

Freymore (English version)

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In Memory of Jack Vance, Master Storyteller

As Marin, the blue sun, disappeared below the horizon, Reewol, the orange sun with the faster orbit, reached its zenith. Instantly, the air temperature on Korpion soared.

Freymore lazily turned in his chair once again. After Marin disappeared, the city fell silent. Aircars still floated, but their sound was barely audible. All other traffic came to a standstill, and at this hour hardly anyone went outside. It had become pleasantly warm and Freymore thoroughly enjoyed it. He deeply inhaled the warm afternoon air. A gust of hot wind made the leaves of the elastic fertiel trees next to Freymore’s hotel tremble. Somewhere in the distance, along the Silver River, which looked like a stream of molten lava in the light of Reewol, the serene call of a wild root creature echoed. Freymore didn’t see the animal, but it probably saw him.

Staring lazily ahead, Freymore tried to gather his thoughts. In an hour, he had an appointment with Sir Reckseyly, First Corkel of

Planetary Affairs. Though he had arranged this invitation himself, he was becoming tense. The mission had to succeed, people were counting on him.

“Ai Sroeter,” said Freymore the customary greeting for that time of day. “I am Supreme Freymore and I am here for the scheduled meeting with the Honorable Corkel Reckseyly.” “I don’t see any appointment for First Corkel Reckseyly. I’m afraid I can’t help you,” said the receptionist with a sour face, swiping the screen in front of him away. It was clear that, for reasons Freymore couldn’t guess, he had no intention of offering any service.

“Fine. What was your name again?” Freymore asked, raising his wrist communicator to his mouth. “I’ll inform Corkel Reckseyly that you, and only you, are responsible for wasting his valuable time. Once again, your name?”

The receptionist visibly startled, pulled the screen back, and said curtly: “Proceed to the amber hover chamber ahead. It will take you to room 7645.”

Freymore smirked slightly, gave a modest nod, and walked toward the indicated chamber. The characteristic foul smell that lingered in all buildings on Korpion intensified as he approached.

Once inside the room, he found Reckseyly sitting behind an enormous desk made of rosewood from Earth. He sucked contentedly on his smoke tube that extended in a graceful arc from the ceiling down to his face. Reckseyly looked at Freymore with a sharp gaze from his green eyes. Though difficult to read through his flattened, beaked face, he wore a measured smile. Under the desk, it was clearly visible that his black-scaled, two-toed feet had been dipped in a basin of saffron jelly. A healing treatment not unusual for people of Reckseyly's age. Certainly not for someone

of his social class. Saffron jelly, besides being expensive, was less a health cure than a way to signal one's social status. Freymore, familiar with this phenomenon, ignored it and deliberately failed to comment on it. Probably out of sheer irritation and knowing this habit wasn't appreciated by Earthlings, Reckseyly took a deep drag from his smoke tube. He inhaled the smoke, causing his pleura to swell like balloons. The intensely acrid air now hung around him like a thick haze. His personal odors, with undertones of strongly sour almond sulfur, rose to the surface. Freymore felt sick and couldn't suppress a slight gag. Reckseyly then laughed inaudibly. Although amplifying personal odors with smoke was a common occurrence on Korpion, he knew it was nearly unbearable for Earthlings. They considered using the smoking pipe improper and antisocial. As the smell grew stronger, Freymore's discomfort worsened.

"Ai, Sroeter, First Corkel Reckseyly." Freymore bowed deeply, making the small scales of the armored vest he wore on Korpion scrape audibly against each other.

"Yes, Sroeter too," snorted the First Corkel, making a careless, inviting wave with his right arm.

Freymore sat down on the only empty chair in the room. The two briefly examined each other, as if each thought they could read the true nature of this encounter from the other.

"I am Supreme Freymore of the Second Earth Battalion of Healers. To get straight to the point: you know that we on Earth are battling the persistent disease Strycritis. Perhaps you also know that this disease is even fatal in its critical final stages," Freymore suggested very directly, trying to keep this conversation as brief as possible. He didn't know how long he could withstand the ever-expanding stench in the room. It now seemed that the intense, acrid odor of almond sulfur was emanating from every pore of the

ever-smoking Reckseyly. "In a previous communication," Freymore continued, "you indicated that there may be an adequate cure on your planet to combat the pandemic on Earth. Am I correct?"

The first Corkel paused for a moment. Probably in an attempt to gain some importance in front of this Earthling. "You understand correctly." He cleared his throat to continue on a lower frequency more audible to Earthlings. "As you know, we are resistant to the disease Strycritis. None of the five stages through which this disease progresses can affect us. It is therefore likely that the solution to your problem can be found here on Korpion. We do indeed have a remedy that you could take in the form of lozenges. We guarantee a noticeable effect within one day, regardless of the patient's stage of the disease."

"If that is the case, we can be brief about this. I would like to receive a sample from you, which I will test immediately, today. If I have been able to convince myself of its effectiveness by tomorrow, I would like to order a large quantity and bring it to Earth as soon as possible."

"Oh no, stop," Reckseyly responded resolutely, "I'm afraid it's not that simple. First of all, I'm here at my official workplace, and I can't have the lozenges here." This indicated that what he was doing was unknown to the authorities and possibly even illegal.

Freymore understood this but decided not to comment. After all, the stakes were too high to fall over such a triviality.

"Besides," Reckseyly continued, "how would you want to test that?"

"That's obviously my concern and my business, but I want to be open about it with you. I myself am in stage two of the disease. I'm even experiencing minor impairments of bodily functions associated with stage three. So I'm not solely responsible for the

problems on Earth; I obviously cannot and must not lose sight of my personal discomfort in the process." So would you please provide me with a sample of the lozenges in question right away?' To emphasize his point, Freymore stood up and extended his arm, his hand open, toward the first Corkel. The stench in the room had become more than unbearable. The scent of almonds had now acquired a different meaning for the rest of his life.

"Ah, now I understand your urgency a little better. I can accommodate your request and even promise to make haste. However, we cannot meet until this evening and at a different location."

After Reckseyly had briefly explained where and at what time they would meet that evening, Freymore sufficed with a curt goodbye nod and left room 7645 as quickly as possible, gagging.

After Reewol had faded, disappearing behind the horizon and a new Marin had cast her blue glow over Korpion, Freymore left his hotel. The atmosphere on the street had changed completely. Hover trolleys and wobbly carriages, pulled by trained root animals, passed by in a line. The high-pitched sounds from the many throats of the Korpioners filled the city. Due to the considerable density of the local population, Freymore was now also hit by a sharp and literally breathtaking palette of scents outside. I must get off this planet as quickly as possible if I want to avoid an untimely death from these smells, Freymore thought. He hailed a passing rickshaw pulled by a lower-class Korpioner. He gave the address, and the rickshaw set off. Because the Korpioner moved unexpectedly smoothly through the traffic, the ride was less long than Freymore had feared.

Marin was already halfway through her journey through the sky when Freymore was dropped off at a building shaped like a box of blocks. In Marin's blue light, the building had an intense silvery sheen, giving it a magical quality. Immense cruff bushes surrounded the building, their metallic leaves further enhancing the effect. The tall silver panels that made up the building were held together by wide black krakon vines, native to the inhospitable southern part of the planet. Freymore knew that these vines were highly prized in modern Korpion architecture, but due to their difficulty in extracting them in dangerous areas, they were practically prohibitively expensive. Freymore was standing before a costly structure. If Reckseyly were housed here, his business had to be booming.

He made his way along the path to the entrance, which was lined with light-blue fluorescent gel. The transparent doors consisted of a stiff, translucent vegetable membrane which, as he approached, were pushed apart from the center by two servants.

“Welcome, Supreme Freymore. You are expected.”

He entered a large hall shaped like a huge circular dome. The space was illuminated in a magical way by the application of various luminous gels against the vault. Across the circular floor, a woman beckoned him. Except for the black, glistening scales on her body, she was naked. A door opened for him, and the characteristic, sharp almond sulfuric scent alone told him that Reckseyly was inside. Seated once again behind a desk, made entirely of transparent material, the first Corkel of planetary affairs waited for him. Although he was not using the smoking pipe present here this time, the sour, almond sulfuric odor was unusually strong. Freymore knew immediately that this visit could not last too long.

"Ah, Router," Reckseyly greeted him in the manner appropriate for this time of day. Freymore immediately noticed that Reckseyly had used the polite addition "Ai" this time. Apparently, he realized he was dealing with a potentially big client.

"Ai, Router," Freymore nodded kindly, remaining silent, trying not to inhale the awful odor.

"I have good news for you," said Reckseyly. "I can offer you a sample that you can test at any time."

"That's absolutely perfect. I'd say, hand me that sample and I'll report back tomorrow. If it turns out to work, I'll place my order definitely with you. Are you able to deliver an initial order of, say, a million units very soon?"

"Certainly, my dear friend. In fact, I'll deliver a multiple of that immediately. The fact is, you are obligated to purchase and pay for five million units immediately if you take the sample with you. We are a friendly and peaceful people, but above all, we are business minded." As he said this, he laughed a laugh that, even with his flattened beak, was clearly meant to be mocking. Realizing he had no choice, and unable to tolerate the sharp almond sulfur any longer, Freymore nodded and made a gesture indicating his acceptance of the deal.

The next morning, Freymore woke up with a severe headache. This headache, accompanied by a stabbing pain in his back, was one of the indicators that he had, in fact, reached stage three of Strycritus. There was no noticeable sign that the test lozenge he had taken, had lived up to its promise. Freymore was uneasy, but decided to rest that day and take another lozenge. It would undoubtedly take effect tomorrow. Freymore was forced to endure a long, painful, and sick day and night.

The next morning, he felt even worse, proof that Strycritus had not subsided. In fact, the disease had noticeably burrowed deeper into his body. Out of sheer envy and frustration, he dumped the entire supply of worthless lozenges into the garbage disposal in his hotel apartment.

Distraught and utterly furious, he went to the building where Reckseyly was supposed to be working at that hour. He stormed into the building, ignoring a desk clerk who was gesticulating and shouting wildly at him, and headed for the amber hovering room. Once in room 7645, the absence of the now-familiar scent was enough for him. Reckseyly was absent. Freymore was immediately very worried. He had paid a considerable sum to this charlatan for something that didn't seem to be working. It wasn't impossible that he'd been duped by this stinking platypus. He even thought that Reckseyly had, as the saying goes on Earth, simply disappeared into thin air.

That evening, he discovered that this time there was no one at the entrance to the silver building. He went inside and saw no one there either. The building seemed deserted. Halfway down the domed hall, now lit by only a few lights, he smelled Reckseyly's presence. His characteristic, sharp, almond-sulfuric scent wafted through the room like a thick vapor. He found him sitting relaxed and smoking behind his transparent desk.

“Ai, Router, sir Freymore. Feeling better?” He made no effort to hide the contemptuous smirk behind his beak.

“You charlatan, you fraud. That stuff of yours doesn’t work at all,” Freymore shouted angrily.

“I can’t accept that. I can tell you the remedy absolutely works,” and again that wicked smirk. “But there’s something else, sir Freymore,” and suddenly his face darkened and his green eyes

seemed to spit green fire, “no one, absolutely no one insults me in this building. No one, do you hear?” At that very moment, he stood up with unexpected agility and leaped as if launched by a spring toward Freymore. Then everything happened suddenly and quickly. After a brief and violent struggle on the ground, during which Freymore gagged, Reckseyly suddenly hung limply in his arm. Light green and nauseating-smelling blood flowed in waves from a head wound. Apparently, Reckseyly had hit a sharp edge of the transparent desk. Freymore stared in horror at the profusely bleeding corpse before him. He tried to spit out the bits of tissue and the foul-tasting blood he'd inadvertently swallowed. Panting, he lay there for a moment, staring at the corpse. Then he became aware of a strange sensation in his body. It was as if he suddenly felt more powerful, energetic, and strong. The devastating symptoms the illness had wrought in him also subsided. A strange but pleasant sensation.

He looked again at the battered corpse he was pushing away. Suddenly, he got a brilliant idea. Perhaps the solution was literally right in front of him.

The return journey from Korpion took four months. As usual, Freymore spent most of that time asleep. When he awoke, he felt strong and, more importantly, completely healthy. Once back on Earth, a doctor confirmed that Freymore was indeed cured. He immediately handed over the lozenges he had taken with him to his superior, who ensured they were distributed efficiently. Meanwhile, several laboratories began working to reproduce the remedy. Although Freymore had brought a fairly large quantity, it was just a drop in the bucket compared to what was needed to treat the entire Earth.

A few weeks later, Freymore was invited by his superior.

“Sir, how can I help you?” Freymore asked.

“Good that you came, Freymore,” his superior said. “I can tell you from personal experience that the lozenges work extremely well. As you know, I had already reached stage four and had essentially given up. But after taking one of the lozenges you brought, I felt reborn. This morning, my recovery was officially confirmed. I wanted to tell you that in person, hence this invitation.”

“That’s wonderful,” Freymore replied, though he had the feeling this wasn’t the whole reason he had been summoned.

“Perhaps you’ve already heard,” the man continued, “but we haven’t yet managed to reproduce the lozenges here on Earth. So I’m afraid, dear Freymore, that I must ask you to return to Korpion as soon as possible to obtain more of the remedy.”

Freymore was startled. “Well, sir, it’s not as simple as you might think. It’s all a bit... complicated.”

“I understand,” said his superior. “I suspect this will cost us a significant amount of money, but what must be done, must be done. Oh, and one more thing—could you please make sure that this time, you bring back lozenges that don’t have that sharp, awful almond-sulfur smell? Honestly, those lozenges are unbearable.”