## Sandow’s Shadow

Rogers Zelazny

*[The first two pages or approximately 650 words of handwrirren manuscript are missing. As the story opens, Francis Sandow is exploring an artificial pocket universe inexplicably placed into stasis.]*

Sandow circumnavigated the globe. Most customers did not even know that such a stasis-device existed, its only use being for maintenance purposes. And this indicated that the person who shut down the pocket universe had had more than a little training in the area. Enough—Sandow smiled ironically—to locate the key…

As he passed over city after city, admiring the skylines and high mountains with great waterfalls, he automatically began contemplating general weather patterns. This person liked real seasons, not just minor fluctuations…

He smiled. Bell. He was looking at an unknown work by one of the true masters—Chesley Bell.

Bell had been dead for centuries now—Sandow had attended the funeral in hard-holo—but he had done some work for God’s Pockets long ago. It had apparently waited in file until the proper customer had come along. He wondered whether all of the universes in question were Bell’s work.

Bell did like his mountain ranges and high cataracts. Sandow seeks a cave to run these [pocket universes] from. The second planet possessed the best collection. He promptly entered the coordinates and napped.

Later, on awakening, he hovered above the absolute stillness of one of the highest falls he had ever seen. He scanned it for masked caverns. There were several. No special reason to favor one over the others. So, on a whim, he chose the middle one. Drifting in, he looked about, casting illumination everywhere. He wanted to be able to make orbit in a hurry if the key activated something else as well.

He sat and pondered. He could think of no reason for shutting things down, and things he did not understand frightened him. He opened up the doorways of his mind and waited. Was this a situation worth inviting Shimbo to?—Shimbo of Darktree Tower, Shrugger of Thunders? The ancient Pei’an deity with whom he enjoyed a peculiar bond when working in complicated areas?

No, he decided at length. Ultimately, Shimbo’s interest might provide a self-summoning—but let that come when it would. Sandow liked to handle things of this sort on his own for so far as he could take them.

He felt a line of force from ahead and to the left. Checking his personal arsenal, he cracked the Model T’s hatch and stepped out into the cave.

Yes; he followed in that direction, realizing that the key was not a full physical object. When he reached a point—a pinkish mineral vein—he placed his hand upon it. It was a power-pull of the sort he had worked with for ages. How did this one want to be dealt with? He stood there, extending into it, and let it tell him.

Then he began moving his hands through the ritualistic sequence he had determined would unlock it. Abruptly, however, he heard a sound of thunder from without the cave. This should not be. In fact, it was technically impossible. Unless…

Unless his Pei’an alter ego Shimbo was trying to warn him of something, and he’d a feeling that this was the case. Completing the final gestures, he broke and ran back to the Model T. Diving inside, he let it secure itself as he activated both systems and shields. Even as he rose from the cave floor, the walls began to slide and tumble about him. There came a point where he had to burn his way through. He was buffeted for a moment by the cataract. Then he was free, moving outward and upward.

“Vessel emerging from cataract,” came a radio broadcast. “You are trespassing on private property. Would you please land and identify yourself?”

“Negative,” Sandow replied. “I just did you one big favor, and I don’t have time for another.”

“I must insist.”

“Me, too.”

The Model T took off at an enormous pace. Its exit key was ready.

“I don’t understand what’s been going on here, but I want to. I will fire.”

“I might have been more cooperative if you hadn’t just threatened me. Good-bye.”

Sandow activated the transportal code.

He departed the area quickly, more than a little puzzled at the treatment he had received. He made his way to Dyce, a completely Dysonized universe—oxygen available throughout scattered multitudes of small worldlets connected by bridges, freeform structures the size of entire cities drifting in space. Finding the key in one such, he releases the universe from its stasis and is again treated as if he were an enemy. Again he departs in a hurry.

Next, he visits Jungen, the archetypal universe, also in stasis. He decides to leave it that way. The same for Cabal, the magical universe. While Dyce seems an experimental piece of Chesley Bell’s, Cabal is the work of someone Sandow does not recognize. From its roughness in some places he takes it as the work of some new person just out of his apprenticeship.

Next he decides to visit Aurons, a pocket universe whose principal world is semi-desert. He arrives to find it intact and functioning. Entering under the guise of every stealth-type device at his command, he seeks the key. He recognizes the pocket universe as the work of the late Nizzim Rochter, an alien bearing a vague resemblance to a kangaroo rat, who specialized in dry climate worlds. This design could have been on file, too, or it could have been commissioned long ago.

Locating the key—a large mass of opal in an enlarged grotto, to be manipulated through a complex series of rotations, Sandow finds that another has beaten him to it, a dark-haired, short individual who is even now studying the thing.

Emerging from his invisible vessel, Sandow approaches the man and the opal. “I’d like to have a few words with you,” he says, holding his hands out from his body.

The man stares, studying him.

“Francis Sandow,” he says. “I’d heard it was almost impossible to get you off of Homefree. If this is because of me, I’m quite flattered.”

“I don’t recall our having met,” Sandow responds.

The other smiled. “I’ll be glad to tell you all about it in just a bit. I’d like to shut this world down first, though.”

“Mind if I ask why?”

“I’d rather hold that till afterwards.”

“All right. I’ll be glad to shut it down for you right now if you’d like. I see how it’s set up.”

“Go ahead.”

Sandow began to manipulate the giant opal. After perhaps fifteen minutes he felt the world slide into stasis.

“Fair enough,” the other said. “Do you want to talk here or someplace else?”

“If you’ve a sufficient supply of terplant juice, let’s talk here. It seems the safest place in this universe.”

The other laughed hoarsely and took a swig from his canteen.

“You never made me a great worldscaper. But that wasn’t why I came to you. Fifty years to learn the preliminaries. I needed that along with a bunch of other things.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand,” Sandow said. “There is something familiar about you, but I can’t really place you.”

The man’s face twisted and rippled. “Face-folding,” he stated. “I have three I can go into. It took three operations and over a year’s training to learn them.”

“Milo Monkson!” Sandow said.

The other laughed. “None other. Studied with you for over twenty years. Learned a lot.”

“Why’d you quit? You’d have made a good worldscaper. But you just took off one day.”

The man laughed again. “That’s my way,” he replied. “I spent five years with the martial arts masters of Quinn V and just took off one day, too. Blew through the Champagne School for Musicians, also without telling my coordinator. Like the wind. Was even a cop for two years. And I have a doctorate in history. Studied sleight-of-hand with a magician for six months also.”

“Impressive resume,” Sandow said. “I’d be glad to hire you just to kill off my mistakes.”

Milo slapped him on the shoulder. Sandow had read the move as benign even before it was started. “Thanks, boss. But I’ve something else I have to deal with first.”

“That being?”

“I’ve seven universes to shut down.”

“Why, for God’s sake?”

“Long story.”

Sandow checked his Time Geni. “I have over half a day.”

“… but I have quite a bit myself/”

“I’d like to hear yout story. Buy you dinner?”

They hastened back to the Model T, where mess prepared them a gourmet meal with an exotic beer.

“Good stuff,” Milo remarked, smacking his lips. “But then you always were a gourmet, boss.”

“Not always. But I take it when I can get it.”

After awhile, Milo tells his story:

“I was born and lived my first twelve years in the mining town of Raidadenc Ban in the Shingta Basin on the planet Pasqua. You may have heard of the Pasquas Wipeout. Seven of the most able space pirates of the day united to rape the world. Their combined forces stole everything worth stealing, melt-mined the most volatile minerals from orbit, sold every able bodied person they could capture in slavery in the infamous warrens of Galloo slave mart, and executed everyone else they could find with a slow-burn over all the areas of major habitation. Afterwards they divided the spoils, retired, and bought new identities and respectability. Much later, when the trails had gone cold and the money old, they bought their own universes—the seven that I am shutting down before I go in to kill them.

“I’m a survivor of the Pasquas Wipeout. I saw them kill off all of my family except for my grandmother Dolba. She’d been a Ditren Commando in her younger days, and she still had all the combat implants in her body. She arrived home from her weekly night out with her friends, saw what was happening, and wiped out the squad of pirates who were doing it. Dolba then got me out of the town—fighting two engagements along the way—and into the hills, where we took refuge in one of the abandoned mines. That’s how we survived the slow-burn. But at one point she left me there for several hours. When she returned, she was injured, but she’d learned who was behind the operation. She made me memorize a lot of other things while we waited. She taught me to live off the damaged land, though we did find some food stores later.

“Then months later we were rescued by a freighter. They made regular stops in the Shingta Basin. She had offworld relatives and money. She raised me then and worked out the training I would need to find the seven and destroy them. She died when I was seventeen, leaving me the money to pursue this bizarre education. The use of her adjuncts at an advanced age mayor may not have accelerated the aging process.

“I swore on her grave that I would do it, and I did. It was her that really conceived of operation Shrike—nailing them all.”

“Why shrike?”

“A shrike is a ruthless killer bird. That’s what I’d become to go after them.”

“I see.”

“Now I am about my business—Operation Shrike.”

Care to tell me more about the people you’re after?” Sandow asks.

Milo does, and the tableau runs like this:

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| RULER | UNIVERSE | FEATURES OF MAJOR WORLD |
| Detco—A brain in fluid-filled sphere with a collection of bodies he can switch into—not all of them human. Limited psi powers. | Urbs | Totally urbanized world; museum-like where not utilized; many sculpture gardens. |
| Ishro Vtzdan—Gorgeous human body, brunette, with a scar on her left cheek and an artificial left hand (which is a multipurpose weapon). | Jungen | Dreamlike place, filled with haunts and archetypes. |
| Mica—A big human guy with so many cyborg replacements he could pass as something artificial. | Dyce | A fully Dysonized universe; atmosphere everywhere, bridges between wordlets, planets, floating cities; ships sail between worlds; some people drive Cyberpunk-like “bridges” who hang out between worlds. |
| Avalon Greer—Male, human, sorcerer. | Cabal | City of brass, city of iron, city of glass, cities of incredible precious and semiprecious stones, etc. Magic works here. |
| Dwisdor—Very tall, thin, humanoid male. Amazing speed of reflexes; shapeshifter, also; can change colors, chameleon-like. Pet, giant blood tarantula. | Aurons | Desert world; Arabian nights-like cities. |
| Merriwind Tatchet—Very mod-looking body; might as well be a dream figure; can warp reality for a distance of 100 feet or so. | Vestry | Dali-like places of wonder. Many limp watches hung on treelimbs. Alice-in-Wonderland feeling. |
| Ahchra—Something big and thick within a dark cassock-like garment, hooded. Three green glowing eyes beneath hood. Might even be a tall quadruped under all those garments, gender male. | Fortune | Casino world with big rugged expanses-rock, sand, forest-where duels are regularly fought. |

Having heard Milo’s story and learned these particulars, Sandow admits to having restored the first two worlds. Milo is furious, moves to attack Sandow. Sandow dodges several attacks without retaliating. Finally, Milo halts and says, “You didn’t know.” Then he sits down, head in hands. After a time, he says “They may be on to me now. May not, also, of course. My best bet is to take out Dwisdor quickly and move on.”

Sandow says, “I’ll help.”

Dwisdor and his own questors are subject to a fire-alarm-type effect (as are the others). In [unintelligible] millions—as his world is being shut down—he is twisted with a personal time-effect of the sort Sandow and Milo are using. Duel scenes with Sandow and Milo-fighting corpses, gem-studded cave of Ali Baba, time-astounded djinn (in vicinity)—and the blood tarantula (Slyve) of near-human intelligence. Sandow’s archer’s eye detects a massive land mass frozen in mid-slide. He pushes the action in that direction till their time fields activate the slide, crushing Dwisdor and Slyve.

They split up after that for a battle involving Sandow’s confrontation with Merriweather Tatchet, who summons warped demons of his past which drive him half-mad, till Shimbo intervenes with meteorological distortions which permit him to regain control of himself—also, of the mad environment (one must have been at least half mad at one time to gain this power). Dueling then with Merriweather, he succeeds in turning one of her own nightmare creations against her and sees her eaten by it.

Milo, in the next battle, proceeds against Mica for a deadly martial arts duel amid the Dysonized worldlets—fighting atop and inside, clusters of floating jewels, on the bridgeways between the worlds, in abundant floating costumes, in the guts of a giant computer, moving from point to point amid the toy worlds of a solar system the size of a football field. Milo’s martial arts skills did not fully prepare him for a man who seems part robot—but, displacing the orbits of worlds in the mini-system, he is finally able to trap Milo between two which are about to collide.

Sandow and Milo team up to go against Avalon Greer, the sorcerer. After a lively chase sequence (with Sandow’s companion finally cracking the language of Avalon’s spells) they corner the man in the dungeons of his Ruby Biome. As they move in for the kill, they are defeated by the arrival of Detco and Ishro Vadan, who had compared notes concerning the mysterious shutdowns and revivals of their respective universes. They have realized that some single individual is behind it all, though they have not yet determined him to be a survivor of the Pasqua Wipeout. However, Milo makes a point of informing his target as to who he is and why he’s doing what he’s doing, to make his revenge complete—and he had just finished telling this to Avalon Greer in anticipation of his death. Hard-pressed, he and Sandow escape with their lives by finding a flaw in the great Ruby and playing their lasers upon it. They make it back to the Model T and Milo’s Shrike and split the scene just a mile ahead of the posse.

Safe in subspace later, immersed in tubs of healing gel and passing a pitcher of Martinis (a totally out-of-common drink most bartenders, human and otherwise, have never heard of). Milo had asked for a popular drink, but Sandow had persuaded him to try the ancient mix.

“Give me a Twi.”

“A what?”

“A drink with ice colade.”

“Crap. Try something decent—like a Martini.”

“What the hell’s a Martini?”

“Try it and see.”

While resting and sipping, they plot their next campaign.