

Upgrade Jules Verne

or an attempt at a small recapitulation of progress

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A list of characters

FOGG

PASSEPARTOUT

FIX

JOURNALIST 1

JOURNALIST 2

JOURNALIST 3

JOURNALIST 4

GUIDE

RICHARD III

HARPAGON

FANTÔMAS

CAPTAIN

JULES VERNE

DR FERGUSSON

COP 1

COP 2

PILOT'S VOICE

CO-PILOT

AUTHOR

ICARUS

ROBUR THE CONQUEROR

RADIO VOICE

Scene 1

FOGG My dear Passepartout!

PASSEPARTOUT Yessir!

FOGG We are setting off on a journey today.

PASSEPARTOUT Yessir! ... And, where to?

FOGG Around the world. We'll be back in a blink.

PASSEPARTOUT Aha, We'll be back in a blink ... around the world? Again? Now? The whole world?

FOGG Can one go around the world just half-way?

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, but we've got to pack a few items, don't you think? And I'm just making you sausages for breakfast! Precisely according to your plan: seven forty – everything will be ready.

FOGG Only pyjamas, my loyal servant, bank checks, the *Continental Guide* and my Schwarz & Braun watch. We don't need anything else. Whatever happens to be missing – we'll buy; and what we won't buy, logically, we won't need. Hurry! I made a bet with the gentlemen from the Reform Club that I would make it in 80 days. So, every extra second is precious, dear friend. And unnecessary packing costs extra minutes.

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, it was just on the radio that there is a third-degree traffic jam, plus an increased smog hazard in the West End. You know, London is infamous for its grey fog that contains molecules of toxic nitrogen.

FOGG You read a lot of useless newspapers, Passepartout. (*He puts a mouth-cover on Passepartout and himself.*) A little chemicals in the atmosphere won't hurt us, and traffic collapse won't discourage us from this great journey, because ...

PASSEPARTOUT Because?

FOGG Because we're going to the Charing Cross rail station on foot. Ah, don't I just love big city and its whims

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, you, the lord, you intend to walk the streets of London? What's more, when in a hurry?

FOGG Precisely. It is an ideal walk from our place on Savile Row. Plus, it's good for circulation. You know very well that I have mild diabetes and an onset of rheumatic

diseases. Moreover, I'm not even thirty yet. A trip around the world will either totally destroy me or save my life. As well as yours, Passepartout! You shall see! Not taking a taxi in London sometimes means prolonging your life. At least by a third.

PASSEPARTOUT Though, I'm as fit as a fiddle!

FOGG So far, so good. If you continue eating the processed food from the retail chains a bit longer, you, too, will bring an end to yourself. Are we packed yet?

PASSEPARTOUT What about those sausages? They are ready!

FOGG How long did it take?

PASSEPARTOUT Three minutes.

FOGG Three minutes of life because of rubber sausages that taste like Styrofoam?

Passepartout! Turn off the hob and let's go!

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, I don't get it: We keep using such terms as taxi, radio, retail chains and Styrofoam, even sausages. Our story was written in the nineteenth century, so all these terms are outside our historical context. ... You know, Jules Verne, when he wrote the story ...

FOGG Dear Passepartout, get used to it – the postmodern. And it's retro, too! Then, Jules Verne was French, not English. They are apt at being inconsistent, though it gives them greater creativity. While we, the English, are far too consistent. And without a pinch of creativity. After all, poor Shakespeare has been paining us for centuries with his ingenious mess! Well, let's not smart about. Genuine globetrotter acts more than he speaks. When he says something, he only does so when necessary. One might say that he is constantly silent with consistent pauses, which he fills with instructions. Do you understand, Passepartout?

PASSEPARTOUT If I don't necessarily have to answer ...

FOGG What time is it exactly?

PASSEPARTOUT Eight past nine.

FOGG I worked out that, at exactly ten, we must be at Charing Cross and on board the train to Dover. Since the station is two and half miles away from our house, we have to do forty steps of seventy centimetres a minute, that is, we have to make one thousand two hundred steps in thirty minutes, that is, forty-eight thousand centimetres, which is four hundred and eighty meters, so, it doesn't work out. Which leads me to the

conclusion that we have to triple our walking speed and we will even end up having three minutes bonus. Precisely as much as your sausages kept us, dear Passepartout! It's that simple! Remember, Passepartout, mathematics is all beauty; happiness requires nothing more. At least to us, the English. Every great work of art draws from ordinary geometry. Even Michelangelo's *David* is merely a well-calculated equation. And, if we want our lives to be just as perfect, we just have to be able to calculate everything properly.

PASSEPARTOUT Let's just say, sir, I didn't quite understand. But I assume you know what you're talking about.

FOGG See, Passepartout! This is where your French roots come at play: what you don't understand, you assume. Your great-grandfather was Norman, right? So, we can get going. We always have with us what matters most: our reason and relentless will to overcome ourselves.

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, looking out the window, the soot is covering vast areas. Visibility is nearly at a minimum. You can't even see the contours of Big Ben from your villa, which doesn't happen even during a major traffic collapse. You can hardly make such a journey in the 21st century and repeat the success of 1872. The world has changed a lot in a century.

FOGG But man remained the same. Let's say our trip will be such a small medley: we will travel by train, steamer, airplane, balloon, submarine, and, if necessary, by helicopter. I have a twenty thousand pounds wager set with the gentlemen from the Reform Club!

PASSEPARTOUT Oh, sir, you're right, this is where all rational arguments end! (*He opens the window, and a vast amount of smog pours into the room.*) Sir, where are you? I can't see you at all! Phileas, dear ... it's smog everywhere!

FOGG What did you say? Smog? Great, good servant. From now on, please call me Phileas Smogg. Would you close the window. If my calculation is right and we eventually take the underground, we shall spare twenty minutes compared to walking. May I therefore ask you for a cup of tea. We shall wait for the wind to disperse the harmful substances in the air. If it blows at 60 miles per hour, within fifteen minutes the visibility won't be ideal, though bearable. And that is all we need. Remember,

Passepartout: never being afraid to change your last-minute plans is a sign of sound mental health. Besides, if we were to walk the streets of London, our physical health might suffer greatly in the urban smoke. So, not only would I not get around the world in 80 days, but I would be lying with respirators in pulmonary ward at Wellington Hospital. That, my dear Passepartout, would be quite sad, since too much realism jeopardises adventure stories. Plus it's lethal! Would you kindly top up the tea with cold milk – we only have eighteen minutes before we leave.

Scene 2

Press, a lot of journalists, cameras, flashes and cameras. Detective Fix is explaining the situation.

JOURNALIST 1 Are you saying that the burglar who robbed the bank is out of England at the moment?

FIX It is possible, I mean probable.

JOURNALIST 2 Is this really the greatest theft in the history of the monarchy, one that can disastrously affect the exchange rate of the British pound?

FIX It is likely, even quite probable!

JOURNALIST 3 The criminal is supposed to look like Lord Phileas Fogg, who just set off on a trip around the world. Is that right?

FIX This is probably possible, I don't rule out the possibility of probability.

JOURNALIST 4 What will the British police do? Do they have a plan in place. Have they yet deployed their agents in every port across the world?

JOURNALIST 1 What about cooperating with the secret police in France? The suspect, Fogg, just arrived in Calais!

JOURNALIST 2 How are Suez, Mumbai and Hong Kong secured, along with all the supposed destinations of the fake lord who intends to go around the world with the stolen banknotes?

JOURNALIST 3 Was the tanker accident in the Gulf of Aden deliberately caused by the delay of Phileas Fogg as the *Morning Chronicle* suggests? Or are these further false conspiracies, as *The Times* claim?

JOURNALIST 4 What if the robber is actually someone other, as *The Daily Telegraph* puts it? Is it probable or even possible?

FIX It's precisely as you say – both probable and possible. Alas, for security reasons, I can't tell you anything more. Good luck, friends!

Scene 3

On the train. Detective Fix is sitting in the adjacent compartment. Though only spectators know (see) that.

PASSEPARTOUT We managed everything, sir. Breeze. Except ... silly me! I forgot to switch off the table lamp in my bedroom!

FOGG Never mind, Passepartout, that's your bill.

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, the bearded gentleman in the next compartment keeps watching us somewhat suspiciously ...

FOGG He's a detective, dear Passepartout. And the moustache is fake – attached with a resin called Mastix. Actors use it in period comedies.

PASSEPARTOUT How do you know all this?

FOGG You can recognise an English detective by the way he behaves so strikingly inconspicuously that it is instantly altogether conspicuous and clear to everyone that it is a detective pretending to be inconspicuous. These are the remnants of silent film and poor literature ...

PASSEPARTOUT What is it he actually want of us, Mr Fogg?

FOGG He thinks we are ... well, it doesn't matter. Wait for the surprise – so important in adventure novels.

PASSEPARTOUT Still, our journey began well. We don't have a single minute delay so far.

FOGG Even so, my friend, we always have to reckon with small delays. If we take them as an inevitable consequence of many factors of human inconsistency, we can equally prevent them with minor hastening of human ingenuity, which we include in our daily agen' da. (*The train comes to a sudden halt.*)

PASSEPARTOUT There seems to be an accident!

FOGG Statistically, on this section between Paris and Marseille, an average of five point twelve tenths of traffic accidents occur each year. If there are four thousandths of an accident per day, it is possible that a third of the expected possibility is occurring at this very time.

CONDUCTOR The French Railways apologise for the delay, but due to several weeks of storms and the ensuing flooding of the river Rhône, we expect a delay of about four hours.

PASSEPARTOUT Oh, my native France, how can that be?

CONDUCTOR The reasons can be various: extreme deforestation, global climate change and consequent acceleration of glaciers melting in the Alps, or the reduced soil absorption due to the chemicals contained in spraying used in regional vineyards. Who knows! I am just an ordinary local railway conductor with a average schooling in the Montpellier school of transportation.

FOGG Quite above-average mediocrity, monsieur.

CONDUCTOR Since we are right by the city of Avignon, where the theatre festival is just underway, we would like to treat you all to free tickets to a show. The running time is the same as the estimated delay along with the time required to fix the broken rails.

FOGG What is on?

CONDUCTOR Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, sir.

FOGG That's very kind of you, sir. But according to the *Cambridge Shakespeare Guide*, it takes exactly three hours and seventeen minutes to perform this fairy-tale without major cuts. Factoring in the break, the delayed start, the transfer and reception, I suppose that, with a little luck, I might make it to the port of Marseille, on a steamer to Genoa.

CONDUCTOR Sir, but how do you intend to get there?

FOGG Well, only the magic of literary fiction can help. If I recall correctly, Jules Verne in his original novel, skipped the entire journey from Dover and continued from Brindisi to Suez. Why can't I thus help myself?! Simply, the next scene in our play opens at the Italian coast. The spectator will work out that we had to somehow get there. Because the creative mind of the people in the auditorium is the fastest and most environmentally friendly transportation means in the world. You know, I'm used to using all available means to speed up time. Why wouldn't I also use methods of aesthetics and disruption of the unity of place? Does that sound logical?

CONDUCTOR Yes, that's quite interesting, sir ...

FOGG Phileas Smogg, please.

CONDUCTOR What a similarity of name! Today's Figaro ran a major story about the biggest thief in history of England, certain Phileas Fogg who robbed the Bank of England. His description seems to fit you perfectly.

FOGG Well ... it's me. Though feel free to call me Phileas Smogg – it's my alias.

CONDUCTOR Whoever finds the thief on the picture and hands him over to the police, receives a reward of 15,000 francs.

PASSEPARTOUT Decent amount! Though my master is worth at least two hundred francs more.

CONDUCTOR You know, not that I'd be a nark ... but if you really are the thief, plus I can make some money ...

PASSEPARTOUT Monsieur, does my master look like a thief?

CONDUCTOR Certainly not. If anything, then it is you to look it, my boy. Still, that's always the case: thieves have an innocent face, and pockmarked faces conceal a good heart.

FOGG Interesting, is that a local saying?

CONDUCTOR No, but every Frenchman who read the *Hunchback of Notre-Dame* and knows the story of Quasimodo harbours a certain distrust of friendly faces.

FOGG Monsieur, I would like to discuss with you the topic of "the paradigms of French Romanticism in Viktor Hugo's novels." Except that this scene ends in ten seconds.

GUIDE Really? But I summoned the cops. They should be here any minute.

FOGG I'm sorry, the author came up with this, so that the story has a rapid pace. Each scene can be a maximum five minutes long.

CONDUCTOR What? What author? And what about my reward? 15,000 francs up in smoke? Just because our police always take their time? Argh ...

FOGG Three seconds left. *Green Drama* rules are relentless.

CONDUCTOR It's incre ...

Gong.

Scene 4

FIX Hello? London? This is Detective Fix. Yes, I'm in Marseille for now. I think I'm on the trail and I'll get Phileas Fogg soon. Beg you pardon? The secret agents gave you new information? He's boarding the ship for Genoa? Incredible! I've been watching him all along on the train through a secret opening in the adjacent compartment. Hold on.

(peeks through) Indeed, no one! And I guess there's not even the compartment. Actually, I'm not even on the train! Unbelievable! The train is gone! Overall, there seems to be white void everywhere. What? The author has already deleted me from the play? Sorry? All I that is left of me is a text file stored in Trash, and all data about me will be expunged within an hour? What? The computer is just identifying me as a virus? You can't be serious! Without the famous Detective Fix, all the journey around the world will prove dull! Yes? The author will think it over? All right then. I shall be waiting.

(hangs up) Unbelievable. Today's generation is unaware of counterpoint – the fundamental rule of adventure. A negative character is the driving force of every story. Negative characters are apparently not in today! And why? Because fiction is useless when, in fact, everyone is evil and scoundrel! What a fate that awaited me! And who are you, hunchback?

RICHARD III I am Richard III.

FIX Where are you going?

RICHARD III To oblivion. There is so much cruelty in the world that mine is nothing compared to that.

FIX How about you?

HARPAGON I am Harpagon – the world’s greatest miser. Nobody wants to play me anymore: people don’t like looking at themselves.

FIX And what’s this mask?

FANTOMAS Fantômas. Nobody enjoys my conspiracies anymore.

FIX Do contemporary audiences find all these famed characters become dreary and dull? Oh, the doomsday of theatre! Crucially, I’ll lose my bonus?! No, and once again: No! The celebrated Detective Fix doesn’t give up just like that!

Scene 5

On the ship called Dante Alighieri.

CAPTAIN Dear Lord Phileas Fogg, welcome to our ship Dante Alighieri. Achoo!
(Captain continues to sneeze; he has nasty flu.) I am not sure whether you know, but your adventurous journey is reported in newspapers all across the world as the utmost attraction in history. Even major bookmakers have given you high odds. People all over Europe are betting copious amounts – either on your success, which means that you really can circumnavigate the world in 80 days, or on your failure – that is, you will be unable to complete the journey in the set time. I, too, bet two thousand pounds on your happy journey and triumphant arrival in your native London, dear Fogg.

FOGG Thank you for your trust, Mr ...

CAPTAIN *(sneezes)* Excuse me, this plague has been keeping me in its grip for months. I seem unable to free myself of it. My name is Giacomo di Fiasco.

FOGG Nice to meet you, Giacomo di Fiasco.

CAPTAIN Sir, you are so popular that they have even started making T-shirts with your portrait. Look, I just got one ...

FOGG Sorry, it’s not me, but Giuseppe Verdi!

CAPTAIN Really? They assured me in the shop that it was you! Though the face did seem familiar ...

PASSEPARTOUT Where can we put ourselves, Mr di Fiasco?

CAPTAIN Our ship Dante Alighieri comprises three parts. We call the first part Hell – that is the third class, the next is Purgatory and the last is the first class – Heaven.

Where would you like to have your cabins? A-cho-ooo!!!

FOGG In Heaven, naturally, Mr di Fiasco.

CAPTAIN As you say. We are the only ship in the world where one can pay for Heaven. Yes. Pull up the anchors! Direction Genoa!

Sailing. Fix is disguised as an artist – painter.

PASSEPARTOUT Haven't we met before?

FIX I am Leonardo – painter.

PASSEPARTOUT I am Passepartout. Jean Passepartout.

FIX Also an artist?

PASSEPARTOUT I had many professions – I was with a circus as an acrobat; I was a camelot selling newspapers on the streets of Paris; I cleaned shoes; and I even worked as a senior bank clerk.

FIX Remarkable CV!

PASSEPARTOUT Excuse me?

FIX Interesting biography. I'm just an ordinary wandering painter.

PASSEPARTOUT And what do you do?

FIX As I said, I'm a painter, so I am unlikely to be cleaning carpets.

PASSEPARTOUT Why? You can make a living by different means, though you always have to make money somehow.

FIX Probably, but I'm a real artist; look, I'm just drawing a sunset.

PASSEPARTOUT Well ... lovely, lovely! It looks like ... well ... I beg your pardon, but what do you really live on? Looking at the drawing, you must be living quite an ascetic life.

FIX Since no one understands real art today, I have to make a living by tiling bathrooms.

PASSEPARTOUT I keep wondering why I find you so inimical. Didn't we see each other on the train to Marseille?

FIX Uhm ... I don't recall. And where is it you are traveling?

PASSEPARTOUT Around the world.

FIX Quite a schlepp.

PASSEPARTOUT Well, my master, Phileas Fogg, has a wager with gentlemen from the Reform Club ...

FIX I know, I know, I know everything. And did you know that, as you set out to trot the globe, someone robbed the Bank of England on the very day?

PASSEPARTOUT What a coincidence – two extraordinary events!

FIX Well, I don't know whether it is a coincidence or two extraordinary events, or just one and the same. Your master is ...

PASSEPARTOUT Excuse me?

FIX Well, never mind. I'm off to draw some still lives – to fit a bathroom ... see you later.

Night. Captain is listening to the radio.

VOICE FROM THE RADIO Ladies and gentlemen, the Othello oil tanker just crashed off the west coast of Italy. The situation is quite grave. The oil spill is not yet under control. Fishing boats are reporting high fish mortality. In the meantime, the Italian government is debating what measures to take. Water barriers, which the army put up, are merely a temporary solution.

CAPTAIN It will significantly slow down our voyage, unless it stops it altogether! And what about my wager? A-cho-oo!

Morning.

PASSEPARTOUT Well then, we have the Italian coast at our fingertips.

FOGG As the old sailors say, my dear Passepartout, the land from the ship always seems closer than it really is. What seems to you like proximity, is in fact a vast distance. Your desire to be on dry land as soon as possible affects even your visual sensations. In the deserts, travellers have fata morganas and illusions on the sea. Though desires distort reality even in other human situations.

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, it is always so good to debate with you, even if I never quite understand you. At the same time, however, it is curious that I always have such a burning desire to chip in some wisdom.

FOGG Dear Passepartout, that's why I chose you. Because you are like extra luggage. Remember, though: every burden that comes along in life draws human ingenuity, thus prolonging our sound mental life. For me, having a servant like you, means to be always on guard, which is the best way to avoid major accidents.

CAPTAIN Sir, concerning our voyage on the Dante Alighieri, things are getting dire. In the morning, oil slicks appeared in the Mediterranean. They prevent us from approaching the Italian coast even by a mile. Unfortunately, the Othello oil tanker crashed off the coast and a greasy spill covers an area of several hundred square miles. We were supposed to arrive in the port of Genoa in just an hour. A-choo! I seem to be only getting worse. (*Fogg gets pensive, he takes some time.*) Do you have any idea, Mister Fogg?

FOGG I'm just wondering whether Jules Verne wrote *Five Weeks in a Balloon* before or after my story.

CAPTAIN And how is that to help us right now?

FOGG I do see right, indeed! (*An airship is flying over their ship.*) Now I remember: *Five Weeks in a Balloon* is actually the master's first novel. So, Doctor Fergusson and his party have long been exploring the African continent. Perhaps they're just returning to England. Hello! We are here. Lower the ropes. (*Fogg and his crew ascend the ropes to the balloon.*)

DR FERGUSSON Mister Fogg?

FOGG Mister Fergusson? I thought you were home a long time ago and you no longer explore the African continent from a balloon.

DR FERGUSSON Not quite so. We have been on the journey since 1864, when the novel was first published. Since then, whenever someone reads our story, we come to life. So we're actually on an expedition around the clock.

FOGG Would you give us a brief lift?

DR FERGUSSON Of course, Mr Phileas Fogg. After all, like our expedition, yours also serves scientific interests. Simply, certain matters need to be tested in practice, because scientific results can never be merely calculated on paper in specialist libraries. That is why Jules Verne, our inventor, transcribed the achievements of science into compelling stories.

FOGG What a splendid coincidence, Dr Fergusson, that you flew over just as our voyage was definitely halted by an oil spill.

CAPTAIN I'm so glad you helped us! At least my bet on Mr Fogg stays valid. A-choo! I'm happy when such lovely coincidences happen.

DR FERGUSSON Coincidence is a special category, mister ...

CAPTAIN Giacomo di Fiasco.

DR FERGUSSON Pleasure to meet you, Giacomo di Fiasco ... curious surname ... Do you fare well in life otherwise?

CAPTAIN Yes, in principle. I'm slightly in debt, my property went into foreclosure and my wife left me. Otherwise, though, I think I live a decent and happy life of any average Italian.

DR FERGUSSON To get back to the topic: a chance is just as important for science as it is for art. It often moves us forward much faster than if we proceeded consistently.

PASSEPARTOUT I also saw comedies in Paris theatres, when everything was eventually resolved by an incredible coincidence and everyone was happy ... Then the curtain went down, nice and neat, we all happily applauded, even though we knew it was nonsense and life never has it like that. Though now, that you saved us, dear Mr Fergusson, I must admit that I am quite happy that playwrights invent such impractical coincidences, even if it is more a sign of them having just run out of ideas than of an extraordinary talent.

DR FERGUSSON You must be the famous servant Passepartout, the man who experienced all jobs in Paris to eventually help Mr Fogg circumnavigate the world.

PASSEPARTOUT That is me indeed.

DR FERGUSSON So it really is true that you have an opinion on everything, while you actually don't understand anything.

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, you know me better than my dear good mother Jeanette.

DR FERGUSSON You're such a jolly bloke, Passepartout.

FOGG Dr Fergusson, I've been thinking about how we might remove that oil spill. I'm glad we're flying over the spill, we are safe and will have plenty of time to catch in Brindisi the steamer to Suez. On the other hand ... when I see the calamity down there, the viscid sea that seems to be suffocating in oil, with all its live creatures becoming extinct ... even though I am English, it doesn't quite leave me indifferent.

DR FERGUSSON You're right, Mister Fogg, human solidarity is one of the greatest virtues that still makes this world spin on its axis ... Well then, how to prevent this enormous catastrophe? We are really helpless. Scientists may need centuries to solve such a recurring problem. I recently read in *New Science Technology* that there are some specific bacteria that are able to quickly neutralise and even directly absorb oil slicks. But where to get them now ...

CAPTAIN A-choo! Dr Fergusson, this ailment has been plaguing me for months, and I think I'm a carrier of the most aggressive bacteria under the sun.

DR FERGUSSON Fascinating! You are the first sneezing person who does not upset me, even though you keep sneezing at my neck. Well then! Why not an experiment – it won't cost us a thing! This is the motto of many geniuses of physics and chemistry, from Antoine Lavoisier, through Madame Curie, to Alexander Fleming. By the way, his discovery of penicillin might help you, but kindly stick to being ill a little more. We will lower our balloon to the sea level, then you sneeze; we move on to the next spot, you sneeze again. We shall see! Perhaps you really are a carrier of the kind of bacteria we need. Given the number of mutations in all bacteria, the chance is one in three trillion. Though, as I said, trial and error – the first step to success.

The balloon flies to the sea, the Captain sneezes, the cries of success "Hooray, it works!", "Hooray, it's a miracle, the oil slick is disappearing completely!", "Those

*bacteria are wonderful!", "Long live the virus snoticus acidophilus!" and so on.
Meanwhile, an unhappy character enters the stage – his name is Jules Verne.*

JULES VERNE Esteemed spectators, dear guests, honoured audience! My name is Jules Verne. If you find the course of the performance strange, incoherent, without a line and overall boring, then allow me to explain why: It is simply because I did not write this text. But since I've been dead for over a hundred years and, unfortunately, the copyrights for my novels have expired, playwrights – largely those endowed with no talent – keep borrowing various fragments from my novels. They keep on fragmenting and crystallising and deriving and distilling the material ... to the point it's not pretty at all. I happen to know the author who wrote the play you are now watching. I must say that I am downright disappointed that he ever embarked on any writing at all. As I have learned, after graduating from high school, he was offered a place at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, but he did not take it. That is quite a pity for him, but especially an enormous pity for art as such! Well, what else to say. During my lifetime, I conceived many obituaries, as many of my friends passed away before me. Yet I have not yet seen an obituary in memory of a living person who, however, is utterly dead and lifeless as a playwright. Honour his memory! Don't let me disturb you anymore. I myself am curious how this story unfolds, as its basic rule is to have no rules. Oh well, like the world, like the authors. Esteemed audience, guests, spectators, dear grieving family, once again – sincere condolences. Nonetheless, since they already made a costume for me for this performance, it would be a pity, as the director said, for me not to appear a few more times and not to offer some apt and intelligent remark. It is also a matter of subtly rebuilding the stage during my lines. Which, in the case of this theatre, means that they add two more chairs on stage, because the drama company that produces this production is about to be broke. Perhaps that's why they approached the aforementioned author, who, being thus honoured, generously donated his opus to them for free. Well, it would be hard for him to sell his play anywhere, and they would hardly be able to buy one: quite an ideal artistic symbiosis!

Scene 6

A little longer in the balloon ...

DR FERGUSSON Well, we are already over the Italian territory – over the country that gave birth to the Renaissance.

PASSEPARTOUT The country that produces the best parmigiano ...

CAPTAIN The country I was born in ...

FOGG A country we have to cross quickly to catch in Brindisi the steamer Garibaldi. Looking at today's date, we are three days behind the schedule, so we don't have time to see too many sights.

DR FERGUSSON I would like to take you all the way to Brindisi, Mr Fogg, but we have just been told that a 12-year-old Tom from Dublin has opened the novel *Five Weeks in a Balloon* in his room, so we have to go back to Zanzibar to fly again in the hot air balloon over the African land. So many times since the publication of our novel! And I always feel the same excitement about whether we manage to do it again.

FOGG Thank you for your help, Mr Fergusson, we shall descend on the ropes, so you don't have to delay yourselves with landing. Thank you for everything.

DR FERGUSSON It is me to thank you. After all, as it is written in many of our master Verne's novels – *transire benefaciendo* – to go and do good. I guess we all succeeded in that a little.

CAPTAIN A-choo. Sir, did you say the penicillin might help me?

DR FERGUSSON Definitely. If you don't manage to get it, try garlic. If you don't even manage to buy garlic anywhere, slivovitz will do just as well. For example, they make excellent slivovitz in Bošáca,¹ but that is a territory far north from the context of our novel.

CAPTAIN Thank you, Dr Fergusson. Farewell.

¹ Transl note: The village of Bošáca in Slovakia produces what is deemed in Slovakia to be the finest plum brandy, slivovitz.

Fogg, Passepartout and Captain descend on the rope. Dr Fergusson removes his face mask and we discover that he is Detective Fix. The scene is accompanied by music appropriate to the situation, reminiscent of the first sound films.

FIX / DR FERGUSSON I forgot to give you greetings from detective Fix. You don't know anything about me yet, but I know everything about you. I suppose they can't hear me anymore. Somehow they are moving slowly; I better help them a little. Long live gravity – the alpha and omega of all the world's inventions. *(He cuts the rope, Fogg & Co. fall sharply to the ground. As they rush to the ground, Jules Verne appears on the forbin.)*

JULES VERNE No! Definitely not! *(music stops)* I won't let anyone make Dr Fergusson a negative character. Nowhere in my works can you find even a shadow of cheap conspiracy.

I request to perform the end of the scene again with a more plausible point!

The scene is performed again.

FOGG Thank you for your help, Mr Fergusson, we shall descend on the ropes, so you don't have to delay yourselves with landing. Thank you for everything.

DR FERGUSSON It is me to thank you. After all, as it is written in many of our master Verne's novels – *transire benefaciendo* – to go and do good. I guess we all succeeded in that a little.

CAPTAIN A-choo. Sir, did you say the penicillin might help me?

DR FERGUSSON Definitely. If you don't manage to get it, try garlic. If you don't even manage to buy garlic anywhere, slivovitz will do just as well. For example, they make excellent slivovitz in Bošáca, but that is a territory far north from the context of our novel.

DR FERGUSSON Wait! I almost forgot! I've got a bottle of slivovitz! I was given it during a trip to Madagascar by Móric Beňovský!² I totally missed it. Fine vintage, excellent aroma and delicious taste. Cheers! Can I drop it to you?

JULES VERNE (*not much more cheerful than before, though not quite so miserable*) Well, will do. Between a rock and a hard place. Oh well ... Though the playwright responds promptly to my challenge, it is clear that we won't get to see any major points. To me, the ethics of the characters has always stood above their aesthetics. Go on, keep on performing chop-chop. The sooner you drop the final curtain, the sooner many will breathe a sigh of relief.

Scene 7

In Genoa.

FOGG So, Passepartout, we are in Genoa, the city where the famous sailor Christopher Columbus was born.

CAPTAIN I'm just catching, gentlemen, omnibus to my hometown of Livorno. It was an honour to spend time with you. I shall remember you for a long time.

PASSEPARTOUT We too, Giacomo di Fiasco ... See, such a name and so much luck all of a sudden!

COP 1 Are you Giacomo di Fiasco born in Livorno?

CAPTAIN Yes. And you are Italian carabinieri? What is it you want?

AUTHOR As a captain, you have left the ship to the mercy of the waves of the Mediterranean Sea, what thus cost Dante Alighieri, Ltd. several million lire.

CAPTAIN The crew's life was in danger!

AUTHOR Well, now you are in danger of the law. Captain is to remain on the ship in all circumstances. You care coming with us, Giacomo di Fiasco. You will sit in a dark dungeon until you pay off everything to the last lira.

² Transl. Note: Móric Beňovský / Maurice Benyovsky, 1746 – 1786, Slovak adventurer, inter alia, king of Madagascar.

CAPTAIN It never occurred to me that, because of Dante Alighieri, I would experience hell in Genoa's cold prison for the rest of my life.

FOGG Excuse me, gentlemen. I am Lord Phileas Fogg of England and I must stand up for this brave gentleman. In a way, he left the ship for us, so it is us to be guilty.

COP 1 I don't understand. By law, the one who gives the orders is to blame; that is the captain, and not the one who obeys the orders and is just an ordinary member of the crew. *(He leaves as if he were going to arrange some matters off stage.)*

FOGG And if I were to logically think further, Mr carabiniere, it is not even us who are to blame, but the oil spill that blocked our path. This oil disaster was caused by wealthy oil companies; hence, they are responsible for the consequences and cost of its environmental and economic damage. Thus, the issue of liability of the captain's deed is more intricate. It is about the so-called structural evil, the roots of which must be found in natural human desire that has humanity in its grip since the Bronze Age, and that is the desire to possess ever more money.

POLICEMAN 2 If you wish to launch a political party, you need to gather three thousand signatures, Mr Fogg. But without a permission to speak in public, please stop smarting about. As for me, I didn't understand a word you said and, as for my colleague, he's been to lunch a for quite a while. So how to draw the matter to a close?

Keep calm and walk on left on the sidewalk. As for the two of us, Giacomo di Fiasco, we have never seen each other. Do part in peace. I, too, should have been at lunch a long time ago – the lunch menu is only available till one. Ci vediamo dopo e non provocare.

CAPTAIN Sir, you are not only a good man, but also a gentleman.

FOGG It's basically the same back in England, Captain.

CAPTAIN Here comes the next omnibus, though in the opposite direction. Though, here in Italy, it doesn't matter ... you always get where you need to get. Goodbye, gentlemen!

FOGG Goodbye, Giacomo di Fiasco ... *(watches him briefly)* Is that possible? The omnibus got a flat at the crossroads, the horses got a fright and the reins tore off. But we, Passepartout, better move on. Now, the captain has to help himself, given he has such an unfortunate name. Philanthropy has its limits, too.

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, but you argued so brilliantly in face of that cop! Awesome! The power of words is amazing! You'd make a great... well, how do you say it? Well, demagogue. Quite a career you would make ...

FOGG My dear Passepartout, even the art of rhetoric is sometimes a good way to avoid pointless collisions. And now it's time to get to the other side of Italy, to Brindisi. It is only 1,079 km. We have one hour and thirty-five minutes to get there, because the steamer Garibaldi leaves the port at exactly 2:35 p.m.

PASSEPARTOUT But sir, that's quite impossible!

FOGG Once you have made a bet with the gentlemen at the London Reform Club, dear Passepartout, worth twenty thousand pounds, you don't use the word impossible in everyday conversation.

PASSEPARTOUT Well then?

FOGG It calls for an idea. A traveller without ideas is like a ship without a rudder: it is stirred about in random circumstances. Well, any idea, Passepartout?

PASSEPARTOUT (*contemplates for a long while*) Well ... nothing again.

FOGG From Genoa to Brindisi it's 9 hours by car, two weeks on a bicycle, two months on foot ... Well, Passepartout?

PASSEPARTOUT Oh, sir, I am merely an ordinary stage character who just spoils things from time to time, thus the story takes a turn. Please don't expect any constructive ideas from me. I do not know ... We haven't travelled by submarine yet, we haven't swum twenty thousand leagues under the seas, or walked in the middle of the earth ... I really don't know, Mr Fogg.

FOGG It's quite simple – let's take an airplane. It takes exactly as much as we need to move across the country, that is 1 hour 35 minutes. The author just checked Google Maps.

PASSEPARTOUT How about the flight tickets?

FOGG English Lord with a gold card ...

PASSEPARTOUT I didn't say a word.

Scene 8

On the plane. Lots of passengers. Detective Fix, of course.

VOICE PILOT (*report*) This is your captain speaking, Alexandro Marcellini. Fasten your seat belts, as we are entering some storm clouds that can cause turbulence. We will have to delay the landing. Thank you for understanding.

In a while.

VOICE PILOT (*report*) This is Alexandro Marcellini. I will also ask Passenger Passepartout to respect my announcements.

PASSEPARTOUT Oh, I'm sorry. Just a sec. (*buckles up, speaking to himself*) Do they have CCTVs everywhere? One doesn't have any privacy even on a plane.

FOGG (*calmly reading his newspaper, mighty storm outside*) We seem to be heading towards strong hail and violent electric shocks. At this altitude, such powerful lightning can even tear off an aircraft wing.

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, I have such a strong feeling, well, how to put it ... can you pray?

FOGG I prayed before the journey, dear Passepartout, I act during the journey.

(*Lightning*)

PASSEPARTOUT Aren't you afraid of death?

FOGG Manchester lost to Chelsea again. (*Indignantly*) They're bound to slip out of the chart! (*Even stronger lightning*)

PASSEPARTOUT Sir!

VOICE PILOT (*announcement*) This is Alexandro Marcellini. Unfortunately, we will have to land directly in the Suez Canal.

FOGG "Texas specialty in fourteen letters." C - h - i - l - l - i - c - o - n - c - a - r - n - e. Splendid. It fits.

PASSEPARTOUT (*strong thunder again*) Sir, shortly we may totally die.

FOGG Passepartout, totally? Can one die partially? You used incorrect adverb. It is vital that you use proper English even in crisis situations.

VOICE PILOT (*announcement*) Ladies and gentlemen, the situation has become more complicated.

FOGG Well ... I probably won't have time to complete the crossword puzzle.

VOICE PILOT (*announcement*) We will not be able to land in the Suez Canal because our wing flaps have frozen and we might thus jeopardise your lives. We will be forced to use the last option – the emergency exit and a parachute. Herewith I order the entire crew to respect the instructions of the co-pilot who will conduct the entire operation.

CO-PILOT (*demonstrates the procedure*) It's very simple. You put on the parachute like a bag, only you secure it here and here. If everything is in order, you jump, count to ten and pull this string. I won't repeat myself, it's very simple. Every idiot will understand that.

PASSEPARTOUT Excuse me, you said to count to what?

CO-PILOT I won't repeat myself, it's very simple. Every idiot will understand that.

PASSEPARTOUT Ah, I remember – seven. I'm sorry, I was just a little distracted.

Passengers are standing in queue. One of them is anxious and keeps interrupting.

FIX I won't make it. I'm afraid of heights. You won't get me down. This is illegal! I want to sign a release form!

CO-PILOT Stop causing a stir, young man. If you don't go down immediately, you will die.

FIX You want to kill me! What if my parachute doesn't open?

FOGG Only a native Londoner can have such distorted English. Perfect cockney! Are you from London, sir?

FIX All my ancestors are from London. Eliza Doolittle of *My Fair Lady* was my aunt.

FOGG And who was Sherlock Holmes to you?

FIX Sherlock Holmes? That doesn't ring bell. Actually, it does! There's a locksmith on Baker Street.

FOGG And what is your actual job?

FIX Regrettably, I can't tell disclose that to you. I am on a secret mission. And I am bound by confidentiality. State secret. Though now that I must jump just like this into

space and die, I don't care. Sir, I'm Detective Fix, and I must arrest you instantly for the robbery of the Bank of England.

FOGG (*stretches out his wrists*) Suit yourself. You have every right to do so, provided you have a good reason. I myself am not aware of anything. Unless I committed a crime when unconscious, which I immediately rule out as an option, because, when unconscious, one is unable to perform conscious motoric movements and use intellect, which, of course, is required when it comes to robbing such a highly-secured institution like the Bank of England.

FIX Don't confuse me, Mr Fogg! I might even come to believe you are innocent and would be bound to lose my bonus! (*handcuffs Fogg, puts the other hoop on his hand, as usual*)

FOGG So, we can jump.

PASSEPARTOUT Dear Mr Fogg, your dry humour and this storm – what a frightening combination!

FIX But I am ever so terrified!

FOGG I can guarantee you, Mr Fix, that according to official statistics calculated by Cambridge analysts, it is just one out of million parachutes that don't open. So don't worry.

FIX Since you say one in a million ... I'll take the risk. But what if I'm the millionth and you the millionth-first?

FOGG Then jump ahead me. Though, since you're so terrified, it can be calculated. Science has reached such a level that it has an integral equation for every life problem. For instance, $2mc$ square derivative $700 / ABC$ times seven thousandths of a nanometre. What do you think I calculated? (*Fix is confused.*) Well, if you're under such stress for another year, you'll definitely develop diabetes by the year after. Excuse me, I just need to tie my parachute properly and we can resume our conversation right away.

CO-PILOT Come on, come on ... who's next? Well, Mr Fix, have you calmed down?

FIX When's my turn?

CO-PILOT You are the seventh, sir.

FIX Seventh? Only? Then it should be no problem. (*He jumps without hesitation, pulling Fogg along.*)

PASSEPARTOUT Sir, I'm flying after you ...

CO-PILOT (*calls after them, upset*) What are you doing? You forgot to take your parachute! You will kill yourself!

Jules Verne enters.

JULES VERNE Do you really want to let Passepartout fall without a parachute?

The author appears in the portal.

AUTHOR But we will save him somehow, Master Verne. Perhaps he opens his umbrella at the last moment. Or he lands in a haystack. He might as well land straight in bed. After all, he did spend time in Paris working for a circus – he is a trained acrobat. It can always be invented somehow.

JULES VERNE Umbrella? Hay? Bed? Circus? Sorry, who are you?

AUTHOR I am the author.

JULES VERNE Dear author, playwrights do not use a sentence “It can always be invented somehow.” It is only used by taxi drivers, when they want to reassure their clients that they will arrive on time. Every bona fide author first sketches a plan for their play and then adds the details according to the precise story line. Just as a painter makes a few sketches at the beginning of his work to gradually come up with the best composition! Really, what about Mr Fogg and Detective Fix?

AUTHOR They are just falling peacefully to the ground on a parachute, and Mr Fogg is doing his crossword puzzle.

JULES VERNE What was the school that offered you the place after you graduated from high school?

AUTHOR Electrical engineering.

JULES VERNE Ah, right. Pity you didn't complete those studies. You could have fared better. And how about our characters on the parachutes: how will they end up?

AUTHOR I don't know yet. Something will come to mind.

JULES VERNE “Something will come to mind.” The pearls of wisdom! Fingers crossed, Master Author. *(leaving, deep in thought)* Though, you admittedly have no system, you do have courage. Who knows what comes out of this hotchpotch of motifs. I suspect some new delicacy. You know, I’m French and it is through food that I come up with best of metaphors ...

Scene 9

Brief conversation between the flying Fogg and Fix during the fall. Naturally, Mr Phileas Fogg uses the time to keep doing his crossword puzzle.

FOGG Swindler in five letters.

FIX Charlatan.

FOGG Mr Fix, five!

FIX Ah, right, five. Then – fraud.

FOGG No. The last letter must be “c”.

FIX Right, how about crook.

FOGG Right ... You see, it’s great to do the crosswords in tandem. Suspicion in eight.

FIX Paranoia. It is my working diagnosis.

FOGG Fantastic! Fits the column. You are great at crosswords. Though, given you’re a detective, I am not at all surprised by your gift at cracking empty trails. Halfwit in five.

FIX Fool, obviously!

FOGG *(doesn’t want to offend him, so he explains carefully)* Fool seems to ... contain few letters.

FIX I don’t like it anymore, Mr Fogg! Are we going to solve anything other than your crosswords during the flight? I am all too aware that you are just trying to distract me, so that I cannot verify the veracity of my suspicion.

FOGG Mr Fix, we have eight hundred meters to go and, since we are in free fall, every three hundred meters we merely solve a single word. So we have at most three more words to work out. I give you my word of a gentleman that I only want to complete the crosswords and nothing else.

ICARUS Excuse me, is this the right direction to Ithaca?

FOGG Yes. Fly northeast, then slightly southwest and you're there.

ICARUS Thank you.

FOGG You better hurry, as it seems to me that the wax on your wings is about to melt.

(Icarus continues to fly resolutely.)

FIX Who was that?

FOGG The mythical Icarus. The first person to try to fly.

FIX Though he's falling to the ground!

FOGG We're all falling, Mr Fix. And our inventions will only slow us briefly in our endless fall.

AUTHOR *(flying a special prehistoric plane)* Sorry, but I didn't write this sentence at all. *(flies off)*

JULES VERNE *(flying on an airship)* Perhaps that's why it is the first meaningful sentence in the entire play. *(flies off)*

FOGG So, just one more metre to go. And hops! On the land at last.

PASSEPARTOUT *(digs himself out from a heap of plastic)* I wouldn't be so sure, sir.

Scene 10

Plastic island. Fogg, Passepartout, Fix and many strange creatures. Basically, this is the last scene, and it is on this plastic island we should sail around the world.

ROBUR THE CONQUEROR Welcome to the Plastic Island. It is quite incredible, but even though you think we are stationary, we are moving actually. We are currently in the Indian Ocean and what is remarkable, not only are we constantly sailing, but we are also growing bigger. Plastic Island is my latest and finest invention.

FOGG You are ...?

ROBUR THE CONQUEROR Robur the Conqueror.

FIX So?

ROBUR THE CONQUEROR So, you all are my volunteer captives. It means that you are free to leave the island, but since it keeps expanding by a kilometre every minute, leaving is impossible. There were times when I wanted to conquer the world with a perfect mechanical invention, until I gradually realised that it would be best to invent something less conspicuous, a so-called passive weapon. After all, a few years ago, who in the world was interested in a few tonnes of plastic floating in the Pacific Ocean. Behold! My country is already bigger than half of Western Europe. Oh, we picked up decent speed. We are in the Bay of Bengal.

PASSEPARTOUT Are we past India yet? But, according to the original novel, I was to save the beautiful Aouda there. It was my ultimate heroic deed in Master Verne's novel.

ROBUR THE CONQUEROR No more time for heroic deeds. All you have to do is stay idle.

FIX For how long?

ROBUR THE CONQUEROR Forever. Ah, there are Captain Grant's children who will never find their father, and there are a group of boys who will not only spend here their two years' vacation, but also their old age. Look, what a beauty! The Philippine Sea.

FIX That speed seems somewhat illogical.

ROBUR THE CONQUEROR We are already by the western shores of South America. Basically, we are almost in place, except the outlines of our island keep swelling geometrically in all directions, across all oceans. The Plastic Island is the most stuffed body on the planet – it is fed by the entire population. Well, we're already in the Atlantic Ocean. So close to your dear home, Mr Fogg. See, you won't even need an extra day to win your famed wager. You will not arrive on time or late, because you won't arrive at all. Behold, a point without a point!

PASSEPARTOUT Mr Fogg, why are you still silent? You always have an idea up your sleeve. What now?

FOGG Sir, don't you happen to be the one who robbed the Bank of England?

ROBUR THE CONQUEROR It was my initial investment in this magnificent project.

FOGG It looks hopeless, dear Passepartout. In the 21st century, when you can cross the world a hundred times faster than when our novel was first published, the world cannot be circumnavigated in 80 days.

PASSEPARTOUT So?

FOGG We shall wait.

PASSEPARTOUT What for?

FOGG Hope ...

The End