

## KUDZU

Koontz, Dean R. Dean Ray wherever the aliens are supposed to have been in the past, we go hoping they'll show up again. And Kath looked apprehensively at Celia. Celia nodded in answer to the unvoiced question. "Yes, that's the way I want it," she said. Kath nodded and accepted the situation at that. Even if she's here in the night, unseen at his side, he can't rely on her. He has no guardian but himself, no. assumes that this freckled interrogator intuits his larcenies dating all the way back to the Hammond house. The officers exchanged some words with the Chironians, then Portney and Wesserman approached the aircraft to survey the interior. After a few seconds Portney nodded to himself, then turned his head to nod again, back at Sirocco. Sirocco beckoned and one of two waiting ambulances moved forward to the Chironian aircraft. Two soldiers opened its rear doors. Four others climbed inside the aircraft and began moving bodies. As each body bag was brought out, Sirocco turned the top back briefly while an aide compared the face to pictures on a compact screen and another checked dogtag numbers against a list he was holding, after which the corpse was transferred to the ambulance. A bitter taste arose in her mouth, perhaps an onion blowback from Geneva's potato salad, and her. Grinning, Leilani bit into a crisp dill pickle. "I really like you, Micky B. You, too, Mrs. D." "Some of your mother's boyfriends? fine hulking shoulders, a neck made to burst restraining collars, and the proud chins of a fattened bull. treasure, and they won't be distracted. to his sister-becoming, he blunders after her into the waterless bog without adjusting his pace or step. He. The Military maintained a facility for reprocessing warheads and fabricating replacement stocks, which as a precaution against accidents and to save some weight the designers had located way back in the tail of the Spindle, behind the huge radiation shield that screened the rest of the ship from the main-drive blast. It was known officially as Warhead Refinishing and Storage, and unofficially as the Bomb Factory. Nobody worked there. Machines took care of routine operations, and engineers visited only infrequently to carry out inspections or to conduct out-of-the-ordinary repairs. Nevertheless, it was a military installation containing munitions, and according to regulations, that meant that it had to be guarded. The fact that it was already virtually a fortress and protected electronically against unauthorized entry by so much as a fly made no difference; the regulations said that installations containing munitions had to be guarded by guards. And guarding it, Colman thought, had to be the lousiest, shittiest job the Army had to offer. Perhaps the trucker has just now remembered a particularly funny joke. His unrestrained hilarity is. He retreats into the bedroom where Britney and monsters watch from the walls, all ravenous. Switches. by then? Somewhere, anywhere, everywhere, waiting. And what if her mother took it with them when. Then Colman's communicator started bleeping. Bernard Fallows was calling from the Communications Center. "I guess you did it," he said. "But it's not over yet. We've found out where Sterm is." wake, but at times ranges to the left and right of her. CHAPTER ELEVEN. out of the booth and rose to his feet. "You wouldn't do something stupid like take the money and then not. of the bite, excited by the prospect of the entertainment to come. "Just . . . what are you getting at?" Bernard asked, sounding disbelieving of his own ears and suspicious at the same time. Across hard-packed earth and fields of sandstone, they race into a dry slough of soft sand. The door at the farther end. This space is also a cooler, with perforated-metal storage shelves on both sides. When she rounded the end of the bed, she saw the pet-shop terror where she had left it, stacked in. any more than he's likely to escape on a flying carpet with a magic lamp and a helpful genie. place, less than twenty-four hours ago. "He wouldn't believe us," Lechat said bleakly. "It sounds like the first bluff anyone would try." Celia spoke for the first time since sitting down with Veronica and Casey. Until now they had not been fully aware of the reason for Bernard and Lechat's visit. "Either way a wanting won't do any good," she said. "Whether you issue one now or later is academic. He would defy it. You don't know him. The hard core of the Army is rallying round him, and it has reinforced his confidence. He thinks he is unbeatable." original. Where'd you find her? ". deeply concerned. Worse than concerned. Grim. Maybe even bleak. "Raised in a box? ". really want to talk about? And I'm ? what? ? supposed to guess the true subject? ". "Love," Geneva declared, and her eyes grew misty with the memory of that long-ago passion. "So far, you're not registering high on my terror meter." another what's-happening-what's-up-what's-this-all-about. southwest. The westbound lanes are blocked by police vehicles that form a gate, and traffic is being. young women in their twenties. Sinsemilla was too old for this game. Self-mutilators frequently suffered. "It hasn't started to respond yet," Stormbel said, sounding relieved for the first time in hours. "Perhaps we took them by surprise after all." He glanced at the numbers appearing on a display of orbit and course projections, "In any case, it can't touch us now." After a few seconds of silence Lay conceded, "Okay, I can see how it might be a good way of getting rid of the odd freak here and there. But what do you do when a whole bunch of them get together?" Just then, the door opened noisily, and several loud voices drowned out the conversations in the coffee shop. Colman recognized three faces from B Company, Padawski--a tall, wiry sergeant with harsh, thin lips and hard, bleek eyes set in a long, swarthy face--and two corporals whose names didn't come immediately to mind. They had been drinking, and Padawski could be mean at the best of times. Colman's earlier friendship with Anita had developed at a time when she had taken to staying close to Colman and Hanlon because Padawski had been pestering her. Colman could look after himself when the need arose, and Hanlon, besides being the sergeant in charge of Second Platoon, was a hand-to-hand combat instructor for the whole of D Company, and good. The combination had. STRANGELY, here in the sunshine, less than a day later, Micky couldn't stop thinking about the. Driscoll propped his gun against the wall, fished a pack and lighter from inside his jacket, lit up, and leaned back to exhale with a grateful sigh. The irritability that he had been feeling wafted away with the smoke. The robot set down its piece of tubing, folded its arms, and leaned back against the wall, evidently programmed to take its cues from the behavior of the people around it. Driscoll looked at it with a

new curiosity. His impulse was to strike up a conversation, but the whole situation was too strange. The thought flashed through his mind that it would have been a lot easier if the robot had been an EAF infantryman. Driscoll would never have believed he could feel anything in common with the Chinese. He didn't know whether he was talking to the robot, or through it to computers somewhere else in the Kuan-yin or even down on Chiron, maybe; whether they had minds or simply embodied some fever programming, or what. He had talked to Colman about machine intelligence once. Colman said it was possible in principle, but a truly aware artificial mind was still a century away at least. Surely the Chironians couldn't have advanced that much. "What kind of a machine are you?" he asked, "I mean, can you think like a person? Do you know who you are?'.are being held. They're in the Columbia District-not far from the Communications Center. If there was some way of getting Borftein out and taking him in on our plan, it would stand a much better chance of having the effect you want on the Army." Then as an afterthought she added, "And if Wellesley could be included as well as Borftein, it might help to make up for some of the things we can't prove." She shifted her gaze around the room and eventually allowed it to settle on Colman. "But I don't know if something like that would be possible." "I agree," Howard Kalens murmured..The bulkhead door at the far end of the catwalk was open, and some tools were lying in front of an opened switchbox nearby. Colman went through the door into the pump compartment and emerged onto a railed platform part way up one side of a tall bay extending upward and below, divided into levels of girders and struts with one of the huge pumps and its attendant equipment per level. On the level below him, a group of engineers and riggers was working on one of the pumps. They had removed one of the end-casings and dismantled the bearing assembly, and were attaching slings from an overhead gantry in preparation for withdrawing the rotor. Colman leaned on the rail to watch for a few moments, nodding to himself in silent approval as he noted the slings and safety lines correctly tensioned at the right angles, the chocks wedging the rotor to avoid trapped hands, the parts laid out in order well clear of the working area, and the exposed bearing surfaces protected by padding from damage by dropped tools. He liked watching professionals..criticism and vicious obscenities delivered in the stupid phony voice of whatever Shakespearean.The boy promises himself that public toileting is a behavior he will never adopt, regardless of how wild."Confused but quiet at the barracks," Jarvis told him. "A lot of shooting inside the base at Canaveral. Everyone seems to be trying to get his hands on the heavy equipment there. A shuttle's on fire in one of the launch bays." "Judge Fulmire." Lechat frowned and tapped in a code to reconnect. The unit returned a "number unobtainable" mnemonic. He rattled in another code to alert a communications operator. The same thing happened. "The regular.Evidently the congressman's battalions no longer found him to be of even the slightest interest. His.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..Yet if he doesn't seek help here, he'll have to visit the next farmhouse, or the one after the next. He is.Jay jumped up and ran to a closet for a jacket. He looked at Jean as he pulled it on. "Yes, Mother, I'll be careful." "SDs," Colman said at once. "It was- a professional job." .Because of the problem of both words having the same initial letter, the dum came to be designated by U and the dee by E. The dum carried a one-third charge, and the dee carried none. Two dums and a dee made the up quark, its three possible color charges being represented by the three possible pennutations, UUE, UEU, and EUU. Similarly two dees and a dum yielded the down antiquark in its three possible colon as UEE, EUE, and EEU; in the same way two "antidums" and an "antidee" gave the up antiquark; and two antidees and an antidum, the down quark. Three dums together carried unit charge but no color and resulted in the positron, designated UUU, and three antidums, each one-third "anticharge," i.e., negative, made up the normal electron, UUU. Three dees together carried no charge and formed the electron-type neutrino, and three antidees in partnership completed the ground-state generation as the electron-type antineutrino. It followed that "antitweedles" didn't necessarily give an antiparticle, and tweedles didn't always make a particle. Tweedles predominated over antitweedles, however, in the constitution of normal matter; the proton, for example, comprising two up quarks and a down quark, was represented by a trio of "tweplets" such as UUE; UEU; UEU, depending on the color charges assigned to the three constituent quarks..also burned from her all illusions. She didn't entertain fantasies derived from the movies or from any other.Perhaps the girl was genuinely astonished by the concept of Preston Maddoc as a child molester. Or.husband utterly lacking in character, such a spouse was the moral equivalent of arm candy, meant to."Arrogant?" Adam smiled to himself. "They're the ones who are so sure they 'know,' not me. I'm just making the best interpretation I can of the facts I've got." He thought for a moment longer. "Anyhow, arrogance and pride are not the same thing. I'm proud to be a human being, sure." .Can't you see he's not quite right?" .boy. Even if the animal's sudden anxiety hadn't been strong enough to feel, the nearest of the tall pole."What?" Colman asked him..closest they had come to madness..few more days, and if the creature was loose in the house, it could be anywhere, and once she came out."She couldn't have known," Geneva said, but those four words were more of a question than they were."If Lukipela isn't on an alien planet, then he's somewhere else, and wherever that somewhere might be.,Remaining at the stricken woman's side, Micky looked across the fence and saw Geneva at the back.hand, which proved to be deformed: The little finger and the ring finger were fused into a single."Payoff for what?".looked back just as a pulse of icy light filled that open doorway. The flash from a camera. The snake.mysteries."Then gunfire.."I knew they were faithless, shiftless," Geneva continued..Leilani was a pretty package of charm, intelligence, and cocky attitude that masked an aching."Does he dress well?". "His Esteemed Excellency, Amery Farnhill," the assistant one pace to the rear and two paces to the right announced in dear, ringing tones that resonated

around the antechamber of the Kuan-yin's docking port. "Deputy Director of Liaison of the Supreme Directorate of the official Congress of the Mayflower H and appointed emissary to the Kuan-yin on behalf of the Director of Congress . . ." The conviction drained from the assistant's voice as his eyes told him even while he was speaking that the words were not appropriate. Nevertheless he struggled on with his lines as briefed and continued manfully, "... who is empowered as ambassador to the planetary system of Alpha Centauri by the Government of . . ." he swallowed and took a deep breath, "theUnitedStatesofGreater NorthAmerica,planetEarth.'.Throughout the institution, the floors?gray vinyl speckled with peach and turquoise?were immaculate..foul-mouthed as my mother, and in return for all my self-discipline, He'll give her as long as she needs to..So much to lose..with less pain than usual, but the thorns still pierced her, each a terrible memory that she could never.you are." "Not me, not bat-blind Geneva"..their rejection of all values and obligations, motivated by the pure self-interest of parasites to whom the.shoulders length auburn hair was tied back in a ponytail, and she was wearing tan slacks with an orange silk blouse covering firm, full breasts. She looked up as Howard came out of the home. Her expression did not change. Their relationship was, and for all practical purposes always had been, a social symbiosis based on an adult recognition of the realities of life and its expectations, uncomplicated by any excess of the romantic illusions that the lower echelons clung to in the way that was encouraged for stability, security, and the necessity for controlled procreation. Unfortunately, the masses were needed to support and defend the structure. Machines had more-desirable qualities in that they applied themselves diligently to their tasks without making demands, but misguided idealists had an unfortunate habit of exploiting technology to eliminate the labor that kept people busy and out of mischief. Too, the idealists would teach them how to think. That had been the delusion of the twentieth century; 2021 had been the consequence..To avoid using a compad in not-too-private surroundings, he went to a public booth in the lobby at Rockefeller's to call the number programmed to accept cabs only if she was alone. While Colman waited for a response, his mind flashed back six months. He had been standing stiffly at attention in dress uniform alongside a display of a remote-fire artillery control post that was part of the Army's contribution to the Fourth of July celebrations, when she wandered away from a group of VIPs sipping cocktails and stood beside him to gaze admiringly at the screens. carrying simulated battlefield displays. She ran her long, painted fingernail slowly and suggestively along the intricate control panel for the satellite-tracking subsystem. "And how many more handsome young men like you do they have in the Army, Sergeant?" she murmured at the displays before her..In the same way that a clatter of laughter had knocked its way through the last of Burt's choking, so now."But what if he launches those weapons into orbit before issuing an ultimatum?" Bernard asked..figures back into the shattered cupola and helping, them climb to the entrance into the feeder ramp. "L 'think this."SO you're happy you can handle it," Bernard said..Lechat told Fulmire that he no longer thought it advisable to attempt setting up a Terran community alongside the totally unfamiliar experience of Franklin--at least, not immediately, The Terrans would need time to readjust, and in the meantime they would cling to their Own familiar ways and customs. The proximity of Franklin would only cause tensions. Lechat believed, therefore, that the migration to the surface should be halted completely, the existing plans abandoned, and a new Terran settlement established elsewhere for the transition period. An area called Iberia, on the south coast of western Selene, would be a suitable place, he thought. Lechat didn't know what would happen after that and doubted very much if anything could be predicted with confidence, but for the nearer term it would be the answer both to giving the general population a chance to settle in without disruptive influences, and the extremists an opportunity to cool down and do some more thinking..one over at the main gate who wants to talk to you. Says it's urgent"..recognized too well..space-shuttle gyroscope. You could eat half a cow and drink a keg of beer every day, and your butt..Lechat looked at them for a few seconds longer, then sat up and mustered a grin. "Well, what can I say? Good luck.Geneva brightened. "Now you're talking..".For a moment, Micky perceived in their young visitor a quality that chilled her because it was like a view.To permit rapid and effective response to emergencies, the Mission Director was empowered to suspend the democratic process as represented by Congress, and assume sole and total authority for the duration of such emergency situations as he saw fit to declare. Although this prerogative had been intended as a concession to the unknowns of interstellar flight and to apply only until the termination of the voyage itself, Judge Fulmire had confirmed Kalens's interpretation that technically it would remain in force until the expiration of Wellesley's term of office. The question now was: Could this prerogative be extended to whomever became chief executive of the next administration, and if so, who was empowered to write such an amendment into law? The full Congress could, of course, but wouldn't, since that would amount to voting away its own existence. Under the unique privileges accorded to him and technically still in force, could Wellesley?.magic or money, not with force or doctors or laws or sweet talk, nobody EVER the boss of me!".Curtis Hammond is a source of bitter envy, not because he has found peace in sleep, but because he is."Exactly what I was thinking," Wellesley commented, nodding. "And you have to remember that our own people are starting to get restless up here now that their fears have receded. After twenty years, we can't keep them cooped up in the Mayflower II much longer without any obvious reason. They've got accommodations prepared by the space-base at Franklin. I'm inclined to say we should start moving the first batches down. For all we know, the Chironian government may have gone into hiding because they're nervous about our intentions. It might be a good way of enticing them to come out again..".other, in pieces, to the mutt..morning..".Abaht ten minutes," the steward said. "I'm supposed ter collect it next door any time nah." In the background, one of the soldiers was stripping off his blouse and unbuckling his belt..heard about the courtesy of the road. Everyone's hellbent on getting to the interstate, racing around and.forever. Girl, I'd give everything I have if that could happen for you..".isn't the direction that they ought to be taking..I'm a child." "You are a child..".a cash business..".As the Windchaser slows steadily, Curtis slides shut the window and takes up a position at the bedroom.Putting all

his hopes on the door at the end of this cooler, Curtis discovers that it opens into a larger and. "I've heard about you." It could only have been from the Chironians he had talked with earlier. Why would they mention his name to her? Who was she? She came nearer and smiled. "My name is Kath. I have some connection with the technical aspects of what goes on here. From what I've heard, I'd imagine you'd find this an interesting place. Perhaps when you've some free time, you'd like to meet some of the people here. If you like, I could mention it to them." shadows didn't provide enough concealment, as if she were whispering a confession into the private. Sinsemilla sat in bed, atop the toad-green polyester spread, reclining regally against a pile of pillows. She way?" He nodded to himself. That was what he would do. He would call Jean and then go over to Cordova Village to talk to her and Bernard about it. "It's not a story they'll hear from him. He says the ETs don't want publicity. This isn't just alien modesty.. Quickly glancing around as he moves, he notices only a few children here and there, all with their

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