Dante and Virgil, passing through a barren, slate-colored plain stretching to the horizon, spot a dark grey cloud in the distance, twisting and turning on itself. As they approach, a snake, fangs bared, leaps from the sand at Dante’s throat; Virgil strikes it out of the air. As it hastily slithers back into the sand, Virgil recognizes the SERPENT who God struck down from Eden for Adam and Eve, his once shrewd mind numbed by an eternity in the void.

The dark cloud draws nearer and winds wailing with rage begin to batter our brave explorers. A great sandstorm whirls without respite: silver-gray sands tear into everything in their path, shredding skin beyond recognition and flattening the landscape. The silhouettes of souls, skin burned down to the last layer, writhe as they are battered and swept every which way. Virgil guides Dante through the storm, which clouds his vision and threatens to cut through every inch of exposed skin. The sand ahead of them collapses into a sinkhole without warning, pulling bodies under the stifling surface. These, Virgil explains, are the DISINGENUOUS: dishonest in life, their manipulation of others earns them an eternity in a storm over which they have no control. Dante flinches at an ear-splitting blast as a geyser of abrasive sand throws souls into the sweltering whirlwind, and watches them writhe in their descent. One NIGEL FARAGE lands at Dante’s feet, interrupting his trek through the sandstorm.
Circle guardian: The Serpent who guarded the Tree of Knowledge.

Sinner: Nigel Farage

My guide and I trudged through a barren wasteland
Which sapped me of my strength and made me sweat,
Virgil's tireless bare feet scorched by the sand.

We’d trekked so long, if not for Virgil’s guidance
And knowledge of our route through the circle
I would have lost myself in the great expanse.

Our silence broke when Virgil noticed a sign:
A hazy cloud on the horizon, turning
in on itself mercilessly, time and time

Again. Dragging onward, I mused silently
On how Virgil withstood the sweltering heat
When a viper, fangs bared, darted out at me

From below the sand. The scaly snake unwound
At my throat with murderous intent. Mere inches
From my face Virgil swatted him to the ground

With a half-chop squarely behind the beast’s head.
Landing in a heap, the sharp but feeble snake
Slithered off to soothe an ego quite wounded.

"What pitch-black serpent could survive a desert
So lifeless?" I inquired. My guide replied,
"That monster's fate is far less than he deserved:

His words and fangs alike injected poison
In life, cursing our first progenitors with
Forbidden knowledge. Now under the hot sun

Which numbed his wits long ago he lies in wait
Vainly for any living prey." On we went.
An eerie wind groaned, lifting sharp, dark grey
Grains of sand up, nipping my sweaty, red face
As we approached that cloud, a sandstorm so fierce
It rended the landscape down to these flat plains

We traversed. Wrapping my robes 'round exposed skin,
I ducked into the fray. Wild winds yowled and tore
Me down every which way. I braced and turned in

To Virgil's shadow. He remained tall despite
The great torment; near him the storm subsided
So I could recover a few metres' sight.

Silhouettes of obscured figures half buried
In the ground wailed without respite, their bare limbs
Swept back and forth by thick sheets of sand carried

On the wind like torrential rain. "Good Master?"
I pleaded, "Which poor souls lie here in the thick
Of this storm, all granite and alabaster?"

He explained: "Before the bell rang out for these
Sinners, they feigned ignorance and goodwill with
Each breath. In life, they earned whatever they pleased

Through manipulation and crocodile tears.
Now, powerless to bluff themselves out of their
Hardship, their cries of agony fall on deaf ears.

The rough sand strips their skin to the last layer;
Belowground sand creeps into every crevice,
Its blistering heat melting their nails and hair

Onto their bodies. They remain there captured
In the ground, powerless to escape their plight
'Til the ground spews them into this cursed rapture."

No sooner had the storm swept these advice
Off, than the ground turned to quicksand and drew in
All my guide and I could see and more, drawn like
Sugar cubes into tea. A sinkhole swallowed
The mass of souls like we might tea or coffee –
Without a second thought as it fell below

The throat into an abyss. Bodies plunged down,
Their screams trailing behind them as they went. Then
Silence. Even the raging wind made no sound

For a blink, the sand floating in its absence.
I'd scarcely opened my mouth to ask Virgil
What happened when a great crack broke the silence,

Throwing sand and mangled bodies out with such
Force I lost my footing. Metallic shards cut
My raw palms anew. I looked up: a corpse rushed

At me, the fleshy meteor threatening to
Knock my weak knees out and bury me below
The scorched earth. Landing in a heap, burnt and bruised

At my feet, the sinner wailed loudly. His skin
Had long since been stripped from him but his nasal,
Whinging voice reminded me of him within

Moments. "Nigel", I spoke, "you putrid, rotting harpy
Of Hades, worm of worms, toady almighty,
I gaze on you without a mote of pity."

He swiftly replied, "Blathering trespasser,
Had my limbs not failed me in my eternal
Punishment, I would soon eject you and your
unwelcome holy ward alike from this land
Upon which you trespass." I shot back: "shame that
Your foul mouth wasn't blasted by sand

Like the rest of your pitiful frame, liar."
"Steady", warned Virgil, "you must not succumb to
your wrath in Satan's realm, else the hellfire
Awaits you. But which man could strike such anger
Into a heart honest as yours? Your face glows
Hotter than the fire pits still deep under

Our feet." Fuming, I explained myself. "Seldom
Has a wolf in sheep's clothing spat vitriol
As bitter and dishonest as his; kingdoms

Drank his hatred like warm beer on Sunday night,
A mass of imagined misdeeds he thought up
To further a sick agenda at the plight

Of those he claimed to serve. Yet when his motives
Were questioned or lies exposed, he whipped up some
New outrage to amnesiac audiences,

Or worse, disappeared outright. No Ghibelline,
Guelph or other snake spat forth a venom so vile
Upon a populace quite so coarsely keen

To swallow it.” Once I’d let my vindictive
Complaints out, the half-corpse, prone in the sand, had
Ceased to respond, new dunes collecting on his

Limp body, flooding his mouth and nose up. “Shall we
Move on? Mid-tirade your robes’ seams already
Began to unravel; even my holy

Form grows weary.” Aware once more, I followed
Ahead, trailing my guide. My voice and body
Weak, I braced myself ‘gainst the storm and sorrow

That followed my outburst. Exhausted, the ground sagged
Underfoot like my body, heaving under
My own weight. A sinkhole. Virgil fell; I lagged

Behind him. The sand pulled me into a dark hole,
And I lost my footing as the cruel wind died.
No light followed; the void had swallowed me whole.
The storm, the fall, and the fatigue
Clouded my mind until it escaped me.
My body plummeted down, limp and asleep.