The Everywhere Chronicles

Jamie Brownell Baldridge

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses

Part of the Fine Arts Commons

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/3343

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
THE EVERYWHERE CHRONICLES

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate faculty of
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in
The School of Art

By
Jamie Brownell Baldridge
B.F.A., Louisiana State University, 2001
May, 2005
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my fiancee’, Natalie Parbhoo, for showing me that the greatest work of art is true love. She has been my muse, critic, champion, and companion. Without her, my work and my life would be empty.

My mother and father who raised me to believe that I could do anything. Without their unquestioning support, love, and understanding nothing would have been possible. They have been the best role models a gentleman could dream of.

My brother and my extended family-the Parbhoos, Hirezis, and Harbs who have welcomed me into their hearts, warts and all.

To Tom Neff I offer my deepest respect and gratitude. For almost a decade he has served as my role model, supporter, and friend. He gave me enough rope to hang myself, but made sure I never actually swung in the breeze.

Michael Book for his unflinching honesty, wry sense of humor, and literary recommendations.

A J Meek for his kindness and patience for two years as my review committee chair.

Kimberley Arp for showing me that I was meant to be an artist…damn the torpedoes. He was my first true teacher and remains an artist I truly admire.

Rod Parker who’s door was always open. Without knowing it he gave me a shot in the arm when I needed it most.

Keli Scott Kelley who’s work has been inspiration to me. Her apropos comments never went unheeded, and more often than not, were right on the money.

Ed Smith for looking out for all of us grads.

Patricia Cassidy for being a great friend and peer. She always knew the right thing to say to make a guy feel better.

Jacob Botter, Lauren Greathouse, and Patrick Reed for protecting my creative time and being inspirations unto themselves.

I would also like to thank those people without whom nothing would have been possible. My Models. My actors. My patient participants.

Paulie “The Famous” Kauk-my Everyman. Always willing to don his suit in deference to my obsessions.

Hollis, Rae, Danielle, Melanie, Becca, Omar, Leanne, Margot, Nena, Susan, Emily, Wes, Sarah, Jeremy, and numerous others too legion to name. Thank you for your trust.

I would also like to thank Neil Gaiman for American Gods, Terry Pratchet for Discworld, C.S. Lewis for the Chronicles of Narnia, Lewis Carroll for Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Harold Bloom for The Western Cannon, Eco Umberto for Foucalt’s Pendulum, Edward Gorey for The Amphigorey(s), Marco Polo for his journals, Edgar Allen Poe for everything, Tad Williams for Otherland, William Shakespeare for The Tempest and Midsummer Night’s Dream, Frank Herbert for Dune, the Council of Nicea for the Christian canon, Sun Tzu for The Art of War, and every monk who ever wrote an enlightening Koan.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ......................... ii
Abstract ..........................................v
The Everywhere Chronicles ...............1
Temporalphilia ..................................3
Velocity of the Dendrites .................5
Chronicler #63 .................................7
Amelia Zola, Headmistress Academy ......9
Amazon & Dyslexia ............................11
Sometime Around Vespers ..................13
A Dainty Phyletic .........................14
The Martyrdom of Saint Tilden ..........16
Lady Palindrome .............................18
The Horologist ..............................20
Creak, Guild of Organ Pimps ............22
The Shrine of Tuesday Milktree .........24
The Romantic ...............................26
The Aviator ...................................28
Toller #37 ..................................29
The Voyager ..................................31
Theories of Evolution .....................32
Methodology………………………….34

Bibliography/Vita………………………43
Abstract

The Everywhere Chronicles is a body of work that has been perambulating through my mind since the halcyon days of childhood. It is not intended as any sort of catharsis, metaphorical or otherwise, nor is it any forum of self discovery, accidental or intentional. These Chronicles are quite simply a journey into imagination, an exercise in “what ifs?”.

They confront the theory that Columbus was actually on a munchies run to an Indian Takeaway in Ipswich and simply took a wrong turn at the Antilles, and that the Lost City of Atlantis is alive and well somewhere outside of Duluth and counts among its major exports-lumber, ale, and peanut based prophylactics. In the end, I did not want to write this thesis, but I had to. It seems to be some sort of requirement. And it has left me wondering if Michelangelo would have been a much better artist if he too had had to find out what an “Abstract” was and how to write it. Enjoy my nervous breakdown.
The Everywhere Chronicles

The Everywhere Chronicles are about a man. Quite an ordinary man by all accounts. A man described by the laundress residing on his street as, “The most ordin’ry man Ai have ev’r had the pleasure of cleanin’. His vests and shirts o’ course, not him, Ai’m a respectabl’ laidy after all.” A man named James Hogsmeath, of the Pliny-on-Tyne Hogsmeaths, photographer by trade and inadvertent adventurer cum discoverer by circumstance. The Everywhere Chronicles are based on the discovery of Mr. Hogsmeath’s journals and photographs after his demise at Saint Tibulas Asylum at the age of ninety-seven and three quarters, having choked to death on one of the forty Dr. Silas’s Long Life pills he swallowed just prior to his expiration. It would seem that not only does Providence have a terrible sense of humor but an abysmal sense of timing.

These journal entries are reconstructed from my years in Ev’rywhere. I apologize to the dear reader, but the originals were lost some time ago and I have come to rely on recovered fragments and my prodigious memory. Have no worries, for I am an honest man and would not dream of prevarication. -James Entworth Hogsmeath, IV

June 4 1892

“I awoke to the taste of deck varnish and crashing seas, my face pressed close to the heaving deck of the Ashur. The fevered calls of rushing sailors and the twang of wind tortured sails hammered at my throbbing temples. My joints creaked and ached from the prolonged fetal position I had held in the frigid puddles of the bow and felt as if I had spent the night in the loo of the Pissing Dutchman again. I stood slowly, still unsure of the shifting world which I had inhabited for what seemed like an eternity. The sailors around me glanced balefully in my direction ensuring that I knew that my welcome was wearing extremely thin. My presence had quickly gone from welcome diversion to pale green annoyance. By the second day it was obvious that I would get tangled in every line aboard ship and every meal would be followed by a heaving diatribe against the sea. By this time I had been sick everywhere, including, but not limited to: the bow, the port, starboard, aft, and even once in the crow’s nest. After a monsoon of curried peas, the crew banished me from the nest evermore. So, I passed the days staring across the roiling blue expanses dreaming of solid ground and warm tea, all the while feeding the dolphins with whatever I had eaten twenty minutes before.”

June 5 (evening) 1892

“We were in the midst of some raging tempest, or so it seemed, although at the time, I had no idea what a tempest looked like. Let’s just say that this meteorological event had all of the hallmarks of being tempestuous in nature. There was sideways rain, seas as tall as the mast, and a steady trickle of urine down my pants leg. The air vibrated with the
shouts of the panicky and wild-eyed crew. Now, I am no seaman, but I instinctively knew that something was amiss when I saw the captain using his saber to cut to the head of the line for the life raft. I would like to tell you what happened next, but there was a loud bang followed by an almost immediate descent into a forced nap.”

June 6? 7? 8? 1892 (I assume)

“I will not belabor the point by describing what happened to me over the next few days. Suffice it to say that they were filled with armfuls of terror and mouthfuls of wet. I was found on a beach, none the worse for the wear after being molested by the sea for an indeterminate measure of time. Miraculously, my luggage, consisting of camera, plates, and one change of clothes were found only a short comb down the tide line. I was taken to a rather large city built into a dormant caldera. My escort cum rescuer was a man with a felt Hamburg, spats, and the ears of an ass. When asked where I was, “Ev’rywhere” was the terse reply. (I was not sure who was misunderstanding whom.) I cannot begin to describe my first impressions of that land. The city was one large beast rising from the thin table of land girded by the sea, farting and belching its way far into the heavens. After a week or two of convalescence in the narrow village that hugged the slopes of the City, I was told that I was awaiting a writ to the city and would be allowed to wander freely with my camera. My apologies if this bit of the story is slim, but the how of my arrival in Everywhere is far less important than the while. For, while in Everywhere I saw such wonders as the rest of my life became as interesting as a damp tea cozy.”
16 July 1892

“This was one of the first things I saw when walking in the glens surrounding the city. Here a nameless man is performing what I later learned was a yearly ritual based on a misinterpreted line in the Holy Book of Snood* called The Carrying of Time. The Carrier must transport a time piece across the city from Thesbon’s pillar to a small marked plinth near Mrs. Spinshops House of Goodies some time between sunrise and sunset, a distance of some seven miles. Though any time piece will do, I suppose this gentleman was extremely pious. The wondrous airships in the background are the backbone of Everywhere commerce, allowing all of the riches of the city to flow to even the farthest shores of the island.

I had yet to be granted a writ of passage into the city proper and have spent the last few days in this small village built on the slopes of Everywhere. I am told that this is a place for those who have been banished from the City. I for one could imagine no more beautiful a penance. The lakes are clear and cold, the trees are verdant, and the sky is a shade of purist lapis. Everyone here, however, seems to be in an awful hurry to gain entrance back into the womb of the city. Agoraphobics by nature, the people here spend as little time out in the open as possible. I suppose if I had been raised from birth in a
city built into the steaming bowels of a nearly dormant volcano, I too might feel a bit squeamish of the great expanses of sky.”

* “He who is not Carrying of Time shall lead a lonely and dreadful life.” –Holy Book of Snood
Most serious Snoodian Scholars now agree that it was originally meant to read as “He who is not Marrying on Time shall lead a lonely and dreadful life.”, and as the result of this typo, many of the cities elderly population suffer from debilitating back problems. It is now the solid opinion of most scholars that if the gods want us to know anything really important, they really shouldn’t trust us to write it down.
2 September 1892

“It was on the second day of my second month in Everywhere that I met Velocity and asked him to sit for a portrait. I had been searching for the Windows so that I may see a bit of sky after so long being ensconced in the city’s womb, when I spied him plying his craft. As he regaled me with stories of his childhood in Paupertas Canton* here in the eighteenth level of the city, and of his life since being apprenticed to one of Everywhere’s most accomplished Ebullists, I quickly forgot my niggling claustrophobia.

At the age of sixteen, already a journeyman in the Guild of Ebullists, he took the sacred vow of the Dendrites, one of the seemingly endless numbers of religions practiced here. He explained that the Dendrites worship Saint Inelet, a laundress of great renown, martyred some three hundred years prior. Her journey to sainthood began when it was discovered that she was the paramour of her wealthiest patron and paid the ultimate price when said patron’s wife caught wind of his dalliances. Said wife invoked one of the cities more obscure laws and had all of laundress Inelet’s teeth pulled before having her hanged by her own lavender scented linen.

Thereafter, every two and one quarter years, when the Great Gear in the City’s clockwork† resets itself, all practicing Dendrites have one of their teeth extracted and bind their jaw with, you guessed it, lavender scented linen provided by the Temple of the Dendrites. Piety has a cost it seems, if not the empty socket in one’s jaw, then the fifty pence for the linen.

Aside from being a bubble artist of the first water and Dendrite still in possession of most of his teeth, Velocity is also an accomplished Vort player, an instrument which resembles nothing so much as a depressed bagpipe and sounds like a flatulent Sheep dog. I endured his ensuing serenade but declined an encore.”
The City is divided into sixteen Cantons, each controlled by one of the Greater or Lesser Houses, and further divided into levels. The most affluent Cantons such as Praeceleus and Copiosus are of course closest to the pinnacle of the mountain, while the less prosperous occupy the lower levels. In addition to the sixteen Cantons there are also the Spire, the Stem, the Clockworks, Gearhouses, and Grand Steamvalves. Near the Spire are the Windows, though not a Canton proper, the Windows offer citizens and guests of the City brief and penny-farthing views of the surrounding land from the very top of the mountain.

One of the most fascinating things I have found in Everywhere is the Clockworks. Designed some four hundred years ago, the City Clockworks control nearly every aspect of life here. The Great Gear, a pig iron cog three hundred and seventy-seven hands high and two hundred twelve tons, controls the lesser Myder Gears. The Great Gear has an orbit of two and one half years, while the Myder Gears have orbits of three hundred and sixty five days. These gears in turn mesh with the legions of lesser gears controlling everything from seasonal changes in temperature, rainfall in the Agrarius Canton and the Spirit Woods, the aqua duct exchanges, and various and sundry other mechanisms necessary to the life of the City. All of this is driven by the Grand Steamvalves far below the city and is overseen by the Guild of Clockworks. After a very short while one realizes that Everywhere is as much an organism as the people who reside here, and it is revered as such.

Also, because of the inherent peccadilloes of living deep in the belly of a mountain, most of the citizens of Everywhere eschew any type of circadian time keeping, choosing instead to mark the passage of time by referring to the idiosyncratic movements of the visible gears in their canton. As my dear reader can imagine, this makes movement from one Canton to the next quite vexing especially if one is trying to keep an appointment.
19 September 1892

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

-Endymion, Keats

“These are the words that came to mind as I wandered the warrens of the Stem*, a veritable ouroboros of corridors filled to the brim with ne’er-do-wells, drunks, prostitutes, and religious scholars (who, of course, make day trips here to research the depths of man’s depravity), and spied this sleeping nymph identified by the plaque above her alcove as #63. The chroniclers make their lives here, in addition to the aforementioned jetsam and flotsam, constantly revising historical texts as the whims of the ruling class
change and power is shifted from House to House. And if the Patriarch has his way at the Synod, I am told, the chroniclers may soon be very busy indeed.

As the Stem is deep in the bowels of the city, the heat is stifling. Air is moved from the city above by great bellows, and after passing through any number of cisterns, slaughterhouses, knacker’s yards, and porcelain privies, the fetid, faintly ochre air gets dumped here. Every wall is coated in sweat and every resident persists in some state of undress, reeking vaguely of onions, iron, and ozone. Though the Steam Valves, Clockworks, and Gear Houses are still further below, I feel as if I have hit the bottom.

At this point I am loathe to point out that her caged Steam Sprite looks wan and listless, and I very much doubt it will see next week. Also, if she is caught sleeping, she will be beaten for her indolence. I suppose I should have pinched her bottom or something.”

* Also referred to as the Pit, the Hole, McAlister’s House (don’t ask), and the Devil’s Ashbin.
27 September 1892

“The first meeting with Headmistress Zola was arranged by Dr. A. Pygmalion, the amiable host for my tenure in the City. Blind from birth, she has become one of the foremost astronomers in the land, and is the first woman to hold her current post. Thanks to the ingenious ocular prosthetics provided by the good doctor, Headmistress Zola is able to spy a candle at thirty leagues and has discovered no fewer than seven new constellations, three of them resembling teabags. The orbs suspended behind her are of her own fashioning. A simple experiment in Neo-stellar Quantum Groupings, she calls them. I noticed that the one behind her head matched my favorite waistcoat and told her as much.

After my trek through the Stem a few days before, I felt girded by the pure air and rangy vistas here in the Praecelsus Canton. Situated almost at the peak of the City’s belching caldera, this canton is home to the Astronomer’s Guild, the Synod, the Heirophant (though I am told he also keeps a house in Copiosus Canton for tax purposes), the Lower Houses, and the Seneschal’s Ward, and commands a view of this part of the continent that would make God green with envy.

Surrounded by the wealth and ease of the Praecelsus’ citizens I could not help but reflect on the implicit geographical caste system imposed on the people of Everywhere.
Though one can certainly rise through the cantons by dint of hard work, graft, and old fashioned bribery, the journey is much shorter if one is born nearer as it were to the top.

I wonder what would have become of blind baby Amelia had she been born in the Stem? She probably could have hoped for no better life than that of a Sweeper* or a flesh peddler, slave to the whims of any gin soaked brute with a farthing to spare.

In the end I was too besotted with the view to weep over the injustices of fortune. Looking down from the balcony of the Academy’s observatory, I asked if anyone had ever spat from this height. The answer being in the negative, I asked if I could. The highborn are such accommodating people.”

*Sweepers are usually culled from the novices and acolytes of the Cult of the Golden Broom of the New Age. Their raison d’etre is to sweep away the sins of man and replace them with the sparkling floors of purity. So far they have made few inroads into curbing the sins of men, but have, for over a century, provided Everywhere with affordable janitorial services. Needless to say, the Synod and the Council of City Elders support the mission of the Sweepers wholeheartedly. In fact, last Gear cycle they awarded the cult three hundred seventy-seven new brooms and encouraged them to keep up the good work. One or two of the Synod even promised to attend one of their meetings some day. Sometime. In the future. We’ll call you.
12 October 1892

“I dreamed all night that I was being attacked by cream custards dressed as Jesuits. Needless to say I was a bit groggy and disheveled when the good doctor knocked on the door in the small hours of the morning. Out of breath and wild eyed he explained to me that the ambassador of the Amazons had arrived. In my less than cogent state of mind I reminded him that Amazons were myths even where I was from and could I please go back to bed. But he was adamant that I dress quickly for she wanted to meet me. So, like a recalcitrant school boy I shuffled off to my hasty ablutions. He admonished me to bring my camera for she wanted her portrait done.
At this point it is worth noting that inspite of all of the wonders of Everywhere, until my arrival no one had seen a camera. The very idea of recording an image with light had never even occurred to anyone. The Guild of Artificers were so highly skilled that the idea was never given a thought. Certainly there had been experiments, but most ended with spectacular explosions or stained towels said to belong to some long dead demi-god. In the end, most of the citizens of Everywhere were content with artwork that did not involve high casualty rates.

Apparently the Amazonian ambassador had heard of me and my magic box shortly after her arrival and wished to see the two of us immediately.

Any doubts I had about the veracity of the existence of Amazons much less Amazonian officials was soon dispelled. I would go further into detail about the meeting, but I can scarcely remember anything, struck as I was by her…lack of humility. Short of a pair of burlesques leggings, she appeared just as God had made her. I broke no fewer than three plates before I was able to make the picture and had to use one of my monotone emulsions for Her Grace’s portrait.

Later, the good doctor explained to me that the Amazons inhabited the farthest shores of the island continent and were fearsome warriors who eschewed any of the comforts of “civilization” including, but not limited to, clocks, prams, and clothing, and despite her ‘homeliness’ was a fairly good example of her race. They traded in basic goods; the City sent out gold, iron ore, and raw canvas, and the Amazons returned sewn dirigible shrouds, metalwork, and slaves*. And although the City keeps strong diplomatic ties to the Amazons, one gets the feeling, mostly from the leers being passed around the Canton, that many of the citizenry would not mind an invasion one bit. I, for one, noticed the calculating stare of that imperious mien and would hold out little hope for Everywhere if Her Grace’s ire were roused.”

* Amazon slaves are a highly prized commodity in Everywhere and command premium prices. They are hard working, strong, beautiful, and most importantly, naked. Every Great House has them as do many of the Lower Houses, depending on their fortunes. Needless to say many a faithful marriage has been torn asunder by the introduction of an Amazon.
7 November 1892

“I was spending the day in the Pulso Canton admiring the precise clockwork of the City’s gizzards when I came upon this man some time around vespers. I vaguely remembered him from some function I had attended at the Temple of Hersius about a month before. In fact I remembered him arguing passionately with a potted philodendron. I did my best to sidestep him but to no avail. He introduced himself as Baron Elmsley Codsnath Vespasian, IV. Vedicite Histriographer Royal, and Prior of the Snoodian Church’s Sacred Kindred of Saint Tilden. Distinguished as the Chevalier Labrahn de St. Dunglemutt, he is Presidential Attache’ to the Everywhere Council of Princes. Formally attached to the Noble Household Guard of the Royal House of Codsworth and is Chancellor of the Imperial and Royal Court of the Dragon Sovereignty which embodies the Journeying Monks of Poracia. The picture attached to his hat is his wife. Mind you, it is not a picture of her, the picture is her. He also claims he can fly. And that he invented crackers. I quit his company when he began to remove his pants and continued my tour of the Upper Clockworks.”
19 November 1892

“After many months in Everywhere I thought that I was inured to many of the strange sights I encountered on a daily basis. Not so.

It was the day after the Feast of Souls and I wandered the corridors of the Inasnum Canton trying in vain to clear the fog from my head and the tweed from my tongue. Before I knew it I was among the Temples of the Lost, sanctuaries for forgotten and sundry deities. Here resided some of the most obscure and esoteric cults of Everywhere. I had heard rumors of this place but was struck by how alien it seemed in person. Every few blocks or so one could peek into temples and see the eldritch goings on. In one temple, men sat around a large bowl of porridge, spitting masticated bits of text torn from some large iron clad tome into it. Further along I passed a temple that was little more than a worn and dented wall upon which robed and tonsured priests banged their heads chanting something about Muester the Bold. In another, I surmised from the noise emanating through the barred and locked doors, was an orgy comprised mainly of cats. As I came to the end of one of the cobbled streets I spied a rather large and airy temple,
and wanting to escape the feline cacophony that seemed about to reach some sort of dramatic crescendo, I entered.

I was immediately struck by, well, the water surging up my pants legs. I was able to make a hurried portrait of this beauty as she performed whatever nearly forgotten ritual her deity demanded of her. Later, nursing a case of sniffles, I was to find out that I had entered the House of Aquarius, and would be blessed with long life if the specter of pneumonia did not claim me first.”
2 December 1892

“I had spent the better part of the past week in convalescence. Just after Gear Shift thirteen and one half I sunk into a devilish malaise. The Good Doctor’s ministrations saw me through the worst of my bad humours, but I am afraid I had to suffer the lions’s share in isolation. The people of Everywhere are terrified of plague running rampant through their densely populated city. So I was left to my suffering by all but the Heirophant, the Good Doctor, and his masked and fidgeting servants.

During my fevered dreaming I was dully aware of people outside of my sick room, coming and going with great rapidity. There were hurried arguments and I heard the Heirophant imploring Doctor Pygmalion to increase my dosages before I was lost. Even in my waning state this struck me as odd as I do not remember the Good Doctor giving me anything other than a rancid soup of herbs and flowers to ease my suffering. And to my knowledge, aside from a resilient fever and racking cough, I was in no mortal danger.

I was well enough a few days after my convalescence to attend ‘The Martyrdom of Saint Tilden’ at the Grand Vizier’s residence. In my still torporous state my attention to the play waxed and waned, but I was able to gather that Saint Tilden was the Patron Saint of Betrayal, Menses, and rope makers. Known far across the land as a genius with
clockwork, he was the creator of The City’s first Timers. He was murdered by a band of Orthodox Snoodians just as he gazed upon his greatest creation known as the Oracle Engine, a device used to measure, to the second, the remaining lifespan of the user. It was said that as he wound it for the first time, he noticed that his life was six seconds from its end, and uttered the words, ‘I wish I had changed my socks’ moments before the arrows of his assailants plunged into his back.

I have asked Dr. Pygmalion to bring me to the verdant glens of the surface in the hope that I may shed this increasing sense of isolation. He has petitioned the Patriarch on my behalf and awaits word.
19 December 1892

“I met with Lady Palindrome, Dame of the Lesser House of Darwin and Priestess of Hersius on an ambulation through the Praecelcus Canton. It would seem my name was becoming synonymous with curiosity. She invited me to attend her at tea the following Gear Shift. Since my illness I had fallen victim to a curious melancholy, the likes of which I had only known as a child upon the loss of my mother. All my life I suffered from an artistic disposition, given to bouts of dyspepsia and nervous humours, but such maladies came only in fits and spurts. This dishwater cloud hanging low over my spirit, however, was resilient to any and every diversion. The Windows helped a bit, but every citizen and guest were only allowed a few minutes bathing in the tarnished sunlight, while the Vort concert I attended with Dr. Pygmalion and a rotund and moribund associate only served to deepen my depression. I hoped tea with Lady Palindrome would somehow lighten my dour and darkening mood.
She sat in a bath of salts and perfumes as we spoke, seemingly oblivious to her state of undress. I had learned to become comfortable with this curious disposition towards nudity that many of the Everywhere people possessed. We spoke at length of the turbulent history of The City, the culture, and the people of Everywhere. I questioned her about the lack of phenotypic variation obvious in the less affluent people of The City and she explained that they were, by and large, ‘not allowed’ into the genus of the Lower and Upper Houses. She said it with such grace and nonchalance that I was momentarily taken aback. I kept my distaste to myself.

How then I wondered did the higher Houses maintain themselves? She explained that centuries of experimentation had ensured that the afflictions of the ‘lower peoples’ would never affect them. ‘While the citizens of The Stem and Paupertas, and Steam and Gear breed like sheep, we maintain a more elegant and pristine method of procreation’, she said with a purr.

It was then that I realized that during all of my months in Everywhere, I had never seen a woman heavy with child except during my treks through The Stem. I had believed the lack was due more to vanity or social mores, but now I nursed a more uncomfortable notion.

My stomach began to squirm as if I had eaten one of Mrs. Dedshel’s meat pies back in Surrey and I cordially begged my leave. She dismissed me with considerably less grace than she had received me with.”
“‘Time is my Mistress, My Ruler, My Servant…Feed the Cat’ were the words inscribed above the great doors of the Guild of Horology. When the founder of the guild was not long for this world, one of his most senior and overzealous acolytes penned his last words, failing to vet wisdom from the whispering gibberish of a dying man. The motto would have surely read ‘Time is My Mistress, My Ruler, My Servant…Feed The Cat, and Water My Fichus. Where’s My Teddy? I Swear, This Guild is A Bowl Full O’ Bastards’ if only the lintel had been a few feet wider.

I was fortunate enough to meet Keeper of the Hours, Edna Pwerth, the youngest person ever inducted into the guild, and one of the few people I had met who was born in The Stem and now resided somewhere above that fetid warren. Blind from birth, Edna showed a precocious proclivity toward precognition at a tender age. Recognized by one of the Heirophant’s familiars, she was first brought to the Guild of Seers, Oracles, and Prophets*, only to be sent to the Guild of Horology when it was discovered that her talents were far more mundane in nature. The Horologists were ecstatic, however, when
this Time Shepherd of the highest caliber was brought into their midst. As I understood it, mind you, this is only one bitterly cold winter at Oxford dodging lecturers and fending off the amorous advances of one Nevish Childers speaking, Ms. Pwerth existed simultaneously now and twelve point one-five minutes in the future and had the unnerving ability of slowing down or speeding up time in the immediate area of her presence.

When I wondered what it was like existing as the same person at two different points in time she responded that people were twice as irritating. I was then invited to browse shelf after shelf of hourglasses, one for every man woman and child in Everywhere, dispassionately parsing their lives into one quiet plink of silica at a time. Unnerved by this, I asked if their were one for me, and I was told cryptically, ‘Because you don’t actually exist silly.’

I suppose that is the problem with existence one is never quite sure if it took or not.

*Not to be confused with the separate guilds of Cheiromancers, Phrenologists, Astrologers, Numerologists, Metroscopists, Geomaneers, Oneiromancers, Tasseomancers, Haruspicists, and Rhabdomancers. All of whom eschewed the ‘fairy-fart’ nonsense of the Guild of SCP, favoring instead the uncompromising science invested in their own brands of divination.
“'The problem lies in The Stem…that’s where it all begins and ends. If we could get to The Stem we could solve everything.’ I tossed in my bed. ‘What has the Doctor said?’ ‘Nothing. He says these things tend to sort themselves out’ I still believe we should think about Lob…’ I awoke, tangled in soiled and soaked sheets. My heart was racing as if I had just swum the Thames. I tried to remember any more of the dream but it was slipping through my fingers like sand on a beach.

Around noon I arrived in The Stem, driven back into those noisome depths by some compulsion. My camera and its plates began to feel like a millstone as I hauled it through the filthy alleys past the Guild of Chroniclers. I stopped for the briefest of moments at the Hall of Offensive images, maintained by the religious scholars who visited The Stem. The collection was extensive and true to its description, quite offensive. Their was every depiction of buggery, lasciviousness, and various unknown aspects of animal husbandry hanging in lit and ornate curtained alcoves. As I made my way to the door remembering
the deck of risqué playing cards my father had hidden in his study, an oily voice hissed at me from the shadows.

‘Got bones and pumpers fer the needin’. Got teeth and livers too.’
I had heard rumors of the Guild of Organ Pimps, though a boon to the untutored barbers of The Stem, they were the bane of any man or woman who stumbled drunk into the gutter. It is told they could harvest a whole person from scalp to toenail in under twelve minutes it was told. And they were more partial to warm corpses even if they had to speed the unfortunate on their way.

‘Wait a tick. Yer the man with the box. We ‘eard ‘bout you,’ he oozed. ‘Could yer make my picture ye think.’

The part of my brain not running down the hall like a madman realized it was not a request. I set up my camera, and with shaking hands, made the picture. I had barely replaced my lens cap when I was already hurrying down the street, dogged by their echoing, raucous laughter.

I decided that any messages providence had for me could be hand delivered from then on.”
“Down in the Guild of Artificers there was gallery after gallery showcasing their cunning work for the past three centuries. The most fascinating of the artifacts on display was the Shrine of Tuesday Milktree. The guild often did pro bono work for the lower classes provided they signed a waver releasing their work back to the guild upon their ultimate demise. Ms. Milktree is one such example. Meant to be a simple exhibit showcasing the work of Herman Clocksman, one of the guilds most gifted artificers and admitted ‘legman’, the room became a shrine after a cleaning woman was freed of the burden of her piles while polishing the case.

The Shrine now receives waves of rectal sufferers much to the Guild’s chagrin. They feel that the waddling masses pressing close to the case somehow detracts from the dignity of their work. A long time sufferer myself I could not help but run my bottom
briefly and surreptitiously along the millwork of the case. I must admit, the throbbing splinters certainly do detract from the pain of the piles.”
23 February 1893

“After suffering from such disturbing dreams for a fortnight, the Good Doctor advised me to attend one of the Romantics in the Spire. Just on the edge of the Corpus Canton, the Spire was home to the bulk of Everywhere’s eccentrics. Having never been to the Corpus Canton and having heard that the Spire commanded a view rivaled only by Praecelsus, I packed my equipment and a small stack of cucumber sandwiches and made my way down. The journey took the better part of the day.

The Romantics were men and women bred specifically for their uncanny abilities. Shortly after birth, the candidate Romantic is fully trepanned and has the first of many implants placed in the cranium. After some years they lose the ability of speech, indeed, they lose every ability save for deep and philosophical thought. They socialize only amongst themselves and when not harnessed to their looking glasses, they communicate through a convoluted series of rebuses.

My own visit to the Romantics was disturbing at best and as enlightening as running headlong into a frozen hedgerow. After posing a series of questions to ‘him’ he proceeded to drive pins into his hand at precise points oblivious to any discomfort. If this
was not disconcerting enough, there began to appear on the looking glasses behind him things that heretofore existed only in my mind. Childhood memories, desires, and turgid fantasies plumbed right out of the dark depths of my mind. No one passing the stall paid any mind to the flashing images, used to seeing the innermost fears and minutiae of strangers, I suppose. With a feral grunt, the Romantic began removing the pins from his hand and one by one the images faded from the glass. Without a word he handed me a chit printed with some indecipherable pictograms and stared blankly ahead preparing for his next customer. Protocol dictates the viewer bring his or her chit to the Guild of Seers for interpretation, but I was in a rush and tossed mine in the nearest wastebin.”
16 March 1893

“My father always told me that there were three types of people in this world; those who did, those who did not, and those who tried like hell to be one of the former. I suppose Ian Paulswich would be the latter. Known to everyone in the Spire as “The Aviator”, inventor, chronic rummy, and liaison to the House of Carpathia. After six broken legs, three broken arms, fourteen broken ribs, and innumerable concussions, Ian’s burning desire to ply the thermals above Everywhere has remained and his pronounced speech impediment has worsened.

Peering down from the dizzying heights of the Spire has given me new respect for ‘The Aviator’, indeed, any man who would willingly plunge himself into the vertiginous depths of the mountain traces should be canonized shortly after his all but imminent death.”
22 April 1893

“My writ of passage to the Outlands came from the Patriarch a few days before I made this picture. The journey to the center of the island took the better part of four days, an airship taking us across the Spine mountains into the plains of Tabula Rasa. I was told at the outset that the trek could be perilous for the unprepared so I spent a fortnight researching the Outlands and its surrounding environs in the Great Library in Praecelcus. Accompanying me were the Good Doctor and two experienced rangers.

Across the vast expanses of sucking mud, bleached bones, cracked river beds, and forests of Biting Thistle stretch the Bell lines. An ingenious chain of bell trees set every four leagues, the Bell lines are manned by petty criminals and the functionally insane.

Toller #37, stationed just at the foothills of the Spine, was sent out here sixty days ago, and lamented that he still had another one hundred and twenty left to his sentence. Tollers are given a cocktail of herbs and berries to sustain them through the agoraphobic pangs that waste many a bell-pull into former shells of themselves. While I found the endless horizon and barren land around me refreshing when compared to the claustrophobia of the city, I could tell the Good Doctor and even our experienced guides were not of the same mind. Perhaps they too were surreptitiously imbibing of the
Toller’s brew as their eyes were unusually glassy and their demeanors bordered on the morose.

In any case I made numerous discoveries my first few days in the wilderness including a sort of cursing marmot, a type of stone that when fermented produced a passable port, and a flower which mimics the female pudenda so well it has been harvested almost to extinction.
24 May 1893

“After over a month in the wastes we came across Baron Horace Von Uttswerth, and his sturdy Amazon haulers. A veteran of this fetid wilderness, the Baron attempts another fruitless expedition in search of the fabled Stone of Snood. Madder than a March hare, his family subsidizes his misguided adventures simply to keep his flatulence, open mouthed mastication, and dubious sense of hygiene as far away from their soirees as possible.

We returned to the city shortly after. Never in my wildest imaginings would I have believed that I would yearn for the claustrophobic safety of Everywhere, but weeks of grime and peril had changed my mind. Besides, I felt my time in the City was coming to an end.
6 June 1893

“Deep in Verdus Canton reside street after street of fallen Houses. Those nobles forced into penury by the vagaries of fortune, politics, and the whims of the Synod often abandoned their holdings to the ravages of time and moved on to less verdant pastures. What resulted was a warren of spartan but spacious manors littered with offal and populated by vagabonds, thieves, hermits, and anyone who wishes to exclude themselves from society proper.

This young woman refused to give her name, but judging from her rather unique appearance, I would say she was one of the Heirophant’s wet nurses. Day and night they feed the legions of Paramours, Romantics at their first stages of development, doing nothing more than staring out the window until their milk is gone and they are sent to the laundries. Though their lives are no more arduous than many in the City, a few have
been known to make good their escapes. After a few months here in the fallen Houses this woman will probably make her way to the Stem and ply her trade to those whose carnal tastes lean towards the more exotic.”

12 June 1893

I was informed by Dr. Pygmalion that a ship would be arriving during the week to carry me home. Though surprised by the suddenness of my impending departure, my longing for the coal scuttle skies of London saw me through the worst of my misgivings. There was still so much of the City I had not seen. Indeed, if I were to spend a lifetime here I would never come to know every corner of her splendor. Over the next week I was regaled at numerous farewell dinners and received an embarrassing number of gifts from well-wishers.

My very last day I sat on the balcony of the Astronomer’s Guild gazing out at the world, wondering how I would explain this strange land to my family and friends. Who would believe my tale? Had I not seen this place with my own eyes…”

It is worth noting that Mr. Hogsmeath was found wandering the quays in lower London shortly before dawn on the first of July, 1893, bedraggled, gaunt, and clutching a weathered valise. The constable’s report described him as nonsensical and confused. After attempts were made to locate his family, Mr. Hogsmeath was taken to St. Tibulas Asylum where he was interred pending solicitation. He was to spend the better part of his life there.

He died on the first of July, 1931. Scrawled upon the north wall of his cell were the words, “I shall return to Everywhere and leap from the heights of the Spire.”
Methodology

*Nothing happens unless first a dream.* – Carl Sandburg

Every image that I create has a spirit all its own. I think of them as children, some unruly and needing discipline, others impeccably behaved needing nothing more than a solid direction. It is difficult writing about my own art work. More often than not I am as unaware of the genesis of a particular image as my viewer. Some frighten me as they bubble out of my subconscious, the jetsam and flotsam of childhood, the small terrors that plague me when I sleep. Others are so beautiful that I wonder if they are truly my ideas at all.

When I was about eighteen years old, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I spent the better part of the month of May interred in a psychiatric institution. The experience was, at the time, frightening as hell. Every where around me were people in various states of sanity; schizophrenics, manics, morbid depressives, multiple personalities, obsessive-compulsives, etc. Medicated on Haldol, Klonipin, Lithium, and Tegretol, I slipped into a torpor that lasted long after my discharge. When the brain is lulled into such a state of emptiness, it is easily mistaken as a cure. I sat on my parent’s back porch staring listlessly out at the yard, wondering in some still lucid part of my brain where it all went wrong. My condition worsened.

My confused and loving parents sought out help anywhere they could and I was subjected to a litany of successive diagnosis and a pharmacological cocktail that would have stoned Elvis.

As the years passed and I was bounced from one prescription to another, I became suspicious. Suppose every person on the planet had gone wrong at some point in time and we sought to quash those moments of beautiful madness with our mass produced opiates? Where would the genius of the world hide from the probes and stethoscopes?

I found my answer in art. Over time I weaned myself off of the synthetics plying my nervous system and threw myself whole heartedly into the act of creation. Catharsis seems too mild a word to me to describe my work. Salvation would be more apropos.

As the years passed I have found a certain harmony between the duelling parts of my psyche. I allow the irrational to the fore only when it can be dealt with in my work and the rest of the time it is sublimated that it may build strength for the next time I call upon it.

In my opinion, a really good artist is a well educated one, able to carry on a dialogue with history, philosophy, theology, linguistics, politics, and legions of other subjects. Consequently, I supplement my voracious visual diet with healthy doses of literature. Subsequently, my work is more literarily inspired than not. Indeed, I tend to think of my work in literary terms. Perhaps that is why the story accompanying The Everywhere Chronicles was so important to me. I wanted the narrative, as disjointed and seemingly incomplete as it is, to be as much a part of the artwork as the prints themselves. While the text is certainly not necessary to the work, and in a way I feel it divorces the viewer
from their own uncertainty and thus their own conclusions, it is a contextual supplementation which I hope enhances the viewer’s trip into another reality.

I was meditating one day. The world around me was as quiet as it could get, the cats caroused just on the edge of my consciousness, but I was able to dismiss this as I attempted to sink deeper into a state of bliss. I counted my breaths slowly and deliberately looking forward to the three or four eternal seconds of quiet mind when I noticed an orb of scintillating colours dancing on the edge of my vision. My heart began to race with anticipation, not for the enlightenment that must be moments away, but for the migraine that was about to savage me.

As I lay in bed shrouded in cool darkness, nauseous and screwing my head between the bars of my head board, I had a vision of The Romantic. An image I was to begin work on the following evening.

**Stage 1-The drawing**

Why is he there? More to whit, what is he doing? Why would he do it? Okay, okay, the top of his head is gone, replaced by pistons and wires. Not new technology, but old. Sophisticated, but old. Old parts at least cobbled together to create something wondrous. He’s wired to a bank of monitors behind him showing his thought process…no prophesies, no dreams. He’s a dream interpreter. Or an oracle. Would he be bred or created? Bred. They breed everything to task in Everywhere. Sort of an autistic savant. No pain. Just thoughts. A thought engine. Pose it a question for twenty p and watch the monitors for the answer. Pay extra for an interpretation of what was on the monitor…

At this point I am formulating how it will be done. I sketch out different compositions of the scene and put it away for a while.

**Stage 2-The Studio**

I bring the model into the studio and photograph him against a neutral background, referring to the sketch, but still trying to work fluidly. After I get the shots I think I want, I diagram where the lights were in the scene so that I may duplicate them later, recording incidence and angle as best I can as well as relative camera position on the x and y axis.

**Stage 3-Maya**

As the images I envisioned became more sophisticated, so too did the tools I would need to construct them. When I first began working in this synthetic digital medium, Adobe Photoshop answered most of my needs. I would photograph different scenes and composite them back together. As time passed I experimented with different suites of digital imaging software, creating completely invented backgrounds to use in my images. Many of these, such as Bryce and Worldbuilder, thought sophisticated, lacked the realism I would need to composite them seamlessly with scanned photographic images. After watching a special on the *Lord of the Rings*, I became interested in the Software package they used for their special effects called Maya. Through an old friend who works for one of the larger programmers in the country I was able to acquire a copy of this exorbitant program.
After much trial and error I began to grasp the fundamentals of the program, but I digress.
To illustrate Maya I will use a simpler image than The Romantic entitled The Horologist.

First, I import an image plain into Maya that contains a reference image of the studio shot chosen for the final composition. It is low resolution and will only be used for positional and compositional purposes.
After the positioning is done, I “turn off” the reference image and begin to model the scene. For the Horologist, I chose to do the scene in two separate parts. One part would contain a detailed model of an hourglass which will be present in the image foreground, and the other part would be the room itself and many shelves of various hourglasses.
To build the main hourglass, I began with a NURBS (non uniform rational b-spline) curve, shaped to the outline of an hourglass. I then rotated this curve along the x axis creating the recognizable shape of an hourglass.

At this point I begin to model the casing of the hourglass in much the same way. For the top and bottom I use extruded polygon surfaces and for the detail work I use Sub-D conversions on lofted and revolved NURBs geometry.
By grabbing and moving individual CV’s (control vertices) imbedded throughout the geometry and the curve splines, I am able to introduce details and imperfections into the model which aid in its realism.

After some work the model is complete enough to begin texturing. In Maya texturing is done by connecting different shader nodes with different physical characteristics to the differing surfaces of the model. Because different surfaces have different specular, occlusive, reflective, refractive, etc. characteristics, some research has to be done into the physics of different substances and how they react to photon bombardment. First I assign a Material characteristic to each surface such as Blinn, Phong, or Lambert amongst a host of others, which defines how light will interact with the surface. Will it have a high degree of specular roll-off or will it have more matte characteristics?

In the case of the glass I assign it a base Phong E material and begin to adjust the transparency, reflectivity, refractivity, specular highlight potential, and proceed to give it the general physical characteristics of real glass. Having an extensive knowledge of photography helps at this point, but I am forced to look up the specular and refractive index of glass in my brother’s old chemistry book.

At this point I begin to map color as well as other physical characteristics to the glass. On the bottom right hand figure the attribute editor is open as I begin the process all over again for the other materials comprising my hourglass.
A lot of work has been done, but I have yet to put any lights into the scene. Referring to my sketches and diagrams made before and after the studio shoot, I am able to place lights with the very same physical characteristics and positions of those used to illuminate the model. In Maya lights have the same editable characteristics as every other material and I am able to control specular output, color, fall-off, and diffusion as well as a host of other characteristics.

Once the lights have been placed into the scene, I run some test renders to see how it all comes together. Maya has three built in rendering engines; Maya Hardware, Maya Software, and Maya Vector, however, I shall use none of them. For my own purposes I need a more robust render engine, able to arrive at a more realistic interpretation of my model. For all of my renders I use a third party renderer called Mental Ray or Renderman developed by Pixar.

After viewing the test render critically I decide that the glass is not “glassy” enough and the burl oak of the hourglass frame is a bit too specular. I change some of the characteristics of my wood material and decide to assign a special dielectric material available only to the Mental Ray renderer. Dielectric materials are those that simply do not conduct electricity well, such as glass, plastic, and ceramic. The dielectric material I use for my glass will be based on the exact physical characteristics of 4 mm thick non-tempered glass. There is one caveat, however, since Mental Ray is not fully integrated into Maya 6, I will have to manually link the scene lights to it.

By opening up the Outliner and Connection editor, I am able to link the message from the photons of the lights to the dielectric material itself.
After a few test renders and some much needed tweaking, I able to do a production render at 4k (4000x4000 pixels). After about 14 hours I have the finished hourglass to be used in the foreground of The Horologist. (See next page)

Now I must begin work on the rest of the scene which I envisioned as a room with shelves stocked floor to ceiling with hourglasses.

To begin, I model five different types of hourglasses. I do not introduce as much detail into them as the previous one as they will be in the background. Once this has been completed I begin a separate job of modeling the room itself which is just a simple polygonal cube with only one division in each axis (this is to simplify texturing later on). If I need more faces in the geometry later on I can introduce them by cutting or extruding the faces.

To construct the shelves I create a shaped NURBs curve and simply loft it to a duplicate placed 16 units away, giving it the illusion of a solid scroll-worked surface. To create the ornamental railings which attach the shelves to the wall, I create another
NURBs curve and extrude a secondary curve along its length, setting its variance to .752 so that it narrows towards the end.

I continue in this fashion until I have my host of shelves built and they are attached to the walls with their ornamental brackets.

At this point I am ready to import into the scene all of the hourglasses that were modeled, duplicate and manipulate them, and position them on the shelves. A lot more work is required to position every element properly and create individual variations in the materials of each hourglass.

I refer back to my studio notes often to set the correct position of the camera and in creation of the scene lights. When completed, the studio shots fit as seamlessly as possible within the manufactured scene.

Because I am dealing with a closed space lights are used a bit differently than in my first example.

I placed five lights in the scene (three more than were present in the studio shoot), one spotlight as my key, a wide area light linked to the dielectric materials on the back shelf, and three point lights with high decay rates. The reason for this is to approximate the fill and ambiance that would occur in a high ceiling room.

As I begin texturing the scene and building their networks via the Hypershade editor, I notice that the lighting is not nearly as realistic as I need it to be.
I open up all of the lights in my Hypershade editor and proceed to instruct each one to emit photons. I set the photon intensity and exponent highest on my key light and lower on my fill point light. By enabling photon emission I am able to create a more realistic environment in which colors bleed onto one another as the light bounces around the room, as well as true caustic effects as the photons trace their way through the glass on the shelves. I also enable ray traced shadows, and Mental Ray refractions. The only drawback to my setup is the amount of processing power it will take to render the scene. I will proceed to do 30 to 40 low resolution test renders as I continue to refine the scene.

Preparing this scene for a production render is a bit more complex than the previous scene. Because this room is so large and filled with so many objects interacting with so many lights, I will render it in passes. Our main hourglass was rendered in one pass, known as “in camera”, however, I want to break this more complex scene down into many individual passes that will later be composited in Adobe After Effects.

Before I begin I must go into my Render Globals window and set a few things. First, I want to enable Global Illumination with a photon Accuracy of 675 and a photon Volume Accuracy of 715. I leave their exponential values as is allowing the software to make its best guess. GI will cause the photons being output from the lights to ricochet around the room causing color bleed and caustic effects from the glass. Next, I will enable Final Gather instructing it took look for 600 rays. FG takes all of the information from the GI lighting and creates close physical approximations of reality. I set the min and max sampling filters to 1, 3 respectively and apply the Mitchell filter (akin to unsharp mask) to the render. Finally, I enable render passes and set the output size to 4k.

I create four render passes. The first is a “beauty” pass, gathering almost all of the information of the scene in one fell swoop. The render takes 12 hours. Next is my specular pass as I am concerned with the strength of the reflected highlights. Then comes the color pass, though I can re-balance the colors in Adobe CS, I prefer to get them as close as possible in After Effects. Finally, we have the shadow pass which allows me to substantially control the density and ambience of my shadow values. All four passes take a total of about 27 hours.

After all of the passes have rendered through, they are imported into Adobe After Effects where they are re-composited.
Step 4-Photoshop

By now I am ready to bring the images together in Adobe Photoshop. My first order of business is to mask the studio shots and color the grayscale image. By “hand coloring” my grayscales I get more of a painterly effect. Though the technique is time consuming, in the end I am more easily able to manipulate the mood of the scene.

Once the model is composited into the scene and all of the manipulations are done and I am quite sure the image is as seamless as it can be, the layers are merged together. I then duplicate the master layer, convert it to grayscale and introduce an ochre variation to it. The opacity of the layer is brought down to about thirty percent. This is done to “temper” the colors and to give the image a bit of an antiquated feel. Finally, I merge these layers together and introduce a bit of noise to simulate film grain.
Bibliography


Carroll, Lewis & Tenniel, John (Illustrator). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland: And through the Looking Glass.* NAL. NY, 2000


Carroll, Lewis. *Sylvie and Bruno.* Indypublish. NY, 2001


Essick, Robert N. *William Blake at the Huntington.* Abrams Publishing. NY, 1992


Herbert, Frank. *Dune.* Ace Publications. NY, 1990


Vitae

Jamie Baldridge was born to two humans one thousand nine hundred and seventy five years after the death of the man called Christ. He didn’t know him, but it seemed an auspicious day nonetheless. Upon his egress from the womb he was immediately assailed with the memories of his past lives. Being a vintner of some renown in Pilagia during the reign of Hadrian, sweeping floors in a temple outside of Calcutta, being borne on his father’s shoulders after routing the Picts in Saxony, making love to a one eyed maiden in Taipei sometime during the reign of the Qin, and selling his body in Alessandria just to feed his four children. He remembered countless battles, husbands, wives, children, births deaths, popes, kings, emperors, and lords. He remembered having his hand severed in Cairo for stealing an apple on a dare from some boy named Farouq, and pulling the sinews of a bison through his teeth to make lashing for a papoose. The actinic smells of the birthing room brought him back to the odors of hemlock, fennel, and mustard seed that permeated the cottage in which he spent the last seven years of his lifetime deep in the forests of Bavaria before dying quietly in the night attended by sixteen grandchildren, seven children, and his second husband. He had cut his elbow on a rusted pike used to prop open the door when the weather was mild and contracted sepsis.

The point is, he remembered. And he wept. He wept not because he was being born and the sterility of the new world was shocking after the warmth and seclusion of the womb, but because he realized he had to do this shit all over again. It is in those first moments of life that many decisions have to be made, and made in a hurry. Contrary to popular belief, infants are not only born fully aware, but fully in command of their faculties. Knowing from experience that his memories and cognitive abilities would take a sharp southern decline over the next few hours he made some hasty decisions. Amidst the rectal and sinusoidal probing he was forced to keep his head and choose the pathway of his life.

Over the past sixteen millennia he had tried damn near everything except for lawyer (too counter productive), homicidal maniac (too much like a lawyer), emperor (never the right parents), fudge maker (not the worst job), and artist (no predilections for madness). After whittling down his options he had decided on fudge maker or artist. He soon came to realize that the brain he had attained this time around did indeed skew towards the eccentric and realized that either he would be the worst fudge maker the world has ever known or one of its most brilliant artists. It was then that he recalled visiting an artist’s studio somewhere in Paris during the eighteen hundreds and being offered absinthe, opium, and a ménage-a-trois. Perhaps this artist thing was a good fit after all.

He cried for effect and allowed himself to be bundled up and placed in his mother’s arms.

The decades passed, but he never seemed to forget his pasts, and when the time came, he did indeed become an artist. Well, himself. Next time around he thinks he shall shoot for emperor. After all, it is a lot like being an artist except the hours are longer.