

Acting Edition

The Time Machine

by Amiel Gladstone

Adapted from the novel by
H.G. Wells

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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The first staged production of *THE TIME MACHINE* was performed at Studio 58, Langara College, Vancouver, British Columbia, in October 2025. The performance was directed by Ming Hudson, with scenic and prop design by Ryan Cormack, costume design by CS Fergusson-Vaux, lighting design by Jamie Sweeney, and sound design by Kate De Lorme. The stage manager was Katie Schram. The cast was comprised of Aiden Currie, Alek Toledo-Cisak, Carys Watts, Chhavi Disawar, Clayton Melanson, Dylan McNulty, Ellie McCullough, Evan Andersen Sterns, Gus Setala-Gay, Hernan Alonso Adrianzén Abanto, Izel De Lara, Juno, Michelle Molina, Saidi Mader, Stella Jack-Rennie, and Tresha Thamilchelvan.

A workshop and public reading of an earlier draft was performed by the Citadel Young Company as part of the Collider Festival at the Citadel Theatre, Edmonton, in April 2022. The performance was directed by Luc Tellier. The cast was comprised of Alexander de Rouyan, Mana Middleton, Rhys O'Donnell, Mara Schoorlemmer, Julie Sucie, and Jack Valentine.

THE TIME MACHINE was originally commissioned by Concord Theatricals.

CHARACTERS

TRAVELER – An adventurous and inquisitive mind, twenties.

FILBY – An officious person with wild hair who isn't sure what they want to do with their life and if there is a world worth doing things in anyway. Traveler's assistant, who has the general air of a clipboard-holding festival coordinator.

A DOCTOR

A JOURNALIST

A POLITICIAN

AN ARTIST

A MILITARY LEADER

CASEY – A young caterer.

CATERING STAFF – A team of caterers. (As many in this ensemble may also be playing ELOIs and MORLOCKS, it would be fun to have some of their future characteristics to be present with this group too.)

ELOI – A community of teenagers in the future, super relaxed vibe, sun-drenched, pastel-coloured outfits. (Pronounced ee – loy.)

WEENA – A curious and affectionate ELOI.

MORLOCKS – A community of adults in the future who live underground most of the time and are afraid of pretty much everything. They dress darkly and don't see the sun very much. They move efficiently and machinelike.

SETTING

A room in the Traveler's place, right now.

Various places in the far future and the very far future.

The set can be more real or abstract. Projections are one solution, but feel free to embrace whatever options you have available. You could do all sorts of things with levels, as well as scale and perspective.

Possibly there is something onstage that gives us the date and time and can be magically changed as the scene changes. A magic clock and calendar could be fun.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Any gender, age, or race can play any role. Pronouns should be changed where appropriate or left as “they.” Caterer, Eloi, and Morlocks’ lines can be divided up amongst larger casts as needed. Cast size can shrink or grow according to what fits your ensemble.

Wells gives us a future that can look like a racist, classist, gendered rescue fantasy: passive Eloi, monstrous Morlocks, helpless Weena, heroic outsider.

This version reframes the future as a social and political warning: comfort without responsibility above ground, fear without trust below ground, and Weena as the one person trying to imagine another way. Weena should be played as curious, morally alert, and already dissatisfied before Traveler arrives.

The play is not asking which future species is better. It is asking what happens when a society loses the ability to care for one another, remember history, trust change, or imagine a shared future.

Stage both communities as human. Stage Weena as a thinker. Stage the drowning as a critique of indifference, not a romantic rescue. Stage the Morlocks as fearful workers and survivors, a community shaped by fear, labour, darkness, and survival; not monsters. Let the audience see that the future is not “them.” It is us.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Amy Rose Marsh and Garrett Anderson and the entire team at Concord. David Hudgins, Raes Calvert, and the whole gang at Studio 58, Langara College. Daryl Cloran and Mieko Ouchi, and the Citadel family, along with all the people who gave their talents to workshops and rehearsals and performances.

Scene One

(Lights up with a flash and sound flourish. A dining room.)

(FILBY is there. Looking around to make sure everything is all set.)

FILBY. The Traveler – that’s the easiest thing to call them – said there were certain things, things we all accept without question, that they would contradict outright. “The geometry you learned at school,” they told us, “is founded on a misconception.” Imagine! School, teachers, the ruler, the compass, the neat right angles. A misconception. As though the ground beneath our feet might be less than certain.

To the Traveler, certainty itself is nothing more than a trick of perspective. And perspective sometimes clouds what is most important in life.

(FILBY picks up a table tennis paddle and ball and bounces the ball up and down on the paddle a couple times.)

(A caterer, CASEY, comes in, interrupting FILBY’s concentration.)

Shoot! Hi there.

CASEY. Hi.

FILBY. Hi?

CASEY. I’m here for the catering?

FILBY. Oh great. Is it that time already? You’re late.

(FILBY immediately has the air of a busy person who has way too much to get done before the guests arrive.)

CASEY. I know, I know.

FILBY. Great. Through that door there to the kitchen.

CASEY. Okay.

(CASEY heads for the kitchen door.)

FILBY. Oh actually, hold on.

CASEY. Yes.

FILBY. Can you help me with this? I just need another set of hands...

CASEY. Sure.

(FILBY and CASEY carry some pieces of a table tennis table into the room.)

FILBY. Great. Just help me carry this in here.

CASEY. Is this ping pong?

FILBY. Table tennis. Yes.

CASEY. Table tennis.

FILBY. It's for tonight.

CASEY. It's a table tennis dinner?

FILBY. Yeah. Kind of. It's for a demonstration.

(FILBY's tone suggests they stop asking questions about it.)

CASEY. Okay. Got it.

FILBY. Through there.

CASEY. You bet. You're welcome.

(CASEY disappears into the kitchen.)

FILBY. Thank you. Man. (*Disapprovingly.*) Actors.

(Table tennis now all set up, FILBY looks around the room. Adjusts some flowers or something. It all looks all right.)

(FILBY goes to the kitchen door. Calls out.)

Hey, catering team? Can you all come into this room please? Hey, everybody, yeah, can you all come in here, just need to go over a few things.

(The CATERING STAFF all slowly file in, making general caterer sounds.)

Hi everybody. My name's Filby. That's Filby with an "F" and not a "P" or "H" or anything fancy. Thank you all for doing this tonight. The agency I used to hire you all said you were top-notch every single one of you, and I've had very few problems with anyone from the agency before, and I want to continue my winning streak! So. Tonight. It's a small intimate affair. Myself and six others. Just follow my lead in terms of when courses are to be brought out. We will have to play it by ear a little bit, but I'm sure we can handle it. Some of the guests tonight are of the famous variety, so I'd ask you to not show it if you recognize a celebrity here tonight. Discretion leads the day. All right? Any questions?

(One of the CATERERS has their hand up.)

Yes, a question?

A CATERER. When do we get paid?

FILBY. When do you get paid? I'm not sure. The agency handles that. Check with the agency.

(Another hand up.)

Yes, another question.

ANOTHER CATERER. What about tips?

FILBY. Tips? "Be alert!" Just kidding. No. No tips.

YET ANOTHER CATERER. What time are we done?

FILBY. What time? Are you kidding me?

(Doorbell rings.)

That's them. Talk to the agency if you have any more questions. Okay great, to your stations.

CATERERS. *(To each other, ad-lib.)* Stations?

FILBY. The kitchen. I mean, the kitchen.

*(The **CATERERS** wander off to the kitchen.)*

CATERERS. *(To each other, ad-lib.)* I think it's a military term.

*(The **CATERERS** disappear into the kitchen, except for **CASEY**, who is lingering.)*

CASEY. It's all so random anyway.

*(**FILBY** shoots **CASEY** a look as **CASEY** realizes they are the last one in the room and not really talking to anybody and they scoot into the kitchen. **FILBY** watches them go, then heads for the door.)*

FILBY. The things I do for the Traveler.

*(The doorbell rings again. **FILBY** disappears down a hallway. **CASEY** pokes their head out and looks to see if they can see who is arriving. When **FILBY**'s voice is heard, they disappear back into the kitchen.)*

*(We hear the **JOURNALIST**, the **DOCTOR**, the **MILITARY LEADER**, the **ARTIST**, and the **POLITICIAN**, all say hellos, good evenings, ad-libs, etc., from the hall.)*

(Offstage.) Let me take your coats – or, yes, just throw them in there. Good. Come on in.

(FILBY, The JOURNALIST, the DOCTOR, the MILITARY LEADER, the ARTIST, and the POLITICIAN enter.)

Right through here. This is great. Now I know I've chatted with you all on the phone, it's good you made it. I'm afraid our host, the Traveler, well, our host is a bit late. Ironically enough.

JOURNALIST. Ironically?

FILBY. It's ironic that the Traveler is late, yes. Well, it will all become apparent. In time. In the *meantime*, who would like something to drink?

(They all raise their hands and/or answer affirmatively.)

Good. Good.

POLITICIAN. But I'm not sure I should.

JOURNALIST. Wait. I'm not sure we all know each other. I mean of course I know the Mayor.

POLITICIAN. *(To the others.)* I'm the Mayor.

JOURNALIST. Mayor.

POLITICIAN. Yes, I am the Mayor.

ARTIST. I knew you looked familiar.

POLITICIAN. The Journalist and I have crossed paths.

ARTIST. *(To the JOURNALIST.)* And so you must be the Journalist?

JOURNALIST. Yes. Pleased to meet you. *(Indicating themselves.)* The Journalist.

ARTIST. Ah, a writer, excellent. I'm an artist. *(Indicating themselves.)* The Artist.

DOCTOR. Did you say artist? The Artist?

ARTIST. Yes. Yes, that's right.

FILBY. This is the Doctor, and this is the Lieutenant.

DOCTOR. Thank you for your service.

MILITARY LEADER. Thank you, Doctor.

(A series of "Nice to meet you" and "pleasure" ad-libs, etc.)

FILBY. And of course you all know me, but for anyone who has forgotten, I am the Traveler's current executive assistant, Filby. So, a drink for everyone?

POLITICIAN. But I'm not sure I should.

ARTIST. Then you absolutely should.

POLITICIAN. Oh really?

ARTIST. It's part of my new manifesto. Do anything you aren't sure about.

POLITICIAN. Your new manifesto?

ARTIST. Yes. I try to have a new manifesto every week. Don't you?

POLITICIAN. "Manifesto" seems to have some intense connotations. In my world anyway.

(FILBY rings a bell or claps their hands or something.)

(The CATERERS wander in with drinks for everyone. The drinks look like they have fancy fruits piled on the top.)

Oh wow.

(A round of "oh my goodness" and "very nice" ad-libs, etc., from the partygoers.)

*(Some of the **CATERERS** recognize the celebrities in the room, and don't do a very good job of hiding that they recognize them: "Is that the frickin' Mayor?!")*

FILBY. *(At gawking **CATERERS**.)* Discretion leads the day.
Shoo. Shoo.

*(The **CATERERS** shoo off.)*

POLITICIAN. Cheers.

DOCTOR. Cheers.

MILITARY LEADER. Cheers.

JOURNALIST. Yes, cheers.

FILBY. Cheers, everyone.

ALL. Cheers!

(They all drink.)

JOURNALIST. So. No Traveler yet?

FILBY. Not yet.

DOCTOR. Seems normal. For them.

FILBY. Yes. It is.

DOCTOR. *(Re table.)* What's all this? Is this normal?
What's this about?

FILBY. The table is part of a demo thing.

JOURNALIST. A demo thing?

FILBY. Yes, the Traveler asked me to invite you – a Military Leader, a Politician, a Journalist, a Doctor, and an Artist – to come see some new ideas.

JOURNALIST. Dinner right?

FILBY. Yes, the Traveler thought the Artist wouldn't come unless there was dinner.

ARTIST. That's not funny.

FILBY. No, it's not. But you're here.

ARTIST. True. I mean, hard to pass up a nice dinner.

MILITARY LEADER. This is true.

ARTIST. Very true.

*(The **JOURNALIST** has wandered over to the table tennis table. **FILBY** starts bouncing the ping pong ball on the paddle.)*

JOURNALIST. *(To **FILBY**.)* Do you play?

FILBY. Traveler asked me to have this set up for this evening's presentation.

MILITARY LEADER. Presentation?

FILBY. That's all I can say. It's classified Lieutenant.

MILITARY LEADER. Understood.

DOCTOR. Well, shall we play?

JOURNALIST. Sure. I mean, it's here right?

DOCTOR. So. While we wait.

POLITICIAN. Who plays ping-pong?

FILBY. Table tennis.

POLITICIAN. Oh. Is ping-pong racist?

FILBY. No.

POLITICIAN. Okay. Good. Can we just agree that tonight is off the record? I mean, we've got the press here, and –

JOURNALIST. I'm not "the press."

POLITICIAN. Well, a member of "the press" –

FILBY. Forgive me, I think "the press" is dead.

DOCTOR. Well, yes "the press" may have died a while back.

JOURNALIST. I'm a journalist. Yes. I write for a website.
Don't get me started.

POLITICIAN. A website that used to be printed by a *press*.

JOURNALIST. Anyway, this is officially all off the record,
sure. I won't write anything about the outcome of this
match.

POLITICIAN. Oh no, I'm not sure that makes me feel
better.

ARTIST. Okay wait. This may be all off the record, but if
I experience anything that is part of my experience, I
reserve the right to make art out of it.

JOURNALIST. Oh boy.

DOCTOR. Doubles?

FILBY. Oh, I don't know...

DOCTOR. You can't opt out now. We need a fourth.

ARTIST. There're six of us. How about we try triples?

FILBY. No. That's not a thing.

DOCTOR. Oh fine.

*(They arrange themselves. Two and two, **FILBY**
and the **JOURNALIST**, and the **DOCTOR** and
the **POLITICIAN**. While the **ARTIST** and the
MILITARY LEADER look on.)*

ARTIST. Shall we bet?

MILITARY LEADER. That is frowned upon.

ARTIST. I didn't mean for actual money.

MILITARY LEADER. Well, all right then. I bet on Filby and
the Journalist.

ARTIST. That leaves me with the Mayor and the Doctor.
Loser has to tell a story.

MILITARY LEADER. Understood.

(They play table tennis as best they can. Using whatever words they need to play.)

*(At one point the ball goes flying off into the audience. **FILBY** looks along where wall should be. Either the audience throws it back or not.)*

FILBY. Hunh. That's weird.

*(The **POLITICIAN**, the **DOCTOR**, and the **JOURNALIST** don't notice this moment, as they are distracted by **CATERERS** who wander in to replace the drinks with fresh ones. The new drinks have another impressive fruit array.)*

POLITICIAN. Wow, again.

JOURNALIST. *(To the **POLITICIAN**.)* Okay, so tell me –

POLITICIAN. No comment. *(To the **DOCTOR**.)* Doctor, I have this thing on my arm –

DOCTOR. No.

POLITICIAN. I was just joking!

JOURNALIST. So was I.

POLITICIAN. Listen. I don't feel safe talking about anything –

JOURNALIST. You don't feel "safe"?

POLITICIAN. Yes.

JOURNALIST. You of all people. You don't feel safe.

POLITICIAN. Everything is so divisive now. Everything is just one or the other. Opinions. Politics. It's like we are two separate species, each with our own way of communicating. Us and them.

DOCTOR. Hear, hear.

POLITICIAN. Hear, hear?

DOCTOR. I mean, I agree with you. Not that I'm in support of it.

POLITICIAN. There's no grey area anymore.

MILITARY LEADER. Don't you have a part in creating this divisiveness?

POLITICIAN. No. Well, yes. No. Yes. No.

JOURNALIST. It just seems like everything is a mess now.

FILBY. "Now"? Everything has always been a mess.

JOURNALIST. I mean, climate change, the wars...is there much hope for the future? I don't see how the next generations are going to do any better.

FILBY. Well, thanks a lot.

JOURNALIST. Well, how much hope do you have?

(FILBY makes a great shot. POLITICIAN puts down their racket.)

POLITICIAN. That's enough for me.

(The MILITARY LEADER looks at the ARTIST. They shake hands.)

MILITARY LEADER. I believe you owe us a story.

ARTIST. Fine. A bet is a bet. A story.

I had a friend, another artist friend, who sold a painting. It was after a lot of hard work on this painting, and it turned out well, and there was a bit of a bidding war, and so my friend, after years of poverty, finally had some money for a down payment on a house.

JOURNALIST. A painting made enough money for a down payment? Already I am suspicious.

ARTIST. It was outside of the city. In a rural area.

POLITICIAN. Speaking of which, I am working on some initiatives for low-income housing. I'd be happy to share that with anyone who might be interested...

(Beat.)

DOCTOR. Please go on.

ARTIST. So my friend bought this place, and in the back, near the edge of some trees, was a shed. My friend was thinking, "This could be the perfect studio, I can paint more paintings in the shed." So they set up the shed as a paint studio, lots of paints, lots of canvases, they even put a daybed in there, so you could paint and nap and paint.

As a result of this one painting selling for a lot, the Down Payment Painting as we called it, my friend starts getting more demand for their work. They are on fire. They need to start pumping out product while they can. So they get down to work, to try and fill the demand.

Before long they discover something strange. When they go into the shed. Time seems to move at different speeds. They go in for hours, paint a bunch, and when they come out, just a couple minutes have passed. They wonder who built this shed and when. And how does it work? My friend asks around town, anyone know who built the old shed at the back of the property? Rumour in town was there was an inventor who built it many years ago, a place to tinker and fix small engines, stuff like that.

My friend just keeps painting. They are producing paintings at an incredible speed, because they have the benefit of extra years in the shed, compared to the speed of time on the outside.

Now you see my friend's work everywhere. Every office building lobby by the elevators. Every doctor's office. All different sizes. So many different colours. The most prolific painter out there. I guarantee all of you have seen their work, and you don't even realize they were all painted by the same person.

(Beat.)

MILITARY LEADER. Is it true?

(The ARTIST smiles.)

ARTIST. I never lie.

(And then, poof, the TRAVELER appears in a very surprising place from somewhere. It's a surprise to everyone.)

TRAVELER. "Survival of the fittest"! Do you know what that means? No! No one does. Darwin has been misunderstood since the day he was published. Hello! The whole planet is one big system. Hi! We are messing with the balance. Good to see you! Everything repeats itself. Different cycles at different rates of repeat. I'm glad you are here. I'm glad you are all here because the natural world has already answered the question we're too afraid to ask. We only have to listen.

Filby! What time is it?

FILBY. *(Says the actual time.)*

TRAVELER. I mean, what year is it?

JOURNALIST. What *year*?

FILBY. *(Says the actual year.)*

TRAVELER. *(Says the actual year.)* Of course, of course. It's very good to see you all.

FILBY. You had me invite them all here *(says today's date and year)*. For dinner.

TRAVELER. Yes.

FILBY. You said you had something to show them. You asked me to arrange a table tennis table.

TRAVELER. YES. RIGHT. Of course. Table tennis table. What an odd phrase. I do have something to show you. Many things. I'm very very hungry. Is there food?

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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