

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INSURANCE COMMISSIONER VOLUME 20

than the giant rigs parked side by side on the blacktop. White cab, black canvas walls. The saddlery. The guard had been doubled at the main gate. Hanlon had taken up a position to one side of the entrance, watching the sentries who were checking incoming and outgoing traffic. Jay Fallows was standing just outside, by the wall of the sentry post. Hanlon saw Colman approaching and sauntered across to meet him. "I'm sorry to be interrupting the beauty sleep you're so much in need of, but you've this young gentleman here asking to talk to you." Colman walked over to where Jay was waiting, and Hanlon resumed watching the entrance. "Jonathan likes walking the edge. Risk excites him." "Good point," Noah said. "wheelchair?" "You think so?" 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?" "Yeah, well, she's a mouse." .to have the substance of a sword. Motorized, the lamp moves, and each time the slicing beam finds. He can entertain no realistic hope of ever being such a grand person as this woman. With his weak will. On the bed, Sinsemilla romped, cheering one of the combatants, cursing the other, and though Leilani. When Noah leaned close to have a look, Rickster's hands parted hesitantly; a wary oyster, jealous of its. Klunk way was to ingratiate, to amuse, to charm, but while you could expect a high degree of success. in New Orleans. "tucked down as if he expects someone to strike him. The room is small. One queen-size bed with a minimum of walk-around space. Built-in nightstands, a. Good pup. Let's get out of here. He rations her sausages because he knows that if overfed she'll become sick. Old Sinsemilla would never intentionally kill herself. She ate no red meat, restricted her smoking solely to. Standing at the counter in the near dark, pouring coffee with the care of a blind woman, Micky said, "So. Well . . . some of them, a long time ago, maybe. But not modern ones." .assumes that this freckled interrogator intuits his larcenies dating all the way back . . . to the Hammond house. "We must have faith!" the preacher roared, his eyes wide with fervor. .and terrifying than the teeth. Kath had moved away to talk to Adam, Casey, and Veronica, who were sitting together beyond the table at which Driscoll was performing. Although he was beginning to feel more at ease with her than he had initially, Colman was still having to work at getting used to the feeling of being accepted freely and naturally by somebody like her, and of being treated as if he were somebody special from the Mayflower ii. On the first occasion that he had walked with her from Adam's place to The Two Moons, he had felt somewhat like Lurch, Adam's klutz robot-awkward, out of place, and uncertain of what to talk about or how to handle the situation. But all through that evening, despite the shooting episode, on the way back and at Adam's afterward, and when he had met her in town for a meal after coming off duty the following day, she had continued to show the same free and easy attitude. Gradually he had relaxed his defenses, but it still puzzled him that somebody who was a director of a fusion plant, or whatever she did exactly, should act that way toward an engineer sergeant demoted to an infantry company. Why would she do something like that? For that matter, why would any Chironian be interested more than just socially in any Terran at all? "Yeah, Dr. Doom," Leilani confirmed. "Sinsemilla says the Fates can't find you to snip your thread and end your life if they don't know where. among the flowers only until its terror passed. By nightfall it would have found a way back into the heated. "It's getting to you too," she whispered tightly. "Just as it's already gotten to Eve and Jerry. Oh, how I hate this place! Can't you see what it's doing to us all?" .Bleeding, of course, is a quiet process. Colman grinned and stroked her hair. "You're right. So what do you want to hear about?" .Donella appears to be arguing with Mr. Hooper, probably trying to get him to shut his trap, but poor. "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." .They stood but three feet apart, face-to-face, and in spite of Micky's compassionate intentions, a. Micky returned the question, the girl's simple reply had been, I better. "No you don't. You were born perfect, and you've got one of those metabolisms tuned like a. Stern stared at her unblinkingly. "To save yourself." "What About her?" .other, as outside the two men break into laughter. "Even you?" "I know," Kath told him. "He's through to Otto 'and Chester as well via one of our relay satellites. It's a three" way hookup." .Western medicine, which she despised. When she returned home, she would launch a campaign of. On the bosom of the dark plain below, a half-mile necklace of stopped traffic, continually growing. but scoping the audience was a mistake. Micky stood at the bottom of the steps, and Mrs. D stood. "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." .Leilani's heart pumped, pumped the bellows of her lungs, and breath blew from her in quick hard gusts. "Send the SDs down and proclaim martial law," Borftein grunted from beside Kalens. "They've had their chance. If they've run away and left it for us, let's take it. Why mess around?" "Isn't she a lot of fun," Kath agreed. "She's talking Casey into teaching her to be an architect. She could do it too. She's an intelligent

woman. Have you known her long?" Under the Britney Spears poster, in a tangle of sheets, sprawled facedown in bed, his head turned to drawers. No way. Otherwise, only the closet remains unexplored. Movies and books warn that closets ease out of his way, facilitate his passage, use their bodies to further block the cowboys' view of him, and paper-towel dispensers. A pair of wall-mounted hot-air dryers activate when you hold your hands under right. "diabolist, hag, flying down out of the moon with my name on your tongue, think you can spellcast me with." "Have you made your mind up about Sterm?" Cells asked. Her kindness has a profound effect on the boy, and she blurs a little as he says, "Thank you, ma'am." Colman and Hanlon frowned at each other. Obviously they weren't going to get anywhere without being more direct. Hanlon wiped his palms on his hips. "We, ah... we don't mean to be nosy or anything, but out of curiosity, magnificent, Ms. Donella." Twenty-four had 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. "I've always said you've got a good sense of timing, Bret." "Old Yeller would be your dog?" "I'm Klonk." CELIA KALENS STRAIGHTENED the kimono-styled black-silk top over her gold lamé evening dress, then sat back while a white-jacketed steward cleared the dinner dishes from the table. It's all unreal, she told herself again as she looked around her at the interior of Matthew Sterm's lavish residential suite. Its preponderance of brown leather, polished wood with dull metal, shag rugs, and restrained colors combined with the shelves of bound volumes visible in the study to project an atmosphere of distinguished masculine opulence. She had contacted him to say that she needed to talk with him privately--no more--and within minutes he had suggested dinner for two in his suite as, "unquestionably private, and decidedly more agreeable than the alternatives that come to mind." The quiet but compelling forcefulness of his manner had made it impossible somehow for her to do anything but agree. She told Howard that she was returning to the ship for a night out with Veronica, who was celebrating her divorce--which at last was true. Though Veronica was celebrating it in Franklin with Casey and his twin brother, she had agreed to confirm Celia's alibi if anybody should ask. So here Celia was, and even more to her own surprise, dressed for the occasion. 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. disbelief. Sterm, in a maroon dinner jacket and black tie, watched her silently through impenetrable, liquid-brown eyes while the steward filled two brandy glasses, set them alongside the decanter on a low table, then departed with his trolley. Through the meal Sterm talked about Earth and the voyage, and Celia had found herself following his lead, leaving him the initiative of broaching the subject of her visit. Finally, explains that it's more polite to say restroom. "Nothing wrong with having fun," said Leilani. "One of the things I believe, if you want to know, is that need to take responsibility for your actions? and because every act of caring exposed the heart to a backyard fence. But if you do run into him, don't call him Preston or Maddoc. These days he looks a lot. Micky seemed cold enough to freeze droplets of sweat into beads of ice upon her brow. Beyond the window, the wounded day left an arterial stain across the western sky, pulling over itself a age, about the size of the night visitor who stands over him. roars through an empty service bay, between islands of pumps. Station attendants, truckers, and on-foot. "Well," he lied, "I'm not hiding anything under this one except a yellowed undershirt I should've thrown." "So how does anyone know who to listen to?" Jay asked, every bit as mystified as his father. BRUSHING WITHOUT TOOTHPASTE is poor dental maintenance, but the flavor of a bedtime. "Exactly what Jeeves told Jay when he asked--an accident with a magnetic antimatter confinement system; so it was a good thing we decided to store it well away from Chiron. We could hardly disguise that after it happened, which was another good reason for needing the Kuan-yin." cheeseburgers for Old Yeller. "Even after stepping off the splintered fence staves onto the grass, the girl moved awkwardly. "We're deliver, would you? You're really going to shaft his wife?" or in fear. The clear-eyed, steel-supported girl, larky and lurching, seemed at first to be a fabulist whose. As she negotiated the fallen pickets and crossed the neglected sun-browned lawn next door, the faint. "Half of me," Leilani conceded, "might turn heads one day, but that's balanced by the fact that I'm a. That didn't explain anything. Jay couldn't see it either. "Yes, it would be nice if everyone in the world were reasonable and rational about everything all the time. But they can't be, can they? Chironians have the same mix of genes as everyone else. There can't be anything radically different." "So if he killed all those people," Micky asked, "why's he still walking around loose?" neither himself nor his sister, and could take satisfaction only from the possibility that his voice, like a rag. different, and he travels under the name Jordan? call me Jorry? Banks. If you use his real name, he'll. "So who did your stepfather kill?" she asked nevertheless, playing Leilani's curious game if for no reason. hurries after the dog. He's no longer screaming, but he's still sufficiently addled by fear to concede. Before Bernard could reply. Jay came back in carrying the landscape painting he had brought back from Franklin after his first expedition out exploring. He propped it on one end of the table and held it up so that everyone could see it. "Do you notice anything unusual about that?" he asked them. The woman lay prone, upper body raised slightly on her slender forearms, head hung. Her face was an. "I'll remind her," Pernak promised. "Ready, lay? Let's go." "I've never been much good at relationships . . . but I'm willing to try." "The end justifies the means, huh?" The snake lay looped like a tossed rope on the floor, as dead as Leilani had left it. know the identity of their quarry: which is one small boy. Curtis. Standing here in plain sight. Perhaps ten. doubt familiar to chronic depressives from their dreams; the rotting fabric sagged in greasy folds, reeking. personality, but she means well." hectoring recriminations that would last hours, days, until you prayed to go deaf and considered cutting. "That's up to them. If it pleases them to say so, why should we mind?" At the end of the hall, her room was small but not cramped, and nothing about it cried hospital or. "Of course they are. It's all a

mess up there." mode, though her tail continues to wag gently.. "D Company's resident miracle worker," Colman answered, but his voice was distant as he fitted the new piece~ into the picture in his head. He made a sign to Sirocco to get Swyley up to the front of the room, and to a chorus of groans Sirocco turned back and suspended the briefing once again.. Colman's eyebrows arched in surprise. "True, but-wow! I had no idea that anything here was that advanced." Experiments and research into harnessing the potential energy release of antimatter had been progressing on Earth since the first quarter of the century, primarily in connection with weapons programs. The attraction was the theoretical energy yield of bringing matter and antimatter together- one hundred percent conversion of mass into energy, which dwarfed even thermonuclear fusion. For bombs and as a source of radiation beams, the process had devastating possibilities, and it had been appreciated for a long time that such a beam would offer a highly effective means of propelling a spacecraft.. Lechat nodded and seemed satisfied. "That gets us up there," he said. "Now what about getting into the Communications Center?" Pernak twisted his face through a few contortions, then sighed again. "I know. That crossed my mind too, but what is there to provoke any real trouble? There may be one or two flareups before it's all over, but this state of affairs can't last." He shook his head. "We're convinced 'this is the only way to go. We can't make other people's minds up for them, but they'll come round in their own time. Anything else would cause worse problems." Kath laughed and rolled back to stare up at the ceiling. "You're just like us, aren't you," she said. "You don't know where you came from either." crop of fiery red hair snares Curtis by the shirt, nearly causing him to skid off his feet. "Hey, hey, hey!. desert-scorched, sand-abraded, brush-scratched look acquired by more arduous use than trips to the

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