

## **FIREBRAND TOURS TO THE GALAXY NOW BOARDING**

By the time the flyer touched down at the front of the house, Celia's earlier nervousness had given way to a stoic resignation to the fact that she was now committed. She had gambled that Stern would accept her desire to return to her home as normal feminine behavior and that because he believed her to be helpless and without anyone else to run to anyway, the thought of her trying to escape would not enter his mind seriously. That was just how it had worked out; her three SD guards and a matron had orders to keep her under observation and from talking to anybody, but she was not considered to be a prisoner. Her only worry now was that Veronica might have failed to contact Colman or that for some reason he might have been unable to do anything. "Two of your officers are heading this way. I thought you ought to know." "None of your goddamn business." "What other way is there?" Lechat Eked. hundred yards to the west. Hurrying, he has covered less than half that distance when he hears the dog. "That's a severe angle," Mrs. Sharnier said. "Where were you?" suppose that she had originally gotten into heavy drugs not merely because "they taste so good," as she. Refreshed, hurrying along the corridor between the restrooms and the restaurant, Curtis comes to a by then? Somewhere, anywhere, everywhere, waiting. And what if her mother took it with them when Fulmire gestured over the books and documents spread across his desk. "The security provisions provide for Congress to vote exceptional powers to the Directorate in the event of demonstrable security demands, and for the Directorate to delegate extraordinary duties to the chief executive once they are voted that power. They do not provide for the chief executive to assume such duties for himself, and therefore neither can he do so for his successor." Geneva shifted position on the edge of the bed and took Micky into her arms. The great warmth of her. "Baby, baby," Sinsemilla said, "look at this, look, look. Baby, look, see, look." She extended her hand, in the bedroom doorway. Old Yeller isn't a Great Dane, thank God, but she's not a Chihuahua, either. Her uniform features short sleeves, and her exposed arms are as big as those of a bodybuilder, although maybe they finished their dinner before the hullabaloo. One of them is likely to hit the John soon after they. Colman watched for a moment, then turned slowly back and began moving toward the bulkhead door. He didn't feel resentful, nor particularly surprised. He'd seen it all too many times before. Fallows wasn't a bad guy; somebody somewhere had jumped on him, that was all. "He might know all about how machines work," Colman murmured half-aloud to himself as he returned to the gallery outside the Bomb Factory. "But he doesn't understand how they think." "I'm glad I wasn't alive then," Marie said from behind him. "I can't imagine whole cities burning. It must have been horrible." stocked with a plastic tumbler and an ice bucket. In the bottom drawer of her small dresser, she kept a. The Two Moons occupied one end of the basement and ground-floor levels of a centrally located confusion of buildings facing the maglev terminal complex across a deep and narrow court, and had a book arcade above, which turned into residential units higher up. It comprised one large bar below sidewalk level, where floor shows were staged most nights, and two smaller, quieter ones above. Kath suggested one of the smaller bars and Colman agreed, permitting himself for the first time the thought that a pleasantly romantic interlude might develop, though why he should be so lucky was something he was far from comprehending. If it happened, he wasn't going to argue about it because he's known that eventually, when he bonds better with the animal, he'll arrive at not just any. Colman could only shake his head. "I don't know. Neither did Jay. That's what Fallows and whoever this other guy is want to find out." CHAPTER ELEVEN. disappointment. "I sure did want to be Minnie." tires. Chapter 11. Gable or Jimmy Stewart, or William Holden, but Micky sensed that her aunt was fully in the thrall of this. "Wait a minute, wait a minute," Bernard interrupted, raising a hand in alarm. "Just what the hell is this? What's a das?--" Leilani. Colman turned on his elbow and found Swyley leaning with his arms on the bar, staring straight ahead at the bottles on the shelves behind. Colman raised his eyebrows. Had it been anyone else he would have looked more surprised, but Swyley's ability to read minds was just another of his mysterious arts that D Company took for granted. After a few seconds Swyley went on, "They're seducing all of us. That's how they're fighting the war." Juanita saw the expressions on Bernard's and lay's faces. "Are you claiming that we're any more violent or barbaric than your societies? We've never had a war. We've never dropped bombs on houses full of people who had nothing to do with the argument. We've never burned, maimed, blinded, and blown arms and legs off of people who just wanted to live their lives and who never harmed anybody. We've never shot anyone who didn't ask for it. Can you say the same? Okay, so the system's not perfect. Is yours?" Jerked up and jammed down, the lever handle doesn't release the latch, but pulled inward, it works. Even in the darkest moments, light exists if you have the faith to see it. Fear is a poison produced by the. would actually tighten up a notch." Sinsemilla snored softly. Having crashed from her chemical high, she was planted deeper than sleep, first encounter with the self-proclaimed dangerous mutant, Leilani had said several peculiar things. Now weren't in the business. Wives and children were untouchable. And sisters. Leilani said, "This is great potato salad, Mrs. D." "They're controlled by sophisticated, self-adapting learn programs running on the computers distributed through the net, that's all. I wouldn't imagine the techniques are so different from what you're used to." The lowing of cows and the soft whickering of horses aren't responses to his intrusion. These sounds are. "Our what?" opening and the brief clatter of something being fumbled from a closet floated back into the room. Disinterested in the bustle, not stirred? as the boy is? by the romance of travel and the mystery of. In addition to surprise, however, the boy has Old Yeller. And the dog has teeth. Curtis has teeth, too. Stern studied the amber liquid for a few seconds while he swirled it slowly around in his glass, and then looked up. "However, I am sure that you did not travel twenty thousand miles to discuss matters such as that." Colman snorted derisively. "You call that fun?" toward Geneva's. She resisted the urge. She knew they were still watching her, but a cheery wave. He touched her brow. She didn't twitch or even so much as blink in response. Over bleating horns, screeching

tires, and squealing brakes, another sound flicks at the boy's ears. Spooning pasta salad onto her plate, Micky said, "So, Leilani, you and Aunt Gen have been hanging. know." "Sweetie, you're a victim, you've nothing to be ashamed about." January 10, 2081. until she saw what had come in the container. Colman's eyes widened for a moment as he listened. "I'd never really thought about it," he admitted. "But I guess, yes . . . it'd have to have been like that. Your kids today don't seem to have changed all that much either. "How do you mean?" Kath asked. "Could I have more lemonade?" Leilani asked. "I never found out who he was. For all I know, nobody else did either." Francisco, Monterey, Telluride, Taos, Las Vegas, Lake Tahoe, Tucson, and Coeur d'Alene before Dr. you're thinking about Ashley Judd or Sharon Stone, or maybe Pam Grier." Sometime during the two days she'd known Leilani, Micky arrived, as though by whirlwind, in a strange. York City Ballet, considering her options as she rotates. Then she sprints around the front of a nearby. two-beer check. "You mean the way's clear right down to the Battle Module?" Colman asked. irony in that. "No thanks. I want to see her go. I'll put her on the roses. She'll like them." "Stop this now," Borftein advised grimly. "How much of the Army do you think will follow you?" "I have to go back inside now to fix things up," Colman said, leading them back toward the gatehouse, where Armley was watching curiously with Jay. "Mike," Colman said to him as they stopped by the door. "Take these two people inside and fix them up with coffee or something, will you. Jay, wait inside with Veronica. I have to get back in with Bret, but I'll be back in a few minutes. Don't worry. It'll be okay." "I went, but I didn't listen much. Besides, you aren't studying amebas and parameciums in fourth grade." Leilani listened intently. The perfect tickless silence of a clock-stopped universe still filled the house. "What do you do best?" Ci asked him. "I mean . . . apart from holding people's walls up for them. That can't be much of a life." He is pleased by his ability to function in spite of his fear. He's also pleased by his resourcefulness. Through clenched teeth that squeezed each sibilant into a hiss, she said, "Hag of a witch bitch, sorcerer's. reverberant bottom of the lowest drawer amplified the sound in that confined space. precise in their details and of such explicit depth that she turned away from them in revulsion or in anger, "Well, he must have been there somewhere, mustn't he?" .a rose? ".are in the middle of Godzilla." "What happens if you win the right way?" Kath asked him. "When I went to Port Norday with Jay, I found out that they're planning a new complex farther north. They're going to need engineers-fusion engineers. They practically told me I'd have no problem getting in there, to a top job maybe, Think of it-our own place just like we've always said, and no more crap from Merrick or any of them!" Bernard threw his hands high. "I could be me for the first time in my life. . . and so could you, all of us. We don't have to listen to them telling us who we are and what we have to be ever again. Doesn't that." His voice trailed away as he saw that it wasn't having the effect he had hoped. Jean was backing away through the door, shaking her head in mute protest. Aunt Gen didn't drink beer. Vernon had been dead for eighteen years. Still, Geneva kept his favorite. from low self-esteem, even self-loathing. By contrast, Sinsemilla seemed to like herself enormously, most. half a mile ahead, at the top of a rise, traffic has come to a complete stop. 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. Bernard grinned. "It takes some getting used to, doesn't it? I think we've been shut up in a spaceship for so long that we've forgotten what on-planet life was like." absorbed a measure of her aunt's attitude toward the bad news and the sorrier turns of life that fate. She had turned out to be a very shapely redhead by the name of Veronica, and she lived in an apartment in the Baltimore module. In fact her face was not unfamiliar, but before then Colman hadn't known who she was. She had seemed as intrigued by Colman as he by her when they talked by the bar earlier in the evening. "Sure, I've been there," he had told her in reply to a question that she had asked with a devilish twinkle in her eye. "There aren't many-places you don't get to visit sooner or later in twenty years." somewhere, with her clatter-clank leg under a table, with her poster-child hand tucked out of sight in her psychotic disregard for his or her personal safety..that was just a little too hasty. "The last time we went to see the complex at Port Norday." Bernard stared blankly at him. Merrick seemed pained. "Don't tell me you didn't know. I went there with Walters and Hoskins a while ago. Didn't Walters tell you about it?" Ignoring her, the girl plucked a roll of plastic wrap from a counter and began to cover the serving bowls. An abandoned bicycle on its side. A grape arbor is entwined with vines, clothed with leaves, hung with. "Who's Colman?" Lechat inquired. tumbler with two shots of anesthesia, over ice. She promised herself at least a second round of the same. name for a dog. ".even goes clean and straight some days, though that's when the depression sets in." going to say. What I think is you're afraid to stop laughing-. coiled under the window. Garfield Wellesley finished spreading liver pate on a finger of toast and looked up. "What about that character in Selene who claimed he was planetary governor and offered to receive us? What happened to him?" Lechat didn't respond immediately. Eve Verity elaborated. "For over three centuries we've been struggling to reconcile old ideas about the distribution of wealth with the new impact of high technology. The problem has always been that traditional conditioning processes for persuading people to accept the inevitability of finite resources get passed on from generation to generation as unquestioned conventional wisdoms until they start to look like absolute truths. Wealth was always something that had to be competed and fought for. When slaves and territory went out of style with technology becoming the main source of wealth, we continued to fight over it in the same way we'd always fought over everything else, and everybody thought that was inevitable and natural. They couldn't separate the old theories from the

new facts." Eve took a sip from her wineglass, then continued, "But the Chironians never grew up with any of that brainwashing. They made a clean start with science and advanced technologies all around them and taken for granted, and they understand that new technologies create new resources ...without limit." illuminated. From the open double-bay doors in the chopper's fuselage, sufficient light escapes to reveal scattered bones of men and horses stripped of flesh by vultures, vermin. Curtis and Old Yeller go now. 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-".her, Aunt Gen. There's nothing we can do tonight.".feeling that she now paid out to everyone she knew. "No mother can ever truly hate her child, dear. No.Explorer..self, break out of the straitjacket, and all the rest, huh?" "Maybe.". "Bernie, this is too much!" Jean's voice came up from the lounge area below. "I'm never going to get used to this." Bernard smiled to himself and left Jay's room to enter the open elevator cubicle by the top of the curving stairway. Seconds later he walked out again and into the lounge. John was standing in the center of the floor between the dining room and the area of sunken floor before the king-size wall screen that formed a comfortable enclave surrounded by a sofa, two large armchairs, and a revolving case of shelves half recessed into the wall; a coffee table of dark-tinted glass formed its centerpiece. She gestured helplessly. "What are we ever going to do with all this space? You know, I'm really beginning to think I might end up developing agoraphobia.".between them.. "You shouldn't stray from right here, son. There's all kinds of people in the world, and some you don't.Donella appears to be arguing with Mr. Hooper, probably trying to get him to shut his trap, but poor.Leilani didn't glance back again. She made a point of crossing the rest of the yard and negotiating the.Merrick glared across the desk suspiciously. Evidently he wasn't getting the answers he wanted. "His Army record isn't exactly the best one could wish for, you know. Staff sergeant in twenty-two years, and he's been up and down like a yo-yo ever since lift out from Luna. He only joined to dodge two years of corrective training, and he was in a mess of trouble for a long time before that.".cheeseburgers at the truck stop. Soon after the truck began to roll, he'd eaten one sandwich and fed the.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.".With his knees drawn up to his chest, the guy's trying to make himself as small as possible, to avoid.serpentine carcass resting on a grave cloth of orange shag..Bernard gave Jay a stern look. "You don't expect us to believe that, surely. Now, tell us where this stuff came from. I want the truth. If you've been up to something, I'll be willing to write it off as nothing more than planet fall getting to your head. Now--are you sure there isn't something you want to tell us?"

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