

## THE BEST SOUND IN THE WORLD

"You too." The image vanished from the screen..across Geneva's face at the counterfeit memory of her anguish-filled love affair with a heroin junkie; but.the dog might otherwise inspire him to be..She nodded, then after a few seconds said, "Casey will have fit!". "What's your pseudofather's real name?" Geneva asked..In most boys' books the world over, and in those for grownups, too, adventure always involves treasure..A tire blows, the trailer bounces, the stacks bark as loud as a mortar lobbing hundred-millimeter rounds.bricks on this road, and here, now, in the lingering sour scent of warm beer, in this small kitchen where.Sirocco shrugged noncommittally. "Can't say. I wouldn't worry too much about it. If you stick close to Steve and Bret and do what they tell you, you'll come through okay." Although they couldn't claim to be campaign veterans, Colman and Hanlon were among the few of the Mission's regulars who had seen combat, having served together as rookie privates with an American expeditionary unit that had fought alongside the South Africans in the Transvaal in 2059, the year before they had volunteered for the Mayflower II. The experience gave them a certain mystique-especially among the younger troops who had matured-in some cases been born and enlisted--in the course of the voyage..CHAPTER FOURTEEN.and then even more solid, a whoosh and a thump combined, as a blade might sound if it could slice off."Photographs," Micky said. "Pictures of you and Luki. That would be proof he wasn't just your.self-destructive, or whether she would be able to pull her life out of the fire into which she herself had.cymbal-like ping off range hoods and off other metal surfaces, slamming?thwack!?into wood or.sooner or later she'd have to come out. To get food. To use the bathroom. They were going to be here a.of the bite, excited by the prospect of the entertainment to come..A siren arises in the distance. This could be a fire truck, an ambulance, a police vehicle, or a clown car..Bernard nodded. "Okay. We'll see you later then. Maybe you'd better leave that stuff here for now, Jay. If things turn out to be not quite the way you said, it might be a good idea not to go carrying it around." Responding in Vietnamese, Curtis passes along some of his mom's wisdom, which he hopes will give.Brow dripping, face slick, body clammy: Leilani reeked of sour sweat, no heavenly flower now. On her."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."..ten. One boy with Tinkertoy hips put together with monkey logic, thrown down into a lonely grave,."Ah. Then I'm not embarrassed, just slightly sickened. Why don't you get a glass of cold lemonade,..sophistication on just a five-minute notice, and Curtis doubts that even five minutes have passed since the.The most senior of the group couldn't have been past his late thirties, but he looked older, with a head that was starting to go thin on 'top, and a short, rotund figure endowed with a small paunch. He was. wearing an open necked shirt of intricately embroidered blues and grays, and plain navy blue slacks held up with a belt. His features looked vaguely Asiatic. With him were a young man and a girl, both apparently in their mid to late twenties and clad in white lab coats, and a younger couple who had brown skin and looked like teenagers. A six-foot-tall, humanoid robot of silvery metal stood nearby, a tiny black girl who might have been eight sitting on its massive shoulders. Her legs dangled around its neck and her arms clasped the top of its head.."As long as you think of me as a handicapped waif, your pity doesn't allow you to be impolite. On the.Maddoc." "Read about him. You'll see." Celia's eyes opened wide. "You're kidding!". Colman's eyes widened for a moment as he listened. "I'd never really thought about it," he admitted. "But I guess, yes . . . it'd have to have been like that. Your kids today don't seem to have changed all that much either. "How do you mean?" Kath asked.."I suppose not," Kath said. She lay silent for a while and then went on in a more distant voice, "But it's still not really the same. I mean, it must be wonderful to have actually been born there ... to know that you were directly descended through all those generations, right back to when it all began." "Ninety-seven,' Pernak replied. He looked at Eve and shook his head..and backs. Two carry shotguns; the others have handguns. They are prepared, pumped, pissed ? and.In the week following Lechat's brief term as Director, the laser link from Earth had brought news of the holocaust engulfing the whole planet. Then the signals had ceased, and for five years there had been nothing. No doubt many pockets of humanity had managed to survive, but mankind's first attempt to establish an advanced civilization had ended in failure - or almost in failure, for it had served its purpose; it had lifted humankind from its primitive, animal beginnings to a level where human, not animal, values could evolve, and it had hurled a seed of itself outward to take root, grow, and blossom at a distant star. And then it had died, as it had to.."Good pup." "Oh, I dunno---some of the things you said, maybe." Waving Leilani toward her, Sinsemilla said, "Come hither, dour peasant girl, and let thy queen acquaint.all, including grotesque appendages and strange nodules on the brain?so she would just have to remain.mother anywhere."..we're proud of them." Two stools away from Curtis, a grizzled trucker looks up from a plate piled with chicken and waffles..could be a cover for low self esteem. From childhood at least through adolescence, Micky herself had.For a moment Driscoll thought the machine had read his mind. He blinked in surprise, then realized it was impossible--just a coincidence. "How can I?" he said. T've.that I think about it, the man who was shot in New Orleans?he was Alec Baldwin." "Uh, yeah." If the Bureau knows what those two cowboys are up to, and if it understands how many others are.Hurry, he urges the men, as if by willpower alone he can move them. Hurry..them around the base later; nobody had seen them at the perimeter; nobody had flown them out; and an intensive search carried on all through the night had failed to locate them anywhere. It was impossible, but it had happened..Along the left wall were high-backed wooden booths with seats padded in red leatherette, a few.gauge, with the hope that these double-barreled blasts would blow her into sleep before helplessness.icals are among its major products, as well as electricity." "Who operates it?" Marcia Quarry asked..the bar dipped as though in sad commiseration. When the Dixie

Chicks followed Brooks, the Stetsons. her suspicions directly, however, she would risk driving Leilani to further evasion. For reasons that she. "There's no such thing." With the coils of his soul exposed for all to see, the bagman, sans bag, swaggered toward the front of. "We don't intend to let it happen," Kath said. In the forty-nine years since, Franklin had grown to become a sizable town, in and around which the greater part of the Chironian population was still concentrated. Other settlements had also appeared, most of them along the Medichironian or not far away from it. Judging by the sound of it, the chopper is heading southwest, following the interstate. This is not good. "Life! Earth life. You're a part of it. Isn't that an exciting feeling? It has to be." "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." CHAPTER EIGHTEEN. CHAPTER ELEVEN. suit and pantyhose. The dog's tail wags, brushing Curtis's legs, either because she catches an appealing scent or because she. fetal position. Wordless throughout her brother's monologue, she remained mute now. points toward the hallway that leads to the restrooms. forbidding than this one, he knows that sprinting flat-out through such terrain in twenty-percent humidity. Unextinguished laughter shakes the skies. ? Homer, The Iliad. Bernard's initial surprise at her candor quickly gave way to a bitter expression as the words sank in to confirm the worst that he had been fearing. It was as if he had been clinging obstinately to a shred of hope that he might have gotten it all wrong, and now the hope was gone he seemed to sag visibly. Jay stared at his feet while Colman wrestled inwardly for something to say. worked on herself no more than once a month. She always sterilized the scalpel with a candle flame and. Jay appeared more reassured, and his eyes brightened a fraction with the relief of having been spared long explanations. "It's all screwed up," he replied simply. In the hall, a violent fit of the shakes overcame her, rattling teeth to teeth, knocking elbows against ribs. "Still not the price of a Navigator," Noah observed. Colman nodded. "Her friends showed up, and she's in Franklin. It all went fine." He turned his head to Celia. "This is Bret. He got Veronica off the base." Paul Lechat paced back and forth in agitation across the lounge of the Fallowses' apartment in Cordova Village. "I didn't think the Chironians would go that far." he said. "I thought they would react only against direct violence. Why couldn't they have just let everything die a natural death?" not merely old-fashioned but antique, not feminine in a liberated contemporary let's-have-hot-sex style. At any moment, however, one of them might retreat here to the bedroom. If a search by authorities. make the swap. Instead, he lights out for the Territory, chasing the clever mutt, hurrying away from the. The first that Colman and his companions had heard was a shot from downstairs, followed by startled shouts and some crashing sounds, and then another shot. By the time they ran into the cellar bar, just seconds later, Wilson was already dead from a shot between the eyes and Ramelly was on the floor with blood gushing from his leg. Padawski and the others were standing uncertainly by the bar, covered by a .38 automatic that one of the young Chironian women was holding. Several other weapons had appeared around the room. A few tense seconds had gone by before Padawski conceded that he had no option but to capitulate, and the SDs had arrived with commendable speed shortly thereafter. Bernard shook his head. "No. We're in touch with them but Wellesley vetoed any mention of it." Colman nodded. He wouldn't have risked their deciding to fire first either. Bernard went on, "Wellesley's tried contacting the Battle Module too, but Sterm won't talk. We sure he'll keep the module attached until after the attack goes in-in other words if he doesn't pull it off and gets blasted, we all get blasted. The same thing applies if the Chironians decide to press the button. We have to assume he's on a forty-minute countdown, Hanlon and Annley are on their way there, and Sirocco left a few minutes ago. Borftein is sending through everybody he can scrape together. What are the chances?" stocked with strange fish. The fish? actually a man with a buzz cut behind the wheel, a brunette with. whole thing now seems feasible I'd like you to have a look at what's at Norday. You should take Hoskins with you. He came with us last time, of course, but a refresher wouldn't do him any harm and it would help you to have someone along who already knows his way around. That was really what I wanted to talk to you about." Merrick was speaking casually in a way that seemed to assume the subject to be common knowledge although Bernard still hadn't been told anything else about it officially; but at the same lime he was eyeing Bernard curiously, as if unable to suppress completely an anticipation of an objection that he knew would come. Gazing at Micky with a solemnity that she hadn't exhibited before, the girl at last said, "I better." "What are all the changes around the back end?" Colman asked curiously. "It looks like a whole new drive system." Colman was becoming irritated again. No one on the ship had met a Chironian yet, but everyone was already an expert. All anybody had seen were edited transmissions from the planet, accompanied by the commentators' canned interpretations. Why couldn't people realize when they were being told what to think? He remembered the stories he'd heard in Cape Town about how the blacks in the Bush raped white women and then hacked them to pieces with axes. The black guy that their patrol had interrogated in the village near Zeerust hadn't seemed the kind of person to do things like that. He was just a guy who wanted to be left alone to run his farm, except by that time there hadn't been much left of it. He'd begged the Americans not to nail his kids to the wall--because that was what his own people had told him Americans did. He said that was why he had fired at the patrol and wounded that skinny Texan five paces ahead of Hanlon. That was why the white South African lieutenant had blown his brains out. But the civilians in Cape Town knew it all because their TV's had told them what to think. she had decided that if any such door existed, it would have to find her. Besides, if this closet were the. Here, now, the hot August darkness. The moon. The stars and the mysteries beyond. No getaway train. It wasn't quite the answer that Celia had been prepared for. She frowned for a second, then reached for her glass. "The reaction that it might provoke worries me. So far the Chironians have been playing along, but nobody has tried to throw them out of their homes before. We've already seen examples of how they do not to hesitate to react violently." IN THE ARMCHAIR, Noah Farrel talked past the point where he bothered to

listen to himself. "We are aware of that," Otto said. I thought you might need a hand with these so I did them last night. If my hunch is right, things have probably gotten a bit difficult for you. There's no sense in upsetting people who don't mean any harm. Take it from me, he's not such a bad guy. Across hard-packed earth and fields of sandstone, they race into a dry slough of soft sand. The. And? chuddaboom! the chopper is right here, passing across the Windchaser, so low, maybe fifteen. The ramped bed of the auto transport isn't much wider than the Explorer, too narrow to allow the dog to. turned. "Say, Michelina Bellsong, did I ask whether you believe in life after death?" Another pair of boots follows the first. Two men, not just one. Neither talks, both move purposefully. "It could open up possibilities that'll blow your mind," Pernak resumed. "Suppose, for instance, that we could get to understand those laws and. create our own concentrations on a miniature scale to inject energy from .... let's. call it a hyperrealm, into our own universe--in other words make 'small bangs'--mini white holes. Think what an energy source that would be. it'd made fusion look like a firecracker." Pernak waved his hands about. "And how about this, Jay. It could turn out that what we're living in lies on a gradient between some kind of hypersource that feeds mass-energy into our universe, and some kind of hypersink that takes it out again--such as black holes, maybe. If so, then the universe might not be a closed thermodynamic system at all, in which case the doom prophecies that say it all has to freeze over some day might be garbage because the Second Law only applies to closed systems. In other words we might find we're flame people living in a match factory." "Yes, it is," he replied. There was nothing more to say..his master's side..get full servings of 'em on bigger plates, but your poor sweet sister, she got hers heaped high on a something sophisticated and classy and smart. She liked things that weren't what they seemed to be..POINT NORDAY WAS twenty-five miles or so north of Franklin, beyond the far headland of Mandel Bay, on a rocky stretch of coastline indented by a river estuary that widened about a large island and several smaller ones. In the early days of the colony, when the Founders first began to venture out of the original base to explore their surroundings on foot, they had found it to be approximately a day's travel north of Franklin. Hence its name.. "You've got it," Kath said lightly. "Isn't that what teaching children is all about?" Reliably off-center, Aunt Gen waved gaily, as though the trailer were an ocean liner about to steam out..grandfather if he were ever in a major motion picture; but he would never be cast as a chainsaw-wielding..He stopped for a moment to stare out through the window while he collected his thoughts. Then he wheeled back to look first at Jean and then at Bernard, who was listening from the sofa below the wall screen. "Anyway I know a lot of people think the way Jean does, but we could still get anti-Chironian reactions from many elements. That's what worries me. But if we set up a liberal civil administration here now, while the opportunity presents itself, I think there's a good chance that Wellesley might accept it as a fait accompli, even if he does declare an emergency, and go along with us when he recognizes the inevitable- which I suspect he might be beginning to do already. That would give everybody a new tomorrow to wake up to, and they'd soon forget this whole business. But there isn't much time. That's why I skipped the meeting. Now you two can help, pretty much in the ways we've discussed. What I'd like you to do first is-" The call tone from Lechat's compad interrupted. He looked down instinctively at the breast pocket of his jacket. "Excuse me for a moment."..of seeing that make the night as penetrable as daylight..morning.. "And now I have one final task to perform," he said. He paused again, and the hall grew curious and attentive, sensing that something unexpected was about to take place, "May I remind the assembly that the declaration of a state of emergency has never been revoked, and that therefore, by the processes that we are still formally pledged to uphold, that emergency condition continues to remain in force, along with its attendant suspension of Congress and the vesting of all congressional authority in me." Puzzled expressions greeted his words, and a ripple of surprised murmurs ran around the hall. "The office of Deputy Mission Director is vacant," Wellesley reminded them. "Accordingly, by the full powers of Congress at present vested solely in me as Mission Director, I hereby nominate, second, and appoint Paul Lechat as Deputy Director, 'effective as of now." He turned and looked along the dais toward where Lechat was sitting, looking not, a little bewildered. "Congratulations, Paul. And now would you kindly take your rightful place." He gestured at the empty chair next to him. Lechat rose up, moved along behind the intervening places, and sat down in the Deputy Director's seat, all the time shaking his head at the other members to..All but incapable of being overfed, he consumes the remaining hot dogs once he senses that Old Yeller is..A thumb-turn lock frees the window. Gingerly, the intruder raises the lower sash. He slips out of the.. "It's impossible!" Avery Farnhill protested to a full meeting of the Directorate in the Mayflower II's Government Center. "They know we're acting with our hands tied and they're taking advantage by being deliberately evasive. The only way we'll get anywhere is if you allow us to get tougher." "Healed?" Micky didn't consider this girl's deformities to be a disease or a sickness. In fact, Leilani's..authorities. He shoves the currency into his pockets once more..he murmured while Colman called the ambulance dispatcher on another panel. "Let's see who steps out from the wings now."..bred anger, because..inevitably anger left her tossing sleepless in the sheets..difficult to believe that a mere bullet wound could be the cause of such horrendous, tortured shrieks..Colman grinned faintly and gestured across the room. "The same one that brought you Veronica and Celia."..to conserve electricity.. "Sure. Why else?"..Bernard stared at him in open disbelief. "You're not saying she'd simply back down? That's crazy!"..Then: big trouble.. "Cool? You idiot, I liked that car." .. but then diminishes and fades entirely away..burning eternal. The motion of the Windchaser makes the moon appear to roll like a wheel..The owner bustled forward, twisting a cloth nervously in his hands. "Look, I don't want any trouble. I just wanna sell food to the people, okay? They don't want no trouble either. Now why don't--". They stopped by a small open square, enclosed on three sides by buildings with striped canopies over their many balconies and flowery windows. A preacher from the Mayflower II, evidently anxious to make up for twenty years of lost time, was belaboring a mixed audience of Chironians from the corner of a raised wall surrounding a bank of shrubbery. He seemed especially incensed by the evidence of adolescent parenthood around him, existing and

visibly imminent. The Chironians appeared curious but skeptical. Certainly there were no signs of any violent evangelical revivals about to take place, or of dramatic instant conversions among the listeners..What a crackerjack that girl is, what a sassy piece of work. By sassy, of course, she wanted them to

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