Leonardo da Vinci visits MIT Nuclear Plant during IAP'04

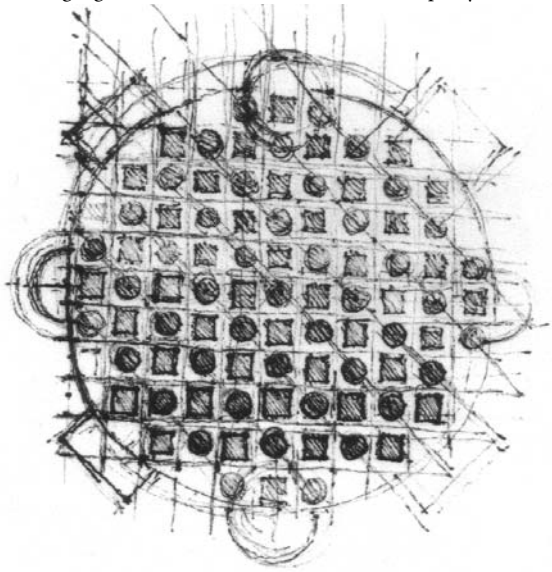
The famous Renaissance Italian engineer and artist Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) visited the MIT Nuclear Reactor facility during IAP2004. Here is a transcript of the exclusive interview granted to our reporter in front of the Greek colonnade of building NW12. Mr. da Vinci wore a black coat and a black hat, and was accompanied by an expensive looking blond lady.

Sushi News — Mr. da Vinci, this is the first time you visit a nuclear plant – before hearing the explanations given to you by the staff, what did you first think was the function of the building?

Da Vinci — We were riding this sunny morning towards the castle of Cambridge, when suddenly a thick white mist rose from nowhere and surrounded us. The horses neighed in fear and my companions drew their swords – it all became very quiet and we thought we penetrated a magical realm [*At the recollection of these moments, the blond lady, in visible anguish, molds herself onto the shape of Mr. da Vinci.*]. When the fog finally dispersed we discovered a colossal temple cut out of a single marble block that we circumambulated for seven days until a hidden gate opened all by itself. Inside we saw an egg so huge that only the bird Rukh could have laid it [*Editor's note: Mr. da Vinci is referring to a creature of the Persian mythology, common during the Middle Ages.*]. Some of us thought that they trapped God inside the egg, while others, judging by the white dress of the priests dashing around reminiscent of the Egyptian fashion during the Pharaons, speculated that the shell might be a repository for the spirits of the sages. And indeed we soon found a confessional, a chamber where ill people put their ears to a funnel, talked to the spirits, listened to their wisdom and came out healed [*MIT is conducting medical research on brain tumor treatment through boron neutron capture.*]. My innate dubitative spirit [*"Caro..." The expensive lady seems bored and she starts to rub her head on the shoulder of Mr. da Vinci, while playing with a button on his coat.*] ... was unconvinced by what seemed to be a miracle and to my great satisfaction I discovered in an underground room a machinery that like in a Sicilian puppet theater animated the spirits inside the egg [*Probably he means the control room of the nuclear plant.*].

Sushi News — We hear that the MIT Corporation would hire you as an architect and designer for the construction of the next generation reactor. Could you give us a quick overview of your plans?

Da Vinci — I will never accept this job before consulting my astrologer! [*"E la tua mamma...?" whispered the biondina. Mr. da Vinci is blushing.*] And erect the equestrian statue of the King on top of the building [*"Quel porco!" she bursts indignantly, while Mr. da Vinci covers his face with the tip of his hat.*]. Then, I will entirely cover the reactor with mirrors and strew diamond powder all over it, so that it will shine under the sun and the moon, until the furthest horizons of Pluto, the sparkling shower of earthen rainbows and hyeroglyphs of its masters' power [*Here Mr. da Vinci reveals himself to be a great poet, orbiting while at the zenith of his many talents the very hyperbolistic and metaphoric exaggerations typical of the medieval rhetoric language.*]. I will claim land from the municipality and surround



the construction with two kinds of parks: an Oriental paradise where troubadours will sing day and night for the successful graduates and, concentric to the former, an English garden full of marshes, venomous snakes and open jawed imported crocodiles, waiting for the freshmen in Byzantine mazes of thorny bureaucracy [*The boiling crescendo of his imagination seems to have tired Mr. da Vinci, who, after all, is 500 years old – he accepts a caress from the biondina.*].

Sushi News — Could you please sketch for our readers the plan of the proposed building?

[*Mr. da Vinci is drawing, then starts to elaborate.*]

Da Vinci — Here you see the ground floor of the reactor. It is all covered with marble slabs. Under each square and circle there is an uranium rod that is lowered and hauled out of sanctified water, depending on how much spirituality must be produced. Their movement can be observed through the transparent stone and resembles that of the Indian game of chess. In fact, I speculate that research into nuclear fission will in future be conducted by playing and analyzing games of chess. The round enclosures on the sides and the rectangular constructions are baroque confessionals and triumphal gates to the core. An asymmetrically situated fountain will fill the room with the sound of zen [*China was just discovered by Marco Polo and Mr. da Vinci seems to be an early adept of European proto-Buddhism.*] and the scientists will travel to their workplaces in gondolas ["*Amore mio, andiamo a Venezia – que ci faciamo qui?!*" – our reporter looks embarrassed at the lady who has managed to open several layers of buttons on Mr. da Vinci, her skillful fingers still traveling further on.]. I guess I will have to design new fashionable uniforms for the employees and hire the Swiss for the police force. You don't see it here on the plan, but for a few supplemental millions of dollars, I could paint a magnificent fresco on the inner walls of the containment building, just as I have done for the Pope in Rome.

Sushi News — A last question, Mr. da Vinci. Will you be running as a candidate for the presidency of MIT?

At this moment a Ferrari-red bizarre-looking limousine powered by steam and levitated over the ground by what looked like the wings of a Japanese origami dragon, stopped with a picturesque shriek. The half naked Mr. da Vinci was dragged inside by a dozen of well tanned Davids, creatures alike to nothing but pure Greek statues, on their way to the beaches of Ostia. In the dull light of a vanishing wintery afternoon our reporter made his way back to Central Square, while behind him the nuclear plant disappeared with a puff in the white cloud released by a passing train.

[Note — Mr. da Vinci's visit was made possible by a generous grant from the Levi-Strauss Foundation, Amazonia. The MIT Astrophysics Laboratory provided the time-traveling machinery, the Neuroscience Department reconstructed the inventor's DNA, while students from the Artificial Intelligence Course 6 synthesized his behavior as best as they could.]

The End

Sushi News *fishing through the mind*
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