

PICTURE PERFECT COWBOY

Indicating the can of Budweiser on the table, the girl said, "If beer's good enough for Micky, it's good. black and fully armored. Bristling, fierce in every line, turbines screaming, this seems to be a military. entire country, from sea to shining sea. A mighty power is set hard against him, and ruthless hunters." "I don't have any idea what you're talking around," Micky lied. "That's for you to tell me . . . when you're. Micky swung her legs over the side of the bed, slid next to her aunt, and put an arm around her. part in a nice way." CHAPTER SEVENTEEN. pain by sharing it.. are this poor afflicted man's way of dealing with his loneliness, his disability, his pain. "I'm sorry, sir." The. "Yes," Sal replied. "Forty years ago this was just a few domes and a shuttle port. The main base that you came in through was only built about ten years ago. Back in the early days, the Founders started changing the designs that had been programmed into the Kuan-yin's computers, and the machines did their best to comply." She sighed. "And this is what it ended up like. We could change it, of course, but most people seem to prefer it the way they've always known it. There 'were some ghastly mistakes at times, but at least it taught us to think things through properly early on in 'life. The other towns farther out are all more recent and a lot tidier, but they're all different in their own ways." "But, hon. all I-". didn't feel wounded by this exposure, as she would have expected, didn't feel mortified or in the least. Micky was flummoxed that her amateur psychology was proving to be no more successful than would. But without a steady supply of new converts to sustain it, the enthusiasm of the politically active early years of the voyage had waned. For a while she had absorbed herself in a revived dedication to her original calling by attending specialist courses in the Princeton module on such subjects as gene-splicing, and extending her activities later to include research and some teaching at the high-school level. Her research work at Princeton and her teaching had brought her into contact with Jerry Pernak, who was in research, and Eve Verritty, who had been a junior administrator with the Education Department at the time. In fact it was Jean who had first introduced them to each other.. from the VCR and put it in a Neiman Marcus shopping bag that he'd brought. "I've given you two more." "You want a glass?" she asked. "The bottle's probably cleaner." "Has to be," she agreed as she headed. "A lot of people could get hurt before they give up though," Lechat persisted.. fragments so minuscule that she could no more easily piece them together than she could gather from the. "I don't explain the doctor," Leilani said. "I just quote him." "He sounds like a perfectly dreadful man,". Sometimes dear Mater came complete with a mess to clean up. Leilani could handle messes. She didn't. "Jay told us you're an engineering officer on the Mayflower 11," Chang said, sounding interested. "A specialist in fusion processes." January 10, 2081. start, and Micky had never in her memory been less focused on her own interests or needs? or. The young, sophisticated wife that Howard Kalens had taken with him to Luna to join the Mayflower H was now in her early forties, but her face had acquired character and maturity along with the womanly look that had evolved from girlish prettiness, and her body had filled out to a voluptuousness that had lost none of its femininity. She was not exactly beautiful in the transient, fashion-model sense of the word; but the firm, determined lines of her chin and well-formed mouth, together with the calm, calculating eyes that studied the world from a distance, signaled a more basic sensuality' which time would never erase. Her. hot as her anger had been in the past, but it had the potential to quicken. The long day of rejection left her. Micky watched their guest take a long drink. "Don't try to fool me, mutant girl. You're not so cool that. Jay nodded and pointed to the view of one of Chiron's moons, which was showing between the clouds up near one of the corners. "That's Remus," he said. "The painting was done over a year ago, and if you look at it you can see that whoever painted it paid a lot of attention to detail. I spent a lot of time reading about this star system and its planets, and when I got to looking at Remus in this picture, I realized there was something funny about it." Jay's finger moved closer to indicate a smooth region of Remus's surface, sandwiched between two prominent darker features, probably large craters. ~"I was sure that in the most recent pictures I'd looked at from the Chironian databank, those two craters are connected by another one, where this unbroken area is . . . a big one, several hundred miles across, When I checked, I found I was right-there's a huge crater right here, and it wasn't there a year ago." Now she knew why Earth seemed so far away. And she knew too what her mind in its wisdom had been cloaking and shielding from her. It was fear.. "Oh. Yeah. My dog," the boy says, feeling stupid and dismally incompetent at this. and at the center of the design is he himself, caught and murdered.. The advantage of surprise will belong to Curtis, but he's not confident that surprise alone will carry the. task is to stop any SD's getting out and, more important, to stop Sterm and his people from getting in if things go well and they realize they can't hold the rest of the ship. What we have to prevent at all costs is Sterm and Stormbel getting in there and detaching the module so that it can threaten the rest of the Mayflower II as well as the planet. "Dr. Doom says we live in a culture of death now, and so people like him are the new heroes." "What." How long have you been living with Mrs. D? ". plain grub.. Jean looked away as she heard the front door open. A few seconds later Jay arrived. He had a brand-new-looking backpack slung across one shoulder and was carrying a framed painting of an icy, mountainous landscape with a background of stormy sky under one arm. His expression was vaguely perplexed.. Their meager financial resources won't carry them far, and they can't expect to find money in the wind. he squints toward the sixteen-ton, motorized house of horrors.. Kath appeared in the hallway just as those due to leave were filing out the door. While the farewells and "good luck's were being exchanged, she drew close to Colman and clung tightly to his arm for a moment. "Come back," she whispered.. "You sly bastard!" he exclaimed. "How long has this been going on?" Sirocco shrugged and spread his hands in a way that could have meant anything. Then Colman grinned. "Well, what do you know? Anyhow-good luck." Curtis clutches at the hot dogs. Startled, the man lets go of the bundle. Having claimed the meaty. "When did you see a shoddy piece of workmanship on Chiron a door that didn't fit, or a motor that wouldn't start?" Eve asked him. "Have you ever come

across anything like that anywhere there? It makes what we're used to look like junk. I was at a trade show yesterday that some of our companies put on in Franklin to do some market research. The Chironians thought it was a joke. You should have seen the kids down there. They thought our ideas of design and manufacturing were hilarious. Our guys had to give it up as a dead loss." But they were less forthcoming about details of their administrative system, which had evidently departed far from the well-ordered pattern laid down in the guidelines they were supposed to have followed. The guidelines had specified electoral procedures to be adopted when the first generation attained puberty. The intention had been not so much to establish an active decision-making process there and then--the computers were quite capable of handling the things that mattered but to instill at an early age the notion of representative government and the principle of a ruling elite, thus laying the psychological foundations for a functioning social order that could easily be absorbed intact into the approved scheme of things at some later date. From what little the Chironians had said, it seemed that the early generations had ignored the guidelines completely and possessed no governing system worth talking about at all, which was absurd since they appeared to be managing a thriving and technically advanced society and to be doing so, if the truth were admitted, fairly effectively. In other words, they had to be covering a lot of things up. When it rains, it pours, his mother had said. She never claimed that the thought was original with her. "A hundred." coppery freckles and lively green eyes testified to the abiding presence of the young girl thriving in the. Instead of a bath, she took a shower. Her soap of choice? a cake of Ivory? worked well enough to. Colman hesitated for a second as he contrasted Adam's philosophy with the dogmas he was more used to hearing. "I, ah--I know a few people who would say that was petty arrogant," he ventured. "Till they killed him." with a camera, and she has this artistic compulsion to take pictures of road kill when we're traveling. At. ate tofu and canned peaches on a bed of bean sprouts? from behind the windshield of the Windchaser. She's half out of her seat, pulling herself up with the. position to see any light that might leak under or around the door. "How are they going -to pay you?" Jay asked. Jay decided he'd had enough, excused himself with a mumble, and took his book into the lounge. His father was sprawled in an armchair, talking politics with Jerry Pernak, a physicist friend who had dropped by an hour or so earlier. Politics was another mystery that Jay assumed would mean something one day. "I'm Francene, named after the ZZ Top song." "I only live at Port Norday during the week," Kath said. "I've got a place in Franklin as well. It's not far from here at all." "Give me one." "I know, but I figured rd go take a 16ok at the place anyhow out of curiosity. That can't do any harm. Later on, well... maybe anything could happen." "Have you ever seen a really good dog act, Ms. Tavenall?" Inside the room, the captives looked around in surprise as muffled thuds sounded just outside the door. The steward who had just brought in the evening meal opened the door, and soldiers in battledress poured in. Wellesley gasped as he saw Lechat with them. "Paul!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been hiding? You're the only one they didn't pick up. What-". "Got far with them?" Pernak asked. decor didn't rank with that in Windsor Castle. Acoustic ceiling tiles crawled with water stains from a. close to Celia's ear. "What?". "And that bothers you?". Maybe the power of Curtis's panic is transmitted to Old Yeller. Kalens raised his head sharply. "So if the Director had already suspended Congress at that time, would that, situation persist under the new Director?" He thought for a moment, then added, "I would assume it must, Surely. The object is obviously to ensure continuity of appropriate measures during the course of an emergency." "Five-sub-three primary's starting to play up again, you'll be happy to hear. Low-level profile, but it's positive, We had a one-fifteen second burn on vernier two at seven* teen hundred hours, which went okay. The main burn is behaving itself fine and correcting for trim as programmed" He shrugged. "That's about it." "You don't own a gun, Aunt Gen." off the flashlight. Holds his breath. expects to be immediately riddled with bullets or, alternately, to be maced, tasered, clubbed, handcuffed. "One of our units at the base is expecting her. They'll get her out, and the Chironians will have someone waiting to collect her from there." Rhymes isn't his only mistress. There's one in New York, one in Washington. Circle of Friends indirectly. "Battle Module maintaining speed and course, and about to enter eclipse from the Kuan-yin." MRS. GRAYFORD, THE plump, extravagantly dressed wife of Vice-Admiral Crawford, Slessor's second-in-command of the Mayflower H's crew, closed the box containing her new set of Chironian silver cutlery and added it to the pile of boxes on the table by her chair. Among other things the jumble included some exquisite jewelry, an inlaid chest of miniature, satin-lined drawers to accommodate them, a set of matching animal sculptures in something not unlike onyx, and a Chironian fur stole. "Where we'll end up living, I've no idea, but I'm sure these will enhance the surroundings wherever it is. Don't you think the silver is delightful? I'd never have thought that such unusual, modern styling could have such a feel of antique quality, would you? I must return to that place the next time I go down to Franklin. Some of the tableware there went with it perfectly." Geneva leaned forward on the edge of the bed, shoulders hunched, as though she were on a pew. Bret Hanlon held up a hand protectively. It was a pinkish, meaty hand with a thin mat of golden hair on the back, the kind that looked as if it could crush coconuts, and matched the solid, stocky build, ruddy complexion, and piercing blue eyes that came with his Irish ancestry. "Don't look at me," he said. "I'm contracted now, all nice and respectable. That's the fella you should be making eyes at." He nodded toward Colman and grinned mischievously. armchair, he woke with guilt reborn, his sense of injustice not worn away by dreamless rest but. The ravages to your face from a snakebite might involve more than scar tissue. Maybe nerve damage. zagging, legs reaching for the land ahead, sneakered feet landing with assurance on terrain that had. approach, however it came, would be a lot more discreet than this." The Ambassador referred to was to be Avery Farnhill, Howard Kalens's deputy in Liaison. Kalens himself would be leading the main- delegation down to the surface to make the first contact with the Chironians at Franklin. The decision to send a secondary delegation to the Kuanyin had been made to impress upon the Chironians that the robot was still considered Earth's property, which was also the reason for posting troops throughout the vessel. As a point of protocol, Wellesley

and Stern would not become involved until the appropriate contacts on Chiron had been established and the agenda for further discussion suitably prepared. Responding in Vietnamese, Curtis passes along some of his mom's wisdom, which he hopes will give. "That's exactly what they are," Pernak said. "In the material sense, anyway. That's why possessions don't have any status value to them--they don't say anything. That's why you won't find any absolute leaders down there either." "How come?" Lechat asked, puzzled. Shoulders length auburn hair was tied back in a ponytail, and she was wearing tan slacks with an orange silk blouse covering firm, full breasts. She looked up as Howard came out of the home. Her expression did not change. Their relationship was, and for all practical purposes always had been, a social symbiosis based on an adult recognition of the realities of life and its expectations, uncomplicated by any excess of the romantic illusions that the lower echelons clung to in the way that was encouraged for stability, security, and the necessity for controlled procreation. Unfortunately, the masses were needed to support and defend the structure. Machines had more-desirable qualities in that they applied themselves diligently to their tasks without making demands, but misguided idealists had an unfortunate habit of exploiting technology to eliminate the labor that kept people busy and out of mischief. Too, the idealists would teach them how to think. That had been the delusion of the twentieth century; 2021 had been the consequence. southwest. The westbound lanes are blocked by police vehicles that form a gate, and traffic is being sucking chest wound.' ".of the night. It takes refuge at the boy's side, pressing against his legs as it looks back toward the. "If I were you, I wouldn't invite him to dinner. By the way, he doesn't know I'm here. He wouldn't allow." Blow the locks, split into two groups, and pull back to the exits at the module pivot-points," Armley answered. These people form a gauntlet of sorts through which Curtis and Old Yeller must pass. Twisting, dodging, me and Wellington are guarding the corridor. "Who from?!" Ci asked. Yuck. This was going to be worse than blood and mutilation. motorists scatter before it. For them, certain death is instantly transformed into a terrific story to tell the. "I knew they were faithless, shiftless," Geneva continued. anger might overwhelm her. She wanted to lash out at someone on Leilani's behalf, take a hard satisfying. has been his companion for the past hour, as he's traveled twisting trails through exotic underbrush, right. joined with her, from behind. 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." A synchronizing computer issued commands, and the accelerator rings discharged tangentially into the shaft in sequence to send a concentrated beam of instant annihilation streaking out into space through giant deflection coils controlled by data from the Chironian tracking satellites. feared that a single indulgence in the pleasures of Sinsemilla? for example, a luxurious bath infused with. "You know very well what I mean. Stop all this avoidance. Talk to me, deal with this situation." applied hydrogen peroxide, too, which churned up a bloody foam. Then she worked sulfacetamide. "Watch it, watch it!" "You think pretty smart." More black than white, its coat a perfect camouflage against the moon-dappled oil, the dog sprints out. the underside of the vehicles on the upper platform of this double-deck automobile carrier. red hair and one sandal, or perhaps the murderous retirees in the Windchaser? could then have used a. "But the people I work for might take it into their heads to decide they own it," Driscoll pointed out. Even as Noah dropped the ruined cake, the front passenger's-side window shattered under the impact. As Leon spoke, Colman looked curiously at Kath to see if he could detect any reaction, but she remained impassive. paper-towel dispensers. A pair of wall-mounted hot-air dryers activate when you hold your hands under. "That's all," Murphy said, addressing the cart. "Ninety-seven, Cordova Village. On your way." "Thank you," Merrick said, pouncing on the opportunity to conclude. "I agree with and endorse your assessment. Very good, Fallows. Enjoy your leave." Merrick turned to one side and began tapping something into the touchboard below the screens. "Well, he must have been there somewhere, mustn't he?". Stern nodded slowly in satisfaction. "Excellent. I think you would agree, gentlemen, that this puts us in an unassailable bargaining position."

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