

## **Grounded.**

By Scott Tolksdorf

He was curled in the starboard side, seawater stained his lips. A man towered over him, steel gaze locked on the tempest before them.

"Boy," he said as his weathered hand grabbed a line, "Follow the gale, and be led into the eye," He pulled sharply, the small boat lurched over the waves.

"Take the tide," he looked back at his son, the heavy rain matting his long grey hair against his face, "and sail smoothly home."

Arthur P. Mulligan left his sea-side home young, at the disobedience of his father. Eyes set upon the city. He was bright, remarkably bright. He took board at a watch repair shop, where he would work tirelessly and passionately. Years past, he forgot about the calm life by the sea, his mother's warm eyes, his father's rough hands. He graduated young, became a professor at Cambridge University during the age of wonder, when science was still young and clutched many wondrous secrets to her bosom.

He felt untethered to his peers. His ideas and aspirations, were delusions and heresy to others. The fruits of Science hung low, he just needed to get a bit higher. Attracted by the idea of temporal manipulation, Mulligan began researching methods to slow the tick of a clock. Using basic mechanics of heat and light, progress was made.

Like most things of that era, science was an art. As such, the designs of his wondrous machines took on the forms of the very concept they were manipulating; Ornate Grandfather Clocks, Mercury-filled Hourglasses, Etched Brass Fogwatches.

Simply slowing nature's pace was not enough. What of reversing the effects of time? He could not just sit by and miserly watch the final grain of sand fall, no matter how slowly. He went to work.

Others around him could not understand his drive. The way he attacked his passions. He tried to bring others with him, into his thoughts. The careful mechanics of genius and pure mathematics were lost to them. They simply smiled and offered more tea, or perhaps suggested that he should accompany a lady to a social.

Progress was lost; the fire that drove him was squelched. Failed attempt after failed attempt. Brass gears, broken glass, and blackened paper littered his laboratory. He wanted to see Time as Herself, but She would not have him. He had no grandiose plans of exploitation, personal gain, or weaponry. Simply curiosity. Why wouldn't She reveal Herself to him? He became distant. He began to focus on his work at the university. Dust grew on the watch.

After a time his eye finally caught her; Amelia. An assistant the university provided for his work. She was unremarkable. Spoke softly and had a strong step. Although she was educated, he could still not confide in her. But she held his hand when they were alone, cooked him meals when he forgot to eat,

smiled and nodded at the right times. That was enough for him.

He gazed into her eyes, becoming lost. He knew she couldn't have all of him. With each second he became more comfortable with the idea of simply boxing those parts of him which she didn't hold claim, and burying them deep. Time be Damned.

Seasons changed. The laboratory became locked; the key placed in a drawer. Arthur became subsistent, focused on the minor things of life. He was content and Amelia was content with him. He would sit on the veranda with her and watch the smoke carelessly rise from the houses around him. Each day and each hour flowed exactly as planned, without deviation. He was content.

Basking in the heat of a lazy Saturday, he sat with her in a park watching the young children play. While he admired how the mid-day sun outlined her face, it came to him. The relentless, never ceasing cogs that drove his mind finally clicked. All this time he spent confiding in the fact that She was gone, how She abandoned him, were ripped away from him. The lost hours, the comfort he had become accustomed to was wiped away in a heartbeat, all at Her command. She beckoned. He ran.

Weeks of endless tinkering. His mind lit aflame. Formulae that once wrestled with him became subdued. Oil flowed, clockwork spun, and filaments took heat. At last he held the finished watch in his hands. The power of Time, the ability to undo mistakes, to become untethered from the flow of causality, to see Her. His hands trembled softly as he flipped the watch open for the first time.