

Character Descriptions

Tesla:

In his thirties, tall and slender, elegantly attired. I know that he maintained a very precise weight at least for twenty five years. It says so in his autobiography. I don't have that detail yet. But he is tailored to perfection and is afraid of germs and dirt.

The kinds of things I will mention in the character description aren't events. They don't happen once, but happen often. And so when I get to the next stage – after the two timelines, and actually narrow down events and think about character descriptions, I'm going to outline exactly what character traits I'm going to use where. For example, some scene which displays his fear of germs. Maybe at an early age because it is an important part of his character. Some scene which captures his obsessive compulsive behaviors.

Tesla had a multitude of idiosyncrasies, and I find that they just make him a more interesting character. I want to display many, if not all of them, on film. We'll like him more for it. Whenever I find a character trait, I'll put it up here.

Idiosyncrasies:

Thought of pigeons he fed as "sincere friends".

Nightmares of his brother Daniel's death.

Favored numbers divisible by three, such as with napkins, or going around a building three times.

A morbid fear of germs.

Clean freak. Even cleaned things in inappropriate times. For example, in a hotel "he began to polish the already sparkling silver and crystal, taking up and discarding one square of linen after another until a small starched mountain had risen on the serving table.

Calculated cubic contents of food and drink – soup, coffee, pieces of food – or else he couldn't enjoy the meal.

Whistled softly, according to Man Out of Time.

Could memorize whole books.

Recited poetry from Yugoslavia in any number of languages – English, French, German, or Italian. I think him doing this at some social event is the best way to show his incredible proficiency with language. This is a passing thing at a scene. Setting the scene. And he might ask his conversational partner what language to recite the poetry in. Something like that.

Had an aversion to earrings.

Counted steps in walking. Perhaps show this with a counter on screen. I'd like to see him imagine the world as full of calculations.

Preferred to dine alone because he liked to measure the cubic contents of his food.

Was totally afraid to touch other peoples' hair "except perhaps at the point of a revolver".

Could memorize a page of type "in the wink of an eye."

While working with other engineers, they wanted blueprints, but he worked in his mind. He loathed free-hand drawing.

Physical appearance:

Carried a cane from his fifties. Also a hat and gloves, but this started earlier. Probably in his thirties.

Mustache at most beginning at age 29.

Tesla "fancied himself as being the very best-dressed man on Fifth Avenue. Moreover, as he once told his secretary, he intended to remain so."

"His usual streetwear included a black Prince Albert coat and a derby hat, and these he wore in the laboratory too unless some important experiment demanded formal evening wear. His handkerchiefs were of white silk rather than linen, his neckties sober, and his collars stiff. He threw out all accessories, including gloves, after a very few wearings. Jewelry he never wore and felt strongly about as the result of phobias."

"Handsome of face."

Tended to stoop.

Handsome, polished, charming.

"A tall, slender young man with long arms and fingers, whose rather languid movements veiled extraordinary muscular power. His face was oval, broad at the temples, and strong at the lips and chin, with long eyes whose lids were seldom fully lifted, as if he were in a waking dream, seeing visions which were not revealed to the generality. He had a slow smile, as if awakening to actualities, and finding a humorous quality in them."

"He has abundant wavy brown hair, blue eyes and a fair skin..." OR: "Bushy black hair"

Let's just say: Dark brown hair.

Eye lids seldom fully open.

Tall and slender, tailored to perfection. Total clean freak.

“A weird, storklike figure on the lecture platform in his white tie and tails, he was nearly seven feet tall, for he wore thick cork soles during his dangerous demonstrations.”

“Well over six feet tall (actually he was a towering six feet six inches), with large hands and abnormally long thumbs.” Hair: “A deep and shining black, brushed sharply from over the ears to make a ridge with serrated edges. His cheekbones were high and Slavic, his eyes blue and deeply set, burning like balls of fire.”

“his head is wedge shaped. His chin is almost a point.”

“Grey-blue eyes.”

Personality:

1929: A tall skinny man of upright posture who might go about for hours in a daze of concentration, but who also had a side intensely human and ‘almost painfully sensitive with fellow-feeling for everything that lives.’ Perhaps shown with his care for sick pigeons.

A poet at heart. Loved his mountains in Yugoslavia.

“Victorian in manner and appearance.”

Unconscious of everything but his work and had no human needs.

Had ego.

Adored scientific research and electrical engineering. Nothing in the world made him happier.

Shared his fascination with electricity with audiences at his world-famous lectures.

Not really a personality thing, but I can’t think of a better category to fit this information: “Seldom did one meet a scientist or engineer, he noted, who was also a poet, a philosopher, an appreciator of fine music, a linguist, and a connoisseur of food and drink.”

Also: “When it was question of the vintage of a wine, or the condition and cooking of an ortolan, he knew that, too.” “And when he spoke, Hawthorne claimed, one could read the future in his face, seeing ‘mankind... arise a Titan, and grasp the secrets of the skies. I saw a coming time when the race would no longer be forced to labor for the means of livelihood, when the terms rich and poor would no longer mean difference of material conditions, but of spiritual capacity and ambition; a time... even, when knowledge should be derived from sources now hardly imagined.’”

“Tesla displayed occasional streaks of cruelty that seemed motivated by likes and dislikes of an almost compulsive sort. Fat people disgusted him, and he made little effort to conceal his feelings. One of his secretaries was in his opinion too fat. Once she awkwardly knocked something off a table and he fired her. She pleaded with him on plump knees to change his mind but he refused to do so. He had a favorite joke about two of his ancient aunts that centered on the fact that both were sublimely ugly.”

Yeah, the last one he even included in his autobiography. It's just a Yugoslavian thing. And over there everyone makes jokes like that. No one sees anything wrong with it. It's like telling a blonde joke. That's not really being cruel. The fat thing is different though – that's serious. But he was very careful with his weight. He had self-control. I suppose he just wanted others to have self-control. I forgive him, though. We all make mistakes."

Some more good information:

"He could be equally imperious about his subordinates' clothes. A secretary might spend half a month's earnings on a new dress, and he would criticize it, ordering her to go home and change it before delivering a message to one of his important banker friends."

"His employees seemed never to question his assumed role as an arbiter of taste and in fact were singularly loyal to him. Other qualities compensated. His assistants Kolman Czito and George Scherff, his secretaries Murial Arbus and Miss Skerritt, stayed with him through thick times and thin. When he grew old and rambling, journalists would protect him from his own utterances. The science writers Kenneth M. Swezey and O'Neill, mere teenagers when they met him, came to worship him as a god. Hugo Gernsback, the famous science editor and father of science fiction, would publish everything he could get of Tesla's, considering him at least as important as Edison.

I like this description: "Strangely captivating figure".

"Honors would be showered upon him; foreign governments would seek his services. People were to call him a wizard, a visionary, a prophet, a prodigal genius, and the greatest scientist of all time. But that was not all."

"Both he and Michael Pupin, although they came from the poorest backgrounds in Yugoslavia, had been appalled when they first confronted the vulgar clamor of America."

A gentleman.

Tesla had the personality of "distinguished sweetness, sincerity, modesty, refinement, generosity, and force...."

His presence and manner were impressive.

"Women were smitten as often as his male admirers."

Tesla "fancied himself as being the very best-dressed man on Fifth Avenue. Moreover, as he once told his secretary, he intended to remain so."

"Had a magnetic personality, but was quiet, almost shy; he was soft spoken, well educated and wore clothes well."

"He has that supply of self-love and self-confidence that usually goes with success."

“When he talks you listen. You do not know what he is saying, but it entralls you... He speaks the perfect English of a highly educated foreigner, without accent and with precision... He speaks eight languages equally well...”

“Yet everyone seemed agreed as to the power of Tesla’s personality. Franklin Chester in the *Citizen* (August 22, 1879) wrote that no one could look upon him without feeling his force.”

“Withal he manifested a courtesy and amiability which were almost feminine, and beneath all were the simplicity and integrity of a child...”

A charismatic presence.

“Tesla’s lifelong distaste for corporate involvement was twofold: most other engineers drove him mad with impatience, and he resented any form of control. If he had to deal with a corporate person, he preferred it to be the president or chairman of the board.

Smiled modestly.

A showman – liked to impress people with visual tricks. Sort of like a magician.

Speaking voice:

Some accounts say accent, some say none. I’m gonna give him a very thin accent.

“Tesla’s voice he described as being somewhat shrill, probably from psychic tension.”

“As he warmed to his act [lecture], his high-pitched, almost falsetto voice would rise in excitement. The audience, riveted by the cadenced flow of words, the play of lights and magic, would stare as in a trance.”

Spoke with cadences at lectures. Slightly high pitched.

Eloquent, educated, clear speaker. Was fluent in several languages. Calm.

A gentleman. Says things like, “I’m pleased you could come, Mr. McGovern.”

In his lecture he addressed the others, “Gentlemen.” A showman.

Mark Twain:

Certainly, one of the big names in the story. All the potential big names so far: Tesla, Edison, Twain, Morgan.

Twain wore a white suit and black string tie.

He was a funny guy. Made everyone laugh.

Tesla’s Mother Duka Mandic: Working on the farm as well as raising kids.

Tesla's Father Milutin Tesla: Sent to an Army officer's school but rebelled and became a minister. He wanted both of his sons to be ministers.

Wrote poetry in his spare times.

Recited Bible verses regularly:

"Since the Rev. Milutin Tesla wrote poetry in his spare time, the boy grew up in a household where cadence always premeated ordinary speech and where the quoting of passages from the Bible or poetry was as natural as roasing corn over charcoal in summer."

Thomas Edison:

I don't like the idea of an antagonist. I don't believe in antagonists, for the most part in reality. He's just a guy who is in opposition to the goals of Tesla.

"And in addition to everything else, he still had to uphold his famous reputation as a man of pithy sayings: 'Everybody steals in commerce and industry,' went one of his apothegms. 'I've stole na lot myself. But I know *how* to steal. They don't know *how* to steal...' *They* were Western Union, for whom he had worked while at the same time selling a competitive invention to their opposition.

There was also his contemptuous saying that he didn't need to be a mathematician because he could always hire them. Formally trained scientists might take umbrage, but at this particular stage of America's technological development there was no gainsaying that engineers and inventors probably *were* making more significant contributions to national life than their academic contemporaries. And just so no one would miss the point, Edison like to add that he could always tell the importance of one of his inventions by the number of dollars it brought and that nothing else concerned him."

Perhaps show his character like this.

I want to portray the character realistically. I don't want him to be a lame, stereotypical villain. I will learn about him – his voice, his attitude, personality, mannerisms – just get a great feel for what makes this character unique. An original character. Absolutely.

Edison was fond of propaganda. As far as I can see, a ruthless business man.

Above all else, the portrayal must be realistic.