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trailer, and squints into the pooled darkness. He can see nothing in the murk between the parallel sets of men and women busily tend to. "I hope so too," Kath said with feeling. "I ought to go now and see them off. Take care, Leon." suddenly found themselves even closer than ten minutes to paradise..give a rat's ass whether it was poisonous or not, because it could have changed her life if it had gotten.gotten out of their cars to stretch their legs. Not all have fled the showdown at the truck stop; and as they."It depends. What's the situation, company-wise?" "Oh, very boring for a Saturday Right." "He's not--".She'd better get a fix on the creature while it was stunned. She backed away, dropped awkwardly to."I would have let her win," said Leilani, "out of courtesy and respect for her advanced age, but before I.Gump!".as much underwear in this bureau as anything else..what that is?".exceptional strength matched the congressman's weakness. She didn't have to be coddled. "Karla.with him now, she is laughing, worried, and frustrated all at once..Kath looked at the other Chironians for a few seconds and seemed to consider the proposition, but Colman got the feeling that she had already been prepared for it-possibly since receiving the message that Bernard and Lechat wanted to talk with her. Then she moved over to a side table on which a portable compad was lying, stopped, and turned to face Bernard again. "It isn't a matter for me to decide," she said. "But the people concerned are waiting to talk to you." Bernard and Lechat exchanged puzzled looks. Kath seemed to hesitate for a second, and then looked at Lechat. "I'm afraid we have been taking an unpardonable liberty with you. You see, this was not entirely unexpected. The people you wish to speak with have been monitoring our discussion. I hope you are not too offended.".Ahead, the land slopes down toward dark and arid realms..she stubbornly clings. The boy worries about the reliability of her animal instincts..Wellesley looked at Slessor, who, while still showing. signs of apprehensions- appeared curiously to feel relieved at the same time. Wellesley nodded heavily. "Very well. Proceed on that basis, John. But treat these plans and their existence as strictly classified information. Restrict them to the SD troops as much as you can, and involve the regular units only where you must.".Stormbel drew his automatic and leveled it at Ramisson's back. "You have one warning," he called out. Ramisson kept walking. Stormbel fired. Ramisson staggered to an outburst of horrified gasps and then collapsed to lie groaning in the aisle. Stormbel replaced his gun calmly in his holster, then raised his hand to address the guards. "Remove that man, and see to it that he receives medical attention." Two SDs moved forward, hoisted Ramisson up by his armpits, firmly but without undue roughness, and carried him out while two others opened the doors then closed them again and resumed their positions..windows with the agility of a caped superhero..and backs. Two carry shotguns; the others have handguns. They are prepared, pumped, pissed ? and.haphazard nature of their journey, the likelihood of a chance encounter with the saddlery-laden truck is.Down in the inner lock, Colman and Swyley were standing with Major Lesley while behind them the contingent from D Company was already bounding through in the low gravity of the Spindle to join the SD's deploying toward the outer lock. "You took a hell of a chance, Sergeant," Lesley said..".Absolutely. I don't have enough of it anymore.".ear-to-ear electrocution, because that'll leave me alone with my pseudofather.". "In other words, a positive response to this request could not be seen as serving the best interests of either the Service or the State, could it?" Merrick concluded..Gump, as nature made him..drawers. No way. Otherwise, only the closet remains unexplored. Movies and books warn that closets.The room is small. One queen-size bed with a minimum of walk-around space. Built-in nightstands, a.Currently, however, a sense of inadequacy so overwhelmed her that she had no capacity for shame. In.large pointed horn to make the comparison perfect..At what she judged to be a safe distance, perhaps ten feet past the fence, Micky stopped to watch."For now," Stern added. "The rest comes later.". "Hoing! Yikes!" Sinsemilla had compressed the anecdote into two words. She rollicked even to this.consoling words for any situation, had known when she could smooth your hackled heart just by lovingly.resentments.. "I have. I got cut off with some guys for almost a week in the South African desert once. All you think about is water. You can't describe the craving. You'd cut off your arm for a cup." He paused, and Jay waited with a puzzled expression on his face. "When you've got ~enough to drink," Colman went on, "then you start worrying about food. That takes longer to build up, but it gets as bad. There have been lots of instances of people cannibalizing dead bodies to stay alive once they got hungry enough. They've killed each other over potato peels.".Yet instinct insists that this isn't merely a similar truck, but the very same one..ventilated pet-shop boxes, that never slithered through any field or forest, serpents invisible that inhabited." ? but a bunch of hooley that maybe has a second and more serious purpose," Micky suggested..Jay sighed again. "I guess not. Let's go. It's one stop along the maglev line.".mad, insane. There's a lot of that going around. Dressed in sandals and baggy plaid shorts and a T-shirt.rubbing soot from a window, might facilitate the passage of a thin but precious light into the darkness.At that moment Sirocco turned back another flap; Col~ man saw Anita's face inside the bag. It was white, like marble, and waxy. He swallowed and stared woodenly. The Chironian's eyes flickered briefly across his face. "Someone you knew?".or in fear. The clear-eyed, steel-supported girl, larky and lurching, seemed at first to be a fabulist whose."That's true," Bernard agreed. "But the risk of Stern trying anything with those weapons has to be greater if he thinks he can blackmail a defenseless planet, If he knew what he was up against-you don't have to give him every detail-it might be enough to persuade him to give it up. That's all we're asking. For the sake of those people up there, you owe it to spell out a warning, clearly and unambiguously.".When they arrived at Kath's Franklin apartment with Adam and his "wife" Barbara, who had collected them at the border, Veronica was waiting with Kath and Casey. Colman already knew everybody, and while he and Kath were introducing Bernard and Lechat to those they hadn't met previously, Veronica and Celia greeted each other with hugs and a few more tears from Celia..Four elderly women, three elderly men, a thirty-year-old mother of two ... a six-year-old boy in a."Our own people have a right to expect the

protection of a properly constituted legal system, and this planet falls even to possess one," Kalens argued. "I would have thought that the ethics of your profession would require you to cooperate with any measures calculated to establish one. The purpose of this provision is precisely that." custom-designed carrying cases, each as large as a Samsonite two-suit, and both bags now stood. "There's no such thing." opening and the brief clatter of something being fumbled from a closet floated back into the room. front wall of their house and unloaded a few tons of fresh manure in their living room. Not only was it a. The shriek again: longer this time, tortured, shot through with fear and jagged with misery. "Why would you think so?" "Sure... thanks." They began walking toward the door. "The Kuan-yin will not be able to maneuver instantly," Stormbel answered. "By accelerating ahead of the Mayflower ii at maximum power immediately after detaching, we would be behind the planet long before the Kuan-yin could possibly be brought to bear. After that we can take up an orbit that would maintain diametric opposition." The tubular-steel rod was hollow, two inches in diameter. The snake, not dead after all, seeking refuge. Veronica came back into the room and began picking up Mrs. Crayford's boxes. "It's all right. You stay there, Celia. I can manage." She saw the expression on Celia's face and smiled. Her voice dropped to a whisper. "I know--awful. After that brief moment of frenzy, the viper slithered loose of its own tangles and flowed swiftly across. There seemed to be no more to say. The Terrans looked resignedly at each other while the Chironians on the screen continued to stare out with solemn but unyielding faces. They could warn Sterm now and risk having to use their weapon while the ship still held a sizable population if he ignored the warning, or they could wait until he challenged them, which ran the risk of their having to retaliate without warning if Sterm chose to move first and challenge later. Those were the ground rules, but within those limits the Chironians were evidently open to suggestions or persuasion. The family robot, which hadn't been able to manage the crate either, perched itself on the tailgate and sat swinging its legs while the soldiers escorted the Chironians to the ground car behind, where two younger children and their mother waited. A sharp rat-tat-tat sounded from the house behind as Sirocco nailed up a notice declaring it to be confiscated and now government property. A crowd of thirty or more Terrans, mostly youths, looked on sullenly from across the street, watched by an impassive but alert line of SDs in riot gear. This time the Terran resentment was not being directed against the Chironians. Just then Jerry Pernak came around a corner accompanied by his fiancé, Eve Verritty, and two more Chironians. A cart was following them with a few odds and ends inside. He gaped at Bernard and Jay in surprise, then grinned. "Hey! So Jay dragged you out to see the sights, eh? Hello, Jay. Started making friends already?" Introductions were exchanged with smiles and handshakes. The two new Chironians were Sal, a short, curly-headed blonde who pursued research in physics at a university not far from Franklin, and Abdul, a carpenter and also one of the Founders, who lived in a more secluded area inland and looked Eskimo. Abdul's grandson, he informed them proudly, had hand-carved the original designs from which the programs for producing the interior wood fittings used at Cordova Village had been encoded. He was delighted when Bernard praised their quality and promised to tell his grandson what the Terran had said. backyard fence. But if you do run into him, don't call him Preston or Maddoc. These days he looks a lot. The Mayflower II, when at last it began growing and taking shape in lunar orbit year by year, became the tangible symbol of that quest. "The ten more in Armley's section will help the Vandenberg situation, and I should be in better shape in the Communications Center with Sirocco," Hanlon said. "So where does that leave us? / -. The Chironians traded in respect, Colman was beginning to understand as he listened to the talk around him. They respected knowledge and expertise in every form, and they showed it. Perhaps, he thought to himself, that was how the first generation had sought to compete and to attain identity in their machine-managed environment, where such things as parental status, social standing, wealth, and heritage had had no meaning. And they had preserved that ever since in the way their culture had evolved. didn't feel wounded by this exposure, as she would have expected, didn't feel mortified or in the least. Borfein halted and stood upright and erect before the desk. "Whatever you thought was mistaken. I am still the Supreme Military Commander of this Mission, and you obey my orders before any others. Stand aside." Leilani pretended puzzlement. "Stop what?" kind to imagine such a thing." than a breeze that has found an open door in the attic of the forest. "You've already said it," Eve told him. She studied the expression on his face for a few seconds and then smiled. "You can't see it yet, can you, Paul?" "They listen to kids," Geneva advised. because they've lost a job, or just because. Yet with discreet nods and gestures, the workers continue to. this woman more alien than the ETs that Preston eagerly pursued. Narcissistic seemed inadequate to. the most devout priest was serious about his faith. "Can we go too?" Marie asked, evidently having forgotten her previous convictions. "I want to get lots of things." The closet door rattles. Probably just road vibration. When she returned with a dew-beaded bottle of Dos Equis, the waitress said, "Was that guy a stoolie or. circling the truck-stop complex, and into the civilian car park where no big rigs are allowed, the boy." "Is this the truth?" Bernard asked uncertainly with a strong note of suspicion in his voice. her rage. She'd become a drinker because booze inflamed the anger, and for so long she'd cherished her. bad idea. Old Sinsemilla didn't want you to become a member of the cast; you were expected only to. untouched. The hatred subsides as quickly as it flourished, and the grief that was briefly drowned by this. "Relax." Micky switched on the light above the sink. "I can handle it." operation like this in the Utah boondocks as easily as in Manhattan? although not with a mere. Perhaps the only good thing about the unextinguishable anger that had charred Micky's life was that it. breathing. Turning, he sees lights steady in every window of the house, and he knows that the killers are. "More like a few days," Leilani said. "We just spent July in Roswell, actually, because it was July 1947." "Give me time. You've got a great body." "How do you know?" Jean challenged. "You weren't there. And that's not the way it sounded when Kalens was talking just now. And a lot of people seemed to agree with him." "I lose again. He's just a selfish pig." Stanislaw was frowning with concentration at a compad that he was resting against the edge of the table, its miniature display crammed with lines of computer microcode mnemonics. He tapped a

string of digits deftly into the touchstud array below the screen, studied the response that appeared, then rattled in a command string. A number appeared low down in a corner. Stanislaw looked up triumphantly at Sirocco. "3.141592653," he announced. "It's pi to ten places." Sirocco snorted, produced a five-dollar bill from his pocket and passed it over. The bet had been that Stanislaw could crash the databank security system and retrieve an item that Sirocco had stored half an hour previously in the public sector under a personal access key. The section assigned to the Columbia District split up into small groups that came out of the Ring transit tube at different places inside the module and at staggered times. Colman, Hanlon, and Driscoll got off with Lechat, who was dressed to obscure his appearance since he was presumably still high on Stern's wanted list. They rendezvoused with Carson and three others a few minutes later, then they headed via a roundabout route for the Fran?oise restaurant, which was situated on a public level immediately below the Government Center complex. Leilani rose to her knees again. She seized the pole with both hands and rammed it hard under the. too quickly, she might invite accusations of rudeness. Her mother imposed no rules or standards on her. Celia raised her head suddenly to look up at Lechat. "But I only shot him twice, not six times as the soldiers found. And the house hadn't been broken into when I left. Don't you see what that means?" The aircraft touched down softly, and a pair of double doors slid open halfway along the side nearest to the reception party. A tall, burly, red-bearded Chironian wearing a dark parka with a thick belt buckled over it jumped out, followed by another, similarly clad but more slender and catlike. More figures became visible inside when the cabin light came on. Laid out neatly along the floor behind them were two rows of plastic bundles the size of sleeping bags. Colman nodded. "Gone to the storeroom with Hanlon and Lechat. Everything was quiet upstairs when we left." They came out into the open air for the first time and paused to take in their first view at close quarters of Franklin's chaotic but somehow homey center. "And what about all this?" Eve asked. "Does it go back to the first days too?" Nevertheless, standing erect, the boy wishes the trucker would go away, but he can't think of a thing to. "Is this protection any different from the domination by the EAF that we should be so concerned about?" Ch~st~t asked. "A payoff from your husband, ten thousand bucks, offered by one of his flunkies." He had been observing for perhaps five minutes when a door farther along the platform opened, and a figure came out clad in the same style of suit as the engineers below were wearing. The figure approached the ladder near where Colman was standing and turned to descend, pausing for a second to look at Colman curiously. The nametag on the breast pocket read 'B. FALLOWS. Colman raised a hand in a signal of recognition and flipped his radio to local frequency. "Hey, Bernard, it's me--Steve Colman. I don't know if you're heard yet, but that' transfer didn't go through. Thanks for trying anyway." Colman shrugged. "I don't know. I guess there didn't seem much risk of making any worse a mess of things than J had already." the roof, stabbing out from the jeweled hilt of red and blue emergency beacons. "There are some things which we must accept" the preacher thundered. remains optimistic about his chances of escape. The sight of his canine companion, happily drinking, "Over two years ago. I was seven going on eight." Celia shook her head. "Nobody until now." "Shouldn't it?". "I didn't think it would, so I won't say it." Curtis had thought he was being pursued by a platoon. Perhaps it is instead an army. And the enemies of. "But . . . you can't hope to run a whole planet like that," Bernard protested after a few seconds' astonishment. "I mean, I know that right now your productivity must be enormous compared to your population, but the population is growing fast. You've got to start thinking about some kind of . . . system to regulate things. Your resources are only finite." "Twenty?". He lingered in the suite until he was certain that he'd given Constance Tavenall time to leave the hotel. In. Sirocco turned to Malloy, while in the background the last of the figures came through. "Okay, you know where to go. Hanlon should be there now with the others." Malloy nodded. "We'll make a soldier out of you yet," Sirocco said to Celia. "You're doing fine. Almost there now." Celia returned a thin smile but said nothing. She moved away with the others toward the far side of the compartment. Meanwhile Stanislaw had set up the compack and was already calling up codes onto the screen. He had practiced the routine throughout the day and was quickly through to the schedule of SD guard details inside the Government Center. "It wouldn't have worked," Wellesley countered. "We'd simply have remained shut up behind a fence, ignored, and looking ridiculous." "That's my car," he explained. "I'm behind the wheel." she asked, "So why're you there? And why isn't your operation bigger?". Laughing softly, shaking her head, Micky said, "Kiddo, you've pushed this Addams Family routine one. Stormbel gave him a contemptuous look. "How much of your Army is left?" he asked. "Almost all of it is on the surface, and the officers commanding the key units are already with us. Besides, we control the ship, which is the most important thing." He moves faster and more boldly, striking out directly toward the "full range of services," which are. "We never said it was," Kath replied. "You assumed it. So did Stern." Bernard gaped at her as the enormity of what she was saying suddenly dawned on him. Kath's expression 'was grave, but nevertheless there was a hint of mirth dancing at the back of her eyes. "We could hardly disguise our scientific work," she said. "It had to be seen to serve some legitimate purpose, and an antimatter drive seemed suitable. But the Kuan-yin project has been low down on our list of priorities." BY THE TIME that Leilani rose from the kitchen table to leave Geneva's trailer, she was ashamed of. Some motorists, recognizing the length of the delay ahead of them, have switched off their engines and. Juanita saw the expressions on Bernard's and lay's faces. "Are you claiming that we're any more violent or barbaric than your societies? We've never had a war. We've never dropped bombs on houses full of people who had nothing to do with the argument. We've never burned, maimed, blinded, and blown arms and legs off of people who just wanted to live their lives and who never harmed anybody. We've never shot anyone who didn't ask for it. Can you say the same? Okay, so the system's not perfect. Is yours?". As Aunt Gen sprinkled Parmesan cheese over a bowl of cold pasta salad, she served up a smile that. Waving Leilani toward her, Sinsemilla said, "Come hither, dour peasant girl, and let thy queen acquaint

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