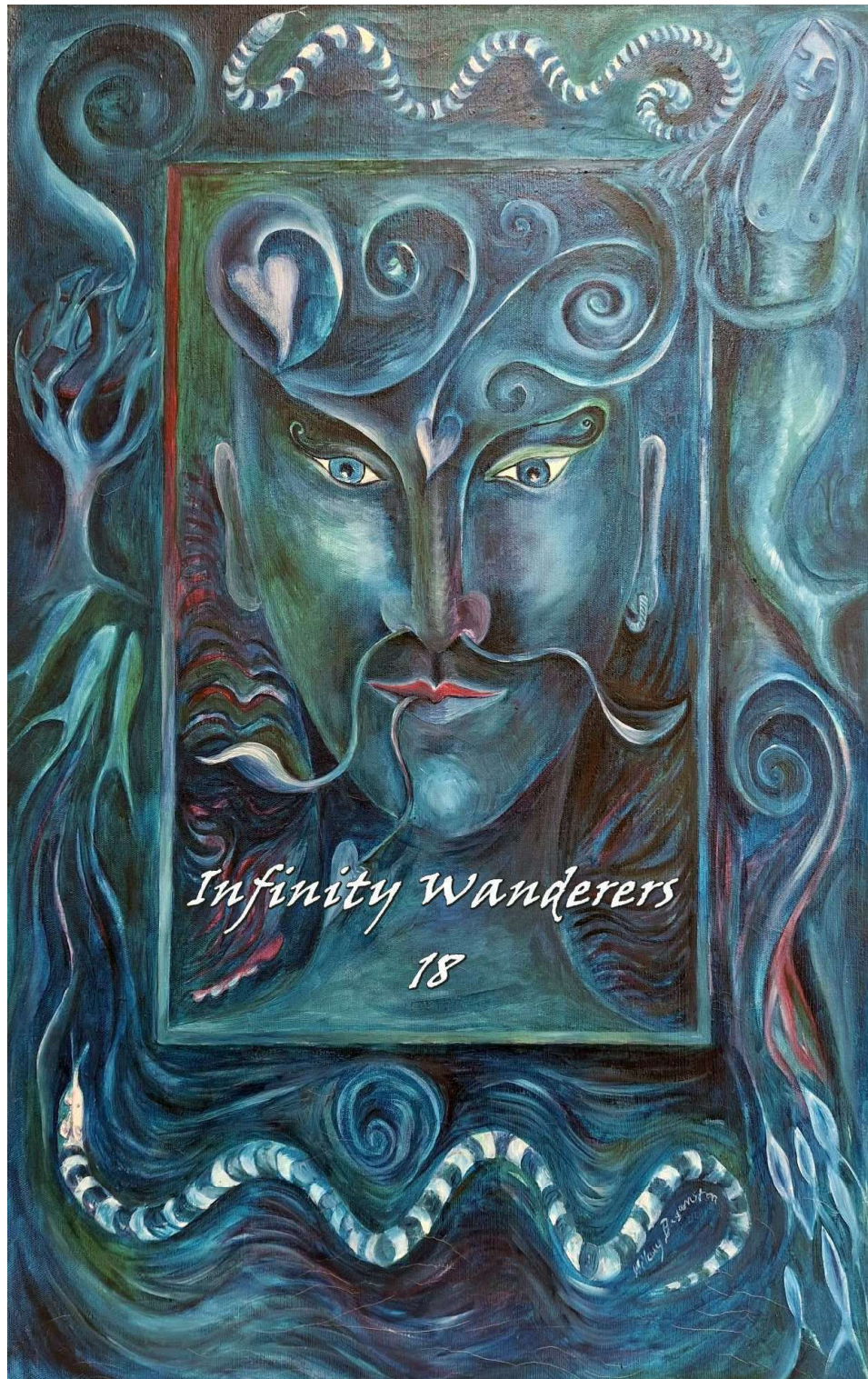
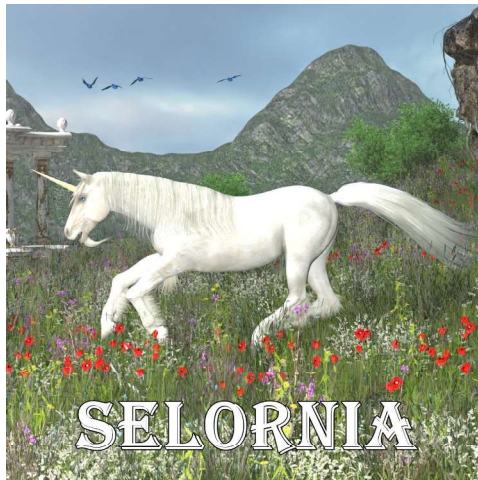




INFINITY WANDERERS

#18

EDITED BY GREY WOLF



CONTENTS

Ten Days In Him	Kelly Xiang
Why Are All the Humans Dead?	Quinn
Coleridge and Kubla Khan	Christopher Barnard
Poetry	S.T. Eleu
William Haggar	Steve Cound
Nagi	Steve McLary
1955 Motoring Holiday to Austria	Gwilym Davies
Poetry	Saeid Pakan
Augustus' Vision	Matias Travieso-Diaz
Jonah	Hilary Bryanston
Erasure	Simon MacCulloch
Margaret Tucker and the Temporal Anomaly	A. Allan Chibi
What the War Gave Back	Jonathan B. Ferrini
Poetry	Doug Stoiber
Solar Eclipse	Matias Travieso-Diaz
Sow the Wind	L.G. Parker
The Lost Scrolls of Shangri La - Part 4	Hamish McTavish

ADVERTS

Solar Eclipse

Matias Travieso-Diaz

In many cultures, a total eclipse of the sun predicts cataclysms and bad events.

Walter Mercado

Charles Fournier had come back to Paris in 1815, after the death of his mother and the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy upon Napoleon's final defeat. They had spent two decades in exile in his mother's birthplace, a small village near Madrid, where they had taken refuge after Charles' father was slain during the mob's storming of the Tuileries royal palace in August 1792. Jean Louis Fournier had been the head baker at the Fruiterie, the department that provided desserts and fruits for the King's table. Jean Louis was no soldier but had been clubbed to death when the mob got past the Swiss Guards that defended the palace and broke into the kitchen in search of loot.

Charles, who was a teenager when he and his mother escaped the French Revolution's terror, had become a baker, following in the footsteps of his father. Upon his return to France, he had taken employment at a Paris boulangerie as pâtissier (pastry chef) in charge of making delicate, sweet desserts. He was not being paid much and lived in a dismal, sloping roof garret on the top of a townhouse near the central market at Les Halles. There, he lived frugally, dressed and ate like a pauper, and eschewed all social amenities.

In the five years after his return, Charles made several attempts at getting hired by the new monarch's staff, submitting written applications to the Premier Maître d'hôtel and the Maître de la Paneterie. None of these were ever answered.

Then, one night in late July, 1820 when he was in his garret reading his favorite conservative paper, he came upon the following column:

La Quotidienne — Astronomical Notice

Notice is given that, according to calculations communicated by the Bureau des Longitudes, next 7 September there will occur a solar eclipse, visible across a large part of Europe, the circumstances of which for Paris will be as follows:

Solar Eclipse of 7 September 1820

Beginning of the eclipse	11:34 a.m.
Beginning of the annular phase	12:49 p.m.
Maximum obscuration	12:51 p.m.
End of the annular phase	12:53 p.m.
End of the eclipse	2:05 p.m.

During the eclipse, the Moon will cover a very large portion of the solar disk; the luminous ring will be fully visible only in parts of Paris, as this city does not fully lie on the central line of the eclipse.

The notice in La Quotidienne brought to Charles' mind an event in which his father had played an important role. In December 1787 there had been a similar solar eclipse, visible in Paris, and the King had asked the staff responsible for feeding the Royal house to prepare a little *collation*, a special dessert to be consumed at sunset, while watching the eclipse. His father had been given the assignment and had prepared something he called "L'Éclipse d'Ambre" (The Amber Eclipse), a dessert that featured a frozen dark core inside a glowing shell of spun sugar, representing the moment the sun disappears behind the moon. Charles never saw what his father had done, but for years had heard him and others describe in glowing terms the marvel that Jean Louis had created, for which he had received high praise from Louis XVI himself.

This recollection gave Charles an idea. His mother had taken with her into exile a notebook in which her husband had entered the recipes for many of his dessert creations. Charles had inherited the notebook and kept it in his trunk. Did it contain the recipe for The Amber Eclipse?

He dug up the notebook and flipped through its food-stained pages. One of the last recipes he found read:

L'Éclipse d'Ambre

Ingredients

Hollowed-Out Vanilla Beans (scraped for caviar)
200g Black Cacao
50g Midnight Butter (cultured, unsalted)
100ml Riesling wine
120g Isomalt Crystals
1 Pinch of Coarse Sea Salt
400g Spun Sugar Glaze

Instructions

1. The Umbra Core: Melt Black Cacao and Midnight Butter over a double boiler at exactly 240 R. Whisk in the vanilla bean caviar, the salt, and the Riesling wine until a glossy, dense ganache is created. Form into a perfect sphere.
2. The surrounding Corona: In a copper pot, heat the Isomalt until it reaches the hard-crack stage. Using a blown-glass pipe, blow a tiny hole on the golden sphere of sugar.
3. Assembly: Inject the chocolate core inside the golden sugar sphere using a heated syringe.
4. Bake the assembled sphere at 300 R as long as required to achieve kinetic balance.

The handwritten recipe was hard to read because it was covered with small wine spots, but the directions were precise and easy to execute by an experienced pâtissier: heating something to 300 R (300 degrees Réaumur, or 375 degrees Celsius) was easily achieved by a variety of methods. He could make it work.

The following morning Charles presented himself at the Tuileries Palace and told the guards he sought an appointment with the Marquis de Lauriston, then Minister of the King's Household, and he should be announced as the son and successor of Jean Louis Fournier. Lauriston was too young to have met Charles' father but, by asking older members of his staff, he learned of the old Fournier's service and his unforgettable dessert for the 1787 solar eclipse. His curiosity piqued, Lauriston ordered that the young man waiting outside be brought into his chamber.

After an exchange of salutations, Charles went right to the point. "Sire, I read that in a few days an awesome natural phenomenon will take place: a solar eclipse, which will be visible throughout France, including this city. My recollections were directed at a much-praised dessert that my father prepared on a similar occasion during the reign of King Louis XVI, and it occurred to me that it would be a fitting homage to your martyred predecessor to salute his memory by partaking of the same dessert on this occasion." He stopped to let the inevitable question be posed. Lauriston obliged:

"And are you capable of preparing such a dessert and delivering it to His Majesty this September?"

"Indeed, Sire. I am an experienced pâtissier and am in possession of my late father's recipe for L'Éclipse d'Ambre. It would be easy for me to prepare the dessert following my father's instructions, and would give me great pride and pleasure to be able to do so."

“Very well” replied Lauriston. “I will bring your offer to His Majesty’s attention and we shall proceed in accordance with his wishes. Leave your address with my assistant and we will notify you if the King decides to accept your offer.”

Three days later, an emissary climbed all the way up the stairs to Charles’ garret and delivered the news: “the King would be pleased to receive the gift of a L’Éclipse d’Ambre dessert, provided said dessert is delivered for inspection to the chambers of the Premier Maître d’hôtel by nine a.m. on September 7. If the dessert is accepted and meets with His Majesty’s approval, you shall be compensated for your efforts.”

Charles received permission to prepare the dessert in the Fruiterie’s kitchen of the Tuileries Palace. At dawn on the day of the eclipse he went to the palace and proceeded to that kitchen, where the staff conducted the final elaboration of desserts for the King’s table and the final plating of confections.

Charles unloaded the ingredients for the dessert and the necessary tools on a large table and proceeded to implement the recipe. However, when he reached Step 4, in which he was to “bake the hollow sugar sphere enclosing the chocolate core at 300 R” a disaster occurred: when heat was applied to the sugar and chocolate sphere, that heat melted the totality of the sphere into a sticky, inedible puddle. Charles frantically tried varying the cooking temperatures to lower and higher levels, but nothing worked. The dessert always collapsed.

Charles was dismissed and slunk away, embarrassed. The story of his failure elicited derisive guffaws throughout the palace.

The disgrace caused by Charles' failure followed him outside the Tuileries. Within days, word of his humiliating experience had spread throughout Paris' culinary circles and reached the boulangerie that was his place of employment. He was promptly dismissed and soon discovered that he could not find any bakery, pastry shop, hotel or restaurant that would employ him. He finally had to leave town and move to a hamlet in the Auvergne, where his disgrace was unknown and, in any case, would not have mattered.

Over fifty years passed. Charles never married and put on a lot of weight: his body had swollen up, evidencing the inner humiliation that had never left him after his disgrace in Paris. Then, in late 1871, he learned of the recent destruction of the Tuileries Palace by the members of the Paris Commune in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. The "communards" had set fire to the palace using petroleum, liquid tar, and turpentine. The resulting inferno raged for approximately 48 hours, gutting the interior and leaving behind only a scorched, hollowed-out shell.

Charles felt that the demise of the Tuileries had erased the memory of his humiliation and decided to pay a farewell visit to his once beloved hometown. During the preparations for this trip to Paris, Charles dusted off his father's recipe notebook and reread the recipe for the ill-fated L'Éclipse d'Ambre dessert. By now, Charles' vision was failing and he needed to use a large magnifying glass to read his father's scribblings; as he pored over the handwritten, stain-covered text, he made a discovery. In the last step of the recipe, the word used was not "*cuire*" (bake) as he had thought ... but "*cong*" (short for congeler, i.e., freeze), and the "300 R" was a

poorly written -30 R, partially covered by a smudge. As corrected, Step 4 read: "Freeze the assembled sphere at -30 R, as long as required to achieve cryogenic balance."

The significance of the correction was obvious. The extreme cold would cause the outer sugar shell to contract tightly around the chocolate core, creating a state of perfect culinary suspension.

He had to make the dessert with the change.

Charles immediately turned his kitchen table into a laboratory. He spent several days gathering the ingredients (some, like the Isomalt crystals and the vanilla beans had to be purchased in Clermont-Ferrand) and arranged for the delivery of enough ice to fill his ice box. When he was finally ready, he placed the sugar and chocolate sphere in a wide-mouth glass bowl, closed the ice box door, and waited. When Charles finally opened the ice box door, a perfectly formed L'Éclipse d'Ambre dessert was sitting on the bowl, glowing and perfect.

Charles gazed in wonderment at his creation for a few moments and took the bowl to the kitchen table. What to do next? Of course, he had to try his masterpiece. With a soup spoon, he made a small cut through the crystallized sugar glaze and reached the chocolate, vanilla and wine ganache. He extracted a spoonful of the mixture and took a taste. It was heavenly.

Charles had developed diabetes over the years, and since no drugs existed to treat the condition, he was under a strict no-sugar diet in which he was required to abstain from consuming sweets as well as starches, bread, potatoes, and most fruits. The Amber Eclipse, wrapped in 400 grams of pure, crystallized sugar glaze, was poison to him. Prudence dictated that he should throw the rest of the dessert away.

But he could not bring himself to do it. Realizing perhaps that he was signing his death sentence, he ate slowly spoonful after spoonful of the delicious dessert. When he was finished, Charles tumbled to the floor, victim of a brain seizure. His arms and legs convulsed repeatedly and, finally, Charles lost consciousness and passed away.

Charles died alone, and nobody witnessed his final victory; however, at the end he still had the taste of a heavenly eclipse fresh on his lips.

END