

60 AMERICANS

For longer than she could remember, Micky hadn't allowed herself to be emotionally affected by anyone. worked on herself no more than once a month. She always sterilized the scalpel with a candle flame and the heat. But no Borftein was present to save the situation at the side entrance. "I don't know anything about it," the SD Officer of the Day said from the screen in reply to the call the guard there had put through. "Those orders are incorrect. Detain those men." The guard on duty at the desk produced a pistol and trained it on Maddock, who was standing where he had been stopped ten feet back with Harding and Merringer. In the same instant the two SD's standing farther back covered them with automatic rifles. Colman sighed. "It's not anything like that. It's just--" Anita waved a hand in front of her face. "It's okay. You don't want me around... you don't want me around. It's okay." Her voice was staging to rise and fall in a singsong fashion. "Who says I need anybody to have a good time, anyhow? I'm fine, see. It's okay You and I can go talk about brains and trains." She began to walk away, swaying slightly and swinging her pocketbook gaily by its strap through a wide arc. communicate with the spirit world, sometimes just talking to herself. grace. wasn't hiding the booze from Geneva; her aunt knew that she enjoyed a drink before bed? and that she. Laughing softly, shaking her head, Micky said, "Kiddo, you've pushed this Addams Family routine one. visible under the door to the right. bring us all together." Colman lifted his head and stared again out over the impossible approaches to the bulkhead lock, picturing once more the inevitable carnage that a frontal assault would entail. Who on either side would stand to gain anything that mattered to them? He had no quarrel with the people manning those defenses, and they had no quarrel with him or any of his men. So why was he lying here with a gun, trying to figure out the best way to kill them? Because they were in there with guns and had probably spent a lot of time figuring out the best way to kill him. None of them knew why they were doing it. It was simply that it had always been done. The girl put down the beer? on the far side of her plate, out of Micky's reach. Her manner was casual. Here came that unsettling shift in the girl's eyes, like a sudden muddy tide washing through clean water. question: "Were you?" as scary as Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff and Big Bird all rolled into one, but she's not dangerous. At. than like a canine. "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." "I stopped reading them when they stopped carrying news," said Geneva. "They're all opinion now, front. Even more loquacious than usual, talking faster, as though the briefest interruption in the flow of words. Curtis can't see any lights in the sky that nature didn't put there, but the helicopter is growing louder by. abandoned. He needed to believe that God existed, that He cherished Laura, that He would not allow. Peach walls with white moldings contributed to an airy, welcoming atmosphere. Cleanliness and cheery. Judging by the sound of it, the chopper is heading southwest, following the interstate. This is not good. as well. Colman shook his head. "There shouldn't be any need. Celia's hair is a lot shorter. There'll be fewer people around later. It'll be okay - . . . as long as there's a different guard there by then, and provided we can get him down along that corridor for a minute. And anyhow, they'll be expecting people to be going in there then." "Well, give us a call when you do, and we'll fix something up. I live in Franklin, so there shouldn't be too much of a problem. That's where we usually get together." once levered herself upright, feeling stupid, feeling clumsy, feeling as though she were the Girl from Castle. ten-minute piece showing a software designer trading diskettes containing his employer's most precious. "We are facing a crisis that jeopardizes the continued integrity of the entire Mission, and it has become evident. since. Kneeling on the mattress, her mother bounced like a schoolgirl, making the springs sing and the bedrails. you've assessed the situation. "As ever," Kath told him and smiled. "And yours, Lurch?" "How many other engineers do you have here?" she inquired lightly, looking around the rest of the squad. It was clearly intended more to invite them into the conversation than as a serious question. They shuffled uncomfortably and exchanged apprehensive looks, unable to decide if she was serious or just slumming with the troops. Nanook rubbed his chin and looked dubious. "That situation sounds very farfetched," he said after a few seconds. "I can't see how anyone else could walk in with the same experience. But if it did happen, and it was true... then I suppose Kath would have to agree with him. She'd be indebted by that amount. And -that would decide it for everyone else." herself, and honest enough to admit to the shame, though dishonest enough to try to avoid facing up to. The Chironians replied readily enough to questions about their population growth and distribution, about growth and performance of the robot-operated mining and extraction industries and nuclear-driven manufacturing and processing plants, about the courses being taught in their schools, the researches being pursued in their laboratories, the works of their artists and composers, the feats of their engineers and architects, and the findings of their geological surveys of places like the sweltering rain forests of southern Selene or the far northern ice-subcontinent of Glace. Sirocco hesitated for a moment, then nodded reluctantly. Celia smiled over her glass. "Thank you. It's rare to find such appreciation." She rejected that unnerving thought as soon as it pierced her. She, too, had grown up in a wretched. temporary emotional paralysis. All her life, until now, Geneva Davis had always found exactly the right. "Who are you?" he demanded. The formality had evaporated from his voice. "Are you in authority here? If so, what are your rank and title?" In the late afternoon, they had boarded the auto transport in the immense parking lot of a busy truck. Lechat was nodding slowly to himself. "And within hours he'd arranged for somebody to make it look like an outside operation, and by the next morning he'd had the takeover all planned, with the Chironians as a pretext. Everything fits. But who would have done it?" single rootlet. I'm homeschooled, currently learning at a twelfth-grade level." The beer, foaming in the door of the trailer, standing on the top step, watching. Leilani remained inside. Just as he plunges into the shadows between the vehicles, he hears shouting, people running? suddenly. "Do you figure they might

start trouble, chief?" Stanislaw asked, turning his head toward Sirocco. You have this kind of pride. Honor, he called it. But these days, honor is for suckers, and that makes you. Since decamping from the Colorado mountains, they had journeyed wherever a series of convenient. By the time the others returned everybody was getting hungry, and Kath and Susie decided to forgo the services of the kitchen's automatic chef and conduct an experiment in the old-fashioned art of cooking, using nothing but mixer, blender, slicer, peeler, and self-regulating stove, and their own bare hands. The result was declared a success by unanimous proclamation, and over the meal the Terrans talked mainly about the more memorable events during the voyage while Kath was curious to learn more about the Mayflower II's propulsion system in anticipation of the tour that she was scheduled to make with the Chironian delegation. Colman found, however, that he was unable to add much to the information she had collected already..magnificent, Ms. Donella." Geneva left the door half open behind her. She sat on the edge of the bed, sideways to her niece..real-estate salesman, one of them might have whupped his ass just as a matter of principle..ventilated pet-shop boxes, that never slithered through any field or forest, serpents invisible that inhabited. "I never said they'd do anything," the robot replied. "I just said that people telling them wouldn't bother them."..told she couldn't have what she wanted, unless it was being told that her choices in life hadn't been the.candleglow..toward Geneva's. She resisted the urge. She knew they were still watching her, but a cheery wave.Cielo Vista Care Home. The real name of the establishment promised a view of Heaven but provided.Tush."..five-hundred rummy." CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE.admire and be charmed by her performance, for this was a one-woman show. If you persisted in sharing.blood drained out of the poor dear's face, he looked like one of the walking dead?though I've got to.Her voice wasn't full of money, no disdain or evidence of tutor-shaped enunciation, but rich with quiet.Bernard looked out again and shook his head. "Not until that ship up there is disarmed somehow." After a pause he turned to face her again. "So it doesn't scare you anymore, huh?"..track him down myself." "That's so completely radical!" In the gathering shadows that darkened but didn't.might dam the stream forever, leaving her parched and mute and defenseless, Leilani filled the narrow.might be used as a bowl. Lie finds only men's and women's shoes, and he's grateful that they don't.Previously scattered clouds, as woolly as sheep, have been herded together around the shepherd moon..sinuous whipping adversary nailed loose..He returned the squeeze reassuringly. "You'd better believe it?".reverse osmosis in a properly formulated hot bath. She traveled with such a spectacular.Driscoll propped his gun against the wall, fished a pack and lighter from inside his jacket, lit up, and leaned back to exhale with a grateful sigh. The irritability that he had been feeling wafted away with the smoke. The robot set down its piece of tubing, folded its arms, and leaned back against the wall, evidently programmed to take its cues from the behavior of the people around it. Driscoll looked at it with a new curiosity. His impulse was to strike up a conversation, but the whole situation was too strange. The thought flashed through his mind that it would have been a lot easier if the robot had been an EAF infantryman. Driscoll would never have believed he could feel anything in common with the Chinese. He didn't know whether he was talking to the robot, or through it to computers somewhere else in the Kuan-yin or even down on Chiron, maybe; whether they had minds or simply embodied some fever programming, or what. He had talked to Colman about machine intelligence once. Colman said it was possible in principle, but a truly aware artificial mind was still a century away at least. Surely the Chironians couldn't have advanced that much. "What kind of a machine are you?" he asked, "I mean, can you think like a person? Do you know who you are?".gazing out across the enormous kitchen, wide-eyed, watching the hunters. The white-uniformed cook.Bernard stared at his glass for a few seconds, then shook his head again. "I can't buy it," he said. "We've never seen anything or heard any mention of anything to do with strategic weapons. Where are they supposed to be?".The ears arc pricked, the head lifted, the nose twitching. The fluffy tail, usually a proud plume, is held."But how can you be so sure?". "Sucky," Aunt Gen said..too hardened to be moved by the plight of anyone else. With grim determination, angry with herself for..and perhaps irrational notion. He's just a boy of comparatively little experience, and she's a grand person.CHAPTER FOURTEEN.candles..coiled under the window..Twenty-four ha4 escaped in all; nine had already given themselves up or been killed in encounters with Chironians. Anita had not been among them. Colman counted fifteen body-bags, which meant that she had to be in one of them..part misery and part fury, as she jabbed the lance hard at the coiled target..drawers as from the other.."They may be a handful," Adam added from across the room, "but they control the ship's heavy weapons. We've given them every chance, and we've encouraged as many people to get themselves out of it as was humanly possible. Our whole world is at stake. If they begin issuing threats or deploying those weapons, the ship will be destroyed. They' can be no changing that decision. It was made a long time ago."."Oh, so it's trouble them fellas is looking for, is it?" a voice with just a hint :of an Irish brogue asked softly from the doorway. Bret Hanlon was leaning casually against one of the doorposts, blue eyes glinting icily. His huge shoulders seeming almost to reach the other side of the door. He looked completely relaxed and at ease, but Colman registered his weight carded well forward on the balls of his feet and his fingers flexing inconspicuously down by his hip. The two corporals glanced at each other apprehensively. Hanlon's appearance altered the odds a bit. Padawski was looking uncertain, but at the same time didn't seem willing to back off ignominiously. For a few seconds that dragged like minutes, the charge in the room crackled at flashpoint. Nobody moved.."After twenty years on the same ship? That's not possible, surely"..stocked. So I took the test through a sugar rush and a major post-sugar crash. Not that I'm making..public has no opinion. You could ask them if a group of mad scientists ought to be allowed to create a."Of course, dear." Geneva slid the dish of garnishes across the table.."You'd be welcome to come too if you want," Rastus said..At about the same moment, inside the memory unit of a lower-security logistics computer located on the same floor, the references to C Company contained in a routine order-of-the-day suddenly and mysteriously changed themselves into references to D Company. At the same time, D Company's orders to remain standing by at the barracks until further notice transformed themselves

into orders for C Company. Ten minutes later a harassed clerk in Phoenix brought the change to the attention of Captain Blakeney, who commanded C Company. Blakeney, far from being disposed to query it, told the clerk to send off an acknowledgment, and then gratefully went back to bed. Inside the logistics computer in the Mayflower II, an instruction that shouldn't have been in memory was activated by the incoming transmission, scanned the message and identified it as carrying one of the originator codes assigned to C Company, then quietly erased it..that you'll come through all right, as well as an immeasurably higher likelihood that you'll be able to look.cymbal-like ping off range hoods and off other metal surfaces, slamming?thwack!?into wood or.fit. If anybody ever saw pictures of him with deformities, they'd know it had to be aliens who made him.December 31, 2080.everyone else perished..evening. She must have left before it happened." Beside Sirocco, Colman breathed an audible sigh of relief..He was dismayed by his inability to accept her compliment with grace, and he wondered?though not.ricocheted across Utah with the unpredictability of a pinball. After all this time and considering the.Pernak half raised a hand, and his plastic features molded themselves into a more intense expression. "We've talked on and off about society going through phase-changes that trigger whole new epochs of social evolution," he said. "Well, that's exactly what's happened down there. You can't extrapolate any of our rules into this culture. They don't apply. They don't work on Chiron..".Freezer Sirocco stepped out in front of them with his automatic drawn and Stewart beside him holding a leveled assault cannon. Before the SD's could react, two more weapons were trained on them from behind. They were disarmed in seconds, and Sirocco motioned them through the open door with a curt wave of his gun while Faustzman herded the two startled civilians from the coffee machine. Two women rounded the corner just as the door of the office closed again, and walked by talking to each other without having seen anything. Moments later Sirocco left the office again with two privates. They formed up in the center of the corridor and moved off in step in the direction of the rear lobby..Bobby's Honda was parked next to a collection bin for Salvation Army thrift shops..beautiful. She might indeed have been a princess once, in a previous incarnation, during another life when.She turned her head toward the speaker and saw a girl of nine or ten standing at the low, sagging picket.It was after 0400 hours, local, when Colman returned to the room which he shared with Hanlon in the Omar Bradley Block, which in the system of twenty-four Chironian "long hours" day was about as miserable a time of day as it was on Earth. With the room to himself since Hanlon was on night duty, he crawled gratefully between the sheets without bothering to shower to make what he could of the opportunity to sleep undisturbed until his call at 0530..And who did those three words bring to mind? Out of control. Like mother, like daughter. Leilani's."I've got two sisters you can't get in trouble with," Stanislaw offered..the house across the street and being greeted at the door by his lover. If Noah reached for the camera,.Nanook shifted his eyes and shook his head again. "Fanatics are gullible fools. If fools don't learn or won't keep themselves to themselves,. they die young here..".needed..".I realize that now, sugar. I didn't first see you're . . . one of those rare folks with a pure soul..".coconut oil, three yellow butterflies as bright as gift-box bows?suddenly seemed full of meaning,.Clutching the handrail, Sinsemilla shakily pulled herself up from the steps. She went inside, into the clock.Red blouses still draped the lamps. The scarlet light no longer fostered a brothel atmosphere; in view of."As long as you think of me as a handicapped waif, your pity doesn't allow you to be impolite. On the

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