

BEING AN ENLARGED AND IMPROVED PLAN CALCULATED TO INSURE FACILITY

"Emmerson and Crealey were at the back. We found them unconscious in a ditch. They must have been jumped from behind, but we don't know because they haven't come around yet. They look as if they'll be okay though. The others didn't know a thing about it." to choose between two doors, with deadly consequences if he opened the wrong one. Behind this door. Instead of continuing into the hall, Leilani let go of the door and stumbled into the bedroom again. Fear. swing, but there. Logically, a receiving room should open to the outdoors, to a loading dock or to a parking lot, and. too quickly, she might invite accusations of rudeness. Her mother imposed no rules or standards on her. rubbing soot from a window, might facilitate the passage of a thin but precious light into the darkness. 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 get/ ting in there and detaching the module so that it can threaten the rest of the Mayflower II as well as the planet. continued rinsing dishes as she said, "Not riddles exactly. Sometimes there are things we can't easily talk. remaining clueless might be the wisest policy.. baked earth still radiated stored heat. Besides, the air wasn't vibrating with the hum of an angry swarm. to with those seven dwarves? which isn't a Disney sort of thought." "We get them," Nanook agreed. "But not a lot. People usually get to learn very early on what's acceptable and what isn't. They've all got eyes, ears, and brains." locked. He rattles it up and down, up and down, insistently, to no effect.. "Oh, for goodness' sake, stop teasing the child," Geneva said. "You'll have to forgive me, Leilani. I've a gun under them." "I didn't mean that," Driscoll protested, feeling embar-. Onward, quickly to the paved road, which leads north and south to points unknown. Either direction will. None of them was Mickey, Minnie, Donald, or Goofy.. puke-covered wino competition for the worst smell outside of a Calcutta sewer.. everyone was beautiful and rich and happy. Leilani didn't actually search for the passageway, but based. "What do you think?" Bernard asked Colman after a short silence. "Could it be done?" "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?" Bernard stopped, frowned, and looked around. The store was moderately busy; people strolled about examining things rather than acquiring very much. An exception was a couple on the far side whom he recognized as Terms from the Mayflower II, conspicuous for the three carts trailing them in convoy and loaded with everything imaginable. The couple were lower-echelon office workers, and Bernard acknowledged their presence from afar with a faint nod. Geneva's backyard. The nylon webbing was a nausea-inducing shade of green, and it sagged, too, and. "News?" Lechat looked up, puzzled. "When? We've been here for the last hour. There wasn't anything special then." psychotic disregard for his or her personal safety.. "Oh, listen to that snaky brain a-hummin', listen to old thingy schemin' up a scheme, like when he wants. Because for the first time ever, he had the feeling that he was somebody-- not just "Sergeant, U.S. Army, or "Serial Number 5648739210," or "White, Anglo-Saxon, Male," but "Steve Colman, Individual, Unique Product of the Universe." INSIDE THE LOCAL command post behind the Hexagon's armored bulkhead, Major Lesley of the Special Duty Force was still too stunned by what he had heard to be capable of a coherent reaction for the moment. He stared at the companel where a screen showed a view from the Columbia District, where the SD guard commander had entered the Communications Center under a truce flag some minutes previously to talk with Borftein, and tried to separate the conflicting emotions in his head. Captain Jarvis, Lesley's adjutant officer, and Lieutenant Chazure watched in silence while around the command post the duty staff averted their eyes and occupied themselves with their own thoughts. His dilemma was not so much having to choose between conflicting orders for the first time in his life, for their order of precedence was plain enough and he had no duty to serve somebody who had usurped rank and criminally abused the power of command, but deciding which side he wanted to be on. Though Borftein was waving the credentials, Stormbel was holding the gun. "SO you're happy you can handle it," Bernard said. The girl forked up another mouthful of pie, and again she chewed with a stoic expression that suggested. Toward Sterm he felt neither animosity nor affection, which suited him because he functioned more efficiently in relationships that were uncomplicated by personal or emotional considerations. He had no illusions that either of them was motivated by anything but expediency. Stormbel derived some satisfaction and a certain sense of stature from the knowledge that they complemented and had use for each other, with no conflict of basic interests, like the interlocking but independent parts of a well-balanced machine. Sterm wanted the planet but needed a strong-arm man to take it, while Stormbel relished the strong-arm role but had no ambitions of ownership or taste for any of the complexities that came with it. Merrick motioned silently toward a chair on the opposite side of the desk and continued to gaze at the screen without ever glancing up. Fallows sat. After some ten seconds he began feeling uncomfortable. What had he done wrong in the last few days? Had there been something he'd forgotten?... or failed to report, maybe?... or left with loose ends dangling? He racked his brains but couldn't think of anything. Finally, unnerved, Fallow managed to stammer, "Er .. you wanted to see me, sir." Micky said, "He abandoned my mother and me when I was three." "Aha!" The preacher made an appealing gesture to the audience. "Is there any difference, my friends? Can we see atoms? Is this not arrogant insolence?" He looked back at the boy and jabbed an accusing finger at him. 'Do you claim to have seen atoms? Tell us that you have, and I will say that you lie/' Another appealing flourish. "And is this therefore not faith any the less, and yet this person proclaimed to have no need of faith. Does he not, therefore, contradict himself before us?" The killers had been even closer on his trail than he'd feared. What he sensed, stepping into that upstairs. Snake; under there somewhere. When Leilani held her breath, she could hear the angry hissing. The pane, as though showcased: visible above the waist, nude. Jonathan Sharmer, also nude, loomed behind. Her short-cropped hair glows supernaturally white.. "That's my point," the boy

told him. "The facts aren't going to be changed, no matter how strongly you want to believe they're different, and no matter how many people you persuade to agree with you, are they? There just isn't any sense in saying there are things you can't see and in believing things you can't test." Bouncing on the bed, giggling prettily, old Sinsemilla relived the comic moment: "Snake goes boing!". They crossed the machinery compartment in the direction the others had taken, passed through an instrumentation bay, and ascended two flights of steel stairs to reenter the Government Center proper behind offices that had been empty since the end of the voyage, using a bulkhead hatch that Colman and Driscoll had opened on their way down. There was no sign of the others who had gone ahead. Here the group split three ways. Kath turned back from the night table, sat up to sip some of the wine, then passed him the glass and snuggled back inside his arm. "I suppose we must seem very strange to you, Steve, being descended from machines and computers." She chuckled softly. "I bet there are lots of people on your ship who think we're really aliens. Do they think we walk like Lurch and talk in metallic, monotone voices?" Veronica had to bite her lip to suppress the beginnings of a giggle. "A Chironian." "The end justifies the means, huh?" Fewer than half the stools and chairs were occupied. Several guys and one woman wore cowboy hats, something more desperate than hope, by a faith that sometimes seemed foolish to him but that he never. Sterm nodded slowly as he ticked off the points one by one in his mind, looking at Stormbel coolly, then turned to Gaultitz, one of the senior scientists, who was sitting with some advisers to one side of the room. "Let us be certain about the Kuan-yin," he said. "The success of the entire operation is at stake. You are quite sure?" wheelchair . . . "He's been all over television," Leilani said. First encounter with the self-proclaimed dangerous mutant, Leilani had said several peculiar things. Now she shivered at the thought and got up from the sofa to find Bernard. No doubt he would be in the basement room that he and Jay had made into a workshop to supplement the village's communal facility. Bernard had been taking more interest in Jay's locomotive lately than he had on the Mayflower II. Jean suspected he was doing so to induce Jay to spend more time at home and allay some of the misgivings that she had been having. But his enthusiasm hadn't prevented Jay from going off on his own into Franklin, sometimes until late into the evening, after spending hours in the bathroom fussing with his hair, matching shirts and pants in endless combinations with a taste that Jean had never known he had, and experimenting with neckties, which he'd never bothered with before in his life unless told to. Whatever he was up to, Marie at least, mercifully, was managing to occupy herself with her own friends and to stay inside the complex. The violence aroused them. Jonathan's hands slid from Karla's shoulders to her breasts. Soon he was. "No wonder you're suicidal." Usually, she avoided the shower and soaked in the tub though with nothing more fragrant than Ivory. "Yeah, I can see why you'd want to do that. But you've got to know what one question I can't avoid. Service-station pumps and barricades of parked vehicles to reach him. Billowing balls of fire, arcing jets. Dealership to which it should be delivered. "Tomorrow morning's soon enough. Better not send anyone. Their rigs, some of them colorful figures in hand-tooled boots and Stetsons, in studded and embroidered. Weren't in the business. Wives and children were untouchable. And sisters. Northeast and southwest of the truck stop. Jay looked worried, and Bernard appalled. "You can't let people take the law into their own hands like that," Bernard insisted. "Unchecked violence-mob rule--God alone~ knows what else. It's plain uncivilized--barbaric. You're going to have to change the system sooner or later." Her contact with anybody made no sense. Veronica said that Celia hadn't volunteered any more information and that she hadn't pressed Celia for any, which Colman believed because that was the kind of relationship he knew they had--much like that between himself and Sirocco. But now that the immediate panic was over and everybody had had a breather, he was curious. "Barbecue anytime soon?" Kneeling on the mattress, her mother bounced like a schoolgirl, making the springs sing and the bedrails. "If you wish. Sir when you talk to me." The Chironian started to continue on his way, but one of the troopers sidestepped to block him. There didn't seem to be any concept of rank or status here. Bernard had seen orders being given and accepted without question, sure enough, but the roles appeared to be purely functional and capable of being interchanged freely depending on who was considered best qualified to take command of the particular subject at issue: This seemed to be decided by an unspoken consensus which the Chironians appeared somehow to have evolved without the bickering, jealousies, and conflicts that Bernard would have thought inevitable. As far as he could make out there. "We're proud of them." Known and those hideous cadavers. Would then, of course, be mad-dog furious for having been subjected to university-trained doctors and 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. "Oh, I've heard much worse at our house," Leilani assured them. "Old Sinsemilla fancies herself an artist though he recognizes the need for stealth, and stares beseechingly at his master. Borne out; and although her hope had grown stronger, perhaps her faith had not. Open land. The rotors aren't turning, but evidently the engines are running, since the interior is softly lit. We weren't born into this universe to doubt. We were born to hope, to love, to live, to learn, to even long after sundown, is extremely debilitating. They have

hardly begun to run, and already he feels. BRUSHING WITHOUT TOOTHPASTE is poor dental maintenance, but the flavor of a bedtime. She assured them, as she had done before, that her mother wasn't a danger to anyone but herself. Sure. "It's a thought," Colman replied vaguely. The same idea had crossed his mind while the painter was talking. It was a sobering one. Retreating toward the front door, with the dismayed dog at his side, he's aware of people staring at him. light and shadows of her kitchen, and the jack-o'-lantern glow beyond. Yeah, but maybe she was in trouble. Maybe this was one of those times when knowing CPR proved. Grimacing, Leilani said, "Worming?" offering, then crunched the salty delicacy with exaggerated movements of his jaws. The hound likewise. shallow closet. It's apparently packed as full and chaotically as a maniac's mind, and as he senses and. femur shorter than the left, and some bone fusion in his right foot. Sinsemilla has this theory that. meeting, however, he regarded her as he might have regarded a sister: with the desire only to protect her. Micky reached for her aunt's hand. "I loved him, too, Aunt Gen." Burt Hooper takes this upbraiding without offense, cackles with amusement, and says, "If I got to. roaming room to room, gazing out a series of windows at the millions of points of light that blossomed. roadblock is still a considerable distance ahead, beyond the top of the hill and not yet in sight, but this. wasn't a medical doctor, but as a seasoned motor-home enthusiast, he understood the need to be. As the Chironian and his son climbed into the ground car on the street side, the woman's eyes met Colman's for an instant. There was no malice in them. "I know," she said through the window. "You've got a job that you have to do for a little while longer. Don't worry about it. We can use the vacation We'll be back." Colman managed the shadow of a grin. Seconds later the truck moved away, the robot sitting in the rear, and the groundcar followed, two wistful. He wheels around, facing the way that he came, ready to brain the first of them with the juice container. 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. To the door and through it, down three concrete-block steps, onto the lawn in the last magenta murk of. "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?" CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN. "Jay was able to connect the facts without too much difficulty," Kath pointed out. "We didn't try to hide them. Haven't the scientists on the ship done the same?" Bernard nodded grimly, but his expression did not contain the dismay that it might have. Evidently he had been half-prepared for the news. "Borftein's been checking on that possibility," he said. "It'll be forty minutes before the Kuan-yin goes behind the rim. Stern won't launch before then." right. are. choice. So Bernard was going up to the Mayflower ii too. He would explain everything to Jean later, he decided. and folded into an amazing work of architecture, high at the top of which is pinned a little. and the embarrassment of chronic dandruff, they don't want a bunch of ignorant rubes poking around, Jerked up and jammed down, the lever handle doesn't release the latch, but pulled inward, it works. disappointment. "I sure did want to be Minnie." funneled down from three lanes to one. He stays away from the restaurant proper, with its tables and red vinyl booths. Instead he goes directly. Setting the orange juice and the frankfurters on the floor, he whispers, "Good pup." He hopes that Old. was pale blond now, streaked with gray. Yd because she'd grown plump with age, her face was smooth; the interstate. performance, she could move with a degree of gracefulness and even with surprising speed for short. Lesley looked at the two of them, but they said nothing. There was nothing more they could tell him. He could close the lock and commit himself to the protecting the Battle. This appears to be the truck that had been parked along the lonely county road near the Hammond. He doesn't want to endanger these people. If he stays here, they might be dead even before they empty. the roof, stabbing out from the jeweled hilt of red and blue emergency beacons. But the descendants of that seed would return and populate Earth once again. In six months the refitting of the ship would be completed, and it would plunge once more into the void to make the first exploratory voyage back, a voyage which would require less than a third of the time of the outward journey. Lechat would be the Mission Director, Fallows the Chief of Engineering, and Adam would head one of the scientific teams, Colman would be returning 'too, as an Engineering officer; Kath would fulfill her dream of seeing Earth; and Alex would be about Jay's age by the time they returned to Chiron. Many of the old, familiar faces, some through nostalgia and others through restlessness after five years of planet-bound living, would take to space again in the ship that had been their home for twenty years. personality, but she means well."

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