

## SEND ME A KISS BY WIRE

Hilbert Schenck



Hilbert Schenck's stories are rich in the characterization of scientists doing the sometimes frustrating daily work that leads to sudden moments of discovery and, perhaps, transcendence. Schenck is a professor of engineering specializing in the ocean, and his characters are rarely far from water; his tales usually deal with the shores, the currents, the storms, the creatures of the sea, particularly of the New England seacoast. His stories often contain blistering satires on academic life, as here in this story.

Harking back to the traditions of the sea story (of Melville and Conrad) and to Jules Verne's imaginary voyages, "Send Me a Kiss by Wire" is a story of adventure, exploration, and zoology. It is an interesting contrast in its depiction of sea creatures to Dickson's "Dolphin's Way," on one hand, and "Davy Jones' Ambassador" on the other, using no overt science-fictional inventions, concentrating entirely on accuracy and the hard sf affect. What if the legendary sea monster were real? Here is a hardheaded, hard-nosed contemporary scientific expedition, with a veneer of calm over barely suppressed intellectual excitement. This is science fiction as the shadow of the hard-boiled, romantic, heroic adventure—disguised as daily work. And the point of it all is a moment of revelation: The legend is revealed as a real natural wonder.

This moment of discovery after exploration is one of the goals of science and the scientist. Sf stories such as this one reaffirm that such a desire as this underpins science. Look for the phrase, "what is the price of true wonder." Then consider for a moment the dying spaceman stories of the 1950s, in which death is the price of the moment of discovery, as sincere salesmanship for space travel. Wonder is worth any price in hard sf.

The big *Challenger* auditorium was already jam-packed when Dr. Walter Bascom, dean of the Oceanography School, pushed through the milling crowds of students, staff, and press people looking for seats. Way down front, surrounded by his usual entourage of vice-presidents and main-campus deans, the ancient university provost, Jacob Holley, instantly spotted Bascom and gave a large and commanding wave in his direction. The small dean, exhausted from a month's cruise following North Atlantic currents, his thin face stiff and icy, pushed into the provost's row while nodding at, or tersely greeting, various important academic bureaucrats. The provost had managed to move some less vital functionary from the seat at his right, and as the dean settled down into it, the gaunt, lantern-jawed Yankee gave Bascom a robotlike smile and muttered, "Wonderful thing. Just what the place needed,

Walter, money and fame," in a voice that the engineering faculty described as a "talking live-steam leak."

Holley's iron-hard face reflected no warmth onto this verbal praise, for he had recognized in Dean Bascom's tight expression a decided lack of sympathy with the proceedings in the auditorium. Bascom turned in his seat to face the taller provost, and though his voice was very quiet, it had the sharp edge of an ice sheet snapping apart. "Whom do we get to fight with this creature, Jacob?" he said. "Fraternity pledges? All our assistant professors in jogging shorts?"

Holley's lined face became, if possible, even craggier, and his voice was now the thin hiss of an annoyed snake. "Walter, this so-called State of the Union and its huge and valuable university are *dead-broke!* If, in order to catch the attention of the state legislature, it becomes necessary to feed to your wife's monster the half a dozen or so virgins among our ten thousand co-eds, then it will be done—*instantly!* Do you understand that, Walter?"

Dean Bascom, managing to actually outhiss the provost, pressed his lips into an invisible line. "Virgins, Jacob, are exactly what we *ain't!*" he retorted.

To a couple of nearby wire-service reporters, this intense and highly charged exchange was simply mysterious, but to the university officials sitting around the provost, catching a word here and there, the problem was clear.

Dean Bascom, a most eligible faculty bachelor for many years, had finally married Dr. Emily Orton, a full professor of biological oceanography in his school. Less than a year later, Emily Bascom had organized a "World Record Octopus Derby" in conjunction with the Saturday afternoon TV show *Wide Sporting World*. Scuba divers in Alaska and Puget Sound were recruited in droves, and the animals were attracted from their caves and grottoes by a water-soluble chemical, pararitatic acid, which Emily had discovered exercised both an attractive and narcotic effect on octopuses.

Unfortunately, the 102-pound world-record octopus was matched in an underwater wrestling contest against a huge scuba-diving pro football player. When it became obvious that the hulking diver was being strangled and would surely drown, over a dozen curare darts fired from three different gas guns were required to subdue and finally to stun the strong, fierce animal, all of this photographed by several underwater camera teams. This Clyde Beatty ending to the octopus project, even though much had been learned about the species, had amused the world oceanographic community, dismayed several environmental groups, and enraged Dean Bascom, who had been assured by both the TV people and his wife that the broadcast material would be educational and scholarly.

"O.K., O.K.," called out a large middle-aged woman from the platform up front. "Some of you will have to sit on the floor, I guess. Please, let's get going."

Dr. Emily Bascom's round, cheerful face scanned the choked, noisy auditorium, and when she saw her husband down front with the main-campus crowd, she smiled and gave him a small, tentative wave, which he did not return.

Her expression tightened a bit, and now she shook her arms impatiently. "Please, can I douse the lights? We've got to start!" she shouted.

The lights dimmed and went out, and Emily Bascom's loud, clear voice dropped into its lecturing tones. "Here's the film that started all of this. It was taken twelve days ago off the stern of an oil-search vessel, *Sonic Hunter*, by a young Japanese crewman who just happened to have a loaded super-eight camera in his duffel when the episode started. Thank heaven he remembered he had it!"

The big color image was jerky and grainy, and at first all they could see was a calm blue sea with two stanchions and the horizontal parts of a ship's rail in the foreground. But then, far in the distance, there was a sense of disturbance in the water.

"The *Hunter* was towing a one-hundred-foot-long acoustic pulse generator at the end of six hundred feet of line," she explained. "This is new sub-bottom profiling equipment, and I can't say any more about it other than that it sends down a series of quite sophisticated, shaped sonic pulses to penetrate the sea bottom. Echoes are received by transducers set in the bottom of *Sonic Hunter's* hull."

Suddenly everyone in the room gave a gasp, for the amateur cameraman had finally remembered his zoom lens, and as the image was quickly and jerkily enlarged, a now clearly seen, long, whippy *something* rose out of the water, followed by several more. These lashed about in the air, making white splashes as they struck the blue sea surface.

"I've studied blowups of these movie frames," said Emily Bascom, "and we're definitely looking at a huge *Architeuthis*, a giant squid. Evidently the creature was attracted and brought up by the acoustic pulses from the towed sound generator."

She gave her audience a reassuring nod. "Now that isn't as weird as it sounds, although nobody ever thought about squids using such classy acoustics. But some fin whales definitely speak through the deep sound channel to contact each other over distances greater than a thousand miles."

The TV producer, his many assistants, plus other important network people sat in a large clot down front next to the university administrators, and now the thickly bearded, white-leather-shoed producer waved a hand. "What are these animals doing all this talking for, Dr. Bascom?" he asked in a smooth voice.

The large woman gave the whole room a wide, round smile. "Oh, the tender passion, of course," she said quickly. "They're just seeking a special friend in a big, lonely world."

But now the audience gasped again, for whereas the arms of the creature had seemed to flop and move about quite languidly for a while, they now began to wave vigorously and with what was clearly a great deal more excitement.

"Somebody on the *Hunter* realized that the signal they were generating had probably brought the thing up, so they shut it off. That was a mistake," laughed Dr. Bascom, and they saw that the squid's arms were getting larger as it moved rapidly and thrashingly toward the stern of the survey vessel along the towline.

"It evidently mistook that thick towline for a friendly tentacle," said Dr. Bascom, "so it moved along the line looking for where the noise went. When it got about fifty yards back, the captain lost his nerve."

As she said this, they saw waves begin to form against the creature's wildly waving arms while a wide, foaming wake suddenly appeared in the center of the picture. The agitation in the water began to get smaller, and in a few moments the image of the creature's arms had become so small that only a spot of white-water confusion showed on the wide, calm sea surface.

"The *Hunter's* skipper went full speed ahead, and the line towing the signal generator—and now also towing our large, agitated friend—simply broke under the strain." Dr. Bascom shrugged. "That's the last they saw of either the squid or their hundred-thousand-dollar acoustic toy."

She turned the room light up a bit and motioned for a slide projection. "O.K., our TV friends—" she gestured toward the large group—"were contacted by the oil-survey company and flew to meet the boat in Dakar. They brought back the film you just saw, some shots of the crewmen telling their stories, plus an agreement that nobody on the boat will say anything about this until they dock in the U.S., which happens today. Tonight the network will air the first of its specials on *Architeuthis*, including this film and a discussion of our hunt for the animal."

She pointed up at a projected side view of a giant squid with various dimensioned arrows superimposed on the image. "We figured out from the camera optics, and

what we knew about the location of the sound generator in relation to the stern of the vessel, how big those arms and tentacles are.

"Most Teuthologists"—Dr. Bascom paused, then interjected with a grin. "That's the name for us crazies who like to fondle squid, octopuses, and cuttlefish—set the upper limit on *Architeuthis* at about 1,000 pounds, with a total length of maybe 60 feet. This big boy is in a whole other class. From the scaled measurements, we estimate his weight will be a hefty 25 tons, and his total length will go way over 200 feet. Now the blue whale still holds the title for bulk, about 180 tons, but this animal wins any length sweepstakes hands down. Nothing living and moving, now or then, has ever been as long as he is. The largest blue whale was less than 120 feet overall."

She touched the big image with a long pointer. "Those arms, and there are eight of them, are a solid 6 feet across at the root and about 40 feet long. The two longer tentacles, which *Architeuthis* uses to catch its prey, are over 130 feet long in this specimen, a structural miracle even for a water creature. The suckers at the club end of those tentacles and arms are over 8 inches in diameter. Even the biggest sperm whale or the most violent great white shark would have a helluva fight with this fellow!"

As she paused for breath, the TV producer gestured at the slide. "How do you know it's a boy, Dr. Bascom?" he asked in a casual tone.

Emily Bascom directed her pointer at two of the arms. "In the film blowups, we can see that the creature has two hectocotylized arms, that is, specialized arms without suckers. When a male squid hugs his lady-love, he uses these two arms to make the adjustments. Otherwise, those eight-inch raspy suckers would chop her into fillets."

The producer chuckled briefly at this, then pointed with a languid hand at the image. "So, can I assume that tubular thing poking out of the—what is it, the 'mantle'?—is the thing's sex organ, its penis?"

Emily Bascom's cheerful, pleasant expression became a bit harder. "Some people have claimed that, but I'm not sure it's an intromissive organ. Since nobody has ever had a live male and female together in an aquarium, their mating methods remain speculation," she said in a stiff voice.

A silence fell over the auditorium as the producer peered in apparent puzzlement up at the high ceiling. The network's large, fleshy vice-president for contract and legal matters, sitting next to him, finally turned and said in a clear voice, "Intromission is what us legal types call 'penetration,' Harry. What we used to call 'getting in' when we were fourteen."

The producer continued staring at the ceiling. "I was a choirboy when I was fourteen, Ben," he said loftily. "I didn't use phrases of that sort." This was followed by sniggers from the other TV people and laughter from the students and most of the faculty.

The producer now turned a more alert gaze back to the projected slide. "How long would that, uh, possibly intromissive organ be, Dr. Bascom?" he said.

Emily Bascom's eyes were now quite thin and her voice was tight, but she took a breath and shrugged. "Oh, three hundred centimeters, about ten feet, I guess," she answered.

The producer sat up a bit straighter. "That would be some sort of zoological record, wouldn't it? Ten feet?"

Dr. Bascom put her hands on her hips and faced him. "Look!" she said fiercely. "This creature has eyes that are over three feet in diameter, real eyes that it sees with! That and those forty-meter tentacles are the great miracles of this thing, not some stupid sex organ that nobody knows a damn thing about!"

But the producer had relaxed back into his chair, and his smile was both broad and comfortable. "Think of that, Ben," he said in an awed, wondering voice, "ten feet long. I foresee quite an audience share with this series."

The large lawyer half-frowned in what was obviously a mock concern. "Harry, I hope you're going to keep this a family show?" he said in a tone of complete insincerity.

The auditorium again filled with laughter, but the frost surrounding Dean Bascom's stiff, small form was now so chill that even the provost twisted uncomfortably. Holley half-waved, half-pointed at Emily Bascom. "Dr. Bascom," he said loudly, "would you tell us something about the financing of this research effort?"

The woman snapped her fingers for a new slide. "The network is chartering *Glomar Explorer* for us. As some of you know"—and she pointed up at the side view of a large motor ship—"this vessel has a center well and lowerable platform half its length. As you see, the cage will be suspended beneath *Glomar's* platform, and we'll use another oil boomer to try and coax the squid inside." She paused, then nodded at the contract lawyer. "Mr. Bernstein, would you like to spell out the money stuff for Dr. Holley?"

"Just a tad under five million for the whole thing," said the paunchy lawyer in an almost-bored voice. "Two of that for refit and charter of *Glomar*, another one-five to Perry Subs for hire of their *Gemini* photo-sub pair, the mother ship, staff, and pilots. The remainder goes to you people for your time, project management, and overhead." He paused, then added in a silky tone, "Over one million for overhead, sir."

The dean had turned again toward the provost. "Even our co-eds won't be big enough for it, Jacob," he said in a frozen whisper. "What about finding a female elephant in rut and cramming her into an oversized scuba set?"

The provost did not find this suggestion amusing. He leaned menacingly toward the small dean. "A million dollars is a lot of money, Walter, even when you said it fast," he gritted back, but the dean made no answer, and the auditorium was now alive with excited questions from the faculty and press people.

## II

The flotilla that finally gathered in the mid-Atlantic three weeks later was the largest ever assembled to study a single species. In addition to the *Glomar* and its gigantic, hastily constructed cage held by cables under its center well was the somewhat smaller *Mother Gemini* catamaran support vessel, mounting a midget two-man sub on the stern of each hull. The Coast Guard had provided a big offshore cutter, the *Dauntless*, for helicopter support off her own large stern platform, while the navy, thanks to a letter from the White House, sent its most advanced remote-sensing vessel, *Argus*.

The first three days were rough and blowy, and everyone rushed around in agitated concern for the huge, fragile cage drawn tight against rolling *Glomar's* bottom. But then the South Atlantic weather turned fair and quiet, and the convoy put down its lure and steamed at a leisurely five knots, waiting for a strike.

Emily and her husband shared a table with the *Glomar's* captain and chief engineering officer, but they spoke only on project matters and each had a separate stateroom. After the weather turned pleasant and the hunt began in earnest, Emily waited until her husband stood alone on the fantail, then approached him with a large but fragile smile.

"Walter," she said earnestly, "there was no other way to do this. And if we don't get to understand these animals right now, the oil boomers may confuse and finish off whatever few of them are left." She peered at him directly, but his face remained stiff.

"Circuses should stay under tents," said the dean in a bitter voice, and when this caused his wife's big face to droop, he gestured defensively. "Look, Emily, the beasts and the fish are innocent, don't you know that? What they do is God's will alone. They can't know sin and they don't know lust as we do. All this suggestive coarse stuff isn't just scientifically abominable, it's plain *stupid*, too!"

But Emily Bascom had made the conciliation efforts, and now her eyes shot angry fire and she set her big jaw. "As if that gigantic, beautiful animal gave one damn about what you think!" she snarled at him. "You really should have been a priest instead of an oceanographer, Walter. Then you could tell everybody just how to act. . . ."

This hurtful exchange was suddenly ended by a series of shrill shrieks from *Argus's* steam whistle. Both Bascoms turned on their heels and ran headlong down two ladders and forward to *Glomar's* operations room. Others were running in, too, and Emily had to shoulder her way to the main communications console and seize a microphone.

"What's happening, *Argus*?" she said in a rush.

"We have a target," responded the *Argus* Ops room. "Moving target! Bearing: two-three-five; true range: thirty-six hundred meters; depth: fourteen hundred meters. Mark! We've got a first track. It's heading right for us. Total velocity about one meter a second, and it's rising at about half that. We're trying to access it now with a laser. Hang on!"

Emily pressed the *BRIDGE* button on her mike. "Captain Jorgenson," she said, "start to slow us up. I want us at dead slow in ten minutes, but don't do anything abrupt."

"Aye, Professor Bascom," came the reply, "I'll ease her back."

"*Mother Gemini!* This is Bascom. Launch! Launch! We have an approaching target!" she said over the microwave intership link.

"We loaded our crews when we heard the *Argus* message, Dr. Bascom. We're lifting the boats now," came the answer as *Mother Gemini's* deck force swarmed around the two chrome-yellow subs and the A-frames began hefting the boats up off their cradles.

"Can we get a laser image, Commander?" said Emily in a tense and quiet voice.

A uniformed officer, the liaison representative from *Argus*, squinted at the snow-filled screens. "They're trying, Dr. Bascom. It's a long ways off yet. Wait . . . wait . . . there's something!"

"We're focused," came an excited voice from *Argus*. "You can see it! Center screen on A channel!"

Everyone in the room left their consoles and gathered behind Emily Bascom and the tall officer, every eye intent on a tiny blob in the center of a flickering TV monitor screen.

"Can you harden that image up?" said Dr. Bascom to *Argus*, peering with fixed, narrowed eyes.

"If we enhance it any more, we'll lose it completely," came the voice. "Let me just try a shorter focus space. . . ."

"Ahhh. . . ." came from every person in the room as the tiny blot on the screen resolved, ever so slightly, into a sharper blot with a sense of arms, now and then rippling at its edge.

A pool reporter stood on tiptoes, staring in wonder at the image. "That thing is two miles away and almost a mile down?" he breathed in wonder. "How in hell can you do that?"

The officer shrugged. "We're generating a thirty-megawatt blue-green laser pulse, maybe a nanosecond long. The light pulse is thin and short, like a pencil, when it leaves the projector sticking down underneath *Argus*, but it gets all smeared and scattered as it travels down into the turbid water, and finally illuminates a small bit of that target animal. But we keep the receiving photocells shut off until the undisturbed part of the original light pulse has been reflected back to *Argus* from the target, then we turn on the receiver for a nanosecond. It's called 'range-gating,' and it prevents the smeared, confused part of the light pulse from getting into our reception system. The beam is a small spot, so we have to scan the target, like a TV raster. We're assembling about one image per second now."

"*Mother Gemini*," said a tense Emily Bascom, "let me talk to your submarine pilots, please."

"Talk away, Dr. Bascom," came a voice from the speaker. "We're in the water and heading for the cage."

"No lights! No lights yet, you understand?" she said quickly. "And no high-level acoustics. Lay back from that cage until we get him inside. I'll tell you when to turn on the lights. We don't want to spook him with the strobes."

"Understood. Affirmative, Dr. Bascom," came the answer.

Now the room was utterly silent as they watched the tiny rippling image grow and fill out into what was obviously a purposefully jetting *Architeuthis* of awesome size.

"Slower, Captain Jorgenson," said Emily Bascom sharply. "We'll lose the *Gemini* twins. Easy!"

The naval officer from *Argus* frowned, then turned to Emily. "As the visual field enlarges, our image-assembly time is going to get pretty long, Dr. Bascom. We figure over a minute for one complete frame by the time that thing reaches the cage. What about the side-scan sonar? We can get a continuous high-res. moving image with acoustics when it's within a thousand yards or so."

Emily Bascom nodded. "We'll chance it. I don't think the side-scan acoustics will spook him. The pulse format from that oil boomer that he's responding to is totally different."

"Give us a ten-meter grid on that target, *Argus*," said the officer, and when the grid lines were superimposed over the image of the squid, Emily saw that this was probably the same big male that had come up to the *Hunter's* signals. On it came, growing in size and detail.

She spoke into the mike. "*Argus*, let's try the side-scan now. Hold your power level as low as possible. Go!"

At once the acoustic projector located in a keel-mounted bubble on *Argus's* hull began to scan the creature with a tight sonic signal. This picture was far more detailed than the one given by the optical laser, and another gasp went up as the writhing arms and a gigantic, round eyehole suddenly showed on the TV monitor, spookily white against the dark, no-return image of the water.

Even the TV producer was awed by the obvious strangeness of the creature. "Ben," he said to the lawyer in a whisper, "imagine reeling that thing in off Montauk!"

"When you put five million bucks on the hook," said the overweight, grinning lawyer, "it's amazing what you reel in."

*Argus* was running to port and a bit ahead of *Glomar*, so that the sonar framing

geometry was showing the rear edge of the cage. "Here he comes. . . ." said everybody together in a kind of sigh.

Sure enough, the gigantic animal, slowing a bit, rose into the cage and threw out two thick arms to grasp the long, bulbous acoustic signal generator suspended in the center.

A peering Emily Bascom leaned forward. "O.K.," she said softly, as though she feared she might frighten the huge creature, "start closing up the cage."

The *Glomar* crewman in charge of the cage door winches began to lift the suspended door up to cover the open cage bottom. "Now," said Emily in a tight and breathless voice, "You! *Gemini*! Light him up!"

The *Gemini* boats were, at best, fraternal twins, looking very different from each other in both side and plan views. *Gemini One* was a thin, graceful submarine with two big navigation domes and a battery of optical and television cameras grouped in her transparent nose. *Gemini Two* was much bigger and fatter. She mounted four long arms that could be swung out to form a large underwater cross that held an array of xenon strobe lamps. *Gemini Two* contained a two-hundred-horsepower diesel generator set fed by a towed, two-pipe snorkel to power these lights. The strobes were flashed twenty-four times a second to match the image rate of the three-thousand-line TV scan of the *Gemini One* cameras. The lights were so intense, so unimaginably bright, that to viewers on *Glomar's* deck and up in the small photo helicopters, it seemed as though a sudden and unending explosion of fearsome magnitude were continuously happening underwater alongside *Glomar*.

In the Ops rooms, the biggest TV monitor presented them with a brilliant full-color underwater picture of the male *Architeuthis*, and the whispers were stilled, for the vast animal was utterly visible in a totally detailed image. Its huge left eye peered unblinking and implacable at the sudden bright light, but its arms still rippled and fondled the signal generator while its tentacles, too long to be fully imaged by even the widest-angle lens on the closing *Gemini* twins, snaked in and out of the picture.

The cold, unblinking eyes of the cuttlefish and the squid, plus their sharp beaks, have always suggested to students of the ocean a kind of zoological epiphany for the alien ferocity possible in the great deeps of the planet, but it was evident from its motions that this creature was patiently seeking some configuration or relationship with the bulbous sound generator that eluded it. There was no sense of fierceness in these stroking and waverings, only puzzlement and a sense of some impatience.

Walter Bascom had been silently watching all this, standing at the back of the crowd around the TV monitor. "Poor, lonely bastard!" he said in a low voice to no one in particular.

And Emily, her great triumph now before them all in stunning, three-thousand-line color, felt it all spoil and turn sour as she stared at the huge, agitated creature attempting to turn an unyielding oil boomer into something very different. If he was all that was left of them, the very last of such an awesome clan, they were too late, and everything was futile and stupid. Emily Bascom stared down at her hands and blinked. How many years, she wondered, had this huge creature been searching for its moment of satisfaction?

"Target! Close target! Look! MY GOD!" came the sudden near screams from both *Argus* and *Mother Gemini*, and at that instant on the screens they all saw something shadowy, vast beyond imagination, hugely rising behind the cage and the bewildered, fondling male squid. At that moment *Glomar* gave a decided shudder, followed by a fearsome series of crashes and rending noises.

"ANOTHER SQUID!" came the simultaneous transmissions from all the ships and aircraft of the fleet as two great, muscular arms, each thicker than a Greyhound bus and longer than a city block, snapped around *Glomar's* midsection and began to vigorously squeeze and shake the nine-thousand-ton vessel.

Several people in the Ops room fell down at that point, while others wildly grabbed at each other or the equipment rack handles to stay on their feet. "Open that cage!" shouted Emily Bascom into the mike. "Shut off the boomer signal! Quick!"

The mounting noises of *Glomar's* destruction masked most of this final command, for the new arrival had seized the hull in four or five of its massive arms and was now applying its huge, horny beak to the hull plates. When a large vessel is torpedoed or smashed apart by gunfire, her breaking-up noises are often lost in the sounds of fire and explosions, but what the people on *Glomar* always remembered about those next few minutes was the deafening, fearful noises of a steel ship being torn, rent, and smashed by a totally silent and ferociously active adversary.

To their eternal credit (and the enrichment of everyone connected to Perry Subs, Inc., which had cleverly held out for a half-interest in all the film and tape taken from the boats), the two *Gemini* pilots and their crews not only kept the strobes and cameras going, but began maneuvering to get a large field of view. And what the astounded viewers on the other ships now saw was a female *Architeuthis* of a size wholly beyond speculation, over twice as long as the still-oblivious male and an order of magnitude heavier.

She was indeed the great kraken of Norwegian legend, but far, far larger even than that shadowy wonder. Nothing in the ocean would stand against this gigantic queen of deeps and darkness. Nothing, even at the peak of the dinosaur age, in or out of the water, could match her musculature. In a single stroke of a single tentacle, she could turn the head of the oldest and strongest sperm whale to bloody mush or smash a four-ton white shark in half. Her anger was as ponderous and monumental as her body, and she realized at once that her smaller consort was somehow bewitched and trapped by a large, hostile floating creature, *Glomar Explorer*.

Discovering that her fierce beak was having problems penetrating the lower hull plates of the vessel, the squid began a series of smashing blows on the deckhouses and upper works with her various arms and tentacles. These appendages, weighing between twenty and thirty tons each, were lifted out of the water over the listing vessel and brought down clublike at high speed. The first full smash, striking aft of the stack and with a shock that shook everyone aboard off their feet, almost broke *Glomar* in two. Fortunately, everyone belowdecks made a dash for the life jackets and the open air at the first series of crashes, so that no one remained in the flattened compartments and sheared, jagged steel that had once been the ship's center cabins. The squid now found she could get her ten-foot beak into the shattered-steel confusion of *Glomar's* midsection, and commenced a terrifying series of rippings and rendings. The Ops room people had dashed up two stairways and out onto the forecastle deck by the bow, and now they stared back, dazed and open-mouthed, at a shambles of smashed lifeboats and crushed cabins.

"How in God's name can it rip steel like that with a beak of bone!" screamed the TV producer at the shocked, sagging faces around him.

Walter Bascom, who was carefully tying on a big cork life jacket, turned and gave him a thin smile. "The same way a karate chop goes through a brick: with plenty of momentum and plenty of will!"

The gigantic squid found this slashing and biting entirely too slow to satisfy her vast irritation, and she now struck the stern a mighty double blow that broke it away completely. The *Glomar*, which was already listing heavily to port, now began

to go down by the stern like a rock, her bow tilting and rising rapidly. The creature interpreted all movement as challenge from her enemy, and loosed her final, most terrible stroke at the rising bow, catching the vessel just in front of the bridge. The stunning, thunderous shock threw everyone clustered up at the bow into the water, some with life jackets and some without, and as the partly dismembered *Glomar* settled rapidly, the rest of the crew and staff jumped desperately from the tilting sides and rails and paddled away to escape the suction of the sinking wreckage.

Walter Bascom had been standing close to the impact point of this final devastating blow, and as he was catapulted off the slanting deck, his lower right leg was struck and deeply slashed by a tilting, ripped deck plate. The pain had that sudden and complete authority that told the dean that he was grievously hurt. After a gasp at the initial shock of the cold water, he doubled over and put both his hands around his right calf. The entire back of his right leg from ankle to knee was cut loose, hanging, and his chill hands felt how warm the pumping blood seemed in the cold water. He gripped tightly with his hands to hold his leg together and slow that flowing warmth.

At the first sight of the squid's flailing arms, both *Dauntless* and *Argus* had stopped and launched several power lifeboats, and these now chugged stoutly toward the devastated *Glomar* and the raging squid. The two TV helicopters were far too small to take even one person aboard, but *Dauntless* carried an eight-passenger rescue machine, and this was started and lifted into the air at about the same time that *Glomar's* stern was sheared off. It was obvious to the officers on both ships that the people shaken off the bow were in the most danger, and so the Coast Guard machine made straight for them, settling down in the middle of a cluster of heads.

Walter Bascom struggled to reach the helicopter's port pontoon, where a young crewman crouched and held out a hand to help him up. "I've got a cut leg, son. I'm bleeding," he said weakly to the boy.

"I'll get you up, sir! Just give me your hand!" shouted the crewman, but then several things happened at once: Off to starboard of the helicopter, no more than twenty yards away, a broad island of gray, scarred flesh and seething malevolence emerged, dripping and ponderous, and in the middle of that gray mountain of squid mantle was a monster eye, rising through the interface, an orange, baleful harvest moon of hostility. Seeing the helicopter and assuming its connection with the shattered *Glomar*, the creature struck at the machine with one of her arms.

The animal's bifurcated vision, with half the eyeball in the water and the other half in the air, confused the squid, and her first gigantic attempt at flyswatting went wild by ten yards or so. The splash from that nearby stroke nearly swamped the helicopter and stalled both its engines.

Walter Bascom had been distracted from the awesomely emerging squid by a thin cry for help some distance away. He saw it was Emily and that she was waving one hand in obvious distress. "Help me!" he heard his wife cry. "I don't have a life jacket!"

"Quick!" said the Coast Guardsman. "That thing is after us!"

Walter Bascom turned, let go of his leg, and began to swim toward his wife. "Get out of here!" he shouted back at the helicopter, "I can support her with my jacket!"

A second arm was emerging from the water about forty yards off, and the pilot desperately cranked his blades around, his starters whining, until the soaked engines finally caught, and the big machine began to skitter uncertainly across the sea surface. Sensing that with a downward stroke, she would probably miss such an evasive target, the squid rounded on the helicopter with a third arm. The arm left the water in a low hissing arc of foam and spray and caught the staggering machine

much as a batter will occasionally catch a baseball bouncing off home plate and golf it up into the centerfield stands.

The big machine was instantly changed into a disintegrating mass of black shapes flying up and out amongst fiercely roaring arcs of flaming gasoline. To the squid, this explosive reaction to her blow was only more defiance and more challenge. Few living things ever completely forget or ignore the possibility of escape when a struggle becomes too uncertain or protracted, but the first part of the flight/fight reaction had atrophied in the ganglia of this immense creature, and she now began to jet toward the flames and figures in the water, her two arms poised for striking while her huge beak snapped open and shut so loudly in her red rage that the Gemini pilots claimed later they could hear these fierce clicks over the noise of Gemini Two's roaring diesel.

Walter Bascom reached his wife and drew her shivering arms around him. "Hold on, Emily," he said. "This thing will keep us both up. It's only Sea State Two."

"Oh, look!" she gasped, and the dean saw over them a four-hundred-foot-long tentacle rising to join the waving arms, rising endlessly out of the water like a gathering waterspout, like the big atomic funnel over Bikini.

The dean felt his warm life running out into the cool water, and he put his arms around his wife. This was a very calm way to go, he thought, really very painless. "Bye, 'bye, Emily," he said. "I can't say it hasn't been exciting."

To a peering Emily Bascom, the view showed only ruin and disaster in every direction: the *Glomar* rolling over slowly for her final dive to the bottom; raging gasoline fires and dismaying black shapes floating all around them; and, worst of all, *Dauntless*, an angry white mother goose coming to save her brood of lifeboats, her siren screaming, was digging her heels in on a tight, high-thrust turn toward them while on her forward deck her gunners had the canvas off the 4.3-inch rifle and were desperately elevating the weapon to try a shot at one of the huge arms that quivered, cobra-like, above the scene.

Tears came to Emily's eyes, and her head fell forward against her husband in dismay and defeat. "You were right, Walter. This was a lousy idea," she said in a small, shivering voice.

But the light-headed dean, woozily cheerful from the wound shock and the numbing water, just shook his head. "No, no, Emily. What is the price of true wonder, anyway? It's everything, Emily, *everything!*"

That was all that the dean was able to say, and he slipped down and down into a velvety, pain-free blackness. Yet it seemed to Walter Bascom that this darkness inverted and bloomed and filled with a bright, clear light, so that he floated no longer in an ocean of dark water but now in an ocean of pure, sweet illumination. Around him swam the great creatures of the planet, no longer scarred and fierce, but made perfect and beautiful; washed in the Blood of the Lamb.

"Come, Walter," said Saint Francis, taking his hand, "come and meet my friends," and the dean filled with a joy greater than any he could ever remember.

Walter Bascom opened his eyes and knew at once that he was in the ship's dispensary bed. He looked to his right and saw another neat cot containing a quiet figure obscured by bandages and I.V. tubes. On the wall was a fire-hose reel stenciled *Dauntless*, CG 582. He looked to his left and saw a pert, redheaded nurse with "U.S. Coast Guard" across her cap and lieutenant (jg) bars on her open collars, seated and staring wanly at him. "How do you feel, Dr. Bascom?" she said.

"Weak," said the dean. "Did I lose my leg?"

The nurse shook her head, smiling. "Goodness, no! That wasn't the problem. You lost most of your blood out there in the water. We really pumped you up, Dr. Bascom. We went into both arms at once."

"What about my wife's pets?" asked the dean, and when he saw the young woman did not understand him, added: "The squid—uh—I mean squids?"

Her eyes sparkled. "My, that was something else, wasn't it! I've watched those movies three times already. Well, after she just *totaled* our helicopter, everybody thought you and your wife would be clobbered next. And they didn't dare shoot at her head—well, I mean 'mantle'—'cause you were so close to her. But just when it seemed like she would flatten you with one of those gigantic, absolutely *humongous* arms, the smaller squid finally got out of his cage and swam underneath her. The *Geminis* got pictures of all that. It's sort of sweet, actually. And the moment he touched her, well, she just lost interest in us completely and sank right straight down, with him doing his stuff, I suppose, and they finally disappeared from the laser picture somewhere down near the bottom."

"It was a lady squid, then?" said the dean, feeling quite cheerful in spite of his throbbing leg.

She nodded positively. "Oh, yes. Your wife says the pictures clearly show that. Imagine, getting that angry because we attracted her friend."

"Well, you know all that stuff about a 'woman scorned'?" said the dean with a sudden grin.

But the nurse took this comment seriously and shook her head in determination. "Maybe we shouldn't have been meddling with such a big sort of life," she said in a firm tone.

She paused to give him a pretty, if rueful, smile. "I shouldn't say that, I suppose, working for the Coast Guard and all, but I think it's *right* she came and got him, even if all that awful stuff had to happen."

"I couldn't agree more," said the dean with a wider grin. "Why, I've always been partial to huge, dominating ladies myself!"

The compartment door, which had been ajar, now opened fully and Emily Bascom stepped in over the sill. "Huge, dominating women is really better than huge, dominating *ladies* nowadays, Walter," she said in a soft voice, "but thank you for coming to save me and risking your neck to do it. We all sweated you out for a few hours, me most of all."