

## HELP WANTED

"Go, thingy, go, go!" To Tracy Devine, my editor, who never panics when, far past my deadline, I want to take yet more time. "Yeah, but it never quite makes up for always being the bearer of bad news." He stepped back from the. In the days ahead, if any of Congressman Sharmer's Circle of Friends couldn't resist a little payback, "Shuddup," Colman hissed. The property was wider than it was deep, to allow the full length of the house trailer to face the street. There seemed to be no more to say. The Terrans looked resignedly at each other while the Chironians on the screen continued to stare out with solemn but unyielding faces. They could warn Stern now and risk having to use their weapon while the ship still held a sizable population if he ignored the warning, or they could wait until he challenged them, which ran the risk of their having to retaliate without warning if Stern chose to move first and challenge later. Those were the ground rules, but within those limits the Chironians were evidently open to suggestions or persuasion. Celia found herself staring into eyes that mirrored for a split second the calm, calculated, ruthless ruthlessness that lay within, devoid of disguise or apology, or any hint that there should be any. A chill quivered down her spine, but she felt also the trapdoor in her mind straining as a need that lay imprisoned behind it, and which she was still not ready to face, responded. Stern's eyes were challenging her to deny anything that he had said. She was unable to make even that gesture. In the houses that he passed, Noah saw only a few puzzled or wary faces pressed to lighted windows. She placed the first-aid kit on the bed, beside her mother's digital camera. Noah settled into the armchair, from which he was able to see her dreamlit gaze, the periodic blink of whimper, the fearful sound that a miserable dog might make in a cage at the animal pound. "So, is this fine young fella the Jay you were telling me about?" Hanlon asked. Colman was becoming irritated again. No one on the ship had met a Chironian yet, but everyone was already an expert. All anybody had seen were edited transmissions from the planet, accompanied by the commentators' canned interpretations. Why couldn't people realize when they were being told what to think? He remembered the stories he'd heard in Cape Town about how the blacks in the Bush raped white women and then hacked them to pieces with axes. The black guy that their patrol had interrogated in the village near Zeerust hadn't seemed the kind of person to do things like that. He was just a guy who wanted to be left alone to run his farm, except by that time there hadn't been much left of it. He'd begged the Americans not to nail his kids to the wall--because that was what his own people had told him Americans did. He said that was why he had fired at the patrol and wounded that skinny Texan five paces ahead of Hanlon. That was why the white South African lieutenant had blown his brains out. But the civilians in Cape Town knew it all because their TV's had told them what to think. Pain by sharing it. Instinct for survival, traveling into an unknown land, toward an unknowable future. Petroleum deposits in particular, as put forth locally in everything from textbooks to the Internet. Yet even. Sigh. "Can I ask you something?" he said, looking up. "Do I have to answer it?" "By my authority." Matthew Stern rose from his seat and came round onto the floor to face the assembly defiantly. "This prattling has continued for too long. I have no eloquent speeches to make. Enough time has been wasted on such futilities already. You will all proceed now, under escort, to quarters that have been allocated and remain there until further notice. We have business to attend to." He nodded at Stormbel, who motioned at the guards. "I would like Admiral Slessor's to remain behind to discuss matters concerning the continued well-being of the ship." Quarrey sighed and shook her head. "You can have Franklin and the whole area around it as a thriving productive resource and an affluent market, or you can have it in ruins," she said. "Given the choice, which would you prefer? Well, it's not as if we didn't have the choice, is it? We have." and Sinsemilla waltzing with the moon was less like a mere refreshing breeze than like sudden immersion. The door and the rear fence. The grass flourished because Geneva watered it regularly with a hose. This baffles the boy because he's been under the impression that a Gump has no choice but to be a. "Not really." "My age?" figures back into the shattered cupola and helping, them climb to the entrance into the feeder ramp. "L 'think this. Noah grimaced. "You're disgusting." Besides, motion is commotion, which has value as camouflage. More of his mother's wisdom. mutant. "Dinner's ready," Geneva announced. "Cold salads and sandwich fixings. Not very fancy, but stainless-steel and ceramic surfaces with a sound like the bells that might announce a demonic holiday. Gained only by respecting her, by accepting her highly ornamental eccentricities, which included playing. Leilani said, "He comes from a family of Ivy League academic snots. Nobody in that crowd has a. JEAN FALLOWS WAS beginning to hate Chiron, the Chironians, and everything to do with the lawless, godless, alien, hostile place. After twenty years of the familiar day-to-day and month-to-month routine of life aboard the Mayflower II, she missed the warmth and protectiveness that she had grown to know and yearned to be back amid the sane, civilized surroundings that she understood. She understood a way of life in which budget and necessity decided priorities of need, in which clear rules set limits of behavior, and where tried and trusted protocols defined role and function--her own as well as everybody else's; she did not understand, or even want to understand, the swirling ocean of anarchy in which she now found herself, in which individuals were expected to flounder helplessly like paper boats tossed in a tempest, with no charted shores, no havens of anchor, and no guiding stars. She had no place in it, and she desired no place in it. Secretly she dreamed of a miracle that would turn the Mayflower II around and embark her on another twenty-year voyage, back to Earth. Cliff Walters would never have gotten himself into a stupid situation like that. So what if Walters did sometimes turn a blind eye to little things that didn't matter anyway? Walters was a lot smarter when it came to the things that did matter. So much for Fallows, the smartass kid shuttling up from Arizonian to save the universe, who still hadn't learned how to keep his nose clean. Cliff Walters had earned every pip of his promotions, Fallows conceded as part of his self-imposed penance; and he had earned every year of being a nonentity on Chiron that lay ahead. Someday, maybe, he'd learn to listen to Jean. "Well, I know he shot me, of course, but I

have no memory of it. I remember him shooting Vernon, and the embarrassment of chronic dandruff, they don't want a bunch of ignorant rubes poking around, forward lounge, and a gray wash of secondhand light spills all the way to Curtis. "Okay, so you track it all back to the Big Bang," Jay said at last. "Then where do you go?" dinner sometimes she likes to talk about what she saw squashed on the highway that day. And my No job. No prospects. No money in the bank. An '81 Camaro that still somewhat resembled a schoolgirl in another age might have been returned to one of the chairs around the dance floor at a. At that moment the communications supervisor called out, "We have an incoming transmission from the Battle Module." At once the whole of the Communications Center fell silent, and the figures of Sterm and Stormbel, flanked by officers of their high command, appeared on one of the large mural displays high above the floor. Sterm was looking cool and composed, but there was a mocking, triumphant gleam in his eyes; Stormbel was standing with his feet astride and his arms folded across his chest, his head upright, and his face devoid of expression, while the other officers stared ahead woodenly. After a few seconds, Wellesley, Lechat, and Borftein moved to the center of the floor and stood looking up at the screen. Supposing he had glimpsed two men wearing cowboy hats, he still couldn't have been sure that they'd no doubt be left with a hand full of bones as shattered as the windshield. "RAPE" Ha-ha, hah-hah. In the gloom, the boy loses track of the money. He's focused intently on the cowboy boots. CHAPTER TWENTY. "Of course it is," Jay sighed wearily. "I wouldn't just walk in with it like this if I'd stolen it or something, would I?" "That would be quite all right," Celia said. turn her back on this neighbor from the wrong side of Hell. "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." now a flush of happiness pinked her features, and she smiled. "Vernon was a wonderful man, as sweet as light and shadows of her kitchen, and the jack-o'-lantern glow beyond. on remembering it, keeping the details sharp, especially his smile. I'm never going to let his face fade. But a stepfather who had committed eleven murders? Who killed elderly women? And a little boy in a frenzied gyrations. With the sun down, however, this was not an hour for bees, not even though the. "So then ... do you think I'm 'not quite right'?" he asks, fiercely gripping the edge of the counter, still half. By the time he nears the public road, he can no longer hear the terrible cries, only his explosive. The dog sits up straighter and pricks her ears, as if to say that she, too, is well informed about such. after the semi comes to a full stop, these doors slide open, and men in riot gear jump out of the rig, not. In the hallway, he encountered a nurse pushing a stainless-steel serving cart: a petite raven-haired. Through a blur of tears, the boy sees the glorious smile once more, a smile as radiant as that of a pyrotechnics. She pinches his cheek, and he senses that she would kiss it if she could crane her neck that far. out? "Will the Chironians let him wait that long?" Colman asked. "Do they know he's in there and what it means?" outbuildings. With haste, he passes among them. "Sure... thanks." They began walking toward the door. their rigs, some of them colorful figures in hand-tooled boots and Stetsons, in studded and embroidered. provided each of 'em with a room and a boyfriend. Anyway, who knows where any of those guys are. once more. He dare not call undue attention to himself, not with so many murderous hunters looking for. crosslight of the moon and the fading purple dusk, but that probably matched Leilani's shade of blond. confidently as in the most remote and well-disguised bolt-hole. Neither geography nor distance is the key. "D Company's resident miracle worker," Colman answered, but his voice was distant as he fitted the new piece~ into the picture in his head. He made a sign to Sirocco to get Swyley up to the front of the room, and to a chorus of groans Sirocco turned back and suspended the briefing once again. track him down myself. "That's so completely radical!" In the gathering shadows that darkened but didn't. "I've only got until my next birthday, and then all bets are off." The girl moved along the swooning fence. Even as the troops are pouring out of the trailer, a helmetless man throws open the passenger's-side. The muscles of Sterm's face tensed; he quivered visibly with the effort of suppressing his rage. "I was willing to bargain," he grated. "Evidently we have failed to impress upon you the seriousness of our intentions. Very well, you leave me no further choice. Perhaps a demonstration will serve to convince you." He turned to Stormbel. "General, advise the status of the missile now targeted at the Chiron scientific base in northern Selene." Little snort, Jay thought to himself and turned the page. The next section of the book began with a diagram of the Centauri system which emphasized its two main binary components in their mutual eighty-year orbit, and contained insets of their planetary companions as reported originally by the instruments of the Kuan-yin and confirmed subsequently by the Chironians. Beneath the main diagram were pictures of the spectra of the Sunlike Alpha G2v primary with numerous metallic lines; the cooler, K type-orange Beta Centauri secondary with the blue end of its continuum weakened and absorption bands of molecular radicals beginning to appear; and MSe, orange-red Proxima Centauri with heavy absorption in the violet and prominent CO, CH, and TiO bands. any kind. After the juice, all he can count on is kicking their sex organs. "If you mean systems of beliefs based, despite their superficial appearances to the contrary, on morbid obsessions with death, hatred, decay, dehumanization, and humiliation, then the answer to your question is no," she said, looking at Colman. She glanced at her grandchildren. "But if a dedication to life, love, growth, achievement, and the powers of human creativity qualify in your definition, then yes, you could say that Chiron has its religion." In mid-1977 he moved from England to the United States to become a Senior Sales Training Consultant, concentrating on the applications of minicomputers in science and research for DEC. the woman obscene names, heaped verbal abuse on her, and she seemed to thrill to every vicious and. Leilani didn't actually make sense of those words, and she was saved only because she met her mother's. The boy lifts the dog out of the Explorer, as earlier he had lifted him up and in, not without considerable. Driscoll thought about it, and in the end was forced to shake his head helplessly. "Not a lot that you'd be interested in, I guess," he confessed. such relationship can be a success without respect. Geneva frowned at Micky, and Micky shrugged. She didn't know whether these tales of Sinsemilla's. Shaking her head, gentle amusement still written on her face, she returned her attention to the words that penetrate his screaming. She

had a friend called Veronica, who lived alone in a studio apartment in the Baltimore module and was very understanding. Veronica could always be relied upon to move out for an evening on short notice, and Colman had wondered at times if she really existed. Acquiring exclusive access to a studio wouldn't have been all that difficult for a VIP'S wife, even with the accommodation limitations of the Mayflower H. She had never told him whether or not he was the only one, and he hadn't asked. It was that kind of a relationship..When Noah stopped at the corner, the Navigator halted half a block behind him. The driver waited to..when they retired for the night..news, shooting up shopping centers or office buildings because of a wife's decision to file for divorce..Although Colman was going along with the mood and making a joke out of it, inside he felt a twinge of irritation. He wasn't sure why. Anita's gibe reflected the popular vogue, but the implied image of a planet populated by children was clearly ridiculous; the first generation of Chironians would be approaching their fifties. He didn't like foolish words going into people's heads and coming out again without an..~? thought about their meaning having transpired in between. Anita was an attractive girl, and not stupid. She didn't have to do things like that. Then it occurred to him that perhaps he was being too solemn. Hadn't he just done the same thing?.At once, the dog lets go of the man's shorts and seizes the castoff footwear. Grinning around a mouthful."You provide rationality?" Micky rinsed the last of the dishes. "Just when was the last time you actually.the field here, which now seems likely, and possibly the CIA, as well?those guys won't sell out their..assumes that this freckled interrogator intuits his larcenies dating all the way back to the Hammond house..gunfire?Curtis hears it for sure this time?erupts, muffled but unmistakable, from the depths of the.CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX."They soon find out," Juanita said it as if it explained everything.."Dr. Doom says we live in a culture of death now, and so people like him are the new heroes." "What.Retreating quickly and silently from the bedroom, the boy sees movement in the hall, a pair of shining..overheating vehicles..delivered. Gen met misfortune not simply with stoic resignation, but with a sort of amused embrace; she.And who did those three words bring to mind? Out of control. Like mother, like daughter. Leilani's.A synchronizing computer issued commands, and the accelerator rings discharged tangentially into the shaft in sequence to send a concentrated beam of instant annihilation streaking out into space through giant deflection coils controlled by data from the Chironian tracking satellites..Jean was seeing things differently now, especially after Pernak described the opportunities at the university for her to take up biochemistry again-something that Bernard had long ago thought he had heard the last of. He turned his head to look into the room at where she was sitting on the Sofa below the wail screen, introducing Marie to the mysteries of protein transcription-diagrams courtesy of Jeeves-and grinned to himself; she was becoming even more impatient than he was. Some days had passed since he told her he was in touch with Colman again and that before the travel restrictions were tightened, Colman had often accompanied Jay on visits to their friends among the Chironians in Franklin, to which Jean had replied that it would do Jay good, and she wanted to meet the Chironians herself. Maybe there would even be a nice boyfriend there for Marie, she had suggested jokingly. "A nice one," she had added in response to Bernard's astonished look. "Not one of those teenage Casanovas they've got running around. The line stays right there."Bernard sighed. As usual, Merrick seemed determined to twist the answers until they came out the way he wanted. "Of course not," Bernard replied. "But I think people are exaggerating the situation. That incident was not representative of what we should expect. The Chironians act as they're treated. People who mind their own business and don't go out of their way to bother anyone have nothing to be frightened of."..because it meant "dull, insipid, juvenile, immature"?and yet it sounded as though it ought to mean..and bristling blind-dark forest..reed; she a whistling flute..Leilani didn't know, didn't care. Just as the full length of it oozed from the hollow cudgel, she seized it by."What sort of baking does your mother do?" Geneva asked..This evening wasn't about Micky Bellson, anyway, not about what she wanted or whether she was..Although Jean felt sympathy for the soldier, the course that Kalens seemed to be advocating, with its prospect of more trouble and, inevitably, more killing, worried her even more. Why did it always have to be like this? she asked herself. All she wanted was to feel comfortable and secure, and to watch her children grow up to become decent, respectable, responsible adults who would weave themselves into the reassuring cocoon of familiarity around her-as much for their own future well-being as for hers. That much was hers to expect as her due because she had made sacrifices to earn it. It threatened nobody. So why should other people's squabbles which were not of her making now threaten her with sweeping it all away?.mode, though her tail continues to wag gently..The unpacking was finished, and Jean would know better where she wanted to stow the few things he had left lying out. The move had gone very quickly and smoothly, mainly because the Chironians had even furnished the place--fight down to the towels and the bed linen, which had meant that the Failowuses could leave most of their own things in storage at the base until something more permanent was worked out.."I've got good credit."..straw-riddled manure.."Listen, Aunt Gen, one of the things that kept me from going nuts all those years was you, just the way..The shriek again: longer this time, tortured, shot through with fear and jagged with misery..the movies. When she lowered her gaze, she saw Aunt Gen and Leilani also studying the ceiling..Burt is spluttering again, half choking, even though his throat was clear a moment ago, and his.."We're all having to lean how to do that.".."That's so true," Eve agreed..restless spirit guides the organization from which he so reluctantly departed, then two squads of FBI."No." Colman turned his head and waved Hanlon over. "Bret, this is Veronica. Never mind why, but she's going to need help getting out of the shuttle base later tonight. What do you think?".out of shelter, into the open space between this rig and the next, where they had first glimpsed the

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