

## *Foraging in the city, an introduction*

(for J.V)

### *1. The Sediments*

The stairway in the southwest corner of the archives will take you all the way down to the flood. Find the service hatch at level 32, wade across the tar lake, work your way up the smaller walkways and ladders until you reach the main shaft.

Levels 25 to 20 is called the Haze. Here, on the concrete ledges, you'll find a quietly fluorescent yellow lichen (mut. of *Chrysothrix*). Grind to a coarse powder, blend gently with near-boiling water and stir into a thick stew. Tastes like sugary dust, but rich in protein and zinc. Make sure all parasites leave before serving – don't be alarmed when they slither out of the pot cursing you. (The heat doesn't harm them, they're just pissed off).

*Pro tip:* Set up camp on one of the wider shelves and spend the night in the Haze. Watch subterranean lightning strike inside the mist, briefly illuminating this four-hundred-metres-high-X-ray-expanding-ribcage of a vast hollow.

*Stay safe:* Don't stray below 32th. The deeper you go, the older and weirder the inhabitants. They remember everything but have no interest in the present.

### *2. The Underground*

The faint overhead glow of broken mall skylights marks the end of the Haze and the start of the constructed levels: flower-clogged sewers, forgotten service tunnels, post-war cemeteries. And the subway. Can't believe it still runs (even the L), though I've never seen anyone use it, except for that one time. The insides of the cars are covered in purplish salt residue. Force the doors, scrape it off, use for seasoning – if you don't mind where it came from. If you're lucky, you'll see some of the salt scratchers graffiti.

The vending machines in stations are still being refilled, an automated process. If you have a cracked keycard, use that, otherwise an iron rod will do

the trick. The Sylvain protein bars are decent, and the beers (in a vending machine!) are beers.

There's a space below the platform on 9th and 4th that you can sleep in. I left my lamp there, in case she comes back.

Batdaws live in the ventilation tunnels. Stay clear of them, unless your peace offering is generous. Follow their calls from a distance and they will lead you to the commercial underpass and the flowering trees. Here look for badger droppings dotted with puffin beaks (the birds drop their beaks whenever they see a badger – it grows back out again). Roast and sprinkle with purple salt, eat as snacks.

*Pro tip:* Chew the flowers from the trees, and time will turn soft and slow. Not bad.

*Stay safe:* Watch out for skeleton service trains.

### 3. *The Holloways*

As you approach the surface the tunnels gently fade into dusky ditches arced by intervowen trees. The maps keep changing, something re-weaves the branches at night. Meditate on this at an intersection until you see fireflies. Where they hover, you'll find patches of b12-enhanced nettles. They make for a good soup. Drop a synthesized dumpling – or any protein blob of vegetable origin – in there if you have it.

At the outskirts of the holloways you'll find the painted cave. Leave your third and receive what you didn't find (yesterday I picked up mushrooms, orange spinach, dark chocolate, fern batteries).

Nb. Only one forager allowed at a time in the cave. It's completely dark, use your light to illuminate the tables with offerings, and memorize the temporary maps shaped from twigs and branches. Photographs and drawings forbidden.

*Pro tip:* There's an abandoned treehouse in the canopy above the cave, if you need a place to sleep.

*Stay safe:* If encountering a badger, caution is advised.

#### 4. Street Level

The compost heap of the higher levels, with the occasional neo-dandelion on top of the waste (with patience it might turn into shitty wine in a year or two, fermented with sugar). The vertical gardens are a good source for greens, though you need to decontaminate them first.

Follow a moth if you see one, it'll sooner or later amble into a mall to find a nootropic birch to feast upon (or an onion, but you probably already knew that).

The coded goutweed in the parks lost a lot of its starches in the last decade, and is now edible as is, though an acquired taste. Eat raw or lightly blanched. There's a lot of looting, if so inclined. Oh, and language declines into poetry on street level, *the*

*elephant ribcage on the square meditating*

*A material that expands in fluid, it can be shaped, dried, woven*

*Yes they mix bitters in it, but you can chew thru it  
(if you're dedicated enough)*

*they think it's semi-alive. Take a biopsy from an approving being and build from  
it*

*Stay safe: Don't mess with the moths.*

*Pro tip: The blobby excretions covering the streets is not great food but pound it flat and let it dry in the sun, it becomes like white leather. My entire outfit is made of the stuff...*

#### 5. Rooftops

The small forest (alder, rowan, oak) in the penthouse of the Sakamoto building is brimfull of funnel chanterelles. Gather their dew, just a few drops will turn spoiled water drinkable and make your surroundings flow and glow. I woke up in the 100 sqm bathroom with Arctic starflowers (non-edible, wasteland indicator species with bronze colored leaves – good for soothing moonburn excema) sprouting from my mossy puke.

Scrape the mildew from the glass wall and admire the view. A few hundred meters to the southeast: the rooftops of the housing project on 1<sup>st</sup>: where fields of flesh-and-concrete-eating *verbascum/matricaria* hybrids stand up to 5 m tall (love to see them thrive after being pushed out by non-natives on lower levels). Their roots infiltrate the structure, slowly processing the concrete into an intensely fine soil. A squirrel I knew went through the roof last week, tumbled through seven floors — the seven spherical dust clouds rising like a chain of beads, reminded me of something.

*what does solidarity within a species mean  
pick the pickled turnip, slice it, decode the signs      the sky at night  
the quiet fall      birds, innumerable in the flooded shelter...*

*Pro tip:* Trade turnips for friendship (with squirrels).

*Stay safe:* Don't climb any buildings with mulleins on top.

Bonus content:

*The borderlands pt. 1 & 2*

The suburban borderlands, endless. The gardens are key: close to the centre the nondescript lawns of the 20th century; further out they progress into semi-controlled wilderness. There's an overgrown mansion in the west reach where they use flamethrowers to keep the bamboo at bay. Lurk in the shadows of the neo-English park and watch the hovercrafts trying to take off, while enjoying a light meal of pear wood splinters, elderberries, yarrow, followed by a few select orchids from the derelict greenhouse.

*...what to say about "agency" in beings with non-nervous systems, being part of the herbivore foragers, am I blinded to injustice by my own prejudice? I'm pro the faux meat factories, but they were all shut down in the third wave, some friends of mine broke into one and managed to start the systems again, I might invest in that –*

And my favourite, the forgotten industrial area by the port. It's flooded during night – forage in the dried out fields, parking lots and riverbeds at

early dawn. In the riverside park there's a sculpture of a giant armadillo, its back appearing, disappearing as the tide shifts and covers it with microcrabs: in the rising sun they glow like tiny lamps, at dusk they're translucent – constantly scuttling, quietly humming, thinking of something unknown.

*...what good is it if you love all these things but can't feel it? It's like arguing with a cat irritated at a fly. I hear a faint sound all the time, a distant choir rising in the walls, coming up from the underground, the humming of things I've forgotten, the wild uncertainty of living. Is the verbascum inside the walls here too? Did she return to the space below the underground platform, is she there now, I mean right now? Or still lost in the Haze? I need to go see.*

*Pro tip:* Take a bath in the tide pools.

*Stay safe:* This area is reasonably safe. But avoid local rainfall, it will bruise your skin.