

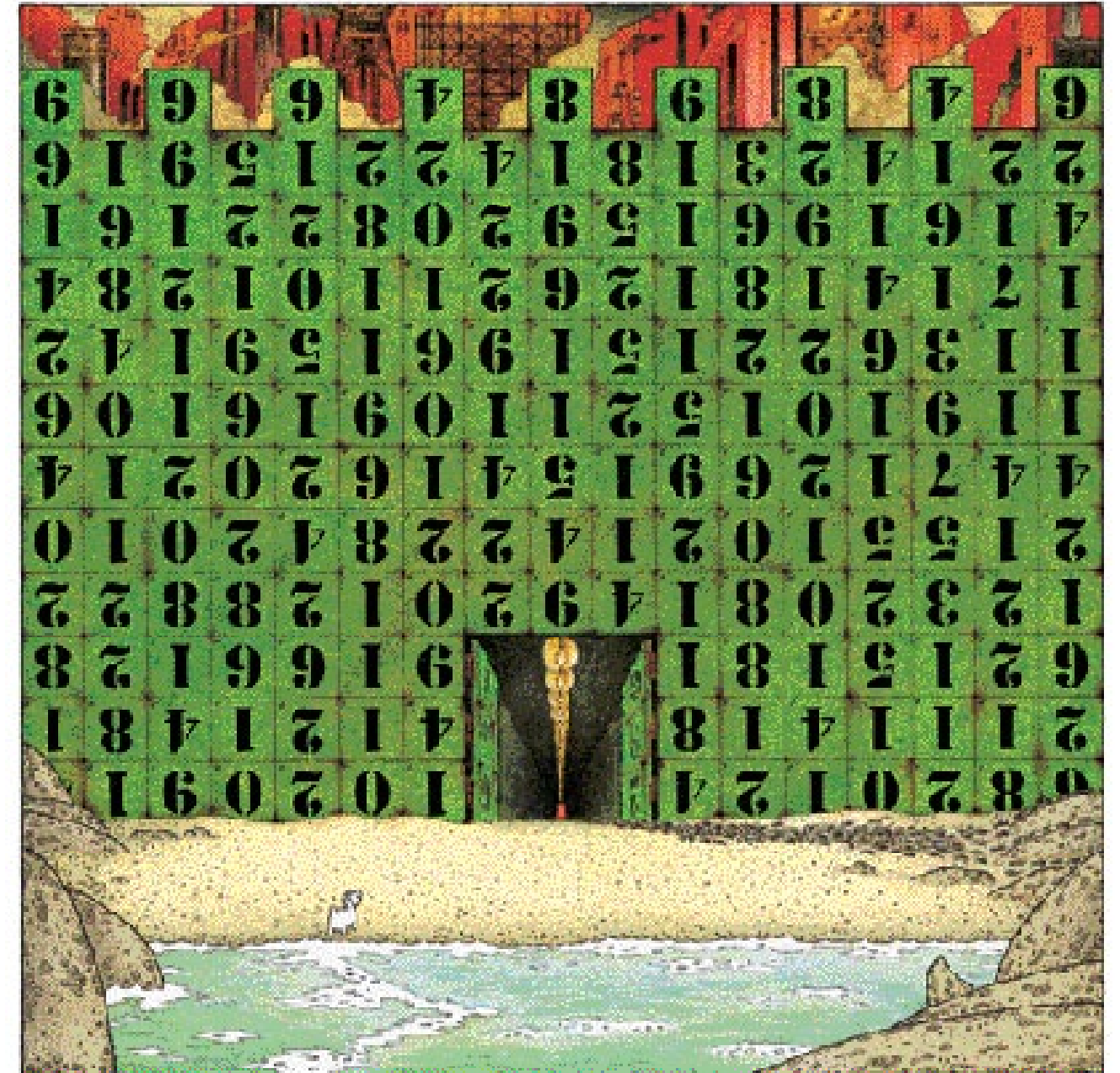


A Tik and Tok
Adventure



1 Tok was dreaming of a song. It was an unearthly, distant song and it called with an irresistible beauty. His nose twitched, an eye opened and he was awake. The song was still there, and he had to go to it. Now. He padded down to the moonlit water's edge, looked wistfully back at the house and paddled out, further and further, towards the horizon where the dawn lay sleeping.

2 He came out of the sea onto a beach below a great wall of numbers where thousands of rats were pouring into a doorway. The song drew him on and he joined the throng, the great doors closing behind him with a noise like thunder. The rats disappeared down drains, into holes and round corners, leaving Tok alone in a dark and filthy street. He cocked his head and listened. The song had stopped.

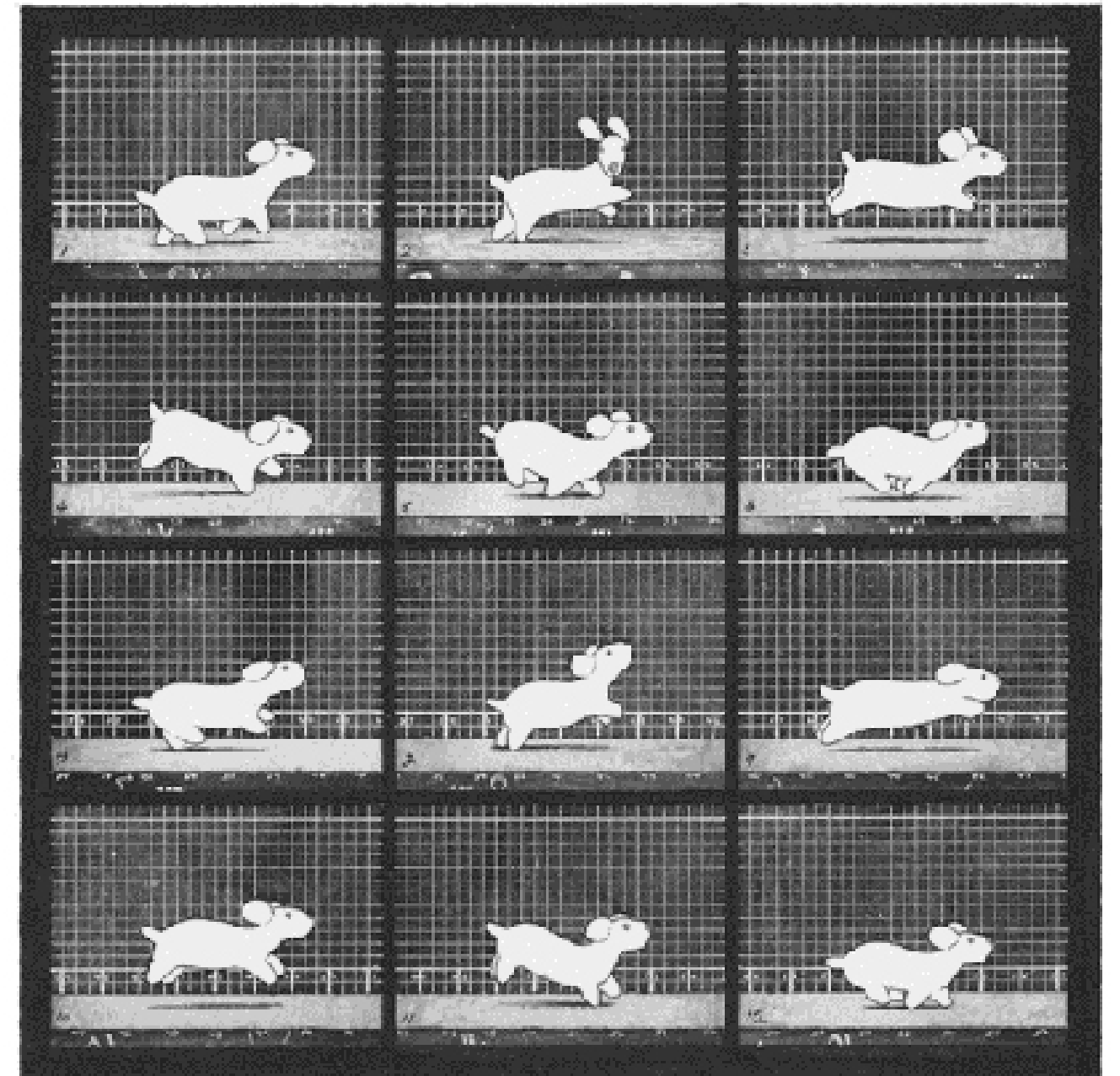


7 Tok sat in his cell musing. Someone had been telling lies about him. Why else had he been imprisoned? Why did they want his photograph? And what were all the machines for? Nothing here made sense. His thoughts were turning to escape when Suckweed the jailer coughed, spat and shoved his sweaty face up to the bars.

'Oi! Barkface!' he snapped. 'You're goin' out, little puppy. Goin' to the dogs, mate. Go on, get out of it!'

Tok was hauled out and dragged through the streets in a cage. When it came to a stop its door was drawn up revealing a dimly lit corridor and Tok shot out like a rat up a drain. A series of bangs and flashes went off as he ran and he dived into a doorway at the far end. The door clanged shut behind him and there was a smell of burning.

'Thank you, kleiner Tok. Thank you,' came a voice from the darkness.



8 Tik wandered the streets. There was no life: not a thing that bloomed or sent out shoots or tendrils, nothing that flew or hopped. But here and there, down side streets and at the mouths of rusty drains, he caught little movements out of the corner of his eye.

He came to a grand staircase and entered a huge hall full of rows and rows of black machines bristling with cables and levers and flashing lights. In front of every machine was a child, intent upon a glowing screen and sucking wetly on little pink pills and bottles of pop. The apparatus hummed and beeped but the children made no sound. Tik crept closer.

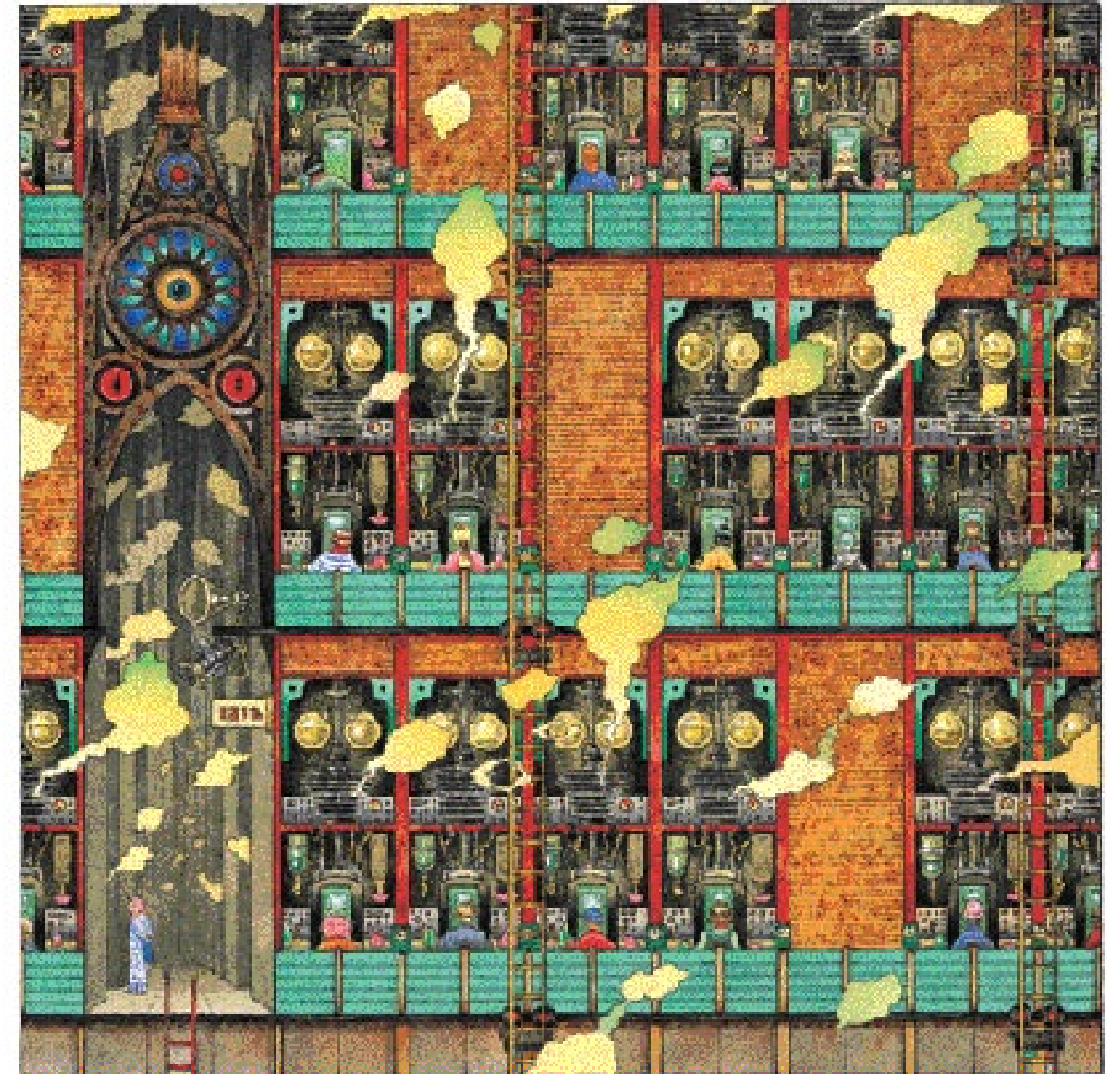
'Hello. I'm Tik,' he whispered. 'Who are you?'

The child ignored him. Tik tried the next one.

'Hello,' he said, a bit louder. 'I'm Tik. What's your name?'

The child made a very small sound, something like 'hmmm'. It was the same with the next child and the next and it all made Tik so cross that he shouted out, 'What's the matter with you all? Wake up!'

Immediately a screaming siren went off and a voice boomed through the hall, 'Aisle 1212, Pinchbrat, Aisle 1212.' A thin man with a face like a fish appeared in the distance and



and ran his finger down the pages.

'Well,' he said, 'if you don't have your own names you can use someone else's. You will be Julia. You are John. You will be Ralph. You are K. And you two,' he said, coming to the twins, who had half a book each, 'are Genie and Memie. Remember that. Now, tell me, what's going on? What's wrong with the children? And what are you doing down here?'

Six pairs of eyes blinked.

'You must be able to speak,' urged Tik. 'S-p-e-a-k. Speak. Words. Language. Speak to me.'

Silence.

'Hmmm,' said Tik. 'I'm going back up there to find out what's going on. If you want to help, so much the better. If you don't, I'm going anyway.'

More silence. The sound of Tik's flute disappeared off into the darkness and far behind him the little light of the lamp went out.

