

# The Colour of Time (by Robert Bee)

Graham Short peered at the liquid sloshing in flask held by his friend Peter Black. “Why is it green?”

You may as well as ‘why is music pink?’” Peter replied.

“Is it?”

“Well, it is to me,” Peter laughed. “Does it matter what colour it is?”

“What, music?”

“No, this,” Peter said, shaking the flask, making the contents fizz, then settle back to a dark green pool with, amazingly, no meniscus around the edge.

“Well,” Graham chewed his bottom lip. “I just thought ... that Time would be... colourless.”

Graham looked about him, taking in the sanitised whiteness of the furniture and experimental apparatus, the function and purpose of the latter being well beyond Graham’s comprehension. Thorpe, the middle-aged scientist who had led him here avoided answering his questions on them. There was a sharp smell of ozone in the air and a low sound of electrical discharges coming from nowhere that he could identify. This laboratory was in the basement of the building. Peter’s company, Temporal Investigations and Technologies, employed dozens of quantum physicists, Harvard and Cambridge trained, spread throughout the building in numerous laboratories like this one. Graham could not elicit from Peter what they were working on. “All in good time,” Peter would say with a chuckle.

But this laboratory was Peter’s own. Graham’s gaze returned to Peter, which was when it struck him that the only non-white items in the entire laboratory, apart from himself, were the green liquid and Peter’s red hair.

“Actually, it is,” Peter was saying.

Graham snapped his attention back to the conversation with his friend. He had been invited to see Peter’s latest discovery on quantum time and so far all he had seen was a sample of lime cordial. “Is what” he asked absently.

“Time is colourless,” Peter said. “I just added some green so you could see it.”

Graham stood up. “Okay Peter, you’ve had your little joke. What did you really bring me in to see?”

“Don’t you believe me?”

“Sure, you’ve got 5 c.c. of Time in that little flask. Give me a break, how could you possibly do that?”

“QED” Peter smirked.

“Question est demonstratum? You haven’t proved a thing.”

“No,” Peter said. “Quantum Electro Dynamics. How far are you up on 12th dimensional quantum mechanics?”

“Not...”

“So don’t tell me it can’t be done until you are.”

“But Time... green time... in a bottle...”

“The other one is blue,” Peter said.

Peter sat with a shock. He found himself staring at the small flask and its green contents. “The other... what?”

“My other product... a by-product of this one. It’s blue. Well, colourless also, really, I put some blue in it to tell them apart.”

Graham was almost afraid to ask, but he did. “Why is there a ‘them’?”

“Well, surely even you must know you can’t create something from nothing in quantum space without also creating its doppelganger, its ghostly opposite,” Peter chided.

Graham nodded at the green liquid. “So if that one is Time, what is the blue one?”

Peter beamed with pride. “Why, anti-time of course. What else?”

Graham took a deep breath, then exhaled slowly. “Alright, my old friend, you didn’t call me in here to discuss pink music and shades of turquoise. What is this really about?”

“You’re a productivity expert, right?” Peter said, as if he hadn’t heard Graham’s question. “Do things more efficiently, faster, tempis fugit, bigger profits.”

“Peter, what does...”

“I thought you of all people would like to see the results of our tests of green Time – I call it GT – on our lab animals.” Peter handed Graham a thick folder of test records. “Mice in mazes, dogs problem solving, monkeys building models, all before and after a dose of GT. Take an hour to read them.” He handed Graham a glass of water. “It makes for dry reading, you’ll need this.” He checked his watch. “7 o’clock, dinner time. I’ll be back in one hour.”

Graham sipped the water as he thumbed through the hundreds of pages. Amazing. Without exception, after ingesting GT every animal was able to improve their times of completing tasks, even allowing for practice gained, by better than a factor of three. How was this possible? He read on for what seemed hours, closed the folder and had just noticed that Peter wasn’t back when his friend stepped into the laboratory.

“What kept you?” Graham said.

“Nothing, I said I’d be back in an hour.”

“Sure, I’ve been at it for at least...” He trailed to a halt, having glanced at his watch. “8 o’clock? It can’t be... it’s...”

“... something in the water,” Peter said. “Sorry, old friend, but I wanted you to see for yourself.”

Allowing his professional curiosity to hold reign over his anger at being experimented on, Graham sniffed the water glass. “This makes me work faster for a burst of time?”

“Not at all. You work at your normal pace. What it does is give you more time. In my hour for dinner, you lived three hours, so you were able to do three times more in that time. Just think of the applications in productivity.” Peter watched for Graham’s reaction.

Graham sat stock still, staring at Peter. Then the horror of it hit him. “You mean, just then, while you aged one hour feeding your bloody face, I aged three hours? I just lost two hours of my life?” He bunched his fists.

“Steady on, that’s where the BT – blue Time – comes in. It will reverse the lost time so it balances out. You know, like rubato in music, you borrow some time, then pay it back later.”

Graham calmed down and watched as Thorpe shuffled back into the lab. “Sorry Peter. So I can take some BT and get my two hours back?”

“Um... I said ‘will’ ... when we get it to work.” Peter turned to Thorpe. “Barry, my friend is in a hurry to get his two hours back.” Thorpe gave a harsh chuckle. “Sure. But I think my twenty years come first.”

(C) Copyright Robert Bee 2009

---