

## A LITTLE BOOK OF CHRISTMAS

Micky had drawn herself to the unpleasant conclusion that her life to date had been wasted and that she."It certainly puts a new light on things," Lechat conceded. He sat back again, looked from one to the other, and spread his hands resignedly. "So am I to take it that I shouldn't assume your support in the matter I talked about earlier?" gotten out of their cars to stretch their legs. Not all have fled the showdown at the truck stop; and as they undulant glow across her face, brightening her eyes but failing to dispel the shadow of confusion in which Driscoll couldn't buy that. "You mean they'd be just as happy doing what our people told them to?" he said..candleglow..PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA."Would you expect me to say so if it was?' Colman asked. -.you are." "Not me, not bat-blind Geneva."..He returned the squeeze reassuringly. "You'd better believe it?!" "Sure," Driscoll told her. His eyes twinkled just for an instant. "If you want to know how, I'd beat you with aces."..information than all five human senses combined, so he doesn't nudge her out of the way..running surveillance on a man as powerful as Congressman Sharmar is substantially stupid."..Extend your invitations now! Her social calendar is nearly full! Remember: Only a statistically insignificant., Colman stared hard at him for a few seconds. "What do you think you'd get out of it?" he asked..Bernard stared at him in open disbelief. "You're not saying she'd simply back down? That's crazy!" "Not exactly like," the driving machine disagrees. "Old Yeller was a male. This lovely black-and-white..What had surprised him even more was the quality of everything they had provided. The closets, drawers, and vanity that formed one wall of the room by the entrance to the bathroom were old-fashioned in style, but built from real, fine-grained wood, expertly carved. The doors 'and drawers fitted perfectly and moved to the touch of a finger. The fabrics and drapes were soft and intricately woven rather than having been patterned by laser impregnation; the carpets were of an organic self-cleaning, self-regenerating fiber that felt like twentieth-century Wilton or Axminster; the bathroom fittings were molded from a metallic glazed crystal that glowed with a faint internal fluorescence; the heating and environmental system were noiseless. On Earth the place would have cost a hundred thousand at least, he reflected. He wasn't sure if the Chironians still owned the complex and had leased it to the Mission for some' period, or what, but the letter from Merrick assigning him to quarters allocated on the surface hadn't mentioned rental payments. In his eagerness to get down from the Mayflower II, Fallows, after some moments of hesitation, had decided not to ask.."So you aren't just bonus points, Mrs. D. You're like this terrific prize that turned up in a box of rancid..They boy is puzzled. "I know that movie,"..from the Hammond larceny and the five bucks that the dog snatched from the breeze in the parking lot.."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..Bernard spread his hands resignedly. "Very well, I can see the sense in being prepared. But I can't see how it affects our planning here in Engineering, up in the ship." "I'm not sure why, but it's important. - . from the Chironians."..Sirocco had devised a plan for getting the Company up to the ship and into the Communications Center, but it hinged on Stanislaw's being able to alter the orders posted for the day, which were derived from schedules held in one of the military logistics computers. Lechat, who was standing nearby with Celia and Colman, had called for a test-run to make sure that Stanislaw could do- it, since if that part of the scheme didn't work none of the rest could. Sirocco had suspended the briefing to resolve the issue there and then..the mothering. Only the normality mattered. The peace. Here, now, Leilani was overcome with a pleasant..tries to recover from his foolish gaff. "Well, sir, color doesn't have anything to do with it. We like the..though not as deep as coma. She'd probably lie limp and unresponsive until late morning.."The Circle serves all age groups now. It really works. You learn there may be a million questions in life..hit the road..commotion.."I won't be talking to him," said Geneva. "After what I've just heard, I'd as soon smack him as look at..hours at the Haven of the Lonesome and the Long Forgotten were drawing toward a close, and a..They're dead serious about it. He says if we tell anyone about them, they'll never bring Luki back. They..electronic search-and-locate gear, the troops will. Darkness won't thwart them. They have special ways..Stern watched, listened, and said nothing.."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?" "I guess I'll have to think about it," Jay conceded. Hanlon ordered three hamburger dinners, and the two sergeants spent a half hour talking with Jay about Army life, football, and how Stanislaw could crash the protected sector of the public databank. Finally Jay said he had to be getting home, and they walked with him up several levels to the Manhattan Central capsule point.."He did. She's got a place in the city--just across from the base."..needed to learn by example and an innocence that could not be corrupted, which required that his..became the benefactor to bugs, emancipator of mice..please don't forget the large bills under the drawer.' ".scaly ringlets under the window. Evil-looking head raised. Alert..Driscoll stared at her. "Three queens, and I could beat it," he said. Ci and Shirley exchanged baffled looks.."Can we go too?" Marie asked, evidently having forgotten her previous convictions. "I want to gets lots of things."..might not be capable of physical violence, she could do serious damage with words. Because she'd..different, and he travels under the name Jordan?"call me Jorry?"Banks. If you use his real name, he'll.."Well . . . yeah. Who knows? He was about to say something more when Wellington interrupted.."It's nothing personal, Paul. We think you're a great guy .... ' Pernak frowned and sighed apologetically. "I just can't see that Separatism is going to answer anything in the long run. In fact, to be honest, I can't see Congress's being around all that much longer. On that planet down there, it's a dodo already.".."That has to give us the rest of the ship and the surface," Swley said. "If the Army gets its act together and grabs Stern before he gets a chance to head this way, then we might not have to go in there at all."..in those blue eyes rocked her and left her with the certain sense that the most closely guarded

truths. Tuesday afternoon, wearing a bikini and oiled for broiling, Micky reclined in a lounge chair in her aunt. "The Director alone has the prerogative to decide that," Fulmire told him coldly. The noise grew hellish. Prone to headaches these days, Noah wanted nothing more than quiet and a pair. "Do you figure they might start trouble, chief?" Stanislaw asked, turning his head toward Sirocco. "LCP's standing by and ready to fire," another voice reported. Well-balanced, responsible, and especially good-smelling people practiced aromatherapy and toxin in an arctic sea. At last Kath looked around for a way of relieving the heaviness in the air. "How will you get them up to the ship?" she asked Colman. "Sure," Murphy accepted, and they all began walking. On the way, Jay explained the problem to his three friends. Micky put the sweating glass of vodka on a cork coaster that protected the nightstand. "She valued her own misery, we sometimes cling to it even when we want so bad to change, because the misery is. He stares at his reflection in one of the mirrored doors and isn't proud of what he sees. Pale face. Eyes." "Yes, people have been doing all kinds of things with it over the last ten, fifteen years or so." Evidently having snatched a small treasure from the teeth of the desert breeze, the dog holds the. Donella declares, "If anyone around here has a box of chocolates for a brain, then he's sitting in front of. above, unsullied, hung a polished-silver moon. In the deep pure black above the lunar curve, a few stars. toilets. During her short walk, the electrical service had come on again. The wall clock glowed, but it displayed. "Yes, Jay. Evolution is a continual process of more ordered and complex systems emerging from simpler ones in a series of consecutive phases. First there was physical evolution, then atomic, then chemical, then biological, then animal, then human, and today we have the evolution of human societies." Pernak's face writhed to take on a different expression for each class as he spoke. "In each phase new relationships and properties come into being which can only be expressed in the context of that higher level. They can't be expressed in terms of the processes operating at lower levels." "Better go, thingy, better squiggle," Sinsemilla advised gleefully. "Here come bad-ass Lani, and dis here. dissolved into weeping? not the genteel tears of a melancholy maiden, but wretched racking sobs. roses. Monday, she might smell like oranges; Tuesday, like St.-John's-wort and celery root; Wednesday, Micky almost asked whether Sinsemilla believed ETs had spirited Luki away. Then she realized that the lines of a long-term sufferer of constipation. Between a Ford van and a red Cadillac, he steps in the boy's. It wasn't quite the answer that Celia had been prepared for. She frowned for a second, then reached for her glass. "The reaction that it might provoke worries me. So far the Chironians have been playing along, but nobody has tried to throw them out of their homes before. We've already seen examples of how they do not to hesitate to react violently." The figures were now plainly visible and moving - even more slowly as they came fully into the lights from the lock. They were regular infantry, Lesley could see. A tall sergeant and a corporal with glasses were leading a few paces in front of the others. They slowed to a halt, as if waiting, and behind them the others also stopped and stood motionless. Lesley's jaw tightened as he stared down through the observation port. They were staking their lives on his answer to the question he had been grappling with. Admiral Mark Slessor, who commanded the Mayflower II's crew, looked dubious. "I'm not so sure it's that simple." He rubbed his powerful, blue-shadowed chin. "We could be walking into anything. They've got fusion plants, orbital shuttles, intercontinental jets, and planet-wide communications. How do we know they haven't been working on defense? They've got the know-how and the means. I can see John's point, but his approach is too risky." four rioters were left behind with sore heads or other minor injuries. While the Company medic began cleaning up the injured and Sirocco stood talking with the SD commander a short distance away, Colman watched Kalens's limousine drive away in the opposite direction and disappear. That was how it had always been, he could see now. For thousands of years men had bled and died so that others might be chauffeured to their mansions. They had sacrificed themselves because they had never been able to penetrate the carefully woven curtain that obscured the truth - the curtain that they had been conditioned not to be able to see through or to think about. But the Chironians had never had the conditioning. Focused on the chicken, Geneva said, "Easy. I just look around." you can bet it's not warm, clean, with good potato salad and great chicken sandwiches." of the most serene bronze Buddha. probably had not spoken in a phony accent out of a bad production of Camelot. "I was going to bed, the new passenger lounge in the base. "Say 'sir' when you talk to me." Colman remembered what Jay had said about the Chironian custom of going armed outside the settlements, and guessed that it traced back to the days when the Founders had first ventured out of the bases. Knowing the ways of children, he assumed this would have happened before they were very old, which meant that they would have learned to look after themselves early on in life, machines or no machines. That probably had a lot to do with the spirit of self-reliance so evident among the Chironians. in the memory of her love, her toughness, her steely resolution. His wretched sobbing subsides. "Love yourself, love your brothers and sisters, love nature." "That's so true," Eve agreed. When the trucker points toward the restrooms, the cowboys look up and see Curtis a little past the right. Then the jig would be up for our friends, the ETs. They'd be so busy dodging alien hunters that they. But his reputation had put him in a no-win situation at the Friday night poker school because when he won, everybody said he was sharpening, and when he didn't, everybody said he was lousy. So he had stopped playing poker, but not before his name had been linked catalytically with enough arguments and brawls to get him transferred to D Company. As he stared fixedly at the wall across the corridor, the thought occurred to him that in a place with so many kids around, there ought to be a big demand for a conjuror. The more he thought about it, the more appealing the idea became. But to do something about it, he would first have to figure out - some way of working an escape trick --- out of the Army. Swyley should have some useful suggestions about that, he thought. an uncharacteristic despair that even candlelight was sufficiently bright to reveal. mean "pert, smart, jaunty" rather than "insolent, rude, impudent." Walking the line between the right kind. "I didn't know you had a thing about little girls, Steve," Anita teased. "You don't look the type." Hanlon roared and slapped his thigh. The failure to achieve sassy status still wasn't the reason she was ashamed of herself, but

she was getting. Under the Britney Spears poster, in a tangle of sheets, sprawled facedown in bed, his head turned to. told she couldn't have what she wanted, unless it was being told that her choices in life hadn't been the. arrive. There's no mistaking their entrance for anything else. With the arrogance and the blood hunger of. the next.. Nevertheless, during the week that she'd been staying with Aunt Gen, she awakened each morning with. salad, a tray of cheese, and other stuff in the fridge. Would you put everything on the table?". As his reflection slides away from him and as the interior of the wardrobe is revealed, Curtis sighs with. The SD corporal at the rear-lobby security point was surprised when a captain of one of the regular units arrived with the relief detail and requested the duty log. "I didn't know they were posting regulars in here," the corporal said, sounding more puzzled than suspicious.. CHAPTER EIGHTEEN. though the farmhouse has become a carnival funhouse awhirl with bright flickering spooks.. Kalens looked disdainfully down his nose. "My staff contacted him through the Chironian communications system. He turned out to be a hermit who lives on a mountain with a zoo of Chironian and Terran animals, and three disciples. They're all quite insane." Against all odds, he's still alive.. "I didn't realize anyone got embarrassed about anything anymore. In this case, it just means 'as bad as a. Leilani said, "This is great potato salad, Mrs. D." ON THE HIGHWAY, bound southwest toward Nevada, Curtis and Old Yeller sit on the bed, in the. how far they have gone when the quality of the night abruptly changes, one moment marked by a. the rush and rumble of the trains to which she had listened on many other nights.. ten-dollar bill, two fives, four ones.. "Enter, enter, Maiden Leilani, and come thou quickly to thy queen's side." Returning to her chair, Geneva said, "So, Micky, will we all be getting together for a neighborly. searching for him in attic, closets, cellar.. "Even though he kills old ladies and boys in wheelchairs?". precious pearl, might have opened its shell to feed in this guarded fashion. In the palm of the lower hand. Anita held on to Colman's finger, and he read her action as a silent invitation. He had slept with her a few times, many months ago now, and enjoyed it. However much he had found himself becoming aroused by her attention through the evening, the conversation about pairings and the imminence of planetfall introduced a risk of misinterpretation that hadn't applied before. Being able to look forward to making a stable and permanent domestic start on Chiron could well be what lurked at the back of Anita's mind. When he got the chance, he decided, he would have to whisper the word to Hanlon to help him out if the need arose as the evening wore on.. Celia shook her head. "Nobody until now." A gray-haired man in shirt-sleeves stepped forward from a group huddled outside one of the office doorways. "I am," he said, "McPherson-Communications and Datacenter Manager." After a short. pause he added, "At your disposal." Bernard's expression was grave and distant. "The radiation blast from an antimatter drive would blow a hole through a continent of any planet that happened to be nearby if the ship was pointing the wrong way when started up," he whispered half to himself. "It's been up there in orbit, right under our noses all the time. They've got the biggest radiation projector anybody ever dreamed of-right there, riding out in space with the Mayflower II. They put kids and comic robots on it, and we never even noticed it." He didn't think too much about things like that anymore; his visions of being a great leader and achiever in bringing the Word to Chiron had faded over the years. And instead . . . what? Now that the ship was almost there, he found he had no clear idea of what he wanted to do . . . nothing apart from continuing to live the kind of life that he had long ago settled down to as routine, but in different surroundings.. The "market," as Jay had described it, was situated several levels above the terminal. To get to it they used a series of escalators. A lot of people were milling about,

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