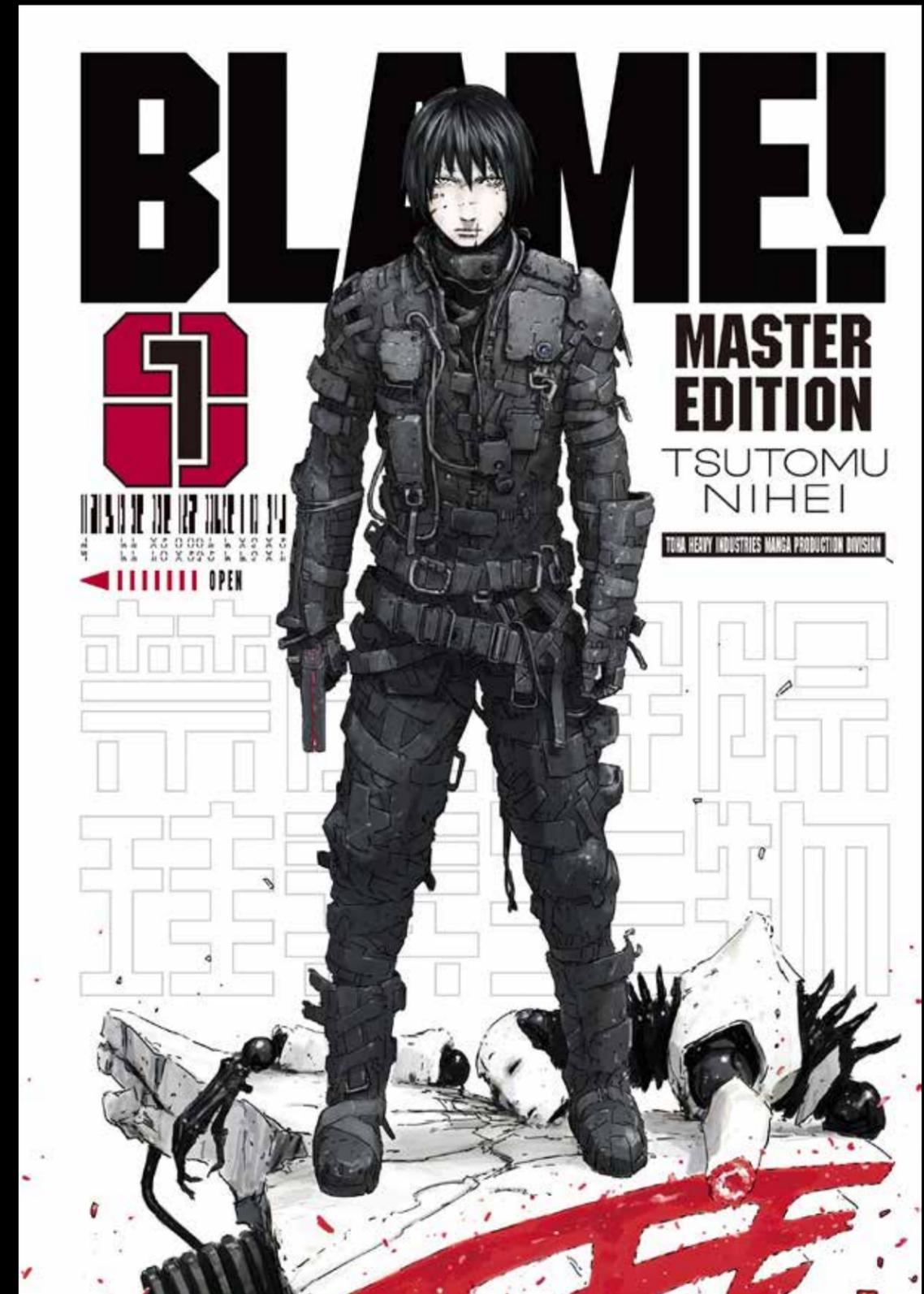


FIGURE 6: BLAME! MASTER EDITION VOL 1



FIGURE 7: KILLY

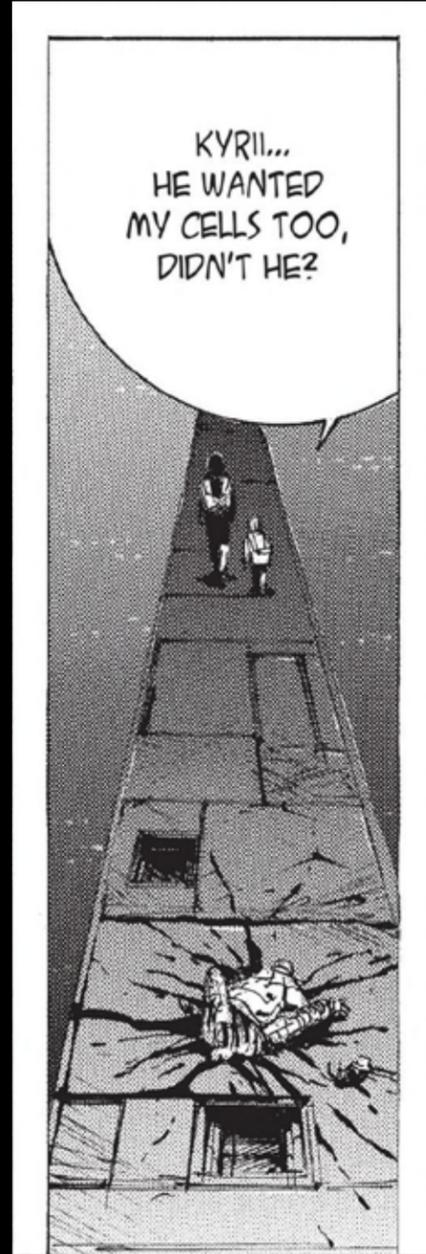


FIGURE 8: NET TERMINAL GENE

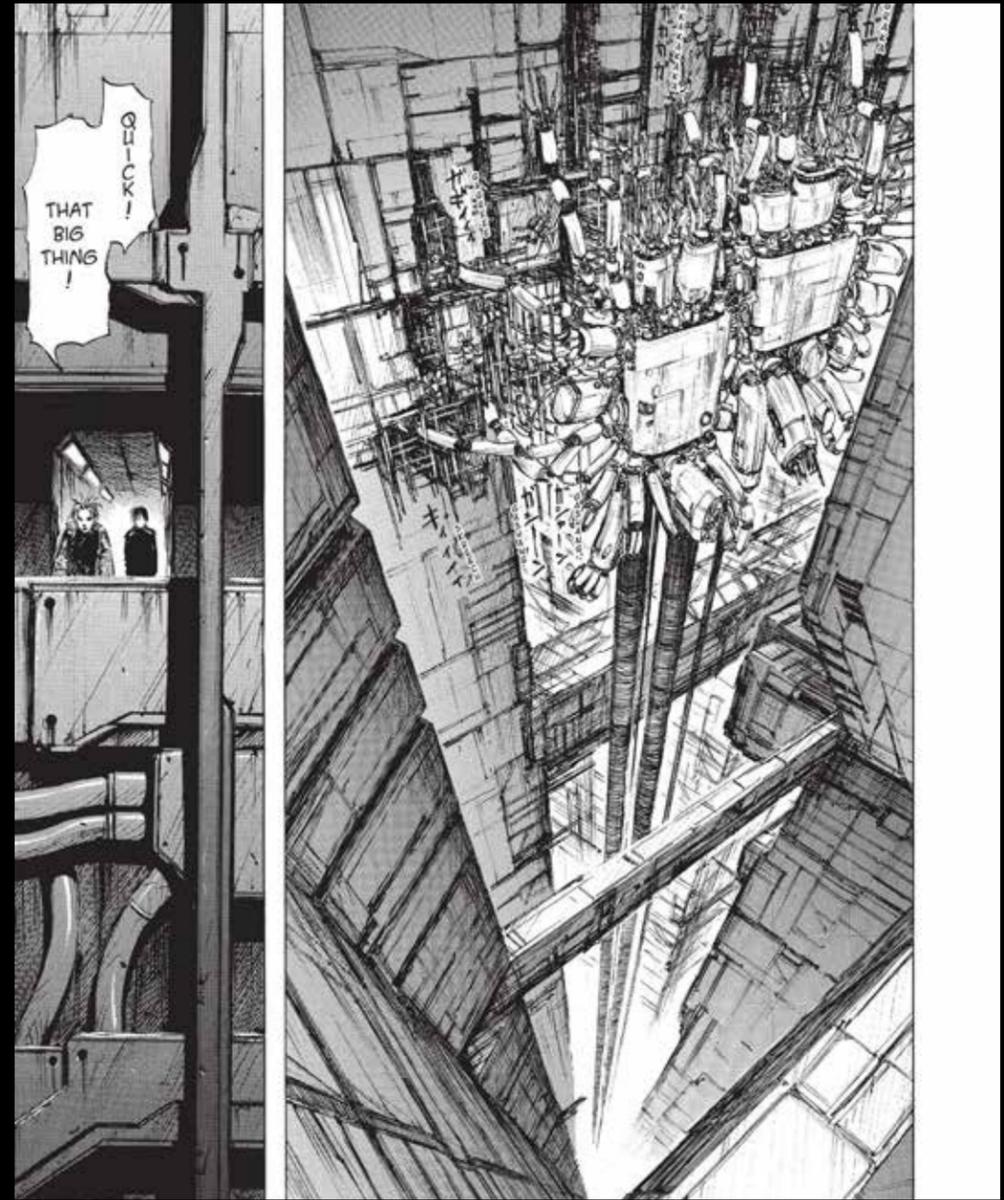
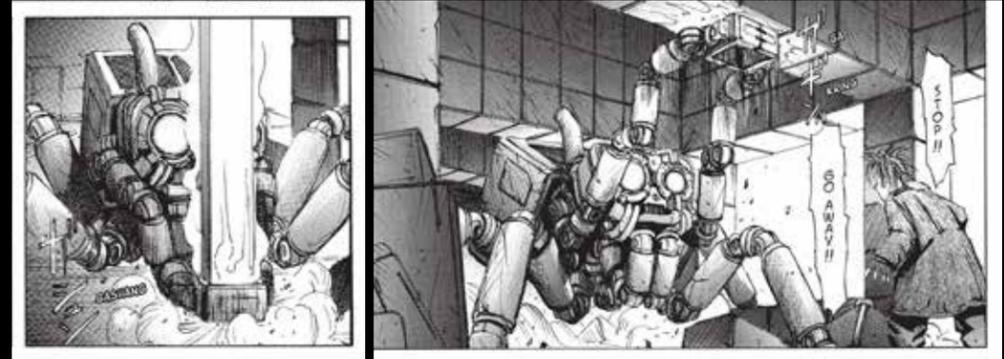
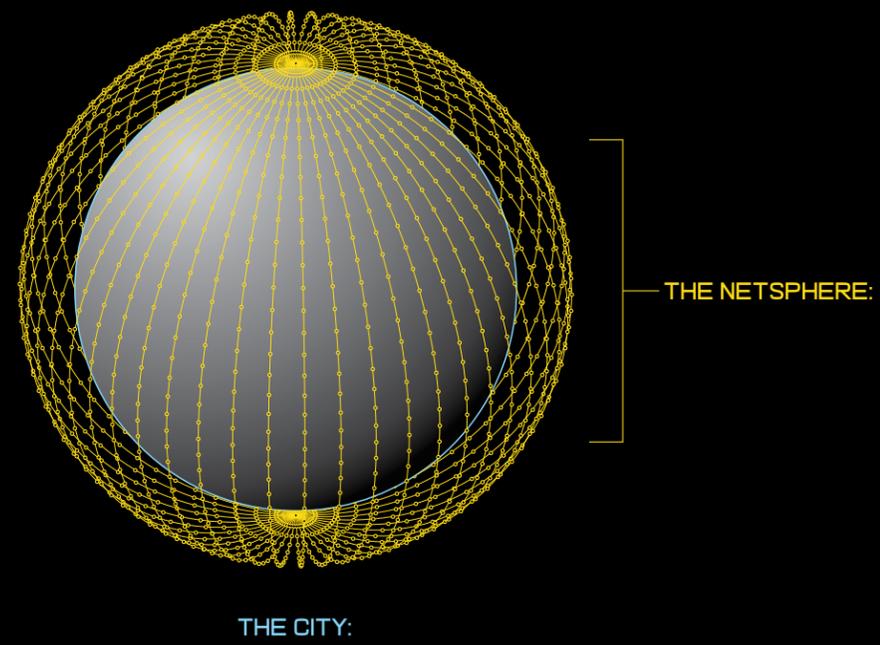


FIGURE 9: BUILDERS



THESIS QUESTION:

What does Nihei Tsutomu's work of speculative architecture teach us about the agency that shapes our cities?

FIGURE 10: THE CITY - BY AUTHOR

PART 1 - ANALYSIS:

SITE:

I've sited my thesis work within *The City*. Envisioned as a contribution to Nihei's work of theoretical architecture, this thesis work must be situated and executed as a comic in order to honour the integrity of the source material: *BLAME!*. Additionally, this intervention must adhere to a narrative the same way Nihei's work did, and must use Nihei's narrative as a stepping-off point. As is typical of site analysis, one must first understand the nature of the site to reveal the unique and varied site conditions of a theoretical, drawn building site. The result of this analysis is a map that reveals the characteristics of *The City*, both physical and ontological, and that allows for an understanding of the *comic medium* and its significance to discourse.

Analyzing a fictional site is unlike traditional architectural site analysis. Rather than examining paths-of-travel, sound, wind, or sun, this process addressed the physical characteristics of the architecture and the ontological

characteristics of *The City* within the parameters of manga. These physical characteristics include but are not limited to the geometry, scale, materiality and matter that are specific to the universe of manga. In addition, the ontological structure of *The City* includes the constraints of time, reality-fabric, and the will of *The City*.

There are several conclusions that can be extracted from the analysis of *BLAME!* as an architectural site.

One of which is that Nihei Tsutomu employs what could be termed as a "kit-of-parts", consisting of an industrial aesthetic, a hostile, sentient universe and superfluous narrative, to construct the world of his manga. Nihei's aesthetic includes adorning his drawings in wires, tubes, factory labels, rusted screw heads, and various other industrial ornaments. Nihei's narrative inhabits a city that hunts its own citizens. Nihei's narrative follows a man on a journey to save humanity. This purpose appears superfluous, as the key to saving humanity, the Net Terminal Gene, no longer exists.

These characteristics are what the author uses to communicate his underpinned cautionary tale to the reader. Secondly, this analysis revealed that ultimately, it is impossible to map *The City*.

Analyzing this site began first by taking a scrutinous look at the manga and marking a page or panel that contained an item that was telling of the physical or the ontological characteristics of *The City*, or the narrative devices of the medium. These items were then translated into Axioms: a concise statement that describes a factual notion of either the medium or of *The City*.

We can understand each one of these axioms as either a capital-A Axiom or a lowercase-a axiom. The capital-A Axioms are the handful of critical characteristics that define the manga, *The City*, and convey the author's message. The lowercase-a axioms describe supplementary characteristics that emerge from the capital-A Axioms.

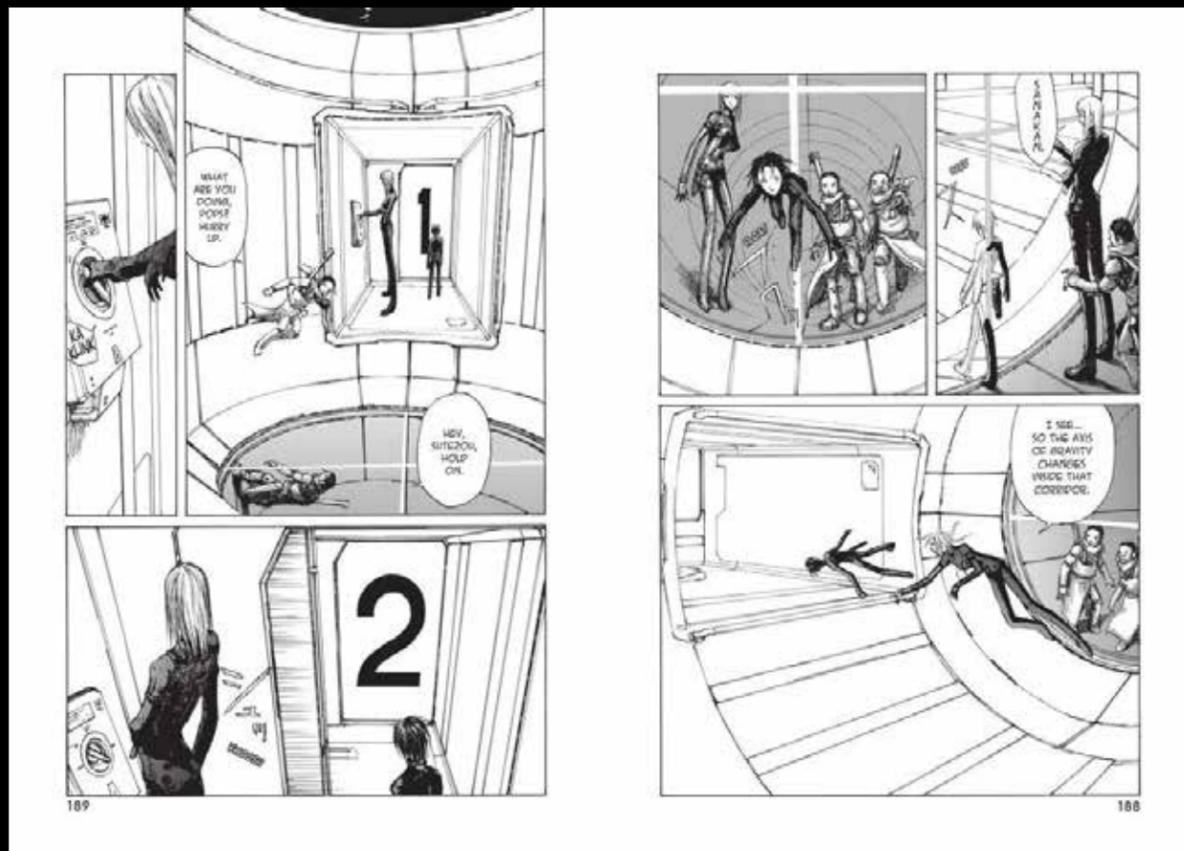


FIGURE 11: READING ORIENTATION

The capital-A Axioms that pertain to *The City* are:

- The City is *antagonistic*.
- The City is *mechanical*.
- The City is *in-human*.
- The City's *reality-fabric*.

The lowercase-a axioms that pertain to *The City* are the nature of:

- The City's *time*.
- The City's *scale*.
- The City's *inhabitants*.
- The City's *gravity*.
- The City's *matter*.

The axioms that pertain to the medium are:

- Reading orientation
- Reading direction
- Narrative pacing
- The establishing shot
- Split panels
- Rendering value
- Narrative structure

The most revealing axiom, "Reading Orientation", is explored in further detail below.

In volume 2 of *BLAME!*, (Volume 2, Pg 188, 189), Cibo and 3 other characters pass through a series of rooms. Each room showcases gravity differently. The first room has a "down". "Down" is the direction the characters would fall in if the force of gravity were acting upon them. The second room they enter has no down, such as a

zero gravity environment, like on a space station. The third room they enter again has a down, but one which is 90 degrees perpendicular relative to the down of the first room.

Reading Orientation is the understanding that to "grasp" the content of a book we must read it in a particular manner. This particular manner includes:

- reading direction* left-to-right as in the west, or right-to-left as in Japan,
- cover placement*, which determines the starting point,
- and the book's own "*right*

way up", which determines the top of the page.

An understanding of how these principles work together to create reading orientation allows for the artist to manipulate the reading experience to convey notions of confusion and disorientation, for example. Nihei, in these 2 pages, exploits the assumption of how the reader will approach his work to manipulate the act of reading the work. Panel 3 of page 188 and panel 1 of page 189 both prompt the reader to ask themselves, "how do I read this thing?"

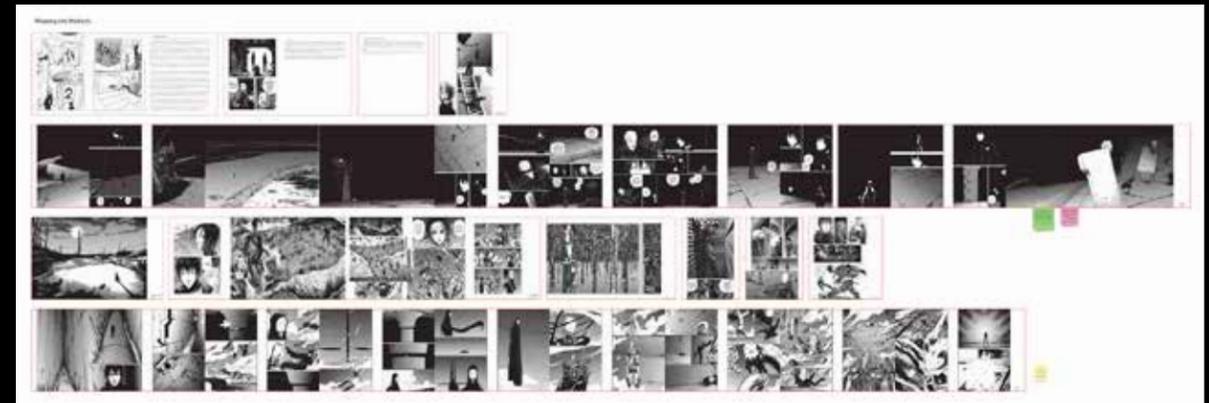


FIGURE 12: AXIOMS OF THE MEDIUM

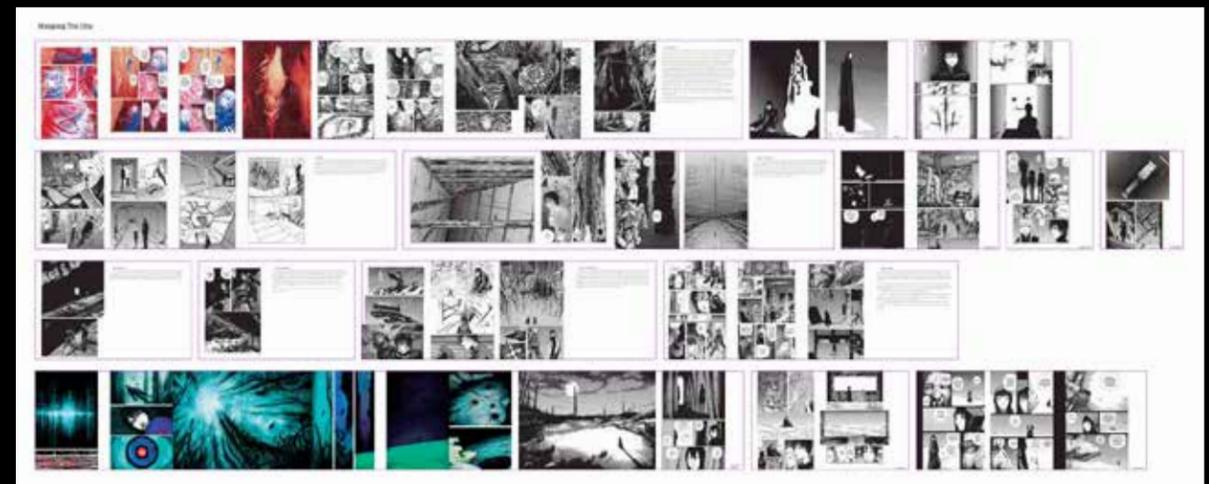


FIGURE 13: AXIOMS OF THE CITY

Exploiting a presupposed reading orientation is a common strategy to create disorientation within comics. For Example, *Batman: The Court of Owls vol1* takes this phenomenon to an extreme. Over the course of 11

pages, the reader goes from reading the pages “the right way up” (portrait orientation), to reading the pages sideways (landscape orientation), and finally to reading the pages upside down (180-degree turn

from the rest of the book). This manipulation of *reading orientation* is used to convey a delusional, schizophrenic breakdown that Batman suffers due to psychological torment at the hands of *The Court of Owls*.



FIGURE 14: BATMAN: THE COURT OF OWLS

As this axiom of Reading Orientation is specific to the experience of *The City*, the characters of this manga must experience multiple gravity shifts off-page. This sequence from volume 2 of *Blame!*, and others like it, show us that unlike on earth, gravity in *The City* is not fixed. *The City* then is a confusing labyrinth where gravity shifts on a whim.

To fully explore this phenomenon of Reading Orientation, I created a drawing that re-oriented this series of rooms to follow the reading direction of the page. When reading the novel the reader’s eye moves from right-to-left and down the page. This movement creates a pattern which the readers eye naturally follows for each page. My intention was to align the spaces the characters move through along the path of the reader’s eye.

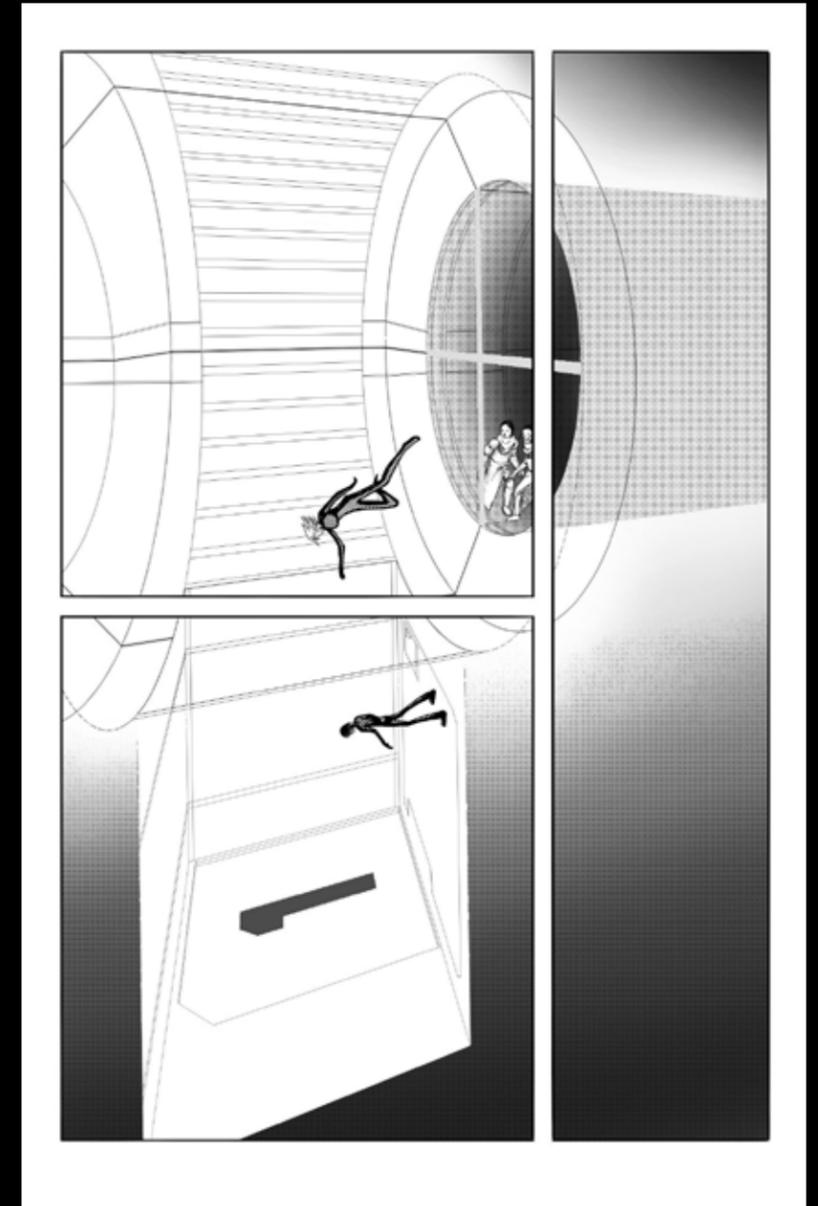


FIGURE 15: READING ORIENTATION

The simplicity of *The City's* geometry became more clear upon 3D modelling these

spaces. The nature of gravity may confuse, but the geometry of these 3 rooms is simply 2

cylinders, and a rectilinear space attached to them.

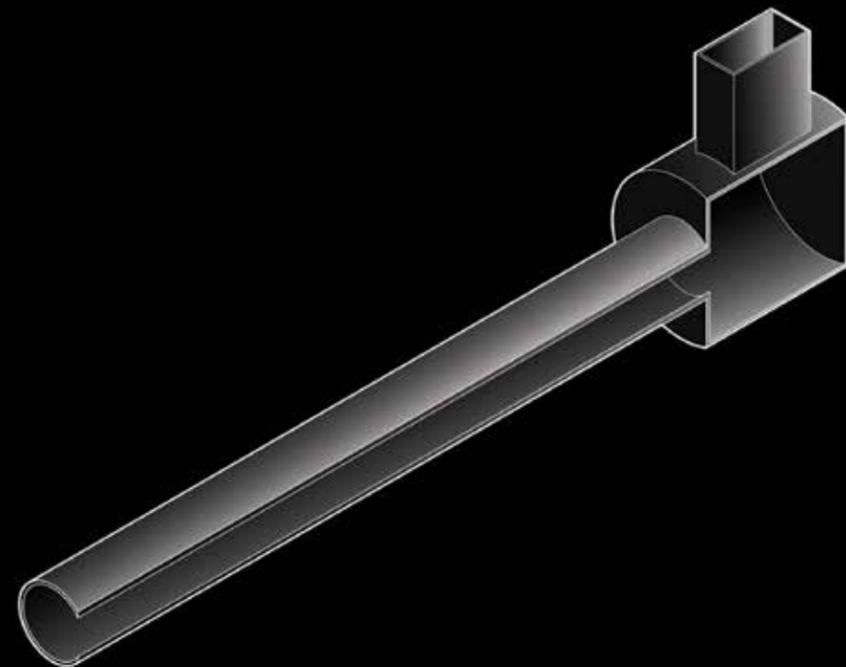


FIGURE 16: 3D MODELLING - RHINO 6 & 7

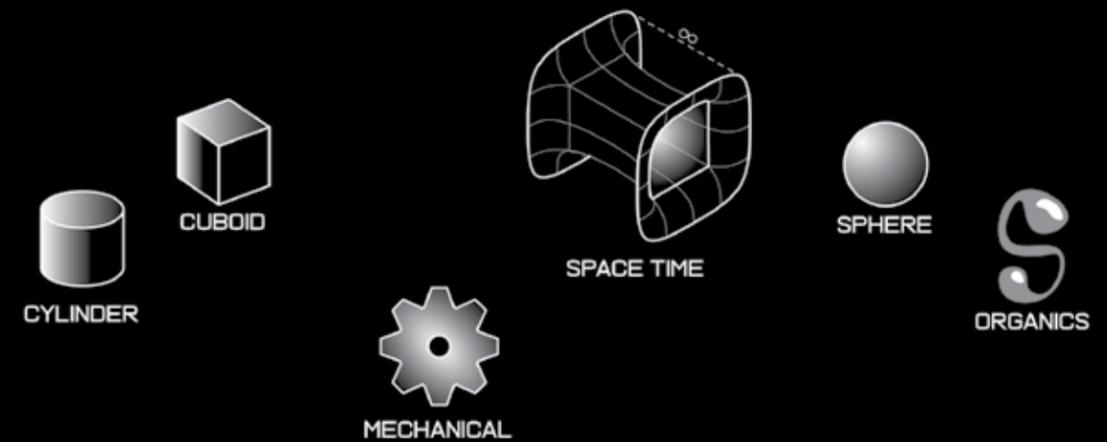


FIGURE 17: KIT-OF-PARTS

Through exploring this first Axiom, there is evidence to suggest that:

1: Gravity shifts within *The City* on a whim. Additionally, matter decays and warps without warning. Therefore, The map of *The City* is impermanent and immaterial. It doesn't exist. These massive, beautiful shots that detail the scenes and settings of the story have little importance, as they are impossible to triangulate and are have likely decayed into something unrecognizable. Tracing your steps through *The City* is impossible. *The City* is an ever changing labyrinth.

2: *The City's* architecture, formally, is quite simple. Every setting, building or other form of geometry within *The City*

is cylindrical, rectilinear, or an intersection of both. While there are very few exceptions, one is in the first chapter of the first volume (Volume 1, Pg 22), where there is humanoid statuary. This statutory is ultimately destroyed and depictions of human beings are never seen again throughout the manga. This is indicative of Nihei's decision to make *The City* increasingly inhuman as the narrative progresses.

3: There is no single geometric sphere used in design of *The City's* architecture. Spheres appear only in the designs of characters. With this gesture, Nihei links the notion of organics, or living tissue, to the sphere. Even *The City* believes that it should only use spheres in organic creations. Using spherical or organic shapes in the

architecture of the Safeguards and the Exterminators, which are all humanoid figures created in *The City's* image, is like *The City* imitating organic design. It's designing with fragmented memories and broken understandings of what it means to be organic, or to be human.

4: fourth and finally, one of the few constants of *The City* is its ontological characteristics. Because you can't trace your steps through or predict how *The City* will change, its ontological attributes are the only thing the reader can expect to see consistently. No one setting is ever revisited by the characters, and as we're shown, *The City* is constantly changing. Therefore the map of *The City* could only be a map of its ontology, rather than its physical layout.

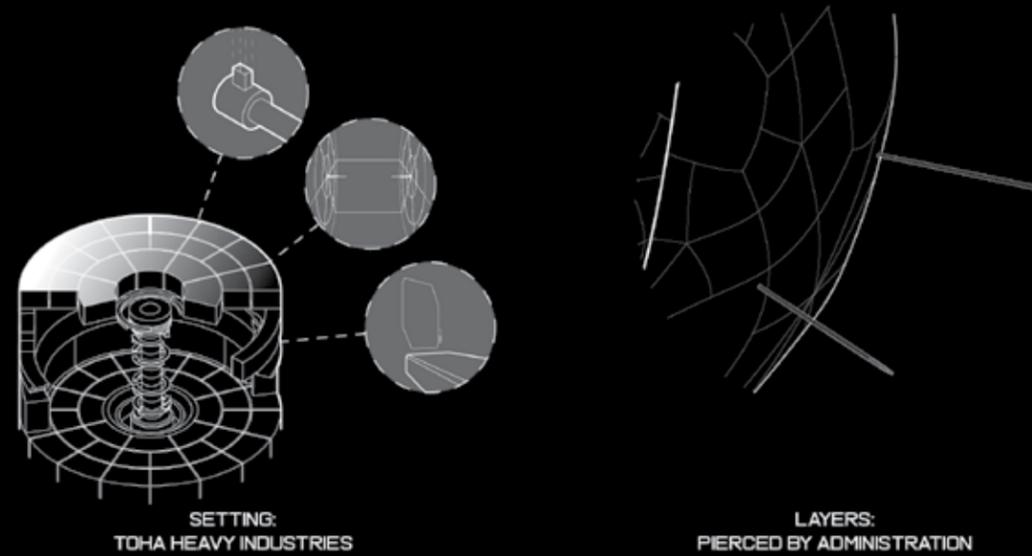


FIGURE 18: ELEMENTS OF THE CITY

In taking all of these different axioms, expanding them and extracting their implications, I've created this map of *The City*, (Figure 20). While reading, we're shown various elements that contributed to the creating and interpretation of this map. We're shown settings where events that reveal some nature of *The City* unfold, and we're shown buildings, so massive that entire cities could exist inside them. This is indicative of the unfathomable scale of *The City*.

We're shown layers, never multiple in succession, the scales of which are astronomical, so much so that they suggest the scale of a solar system. We see both the *Administration*, a higher benevolent force, and the *Safeguards*, a higher malevolent force, commandeer matter as means of entering *The City*. Essentially, the *Administration* and *Safeguards* use the physical matter of *The City*, either the human bodies of characters or *The City's* own architecture, and transform it

into a shape or body they can inhabit. We see that there's a master key to *The City*: Killy's Gun. The mega-structure that delineates the layered strata is nigh indestructible, and thus creates an inescapable prison. However, a blast from Killy's gun is so powerful that it can pierce through the walls of the mega-structure. Most of the remaining few inhabitants of *The City* are trapped in between these layers of mega-structure,

and are unable to escape *The City's* borders. Yet, this weapon allows Killy to move freely throughout the impenetrable layers *The City*, and to be the only individual capable of doing so. We're shown that *The City* is an

untraceable and unmappable labyrinth. This labyrinth is ever transforming: Warping matter, meaning matter that decays and transforms: Stray Builders demolishing and rebuilding sections of *The City*: Gravity shifting without

warning. In all likelihood, many of the settings we encounter as readers of *BLAME!* have long been rebuilt, warped, or otherwise destroyed during unseen events.

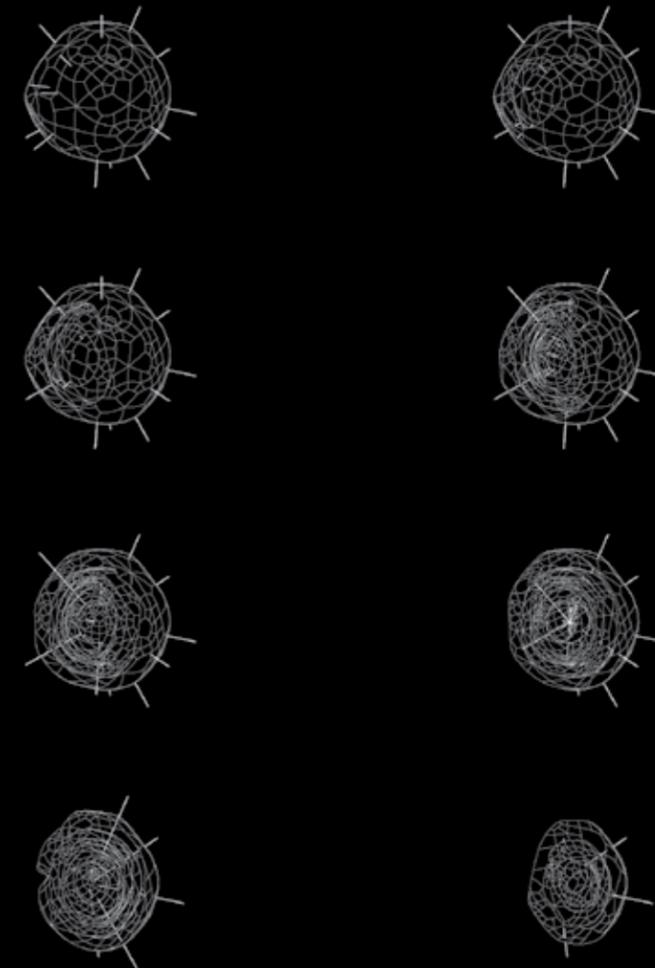


FIGURE 19: LAYERS OF THE CITY

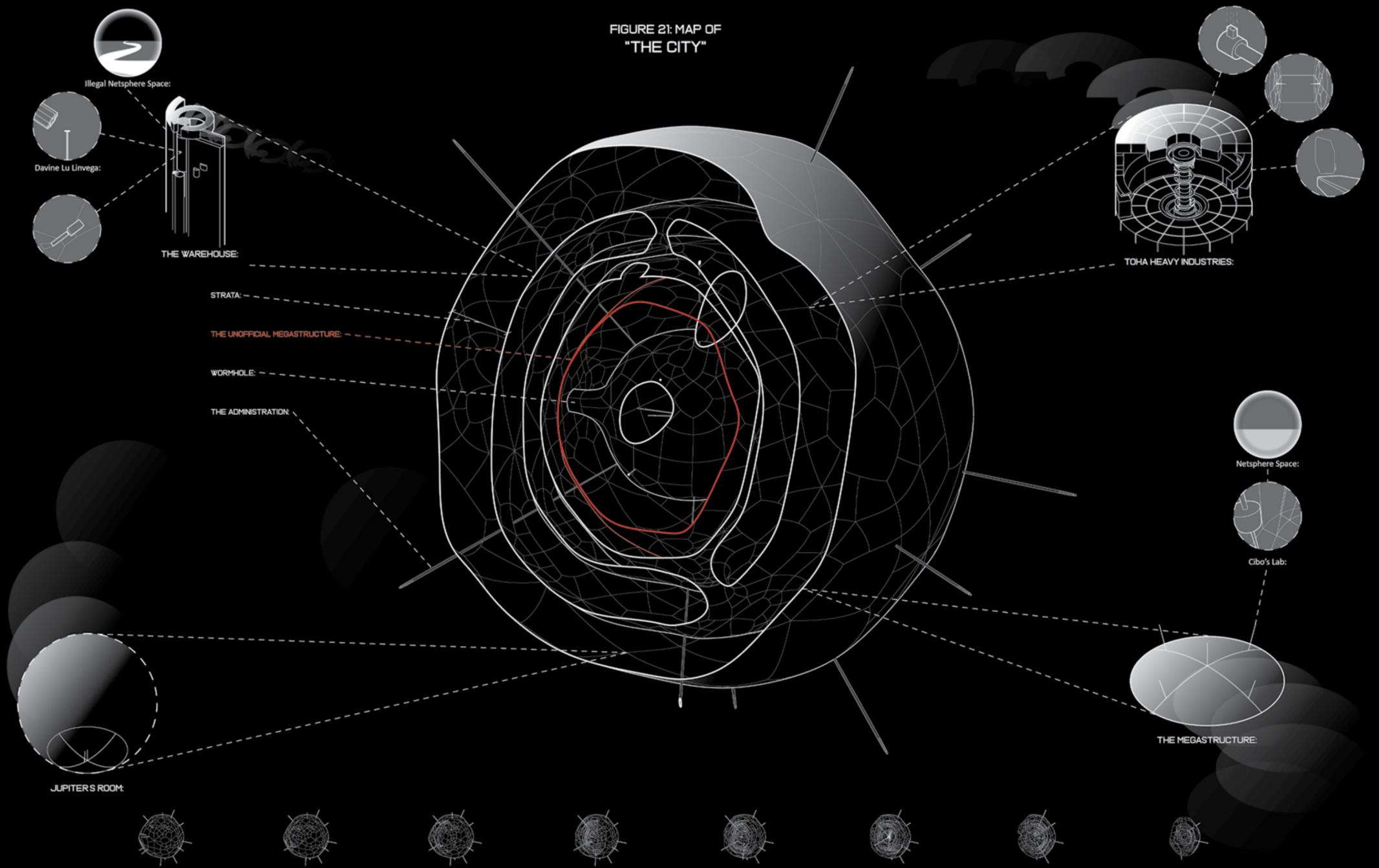
Consequently, any map of *The City* would be impermanent and immaterial. It exists only as an ever changing collage of architectural and ontological notions. These characteristics of *The City* reveal a message from the author. Nihei's message is that *untethered expansionism and over-consumption will bring about the extinction of our world, and its cities, as we know it*. The specifics of manga's story are secondary to the message the author communicates through the characteristics of *The City*.

The City is mechanical, designed and manufactured by the technological entity embodied by *The City* itself. *The City* is antagonistic, hunting and eradicating all illegal residents. *The City* is a labyrinth, its matter warping, its gravity shifting. *The City's* time and scale are inhuman: a temporality existing outside of our comprehension. *The City's* geometry is cylindrical, rectilinear, and is metaphoric of its lifelessness. The methodology of this thesis developed around understanding Nihei's *kit-of-parts*, and determining how to map *The City*, using non-traditional cartography.

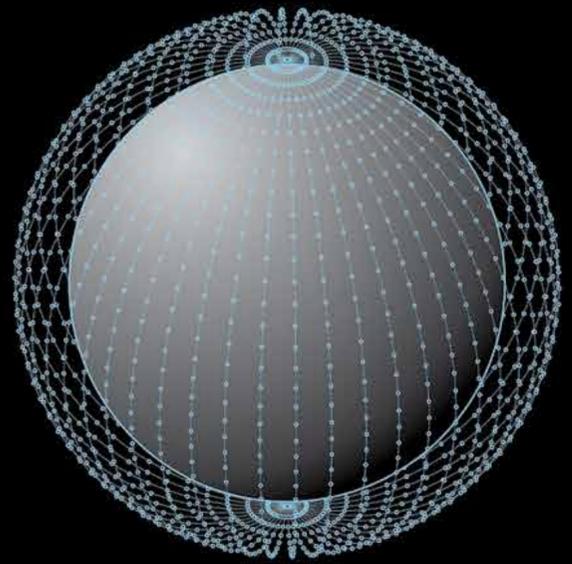


FIGURE 20: ADMINISTRATION COMANDEERS MATTER

FIGURE 21: MAP OF "THE CITY"



GBE - GRAVITY BEAM EMITER:
The Skeleton Key to The City.



THE NETSPHERE:

NIHEI TSUTOMU'S *THE CITY*:

The City began as a human creation. However, its citizens have forgotten almost everything surrounding its origins. Little more than myths, legends and hearsay remain.

The City is divided into spherical layers¹⁵, so massive they appear flat from ground level. These spherical layers, called strata, are delineated by a nigh indestructible material called mega-structure.¹⁶ Strata vary in size but are extremely large and can take upwards of a month to traverse top to bottom.¹⁷

In the origin of *The City*, citizens possessed a genetic marker known as the Net Terminal Gene.¹⁸ This marker allowed for citizens to telepathically access an immaterial network known as the NetSphere.¹⁹ This NetSphere, similar to what we know as the internet, allowed individuals to control and command *The City's* Builders.²⁰ The Builders are *The City's* hands, they are extensions of *The City's* will that build, demolish, and shape it. They are autonomous machines that vary in size dramatically and are *The City's* means of physical self-development.²¹

In order to protect its citizens, *The City* actively eliminates any foreign or invading bodies. Operating on artificial intelligence coded for it by its creators, *The City* once protected humanity, until humanity changed.

A species-wide genetic mutation occurred, and the *Net Terminal Gene* quickly faded from civilization, along with it the ability to control *The City*.²² Once citizens no longer possessed the gene to command *The City*, *The City* saw its own citizens as foreign entities that were to be eliminated. In a tragic turn of events, humanity's utopian creation betrayed its creators, and began deploying means of eliminating and eradicating humanity. All that survives of the world before are sparse tribes of refugees, Trans-Humanist cults, and rogue packs of newly evolved Silicon Life.

The City is the principal setting of the manga *BLAME!*. The story mostly follows secondary settings within this world. However, the scale of *The City* is more akin to the scale of our solar system rather than any terrestrial city we are familiar with. *The City* has grown

into an astronomically scaled, sentient mega-structure, with a heart of steel and concrete, and neurons of radio waves. Using the intelligence given to it by its own citizens, *The City* exercises its sovereign will and carries out genocide as it sees fit.

Like an organic body with each cell being replaced and rebuilt by microscopic organisms, *The City's* Builders build, demolish, and rebuild; constantly expanding. Like antibodies fighting off infection, organisms separate from the host body, Killy, Cibo, and others, survive within it. *The City* is the host body, its antibodies are Safeguards: an incredibly advanced race of humanoids who possess weapons capable of turning entire strata to dust.²³ The targeted infections are the descendants of *The City's* original citizens, now genetically mutated from their ancestors' form. The last surviving organisms are the citizens who have managed to find shelter from *The City's* efforts to eradicate impurity.

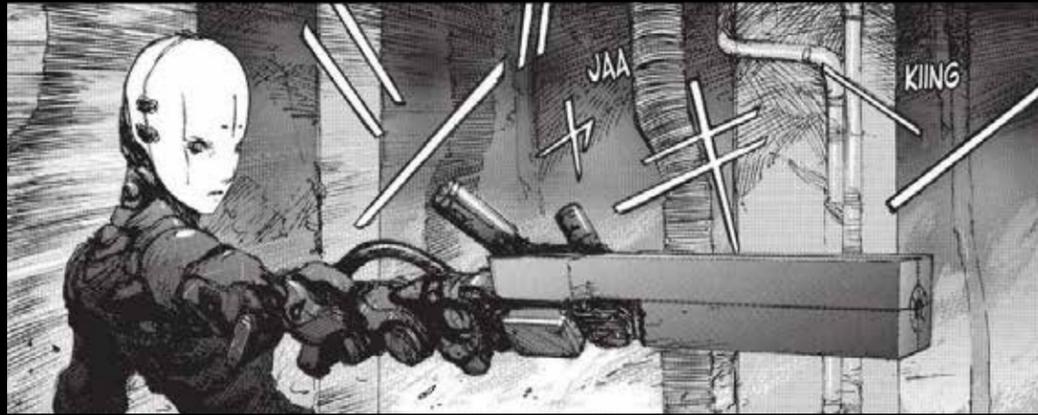


FIGURE 22: SAFEGUARD - UNNAMED

Along with *The City's* mechanical nature and hostile disposition comes a great deal of instability. Many of the things we take for granted here on earth have long vanished from the world of *BLAME!*. Matter in some strata devolves unpredictably into a primordial goo, the very atoms that comprise *The City* decaying like organic material.²⁴

Additionally, the ontology of gravity has distorted within *The City*. During the aforementioned sequence from volume 2, (Volume 2, Pg 188, 189), Nihei creatively explores gravity's affect on orientation. Nihei illustrates a sequence wherein the 4 characters we are following; Cibo, Sanakan, Pops and Sutezou proceed through 3 independently significant spaces. As they transition from Space 1, to Space 2, and to Space 3, gravity's axis rotates 90 degrees. If at first this is difficult to comprehend, it's because our own built-in balance mechanism: *the vestibular system*, evolved under the affects of earth's gravity.²⁵ Therefore to experience changing or shifting gravity is an intrinsically alien, or *in-human*, thing.

The ontology of time within *The City* is incomprehensible.

In volume 4, (Volume 4, Pg 214) Nihei inserts a simple quantitative measurement of time into his narrative. This measurement follows a scene-cut where, we as readers, jump from one set of characters to another. At the top of the page, a small narration bubble (something rarely used by Nihei) reads: "2,244,096 hours later". That's two million, two hundred and forty-four thousand, and ninety-eight hours, which is equivalent to 256.18 years. Nihei could have just as easily written "256 years later" but opted for the longer "2,244,096 hours later", as if to illustrate his intention of making time incomprehensible. If one were to stack on top of each other **one million** one-dollar bills, the height would measure 358 feet, 109 meters, or approximately the height of a 30-35 storey building.²⁶ One million one dollar bills, each as thick as a sheet or paper, are as tall as Big Ben. The concept of "a million" exists far beyond our comprehension as human beings, let alone as a measure of the passing of time within *The City*.

The example of the Z-axis-shift from volume 2, (Pg 188, 189), is just one instance where Nihei shows the reader that orientation is constantly changing

in *The City*. When paired with the ontological characteristics of time, like the quantitative example from volume 4, (Pg 214) the disorienting effects multiply. A lot can unfold during a million hours, and there is no way to determine how frequently these colossal time-jumps happen throughout the novel. *The City's* incomprehensible **time** and irrational **gravity** yields an untraceable path of travel through *The City*, and an overwhelming sense of **disorientation**.

Lastly, *The City* has no horizon. There are no points of reference: no sunrise and sunset to mark the passing of time: no clear delineation of up and down, or any of the cardinal directions. *The City* is a deep labyrinth devoid of almost all things that are integral to the human experience. The only device used to orient characters in *The City*, an instrument fitting of the hostile and destructive nature of this world, is Killy's Gravity Beam Emitter. The Gravity Beam Emitter, or GBE, is a small hand-held pistol that uses gravity manipulation technology to emit a blast so powerful that it can pierce through the prison-like layers of mega-structure. The GBE's blast follows a perfectly straight path of travel and is

the master key to *The City*. The only device for direction and orientation is a weapon of mass destruction that fits into one's pocket.

The narrative of *BLAME!* is superfluous and inconsequential. Killy, the story's protagonist and guiding force, spends 6 volumes totaling 2,158 pages, wandering in search of a genetic marker that has presumably vanished from existence. At the series' finale, upon seeing the embryo introduced in volume 6 now fully grown into a child, the reader is led to believe that perhaps Killy's mission was a success. This embryo contained the Net Terminal Gene. The logical conclusion to seeing that the embryo has developed into a child is that the child would also possess the Net Terminal Gene. However, nothing definitive ever comes of his quest, as this child is only shown on the final, concluding page of the series, contained within a single panel. Nihei's superfluous narrative is reflected in the insignificance of Killy's journey.

The City, developed and created for humanity, grew well beyond a comfortable scale, and

enveloped and enclosed our solar system. For tens of thousands of years *The City* has expanded at an accelerated rate, uncontrolled and unchecked, consuming and reshaping all things in its path, in its own image. It hunts humanity to near extinction and expands and shapes itself using fragmented memories of its original purpose. Its terrain is hostile and mechanical, and its reality-fabric is unstable and deteriorating. The only purpose for *The City's* inhabitants to carry on, is to survive.

15 "City," *Blame!* Wiki, accessed November 4, 2020, <https://blame.fandom.com/wiki/City>.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Tsutomu Nihei, *Blame!*, Master Edition, vol. 1, 6 vols. (NY, New York: Vertical Comics, 2016).

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 "Net Terminal Genes," *Blame!* Wiki, accessed March 27, 2021, https://blame.fandom.com/wiki/Net_Terminal_Genes.

23 Tsutomu Nihei, *Blame!*, Master Edition, vol. 2, 6 vols. (NY, New York: Vertical Comics, 2016).

24 Tsutomu Nihei, *Blame!*, Master Edition, vol. 3, 6 vols. (NY, New York: Vertical Comics, 2016).

25 "Human Ear - The Physiology of Balance: Vestibular Function | Britannica," accessed April 29, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/science/ear/The-physiology-of-balance-vestibular-function>.

26 "Grasping Large Numbers," accessed March 26, 2021, https://www.ehd.org/science_technology_largenumbers.php.

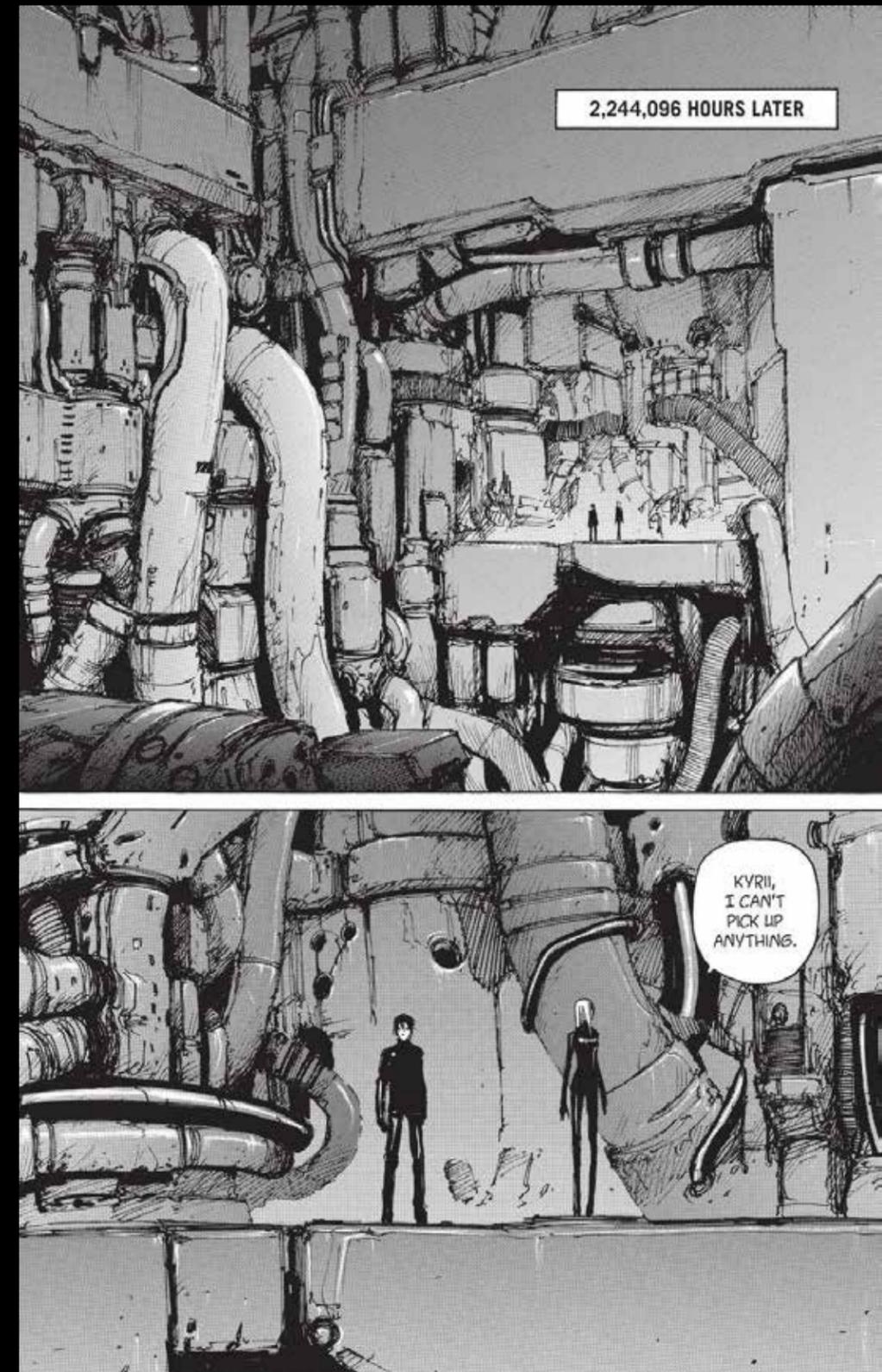


FIGURE 23: ETERNALIST TIME



FIGURE 24: SAFEGUARD - SANAKAN

ARCHITECTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF *THE CITY*:

With the presentation of his city, Nihei's creates several issues that not only impede the citizens of *The City* from exercising their own will and agency over it, but that also prevent *The City* from resembling anything we might be familiar with on earth as a city.

ISSUE 1: ASTRONOMICAL SCALE

The scale of *The City* is astronomical. Astronomical units, or AU, are a system of measurement developed to better quantify distances and measurements between planets.²⁷ These distances are so immense that our terrestrial systems of measurement, imperial and metric, cannot quantify them. 1 AU is the mean distance between the earth and the sun.²⁸ The diameter of *The City* is likely close to 1,921.56 AU²⁹, which is the diameter of our solar system. An exchange between Killy and a neutral Silicon Life in Volume 6, (Volume 6, Pg 84), implies that *The City* has expanded well beyond the limits of Jupiter's planetary orbit.³⁰ The human scale is the past: something forgotten. Machines designed and built so much of this world that any attempt humanity may make

to exercise their will over their environment is futile. In a city the size of our solar system, human scale has all but been erased from memory.

The City's infinite expanses coupled with its genocidal mission creates vast emptiness. The Safeguards actively erase humanity while the mechanical nature of this universe makes it next to impossible for any organic life to prosper. There is the occasional mammalian creature, or the odd plant growing in between the cracks of steel and concrete, but biological life's sparsity punctuates *The City's* emptiness.

A city must possess human scale. From the width of streets to the height of rooms and the size of buildings, we must design every aspect of a city with the human scale as its basis.

ISSUE 2: STERILITY

As *The City* is almost entirely devoid of life, it is sterile. *The City* lacks warmth, natural light, biological life, colour, and natural, organic forms. Nihei goes to great lengths to illustrate this sterility. For example, in Volume 1 (Volume 1, Pg 165) Killy comes across the lone

survivor of a recent safeguard massacre. In this scene, the protagonist converses with and agrees to help the injured survivor, all while surrounded by piles of bodies. A common theme in Nihei's work are these happenstance encounters with the effects of *The City's* hostility, rather than the affects of its hostility. Nihei does this to emphasize just how little life exists within *The City*. However, a city cannot exist without life.

Neuroarchitecture, a field of architecture that considers human perception of a space, closely approximates an antithesis to *The City*. Neuroarchitecture examines human perception on a neurological level before designing the built environment, and imbuing it with life. Neuroarchitecture is best described in the following quote; "Architects and neuroscientists work together to design places where everything is determined by how the brains of its occupants work, from the distribution of the space to the colour of the walls."³¹

An article by FINSA outlines what they believe to be some keys to understanding Neuroarchitecture:



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FIGURE 25: WARPING MATTER

Temperature: “a well-balanced temperature is important for creating comfortable surroundings, given that our brain is very sensitive to sudden temperature changes which may impede cognitive performance and, on an emotional level, result in hostility.”³²

Lighting: “insufficient lighting can change our circadian rhythms, but the level and temperature of the colour also affect our mood and activity. While an intense, white light activates our brains, warm lighting reduces stress.”³³

Plants: “styles such as biophilic or ecological design are based on evidence regarding the beneficial effect that green surroundings and natural materials have on our health.”³⁴

Colours: “each colour acts on a different area of our brain and affects our mood. Thanks to science, we have discovered that pink calms our nerves and reduces anger, while warm colours improve productivity and concentration, making them ideal for work environments.”³⁵

Scents: “our sense of smell is one that is often forgotten in architecture, but the right scent can enhance a space. For example, natural scents encourage relaxation.”³⁶

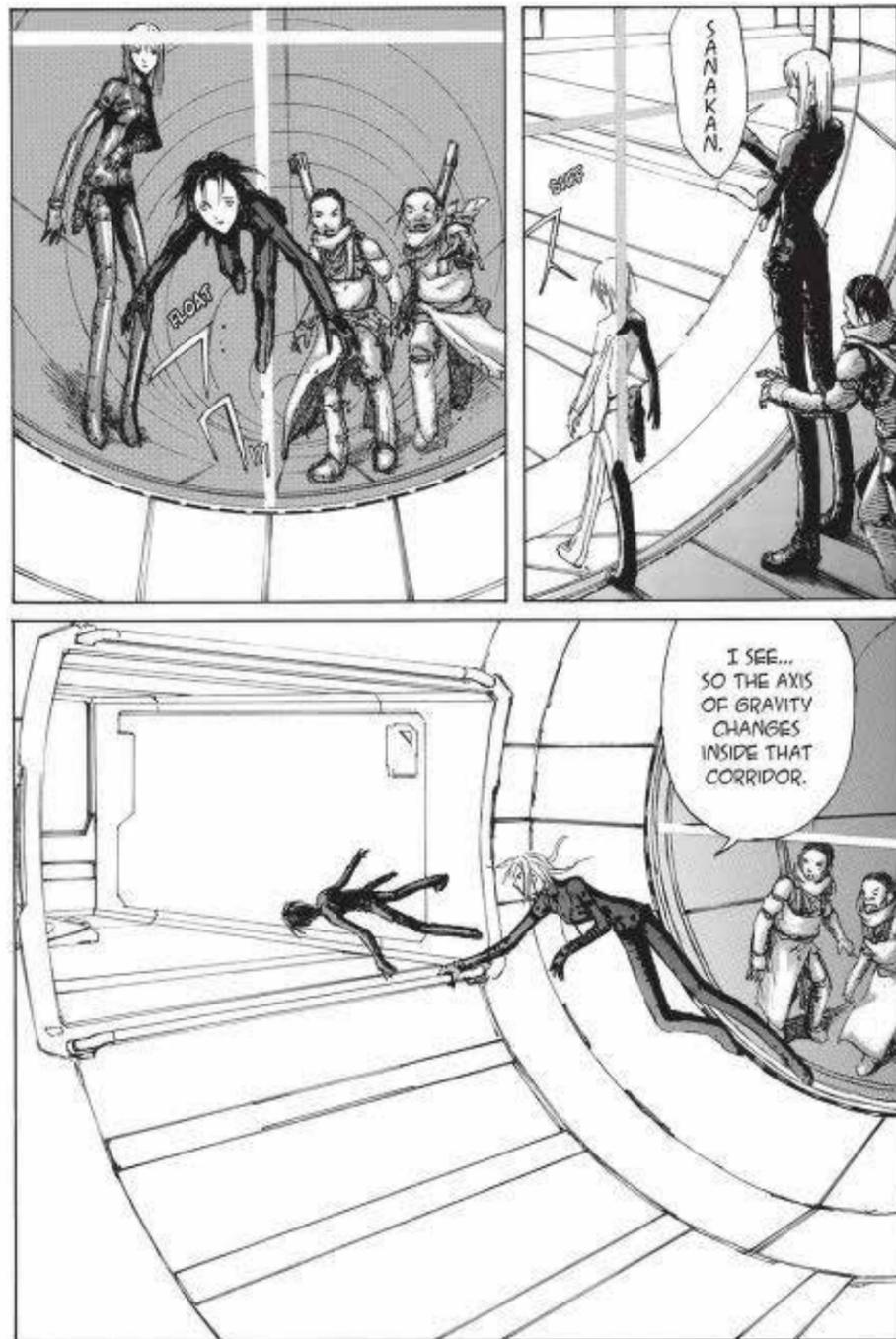
Curves: “rounded edges help us relax more than sharp angles.”³⁷

We must imbue a city with life, and not just human life. The symbioses that the human species exists alongside plant life and mammalian life is integral to a well-designed city. However, *The City* proposed by Nihei is devoid of almost every element that might be fertile. While there may be artificial lighting in *The City*, the sun was likely consumed and re-purposed for *The City's* expansion. Natural light is no longer a plausible reality of *The City*. As stated before, plant life is essential to the built environment, but Nihei's built environment almost completely does away with plant life. Colours, scents, and curves are all things that are foreign to *The City* as well, and the temperature of a concrete and steel cage floating through the unforgiving void of space is likely less than comfortable.

ISSUE 4: IMMATERIALITY

Warping matter, a phenomenon seen across *The City*, only appears over the course of a few panels, but is quite revealing of the reality of *The City*. A sequence from Volume 3, (Volume 3, Pg 192), shows Cibo and Killy standing on a large platform that fades into the distance. Its appearance in terms of materiality is much the same as other significant settings of the series. Yet the very first panel of this sequence illustrates the ground turning *soft*, with an audible “squish”. Cibo, notes this and states: “The matter has started to warp.” The 2 characters leave this setting with haste, implying that warping matter is an added danger. The implication is, among everything else, that the very fabric of reality in *The City* is mutable and subject to physical distortion.

The NetSphere is a space integral to *The City*, but of which little is known. We know that possessors of the Net Terminal Gene could access the NetSphere in ancient times, and that the hardware that supports the NetSphere is built into the mega-structure of *The City*. The NetSphere Space, as far as we know, is a heaven-like, digital utopia. Much like



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FIGURE 26: READING ORIENTATION

how heaven is the reward for earthly tribulations to followers of Abrahamic religions, the NetSphere Space is freedom from the prison of the iron labyrinth. However, to ascend to the NetSphere Space would not only require one to possess the Net Terminal Gene, but would also require the sacrifice of all things real and tangible.

These gestures of warping matter and an intangible, alternative reality, further impede our hero's efforts to save the people of *The City*. The existence of the NetSphere Space, which can be compared to the Christian afterlife, presents an issue of morality: should our hero free the citizens of *The City* by destroying it, or should he free these citizens by finding a means through which they could ascend to the NetSphere Space? Even if they can restore *The City* to human control, what becomes of the NetSphere? As the fabric of *The City* continues to distort, the integrity of the NetSphere Space grows increasingly threatened.

ISSUE 4: SENTIENCE & HOSTILITY

A city must be sentient, but the sentience driving the

development of city blocks and public spaces must ultimately be human autonomy, because what is a city if not a higher level of human civilization?

A sentient city is a hostile city, at least in the case of *The City*. The only intelligence that *The City* has to use as a basis for its operations is the artificial intelligence conceived and encoded into it by prehistoric humanity. The ability to turn against genetically mutated human beings, the autonomy to deploy bounty hunter-like Safeguards, and the directive to expand endlessly are all oversights that stem from the very beginnings of *The City*. Even in strata where Builders are less active and small groups of human beings have been able to slowly, over eons, build some kind of functioning society, the risk of Builders or Safeguards returning and reshaping the sector always looms overhead.

The City's disorientation, inhuman scale, its sterility, immateriality, sentience, and hostility are all factors that produce a city that is unrecognizable as a contemporary, human-scaled city. A world without orientation

is a world without a foundation for settlements, for cities, or for architecture to be built on. A world without human scale, complex symbiotic relationships across multiple species, or the ability for humanity to exercise their will over their environment in any way is hardly a city at all.

These factors give rise to a world that is cold, harsh, apocalyptic. A world without human intervention, human agency or any kind of human autonomy yields a hostile, mechanical, and confused wasteland. The insurmountable odds that human beings face if they are to reassert their agency in *The City* begins with these factors.

27 "What Is an Astronomical Unit? | EarthSky.Org," accessed March 27, 2021, <https://earthsky.org/space/what-is-the-astronomical-unit>.

28 Ibid.

29 "City," *Blame!* Wiki, accessed November 4, 2020, <https://blame.fandom.com/wiki/City>.

30 Tsutomu Nihei, *Blame!*, Master Edition, vol. 6, 6 vols. (NY, New York: Vertical Comics, 2016).

31 FINSA, "Connections by FINSA," *Connections by FINSA*, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.connectionsbyfinsa.com/neuroarchitecture/?lang=en>.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

THE MEANING OF BLAME!

The world is growing. It took 200 million years of human history before the global population reached 1 billion, in 1804.³⁸ The global population is expected to reach 10 billion by the year 2050.³⁹ The only way to sustain this kind of population growth, assuming we survive climate change, is with cities, and the world is becoming more *city*. People are moving out of rural areas and into cities faster than ever before,⁴⁰ and the COVID-19 Pandemic has highlighted many of the flaws of our cities.⁴¹

In China, there are an estimated 50 municipalities that stand almost entirely empty, some unfinished, some fully fledged metropolises.⁴² As China continues to experience economic growth, the government rushes to urbanize massive rural areas.⁴³ For example, the Kangbashi District, City of Ordos, inner Mongolia, makes much of its profit from the coal industry boom.⁴⁴ Originally planned to house over one million people, this 90,000-acre city on the edge of the Gobi Desert currently houses less than 100,000.⁴⁵ China used more cement in its construction of new

cities between 2011 to 2013 than the entire United States in the 20th century.⁴⁶ It's estimated that in China, 50 million apartments sit empty.⁴⁷

As cities, or *ghost cities*, continue to develop without inhabitants, global debt, both financially and environmentally, continues to balloon. As humanity moves more towards a global city, the conversation surrounding the agency that shapes our cities grows increasingly pertinent. The world is becoming a *global city*, and the *city* is becoming more disoriented.

Nihei's critical message to the readers of *BLAME!* is that the current rate of development in our contemporary cities is both irresponsible and chaotic. The agency that resulted in Nihei's dystopian city is the same agency that drives the construction of the aforementioned ghost cities in China. Not only is the health of our cities at risk, but the integrity of the field of architecture is being challenged by overly ambitious developers who operate on a financial model, as opposed to a more human-centric model.

Through his work, Nihei suggests that untethered expansionism and over-consumption very well may bring about the extinction of life as we know it. More and more our society grows aware of the importance of culture, history and biophilia to the architectural practice, and yet more and more cities are designed using economic models. As the role of *human agency* in designing our cities slowly takes a back seat to *monetary gain*, the practical application of building is being distorted and forgotten. The accumulative effect of this may look more like Nihei's dystopian future than we realize.

³⁸ "It's Been 20 Years since the Day of 6 Billion | Human World | EarthSky," accessed April 22, 2021, <https://earthsky.org/human-world/this-date-in-science-6-billion-humans-and-counting>.

³⁹ "World's Population Will Continue to Grow and Will Reach Nearly 10 Billion by 2050," accessed April 22, 2021, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/worlds-population-will-continue-grow-and-will-reach-nearly-10-billion-2050>.

⁴⁰ "Coronavirus Hasn't Killed the City. Here's Why," World Economic Forum, accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/09/inclusive-cities-post-pandemic/>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Natasha Ishak, "Inside The Ghost Cities Of China That Feel Like An Eerie, Futuristic Dystopia," All That's Interesting, April 28, 2019, <https://allthatsinteresting.com/chinese-ghost-cities>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.



FIGURE 27: ZHENG MEIJU - NAIL HOUSE

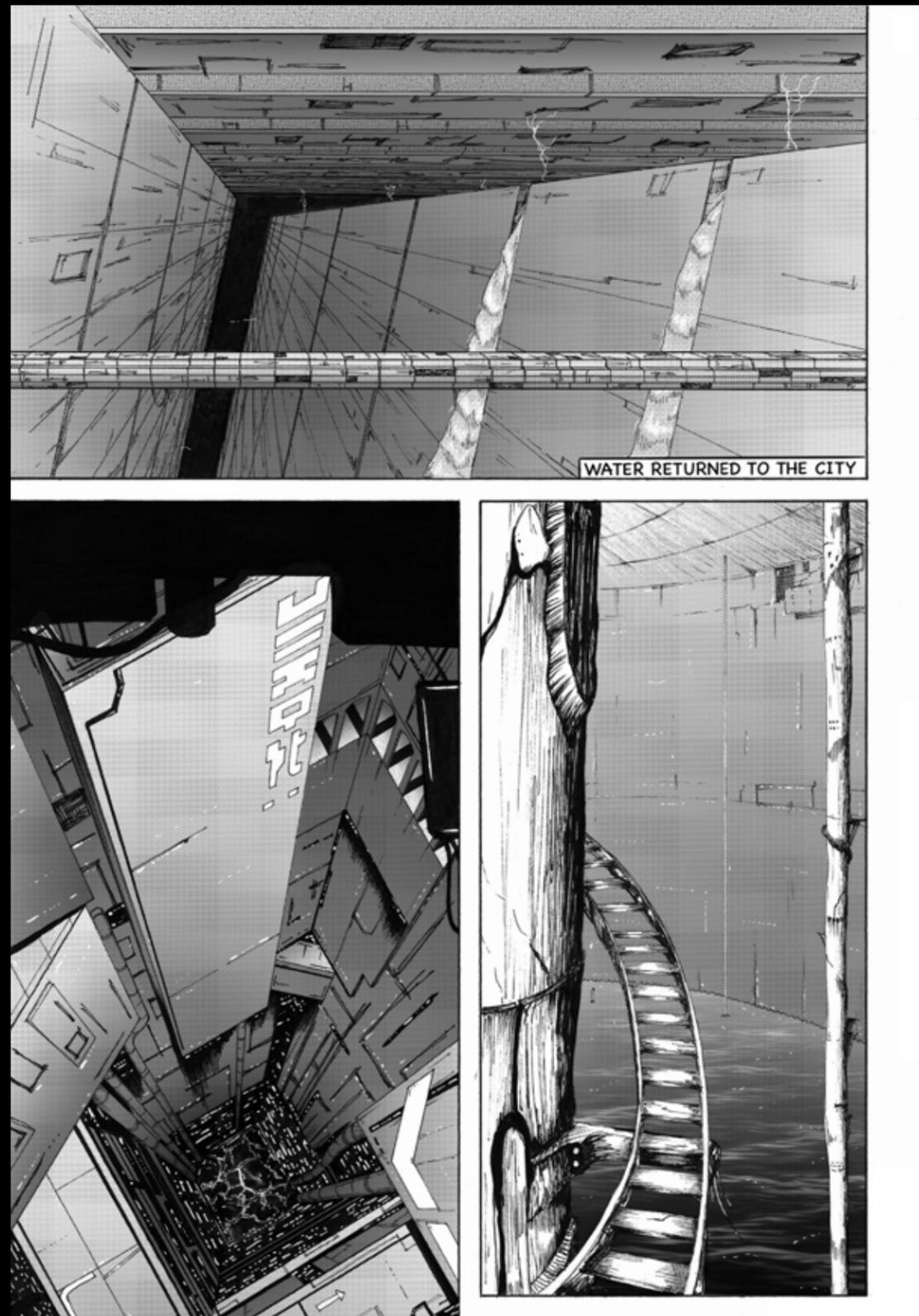


FIGURE 28: WATER IN THE NEW CITY

DESIGN PROPOSAL:

The objective of this design proposal is to, under the preconditions set by Nihei, alter the ontology of *The City* in order for humanity to reassert their agency into it.

The thesis work conducted during semester one, summarized as concisely as possible: I conducted a thorough examination of *BLAME!*, and from that examination created a map that captured the essence of Nihei's world. The thesis work conducted during semester two, put in the same terms, was to create an addition to the story of *BLAME!* using the medium it was conceived through, and to analyse it similarly. Using the information extracted from the examination and the information produced by my intervention, I created core sample drawings of my work, and second map.

Much about this world would need to change before humanity could reassert their agency into it. A city without human intervention is a city without purpose. A city without orientation, human scale, without time or gravity, is hardly a city at all. Time and gravity are givens, but a city needs orientation. In fact a city begins

with orientation and is then developed using human-scale. *The City*, the largest artificial structure in the universe, doesn't even meet the basic definition of a city. Because this city, *The City*, is a city only by technicality. Too vast to have borders and too disoriented to have any sense of place, *The City* is more akin to our observable universe, something that contains every knowable form of reality and life: a **universal** city. Again, part of the reason it's not a veritable city is because of its size. The scale of *The City* is nothing like human scale, it's alien, a concept so foreign that any effort to comprehend it is futile.

How will humanity reassert their agency into this world? The significant events that need to take place in order to reclaim *The City* are:

- halt the expansion of *The City*
- introduce agents of change to *The City*
- restore time
- restore gravity
- give this new changing world motivation
- re-orient this world, and finally,
- redefine the idea of city

Only after humanity reaches these milestones might they begin to rebuild in this new world.

HALTING *THE CITY*:

The autonomous, chaotic expansion of *The City* is one of the biggest impediments to the reassertion of human agency in this world. The size and scale of *The City*, along with its constantly changing shape are directly responsible for its disorientation. In order to reassert human agency, *The City* must reach an end.

In this new world, a quieter world with far more consistency, *The City* would begin to transform. Out of the unforgiving void of *The City* would arise *The New City*. In this new world, the child shown on the final, concluding page of Nihei's series, who possesses the net terminal gene, is able to access the NetSphere and could halt the expansion of *The City*. Born from the embryo created by Cibo and Sanakan, and fertilized using illegal level 9 safeguard protocols, this child is the first being in eons to be born with the Net Terminal Gene.

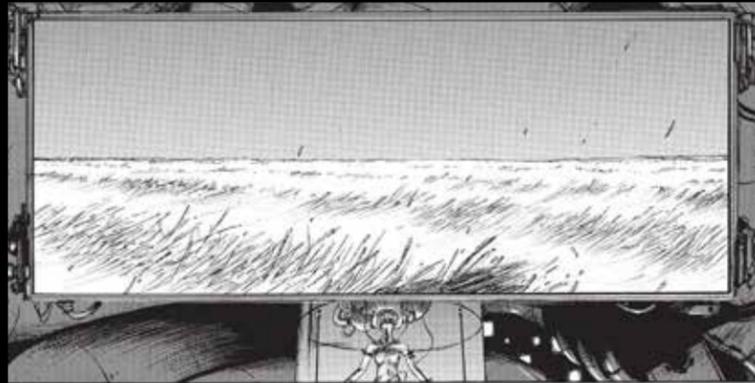


FIGURE 29: THE NETSPHERE SPACE

By halting *The City I* would remove the threat of a malevolent entity pursuing and attempting to eliminate our characters. The agency that shapes this new world would contrast the malevolent agency of *The City*, and would resemble like the dawn of civilization. Humanity could now, to some small degree, feel safe to reassert their agency in this stoned-aged, mechanical world. The primary architect of *The City* would cease to be *The City* itself.

INTRODUCE AGENTS OF CHANGE TO *THE CITY*:

Before humanity could re-inhabit *The City*, this world would require an actuating event; an event that triggers a subsequent chain of events that redefine The New City. As Nihei's city is sterile and hostile, an actuating event that brings with it an explosion

of new life would be the most apt solution. Nihei repeatedly highlights in his work that *The City* is devoid of life, however, water is already present within *The City*, albeit only in limited quantities.

Therefore, I propose introducing rising water into *The City*. This actuator could allow humanity to reassert their agency into Nihei's world by, over the course of time, shifting the the ontology of *The City* from cold, hostile, and malevolent, to warm, teeming with life, and benevolent. Water could erode the concrete and steel of *The City* and transform its chemical makeup. Settling into new valleys and crevasses, water would carry the nutrients extracted from the highly refined materials of *The City* and spread them, introducing and propagating new

life throughout. The rising nature of the water is integral to many of the milestones I've outlined.

RESTORE TIME:

In a world without a sun, without an earth that orbits it, and without a moon, how does one restore time? Water would rise throughout the still city, presumably at a fixed rate, therefore rising water could be what restores time to this world. Rising water would give the inhabitants of this world a reference point: their distance from the water level, and time: the speed at which the water rises.

Using the widely available technology of *The City*, many inhabitants would develop devices that track the rising of the water. These devices would monitor the water level to

ensure one is not caught in a trap created by the rising water. More importantly, inhabitants of The New City could track the rate at which water rises. Time on earth is measured by the turning of the planet and the earth's orbit of the sun. Time in The New City would be measured in meters of rising water, and a clock would track the water level, rather than the hours of the day.

RESTORE GRAVITY:

The City in its current state has no horizon. At no point does the sky meet the land, as there is no sky or land. There is simply endless cityscape. Gravity shifts its axis on a whim,. There is no comprehensible way to trace one's path through *The City*. With the presence of rising water in The New City, a horizon would emerge. Rather than extending into the distance and vanishing, this horizon would climb upwards vertically through The New City. Rising water would give all inhabitants of *The City* a "down", and would restore orientation. In The New City, universal orientation would restore gravity's orientation.

FIGURE 30: *THE CITY*

IMBUE THE NEW CITY WITH AGENCY:

The humans of this world would need a purpose, a reason to reassert their agency. Something beyond escaping *The City*, as escaping something so incomprehensibly massive is simply impossible and beyond imagination. Rising water, while a blessing, would also be a real danger. Most of The New City's inhabitants have never seen

water before, and even fewer are familiar with the concept of swimming. Rising water is simply something that needs to be escaped. For any living inhabitant, anyone left who might exercise their agency and reshape *The City*, moving upwards is mandatory. Rising water would restore time, gravity, and would give a purpose to all living beings. Move up, or perish.

RE-ORIENT THIS WORLD & RE-DEFINE CITY:

A city, a large settlement defined by a border, would fail to serve its purpose in this world. By definition, for a city to exist in The New City, it could not have a fixed place or static walls. As Joseph Rykwert's states in *The Idea of Town: a city begins with and must have orientation and a boundary.*⁴⁸ As explained above: water, rising through *The City*, could reorient it. All forms of settlement, towns, villages, and sub-cities, must orient themselves vertically and must move upward. Where it was once a disoriented labyrinth, *The City* would now have at least one point of reference. However, the notion of a moving city presents many other hurdles. These hurdles signal a need to redefine the idea of a city from a place with borders, to a place with people.

We can trace the etymology of the word city back to the Latin *civis*, meaning citizen.⁴⁹ It is a place's citizens that truly define it as a city. Citizens bring culture, society, language, biology, and sentience to a city. A city of this proposed new world aligns with this conceptual definition of a city as a place with people.

Nomadism would define all cities, towns, villages, and

settlements of The New City. At every scale, settlements would climb upwards. The culture these citizens would bring with themselves, their society and languages, would all develop around climbing nomadism.



FIGURE 31: TRANSHUMANISM

⁴⁸ Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy, and the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Princeton University Press, 1964).

⁴⁹ "City | Origin and Meaning of City by Online Etymology Dictionary," accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/city>.

PART 2 - DESIGN WORK:

Non-traditional site analysis, the site analysis I've conducted for the manga *BLAME!*, requires that I conduct non-traditional architectural design. As stated in Part 1, a contribution to Nihei's work of theoretical architecture

must be situated and executed as a comic. By using the same visual storytelling methods as Nihei, I've garnered several short stories that exist within the world of *BLAME!*. These stories, or *episodes*, visually demonstrate

the changes that have begun in *The City*, and the ways in which humanity has slowly re-appropriated and re-purposed their environments.



FIGURE 32: MATERIALS

ACCESSING THE NETSPHERE:

The first story follows the child from the final pages of *BLAME!* as she enters, for the first time in eons, the NetSphere Space. Born from the sacrificial efforts of Cibo and Sanakan,

the child is the first human in tens of thousands of years to be born, albeit artificially, with the Net Terminal Gene. Once she was ready, the child entered the NetSphere Space with the objective of halting the expansion of *The City*. Upon

speaking with the Administration, the entity that once oversaw the safety and expansion of *The City*, the child halted its expansion. This is the first event that will begin to alter the ontology of Nihei's world.



FIGURE 33: NETSPHERE PG1



FIGURE 34: NETSPHERE PG2



FIGURE 35: NETSPHERE PG3



FIGURE 36: NETSPHERE PG4

INTRODUCING AGENTS OF CHANGE:

Now that *The City* lays dormant, water begins to return to *The City*, and in greater quantities than before. Waterfalls and flowing rivers carve away at the harsh, industrial landscape of this world, and began to form

new lakes, pools, and ponds. These new bodies of water are filled with nutrients extracted from the landscape of *The City*, which would fuel any aquatic life that might evolved, or that might have evolved already. This

aquatic life, likely plant based, would further alter the landscape of *The City*. The erosion from moving water would only be accelerated upon introducing living organisms into The New City's bodies of water.

RESTORING TIME AND GRAVITY:

The return of water, specifically rising water, would bring with it a means to tell time, and a horizon with which

to orient oneself. Restoring time and gravity, which rising water would do, would finally provide a foundation on which settlements,

cities, and architecture could be rethought by this new era of civilization.

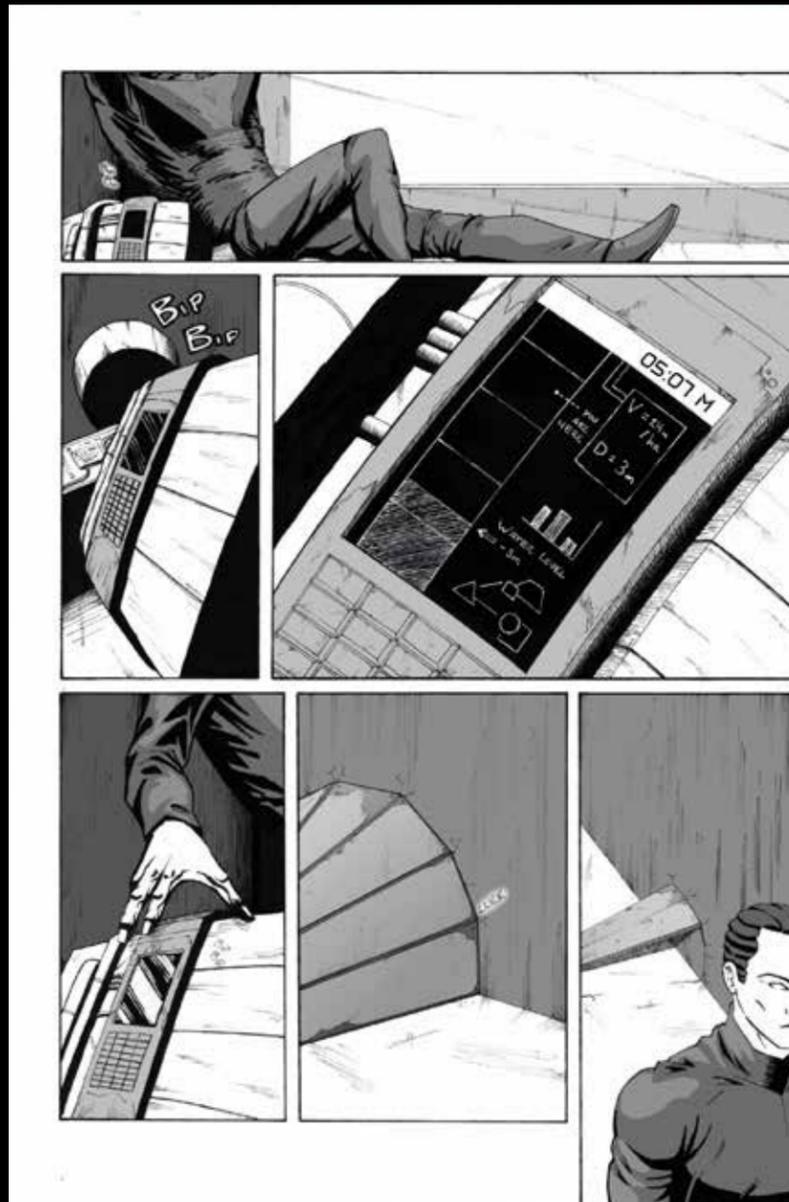


FIGURE 37: WATERCLOCK PG1



FIGURE 38: THE TILT PG1



FIGURE 39: THE TILT PG2

AGENCY:

Rising water would allow for the citizens of The New City to finally develop their own sentience, and exercise their own agency over their environment. Imbued with purpose, the citizens of The New City share a common goal: to climb. This

purpose would define the form of all architecture within *The City*. Using narrative to drive the contents of my intervention, I've created this collection of short stories. Some are several pages

long, most are one to two, and each one addresses one or more of the changes I propose to make to Nihei's city, in order to reassert human agency into his world.

REVIEW:

EPISODIC DRAWING:

The narrative of my intervention into *BLAME!* drove the creation of these comic stories, which represent episodic, serialized architectural events. Serializing architecture, that is transforming theoretical architecture from single, static images into a collection of stills

that together simulate the flow of time, adds a temporal dimension to architecture. Architecture is inherently spatial, and so is time. Time is a spatial dimension, not in the sense that it can be physically felt or measured, but rather time is a *quantity used to measure*

*the changing location of 3-dimensional objects in space.*⁵⁰ Time also measures the quality of 3-dimensional objects, namely, time is used to measure the decay of our cities and buildings, and determine their lifespan.

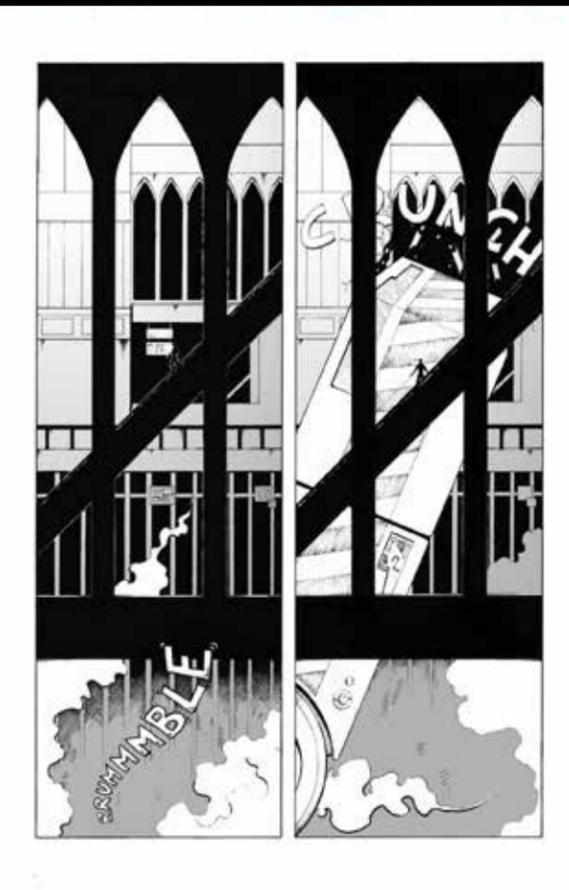


FIGURE 40: CLIMBER PG1

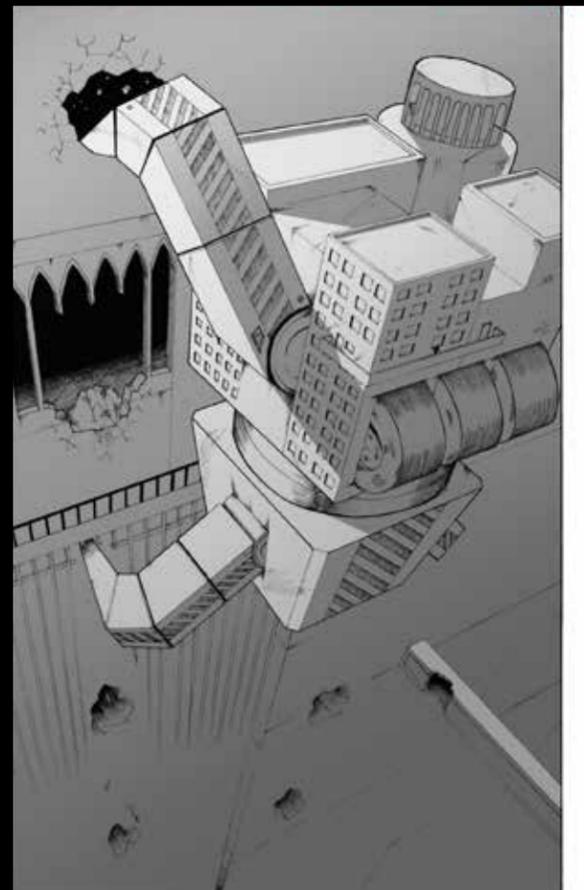


FIGURE 41: CLIMBER PG2



FIGURE 42: BELAY PG1



FIGURE 43: BELAY PG2

As with *BLAME!*, my comic stories possess patterns, both intentional and fortuitous. By imbuing theoretical architecture with the dimension of time, theoretical architects create

space wherein temporal patterns are allowed to emerge. By imbuing the architectural language of my thesis work with the added dimension of time, these episodic drawings provide

a space for temporal patterns to emerge, where a much deeper analysis of the architectural consequences of narrative can be made.

CORE SAMPLE DRAWINGS:

Core sample drawings are similar to contemporary architectural drawings. Architectural drawings in the contemporary architectural practice are largely comprised of detailed technical drawings that illustrate the dimensions, connections, and technicalities of architectural designs. These core sample drawings flesh-out some of the details of the architectural typologies that emerged as a consequence of the changes I propose making into Nihei's city. They provide this thesis with a comprehensive understanding of the *physical make up*, the *social positioning*, and the *greater context* of these architectural typologies.

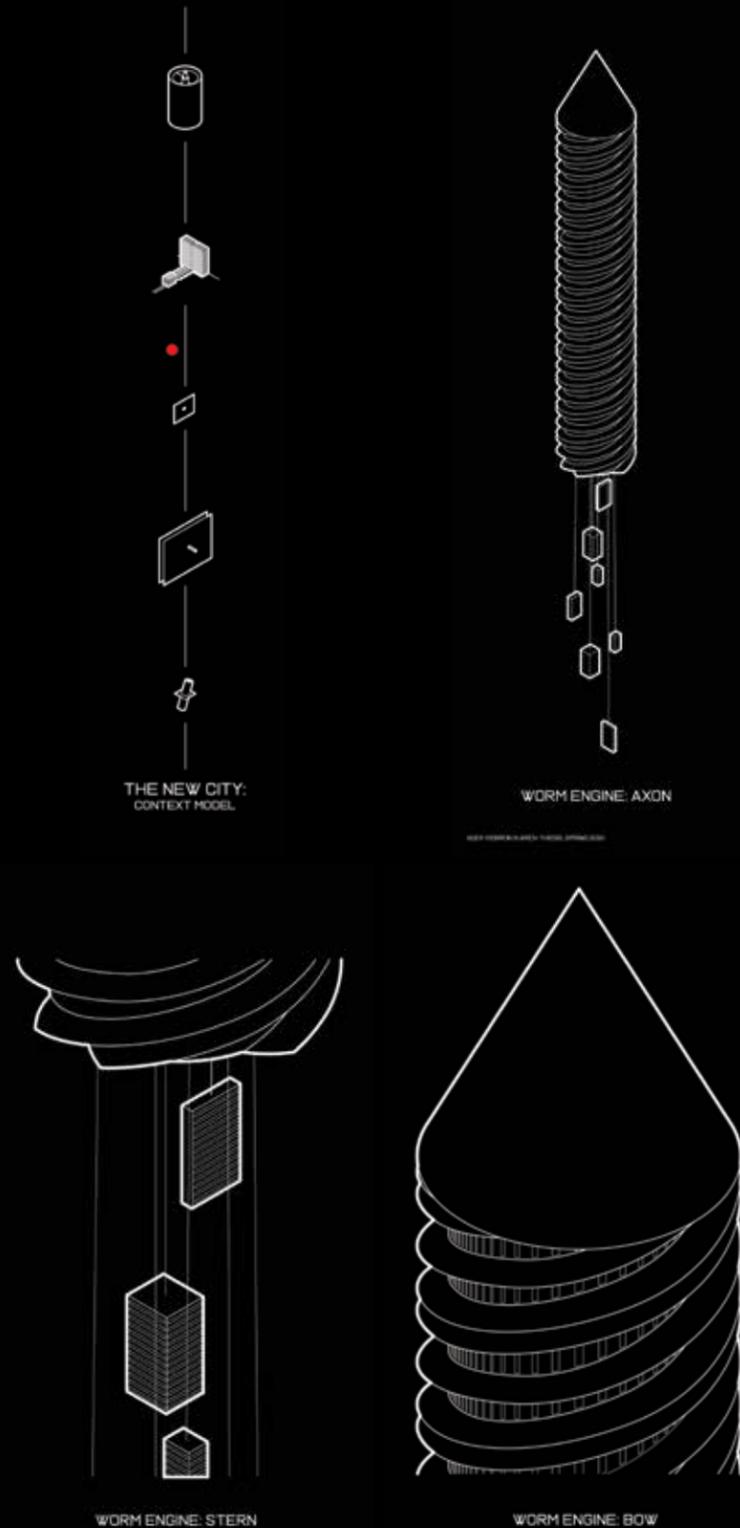


FIGURE 44: CORE SAMPLE DRAWING

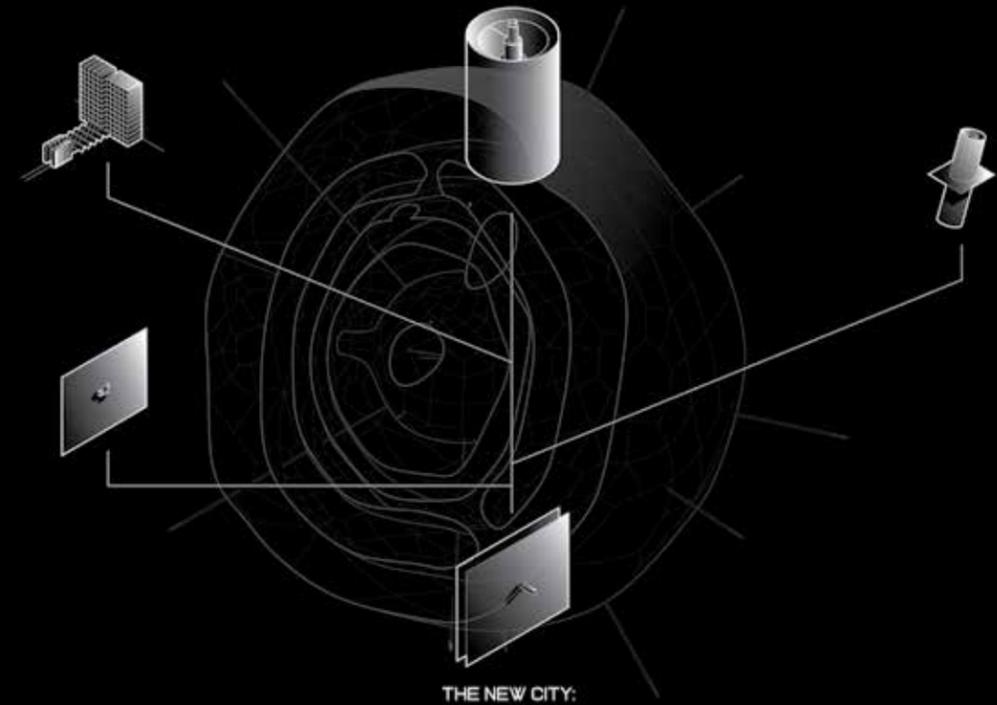


FIGURE 45: MAP 2 - THE NEW CITY

MAP 2 - THE NEW CITY:

The world of *BLAME!*, under the conditions of my proposed changes, would develop new characteristics. These characteristics would reshape *The City* proposed by Nihei, and redefine the purpose of its inhabitants. Using the various settings from my intervention, settings that exist to illustrate the changes made in this world, I created the second map. This map is a collection of vertically

oriented settings which are ordered based on the events that occur in each. For example, water is rising through *The City*. A setting that has water exists below every other setting that doesn't. Or a setting that is newly re-oriented exists below a setting that isn't. Imagine the reorienting process as a wave that travels slowly up through *The City*, as the herald of the rising water.

This map represents the ontology of my proposed world,

an ontology that is primarily dependant on the ontology of *BLAME!*. The events of this world all share the same orientation and direction, but their exact locations are still mostly arbitrary. *The City* remains so vast that to pinpoint the location of each event or story is impossible. This collection of significant events and settings is the legend to the ontology of my comic.

THE GLOBAL CITY:

As the global city approaches, so does a reality wherein technology and the world's population have grown and advanced beyond what most could ever predict. In this globalized world, what form will our cities take? Nihei proposes a future which mirrors a cold, labyrinth-like prison. A city so lifeless and massive that it would be more accurate to refer to it as *The Universe*. In this future, humanity's faith in technology is their downfall. However, as climate change continues to worsen, technology may be the only chance humanity has for survival.

Technology has changed as a gruelingly slow pace for hundreds of millions of years of human evolution, and within the past couple decades alone we've witnessed more technological advancements than all our hundreds of millions of years of evolution combined.

For example, the first stone hammer, which was little more than a specialized stone, developed 3.3 million years ago.⁵¹ By contrast, the first stone hammers to have handles developed 6000 years ago.⁵² From 1760, the start of

the industrial revolution,⁵³ until now, we've seen humanity take flight, land on the moon, develop medicine that prolongs our lives, develop weapons of nuclear war, and increase its population by 7 billion.⁵⁴

The only way to that technology could save our planet is to increase innovation. The only way to increase innovation is to decrease poverty, hunger and water instability, and increase education and quality of life. The 2.2 billion people projected to live in the Sub-Saharan Africa region by 2036⁵⁵ won't be able to advance our society into a global city if they continue to have their lives plagued by suffering and war.

A global city does not have to be bad. In fact I, along with many others, propose that a global city could represent the pinnacle of human evolution and society. A global city could be where survival transcends seeking nutrients and shelter, and is instead becomes advancing the collective consciousness of the universe and testing what is truly possible. Drawing, when used in the context of architecture and the future of our cities, is social modeling. *BLAME!* and

my intervention into it are social modelling for the future, global city.

50 "Physicists Continue Work to Abolish Time as Fourth Dimension of Space," accessed April 22, 2021, <https://phys.org/news/2012-04-physicists-abolish-fourth-dimension-space.html>.

51 Kate Wong, "Archaeologists Take Wrong Turn, Find World's Oldest Stone Tools [Update]," Scientific American Blog Network, accessed April 22, 2021, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/archaeologists-take-wrong-turn-find-world-s-oldest-stone-tools-update/>.

52 "Mesolithic | Definition, Technology, & Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed April 22, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Mesolithic>.

53 "Industrial Revolution | Definition, History, Dates, Summary, & Facts | Britannica," accessed April 22, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Industrial-Revolution>.

54 "World Population by Year - Worldometer," accessed April 22, 2021, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/world-population-by-year/>.

55 "Population Growth: A Ticking Time Bomb for Sub-Saharan Africa? - United Nations University," accessed April 22, 2021, <https://unu.edu/news/news/population-growth-a-ticking-time-bomb-for-sub-saharan-africa.html>.

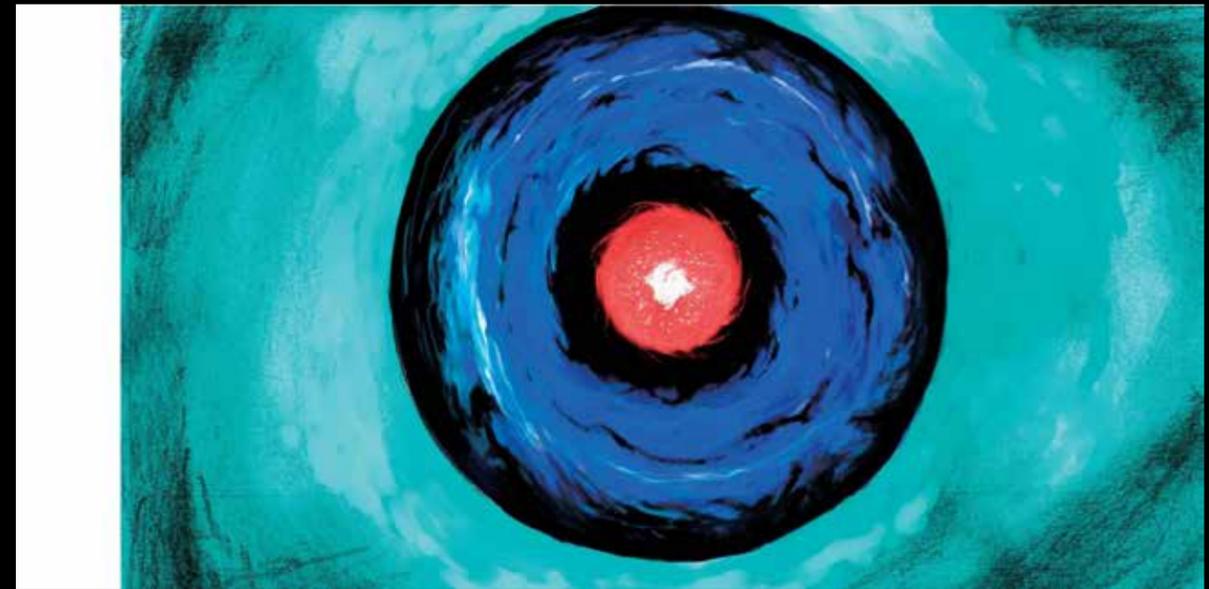


FIGURE 46: *BLAME!* - FINAL PAGE - THE CHILD

CONCLUSION:

The core elements of this thesis are **drawing**, the **comic medium**, and **theoretical architecture**.

What does Nihei Tsutomu's work of speculative architecture teach us about the agency that shapes our cities? Through his work of theoretical architecture and using the drawn medium of comics, Nihei Tsutomu generates relevant architectural discourse surrounding the development of our contemporary cities, via a fictional, theoretical future.

Through an investigation of the comic medium, this thesis explores the architectural implications of a city, situated in a fictional world, without; orientation, time, or human intervention.

By examining a work of theoretical architecture, the manga *BLAME!*, this thesis explores the effects of disorientation on both the physical and ontological levels of architecture, and examines how the drawn medium critiques the forces of expansionist, economy-based development, and their role in shaping our contemporary cities.

The fate of our cities, the fate of our planet, looks grim. Architect's responsibility to consider the future of our cities is about more than the satisfaction of its citizens, it's about the continuation of human life. Architects must challenge the state of architecture and the future of our cities. *BLAME!* takes place in a fictional dystopian future, but this future closely parallels what we might expect to see in our own future. Humanity's mass migration into cities has already begun, and with the rate of technological advancement and environmental destruction, an infinitely vast mega-structure seems almost likely.

Theoretical architecture lends so much to architectural theory specifically because it can exist within the impossible. By design, theoretical architecture conjures questions of: what is possible, what is acceptable, and where we're headed as a global city. Theoretical architecture is a tool of inquiry and a test of architectural thought. Drawing is so important to architecture because it lives within the realm of the theoretical, the impossible, and the future.

In creating an intervention into the fictional universe established by Nihei Tsutomu, this thesis contributes to the continuum of architectural theory through drawing that challenges the state of architecture and the future of our cities.

Drawing is an architect's best mode of communication. As an instrument of spatial thinking, drawing allows architects to imagine how spaces might exist. As a tool of theoretical architecture, drawing allows theoretical architects to imagine how alternative forms of agency might affect the development of our cities, and speculate where the agency that develops our contemporary cities might lead us.

The comic medium poses the unique ability to serialize both architecture and narrative. By serializing architecture, comics add a temporal dimension to it. Time, as a dimension of architecture, allows us to examine the patterns that emerge over the complete lifetime of a building, or even over tens of thousands of years. From that we can analyse why those patterns emerge, and how their architectural significance might manifest in the real world.

Using the mass appeal of pop culture mediums, theoretical architecture allows architects to insert architectural theory into everyday life, and through narrative, host conversations regarding the future of our cities.

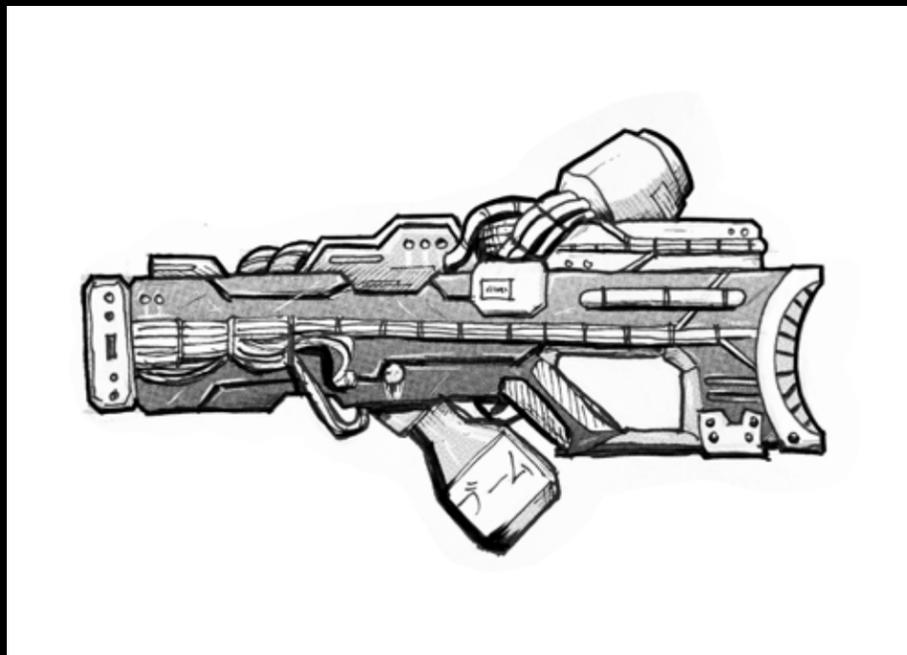
GALLERY:
BY AUTHOR



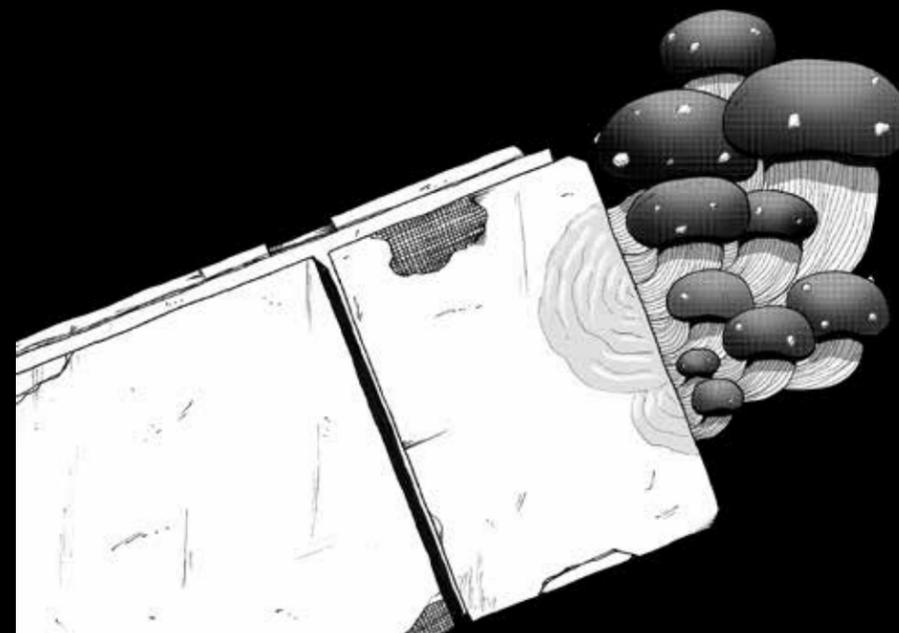
DECENDANT OF THE CHILD



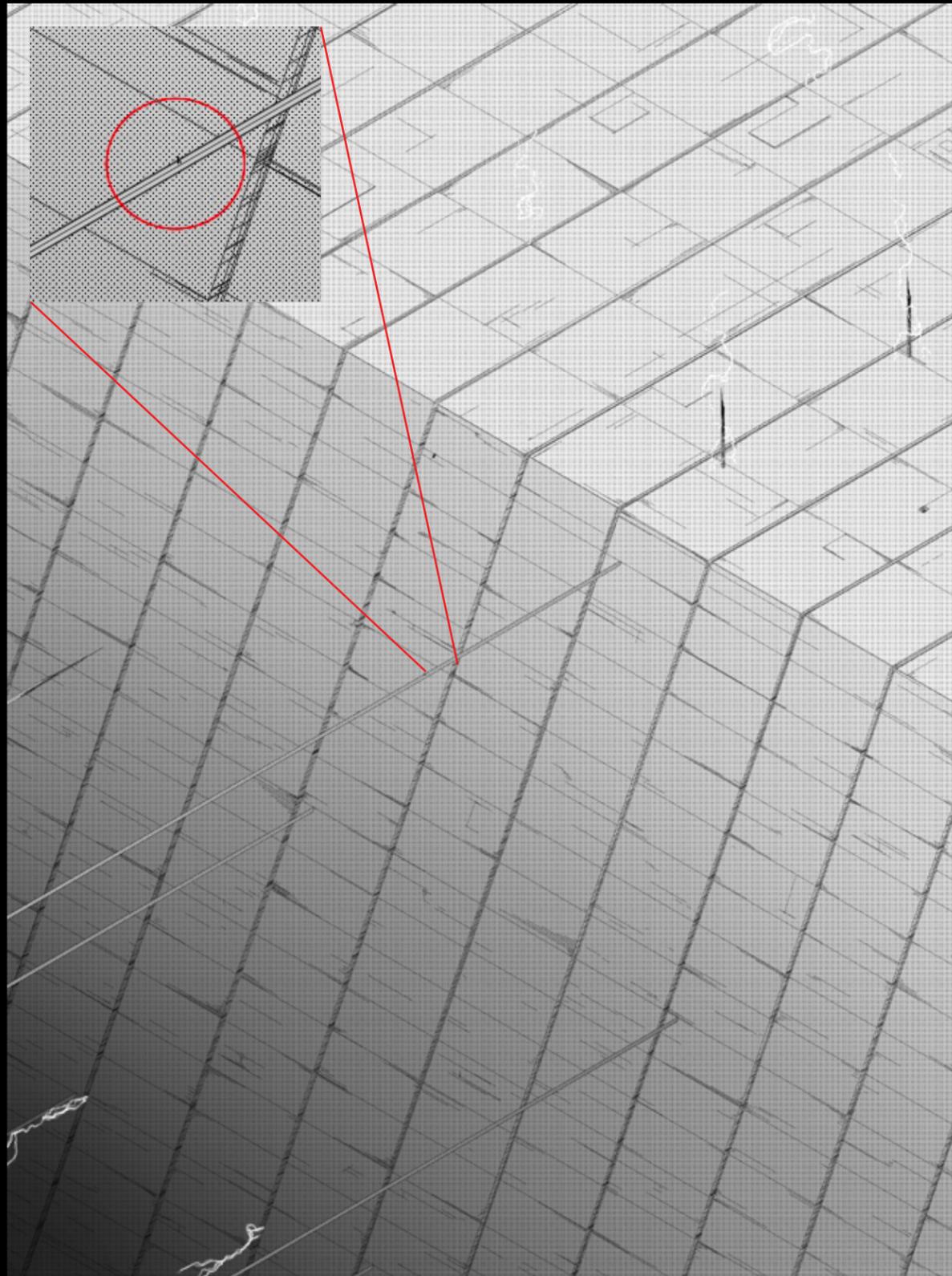
THE NEW CITY CONCEPT



GUN

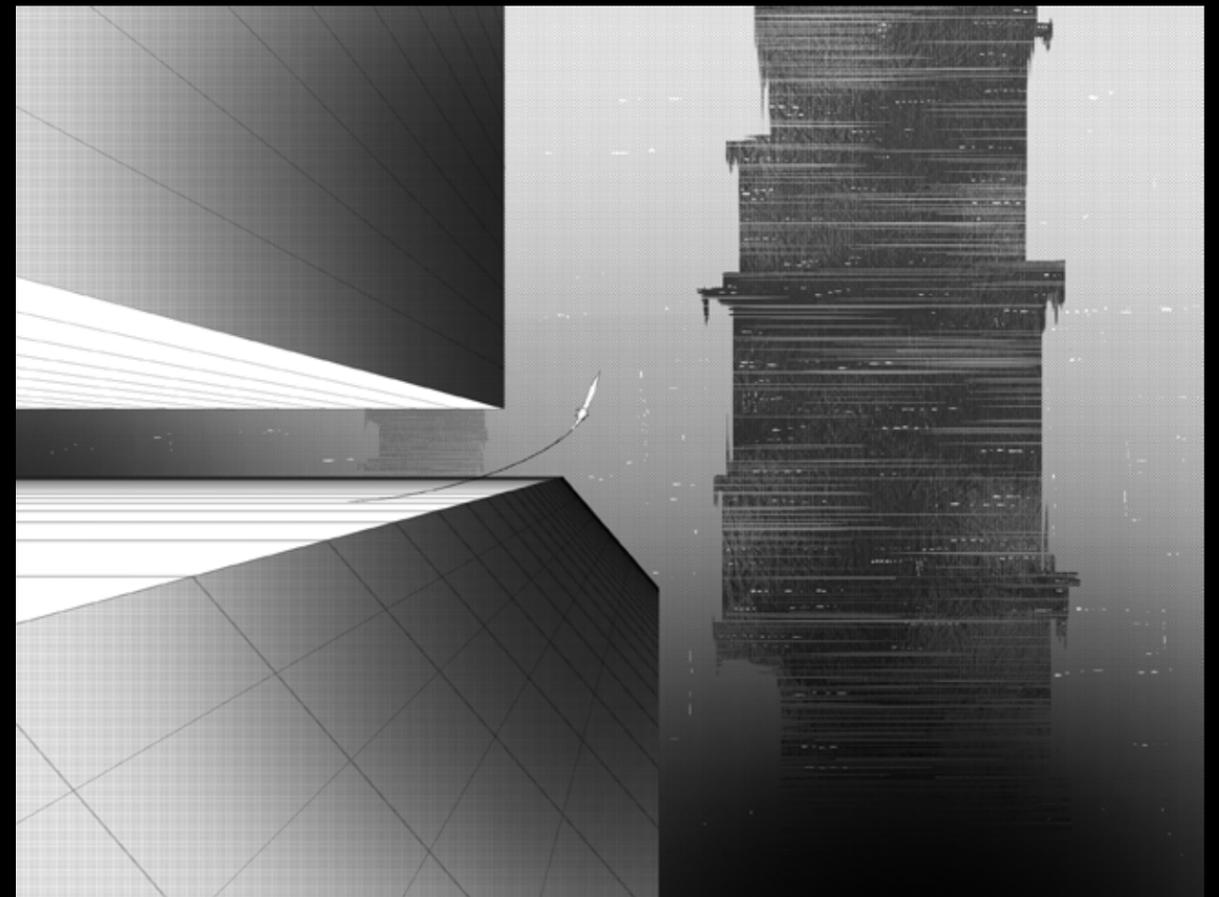


FUNGAL FRUIT BODY



SCALE

KODY ROYCE FERRON



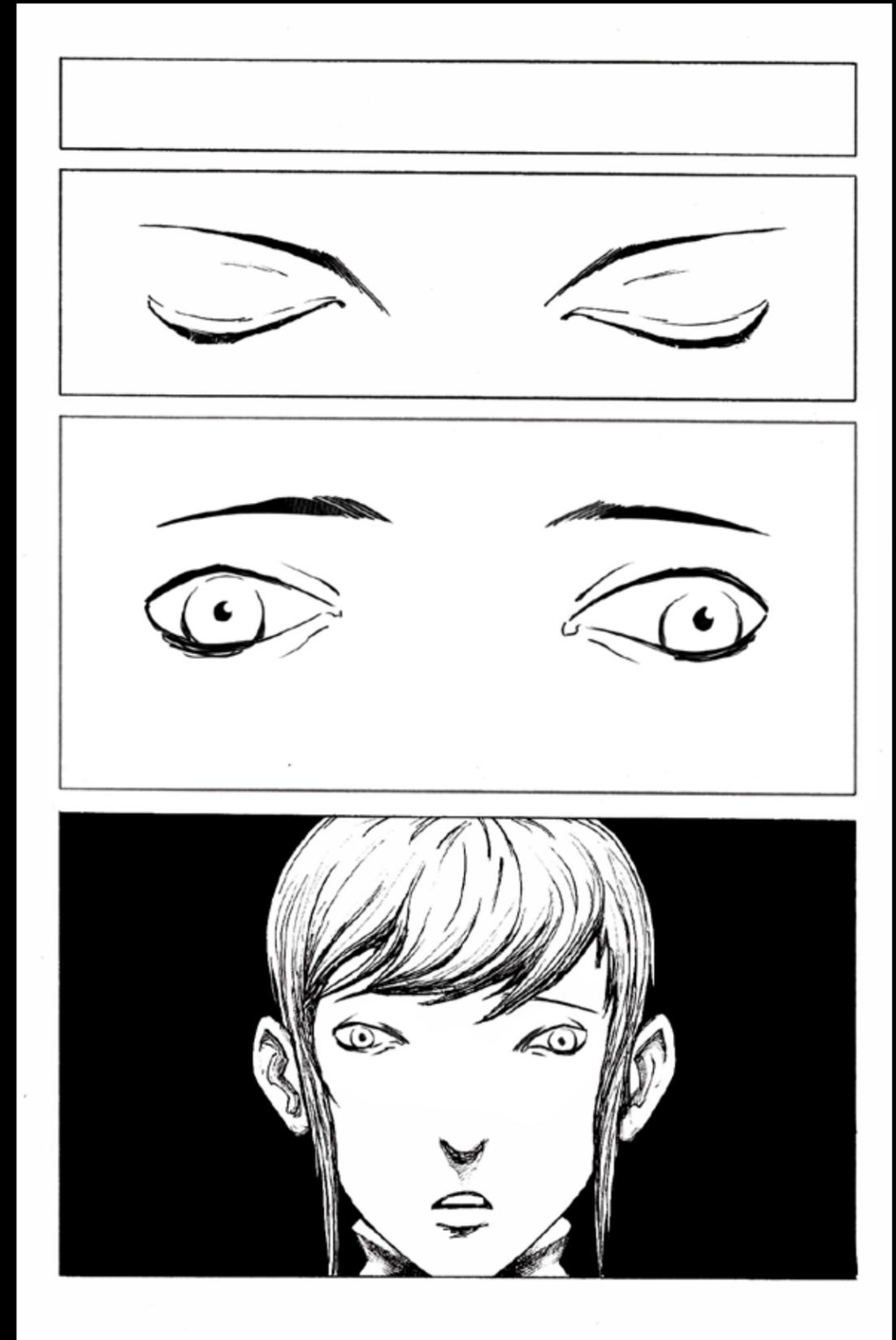
AESTHETIC EXPLORATION

NETSPHERE SPACE: P1



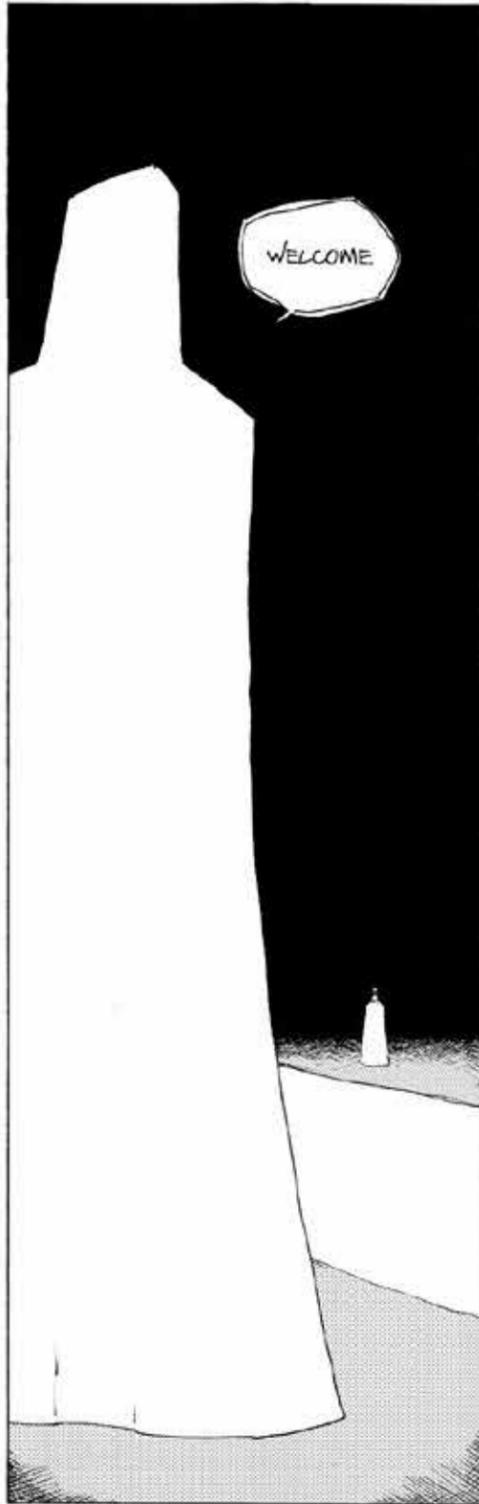
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NETSPHERE SPACE: P2



NETSPHERE SPACE: P3

NETSPHERE SPACE: P4



THE TILT: P1

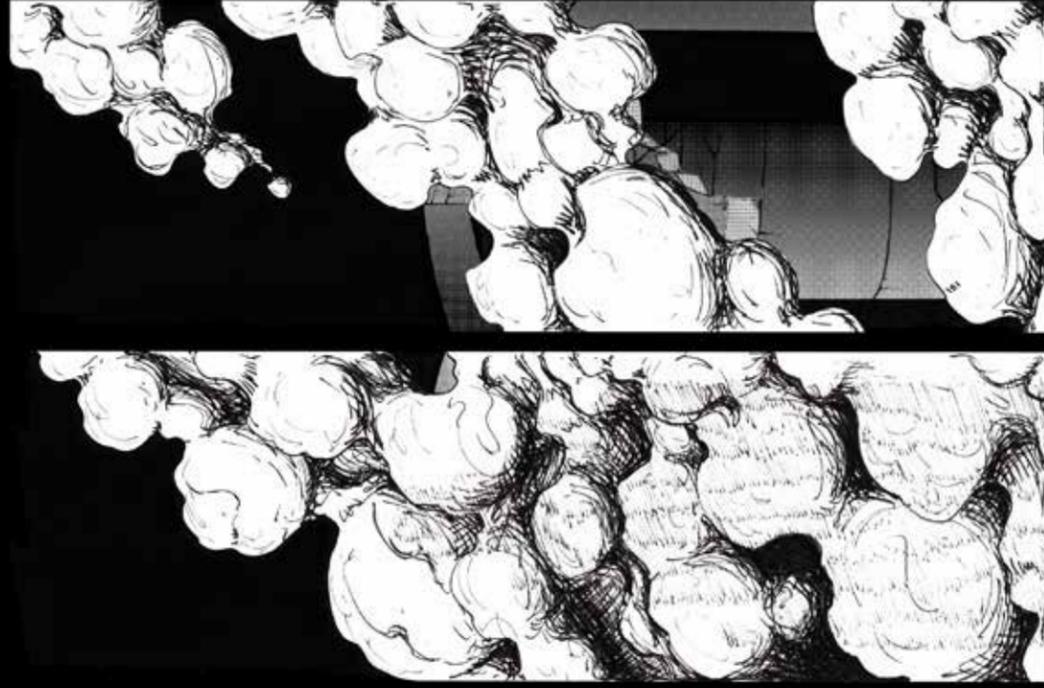


THE TILT: P2



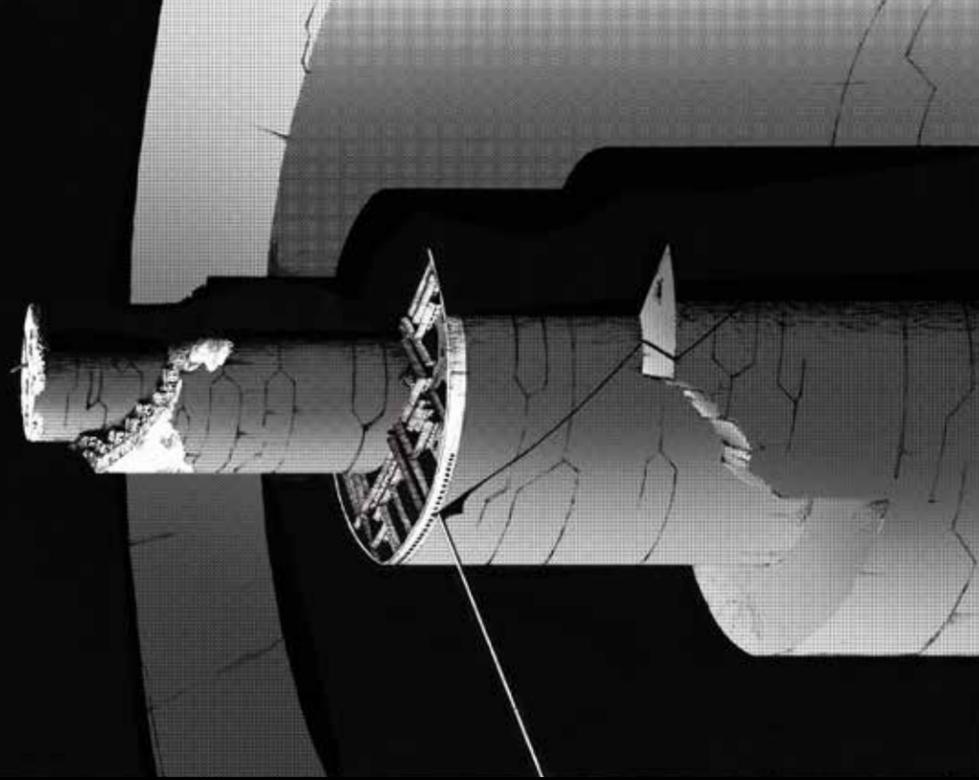
KODY ROYDE FERRON

SPITE HOUSE: P1

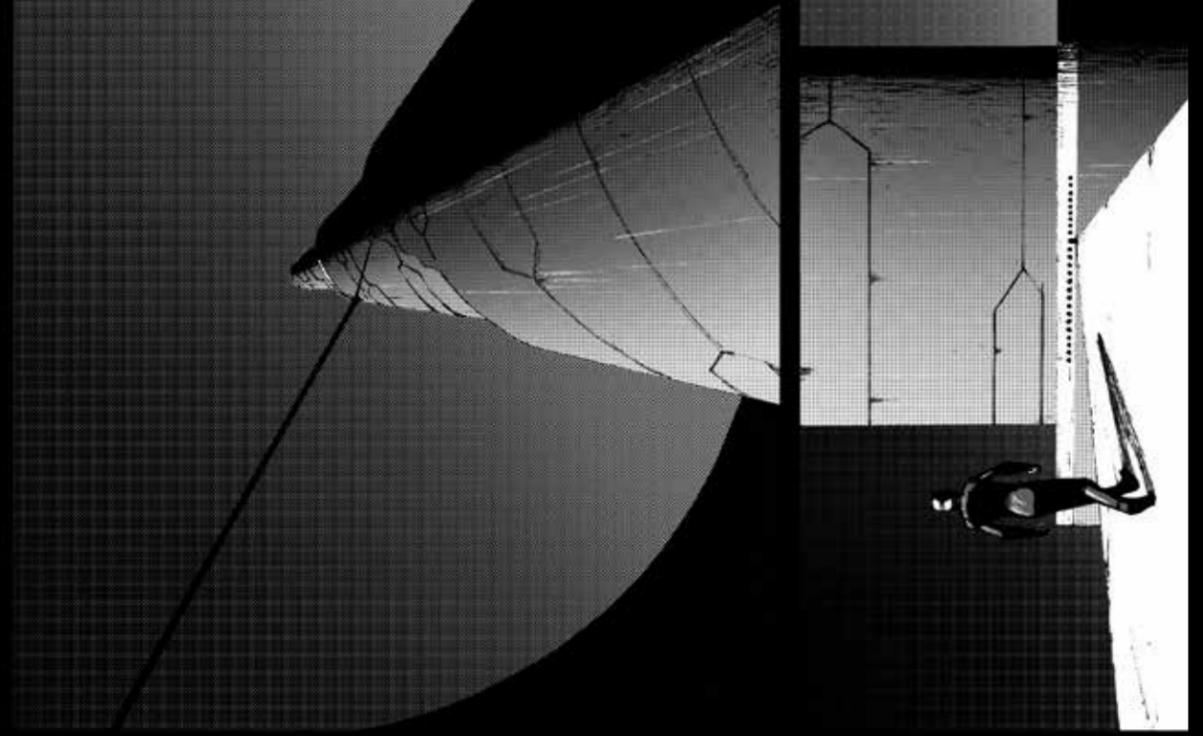


SPITE HOUSE: P2

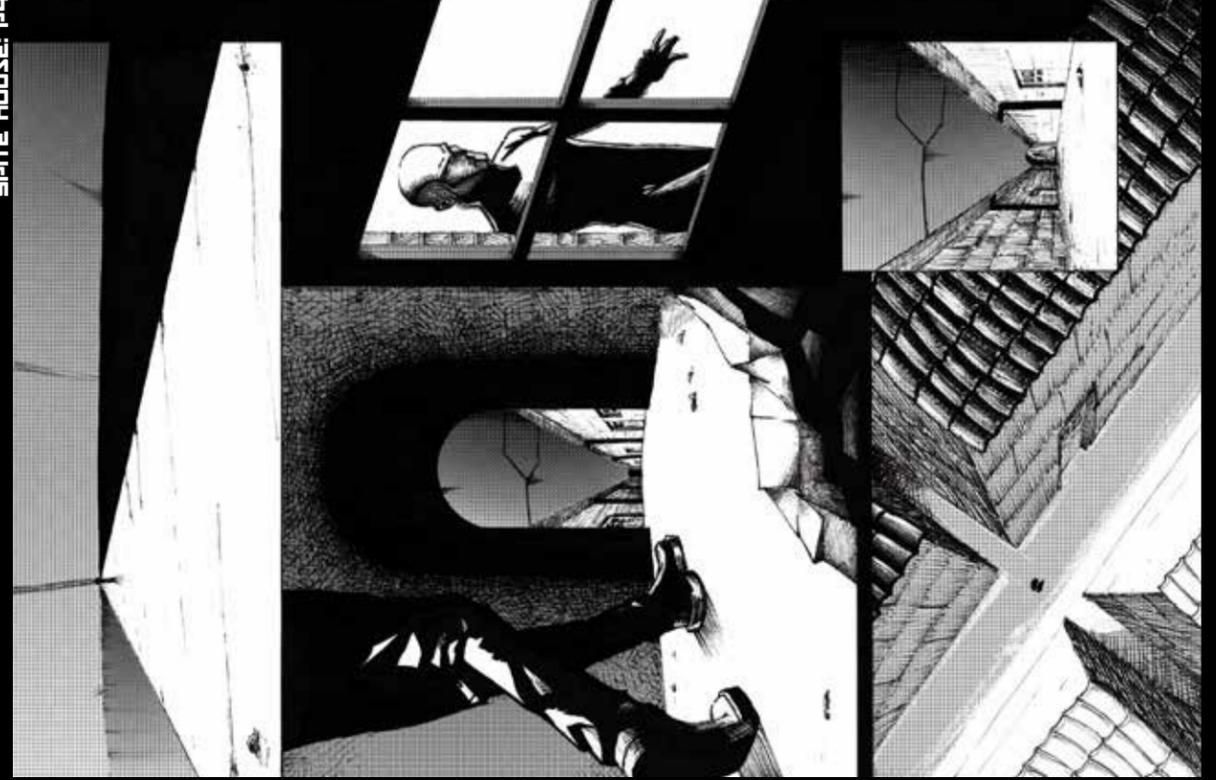
:: LOG.66 ::
THE TINKERER



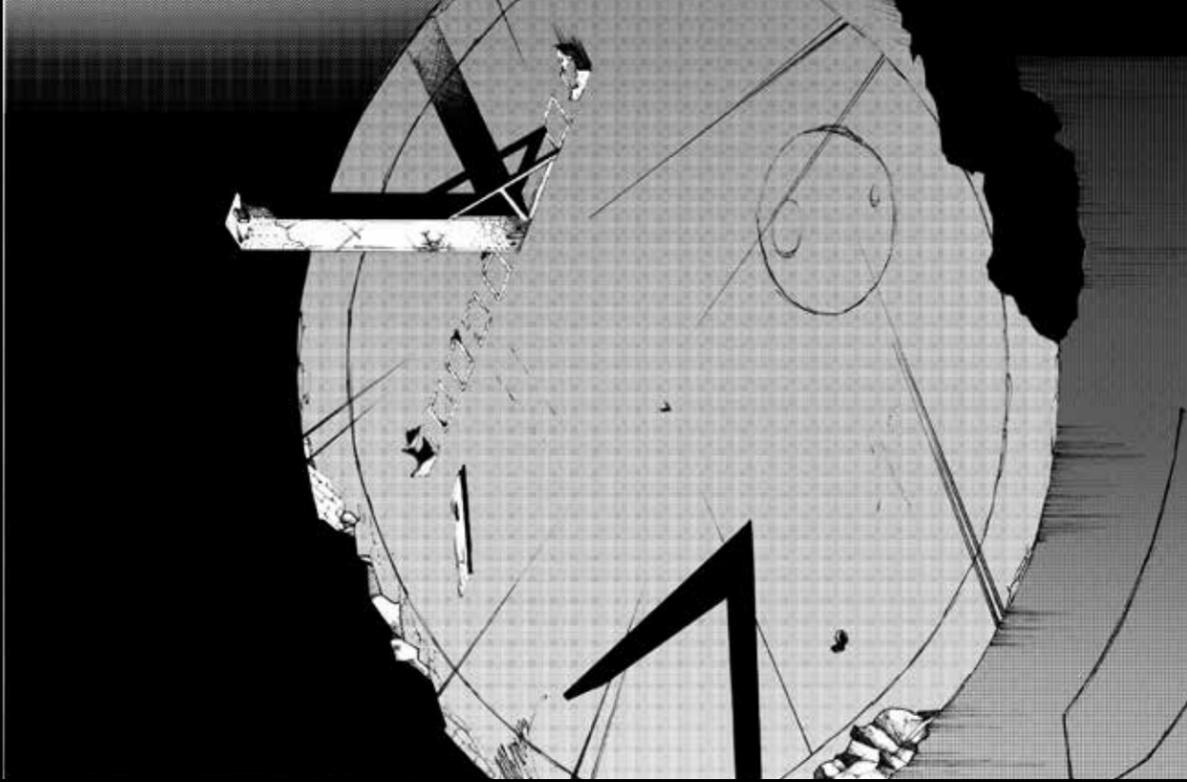
SPITE HOUSE: P3



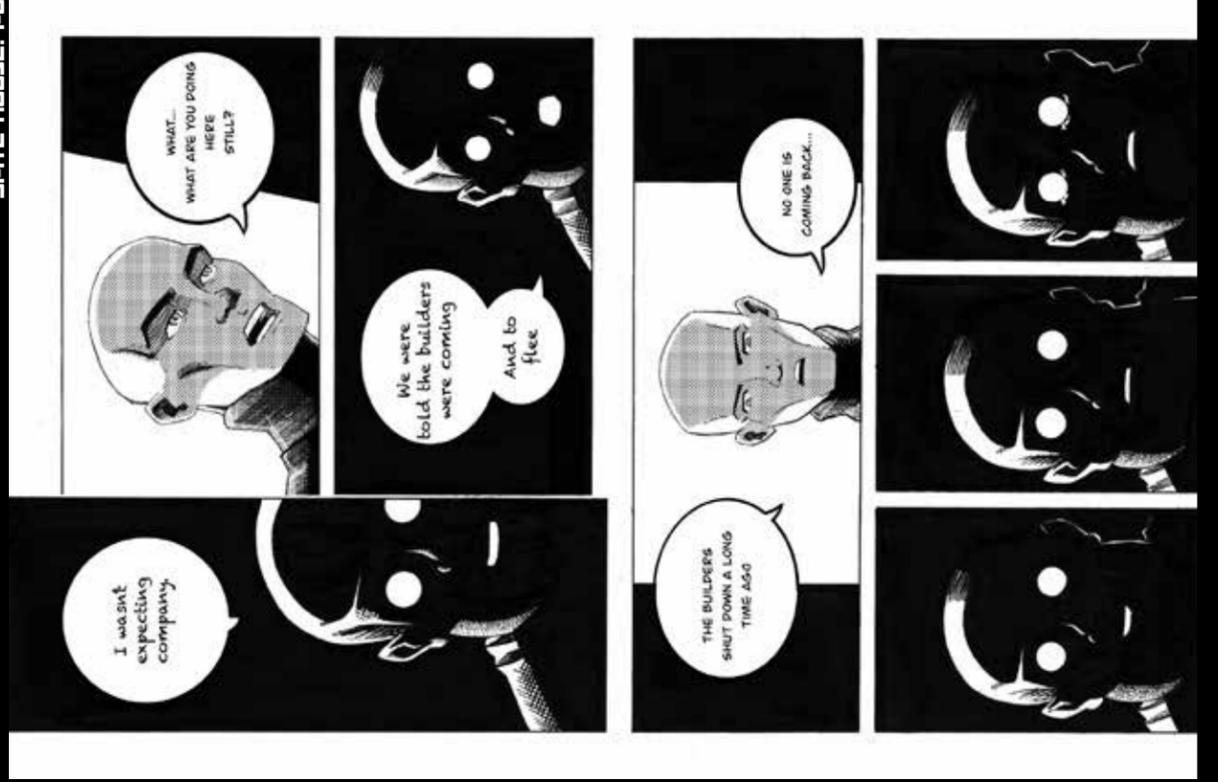
SPITE HOUSE: P4



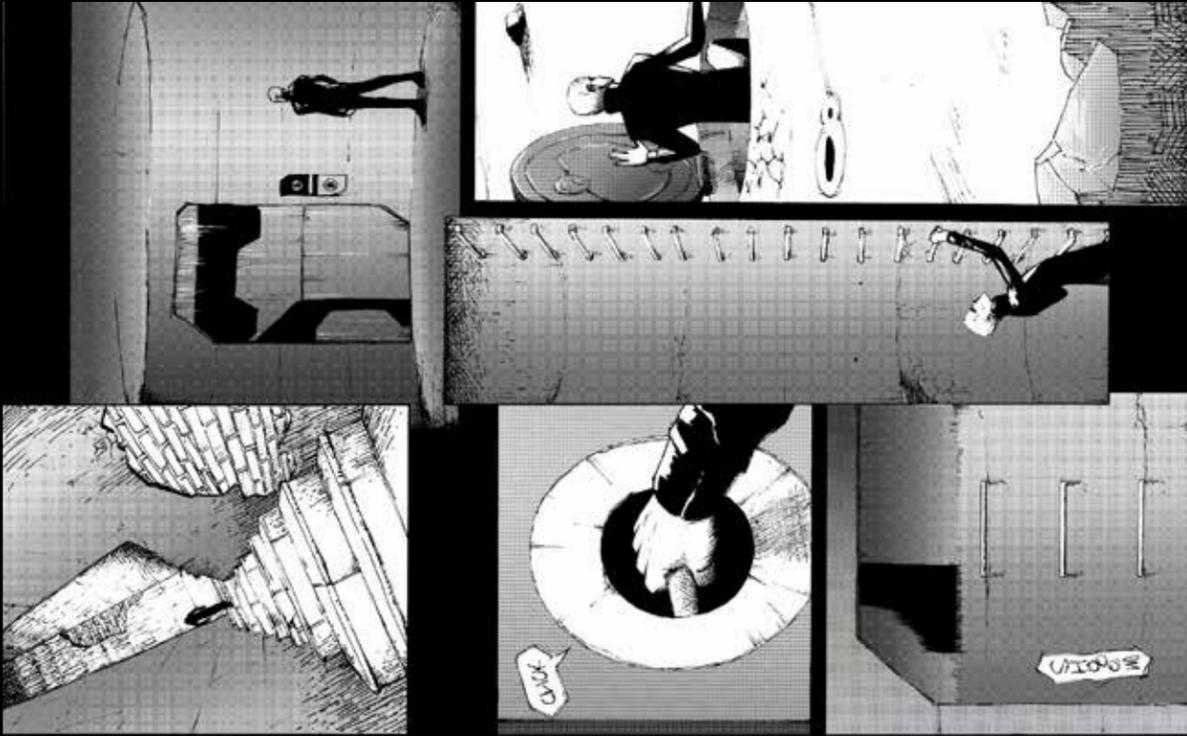
SPITE HOUSE: P6



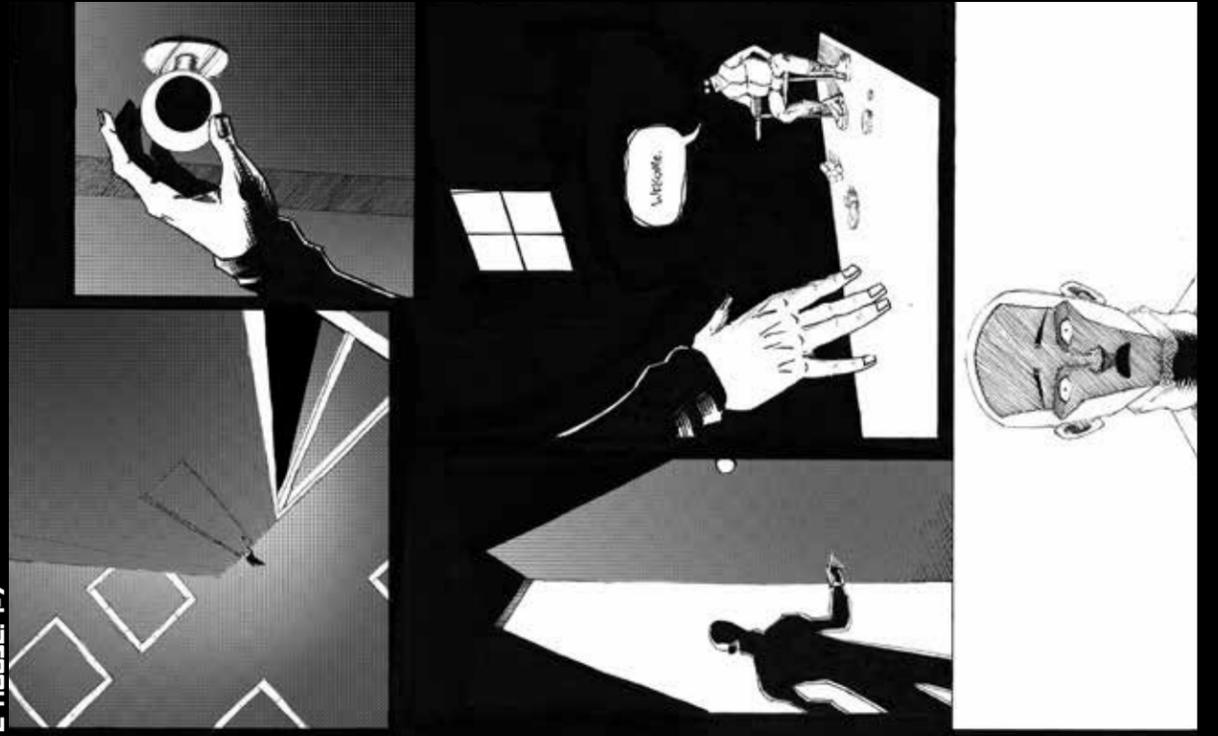
SPITE HOUSE: P8



SPITE HOUSE: P5



SPITE HOUSE: P7

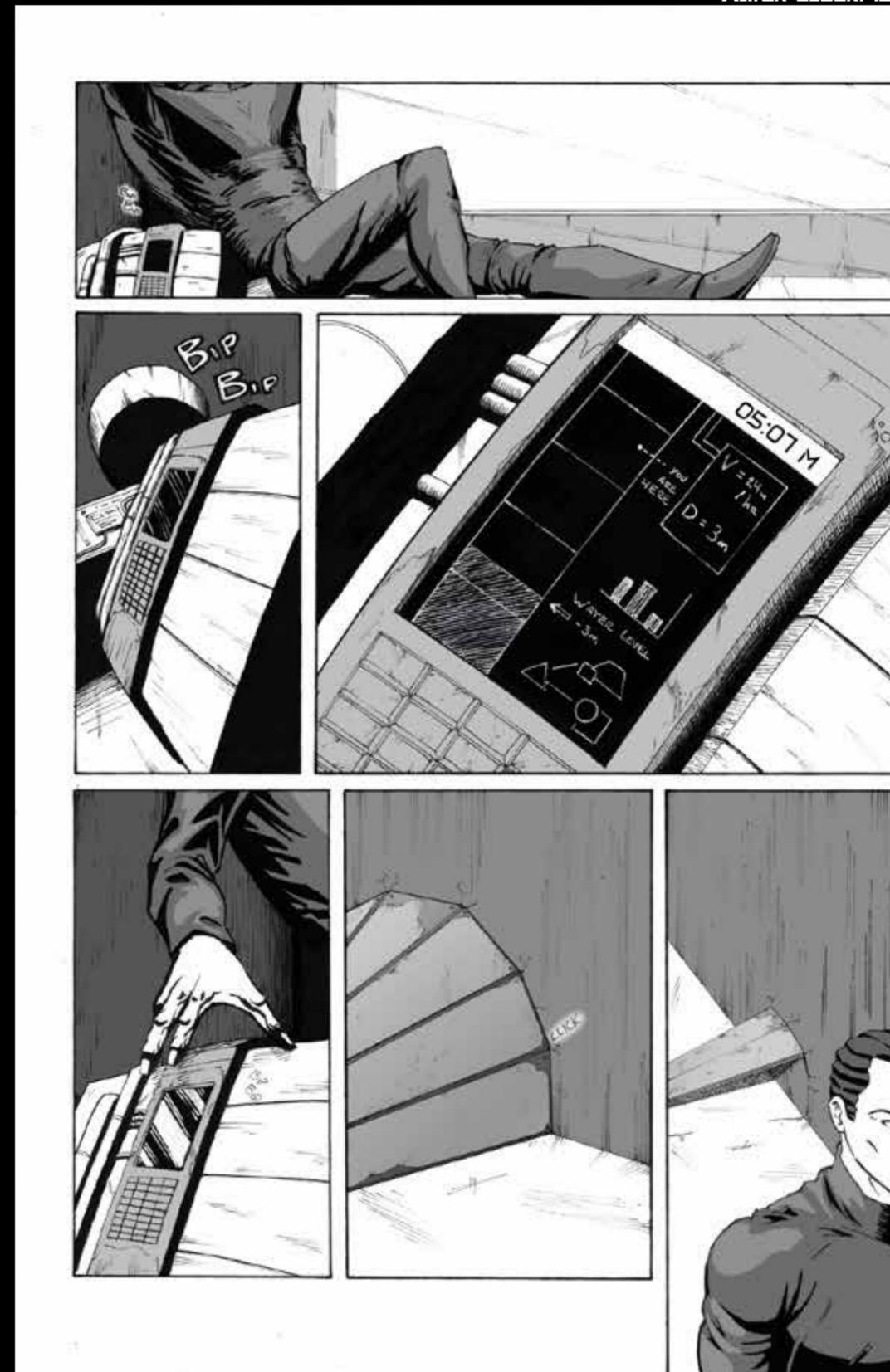


SPITE HOUSE: P10 (P9 NEVER COMPLETED)

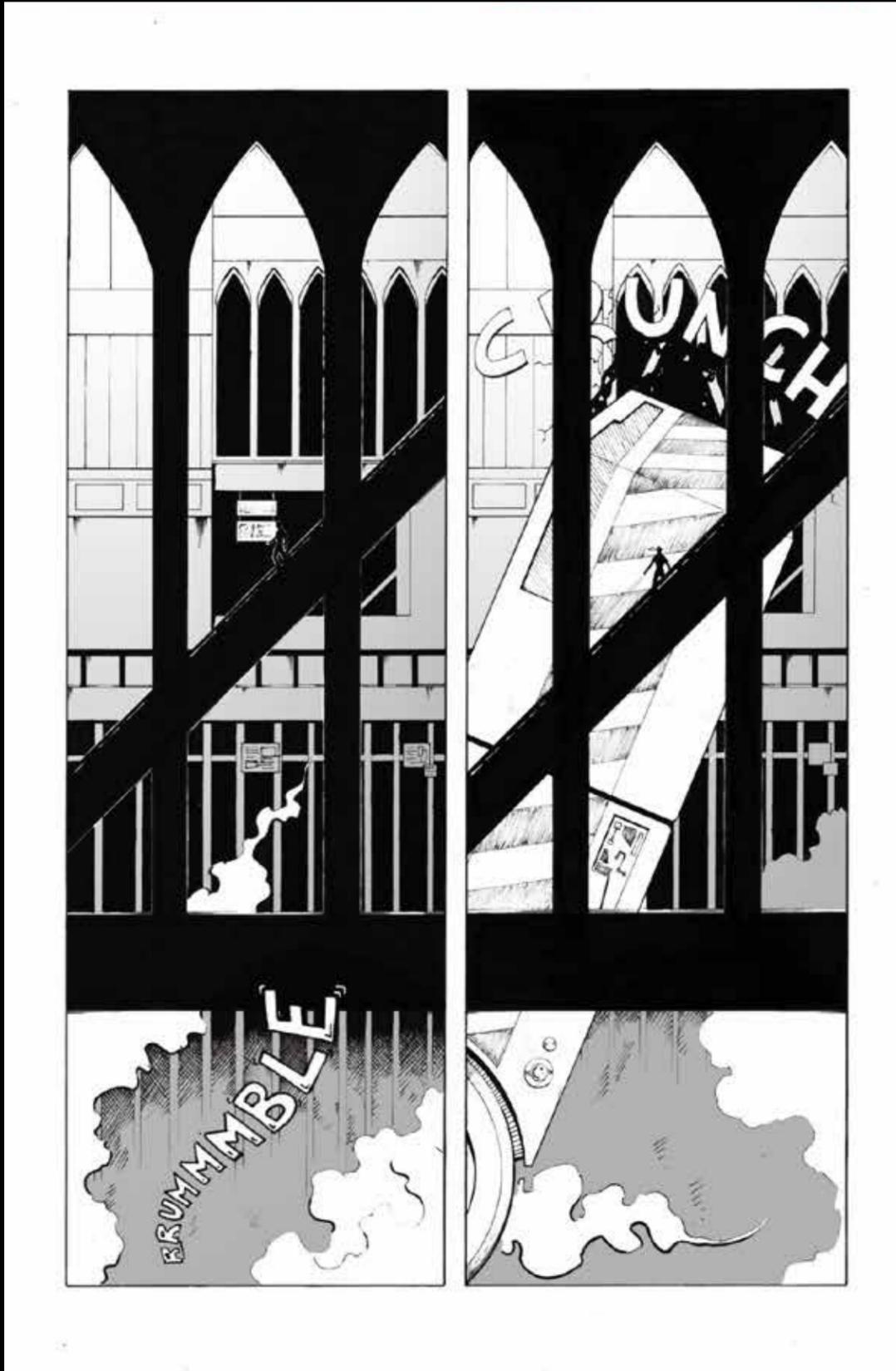


KODY ROYDE FERRON

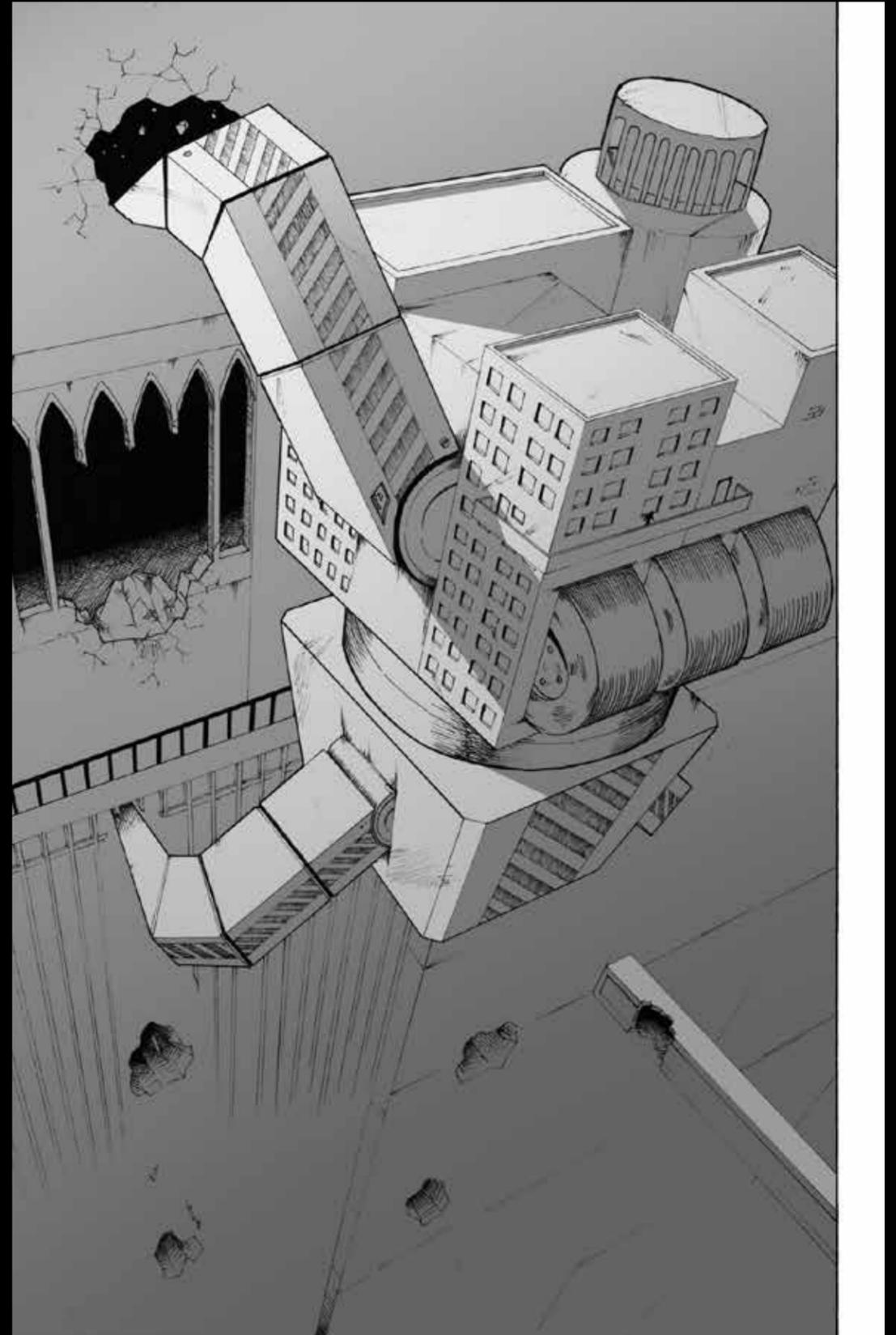
WATER CLOCK: 10F1



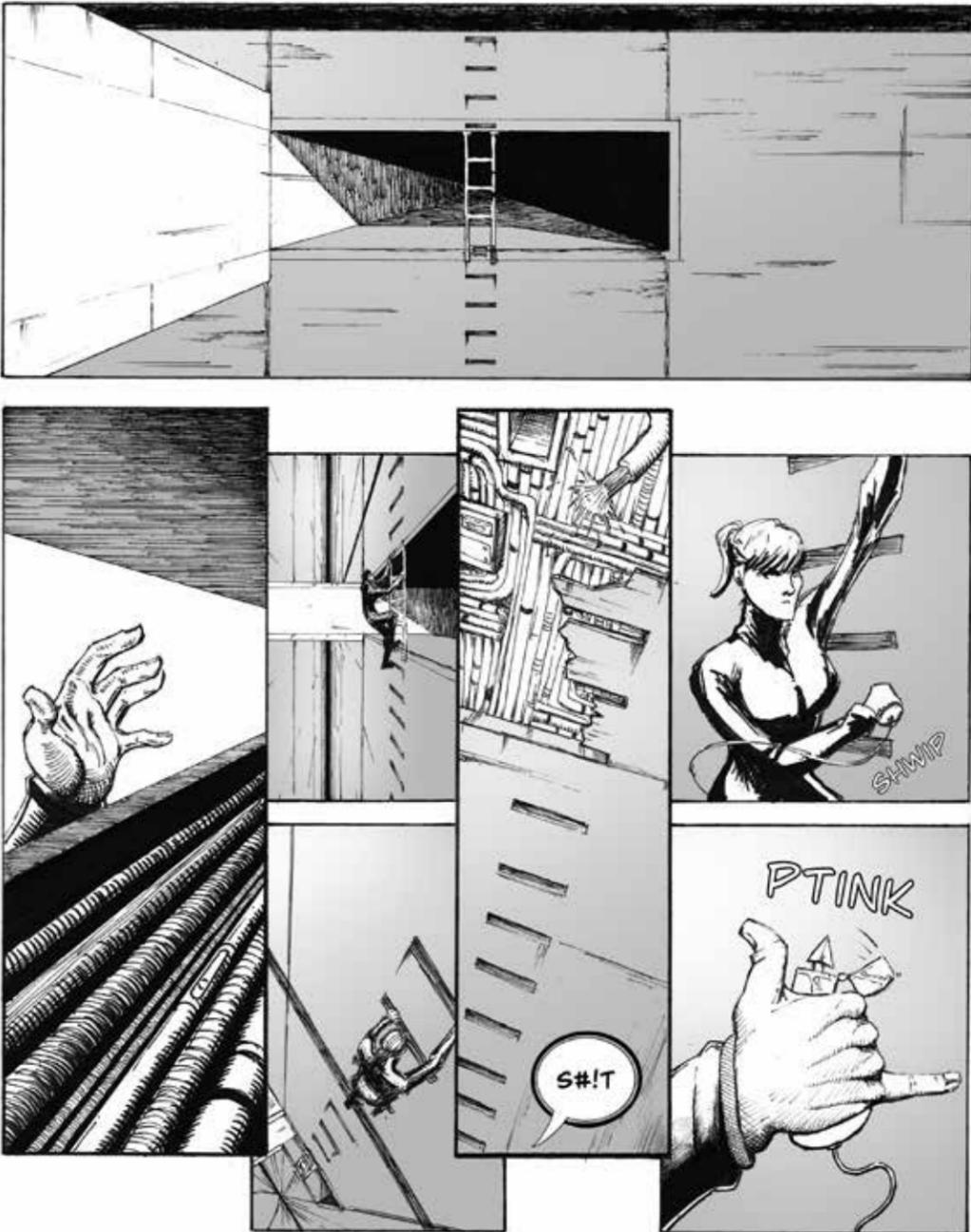
CLIMBING VILLAGE: P1



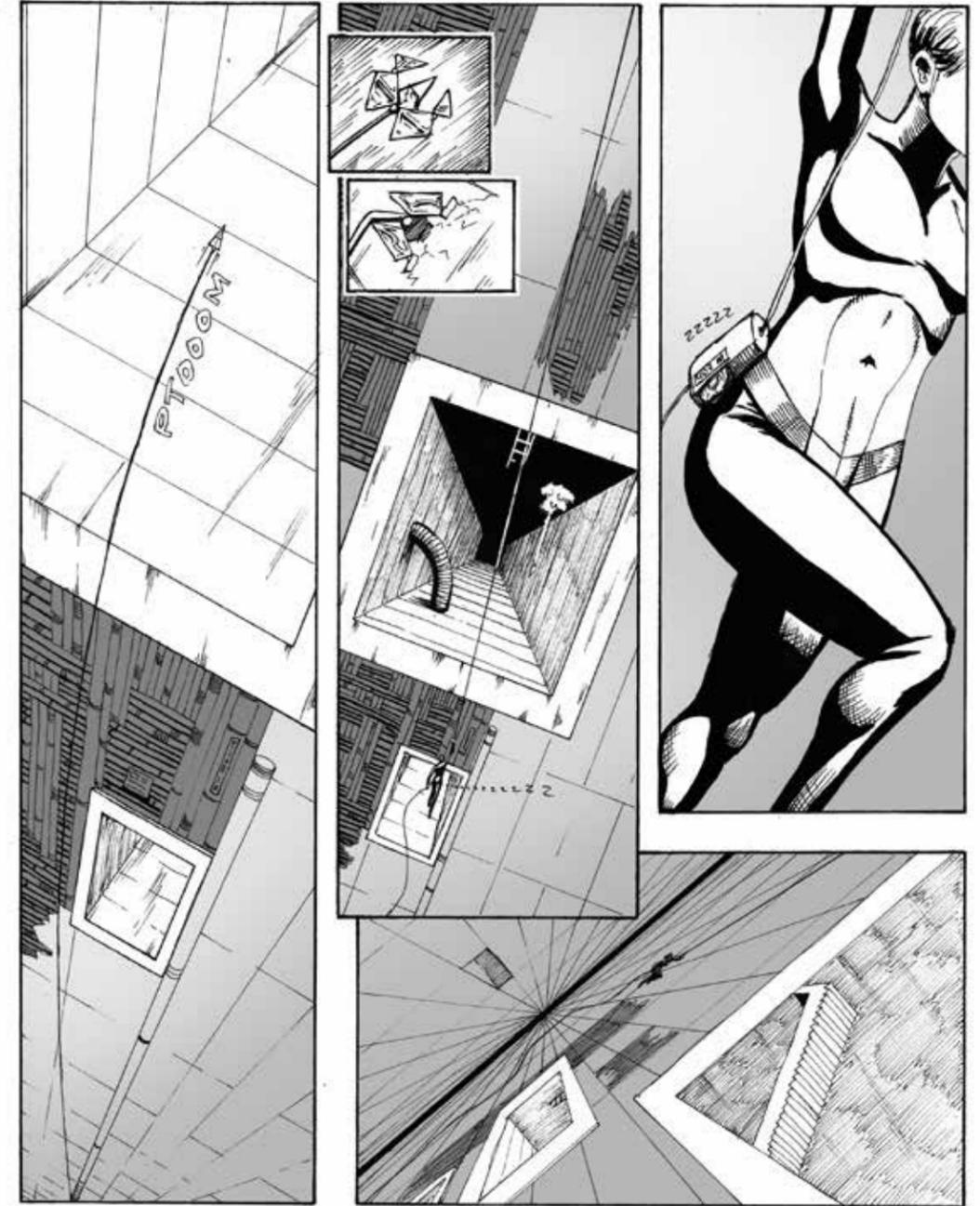
CLIMBING VILLAGE: P2



LADDER RUNGS: P1



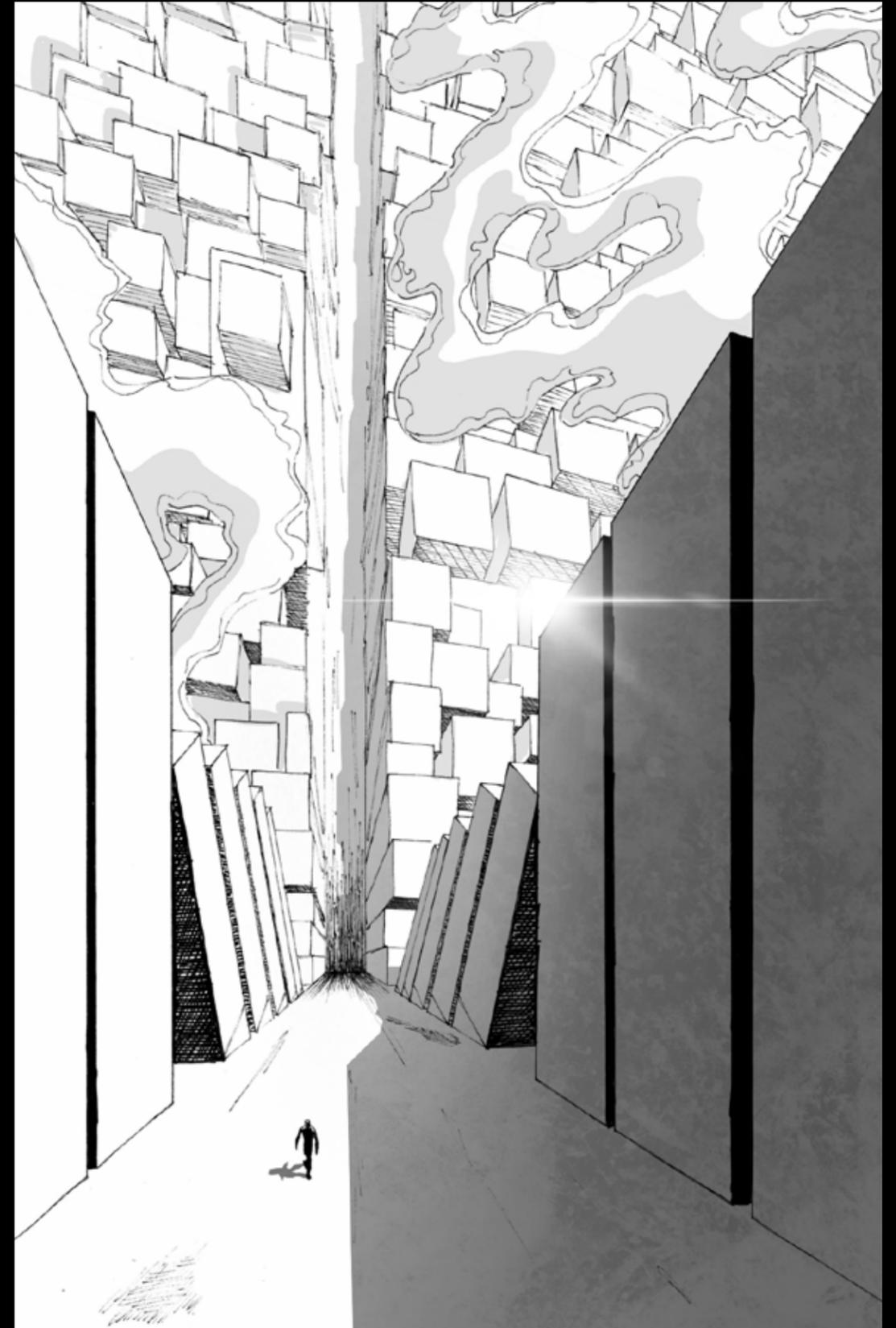
LADDER RUNGS: P2



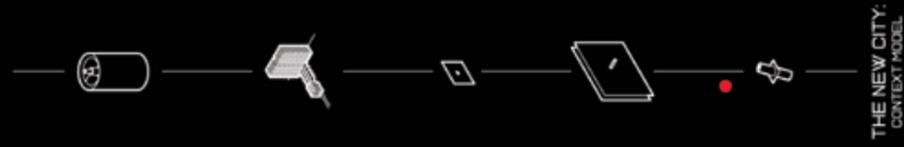
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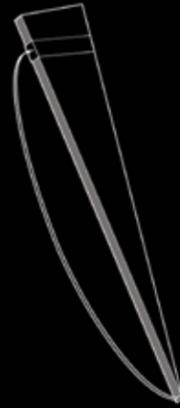
THE HISTORY OF TILTING: 10F1



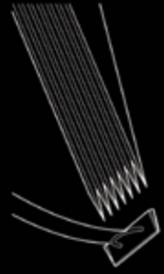
NOMADIC STEEL TENT - FOLDABLE:



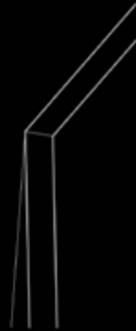
THE NEW CITY: CONTEXT MODEL



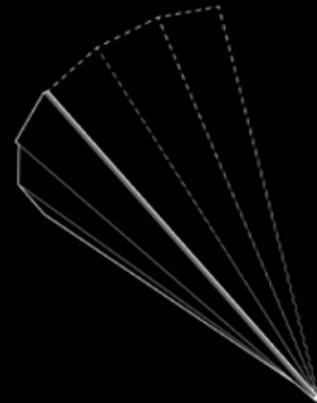
STEEL TENT, FOLDED: AXON



BOTTOM STRAP CONNECTION



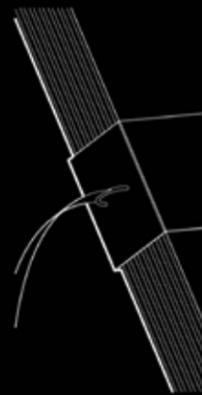
JOINT DETAIL



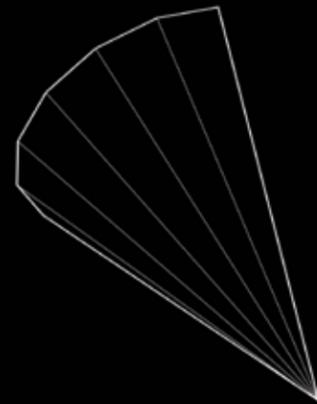
STEEL TENT, FOLDING: AXON



BOTTOM STRAP DETAIL



TOP STRAP DETAIL

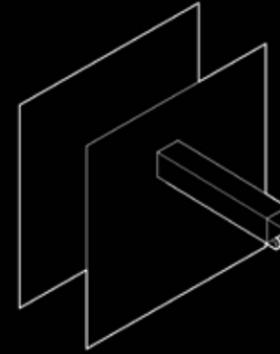


STEEL TENT: AXON

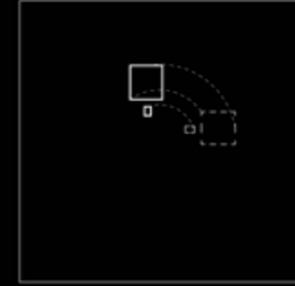
KODY ROYDE FERRON 2011

CORE SAMPLE DRAWINGS:

RE-ORIENTATION:



RE-ORIENTATION: AXON

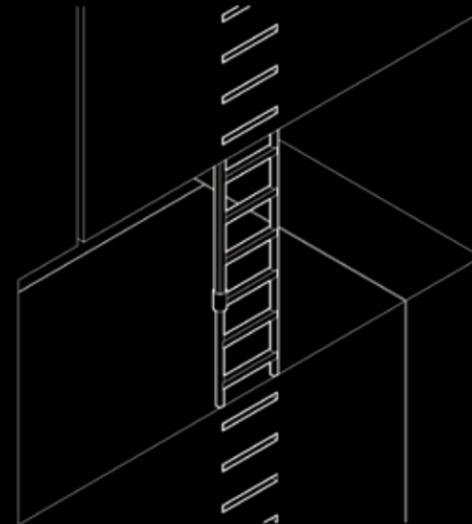


RE-ORIENTATION: ELEVATION



THE NEW CITY: CONTEXT MODEL

LADDERS AND FOOTHOLDS:



ASCENT: AXONOMETRIC



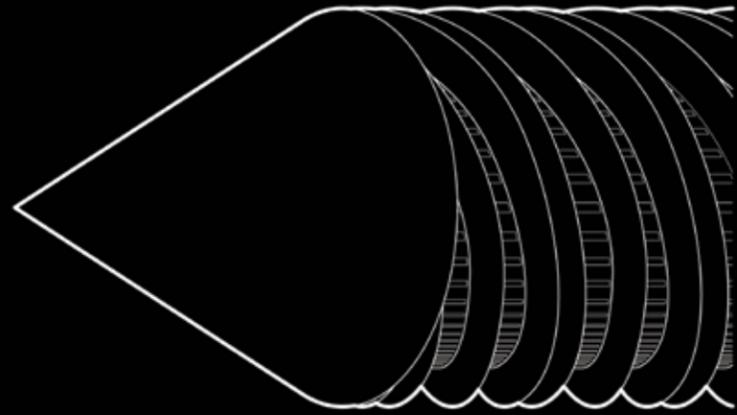
THE NEW CITY: CONTEXT MODEL

CORE SAMPLE DRAWINGS // THE NEW CITY:

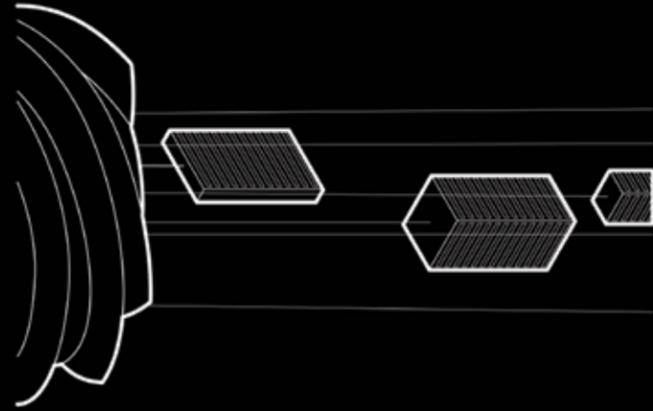
THE WORM ENGINE:



THE NEW CITY:
CONTEXT MODEL



WORM ENGINE: BOW

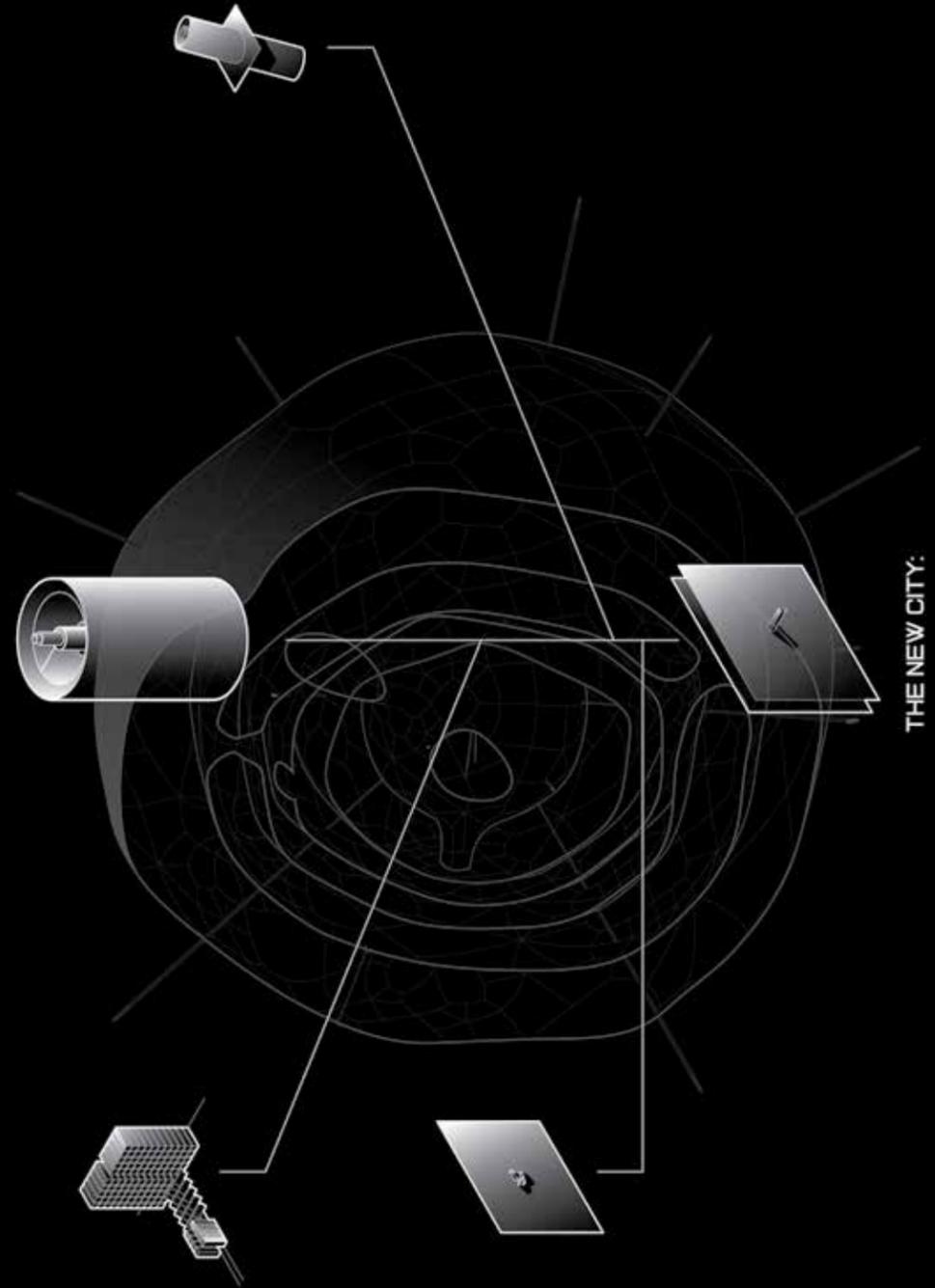


WORM ENGINE: STERN



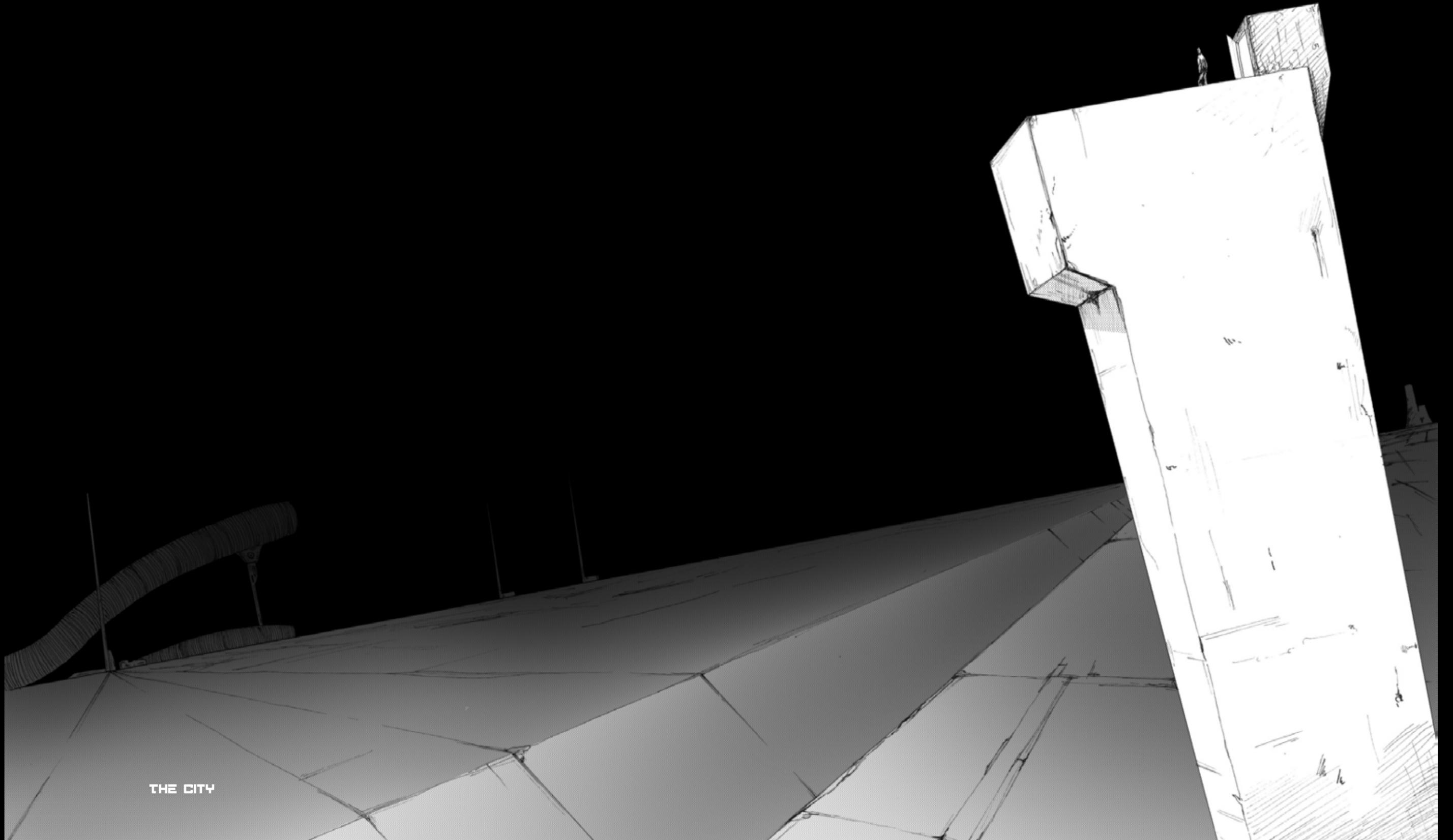
WORM ENGINE: AXON

KODY FERRON / ARCHITECTURE / THE NEW CITY / SPRING 2011

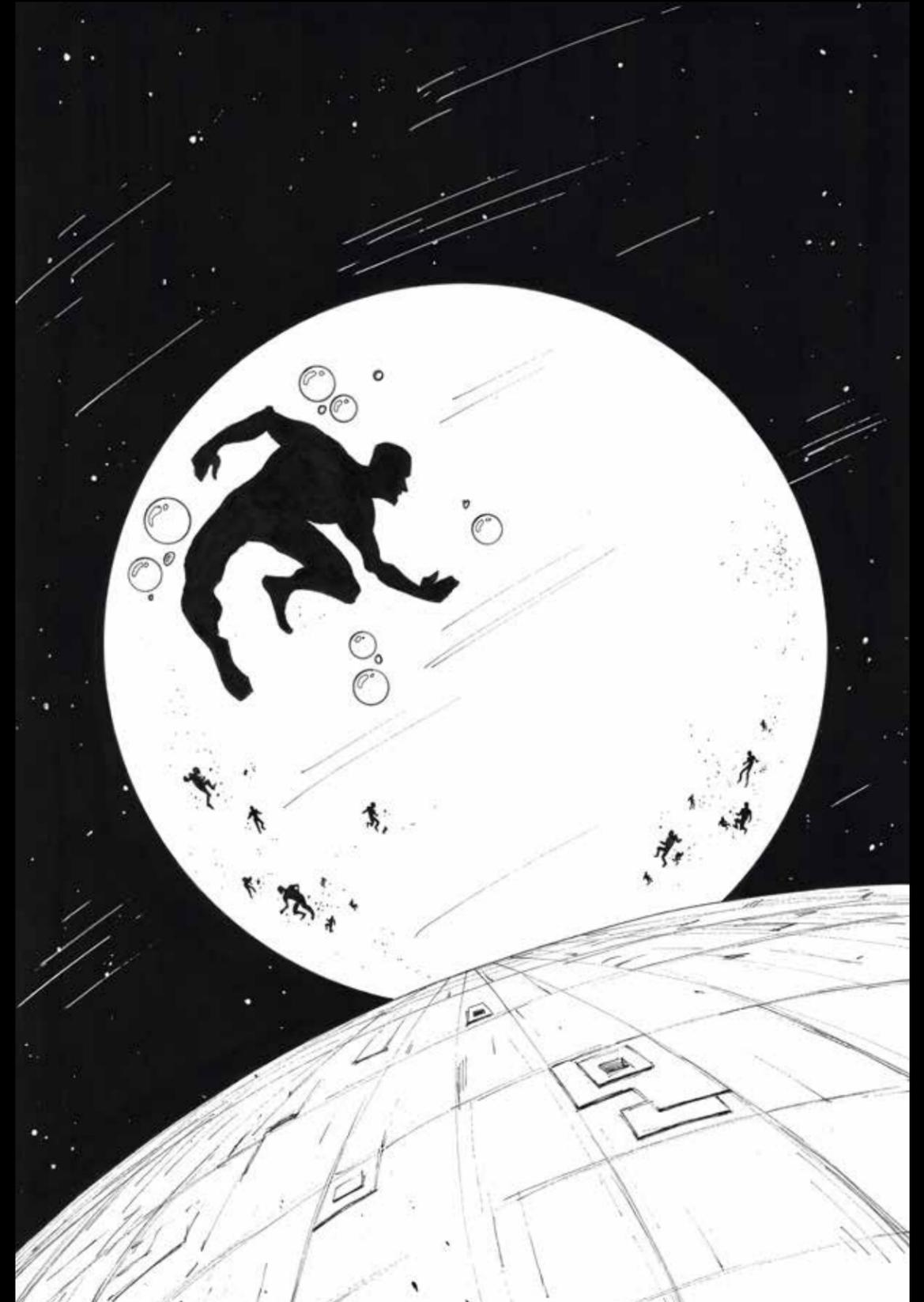
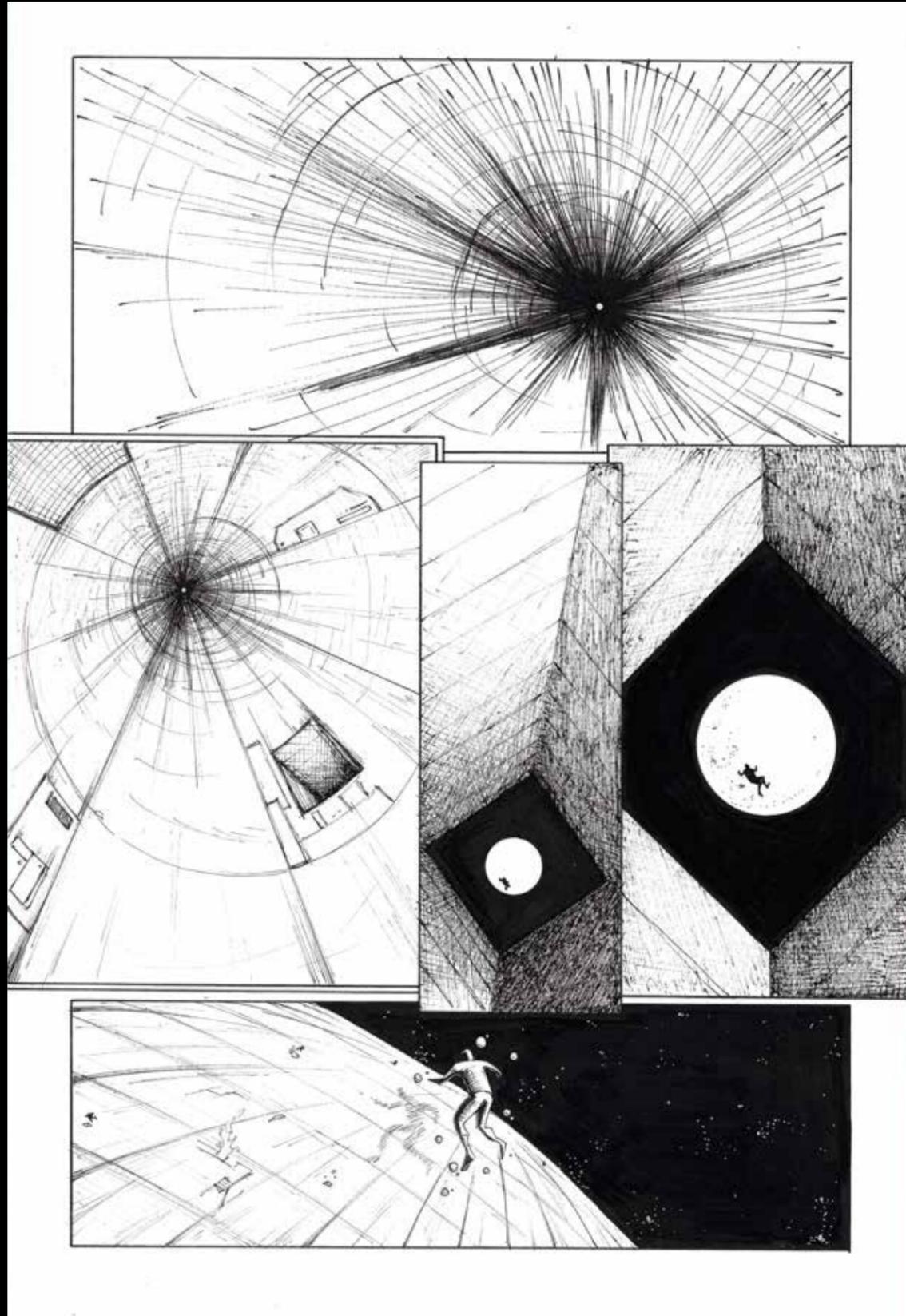


THE NEW CITY:

THE CITY



THE END





**APPENDIX A:
GRAVITY BEAM
EMITTER**

APPENDIX A: GRAVITY BEAM EMITTER:

The City is a labyrinth. Gravity, time, and scale are all distorted because of *The City's* chaotic expansion. There is no way to orient oneself without gravity, and the distortion of time and scale has completely disoriented *The City*. Nihei made the walls of his labyrinth from a nigh-indestructible material called mega-structure, therefore, beyond being a labyrinth, *The City* is also a prison. *The City* is an endless concrete and steel trap, and to escape it, one would need a key of mythical proportions.

The gun, Killy's Gravity Beam Emitter, is an enigmatic object integral to the progression of the narrative of BLAME!. Being the only device capable of cutting through the layers of mega-structure, the GBE is the skeleton key to *The City*. Nihei details very little regarding the origins of the GBE, however, he links the device to the administration, implying that the administration gave Killy the weapon. Knowing that the administration represents some kind of higher power, knowing little about the gun's origins besides that we can connect it to the administration, and knowing that it is one of the few things in the universe powerful enough to cut through mega-structure,

the device is clearly significant. The notion of disorientation is the most significant element of BLAME!'s narrative, and Killy's GBE is *The City's* one means of orientation.

This Gun is the master key to *The City*. The key that opens the prison door, and that cuts through the walls of the labyrinth. The gun is both literally the skeleton key to *The City*, and figuratively. Without the GBE, Killy could not pursue his one and only goal: scower *The City* for the Net Terminal Gene. The GBE is the linchpin to Nihei's entire narrative.

After opening the prison doors, the gun orients this story's characters in the only way possible. The GBE projects a perfectly linear beam of gravitons that erase any matter they come in contact with. The gun is the skeleton key to *The City*, the crux of the narrative, and as an example of a human-scaled object, the GBE is the undeniable thesis to BLAME!.

Killy's Gravity Beam Emitter is a finely crafted digital object which not only embodies this manga, but which also embodies my thesis. In Nihei's world, the relationship between human beings and the ontology of scale differs wildly from our contemporary understanding of the human-scale. This gun is the symbol for the various ways Nihei has distorted the ontology of scale and reality.



FIGURE 47: STILLS FROM FAB2 VIDEO ASSIGNMENT

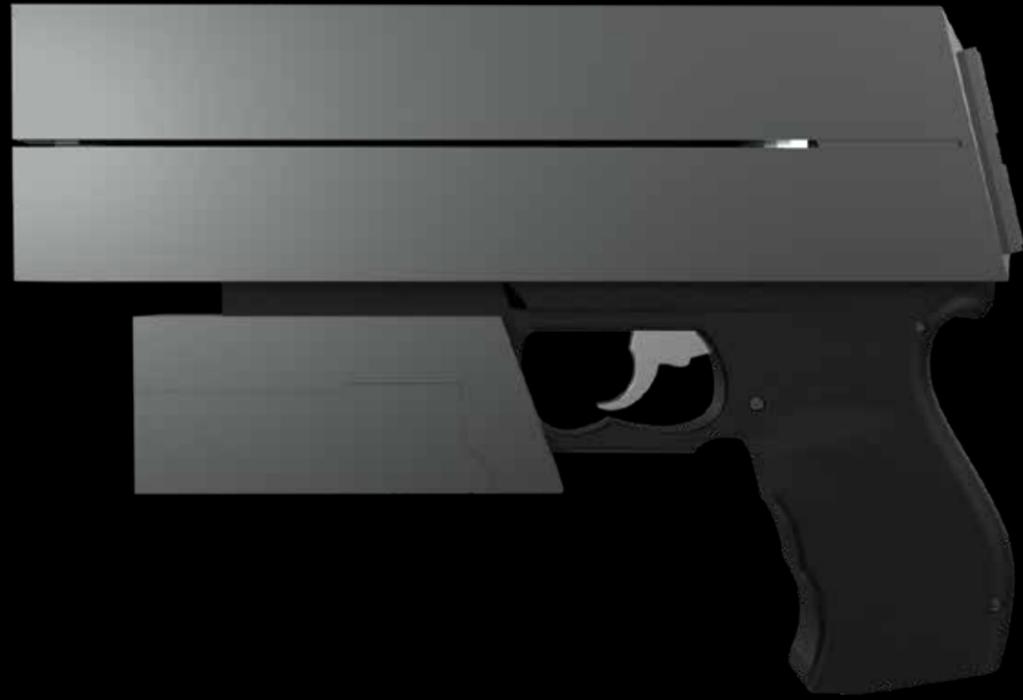


FIGURE 48: PROFILE



FIGURE 50: LEVEL-UP

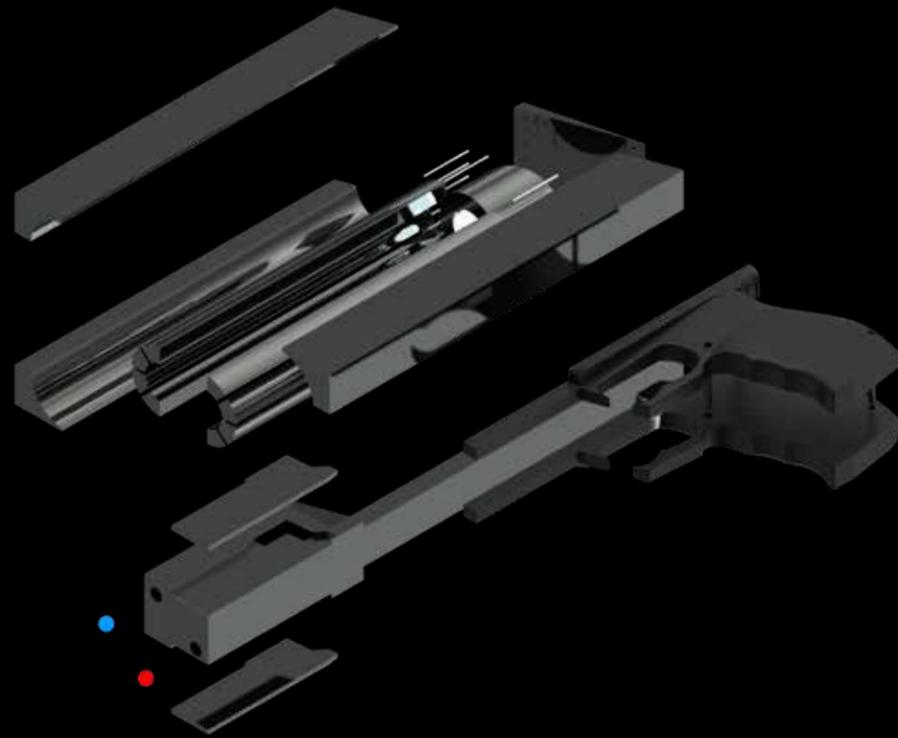


FIGURE 49: EXPLODED



FIGURE 51: GRIP

**APPENDIX B:
HOW TO DRAW A
COMIC!**

APPENDIX B: HOW TO DRAW A COMIC!

The purpose of a comic is to tell a story. As comics are a visual medium, they rely on many of the same methods and techniques of most visual arts.

The basic elements of a comic page are the page, the panels, and the gutters. The panels are the small subdivisions of the page that each represent a moment in time. The gutters are the area surrounding and separating the panels, most often left as a blank white space, or a solid black space.

The fundamental principles an artist uses to create a coherent and appealing page layout are:

- Composition
- Draftsmanship
- Technique

The following is an abridged version of the process I've developed in order to create my thesis work:

- Step 1: Thumbnail (ideas)
- Step 2: Page Rough 1 (composition)
- Step 3: Page Rough 2 (draftsmanship)
- Step 4: Line
- Step 5: Rendering (technique)
- Step 6: Scan and Colour (technique)

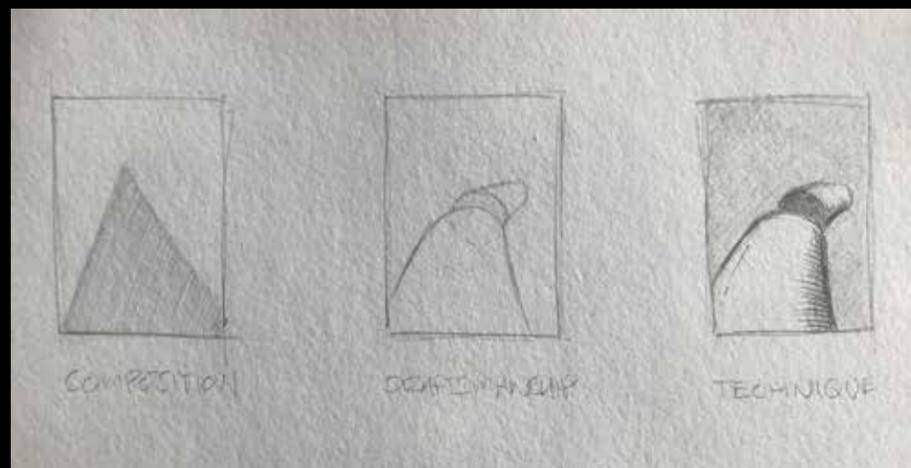


FIGURE 52: PAGE PRINCIPLES

STEP 1: IDEAS - THUMBNAIL

The “ideas stage” of the work is done via thumbnailing. Thumbnails get their name from their size. They should be small and fast sketches that explore the possible arrangements of the pieces of a composition. As the end goal is a comic page, the experimentation with ideas in their earliest stage is best done as miniature comic pages which test the artistic validity of the ideas.

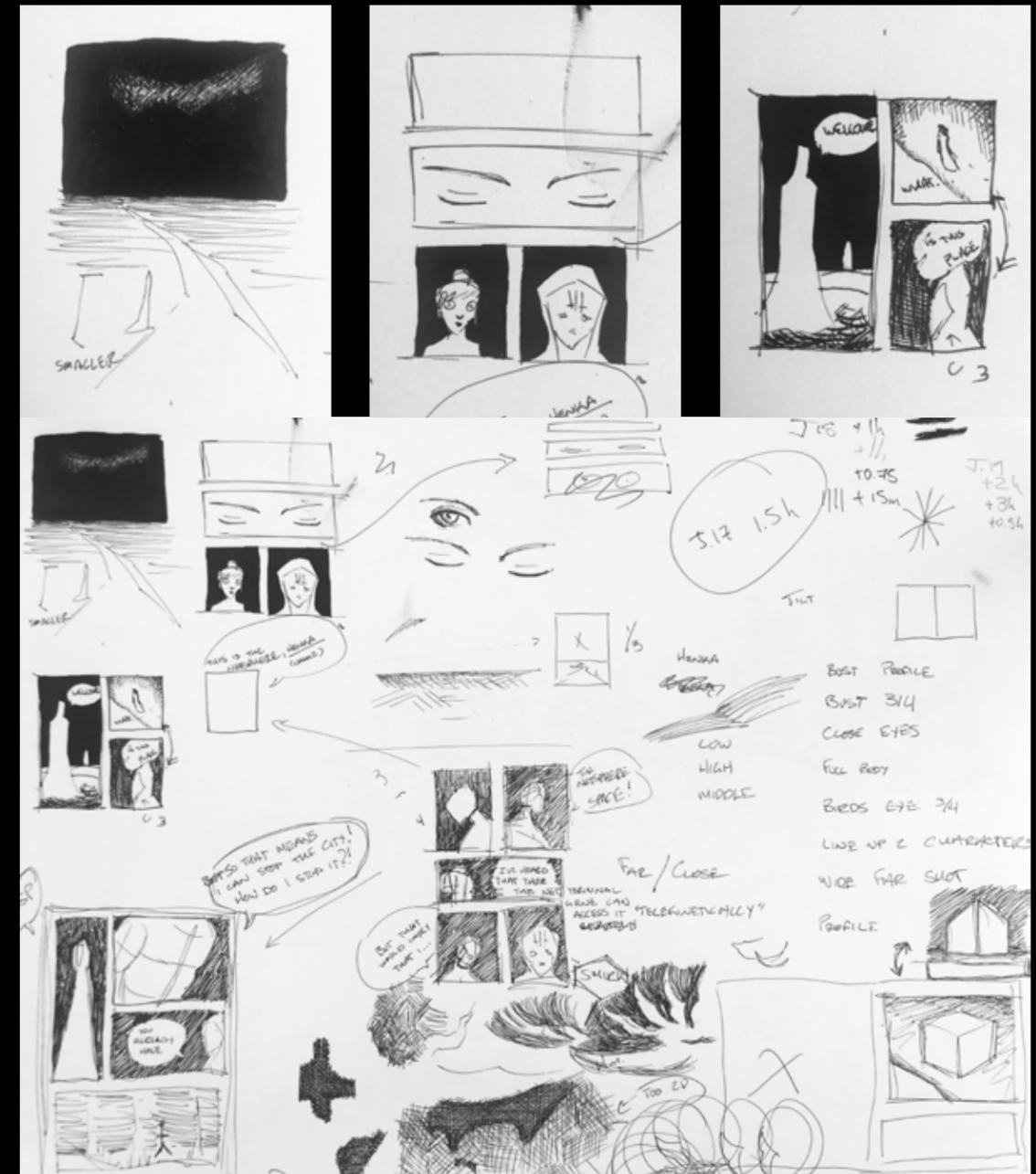
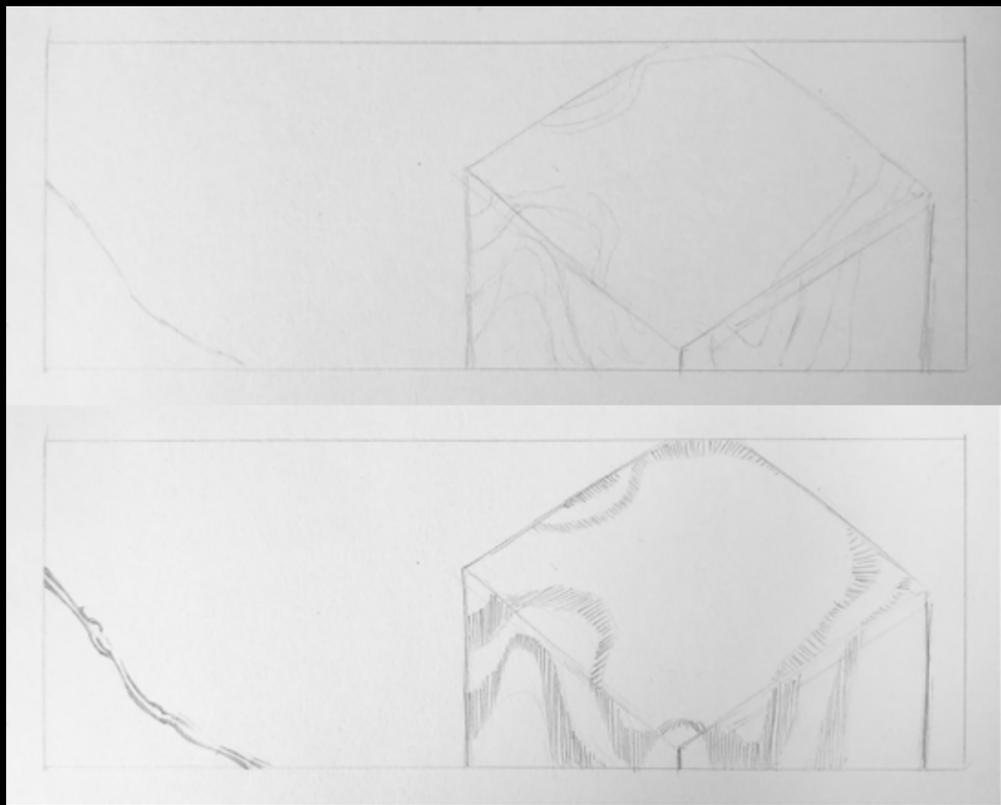


FIGURE 53: THUMBNAIL SKETCHES

STEP 2: COMPOSITION - PAGE ROUGH 1

After developing an appealing composition during the thumbnail stage, the next step is to translate that composition into a full size, 11x17 comic book art board. During this stage it is important to remember to “stand back” from the page and ensure the composition continues to read well as a whole. Sketching compositions as small thumbnails initially allows us to judge quickly whether or not we like a composition, and “standing back” allows us to have the same level of perspective over a full size page.

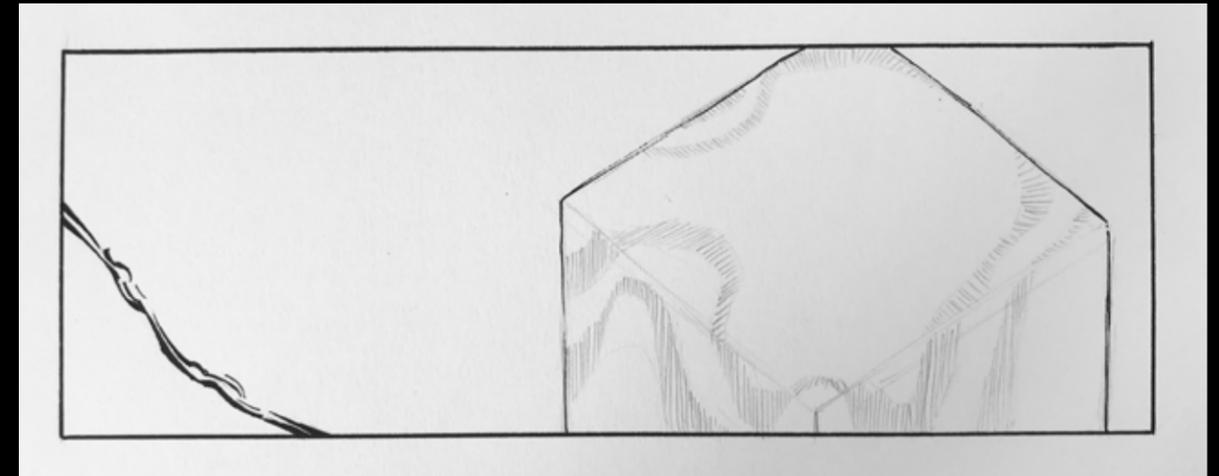
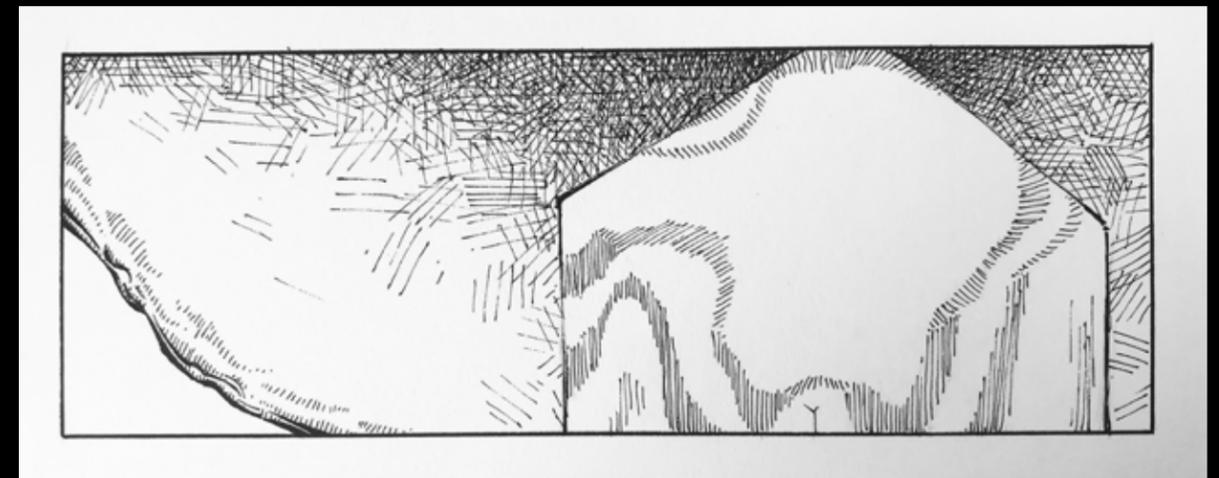
Gesture is one of the more important elements to be captured in the composition. Gesture can be understood as energy and movement. As most comics are capturing action sequences, whether its characters running and fighting or buildings crumbling and changing, movement and energy are important elements to capture in a comic page composition.

**FIGURE 54: COMPOSITION & DRAFTSMANSHIP****STEP 3: DRAFTSMANSHIP - PAGE ROUGH 2**

This stage is where perspective, foreshortening, proportion and silhouette all come into play. Perspective and foreshortening are how an artist uses spatial reasoning to layout 3D objects in a scene and create believability.

STEP 4: LINE

This is a simple stage of the comic page process. I outline the major forms, ensure that silhouettes are strong, and that the compositional elements are properly overlapping to create depth.

**FIGURE 55: LINE****FIGURE 56: TECHNIQUE****STEP 5: TECHNIQUE - RENDERING**

Now that I have a basic line drawing that has depth, composition, perspective and form I can begin to add my lighting and rendering. Light can be used to create a lot of emotion in a scene, and a good composition works together with lighting to create a complete image.

STEP 6: TECHNIQUE - SCAN AND COLOUR

Nihei used physical screentones to create the grey scale gradients in his artwork. I did not have access to authentic screentones, but I was able to simulate them digitally. I used them initially to approximate Nihei's original style, but as my work progressed I felt that the use of digital screentones were more of a detriment to my work than they were an asset.

This 6 step process is not something I had from the beginning of this semester. It took much trial and error to not only develop a system that I could use to my advantage, but that I could fully comprehend. Many of the drawings I created this semester did not strictly adhere to this process, and the points where I diverged from a clear process are highly visible in the finished products.

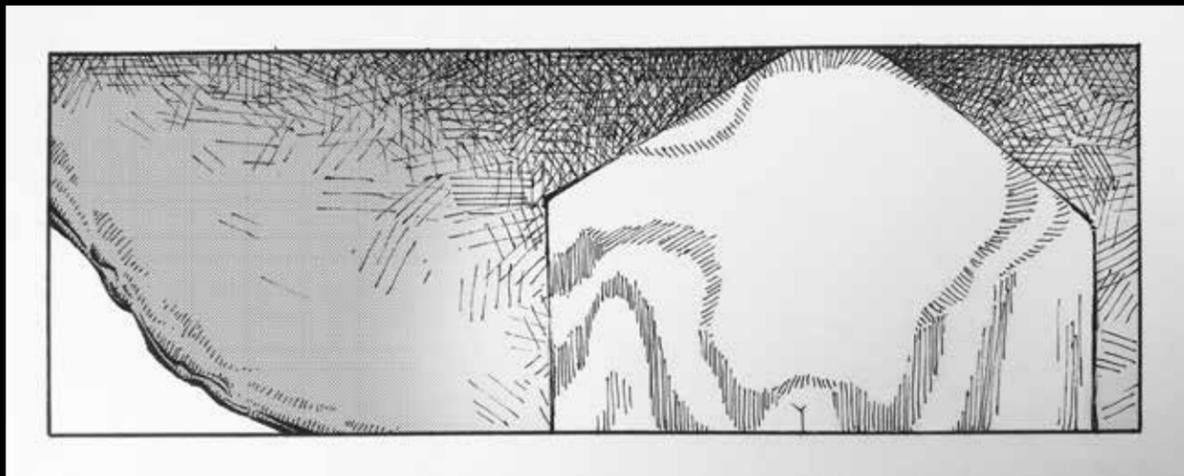


FIGURE 57: COLOUR

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