

SESSHU FOSTER

THE FAMOUS TV SHOW (THE STUNTMAN'S TALE)

He wasn't killed today so he had a free day, in theory, to take his son to school and pick him up afterwards, perhaps take the kids to the park, meanwhile replumb the sink which was leaking inside the cabinet underneath, peel off old roofing from the garage and take it to the dump in his pickup, perhaps purchase new clothes to make it easier for him to show up for work and to look for work and not have people looking at him the way they recently had been looking at him (so it seemed to him, with peremptory derision indicated by immediate insolent dismissal and pointed disregard---he was thinking if he could just get some partial acknowledgement out of the receptionist's eyes...) because there didn't seem to be much demand recently for our unnamed unaccredited 'man' dying, being killed a dozen ways including thrown from a horse (which itself was tripped on a wire, tossing him as de horsed rider face-forward into dirt in explosion of dust), shot, clutching himself or twitching, falling off high boulders of the canyon onto hidden air cushion behind granite boulders, riding back and forth in the dust cloud of riders (most of them white boys in brown paint, whooping) shot to pieces, fired upon, stepped on by massive horses, get big bruises and broken ribs, too bad---maybe he'd get lucky and some Chuck Norris or Sly Stallone wannabe would remake Vietnam jungle wish-fulfillment battle scene where America wins this time (wins again: the sequel---"in our minds, we are winners"), he could scoot practically invisible through the Malibu State Park chaparral foliage (nameless gook) only to get blown sky high out of a prop palm tree just as he was about to take a deadly fatal shot: by casual offhand rpg from the hero or his cool cohort, while digital flock of white birds fly off over patched jungle shot. "Kill me, kill me, kill me," some voice whined in his subconscious while he wondered whether it was really worth it to spend \$30 on a shirt.

There was a famous TV show where the narrator came on to introduce the eerie subject matter of each evening's fantastic episode in an eerie semi-ironic monotone, cigarette smoke curling offhandedly, vaguely from the unsucked cigarette in one black and white hand, every Ronald Reaganesque spokesperson-hair in place groomed with hair grease Brylcreem product of the day in unironic black tie white shirt and suit, he'd say something like, "our dauntless hero, a famous dirigible pilot in his day used to extreme hazardous duty in the violent storms of the upper atmospheres at the edge of space, is about to find out that there's an even stranger zone whipped by merciless winds of the human heart, a

zone where love may be the most dangerous weather of them all, in tonight's episode..." etc., as eerie zither and bongo music rises and the copyrighted title sequence rises against a black background punctuated or punctured by what a viewer might presume to be stars and not condensed nodes of weird leftover electronic 1960s sparkles.

This is how to simulate the "Atmospheric Trash Vortex" or "Orange Gyres."

Industrial fans, small, medium, large:

1. small fans placed immediately in front of the camera, blowing on buckets of dry ice and water, to stream wispy vapors
2. medium fans placed waist high into whose streams assistants toss handfuls of confetti and tiny bits of paper streamers or ribbons
3. large fans which blow on great murky cheesecloth screens hung like banners in the background, which themselves ripple and billow like waves and like clouds, additionally, some of this circulating air spills onto our actors and the set, causing the set to creak and sway with realistic tension and gale force, against which the actors must lean in order to advance and must shout in order to be heard
4. these streams all combine to produce what we believe to be **the most realistic Atmospheric Trash Vortex or Orange Gyre atmosphere yet presented to the viewing public!**
5. every now and then a prop person throws newspapers, cardboard boxes and pieces of cardboard, various foam or paperboard objects roughly the size and configuration of five gallon drums, shipping boxes, detergent bottles or food containers, etc. into the wind stream---sometimes small items such as cigarette packs get sucked out of the grip of grips and swirl into the windstream (production stalled for a matter of minutes one afternoon when the lead actor nearly swallowed and choked on a cigarette butt that flew into his mouth)
6. behind the curtains and billowing sheets of "atmosphere" large sheets of sheet metal strung on frames are "played" with soft mallets or rubber hammers to manufacture rumbling thunder and crashing lightning and other 'ambient' sounds--- (lead actor choking, hacking, coughing, spitting)
7. Addition of animated flying items, large black birds flapping or flailing like crushed

spiders, old model cars mostly as silhouettes flapping by, etc.

The lighting is muted, sometimes flashing as with lightning, but otherwise we simply focus spots strategically on figures or silhouettes, and tightly on facial close-ups as we see fit, because---face it---the audience has to see *something!* It makes for dramatic lighting! Even if our consultant, Liki Renteria, assures us that in an Actual Trash Vortex or Orange Gyre, visibility will be extremely limited or lacking entirely. “You wouldn’t be able to see your hand in front of your face.” (So says Renteria.) “Objects will just fly out of nowhere and hit you in the face!” But we can’t film a TV show in the dark! We’ll have to clear it and lighten the visibility to at least low fog level, called “San Francisco” in the industry.

Actors may occasionally be blown off their feet and have to resort to grasping at stanchions or the hidden steel scaffolding that underpins the set in order to save themselves. Limited visibility enables them to wear padding under their raggedy flapping “atmosphere suits” that cushion some of their sudden falls and spills and take the brunt of sliding horizontally across the set, only to fetch up against the far end of superstructure, the improvised and unstable ramshackle raft-like edifices of “Sky City.” (Liki Renteria assures us his verbal descriptions of the improvised habitation in the cloud vortices are highly accurate, and we’re lucky to have them, given the total secrecy of the government’s own investigations so far. Liki Renteria suggests they have not really penetrated the cloud vortices for lack of minimal competence and fundamental courage. He suggests that, like the citizens of New Orleans after hurricanes Katrina and Timothy, any citizens swept up into the trash vortices in the sky have been abandoned by the very government forces sworn by law to protect them. In fact, the security forces view these people as outsiders, outlaws, threats to civilization and “rogue federal units” are implicated in suspected killings, torture or disappearances of vortex survivors reputed to have returned to earth---so says Renteria.) Some actors will be attached to guy wires and hauled off suddenly into total blackness of howling space in order (at proper points in the narrative) to indicate the fate of anyone who does not grab it fast, whatever they wish to keep they think will last, it’s all over now baby balloon.

We have numerous prototype dirigible replicas in production at all times, since they tend to suffer accidental destruction at a high rate.

My favorite dirigible models: the model is seen piercing the cloudy skies---generally “floating” across a cloudy sky attached to an unseen guide wire strung across the set and propelled by pyrotechnics of some sort---or pulled by a hidden wire---with lightning flashing dramatically on its bulgy tumescent carapace, sometimes with water droplets streaming poignantly across metallic skin, opalescent in pearly glow of lighting by union members of Motion Picture Studio Professional Electrical Lighting Technicians Ass. and sometimes enhanced by passive reflectors held in place by grips or ‘condors’ held by grips to create a “moonlit effect.”

These favorites are:

1. ELADATL “Colima”---papier mache dog head atop an airship constructed mostly of chicken wire and duct tape, the dog head which replicates the amazing iconic ceramic superstructure bridge that perched atop the legendary airship which vanished under mysterious circumstances---unfortunately our model (just like it’s namesake!) was blown up in a spectacular propane accident on set during filming, luckily the explosion was caught on film from several angles and the writers worked furiously to change the storyline to fit in the destruction (of it). “That ship is jinxed, get me out of here,” someone was heard to say.
2. ELADATL “Ehecatl”---a sleek, valient courageous airship of friendly open demeanor, much heart, supposedly has a preying mantis as its mascot---
3. ELADATL “Jolina”---all black pirate ship of the air, all-female crew, strange stoic raven-haired impulsive captain thought to be grumpy and aloof because of “lack of love” and lonesomeness---
4. ELADATL “Agnes Smedley”---awkwardly constructed of papier mache and tin cut with metal shears, spliced together with duct tape and cheesecloth, ‘powered’ by “Smokey Joe” racial stereotype fireworks which sputter and glow and smoke as the ship is pulled across the cinematic skies of projected cloud vistas and darkening atmospheres while--



In one story line on the show he was of course the evil Chinese Fu Manchu horde-villain, black pajama-clad gook weakling sneak-killer. With the other killers, some just regular white guys in yellow face, they swung down on ropes “seemingly out of nowhere” (from the sudden appearance of the evil Fu Manchu Mother Ship, with its communistic red curvy oriental Cadillac tailfins and slanty-eyed windows maniacally glittering with freakish light as the stoic Asian faces (lit from below) peered malevolently down at the Sky City. Their whole job, it seemed, was to exert China’s hold over the Western hemisphere from above, starting with infiltration and take-over of the Sky Cities of America, a devious plan because the government refused to acknowledge the existence of these outposts of disposable civilization sucked up into upper trash-laden atmospheres. So the Chinese agents (they could be said to be controlled by a rogue agency internal to the Chinese government, for “plausible deniability”) could descend upon America from above, dropping out of its own

atmospheric layers. But who stood in their way, to total control first of the skies then of all of American and domination of the Western hemisphere, but Our Hero who was looking for the Love of his Life, to rescue her from being trapped in an Orange Gyre. So happily for the “story line” (so-called) he could kill us all (reluctantly, but he had to). He just had to, because we were so mean, killers, devious, inarticulate, just violent even beyond self-interest in our own survival, we just had to rush at him on the various levels of the Sky City ramparts and balconies and rickety, gale-swept walkways which sometimes ripped apart in the huge winds, sometimes at opportune moments when the hero was trapped, tossing black clad Chinamen ninjas to the black winds of night. The wire harness would suddenly jerk him, our nameless figure of a low budget extra (and villain), backwards off the set and off-camera. Then he could get back to work and re-enter a later scene.

So that was the ‘story.’ He was (of course) glad to get the work. He did decide to purchase the \$30 new shirt. Might as well look the part when asking for work, professional working man now. As he fastens a safety line and leaps with his big knife drawn upon the unsuspecting turned back of the hero, but a woman’s piercing shriek pierces the howling gale---the hero pirouettes in a spinning roundhouse kick that connects with the villain’s jaw, knocking the evil-doer against his own safety line, which snaps. Dragged---elbow banged a stanchion painfully---he’s sucked up swirling into stormclouds of vagaries of the upper atmospheres. The body count of this one movie had to approach that of Pearl Harbor, therefore he would (re)appear in several scenes. He could purchase another shirt; he chose to decide to purchase earrings for his wife when he got a chance. He would buy the kids some healthy snacks. He would take the wife out for dinner! In one penultimate semi-climactic scene, he dangles from a high tower (from which red, black and white Pacifica Radio call letters “KPFK” can still be read through foggy wisps of shredded clouds in weather-beaten ancient sans serif font from the 1990s), after being totally defeated and beaten to a pulp *mano a mano* by the Bruce Lee martial arts prowess of Our American Hero. But as the unknown extra (henchman) slides into the gaping maw of the abyss, the All-American Hero grabs his fallen opponent’s wrist, showing utter generous humanity towards the nasty, duplicitous snarly loser. Offers mercy, showing his great American respect for life! What does the villain do (with close-up facial grimaces spliced in during editing, provided by a son of late Syrian-born actor Michael Ansara, who looked vaguely

Asian, especially with taped eyes when he played Klingon aliens) but pull out a hidden scary Filipino escrima dagger! The Hero's sorrowful eyes widen! In a gesture meant to convey the notion that even the sneaky, cruel, inhuman Asiatic has come to understand and respect (almost worship) the moral superiority of his conqueror, the vanquished Asian creep cuts off his own hand with one mighty slash! Because he'll never be anything other than just a cruel, evil Asiatic killer and his pale vanquisher is too good! Then he nods with understanding and respect at his would-be rescuer! So he plummets upward! To certain death! (Redeemed and dead--- the perfect Indian.)

The scene is filmed several times, to make sure his final Nod of Respect is visible through the vapors and flying trash. Then the Hero contemplates the Asiatic's severed hand in his own soulfully for a moment, and tosses it over the edge. It swirls around in the tornado force winds as if waving goodbye and flies out of sight. The solemn Hero tries to get back to rescuing the love of his life but little does he know that the nameless unaccredited dark extra has re-entered the stage from below with others of his ilk and is working his way up to attack him again! Through a trap door! Oh, will he ever know peace? To think, according to Liki Renteria, this is all "based on a true story." Twelve minutes of screen time left before the credits roll.

Our unnamed, uncredited, unknown heavy or gangster extra, Indian, killer of innocents and of luckless whites, horde member, future zombie of plague apocalypse, mob torch bearer chasing the White Hero Monster, Napoleonic battlefield corpse, pistolero, bandido machinegunned by cynical Peckinpah outlaws, pirate falling from Disney's high mast, German casualty in trench warfare of World War 1 epic shoot, killed at Marne and Vicksburg and Monument Valley and fake-front towns of the manufactured 1950s West, not to mention blown up, riddled with M-16 full-auto fire, blasted dozens of times in rice paddies and simulated East Asian jungle foliage, chanting "Oogah boogah" from the scaffolding in torchlit scenes for Francis Ford Coppola's gook shoot-em up Apocalypse Whatever, another shadowy figure lurking backlit behind high window but spotted like a dummy by the squinty eagle-eyed detective, stupid thug running herky jerky forward into the headlights right into blazing copper's guns, he happily took the bus and joined the crowds on the democratic sidewalks of downtown Los Angeles. Bright day, taking

his time purchasing two shirts, so he could look his best soliciting more such jobs. He was certainly on his way to success in his chosen line of work. He knew how to paint his face white, black, yellow, red. He could have long abominable shaggy yak hair, neat sneaky braids or appear completely bald. He could grimace, yowl, growl, creep, clutch, saunter arrogantly, overbearingly overconfident right into the expert sights of the expert shots that never missed and never could, because his chest was wired to explode with erupting sacks of blood, that's how he could afford to grab fried chicken drumsticks at the downtown stand a couple blocks from Grand Central Market where his dad had taken him when he was a kid, before running out of his life forever and leaving him to grow up on these streets on his own (he thought of them as his own, too). With his fingers still greasy, even after wiping them repeatedly with thin white paper napkin, then wiping them absentmindedly on his pants, he stepped through the crowd under the theater marquee (of the dead grand old movie theater now used as an evangelical Spanish church---"Pare de sufrir"---), pushing his way through expecting to see some mildly grotesque street performer (whatever the contemporary equivalent was for a man and a monkey, the grimacing death's head monkey thrusting forward its little monkey cap, snatching with its little hands and their tiny black nails at any dirty proffered coin) but instead it was a thick-necked red-faced cop kneeling on some scrawny kid's back dislocating the kid's shoulder twisting his arm behind him, the kid howling in agony and the cop screaming curses at the kid for what reason? "Do something, do something, that's you down there, you know it too, when nobody stood up for you, nobody did anything, that was you---" one voice exhorted in his mind, while the other said louder and louder---"piss on that, let the kid deal with it himself, he'll learn the same way I did," ---already the first voice finished, "you cheap bastard, cowardly bastard, you **bastard!** Rub two new shirts together in a crisp paper bag and suddenly you're too afraid to step out in front of the crowd and open your---" as he found himself stepping forward, pushing past dazed bystanders with some unseen hand (like that of a child's) pushing him forward, he could hear his own voice, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute, he's just a kid, you're hurting him, you're **breaking his arm---**"

A missing front tooth, anyway, the further scars on his face, did not count against a man in his line of work, though of course the thirty dollar shirts were long gone by the time

his wife went his bail, the clothes he'd been wearing before he was handed the orange jailhouse jumpsuit so ripped to shreds he had to have her bring him a change in a paper sack when she came to pick him up, she was outraged (not at the cop when he explained what had happened, through the aching of his broken face, with his new lisp he was going to have to get used to, this new way of speaking with swollen rubbery mouth---no, she was thoroughly enraged at him, what was he thinking going near a cop---"all I did was grab his arm and pull him off, give the kid a chance"---she just clamped her jaw closed and drove, her last word was ever that bitter silence)---he sensed it would be so much the worse if he mentioned the little earrings he'd purchased for her were in that shopping bag, failed gesture puny and ineffectual in the face of the season of worry tormenting her, all that anyway just a memory he might review daily, almost hourly the previous week he spent in jail while she, prompted by his one allowed phone call out, got his cousin to secure, co-sign the bond. Weeks later, felony assault on a peace officer arraignment approaching, he could come home to the place emptied of her and her possessions, her purposes and aspects, "I'm not going down with you. I choose not to be one of the women who enable the self-destruction of her man. I'm not holding your hand and going down that road. You get paychecks for them killing you off in big ways and small, but you finish the job off yourself on your own time. This is my life, too. I don't have to give my assent and be part of that choice (you say it's no choice, due to lack of choice). I care too much about us both. We are responsible for us. You made choices that hurt us both. Take care of yourself. Love,"

So what if he should have known, could have expected it. That was in the future, anyway, the strange future of war over Los Angeles of zeppelins versus dirigibles, zeppelin attack dirigibles against an insolent seething roiling black and orange sky, where unpredictable papier mache kraken surprised on-lookers by appearing (as if guided by puppet strings from above, off-screen) to destroy huge airships clasped in giant suckers of writhing tentacles, in fireballs, escaped gases and deadly lightning (from the dark clouds or somewhere). So not only did entire crews of good guys and bad guys have to lurch back and forth as the cameras lunched back and forth to imply the violent forces with which airships were destroyed, but sometimes he and the rest of the crew had to fall out of suddenly ruptured gondolas, screeching for all they were worth as the skies exploded

around them. So what if he could hardly breathe even when he landed on the piles of cushions, his broken ribs unhealed as yet, his shattered left zygomatic arch pounding in his cheek with the force of a continual punch, his left eye so full of broken capillaries and blood it had gone partially sightless, red and later red and yellow and an object of discussion. He did his best to keep his broken nose out of the game, broken finger taped together with its mate. The aspirins he ate all day with coffee made his stomach a swirling vortex. Red and black back screen projections simulating the dystopian futuristic skies could have been projected from his own gut. Next time, it was true what his wife had said, he might just have to let the next kid or whomever deal with the cop (or whomever) all on his own. He was never able to explain to his wife that he was surprised as anyone by the way things worked out, stepping from the crowd, stepping forward. These things he thought about as he executed his falls, his attacks, his runs, as best he could. Meanwhile, they called on him to kill or be killed (regular, mostly the latter).

What were these stories even about? He did not understand them, it's true. His mind wasn't on the story line or whatever it was about. Some science fiction bullshit, just this side of ray guns and bubble helmets, rubbery latex monsters floating out of cardboard caves on papier mache moons in far off galaxies where everybody was white and even the colossal-headed monsters spoke English. They explained in this latest episode that they were members of a death squad dispatched the kill some gallant self-taught illegal immigrant engineer who was holed up in an abandoned airfield, building one of the last (or was it one of the first?) dirigible airships by himself. Their ostensible purpose was to infiltrate the vast abandoned airplane factory and chop this illegal immigrant genius to pieces with machetes, knives, pistols, and--- Something like that. He'd been thinking about his wife and hadn't caught the rest of the plot. He had a hard enough time focusing on the present, cracked and loose teeth tasting like metallic fillings, ribs grating, broken finger sore still weeks later, pulsing face where blood from his sinuses drained into the back of his throat, he swallowed it. He took his falls like a professional. He ran like a twenty year old. He took every tumble, fall and shot and never asked to be excused nor complained. His eye flared like a black marble shot through with red tiger stripes. He was swallowing his own black blood as viscous as green flu snot. On his way home, he'd get off the train downtown to replace those shirts; luckily he hadn't mentioned them before, he remembered exactly where to pick up the earrings.