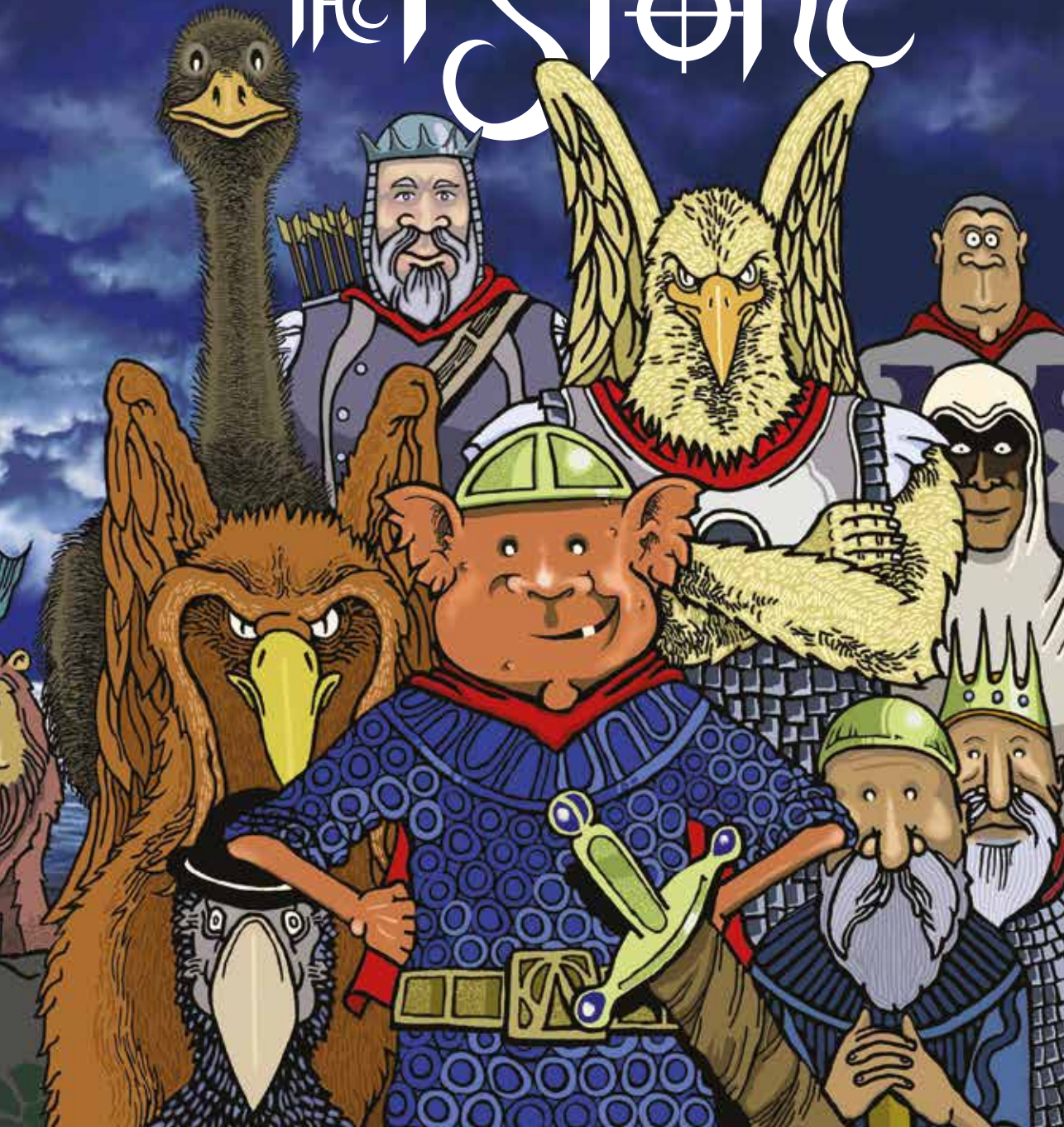


GWEE LI SUI

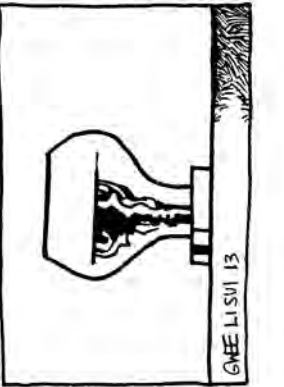
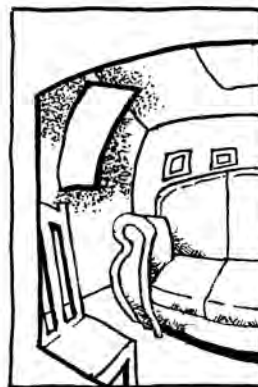
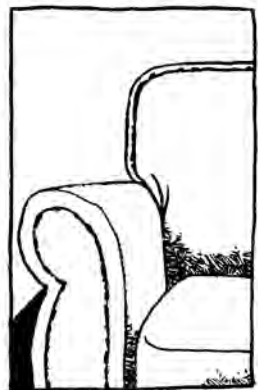
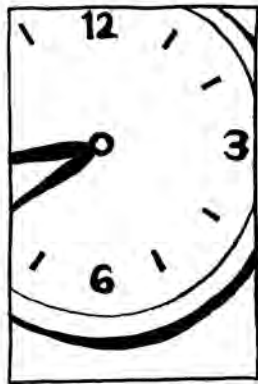
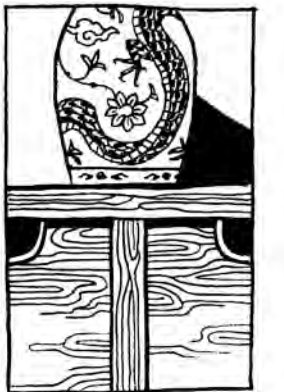
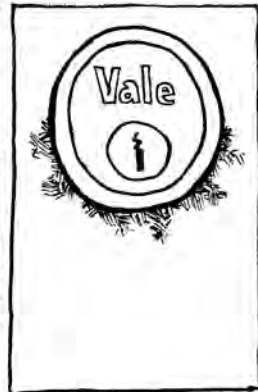
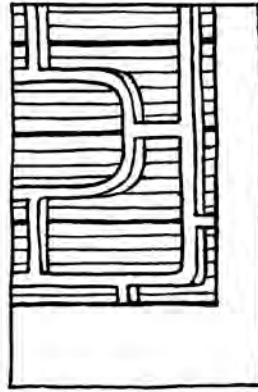
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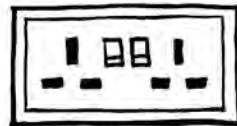
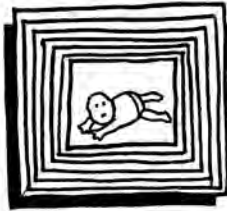
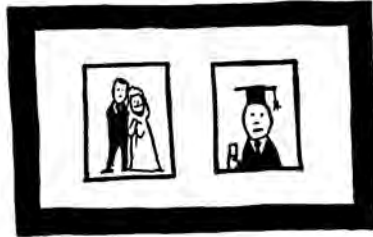


20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

MUTH OF
THE STONE

20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION





GWEE LI SUI

MOUTH OF THE STONE

20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

GWEE LI SUI '13



EPIGRAM BOOKS / SINGAPORE



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Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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INTRODUCTION

Tucked above the front door of BooksActually, the little indie bookstore, is a book placed so high that only a good-sized giant could reach it. If you have sharp eyes, you can kind of make out the title.

I was peering at it when Pico, the bookstore's cat, idled up next to me.

"Hey, whose book is that?" I asked.

"Oh, that's Gwee's *Myth of the Stone*." (Long-time visitors to BooksActually can attest that the cats there talk. You just need to listen.)

"Gwee? Internet commentator/lecturer/editor/poet/assorted multi-hyphenate?"

"Yes, that Gwee." Pico then strolled off to look for kibble, or to read a book.

It seems that, before Gwee became what he is today, he was a cartoonist. Gwee had produced one of the first graphic novels in Singapore back in 1993, but the book was swallowed up by publishing missteps, and only a few copies now remain out in the wild. The book became as much a myth as the story itself.

Well, fortunate reader, now you have the chance to read it finally. Gwee's lost masterpiece has been rejuvenated after he went on a quest to retrieve it from the mists of time or dust-strewn boxes, or both. Spiders were defeated, old wounds reopened, and a layer of dust thick enough to bring about a new haze alert wiped off. New material has also been added, and the result is a reborn *Myth of the*

Stone that one hopes will help the work gain the recognition it truly deserves.

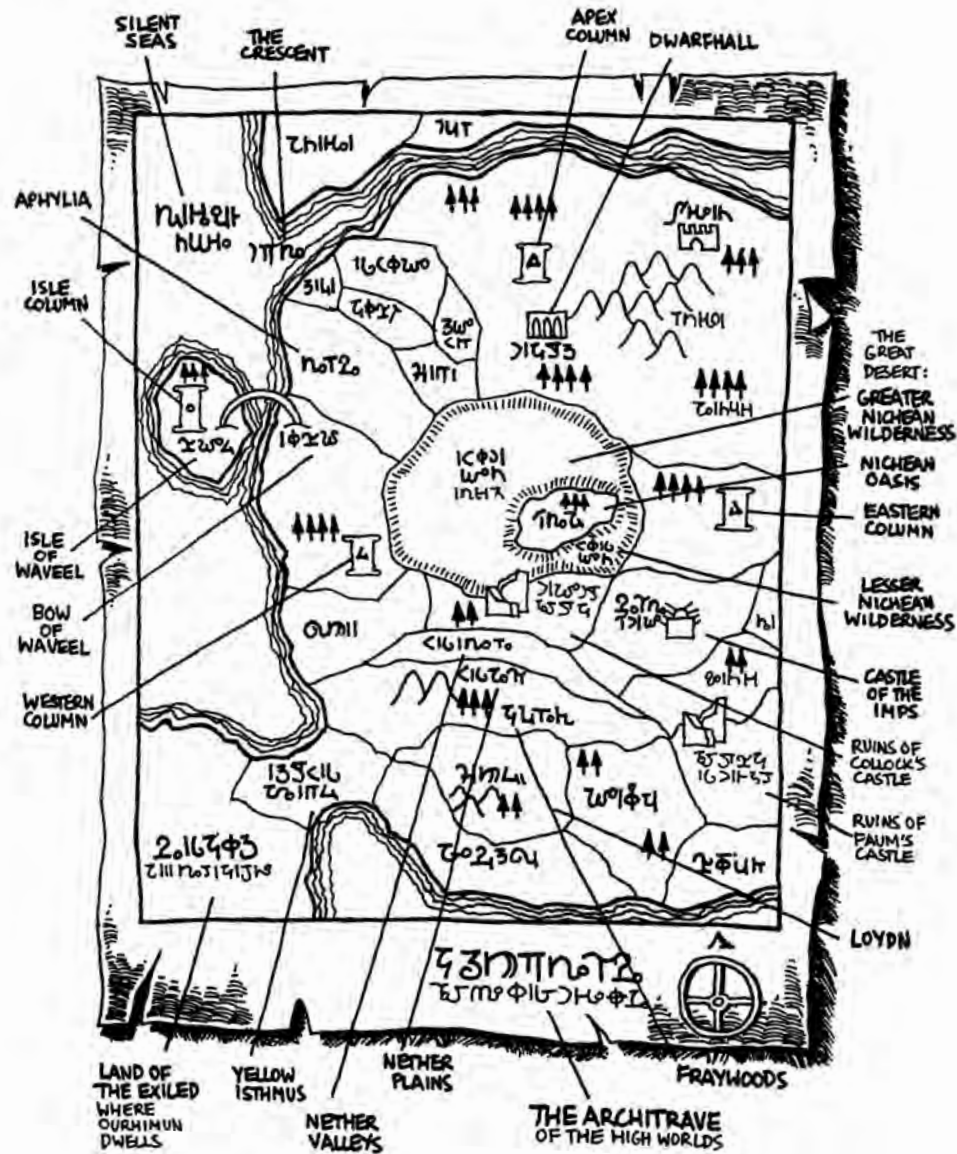
The book itself has been well worth the hype. It is a mix of Biblical myth, Tolkien and Carroll, featuring creatures of Asian legends, such as the kappa, and even an appearance by mermaids. Gwee has tapped into the vein from which myths, original and new, emerge.

Like Gwee, the story has more depth than one might initially see, and I encourage you to read it again, upside down, and in both public and private places. Gwee has created a story that is as multi-hyphenated as he is, as crafty and sly as he is, and has depth, wisdom and complexity like his. The visuals have a remarkable attention to detail that shows Gwee's pure joy in his art and characters. For example, look at the distinct textures on his creations: the leaf-like feathers of the garuda, the ink blots of the dodo and the hairs of the moa. Each has a design as unique as their characters.

Remember, dear reader, in your hands you hold a treasure that has taken a long journey to arrive in your hands. The tale of the book's second printing is just as convoluted and epic as the story within these pages, and one is thankful that it can now be found without the reader going on a quest of his own. Pico might have something to do with it, though he would never take credit for it.

DAVE CHUA
AUGUST 2013

Dave Chua is author of the novel *Gone Case* (1997), which has been adapted by artist Koh Hong Teng into a two-volume graphic novel. His book *The Beating and Other Stories* (2011) was longlisted for the 2012 Frank O'Connor International Short Story prize. Chua's latest graphic novel *The Girl Under the Bed* (2013), co-written and illustrated by Xiao Yan, is published by Epigram Books.



LI-HSU
AS A BOY



LI-HSU
AS AN IMP



MAUDUS REX
LORD OF THE HIGH WORLDS



OURHIMUN
THE DARK LORD



KEAGGA
GARUDA OF LOYDN



AKLIN
THE IMP LORD



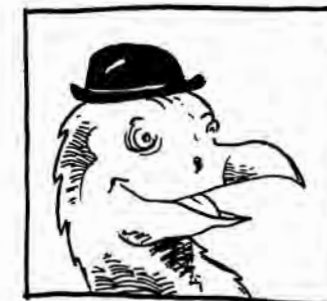
SASHBUN
THE GUARDIAN CENTAUR



CRUMBLIE
THE DWARF



FÜVEROTH
THE GOBLIN KING



CASSOWARY
THE DODO



BROWGIN
LEADER OF THE GRYPHONS



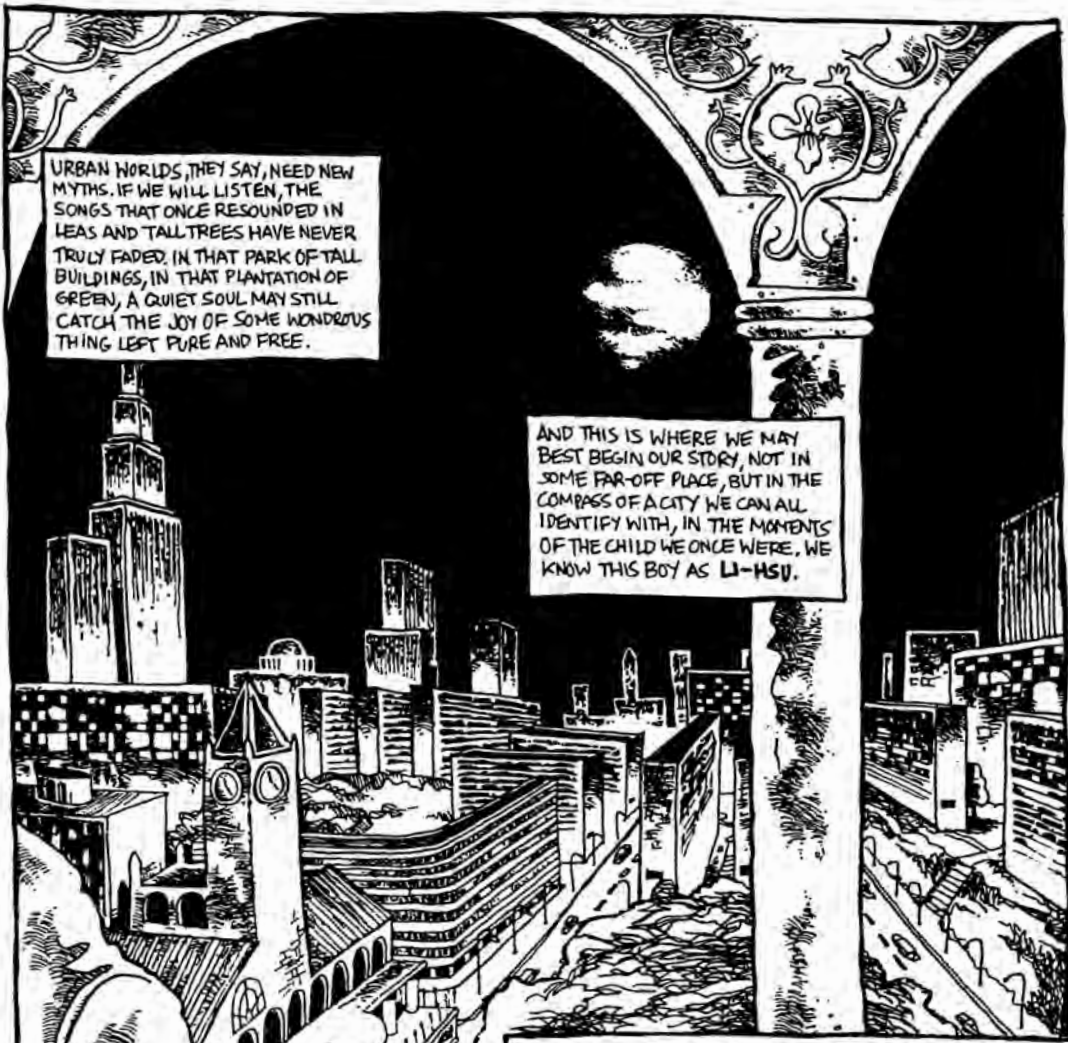
STINKY
THE IMP

NEATH THE MOSSES THE IMMORTAL STONE
A QUARTER OF SKY TO EACH EARTH BONE
LIGHT IS ALL LIFE AND BLOOD OF THE SUN
IN SHIMMERING GOWNS THE RIVERS RUN

AND RUNNING, ALL WORLDS BECOME ONE'S OWN
NEATH THE MOSSES THE IMMORTAL STONE
WHEN THE FIRM ICE OF THE LONGBOW BURNS
WHEN THE SON OF EVENSTEEL RETURNS

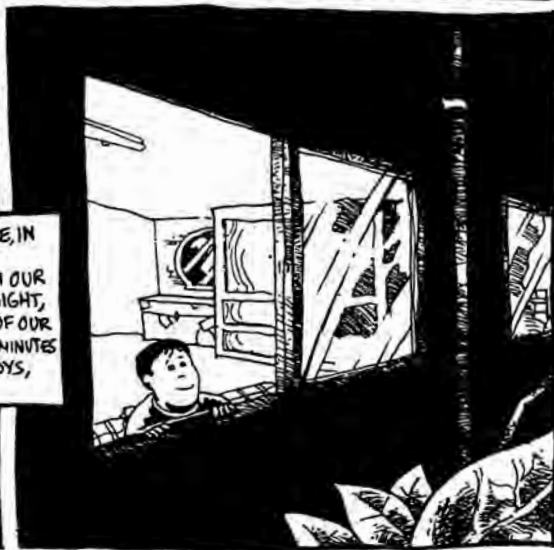
WHEN THE NIGHTS OF FORESTS PREVAIL
WHEN THE ECLIPSED SONS AND DAUGHTERS WAIL
NEATH THE MOSSES THE IMMORTAL STONE
THE GATES SHALL OPEN BY BLOOD ALONE

THE DREAMS OF REST IN LONG BATTLES BREED
THE ASH IS BREAD TO THE BURIED SEED
OLD FORMS MUST IN PANGS OF NEW FORMS GROAN
NEATH THE MOSSES THE IMMORTAL STONE



URBAN WORLDS, THEY SAY, NEED NEW MYTHS. IF WE WILL LISTEN, THE SONGS THAT ONCE RESOUNDED IN LEAS AND TALL TREES HAVE NEVER TRULY FADED. IN THAT PARK OF TALL BUILDINGS, IN THAT PLANTATION OF GREEN, A QUIET SOUL MAY STILL CATCH THE JOY OF SOME WONDROUS THING LEFT PURE AND FREE.

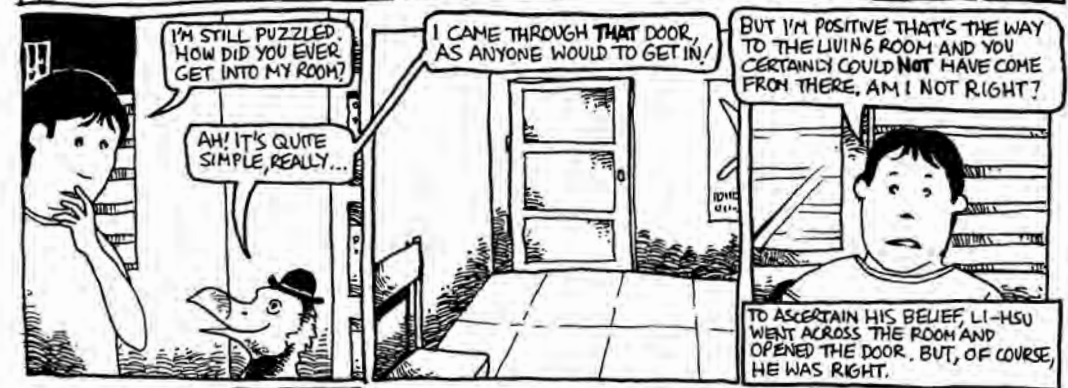
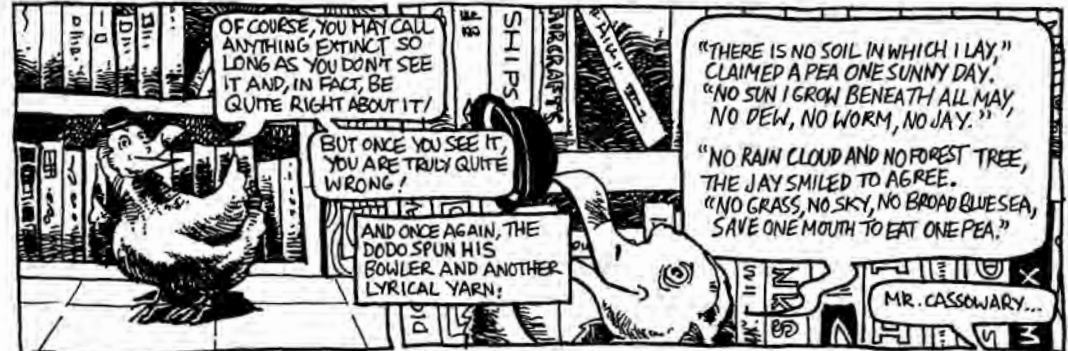
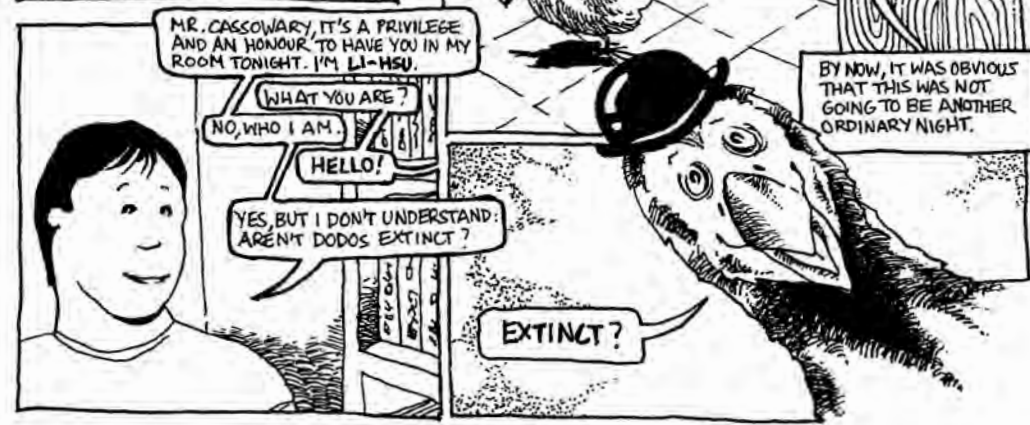
AND THIS IS WHERE WE MAY BEST BEGIN OUR STORY, NOT IN SOME FAR-OFF PLACE, BUT IN THE COMPASS OF A CITY WE CAN ALL IDENTIFY WITH, IN THE MOMENTS OF THE CHILD WE ONCE WERE. WE KNOW THIS BOY AS LI-HSU.



AND, AS WE MAY HAVE ONCE, IN OUR CHILDHOOD DAYS FOUND OURSELVES GAZING THROUGH OUR WINDOWS AT THE VELVET NIGHT, SO HERE WE FIND THE BOY OF OUR STORY SPENDING HIS FEW MINUTES OF WONDER AWAY FROM TOYS, BOOKS AND FAMILY.



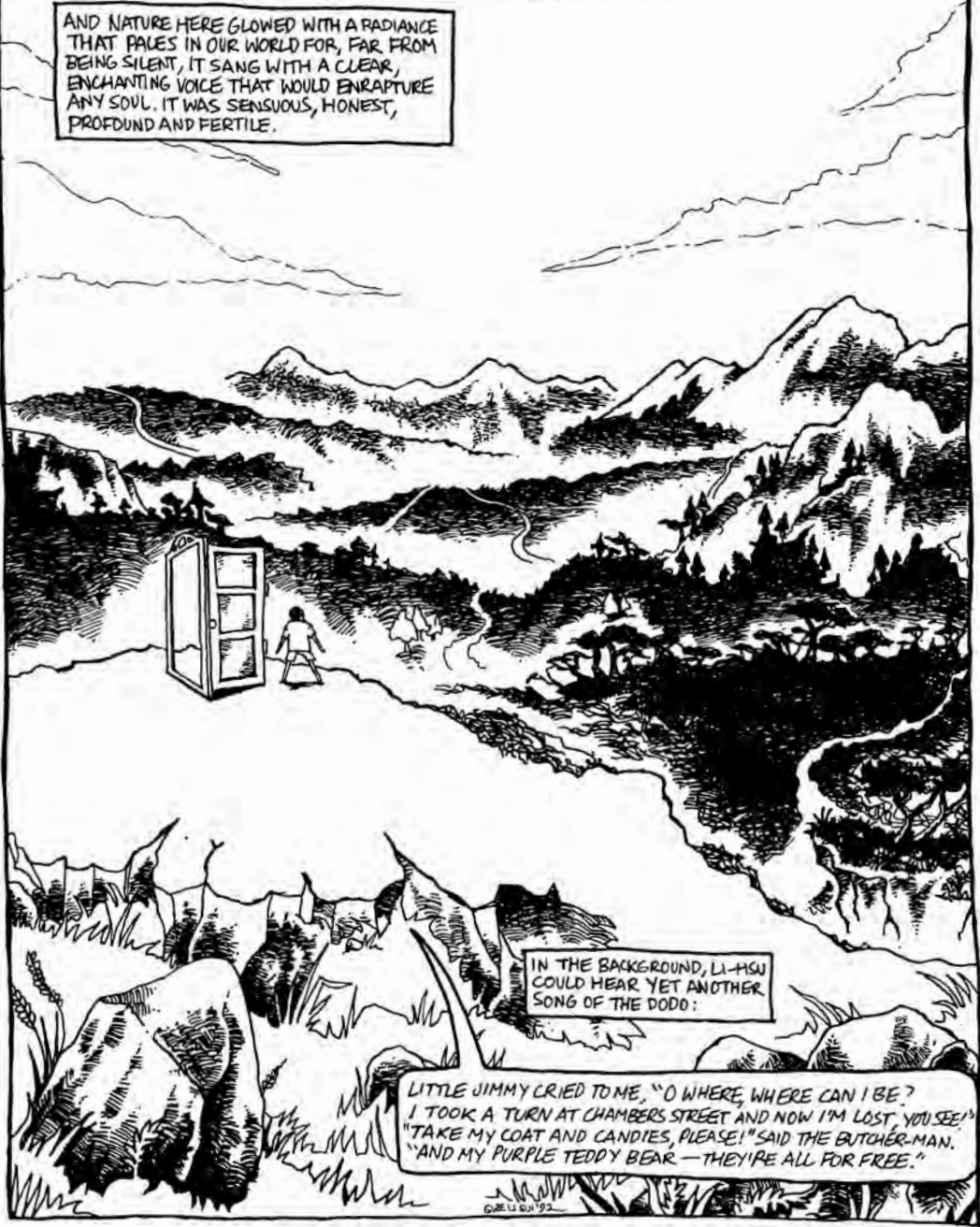
WHAT LI-HSU SAW THAT NIGHT WAS MOST CURIOUS INDEED. STANDING SOME THREE STEPS AWAY WAS AN ODD-LOOKING PIGEON WITH A BOWLER WHICH IT REMOVED BEFORE MAKING A SLIGHT BOW.



"COME INTO THE LIGHT," THE DODO SAID. "YOU, LIKE ALL HAPPY BEINGS HERE, ARE FREE TO BE FREE IN THE HIGH WORLDS."

AND WHAT A BOLD RESPLENDENT WORLD IT WAS THAT STRETCHED FROM THE EDGE OF THAT DOORPOST! A DRAPERY OF FORESTS AND PLAINS, SEWN WITH THE GLEAMING THREADS OF RIVERS, RAN ALONG THE SPREAD OF BLUE SKY. ONE COULD FEEL THE VIGOUR OF THE LAND AS IF ONE WERE STANDING IN ITS BLOODSTREAM.

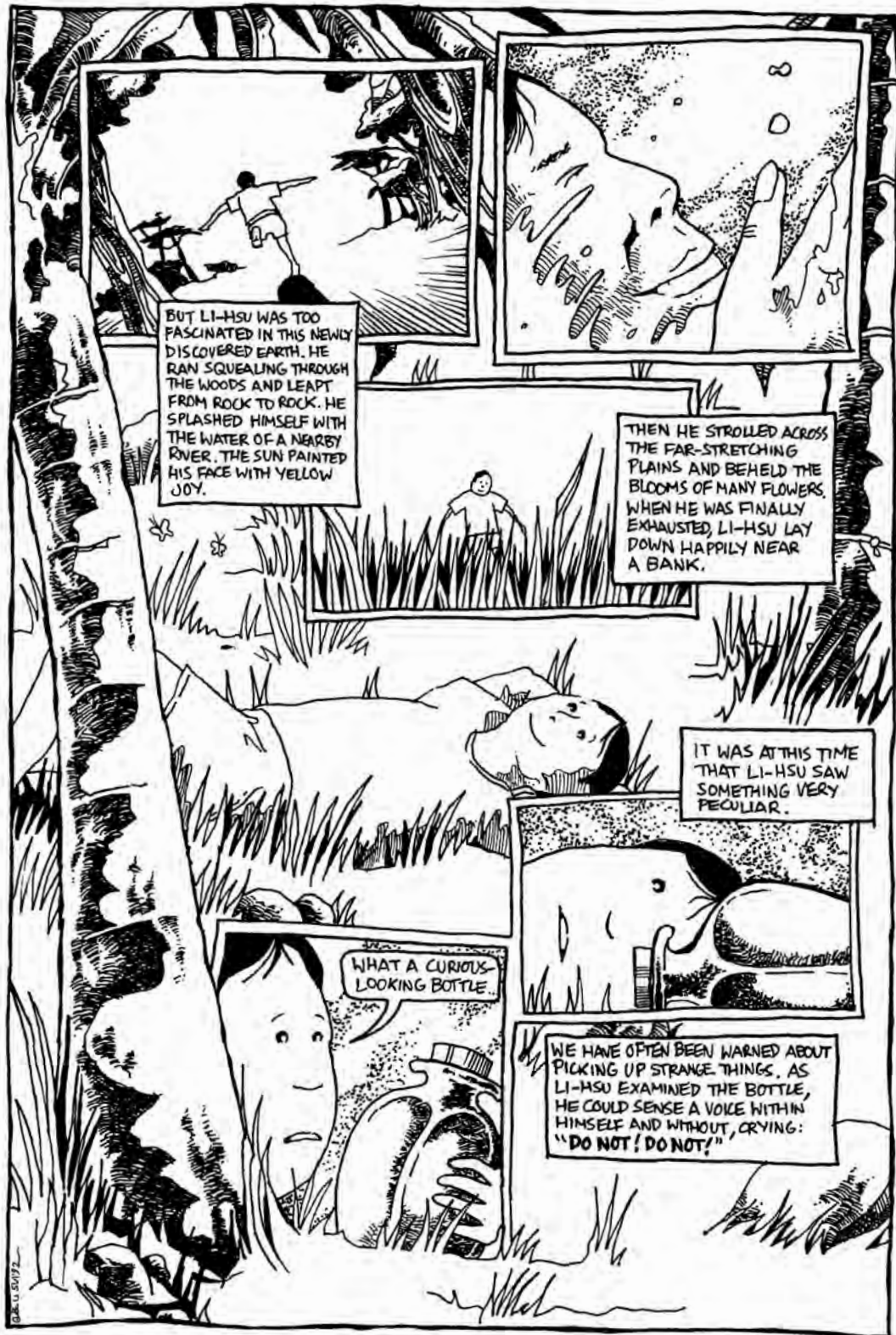
AND NATURE HERE GLOWED WITH A RADIANCE THAT PACES IN OUR WORLD FOR, FAR FROM BEING SILENT, IT SANG WITH A CLEAR, ENCHANTING VOICE THAT WOULD ENRAPTURE ANY SOUL. IT WAS SENSUOUS, HONEST, PROFUND AND FERTILE.



IN THE BACKGROUND, LI-HSU COULD HEAR YET ANOTHER SONG OF THE DODO:

LITTLE JIMMY CRIED TO ME, "O WHERE, WHERE CAN I BE? I TOOK A TURN AT CHAMBERS STREET AND NOW I'M LOST, YOU SEE!" "TAKE MY COAT AND CANDIES, PLEASE!" SAID THE BUTCHER-MAN. "AND MY PURPLE TEDDY BEAR — THEY'RE ALL FOR FREE."

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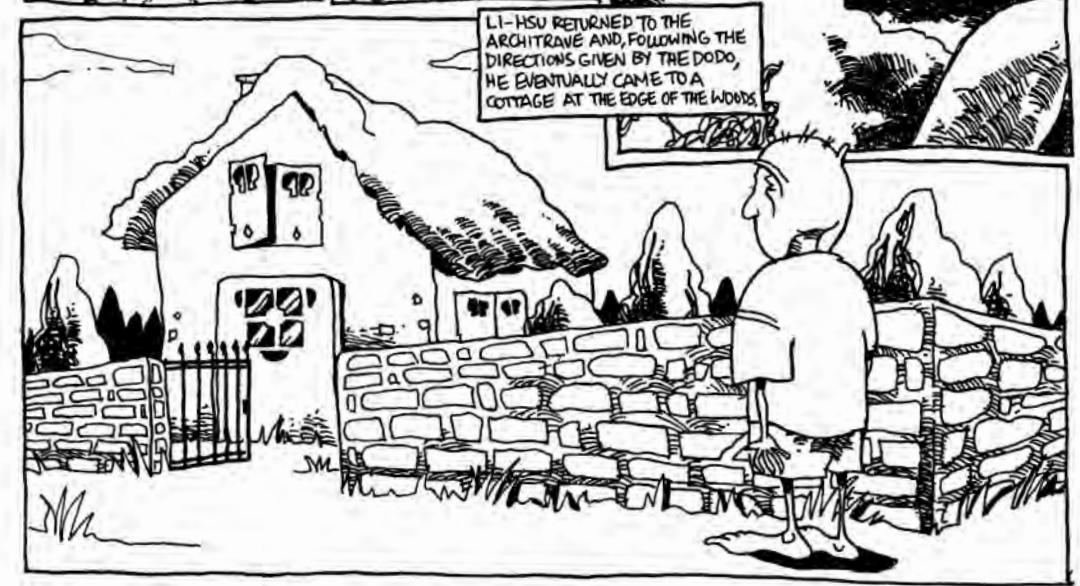
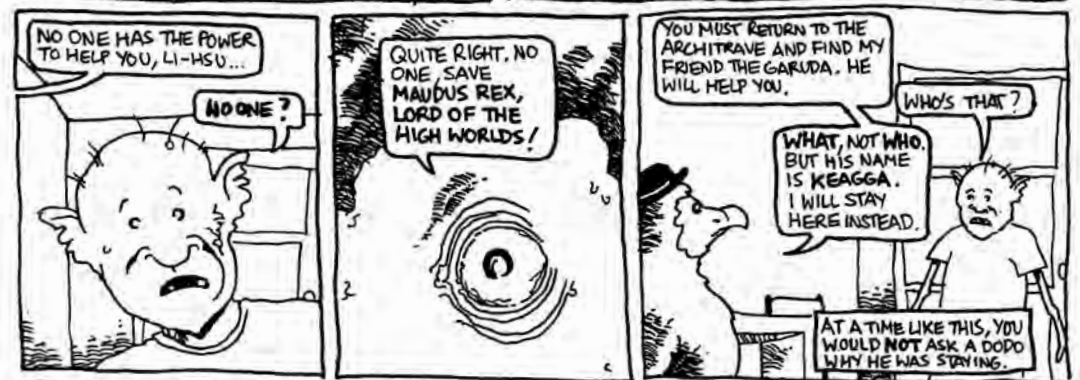
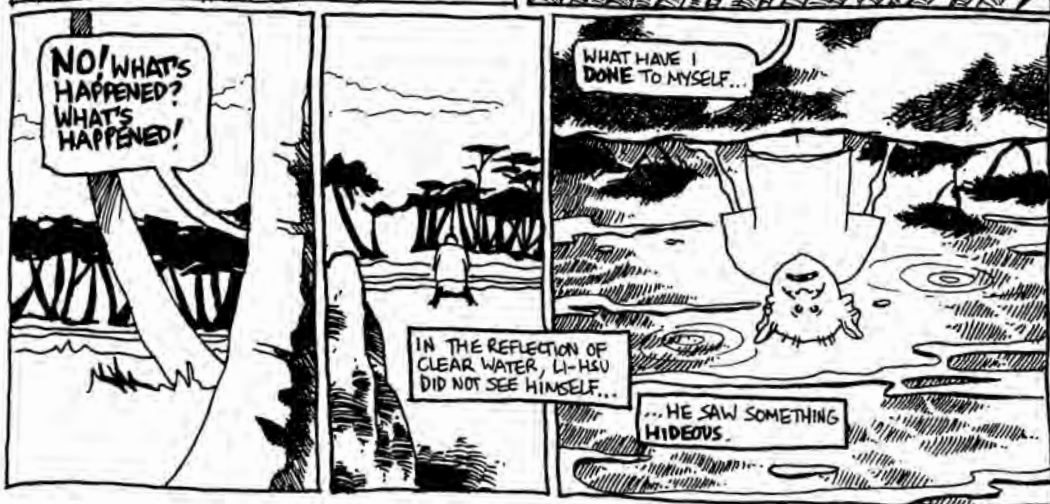
BUT LI-HSU WAS TOO FASCINATED IN THIS NEWLY DISCOVERED EARTH. HE RAN SQUEALING THROUGH THE WOODS AND LEAPT FROM ROCK TO ROCK. HE SPLASHED HIMSELF WITH THE WATER OF A NEARBY RIVER. THE SUN PAINTED HIS FACE WITH YELLOW JOY.

THEN HE STROLLED ACROSS THE FAR-STRETCHING PLAINS AND BEHELD THE BLOOMS OF MANY FLOWERS. WHEN HE WAS FINALLY EXHAUSTED, LI-HSU LAY DOWN HAPPILY NEAR A BANK.

IT WAS AT THIS TIME THAT LI-HSU SAW SOMETHING VERY PECULIAR.

WHAT A CURIOUS-LOOKING BOTTLE.

WE HAVE OFTEN BEEN WARNED ABOUT PICKING UP STRANGE THINGS. AS LI-HSU EXAMINED THE BOTTLE, HE COULD SENSE A VOICE WITHIN HIMSELF AND WITHOUT, CRYING: "DO NOT! DO NOT!"



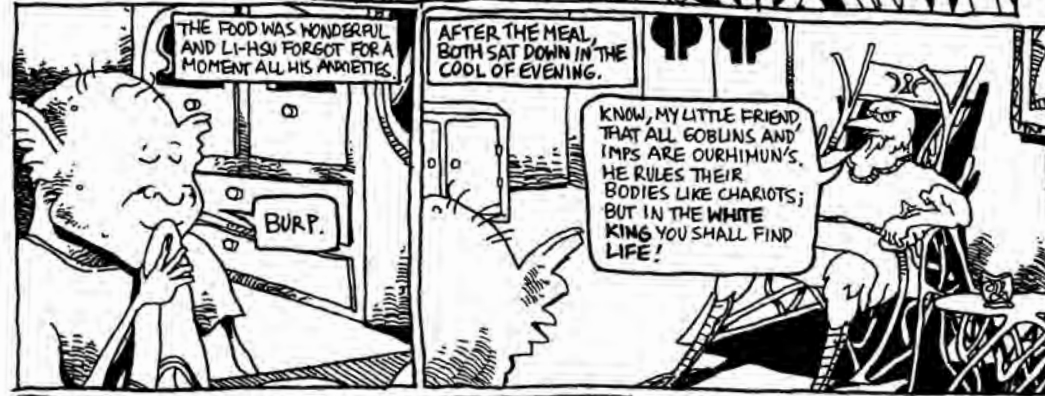


FOOLISH IMP! HOW DARE YOU LAY FOOT ON THE ENCLAVE OF A GARUDA?

HELP! MR. KEAGGA! I'M LI-HSU! I'M NOT AN IMP- I MEAN I AM AN IMP, BUT I AM A BOY- RATHER I WAS A BOY... I KNOW MR. CASSOWARY!

HE PASSED THROUGH THE GATES AND WAS HEADING TOWARDS THE DOOR WHEN A POWERFUL HAND CAUGHT HIM UNAWARES AROUND THE WAIST.

THE GARUDA RECOGNISED THE PEARL IMMEDIATELY AND SET THE IMP DOWN. LI-HSU DID NOT HESITATE TO RELATE HIS STORY, WHICH THE GIANT SEEMED TO BELIEVE WHOLLY. HE INVITED OUR IMP INTO HIS HOME FOR A MEAL. OF COURSE, LI-HSU WAS MORE THAN DELIGHTED, FOR HE COULD FEEL A NEW SENSATION OF HUNGER IN HIS BELLY.



THE FOOD WAS WONDERFUL AND LI-HSU FORGOT FOR A MOMENT ALL HIS ANXIETIES.

AFTER THE MEAL, BOTH SAT DOWN IN THE COOL OF EVENING.

BURP.

KNOW, MY LITTLE FRIEND THAT ALL GOBLINS AND IMPS ARE OURHIMUN'S. HE RULES THEIR BODIES LIKE CHARIOTS; BUT IN THE WHITE KING YOU SHALL FIND LIFE!



BUT MR. KEAGGA, WHY IS MAUDUS REX POWERLESS IN DISABLING OURHIMUN'S CROCKS IF HE IS RULER OVER ALL?



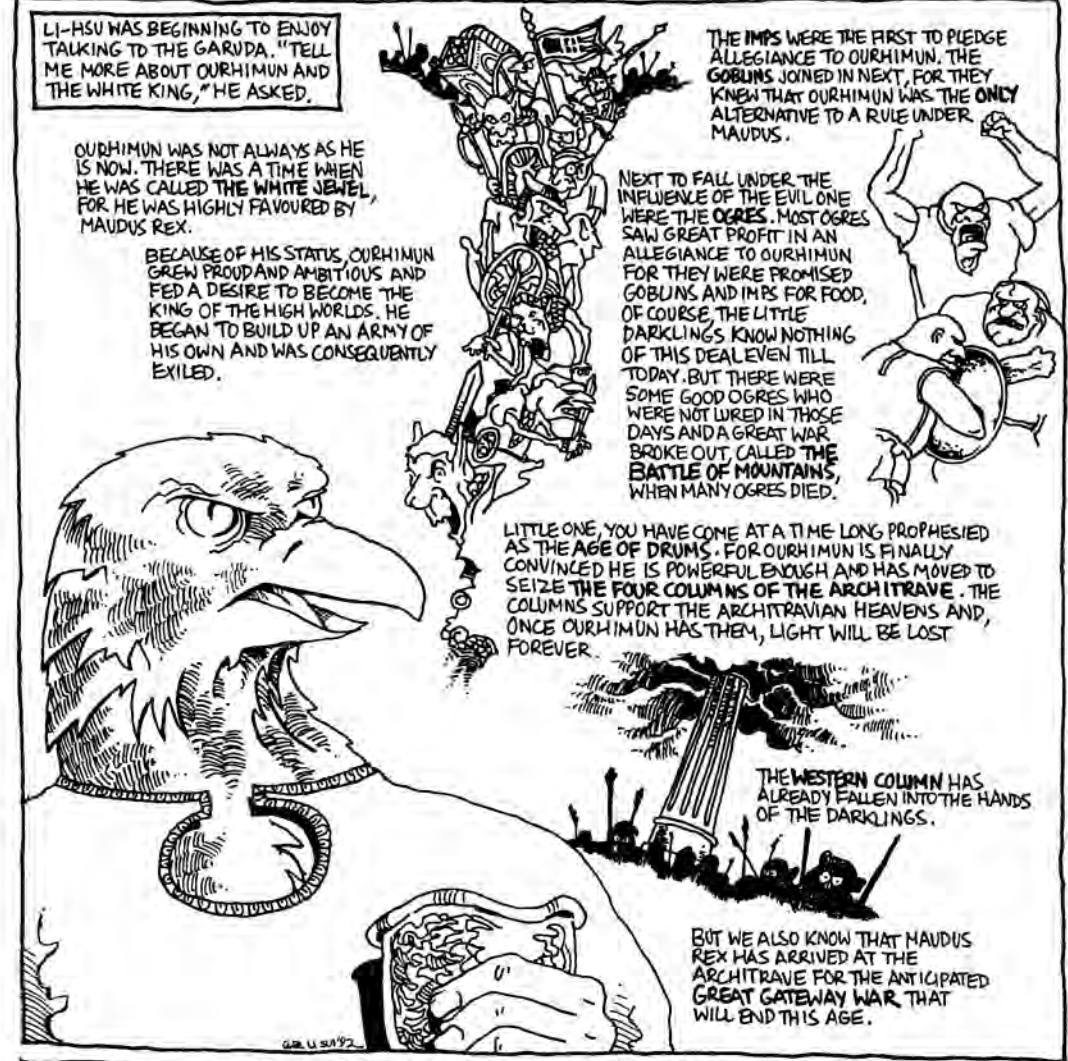
YOU ARE MISTAKEN: OURHIMUN DID NOT PLANT THE CROCKS. MAUDUS DID.

MAUDUS?



WHEN A ROTTEN FRUIT IS FOUND THROWING IT AWAY IS NEVER ENOUGH. THE TREE MUST BE PRUNED. THEREFORE, EVERYONE MUST CHOOSE AND MUST BE FREE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN MAUDUS AND OURHIMUN, FREEDOM AND SLAVERY, LIFE AND EVENTUAL DESTRUCTION.

OF COURSE, LI-HSU COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY ANYONE WOULD CHOOSE OURHIMUN.



LI-HSU WAS BEGINNING TO ENJOY TALKING TO THE GARUDA. "TELL ME MORE ABOUT OURHIMUN AND THE WHITE KING," HE ASKED.

OURHIMUN WAS NOT ALWAYS AS HE IS NOW. THERE WAS A TIME WHEN HE WAS CALLED THE WHITE JEWEL, FOR HE WAS HIGHLY FAVOURED BY MAUDUS REX.

BECAUSE OF HIS STATUS, OURHIMUN GREW PROUD AND AMBITIOUS AND FED A DESIRE TO BECOME THE KING OF THE HIGH WORLDS. HE BEGAN TO BUILD UP AN ARMY OF HIS OWN AND WAS CONSEQUENTLY EXILED.

THE IMPS WERE THE FIRST TO PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO OURHIMUN. THE GOBLINS JOINED IN NEXT, FOR THEY KNEW THAT OURHIMUN WAS THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO A RULER UNDER MAUDUS.

NEXT TO FALL UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE EVIL ONE WERE THE OGRES. MOST OGRES SAW GREAT PROFIT IN AN ALLEGIANCE TO OURHIMUN FOR THEY WERE PROMISED GOBLINS AND IMPS FOR FOOD. OF COURSE, THE LITTLE DARKLINGS KNOW NOTHING OF THIS DEAL EVEN TILL TODAY. BUT THERE WERE SOME GOOD OGRES WHO WERE NOT LURED IN THOSE DAYS AND A GREAT WAR BROKE OUT, CALLED THE BATTLE OF MOUNTAINS, WHEN MANY OGRES DIED.

LITTLE ONE, YOU HAVE COME AT A TIME LONG PROPHESED AS THE AGE OF DRUMS. FOR OURHIMUN IS FINALLY CONVINCED HE IS POWERFUL ENOUGH AND HAS MOVED TO SEIZE THE FOUR COLUMNS OF THE ARCHITRAVE. THE COLUMNS SUPPORT THE ARCHITRAVIAN HEAVENS AND, ONCE OURHIMUN HAS THEM, LIGHT WILL BE LOST FOREVER.

THE WESTERN COLUMN HAS ALREADY FALLEN INTO THE HANDS OF THE DARKLINGS.

BUT WE ALSO KNOW THAT MAUDUS REX HAS ARRIVED AT THE ARCHITRAVE FOR THE ANTICIPATED GREAT GATEWAY WAR THAT WILL END THIS AGE.



COME NOW, MY LITTLE ONE, IT'S TIME FOR A GOOD REST. TOMORROW WE SHALL BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE.



BUT LI-HSU FOUND IT HARD TO SLEEP AT FIRST. WHAT WOULD DAD AND MUM DO IF THEY FOUND HIM MISSING? AND WHAT ABOUT THE DODO? MAYBE HE HAD SOME MAGIC TO TRANSFORM HIMSELF INTO A BOY SO THAT NO ONE WOULD KNOW WHAT HAD HAPPENED, MAYBE HE HAD LOCKED UP THE DOOR. MAYBE...



BEFORE LONG, THE WINGS OF HIS THOUGHTS GREW HEAVY AND DESCENDED QUIETLY UPON HIS BROW AS HIS EYES FELL SHUT IN DEEP SLEEP.



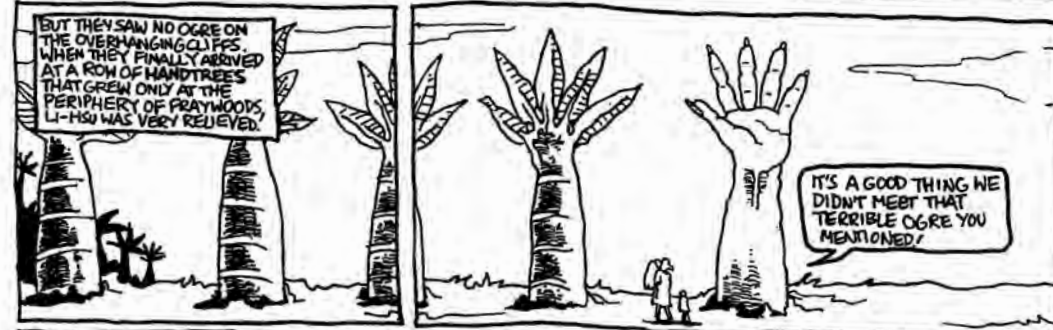
FOR MEALS, THEY ATE THE FRUITS OF STRANGE TREES AND DRANK FROM RIVERS. KEAGGA TOLD THE STORIES OF PASTAGES ALONG THE WAY, OF THE FIRST REIGNS OF OUR HIMN, OF THE MIGHTY TYEROM IN THE AGE OF SONGS, AND OF THE REIGN OF THE GOOD OGRE, FARM.

EARLY NEXT MORNING, THE GARUDA AND THE IMP SET OFF ON THEIR JOURNEY. THE WAY THEY TRAVELLED WAS ROUGH AND DRY AS THE SUN GREW STEADILY STRONGER THROUGH THE DAY.



WE ARE NEARING FRAYWOODS AND BEYOND THOSE THICK STRANDS OF TREES ARE THE NETHER VALLEYS. BE CAUTIOUS NOW WHERE YOU TREAD, FOR HERE ALSO LIVES THE OGRE OF THE ROCKS!

AT THE EDGE OF FRAYWOODS, KEAGGA DISMISSED THE UNICORN "GO!" HE SAID. "MAY PEACE FLOW AND ENLIVEN YOUR HEART!" THEN, THEY MOVED ON, GOING DEEPER INTO THE WILD WOODS THAT LINED THE MOUNTAINS.



BUT THEY SAW NO OGRE ON THE OVERHANGING CLIFFS. WHEN THEY FINALLY ARRIVED AT A ROW OF HAND TREES THAT GREW ONLY AT THE PERIPHERY OF FRAYWOODS, LI-HSU WAS VERY RELIEVED.

IT'S A GOOD THING WE DIDN'T MEET THAT TERRIBLE OGRE YOU MENTIONED!



BY THEN, IT WAS TOO LATE. THE OGRE'S PALM CAME DOWN UPON THE TWO CREATURES AND ROLLED THEM INTO A CAKE OF SOIL AND GRASS.

EVEN AS HE SPOKE, LI-HSU FELT THE GROUND SHIFTING AND, TURNING HIS HEAD, HE THOUGHT HE SAW ONE OF THE HAND TREES TWITCH. IN A SPLIT SECOND, LI-HSU REALIZED WHAT IT REALLY WAS.



WHAT SEE HERE IN HAND? ONE SMALL IMP! LOVE IMP!

THE OGRE OF THE ROCKS MAY NEED SOME INTRODUCTION TO MOST OF US. HE IS THE LARGEST OF ALL WILD OGRES AND DWELLS AMONG THE MOUNTAINOUS ROCKS FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT THOSE ARE WHERE HE CAN PROPERLY TREAD WITHOUT SINKING INTO THE GROUND.

HOWEVER, THE OGRE HAD APPARENTLY TURNED HIS WEAKNESS INTO AN ADVANTAGE. WADING THROUGH THE NETHER PLAINS, HE GRINNED, HAVING CAUGHT ANOTHER TWO UNSUSPECTING VICTIMS.

YUM!



IT SEEMED AN UNTIMELY END TO THE ADVENTURE AND OUR HERO, AND FOR A BRIEF FRIGHTENING MOMENT LI-HSU THOUGHT SO TOO.

BUT, BREAKING OUT QUICKLY FROM THE SOILY CAKE, THE GARUDA STRETCHED HIS WINGS AND SNATCHED OUR IMP FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH.



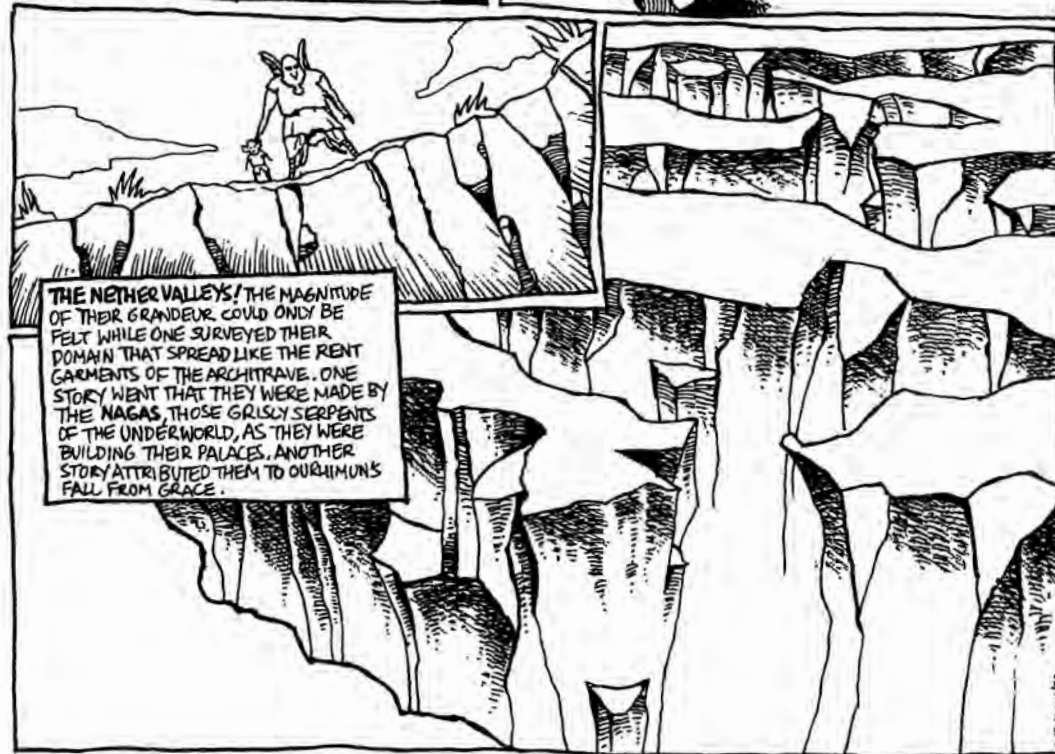
COME BACK!

BUT THE OGRE WOULD NOT GIVE UP HIS FOOD. HE PURSUED THE GARUDA AND WAS, IN FACT, GAINING ON HIM.

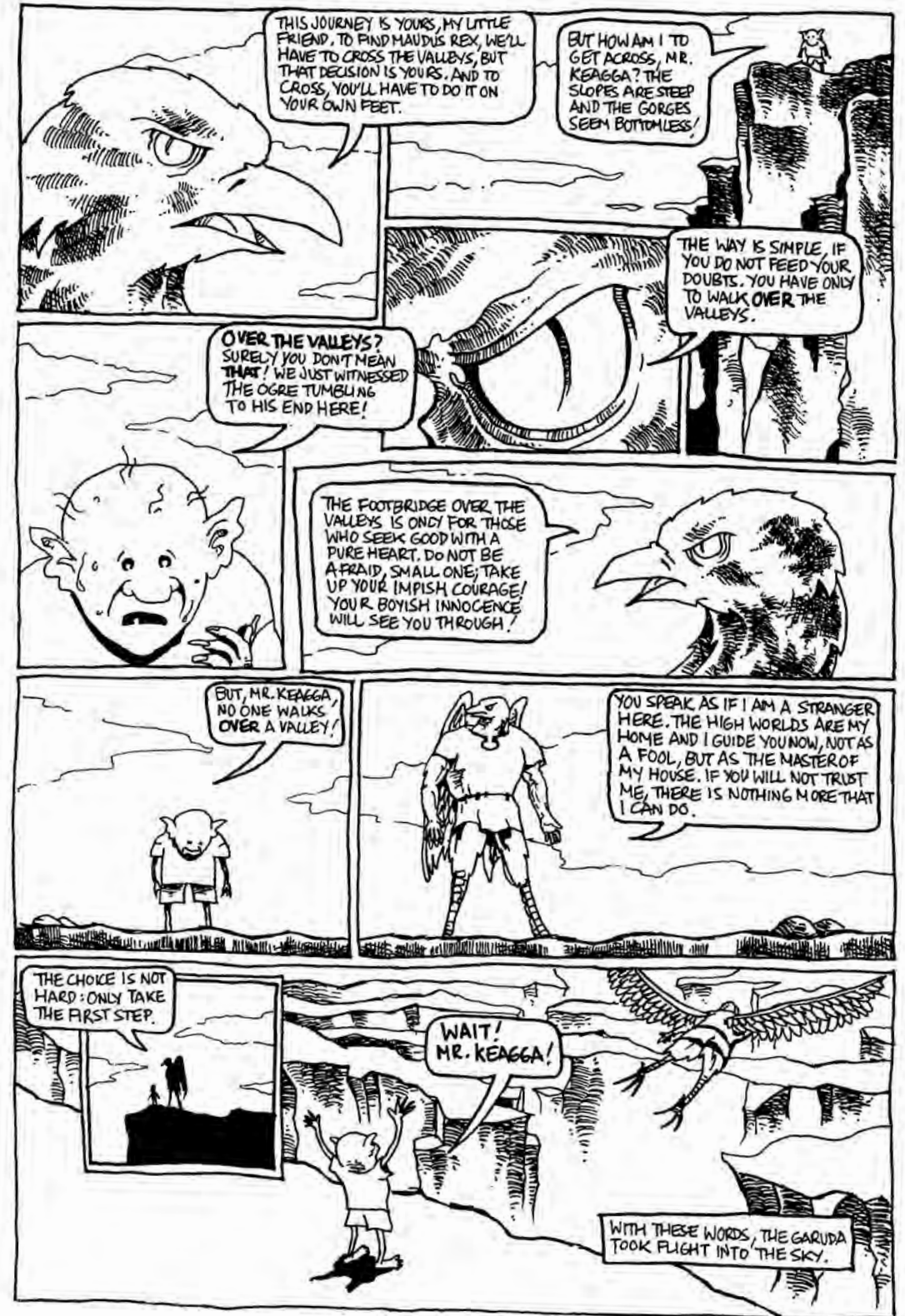
I BELIEVE IT IS TIME WE BRING THIS TIRESOME CHASE TO ITS CLOSE.



IN HIS BESTIAL OBSESSION, THE OGRE RAN RECKLESSLY THROUGH THE PRECIPICE AND SANK LIKE AN ANSLANCHE, FALLING HEADLONG AND SCREAMING WITH A VOICE LOUDER THAN THE ROARS OF A THOUSAND LIONS. IN SECONDS, THE OGRE CEASED TO BE A THREAT, EVEN TO THE DEAD SILENCE OF THAT PLACE.



THE NETHER VALLEYS! THE MAGNITUDE OF THEIR GRANDEUR COULD ONLY BE FELT WHILE ONE SURVEYED THEIR DOMAIN THAT SPREAD LIKE THE RENT GARMENTS OF THE ARCHITRAVE. ONE STORY WENT THAT THEY WERE MADE BY THE NAGAS, THOSE GRISLY SERPENTS OF THE UNDERWORLD, AS THEY WERE BUILDING THEIR PALACES. ANOTHER STORY ATTRIBUTED THEM TO OUR HUMAN FALL FROM GRACE.



THIS JOURNEY IS YOURS, MY LITTLE FRIEND. TO FIND MAUDUS REX, WE'LL HAVE TO CROSS THE VALLEYS, BUT THAT DECISION IS YOURS. AND TO CROSS, YOU'LL HAVE TO DO IT ON YOUR OWN FEET.

BUT HOW AM I TO GET ACROSS, MR. KEAGGA? THE SLOPES ARE STEEP AND THE GORGES SEEM BOTTOMLESS!

THE WAY IS SIMPLE. IF YOU DO NOT FEED YOUR DOUBTS, YOU HAVE ONLY TO WALK OVER THE VALLEYS.

OVER THE VALLEYS? SURELY YOU DON'T MEAN THAT! WE JUST WITNESSED THE OGRE TUMBLING TO HIS END HERE!

THE FOOTBRIDGE OVER THE VALLEYS IS ONLY FOR THOSE WHO SEEK GOOD WITH A PURE HEART. DO NOT BE A FRAID, SMALL ONE; TAKE UP YOUR IMPISH COURAGE! YOUR BOYISH INNOCENCE WILL SEE YOU THROUGH!

BUT, MR. KEAGGA, NO ONE WALKS OVER A VALLEY!

YOU SPEAK AS IF I AM A STRANGER HERE. THE HIGH WORLDS ARE MY HOME AND I GUIDE YOU NOW, NOT AS A FOOL, BUT AS THE MASTER OF MY HOUSE. IF YOU WILL NOT TRUST ME, THERE IS NOTHING MORE THAT I CAN DO.

THE CHOICE IS NOT HARD: ONLY TAKE THE FIRST STEP.

WAIT! MR. KEAGGA!

WITH THESE WORDS, THE GARUDA TOOK FLIGHT INTO THE SKY.



Gwee Li Sui lives a number of parallel lives.

In one life, he is a poet. His poetry is so diverse that one may be forgiven for thinking that he may be a few poets.

In another life, he is a literary critic. This Gwee has a PhD that allows him to talk about writers few people read but he thinks everyone should be reading.

The life we are concerned with here is the one in which he draws comics. If you know this side of him, you may know that he has always been drawing because that makes him happy.

Gwee has a few more lives that we'd rather not hear about.

"To find this book is like discovering a four-leaf clover in the grass.
The Muses do not discriminate among nationalities when they strike."

— Wena Poon, author of *Lions in Winter* and *Alex y Robert*

A curious young boy opens a door and is thrust into the Archtrave, a fantastical, fractured world upheld by four Columns. Arriving as the Great Gateway War draws to a start, Li-Hsu must fight bravely alongside a host of strange creatures in order to find his way back home.

First published in 1993, Gwee Li Sui's *Myth of the Stone* is an endearing tale of one unlikely hero's journey through an unfamiliar landscape.

This 20th anniversary edition of Singapore's first full-length graphic novel in English comes with bonus features.



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