

# The Orsini Insanity

*Jerry Grasso*

In 1547, Prince Vicino Orsini commissioned work to begin on a park filled with twenty four natural bedrock-sculpted art pieces. Most of these are based on grotesque figures of mythological origin that were important during this time period. The park, currently considered by many to be the first theme park, was called Bosco Sacro. It is known today as “Monster Park”, located in Bomarzo, Italy. It eventually became dedicated to the loving memory of his wife, Giulia Farnese, who died in 1560 before the park was completed. The Prince commissioned Pirro Ligorio, well-known at the time for finishing St. Peter’s Basilica after Michelangelo died, to create these sculptures.

Legend has it that the heart-broken Prince had lost his sanity soon after his wife’s death, and changed the park’s creation to reflect his state of mind. This may have been his way of conveying his sense of anguish, or the confusion and dizziness of this experience within his head.

Inspired by Prince Orsini’s artistic vision, I have attempted to construct a modern day adaptation of a dreamland journey through the visions of his insanity. The distorted pieces contained within this series are composites of many of the original twenty four Ligorio works.

The story begins with our hero, the proud figure of a man, Hercules, dreaming of the loss of his beloved wife. During the course of his Underworld visions, the hero barehanded slaughters Cacus, a fire-breathing giant and the son of Vulcan. He must also avoid the echo and terrorizing scream of Orcus, the demon prince and lord of the undead. There are encounters with Jupiter and Neptune. The fortified elephant of Hannibal is found carrying the unconscious body of a legionnaire. He passes Cerberus, the three headed dog, guardian of hell; a winged Dragon; a clash between Pegasus and the harpy, a dragon woman; and Ceres, the goddess patron of Rome.

Our hero’s journey into insanity ends with the final vision of Proteus swallowing the tortured eyes of his wife.



The Orsini Castle...





The dreamland descent into the Underworld visions begins...





The court of the harpies...



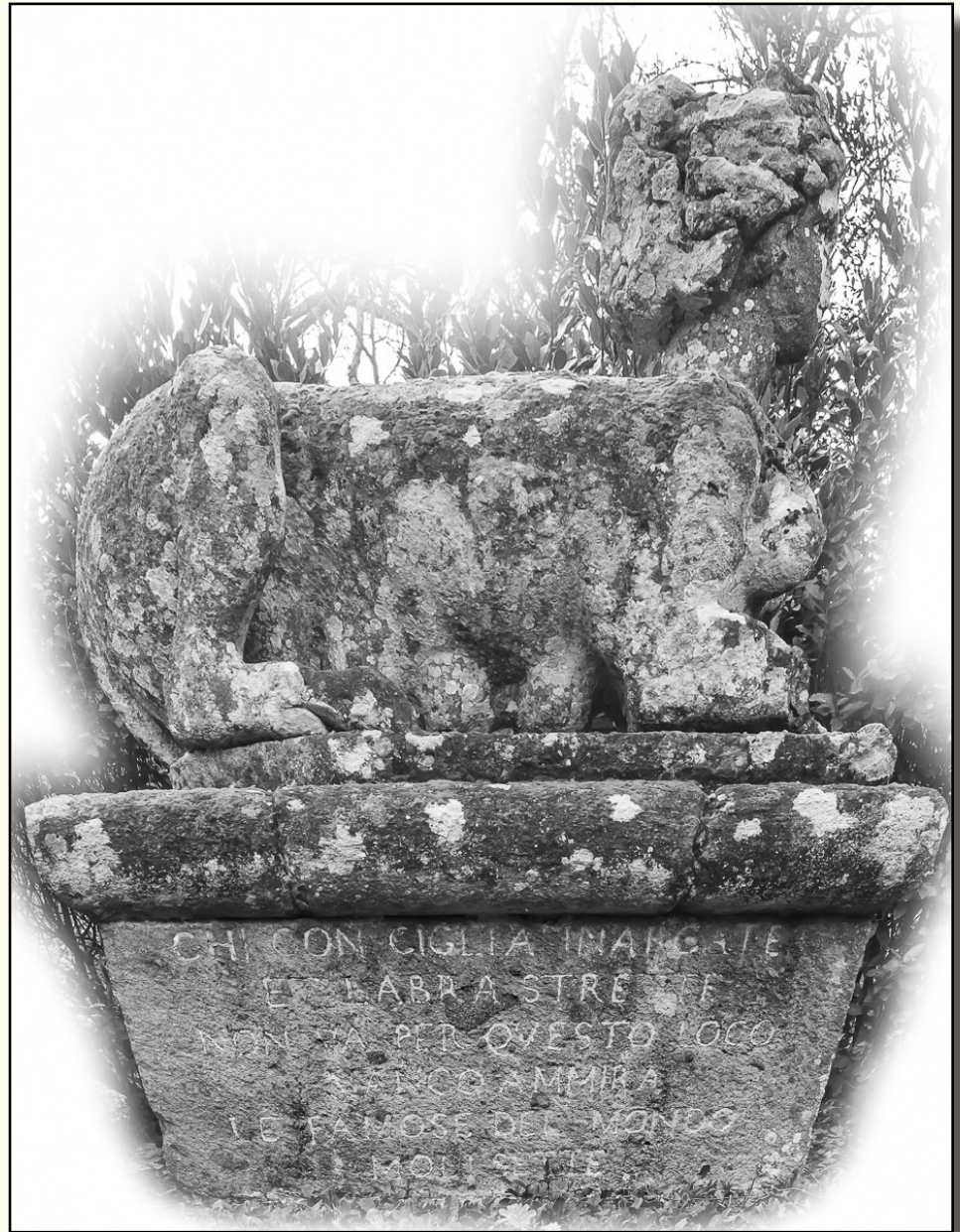


The Etruscan bench. The inscription above it reads...

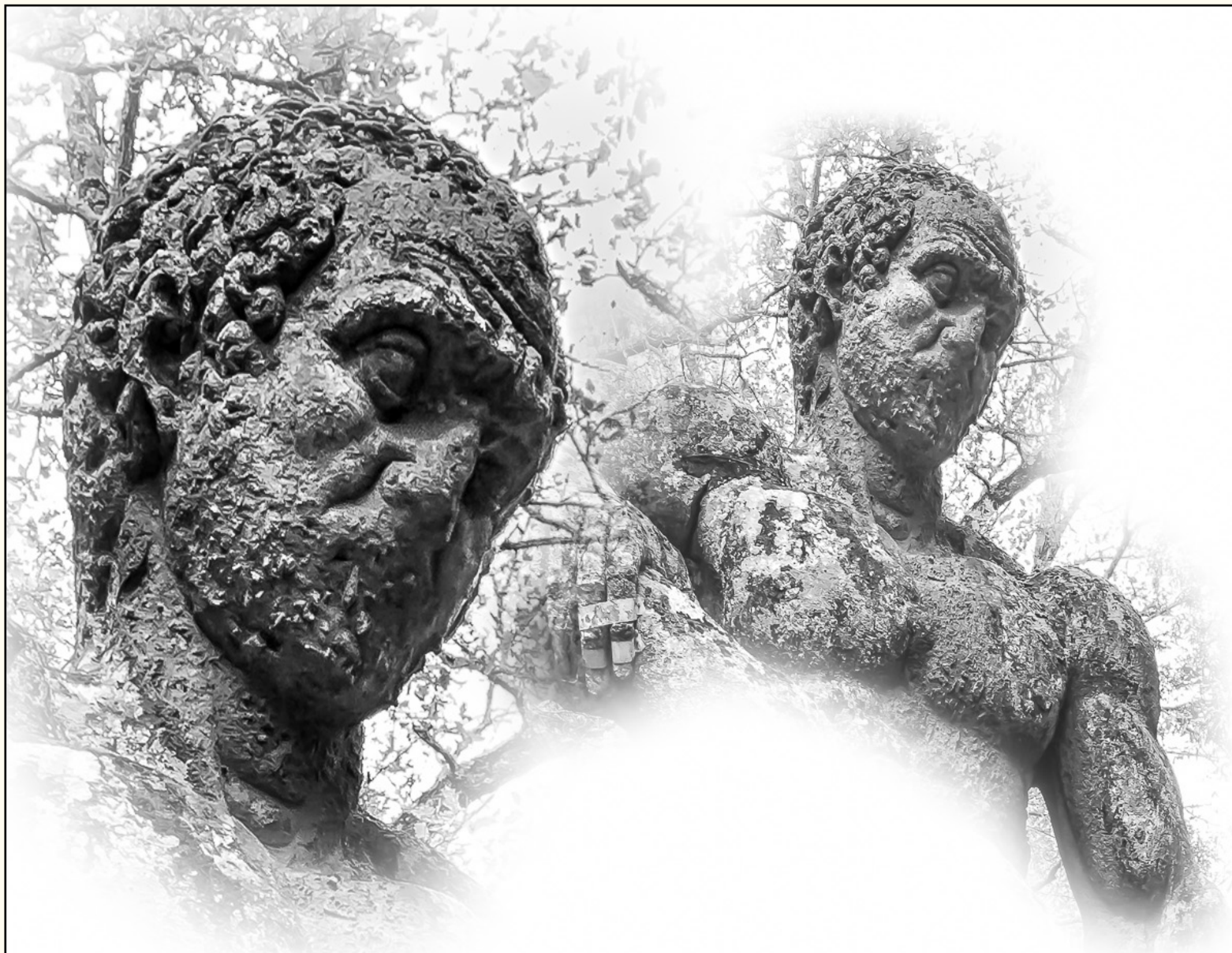
*"You who have traveled the world wishing to see great, stupendous marvels — come here, where there are horrendous faces, elephants, lions, bears, orcs and dragons."*

The sphinx, the classical riddler of ancient times, inscribed...

*"He who does not visit this place with raised eyebrows and pursed lips will fail to admire the seven wonders of the world."*

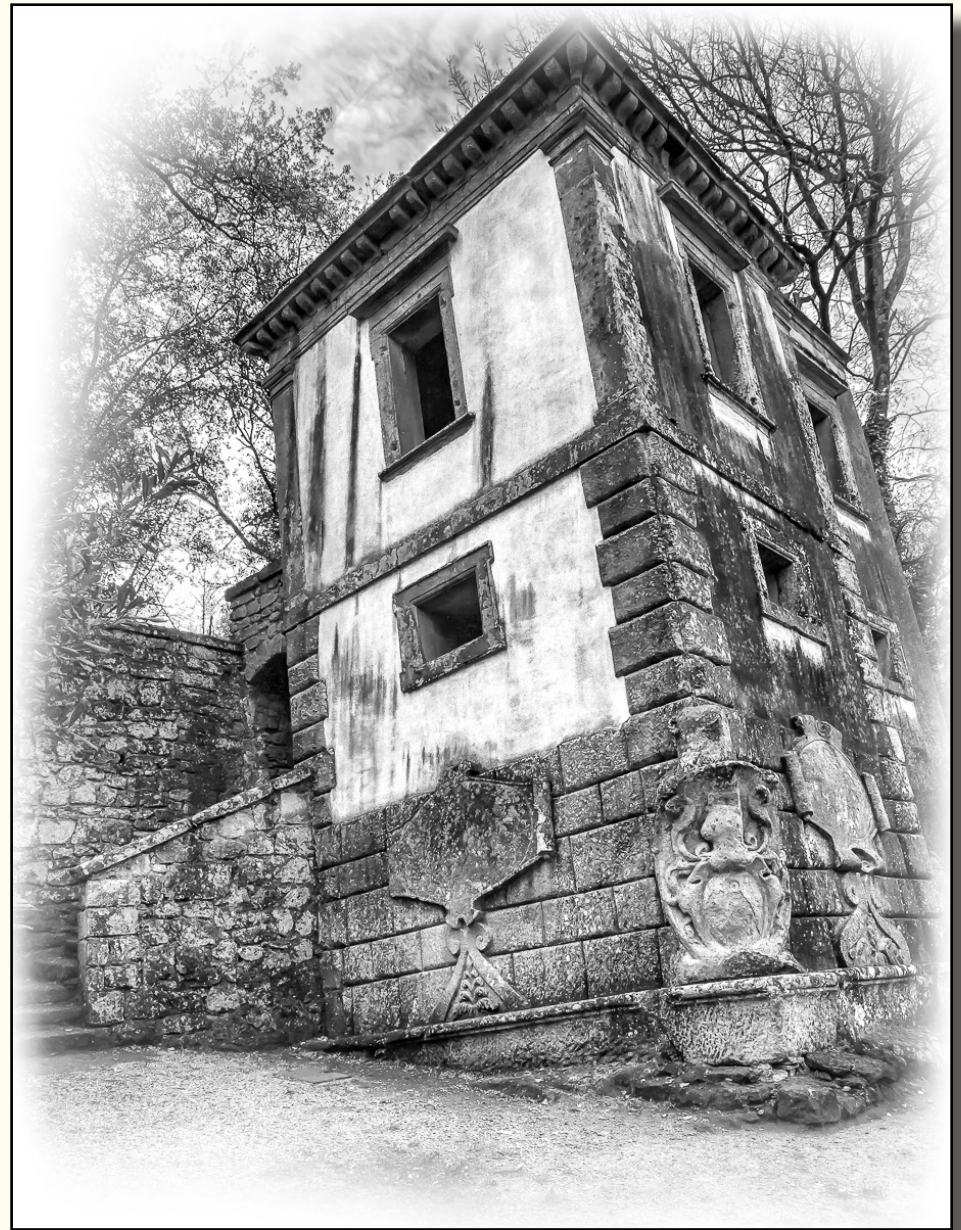






Hercules, our hero, on his fated journey...

The leaning house, meant to reproduce the physical vertigo  
and disorientation of the death of our hero's wife...











This is Orcus, the ogre, the king of the underworld. The inscription reads...  
*"All reason departs."*



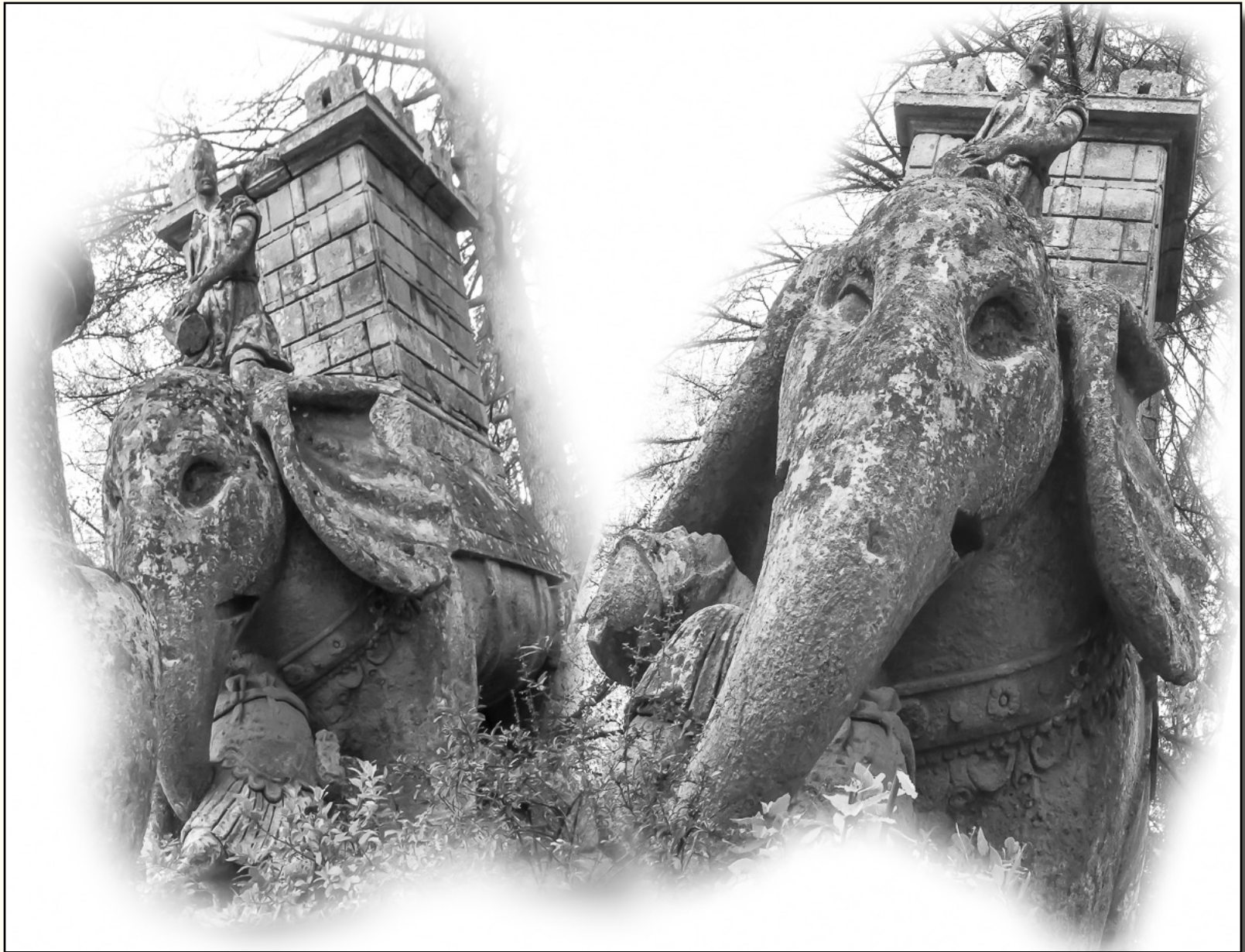
This is the battle of Hercules, who barehanded slaughtered Cacus, the fire-breathing giant and son of Vulcan...



Venus Cloacina, Venus the purifier, a hybridization of the Etruscan water goddess Cloacina. She is standing on a dragon with an offering—perhaps a bouquet of roses, her signature flower...





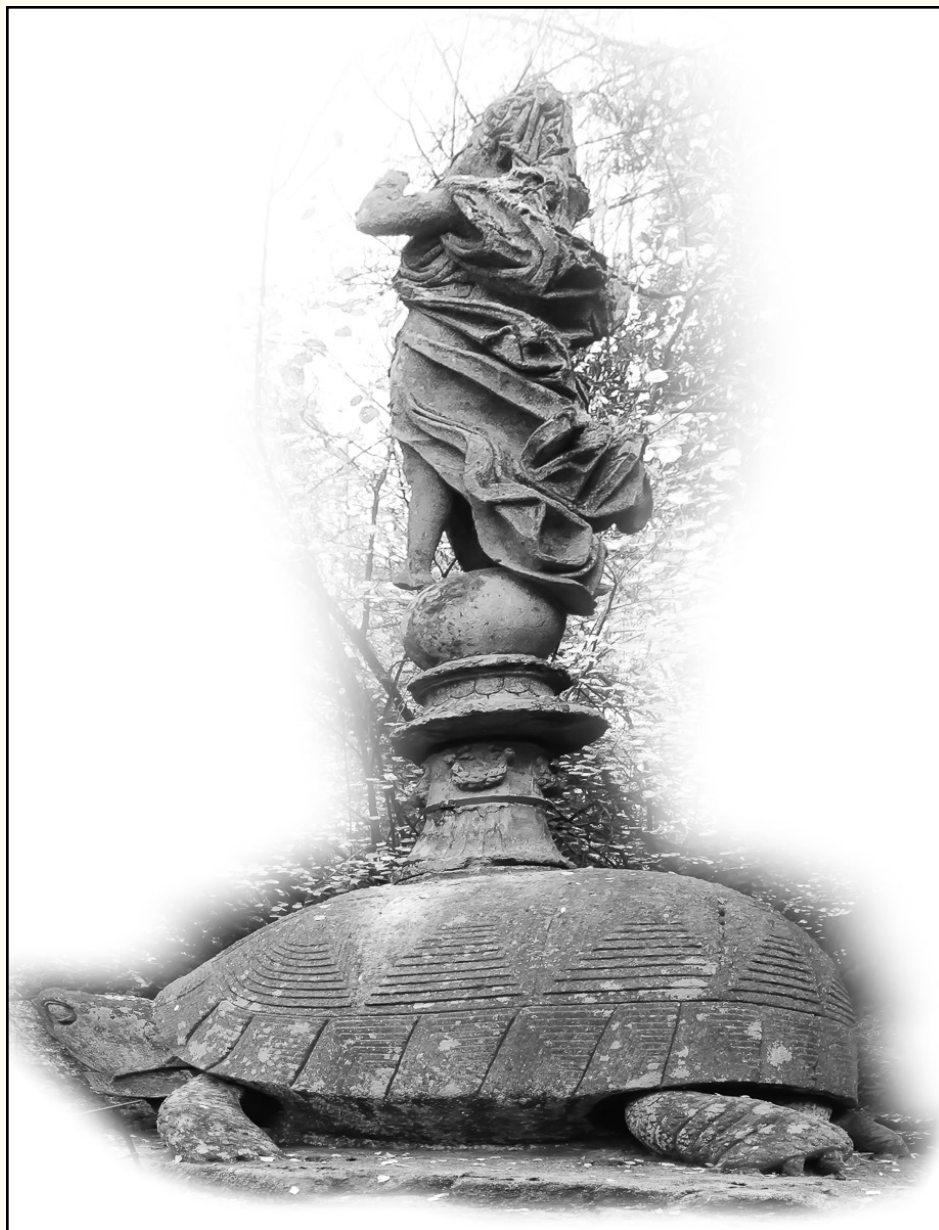


The double-visioned fortified elephant with which Hannibal transports the unconscious body of a legionaire...



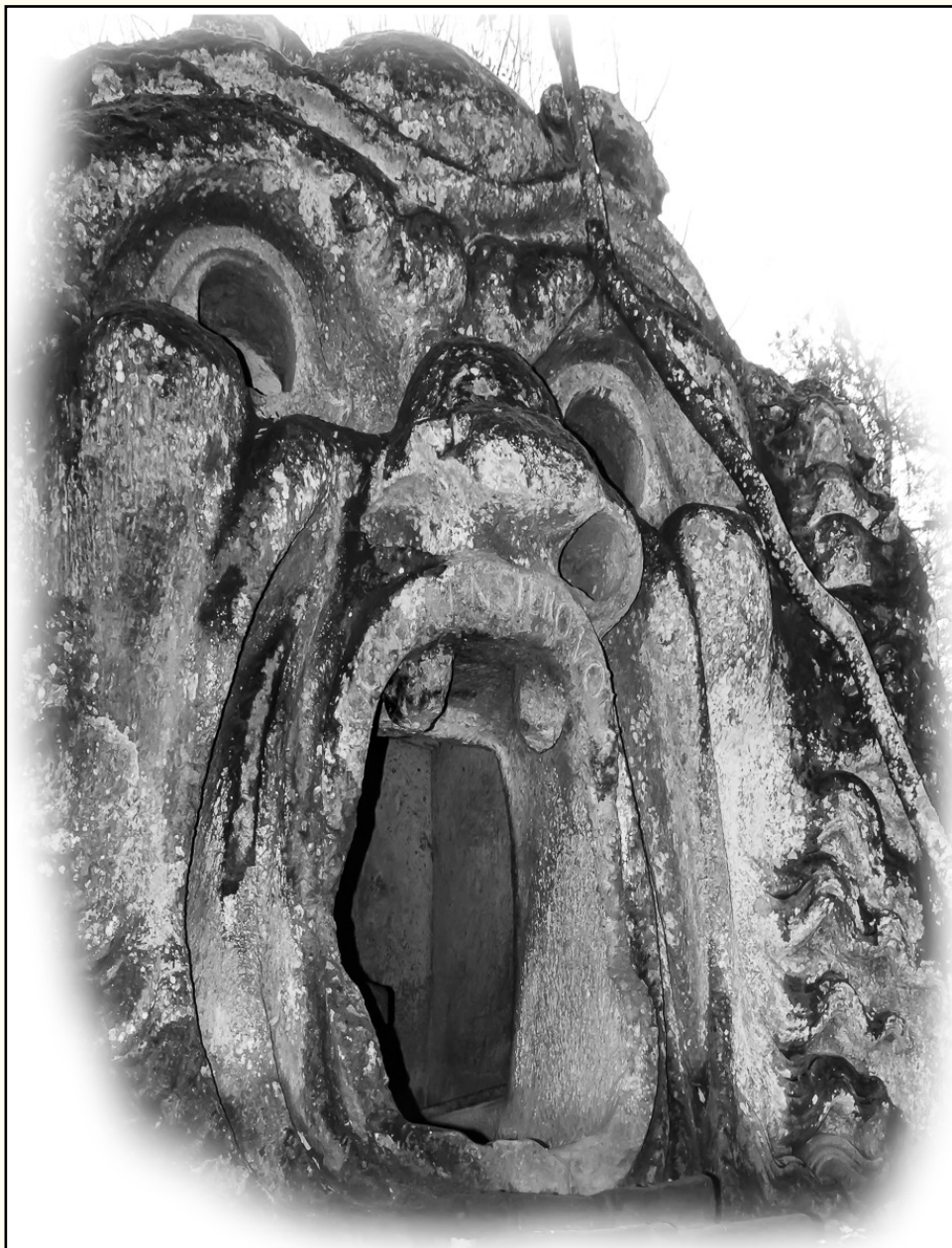
A bear holding the Roman rose and the Orsini coat of arms...





The monument of Victory atop the sacred turtle...





Orcus terrorizing...

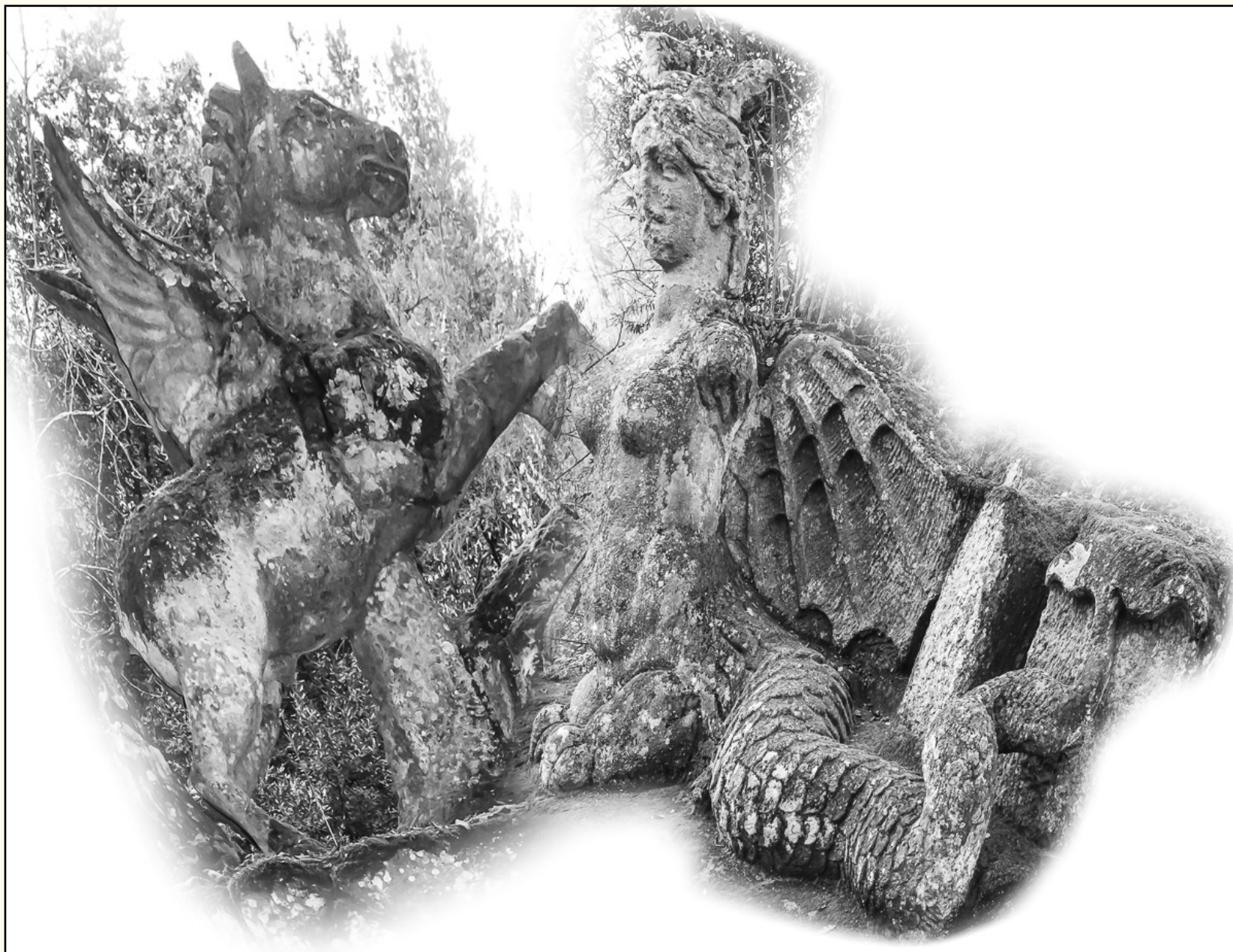
Pegasus takes flight from atop a fountain representing the waters of both life, and the Underworld—escapes into an unbound world of air...







The harpy, a dragon woman, a snatcher, a thief...



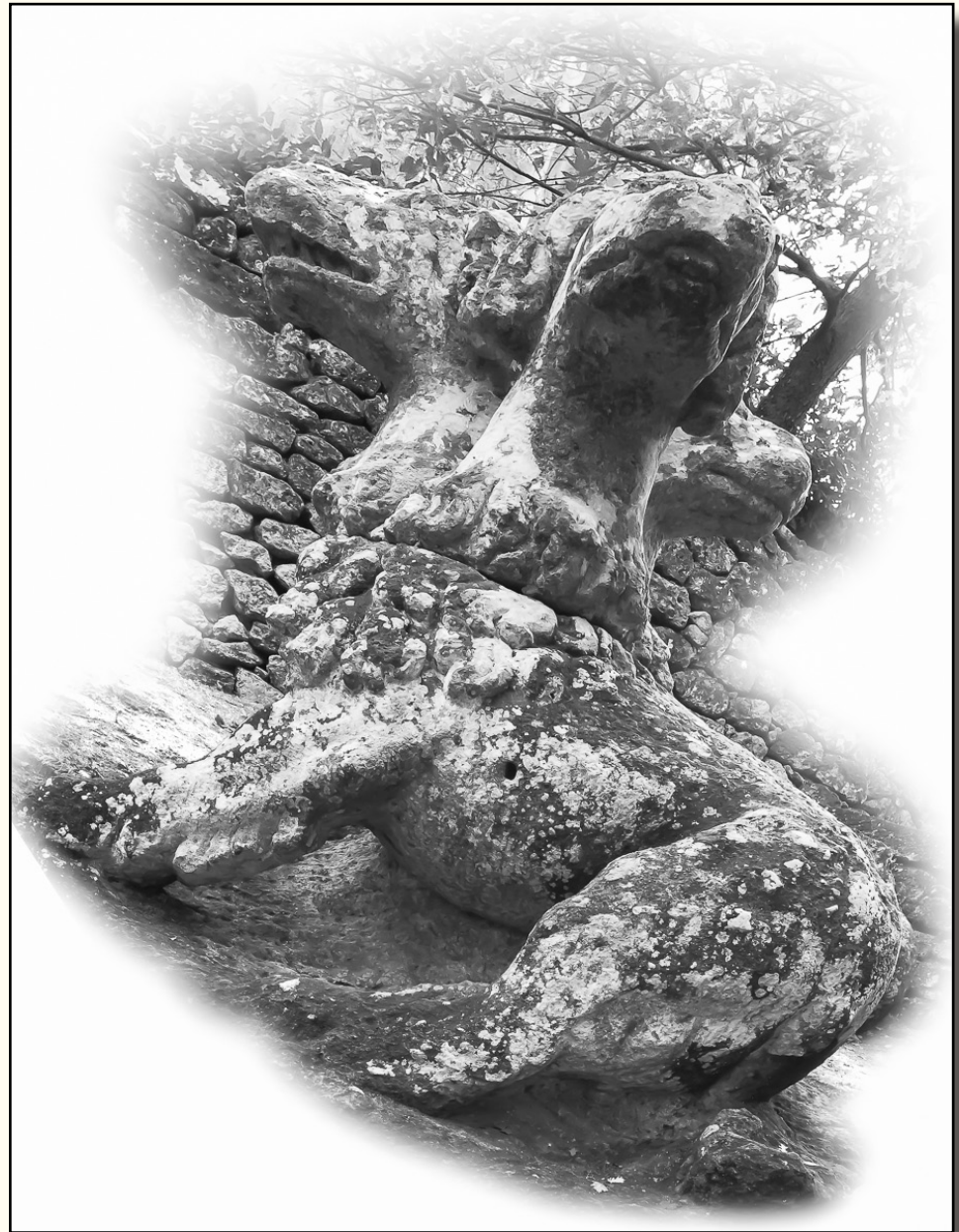
The clash...



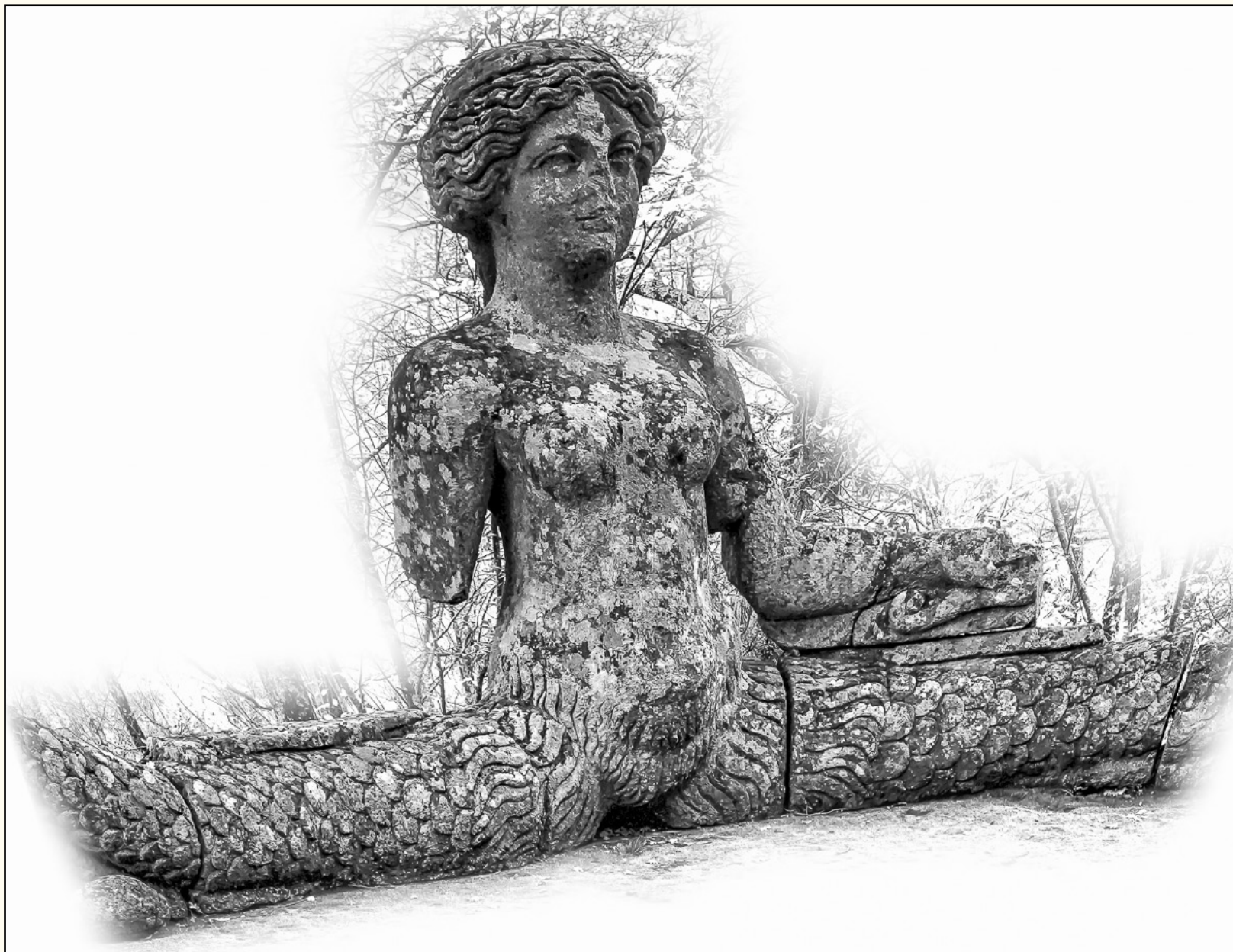


A dragon battles three foes, one of which is a lion...

Cerberus guards the gates of the Underworld to prevent the dead from leaving...







Echidna, by tradition gave birth to the enemies of Hercules...



Two lions...



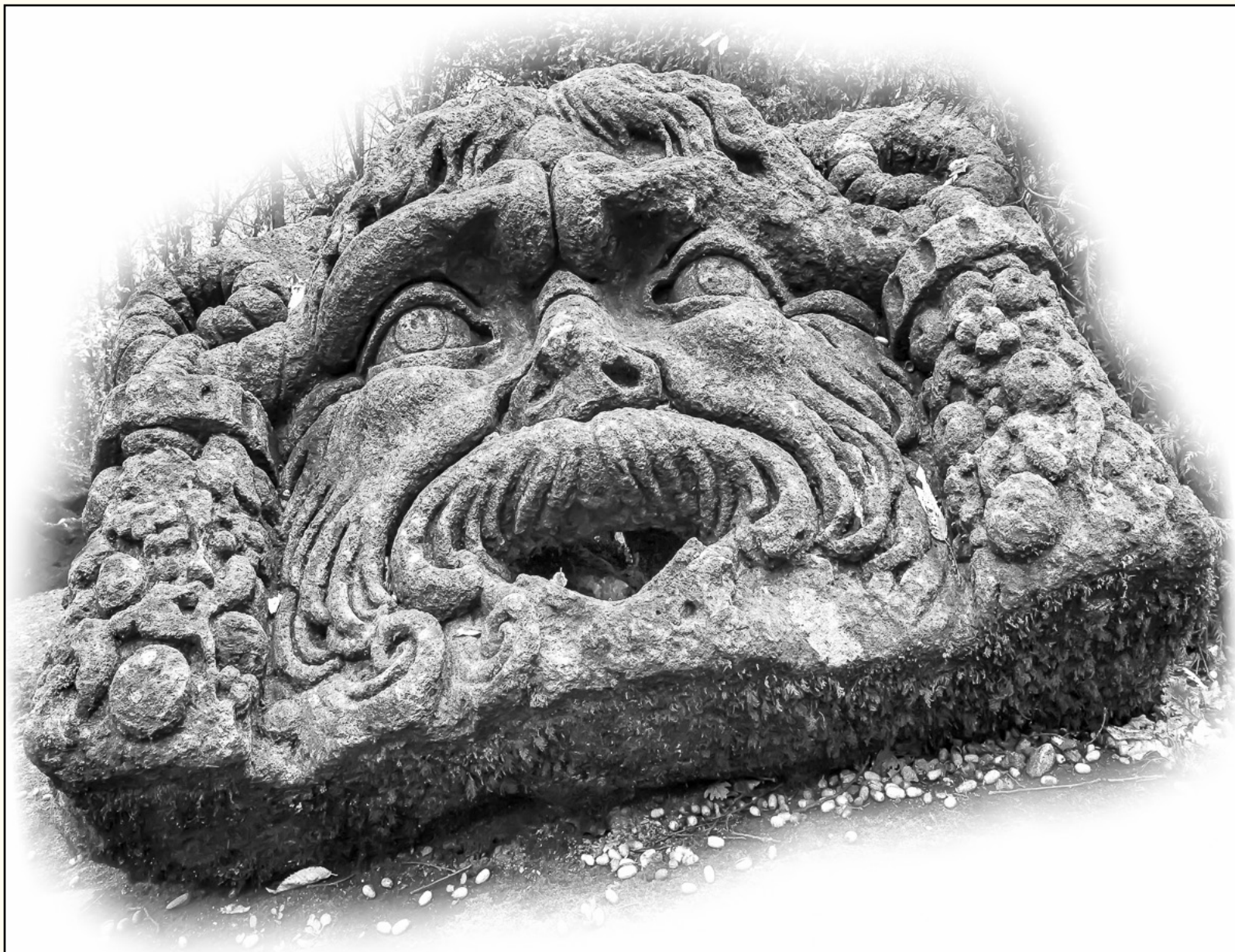


Proserpina, the maiden...



Neptune, the god of freshwater and the sea...





Jupiter is the god of the sky and thunder and king of the gods...

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A dolphin rears up in an attempt to consume...







The sleeping nymph, with the alert watchfulness of her canine sentinel...















The Three Graces: goddesses of charm, beauty,  
and creativity...



Ceres is a goddess of agriculture, grain crops, fertility and motherly relationships. Ceres' torso is literally crawling with infants...





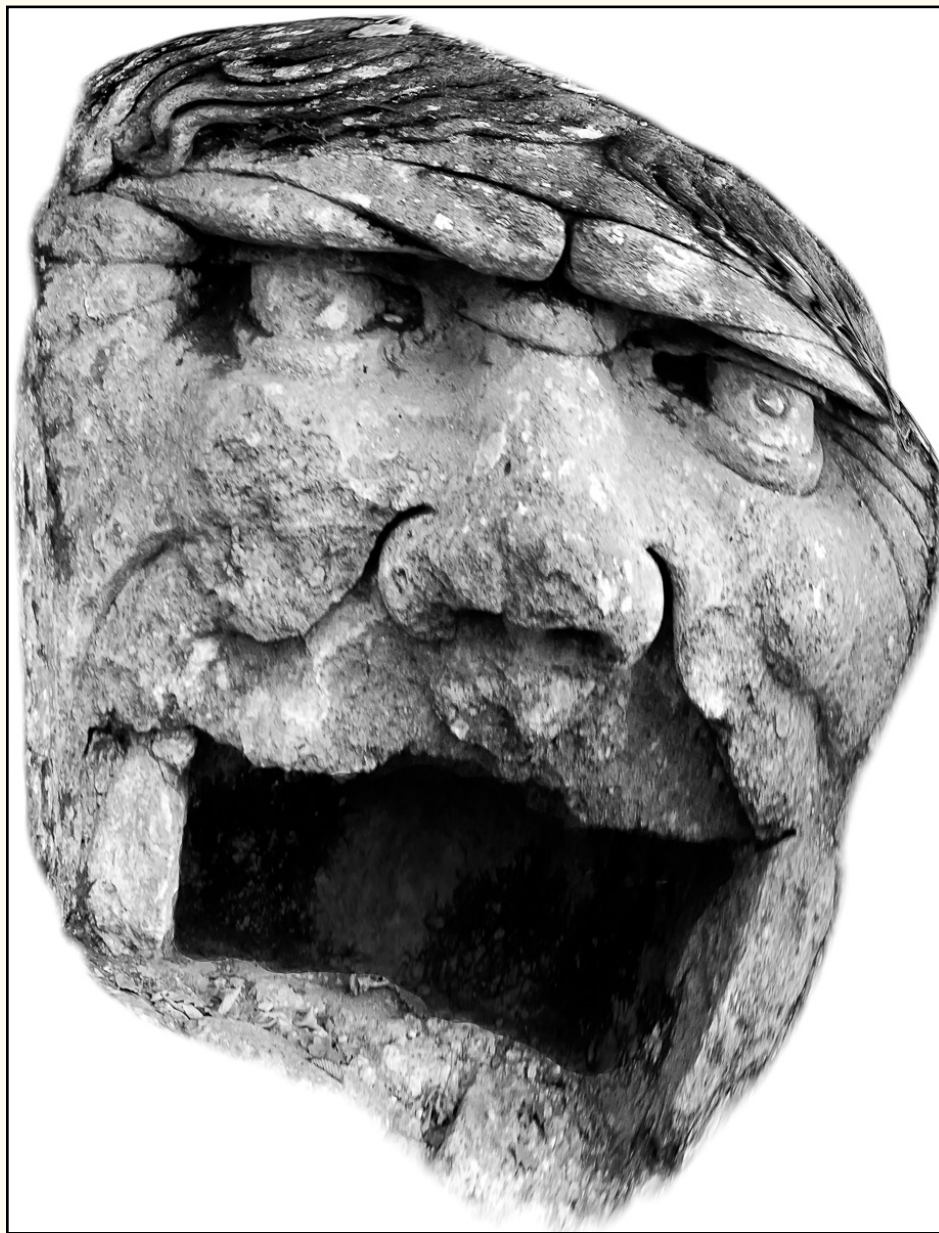


Proserpina along with her mother, Ceres...



Orcus consumption of all remaining reason...





An angry Jupiter...

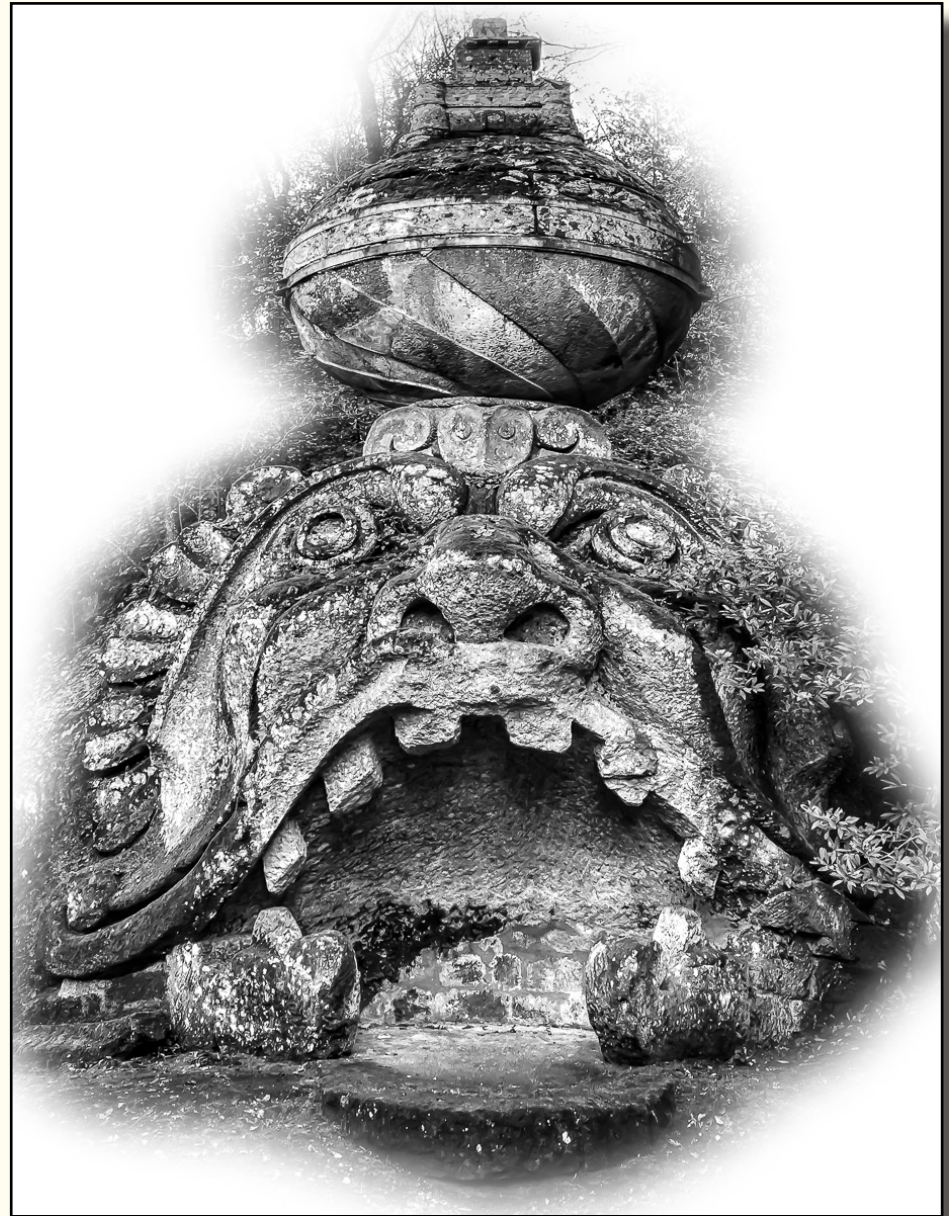


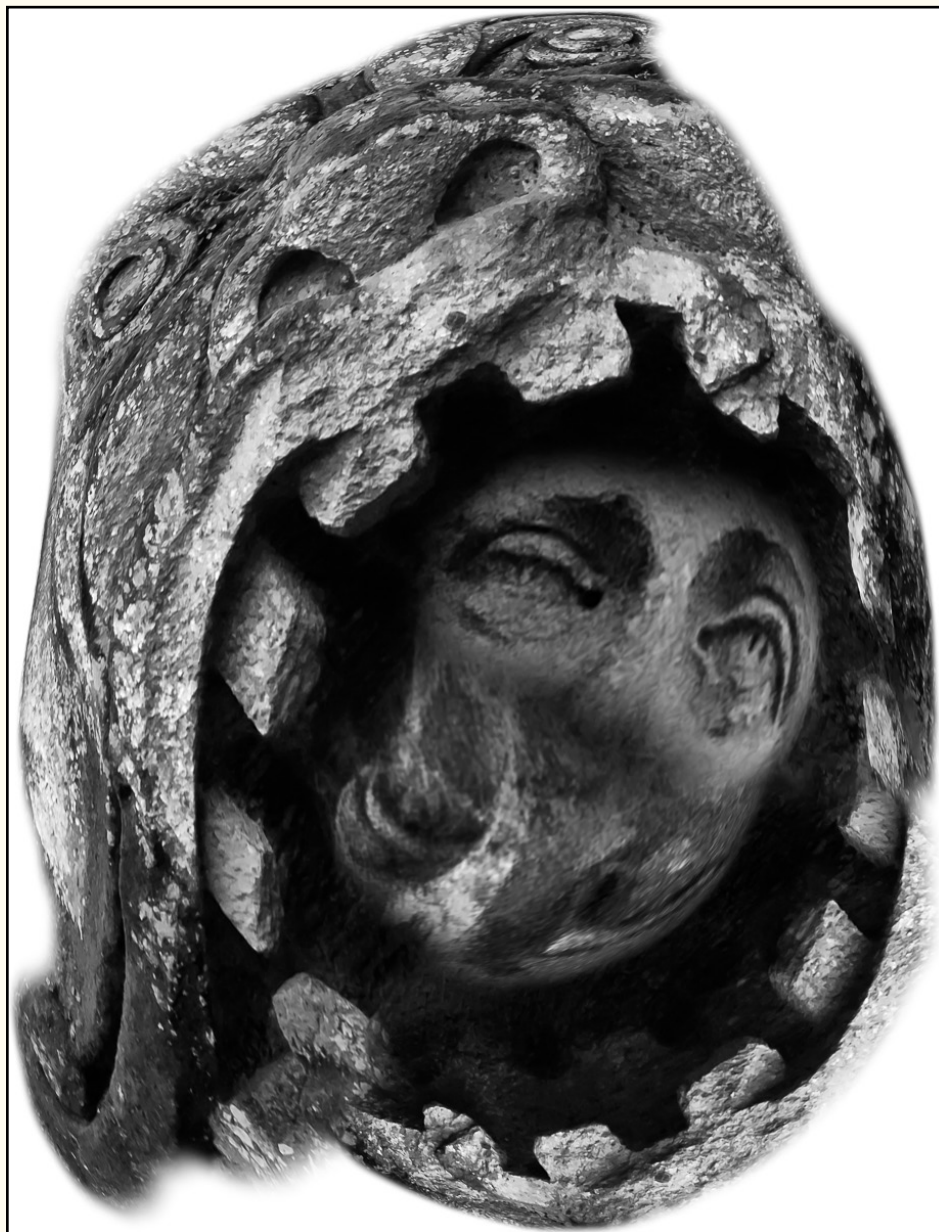
The tourture of our hero's wife...

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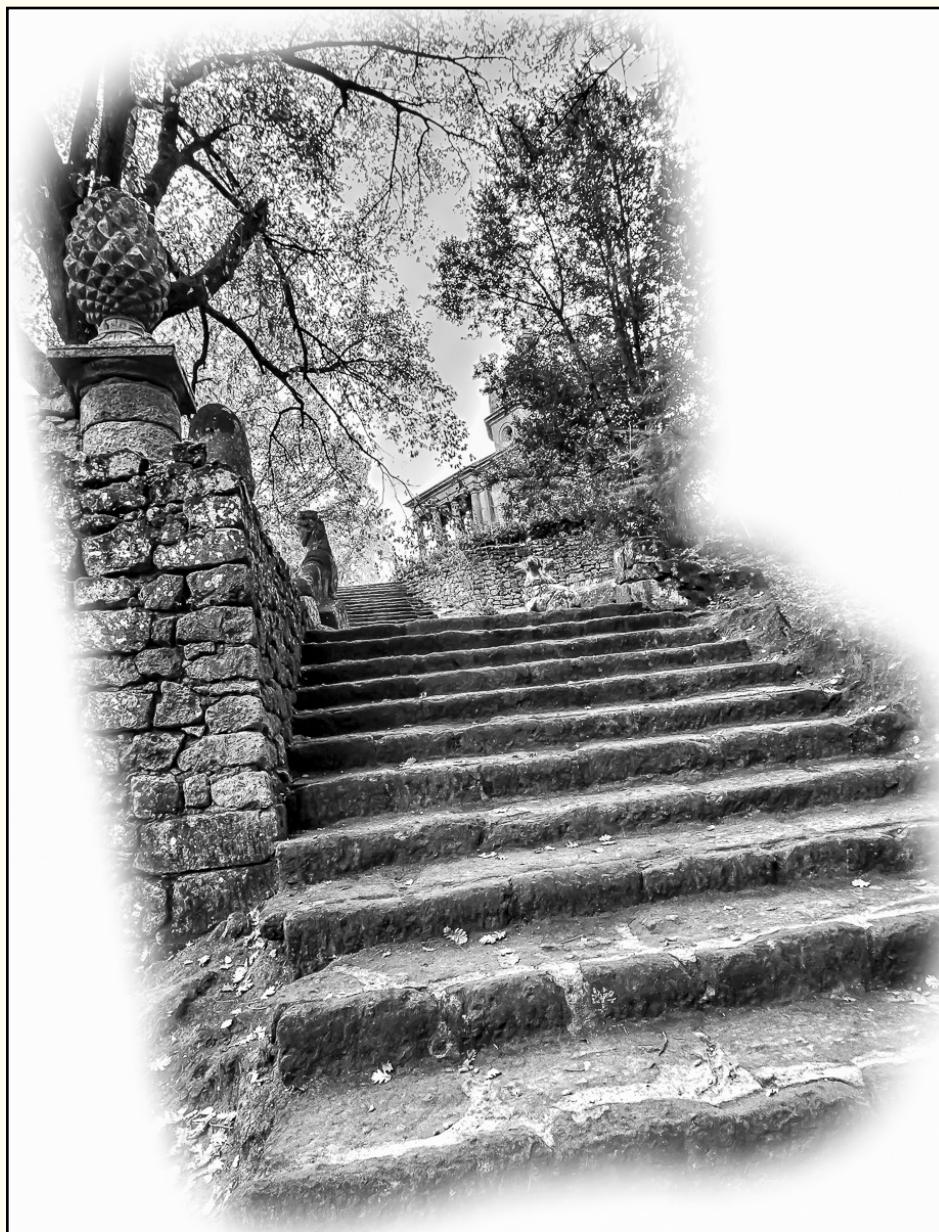
Proteus is the malevolent swallower of all. On the top of his head is a globe with spiral elements at the base of the earth, suggesting the rotation of the planet. The reference seems to tell us that as the world turns, time passes, and the swallower of all things is time itself...





Proteus swallowing the tortured  
eyes of our hero's wife...





The stairs leading to the temple, the  
final resting place of our hero's wife...



The temple to our hero's wife...





The gates of insanity have closed-in, forever...

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below to view it full size.





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## *The Orsini Insanity*

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## *My Artistic Mission*

**C**hild-like wonder and inquisitiveness are qualities frequently put aside once we become adults. We tend to slowly become sterilized by our right-or-wrong kind of world which too often has too little time to explore the what-if's and the what-could-be's. I believe we all need to re-connect with these qualities to re-enrich our lives. Animation innovator, Walt Disney, recognized this and tried to bring back the power and importance of imagination. Inspired by his spirit, my mission therefore is to encourage the use of viewer imagination. My work attempts to explore and suggest what often lies hidden within the personalities and mysteries present in the world that was, and the world that is around us.

**F**or me, my photography is not so much about the decisive moment. Rather, it is about creating a place with a sense of history with an aura of mystery. It is the starting point for my artistic journey, not the destination. My final images attempt to reflect the emotional, mind's eye after-image that was captured by both the eye and the heart.

**M**y hope is that my images will serve as a springboard into inventiveness and exploration with the hopes of awakening the viewer's inner child. I will try to do whatever I can to make the viewer linger longer in front of my works, to ignite my viewer's imaginative response through discovery and inquisitiveness.



Jerry bought his first SLR camera in 1975 and taught himself how to use it during trips through the Orient and hiking the Appalachian trail in Maine and New Hampshire. But it wasn't until 2002 that photography became his passion.

By 2004, Jerry became serious about developing his art. After upgrading his equipment, he began taking formal instruction in compositional techniques. That was the year he started his photography blog to document his artistic progress. By 2008, Jerry took the first of his courses with photographer Mallorie Ostrowitz who opened his photographic eyes to the artistic world of abstraction.

Also in 2008, Jerry spent a day of digital darkroom and printing training, one-on-one, with Michael Reichmann, the founder of the *Luminous Landscape* website.

In 2010, Jerry attended a John Paul Caponigro creativity workshop. John Paul gave him the courage to continuously push beyond the boundaries of his comfort zone in order to sustain growth as an artist. He was also personally selected to become a member of his *Next Steppers* artistic community.

Currently, Jerry's photography is only the starting point for his visual art. He prefers to work in a story or series, rather than only with separate images.

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