The Furies

Roger Zelazny

As an afterthought, Nature sometimes tosses a bone to those it maims and casts aside. Often, it is in the form of a skill, usually useless, or the curse of intelligence.

When Sandor Sandor was four years old he could name all the one hundred forty-nine inhabited worlds in the galaxy. When he was five he could name the principal land masses of each planet and chalk them in, roughly, on blank globes. By the time he was seven years old he knew all the provinces, states, countries and major cities of all the main land masses on all one hundred forty-nine inhabited worlds in the galaxy. He read Landography, History, Landology and popular travel guides during most of his waking time; and he studied maps and travel tapes. There was a camera behind his eyes, or so it seemed, because by the time he was ten years old there was no city in the galaxy that anyone could name about which Sandor Sandor did not know something.

And he continued.

Places fascinated him. He built a library of street guides, road maps. He studied architectural styles and principal industries, and racial types, native life forms, local flora, landmarks, hotels, restaurants, airports and seaports and spaceports, styles of clothing and personal ornamentation, climatic conditions, local arts and crafts, dietary habits, sports, religions, social institutions, customs.

When he took his doctorate in Landography at the age of fourteen, his oral examinations were conducted via closed circuit television. This is because he was afraid to leave his home-having done so only three times before in his life and having met with fresh trauma on each occasion. And this is because on all one hundred forty-nine inhabited worlds in the galaxy there was no remedy for a certain degenerative muscular disease. This disease made it impossible for Sandor to manipulate even the finest prosthetic devices for more than a few minutes without suffering fatigue and great pain; and to go outside he required three such devices-two legs and a right arm-to substitute for those which he had missed out on receiving somewhere along the line before birth.

Rather than suffer this pain, or the pain of meeting persons other than his Aunt Faye or his nurse, Miss Barbara, he took his oral examinations via closed circuit television.

The University of Brill, Dombeck, was located on the other side of that small planet from Sander’s home, else the professors would have come to see him, because they respected him considerably. His 855-page dissertation, “Some Notes Toward a Gravitational Matrix Theory Governing the Formation of Similar Land Masses on Dissimilar Planetary Bodies,” had drawn attention from Interstel University on Earth itself. Sandor Sandor, of course, would never .see the Earth. His muscles could only sustain the gravitation of smaller planets, such as Dombeck.

And it happened that the Interstel Government, which monitors everything, had listened in on Sander’s oral examinations and his defense of his dissertation.

Associate Professor Baines was one of Sander’s very few friends. They had even met several times in person, in Sandor’s library, because Baines often said he’d wanted to borrow certain books and then came and spent the afternoon. When the examinations were concluded, Associate Professor Baines stayed on the circuit for several minutes, talking with Sandor. It was during this time that Baines made casual reference to an almost useless (academically, that is) talent of Sander’s.

At the mention of it, the government man’s ears had pricked forward (he was a Rigellian). He was anxious for a promotion and he recalled an obscure memo. . . .

Associate Professor Baines had mentioned the fact that Sandor Sandor had once studied a series of thirty random photos from all over the civilized galaxy, and that the significant data from these same photos had also been fed into the Department’s L-L computer. Sandor had named the correct planet in each case, the land mass in 29, the county or territory in twenty-six, and he had correctly set the location itself within fifty square miles in twenty-three instances. The L-L comp had named the correct planet for twenty-seven.

It was not a labor of love for the computer.

So it became apparent that Sandor Sandor knew just about every damn street in the galaxy.

Ten years later he knew them all.

But three years later the Rigellian quit his job, disgusted, and went to work in private industry, where the pay was better and promotions more frequent. His memo, and the tape, had been filed, however. . . .

Benedick Benedict was born and grew up on the watery world of Kjum, and his was an infallible power for making enemies of everyone he met.

The reason why is that while some men’s highest pleasure is drink, and others are given to gluttony, and still others are slothful, or lechery is their chief delight, or un-doing, Benedick’s was gossip-he was a loudmouth.

Gossip was his meat and his drink, his sex and his religion. Shaking hands with him was a mistake, often a catastrophic one. For, as he clung to your hand, pumping it and smiling, his eyes would suddenly grow moist and the tears would dribble down his fat cheeks.

He wasn’t sad when this happened. Far from it. It was a somatic conversion from his paranorm reaction.

He was seeing your past life.

He was selective, too; he only saw what he looked for. And he looked for scandal and hate, and what is often worse, love; he looked for lawbreaking and unrest, for memories of discomfort, pain, futility, weakness. He saw everything a man wanted to forget, and he talked about it.

If you are lucky he won’t tell you of your own. If you have ever met someone else whom he has also met in this manner, and if this fact shows, he will begin talking of that person. He will tell you of that man’s or woman’s life because he appreciates this form of social reaction even more than your outrage at yourself. And his eyes and voice and hand will hold you, like the clutch of the Ancient Mariner, in a sort of half dream-state; and you will hear him out and you will be shocked beneath your paralysis.

Then he will go away and tell others about you.

Such a man was Benedick Benedict. He was probably unaware how much he was hated, because this reaction never came until later, after he had said “Good day,” departed, and been gone for several hours. He left his hearers with a just-raped feeling-and later fear, shame, or disgust forced them to suppress the occurrence and to try to forget him. Or else they hated him quietly, because he was dangerous. That is to say, he had powerful friends.

He was an extremely social animal: he loved attention; he wanted to be admired; he craved audiences.

He could always find an audience too, somewhere. He knew so many secrets that he was tolerated in important places in return for the hearing. And he was wealthy too, but more of that in a moment.

As time went on, it became harder and harder for him to meet new people. His reputation spread in geometric proportion to his talking, and even those who would hear him preferred to sit on the far side of the room, drink enough alcohol to partly deaden memories of themselves, and to be seated near a door.

The reason for his wealth is because his power extended to inanimate objects as well. Minerals were rare on Kjum, the watery world. If anyone brought him a sample he could hold it and weep and tell them where to dig to hit the main lode.

From one fish caught in the vast seas of Kjum, he could chart the course of a school of fish.

Weeping, he could touch a native rad-pearl necklace and divine the location of the native’s rad-pearl bed.

Local insurance associations and loan companies kept Benedict Files-the pen a man had used to sign his contract, his snubbed-out cigarette butt, a plastex hanky with which he had mopped his brow, an object left in security, the remains of a biopsy or blood test-so that Benedick could use his power against those who renege on these companies and flee, on those who break their laws.

He did not revel in his power either. He simply enjoyed it. For he was one of the nineteen known paranorms in the one hundred forty-nine inhabited worlds in the galaxy, and he knew no other way.

Also, he occasionally assisted civil authorities, if he thought their cause a just one. If he did not, he suddenly lost his power until the need for it vanished. This didn’t happen too often though, for an humanitarian was Benedick Benedict, and well-paid, because he was laboratory-tested and clinically-proven. He could psychometrize. He could pick up thought-patterns originating outside his own skull. . . .

Lynx Links looked like a beachball with a beard, a fat patriarch with an eyepatch, a man who loved good food and drink, simple clothing, and the company of simple people; he was a man who smiled often and whose voice was soft and melodic.

In his earlier years he had chalked up the most impressive kill-record of any agent ever employed by Interstel Central Intelligence. Forty-eight men and seventeen malicious alien life-forms had the Lynx dispatched during his fifty-year tenure as a field agent. He was one of the three men in the galaxy to have lived through half a century’s employment with ICI. He lived comfortably on his government pension despite three wives and a horde of grandchildren; he was recalled occasionally as a consultant; and he did some part-time missionary work on the side. He believed that all life was one and that all men were brothers, and that love rather than hate or fear should rule the affairs of men. He had even killed with love, he often remarked at Tranquility Session, respecting and revering the person and, the spirit of the man who had been marked for death.

This is the story of how he came to be summoned back from Hosanna, the World of the Great and Glorious Flame of the Divine Life, and was joined with Sandor Sandor and Benedick Benedict in the hunt for Victor Corgo, the man without a heart.

Victor Corgo was captain of the Wallaby. Victor Corgo was Head Astrogator, First Mate, and Chief Engineer of the Wallaby. Victor Corgo was the Wallaby.

One time the Wallaby was a proud Guardship, an ebony toadstool studded with the jewel-like warts of fast-phrase projectors. One time the Wallaby slapped proud about the frontier worlds of Interstel, meting out the unique justice of the Uniform Galactic Code-in those places where there was no other law. One time the proud Wallaby, under the command of Captain Victor Corgo of the Guard, had ranged deep space and become a legend under legendary skies.

A terror to brigands and ugly aliens, a threat to Code-breakers, and a thorn in the sides of evildoers everywhere, Corgo and his shimmering fungus (which could burn an entire continent under water level within a single day) were the pride of the Guard, the best of the best, the cream that had been skimmed from all the rest.

Unfortunately, Corgo sold out.

He became a heel.

... A traitor.

A hero gone bad . . .

After forty-five years with the Guard, his pension but half a decade away, he lost his entire crew in an ill-timed raid upon a pirate stronghold on the planet Kilsh, which might have become the hundred-fiftieth inhabited world of Interstel.

Crawling, barely alive, he had made his way half across the great snowfield of Brild, on the main land mass of Kilsh. At the fortuitous moment, Death making its traditional noises of approach, he was snatched from out of its traffic lane, so to speak, by the Drillen, a nomadic tribe of ugly and intelligent quadrupeds, who took him to their camp and healed his wounds, fed him, and gave him warmth. Later, with the cooperation of the Drillen, he recovered the Wallaby and all its arms and armaments, from where it had burnt its way to a hundred feet beneath the ice.

Crewless, he trained the Drillen.

With the Drillen and the Wallaby he attacked the pirates.

He won.

But he did not stop with that.

No.

When he learned that the Drillen had been marked for death under the Uniform Code he sold out his own species. The Drillen had refused relocation to a decent Reservation World. They had elected to continue occupancy of what was to become the hundred-fiftieth inhabited world in the galaxy (that is to say, in Interstel).

Therefore, the destruct-order had been given.

Captain Corgo protested, was declared out of order.

Captain Corgo threatened, was threatened in return.

Captain Corgo fought, was beaten, died, was resurrected, escaped restraint, became an outlaw.

He took the Wallaby with him. The Happy Wallaby, it had been called in the proud days. Now, it was just the Wallaby.

As the tractor beams had seized it, as the vibrations penetrated its ebony hull and tore at his flesh, Corgo had called his six Drillen to him, stroked the fur of Mala, his favorite, opened his mouth to speak, and died just as the words and the tears began.

“I am sorry . . .” he had said.

They gave him a new heart, though. His old one had fibrillated itself to pieces and could not be repaired. They put the old one in a jar and gave him a shiny, anti-septic egg of throbbing metal, which expanded and contracted at varying intervals, dependent upon what the seed-sized computers they had planted within him told of his breathing and his blood sugar and the output of his various glands. The seeds and the egg contained his life.

When they were assured that this was true and that it would continue, they advised him of the proceedings of courts-martial.

He did not wait, however, for due process. Breaking his parole as an officer, he escaped the Guard Post, taking with him Mala, the only remaining Drillen in the galaxy. Her five fellows had not survived scientific inquiry as to the nature of their internal structures. The rest of the race, of course, had refused relocation.

Then did the man without a heart make war upon mankind.

Raping a planet involves considerable expense. Enormous blasters and slicers and sluicers and refiners are required to reduce a world back almost to a state of primal chaos, and then to extract from it its essential (i.e., commercially viable) ingredients. The history books may tell you of strip-mining on the mother planet, back in ancient times. Well, the crude processes employed then were similar in emphasis and results, but the operations were considerably smaller in size.

Visualize a hundred miles of Grand Canyon appearing overnight; visualize the reversal of thousands of Landological millenia in the twinkling of an eye; consider all of the Ice Ages of the Earth, and compress them into a single season. This will give you a rough idea as to time and effect.

Now picture the imported labor-the men who drill and blast and slice and sluice for the great mining combines: Not uneducated, these men; willing to take a big risk, certainly though, these men-maybe only for one year, because of the high pay; or maybe they’re careerists, because of the high pay-these men, who hit three worlds in a year’s time, who descend upon these worlds in ships full of city, in space-trailer mining camps, out of the sky; coming, these men, from all over the inhabited galaxy, bringing with them the power of the tool and the opposed thumb, bearing upon their brows the mark of the Solar Phoenix and in their eyes the cold of the spaces they have crossed over, they know what to do to make the domes of atoms rise before them and to call down the tomado-probosci of suckvortices from the freighters on the other side of the sky; and they do it thoroughly and efficiently, and not without style, tradition, folksongs, and laughter-for they are the sweat-crews, working against time (which is money), to gain tonnage (which is money), and to beat their competitors to market (which is important, inasmuch as one worlds worth influences future sales for many months); these men, who bear in one hand the flame and in the other the whirlwind, who come down with their families and all their possessions, erect temporary metropoli, work their magic act, and go-after the vanishing trick has been completed.

Now that you’ve an idea as to what happens and who is present at the scene, here’s the rub:

Raping a planet involves considerable expense.

The profits are more than commensurate, do not misunderstand. It is just that they could be even greater....

How?

Well- For one thing, the heavy machinery involved is quite replaceable, in the main. That is, the machinery which is housed within the migrant metropoli.

Moving it is expensive. Not moving it isn’t. For it is actually cheaper, in terms of material and labor, to manufacture new units than it is to fast-phase the old ones more than an average of 2.6 times.

Mining combines do not produce them (and wouldn’t really want to); the mining manufacturing combines like to make new units as much as the mining combines like to lose old ones.

And of course it is rented machinery, or machinery on which the payments are still being made, to the financing associations, because carrying payments makes it easier to face down the Interstel Revenue Service every fiscal year.

Abandoning the units would be criminal, violating either the lessor-lessee agreement or the Interstel Commercial Code.

But accidents do happen . . .

Often, too frequently to make for comfortable statistics ...

Way out there on the raw frontier.

Then do the big insurance associations investigate, and they finally sigh and reimburse the lien-holders.

. . . And the freighters make it to market ahead of schedule, because there is less to dismantle and march-order and ship.

Time is saved, commitments are met in advance, a better price is generally obtained, and a head start on the next worlds worth is supplied in this manner.

All of which is nice.

Except for the insurance associations.

But what can happen to a transitory New York full of heavy equipment?

Well, some call it sabotage.

. . . Some call it mass-murder.

. . . Unsanctioned war.

. . . Corgo’s lightning

But it is written that it is better to burn one city than to curse the darkness.

Corgo did not curse the darkness.

. . . Many times.

The day they came together on Dombeck, Benedick held forth his hand, smiled, said: “Mister Sandor . . .”

As his hand was shaken, his smile reversed itself. Then it went away from his face. He was shaking an artificial hand.

Sandor nodded, dropped his eyes.

Benedick turned to the big man with the eyepatch.

“. . . And you are the Lynx?”

“That is correct, my brother. You must excuse me if I do not shake hands. It is against my religion. I believe that life does not require reassurance as to its oneness.”

“Of course,” said Benedick. “I once knew a man from Dombeck. He was a gnil smuggler, named Worten Wortan—”

“He is gone to join the Great Flame,” said the Lynx.

“That is to say, he is dead now. ICI apprehended him two years ago. He passed to Flame while attempting to escape restraint.”

“Really?” said Benedick. “He was at one time a gnil addict himself—”

“I know. I read his file in connection with another case.”

“Dombeck is full of gnil smugglers"-Sandor.

“Oh. Well, then let us talk of this man Corgo.”

“Yes"-the Lynx.

“Yes"-Sandor.

“The ICI man told me that many insurance associations have lodged protests with their Interstel representatives.”

“That is true"-Lynx.

“Yes"-Sandor, biting his lip. “Do you gentlemen mind if I remove my legs?”

“Not at all"-the Lynx. “We are co-workers, and informality should govern our gatherings.”

“Please do,” said Benedick.

Sandor leaned forward in his chair and pressed the coupling controls. There followed two thumps from beneath his desk. He leaned back then and surveyed his shelves of globes.

“Do they cause you pain?” asked Benedick.

“Yes-"-Sandor.

“Were you in an accident?”

“Birth"-Sandor.

The Lynx raised a decanter of brownish liquid to the light. He stared through it.

“It is a local brandy"-Sandor. “Quite good. Some-what like the xmili of Bandia, only nonaddictive. Have some.”

The Lynx did, keeping it in front of him all that evening.

“Corgo is a destroyer of property,” said Benedick.

Sandor nodded.

“. . . And a defrauder of insurance associations, a defacer of planetary bodies, a deserter from the Guard—”

“A murderer"—Sandor.

“. . . And a zoophilist,” finished Benedick.

“Aye"-the Lynx, smacking his lips.

“So great an offender against public tranquility is he that he must be found.”

“. . . And passed back through the Flame for purification and rebirth.”

“Yes, we must locate him and kill him,” said Benedick.

“The two pieces of equipment . . . Are they present?"-the Lynx.

“Yes, the phase-wave is in the next room.”

“. . . And?” asked Benedick.

“The other item is in the bottom drawer of this desk, right side.”

“Then why do we not begin now?”

“Yes. Why not now?"-the Lynx.

“Very well"-Sandor. “One of you will have to open the drawer, though. It is in the brown-glass jar, to the back.”

“I’ll get it,” said Benedick.

A great sob escaped him after a time, as he sat there with rows of worlds at his back, tears on his cheeks, and Corgo’s heart clutched in his hands.

“It is cold and dim. . . ”

“Where?"-the Lynx.

“It is a small place. A room? Cabin? Instrument panels ... A humming sound . . . Cold, and crazy angles everywhere . . . Vibration . . . Hurt!”

“What is he doing?"-Sandor.

“. . . Sitting, half-lying-a couch, webbed, about him. Furry one at his side, sleeping. Twisted-angles-everything-wrong. Hurt!”

“The Wallaby, in transit-Lynx.

“Where is he going?"-Sandor.

“HURT!” shouted Benedick.

Sandor dropped the heart into his lap.

He began to shiver. He wiped at his eyes with the backs of his hands.

“I have a headache,” he announced.

“Have a drink"-Lynx.

He gulped one, sipped the second.

“Where was I?”

The Lynx raised his shoulders and let them fall.

“The Wallaby was fast-phasing somewhere, and Corgo was in phase-sleep. It is a disturbing sensation to fast-phase while fully conscious. Distance and duration grow distorted. You found him at a bad time-while under sedation and subject to continuum-impact. Perhaps tomorrow will be better. . . .”

“I hope so.”

“Yes, tomorrow"-Sandor.

“Tomorrow . . . Yes.

“There was one other thing/' he added, “a thing in his mind . . . There was a sun where there was no sun before.”

“A burn-job?"-Lynx.

“Yes.”

“A memory?"-Sandor.

“No. He is on his way to do it.”

The Lynx stood.

“I will phase-wave ICI and advise them. They can check which worlds are presently being mined. Have you any ideas how soon?”

“No, I can not tell that.”

“What did the globe look like? What continental configurations?"-Sandor.

“None. The thought was not that specific. His mind was drifting-mainly filled with hate.”

“I’ll call in now-and we’ll try again. . . . ?”

“Tomorrow. I’m tired now.”

“Go to bed then. Rest.”

“Yes, I can do that. . . .'”

“Good night. Mister Benedict.”

“Good night. . . .”

“Sleep in the heart of the Great Flame.”

“I hope not. . . .”

Mala whimpered and moved nearer her Corgo, for she was dreaming an evil dream: They were back on the great snowfield of Brild, and she was trying to help him-to walk, to move forward. He kept slipping though, and lying there longer each time, and rising more slowly each time and moving ahead at an even slower pace, each time. He tried to kindle a fire, but the snow-devils spun and toppled like icicles falling from the seven moons, and the dancing green flames died as soon as they were born from between his hands.

Finally, on the top of a mountain of ice she saw them.

There were three . . .

They were clothed from head to toe in flame; their burning heads turned and turned and turned; and then one bent and sniffed at the ground, rose, and indicated their direction. Then they were racing down the hillside, trailing flames, melting a pathway as they came, springing over drifts and ridges of ice, their arms extended before them.

Silent they came, pausing only as the one sniffed the air, the ground. . . .

She could hear their breathing now, feel their heat.

In a matter of moments they would arrive....

Mala whimpered and moved nearer her Corgo.

For three days Benedick tried, clutching Corgo’s heart like a Gypsy’s crystal, watering it with his tears, squeezing almost to life again. His head ached for hours after, each time that he met the continuum-impact. He wept long, moist tears for hours beyond contact, which was unusual. He had always withdrawn from immediate pain before; remembered distress was his forte, and a different matter altogether.

He hurt each time that he touched Corgo and his mind was sucked down through that subway in the sky; and he touched Corgo eleven times during those three days, and then his power went away, really.

Seated, like a lump of dark metal on the hull of the Wallaby, he stared across six hundred miles at the blazing hearth which he had stoked to steel-tempering heights; and he felt Like a piece of metal, resting there upon an anvil, waiting for the hammer to fall again, as it always did, waiting for it to strike him again and again, and to beat him to a new toughness, to smash away more and more of that within him which was base, of that which knew pity, remorse, and guilt, again and again and again, and to leave only that hard, hard form of hate, like an iron boot, which lived at the core of the lump, himself, and required constant hammering and heat.

Sweating as he watched, smiling, Corgo took pictures.

When one of the nineteen known paranorms in the one hundred forty-nine inhabited worlds in the galaxy suddenly loses his powers, and loses them at a crucial moment, it is like unto the old tales wherein a Princess is stricken one day with an unknown malady and the King, her father, summons all his wise men and calls for the best physicians in the realm.

Big Daddy ICI (Rex ex machina-like.} did, in similar manner, summon wise men and counselors from various Thinkomats and think-repair shops about the galaxy, including Interstel University, on Earth itself. But alas! While all had a diagnosis none had on hand any suggestions which were immediately acceptable to all parties concerned:

“Bombard his thalamus with Beta particles.”

“Hypno-regression to the womb, and restoration at a pretraumatic point in his life.”

“More continuum-impact.”

“Six weeks on a pleasure satellite, and two aspirins every four hours.”

“There is an old operation called a lobotomy. . . .”

“Lots of liquids and green leafy vegetables.”

“Hire another paranorm.”

For one reason or another, the principal balked at all of these courses of action, and the final one was impossible at the moment. In the end, the matter was settled neatly by Sander’s nurse Miss Barbara, who happened onto the veranda one afternoon as Benedick sat there fanning himself and drinking xmili.

“Why Mister Benedict!” she announced, plopping her matronly self into the chair opposite him and spiking her redlonade with three fingers of xmili. “Fancy meeting you out here! I thought you were in the library with the boys, working on that top secret hush-hush critical project called Wallaby Stew, or something.”

“As you can see, I am not,” he said, staring at his knees.

“Well, it’s nice just to pass the time of day sometimes, too. To sit. To relax. To rest from the hunting of Victor Corgo . . .”

“Please, you’re not supposed to know about the project. It’s top secret and critical—”

“And hush-hush too, I know. Dear Sandor talks in his sleep every night-so much. You see, I tuck him in each evening and sit there until he drifts away to dreamland, poor child.”

“Mm, yes. Please don’t talk about the project, though.”

“Why? Isn’t it going well?”

“No!”

“Why not?”

“Because of me, if you must know! I’ve got a block of some kind. The power doesn’t come when I call it.”

“Oh, how distressing! You mean you can’t peep into other persons’ minds any more?”

“Exactly.”

“Dear me. Well, let’s talk about something else then. Did I ever tell you about the days when I was the highest-paid courtesan on Sordido V?”

Benedick’s head turned slowly in her direction.

“Nooo . . .” he said. “You mean the Sordido?”

“Oh yes. Bright Bad Barby, the Bouncing Baby, they used to call me. They still sing ballads, you know.”

“Yes, I’ve heard them. Many verses. . . .”

“Have another drink, I once had a coin struck in my image, you know. It’s a collectors’ item now, of course. Full-length pose, flesh-colored. Here, I wear it on this chain around my neck-Lean closer, it’s a short chain?”

“Very-interesting. Uh, how did all this come about?”

“Well-it all began with old Pruria Van Teste, the banker, of the export-import Testes. You see, he had this thing going for synthofemmes for a long while, but when he started getting up there in years he felt there was something he’d been missing. So, one fine day, he sent me ten dozen Hravian orchids and a diamond garter, along with an invitation to have dinner with him . .”

“You accepted, of course?”

“Naturally not. Not the first time, anyway. I could see that he was pretty damn eager.”

“Well, what happened?”

“Wait till I fix another redlonade.”

Later that afternoon, the Lynx wandered out into the veranda during the course of his meditations. He saw there Miss Barbara, with Benedick seated beside her, weeping.

“What troubles thy tranquility, my brother?” he inquired.

“Nothing! Nothing at all! It is wonderful and beautiful, everything! My power has come back-I can feel it!” He wiped his eyes on his sleeve.

“Bless thee, little lady!” said the Lynx, seizing Miss Barbara’s hand. “Thy simple counsels have done more to heal my brother than have all these highly-paid medical practitioners brought here at great expense. Virtue lies in thy homely words, and thou art most beloved of the Flame.”

“Thank you, I’m sure.”

“Come brother, let us away to our task again!”

“Yes, let us!-Oh thank you, Bright Barby!”

“Don’t mention it.”

Benedick’s eyes clouded immediately, as he took the tattered blood-pump into his hands. He leaned back, stroking it, and moist spots formed on either side of his nose, grew like well-fed amoebas, underwent mitosis, and dashed off to explore in the vicinity of his shelf-like upper lip.

He sighed once, deeply.

“Yes, I am there.”

He blinked, licked his lips.

“. . . It is night. Late. It is a primitive dwelling. Mud-like stucco, bits of straw in it ... All lights out, but for the one from the machine, and its spillage—”

“Machine?"-Lynx.

“What machine?"-Sandor.

“. . . Projector. Pictures on wall . . . World-big, filling whole picture-field-patches of fire on the world, up near the top. Three places—”

“Bhave VII!"-Lynx. “Six days ago!”

“Shoreline to the right goes like this . . . And to the left, like this. . . .”

His right index finger traced patterns in the air.

“Bhave VII"-Sandor.

“Happy and not happy at the same time-hard to separate the two. Guilt, though, is there-but pleasure with it. Revenge. . . . Hate people, humans . . . We adjust the projector now, stop it at a flare-up-Bright! How good!-Oh good! That will teach them!-Teach them to grab away what belongs to others ... To murder a race!-The generator is humming. It is ancient, and it smells bad. . . . The dog is lying on our foot. The foot is asleep, but we do not want to disturb the dog, for it is Mala’s favorite thing-her only toy, companion, living doll, four-footed. . . . She is scratching behind its ear with her forelimb, and it loves her. Light leaks down upon them. . . . Clear they are. The breeze is warm, very, which is why we are unshirted. It stirs the tasseled hanging. . . . No force-field or windowpane . . . Insects buzz by the projector-pterodactyl silhouettes on the burning world—”

“What kind of insects ?"-Lynx.

“Can you see what is beyond the window?"-Sandor.

“. . . Outside are trees-short ones-just outlines, squat. Can’t tell where trunks begin . . . Foliage too thick, too close. Too dark out-Off in the distance a tiny moon . . . Something like this on a hill . . .” His hands shaped a turnip impaled on an obelisk. “Not sure how far off, how large, what color, or what made of . . .”

“Is the name of the place in Corgo’s mind?"-Lynx.

“If I could touch him, with my hand, I would know it, know everything. Only receive impressions this way, though-surface thoughts. He is not thinking of where he is now. . . . The dog rolls onto its back and off of our foot-at last! She scratches its tummy, my love dark . . . It kicks with its hind leg as if scratching after a flea-wags its tail. Dilk is puppy’s name. She gave if that name, loves it ... It is like one of hers. Which was murdered. Hate people-humans. She is people. Better than . . . Doesn’t butcher that which breathes for selfish gain, for Interstel. Better than people, my pony-friends, better ... An insect lights on Dilk’s nose. She brushes it away. Segmented, two sets of wings, about five millimeters in length, pink globe on front end, bulbous, and buzzes as it goes, the insect-you asked . . .”

“How many entrances are there to the place?"-Lynx.

“Two. One doorway at each end of the hut.”

“How many windows?”

“Two. On opposing walls-the ones without doors. I can’t see anything through the other window-too dark on that side.”

“Anything else?”

“On the wall a sword-long hilt, very long, two-handed-even longer maybe-three? four?-short blades, though, two of them-hilt is in the middle-and each blade is straight, double-edged, forearm-length . . . Beside it, a mask of-flowers? Too dark to tell. The blades shine; the mask is dull. Looks like flowers, though. Many little ones. . . . Four sides to the mask, shaped like a kite, big end down. Can’t make out features. It projects fairly far out from the wall, though. Mala is restless. Probably doesn’t like the pictures-or maybe doesn’t see them and is bored. Her eyes are different. She nuzzles our shoulder now. We pour her a drink in her bowl. Take another one ourself. She doesn’t drink hers. We stare at her. She drops her head and drinks.-Dirt floor under our sandals, hard-packed. Many tiny white-pebbles?-in it, powdery-like. The table is wood, natural . . . The generator sputters. The picture fades, comes back. We rub our chin. Need a shave . . . The hell with it! We’re not standing any inspections! Drink-one, two-all gone! Another!”

Sandor had threaded a tape into his viewer, and he was spinning it and stopping it, spinning it and stopping it, spinning it and stopping it. He checked his worlds chronometer.

“Outside,” he asked, “does the moon seem to be moving up, or down, or across the sky?”

“Across.”

“Right to left, or left to right?”

“Right to left. It seems about a quarter past zenith.”

“Any coloration to it?”

“Orange, with three black lines. One starts at about eleven o'clock, crosses a quarter of its surface, drops straight down, cuts back at seven. The other starts at two, drops to six. They don’t meet. The third is a small upside-down letter 'c'-lower right quarter . . . Not big, the moon, but clear, very. No clouds.”

“Any constellations you can make out?"-Lynx.

“. . . Head isn’t turned that way now, wasn’t turned toward the window long enough. Now there is a noise, far off ... A high-pitched chattering, almost metallic. Animal. He pictures a six-legged tree creature, half the size of a man, reddish-brown hair, sparse ... It can go on two, four, or six legs on the ground. Doesn’t go down on the ground much, though. Nests high. An egg-layer.

Many teeth. Eats flesh. Small eyes, and black-two. Great nose-holes. Pesty, but not dangerous to men-easily frightened.”

“He is on Disten, the fifth world of Blake’s System,” said Sandor. “Night-side means he is on the continent Didenlan. The moon Babry, well past zenith now, means he is to the east. A Mellar-mosque indicates a Mella-Muslim settlement. The blade and the mask seem Hortanian. I am sure they were brought from further inland. The chalky deposits would set him in the vicinity of Landear, which is Mella-Muslim. It is on the Dista River, north bank. There is much jungle about. Even those people who wish seclusion seldom go further than eight miles from the center of town-population 153,000-and it is least settled to the northwest, because of the hills, the rocks, and—”

“Fine! That’s where he is then!"-Lynx. “Now here is how we’ll do it. He has, of course, been sentenced to death. I believe-yes, I know!-there is an ICI Field Office on the second world-whatever its name-of that System.”

“Nirer"-Sandor.

“Yes. Hmm, let’s see . . . Two agents will be empowered as executioners. They will land their ship to the northwest of Landear, enter the city, and find where the man with the strange four-legged pet settled, the one who arrived within the past six days. Then one agent will enter the hut and ascertain whether Corgo is within. He will retreat immediately if Corgo is present, signaling to the other who will be hidden behind those trees or whatever. The second man will then fire a round of fragmentation plaster through the unguarded window. One agent will then position himself at a safe distance beyond the northeast corner of the edifice, so as to cover a door and a window. The other will move to the southwest, to do the same. Each will carry a two-hundred channel laser sub-gun with vibrating head.-Good! I’ll phase-wase it to Central now. We’ve got him!”

He hurried from the room.

Benedick, still holding the thing, his shirt-front soaking, continued;

” 'Fear not, my lady dark. He is but a puppy, and he howls at the moon. . . .'”

It was thirty-one hours and twenty minutes later when the Lynx received and decoded the two terse statements:

EXECUTIONERS THE WAY OF ALL FLESH.

THE WALLABY HAS JUMPED AGAIN.

He licked his lips. His comrades were waiting for the report, and they had succeeded-they had done their part, had performed efficiently and well. It was the Lynx who had missed his kill.

He made the sign of the Flame and entered the library.

Benedick knew-Jig could tell. The little paranorm’s hands were on his walking stick, and that was enough-Just that.

The Lynx bowed his head.

“We begin again,” he told them.

Benedick’s powers-if anything, stronger than ever-survived continuum-impact seven more times. Then he described a new world: Big it was, and many-peopled-bright-dazzling, under a blue-white sun; yellow brick everywhere, neo-Denebian architecture, greenglass windows, a purple sea nearby. . .

No trick at all for Sandor:

“Phillip’s World,” he named it, then told them the city; “Delles.”

“This time we burn him,” said the Lynx, and he was gone from the room.

“Christian-Zoroastrians,” sighed Benedick, after he had left. “I think this one has a Flame-complex.”

Sandor spun the globe with his left hand and watched it turn.

“I’m not preconning,” said Benedick, “but I’ll give you odds, like three to one-on Corgo’s escaping again.

“Why?”

“When he abandoned humanity he became something less, and more. He is not ready to die.”

“What do you mean?”

“I hold his heart. He gave it up, in all ways. He is invincible now. But he will reclaim it one day. Then he will die.”

“How do you know?”

“... A feeling. There are many types of doctors, among them pathologists. No less than others, they, but masters only of blackness. I know people, have known many. I do not pretend to know all about them. But weaknesses-yes, those I know.”

Sandor turned his globe and did not say anything.

But they did burn the Wallaby, badly.

He lived, though.

He lived, cursing.

As he lay there in the gutter, the world burning, exploding, falling down around him, he cursed that world and every other, and everything in them.

Then there was another burst.

Blackness followed.

The double-bladed Hortanian sword, spinning in the hands of Corgo, had halved the first ICI executioner as he stood in the doorway. Mala had detected their approach across the breezes, through the open window.

The second had fallen before the fragmentation plaster could be launched. Corgo had a laser sub-gun himself, Guard issue, and he cut the man down, firing through the wall and two trees in the direction Mala indicated.

Then the Wallaby left Disten.

But he was troubled. How had they found him so quickly? He had had close brushes with them before-many of them, over the years. But he was cautious, and he could not see where he had failed this time, could not understand how Interstel had located him. Even his last employer did not know his whereabouts.

He shook his head and phased for Phillip’s world.

To die is to sleep and not to dream, and Corgo did not want this. He took elaborate pains, in-phasing and out-phasing in random directions; he gave Mala a golden collar with a two-way radio in its clasp, wore its mate within his death-ring; he converted much currency, left the Wallaby in the care of a reputable smuggler in Unassociated Territory and crossed Phillip’s World to Delles-by-the-Sea. He was fond of sailing, and he liked the purple waters of this planet. He rented a large villa near the Delles Dives-slums to the one side, Riviera to the other. This pleased him. He still had dreams; he was not dead yet.

Sleeping, perhaps, he had heard a sound. Then he was suddenly seated on the side of his bed, a handful of death in his hand.

“Mala?”

She was gone. The sound he’d heard had been the closing of a door.

He activated the radio.

“What is it?” he demanded.

“I have the feeling we are watched again,” she replied, through his ring. “. . . Only a feeling, though.”

Her voice was distant, tiny.

“Why did you not tell me? Come back-now.”

“No. I match the night and can move without sound. I will investigate. There is something, if I have fear. . . . Arm yourself!”

He did that, and as he moved toward the front of the house they struck. He ran. As he passed through the front door they struck again, and again. There was an inferno at his back, and a steady rain of plaster, metal, wood and glass was falling. Then there was an inferno around him.

They were above him. This time they had been cautioned not to close with him, but to strike from a distance. This time they hovered high in a shielded globe and poured down hot rivers of destruction.

Something struck him in the head and the shoulder. He fell, turning. He was struck in the chest, the stomach. He covered his face and rolled, tried to rise, failed. He was lost in a forest of flames. He got into a crouch, ran, fell again, rose once more, ran, fell again, crawled, fell again.

As he lay there in the gutter, the world burning, exploding, falling down around him he cursed that world and every other, and everyone in them.

Then there was another burst.

Blackness followed.

They thought they had succeeded, and their joy was great.

“Nothing,” Benedick had said, smiling through his tears.

So that day they celebrated, and the next. But Corgo’s body had not been recovered. Almost half a block had been hurled down, though, and eleven other residents could not be located either, so it seemed safe to assume that the execution had succeeded. ICI, however, requested that the trio remain together on Dombeck for another ten days, while further investigations were carried out.

Benedick laughed.

“Nothing,” he repeated. “Nothing.”

But there is a funny thing about a man without a heart:

His body does not live by the same rules as those of others: No. The egg in his chest is smarter than a mere heart, and it is the center of a wonderful communications system. Dead itself, it is omniscient in terms of that which lives around it; it is not omnipotent, but it has resources which a living heart does not command.

As the burn and lacerations were flashed upon the screen of the body, it sat in instant criticism. It moved itself to an emergency level of function; it became a flag vibrating within a hurricane, the glands responded and poured forth their juices of power; muscles were activated as if by electricity.

Corgo was only half-aware of the inhuman speed with which he moved through the storm of heat and the hail of building materials. It tore at him, but this pain was canceled. His massive output jammed nonessential neural input. He made it as far as the street and collapsed in the shelter of the curb.

The egg took stock of the cost of the action, decided the price had been excessively high, and employed immediate measures to insure the investment.

Down, down did it send him. Into the depths of sub-coma. Standard-model humans cannot decide one day that they wish to hibernate, lie down, do it. The physicians can induce dauersch-laff-with combinations of drugs and elaborate machineries. But Corgo did not need these things. He had a built-in survival kit with a mind of its own; and it decided that he must go deeper than the mere coma-level that a heart would have permitted. So it did the things a heart cannot do, while maintaining its own functions.

It hurled him into the blackness of sleep without dreams, of total unawareness. For only at the border of death itself could his life be retained, be strengthened, grow again. To approach this near the realm of death, its semblance was necessary.

Therefore, Corgo lay dead in the gutter.

People, of course, flock to the scene of any disaster.

Those from the Riviera pause to dress in their best catastrophe clothing. Those from the slums do not, because their wardrobes are not as extensive.

One though, was dressed already and was passing nearby. “Zim” was what he was called, for obvious reasons. He had had another name once, but he had all but forgotten it.

He was staggering home from the zimlak parlor where he had cashed his Guard pension check for that month-cycle.

There was an explosion, but it was seconds before he realized it. Muttering, he stopped and turned very slowly in the direction of the noise. Then he saw the flames. He looked up, saw the hoverglobe. A memory appeared within his mind and he winced and continued to watch.

After a time he saw the man, moving at a fantastic pace across the landscape of Hell. The man fell in the street. There was more burning, and then the globe departed.

The impressions finally registered, and his disaster-reflex made him approach.

Indelible synapses, burnt into his brain long ago, summoned up page after page of The Complete Guard Field Manual of Immediate Medical Actions. He knelt beside the body, red with burn, blood and firelight.

“. . . Captain,” he said, as he stared into the angular face with the closed dark eyes. “Captain . ..”

He covered his own face with his hands and they came away wet.

“Neighbors. Here. Us. Didn’t-know . . .” He listened for a heartbeat, but there was nothing that he could detect. “Fallen ... On the deck my Captain lies . . . Fallen . . . cold . . . dead. Us. Neighbors, even . . .”

His sob was a Jagged thing, until he was seized with a spell of hiccups. Then he steadied his hands and raised an eyelid.

Corgo’s head jerked two inches to his left, away from the brightness of the flames.

The man laughed in relief.

“You’re alive. Cap! You’re still alive!”

The thing that was Corgo did not reply.

Bending, straining, he raised the body.

“’do not move the victim'-that’s what it says in the Manual. But you’re coming with me. Cap. I remember now. ... It was after I left. But I remember . . . All. Now I remember; I do ... Yes. They’ll kill you another time-if you do live. . . . They will; I know. So I’ll have to move the victim. Have to ... -Wish I wasn’t so fogged . . . I’m sorry. Cap. You were always good, to the men, good to me. Ran a tight ship, but you were good . . . Old Wallaby, happy . . . Yes. We’ll go now, killer. Fast as we can. Before the Morbs come.-Yes. I remember . . . you. Good man, Cap. Yes.”

So, the Wallaby had made its last jump, according to the ICI investigation which followed. But Corgo still dwelled on the dreamless border, and the seeds and the egg held his life.

After the ten days had passed, the Lynx and Benedick still remained with Sandor. Sandor was not anxious for them to go. He had never been employed before; he liked the feeling of having co-workers about, persons who shared memories of things done. Benedick was loathe to leave Miss Barbara, one of the few persons he could talk to and have answer him, willingly. The Lynx liked the food and the climate, decided his wives and grandchildren could use a vacation.

So they stayed on.

Returning from death is a deadly slow business. Reality does the dance of the veils, and it is a long while before you know what lies beneath them all (if you ever really do).

When Corgo had formed a rough idea, he cried out:

“Mala!”

. . . The darkness.

Then he saw a face out of times gone by.

“Sergeant Emil . . . ?”

“Yes, sir. Right here, Captain.”

“Where am I?”

“My hutch, sir. Yours got burnt out.”

“How?”

“A hoverglobe did it, with a sear-beam.”

“What of my pet? A Drillen . . .”

“There was only you I found, sir-no one, nothing, else. Uh, it was almost a month-cycle ago that it happened.

Corgo tried to sit up, failed, tried again, half-succeeded. He sat propped on his elbows.

“What’s the matter with me?”

“You had some fractures, burns, lacerations, internal injuries-but you’re going to be all right, now.”

“I wonder how they found me, so fast-again . . . ?”

“I don’t know, sir. Would you like to try some broth now?”

“Later.”

“It’s all warm and ready.”

“Okay, Emil. Suie, bring it on.”

He lay back and wondered.

There was her voice. He had been dozing all day and he was part of a dream.

“Corgo, are you there? Are you there, Corgo? Are you . . .”

His hand! The ring!

“Yes! Me! Corgo!” He activated it. “Mala! Where are you?”

“In a cave, by the sea. Everyday I have called to you. Are you alive, or do you answer me from Elsewhere?”

“I am alive. There is no magic to your collar. How have you kept yourself?”

“I go out at night. Steal food from the large dwellings with the green windows like doors-for Dilk and myself.”

“The puppy? Alive, too?”

“Yes. He was penned in the yard on that night. . . . Where are you?”

“I do not know, precisely. . . .Near where our place was. A few blocks away-I’m with an old friend. . . .”

“I must come.”

“Wait until dark, I’ll get you directions.-No. I’ll send him after you, my friend. . . . Where is your cave?”

“Up the beach, past the red house you said was ugly. There are three rocks, pointed on top. Past them is a narrow path-the water comes up to it, sometimes covers it-and around a corner then, thirty-one of my steps, and the rock hangs overhead, too. It goes far back then, and there is a crack m the wall-small enough to squeeze through, but it widens. We are here.”

“My friend will come for you after dark.”

“You are hurt?”

“I was. But I am better now. I’ll see you later, talk more then.”

“Yes—”

In the days that followed, his strength returned to him. He played chess with Emil and talked with him of their days together in the Guard. He laughed, for the first time in many years, at the tale of the Commander’s wig, at the Big Brawl on Sordido III, some thirty-odd years before. . .

Mala kept to herself, and to Dilk. Occasionally, Corgo would feel her eyes upon him. But whenever he turned, she was always looking in another direction. He realized that she had never seen him being friendly with anyone before. She seemed puzzled.

He drank zimlak with Emil, they ventured off-key ballads together. . . .

Then one day it struck him.

“Emil, what are you using for money these days?”

“Guard pension. Cap.”

“Flames! We’ve been eating you out of business! Food, and the medical supplies and all . .”

“I had a little put away for foul weather days, Cap.”

“Good. But you shouldn’t have been using it. There’s quite a bit of money zipped up in my boots.-Here. Just a second . . . There! Take these!”

“I can’t. Cap. . . ”

“The hell, you say! Take them, that’s an order!”

“All right, sir, but you don’t have to. . . .”

“Emil, there is a price on my head-you know?”

“I know.”

“A pretty large reward.”

“Yes.”

“It’s yours, by right.”

“I couldn’t turn you in, sir.”

“Nevertheless, the reward is yours. Twice over. I’ll send you that amount-a few weeks after I leave here.”

“I couldn’t take it, sir.”

“Nonsense; you will.”

“No, sir. I won’t.”

“What do you mean?”

“I just mean I couldn’t take that money.”

“Why not? What’s wrong with it?”

“Nothing, exactly ... I just don’t want any of it. I’ll take this you gave me for the food and stuff. But no more, that’s all.”

“Oh . . . All right, Emil. Any way you like it. I wasn’t trying to force . . .”

“I know. Cap.”

“Another game now? I’ll spot you a bishop and three pawns this time.”

“Very good, sir.”

“We had some good time together, eh?”

“You bet, Cap. Tau Ceti-three months’ leave. Remember the Red River Valley-and the family native life-forms?”

“Hah! And Cygnus VII-the purple world with the Rainbow Women?”

“Took me three weeks to get that dye off me. Thought at first it was a new disease. Flames, I’d love to ship out again!”

Corgo paused in mid-move.

“Hmm . . . You know, Emil ... It might be that you could.”

“What do you mean?”

Corgo finished his move.

“Aboard the Wallaby. It’s here, in Unassociated Territory, waiting for me. I’m Captain, and crew-and everything-all by myself, right now. Mala helps some, but-you know, I could use a First Mate. Be like old times.”

Emil replaced the knight he had raised, looked up, looked back down.

“I-I don’t know what to say. Cap. I never thought you’d offer me a berth. . . .”

“Why not? I could use a good man. Lots of action, like the old days. Plenty cash. No cares. We want three months’ leave on Tau Ceti and we write our own bloody orders. We take it!”

“I-I do want to space again. Cap-bad. But-no, I couldn’t, . . .”

“Why not, Emil? Why not? It’d be just like before.”

“I don’t know how to say it, Cap. . . . But when we-burnt places, before-well, it was criminals-pirates, Code-breakers-you know. Now . . . Well, now I hear you burn-just people. Uh, non-Code-breakers. Like, just plain civilians. Well-I could not.”

Corgo did not answer. Emil moved his knight. “I hate them, Emil,” he said, after a time. “Every lovin' one of them, I hate them. Do you know what they did on Brild? To the Drillen?”

“Yessir. But it wasn’t civilians, and not the miners. It was not everybody. It wasn’t every lovin' one. of them, sir.-I just couldn’t. Don’t be mad.”

“I’m not mad, Emil.”

“I mean, sir, there are some as I wouldn’t mind burnin'. Code or no Code. But not the way you do it, sir. And I’d do it for free to those as have it coming.”

“Huh!”

Corgo moved his one bishop.

“That’s why my money is no good with you?”

“No, sir. That’s not it, sir. Well maybe part . . . But only part. I just couldn’t take pay for helping someone I-respected, admired.”

“You use the past tense.”

“Yessir. But I still think you got a raw deal, and what they did to the Drillen was wrong and bad and-evil-but you can’t hate everybody for that, sir, because everybody didn’t do it.”

“They countenanced it, Emil-which is just as bad. I am able to hate them all for that alone. And people are all alike, all the same. I burn without discrimination these days, because it doesn’t really matter who. The guilt is equally distributed. Mankind is commonly culpable.”

“No, sir, begging your pardon, sir, but in a system as big as Interstel not everybody knows what everybody else is up to. There are those feeling the same way you do, and there are those as don’t give a damn, and those who just don’t know a lot of what’s going on, but who would do something about it if they knew, soon enough.”

“It’s your move, Emil.”

“Yessir.”

“You know, I wish you’d accepted a commission, Emil. You had the chance. You’d have been a good officer.”

“No, sir. I’d not have been a good officer. I’m too easy-going. The men would’ve walked all over me.”

“It’s a pity. But it’s always that way. You know? The good ones are too weak, too easy-going. Why is that?”

“Dunno, sir.”

After a couple of moves:

“You know, if I were to give it up-the burning, I mean-and just do some ordinary, decent smuggling with the Wallaby, it would be okay. With me. Now. I’m tired. I’m so damned tired I’d just like to sleep-oh, four, five, six years, I think. Supposing I stopped the burning and just shipped stuff here and there-would you sign on with me then?”

“I’d have to think about it. Cap.”

“Do that, then. Please. I’d like to have you along.”

“Yessir. Your move, sir.”

It would not have happened that he’d have been found by his actions, because he did stop the burning; it would not have happened-because he was dead on ICI’s books-that anyone would have been looking for him. It happened, though-because of a surfeit of xmili and good will on the part of the hunters.

On the eve of the breaking of the fellowship, nostalgia followed high spirits.

Benedick had never had a friend before, you must remember. Now he had three, and he was leaving them.

The Lynx had ingested much good food and drink, and the good company of simple, maimed people, whose neuroses were unvitiated with normal sophistication-and he had enjoyed this.

Sandor’s sphere of human relations had been expanded by approximately a third, and he had slowly come to consider himself at least an honorary member of the vast flux which he had only known before as humanity, or Others.

So, in the library, drinking, and eating and talking, they returned to the hunt. Dead tigers are always the best kind.

Of course, it wasn’t long before Benedick picked up the heart, and held it as a connoisseur would an art object-gently, and with a certain mingling of awe and affection.

As they sat there, an odd sensation crept into the pudgy paranorm’s stomach and rose slowly, like gas, until his eyes burned.

“I-I’m reading,” he said.

“Of course"-the Lynx. '

“Yes"-Sandor.

“Really!”

“Naturally"-the Lynx. “He is on Disten, fifth world of Blake’s System, in a native hut outside Landear—”

“No"-Sandor. “He is on Phillip’s World, in Delles-by-the-Sea.”

They laughed, the Lynx a deep rumble, Sandor a gasping chuckle,

“No,” said Benedick. “He is in transit, aboard the Wallaby. He had just phased and his mind is still mainly awake. He is running a cargo of ambergris to the Tau Ceti system, fifth planet-Tholmen. After that he plans on vacationing in the Red River Valley of the third planet-Cardiff. Along with the Drillen and the puppy, he has a crewman with him this time. I can’t read anything but that it’s a retired Guardsman.”

“By the holy Light of the Great and Glorious Flame!”

“We know they never did find his ship. . . .”

“. . . And his body was not recovered.-Could you be mistaken. Benedick? Reading something, someone else. . . ?”

“No.”

“What should we do. Lynx?"-Sandor.

“An unethical person might be inclined to forget it. It is a closed case. We have been paid and dismissed.”

“True.”

“But think of when he strikes again. . . .”

“. . . It would be because of us, our failure.”

“Yes.”

“. . . And many would die.”

“. . . And much machinery destroyed, and an insurance association defrauded.”

“Yes.”

“. . . Because of us.”

“Yes.”

“So we should report it."-Lynx.

“Yes.”

“It is unfortunate. . . .”

“Yes.”

“. . . But it will be good to have worked together this final time.”

“Yes. It will. Very.”

“Tholmen, in Tau Ceti, and he just phased?"-Lynx.

“Yes.”

“I’ll call, and they’ll be waiting for him in T.C.”

“... I told you,” said the weeping paranorm. “He wasn’t ready to die.”

Sandor smiled and raised his glass with his flesh-colored hand.

There was still some work to be done.

When the Wallaby hit Tau Ceti all hell broke loose.

Three fully-manned Guardships, like onto the Wallaby herself were waiting.

ICI had quarantined the entire system for three days. There could be no mistaking the ebony toadstool when it appeared on the screen. No identification was solicited.

The tractor beams missed it the first time, however, and the Wallaby’s new First Mate fired every weapon aboard the ship simultaneously, in all directions, as soon as the alarm sounded. This had been one of Corgo’s small alterations in fire-control, because of the size of his operations: no safety circuits; and it was a suicide-ship, if necessary: it was a lone wolf with no regard for any pack: one central control-touch it, and the Wallaby became a porcupine with laser-quills, stabbing into anything in every direction.

Corgo prepared to phase again, but it took him forty-three seconds to do so.

During that time he was struck twice by the surviving Guardship.

Then he was gone.

Time and Chance, which govern all things, and sometimes like to pass themselves off as Destiny, then seized upon the Wallaby, the puppy, the Drillen, First Mate Emil, and the man without a heart.

Corgo had set no course when he had in-phased. There had been no time.

The two blasts from the Guardship had radically altered the Wallaby’s course, and had burnt out twenty-three fast-phase projectors.

The Wallaby jumped blind, and with a broken leg.

Continuum-impact racked the crew. The hull repaired rents in its skin.

They continued for thirty-nine hours and twenty-three minutes, taking turns at sedation, watching for the first warning on the panel.

The Wallaby held together, though.

But where they had gotten to no one knew, least of all a weeping paranorm who had monitored the battle and all of Corgo’s watches, despite the continuum-impact and a hangover.

But suddenly Benedick knew fear:

“He’s about to phase-out. I’m going to have to drop him now.”

“Why?"-the Lynx.

“Do you know where he is?”

“No, of course not!”

“Well, neither does he. Supposing he pops out in the middle of a sun, or in some atmosphere-moving at that speed?”

“Well, supposing he does? He dies.”

“Exactly. Continuum-impact is bad enough. I’ve never been in a man’s mind when he died-and I don’t think I could take it. Sorry. I just won’t do it. I think I might die myself if it happened. I’m so tired now. ... I’ll just have to check him out later.”

With that he collapsed and could not be roused.

So, Corgo’s heart went back into its jar, and the jar went back into the lower right-hand drawer of Sandor’s desk, and none of the hunters heard the words of Corgo’s answer to his First Mate after the phasing-out:

“Where are we?-The Comp says the nearest thing is a little ping-pong ball of a world called Dombeck, not noted for anything. We’ll have to put down there for repairs, somewhere off the beaten track. We need projectors.”

So they landed the Wallaby and banged on its hull as the hunters slept, some five hundred forty-two miles away.

They were grinding out the projector sockets shortly after Sandor had been tucked into his bed.

They reinforced the hull in three places while the Lynx ate half a ham, three biscuits, two apples and a pear, and drank half a liter of Dombeck’s best Mosel.

They rewired shorted circuits as Benedick smiled and dreamt of Bright Bad Barby the Bouncing Baby, in the days of her youth.

And Corgo took the light-boat and headed for a town three hundred miles away, just as the pale sun of Dombeck began to rise.

“He’s here!” cried Benedick, flinging wide the door to the Lynx’s room and rushing up to the bedside. “He’s—”

Then he was unconscious, for the Lynx may not be approached suddenly as he sleeps.

When he awakened five minutes later, he was lying on the bed and the entire household stood about him. There was a cold cloth on his forehead and his throat felt crushed.

“My brother,” said the Lynx, “you should never approach a sleeping man in such a manner.”

“B-but he’s here,” said Benedick, gagging. “Here on Dombeck! I don’t even need Sandor to tell!”

“Art sure thou hast not imbibed too much?”

“No, I tell you he’s here!” He sat up, flung away the cloth. “That little city, Coldstream—” He pointed through the wall. “—I was there just a week ago. I know the place!”

“You have had a dream—”

“Wet your Flame! But I’ve not! I held his heart in these hands and saw it!”

The Lynx winced at the profanity, but considered the possibility.

“Then come with us to the library and see if you can do it again.”

“You better believe I can!”

At that moment Corgo was drinking a cup of coffee and waiting for the town to wake up. He was considering his First Mate’s resignation:

“I never wanted to burn anyone, Cap. Least of all, the Guard. I’m sorry, but that’s it. No more for me. Leave me here and give me passage home to Phillip’s--that’s all I want. I know you didn’t want it the way it happened, but if I keep shipping with you it might happen again some day. Probably will. They got your number somehow, and I couldn’t ever do that again. I’ll help you fix the Wallaby, then I’m out. Sorry.”

Corgo sighed and ordered a second coffee. He glanced at the clock on the diner wall. Soon, soon . . .

“That clock, that wall, that window! It’s the diner where I had lunch last week, in Coldstream!” said Benedick, blinking moistly.

“Do you think all that continuum-impact. . . . ?"-the Lynx.

“I don’t know"-Sandor.

“How can we check?”

“Call the flamin' diner and ask them to describe their only customer!"-Benedick.

“That is a very good idea"-the Lynx.

The Lynx moved to the phone-unit on Sander’s desk.

Sudden, as everything concerning the case had been, was the Lynx’s final decision:

“Your flyer, brother Sandor. May I borrow it?”

“Why, yes. Surely . . .”

“I will now call the local ICI office and requisition a laser-cannon. They have been ordered to cooperate with us without question, and the orders are still in effect. My executioner’s rating has never been suspended. It appears that if we ever want to see this job completed we must do it ourselves. It won’t take long to mount the gun on your flyer.-Benedick, stay with him every minute now. He still has to buy the equipment, take it back, and install it. Therefore, we should have sufficient time. Just stay with him and advise me as to his movements,”

“Check.”

“Are you sure it’s the right way to go about it?"-Sandor.

“I’m sure. . . .”

As the cannon was being delivered, Corgo made his purchases. As it was being installed, he loaded the light-boat and departed. As it was tested, on a tree stump Aunt Faye had wanted removed for a long while, he was aloft and heading toward the desert.

As he crossed the desert. Benedick watched the rolling dunes, scrub-shrubs and darting rabbophers through his eyes.

He also watched the instrument-panel.

As the Lynx began his journey, Mala and Dilk were walking about the hull of the Wallaby. Mala wondered if the killing was over. She was not sure she liked the new Corgo so much as she did the avenger. She wondered whether the change would be permanent. She hoped not. . .

The Lynx maintained radio contact with Benedick.

Sandor drank xmili and smiled.

After a time, Corgo landed.

The Lynx was racing across the sands from the opposite direction.

They began unloading the light-boat.

The Lynx sped on.

“I am near it now. Five minutes,” he radioed back.

“Then I’m out?"-Benedick.

“Not yet"-the reply.

“Sorry, but you know what I said. I won’t be there when he dies.”

“All right, I can take it from here"-the Lynx.

Which is how, when the Lynx came upon the scene, he saw a dog and a man and an ugly but intelligent quadruped beside the Wallaby.

His first blast hit the ship. The man fell.

The quadruped ran, and he burnt it.

The dog thrashed through the port into the ship.

The Lynx brought the flyer about for another pass.

There was another man, circling around from the other side of the ship, where he had been working.

The man raised his hand and there was a flash of light

Corgo’s death-ring discharged its single laser beam.

It crossed the distance between them, penetrated the hull of the flyer, passed through the Lynx’s left arm above the elbow, and continued on through the roof of the vehicle.

The Lynx cried out, fought the controls, as Corgo dashed into the Wallaby.

Then he triggered the cannon, and again, and again and again, circling, until the Wallaby was a smoldering ruin in the middle of a sea of fused sand.

Still did he burn that ruin, finally calling back to Benedick Benedict and asking his one question.

“Nothing"-the reply.

Then he turned and headed back, setting the autopilot and opening the first-aid kit.

“. . . Then he went in to hit the Wallaby’s guns, but I hit him first"-Lynx.

“No"-Benedick.

“What meanest thou 'no? I was there.”

“So was I, for awhile. I had to see how he felt.”

“And?”

“He went in for the puppy, Dilk, held it in his arms, and said to it, 'I am sorry.' ”

“Whatever, he is dead now and we have finished. It is over"-Sandor.

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

“Let us then drink to a job well done, before we part for good.”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

And they did.

While there wasn’t much left of the Wallaby or its Captain, ICI positively identified a synthetic heart found still beating, erratically, amidst the hot wreckage.

Corgo was dead, and that was it.

He should have known what he was up against, and turned himself in to the proper authorities. How can you hope to beat a man who can pick the lock to your mind, a man who dispatched forty-eight men and seventeen malicious alien life-forms, and a man who knows every damn street in the galaxy.

He should have known better than to go up against Sandor Sandor, Benedick Benedict and Lynx Links. He should, he should have known.

For their real names, of course, are Tisiphone, Alecto and Maegaera. They are the Furies. They arise from chaos and deliver revenge; they convey confusion and disaster to those who abandon the law and forsake the way, who offend against the light and violate the life, who take the power of flame, like a lightning-rod in their two too-mortal hands.