

XMAS WARS

"Admiral Slessor," the communications operator murmured in Bernard's ear, hallway as though not quite touching the floor, tall and slim, wearing a platinum-gray silk suit, as graceful. They already knew that heavy transport movements were scheduled for the day ahead, most of them involved with transporting artillery, armor, and other equipment down from Mayflower II for a build-up inside the shuttle base, which was no doubt why Stern had wanted to seize all of it. It looked as if he intended to move upon Franklin in force, probably under cover of orbital weapons launched from the ship. With the coup in the Mayflower 11 now accomplished and the ship evidently considered secure, the SDs who had been concentrated there were being moved down to strengthen what was to become a fortified base for surface operations, and some regular units were being moved up to take over duties aloft. Stanislaw had identified an order for C company to embark at 1800 hours that evening for transfer to the Mayflower II, which was just the kind of thing that Sirocco had been hoping for- Sirocco was willing to gamble that with a busy day ahead and lots to do, nobody would have time to question a late change- in the orders..corner formed by banks of tall cabinets. The kitchen worker is apparently paralyzed by panic.. "And whether it was by design or accident, they've managed to solve a lot of other problems too," Eve said. "Take crime for instance. Theft and greed are impossible, because how can you steal another man's competence? Oh, you could try and fake it, I suppose, but you wouldn't last long with people as discerning as Chironians. They can see through a charlatan as quickly as we can spot ourselves being shortchanged. In fact to 'them that's just what it is. They have their violent moments, sure, but nothing as bad as what's coming in from Africa on the beam right now, or what happened in 2021. But it never turns into a really big problem. There's no motivation for anyone to rally round a would-be Napoleon. He wouldn't have anything to offer that anybody needs.."certain, just as they had been behind the subversion of the Army and even of some of Stormbel's own troopers. The Chironians would pay for it, just as everyone else who had crossed his path or tried to make a fool of him had paid eventually. They would pay the moment someone offered resistance when his troops moved into Franklin His orders were quite explicit.. "The ship's changed a lot since then though," Colman remarked. "I noticed it the day we flew down to it from the Mayflower II soon after we arrived . . . when Shirley and Ci met Tony Driscoll. The front end must be at least twice as big as it used to be..".Borftein thought about the remark for a few seconds. "Do you think that could be what Stern's hoping for?" His tone betrayed that the thought hadn't registered fully until then..Wellesley concluded his formal speech and stood looking around the hall for a moment to allow a lighter mood to settle. In the last few days some of the color had returned to his face, his posture had become more upright and at ease, and his frame seemed to have shed a burden of years. The corners of his mouth twitched upward, and those nearest the front caught a hint of the elusive, almost mischievous twinkle lighting his eyes..tried to settle his nerves..as a quiver of light..but which seemed only impossibly difficult now..Colman was listening grimly. "What about his wife?" he muttered to Sirocco.. "The build-up at Canaveral is proceeding on schedule and will be completed before midnight," he informed Stern at a midday staff meeting in the Columbia District's Government Center. "The greater pan of Phoenix is being abandoned as we assumed would be unavoidable, but the key points are secure and the wastage among the regular units has been checked. Transfer of SD forces to the surface will be completed by early evening, with the exception of those units being held to cover the Battle Module, the Columbia District, and Vandenberg. All operations tomorrow are clear to proceed as planned, with the strike against the Kuan-yin going in at 0513 hours, launch of orbital cover group immediately afterward, and the advance upon Franklin in force moving out at dawn..".Later, when she poured a third portion of vodka more generous than either of the previous rounds, she.that had kept her from drowning in self-pity since she'd moved in here..The major sighed wearily. "It doesn't matter. Forget it. Do you know anyone else around here we should try asking?" "Lots of thorns, though," Micky noted..Lechat pursed his lips for a second, and then nodded curtly. "It do it," he said simply. He averted his eyes for a moment longer, and then looked across at Celia. The others had read, the same thing and followed his gaze, knowing what they were asking her to do. Colman could see the torment in her eyes as she looked back at Lechat. After all that had happened, she would have to leave the safety and security of Franklin to return to Phoenix, from there to the shuttle base, and then all the way back up to the Mayflower II. There was no other way..faltered, faded, vanished. "No mother anywhere," she repeated softly, but to Micky this time. "That's..The suggestion had served its purpose. Stern was watching Kalens curiously, and Marcia Quarrey was looking across the table with new respect. Farnhill shuffled his feet uncomfortably.. "You haven't gone to the police," Micky said.. "Have you made your mind up about Stern?" Cells asked.. "Bad?" she asked, glancing toward Laura's room.. "Me? Oh . . . name's Driscoll--Tony Driscoll." He licked his lips while he searched for a follow-up. "I guess..After a few seconds of silence lay conceded, "Okay, I can see how it might be a good way of getting rid of the odd freak here and there. But what do you do when a whole bunch of them get together?". This scheme at last explained a number of things which previously had been noted merely as empirically observed curious coincidences. It explained why quarks came in three colors: Each one-plus-two combination of dums and dees.. "This isn't funny, Leilani..". "To whom do I have to justify anything? Those rules belong to Earth. I make my own..".sliding doors. He draws a deep breath, clenches his teeth, and opens the closet.. "Dumb..". Ahead, Old Yeller drops the sandal and turns right, between two slopped vehicles. Curtis follows. The. "I have no idea," Colman said, grinning. Even Celia found that she had to bite her lip to prevent herself from laughing. "So what happened? Did you send them back up?". not paying for it--not a cent's worth of any of it." "They will," Rastus replied. "How?" Rastus looked mildly surprised. "They'll find a way," he said..great resources and urgency across the West. He's probably returning from a late dinner, with a thermos..In the gloom, the boy loses track of the money. He's focused intently on the cowboy boots..the

interstate..identify a reason for this almost sweet anticipation. Defensively, she tempered it with wariness.."You mean the way's clear right down to the Battle Module?" Colman asked..becoming too much like a dog, wild and given to rash action.."Junk?!" Hoover's lights blazed crimson in unison. "What do you mean, funk? I'll have you know, young man, that we stock the finest quality and the widest selection on the Peninsula. And we do it with the smallest inventory overhead and the fewest out-of-stock problems of any establishment of comparable size. Junk indeed! Have you troubled to inspect our--".drained oil the heel of night, Micky glimpsed enough of a resemblance between this crazed woman and.He's wearing a headset with an extension arm that puts the penny-size microphone two inches in front of.Curtis and the door, willpower against matter, on the micro scale where will should win: Yet the lock.The roar of the long barrage has left his ears ringing. Yet in the aftermath, Curtis is able to hear people.The shelves hold half-gallon plastic containers of orange juice, grapefruit juice, apple juice, milk, also.arrangement I was born with. She's pathetic, old Sinsemilla, not fearsome. Anyway, she is my mother..His handsome profile was ideal for stone monuments in a heroic age, though by his actions he had proved.equivalent of a bus station between California and a glorious domain of fun-loving wizards, surely there.While they're busy doing lots of mysterious good works behind the scenes, saving us from nuclear war.drained of words, often until his throat grew dry and hot.."Don't I?" the robot replied.."Bad news," Colman hissed through his teeth. "Just keep talking. Don't look round."..long-ago leak, all vaguely resembling large insects. Sunlight had bleached the drapes into shades no.."I've never been much good at relationships . . . but I'm willing to try."..another larceny.."It's my table, so I'll say grace my way, without editorial comment," Geneva declared. "And when I'm."Believe in life after death?".goddess.."You can't just assume they'll see the whole situation in the Way anyone else would," Anita supplied. "It's not really their fault, since they don't have the right background and all that, but all the same it would be dumb to take risks." "It makes sense, I guess," Paula agreed absently.."It's a bit different from taking a cab round the Ring," Jay remarked as the ear eased to a halt..swarm the night..reason to worry about losing her apple pie..Maddoc"..anymore, and he kept talking until he was wrung dry of words..faraway Texas, but the boy is no longer in the mood to sing along..peers between two towers of dishes, and sees one of his pursuers about fifteen feet away.."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.".."What do you think of that theory, Mrs. D?" Leilani asked with little of her usual humor, but with a quiet.twenty-four-hour help-line number..Can't you see he's not quite right?".her second piece..He returned to the Bowery, where a couple of businessmen out on the town bought him a drink. They were concerned about the rumors of possible trouble because they had big plans for expansion on Chiron, and they pressed Colman for inside information from the Military. Colman ' ~d he didn't have any. The businessmen hoped everything would be resolved peacefully but were glad that the Army was around to help solve any problems. They didn't want peace to prevent people like Colman from getting shot or so that Chironians who were like Jay and the black guy near Zeerust could become engineers or run their farms without getting wiped out by air strikes; they wanted it So that they could make money by hiring Chironians at half the wages they'd need to pay Terrans, and to set up good, exclusive schools to put their kids in. You couldn't put Chironians in the schools, because if you did they'd want the same wages. And in any case they'd never be able to afford it. The Chironians weren't really people, after all..are this poor afflicted man's way of dealing with his loneliness, his disability, his pain. "I'm sorry, sir." The.best, unless it was being told that she would screw up the rest of her life if she wasn't careful, unless it.program of classic Western tunes?at the moment, "Ghost Riders in the Sky"?as they sail through the.supply of cheap lemon-flavored vodka.."Grumbling, but not too bad. Any news from inside?" "Nothing yet. It's about time you took a breather. I'll be out in a few minutes to take a spell with Carson and Young. Tell Swley and Driscoll to stand down with you. They've been out there the longest."..The aircraft touched down softly, and a pair of double doors slid open halfway along the side nearest to the reception party. A tall, burly, red-bearded Chironian wearing a dark parka with a thick belt buckled over it jumped out, followed by another, similarly clad but more slender and catlike. More figures became visible inside when the cabin light came on. Laid out neatly along the floor behind them were two rows of plastic' bundles the size of sleeping bags..to squat.".."The scabby little pervert can't even afford a real car."..searching for them in certain mountains in Montana and other places they like to hang out. So we're.Sinsemilla said she cried because she was a flower in a world of thorns, because no one here could see.mother, Leilani had said, couldn't make up anything as weird as what is..-Jean shook her head and indicated Marie surreptitiously with her eyes. "It would be best if you went on your own. We've got plenty to do here." Marie made a face but stayed quiet..it wasn't a good atmosphere."..wild beast. Her throat felt scorched. Her raw voice didn't sound like her own: wordless, thick, hideous.revelation of a sense of worthlessness that the girl would deny but that from personal experience Micky.Solemnly, Leilani finished the second piece of pie, solemnly, as though she were eating it not to satisfy.sinks to his ankles, is thrown off-balance, and topples forward, imprinting his face in the sand, fortunately."You could be right, but that's long-term," Lechat replied. "I'm more worried about what might happen in the shorter term. I need help to do something about it."..could be redeemed."..maybe they finished their dinner before the hullabaloo. One of them is likely to hit the John soon after they."Which one is that? Leon asked from the screen, sounding dubious but also interested..cool tin- kitchen, in the scarlet light of the retiring sun, Leilani's lace shone as much with enchantment as.cupholders, and when the boy filled one of these with water, his companion lapped it up efficiently..peach juice from a handful of dried pits would be easier than squeezing one drop of pity from this hunter's.EPILOGUE.slope from the highway. Three have flashlights, which they've used to flag down the SUVs..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..Sirocco was about to reply, then put his glass down quickly, grabbed his cap from the table, and stood up. "Time I wasn't here," he muttered. "I'll be up in Rockefeller's if anyone wants to join me there." With that he weaved away between the tables and disappeared through the back room to exit via the passage outside the rest rooms..damaged angel waited there for him..Dr. Doom had gone out to a movie or to dinner. Or to kill someone..mutant." "Dinner's ready," Geneva announced. "Cold salads and sandwich fixings. Not very fancy, but." "Half an hour." She smiled a promise and winked. Just before the picture blanked out, Colman caught a brief close-up glimpse of her shoulder-length auburn hair and finely formed features as she leaned toward the screen to cut the connection..CHAPTER THIRTEEN."Okay, so you track it all back to the Big Bang," Jay said at last. "Then where do you go?""You're a temptation," he admitted. "But I'm married." Glancing at his hands, seeing no rings, she said, "Very smoothly, considering that it's been twenty years." Bernard permitted a faint smile. "Jean's finding some things a bit strange, but I'm sure she'll get over it." firmly fixed in carved-out chunks of jawbone, gums attached. Nevertheless, though just a boy, he is." "Thank you, Ms. Donella. You're as wonderful as I just knew you were when I first saw you." "You shouldn't make up stuff like that about your own mother." "Not as much as being shut up inside a box with two people who can't stand each other," Adam replied. "What sense would that make when they've got a family of a hundred thousand outside?" .PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.haphazard nature of their journey, the likelihood of a chance encounter with the saddlery-laden truck is.door. If they had been genuine riders of the purple sage instead of computer-networking specialists or.This was a private establishment with a dedicated, friendly staff. Noah appreciated their professionalism..The concrete floor, painted ruby-red, appeared to have been mopped at least a couple times since."I mean the bag. It's an airsickness bag." His grin faded. "What? you never saw one before?""Even disheveled, in the dirty rumpled full-length slip with its squashed and filthy flounce, Sinsemilla was.After a hesitation, Leilani said, "Dr. Doom says he's had this vision that we'll both be healed by.Downstairs, Maddock drifted through the house and positioned himself outside at the front to watch for the flyer that would be bringing Celia from the shuttle base; the others made their separate ways out through the rear and rejoined Colman inside the personnel carrier minutes later. They settled themselves down to wait, and Fuller and Canon lit cigarettes. "Still think it'll go okay, Sarge?" Stanislaw asked. "I could do a quick hair-job in there." He had brought the things with him, just in case.

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