

## THE DREAMER

In addition to surprise, however, the boy has Old Yeller. And the dog has teeth. Curtis has teeth, too. The Ring modules contained all of the kinds of living, working, recreational, manufacturing, and agricultural facilities pioneered in the development of space colonies, and by the time the ship was closing in on Alpha Centauri, accommodated some thirty thousand people. With the communications round-trip delay to Earth now nine years, the community was fully autonomous in all its affairs -- a self-governing, self-sufficient society. It included its own Military, and since the mission planners had been obliged to take every conceivable circumstance and scenario into account, the Military had come prepared for anything; there could be no sending for reinforcements if they got into trouble. . . . pity cripples, but they're afraid of mutants." Howard Kalens simmered as he listened. Quatre had changed her tune when the commercial lobby, whose interests she represented, panicked at the prospect of having to compete in the insane Chironian economic system. The signals coming down the line had told her that she'd better get something done about it and soon, if she wanted to see herself reinstated after the elections, which in turn meant that Kalens had better be seen to back her ease if he expected her support in his bid for the Directorship. "I'm not. He's an architect . . . and gorgeous I met him in Franklin yesterday and stayed last night. It's so easy--they act as if it's perfectly natural . . . And they're so uninhibited" Celia just gaped at her. Veronica winked and nodded. "Really. I'll tell you about it later, I'd better go." Then gunfire. 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. "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." "Who was that?" Jean gasped, her eyes wide with disbelief. "The end justifies the means, huh?" battle. "Worming your way into our hearts," Micky continued, because saying our instead of my seemed to me on the cheek, he'd probably puke up his guts." Ten years went by while North America and Europe completed their recovery, and the major Eastern powers settled their rivalries. At the end of that period New America extended from Alaska to Panama, Greater Europe had incorporated Russia, Estonia, Latvia, and the Ukraine as separate nations, and China had come to dominate an Eastern Asiatic Federation stretching from Pakistan to the Bering Strait. All three of the major powers had commenced programs to reexpand into space at more or less the same time, and since each claimed a legitimate interest in the colony on Chiron and mistrusted the other two, each embarked on the construction of a starship with the aim of getting there first to protect its own against interference from the others. "Okay, then what about human beings crossed with puppy dogs?" him. "In that Windchaser, they keep body parts in the bedroom." "I lose again. He's just a selfish pig." If the Chironians were already fitting out the Kuan-yin, they must have solved a lot of the problems that were still being argued on Earth, Colman thought. The whole planet, he realized as he reflected on it, was a powerhouse of progress, unchecked by any traditions of unreason and with no vested-interest obstructionists to hold it back. If the pattern continued until Chiron became a fully populated world, it would effectively leave Earth back in the Stone Age within a century. "Have you actually flown it anywhere yet?" he asked, turning his head toward Kath. "The Kuan-yin . . . Has it been anywhere since it arrived in orbit here?" Currently, however, a sense of inadequacy so overwhelmed her that she had no capacity for shame. In Lechat had digested the implications by now and appeared worried. "Maybe the Chironians have given a warning, but nobody realized it. They might already have said that they're almost down to their last option." He watched her walk away. Then between long swallows, he studied his beer as though it meant. Another pair of boots follows the first. Two men, not just one. Neither talks, both move purposefully. . . . eyes, no pity, because nothing in her face said cripple. The snake had struck at her face, and she didn't. This mutt isn't, as Curtis first thought, his brother-becoming. She is instead his sister-becoming, and that's as decrepit as Micky's bile-green lounge. "This lawn furniture sucks." Curtis is relieved to see that this co-killer is encumbered by a safety harness that secures her to the. If he ever dreamed, he could convince himself that he's in a dream now, that this landscape seems to match Geneva's smile. Instead, the girl's cocky cheerfulness melted into melancholy. Her clear eyes. but their smiles and greetings seemed false, not because he doubted their sincerity, but because he himself. "The Chironians on channel eight are requesting a report, sir." Not even a major city, with a fat budget and crime-busting mayor, could turn out a force of this size and. Curtis hopes that he won't have to kick anyone in the sex organs, but he's prepared to do whatever is. Dark with clotted blood, the holes no longer oozed. He's heard people say that it's a small world, and this Cruise connection sure does support that. dedication is too effusive and in need of cutting. Well, this time she's wrong. Standing a short distance apart from the group in the opposite direction, Colman was becoming as fed up as the rest of them. It was midafternoon, and Farnhill's party was still inside with no sign yet that whatever was going on was anywhere near ending. The squad's orders were to stand easy, which helped a bit, but all the same, things were starting to drag. He heaved a sigh and for the umpteenth time paced slowly across to the corner of the building to stand gazing past it at the above-surface portion of the complex. Behind him, Driscoll and Stanislau stopped talking about Carson's sex lie abruptly as two Chironians stopped by on their a t the m entrance. asleep, because the snake is essentially sleepless. This wasn't a way Leilani could live, not a situation she. baroque detail was not a fabrication, then what of the murderous stepfather, Dr. Doom, and his eleven. hearts, wounded minds, torn spirits. earlier. He isn't sure what it means, but it got him out of trouble before, so he says, "Sir, I'm not quite. Understanding its new master's intent, the dog springs into the cargo bed

of the truck, landing so lightly. "He wasn't dead then," Geneva assured the girl. "He hadn't even begun to lose his hair yet." until she saw what had come in the container. "They know where to find us," Colman said. "way?" With her deformed hand, Leilani pointed at Micky's untouched serving of pie. "Are you going to eat. right for the weather." "You think that's really a possibility?" Colman asked, looking concerned and doubtful at the same time. feet were grass-stained and filthy, though her fine slip was rumpled and streaked with dirt, though her hair. She placed the first-aid kit on the bed, beside her mother's digital camera. you a tale of woe that might wring pity even from the chicken she's eating, were the poor fowl still alive! dog's neck, Together they wait, alert. purging. Yet she shied from using the bath seasonings for the same reason that she didn't participate in. even goes clean and straight some days, though that's when the depression sets in. might simply have absorbed Curtis's mood. "You've already worked most of that out." The Chironians traded in respect, Colman was beginning to understand as he listened to the talk around him. They respected knowledge and expertise in every form, and they showed it. Perhaps, he thought to himself, that was how the first generation had sought to compete and to attain identity in their machine-managed environment, where such things as parental status, social standing, wealth, and heritage had had no meaning. And they had preserved that ever since in the way their culture had evolved. "A payoff from your husband, ten thousand bucks, offered by one of his flunkies." and Curtis can't simply tuck her inside his shirt and scramble through one of these less than generous. "If you want to put it that way." grass that shimmers out there beyond the trees. so resourceful and cunning that they are likely to track down their quarry no matter how successful the. but doesn't follow. they would come for Noah, not for his sister. Jonathan Sharmer was a thug wrapped in the robes of. How peculiar the world had grown if now life with Aunt Gen had become the sterling standard of. The painter looked dubious while he inspected the windowsill that he was to tackle next. "That doesn't make much sense," he murmured after a while. "Why would somebody stay poor if he didn't have to? That'd be a strange. kind of way to carry on." remote control. They're most likely fast approaching from the other side of the vehicle. "Child Protective Services?" at me. His face was blurred a little because the window was dirty. I think he waved. "To stave off more tears, Micky said, "That's sweet, Aunt Gen, but everything you have doesn't amount. Farnhill stopped him with a curt wave of his hand. "This spectacle has gone far enough," he said. He looked at Clem. "Perhaps we could continue this discussion in conditions of greater privacy. Is there somewhere suitable near here?" girl mean bidness! rod, taking the clothes to the closet floor. I thought you might need a hand with these so I did them last night. If my hunch is right, things have probably gotten a bit difficult for you. There's no sense in upsetting people who don't mean any harm. Take it from me, he's not such a bad guy. "Enter, enter, Maiden Leilani, and come thou quickly to thy queen's side." The soft knock wasn't opportunity, but Micky said, "Come in." of burning gasoline, airborne flaming debris, and a bullet-fast barrage of shrapnel are more likely to be. of the FBI, but not in the least heartened by this unexpected development. By midmorning Terran newscasters were interpreting the development as a Chironian backlash to the Padawski outrages and as a warning to the Terrans of what to expect if Kalens was elected to head the next administration after his latest public pledge to impose Terran law on Franklin as a first step toward "restabilizing" the planet. Interviews in which Chironians denied, dispassionately and without embellishment, that they had had anything to do with the incidents were given scant coverage. Reactions among the Terrans were mixed. At one extreme were the protest meetings and anti-Chironian demonstrations, which in some cases got out of hand and led to mob attacks on Chironians and Chironian property. At the other, a group of two hundred Terrans who believed the bombings to have been the work of the Terran anti-Chironian extremists announced that they were leaving en masse and had to be stopped by a cordon of troops. Before they could disperse they were attacked by an inflamed group of anti-Chironians, and in the ensuing brawl the Chironians looked on as impassive spectators while Terrans battled Terrans, and Terran troops in riot gear tried to separate them. "iLoco mocoso!" pseudofather? Celia's eyes opened wide. "You're kidding!" ever since she popped me out of the oven, and I've still got all my limbs, or at least the same odd. automatically lock, so the truck skates like a pig on ice, with a lot more squeal than grace, though the. Tweaked by puzzlement, her classic features had a pixie charm. "Excuse me?" many clothes to allow a boy and a dog to shelter among the shirts and shoes. At the windows of the two-story motel, most of the drapes have been flung back. Curious, worried. at the shuttle base. Orders have come down from the ship to move the Chironians out and seal off the whole place. Major Thorp's there with part of A company, and he's refusing to take SD orders. We've been ordered to send two platoons. Sirocco wants Hanlon to go with them, and you to secure the block in case there's any shooting and it spreads here. The other members of Red section in the row of seats to the left of him and those of Blue section sitting with Hanlon and Sirocco in the row ahead were strangely silent as they watched the screen where the bright half-disk of Chiron hung in the background: the first real-time view of a planet that some of them had ever seen. Farther back along the cabin, reflecting the planned order of emergence, General Portney was sitting in the center of a group of brass-bedecked senior officers, and behind them Amery Farnhill was tense and dry-lipped among his retinue of civilian diplomatic staff and assistants. In the rear, the SD troops were grim and silent in steel helmets and combat uniforms festooned with grenades, propping their machine rifles and assault cannon between their knees. "Who said anything about them? Have you figured out how many sweet young dollies there must be running around down there?" Sirocco chuckled lasciviously over the intercom. "I bet Swyley has a miraculous recovery between now and when we go into orbit." Color-blind or not, Corporal Swyley had seen the present situation coming in time to report sick with stomach cramps just twenty-four hours before D Company was assigned two weeks of Bomb Factory guard duty. He was "sick" because he had reported them during his own time; reporting stomach cramps during the Army's time was diagnosed as malingering. To her own ear, she had sounded as false as George Washington's wooden teeth, but Dr. Doom had. strange because it exists only in his mind, that regardless of how long or how fast he runs, he'll

never didn't have any real passion left; drugs of infinite variety had scorched away all her passion, leaving her. A short silence fell while the meeting digested the observation. Kalens thought about the fusion complex that Farnhill had learned about in his largely unproductive talks with an assortment of Chironians in Franklin. Kalens had sent Farnhill off to learn what he could through more casual contact and conversation, after Borftein's sarcastic remark to the effect that the Army's company of misfits seemed to be making better progress with the natives than the diplomats were managing. "Yes... I know what you mean," Kalens said, acknowledging Stern with a motion of his head. "As a matter of fact, we have already begun inquiries along those lines." He turned toward Farnhill. "Amery, tell us again about that place along the coast." unpredictable neighbor..Like a gargoyle above, Sinsemilla leaned over the footboard of the bed, her face shadowed but her head. Jay appeared more reassured, and his eyes brightened a fraction with the relief of having been spared long explanations. "It's all screwed up," he replied simply..Instead, the man goes to the bathroom sink and switches on a small overhead light. Standing in profile to. Sometimes, from the side windows, depending on the encroaching landscape, they are able to see the. "My pleasure." .She must deal with this, and fast; but nothing on the bed would be of help to her in a snake chase, snake. In the closet: no Mom, no puke, no blood, no hidden passageway leading to a magical kingdom where. BANSHEES, SHRIKES TEARING at their impaled prey, coyote packs in the heat of the hunt.. Noah smiled. This was one reason he liked her. Class and style without pretension. "Exactly." .Some motorists, recognizing the length of the delay ahead of them, have switched off their engines and. "Love. I thought you would say love is the answer." Her sweet gamine face wasn't designed for ironic. Bernard nodded and seemed relieved, but his expression was still far from happy as he turned toward Kath, who had moved away from the others, and was watching curiously. Bernard seemed to want to say something that he didn't know how to begin. "No, we can't. I've got to think." .dragged so low by her demons and her drugs that she was less likely to be found in an armchair than. recently met and therefore are still in the process of becoming a fully simpatico boy-dog unit. More likely, .purple beams through black tides of incoming night.. "And someone wanted the cash," Leilani guessed.. "Primed and ready for immediate launch," Stormbel replied in a monotone. "Programmed for air-burst at two thousand feet, impacting after thirteen minutes. Warhead twenty megatons equivalent, non-recallable and nondefusible after firing." .-"Maybe we shouldn't rush things too much," Bernard suggested. He looked at lay: "You may want to give yourself time to acclimatize before you get into something like this." His tone said that he was being tactful in his phrasing; lay wasn't going. For the moment, at least, lay didn't feel inclined to argue too much.. Noah stopped, dismayed. "Which one?" .CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE. steering wheel, the better to see him. From here, she might be mistaken for an innocent and kindly. He can entertain no realistic hope of ever being such a grand person as this woman. With his weak will. brand in the refrigerator, and if no one drank it, she periodically replaced it with new stock when its. either adventure or a share of the juice.. you? some political nut? I thought you were just a sad-ass gumshoe grubbing a few bucks by peeping in. stop near Provo, while the driver lingered over a slice of pie in the diner. The door of one of the. men and women busily tend to. "More like a few days," Leilani said. "We just spent July in Roswell, actually, because it was July 1947. hours of punching babies and nuns, the pacifist said, "The congressman isn't unreasonable. By taking his. "You don't know where you were born?". "I know. Maybe we can get Gustav and Steve working on it together." . "Profit from this case will buy another six months here," Noah told her. "So now we have the first half of." "Could I have more lemonade?" Leilani asked.. blood of others was the staff of life.. is an opportunity that only a disobedient, mother-ignoring boy would fail to take.. Klunk way was to ingratiate, to amuse, to charm, but while you could expect a high degree of success. "From a white back. But not anymore, I guess, by the look of it." .that Luki and the compassionate spacemen were sending her subliminal messages in reruns of Seinfeld, in. garments from the skin of those they murder, or they create mobiles with weird arrangements of dangling. As Curtis realizes that somehow he has further offended her, hot tears blur his vision. "I only want you to. shoulder straps and bodice, as well as on the deep flounce that hemmed the skirt. The garment appeared. "By your customs," the Chironian observed.. somewhere, with her clatter-clank leg under a table, with her poster-child hand tucked out of sight in her. From her back door, Aunt Gen said, "Micky dear, we're putting dessert on the table, so don't be long," .goddess.. incoherently, believed herself to be a more delicate and exquisite flower than any hothouse orchid.. In her tiny bedroom, Micky kicked off her toe-pinching high heels. She stripped out of her cheap cotton

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