

HISTORY AND PRESENCE

"The Chironians on channel eight are requesting a report, sir." The concrete floor, painted ruby-red, appeared to have been mopped at least a couple times since. The serpent huddled all the way back against the wall, and about as far from one side of the chest of. "You think pretty smart." "Oh, listen to that snaky brain a-hummin', listen to old thingy schemin' up a scheme, like when he wants. Otto shook his head. "If Earth is tearing itself apart, it ~ because its people allowed themselves to believe the same - self-fulfilling prophecies that you are asking us to accept, Mr. Sterm. But we reject them. We need no more protection from you against the people in the EAP starship than they need from their Sterms to protect them against us. We have no need of that kind of strength. Is it strength for neighbors to fortify their homes against each other, or is it paranoia? You must feel very insecure to wish to fortify an entire star system." Sterm's mouth clamped into a grim, down turned line. Pretending that the thorny tentacles of the bloomless rosebush had threatened her, she turned to confront. has taught you to think. I feel bad about that, Micky B, about whatever you went through." Courage would be required to stand up for Leilani, but Micky didn't deceive herself into thinking that she. twenty-eight, but who sometimes felt ancient. spectacle of himself that it's evident he would be a lousy fugitive. "Which service?" the terminal inquired. "Communications," Fulmire answered, speaking slowly and with his face still thoughtful. "Find Paul Lechat for me and put him through if he's free, would you. And route this via a secured channel." Without hesitation, Leilani said, "Four elderly women, three elderly men, a thirty-year-old mother of two. None of these people appears to be suspicious of him, and none seems likely to be one of the relentless." "Close up ranks," Sirocco said, and the guard detail shuffled forward to crush up close behind Sirocco, Colman, and Hanlon to make room for the officers and the diplomats to move up behind. Sirocco looked at the Dispatching Officer and nodded. "Open outer hatch." The Dispatching Officer keyed a command into a panel beside him, and the outer door of the shuttle swung slowly aside. The motel and the diner lay out of sight to the east, beyond the ranks of parked vehicles, marked by the revelation of a sense of worthlessness that the girl would deny but that from personal experience Micky. - motives and provided a sight-seeing attraction and historical curiosity that every visitor to the area had to ride on at least once. Veronica, a practicing architect, was there with Casey, Adam, and Barbara. Celia had declined to return to the ship but was watching from the home that she shared with Lechat - on the coast; and Wellesley had taken a trip from his farm in Occidena to see his old ship recommissioned and renamed. "I'm talking around?" "We should have mentioned it," Murphy said. "Bring one along. A forty-five or something like that would be best, if you've got one." he'd no doubt be left with a hand full of bones as shattered as the windshield. whenever he was admitted. Bret Hanion, the sergeant in charge of Second Platoon and a long-standing buddy of Colman, was sitting on the other side of Sirocco with Stanislaw, Third Platoon's laser gunner, and a couple of civilian girls; a signals specialist called Anita, attached to Brigade H.Q. was snuggling close to Colman ~with her arm draped loosely through his. fabulous bulk will allow, bringing her face closer to his, and she whispers these teaberry-scented words: In spite of the news about the marriage, Micky clung to the hope that her newfound desire to act as?so. "Donella, don't be too hard on the kid. He didn't mean nothing by what he said. Nothing like you think." "I'm not interested in anything like that. I just want to hear about someone who lived there and came from there. Where did you come from?" well-meant if less than completely appropriate advice: "Maniac! Crazy boy!" "I would have let her win," said Leilani, "out of courtesy and respect for her advanced age, but before I. Bernard sat back and drew a long breath. He was just about to say something when Jeeves interrupted to announce an incoming call on the Chironian net. It was Kath, calling from her place in Franklin. "I've heard from Casey," she said when Bernard accepted. "He's collected his package with Adam, and they're on their way home with it. I just thought you'd like to know." communicate with the spirit world, sometimes just talking to herself. defensive tactics might be employed. -. next year covered." this woman more alien than the ETs that Preston eagerly pursued. Narcissistic seemed inadequate to. Quickly glancing around as he moves, he notices only a few children here and there, all with their. With cheerful sincerity, Aunt Gen said, "Oh, I don't know, Micky, I rather like Leilani Doom." A short silence fell while the meeting digested the observation. Kalens thought about the fusion complex that Farnhill had learned about in his largely unproductive talks with an assortment of Chironians in Franklin. Kalens had sent Farnhill off to learn what he could through more casual contact and conversation, after Borftein's sarcastic remark to the effect that the Army's company of misfits seemed to be making better progress with the natives than the diplomats were managing. "Yes. . I know what you mean," Kalens said, acknowledging Sterm with a motion of his head. "As a matter of fact, we have already begun inquiries along those lines." He turned toward Farnhill. "Amery, tell us again about that place along the coast." "I have to go back inside now to fix things up," Colman said, leading them back toward the gatehouse, where Armley was watching curiously with Jay. "Mike," Colman said to him as they stopped by the door. "Take these two people inside and fix them up with coffee or something, will you. Jay, wait inside with Veronica. I have to get back in with Bret, but I'll be back in a few minutes. Don't worry. It'll be okay." With a mental sigh that she dared not voice, Leilani approached the bed. The capsule arrived, and Jay fell silent while he digested what Pernak had said. As they climbed inside, Jay entered a code into the ~ panel by the door to specify their destination in the Jersey module, and they sat down on an empty pair of facing seats as the capsule began to move. After a short run up to speed, it entered a tube to exit from Maryland and passed through one of the spherical intermodule housings that supported the Ring and contained the bearings and pivoting mechanisms for adjusting the module orientations to the ship's state of motion. For a brief period they were looking out through a transparent outer shell at the immensity of the Spindle, seemingly supported by a web of structural booms and tie-bars three miles above their heads, with the vastness of space

extending away on either side, and then they entered the Kansas module where the scene outside changed to animal grazing enclosures, level upon level of agricultural traits, fish farms, and hydroponics tanks. Propped upon stacked pillows, old Sinsemilla lay faceup, eyes closed, as motionless as the snake. broom to the blacktop, sweeping along puffs of dust, spidery twists of dry desert grass, and scraps of. The fence, old and in need of repair, clatters as he climbs across it. When he drops to the lane beyond, "And whether it was by design or accident, they've managed to solve a lot of other problems too," Eve said. "Take crime for instance. Theft and greed are impossible, because how can you steal another man's competence? Oh, you could try and fake it, I suppose, but you wouldn't last long with people as discerning as Chironians. They can see through a charlatan as quickly as we can spot ourselves being shortchanged. In fact to 'them that's just what it is. They have their violent moments, sure, but nothing as bad as what's coming in from Africa on the beam right now, or what happened in 2021. But it never turns into a really big problem. There's no motivation for anyone to rally round a would-be Napoleon. He wouldn't have anything to offer that anybody needs.'" "You really wanna know?" An intense note had come suddenly into Driscoll's voice. Micky understood this special girl well enough to know that the mysteries of her heart were many, that. Donella says, "Curtis, I'm sorry I snapped at you." corner a life-size plastic model of a human skeleton hangs from a metal stand, grinning as if death is great. cliff, so be it; even in his dying fall, he will love her, his sister-becoming. he himself is a total Forrest Gump, good-hearted but a Gump nonetheless. Well-meaning, Mr. Hooper. rope, stretched long by centrifugal force that thwarted its inward-coiling efforts, the reptile parted the air. Then Colman's communicator started bleeping. Bernard Fallows was calling from the Communications Center. "I guess you did it," he said. "But it's not over yet. We've found out where Sterm is." The officers exchanged some words with the Chironians, then Portney and Wesserman approached the aircraft to survey the interior. After a few seconds Portney nodded to himself, then turned his head to nod again, back at Sirocco. Sirocco beckoned and one of two waiting ambulances moved forward to the Chironian aircraft. Two soldiers opened its rear doors. Four others climbed inside the aircraft and began moving bodies. As each body bag was brought out, Sirocco turned the top back briefly while an aide compared the face to pictures on a compact screen and another checked dogtag numbers against a list he was holding, after which the corpse was transferred to the ambulance. "Healing technology," Leilani corrected. "An alien species, having mastered interstellar travel and the. Colman was listening grimly. "What about his wife?" he muttered to Sirocco. probably had not spoken in a phony accent out of a bad production of Camelot. "I was going to bed. Yes, Simmonds?" "You haven't gone to the police," Micky said. In the bathroom though the far door of the bedroom behind the lounge, Veronica was already stripping off her fatigues and boots, which she then stowed beneath the towels in the linen closet. By the time the outside door to the suite finally closed to cut off the noises from the house and envelop the rooms in silence, she was putting on the flight-attendant's uniform except for the shoes. After that she used Celia's things to attend to her makeup. how to cope with that. news, shooting up shopping centers or office buildings because of a wife's decision to file for divorce. Here, now, the hot August darkness. The moon. The stars and the mysteries beyond. No getaway train. him. But she will never be at his side again in this life. Suddenly the whole structure of the lock exploded inward under a salvo of high-explosive, armor-piercing missiles. Although there was no air to conduct the shock, the floors and walls shuddered. Some of the defenders were caught by the debris, and more went down under the volley of fragmentation bombs fired in a second later through the hole where the lock had been. The remainder began firing at the combat-suited figures moving forward among the wreckage of the cupola outside. One of the RCC's was upended and tangled up with a part of the lock door, and the other was trying to maneuver around it. "Red section, move to fallback positions," the captain yelled. "Covering-". "When did you see a shoddy piece of workmanship on Chiron a door that didn't fit, or a motor that wouldn't start?" Eve asked him. "Have you ever come across anything like that anywhere there? It makes what we're used to look like junk. I was at a trade show yesterday that some of our companies put on in Franklin to do some market research. The Chironians thought it was a joke. You should have seen the kids down there. They thought our ideas of design and manufacturing were hilarious. Our guys had to give it up as a dead loss. self, break out of the straitjacket, and all the rest, huh?" "Maybe." creeping cat. the door and the rear fence. The grass flourished because Geneva watered it regularly with a hose. problems, a pleasing face wasn't just about looking good; it was about survival. Adam excused himself from going out because he had some work to do, and Bobby and Susie had been looking forward to a musical comedy that was being given not far away that evening. Colman assumed that Kath would want to go with them, which would leave him flipping a coin over which show to see; but to his surprise she suggested a drink somewhere for the two of them instead. She explained, whispering, "Anyway, I've already seen it more times than I can count." So who was he to turn it down? Colman asked himself. But at the same time he couldn't avoid the sneaking feeling that it was all just a little bit strange. "But it's there, just the same. And I think maybe ... I was afraid if I ever talked about it, I might let go of. strange because it exists only in his mind, that regardless of how long or how fast he runs, he'll never." Listen, kid, you can't come around here, doing your dangerous-young-mutant act, worming your. Lesley and the major obviously knew each other. "Brad," Lesley said. "What in hell's happened? We were expecting a fight." swarm the night. address is also his apartment? and the whole shebang in three rooms above a palm-reader's office. scrub the snake ichor from her hands, to sluice away the sweat of the day, and to remove every trace of. Before the snake could wind back on itself and bite her hand, Leilani shot to her feet faster than her. The young fugitive drops flat to the pavement and slips under the trailer, and the dog crawls beside him. 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, sand, across loose shale, between masses of sage and weather-sculpted thrusts of rock, zigging and. heat isn't blistering. She turns in a four-legged pirouette, with enough grace to qualify her for the

New.another blacktop parking lot, which is only half as well lighted as those he's seen previously..Though the source is unclear from this perspective, the tumult can't be missed. Fleeing customers are.for the bar..Ignoring her, the girl plucked a roll of plastic wrap from a counter and began to cover the serving bowls..Just then, two Chironian girls strolled around the corner from the narrow corridor. They looked fresh and pretty in loose blouses worn over snug-fitting slacks, and had lightweight stretch-boots of some silvery, lustrous material. One of them had brown, wavy hair with a reddish tint to it, and looked as if she were in her mid-thirties; the other was a blonde of perhaps twenty-two. For a split second, Driscoll felt an instinctive twinge of apprehension at the thought of looking ridiculous, but the girls showed no surprise. Instead they paused and looked at him not unpleasantly, but with a hint of reserve as if they wanted to smile but weren't quite sure if they should.."A good question," Wellington commented..Their meager financial resources won't carry them far, and they can't expect to find money in the wind.If warehouse decor favored red light, as reputed, then this atmosphere was holier suited to a prostitute.Jay nodded and pointed to the view of one of Chiron's moons, which was showing between the clouds up near one of the corners. "That's Remus," he said. "The painting was done over a year ago, and if you look at it you can see that whoever painted it paid a lot of attention to detail. I spent a lot of time reading about this star system and its planets, and when I got to looking at Remus in this picture, I realized there was something funny about it." Jay's finger moved closer to indicate a smooth region of Remus's surface, sandwiched between two prominent darker features, probably large craters. ~I was sure that in the most recent pictures I'd looked at from the Chironian databank, those two craters are connected by another one, where this unbroken area is . . . a big one, several hundred miles across, When I checked, I found I was right-there's a huge crater right here, and it wasn't there a year ago."..the capacity for any emotions other than fear and grief, considering the ordeal he has so recently endured..With no hesitation, determined to make his mother proud, to be daring and courageous, the boy sprints.Bernard relaxed back in his chair and met Merrick's outraged countenance with a calm stare. "Nobody's going to shut that complex down, and you know it," he said. "Save the propaganda. I've helped get the ship here safely, and there are plenty of juniors who deserve a step up. I've done my job. I'm quitting."."No offense intended."..Beyond the hard-packed barnyard earth lies a recently mown lawn. A concrete birdbath. Beds of roses..Lechat glanced uneasily in Celia's direction for a moment and then looked back. "Howard Kalens," he said in a lower voice. "Couldn't that have been a final warning? Look at the effect it's having on the Army, except that they don't seem to be reading the right things into it." He looked at Jay. "I can't see that they've got it all figured out. They can't have."."Scribe", Wellesley said in a still angry voice to the computer recording the proceedings. "Delete the statement about an offensive response and everything following it."..Waiters slipped off his jacket and hung it in the closet by the door after taking a book from the inside pocket. Fallows frowned but made no comment..Howard brought a hand up to his chin and rubbed it dubiously for a few seconds. "Mmm . . . Stern. I can~ make him out. I get the feeling that he could be a force to be reckoned with before it's all over, but I don't know where he stands." He thought for a moment longer and at last shook his head. "There are some confidential matters that I'll want to bring up. Stern could turn out to be an adversary. It wouldn't be wise to show too much of our hand this early on. You'd better leave him out of it. Later on it might change... but let's keep him at a distance for the time being."..even goes clean and straight some days, though that's when the depression sets in."..also left with a vague uneasiness. Like a quick dark fish, some disturbing half-glimpsed truth had seemed..The dog had continued to be an instinctive conspirator, huddling quietly with his master, below the..those fangs in her cheek or her nose. Then people would never think of her as sassy, but would always..but their smiles and greetings seemed false, not because he doubted their sincerity, but because he himself."Good grief, didn't you go to school?"..appearances, Burt Hooper is striving to quell a fit of giddiness, the boy now knows that this is like the..roadblock is still a considerable distance ahead, beyond the top of the hill and not yet in sight, but this..Fulmire gestured over the books and documents spread across his desk. "The security provisions provide for Congress to vote exceptional powers to the Directorate in the event of demonstrable security demands, and for the Directorate to delegate extraordinary duties to the chief executive once they are voted that power. They do not provide for the chief executive to assume such duties for himself, and therefore neither can he do so for his successor."..place with both hands, his face entirely concealed, evidently because he thinks this will provide some..Leilani's hard-pounding heart seemed to clunk as arrhythmically and as awkwardly as a panicked girl..something?"."I'm not. He's an architect . . . and gorgeous I met him in Franklin yesterday and stayed last night. It's so easy-they act as if it's perfectly natural . . . And they're so uninhibited' Celia just gaped at her. Veronica winked and nodded. "Really. I'll tell you about it later, I'd better go."..Like any mature realist, Borftein had come to terms with the regrettable truth that on occasion the plans and stratagems which he approved would result in fatalities, as often as not in agonizing and horrifying ways, but he had learned to "objectivize his perspective" with the detachment required by his profession. The numbers of killed and wounded predicted for an intended operation were presented by his analysts as the "Loss Factor" and the "Combat Reduction Factor," respectively; a city selected to be incinerated along with its inhabitants was "nominated"; an area drenched with napalm and saturated with high explosive was subjected to "exploratory aggressive reconnaissance"; and a village flattened as a warning against harboring insurgents became an object of a "protective reaction." Such were the rules..Klonk I was born with. You've got to be mad to be Mad-doc?that's what Luki and I used to say."..This evening, he didn't doze, and after a while his mind began to brim once more with unwanted

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