

Production Statement: "The Fraternity of the Lantern" (2005)

The "*Jack of Spades*" illustrates a man in work cloths and rubber boots, digging a hole in a tangled field by the light of a kerosene lantern. The encroaching darkness and shadows seem to feed on the light, like a cancerous growth. The impenetrable black creates a sense of claustrophobia, and the overall tone of the image is one of foreboding and secrecy.

Modern playing cards have their origin in the Tarot deck used commonly today for the purpose of fortune telling. The Tarot equivalent of the "*Jack of Spades*" conveys a message of caution in fortune telling, and is also indicative of spying and secret information, thus reinforcing the element of secrecy in the image.

The words "*Jack*" and "*Spade*" in them-selves have multiple meanings that add further significance to the title. The word "*Jack*" can mean a laborer (which would seem to reflect the manner of dress and actions of the subject). It can also mean to hunt at night with a light (which adds a subtle layer of meaning to the light in the image). Is the digger a hunter? Is he digging a hole to trap game, or is he burying a body? Notably the Jack card was more commonly referred to as the "*Knave*" card prior to the mid 1800's (interestingly the word "*Knave*" can refer to a tricky, deceitful fellow). The word "*Spade*" also has a double meaning. Other than referring to the black suit in modern playing cards, it also refers to a digging implement (thus emphasizing the use of the shovel in the image).

Though specific design elements of the court cards are rarely used in game play, a few are notable. The *Jack of Spades* and *Jack of Hearts* are drawn in profile, while the rest of the courts are shown in full face, leading to the former being called the "*One-Eyed-Jacks*". In some popular card games the One-Eyed-Jacks are considered "*wild*".

In context – The lone figure digging a hole in the dark appears to be somewhat menacing. The viewer is as much in the dark about the diggers intentions as the subject himself. The image has no closure or resolution, and like the tangled weeds about the figure, the viewer continues to draw a twisted conclusion.

In opposition to "*Jack of Spades*", the "*Page of Spectacles*" depicts an amateur astronomer perched in a snowy field, peering through a telescope into an unseen tapestry of winter stars. The lantern by his feet illuminates an antiquated astrological log balanced on his lap. However, unlike the image "*Jack of Spades*" we are not privy to what the amateur astronomer sees. This image seems to reflect what the astronomer himself might see through his telescope - The darkness breached by the light of a single star. There is a sense of tunnel vision. In this the photographer and astronomer are akin to one another.

The words "*Page*" and "*Spectacle*" have dual meanings that add further significance to their title as well. The word "*Page*" for instance can refer to the pages of a book (that in which the astronomer clutches in his lap) or it can refer to someone who holds the status of an apprentice, or student; someone in the process of learning. The word "*Spectacle*" refers to curved glasses that brings an image into focus (as in the telescope) or an event of grand display prompting curiosity (like a cosmic affair within the celestial firmament). Therefore, the "*Page of Spectacles*" is both a title for the amateur astronomer spying through the lenses of his telescope – as well as a written guide to the spectacles in the night sky, documented in the book on the astronomers lap.

The significant titles of these two images further the concept towards the series' identity. "*The Fraternity of the Lantern*" is designated as a set; a duo – fraternal twins in exceptionally different moods, yet similar situations. It is a brotherhood denoting stark similarity together with strong differences. The series portrays a sense of duality and opposition: Summer versus Winter; earth versus sky; study versus labor, et cetera. However, their physical situation is quite similar with the kerosene lantern standing as the unifying medium. The Lantern is the centerpiece of their current lives. It acts much like the sun in Earth's solar system, while we progress similar to fleeting bugs swarming a light bulb. The blazing lantern is what lights their paths. Along with the photographer, The Jack and The Page are carrying out their actions within the light, using it as their sole resource for sight and being.

Geoffrey Mattie

Technical:	Images captured on 4"x5" large format film at night. A gas-powered lantern was solely used to illuminate the fields for the shoots. Each image is a 5 second exposure. Processed film was digitally converted using a high precision drum scanner.
Shoot Locations:	Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada
Exhibitions:	<i>"The Fraternity of the Lantern"</i> (Photo Series) Gallery 44, Toronto, Canada January 2008



Jack of Spades
from "*The Fraternity of the Lantern*", 2005
Numeric Chromogenic Print, 112 cm x 140 cm



Page of Spectacles
from "*The Fraternity of the Lantern*", 2005
Numeric Chromogenic Print, 112 cm x 140 cm