

INTRODUCTION

ALBERTO COTTICA

A while back, we at the Sci-Fi Economics Lab had a new idea: instead of writing academic papers, we could channel out-of-the box economic thinking around building a fictional world, to serve as the backdrop for works of science fiction or fantasy. In retrospect, it seems obvious: after all, this space exists because a small patrol of economically inclined sci-fi authors invested a lot of time and brainpower into dreaming up exotic economic systems. But we added a couple of extra ideas to that original insight.

First, we decided to build the world in a participatory way. We want anyone to be free to contribute ideas, analysis, references, visuals, and so on.

Would technologies of great power (like Star Trek's replicators) be compatible with a market economy as we know, based on scarcity? How would slower-than-light interstellar trade work?

1. Paul Krugman, *The Theory of the Interstellar Trade*, 1978, <https://www.princeton.edu/~pkrugman/interstellar.pdf>

2. <https://www.poll-maker.com/poll1009893x-a10948B5-42>

3. For an explanation of the Hives in *Terra Ignota*, see: Ada Palmer, *Writing a Future in Which You Choose Your Own Nation*, Tor.com 2017

<https://www.tor.com/2017/03/13/writing-a-future-in-which-you-choose-your-own-nation/>

(Nobel laureate Paul Krugman actually worked that one out!) How can Harry Potter's Wizarding world use precious metal as a currency, given that wizards can simply magick out more of it and cause hyperinflation? No matter how smart, an individual author can not keep track of all the possible variables and their permutations. So, we are going to do that as a community. It just makes sense.

There are already over 150 people posting on the Science Fiction Economics Lab forum, many of us professional economists. We are licensing the world with an open source license: you can use it for your novel, film or game, and no lawyer will ever come calling if you make it big.

Second, we decided we want a world that contains several economic systems, not just one. Again, this is an old trick in sci-fi: Anarres and Urras in Ursula K. Le Guin *The Dispossessed*, the Hives in Ada Palmer's *Terra Ignota*, the Acquis and the Dispensation in Bruce Sterling's *The Caryatids*, and so on. This plurality creates a nice narrative tension, as characters can move across places and experience different economies. Also, readers tend to start thinking which economic system they would choose, if they were free to do so. For example, this poll² about "which *Terra Ignota* Hive would you choose" is popular on the Internet³.

But participatory projects work best if someone makes an initial investment in them. Participating in filling an empty space can be intimidating, or simply not that much fun. So, third, we decided to offer a writers' residency to



This technique gives Saint Hildegard its peculiar appearance, and has earned it the nickname of Floatsam. They have announced that their mission is to build and launch the **Saint Christopher**, a slower-than-light starship for interstellar colonization, conceived as a deep space monastery. The project has an estimated duration of 400 years, with the first 300 dedicated to developing blueprints and the ancillary technologies.

WORLDBUILDING ACADEMY

GRAPHIC NOVEL DESIGN AND DRAWINGS BY MICHELA DE DOMENICO AND MARCO LO CURZIO

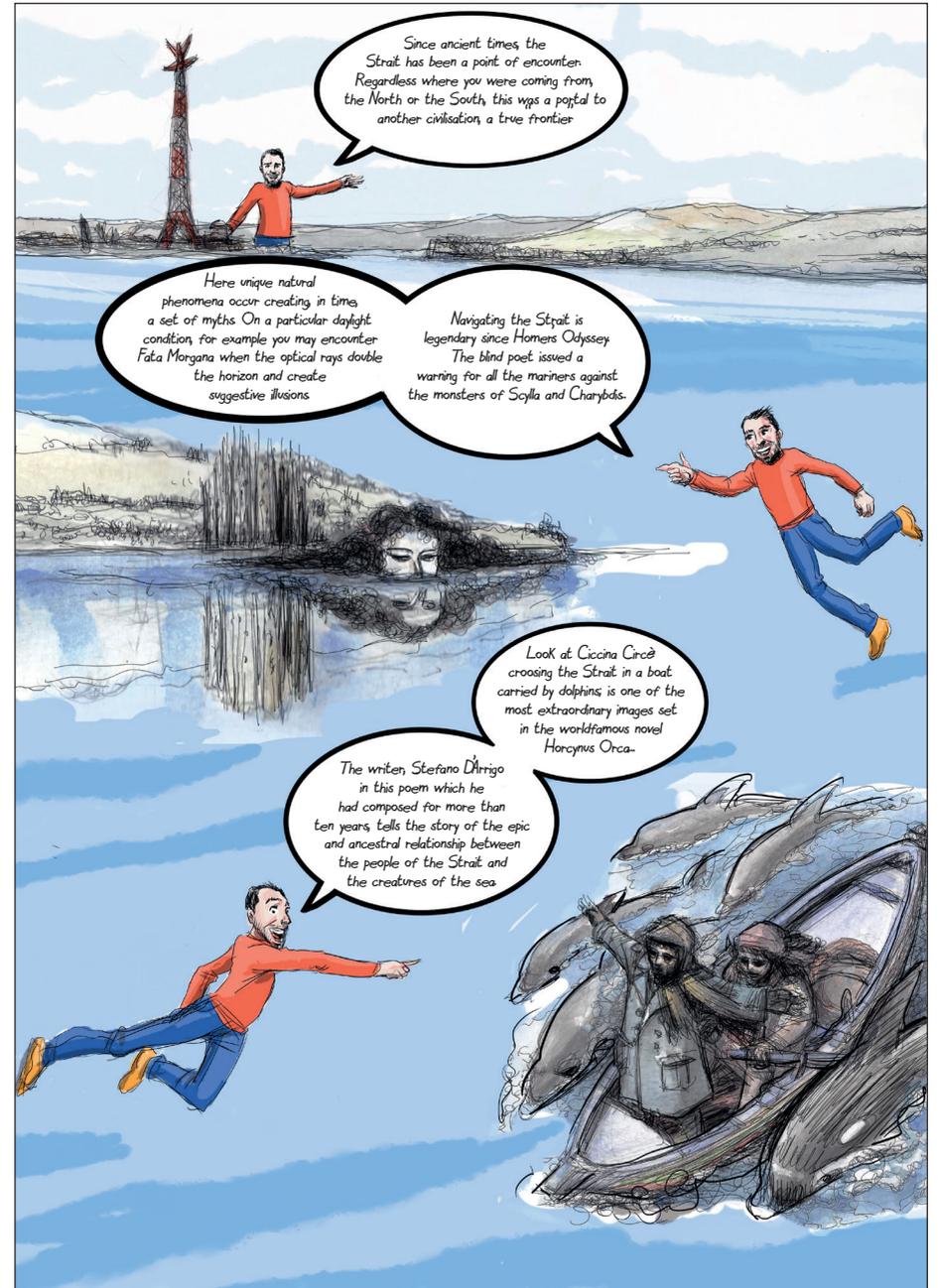
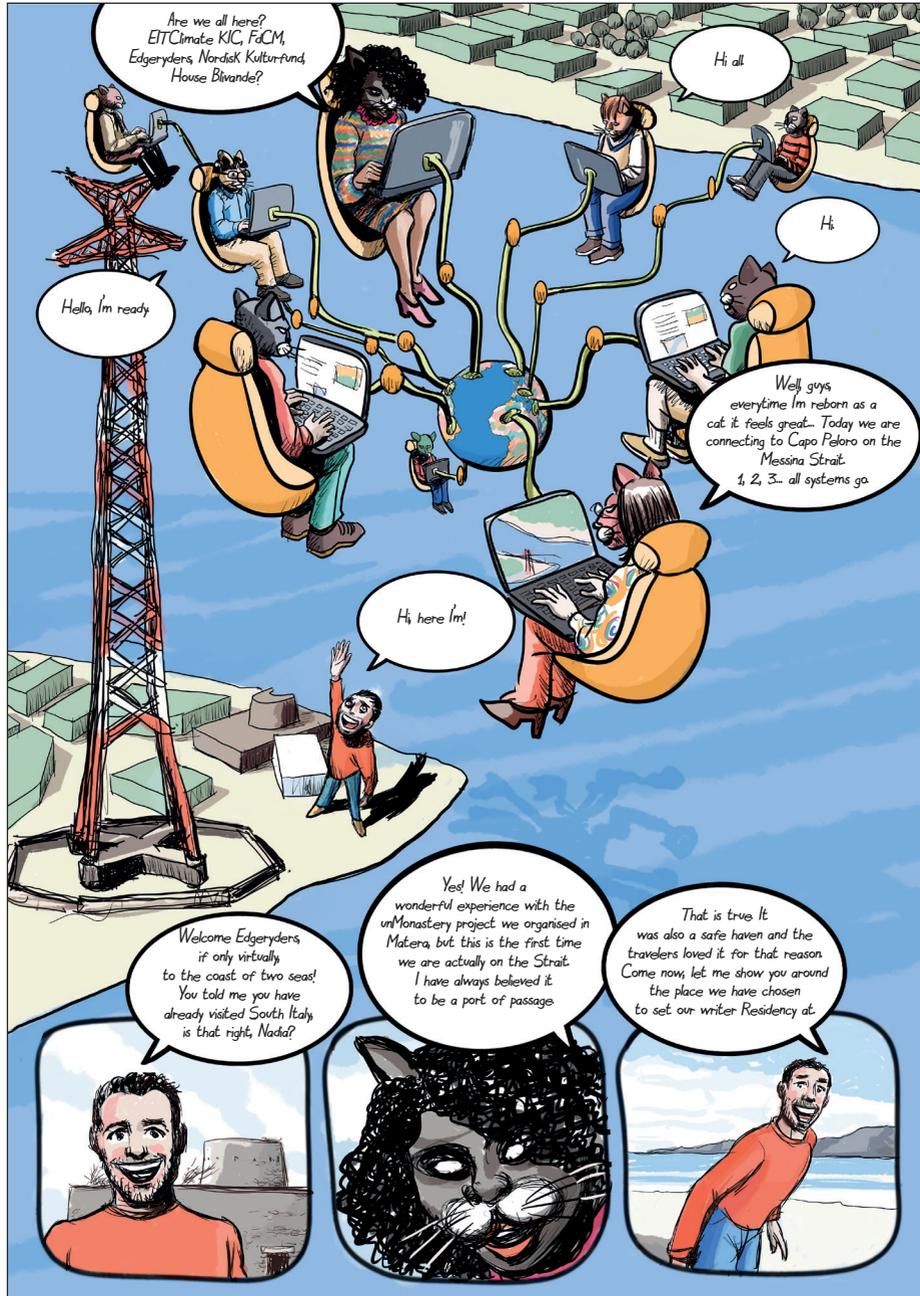
Economics, as we know it currently, has changed from a place to imagine new and better worlds to a discipline which re-enforces and improves itself in a single model. Much “blue sky” economic thinking is now done in strange contexts.

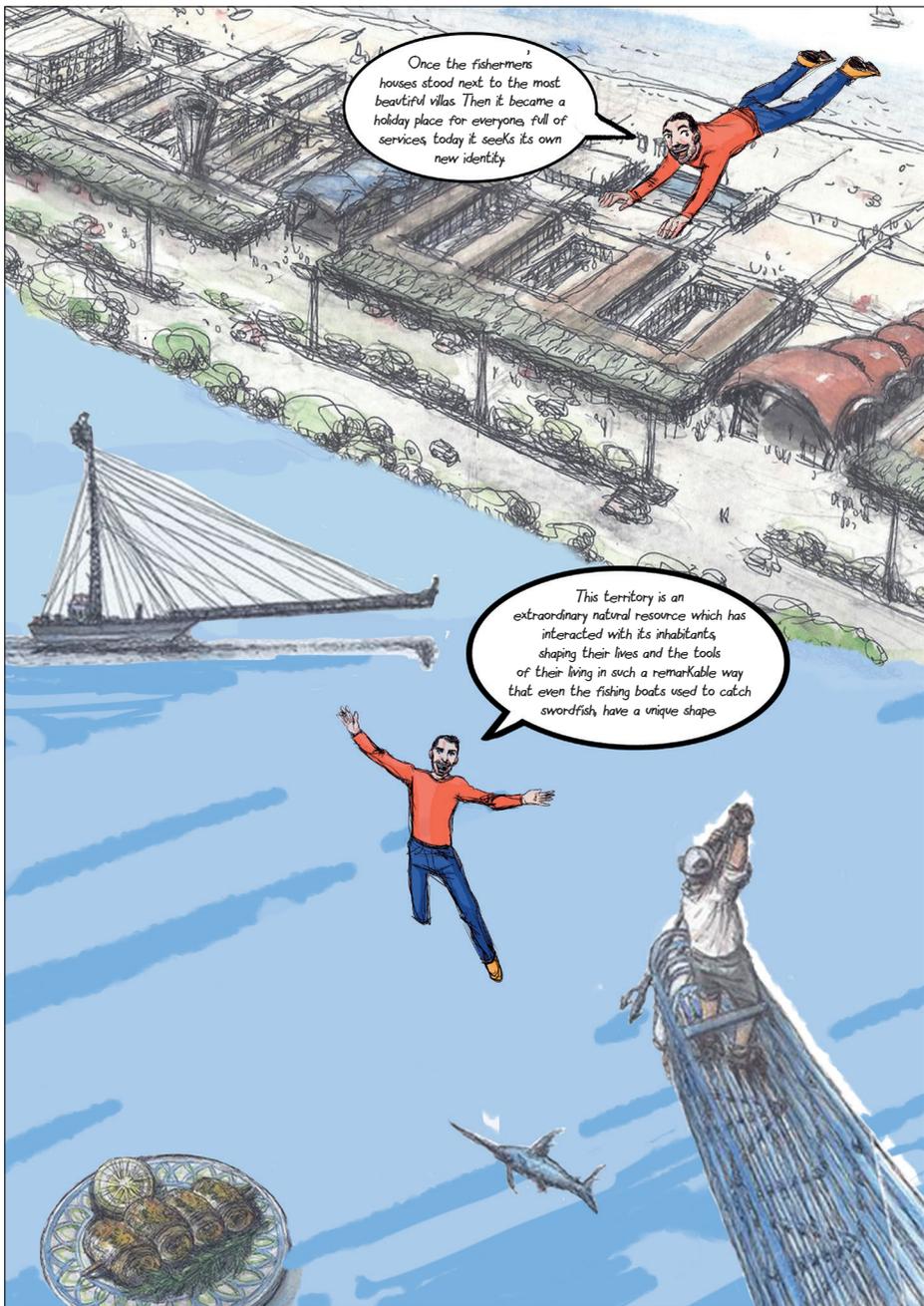
Science fiction is one of them. Another one is local communities who attempt to reboot their economies in more humane and long-term resilient ways.

The Science Fiction Economics Lab papers track down and investigate examples of systemic innovation or radical rethinking of the current economic model.

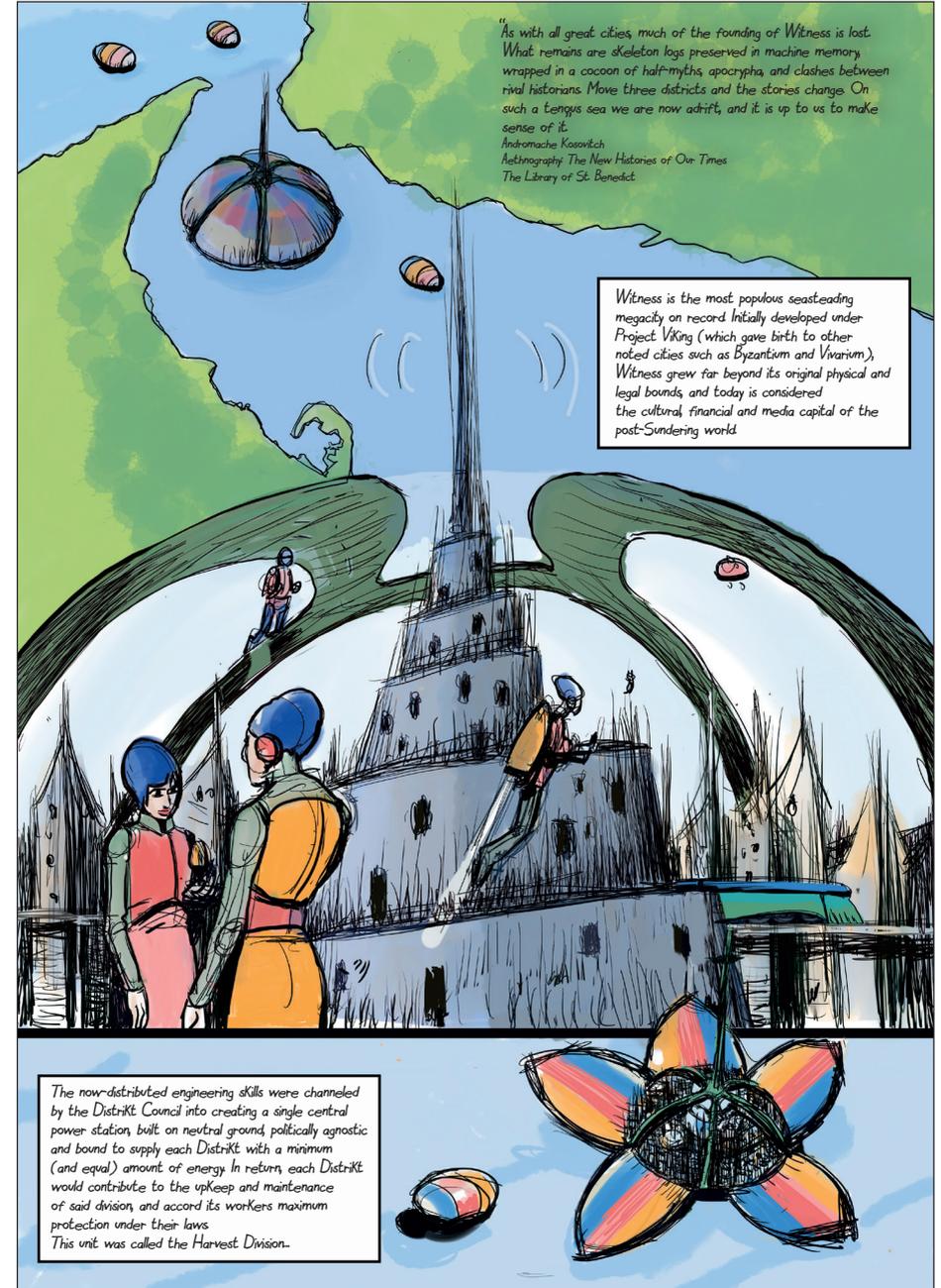
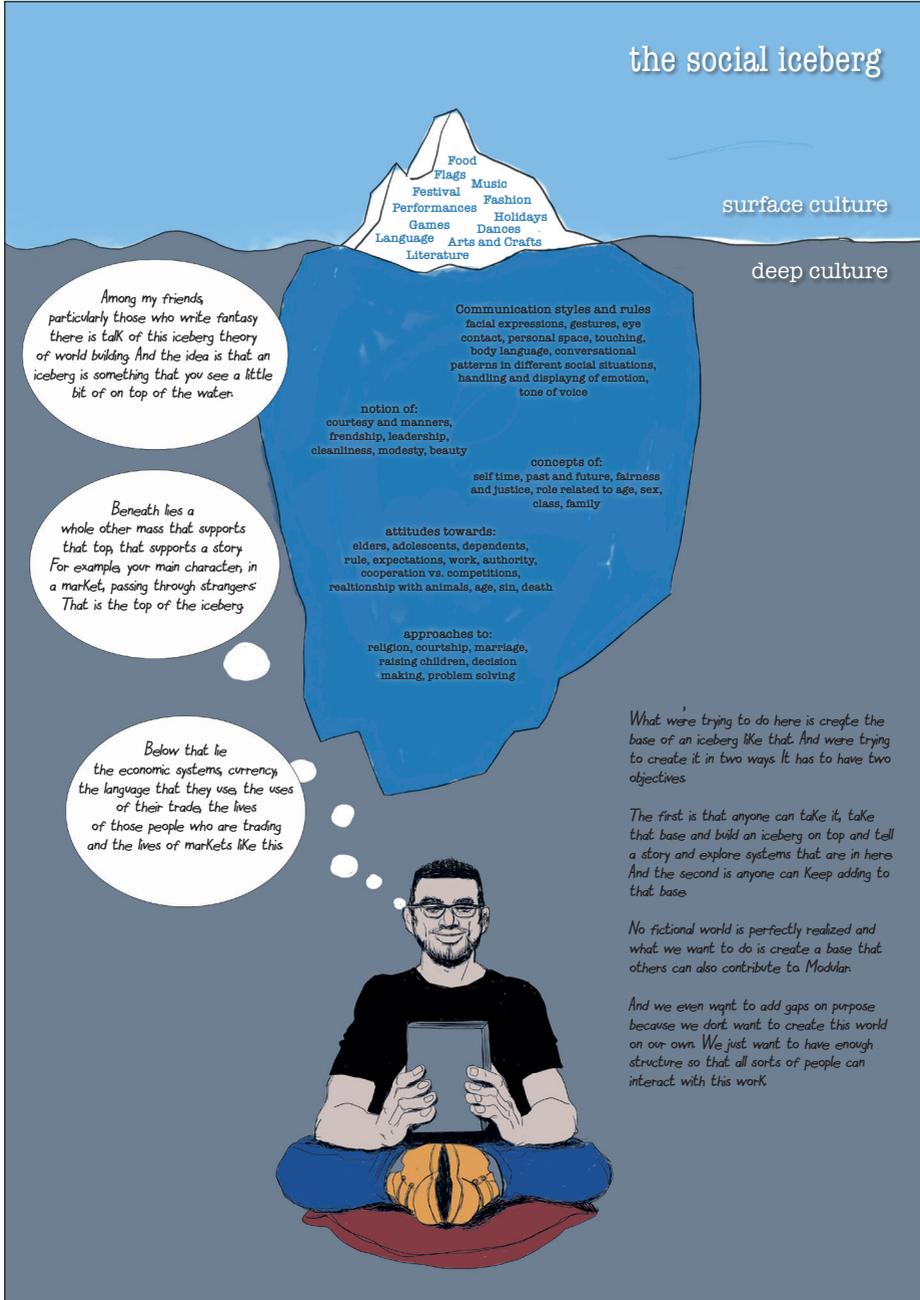


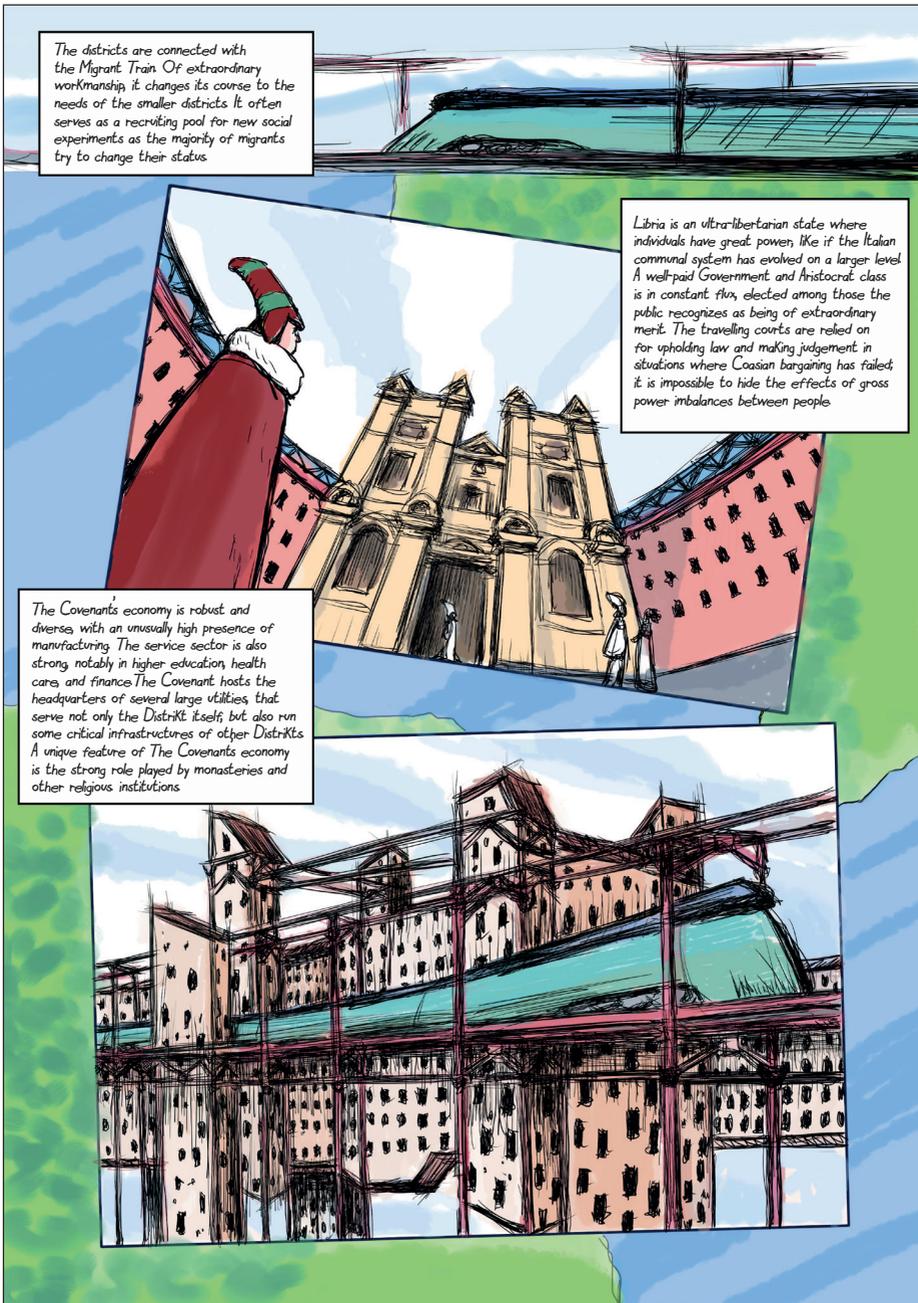
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the social iceberg

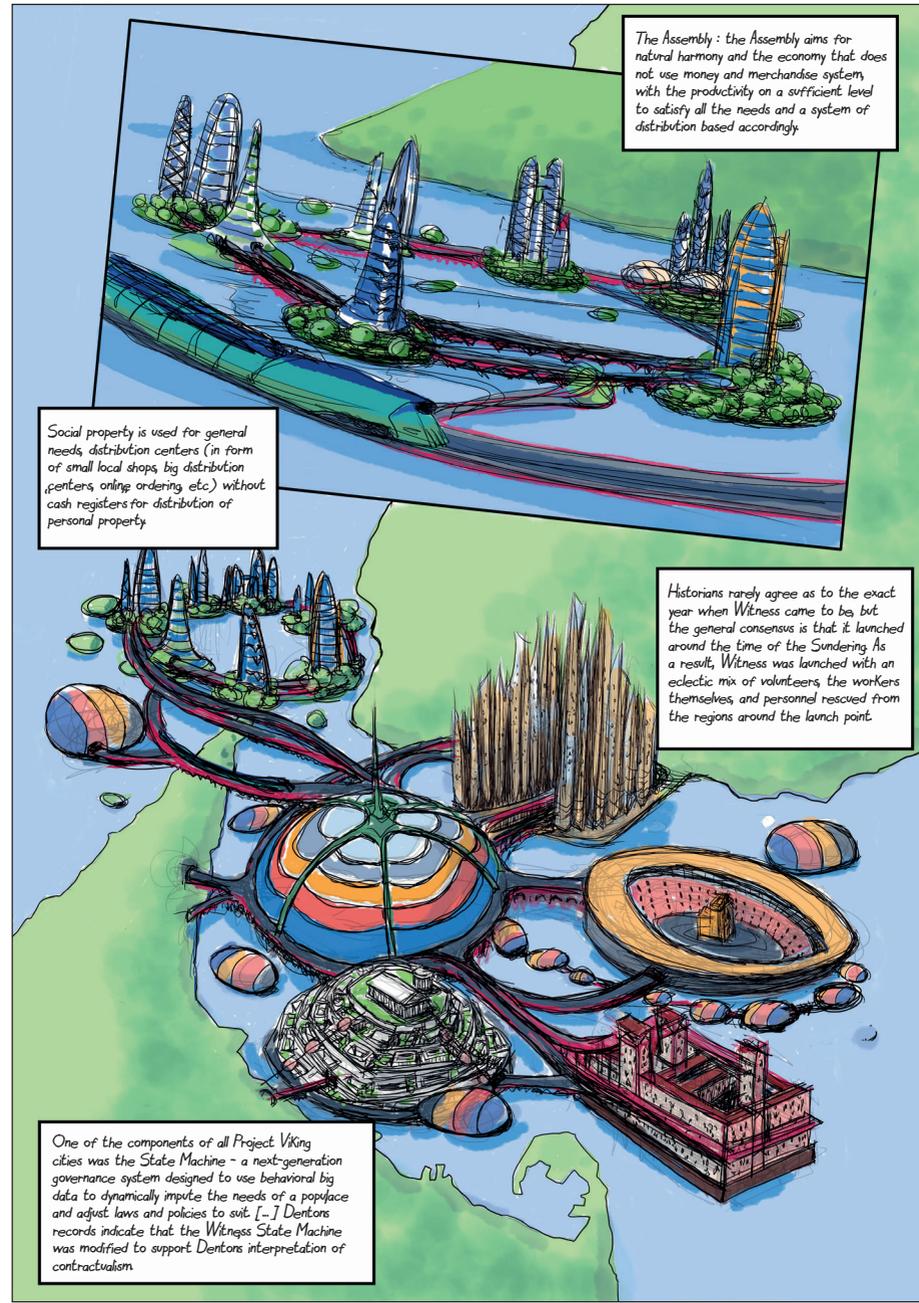




The districts are connected with the Migrant Train. Of extraordinary workmanship it changes its course to the needs of the smaller districts. It often serves as a recruiting pool for new social experiments as the majority of migrants try to change their status.

Libria is an ultra-libertarian state where individuals have great power. Like if the Italian communal system has evolved on a larger level. A well-paid Government and Aristocrat class is in constant flux, elected among those the public recognizes as being of extraordinary merit. The traveling courts are relied on for upholding law and making judgement in situations where Coasian bargaining has failed. It is impossible to hide the effects of gross power imbalances between people.

The Covenant's economy is robust and diverse, with an unusually high presence of manufacturing. The service sector is also strong, notably in higher education, health care, and finance. The Covenant hosts the headquarters of several large utilities that serve not only the Distrikt itself, but also run some critical infrastructures of other Distrikts. A unique feature of The Covenant's economy is the strong role played by monasteries and other religious institutions.



The Assembly: the Assembly aims for natural harmony and the economy that does not use money and merchandise system, with the productivity on a sufficient level to satisfy all the needs and a system of distribution based accordingly.

Social property is used for general needs, distribution centers (in form of small local shops, big distribution centers, online ordering, etc.) without cash registers for distribution of personal property.

Historians rarely agree as to the exact year when Witness came to be, but the general consensus is that it launched around the time of the Sundering. As a result, Witness was launched with an eclectic mix of volunteers, the workers themselves, and personnel rescued from the regions around the launch point.

One of the components of all Project Viking cities was the State Machine - a next-generation governance system designed to use behavioral big data to dynamically impute the needs of a populace and adjust laws and policies to suit. [...] Dentons records indicate that the Witness State Machine was modified to support Dentons' interpretation of contractualism.



Fondazione di Comunità di Messina



NORDISK KULTURFOND OPSTART



|||| worldbuilding graphic novel

concept and layout | Marco Lo Curzio and Michela De Domenico
drawings | Michela De Domenico

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