At just twenty-one Marcel Alvarez changed the world and our discipline with an invention that was astounding at the time and is even more astounding all these years later.
So, where do we begin in discussing a man such as Marcel Alvarez? Where do we begin discussing any life for that matter? Our industry is, at times, afforded a luxury. Geography has its limits, paper has borders and we get to fit a world between those on the map. No such luxuries are afforded me here today, outside the fact that my microphone will be cut off if I run on for longer than my allotted forty-five minutes. Though anyone who caught Mike Riley’s opening address will know that this can feel like a lot more, or a lot less than that.... So I suppose I do have a border after all, a limit to what can be said about this great man’s life. An impossible task? Impossible to be as accurate as the man himself strove to be, but I can at least attempt to peak your interest in this period of our industries history, the period between 1785 and 1825, and perhaps inspire you to research and join in the debate yourself.

I will try to tell you enough about the great man, and why I find his contribution so much more important than his father’s, who many people presenting at this symposium would no doubt favour: the traditionally perfect and gifted cartographer. There’s plenty of time in the week to hear their thoughts, but for now we only have my own.

But first, a question: what is cartography? Is it the pretty inks of days gone by, rotting in their pots? Or is it an attempt to capture places in the moment, so that they might be better understood and navigated by our fellow men. Keep this in mind as I continue to talk about Marcel, because for me the cartographer is successful if for one moment the world makes sense to those looking at a scaled down version of it. And in this sense, we need no other papers at the symposium [laughter], the question is already answered as to why Marcel is more deserving of an hour of us old men’s time, a place on the map of our own industry’s history.

My wife and I recently returned from the latest of the many trips we have taken to the little sepia-green island that housed — and still does — the Alvarez family line. The little island of Valtari. I was there researching my book, which is due out in August¹ and my wife, Alissa, was there studying the local folklore. It was a strange feeling for us both; to be standing along the beaches that

¹ Michael asked me to stress that this book is now available for purchase from any retailer on line.
represented the illusive border of the map all those years ago; to be actually standing in the church and doing our own rubbings against the wall... It was remarkable, always is. The island is really every bit as beautiful a described by Jacques and Marcel in the various scraps of journals that have been maintained by the Alvarez family trust, and I must say, before we go on, a never-ending thank you for their continued patience with our nagging questions, and wishes to see the suits and the goggles and all those sketches and schematics of Marcel’s just one more time.

Because there’s always some detail we think we’ve missed. Always something that we know we could have fit in if we’d had a bigger map... A life in this industry is about catching monsters, it reduces us to children, running with butterfly nets after speckled bits of paper with beating — if tiny — hearts, and real, inky blood pumping through them, in the hopes that life might be extended indefinitely once the pin goes in, and the formaldehyde is poured on... but it can’t and it crumbles... and we never have enough space... “All we could do, once, was hope to capture the world as we really saw it, not as it was, because when they come across our maps in history, nothing will be recognisable, and they’ll have better tools of depiction than we ever dreamed of when they make all the maps again”... So says the man himself.

But I have talked enough about the abstract; about the theory of the life I presume to make unfold for you. One would hope that it might speak for itself, that we can silence the critics across the university who would say that Marcel Alvarez is a cheat. He is no cheat. He captured the world most perfectly after all.

He was born, we know, from a diary entry made by his mother before she left his father, on a particularly cold and dewy morning in one of the thickest of the thick, as yet untouched forests on the island of Valtari. He was born already in pursuit of a map. Marcel’s Father and Grandfather had been tasked by the Lord Mayor of Valtari to create a map of the forested side of the island that would dispel any fear from the civilian’s minds as to the presence of werewolves
or pixies, or any other fantastical nonsense that had made its way over to the island on the ships that occasionally traded with the fishing village².

On that morning, Marcel’s mother recounts, Jacques was so consumed by his attempt to draw a small tree perfectly, that he did not notice his son being born beside him. This is a testament to the famous concentration and skill of Jacques Alvarez. He wanted to draw the world exactly as he saw it. Unfortunately this took up a lot of time and led to the occasional neglect of his personal relationships. Needless to say this map, commissioned in 1785, was severely behind schedule.

Jacques was obsessed with this idea of drawing the world exactly as he saw it. He had attempted, as a teenager, to remove all the bodily functions that he felt impeded his attempts to paint. But no matter how well he trained himself to control his bowels, or to hold his eyelids open and to stop the flutter, he still couldn’t shake the feeling that what was put down on paper in front of him was not the tree, not the rock or the forest that he was looking at. It was nothing like the image in his mind, which he could feel pulsating at the tip of his forehead. We have from his journals a particularly comical example of how far he took this idea in his early years, before giving over to pursuing a mastery of traditional painting. He would sit in front of his canvas, concentrating as hard as he could on what he could see in front of him, until he could feel that the image was entirely realised in his mind, then he would, without breaking concentration, paint across his forehead in ink and press his head against the canvas. Needless to say this did not work and was a great cause of frustration to the 13 year old, and of confusion to his father Louis, of whom we know very little despite his extensive work on the first portions of the great map. Urged by Louis, Jacques settled on the more traditional method of painting and continued on, forever frustrated at how imperfect his drawn world was even though he should be considered, I will concede to Mike Riley, one of the greatest painters of the 19th century.

Perhaps the first consolation for this frustration, however, came when Marcel was only four years old. So consumed was Jacques in trying to finish the map of a small rocky outcrop that he did not notice, for a whole day, his wife

² More information on this topic is available in Alissa MacVail’s book: Valtari Intransient, Myths from the Formative years of the Island (1612-1785).
leaving him, walking out the same way she had entered with him into the forest all those years ago.

When he did realise that his wife had gone, when he felt a tug at his leg and bent over to see Marcel staring up at him, it was immaterial, or so we are told by the great man himself. He had his son to look after now, and his map to keep working on.

This was in 1801. The great map of Valtari was not completed until 1816. Jacques thought he might have an apprentice to help him speed up completion of the map, but it became evident by the time Marcel was five (the age at which Jacques and his Grandfather were already drawing perfect circles\(^3\)) that Marcel was no painter. They lived in the Lighthouse at the very southern-most tip of the island (now a museum) and would periodically return to archive sheets of the great map, before they were collected by the engraver, and to gather supplies for the next expedition. It was in these times that Jacques dedicated himself to trying to get his son up to a standard where he could work on the map with him. Now, even if Marcel was, at age six, the world’s greatest six year old painter, he was by no means going to be able to produce a piece of the map that was anywhere near his father’s ridiculous standards at that point. So the map continued to grow sluggishly, while Marcel, continued to grow in continual disappointment, to a father who was looking longer and longer without blinking at the trees in the forest.

It is at age seven that we first get a sense of Marcel’s ability as an inventor. On one of the days that his father was out in the forest with easel and ink, Marcel had gone back to the lighthouse to keep up his study, determined as he was to help his father out before the map was officially completed. He tried to draw the diagrams that his father had left out for him, but found his arm began to shake and whatever line that was supposed to be perfectly straight, invariably ended up as a wobbly swirl, as if his arm simply couldn’t keep its strength. He recalls that he wished he were made of wood. In his seven-year-old mind, where anything was possible, this idea infused itself with possibility. When Jacques

\(^3\) A trait that antiquity tells us belonged to Giotti de Bondone as well. Though as Mike Riley points out in his praise of Jacques Alvarez, Giotti could not achieve this until he was well into middle age.
came back home that night from the forest, he found his boy sitting at his desk, drawing near perfect replicas of the exercises Jacques had set for him and had never hoped to see get anywhere near completion. A long piece of wood, several actually, jointed together along his arm kept it steady in a kind of brace.

Jacques could see a raised level of acuteness in his son’s work, but he did not encourage the use of the brace. For Jacques the real skill was in the pathway of the mind, down which the image in the brain travelled, to animate the arm. His own experiments with painting his forehead revealed as much to him. Marcel practised and practised but never was allowed by his father to add any detail to the sheets of paper that were beginning to overtake the upstairs rooms of the lighthouse, those that were being readied for the engraver in the church.

It carried on like this, the boy at his desk, deforming his arm to the standards of his father, the father in the woods until late, right up until Jacques was finally able, when Marcel was fifteen, to unveil his great map to the world.

Marcel recounts the morning as follows:

“I, at my desk. My father above me, still at his own desk from when he came in last night. I have not seen him in days as the momentum of nearing completion forces him to a delirium I do not fully understand. I know they are getting near, because the engraver came to pick up another box of sheets yesterday, and with those gone I count only one more box, and father doesn’t go into the forest as much any more…”

And this, when he is much older, after his father’s unfortunate drowning:

“I could almost sense my father’s hesitation, the delay he felt necessary in putting the last drop onto the map, knowing he would be finished... The tension he felt would have been extraordinary... I remember the brace across my arm; concentrating on an apple I had taken from the kitchen, trying to draw it on the paper, but never getting it quite right... The next thing I knew father’s hands were around my belly...

’It is finished’, he said.

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4 These diaries are kept by the Alvarez Family Trust. Marcel kept meticulous diaries throughout his life, and the great wealth of material garners a fascinating insight into the man’s mind.
I turned around, but the energy had hollowed out of me. I never got a chance to help him, at least, not at that stage... I can proudly say that all I tried to do in my life was help my father..."

To the famous day in church: the day of the unveiling. We can imagine the town's impatience, as they sat there in the pews with the heavy velvet curtains around them, covering each wall of the church. Or perhaps not. The largest impatience I have had to suffer recently was the ten-minute wait for coffee in the university cafeteria (I recommend going across the road if you require caffeine). Valtari had been waiting thirty years for their map to be delivered. But we needn't guess too hard about where people were that day and the expression on their faces... We know that the Son of the Lord Mayor of Valtari, the Mayor himself dying several winters previous, sat on a throne beside the Priest, the Engraver and the great Cartographer. Marcel sat next to his father as well, on the other side.

The Sunday before, in church, the town had been told by the priest a very specific set of instructions as to what to wear to the next service. Each member of the community was allotted a specific place in the church, they were told what kind of coat to wear, what color hat, what jewellery... the list was exhaustive, but the Lord Mayor's Son stressed that anyone who didn't comply would not be able to partake in the festivities that were sure to follow the unveiling of the north and north-western parts of the island.

When the pews were settled, Jacques approached the altar and gave the following address, which is recorded in the church book for any visitors to read today:

“People of Valtari, thank you for your patience. We began a mission many years ago, my father and I, and my son and I, to mark you out a safe passage through the wilderness, well I think we have finally arrived at that today. In a moment, I can show you the greatest map the world has ever and will ever know."

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5 The actual map of Valtari in its paper form is something to behold, kept in trust by the Alvarez foundation in separate compartments, pertaining to the geographical location of each canvas. The map itself is perhaps in contention
On cue a bell struck in the town, to mark the time of eight o'clock. The curtains around the church began to fall, and with them the island — the whole island — was revealed, etched into the walls. We can see, retrospectively, why it took Jacques so long to get it all done. He continued as the last echoes of the bell died away:

“This moment here, the bell striking, is forever captured, exactly as it was...”

They ran from their seats, the crowd, to the walls, as fast as they could, while Jacques saw the image he had worked so hard to manufacture from the front of his brain where he knew it so perfect, realised and fractured in an instant. He fell back content. Even the Lord Mayor’s Son was consumed in the noise of the crowd so exited. The Engraver — who is owed a great deal of credit to this accomplishment that is largely washed over in the recent accounts of Jacques Alvarez’s singular success as a cartographer — and Jacques shook hands, a job completed; his little boy beside him, with a slightly too straight arm, and an overwhelming sense of pride banishing any thoughts of jealousy that he couldn’t be a part of his father’s and his grandfather’s legacy...

A woman who worked at the bakery shouted for the people of the town to come over to where she was, to look at what she had found. Other people were shouting, they were all shouting, but this woman had the loudest voice so they all ran to her. She had found where on the great, engraved map the church itself was, scanning desperately through the pews until she found the hat that resembled her own, in the exact shape and position she had been in moments ago when the bell struck. She raised her arms and felt the frills, the plumage cascading over her own face, all of which she could see in front of her.

“Forever”, repeated Jacques.

That’s the picture we see and all know about the church at Valtari. But I want to tell you that this is only the beginning of the real tale of the family. It is with only a few maps as to the title of greatest map ever made. The maps of Henricus Martellus and the Chinese Globe of 1623 are two of Michael’s favorites.


Made popular in the book of Mike Riley’s mentioned above.
merely the genesis for the inspiring work of Marcel, and I hope I can lay it out for you in enough detail to make sense before my microphone is turned off on me.

After the publication of the map, Valtari went into a frenzy. The map was published in the tradition of a stele-map, which existed in China as early as 1000 AD, but finds its first appearance in the West in the church of Valtari. This method was chosen for publication because it allowed for anyone to simply rub charcoal or anything across the engraved map on their own paper, and the map was endlessly repeatable. This, in part, lead to the frenzy that I will now account.

There was nothing to be afraid of anymore. There was only what the map said they would find, paths laid out for them in immaculate detail. They bolted into the forest with as much speed as they could muster, began to fornicate in fields without fear of magic trees or pixies or god; engorged in the sudden intake of mass knowledge. Jacques and the Engraver were hailed as heroes, and everyone forgot that the map was at least twenty-six years too late and would; I hate to say it, be largely out of date in sections. Jacques perfect capturing of the world is largely a fallacy. It is an unfortunate fact of his work process. But this did not matter to the people on the island, who had no other reference, and doesn’t strip away from the sheer effort that he went to.

Of course there were no monsters in the forest. The stories they were told were merely myths perpetrated by the fisherman with whom the island sometimes traded. But none of this really mattered. Prosperity multiplied, and

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8 Began in 1785, finished in 1816. Louis had initially promised the Lord Mayor that the map would have been completed by 1790. And this may have been possible, if not for Louis’ unfortunate death. His painting was less detailed than his son’s and meant he could move at a quicker pace.

9 Michael’s Wife’s book talks at length about this situation. Valtari Intransient. Accounted in the volume are 9 myths that helped scare the island into submission. His favorite is one entitled The Tubby Magic Boy, about a boy who cuts down a magic tree after it calls him fat, and a curse of enchanted wooden figurines is unleashed upon the town. This is the supposed cause of the lack of wooden structures on the island, as wooden construction was banished in the town’s early history, so that “magic trees could not rise against them again”. But this is probably more to do with the fact that the wood on Valtari is coastal and not suited to large construction, but was used in the construction of boats. On his most recent visit, Michael marveled at the metallic structures that inhabit the
for a period of months the town was what we might call, collectively, happy. Valtari flourished in a map’s world.

In the days after the un-veiling the Alvarez’s spent a lot of time visiting the family graveyard, which is quite near the lighthouse. If you go there now it is sectioned off and almost un-approachable, but back in its day it sat at the behest of the ocean winds and whoever might come across the white headstones from the bay.

These days were largely spent in solitude, a quiet respite from the revelry that was happening in the forests across the island; largely spent with their faces to the cool wind and their backs to the mainland. Marcel recounts the following from one such day:

“We at dinner out by the graves, as father wished to be close with our family. I was eating a chicken. The townspeople, in gratitude, provided us with exotic dishes which we had little knowledge of before that day. I remember my father looking out at the ocean beyond the lighthouse. I finished sucking the meat from the bones and for a reason I do not fully understand and therefore cannot recount, placed the bones upon Grandfather’s grave. The earth gave way a little, and swallowed. A little bit of dirt sprayed in the air...Like the ground was burping. I didn’t tell father.”

The town hailed them as heroes, offering them as much free wine and food as they would like. Everybody was getting rich at last from suddenly rushing into the wealth hidden from them for so long. Everyone was experiencing the joy of discovery — a joy that Jacques had never really felt, as he had only seen the world as details to be recorded, one step removed. He envied them, even more as the days remained un-filled, as he had nothing to occupy his mind. He had exhausted his ideas, and grew idle, infused with the wine of his admirers. He thought of publishing another map, one that was the world as seen through wine, but he gave up on the idea as he drifted off to sleep in the lazy sun, next to his father’s grave.

Above him the weather was turning. Clouds rolled in, pregnant with water.

island. It really does look like wood was cursed initially. Michael also wishes me to point out that this book is also available for purchase online.
How hard the rain must’ve come down. The great storm is described in
the record books of 1816 as being not like rained, but like the town was on fire,
smoke — water spray — curling off houses so viciously.

Marcel was in the lighthouse, still trying to fix his arm brace and learn
how to paint, to be like his father who, outside, woke to the storm’s beginning.
Not so much to the noise, but to the light, the texture of water, as the rain
crashed down around him and lighting turned everything on the island white. He
bolted to the lighthouse as fast as his hung-over legs would get him there, ripped
open the door and all the wet and cold entered with him, spreading the sheets
that Marcel had been working on out, across the floor.

The following conversation is recorded by Marcel. I am no actor so you’ll
have to excuse me as I try to do the voices:

“Marcel, what are you doing?”

“Father, you are soaked, how does the storm rage—”

The door slammed shut.

“No more.”

“I was just working—”

“No more. They do not need us. They have seen their world enough out
there. And we have seen their world, one of debauchery.”

“But I’m getting better.”

“Better? This, thing”, he grabbed the brace in his hands, “is nothing but a
trick.”

“Please, father.”

It came off his arm easily, Jacques raised it above his head, paused a
moment, then brought it back down across the floor where the papers were
already spread, flicking in the gusts of wind that made in cracks through the
doors and windows.

His father left and there was only Marcel on the bottom floor of the
lighthouse, fractured wood and splinters all around him10.

Marcel did not break down at the sight of his father. This was not a
moment of weakness for him as it was for Jacques. He knew that he could make
the device better, make it better able to translate the world for him and he was

10 Another testament to the flimsy wood that stocked the forests in Valtari.
determined to not let his father detract from that. He worked on late into the night, re-designing, re-working the device, sketching plans until he fell asleep at his desk.

They awoke to a knock at the door. The Lord Mayor's Son stood outside.

"Jacques! Jacques!" he called, until the grumbling, tired cartographer could make it down the spiral stairs. Marcel also awoke groggy, much like the whole town would have after that night.

"Jacques, we have something we need to show you."

"Hold on, I'll get dressed."

"Now, Jacques."

The boat lay in pieces, cheap wooden fragments like the bits of Marcel's brace broken over night. The crew of drowned men, who were local fisherman, spread out across the shore, full of water like sponges. The women, their wives, were taking it in turns by their sides, trying to wring the water from their flesh. But it was taking a long time and their wrists were getting sore, and not even the baking sun that split the storm apart was helping them dry out any faster.

Jacques calmed the pulsing in his head.

"What could have done such a thing?" Said the Lord Mayor's Son.

"I am only a cartographer ... I can only show what I have seen... I have never seen this before..."

Wood and rope was frayed all along the beach. Bits of everything, broken. Along the whole eastern coast, still washing up, the eviscerated hull of the fishing vessel.

"Teeth. It must have had large teeth."

"Larger than anything that could have existed in the forest."

"Where is the dentist?"

"I am the dentist."

"What is your professional opinion?"

The dentist leaned forward, inside what remained of what could be called the hull, more a shell, a broken egg of a boat. He immediately shot back out.

"Whatever it was, it needs to brushed or picked... There are bits of meat... the smell."
Along the beachhead, the coast wrapping around the island, the women worked while night settled inky on them.

They squeezed and squeezed, wringing until tendons snapped like roots coming out of the ground.

One wife gave up and left her bloated husband by the sea.

Another went home and returned with her mangle. This got the water out, but made her husband flat. She put her lips against his mouth and tried to blow him back to life. But she didn't have enough breath in her to fill him up.

Water released, mixed with tears along the salt-edge of the land.

The rest, they jumped on their husband's bellies. They did not give up until daybreak.

So it was that the Alvarez family was called again into commission to produce a safe map of a space for the people of Valtari. But this was a different place to the forest that Jacques and his Father would have first stepped into. Though the feeling must have largely been the same. The space before them is unknown, the precipice of a great abyss, at the edge of a forest, on the shore of a beach.

“Do you think it is possible?” Asks the Lord Mayor’s Son from the sand dunes.

“I don’t know, it’s never been done before.”

Jacques leans over the shoreline, where the waves are slowly lapping at him. He can see the sand, could almost draw the sand, but when a rave rushes over, frothy and sprite, his sight fails and it is covered again.

“Marcel, the canoe.”

Underneath the metal edge of the canoe, the surface is slick like painting with oils. There is nothing for Jacques to focus on. Everything below is shadow and approximation, keeps changing as the view wobbles below him. He asks Marcel to hand him his canvas; takes it in both arms, as strong as he can. He dips

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11 A device used to wring out clothes, eventually usurped by the washing machine.
it in the water, and the strength in his hands rips the now weakened canvas
away, to be nibbled at by the silver flashes beneath them.

Marcel looking at his father: for the first time he sees him unsure.

Jacques leans back out over the edge; he sees his murky reflection in the
water.

"Are you going to try, father?"

"Yes, of course I will try."

He readies himself, breathes in the sharp salt air and places his face
against the ocean. He puts it under, opening his eyes to a sting like the sea is
really made of acid, or mercury — the brief glimpse of the ground below is a
vague color, green, or black. There’s a dull roar, a rolling in his head. Shapes
move, opaque and indefinable. His lungs kick his head back up to the water.

"Could you see?

"No..."

Next, sees what a tube of paint will do. He squeezes it above the ocean.
Color makes contact, but doesn’t mix, sinks into the dark. It’s getting late.

"It’s useless."

"I think I can help."

"How? It is impossible."

We can imagine the inadequacy that would have been felt by the great
cartographer. Nothing of his own design was going to make the world below
them clear, and certainly not to the standard of his previous work, which the
town was accustom to, and expected of him.

For the first time in his life, he was dependent on his son, whose mind was
not limited to paint, an arm, and two eyes. It is important to the development of
the device that this need for revelation occurred to Marcel when he was still in
his youth. Jacques himself had been ready, as a younger student of the art, to
experiment in different forms, but was too set in his old ways and methods to
attempt to adapt to the ocean. Marcel was still at the age when it was possible.
He was 16 when the attack happened: an age to see the world anew.

Each element of the devices conception was rooted in the first attempts of the
Alvarez's to find a way to write underwater. But we have not a lot of time left to talk about it — I better get a move along and attempt to show you how this remarkable feat came to be.

The first thing that Marcel understood was that he’d need to open his eyes underwater and not burn. For this he enlisted help from the local glassmaker who had recently had an explosion of business from the great maps revelation of the fertile sides of the island, a booming vineyard industry being deployed on Valtari. He took with him his plans. What he came back with was a pair of goggles that were based on what he had observed of the fish eyes, which he had purchased from the local fisherman, whom had only a short supply left after the ban on all fishing.

The day that they first tried out the goggles is much better left to the description of Marcel himself as I could never do such a thing justice:

“"The first thing I noted was a flaw in the design: a way the glass was skewed so that the world looked so far away, when it was, in fact, so close. I thought I could cure this problem later. I had to breathe, but the first thing from my lungs when I broke the surface was not breath but the words ‘it’s beautiful’, which lead to great cheers from the town who were gathered to watch the spectacle on the beachhead. Some sand kicked up below me when I put my face back below the surface. Silver flashed. I took another step. The strap and suction of the glass kept the seal, and I had no trouble identifying certain marked similarities between the underwater world and the island itself. This heartened me greatly, as if, after all, it was only rock once the film of water was dissolved, then it was map-able in the same tradition that we had always worked. The problem would lie in how best to translate this to my father, as I, would be incapable of communicating such beauty in words... but the physical dimensions might be possible... Fish broke free of the sand, shaking it loose like water from a dog’s back on land. I swear I saw something... A large shape moving out to deeper water, but I was confused... I think. I spluttered next, as salt hit my lungs. I had to kick to get back to where I could stand; to where my father was rushing into the water when he saw me in trouble. The water got colder, must have come from a deeper part of the ocean. I remember shivering.”
Certainly impressive. The first person to really see what lay below the ocean. How we can be envious of Mr. Marcel Alvarez.

From here he needed a way to communicate with his father, who would begin to draw the map. He needed to be safe while underwater as well. Marcel continued to study the fish he brought into the lighthouse, which no doubt made for a horrid work space, but lead to many important discoveries which we now take for granted. They noted the scaled structure of the skin, and re-imagined amour, scale-mail from antiquity which was kept in the church, which would keep him protected, dry, and glued to the ocean floor from its weight. Unfortunately there was no way of procuring gills to the suit, but this was countered by a tube connected to the back of the helmet, which ran towards the beach. The end of it connected to the opening of a gramophone which relayed Marcel’s description to his father and the townspeople, who stayed crowded on the beach. I can't help but be reminded of my own childhood, listening to radio shows with my parents. It must have been a real event for the town. The following is a description of one such expedition:

"I took a heavy step and felt the ground shake below me. All that color, all those creatures that I had seen so beautiful when I first saw them underwater, suddenly ran from me. This made it easier to relay geographical information to my father, but left me with the distinct feeling that this was a different place to when I had first seen it. I resolved to find a way to rectify this, and communicate the beauty I had first seen properly. I will capture it as it was that first day.”

We can see, here, what is beginning to tick away inside Marcel. He would spend the hours he was not working at his table inside the lighthouse sitting on the ocean bed, letting the creatures return after he initially scared them off with his heavy steps. The embargo on all fishing after the “monster’s” attack had replenished the stocks to a near bursting point; it was so full of color and movement. When they grew used to Marcel, he tells us that they would swarm around him, all purple, or silver, his whole world in scales. He tells us that all he needed to do was reach out a hand and he would be the greatestfisherman the world had ever known.
In these years the Alvarez’s pushed on in slow pursuit of a creature that was ever allusive and could sense them coming from miles and miles away. They published a map of the surrounding shallows, published in the same method as before, put up on a stonewall near the beach so that the fisherman might consult it before heading out on an expedition. The Engraver again, is owed a debt of gratitude.

To continue the map, they had to go out to deeper water, such that no one in the world had done successfully. It would have been impossible without new technology, and it is at this time that Marcel chose to unveil the device to his father.

At the age of 20, he records it as follows:

“There is a downside to the pride that I take in my father’s work, in my father’s skill. The work we do takes so long to complete, because there is only one master cartographer on the island, and only one of me as well. I had been toying with this idea for years, ever since I was about 15 or 16, before even our great quest began. But I am pleased to record that it is near completion...

...I did not know how my father would respond. I was set to show him how his role was unnecessary; a hindrance to any attempt to actually stop the monster... With my device we are all master cartographers, and the world that I have seen so beautiful is no longer my own to conceal, but to share with the world, exactly as it was... what he always wanted. An eye that is always open, and not lost at the discretion of the body.

I took the first image yesterday. I went out by myself, to the dark parts of the ocean where we have not trod yet. As I walked further and further out, the light drained and the heavy equipment clunked around, alerting all creatures to my presence and intent. But I settled on the ocean floor. In the dark I worked to set up the device, opening the shutter and preparing the flash, the phosphorus in it’s glass container, untouched. What I saw when I pressed the trigger, and the dark world opened up... wasn’t fear. I was not afraid...

I took that image to my father, who was lazing amongst the graves of our family. He did not know what he was looking at. He asked if he had painted this. Had I painted this? I told him: this is the world as god painted it.”
The world as god painted it. This was the goal for both men, but the technology would put them in conflict. Marcel’s camera predates Nicophene’s by one year\(^\text{12}\) and shows a remarkable synchronicity between the two men and countries. This invention needed to be invented, and was called forth by two men, a year apart, a world apart... We can see the photograph here, pretty isn’t it?\(^\text{13}\) The first photograph we have in existence. You can see the diversity of life present in this time period. But of course most of it is extinct now. And, of course, there are no monsters in sight.

Marcel produced several other inventions after this which aided in his efforts, but his greatest achievement was being able to introduce the technology to the Queen of the Mainland and teach a section of the royal fleet his methods so that the expedition could be carried on without him. The world at this time was awash with inventions: light bulbs, roller coasters, linoleum... it was a time of change and Jacques Alvarez was not the only one feeling himself become inferior to this new science. Time was reversing itself, mirroring itself: the young boy sitting in church as the curtains fell around him; the old man waiting at the ocean surface while his son descended into the abyss no longer with a tube that connected his voice to his, but with his own air, manufactured for himself. And what must he have seen looking down?

The circumstances of Jacques drowning are sad and unclear, at least to us now, in the present, looking back. Marcel outlines his own interpretation of events as follows:

“Father... after seeing me, so many times descending below the ocean... His mind, it is not as it once was... It must have been confusing: all this rush of information, and knowledge... this delirium we have seen before... Something of my father was not falling into the spaces of his mind that were once so full of energy and desire... My Father must have wished to come down to me... to see how it all worked... to be of use again... But his mind escaped him and when he did come down to look it was without any guides or suits to wear, or air to breathe... when we met below the ocean there was nothing tethered to him...

\(^{12}\) Nicephene’s is completed in 1822.
\(^{13}\) Michael is looking at the screen, and at his PowerPoint presentation, displaying an image of the photo.
only the old man and his old man’s eyes open against the burn of the salt water fresh... I did not understand then... but he took me in his arms... I wish to believe this a last act of connection... but how could he have known who I was? I would have been an indistinct shape... a blur... less a son... Needless to say I raced to the surface with him in my arms but by the time we broke free there was nothing there...

I had left the device below. It was not there when we went back to claim it... I wish to find it... to see if, in the confusion and sprawl, amongst the sand kicked up as I tried to swim away as hard as I could... there might be a photo of me and my father... not as we were, or appeared... but as god painted us... Father and Son."

Jacques was buried next to his father. His epitaph reads: “sorry it took so long.”

That sentiment pretty much sums up the Alvarez line, until industrialization took hold of the attempt to map the ocean, and nothing was solely contingent on Marcel nor the island anymore. The focus of the mapping world slowly moved away from him after he accepted his prize in 1903... He retired, but continued to dive and produce maps in his old ways, looking both for the camera he lost and the monster he never found, as his new method too was slowly replaced by a technology that allowed more and more of the world to be made safe and free of monsters.

Even today, we have only mapped five percent of the ocean, with all our tools and GPS equipment. It is truly another frontier. And, like the expedition through the forest, it is taking a long, long time to map. Marcel’s quest is still unfinished, but we face the perils of the ocean without fear of whatever attacked Valtari. Maybe there are still places that these wonders can hide, far below, near the hydrothermal vents, but they are not in the crystal clear waters around the small island, which is lovely for a swim in Summer.

The debate we have at our hands, about who was the superior cartographer, father or son, is ultimately useless, subservient to the ultimate aims of our craft. It is a debate that reflects our own values outwards. Modern day cartography is not about the master sitting alone in his room: it is about technology showing us the safest way through our world. The age of technology
spurred on by Marcel’s work, might make a lot of my colleagues nostalgic for the
days when a painter could claim ownership of a section of land or society but it
does nothing for us really discovering what lies in wait in the world. Even Marcel
in his diving bell was eventually replaced by sound, bouncing off the contours of
the shape of the land below the ocean.

There is a lot that has been left out of this introduction to the Alvarez’s, so
much more detail that might help to paint a better picture — a better map — for
you. In every act of condensing something larger, an island, a life, things that we
can’t really define are lost, no matter the skill of the cartographer: shine,
impression, grandeur... all these abstract things. Even in Marcel’s work we find
discrepancies, as is recounted in this tale of the day Marcel unveiled his device to
the island. He took photographs of a young couple, newly married. After they
were developed he showed the groom the picture he had taken of his wife. He
stared at it, as if he almost didn’t recognize her. He said, “that is nothing like what
I see, nothing so lovely...”

I can’t pretend to summarize the world of these men so quickly, not even
in the book I have written on the subject can I come close, but maybe closer than
this. All I can hope, really, like the Alvarez’s, like all of us in our industry, is that
you might’ve recognized a bit of our own world in the story of the two men’s
struggle with perfection.

One final word before I leave the stage: Marcel Alvarez died in 1934, on
an expedition to deepest point of the ocean that anyone has ever attempted to go
without the aid of a submarine. The team that he was diving with consisted of
four other individuals. Radio contact was lost at the surface, 30 minutes into the
dive. And none of the bodies has ever been recovered.

The epitaph on Marcel’s empty grave, next to his father’s, next to his
grandfather’s, reads: “When there’s no place left to hide, come find me in the
belly of the monster...”

Thank you for your time, ICA. I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference,
and don’t forgot to catch my wife who will be presenting on the 18th, on this

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14 At that time.
same stage. Thank you very much for letting me speak. I am honored to be here. Enjoy the rest of your days.

[A voice from the audience called out to Michael at this point]
I’m sorry, was that a question?

[He came back onto the centre of stage, searching for the voice in the dark. It was a small child in the second row.]

“Mr... Collins... What was the monster that attacked the ship?”

“...I can assure you, my dear, that the explanation is a lot less interesting than the idea that something existed to be chased. It will become obvious, in time, as to what the monster really was, and what its sharp teeth were, but for now, enjoy the fact that it exists, as long as that isn't too frightening to you. I thank you for coming, but I really have not time left. Goodbye again, and thank you to the ICA”.

[He leaves the stage to a sporadic round of applause resounding from several members of the audience. The small crowd in attendance rejoins the mumble they halted for the speech as they filter back outside the darkened auditorium, back into the university where the sunshine is bright and they have to let their eyes adjust, to cue up for coffee in a line, and prepare themselves for the next speech to be presented that day: Mike Riley’s speech on the Greatest Cartographer Ever Known to Man, The Life of Jacques Alvarez, collected below. There is a minute more of silence before the tape ends.]