

THE DEFECT THAT HINDERS COMMUNICATION
BETWIXT THEM AND US, WHY MAY IT NOT BE
IN OUR PART AS WELL AS THEIRS?...

... 'TIS YET TO DETERMINE WHERE THE FAULT
LIES THAT WE UNDERSTAND NOT ONE ANOTHER
THE LANGUAGE OF ANIMALS, MONTAIGNE

THE *WEIRD* CAN BE TRANSFORMATIVE — SOMETIMES
LITERALLY — ENTERTAINING *MONSTERS* WHILE NOT
ALWAYS SEEING *THEM* AS MONSTROUS...

... IT STRIVES FOR A KIND OF UNDERSTANDING
EVEN WHEN SOMETHING *CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD*
THE WEIRD, ANN & JEFF VANDERMEER



I WALKED AROUND
IN *WONDERMENT*,
LICKING SHELLS,
STARING AT *ALGAE*
ON THE ROCKS AND
LAUGHING LIKE A
FOOL. HOURS WENT
BY...

...I GOT *LOST* IN A
SMALL ROCK POOL
AND SAW LAYERS OF
LIFE *EMERGE* FROM
THE WATER: TINY
ANEMONES, CUSHION
STARS WITH THEIR
GORGEOUS MOSAIC
DESIGNS...

...THE CLENCHED FIST
OF MY *MIND* HAD
FINALLY *OPENED* AND
IT WAS PURE JOY; I
WAS *FREE* AND I WAS
TRIPPING HARD.
SEA CHANGE,
ROSS FRYLINCK



WEIRD ECOLOGY REPRESENTS THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN RADICAL ECOLOGY AND WEIRD FICTION.

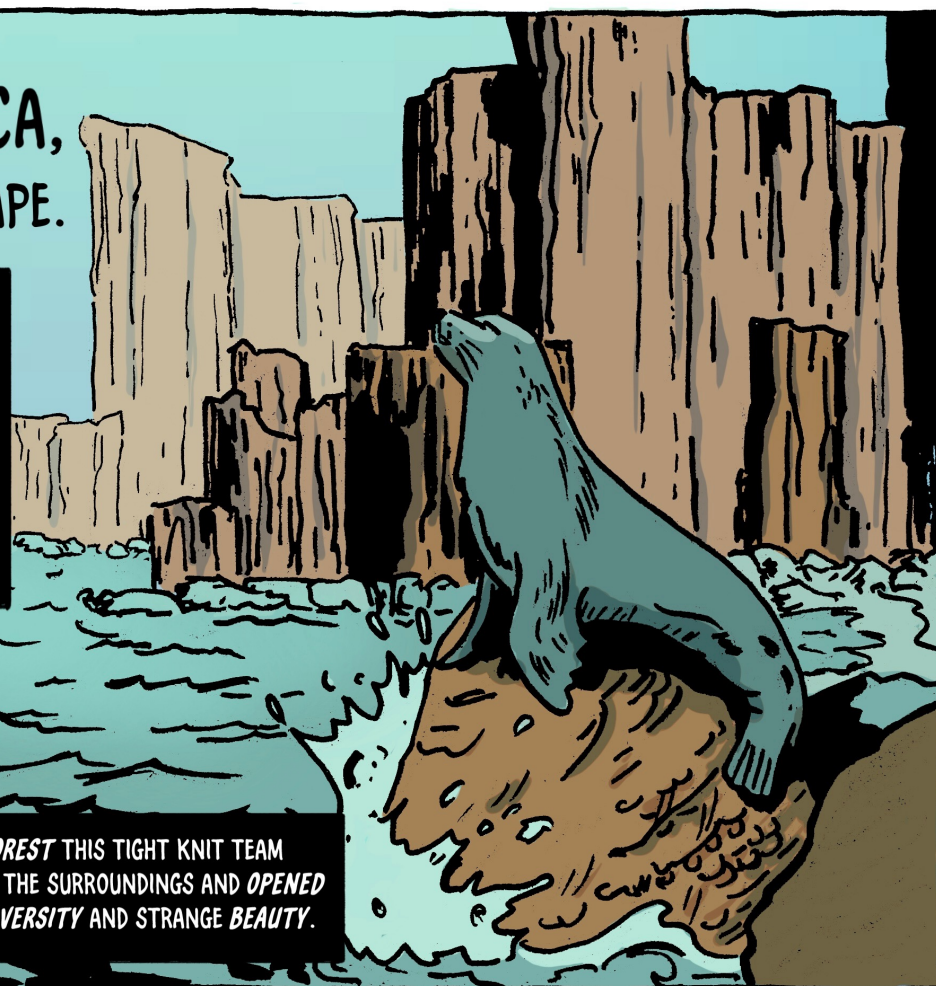
WEIRD ECOLOGIES ARE FOUND ALONG BORDERS, MARGINS, GAPS AND GATEWAYS WHERE THE HUMAN WORLD MEETS THE WILD, IN SPILLAGES BETWEEN THE ANTHROPOCENE AND THE NON-HUMAN HORIZON BEYOND.

WEIRD ECOLOGIES ARE NOT STATIC *GEOGRAPHIES*, BUT RATHER ACTIVE SPACES OF *ENCOUNTER*, PARTICIPATION, AND *TRANSFORMATION*.

SOUTH AFRICA, THE WESTERN CAPE.

DIFFICULT WEATHER, *COLD WATERS*, AND SPIRALLING KELP, MIGHT NOT SOUND LIKE THE PERFECT CONDITIONS FOR A DIVERS' *PARADISE*, BUT PARTICIPANTS IN THE *SEA CHANGE PROJECT* WOULD BEG TO DIFFER.

IN *THE GREAT AFRICAN SEA FOREST* THIS TIGHT KNOT TEAM OF FREE DIVERS HAVE EMBRACED THE SURROUNDINGS AND *OPENED* A WORLD OF ASTONISHING *BIODIVERSITY* AND STRANGE *BEAUTY*.



USING LITTLE *EQUIPMENT*, AND HAVING DEVELOPED A RANGE OF LOW-*FI TRACKING* METHODS, THE FREE DIVERS HAVE FOUND AN EXPERIENCE BEYOND OBSERVATION AND CLOSER TO *DIRECT ENCOUNTER*.



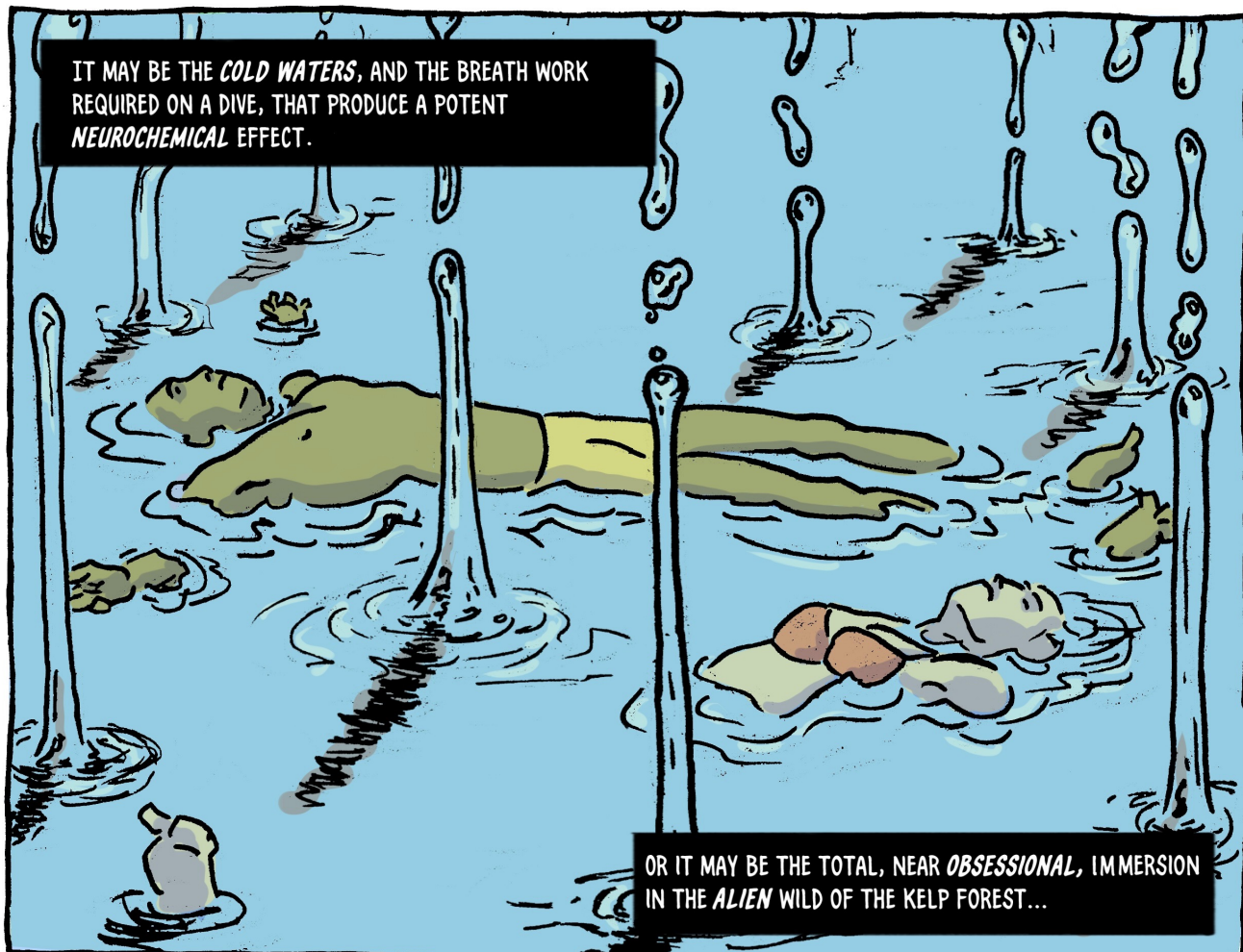
BUILDING CROSS SPECIES *KINSHIPS*, THROUGH FAMILIARISATION AND *RESPECT*, THE SEA CHANGE PROJECT IS PRACTISING WHAT THEY CALL '*LIVING SCIENCE*,' WHERE SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH IS ONLY A BYPRODUCT OF A GREATER GOAL OF *RE-ENCHANTMENT* WITH THE NATURAL WORLD.

THROUGH *DAILY DIVES*, DEDUCTION, *RITUAL*, STORYTELLING AND A COMMUNAL ETHIC, THEIR EFFORTS HAVE BEEN *GREETED* WITH REMARKABLE *INSIGHTS*.



AND THEN IT STARTS TO GET *WEIRD*...

IT MAY BE THE *COLD WATERS*, AND THE BREATH WORK REQUIRED ON A DIVE, THAT PRODUCE A POTENT *NEUROCHEMICAL* EFFECT.



OR IT MAY BE THE TOTAL, NEAR *OBSESSIONAL*, IMMERSION IN THE *ALIEN* WILD OF THE KELP FOREST...

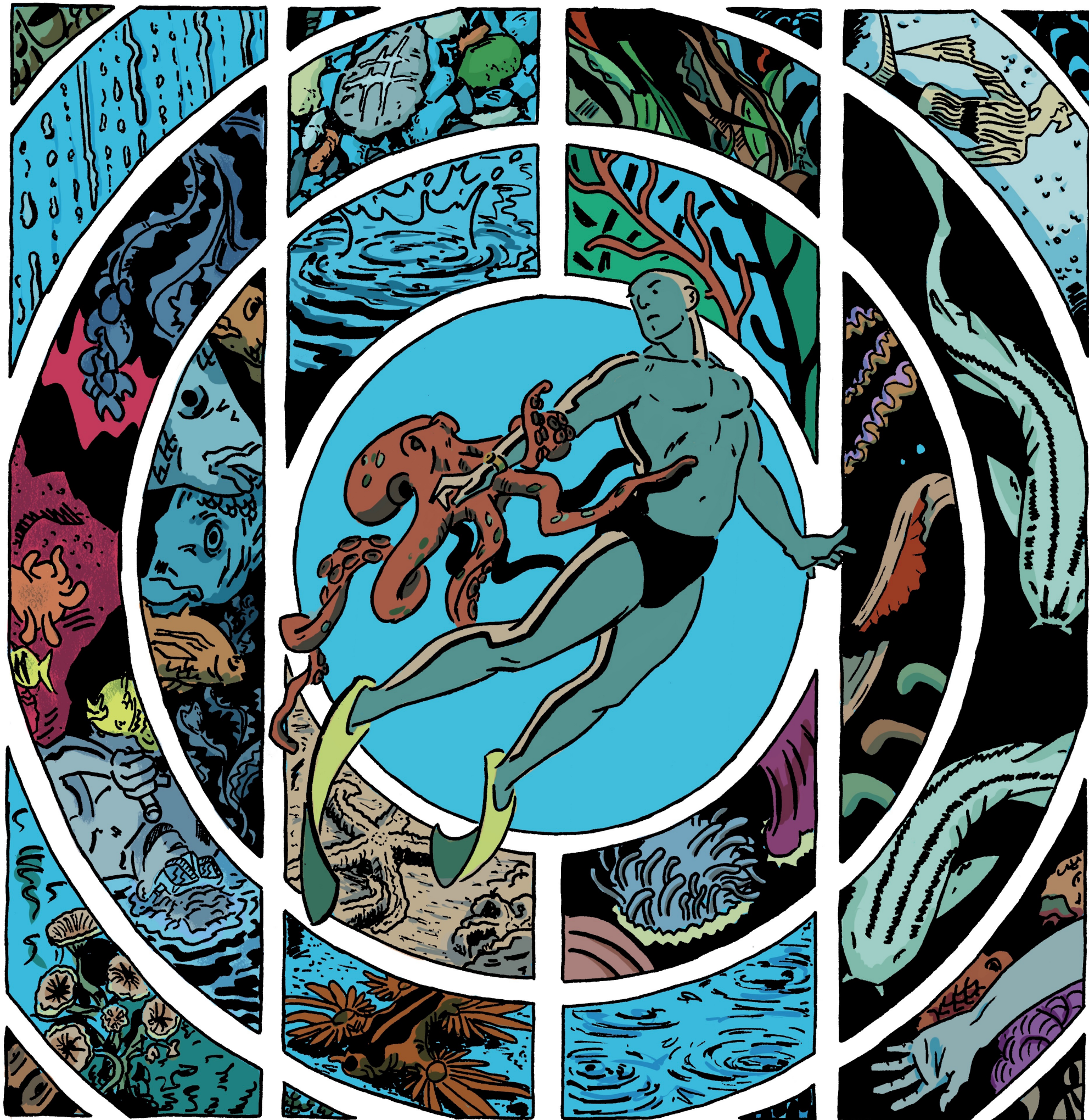
...BUT IT SEEMS BEING *UNDER* THE WATERS HAS CAUSED A *PSYCHOLOGICAL*, EVEN EXISTENTIAL, CHANGE IN THE FREE *DIVERS*, AT LEAST AS POWERFUL AND *PROFOUND* AS ANY *PSYCHEDELIC TRIP*.



THEIR EXPERIENCE REPRESENTS SOMETHING OF AN *ONTOLOGICAL* SHIFT, WHERE A POSITIVIST SCIENTIFIC APPROACH IS LESS REDOLENT OF *MEANING*, AND WHERE THE BORDER SEPARATING THE HUMAN FROM THE *ANIMAL* HAVE BEGUN TO DISSOLVE.

AS *CRAIG FOSTER*, SEA CHANGE PROJECT MEMBER, *PSYCHONAUT* AND PIONEER OF UNDERSEA TRACKING, PUTS IT 'WE ARE *WILD BY NATURE*, WILD BY BIRTH. IT'S THE WILDNESS THAT MAKES US HUMAN, THAT *EXCITES* OUR BEING'

CONSIDERING *ENCOUNTERS* IN THE KELP FOREST, FOSTER TURNS HIS THOUGHTS TO ONE OF ITS MOST *ENIGMATIC* CREATURES 'WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE *OCTOPUS* IT APPEARS TO BE COMPLETELY ALIEN BUT...



...YOU ARE *ACTUALLY* LOOKING AT YOURSELF. YOU ARE *WOVEN* OF THE SAME *FABRIC* AS THAT OCTOPUS. EVEN THOUGH IT FIRST APPEARS SO *DIFFERENT* FROM YOU, YOU CAN MAKE A CONNECTION AND IT BRINGS YOU *CLOSER* TO ONENESS'

THE *MIRROR* OF NATURE, RECOGNITION IN THE GAZE OF THE *OTHER*, WEIRD ECOLOGIES ARE A *PERMEABLE* MEMBRANE BETWEEN *EPISTEMOLOGICAL* FALLACY AND THE SECRET, VAST, AND *UNACCOUNTABLE* REALMS OF EXPERIENCE WAITING IN NATURE.

FOSTER'S OWN EXPERIENCE ECHOS TROPES OF *WEIRD FICTION*, WHILST ALSO POINTING TO THE ECOLOGICAL *TURN* IN MUCH RECENT WEIRD SCI-FI SUCH AS *JEFF VANDERMEER'S SOUTHERN REACH TRILOGY*, AS WE SHALL SEE.

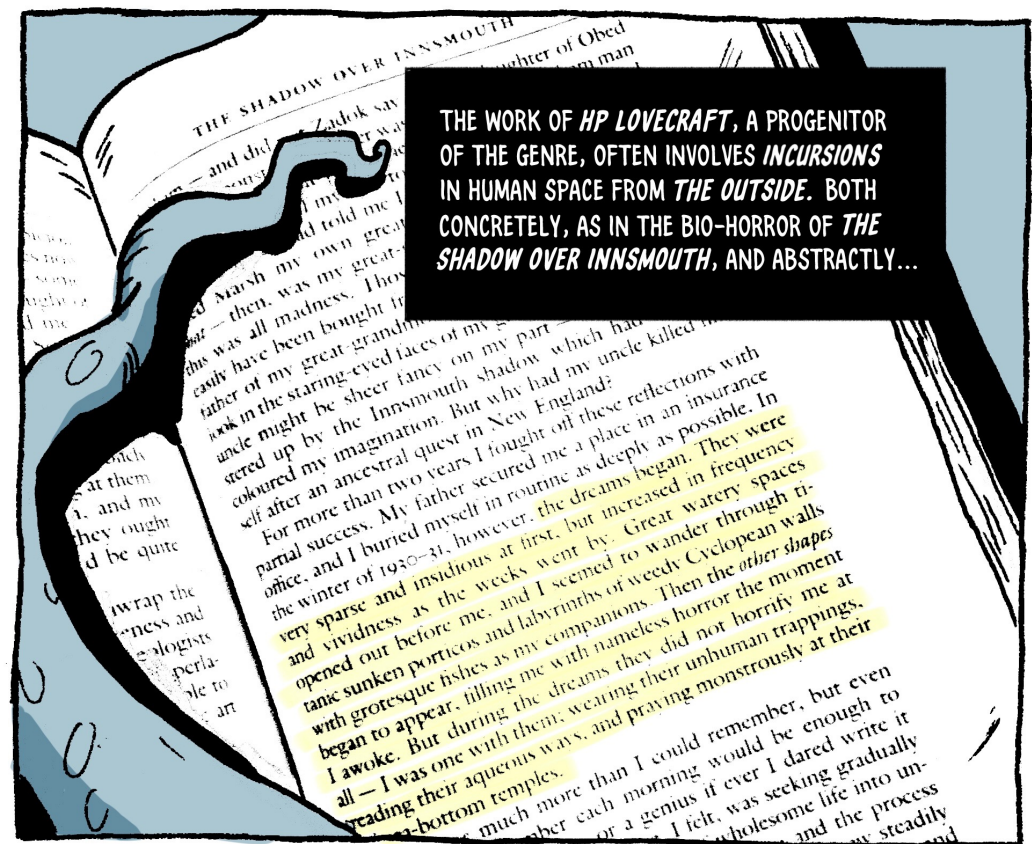


CONCERNED WITH *BORDERS*, *BOUNDARIES* AND THE *TRANSGRESSION* OF LIMITS AND LIMINAL SPACES, *WEIRD FICTION* PRESENTS A *CONTESTED EXISTENTIAL LANDSCAPE*.

WE LIVE ON A PLACID ISLAND OF IGNORANCE IN THE MIDST OF BLACK SEAS OF INFINITY.

SLIME, *TENTACLES*, *OOZE*, *BRINE*, *GELATINOUS BEINGS*, *ELDRITCH GROTESQUERIES* AND CURIOUS *BODILY MUTATIONS* FIGURE PROMINENTLY IN THE *MAD CARNIVAL* OF *WEIRD FICTION*.

SINCE IT'S RISE IN THE *PULP MAGAZINES* OF THE 1930'S, *WEIRD FICTION* HAS OFTEN CONTAINED IDEAS TOO VAST FOR ITS OWN *NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK*, WITH CONCEPTS SPILLING AND *SLIPPING* FROM AUTHOR TO AUTHOR, WORK TO WORK. WITH SHARED *GEOGRAPHIES*, *ARCHAEOLOGIES* AND *MYTHOLOGIES* SPANNING LITERARY TRADITION.



THE WORK OF *HP LOVECRAFT*, A PROGENITOR OF THE GENRE, OFTEN INVOLVES *INCURSIONS* IN HUMAN SPACE FROM *THE OUTSIDE*. BOTH CONCRETELY, AS IN THE BIO-HORROR OF *THE SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH*, AND ABSTRACTLY...



...AS IN THE *COLOUR OUT OF SPACE*, WHERE A NEW COLOUR INVADES THE *KNOWN SPECTRUM*, WARPING THE *WOULD* AROUND IT. IN *LOVECRAFT* THE *WEIRD* SIGNIFIES AN ATTACK ON *HUMAN LOGICS*, BOTH *HARMFUL* AND *TERRIFYING*.



THE *LOVECRAFTIAN WEIRD*, WILDLY ENTERTAINING AS IT MAY BE, IS JUST ONE TYPE OF *WEIRD*, PROCESSED THROUGH A *PARTICULAR LENS*. THE *WEIRD* OFTEN REDUCED TO A STAND IN FOR THE *FEARS* OF A WHITE, *HETERO-NORMATIVE*, AND *MISOGYNIST PSYCHOPATHOLOGY*.

BUT THE *WEIRD* *EXCEEDS ITS ORBIT*...

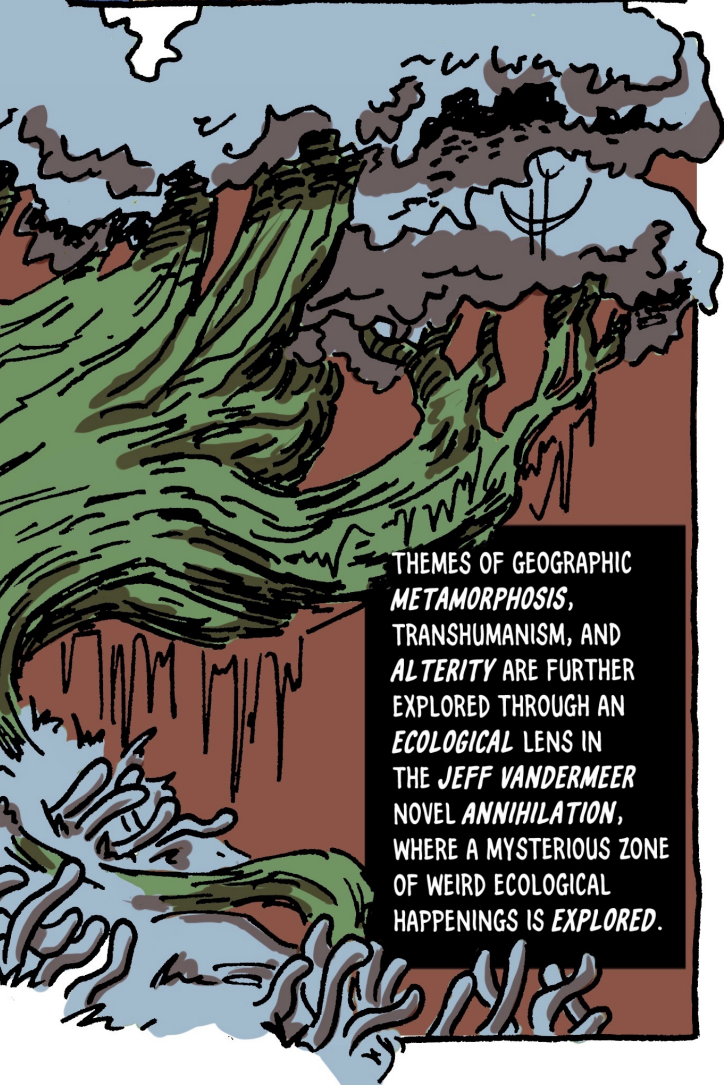
IN 1972'S *ROADSIDE PICNIC*, A NOVEL BY THE *STRUGATSKY BROS*, ZONES OF STRANGE ACTIVITY HAVE *EMERGED* ACROSS THE GLOBE IN THE WAKE OF ALIEN VISITATION.



THE *ZONES* ARE A BIZARRE LANDSCAPE OF SHIFTING GEOGRAPHIES AND CONTRADICTION. A *HYBRID* OF MATERIAL COMPOSITES AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THOSE WHO *TRAVEL* THROUGH THEM.

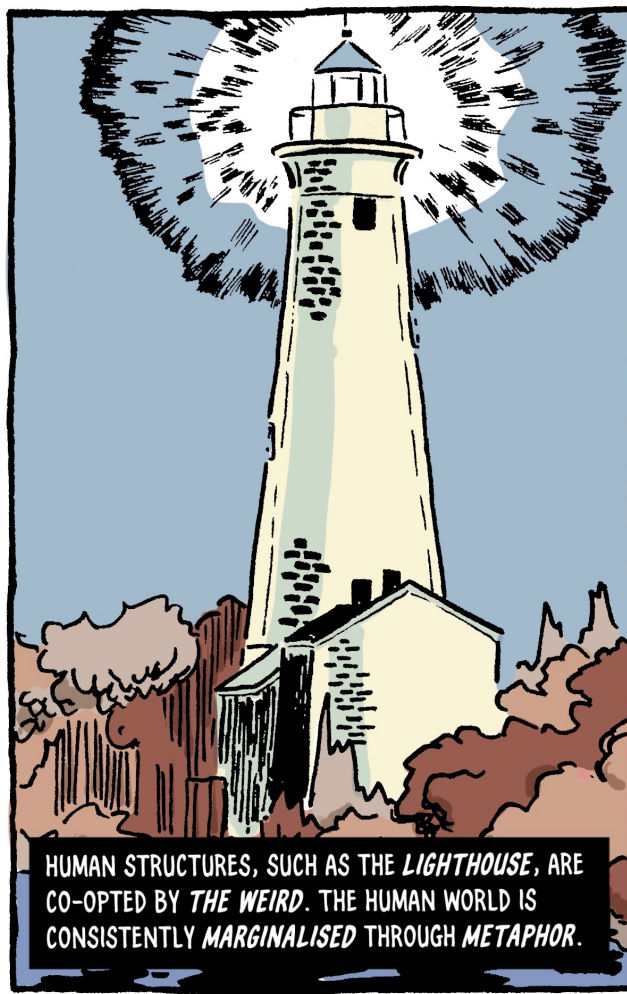


IN *ROADSIDE PICNIC* THE WEIRD STRAYS FROM THE TRADITIONS OF THE GENRE, PRESENTING *ALTERITY* AS ULTIMATELY SOMETHING OF A *GIFT*, AMBIVALENT AS IT MAY BE, TO THE HUMAN WORLD.



THEMES OF GEOGRAPHIC *METAMORPHOSIS*, *TRANSHUMANISM*, AND *ALTERITY* ARE FURTHER EXPLORED THROUGH AN *ECOLOGICAL* LENS IN THE *JEFF VANDERMEER* NOVEL *ANNIHILATION*, WHERE A MYSTERIOUS ZONE OF WEIRD ECOLOGICAL HAPPENINGS IS *EXPLORED*.

VANDERMEER COMPLICATES THE *NATURE-IN-REVOLT* NARRATIVE BY MIXING *BODY HORROR* WITH MORAL *AMBIVALENCE*. SKEWING THE HUMAN NARRATIVE IN FAVOUR OF A MORE *COMPLEX* ECOLOGICAL MYSTERY.



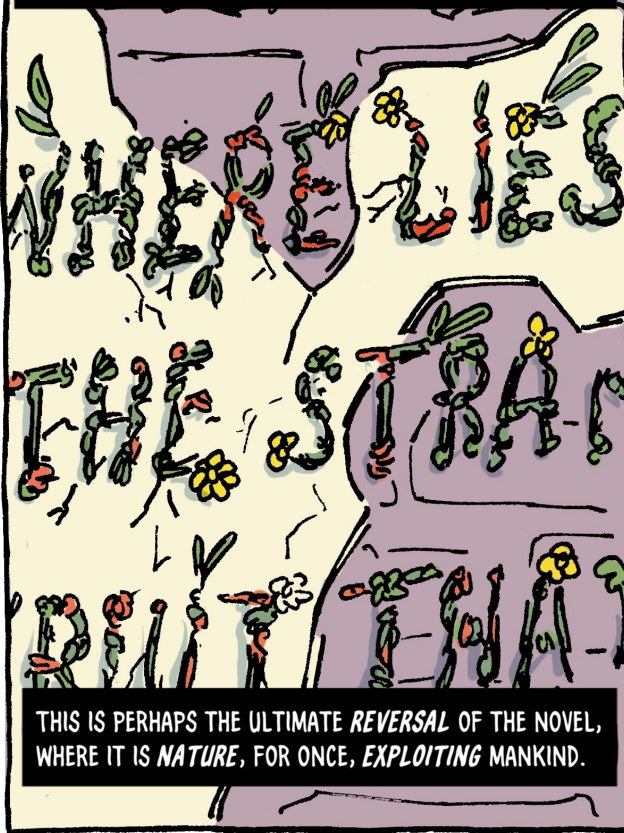
HUMAN STRUCTURES, SUCH AS THE *LIGHTHOUSE*, ARE CO-OPTED BY *THE WEIRD*. THE HUMAN WORLD IS CONSISTENTLY *MARGINALISED* THROUGH *METAPHOR*.

EVEN THE NOVEL'S NARRATOR IS *UNIMPRESSED* BY THE HUMAN WORLD, COMMENTING: 'FUN FOR ME WAS SNEAKING OFF TO PEER INTO A *TIDAL POOL*, TO GRASP THE *INTRICACIES* OF THE CREATURES THAT LIVED THERE.'



...SUSTENANCE FOR ME WAS TIED TO *ECOSYSTEM* AND HABITAT, *ORGASM* THE SUDDEN REALIZATION OF THE INTERCONNECTIVITY OF *LIVING THINGS*.'

AT ONE POINT IT *APPEARS* AS THOUGH THE *ECOSYSTEM* ITSELF IS ATTEMPTING TO *COMMUNICATE* USING *LANGUAGE* IT HAS *EXTRACTED* FROM ITS HUMAN VICTIMS.

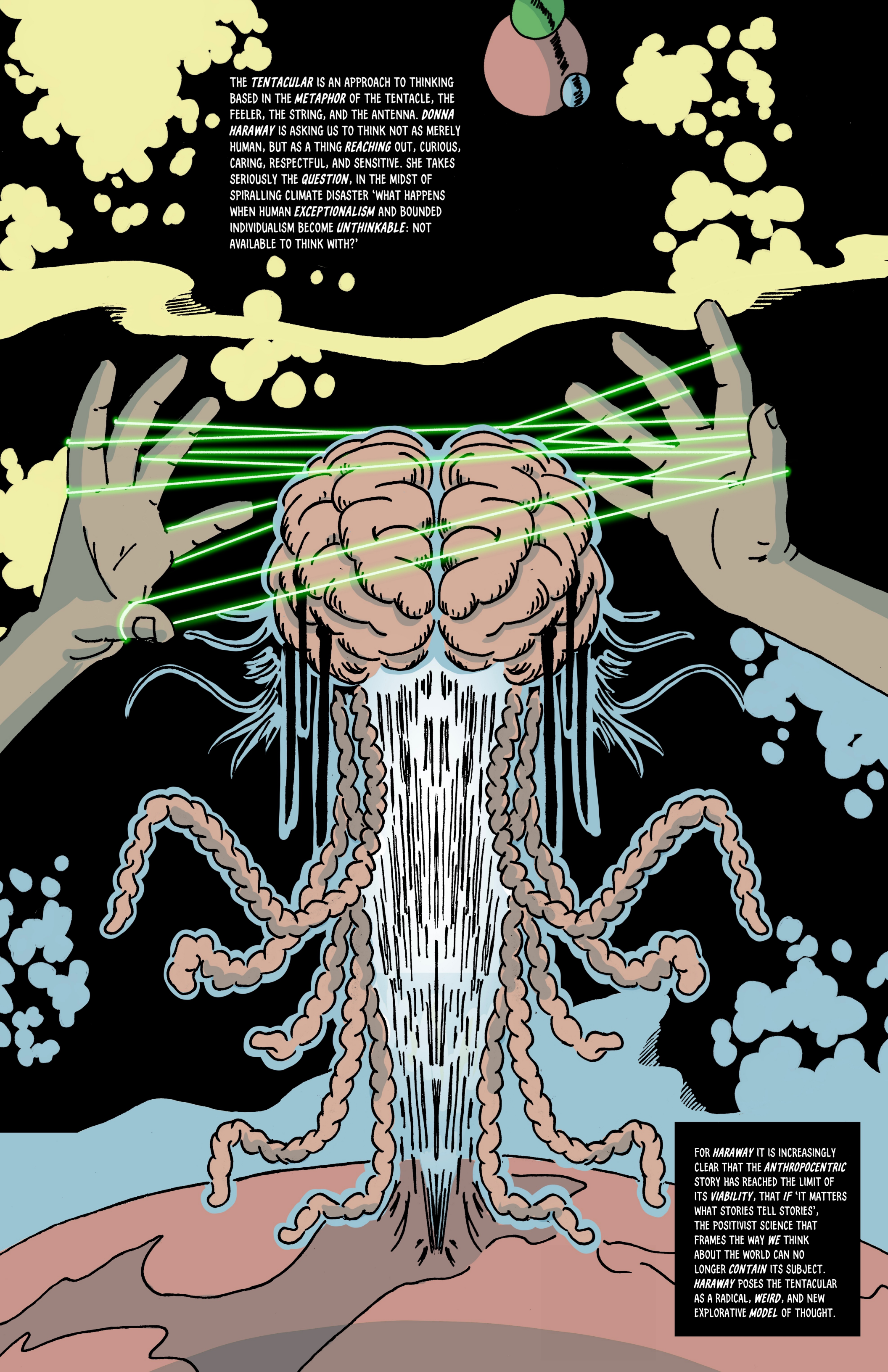


THIS IS PERHAPS THE ULTIMATE *REVERSAL* OF THE NOVEL, WHERE IT IS *NATURE*, FOR ONCE, *EXPLOITING* MANKIND.

THE WEIRD IN *VANDERMEER* SIGNIFIES A BROADENING OF *STORYTELLING* POTENTIAL, A MOVE BEYOND THE *ANTHROPOCENTRISM* OF EARLIER *WEIRD* FICTION.

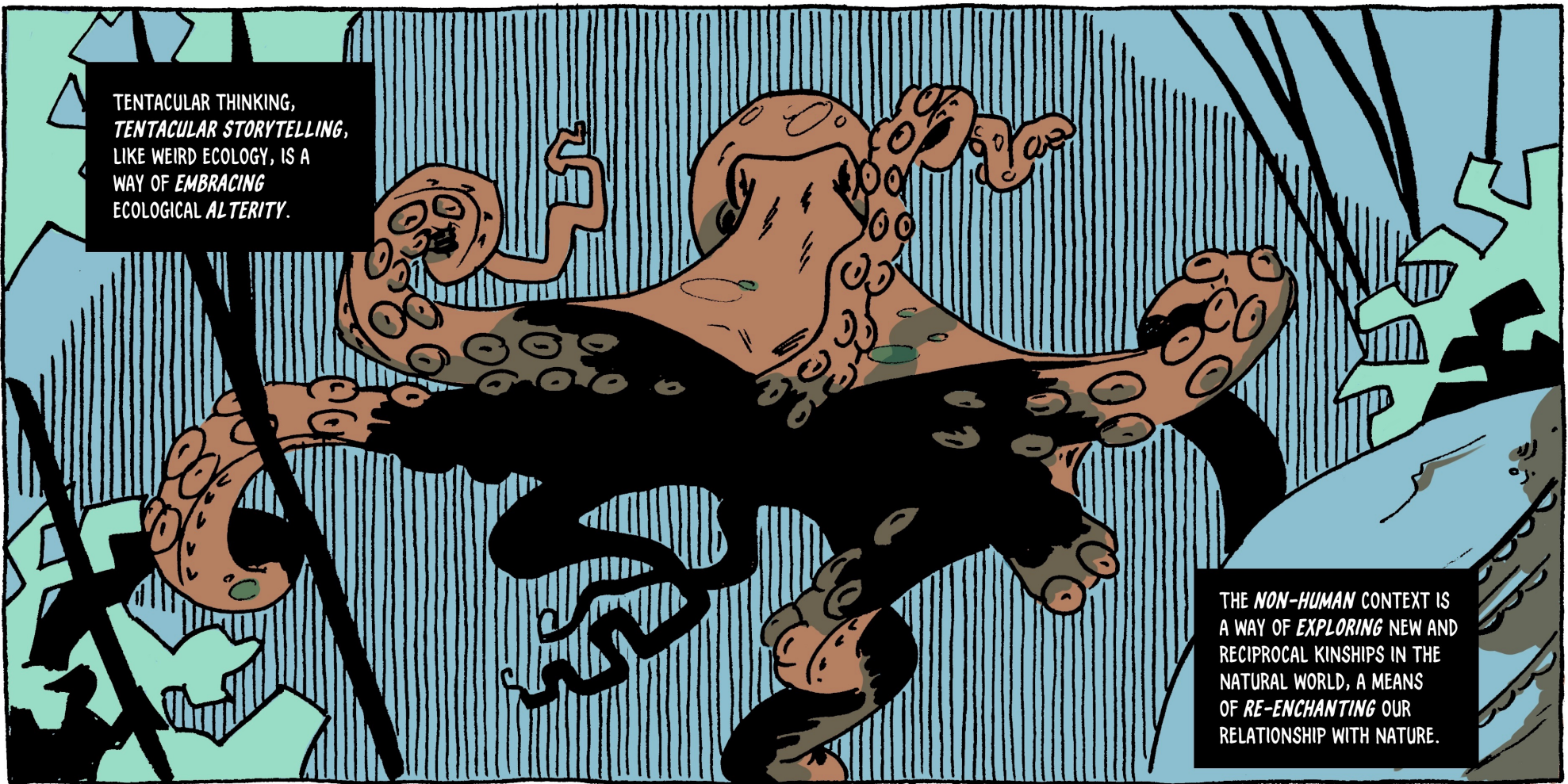


THIS STORY TELLING *POTENTIAL* IS SOMETHING FIGURED IN THE WORK OF *DONNA HARAWAY*, WHO CALLS THIS WIDER FOCUS '*TENTACULAR*.'



THE *TENTACULAR* IS AN APPROACH TO THINKING BASED IN THE *METAPHOR* OF THE TENTACLE, THE FEELER, THE STRING, AND THE ANTENNA. *DONNA HARAWAY* IS ASKING US TO THINK NOT AS MERELY HUMAN, BUT AS A THING *REACHING* OUT, CURIOUS, CARING, RESPECTFUL, AND SENSITIVE. SHE TAKES SERIOUSLY THE *QUESTION*, IN THE MIDST OF SPIRALLING CLIMATE DISASTER 'WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HUMAN *EXCEPTIONALISM* AND BOUNDED INDIVIDUALISM BECOME *UNTHINKABLE*: NOT AVAILABLE TO THINK WITH?'

FOR *HARAWAY* IT IS INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT THE *ANTHROPOCENTRIC* STORY HAS REACHED THE LIMIT OF ITS *VIABILITY*, THAT IF 'IT MATTERS WHAT STORIES TELL STORIES', THE POSITIVIST SCIENCE THAT FRAMES THE WAY *WE* THINK ABOUT THE WORLD CAN NO LONGER *CONTAIN* ITS SUBJECT. *HARAWAY* POSES THE *TENTACULAR* AS A RADICAL, *WEIRD*, AND NEW EXPLORATIVE *MODEL* OF THOUGHT.



TENTACULAR THINKING,
TENTACULAR STORYTELLING,
LIKE WEIRD ECOLOGY, IS A
WAY OF *EMBRACING*
ECOLOGICAL ALTERITY.

THE *NON-HUMAN* CONTEXT IS
A WAY OF *EXPLORING* NEW AND
RECIPROCAL KINSHIPS IN THE
NATURAL WORLD, A MEANS
OF *RE-ENCHANTING* OUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE.

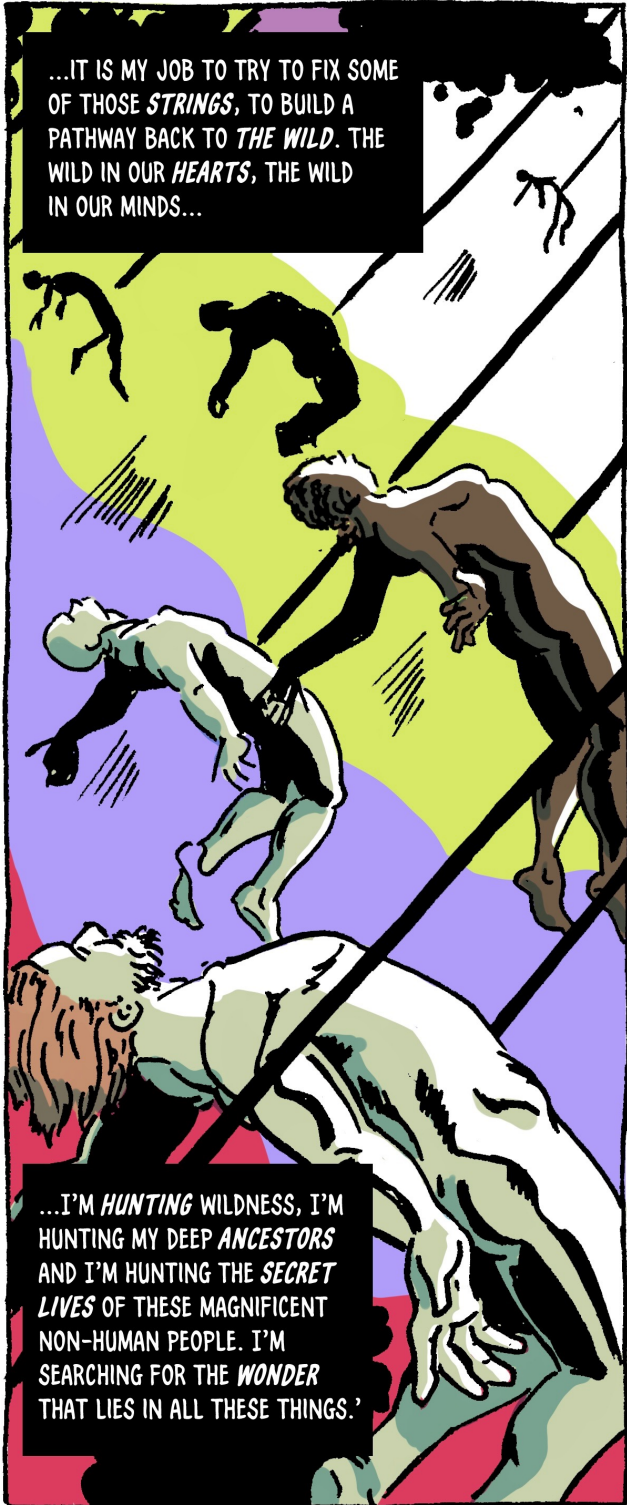


WITH THIS IN MIND, IT
SHOULDN'T BE A SURPRISE
THAT THE DIVERS OF *SEA
CHANGE PROJECT* REFER
TO THEMSELVES, AS
STORYTELLERS. NOT
SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY
BRING BACK STORIES
FROM THE *SEA FOREST*,
BUT BECAUSE *OUT-THERE*
THEY ARE *RETRACING*
OUR STORY.



PIPPA EHRLICH, FILM MAKER AND
FREE DIVER, EXPLAINS 'OUR GOAL
IS TO CREATE AN *EMOTIONAL*
CONNECTION BETWEEN THE VIEWER
AND THE *NATURAL WORLD*.'

CRAIG FOSTER GOES ON 'WE'VE
BROKEN THE *STRINGS* TO THE WILD...



...IT IS MY JOB TO TRY TO FIX SOME
OF THOSE *STRINGS*, TO BUILD A
PATHWAY BACK TO *THE WILD*. THE
WILD IN OUR *HEARTS*, THE WILD
IN OUR MINDS...

...I'M *HUNTING* WILDNESS, I'M
HUNTING MY DEEP *ANCESTORS*
AND I'M HUNTING THE *SECRET
LIVES* OF THESE MAGNIFICENT
NON-HUMAN PEOPLE. I'M
SEARCHING FOR THE *WONDER*
THAT LIES IN ALL THESE THINGS.'



WEIRD ECOLOGY IS A WAY
TO THINK ABOUT NATURE,
A WAY TO *FRAME* THE
STORIES WE TELL ABOUT
IT, A WAY OF CONCEIVING
THE WORLD *BEYOND* THE
ANTHROPOCENTRIC
FOCUS OF *EXTRACTION*
AND *RESOURCE*.

OUT BEYOND THE *SHORELINE*,
OR *UNDER* THE NEAREST LOG,
A WORLD OF *STRANGE* AND
WEIRD POSSIBILITY EXISTS,
AT ONCE FAR REMOVED FROM
OUR EVERYDAY *EXPERIENCE*,
BUT PERHAPS, ALL THE MORE
INTERESTING AND MORE
NOURISHING FOR IT.