

Ceteicopters

History does not record the name of the medieval mage who first looked at a whale, and then at a double samara (otherwise known as a 'helicopter seed'), and decided that the two should be combined, somehow. Possibly because History was laughing too hard: first at the concept, and then the exceedingly comic attempts to execute it. For some reason, Northern European mages and monarchs were obsessed at the idea of making a whale take off, hover in the air, and then touch down in a specific and precise location.

Those mages got nowhere, of course -- but they did keep the idea alive until the era of Leonardo da Vinci, which was all that was required. Leonardo, of course, was not a mage himself. Probably. He was just treated as one by every mage who ever met him, mostly because Leonardo had a habit of instinctively coming up with amazing ways to use magical energy effectively. During his lifetime the state of the art of magical engineering accelerated at a pace that will not be seen again until the Edison era starts up in a few years... but I digress.

At any rate, Leonardo was as captivated by the idea of a hovering whale as anybody else; the difference was that he instinctively rejected the brute-force, constant-thrust approach used by everybody else. Leonardo instead went deep into the cetacean gut (both metaphorically, and literally) and worked out how to enchant the blubber itself to make the whale slightly buoyant in air. Once the weight issue was taken care of, the construction of VTOL spinning seed-propellers for thrust (with an ingenious system that simultaneously cooled the propeller shafts and kept the whale's skin moist) was a trivial enough problem. If you were Leonardo. It took other mages rather longer to turn his notes into working model.

Surprisingly, the sudden appearance of flying whales had little effect on European warfare for quite some time. Ceteaopters were still slow, difficult to steer, and amazingly skittish in combat; early attempts to make them mobile weapons platforms all ended in failure. When Napoleon ordered a breeding program instituted, he did so solely to give him aerial troop transports for a hypothetical invasion of England. He never got to do that; but his nephew Napoleon III later used Ceteaopters to great effect to both break the siege of Metz, and force off a Prussian army at Sedan.

Unfortunately for the prospects of peace, the stalemate that ended the Franco-Prussian War has merely convinced Otto von Bismarck that the North German Confederation needs to create a German Empire by any means necessary. Which is why there's currently yet another civil war going on in the Germanies. Prussia's having a surprisingly difficult time of it: turns out that an officer from South Germany came back from the American Civil War with a notebook full of observations, sketches, and concepts about the best logistical use of flying sea mammals. Ferdinand Zeppelin (he lost the 'von' when he broke with the Prussians) also has quite a few ideas on how make Ceteacopters actually useful in direct combat. His first efforts aren't just promising; they're pretty effective.

Unfortunately, the process does also make them a little more flammable, but that's life in war.

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