

Disclave 1987



DISCLAVE '87

The Washington Science Fiction Association's 31st Convention in 38 Years

May 22-25, 1987—Memorial Day Weekend

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Gene Wolfe

Artist Guest of Honor
Barclay Shaw

Fan Guest of Honor
Chick Derry

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Mary Elizabeth Allen
John Betancourt
Steve Brown
Ed Bryant
Ginjer Buchanan
Susan Casper
Jack L. Chalker
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Ann Crispin
Jack Dann
Jeanne Van Buren Dann
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Gary Farber
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Gay Haldeman
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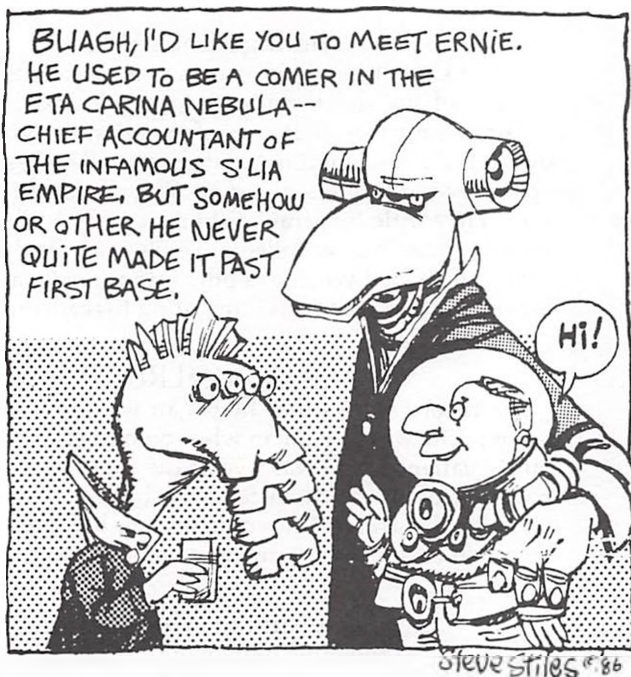
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The Role-Call of the Wolfe

by Virginia Kidd

"I'm really breaking new ground," the officer said. "I've established that the wolf is an entirely self-referential figure."

"In Old English poetry?" asked Mr. Leroux.

"In *The Three Little Pigs*. No one's ever done a deconstructionist reading of it before."

—Russell Griffin

"Saving Time," F&SF, Feb. 1987

Meet Gene Wolfe

Just as you think you have grasped Gene Wolfe, the writer, entire, there prances in from stage right a centaur or on stage left there glides by a wily serpent, and each of them is a manifestation of this protean person.

Genius Loci

Gene Wolfe currently resides in a post office box in a sort of suburb of Chicago, where he writes full time. His contractual umbrella (with Tor) at this moment consists of three books (*The Urth of the New Sun*, technically the fifth volume of the tetralogy, *The Book of the New Sun*, a contradiction in terms and a *tour de force*, as well); a novel about a fellow who has fallen in love with a goddess from another world, *There Are Doors*; and, because events play themselves into his magical hands, the third work is planned to be a sequel to *Soldier of the Mist*. Just your typical major writer's working schedule, right? (To say nothing of a possible anthology of stories about a mythological beast: *Griffins' Tails*, to be co-edited with mediaevalist Sandra Miesel.)

Wolfe is not only industrious, he is inspired. He is endlessly mischievous, and yet he has dignity to spare. How does one write about a protean prodigy who is not very jolly but rather high-tempered, and quick to take offense? As John Calvin Batchelor said of *Soldier of the Mist*, ". . . No science fiction fan is truly concerned with the easily accessible. . . . If you love this, you are wonderfully crazy and nothing said disenchantingly signifies; if you defer, it is no disgrace, Homer awaits."

I love this. I am wonderfully crazy. I am lucky, too. I am a literary agent, and this man has been my client for longer than I can remember.

I have, on my worktable, a little brown woolly mammoth about the size of a football. Many think his name is Eugenius, but it is actually *You Genius*, in honor of Wolfe, and specifically of



"The Fifth Head of Cerberus." He brought this novella to a Milford Writers Conference, where I met him, flipped for the story, and introduced him to the man who would eventually be his editor at Scribner's, Norbert Slepyan.

The Ingenious Wolfe

One of Gene Wolfe's wiliest tricks is to leave the denouement of some of his short stories knotted. If asked, he refuses to explain, demurring that the information is right there on the page. If it seems sometimes ambiguous, all he has for the inquiring reader is a twinkle . . . or possibly a snarl. (I've never asked twice. I'm a little bit afraid of him, actually.) While being interviewed about his so-called juvenile *The Devil In a Forest*, he remarked, "Good writing is only intentionally ambiguous." He also said, "Good writing is interesting to read, rather than easy."

Historical Roots

The record shows that he began writing by dictating to his mother. She was "a woman who sometimes exhibited an almost saintly patience." He was five at the time. He adds, "I have lost that book, but I would love to have it back—it was the only work I have ever illustrated." Later, he says, he became a reader, "which is a much better thing—and gave up writing."

A Criminal Connection

Wolfe says, "I remember employing a friend of mine, who was an accomplished thief, to steal a used Edgar Rice Burroughs for me from the \$1 table of a bookstore. I think I paid him 25¢, and he graciously bought me a Coke at James Coney Island with a nickel of it. Obviously I was cut out for the literary world, but I didn't know it. I also used to crouch behind the candy case in the

Richmond Pharmacy so I could read the pulps without buying them. I was expelled a number of times, but I always returned in three or four days. Once I saw a black boy reach into the case and take a handful of Baby Ruths. Since to have reported him would have been to reveal my own clandestine activities, I did not do so. He met me outside the drugstore, thanked me, and offered to split the lot. I refused and laid a slop jar of liberal jive on him, for which I hope he despised me—I certainly deserved it."

Wild College Days

"I began writing in college because my roommate, Lou Hampton, was an artist and wanted something to illustrate. I can no longer remember if the magazine that published us was called the literary magazine or the humor magazine; quite possibly they were one and the same. I wrote the same sorts of things then that I do now, but they were much shorter."

Whoopee, But No Cushion

"When I was married in 1956, I took up writing again, this time in the hope of earning enough to buy furniture. I failed."

But how can he be said to have *failed*, when (by committing matrimony) he singlehandedly invented Gene-Splicing, without which where would fantasy and science fiction (and science!) be now? Also, sooner or later, he most likely made enough money to buy the odd footstool or flagstone for the patio; in 1973, he slew a dragon and brought home a Nebula to enhance the family hearth.

Curriculum Vitae

You have no real need to know that Gene Wolfe's middle name is Rodman, or to note a religious affiliation (although everyone seems to know that he is a practicing Catholic, and it *is* of interest if your concern with his fiction is a serious concern); it is a matter of record that his charming wife is Rosemary Wolfe (but not that same Rosemary Wolfe who was quoted in *Reader's Digest* as replying to the comment that her spouse was a very interesting man, with "He's a nice man to visit, but you wouldn't want to live with him!") and their four children are Roy, Madeleine, Therese, and Matthew. You may take a real interest in the facts that Wolfe was born in New York on May 7, 1931, took a BSME in 1965 at the University of Houston, and has worked as an engineer, technical journalist, and since his early retirement, as a full-time writer. The one thing you do not know and do not want to know—or if you know it you had bleeding well better forget it—is his telephone number. If he is summoned to his unlisted phone (even by a colleague who believes he got the number by fair means) Gene Wolfe instantly metamorphoses into a fearsome great shaggy werewolf, red-eyed and ravening.

So have a care.

Of course, if you meet him at a convention, you may speak to him with impunity. Say "Hi! Virginia sent me!"

After that, you're on your own.

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Barclay Shaw: The Surrealist Sculptor As Painter

By David B. Mattingly

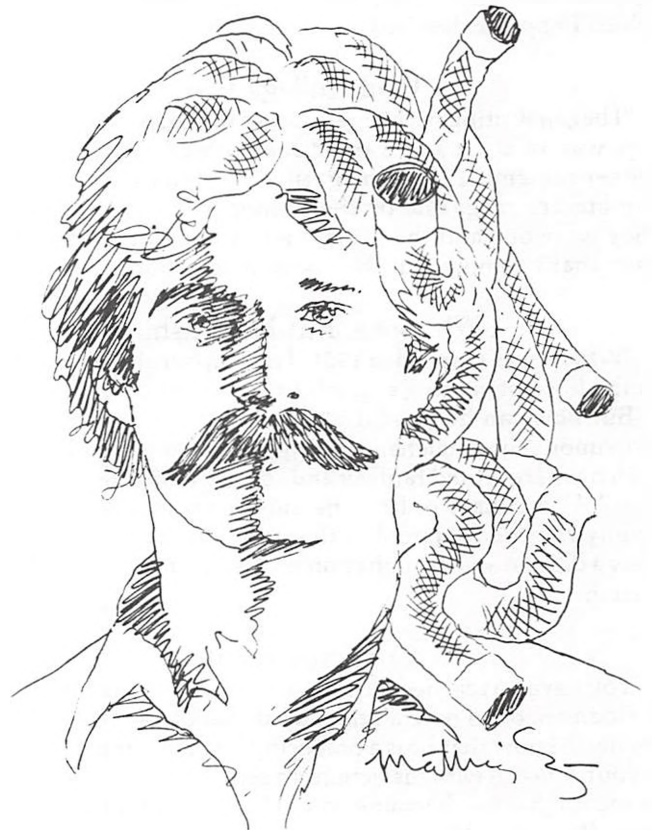
Let's play a parlor game. Here's the concept: if each of today's science fiction illustrators were a movie director, who would he be? How about Darrell Sweet as Frank Capra? Or Michael Whelan as Steven Spielberg? Kevin Eugene Johnson as Cecil B. DeMille? Rowena Morrill as . . . well, you fill in the blank. The idea is to compare and contrast artists in different media. Thinking in cross-media terms, who would Barclay Shaw be? How about Luis Buñuel, the great Spanish cinematic surrealist?

When one watches Buñuel's films, like *That Obscure Object of Desire*, *Viridiana*, or *L'Age D'Or*, each frame is somewhat out of its natural state; it's a transmutation that can throw new light on its subject, be psychologically revealing, and make the viewer reconsider old ideas. Much the same can be said for Barclay's work. It is always unusual and gives us an off-kilter look at his subject, approached in a way singularly his own. At his best, Barclay, like Buñuel, deals with sexuality, creative frustration, and dark emotions. His work is surreal in its depiction of images from the subconscious and unconscious mind. Often, his work looks at issues which are supremely difficult, but very necessary for an artist to deal with. This is why I think it is important to look at the essence of Barclay's work, and in appreciating it, enhance our understanding of it.

Let's begin with Barclay's sculpture at Boskone, 1985 called *Glass Teats*. The lower section and the framed upper section are formed by a conglomeration of chromed entrails—odd globs that resemble disconnected penises and gaping vaginas. The illustrated top cutaway is a woman's torso in black panties with tiny television screens for nipples. The reference to Harlan Ellison's *Glass Teat* is obvious, but never has this idea been expressed so potently, even by Harlan. This sculpture is a powerful symbol of disturbed sexual desire worthy of Bunuel himself. The beautiful lifelike breasts—that make observers want to caress them as they watch the tiny TV screens—are encased in a psychic nightmare; a shocking image that repels at the same time as it probes the subconscious mind.

It is surprising to those who know Barclay as a happy, personable, unpretentious man, that the dark character of his work is one of the most trenchant and interesting parts, perhaps best typified in a painting somewhat reminiscent of the *Glass Teats* sculpture, called *Medusa*. The woman featured looks at the viewer with arousing and unrestrained invitation, like the voracious whores in *Viridiana*. Yet the configuration of hoses that dangle down in her hair like detached phalluses, are as shocking as the razor across the eye in *Un Chien Andalou*. This technological Medusa has a dark charm, attractive in spite of the disturbing paraphernalia around her. Combined again: attraction and repulsion, giving the viewer a wonderfully haunting symbol of the modern age, a Medusa with serpentine computer cables.

Barclay's commercial work also has interesting symbolic content. His cover for *Sentenced to Prism* is a stunning metaphor for trapped creative energy. An anguished, distorted human face stares out from robotic entrapment; one can almost imagine it as the face of Barclay himself, straining at the constraints of commercial production. Barclay has done some great commercial work. *Spiderkiss* is arguably one of the best covers of the decade. Unfortunately, most cover assignments don't offer the opportunity for personal expression that his Ellison covers did. In my opinion, much of the very best of Barclay's work has been done



for himself, not for commercial publication. After all, there is no way either *Medusa* or *Glass Teats* could have been done for a commercial client. Barclay's leanings in these pieces are so complex and disturbing that they stretch the limits of commercial acceptability, but I for one hope he can find time in his busy schedule to follow those leanings that are too personal or too innovative to be put on a book cover.

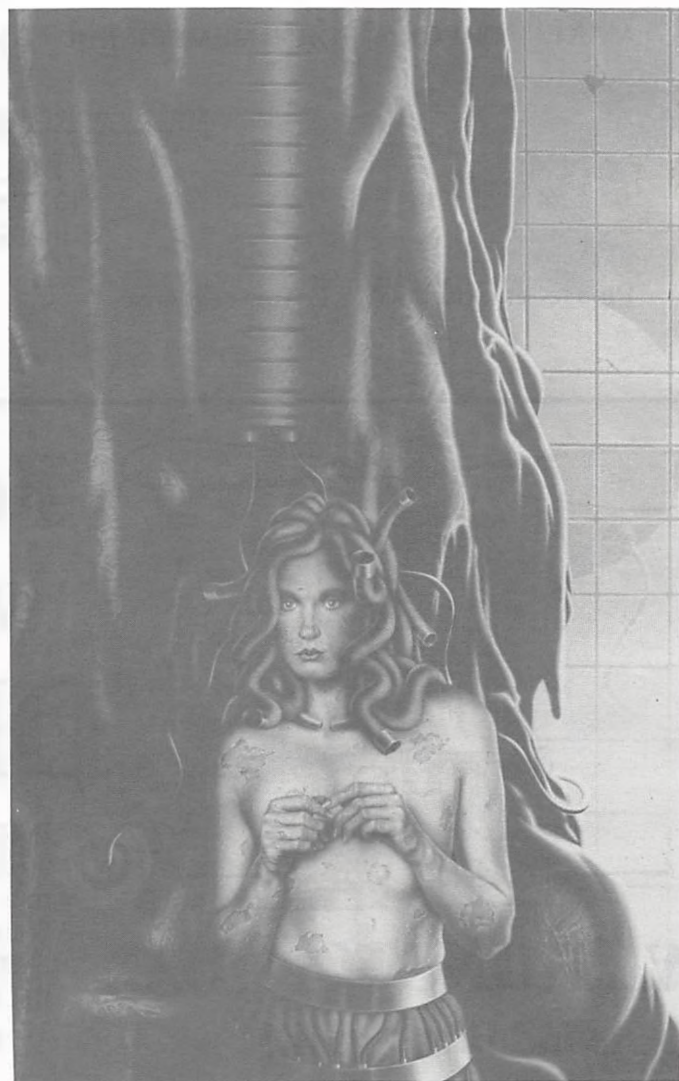
The comparison between Barclay and Buñuel can be taken a step further into technique. Just as Buñuel avoided the odd angles and storytelling twists of a much more commercial filmmaker like Hitchcock, Barclay reveals his ideas with a no-nonsense dive into undiluted surreal space. Barclay, like Buñuel, sublimates flashy technique in a search for an almost sculptural truth. A flashy technique can stand in the way of a serious message; a great technique often becomes its own message. Barclay has not expressed interest in becoming the greatest technician of today's illustrators; lost edges, blended passages and visual pyrotechnics are the least part of his work. Barclay has often said he considers himself more a sculptor than a painter. In a sculptor's world, there are no lost edges: everything must be defined within the limits of sculptural space. In Barclay's self-taught technique, he seems to be carving out his image with successive glazes of pigment rather than, in strict technical terms, painting.

In Barclay's universe, everything becomes more solid, more sculptural, more literally three-dimensional. Even water takes on new solidity as in his cover for *Texas on the Rocks*. The water in the foreground is raw-hewn as only a sculptor would paint it. Another illustrator might paint water more delicately or more realistically, but no one could capture such a full sense of solid form. Folds in clothing become carved clefts, as in the shirt on the *Ellison Wonderland* cover. Barclay's painting of drapery is reminiscent of Bernini's deliberate and sharply defined handling of fabric



Glass Teats

Medusa



in marble. Each tonal passage in each fold is clearly carved out in paint. I was amused in looking at Barclay's originals to see deep cuts in his painting surface from airbrush masking. It looks almost as though he took to carving the painting, dissatisfied with the limitations of the two-dimensional surface.

Barclay's search for a sculptural truth in his painting sometimes sacrifices commercial appeal for a deeper verisimilitude. But just as Buñuel's films will never be as popular as Spielberg's, proving once again that there is little relationship between popularity and thoughtfulness, I think few would argue that Buñuel's work contains the greater meaning and substance, even if that substance is less pleasant to assimilate. It may be more fun to watch *ET*, but a single viewing of *Viridiana* can lead to many hours of deep thought about the interesting and tortuous complexities of life. Barclay's paintings make a strange and disconcerting try at transferring sculptural truth to flat canvas, and I think the effect is powerful, extraordinary, and richly rewarding to those viewers willing to exert the soul-searching effort required to fully understand it.

Looking at those aspects of Barclay's work that are perhaps the most notable and fascinating—the dark surrealism and the sculptural quality—we see a wonderful combination of solid sculptural truth and Buñuelesque digging into the unconscious mind, attributes that have made Barclay one of the most popular and sought-after science fiction illustrators today. Even on the most mundane assignment, Barclay manages to communicate his unique vision of the world, consistently coming up with surprises, new areas to explore in his own inimitably dark and disturbing way. I and a legion of fans look forward to seeing what revelations Barclay's work holds for the future.

DISCLAVE'88

The Washington Science Fiction Association's 32nd Convention in 39 Years

GUEST OF HONOR

BARBARA HAMBLY

Author of DRAGONSBANE and THE DARWATH TRILOGY

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND – FRIDAY, MAY 27 through MONDAY, MAY 30, 1988

SPECIAL MEMBERSHIP RATE AT DISCLAVE'87 = \$12

Afterwards \$15 until January 1, 1988; then \$20 until May 1st when it goes up to \$25. DISCLAVE is actually a four-day party for WSFA members: if you bought a membership this year, you are a non-voting member of WSFA for calendar 1987; likewise, membership in our 1988 Con is actually non-voting membership in WSFA for calendar 1988.

DEALERS TABLES

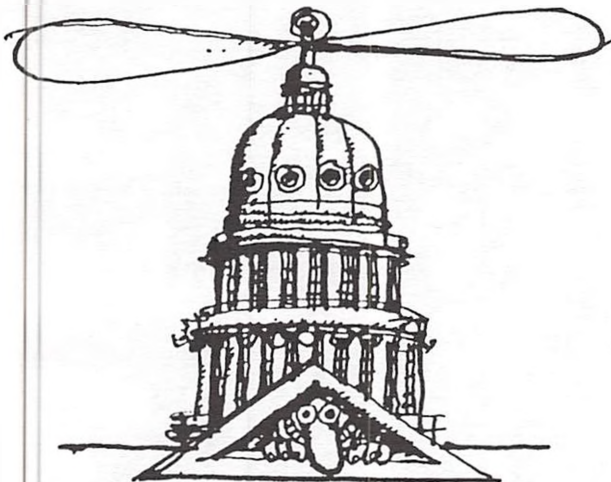
A maximum of 3 tables will be sold to any vendor. Sub-letting to other vendors must be approved in advance by DISCLAVE. Please indicate what you will be selling when you apply for tables. No weapons are to be sold. We will refund tables only if we are able to resell them. All dealers must have and display memberships in DISCLAVE'88 while working at their tables. RATES: 1st table (includes 1 membership) = \$55. 2nd table (includes 2nd membership) = \$65. 3rd table (does not include a membership) = \$65.

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For the 1992 WORLD S.F. CON: DISCON III

DISCON I and II began as bids sponsored by WSFA, which is backing yet another WorldCon bid. We are bidding with the SHERATON WASHINGTON (the old Sheraton Park, site of the 1974 WorldCon), OMNI SHOREHAM (across the street) and the WASHINGTON HILTON (ideal for a WorldCon Masquerade!)

If you want more info, our address is:

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Primordial WSFA by Chick Derry

I have been blamed for many things in my lifetime, but no one has the presence of mind to blame me for having created WSFA. Just in case someone decides to rectify this error of history, let me hasten to state for the record that I did *not* do it alone.

Just to prove that Science Fiction is stranger than truth, consider the following: God created the earth and everything in and on it in six days; WSFA required six people and a couple of years to bring to fruition. It was a dirty job, but someone had to do it.

Just creating WSFA should have been enough; but no, those giants of the past also came up with the Nuclear Fizz, Disclaves and the fine art of Silping. Oh, there were gods abroad in the land in those magical days of the 1940's.

One Sunday evening in September, 1947, still flushed with the Sense of Wonder, those immortals of history met at the home of Frank Kerkhof. This basement apartment was aptly named the Coal Bin, because prior to 1942 it had been just that. Greed, coupled with the tremendous pressure of housing shortages during the war years, caused the building's owner to create an apartment where once a rich treasure of black gold had reposed.

A large galvanized tub of the type with the number 32 embossed on its bottom reposed in the middle of the single room. Ice and bottles of beer (probably Gunthers or Senate, which were cheap and local) filled the tub. Two artists, Bob Briggs and Russell Swanson, were there, as were one student, Bob Pavlat, and three common working types, Frank Kerkhof, Mercedes Mansfield (a very personable female) and YHOS.

Like the current inhabitant of the White House, my memory is faulty. Fortunately for me, none of the original members are here to dispute my recollections. There are no tapes, no pictures, and the only written history was several years in the future. I know that amid all the fine memories of the recent Philcon there was talk about some sort of organization to attract other citizens of like interests.

According to Harry Warner (*All Our Yesterdays*) and Bob Pavlat (*Gallery*) the first two years of WSFA were notable for their lack of formal organization or anything else except good talk, good beer and good friends.

You who are gathered here to enjoy this Disclave have the foresightedness of those foundering (sic) fathers to thank for one thing. If the club had gone forward as planned you would have had to turn your head every time you spoke the acronym: WSFS is a dangerous phrase, especially if you have Terry-Thomas teeth.

I draw on a short series of articles that Bob Pavlat wrote for my fanzine, *Gallery*, in the mid-Fifties, for the rest of this article.

From the Coal Bin the fledglings moved their meetings to the Transportation Building. Frank Kerkhof worked for some mysterious department involved with the American railroad system. On Sunday evenings we would gather in a huge room furnished with long polished tables and many, many chairs. Adjacent to this ideal meeting room was the now legendary mimeo room. Aside from eight electric state-of-the-art mimeographs and tons of paper, this room was notable for its walls and pillars, which were papered with pictures of nude women. You might say we were sexist but that was normal. Despite this wealth of equipment the first WSFA fanzines were more than a year in the future.

Early meetings were very informal. We met on Sunday, for practical reasons, since everyone had the day off and besides, Saturdays were used for more pressing needs. Beer drinking and skirt chasing.

A kaleidoscope of images races through my memory, such as:

George O. Smith fencing with Lou Gardner. George bested Lou, but then Lou was operating at a disadvantage; he was sober.

The full-scale dinner that the Club hosted to honor Seabury Quinn, the grand old man of Weird Tales and author of that gentle fantasy, "Roads," that tells the true story of the origin of Santa Claus.

Every organization has its "character." WSFA had the old gentleman who appeared at many meetings accompanied by his favorite companion, a bottle of cheap wine. I can't remember his name and all that comes to mind is that we called him "Mister" something.

Dick Eney and Ted White were the *enfants terribles* of the growing years. Not only were they loud, enthusiastic, and imbued with the necessary Sense of Wonder, they were *active!* I guess it was their frenetic activity that daunted us founding fathers. After all they were FANS. We were fans.

The conservative Poul Anderson was once a wild-eyed fan. He was a transitory WSFA. Wherever he was, a crowd would collect. He had that gift of storytelling even then that shines out of his writing today. There is a little bit of history about Poul that has never been put in print before.

While a member of WSFA he met Karen Kruse. Whether or not it was love at first sight I can't say. But they have been married a number of years and a number of children, so perhaps it was. Nevertheless it was a planned project of the club to separate the two at meetings. Karen didn't approve of a talent that Poul exhibited: limericks! He knew almost as many limericks as Isaac Asimov! We would lure Karen aside with what ever females might be there in order that Poul could hold forth with rhyme and ribald humor.

In 1949 WSFA almost came a cropper. The newer element, Lou Gardner leading, decided they should bid for the 1950 Worldcon. The old guard felt this was ridiculous. The club had no money, no expertise and no credit rating. Bob Pavlat, Bob Briggs and I took umbrage (actually we didn't take it, we just sorta borrowed it). We formed an informal splinter group calling ourselves the Elders, as opposed to the youngsters. The club did not get the bid, Portland did, and one of the least memorable fanzines was created: *Hazing Stories*, words and pictures by the Elders.

During the late Forties and early Fifties WSFA was host to some of the finest SF pros. I remember Seabury Quinn, Isaac Asimov, Willy Ley, George O. Smith, Lloyd Eschbach, Oswald Train, Poul Anderson, and Sam Moskowitz. I realize that I have left out a number of others; please accept my apologies. As I said at the beginning, these are simply my recollections; there are no notes or files.

After 1950, other very capable hands can take up the narrative, and the club has a proud list of fans turned professional to do the job.

Dedicated to the memory of Bob Pavlat

SF and the History of British Films

by Kathi Overton

In honor of this year's British Worldcon, Disclave's film program is a retrospective of British films in the science fiction and fantasy genres. When we put together the program, we tried to include some interesting films that are not shown very often, rather than the same two or three you've seen over and over. To put the films in context, included here is a very brief overview of the history of British films, and how science fiction has been treated in them.

The first decade of the cinema was full of sensationalism and experimentation. Movies were a working class affair, associated with peep shows, penny gaffs, and vaudeville. Magistrates bemoaned the inevitable decay of moral values moving pictures would cause, and intellectuals dismissed them as a passing curiosity for the masses. No one seemed to think that film would have any lasting influence until well after it was a large and lucrative business.

Until 1906 or so, England was among the world's leaders in film production. Several young entrepreneurs, many of whom were amateur scientists, bought or constructed their own equipment and started making movies. Most of the output of this Brighton School consisted of "actualities" (scenes of real events), slapstick humor, or adaptations from literature or the stage. Elements of science fiction showed up in many of the era's trick films: potions restored lost hair, made objects fly, and caused invisibility, while "electricity" made people move at amazing speeds.

After 1906, the British industry started to decline. Local producers lost ground to more complex and sophisticated films from France and America. Most of the pioneers of British cinema retired or faded into obscurity. By the time World War I ended, almost 90% of the films shown in England were produced elsewhere. The major obstacle to domestic production was the small national audience: filmmakers could not recoup the costs of epics such as Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* without extensive foreign distribution, which was often difficult to obtain.

In the 1920's, the British government tried to prop up the floundering movie business by establishing a quota system, requiring theatres to show a minimum percentage of British films. Unfortunately, the plan backfired. Though national production did increase dramatically, most of the films were cheap and unimaginative "quota quickies," which did nothing to improve the poor image of England's cinema. Science fiction was almost totally ignored, despite the success of German expressionist films such as *Alraune*, *Metropolis*, and *Die Frau im Mond*.

The Thirties brought new life to the industry from several different directions. First, talkies had become the standard, meaning that foreign language films had to be subtitled or dubbed. This reduced the number of films being imported from the Continent, though in the early Thirties a few titles were made in several languages simultaneously, with different casts for each version. Second, a strong documentary school was developing, guided by John Grierson. Many talented individuals who started working for Grierson and his compatriots later moved on to dramatic features, increasing the base of competent technicians in the country. Third, England was invaded by Alexander Korda, a flamboyant Hungarian who vowed to make British film a worldwide force again.

Korda fostered many worthwhile projects, including the famous *Things to Come*, *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, and a lavish Technicolor version of *Thief of Bagdad*. He was an avid reader (he was particularly fond of H.G. Wells), and preferred to take his subject matter from literature. He made and lost fortunes repeatedly, and was credited as both savior and destroyer of the British film. He improved immeasurably the way the rest of the world looked at English cinema, but at the same time created a role model that few others could live up to. Many companies which tried to copy Korda went bankrupt, and American features started to take over the market again. Korda died in 1956, still trying to engineer a national cinematic identity for his adopted country.

Most of the 1940's found the nation preoccupied with World War II and its aftermath. Many of the theatres were closed, and much of the available production facilities were given over to the government for propaganda purposes. The industry's greatest strength still resided in the documentary school. Entertainment films of the period tended toward inexpensive, light, domestic comedy. Only a few fantasies or gadget-riddled spy thrillers could be considered even remotely related to the science fiction genre.

The Fifties brought an unprecedented surge of films with science fiction themes. Hammer Films really got the movement started with *The Quatermass Experiment* in 1955, which later spawned three sequels. Other monster pictures and cautionary science fiction films followed, an appreciable percentage of them also made by Will Hammer. His company concentrated most of its efforts on horror, however, after the resounding success of *The Curse of Frankenstein* in 1957.

Most of the titles in the Fifties were cheap and exploitive, but a few serious attempts, such as *The Sound Barrier* in 1952 and *1984* in 1956 did surface. These were followed in the early Sixties by some of the most powerful British science fiction films ever made. Psychological stress and apocalypse, in one form or another, figured heavily in many of the better features of the period: *Village of the Damned*, *The War Game*, *The Mind Benders*, *The Innocents*, *The Damned*, and the infamous *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Of course, many less serious films were also produced at the time, such as *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* and the duo of *Dr. Who* pictures.

At the close of the Sixties cinematic science fiction became caught up in the psychedelic movement that was affecting so much of the rest of society. *Privilege*, *The Bed-Sitting Room*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Zardoz*, and a host of other movies centered on ecological and emotional unbalance. Hostility and violence became a central issue. Even light fantasies such as *Yellow Submarine* were rife with attacks on conventional attitudes and narrative form.

Psychedelia gave way to technopop sometime in the mid-Seventies. *2001*, itself one of the major psychedelic films, had proved to the studios the flashy, big-budget science fiction could make money if conditions were right. The amazing box office returns of *Star Wars* (shot largely in Britain) sent producers into a flurry of production. Though English companies did not really have the resources to finance special effects extravaganzas, they managed to lure U.S. studios into the country. The resulting marriage of U.S. money and British facilities and crew brought

Superman, Alien, and Outland to the screen.

Everyone wanted in on the science fiction craze. Even James Bond went into orbit in *Moonraker*. Producers with smaller budgets cashed in on exploitative look-alikes of successful money-makers, but most companies were trying to get bigger and bigger budgets to allow for more and better special effects. In the early to mid-Eighties, it seemed as though visual effects had become the dominant element in genre movies. Movies like *Lifeforce* looked slick, but had very little substance.

It remains to be seen whether or not the British film industry will consistently produce science fiction features in the future. As the cost of making films rises, and it becomes harder to wow audiences with visual effects, few projects may be done. Hopefully, filmmakers will depend less on effects and more on thematic content. The relatively recent releases *1984* and *Brazil* offer some hope in this direction.

Overall, British films, science fiction films in particular, have had a very difficult and uneven history. Their scope has been limited; a large percentage of them have been preoccupied with apocalyptic doom, most often nuclear, and many of the rest were satirical comedies. In addition, chronic difficulties in funding and overseas distribution have severely limited the number of completed projects. A number of the films that were produced were done with foreign money and foreign directors. Zoltan Korda, Joseph Losey, Richard Lester, and Stanley Kubrick are all foreigners who became famous for their "British" films.

We should appreciate any movie that succeeds in being more than a simple commercial machine. A good British science fiction film, however, has overcome more obstacles than most. It is a tough animal, and often a difficult one to find. Maybe if we gave quality British films more attention and support, there would be more of them.

DISCLAVE 1987 FILM PROGRAM

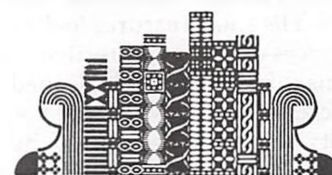
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The Most Beautiful Woman On The World

by Gene Wolfe

There were only three men in the shack. They sat close to the table, all three; perhaps it was merely that each wished to be near the others, or in the candle's rich, golden light. Garcia was tall, lean, and handsome, with deep-set, intelligent eyes.

Hoong looked like a middleweight wrestler, which as it happened he had once been. His broad face was a sculptured mask in which only his darting glance seemed to live.

Davis cannot be described so easily. He was shorter than Garcia, taller than Hoong. His reddish hair had been bleached blond by the sun. His small features looked sunburned, though not badly, and traces of white, protective cream could be seen in the convolutions of his ears. He leaned forward, listening intently to Garcia, whose slow, cadent voice made itself heard without difficulty above the keening of the wind outside.

"It is we men," Garcia said, "who are the true romantics. We see a girl, she stares at the ground, afterward we observe her studying a wedding gown in a dressmaker's window. Ah, we say, how romantic, what a tender thing is a woman's heart!"

Hoong nodded without speaking.

"And it is so. The hearts of women are tender and easily broken, and there are men — we know them — who enjoy hearing the little chimes of the hearts as they break. But romance from a woman? Bah! Nothing."

This time it was Davis who nodded. Hoong remarked, "Just the same, women all tell you that they're too romantic."

"But it proves my point," Garcia insisted. "When everyone says it is true of them, they cannot know what it is. Men know what it means, courage, and so not all say that they are brave. I give you that example. As easily I could give you a hundred, in the name of God. No, every woman wants a good husband so she will not have to work, six beautiful children she can spoil and order about. She listens at the window when we sing to her and hopes her neighbors listen too, so they will know we have come. But if there were no neighbors, she would care nothing that we came. She preserves our foolish letters, to be sure. They may be of use in the court, and they are in addition the proofs of her prowess. You have your diploma still, *mi amigo*?"

Hoong said, "With my uncle. He's keeping a footlocker for me."

"So do women preserve our letters. Let me tell you of a man I knew once. He married in the church a lovely girl because she had a certain way of looking at him, and little breasts like doves. Her family owned some land also, though it was no better than this. For the ceremony he gave her a fine horse, a Barbary stallion. Her name was Catalina."

Hoong remarked, "I thought you said it was a stallion." He spoke in such a way that no one could have known whether he was joking.

"Catalina was the girl, *cabron*," Garcia explained without rancor, "the horse Estampido." Drafts had covered the tabletop with sifted red dust, almost invisible until it was disturbed. Garcia moistened a finger and wrote "Catalina" in the dust. "She told me she had dreamed of such a one. I wished to wake her."

"Surely it's romantic," Hoong said, "to dream of a horse."

Garcia snorted. "If you are another horse, perhaps. For Estampido I found a fine white mare to be his wife, though the *carabineros* did not like it and there were difficulties."

Davis said, "I once knew a woman who had been married to a geologist who always dreamed of one particular castle."

"Bravo!" Garcia grinned; when he grinned, his mouth became a sharp V. "There you have the true romance, the romance of the male—for a woman it would have been a palace, a place of luxury without defiance."

"I met him myself a few times." Davis leaned back, staring at the underside of the roof as though he saw a nearly forgotten face among its green thermosetting corrugations. "He was a big redhead; they were both redheads. Is there a thing about women that makes them like men who look like their brothers?"

"Their fathers," Hoong told him.

"She said he used to talk about it every so often. One of the towers had fallen, she said, and he'd tell her how they were going to fix it, how they'd make the foundation a lot stronger. It had collapsed because of an earthquake, I think."

Garcia nodded. "For a geologist that would be natural."

"And he talked a lot about the walls. They had some kind of system that let them add to the walls again and again, over and over, parapet above parapet. That was what she called them. It was all red rock, she said. Something like that."

"He told her about the people too—the people who lived in the castle. There was a Master of Archers who shot against him sometimes; he said this head archer was a dead shot, but mostly he beat him in the end. And there was one certain old man that polished some gold bowls and platters and tended the demon, or whatever it was that lived under the vault; he said maybe it was a god like the one that the Bible calls Moloch, or Ansenef, the blood-drinker from Egypt."

Garcia said, "The husband was the lord of this castle?"

"Sometimes. Sometimes his father's ghost came. Then his father was the overlord, and Sigrig's husband always asked for his advice and always took it. In the castle there wasn't much difference between a live man and his ghost, she said."

Hoong said, "Maybe they were all ghosts, huh?"

Davis looked at him sharply. "Were you ever there?"

"In this guy's dream castle?" Hoong shrugged. "I don't know. You'd have to ask him."

Garcia said softly, "No, *amigo*, Captain Hoong has never been there. But you have, I think. So it was a real castle after all?"

Davis nodded, the movement of his head so slight as to be nearly imperceptible. "In a way it was. He came back from a field trip down the rift. She said she could tell right away that something was wrong. I guess maybe she kissed him and sat in his lap. That was how she acted with me when I was feeling dusty."

"As you are feeling now, poor little one. I myself prefer blondes, and should I marry again that is what I will have. But it is no small thing to lose a woman one loves."

"I just wish I could show her to you. She had blue eyes, like the sky back home, and the longest legs you've ever seen. The line of her legs was just so graceful and tender—know what I mean? No artist could have programmed it. She had freckles all over. She hated them and said they were ugly, and she put some kind of goop on them to make them lighter. But they were pretty, really. When she soaked in the tub, it looked like she was sprinkled with little rubies. It was like she belonged to some other kind of people, not white or black or anything else we know about. I used to try to get her to stand up; sometimes she would, but she always had a little apron for herself, you know? In front, made out of bubbles."

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Hoong whistled sharply and tunelessly, his face as blank as ever.

"She was the most beautiful woman on the world, and I told her that over and over. I don't think she ever really believed I was serious."

Garcia nodded. "Fortunate for you she did not. But you say the husband's castle was a real place? You have not said anything about that, only that he was disturbed."

"That's right." Davis paused. "After three or four days, she said, he started talking about it; then he wouldn't shut up or talk about anything else. She said he acted, too, as if he hadn't told her about his dreams at all; now he told her again, beginning back when he was a kid. She said he told her things he hadn't mentioned before, besides the old dreams. He told her a lot about hunting with hawks, except the birds weren't hawks—she couldn't say just what they were. I asked what he'd called them, but she couldn't remember.

"Then he said he was going there again and he wanted her to come with him. She wasn't authorized, but he had a lot of pull. The tech who usually went got sick leave, and he and Sigrid took the creeper."

Hoong said, "Pretty dangerous for a gasper. Did she know her way around?"

"She'd had Basic; everybody had to take it, back when she came. But that was all." Davis paused again. "She got back all right."

Garcia had been inspecting his nails in the light from the candle. They were short but very dirty, and he began to scrape beneath them with a bit of sharp metal he fished from a pocket. "She came back all right. But he did not, this field man, this geologist with the so-beautiful wife."

"No," Davis said. "He didn't come back at all."

"But he had no help in that from you?"

Davis shook his head. "I wasn't even there. I was way up in the snowlands. Everybody knew that."

"I would hope so, for your sake."

Hoong asked, "What about the castle?"

"They went a long way down the rift. I went myself later, and it was over a hundred kilometers. You know how it is — days aren't much over an hour long when the sun's clear of both rims, and there are more shades of red in the rock than anybody's got names for; but morning and evening seem like they go on forever, with everything shadowy and almost black." He paused. "That's when people see leapers, they say." After a moment he added, "I never saw one myself."

"I have," Hoong told him. "I was doing a survey, me and an operator, Rosa something—she wasn't black but one of those dark girls that sweat all the time." He shot a glance toward Garcia, but if the tall man felt the hit he did not show it.

"We were setting up, and this Rosa was putting together a signal pole. A couple hundred meters ahead was a side canyon, and the sun was right there, shining between the cliffs. The leaper jumped across so I saw it against the face of the sun. It looked black, but naturally anything would have."

Davis said, "Was it like an ape? Somebody I knew said hers looked more like a big ape than anything else, except there were too many arms."

"It looked like some kind of cat to me," Hoong told him. "It didn't look so big at that distance, but we went up there later and checked out the cliffs, and it must've been bigger than a tiger." For an instant the lids of his dark eyes flew wide in a tiger's fierce stare. "Anyhow, I told Rosa what I'd seen, and we spent a couple of hours scouting around; but we didn't find anything."

Garcia was still cleaning his nails. "Superstition. What would they eat?"

"Who said they have to eat?"

"Then how would they leap, *mi amigo*? Even you will concede that energy is required."

"Only if they have mass. Any anywhere you've got sunlight you've got energy."

Davis cleared his throat, and Garcia glanced up from his nails. "You have your own theory, I take it. Is it the vast cities beneath the ground? That is what some believed before the sonic tests."

Davis shook his head. "You're not eating, Garcia. But you're expending energy."

Garcia opened his mouth to reply, then shut it again and pushed out his lower lip. At length he muttered, "Stored for so long? Perhaps. *Quien sabe?*"

"Anyhow," Hoong continued, "both of us heard it that night. Sometimes it howled and sometimes it screamed. A lot was like howling and screaming together."

"*El viento.*"

"Crap," Hoong said. "Nobody pays attention to the wind. You get so you tune it out. Besides, we could hear the wind too, when we listened, and this was different."

"As you wish. You said that you yourself saw this castle, *amigo?*"

"That's right. After Sigrid told me about it, I made her take me out there. It wasn't easy, but we traded a man I knew out of a day's use of his vehicle. We had to promise we'd say we'd stolen it if we got caught."

Garcia grinned. "And would you have said that?"

"Hell, no. At least I wouldn't have. Sigrid would have, maybe. It was one of the half-tracked creepers, a bullet on a good surface and dug itself in up to the floorboards in sand or dust. We were most of the day getting there, and most of the night getting back."

"But when you were there? What did you see?"

"Not what she'd seen, that's for sure. Just a big red rock sticking out of the side of the rift. It was ragged on top, so it did look a bit like a castle if you shut your eyes a little. And there were columns sticking up from the top. You know what I mean? Left by the erosion. Some of them had fallen over."

"So you went up to look."

"That's right," Davis said, "we climbed the walls. Sigrid didn't want to, but I talked her into it. She'd been up there with her husband — that's what she'd told me — so I made her come with me. To tell the truth, I thought that if I left her down on the floor alone she'd take the creeper and run off in it; she was that scared. Ten to one she'd have gotten stuck, and maybe we'd both have died."

"Which would not have been desirable, certainly. Doubtless she knew the best slope as well. Was it a bad climb?"

"Yeah, it was — almost up to the toplands. The air got thin as hell. A couple times I was afraid she was going to pass out, and once I thought I was. I had us roped together, though. Do you think they'll ever really make it rain?"

Hoong nodded. "Sure. But we won't be around to see it."

"I guess not. Listen, there really isn't anything left to tell. We got up there, and it was one hell of a climb. When we got our breath, we walked all around — it was pretty big — and saw a whole bunch of rocks with funny shapes, and then we rappelled back down. Getting down was a lot easier than climbing up."

"And that's all?" Hoong asked. "Just funny rocks? I don't believe you."

Davis shrugged. "I can't help that. That was it. Some of the rocks had marks on them, but they didn't mean anything, they were just black marks, like there was coal in them or something. They wouldn't rub off."

"Pictures?" Garcia suggested.

"No. Mostly just wiggly lines. If you looked long enough, you could see snakes, and faces and things, but you can do that if you look long enough at anything, even real writing."

"Pictographs," Hoong said. "Want to see me write my name in Chinese? My grandfather showed me." He moistened a finger as Garcia had earlier and sketched the character in the blood-

colored dust.

"It wasn't much like that," Davis said. "More like Arabic, or maybe Hebrew. But I can't read them, so how would I know?"

Garcia spat into the corner. "As you knew what you saw was not writing, I suppose."

"Listen, I had her husband's old hammer. You know those things? It had a head like a real hammer's on one side and a chisel blade on the other; I used the chisel and split one of those rocks, and there were more marks inside."

"No doubt the *senor* would have said that it was a petrified book, and you opened its pages—possibly for the first time in a million years. The woman saw no more than you yourself?"

"That's right."

"You know," Hoong said slowly, "I'm surprised she doesn't try to help you now, if she really loved you."

"She liked me. I was crazy about her—I told you that—and I guess I got her on the bounce. She was afraid to sleep alone, all that stuff. But she loved me after awhile; I know she did."

Garcia whispered, "Yet perhaps not quite so much when you had made her climb?"

"More than ever then," Davis told them. "She's dead, all right? I don't want to talk about her any more."

As if he had not heard Hoong asked, "Why should she love you when you made her do something she didn't want to do?"

"Because she did," Davis said. "She wanted to just as much as I did—more. But she needed somebody to make her do it. She needed me to say come on, Sigrid, we can't back out now, quit horsing around and do it. Haven't either of you ever known a woman in your lives?"

"But the lovely Sigrid is dead? She fell, perhaps, while you were climbing down?"

"No, she died in bed, back in the city. We were in bed together, and I didn't kill her. That was what some of them said, but there wasn't a mark on her; or anyway there wasn't when the M.E. examined her."

Garcia nodded. "We will return to that, I think. But was it while you were climbing down that she saw the leaper?"

"I didn't say she'd seen one. I never said that."

"Ah, but certainly you did, *mi amigo*. You said it was by twilight that they were seen, and when you spoke of one who had seen one, you employed the feminine. We are not men of genius, perhaps, Hoong and me. Still, we are not fools. It *was* while you were climbing down?"

"No. It was while we were still up on the castle."

"You said that was near the topland. Twilight there is not long."

"There was still bright sunshine up there," Davis admitted, "but it was nearly dark down in the rift. She looked over the wall. There were a lot of formations that were like walls—you know, strata that had been tipped on end by geological pressure and combed out by erosion."

"And thus looking down she saw it—perhaps it was thumbing its nose at her. You said it had many arms."

"That's right, but she wasn't sure how many—four at least, she said. Maybe six. It was jumping from rock to rock as if it was coming up to join us. Except that it didn't, it never got there. Or ..."

He fell silent. Garcia said softly, "Si?"

"Or if it did we couldn't see it. I've thought about that sometimes—what if you can't see them up close?" He glanced at Hoong. "Does that make sense?"

"Sure. Camouflage can be like that, sometimes."

"Anyway, I looked down, but I couldn't see it . . . and then we waited. We didn't have any weapons, just the hammer."

"I want to know what it was she told you."

Davis nodded as though Hoong had read his thoughts and he, Davis, had expected them to be read. "Up there was where she told most of it, while we were waiting. Before it had just been odds and ends, about her husband's dream and her going out

there with him. I'd known she was frightened of the place, but before then I hadn't really understood why.

"They had come out in the creeper, not taking quite so much time to get there as we had. She said most of that section was still in deep shadow; but just as they drove up the sunlight lit the castle, running down the sides of the towers—the big stone shafts—like wildfire and lighting the battlements. Her husband pointed out each tower to her and told her something about its history. They hadn't had to climb the way we did, with pitons and so forth; there had been a path up the side of the cliff.

"She said she thought she had been hypnotized, although she was never conscious of it, and she didn't think her husband had done it consciously either. But while they climbed the path he kept talking to her, kept telling her things, and as he talked the red rock formation she'd seen disappeared. When we'd come, it had looked kind of like a real castle from the bottom of the rift; it was only when we'd climbed up that we saw it wasn't a real castle at all.

"But when she and her husband had come, it went the other way. The closer they got, the more castle-like it looked, until she could see the sentinels on the walls, she said, tall and wrapped in dark red cloaks, and banners with hairy tails like wolves, so light it seemed like they floated in that thin air. There were ports in the walls like for gates or windows, and she saw shapes pacing back and forth like the lions in a zoo.

"Then she looked again, and it wasn't really a castle at all. She said it was like the time her folks had taken her to Mammoth Cave when she was a kid, and at first she'd thought it was just a hole like the neighborhood kids dug sometimes in the side of a hill; but when they got inside, she understood that their little caves were just bad copies of this, and this was the real thing, millions of years older than any kid and full of power and magic. That's what she said.

"That was what she saw gripping the cliff face then—the thing that all the castles and forts on Earth had been copied from. It was a ship, she said, and it was an emblem. Right then she knew it could come into your dreams if it wanted to, and you couldn't stop it, and she knew it was too old ever to die.

"Something came fluttering toward them, she said, like a pigeon flies on Earth. It had four wings like a dragonfly's, and a circle of topaz eyes around a pointed head; when it got close to them, the head bloomed like a flower, and the petals were edged with needle teeth.

"She said her husband whistled to it. *Whistle* was as near as she could come to the noise he made. She said she'd never heard anybody whistle like that, and she'd never thought anybody could. The flying thing landed on the crown of his head like a helmet then. It put all four wings down over his cheeks and his neck. It put its head under one wing, and it seemed like it was whispering in his ear.

"She was almost too scared to speak, but she said, 'Jack, what's that? What is that thing?' And he turned and answered her, but it was in some language she didn't understand.

"He took her hand then, gently she said, and pointed. The castle was sticking out what you call a natural bridge to them, sticking out a long, narrow tongue of rock that fell away at the edges but looked pretty strong down the middle. When it got to the path, her husband stepped out onto it."

"*Madre de dios!* What happened next?"

"He tried to pull her after him. And she wanted to come, she said. But when she tried to step out onto the bridge, her foot went right on through it. She nearly fell, and she jerked back as hard as she could. He called out to her just like any man would if he'd seen his wife almost fall like that. But he didn't call 'Sigrid.' He called her something else, something she said she could never twist her mouth enough to pronounce. But she knew it was her name.

"She turned away and ran down the path, but soon it wasn't

really a path at all, she was just scrambling and slipping, she said, down the lower part of the cliff. It wasn't until she was in the creeper that she knew she'd sprained her right wrist. She tried to neutralize the deadlock with her right hand the regular way, and it hurt so much she couldn't get it. She had to reach across to do it and start the engine.

"That was when she spotted the leaper. It was keeping just ahead of the sunlight racing down the cliff face, and it looked like the shadow of an ape with too many arms.

"Then it was gone, she said, as if the light had caught up with it and it had hidden in some crack in the red rock like the other shadows. She shut the creeper's bubble and jerked out the throttle. She could have stalled it, I guess, but it was a good machine. She got back all right."

"But subsequently died," Garcia said dryly. "Died in the bed with you, no? How much after, *amigo*? A year, perhaps?"

Davis shook his head. "Couple of months."

Hoong asked, "What was the mark?"

Davis did not answer.

"You said there weren't any marks on her when the medical examiner saw her. So there was one before that. What was it, and how'd you get rid of it? You might as well tell us."

"A hand," Davis said. "It was the mark of a red hand, a big hand with long fingers."

"Ah!" Garcia chuckled. "Around her throat, *amigo*?"

"No, not on her neck." Davis spoke slowly, as men do when they force themselves to recall things they would sooner forget. "It was on her right hand, just like somebody with blood on his hand had shaken hands with her. I tried to wash it off. For a real long time I scrubbed at it. Finally I even rubbed some of the cream she put on her freckles on it. But the cream didn't work, either."

"Yet the medical examiner failed to see it. I find that interesting."

"I got out the big knife she used to chop vegetables with. I thought maybe I could scrape it off her hand." Davis spread his own hands in appeal.

"Of course," Garcia said. "But that too was ineffective?"

"I'd had this dream that night—I dreamed she hadn't gotten away from him, and he was pulling and pulling, stronger all the time, taking her with him. I had her other hand, and I tried to follow them; but I slipped, the stone bridge was like glass, and I fell, and the leaper was down in the rift waiting for me.

"So when it wouldn't scrape off, either, I tried to cut it off, except I couldn't." He turned toward Hoong, desperate for reassurance. "I tried and tried, but I was just hacking her up. I thought dead people didn't bleed, but she bled and bled. God, what a mess!"

Hoong nodded. "Sure. Bound to be."

"Then I tried to cut her whole hand off. I pulled her part way off the bed, so I could lay her arm on the floor and chop at it. That didn't work either. It's not as easy as they make it look on the nets."

Hoong said, "A machete, that's what you needed."

"Or a hatchet, *amigo*." Garcia's eye were sad, though half a smile played about his lips.

"But I got it in the end. I checked a power saw out of the toolroom and took it back to our place. I wrapped her hand in a couple of towels and dropped it in the incinerator. They never found it. *Everything they saw was mine, and there wasn't a mark on her.*" He struck the table with his fist.

No one spoke.

"Anyway, that's why I'm here," Davis said.

Garcia nodded to himself.

"I think it got her scent when we went back. She died that night in bed; maybe it got mine then. Did I tell you?"

Neither man answered him. The silence thickened until it seemed to fill the dark corners of the shack and press against the candle flame like smoke.

At last Hoong said, "Whatever happened to your wife, Pepe? To Catalina?"

Garcia shook himself as though waking from an evil dream. "He trampled her," he whispered. "That black stallion, that big Estampido. He trampled her one hot afternoon toward the end of August."

Hoong told Davis, "The guys train those stallions to fight down there just like you'd train a Doberman. The stallion goes for you when his trainer gives the signal."

Seeing Davis's face, Garcia took him by the shoulder. "Her heart, *amigo*. He trampled upon her little heart, that is what I meant to say, when she watched him mount the mare. The heart of a woman is such a fragile thing, so easily broken."

Outside and far away, something shrieked louder than the keening of the dust-laden wind.



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