

Cartier – Film Storyline  
The Earth is Round as a Ring

The scene opens in Place Vendôme. Possibly dawn. Almost as in a Melville novel, except that no human presence disturbs the still, tranquil city. A flickering display of shadow and light harks back to the early days of cinematography. Fittingly, the spectacle unfolds from behind a Cartier window. A seemingly frozen tableau: beneath a classically proportioned dome a big cat is regally poised, a shade lighter than the star of Jacques Tourneur's panther-themed horror movie.

At first rooted to the spot, the animal is nothing less than natural, shimmering with affected luster and almost aglow with iridescent light. All the while waiting expectantly to leap into motion. Life beckons from on high, from the top of this dome of knowledge and enclosed tomes. The call of wide-open spaces is symbolized by the rings that now emerge to light the way as a faithful guide, ready to tirelessly anticipate every next move.

These rings roll on unstoppable, as round as the Earth itself in its perpetual orbit. They alert the audience to the passage of time and changes of landscapes, perhaps even proclaiming the superior harmony of their curved design. Here is the ring. Here is where you shall dance, they seem to murmur to the panther, who stirs to life and literally bursts through the dome and the screen, flouting the laws of plausibility and gravity alike. But such things are possible in the world of cinema, and have been since the cinematic illusions of Georges Méliès. We can soar like Icarus and only need come down when we so choose.

The rings have been crying out to star in their own international road movie, to gallop across continents, or come close to it, at the speed of a panther and then some. Less the childhood traumas of night of the hunter, more an ongoing quest for

smooth flowing beauty. The irrepressible panther leads the way towards this holy grail, unflinching through the snow and icy cold of Russia's frozen rivers and romantic sleigh rides. Perhaps passing Potemkin and his Tsarina mistress. The feline's eyes might gleam at the sight of an imperial or simply feminine ring, one colluding with the other to glide beautifully over the pristine snow. But the rings are already ushering us onwards, grazing snowy chasms to prove their mastery of dangerous ground. At this altitude the rings seem to take on gargantuan proportions, and the snow is pocked with their enormous tracks.

Cut to another mountainous landscape. No snow here. Asia steps up with the next exotic offering, the dragon. This alien of Chinese folklore is traditionally the protector of folk holidays, yet the monster is depicted as the ideal adversary in samurai films and the beloved tales and legends of storytellers. The dragon bursts forth from the bowels of the Earth, an impeccable model of kinetics and cinematography, shuddering to the mesmerizing tempo of Pierre Adenot's score - the only other element of the film that remains in constant motion. All eyes are glued on the fascinatingly flowing movements of the beast. Juxtaposition with this magnificent, yet simulated, Godzilla casts the real-live panther in a favorable light.

Cinematographic effects pale to the point of insignificance in comparison with the flesh-and-blood creature. Once the life force of the panther has won out in myth and legend, a rolling landscape comes into view on the horizon. The wildly grandiose man-made structure is none other than the Great Wall of China. The road beckons before this attempt to tame savage nature. To quote Nosferatu: "And when he had crossed the bridge, the phantoms came to meet him." But here the spirits are far from hostile. The magic of their enchanted cave is undeniable even to Jean Cocteau and his disciple Jacques Demy, who paid tribute to his forebear in *Donkey Skin*. A peacock displays much more than its tail: a rainbow of gems colorfully sweeps aside the memory of previous black-and-white scenery. Trees and fauna emerge as "colors of time" inside a massive aviary. The place feels somehow Eastern. We are in India. Here, the panther cedes once and for all to the outrageous temptation to ride like a prince on elephant-back, yielding the curious

tableau of a big cat perched upon the cracked, leathery skin of a pachyderm, itself capable of carrying an entire palace.

Cue a modern-day Icarus, the pioneering dare-devil aviator determined to take to the air and finally fly. Time ticks by on the adventurer's watch, yet this strange bird that spurns distance by the same turn almost renders time meaningless. The one-of-a-kind aircraft delivers the panther back to where her journey began. The City of Light twinkles under the watch of Eiffel's towering beacon. Here, everything is lighter than air. This birdseye view of Paris echoes the sweeping panoramas seen in Martin Scorsese's latest film *Hugo*. A Paris where today's inventions intersperse yesterday's sculptures, where the birds of the future meet the steeds of eternity. For now the wandering panther needs new accommodations, and none could be more fitting than the Grand Palais. At the beginning of the night, as the big clock says. Time has ticked on since dawn on Place Vendôme.

It is time for the panther to pad silently home, slink up the grand staircase and slip into the case-like bedroom. Inside, a woman in a blood-red evening gown awaits; after the aviator, she is the only other human cast member. Beauty meets the beast, each spurred to recognize, size up and acknowledge the other. Hand and collar are primed for contact with a matador's grace. The two female stars exit together, allowing the case to close around beauty in its pure state before the credits roll.

No unwarranted verbiage is needed to leap between continents. The camera silently relates the story of the panther as she trustily brings to bear our wide-ranging dreams. We flit from one country to the next as from one image to the next. Cinema has the capacity to masterfully segue between Chinese dragons and Indian palaces. As time and space loosen their grip, the rings are free to majestically roll on towards the great beyond.