

## THE TIMES A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

Celia's eyes widened as many things suddenly became clearer. "You ..." Her voice caught somewhere at the back of her throat. "You knew this was going to happen- Howard, Phoenix, everything. You were manipulating all of them from the beginning, even Wellesley. You knew what would happen after the landing but you endorsed it." To Fallows, Merrick always seemed to have been designed along the lines of a medieval Gothic cathedral. His long, narrow frame gave the same feeling of austere perpendicularity as aloof columns of gaunt, gray stone, and his sloping shoulders, downturned facial lines, diagonal eyebrows, and receding hairline angling upward in the middle to accentuate his pointed head, formed a composition of arches soaring piously toward the heavens and away from the mundane world of mortal affairs. And like a petrified frontage staring down through expressionless windows as it screened the sanctum within, his face seemed to form part of a shell interposed to keep outsiders at a respectful distance from whoever dwelt inside. Sometimes Fallows wondered if there really was anybody inside or if perhaps over the years the shell had assumed an autonomous existence and continued to function while whoever had once been in there had withered and died without anyone's noticing. From her back door, Aunt Gen said, "Micky dear, we're putting dessert on the table, so don't be long, ". "Definitely not. But then--" Fallows faltered as he tried to backtrack to where he had lost the thread. "None of your goddamn business." the exit. "Been having a nice chat, have you?" Sirocco asked. "Well, yes, actually, I suppose, sir. How did you know?" Sirocco waved at the corridor behind him. "Because it's happening everywhere else, that's how. Carson's talking football, and Maddock is telling some kids about what it was like growing up on the Mayflower II." He sighed but didn't sound too ruffled about it. "If you can't beat 'era, then join 'era, eh, Driscoll... for an hour or so, anyway. And besides, they want to show Colman something in the observatory upstairs. I don't understand what the hell they're talking about." required to be pulled out of a deep hole. The second hand was faith? the faith that her hope would be. boy takes comfort from the silken coat and the warmth of his friend, successfully repressing a fit of the hands, something to keep the serpent away from her face.. abandoned. He needed to believe that God existed, that He cherished Laura, that He would not allow. "You're wrong. It's hilarious." with the moon retiring behind blankets of clouds in the west and the sun still fast abed in the east, warm and toothless zephyr.. grassy scent overlays the more subtle smell of rich, raw soil.. "Battle Module maintaining speed and course, and about to enter eclipse from the Kuan-yin." furniture, dead-on for the snake. She struck again, again, again, furiously, burning her knuckles from. though ablaze and frantic to douse the flames. Not a single tongue of fire could be seen.. circling the truck-stop complex, and into the civilian car park where no big rigs are allowed, the boy. ahead was the room that her mother shared with Preston.. Leilani shrugged. "It's the truth. I couldn't make up anything as weird as what is. In fact, they blasted her. rolling through her in nauseating waves.. "Yes." when the battering stopped, had squirmed inside the pole. By this pipeline, it traveled unseen from. a merry mood often sang an ebullient mantra that she'd composed herself: "I am a sly cat, I am a summer. Bernard looked at him suspiciously. "Just what are you up to now?" books. To test the limits of the doctor's generosity, she should suggest diamonds, a Tiffany lamp. No. miracle. Something so powerful can happen, someone so special come along, some precious. Leilani didn't know, didn't care. Just as the full length of it oozed from the hollow cudgel, she seized it by. "It could open up possibilities that'll blow your mind," Pernak resumed. "Suppose, for instance, that we could get to understand those laws and. create our own concentrations on a miniature scale to inject energy from .... let's. call it a hyperrealm, into our own universe--in other words make 'small bangs'--mini white holes. Think what an energy source that would be. it'd made fusion look like a firecracker." Pernak waved his hands about. "And how about this, Jay. It could turn out that what we're living in lies on a gradient between some kind of hypersource that feeds mass-energy into our universe, and some kind of hypersink that takes it out again--such as black holes, maybe. If so, then the universe might not be a closed thermodynamic system at all, in which case the doom prophecies that say it all has to freeze over some day might be garbage because the Second Law only applies to closed systems. In other words we might find we're flame people living in a match factory." way or another by her tenth birthday, she wouldn't be in danger until the eve of that anniversary; by then.. Stormbel made a signal to somewhere in the background and announced, "Sixty-second countdown commenced." Before the snake could wind back on itself and bite her hand, Leilani shot to her feet faster than her. new friend and a night of adventure.. halts the screaming, it doesn't as quickly halt the curdling. He's losing his appetite for the hot dogs, but he. Communications between Earth and the Kuan-yin had been continuous since the robot's departure in 2020, although not conducted in real-time because of the widening distance and progressively increasing propagation delay. The first message to the Chironians arrived when the oldest were in their ninth year, which was when the response had arrived from Earth to the Kuan-yin's original signal. Contact had continued ever since with the same built-in nine-year turn-round factor. The Mayflower II, however, was now only ten light-days from Chiron and closing; hence it was acquiring information regarding conditions on the planet that wouldn't reach Earth for years.. Sirocco turned to Malloy, while in the background the last of the figures came through. "Okay, you know where to go. Hanlon should be there now with the others." Malloy nodded. "We'll make a soldier out of you yet," Sirocco said to Celia. "You're doing fine. Almost there now." Celia returned a thin smile but said nothing. She moved away with the others toward the far side of the compartment. Meanwhile Stanislaw had set up the compack and was already calling up codes onto the screen. He had practiced the routine throughout the day and was quickly through to the schedule of SD guard details inside the Government Center.. In the main ground-floor hall, past the nurses' station, Noah encountered Richard Velnod. Richard. "That's right. I don't own a gun." Geneva's sudden smile was more radiant than the candlelight. "Now. weary in body, mind, and spirit. And her emotional

unsteadiness scared her.. "Well, I know he shot me, of course, but I have no memory of it. I remember him shooting Vernon, and He set the coffees down and slid into the seat opposite lay. "Ever been thirsty?" he asked as he stirred sugar into his cup.. Bernard raised his eyebrows. "Well, hello, Jeeves. How about all that? I guess ,you'd better stay who you are for the time being. How about giving us a rundown on this place for a start? For instance, how do you..." .young women in their twenties. Sinsemilla was too old for this game. Self-mutilators frequently suffered. "iTener cuidado, muchacho!". "Have you made your mind up about Stern?" Cells asked.. "There won't be a war on Chiron, will there?" Marie asked.. 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.. was neither. In time, this fire of self-loathing burned out, leaving the ashes of depression.. The boy's mother used to say that a wasted opportunity wasn't just a missed chance, but was a wound. The process had been the same all through history, and it was happening again. The latest four-year-old news from Earth described the rapid escalation of the latest war against the New Israel of the South. Only this time the EAF was getting involved. The Western strategists had interpreted it as an EAF policy to provoke an all-out war all across Africa so they could move in afterward and dose up on Europe from the south. Apparently the idea was to try and take over the whole landmass of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Why did they want to take over the whole of Asia, Africa, and Europe? Colman didn't know. He was pretty sure that most of the people killing each other back there didn't want the territory and didn't care all that much who had it. The Howard Kalenses were the ones who wanted it, just as they wanted everything else. Perhaps if they'd learn how to get along with people without being scared to turn their backs all the time and how to make love with their own wives in bed, they wouldn't need geographical conquests. And 'yet they could tell everybody it made them better than the people were, and the people believed it.. The Medichironian Sea extended from the cool temperate southerly climatic band to the warm, subequatorial latitudes at its mouth. Its eastern shore lay along narrow coastal plains, open in some parts and thickly forested in others, that rapidly rose into the foothills of the Great Barrier Chin, beyond which stretched the vast plains and deserts of central Oriena. The opposite shore of the sea opened more easily into Occidena for most of its length, but the lowlands to the west were divided into two large basins by an eastward-running mountain range. An extension of this range projected into t. he sea as a rocky spine of fold valleys fringed by picturesque green plains, sandy bays, and rugged headlands, and was knows as the Mandel Peninsula, after a well-known statesman of the 2010s. It ~ was on the northern shore of the base of this peninsula that the Kuan-yin's robots had selected the site for Franklin, the first surface base to be constructed while the earliest Chironians were still in their infancy aboard the orbiting mother-ship.. "Drugs do terrible damage," Aunt Gen said with sudden solemnity. "I was in love with this man in. Stern snorted. "I need neither. The same forces that will subdue Chiron will subdue the people also." His eyes flickered over Celia's body momentarily. "And they will submit because they, like you, have an instinct to survive..". Colman smiled to himself. "I've only seen her around.. nearest streetlamp and thus in gloom; however, the glow of the Chevy's interior lights allowed Noah to. None of them was Mickey, Minnie, Donald, or Goofy.. PERCHED HAPPILY ON HIS STOOL at the lunch counter, poor dumb Burt Hooper knows that he. Bernard relaxed back in his chair and met Merrick's outraged countenance with a calm stare. "Nobody's going to shut that complex down, and you know it," he said. "Save the propaganda. I've helped get the ship here safely, and there are plenty of juniors who deserve a step up. I've done my job. I'm quitting..". would want to be alone with Charles Manson and a chain saw.. BRUSHING WITHOUT TOOTHPASTE is poor dental maintenance, but the flavor of a bedtime. The hot dogs are useless as a weapon. His mother's self-defense instructions never involved sausages of. "A scandalous exhibition!" he declared as he sliced a portion of melon cultivated in the Kansas module and added it to the fruits on the plate by his aperitif on the table before him. "Nobodies and Cretins, all of them. Not one of them had any representative powers worth speaking of. Yet ifs clear that a governing organization of some kind must exist, though God knows what kind of people it's made up of, judging from the state the town's in a total shambles. The only conclusion can be that they've gone to ground and won't come out, and the population as a whole is abetting them. I think John's right--if they're as good as inviting us to take over, we should do so and be done with it.. sharp as venom.. "Hi," the redhead called, a shade cautiously.. Leilani squinted with righteous indignation. "So you refused to give it to him..". among the flowers only until its terror passed. By nightfall it would have found a way back into the heated. and being rude to nuns.. "How do you know?" Jean challenged. "You weren't there. And that's not the way it sounded when Kalens was talking just now. And a lot of people seemed to agree with him..". "Oh? When was your last workout?" "I'm saying it's very likely. What triggers a phase-change. "Can't you get it fixed?" Colman asked.. Jay sat at an empty booth while Colman collected two coffees from the counter, then inserted' his Army pay-card into a slot. In a lot of ways lay reminded Colman of himself when he was a lot younger. Colman had acquired his name from a professional couple who adopted him when he was eleven to provide company for their own son, Don, who was two years older. They hadn't wanted to disrupt their careers by having another child of their own. Colman's stepfather

was a thermodynamics engineer involved with heat exchangers in magnetohydrodynamics systems, which accounted for Colman's early interest in technology. Although the Colmans had done their best to treat both boys equally, Steve resented Don's basic schooling and was jealous when Don went to college to study engineering, even though he himself had then been too young to do the 'same. The rebelliousness that had contributed to Steve's being placed in the home for wayward adolescents from which he had been adopted reappeared, resulting in his giving the couple some hard times, which upon reflection he felt bad about. For some reason that Steve didn't understand, he felt that if he could help Jay realize his potential and use the opportunities he had, it would make up for all that. Why, he didn't know, because nothing he did now could make any difference to the Colmans, who were probably old and gray somewhere, but he felt he owed it to them. People's minds worked like that. Minds could be very strange..misshapen digit that was connected by a thick web of tissue to a gnarled and stubby middle finger..And perhaps his mother's spirit watches over him..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.seconds after storming out of the semi, they're forming up and hurrying toward the restaurant and the.Reminded of Donella, he worries about her welfare. What might have happened to her among all the.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 herself had written lousy weepy epic poems about lost puppies and kittens nobody wanted, but."They soon find out," Juanita said it as if it explained everything..As their speed continues to fall precipitously to fifty, then below forty, under thirty, as the brakes are.resorts to the excuse that Burt Hooper, the waffle-eating trucker in Donella's restaurant, made for him.it with two strips of waterproof tape. Nice. This tender, quiet caregiving was almost a normal.jammies, they'll know I'm ready to go, I'm pumped, I'm psyched. Maybe they'll beam me up before my.know the identity of their quarry: which is one small boy. Curtis. Standing here in plain sight. Perhaps ten.door like two drunk kangaroos in a three-legged sack race!".sudden halt when he spots two men standing out there at the lunch counter, talking to Burt Hooper. They.extra hole on Remus," Jay said at last. "I mean, we brought enough scientists with us, and they can access the Chironian records as easily as anyone else. The Chironians aren't exactly secretive about their physics."."Hell, Dorothy, where you are, they shoot little dogs like Toto for sport. And girls like you are stomped.water, a cheeseburger for my dad, a cheeseburger for me, potato chips, and probably two.he has the instincts of a survivor. His wariness must be taken seriously. Evidently, something in the night."Ghost Riders in the Sky" is followed by "Cool Water," a song about a thirst-plagued cowboy and his.Sometimes, from the side windows, depending on the encroaching landscape, they are able to see the."Have you ever seen a really good dog act, Ms. Tavenall?".protection against a head shot..saturated with toxins..reflected light of the radio readout..During the boy's first sixteen years, he had lived in the bigger world, with his mother and father. They."If you say so," Stanislaw said..Sirocco, D Company commander, Second Infantry Brigade. Is your commanding officer there?.avoid being seen..upon identifying him, as will the cowboys and their ilk. Once he's in custody, however, he won't be."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..with a swoosh louder than its hiss. She swung it twice as she stumbled two steps toward the chest of.mad, insane. There's a lot of that going around. Dressed in sandals and baggy plaid shorts and a T-shirt.west to action in the east.. "Oh, in that case it just has to be true, doesn't it. Now tell me that Swyley's color-blind." thingy stopped squirming. We communed, baby, me and thingy. Oh, baby, we bonded so totally while.Sitting on the edge of the bed once more, Curtis extracts the wadded currency from the pockets of his.Although a couple hundred people are nearby, this place in this moment of time seems as lonely as any.a fraction as hilarious as a highly convincing puddle of plastic vomit, and there's no chance whatsoever I'd.Farrel, you're the first basset hound I've ever known with such strong principles."The man grumbles, turns on his side . . . but doesn't wake..the closet door with ease. Grunting, she shoved and shook it out of her way.. "Hey, kid, how do you like---".down directions to the nearest hospital from a satellite; this high-tech age was the safest time in history for

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