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# The Cleansing Fire of God

By Jay Lake

29 September 2003

*Canaveral Reformist Christian  
Re-Education Camp, May 7th, 1992nd  
Year of the Lord, early morning*

Palm fronds drooped like dead hands from trees along the embankment of the swamp road. Last night's tardy moon hung low in the west, the flaming ring near Tycho visible even in daylight.

Rodgers worked the bottom of the slope, shifting limestone chunks from his pushcart, past the scaly trunks, and down into the sucking mud that lined his side of the causeway. Mosquitoes swarmed the sores on his back and arms as the sun raised scarlet blisters.

At least the guards had riot guns against the 'gators.

"Heretic Rodgers!" screamed the coffle boss, a trusty named Gombosuren. Gombo was a Mongol interned off a tramp freighter so long ago even he couldn't remember why any more.

Rodgers figured he'd grow old in Canaveral just like Gombo had. There were worse fates.

"Here, sir," Rodgers called, scrambling up the bank to stand at attention by his pushcart.

Gombo scowled through missing teeth and a broken nose. "Explain yourself to our holy visitors."

Two Brothers of the Armorican Bureau of Joy stood beside Gombo, the effect of their black half-masks and rippling scarlet robes spoiled by ragged straw hats. Rodgers knelt on the rubbled limestone road, wincing as his knees were stabbed by the white gravel. He spoke in time to the throbbing of his sores, a ritual confession of his official crimes. His true crime was never mentioned.

[Before Paphos](#)

by Loretta Casteen

8 January 2007

It starts again. The baby begins to cough and choke.

[Locked Doors](#)

by Stephanie Burgis

1 January 2007

*You can never let anyone suspect, his mother told him. That was the first rule she taught him, and the last, before she left him here alone with It.*

[Heroic Measures](#)

by Matthew Johnson

18 December 2006

Pale as he was, it was hard to believe he would never rise from this bed. Even in the darkest times, she had never really feared for him; he had always been strong, so strong.

[Love Among the Talus](#)

by Elizabeth Bear

11 December 2006

Nilufer raised her eyes to his. It was not what women did to men, but she was a princess, and he was only a bandit. "I want to be a Witch," she said. "A Witch and not a Queen. I wish to be not loved, but wise. Tell your bandit lord, if he can give me that, I might accept his gift."

[Archived Fiction Dating back to 9/1/00](#)

