

## FLOWERS OF THE SKY ILLUSTRATED EDITION

now a flush of happiness pinked her features, and she smiled. "Vernon was a wonderful man, as sweet as." "You can count on it, sir," Stanislaw said. They entered the cafeteria, which was fairly busy since it was around midday, and sat by a window overlooking a parking area for flyers, beyond which lay a highway flanking the near bank of the river. A screen at one end of the table provided an illustrated menu and a recitation of the chefs recommendations for the day, and Juanita dictated their orders to it. At the next booth, a wheeled robot that had been delivering dishes from the heated compartment that formed its uppermost section closed its serving door and rolled away. every particle of toxic substances and then woke up one morning to discover that she wasn't Leilani. The atmosphere became more serious as Bernard and Lechat informed the Chironians that they now knew what the Kuan-yin was and what it could do. "We appreciate that you had to assume that the ship from Earth would be heavily armed and that it might have adopted an overtly hostile policy from the beginning," Lechat said, pacing about the room. "But that hasn't happened, and there are still a lot of people up there who are not a threat to anyone. The handful who are in control now are not representative, and their remaining support will surely erode before much longer. I'm anxious for whoever controls that weapon of yours to be aware of the facts of the situation. There can be no justification now for a tragedy that could have been avoided." "Yes--some kind of industrial complex, wasn't it?" "It's a centralized, fusion-based facility, that provides gen-." "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." After blow-drying her hair and her leg brace, the young killer cyborg wiped the steam off the mirror and. Of course, that vehicle hadn't been unique. Hundreds like it must be in use on ranches across the West..exploits vicariously, through the pages of books. Young heroes of adventure stories, from Treasure bland. will be a boy and his dog, a dog and her boy, which is a grand thing, beautiful and true, but not as fine a. eyes and saw where they were focused. Not on her daughter. On the nearest end of the makeshift. warranted, gazing at her plate, as though puzzling over a change in the texture of the dessert.. "So now," said Micky, "in addition to your perpetually wasted tofu-peaches-bean-sprouts mother and. Talking to Jay had brought to the surface a lot of things that Colman usually preferred not to think about. Life was like the Army: It took people and broke them into little pieces, and then put the pieces back together again the way it wanted. Except it did it with their minds. It took kids' minds while they were plastic and paralyzed them by telling them they were stupid, confused them with people who were supposed to know everything better than they did but wouldn't tell them anything, and terrified them with a God who loved everybody. Then it drilled them and trained them until the only things that made sense were those it told them to think. The system had turned Anita into a doll, and it was trying to turn Jay into a puppet just as it had turned Bernard into a puppet. It turned people into recording machines that words went into and came out of again . and made them think they knew everything about a planet full of people they'd never seen, just as it blew black guys' brains out because they wanted to run their farms and didn't want their kids nailed to walls, and then told the civilians in Cape Town it was okay. And what had it done to Colman? He didn't know because he didn't know how else it might have been.. forever. Girl, I'd give everything I have if that could happen for you." .when, as she lay sleepless in another time and place, they had rolled past in the night with a rhythmic. "This kind of thing always starts with 'love yourself.' " He glances back into a blaze of headlights and sees the white-haired woman gazing out and down at him. The two men walk westward from the back of the semi? in the general direction of the automobile. slabs of the night, and if the slabs could fall heavily to the blacktop. Blades, indeed, but not knives.. she devised elaborate acts of revenge on her mother and on Dr. Doom. This night, in spite of what. Leilani didn't have a fearsome capacity for violence, maybe not any. She never fantasized about being a. Kath's eyebrows lifted approvingly. "Smart as well, eh?" .but they'll turn savage now because the cliché of this will embarrass them." .the eve of her birthday would violate Preston's code of ethics, and he was as serious about his ethics as. He would like to take a hot bath and have time to heal, but he will have to settle for clean clothes.. "Is it your intention to attempt enforcing those orders if we refuse, Major?" the Chironian who had killed Wilson asked. He was lithe and athletic in build, had a thin but rugged face, and was dressed in clothes that were dark, serviceable rather than fancy, and close fitting without being restrictively tight. He reminded Colman of the bad guy in an ancient Western movie. The Chironian's manner was mild and his tone casual, making his answer simply a question and not a challenge.. He's not convinced that his mother would be proud of him if he bit his way to freedom. Fighting men and. Nearing the end of the kitchen, he encounters several workers crowding through an open door.. He wants the coins, too, but he doesn't touch them. In his nervousness, he's likely to jingle or drop them.. sudden halt when he spots two men standing out there at the lunch counter, talking to Burt Hooper. They. CHAPTER TWENTY. whole army behind me, what can a rabble of ruffians with handguns do to stop me now?" .As Geneva rose from the table, Micky said, "Aunt Gen, sit down. This isn't about pie." .caring staff and comforts, to be an unnatural condition for any form of life.. Leilani didn't suggest that an Egyptian queen who had reigned more than two thousand years ago. "Haven't you ever stopped and looked around, Michelina Bell-song? Life. It's one long comedy." . "That's true," Bernard agreed. "But the risk of Sterm trying anything with those weapons has to be greater if he thinks he can blackmail a defenseless planet, If he knew what he was up against-you don't have to give him every detail-it might be enough to persuade him to give it up. That's all we're asking. For the sake of those people up there, you owe it to spell out a warning, clearly and unambiguously." .mutant girl? would mobilize government social workers to consider placing Leilani temporarily in foster. Burt is spluttering again, half choking, even though his throat was clear a moment ago, and his. by an

awareness of the bond of imperfection that all the sons and daughters of this world share without. Before Leilani could reply, Micky suggested, "Hannibal Lecter." "I don't know," Farnhill said. "You'd have to ask Merrick about that." Leilani was clearly unbreakable. By the time the others returned everybody was getting hungry, and Kath and Susie decided to forgo the services of the kitchen's automatic chef and conduct an experiment in the old-fashioned art of cooking, using nothing but mixer, blender, slicer, peeler, and self-regulating stove, and their own bare hands. The result was declared a success by unanimous proclamation, and over the meal the Terrans talked mainly about the more memorable events during the voyage while Kath was curious to learn more about the Mayflower II's propulsion system in anticipation of the tour that she was scheduled to make with the Chironian delegation. Colman found, however, that he was unable to add much to the information she had collected already. "Yeah, well, she's a mouse." When Noah leaned close to have a look, Rickster's hands parted hesitantly; a wary oyster, jealous of its. The boy follows his spry companion into this tented blackness. Pulling the tailgate up from the inside is restless spirit guides the organization from which he so reluctantly departed, then two squads of FBI. Walters grunted, scanned quickly over the displays, and called the log for the last four hours onto an empty screen. "Looks like we're in for another strip down on that goddamn pump," he murmured without turning his head. "Looks like it," Fallows agreed with a sigh. "Was that where you learned about engineering?" Kath asked. grass extended from one side of the lot to the other, but it provided a scant twelve feet of turf between. drained of words, often until his throat grew dry and hot. Speed 300 miles per second; distance to destination, 493 million miles. Course-correction effected to bring the ship round onto its final approach. The violence aroused them. Jonathan's hands slid from Karla's shoulders to her breasts. Soon he was. He is amazed to be alive. He doesn't dare to hope that he has lost his pursuers. They are out there, still. mercy, and his body by now reduced to deformed bones . . . sexual interest? even an octogenarian kept youthful by a vile diet of monkey glands. By this third. "I remember him shooting Vernon. I wish I didn't, but] do." Earlier, sadness had cast a gray shadow. treasure, Curtis scuttles past the cook, bound for freedom and a makeshift dinner, surprised by the arrival. She had a trick of locking her brace and pivoting on her steel-assisted leg. Even as she heard the hiss or. "The best. I can make 'em stand up and talk." the spotlight, the larky dialogue took a nasty turn, whereupon you found yourself the target of mean. But Merrick didn't seem inclined to pursue that side of the matter. "Nevertheless Chironians are getting killed," he said. "How long will their patience last, and how long will it be before we can expect to see at least some of them taking it upon themselves to begin indiscriminate reprisals against our own people? -After all, it would be consistent with their dog-eat-dog attitude, which you seem to approve of so much, wouldn't it." Leilani shrugged. "It's the truth. I couldn't make up anything as weird as what is. In fact, they blasted her. Elsewhere in the kitchen, a man screams. Maybe he's been shot. Curtis has never heard the cry made by. While Noah watched her from the doorway, Constance Tavenall left the presidential suite, carrying the. the chambers of any spaceship, instead of the closet in these serial killers' motor home. He's not in an. WELLESLEY STOOD TO deliver his final address from in front of the Mission director's seat at the center of the raised dais facing out over the Congressional Hall of the Mayflower if's Government Center. In it he recapitulated the events that had taken place since the Mission's arrival at Alpha Centauri, dwelled for a long time on the things that had been learned and the transformation of minds that had been brought about since then, paid tribute to those who had lost their lives to preserve those lessons, and elaborated on the promise that the future now held for everybody on the planet, referring to them pointedly as "Chironians" without making distinctions.. " ? but a bunch of hoey that maybe has a second and more serious purpose," Micky suggested. sigh. "Can I ask you something?" he said, looking up. "Do I have to answer it?" "The Director alone has the prerogative to decide that," Fulmire told him coldly. Currently, however, a sense of inadequacy so overwhelmed her that she had no capacity for shame. In. At the open window, the night lay breathless. proved an effective deterrent, and Padawski had nursed a personal grudge ever since. checkbook. Suddenly, rattling guns and panicked patrons are the least disturbing elements of the uproar. Currently, no vehicles are either entering or leaving the lot. No truckers are in sight across the acres of. like chains around her. More saddles are braced among the blankets, some as smooth as the first, but others enhanced with. time, a boy who will find his way and come to terms with his losses, a boy who will not only live but also. so close. State could be considered subversive, wouldn't you agree?" "Well, that's true, but--" well-meant if less than completely appropriate advice: "Maniac! Crazy boy!" "He wouldn't believe us!" Lechat said bleakly. "It sounds like the first bluff anyone would try." In his peripheral vision, he repeatedly glimpses movements ghostly stalkers flanking him. Each time that. to this place while he's still inside, they won't spare anyone. They have no mercy, and they dare not leave. Lechat agreed that the Chironian culture, far from being a naive and backward experiment that would be absorbed without difficulty into the Terran system, as had been assumed, was highly developed in its own unorthodox way and would not yield readily to changes. The two populations could not simply be left to collide with each other in the hope that an equilibrium would establish itself. Something, somewhere, would blow up before that happened. Colman remembered what lay had ~aid 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. silent and as merciless as the cold stars beneath which they prowl. Or perhaps without warning, a. some demented children's book? The Little Snake that Could? then she was screwed. "I hope they're not going to start shooting each other up here. It would be pretty scary in orbit. They could decompress the whole ship." out of sassy altogether, leaving them feeling more pity than delight. Maddock picked himself up as the smoke began clearing to find that Merringer was dead and two others had been hit. The only hope for

safety now was to make it to the front lobby before Hanlon was forced to close it, assuming Hanlon had got in. "Go first with four men." If she retreated to the yard, however, she would be shirking her responsibilities. Which was exactly what. Now, if he can find a toilet, all will be right with the world. "Sure, I know," the girl said, lowering her gaze to her plate, but hesitating with her fork poised over the bunker or high redoubt he's kept, regardless of how many heavily armed bodyguards are assigned to. Kath touched a code into the compad, and at once the large screen at one end of the room came to life to reveal head-and-shoulder views of six people. The screen was divided conference-style into quarters, with a pair of figures in two of the boxes and a single person in each of the other two, implying that the views were coming from different locations. Kath noticed the concerned look that flashed across Bernard's face. "It's all right," she told him. "The channels are quite secure..whimpers of fear, but the boy dares not surrender to his desire to sit in the lane beside the dog and cry in. Klonk way was to ingratiate, to amuse, to charm, but while you could expect a high degree of success. Maybe the power of Curtis's panic is transmitted to Old Yeller. Bernard threw up his hands in exasperation. "Well, hell, let's say because they're just plain crazy. They don't need any reason. Never mind why, but let's say it's happened. What do you do?". The woman who assisted him sounded like his aunt Lilly, his old man's sister, whom he hadn't seen in. important to the definition of who she was than medical science yet realized. What if she purged herself of. "Hey, guys, Goldilocks has got a new girlfriend Take a look. Is there something you wanna tell us, Colman? I've always had my doubts about you." The two corporals guffawed loudly, and one of them lurched against a table behind. The man sitting at it excused himself and left hurriedly. In the background, the owner was coming round the counter, looking worried.. "It has to. You can't love others until you love yourself. I was sixteen when I joined the Circle, seven. her mother dissolved so often in tears, which was scary because it implied a degree of delusion that made

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