



The Artist and the Thaumatrope

I retired from my career in the Royal Navy of France at a young age, having completed my duties before I was thirty, and still having much of my life ahead of me, I decided to move to the great city of Milan in Northern Italy.

I wanted a peaceful and tranquil existence away from the frivolities of modern life, hoping to enjoy the fact that my most challenging days were behind me, and that I was to reap the fruits of my labor as any good sailor that leaves in due time should.

Perhaps for the better, I had no idea what new adventure would find me there. I took up residence in the heart of the city, and befriended a most incredible and peculiar individual who became as much of a brother to me as any blood relative, perhaps even more so.

I first encountered Leonardo da Vinci in a local market, where his peculiarities began, although they were but the tip of the iceberg with this complicated man.

I watched with astonishment as he carefully examined the birds and poultry available for purchase for what seemed like hours, but could have been minutes. His incredible ability to concentrate seemed to slow down time itself, whether this was due to his brilliant mind or his dashing good looks, I'll leave that for more insightful men than myself to decide.

He proceeded to purchase the prize bird of the day, the most beautiful living specimen in the market, and without hesitation, moments after handing a bag of coins to the merchant, he opened the bird's cage and watched it soar off into the air with a look of pure joy on his face.

When I asked him why he did this, his response was elegant in its simplicity. He shrugged and said: "It cannot be undone. And what would you have me do differently?"

Leonardo and I spent countless hours discussing my time in the Navy, and he took a keen interest in the engineering of the whole endeavor, both the virtues and the limitations of naval battle.

It struck me as peculiar that this man, who mainly earned his keep by patronage from the Duke of Milan, would take such an interest in my past. He made his living building parade floats and painting cathedral murals, he was by no means a military man. His quarters were littered with architectural diagrams, astonishingly beautiful drawings beneath paint tins and coffee mugs, mathematical formulas scratched onto the walls, and models of peculiar birds crafted in wood. Later this would all make sense to me, but in the early days of our friendship, it seemed like chaos.

We were friends for nearly two decades, and over that time I took up the practice of humbly studying his drawings and making my own meager attempts at the craft. It was then that I began to understand his mastery, and I was bewildered by his ability to excel so deeply at so many things.

The strange man that freed caged birds in the marketplace had become an artist, a visionary, an engineer, a musician, somehow more than human, and I knew that being witness to his life was a greater honor than a humble sailor like me deserved.

Near the end of our time together, after almost twenty years of friendship, his demeanor changed and he withdrew almost entirely from the charismatic oddball I had cherished.

In the fall of 1497, after almost nine months of dormant friendship, I had to see him again. When I knocked on his door that evening, I was not greeted by the now-usual sound of him muttering to himself on the other side, ignoring me.

Instead the door burst open — giving me such a startle that I caught my breath — and he jerked me inside by the collar of my newest shirt, which should have perturbed me greatly, but I was far too elated to have communion with my best friend once again.

I was struck by his age. He was not worn with stress or fatigue, he was just no longer the healthy, fifty-year-old man that holed himself up so many months ago. He had visibly aged by what seemed to me closer to ten years.

He gingerly hung a necklace bearing an octagonal medallion with a circular disk inside on a hook by the door beside me, and then he turned around and dashed through his belongings, spilling things over and storming about his studio as I tried to talk to him.

When he finally realized that he was alarming me, he stopped and put a hand on my shoulder, saying, “I have been a terrible friend, my dear Trouvier. I do hope you will forgive me. All these years away from you.” He sighed and looked fondly upon me, and I truly believe that he thought it had been years since we last spoke.

He left me standing in his living area, and darted off again. I approached the beautiful pendant he’d left hanging there so carefully, startled from my trance when he shouted: “Don’t touch that pendant!” from the other room.

He returned and collected his thoughts, rubbing his forehead in his characteristic way, and said, “Feed my cat, would you? I must be off.”

He moved toward the pendant, and seeing that was his intent, I seized it before he could, and demanded answers.

My oldest friend was acting like a madman, and I was concerned. He fell to pleading that I very carefully give him the pendant back—that I had no idea what I was holding.

“Trouvier, my dearest friend, please be careful. Also, you must leave Milan before the end of the year—war is coming,” he said, and grabbed for the pendant.

I fell backwards, crashing over a table heaped with drawings and pottery. Some of those discarded scraps of his were some of my favorites, surely lost to history

forever now, and this was what sent me into a rage all my own.

In an act of pure defiance, I held the pendant at arm’s length, taunting him with it, using all my faculties to plead with him to stop this madness.

He froze, petrified, more afraid than I’d ever seen him before. The papers he’d so frantically gathered earlier slid to the floor as his arms relaxed. With tearful eyes, and a trembling voice, clearly delusional to me in my limited knowledge of the situation, he said: “Whatever you do, brother—” he swallowed hard and waved one hand pleadingly toward me, “do not allow your breath to touch that pendant, for the sake of your life.”

How can life’s most pivotal moments occur in the smallest fraction of a second?

Why do we cause so much damage when hurtful words spill from our lips?

When does the first foot fall in our longest journeys? In a single glance, we find our soulmates. By writing one word, we begin a great novel.

Our lives are full of seconds, each one more impactful than the last.

In that moment, while I stood hurt and rejected by my truest friend, concerned for his health and well-being, I forgot that before me stood the most ingenious man that would ever live.

I forgot the artist, the visionary, and the inventor.

In a moment that seemed to last an eternity, with one exhale of my earthly breath, I blew upon the medallion hanging from my hand, and unwittingly embarked on a journey from which I may never return.



The Ghost and the Machine

When the world gathered back around me, I immediately knew I was in a place far more modern than any I'd seen before. It resembled the highly urbanized streets of Paris and Milan, but only in function.

The roads were of impeccable craftsmanship, the buildings were monstrous, choking the sky, and wagons that moved seemingly of their own will carried passengers to and fro. It was almost a second too late that I realized I was standing in the midst of their traveling paths, and dived out of the way, luckily keeping myself and my belongings intact.

I almost barreled into the wall of a building, and looked at myself in the reflection of a window that touched the ground and rose just above the height of an average man. I could barely see myself, as it was night here just as it was in the desert.

I looked dreadful. I was covered in sand, and probably resembled a vagrant or a stowaway to the average passerby, of which there were many. At first I felt as though I was invisible, no one paid me a passing glance.

I examined the window further, and much to my amusement, I noticed a gripping mechanism and hinges, making it obvious that this was not a window, but a door. Upon it was inscribed in intricate letters, "Tesla Electric Company, 89 Liberty St., New York, NY 10006, Est. 1887."

Having little idea what to do next, I stood admiring the craftsmanship of the door itself for some time, until a voice broke my concentration. "You there! Sir!" the man was addressing me, and when he noticed I was startled, he quickly acted to alleviate my concerns.

"Good sir, no worries! I own that building. My name is Nikola Tesla. How can I help you?" Mr. Tesla said with a clap on my back. Then he looked at my disheveled

appearance as I adjusted my overcoat and brushed sand away from my hair, hoping he hadn't noticed.

"You look like you just came from an African safari! How interesting. You're obviously not homeless, your belongings belie your condition. I ask you again, how may I help you?"

"I.... I am just passing through, I suppose, and stopped to admire this place," I said in my best English.

"Admire? This place? Ha, ha!" He erupted in laughter to the point I thought he may very well cause himself to be faint. "Oh, did that jokester Mr. Peck put you up to this?" he gasped.

Not knowing how to explain without causing him alarm, I stated simply, "The door, it is very nicely made." This only caused him to laugh even harder, exclaiming "*the door!*", eventually sliding down against the wall of the building, in tears and fitful, almost silent laughter, clutching his stomach.

I started to elaborate, not understanding the humor, but finding his hysteria amusing myself, stifled a chuckle. I smiled broadly and started to speak, and then he waved his hand in what I understood to mean "no more" while he calmed himself down.

"Ohh, that's too good, sir. Too good. A right good actor, you are!" he said, standing and patting me on the shoulders, adjusting my coat further, then looking into my eyes. I was a bit unnerved by this and surely it showed on my face. "There's something about you, good sir, what is your name?"

"I am Captain Trouvier ... well, retired now, I suppose," I said humbly.

"I'll still call you Captain, for as long as you feel you are



A Brief and Terrifying Encounter

I landed more deftly than my last several transitions from one time to another. I found myself with both hands on the ground, on one knee. I was in a bedroom or changing room like those from my own time. There was something familiar about the place. I noticed a Fleur-de-lys on several of the room's dressings, and breathed a sigh of relief. Looking outside, I realized I was in the upper levels of Notre Dame in the loveliest city on earth, Paris.

Perhaps I was closer to home now that I had been in a long time. I noticed the look of my traveling gear and garments, matched with an unseasonable weathering of my skin and my general unkempt appearance. I was determined to make my exit as quickly as possible for fear of being accused of intruding where I didn't belong.

I made my way to the door. Soldiers marched by, and music could be heard from a great distance, mixed with the murmurs of what seemed to me hundreds of people.

I kept my head down as I walked. To my horror I found myself walking into the Apse of the great Cathedral, just behind the altar, during what appeared to be a coronation of a new King. Almost frozen, I thought first of the medallion. I thought better of it, and I calmly backed away, to avoid interrupting or being seen.

Just as I was backing away, I noticed a man in the massive crowd. I don't know what made me notice him, but I attribute it to the fact that he was dressed from head-to-toe in white formal attire with his eyes set upon me with intent. He bolted outright toward an exit at the back of the cathedral. While it appeared this man was running away from me, I knew without a doubt he was in my pursuit, and I aimed to get as far away as possible.

No sooner had I found myself in a corridor, looking behind me for the man in white, did I run square into his chest and into his capture.

"Ah, not so fast, you're about to miss something incredible." The man disregarded my panic and my resistance with an oddly pleased demeanor. I assumed that being of formidable size and strength compared to me, he found my struggles amusing. He escorted me to another door, where I was sure to meet my demise.

After dozens of stairs, we arrived at a balcony, so far up that I found it quite disorienting to look down at the coronation happening below. The man in white held me firm, and I was sure that I was to die a horrible and public death at his hand for intruding upon the coronation.

He smiled and adjusted his wardrobe as we watched. While I was in his custody, he seemed cheerful, and did not have malice in his eyes. He motioned down below, beckoning me to look down at the coronation.

I looked down, hesitant to lose sight of the man. "I mean no harm. You'll want to see this. The famous coronation of Emperor Napoleon I. Should be a good show."

As I looked down below, I was shocked to see this new ruler take the crown from the Pope and place it upon his own head, an utter act of defiance in any culture, for sure.

"That's something you don't see every day, I would say," said the man as he smiled at the gasps and awe of the multitudes below. "Now, good. We didn't miss the fun part. May I ask, what brings you to Paris on a lovely day like this, Captain Trouvier?" I had no idea how he could have known my name. I panicked and wrenched myself free. I lost my footing, and toppled over the balcony. The man in white lurched out to grab me just a moment too late.

As I fell, as luck would have it, or in this divine place, perhaps by the good graces of God, the air rushing past me caused the thaumatrope to spin. The world dimmed, and I would live to travel through time another day.

The Genius in the Jungle

In Atlantis, I was informed that time travel is rarely arbitrary, that every device is imbued with the desires of its creator and seeks in time that which would most please its maker. I take comfort in knowing that wherever I go is somewhere that would have inspired Leonardo.

My surroundings formed around me, and I found myself on a beautiful tropical beach, serene and crystal clear waters in every direction. There were creatures the likes of which I'd never seen scampering along the shore.

I walked along a small natural path through the trees. It wasn't long before I noticed I was being followed. Soft chirps collected behind me, and before long, birds the height of my knees with spindly legs and big beaks had filed behind me, matching my progress step for step. I led them in a circle, then a figure eight, and then got half of them to stand on one foot after a bit of trial and error.

I would have probably continued for a while longer, but I heard someone coming. The man that came through the clearing was young, hardly more than boy, and he was writing in his notebook. He didn't seem to notice me until he almost ran me over.

Nearly running me over, he yelped in surprise when he spotted me, and his notebook and pen went flying. I managed to retrieve his notebook quickly and he found his pen. After a tense moment of staring me down, I handed his notebook back without contest, and greeted him peacefully.

"My heavens, man, you nearly scared me to death. What are you doing here? You are not from here." He looked me over intensely, and made a note in his book. "Are you with another expedition? I have been wandering this island documenting the wildlife for weeks, I've never seen another civilized person other than those from our ship. My name is Charles." He extended his hand. I took it, and introduced myself as well.

"I started walking this way when I heard the Mirror birds.

That's what I call them, anyway. Have you ever seen such creatures? They will imitate almost anything to the best of their ability. I theorize that the best performers are the ones that find mates. The females put on the most elaborate displays, to encourage competition. It's unlike anything you've ever seen. Let me show you."

"I'm writing a book on the nature of these animals. Well, all animals. I can't even begin to document every creature I've found here. It's amazing to me how every trait, no matter how ridiculous, serves a divine purpose in the order of things." He spoke about the silly Mirror birds as if they held the key to life. But it was mesmerizing to listen to him—he was so full of fierce curiosity.

"We are all connected, after all," he murmured, pausing for a minute and then shaking his head, as if bringing himself back down to Earth from his lofty thoughts. "My ship leaves soon. I hoped to spend more time with these birds, perhaps another time. I have plenty of life documented here already." He raised his notebook with a grin.

I raised my notebook as well, and we both laughed. "I didn't catch your full name, sir. Charles ...?" I asked.

"Darwin. Charles Darwin. Farewell, Captain. May your voyages be safe," he said.

"And to you the same, sir," I said. He was already making his way back through the brush.

I watched the Mirror birds for another minute longer, very pleased to have met such a keen observer. I made a note to look him up when I returned again to Atlantis, and was astounded to see what an incredible impact this man of twenty-five years old made on biological studies. It just goes to show you, whether it be on a tropical island or a busy street in Milan, genius occurs in the most unexpected places. We must always remain vigilant and open to those experiences, they are the blessed ones.





Time Privateer Blackbeard

Since none of this is a precise or predictable science, sometimes things don't go quite as planned. Imagine the fear of appearing ten feet over the water, in the middle of the night, in the open and treacherous waters of the Atlantic, for instance. That, I assure you, is not an experience anyone wants to have.

I hadn't noticed the gunship nearby, or I would have certainly flagged them for help. I have never been an excellent swimmer, despite all my time in the French Navy, but fortunately I was spotted as I was struggling to activate the thaumatrope.

The ship was no more than a great dark weapon of piracy. The Captain reeked of singed leather and rum, his long dark hair was matted from extinguished fuses.

"Tell me this, before we toss ye back to the sea from whence ye came ... why does a bobber in the ocean like you look so equipped for foot travel? Did ye spot land that we missed and forget to tell us?" A great laughter that erupted from the crew.

Then he took notice of the thaumatrope around my neck. His eyes met mine, and he spoke in a lowered voice. "Ah, perhaps it was the sea that found you, and quite unexpectedly, I presume." He asked to speak with me privately. We retired to his private quarters.

"My name is Captain Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard." He waited for a reaction, and when I could not satisfy him with surprise or awe, he continued, slightly dejected. "I find that being a bit dramatic incites just the right amount of fear and respect in these times." He paused and considered me before continuing. "More so than ... other times I've visited." At this, I feel he got the reaction from me that he sought. "I knew it!" He hit the table with his fist out of excitement. "Ye be a traveler, too, aye. I knew it when I saw that necklace of yours. Not the first time I've seen those Latin words, you see. Look here."

He removed a satin bag from a locked chest, itself inside a larger locked chest. The key to both hung around his neck. He lifted what appeared to be a human skull from the bag, and placed it on the table before me. "Meet Nostradamus. Forgive him for not standing." He erupted in laughter. "Ah, but anyway. I acquired this at an auction in the twenty second century. It was rumoured that a single drink of water from the skull would curse the subject to instant death. Well, that wasn't entirely true. Water might kill a man, but rum ..." he raised both hands and looked around the cabin. "Sure, I was scared at first, but I found my way. These people are so easily intimidated, so simple-minded. This time proved favorable for me, so I stayed. Ah, the riches, my boy, the riches!"

I thought about the Time Keepers, the Monitors, and wondered what fate would befall this man in due time. After he'd imbibed more than a healthy share of rum, it became clear to me that I needed to get away. His ramblings turned to the fate of man, the plight of his work, and something about an annoying parrot he'd recently acquired.

Blackbeard mumbled about wanting to return to his former life. It wasn't long before the ship rocked him to sleep, maps and papers scattered beneath his fuse-matted head.

Having sufficiently dried from my dip in the ocean, I felt it prudent to continue my journey elsewhere, or meet a fate worse than salt water upon his waking. I replaced the skull of Nostradamus in the bag and then the two chests, and picked his hat off the floor.

I know not what fate befell the privateer, perhaps the Monitors would catch up to him. Maybe he would meet his final days at the end of a sword. It was clear that this was no friendly place for a man in my position, so I blew on the thaumatrope, and left that vile ship sailing toward its next destination, or more likely, its next victim.