

L A B Y R I N T H
EXCERPTS 54-66

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To write, take a blank sheet.

To compare this image with another image of rock formations, turn to page 57.

To read, turn to page 55.

We made our approach as the morning light started to pull everything into focus. The gentle incline of the walkway, leading up to the edge of the so-called Entrance Hub, took us closer to a line of pylons, each with a plume of white tickertape billowing from its tip. The streamers, in fact, came out almost at right angles to their posts, as if pressed outward by an unnaturally steady breeze. The effect was reminiscent of the lifeless national flag captured in photographs of the lunar surface. Identical, equidistant pylons encircled the rim of the Entrance Hub, which we could now see rising beyond the edge of the approach ramp. An enormous concrete crater opened before us, some 60-metres in diameter and 10-metres below ground at its lowest point, dotted by the dark apertures of entrances to other chambers. Soon enough, crowds would make their way up these same slopes, working their way down into the crater, to disperse into the holes in the basin. From this elevated position, the crater was most impressive – an indentation engineered in the middle of a city. It was the work of a collective, convened for this event under the name Ruxton, who had been commissioned to design a congregation area that would lead into a labyrinth of chambers and cavities underneath the surface. Indeed, the crater's design suggested it was closely related to that subterranean network, but in a way that was disturbed, as if its walls and ceiling had been scooped up from above – the roof lifted off Speer's ceremonial anthill. It was with a sense of clinical disenfranchisement that we made our way down toward the constellation of entrances. As we spiralled downward, occasionally following directional markers embedded into the concrete, we realised that the entire basin constituted a gigantic modulating vent. It was designed as a complex network of chutes, sluices and sculpted angles that manipulated pressurised airflows, differing in temperature and humidity, in order to force them over the crater rim and down the approach ramps. The crater's ceaseless exhalation was what made those streamers, which had so strikingly heralded our approach, strangely lifeless.

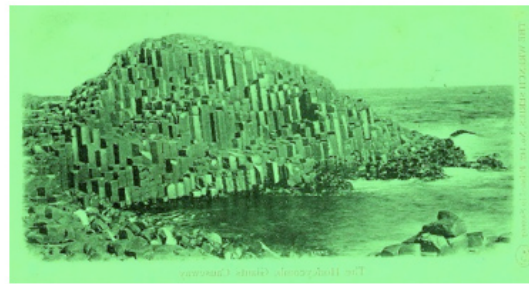
My eyes were filled with blue as the sound entered my skull – a violent, piercing compound of clear and distorted signals. For a moment I thought I could make out a conversation between Arnaut and Boy Six, but the pain smothered this almost instantly. When I lay crumpled on the concrete once more, my ankle having given way on the incline as I landed, I could feel blood starting to well in my ears. Still somewhat stunned, I nonetheless had the impression that I had punctured a membrane of some kind – an invisible bubble that had been hovering just above the nadir of the crater the whole time; I had pushed into it like a needle penetrating a balloon. And in that instant (although my perception of time now seemed unreliable) I had tapped into an overloaded network of signals that I was sure bore some relation to the system of chambers beneath the surface. In fact I thought of the crowds that I had seen filtering down into the tunnels, of Arnaut too, as if all their chants, all their thoughts, had been collected into one overpowering noise.

Again, even though I could only have remained in the necessary position (at the full limit of my highest leap) for a fragment of a second, my second occupation of this point had had an immediate effect on the crater. I could no longer hear anything except a dull buzz, but I felt something shift in the atmosphere. I looked over to Boy Six, who had started to walk backwards away from the centre of the basin, and noticed that, behind him, the streamers on the far pylons had started to sag and drift down toward the ground. Now I felt a more definite shift in the airflow all around me, as if currents had been put in reverse. All the streamers around the circumference of the crater – previously flowing outward, perpendicular to the pylons – had switched their orientation, and now pointed toward a position above my head – the point in space where my signals had overlapped. I wiped some of the blood from my ears with my fingers, swiping them on the pale concrete. A few metres away, just inside one of the entrance apertures, I could see pink smoke, welling right up to the threshold of the crater. Its consistency was different, as if hardening – for I was sure that it should have started dispersing into the clear afternoon sky.

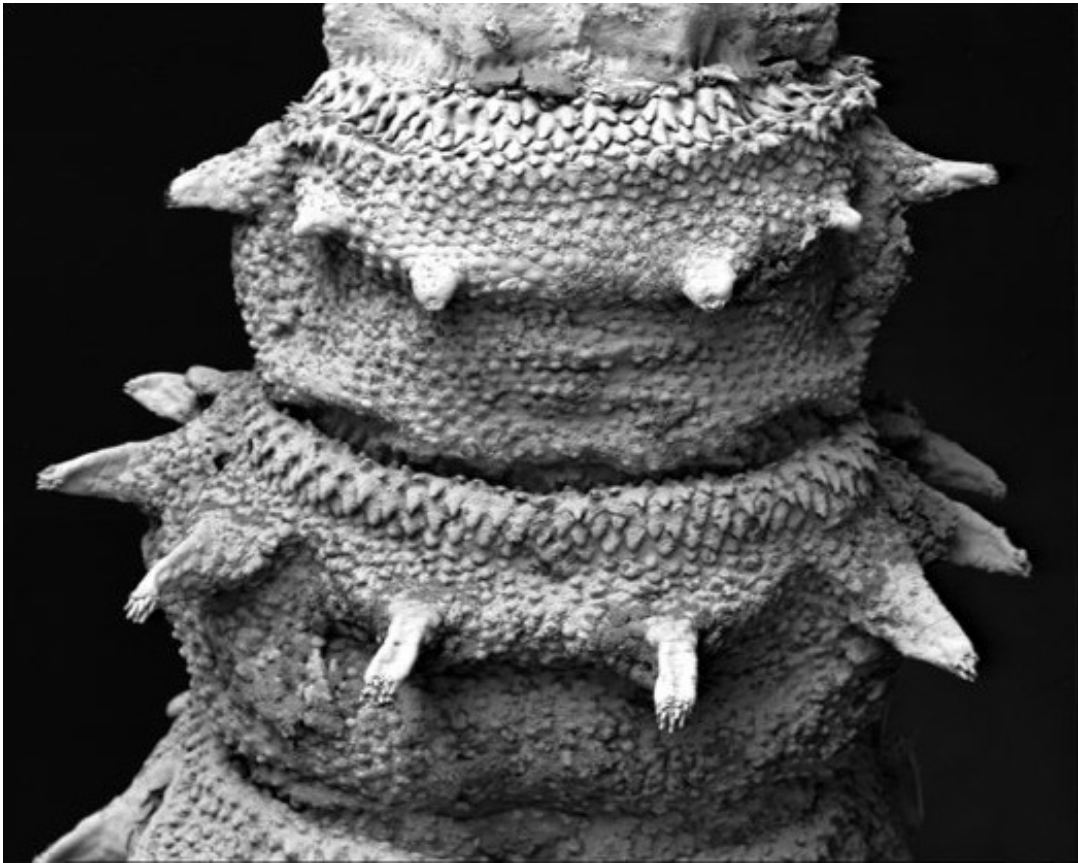
For an illustration of the 'invisible bubble' turn to page 64.

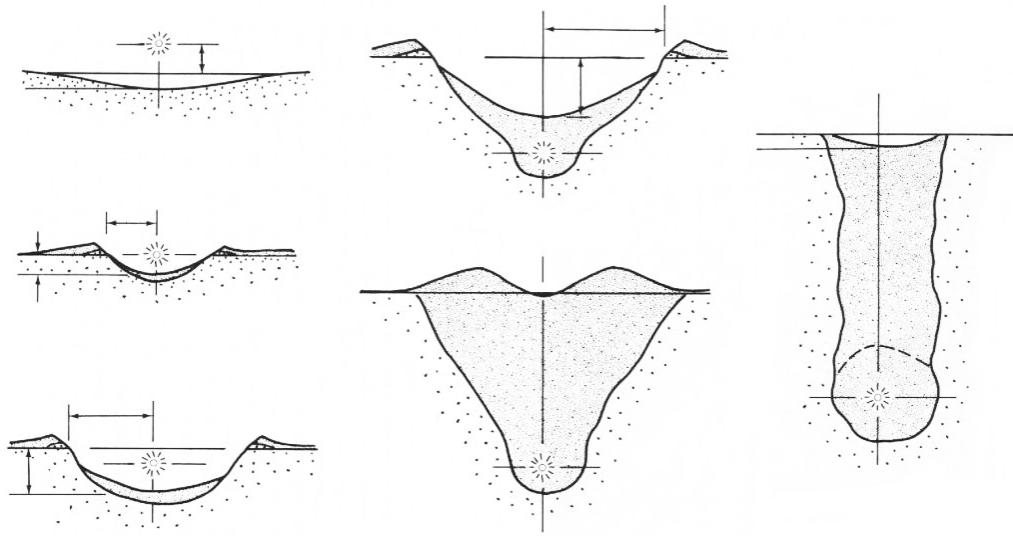
To continue, turn to page 64.

To go back, turn to page 61.



*To compare this image with another image of rock formations, turn to page 54.
To continue, turn to page 63.
To go back, turn to page 60.*





Continuing along the walkway, the viewer is taken close enough to Tinline's collecting haze to detect an odour that is imperceptible when following its first threads. The smell is pleasant enough but vaguely artificial, either as if chemical additives are attempting to sweeten the lurid smoke, or that it is in fact edible, even nourishing, for humans. On reflection this too is consistent with Tinline's interest in the perceptual ambiguities involved in manipulating physical compulsions through architectural space, as well as the political or ethical implications of such direction. Images of people being herded through these labyrinthine cells by a thread of gas, with its ever-present analogy of a noxious cultural fug, is clearly a troubling one – even more so if it can so easily be associated with the kinds of impulses epitomized by gravity advertisements.

Almost immediately, however, a point of escape is provided, although again it is not clear whether Tinline is responsible for this break or whether an anonymous member of the Ruxton Collective has shown their hand. Beyond a narrow opening in the main passage, which the majority of people will have to stoop to pass through, another large space opens up – this time an immense cube-shaped hanger lit only by a line along the sharp angle of wall and floor. No trace of the pink smoke has been allowed to leak into this chamber, so it seems. At the far end of the space, sharpening all the time as the eyes adjust to the darkness, there stands an enormous configuration of paperback books, at least thirty-metres high. Several thousand tomes, their covers and end pages painted black, rise up in a great wave, mirrored down the centre and tapering off on each sides, like a separating moustache. It is not clear whether this is a thing to be observed or an artificial escarpment to climb. Its silent presence is imposing enough. Before its erudition as an image of stockpiled, rejected or deferred writing, it is actually the meticulous symmetry that is the most powerful aspect of the work – as if the stack acknowledges the horror of whole lives being lost arranging material that will never see the light of day. As such it stands most obviously as a monument to the writer's anxiety, but is not limited to it. It is a melancholy mass, and it is easy to imagine it keening like a whale out of water. It is not until the room is exited through another door that the model for the arrangement, which has been copied precisely, is revealed: twin photographs presented in a tiny light box, showing honeycomb causeways of basalt slowly being stripped by the sea.

To consider an illustration that may turn out to be more appropriate than the one intended, turn to page 58.

To continue, turn to page 57.

To go back, turn to page 65.

Boy, six. What I had first taken for the letter 'R' on his tunic was in fact a number, the identification he had given. As the speaker continued to rattle out its mixture of indecipherable acoustics, boy six began to make his own contributions. At first I paid little notice, believing it to be a private communication, a protective circle drawn by him for comfort in a strange place. But his trailing narrative of chatter had another effect, revealing itself now as my thoughts returned to the halls. His voice was another coordinate alongside those of the electronic sound. The strangled tones of Arnaut's utterances continued to issue forth. The rhythmic chanting of the crowd emerged in peaks through the static. Boy six's proximate voice had its own indecipherable quality, to be sure. Each of these on their own would have been mere irritation, but converging they gave birth to something different, something outside the realm of sound. I caught a glimpse of it and knew immediately what I had to do. Gathering the equipment I took boy six by the hand. Together we slid down the crumbling slope to the floor of the basin. With a little encouragement I persuaded the boy to run to a spot some yards off. Then I took the telephone and, with a sharp smack on a rock, broke its handset in two. A few moments of rewiring converted the microphone into a second speaker, which I sat next to the shoulder pack in its leather case. With a length of spare cable, I extended the reach of the first speaker, pacing out an equal distance from both the second and the boy, making sure that each point of the triangle was symmetrical in relation to the basin's central point. Using a lump of broken concrete, I secured the remote speaker on the ground. Then I waited. Boy six knew what to do. Crouching with his arms round his knees as before, he commenced his chattering narrative, dramatizing the words from time to time with swaying gestures and wriggles of his body. With the controls available to me, I adjusted the sound from the speakers. As I had expected, the concaved inner surface of the basin collected the three sounds and projected them to a point at the centre, which I now tried to find. This took a moment. After positioning my head at various distances from the ground I worked out that the convergence point was higher. By jumping I got a momentary impression of the effect that would be sustained if I could find something of the correct size to stand on. There was no convenient pedestal nearby. So I jumped again, arms outstretched for balance, head back, eyes directed vertically at the sky.

Scatter the pages. Choose three at random. Make adjustments to establish continuity while respecting the integrity of each.

To continue, turn to page 56.

To go back, turn to page 66.

Presently I became aware of being watched. A small child was standing a little way off, behind a mound of rubble. I pretended not to notice, continuing to kneel in an awkward position at the very edge of the incline into the crater. I had one arm still anchored against my leg, with the brass and Bakelite of the telephone receiver at a distance allowing me just to decipher words through the crackle of its signal. I hoped to re-establish contact with my companion. With the other hand I altered the orientation of the shoulder pack and its aerial, as if engrossed in a technical problem. But this was a ruse while I waited to see if the child would pluck up courage to approach closer. I wondered if he would be intrigued by my spectacles. These allowed me to keep him within view while hiding the precise direction of my gaze. In a moment or two, as I had guessed, my apparent lack of interest impelled him into action. With both hands steadying himself against the mound of building debris, he clambered round its edge into view.

I was struck, first of all, by his shoes. They were finely made, if somewhat scuffed around the toe, in light blue leather with a single strap buckling them across the front – or, I should say, ‘shoe’ in the singular, for one of his feet was dressed only in a faun-coloured sock slipped half-way off, and that had soaked up the moisture from a puddle. Short trousers and a patterned anorak with elasticated sleeves and a hood gave the impression of an infant from another time. His hair was blond. From the smooth and perfect curves of his features I guessed his age to be six years. He came close enough to rest his hand against the iron post of the pylon, with his fingers exploring one of the bolts that held its stays in place. I turned to address him. He was doubled through my lenses, fragments of colour from his clothes having separated into a kaleidoscopic penumbra to the edges of my vision.

‘Hello’, I said.

‘I’m six’, he replied.

Turn to page 59. Invert the page. Consider the illustration of cavities instead as mounds of rubble pushed up by earth movements. Speculate about a precious object in the midst of the rubble and the characters’ relationship to this object.

To continue, turn to page 66.

To go back, turn to page 63.

A line of text in miniscule font beneath the image instructs viewers to retrieve a pair of card-framed spectacles from an adjacent box. When used to view the image these should provide an effect of 3-D. In fact the tinted plastic lenses have another result altogether, which is difficult to describe. The difficulty is not due to any subtlety – indeed it can be stated all too abruptly – but the fear of summoning up again that unsettling moment. I'll negotiate the challenge – with a composure that is surely misleading – by saying that the image disappears. Appreciate that the witness is standing in front of his or her object of vision. What happens here does so in correspondence with the donning of the spectacles; there is no doubt that in reality the thing has not moved nor altered in itself in any way. In a peripheral effect of vision, a limit of the technology perhaps, some fracturing at the edge allows what is missing to still be visible in shards. This is evidence of the trick. But it does not distract sufficiently, nor balance the horrible compulsion to throw one's vision again into the central hole that signals what's missing...

...I am duty bound to confess that my courage failed. I dropped my things and fled the halls, not able even to consult with my companion before doing so. (In the meantime it has become clear that his decision at this same juncture was equally extreme, if differently directed. But more on this in a moment.) He who witnesses a fraction forfeits his qualification as commentator. However, I found myself standing on the edge of the basin, beneath the pylons with their papery plumes, in the fresh air. Gazing into the dusty sun that sprinkles its talcum on the land, my shattered nerves did begin to restore. Now there were others around, small groups of visitors arriving. I was still wearing the spectacles, but on realising it, left them where they were unless by removing them I would draw further attention to my confusion. In fact I had seen more of the exhibit than appreciated. In my haste to get out I had taken a wrong turning, and after that, several more. There were officials. It comes back to me as I write. No doubt they had my safety in mind. But I see them now as they appeared to me then: mouthing hysterically, arms stretched, captured in mid-gesture as if stilled by a specialist's lens. It remains hazy but my frantic detour had brought me into the proximity of much that, with my pupils dilated beyond their usual radius, I could see with unusual clarity.

Turn to page 65. Imagine the inscribed words retaining their materiality while disappearing into the texture of the paper.

To continue, turn to page 62.

To go back, turn to page 57.

A semi-spherical form is orientated with its flat section uppermost. It is solid. There are indents in its convex surface, and cavities, but these do not alter the shape's more general impression. Leading away from it, meandering, stick-like growths jut out in multiple directions. They connect with others, and where they do, an unevenly shaped polyp marks the junction. Elsewhere the growths bifurcate, with their diameters remaining constant. Looking closer the surfaces of the stick-structures are pitted with markings. These are regular in places and irregular in others. The root-growths, polyps, and semi-sphere are of a consistent colour and matter. Traces of other materials of different, more varied colours and textures, adhere to the structure's surface. It is natural to assume that these are impurities, to imagine processes by which they might be removed – cleaning processes, or purification processes, carried out so as not to damage the surface itself.

In contrast, the flat and upwardly orientated section of the semi-sphere shows no traces of impurity. Unlike the rest its surface is not pitted with indentations. Although solid too, its form is that of a liquid substance arrested. At the centre of the semi-sphere's circular section, a tubular form extends out and upwards. This gives the impression of being a handle, a long black handle. Where the tube form meets the semi-sphere (where it plunges into the matter of the semi-sphere) some disturbance is recorded. It is as if there has been an act of violence. A controlling of the semi-sphere, root-growths, and polyp structure, is implied. Gripped by way of this device, the whole thing might be re-orientated, inverted, tilted, spun. It might be relocated, submerged into other matter, drawn clear but now coated. It might be brought into catastrophic contact with other matter, smashed by collision, eroded by abrasion, altered irrevocably by chemical reaction. Or the thing might be conserved, displayed in a vitrine, affixed to a plinth, mounted on the wall. It might be protected behind a screen of laminated glass, partitioned in a space marked by a flimsy chord. The public might shuffle past in rows along a temporary ramp built for the purpose. Those wishing to spend longer might be asked to stand further back. Tour guides might show up with small groups of listeners, speaking authoritatively for a moment before moving on. Tickets might be sold. Money might be made. And when the lights are turned off in the evening, the thing would surely be an object of attention no more, turning its own indifferent gaze now on a silent room.

Hole-technicians work with attention to hole-architecture. But this case adds a new perspective. The Ruxton Collective. Associates with their administrative partners. No volume. They provide to be treated as empty. An interior occupied to capacity. The impression on parting the rubber flaps on step into the blast of warm air in the passage. A challenge of the Ruxtons' surfeit of overbearing conditions taken up. A narrow dribble of pink smoke issuing from a pipe at ankle-level. Gathered by a draught of air. Localised. Following its direction. Pass along a passageway where the tunnel widens. In the distance a cluster of bright lamps on stands. Illuminated there the mauve fog. The smoke reached to its destination. Transformed in placid dispersal. Confounded visibility. Further spaces may exist beyond. But notice while considering the short distance to be traversed towards the floodlit terminal that incentive is rendered passive. Like the smoke. Names on a sign. Information on a sign in enameled steel. Riveted to the wall. The many specialists. Their reputations precede them. And others less familiar who are the hole-architecture specialists too. Interior interventions belong to them belong to them. Phil Tinline departs some distance etc. His preoccupations sublimate into old terms of subterranean planning. The modern science of directing bodies in the green-tiled passages of the sewer. Lo there is a light in the distance and so on. Silhouettes of figures. Men with sticks. Slim frames. Eroded by backlight. The smoke. The isolated name. The name appears stamped onto sheet-metal. Riveted to the wall. Get up close. Run up. Run hand across dented surface. Note the letters' troughs. Not the raised edge a liquid moment of metal's stamping. Positioned at a distance from the wall upon a small concrete armature a too permanent display. Underlined is the fragility and implausibility of the inscribed identity. Who? The question is irresistible. Intentionally so? It. The cause of a reversal. Of focus. Onto the fact of its own necessity. 'As we move into the interior,' and so on. This the more widely exploited mode of operation...

For an image equating writing-paper's texture with a diagram of the earth and its cavities in cross-section, turn to page 59.

To 'continue along the walkway', turn to page 60.

To go back, turn to page 55.

The correspondence between my approximation of the boy's age and his immediate announcement was unnerving. I smiled absently while at the back of my mind wondered if something else was happening – perhaps the coloured glasses had opened my mind up like a stable, so that anyone could peer in and read my thoughts. It was possible too that the boy was simply stating his name, more likely some nickname, or perhaps another, more sinister, numerical assignation. I worried too much, I thought. I raised my right hand as if to remove the glasses from my face, but for some reason thought better of it. I gently scratched my forehead instead and then turned to face the doubled boy more directly. I looked again at his calm features, which still managed to shine through the coloured lenses without too much distortion. Both of us had resorted to a cautious silence since his last statement. It was the boy who broke it again, however, his hands now wrapped around the pylon.

'What's that?' he asked, staring at the whirring handset I still held out toward the centre of the crater, keeping it away from my body as if it were in danger of exploding.

'It's my friend Arnaut,' I said, conscious of the absurdity. It seemed that the boy had in effect asked 'who' was on the end of my arm, and my answer surely came out of my growing concern for my absent companion. I think I wanted to say his name again. 'He's inside there,' I said, gesturing toward the centre of the concrete basin.

The boy came closer, stepping over the lip of the crater and sitting down next to me. I could see fragments of his clothing at the edge of my field of vision, to the side of the spectacles, which reminded me how much my vision was being manipulated. At the end of one of the boy's sleeves I could make out a monogram with two letters, perhaps 'BR', stitched closely together. The boy did not respond to my comments and instead sat watching the crater. There were now fewer people milling around the various entrance apertures. I placed the handset, still crackling with incoherent voices and white noise, at my feet. I looked again at the boy and noticed that he had donned his own pair of spectacles, with coloured lenses identical to my own. He had clasped his tiny hands around his knees and seemed to be patiently waiting, with me, as if we were companions on a beach watching the ocean.

Take this page and page 64. Flip the top page (either one) so that the text sides are facing one another. Hold the two sheets together up to the light. Line up the text so that the lines of one page correspond with the lines of the other. Treat the combined texts as a language that is readable but unintelligible - an alien language, a divine language, a non-communicable language. Find and record unknown words. Use these as a basis for the development or discovery of images.

To continue, turn to page 61.

To go back, turn to page 62.