

**An Artist in the  
House of  
Lungbarrow**

By Aristide Twain



# An Artist in the House of Lungbarrow

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## Aristide Twain

“Ah, *Lungbarrow!*” cried the artist. “What a name... Lungbarrow, Lungbarrow, Lungbarrow! Such an exquisite sound!”

He repeated the word thrice more before Quences struck the checkerboard floor with his cane, and snapped:

“*Silence, painter, and be at it!* We do not pay you forty-five hundred coronets to *chatter.*”

The artist shrank. There was a hardness to the deep-set blue eyes and the gaunt, angled face; even the neatly-trimmed moustache, which might have looked avuncular in isolation, contributed a terse, military edge. The artist stared at that moustache, enticed by the thought of growing one just like it, until the old man arched an eyebrow; then he ducked behind the work-in-progress.

He was working, of course, in three dimensions—an intricate mechanism of spinning crystals surrounded the frame, generating space. But his would be no Ancestral Portrait, imbued with biodata; merely a vanity pursuit.

*All forty-five Cousins*—a family portrait. Such things were rarely attempted. Oldbloods’ disinterest in artwork was one reason; but another, the artist now realised, was the difficulty involved in making two scores of Superiors stand together at close quarters without triggering a brawl. He had, of course, begun the work in his own Chapterhouse, filling the cellar with dummies dressed in borrowed fineries, but even so, reaching a consensus on the composition had been the work of years; every time he thought he had it, some looming’s ego ached once more, and they would demand to be moved, or to be given grander clothing. One Lungbarrovian in grey-green robes had managed to gain a whole new body while he worked—thinner, in a wholly different style.

Still, he relished this chance. Even on his eleventh body, he was a boy, with little glory to his name; only a few personal portraits here and there, some of people in this room. So he worked, silently, with renewed fervour—until at last, every Cousin, from Glospin to Vyrdlequith, had been perfectly captured in droplets of hovering paint, every angle a masterpiece of design.

He announced his achievement, and, with sudden violence, they broke from their poses, swarming around him, rushing to preen and criticise.

“—not bad—”

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“—Cantobel, one can hardly *see* me—”

“—hardly *my* fault, Arkhew—”

“—captured my chin—”

Finally Quences parted the crowd, an old woman behind him. Kithriarch and Housekeeper exchanged glances, then pivoted mechanically to face the anxious artist. Sathralope nodded, once, stiff as clockwork.

“It will do,” she declared.

There was a moment of silence; then the artist remembered to breathe, and reached down to unclasp the ornate wooden frame from the mechanism, locking the image into shape as the surface hardened into glass. With swelling pride, he handed it to the crone, who accepted it in the manner of a sacrament, and shuffled away to find a place to hang it. One by one, the Cousins followed in her wake, until only Quences was left.

The artist tugged at the lapels of his crimson vestment.

“...Well!” he blurted out at last, “I’m honoured to have been of service, Ordinal-General.”

“Mmh... Serviceable, yes,” Quences grunted absently; he was staring at his distorted reflection on the hull of the crystal machine, with an air of melancholy.

“If I might be so bold,” the younger man tried again, “your family are captivating subjects for an artist like myself. I should be—ahem—greatly honoured to expand your collections further, if you saw any need.”

“...I see none,” Quences muttered, then rubbed at one eye with two fingers. “I agreed to this frivolity for one reason only—because a son of Lungbarrow calls you his friend.” The old man’s gaze grew distant again. “Poor, peculiar boy. Such brilliance. But those rituals of his, those theories... I should have...” His wandering gaze landed on the artist again, and sharpened. “In any case, our collections are exhaustive. All forefathers accounted for. Besides this... family tableau, what else could you give us?”

At this, the young man’s eyes glinted; he steepled his fingers together. “My Lord, there *is* one ancestor of your illustrious line whose likeness is not represented.”

“Impossible—”

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“There *is*,” he interrupted, pressing his advantage. “Your House’s *oldest* ancestor, the Grandfather of you all. The Forgotten Founder... the Alterity... the *other*.”

Quences froze.

“Naturally,” said the artist, still smiling, as he began to amble through the Hall, “it would have to be an artist’s vision—inspiration, not history—why, I might make them look like *you*, or your heir presumptive...”

Suddenly Quences was upon him, gripping his collar, *pulling* him close with incredible strength and speed.

“*How do you know this!?*” he hissed.

“I do read—”

“*No one* knows this. Do not *speak* this!”

“Oh, come, Lord Quences—” he chuckled fearfully. “—we’re all family here...”

“What?” He dropped his captive in outrage, then pointed at him with the cane. “You’re no Childe of Lungbarrow’s Loom, you Cliffside brat!”

“But the *other* has touched many Looms,” the artist protested. “Every cycle, there are more of us who carry their blessings, as you do, as all your House does. Sequence their chronogenetics if you doubt me! Why else should the City now crawl with Interventionists? Take dear old Ferain, as he now calls himself—old powers are returning, Kithriarch. At your will, when they rise, they shall bear Lungbarrow’s crest. Be ready!”

“This—this is *nonsense!*” the old man roared, and he ran for the stairs, stopping on a landing. “Witch-talk and nonsense—blasphemy upon the Founders! Out—*out!* Drudges, to me! A *madman*—I—I—”

Then Quences collapsed with a final cry, clutching at his chest. Within moments, wooden hands had seized the painter, and thrown him across the threshold. He lay in the dirt a moment, then made to limp home, the tools of his trade forsaken.

\* \* \*

The attack had not killed the Kithriarch. But he lay there for some hours; it was Innocet who found him in the night, and sounded the alarm. When he woke, much weakened, he would not speak of what had occurred, not to any living soul.

And neither would Glospin, who’d lingered in the other room.

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