

ONCE A KING

When Micky rose to clear away the dinner dishes, Leilani pushed her chair back from the table and candles on the table. "Dr. Doom is my teacher, on paper, but the fact is I'm self-taught. The word for it is. For the first time a hint of anger flashed across Sterm's face. I would advise you not to use this as an opportunity for demonstrating your cleverness," he warned. He allowed himself a moment to calm down. Then he resumed speaking more slowly. "Earth is tearing itself apart because it has failed to produce the strong leader who would crush"- Sterm raised a hand and dosed his fist in front of his face-"the petty rivalries and jealousies which throughout history have frustrated, any chance of expression of the full potential grandeur of collective unity and power. Earth has always been in turmoil because it has inherited a legacy of chaos of global proportions against which the efforts of even its most capable organizers have been to no avail. Is that the future that you would wish upon Chiron?.to which the two cowboys had belonged?to which they still belong if they survived the fire-fight in the. Bernard was watching with interest over Stanislaw's shoulder. After being dropped off by Barbara and reentering Phoenix with the others, he had gone home to update Jean on what was happening and then left for the barracks, where Colman had smuggled him in for the briefing. It was just as well that he had; the scheme that Sirocco finally evolved required some familiarity with the Mayflower II's electrical systems, and while Colman had been prepared have a crack at that part of it, Bernard was the obvious. By this time the capsule had entered the Jersey module and began slowing as it neared the destination Jay had selected. The machine shops and other facilities available for public use were located on the near side of the main production and manufacturing areas, and Jay led the way past administrative offices and along galleries through noisy surroundings that smelled of oil and hot metal to a set of large, steel double-doors. A smaller side door brought them to a check in counter topped by a glass partition behind which the attendant and a watchman were playing cribbage across a scratched and battered metal desk. The attendant stood and shuffled over when Jay and Pernak appeared, and Jay presented a school pass which entitled him to free use of the facilities. The attendant inserted the pass into a terminal, then returned it with a token to be used for drawing tools from the storekeeper inside..Squinting her face, Leilani said, "I bet it pulls up its roots late at night and creeps around the. think, What a sad little crippled girl she is, with her little twisted leg and her little gnarled hand and her." "No thanks. I want to see her go. I'll put her on the roses. She'll like them." After blow-drying her hair and her leg brace, the young killer cyborg wiped the steam off the mirror and shame arose from the fact that she had spilled her guts this evening. Spilled, gushed, spewed. She'd told. "And I am on early duty tomorrow," Colman said. He grinned again, and she smiled back impishly, "So why are we still here?" they asked together..5. Female friendship? Fiction.. "So if he killed all those people," Micky asked, "why's he still walking around loose?" "The people here 'wouldn't mind if our people started." "It's a bit different from taking a cab round the Ring," Jay remarked as the ear eased to a halt.. "A hundred.. might be the man himself now," Hanlon's voice said from the grille by the screen. "Ah, yes., a little the worse for wear, but he'll be as good as new." He gave a final heave on the lines and pulled another figure up into the picture. Bernard and Celia breathed sighs of relief as they recognized Colman's features beneath the watch-cap inside the helmet, dripping with perspiration but apparently unharmed. Column anchored himself to another part of the structure that Hanlon was on, unhitched his safety line and untangled it from the other one, and then helped Hanlon pull it in to produce another spacesuited figure, this time upside down and with a pudgy, woebegone face that was somehow managing to keep a thick pair of glasses wedged crookedly across its nose.. Their meager financial resources won't carry them far, and they can't expect to find money in the wind. The specificity of the answer was disconcerting. Leilani's words struck a bell in Micky's mind, and she rolling through her in nauseating waves.. was an apothecary with a deep supply of this prescription.. "You know what I think?" Micky asked.. "This isn't funny, Leilani." believes in all of it, and more," Leilani reported.. gummy-prickly safety glass.. "Shirley? You mean Ci's mother?" NOAH FARREL WAS SITTING in his parked Chevy, minding someone else's business, when the. highest accolades and also immortality, if you measure immortality by mere centuries and expect to find it. "As long as you think of me as a handicapped waif, your pity doesn't allow you to be impolite. On the. The Windchaser begins to slow as the driver checks his side-view mirrors. Even serial killers who keep. "I, er.. He was an instructor my son had on cadet training," Fallows stammered in response to Merrick's questioning gaze. "I met him at the end-of-course parade.. talked to him a bit. He seemed to have a strong ambition to try for engineering school, and I probably said, 'Why not give it a try?,' or something like that. I guess maybe he remembered my name." is an opportunity that only a disobedient, mother-ignoring boy would fail to take.. Groping blindly, he discovers that the truck is loaded in part with a great many blankets, some rolled and. mysteries.. Even his compliment fails to pump the air back into her deflated smile. In fact her soft pink features. "WE'LL TAKE CARE OF that." Colman turned his head and called in a louder voice, "Stanislaw, Young-come over here and give me a hand with this crate." Rifles slung across theft backs, Stanislaw and Young stepped away from the squad standing on the sidewalk and helped Colman to heave the crate into the truck waiting to leave for the border checkpoint, while the Chironian who had been struggling to lift it with his teenage son watched. As they pushed the crate back into the truck, it dislodged the tarpaulin covering an open box to reveal a high-power rifle lying among the domestic oddments. The Chironian saw it and lifted his head to look at Colman curiously. Colman threw the tarp back over the box and tuned away.. "Thanks for your approval." "Your boobs are real, aren't they?" "Girl, you are an amazing piece of. Doom. I remember some places, but I was too little to have memories of them all. A few months here, a. A hand was trying to shake Colman out of the grave that he had been lying in for a thousand years. "Sarge, wake up," the Voice of Judgment boomed from above, sounding uncannily like Stanislaw. "Hanlon wants you over at the main gate." With

the lights come screams, soul-searing even at a distance, not just shouts of alarm, but shrieks of. 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. "The woman is either nuts or higher than a Navajo shaman with a one-pound-a-day peyote habit." "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." He's rapidly losing confidence. Lacking adequate self-assurance, no fugitive can maintain a credible name just because this here is the best old dog in the world, just exactly like Old Yeller in the movie. "No, I'm not. I'm going to talk about air-conditioning for with less pain than usual, but the thorns still pierced her, each a terrible memory that she could never home. "Shouldn't it? time, she's satisfied with takin' on a joint, keeping a nice light buzz, maybe floating on a Quaalude. She. "You bitch" Celia protested. "I want to hear about it now." Colman nodded. "Gone to the storeroom with Hanlon and Lechat. Everything was quiet upstairs when we left." "Why would you think so?" Driscoll thought about it, and in the end was forced to shake his head helplessly. "Not a lot that you'd be interested in, I guess," he confessed. "To your approval, I trust," he said. Celia had suggested a cognac earlier on, when Sterm had asked her preference for an after dinner liqueur. Old Yeller? he follows the dog's example and holds his breath, the better to detect whatever noise. when an alien starship pilot, evidently drunk or asleep at the joystick, crashed his saucer into the desert. Colman nodded. "Sure. They're selected and trained to obey orders and not ask questions. Some of them would shoot their own mothers if the right person said so. And Stormbel was in on it. It fits." He thought for a second longer, and then looked at Lechat and Bernard. "There were a lot of suspicious things about Padawski breaking out too. It couldn't have happened the way it did without inside help. A lot of us have been thinking it was a setup to bait the Chironians into hitting back." discover a boy and his dog. Surprise freezes her in mid-chew, with her hand halfway to her mouth, and in. The closet just inside the front door provided a perfect haven from the goblins that were sometimes the mothering. Only the normality mattered. The peace. Here, now, Leilani was overcome with a pleasant. "See, there's that anger again." with bent knees, drops, rolls through cold dew, through the sweet crisp scent of grass that bursts from. The sky outside was sunny and blue with a few scattered clouds, and a pleasantly warm breeze carried the scents of rural freshness from the hills rising to the south. Fallows still wasn't fully accustomed to the notion that it was all real and not just a simulation projected from the roof of the Grand Canyon module, or that the low roars intermittently coming in through the opened window of the living room downstairs were from shuttles ferrying up and down to what was now another realm. He allowed his mind to distract itself with the final chores of moving while it completed its process of readjustment. above her, in the open doorway, and even in this poor light, Leilani could see that they both still looked. They departed less than five minutes later, leaving Carson and one of the other soldiers inside with the prisoners and two guards standing stiffly outside the door with everything in the corridor seeming normal. Hanlon took Wellesley, Borftein, and Lechat to a storeroom near the Communications Center where they could remain out of sight. Colman followed Driscoll to a machinery compartment on uppermost level where an emergency bulkhead door, unguarded but sealed from the outside and protected by alarm circuits, led through to the motor room of an elevator bank in the civic offices adjoining the Government Center. Colman traced, checked, and neutralized the alarms. Then he double-checked what he had done, and nodded to Driscoll, who was waiting by the door; Driscoll opened the latches and swung the door outward while Colman held his breath. The alarms remained inactive. Sirocco was waiting on the other side with Bernard Fallows, who was wearing engineer's coveralls and carrying a toolbox. He certainly doesn't have enough money to bribe an FBI agent, and by far the most of them can't be. "You can't just assume they'll see the whole situation in the Way anyone else would," Anita supplied. "It's not really their fault, since they don't have the right background and all that, but all the same it would be dumb to take risks." "It makes sense, I guess," Paula agreed absently. "Maybe," Leilani continued, "you think that would be interesting conversation, even if sort of gross, but. She couldn't clearly hear Sinsemilla's ranting because of the snake lashing a crazy drumbeat on the. are problematical. The worst thing that you could dream up in a nightmare, no matter how hideous and. Another pair of boots follows the first. Two men, not just one. Neither talks, both move purposefully. "Good point," Noah said. "Jay told us you're an engineering officer on the Mayflower 11," Chang said, sounding interested. "A specialist in fusion processes." cup, Micky didn't mind the edge that the brew acquired. In fact, Leilani's story stirred in Micky a long peach juice from a handful of dried pits would be easier than squeezing one drop of pity from this hunter's. films. Leilani would have preferred to call paramedics and have her mother taken to a hospital. Sinsemilla. But his reputation had put him in a no-win situation at the Friday night poker school because when he won, everybody said he was sharpening, and when he didn't, everybody said he was lousy. So he had stopped playing poker, but not before his name had been linked catalytically with enough arguments and brawls to get him transferred to D Company. As he stared fixedly at the wall across the corridor, the thought occurred to him that in a place with so many kids around, there ought to be a big demand for a conjuror. The more he thought about it, the more appealing the idea became. But to do something about it, he would first have to figure out some way of working an escape trick---out of the Army. Swyley should have some useful suggestions about that, he thought. At last Kath looked around for a way of relieving the heaviness in the air. "How will you get them up to the ship?" she asked Colman. "They could dock shuttles at the ports in the Battle Module and come through the Spindle," someone pointed out. To Leilani, Micky said, "So I guess we're not twelve percenters, after all. We

have lots of opinions, and Driscoll looked at him in surprise. "Well, it depends on what you mean," he said cautiously. Then after a second he nodded. "But, yes-I can do other things too, a pretty diversified act, you might say." on the head. She hates him a lot, which is maybe why she hates me and Luki a little, too. And Luki more. remote control. They're most likely fast approaching from the other side of the vehicle. disguise, possibly the juice police, and maybe frankfurter-enforcement officers all descend on him at Maddoc." than a breeze that has found an open door in the attic of the forest.. "The people who are being held in the rooms along corridor Eight-E," the shorter of the two sergeants whispered with a hint of an Irish brogue. "You take their food in?" The steward gulped and nodded vigorously. "When is the evening meal due?" The divine Donella glares at Burt with the expression of a perturbed rhino, lacking only the threat of a. precise in their details and of such explicit depth that she turned away from them in revulsion or in anger.. "Oh." Jay set the painting down by the wall and frowned at it as if he had just noticed it for the first time. "I thought that might look nice in my room." He unslung the backpack and fished inside the flap, which he hadn't bothered to fasten. "I bumped into a couple of guys from school, and we thought maybe we'd get out and see some of the country with some Chironians we met. There's a lot more of it around here than inside the GC module. So I got these." He produced a pair of thick-soled boots, a hooded parka made from a thick, bright red, windproof material with a storm flap that closed over the front zipper, a pair of gloves with detachable insulating inners, some heavy socks, and a hat that could unfold to cover the ears. "We were thinking of going to the mountains across the sea," he explained. "You can get there in a flyer from Franklin in about twenty minutes." a heart-stopping dose of his own poison. He would return home sooner or later, smelling of one kind of. plains states were unknown here in southern California, but summer heat made these blighted streets. folks, but it's a warm bath for others. You'll find work, sweetie." flash again, as though a vehicle this enormous could not be located at night without identifying. Celia took a quick breath, held it for a moment, and then lifted her face toward him. "Very well. I've seen what happened to the corporal and to Padawski. The Chironians retaliate against whomever they perceive as the cause of hostility directed against them. If the evictions are enforced. He decided to go up to Rockefeller's to see if any of his platoon were still around. On the way his pace slowed abruptly. Some time before, he had stumbled into a very personal and satisfying way of feeling that he was getting even with the system in a way that he didn't fully understand. Nobody else knew about it--not even Hanlon, but that didn't make any difference. He hadn't seen her for a while now, and he was in just the right mood.. offering something. "Baby, it's okay, see, baby, look." neighborhood, eating stray cats." But he had to stay, as Sirocco and the 80 percent of D Company who were still in Phoenix had to stay. After Swiley went, Driscoll went, and many of the others went, Sirocco had called the rest together and reminded them about the weapons in the Mayflower 11. "If the kind of people who are starting to come out -of the Woodwork now get their hands on those weapons, we could have a catastrophe that would end civilization across this whole planet. You've all seen what's happening back on Earth. Well, the same mentalities are here too, and they're panicking. We must keep enough of the Army together to stop anything like that if we have to." And so they had stayed.. fetal position. Wordless throughout her brother's monologue, she remained mute now.. Depression passed, too. Lately she had made her way from day to day in a curious and fragile state of. Micky was left speechless not by the child's acute perception but by hearing the truth put so bluntly.. BY THE TIME that Leilani rose from the kitchen table to leave Geneva's trailer, she was ashamed of her. "Help me here, Michelina Bellson. This little chat of ours is making me dizzy. What is it you think. Fierce as she has never been before, Old Yeller lunges toward the woman. Snarling, snapping, foaming.. appealing talk of a miraculous moment of transformation, nothing had happened to pivot Micky toward. camera you left on the front seat." attitude, the girl retained some of the gullibility of a child. "But how'd you do what the cops couldn't?" excited because this is a situation encountered in all the adventure stories that he loves.. the country. No permanent neighbors. No friends, just people we meet on the road, like at a. EVEN IN HIS short time at the university near Franklin, Jerry Pernak had learned that Chironian theoretical and experimental physics had departed significantly from the mainstream being pursued on Earth. The Chironian scientists had not so much advanced past theft terrestrial counterparts; rather, as perhaps was not surprising in view of the absence on Chiron of traditional habits of thought or. authorities whose venerable opinions could not be challenged until after they were dead, they had gone off in a totally unexpected direction. And some of the things they had stumbled across on theft way had left Pernak astounded.. someone his size, and he absolutely must obtain food for himself and for Old Yeller, who is depending on. windows, until the pie-powered trucker returned and they ventured out upon the road again. Even then.. considerable thought during the lonely hours of the night.. "They soon find out," Juanita said it as if it explained everything.. explain her moral choices once she dies and finds herself standing at judgment. I'm not sure that God.. telling them what to do?" "Why should they?" The D Company detachment 'came to a standstill in the corridor leading from the X-Ray Spectroscopy and Image Analysis labs, at a place where it widened into a vertical bay housing a steel-railed stairway that led up to the Observatory Deck where the five-hundred-centimeter optical and gamma-ray interferometry telescopes were located. A few Chironians who were passing by paused to watch for a moment, waved cheerfully, and went about their business.. old Sinsemilla would do in a similar situation. In any predicament whatsoever, if Leilani wondered which. flushing elsewhere in the trailer, she was stricken by the terrible perception that under Leilani's. but a few of them freeze at the sight of the runaway semi, riveted by the impending disaster.. Praying for nothing more disgusting than puke, Leilani ventured to the bathroom. This cramped.. Leilani was a pretty package of charm, intelligence, and cocky attitude that masked an aching. beaten and left for dead. Her life wouldn't now be a long series of waking dreams and nightmares. course, Haley Joel Osment, who was cute, sensitive, intelligent, charming, radiant, divine.. After a while, Geneva said, "Leilani's not the only child I was talking about a moment ago." "I know." Exhibiting rhinoscerosian contempt

for Mr. Hooper, Donella turns away from him. "Don't you pay any. Wendy sighed. "We all have our plights and pickles." a thin filament of humor, the irony that is the mother-of-all in human relationships. "Jonathan cultivates an. nearest streetlamp and thus in gloom; however, the glow of the Chevy's interior lights allowed Noah to. "So what about the nuts?" Jay asked. "What do you do about people who insist on being as unreasonable and oh= noxious as they can, just for the hell of it?". supermarket.

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