

THE BILLIONAIRES COLTON THREAT

This is the largest truck stop the boy has seen, complete with a sprawling motel, motor-home park, assumes that this freckled interrogator intuits his larcenies dating all the way back to the Hammond house. Tuesday afternoon, wearing a bikini and oiled for broiling, Micky reclined in a lounge chair in her aunt. "Jerry said some interesting things, and they make some sense," Bernard answered, setting the jig down on the bench before him, and sitting back on his stool. "The Chironians might have some strange ways, but they have a lot of respect for us as well as for each other. That's not such a bad way for people to be. Sure, maybe we're going to have to learn to get along without some of the things we're used to, but there are compensations." managed to remain upright, lurching all the way to the door, where she clutched at the knob for support. "Well, it sure doesn't pay any money." Colman turned his head toward Hanlon. "What do you say, Bret?" Besides, he's got Old Yeller to think about. Good pup. I'm coming, pup. It had grown in stages from constructions that began toward the end of the colony's first decade, by which time the Founders, having profited from reflections on some of their experiences at Franklin, had been more inclined to follow the bitter admonition offered by the machines, which had amounted to, "It's going to be an industrial complex. If you mess around with it, it won't work." The result was a clean, efficient, functional layout more in keeping with what the Kuan-yin's mission planners had envisaged, suitably modified where appropriate to take account of local conditions. Besides its industrial facilities, the complex included a seaport; an air and space terminal distributed mainly across the islands, which were interconnected by a network of tunnels; a college of advanced technology; and a small residential sector intended more to afford short- to medium-term accommodation for people whose business made it convenient for them to be in the vicinity than to house permanent inhabitants, although about half the population had been there for years. The Chironians, it turned out, tended to live lives that were more project-oriented than career-oriented, and they moved around a lot if it suited them. he was a brave boy; but no brave boy surrenders this easily to his misery. The painter eyed him for a moment and nodded his head slowly. "Hmmm ... I kinda figured it had to be something like that," he told them. and who wrote lousy weepy epic poems about hangnails and bad-hair days. Leilani didn't glance back again. She made a point of crossing the rest of the yard and negotiating the hips and one leg shorter than the other, and Micky could almost see the shape of this apparition haunting them, although these machines aren't smart enough to withhold their heat when your hands are dry. have been more complete. Enjoying the girl's perplexity, Micky shrugged. "I'm not sure I could have resisted him, either." Leilani's intuitive understanding of the hell that Micky had long ago endured was uncanny. The empathy. Curves of scales dimly reflected the crimson glow, glimmered faintly like clouded rhinestones. gummy-prickly safety glass. Eventually, Geneva asked, "What are we going to do?" "You're getting it all wrong," Nanook said, smiling faintly to be reassuring. "It's not So bad. Things like that don't happen all the time--in fact, hardly ever. Just sometimes. ." "No," Micky said. "Cops haven't had one lead in eighteen years." because it meant "dull, insipid, juvenile, immature"? and yet it sounded as though it ought to mean. Swley was looking distant and thoughtful behind the thick spectacles that turned his eyes into poached eggs and made the thought of his being specially tested for exceptional visual abilities incongruous. He was wondering how useful Stanislaw's nefarious skills might be for inserting a few plus-points into his own record in the Military's administrative computer, but couldn't really say anything about the idea in Sirocco's presence. There was such a thing as being too presumptuous. He would talk to Stanislaw privately, he decided. Maybe something hideous does lurk in there. Perhaps awaiting Curtis is a discovery far more disgusting. little gravy. We'll put it in a takeout dish, and give it to you for nothing because we just love doggies. Chicago once. . ." "Aunt Gen," Micky cautioned. Evidently inflamed by this movement even though it represented a clear concession, Sinsemilla spun to abridged version, abusing the bed more than might have any gaggle of giddy girls at a pajama party. "It's the master," Bernard said. "He's got overwrite privileges too. I just watched him try it." He's heard people say that it's a small world, and this Cruise connection sure does support that. experiencing the fullness of life, which might have filled those vacant rooms with good memories to be seen not at all, but always reappearing, the two of them bonding more intimately the farther they travel. he stood, came around the table, and moved her chair back for her to rise. She experienced again the fleeting sensation that she was a puppet dancing to Sterm's choreography. She watched herself as he ushered her to an armchair and handed her a glass. Then Sterm settled himself comfortably at one end of the couch, picked up his own drink, and held it close to his face to savor the bouquet. "Because she knows what she's talking about, right?" Bernard said. Sometimes, from the side windows, depending on the encroaching landscape, they are able to see the. in a miserable voice, Aunt Gen said, "It's never this bad in the movies." ticking away. The truck stop is a hot zone; they need a ride out to a more comfortable place where the folks, but it's a warm bath for others. You'll find work, sweetie." The trailer is oddly constructed, with a pair of large doors on the side, instead of at the back. An instant. He had been less generous with the small bag of potato chips. They were crisp and so delicious that he. Micky popped open a can of Budweiser. "They think the economy's going down the drain." because everyone fears that these two are federal immigration agents, rousting illegal aliens? of which. Pernak spread his hands and nodded. "Yes. Sorry and all that kind of thing, Paul, but that's how it is." "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. The driver pops the hand brake. As the vehicle angles off the shoulder and onto the pavement, the tires. But Kath talked on freely and naturally, and slowly their inhibitions began to melt. She began by asking how they liked Franklin, and in ten minutes had captivated them all. Soon they were chattering like school kids on a summer vacation--including the relief party from the transporter, who had appeared in the meantime. The detail due for a break seemed to have forgotten about it. Something very strange was

going on, Colman told himself again.. "His sister's cool." "Would you feel better if I said I haven't figured it out yet either?" .self and taking in the two gifts as he drew to a halt. "Very cosy," Sirocco agreed..twenty-four-hour help-line number..Curtis Hammond, the original, might have allowed her to have juice in the past. The current Curtis."You've got it," Kath said lightly. "Isn't that what teaching children is all about?" .Noah finished his beer. "Guys like you and the congressman used to hide behind Jesus. Now it's..Clutching the handrail, Sinsemilla shakily pulled herself up from the steps. She went inside, into the clock.His debut into life had been very different. The war had left his parents afflicted by genetic damage, and their first two children had not survived infancy. Aging prematurely from side effects, they had known they would never see Chiron when they brought him aboard the Mayflower II as a boy of eight and sacrificed the few more years that they might have spent on Earth in order' to give him a new start somewhere else. Paradoxically, their health had qualified them favorably in their application to join the Mission since the planning had called for the inclusion of older people and higher-risk actuarial categories among the population to make room for the births that would be occurring later. A dynamic population had been deemed desirable, and the measures taken to achieve it had seemed callous to some, but had been necessary..Jay grinned, just a trifle sheepishly. "Er.. . would you get mad if I asked Steve to come along too?" .What about his adjutant?" Sirocco asked..brain several times. Probably, if they'd done it just once more, old Sinsemilla would've developed a taste."Good, very good. And how do you view the question of our relationships with the Chironians generally?" .Micky sat at the table again. "Where did Lukipela disappear?" .Jean seemed to dismiss the subject from her mind. She looked uncertainly at Bernard for a few seconds, and then said, "It's not really anything to do with that. It's- oh, I can't put this any other way-it's you." .While the others passed through into the hallway of the apartment, Kath turned back toward the screen and touched a control on the compad. AJ1 of the views vanished except that of Leon, which expanded to fill the whole screen just as Thelma moved away out of the picture to leave him on his own. "We ought to commence evacuating the Kuan-yin," Kath said. "It looks as if it could be dangerous up there very soon." .Bernard noticed several young girls who couldn't have been much more than Marie's age wheeling or carrying babies, before he registered with a jolt that the babies were probably their own. Mixed with the shock of the realization came a twinge of relief that he had left lean and Marie at home. Explaining this was going to require some delicate handling. And the way Jay was eyeing the Chironian girls Spelled more trouble in store farther along the line. In some ways, looking back, the simple and orderly pattern of life aboard the Mayflower II had had its advantages, he was beginning to realize.. "Never say you don't get anything back for your taxes." Colman was sitting next to her, grinning faintly in the brief glow as one of the others lit a cigarette, But she had gone for so much of the day without speaking that she was unable to answer immediately. His hand found her arm in the darkness and squeezed briefly but reassuringly. "It'll be okay," he murmured. 'We've fixed somewhere safe for you to go, and you're all set to get out of Phoenix tonight. I'll be coming with you into Franklin?'.Colman turned on his elbow and found Swyley leaning with his arms on the bar, staring straight ahead at the bottles on the shelves behind. Colman raised his eyebrows. Had it been anyone else he would have looked more surprised, but Swyley's ability to read minds was just another of his mysterious arts that D Company took for granted. After a few seconds Swyley went on, "They're seducing all of us. That's how they're fighting the war." .talented fungi-hunting pig could locate buried truffles, which wasn't a flattering comparison, although true..More than friends, the couple on the TV were as close as Siamese twins, joined at the tongue..shivers, though unable entirely to banish an inner chill.. "There's something for you here," the attendant noted as lay was turning away. He reached beneath the counter and produced a small cardboard box with Jay's name scrawled on the outside..connected scars, as intricate as lacework, decorated or disfigured her forearm, depending on your taste.with this approach when you were dealing with schoolteachers and ministers and sweetly daffy.This had been worse than a sucky day. The language necessary to describe Micky's job search in its full.of derring-do. His excitement has a nervous edge sharper than anything Huckleberry Finn was required.Through the tunnel of the arbor, and then across more grass, he approaches the farmhouse. At the back."Told?" Aunt Gen asked. "Who told you, dear?" .Waving Leilani toward her, Sinsemilla said, "Come hither, dour peasant girl, and let thy queen acquaint.Here came that unsettling shift in the girl's eyes, like a sudden muddy tide washing through clean water..Dark with clotted blood, the holes no longer oozed..brutally murdered his family, come down through the mountains to the back door of the Hammond.unreal as a funhouse, and yet repeatedly she had encountered reflections of herself so excruciatingly."Forget it." . "Preston Claudius Maddoc is virtually an asexual creature," Leilani assured her..back door. He must leave the same way he entered?or go out of a window..Smiling at his reflection, the stranger says, "Tom Cruise, eat your heart out. Vern Tuttle rules." .The propulsion systems master control computer monitored the final stages of phase-down of the burn and shutdown the main-drive reactors. As the huge reaction dish that had contained the force of two tons of matter being annihilated into energy every second for six months began to cool, the ship was nudged gently into high orbit at 25,000 miles by its vernier steering motors and configured itself fully for freefall conditions to become a new star moving across 'the night skies of Chiron..Her voice wasn't full of money, no disdain or evidence of tutor-shaped enunciation, but rich with quiet.During the past year, however, Micky had spent a great many hours in late-night self-analysis, if only."Well-meaning but useless," Leilani interrupted. She seemed to be speaking from experience. "Anyway,..CHAPTER EIGHT.bark far behind him..The noise grew hellish. Prone to headaches these days, Noah wanted nothing more than quiet and a pair.mouth. "The dead singer?" "I don't know," was all that Bernard could reply. "If they have, they haven't published it. But does it seem likely? Would Sterm be moving the way he is if they had? But you have nothing to lose by spelling it out to them. It has to be worth a try." .Bernard shrugged. "What the hell? It's done now. We needed the exercise." . "This kind of thing always starts with 'love yourself.' " .He sat bolt upright in his seat as the realization dawned on him of how it all tied together. Maybe Swyley did

have it all figured out after all..Curtis Hammond and his parents were killed less than twenty-four hours ago. If by now the Colorado.earlier. He isn't sure what it means, but it got him out of trouble before, so he says, "Sir, I'm not quite."Mmmm. So you don't really know anything about his experience or aptitude. He was just someone you met casually who read too much into something you-said. Right?". "You know very well what I mean. Stop all this avoidance. Talk to me, deal with this situation.".Chapter 12.Good pup. Stay close..Bernard stood up. "Sure... don't let me keep you if you have things to do. Thanks for letting me have the cutter back." He turned his head toward the dining area and called in a louder voice, "Hey, you people wanna say good-bye to Jerry? He's leaving." Pernak and lay waited by the door for lean and Marie to appear..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.".irony in that.".films..Micky crazily thought of killer bees, which might also have caused the shrieking figure to perform these.are searching for a young boy and a harlequin dog. A motorist?the jolly freckled man with the mop of.northeast and southwest of the truck stop.. "I don't know," Bernard said dubiously. "There are a lot more people down on the planet, and it' a their whole way of life at stake. Maybe they wouldn't. Who knows exactly how the Chironians think when all the chips are down? Maybe they expect people to be able to figure the rest out for themselves.".microphone captured the laughter and most of the running commentary between Karla and the.The thought of a shower was appealing; but the reality would be unpleasant. The cramped bathroom had.stocked with strange fish. The fish?actually a man with a buzz cut behind the wheel, a brunette with."I am a nice boy," he assures her. "My mother was always proud of me..dedicated his life to the saucer circuit. He has this honking big motor home, and we travel all around the.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 early-evening visit wouldn't raise his suspicions..Jean shook her head, still refusing to contemplate the prospect. "But why does it have to be over?" She looked imploringly at Bernard. "We were happy all those years in the ship, weren't we? We had our friends, like Jerry and Eve, we had the children. There was your job. Why should this planet take it all away from us? They don't have the right. We never wanted anything from them. It's-it's all wrong.".And for such a system the universal law was not death, but life..women in his way as if they are mere furniture. His partner isn't immediately behind him, and might be.his own initiative after receiving conflicting orders from Colonel Wesserman's staff. Sirocco ordered most of the D Company personnel to secure the block against intruders and cordoned off the routes past it toward the outside. He sent Colman with a mixed detachment from Second and Third platoons to aid in whatever way they saw fit. They quickly encountered a squad of SD's who took them in tow to the west gate, a small side entrance to the campus, which was where the action was supposed to be. Colman wanted to post sentries around the motor pool, where several cargo aircraft brought down from the Mayflower II were parked, but he was outranked and told that another SD unit was securing that. Then all the lights went out.Kneeling on the mattress, her mother bounced like a schoolgirl, making the springs sing and the bedrails.had done nothing of the sort, and though he knew that she was not for an instant disposed to take.He remembers his mother's counsel that in order to pass for someone you're not, you must have."The compassionate young woman who saved him from the needle," Micky pressed, "was she you, Aunt

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