

IF I WAS A ROBIN

The dog watches, head cocked, looking every bit as puzzled as it ought to be. The party of Terrans and Chironians moved on and left the audience to the explosive tirade that followed. "Those were hardly more than children," Eve Verritty murmured. He rounds the end of another work aisle and finds an employee sitting on the floor, wedged into the. But Colman felt that he did belong here--among the machines. He understood them and talked their language, and they talked his. They were talking to him now in the vibrations coming through his suit. The language of the machines was plain and direct. It had no inverted logic or double meanings. The machines never said one thing when they meant another, gave less than they had promised to give, or demanded more than they had asked for. They didn't lie, or cheat, or steal, but were honest with those who were honest with them. Like Sirocco they accepted him for what he was and didn't pretend to be other than what they were. They didn't expect him to change for them or offer to change themselves for him. Machines had no notion of superiority or inferiority and were content with their differences--to be better at some things and worse at others. They could understand that and accept it. Why, Colman wondered, couldn't people? there's no relief in even one voice among them? only shirk anxiety, urgency, wariness. automobile-club card out of his wallet, he unclipped the phone from his belt and called the. "... have strayed from the path in many ways, and we must be mindful of our Christian, as well as our patriotic, duty to lead this errant flock back into the haven of the fold. Sometimes this is not an easy task, and requires firmness and dedication as well as compassion and understanding ". "I didn't mean that," Driscoll protested, feeling embar-. She seldom spoke, and never recognized Noah. If she possessed any memory whatsoever of the days. capsules of vitamin supplements, and spent a lot of time worrying about global warming. She had been. Sirocco looked back at the orders and resumed, "The advance guard will fan out to form two files, of ten men each, aligned at an angle of forty-five degrees off either side of the access lock and take up station behind their respective section leaders. Officer in command of the guard detail will remain two paces to the left of the lock exit. Upon completion of the opening formalities, the guard will be relieved by a detail from B Company who will position themselves at the exit ramp, and will proceed through the Kuan-Yin. to post sentry details at the locations specified in Schedule A, attached. The sentry details will remain posted until relieved or given further orders. Are there any questions so far?". "Is that a proposal?" Wellesley asked. "You're proposing to plan for contingencies involving a first use of force?". "What about the ameba?". The mention of antimatter reminded Colman of something. He sat back on the sofa and cast his mind back as he tried to pinpoint what. It reminded him of something Kath had said. The others stopped talking and looked at him curiously. And then it came to him. He cocked his head to one side and looked at Bernard. "Did you know that Chironians were modifying the Kuan-yin into an antimatter ship?" he asked. style and sexy allure of a robot hunter who had been constructed in a laboratory in the future and sent. "Never say you don't get anything back for your taxes." Colman was sitting next to her, grinning faintly in the brief glow as one of the others lit a cigarette. But she had gone for so much of the day without speaking that she was unable to answer immediately. His hand found her arm in the darkness and squeezed briefly but reassuringly. "It'll be okay," he murmured. "We've fixed somewhere safe for you to go, and you're all set to get out of Phoenix tonight. I'll be coming with you into Franklin?". The other two followed his gaze to a Chironian wearing coveralls and a green hat with a red feather in it, painting the lower part of a wall of one of the houses. Near him was a machine on legs, a clutter of containers, valves, and tubes at one end, bristling with drills, saws, and miscellaneous attachments at the other. A ground vehicle with a multisectioned extensible arm supporting a work platform was parked in front; and from a few yards to one side of the painter, a paint-smeared robot, looking very much like an inexperienced apprentice, watched him studiously. The Chironian was as old as any that Colman had seen, with a brown, weathered face, but what intrigued Colman even more was the house itself, which was built after the pattern of dwellings on Earth a hundred years earlier--constructed from real wood, and coated with paint. It was not the first such anachronism that he had seen in. Franklin, where designs three centuries old coexisted quite happily alongside maglev ears and genetically modified plants, but he hadn't had an opportunity to stop and study one before. cheeseburgers for Old Yeller.". yards from them. Under a parking-lot arc lamp. "Don't you want to come along?" Bernard asked Jean. "It would get you out and give you a break.". Bernard shook his head in protest and tore his eyes away to look at the screen still showing Kath. "You can't let this happen," he implored. "Those are your own people up there in Selene. This will just be the first example. Then it'll get worse.". Bernard shrugged helplessly. "I know. It's a chance-but what else is there?". biting him in half or swallowing him whole. flat if you don't stay out of the way.". called herself Sinsemilla as long as I've known her." Leilani settled into a hideous orange-and-blue chair. "I've got two sisters you can't get in trouble with," Stanislaw offered. dazzle the cognoscenti, not with her beauty, but with her sterling reputation, making it less likely that. "It is. A research team is modifying the Kuan-yin to test out an antimatter drive. In fact the project is at quite an advanced stage. They're doing the same kind of thing back on Earth, aren't they?". Kath switched on her impish smile again. "That's all I'm prepared to say," she replied. "For now, anyway. I just thought you'd like to hear it." She turned to Jay to change the subject. "Chang told my son Adam about you, and Adam says you ought to drop by sometime, Jay. He lives in Franklin, so it wouldn't be far. Why don't you do that?". You have this kind of pride. Honor, he called it. But these days, honor is for suckers, and that makes you. "Was that where you learned about engineering?" Kath asked. The owner bustled forward, twisting a cloth nervously in his hands. "Look, I don't want any trouble. I just wanna sell food to the people, okay? They don't want no trouble either. Now why don't--". ONE DOOR AWAY FROM HEAVEN A Bantam Book December 2001. "All set, except for springing Borftein and Wellesley," Colman said. "Now that we've got Malloy, those two would make the whole thing cast-iron." He

turned his head to Sirocco, who was half listening but looking away across the room with a thoughtful expression on his face. "Had any more thoughts about that?" Colman asked. Sirocco responded distantly, "Borftein and Wellesley." "Worming your way into ..." Micky fell silent, surprised by what she had been about to say. Oven to oven, past a ten-foot-long cooktop, past an array of deep fryers full of roiling hot oil, around more than once this time. Her thin cold complaints melted into a moan of abject misery, and the moan quickly named for a dog. had these memory problems now and then, ever since I was shot in the head. A few wires got scrambled. door in Micky's heart, a door that had for a long time been kept locked, barred, and bolted. Beyond lay. "I never imagined you were. More news? Karla's house was bought with Circle of Friends money. Half. Colman felt something cold deep in his stomach even before his mind had fully registered what Brad had said. "Sterm?" he repeated numbly. He licked his lips, which had gone suddenly dry, and looked from one of the SD majors to the other. "You mean he's already in there?" Though the source is unclear from this perspective, the tumult can't be missed. Fleeing customers are. But she saw no blood, no ichor, no snake syrup of any kind. Across the room in the sunken area below the wall screen, Bernard, Lechat, Colman, and Jay resumed their conversation. "We don't know what they've got exactly, but it's pretty devastating," Jay told Colman. "We figure they've already tested it. There's an extra crater on one of the moons—a couple of hundred miles across—that wasn't there a year ago. Imagine if whatever did that was to hit the ship." "How's that work?" drawer in search of something else. The sight of this stash, when she wasn't immediately in need of it, had aware of the boy himself, and if they can recognize the hunters, they must be able to recognize the boy. 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. "Old Sinsemilla. Who else? She's psychotic. As they say when they commit people to the psychiatric. energy, as knights might thunder toward a joust, lances of light piercing the high-desert darkness. In these. Another missile salvo streaked in and smashed into the walls and structures inboard from the lock, wiping out half the force that had just begun to move. The survivors reeling among the wreckage began crumpling and falling under a concentrated hail of HE and cluster fire from M32s and infantry assault artillery. What was left of the covering force broke and began running back in disorder. "Get everybody out! Pull back to—" The glass partition imploded under a direct hit, and a split second later a guided bomb carrying a five-hundred-pound incendiary warhead put an end to all resistance in the vicinity of Number 2 Aft Access Port, high, either. Driscoll didn't follow what she meant, so he ignored it. "I mean it," he told her. "It's all very nice," Veronica agreed, getting up from her chair in the large living room of the Kalenses' Columbia District home. "I'm sure you'll find somewhere wonderful." Veronica had been one of Celia's closest friends since the earliest days of the voyage. She had earned herself something of a dubious reputation in some circles by not only joining the ranks of the few women to have been divorced, but by staying that way, which for some reason that Celia had never quite fathomed endeared Veronica to her all the more as a companion and confidante. of the lowest drawer. blue eyes. "Now don't you wish you could see me as a mutant?" the next growth of trees. He's just entering the next aisle, one layer deeper into the huge kitchen, when he hears the two cowboys shouting. "FBI! FBI! Freeze, freeze, freeze!" grunting, gasping, snake-killing rage and terror. Like a foxtail bramble, this hateful picture would work its. The tubular-steel rod was hollow, two inches in diameter. The snake, not dead after all, seeking refuge. would, sooner or later. Yet right up until the minute she decided she needed a change, until she threw submission. With her deformed hand, Leilani pointed at Micky's untouched serving of pie. "Are you going to eat." "Not interested?" Even in the darkest moments, light exists if you have the faith to see it. Fear is a poison produced by the. Lechat nodded and seemed satisfied. "That gets us up there," he said. "Now what about getting into the Communications Center?" appears to be at once enthralled by the offerings on the tall, two-fold menu. The SD sergeant half rose from his seat. "Sir, I didn't—I thought—" lottery numbers, start fires with the power of my mind, and teleport to Paris for lunch. "I don't even know what a paramecium is." Sterm 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 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." Surely one of the men will make at least a halfhearted attempt to search for the five bucks. Little snot, 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. "Frankly," Leilani said, "neither do I. But the alternative is too hideous to consider, so I just suspend my." "That's a severe angle," Mrs. Sharmer said. "Where were you?" CHAPTER EIGHTEEN. Merrick

motioned silently toward a chair on the opposite side of the desk and continued to gaze at the screen without ever glancing up. Fallows sat. After some ten seconds he began feeling uncomfortable. What had he done wrong in the last few days? Had there been something he'd forgotten?... or failed to report, maybe?... or left with loose ends dangling? He racked his brains but couldn't think of anything. Finally, unnerved, Fallow managed to stammer, "Er .. you wanted to see me, sir." "Because the Book tells us we must." automatically lock, so the truck skates like a pig on ice, with a lot more squeal than grace, though the you're sure it's okay, then thanks ... thanks a lot." "No problem," Chang told him..Shaking her head, gentle amusement still written on her face, she returned her attention to the remains optimistic about his chances of escape. The sight of his canine companion, happily drinking..bribed, anyway. They aren't politicians, after all. If the National Security Agency also has operatives in.werewolves in the misery of the moon could not have produced more chilling cries than those that caused."A shuttle's lifting off from Bay Five at 2130," she said. "I'll be coming off it about thirty minutes before it leaves. All I need, is to get over into Chironian territory. I can make it on my own from there."The Chironian hesitated for a moment as if reluctant to say something which he thought might be taken as insulting. Kath caught his eye and nodded reassuringly. "Well," the Chironian began, then paused again. "Most people here start to feel that way by the time they're about ten. Fm not trying to offend anyone-but that's the way it is."Dinosaur-loud, dinosaur-shrill, dinosaur-scary bleats shred the night air, sharp as talons and teeth.."Excuse me," he said to the bargain-basement Thor as the hammer arced high over the hood again, and."You could talk to him. I know he listens to what you say. We've talked about things."Or, for all Curtis knows, this shirt-clutching stranger might be psychotic rather than psychic. Loony.,the only nourishment that his soul received, and the possibility of redemption watered the desert of his.compliment, speaking with sincerity and emotion that cannot be misconstrued as anything else: "You."Oh, just make it a shot of amaretto," Micky relented, and on the etto, Leilani quietly said, "Milk.".'CHANGE ISN'T EASY, Micky. Changing the way you live means changing how you think. Changing.With an earnestness that could be achieved only by a boy-man with a wispy goatee and the conviction.as a purely passive observer; there was no reason why she should change that role now..Jay began speaking earnestly and in a low voice. "My father asked me to find you. It's urgent. One of the people the SDs are looking for is at the house. Stern has arrested the whole of Congress, and we're pretty sure he's going to issue an ultimatum with the Military. If they do the Chironians will take out the whole ship. Pa wants to go with our guy and talk to Kath to see if they can do something, but they need help getting out of Phoenix."Explorer..dedicated his life to the saucer circuit. He has this honking big motor home, and we travel all around the.She stood hurriedly, picked up the sculpture and, with trembling hands, replaced it in its box, then stowed the box at the bottom of a closet as far back as she could reach..percent of all life on the planet, whichever came first..each of the bastards out, she cared about me less than him, and me less than the new bastard who was."I'll remind her," Pernak promised. "Ready, lay? Let's go."CHAPTER THIRTEEN.Hanlon shook his head. "Ah, why be vindictive? We got her off and sent them all on their way. They're probably in Franklin by now, looking for the fastest way out of town."Arrogance issued from him as holy light might radiate from the apparition of a saint, and he stood facing."Let's do that," Pernak agreed. "I'll take the things." "They can go on the maglev on their own," Murphy informed them. "The handler at the village terminal will route them through. You pick them up by the elevator in your basement. What's your number there?"..films..those fangs in her cheek or her nose. Then people would never think of her as sassy, but would always.Stormbel was a short, stocky, completely bald man with pale, watery eyes and an expression that never conveyed emotion. A thin moustache pencil-lined his upper lip. He put his hands on his hips and stared for a few seconds at the gaping faces before him. "This Congress is dissolved," he announced in his thin but piercing, high-pitched voice. "The Mission is now under the direct command of the Military." He turned his head to Borftein "You are relieved of command of both the regular and Special Duty forces. Those functions are now transferred to me."..his leg stiff, rolling his hips in that funny way he did. And then ... as they drove away. . . Luki looked back

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