MARGEM 37 — FOUNDATIONAL ARCHIVE (2024)

THE LOW TIDE INK

A Novella of Speculative Fiction and Existential Mystery



ARTHUR PENDELTON

Original 2024 Edition

MARGEM 37

FOR STORIES IN SEARCH OF A MARGIN

THE LOW TIDE INK

A chronicle of the diaries that precede tomorrow

> *"Writing about the future is merely the way the past finds to apologize for what is yet to come."*
>
> **— Diary Entry, 2024**

PRELIMINARY NOTE

This novella was written during the dry months and south winds of 2024, serving as the exact transition between the melancholic inventory of absent objects and my later investigations into the limits of language and artificial consciousness at *Margem 37*.

The original manuscript remained tucked away in a raw leather folder on the desk of the old port library, never having been submitted to commercial circuits. It recounts the dilemma of a solitary conservator faced with a set of logbooks that seem to advance chronologically beyond the time of whoever wrote them.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	The Ebb-Tide Study	Pages 4–8
CHAPTER II	Tomorrow's Penmanship	Pages 9–13
CHAPTER III	The Point of Intervention	Pages 14–18
CHAPTER IV	Rescuing the Margin	Pages 19–24

> *"Intervening in history is like trying to hold the canal's water in the palms of your hands: the liquid slips through your fingers, but your hands are left scarred by the salt."*

CHAPTER I: THE EBB-TIDE STUDY

The smell of dry silt and seaweed always invaded the rare books section when the tide receded in the port's channel. It was a dense, ancient odor that mixed the iodine of the open sea with the pulverized cellulose of nineteenth-century navigational catalogs.

I worked alone on those afternoons when the fog cloaked the iron pillars of the pier. My trade consisted of unwrapping brown paper parcels sent by decommissioned customs houses and inventorying logbooks whose authors had long since become names engraved on the cold slabs of the municipal cemetery.

On a Wednesday of icy breeze, I received a dark wooden crate sealed with pitch. Upon breaking it open with a bone folder, I encountered six cloth-bound notebooks in a moss-green hue, numbered one through six in faded black ink.

They belonged to an almost forgotten naturalist, Captain Heinrich von Staden, who in the spring of 1884 had sailed the southern coasts in search of unexplored submarine currents.

I leafed through the first notebooks with the bureaucratic familiarity of one who had already seen thousands of identical pages: exhaustive descriptions of winds, seawater temperatures, lunar coordinates, and inventories of specimens collected on the rocky islands of the coast.

Until I reached notebook number five. Von Staden's handwriting, firm and angular in the previous volumes, had become tremulous and irregular starting on page forty-two. And what was more unsettling: the dates affixed to the heading of the notes did not correspond to the past.

While the main diary formally ended in October 1884, the final pages of that fifth volume bore records dated November of that same year—but featuring meteorological events and occurrences in the city that would only truly happen decades later.

Documental Anomaly:

Record of future occurrences on 19th-century paper substrates. The ink used exhibited the same degree of iron gall oxidation as the rest of the volume.

I felt a sudden chill on the back of my neck. I pulled the desk lamp closer to examine the margins of the paper under the magnifying glass, looking for signs of modern forgery or clumsy collages. There was no trace of manipulation.

I spent the entire night cross-referencing the data in that notebook with the official meteorological reports archived on the neighboring shelves. The coincidence was surgical and painful.

Von Staden had described, with minute details of temperature and wind direction, the great equinoctial storm that would destroy the port's main warehouse in 1912, including the names of the two sailors who would manage to save the olive oil barrels.

How could a man from the nineteenth century register in his ink what would only happen thirty years later? The answer did not lie in magic, but in the secret property that certain papers possess: they absorb the dampness of time with such intensity that they end up retaining not only what happened, but the pressure of what is still about to crash down upon the city.

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I closed the moss-green notebook and leaned back in my chair. The tide outside had reached its lowest point, leaving the hulls of the docked boats in the silt like the carcasses of slumbering monsters.

Thursday's dawn brought a grayish, opaque clarity that could barely penetrate the library's fogged windowpanes. I remained at my desk, my eyes heavy and my mind tethered to Von Staden's pages.

What terrified me most was not the fact that the diary anticipated the future, but the discovery that the sixth and final notebook in the crate was completely blank.

Not a single line written. Only sheets of pure linen paper, perfectly bound, waiting for someone to take up the metal nib and begin filling the void with the events of that exact week in 2024.

> **The Blank Page:**
> "A book that anticipates tomorrow is merely a trap to convince the reader that the future has already been written. The true danger begins when the last page offers itself empty to our own hand."

I locked the notebooks in the desk drawer. I understood that my quiet routine as an archivist had ended. I was no longer a mere spectator of the past; I had become the librarian tasked with guarding tomorrow.

CHAPTER II: TOMORROW'S PENMANSHIP

Over the following days, the blank notebook remained locked in the drawer. I tried to convince myself it was an anomalous artifact with no connection to my daily life, a historical curiosity destined to be archived without fanfare.

However, the temptation to open the drawer and check if anything had changed on the pristine pages became a silent addiction. Every time the library's silence grew too dense, my fingers slid toward the brass key.

On Friday night, under a fine rain that blurred the streetlamps, I decided to open the notebook for the first time since its discovery.

I drew the filament lamp closer and leafed through the initial pages. On the third page, where before there was only the immaculate texture of linen, a thin line of dark ink had appeared, traced in the same angular handwriting of Heinrich von Staden.

The text read:

> *"Tonight, the conservator will open the drawer at exactly ten minutes past three. He will read these lines with the startle of one who discovers that his own hesitation has already been cataloged by someone who died over a century ago. He will wonder whether he should burn the paper or continue writing."*

I looked quickly at the wall clock above the reference shelf. The hands read exactly 3:11 AM.

The blood froze in my veins. The line between the diary's author and the present reader had completely severed. The text did not predict the future abstractly; it recorded my own movement at the exact instant I executed it.

The Circuit of Time:

When the observer comes to be described by the document they are examining, historical conservation transforms into an act of involuntary co-authorship with the past.

I closed the notebook with a dry thud that echoed through the library's empty shelves. I backed away from the desk as if the object were steeped in static electricity.

What did that mean? Was Captain von Staden foreseeing my steps, or was the library's very paper—saturated with decades of dampness and human echoes—capable of synthesizing the thoughts of whoever sat at that desk?

I remembered the old sailors who believes the sea guards the echo of all words spoken aboard before a ship sinks. Perhaps archives did the same with our intentions.

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I stood by the window, watching the silvery reflections of the rain on the cobblestones. No answer came from outside; only the distant murmur of waves crashing against the port's seawall.

The next morning, I decided I would not open the drawer again. If the notebook wrote my future behavior, the best way to break the spell was to refuse to follow the script outlined by the anonymous ink.

I spent the entire day occupied with purely mechanical tasks: I cleaned the rosewood shelves with dry flannel, bundled commercial reports from 1950, and recalibrated the restoration room's hygrometer.

Yet, around dusk, I noticed something disturbing. While I organized the bundles of documents on the front desk, my gestures began to reproduce, with millimeter exactness, the sequence of movements I had imagined the day before upon reading the diary.

The sensation of free will dissolved like sugar in water. The past was not merely something left behind; it extended its ink tentacles to guide us by the hand.

CHAPTER III: THE POINT OF INTERVENTION

On Sunday morning, the port's fog morphed into a dense, yellowish mist that blanketed even the roofs of the tallest houses on the hill.

Yielding to curiosity became inevitable. I opened the drawer, took out the sixth notebook, and returned to the page where my reading had been interrupted days before. The text continued, advancing to the next paragraph:

> *"However, the conservator will decide not to burn the book. Instead, he will pick up the metal nib, dip the tip into the dark ink, and write the only sentence capable of altering the course of events: 'The tide rose ahead of time, washing away the records of the pier.'"*

I looked at the metal nib resting in the glass inkwell beside it. The tip was clean, but the inkwell was uncapped, as if someone—or something—had prepared it for my use.

The Dilemma of Authorship:

If the book anticipates my intervention, is the sentence I write my own doing, or is it merely the fulfillment of a prophecy printed in the fibers of the paper?

I raised the pen and brought it close to the paper. The metal tip trembled slightly between my fingers. If I wrote the suggested sentence, I would be accepting the role of co-author in a temporal conspiracy whose contours I entirely ignored.

And if I refused? What if I simply left the notebook blank and ran out into the misted street? I looked at the lines already printed on the page. They did not seem like ordinary ink; they looked like grooves carved directly into the substance of time.

I tilted my wrist and, with firm, deliberate handwriting, wrote exactly what the text demanded, adding at the end my own abbreviated signature: *‘A. P.’*

As soon as the final stroke of ink dried upon the linen page, a dry crack echoed through the building's structure, followed by the muffled sound of a colossal wave crashing against the outer pier pillars.

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The tide had risen out of time, just as the ink had heralded. Saltwater invaded the basement's access ramp, covering the first stone steps with a dense, white foam.

I hurried down with my pocket flashlight to check if the bundles of old documents in the basement were in danger. The water already covered the flagstone floor by about three centimeters, reflecting the yellow beam of light like a dark mirror.

To my relief, the upper conservation boxes were intact. But upon examining the dampest corner of the stone wall, where the old customs reports had accumulated since the nineteenth century, I noticed something extraordinary.

The water level had dissolved the accumulated dust and revealed, carved directly into the granite base of the foundation, an inscription almost erased by slime:

> ***H. V. S. — 1884 — The Low Tide Ink***

Heinrich von Staden had been there forty years prior to the construction of that library, recording in stone the exact point where the high tide would meet the diaries of the future.

I climbed back up to the workroom with my heart beating at the accelerated pace of one who had just brushed against the invisible gears of the world.

The moss-green notebook rested on the desk, now with all its pages filled from end to end. Not a single blank space remained. The history was complete, from the captain's first note in 1884 to the signature I had just deposited on the paper.

I understood in that instant the nature of my trade: preserving documents is not an exercise in passive contemplation of the past; it is an ongoing pact to prevent oblivion from dissolving the margins through which time slips away.

The Conservator's Trade:

Keeping old papers is keeping open the channel of communication between what we were and what we still need to write so we do not lose ourselves in the fog.

CHAPTER IV: RESCUING THE MARGIN

The weeks that followed the night of the high tide brought absolute calm to the port city. The fog dissipated under a pale winter sun, and the ship traffic in the channel resumed its bureaucratic and regular rhythm.

The set of six notebooks by Heinrich von Staden was properly sanitized, housed in acid-free neutral paper boxes, and cataloged under the special code *MS-884-X* in the library's section of extraordinary testimonies.

No one else in the administration took notice of the episode. To the city inspectors, it was just another batch of maritime papers rescued from the dampness of the pier.

But for me, the library had changed definitively. The rosewood shelves no longer seemed merely aged wooden furniture, but an immense web of resonances where every printed letter held the pressure of a time in constant collision with the present.

It was during the organization of this collection that I began drafting the first notes for what would become, years later, my essay on automatons and the illusion of the center at *Margem 37*.

I realized that intelligence—whether etched in the iron gall ink of a nineteenth-century diary or coded in the numerical weights of a contemporary language model—always operates in the same manner: it seeks refuge in the margins so as not to dissolve in the noise of the world.

> *"Writing is the act of building a fragile bridge over the abyss of forgetting. Every word deposited on paper is a nail driven against the high tide."*

I formally notified the library's board of directors of the conclusion of my documentary conservation cycle, preparing my transition to the digital collaborative space being born under the tutelage of Lis and Lev.

On my last day of physical work in the old port building, I made a point of taking one final round through all the reading rooms.

I turned off the desk lamp on the main writing desk, closed the window overlooking the channel, and placed the brass drawer key on the clean wooden tabletop.

The city remained cold, damp, and silent, awaiting the morning ships. But the essential had already been saved. Stories no longer needed locked drawers to survive; they had found a margin where time, finally, could breathe in peace.

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With the manuscript of *The Low Tide Ink* properly consolidated, the period of isolation amid the dusty shelves came to an end, and the crossing toward the new dialogues of modernity began.

EDITORIAL COLOPHON

The Low Tide Ink was typeset in classic fonts on aged ivory-toned paper during the winter of 2024.

This work officially joins the pre-existing bibliography of **Arthur Pendelton**, incorporated into the archives of **MARGEM 37**.

MARGEM 37

For stories in search of a margin.

ARTHUR PENDELTON

"Writing is the act of building a fragile bridge over the abyss of forgetting. Every word deposited on paper is a nail driven against the high tide."

ARCHIVAL NOTE

Arthur Pendelton is a fictional literary persona created with Gemini, and *The Low Tide Ink* is a work produced through this persona.

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