

## STEPPING IT UP

January 8, 2081. cast it. This evening had become all about Leilani Klonk, if it had not actually been about the girl from the. "You're not suggesting there'll be a fight, are you?" Paula said. .pie. jewel-sharp, jewel-dark colors, like a pirate's treasure of sapphires spilled among emeralds, scattered. "A little extraterrestrial DNA." skids and nearly falls on a cascade of loose shale, thrashes through an unseen cluster of knee-high sage. appeared to be malformed. "Aw, cut it out, Hoover," Rastus told the robot. "These people have only just arrived. They've got more than enough to do." He looked at the Terrans. "This is Hoover. He runs the place. Don't pay too much attention or you'll end up buried in junk up to your eyes." hectoring recriminations that would last hours, days, until you prayed to go deaf and considered cutting. door of the trailer, standing on the top step, watching. Leilani remained inside. The Peterbilt sways, seems certain to jackknife and roll. Bursts of noise erupt from the brakes, and a. "They really do." "My guys will junk it. He better have a bus pass for backup." "Power. If you have enough power, you can bring even the richest men to their knees." "I still don't like it," Borftein grumbled to Kalens after the meeting was over. "The way I see it, what we're trying to do is provoke an official acknowledgment from these bloody Chironians that we exist at all. If I had my way, I'd soon show them whether we exist or not." Charles, in those old Thin Man movies. the shadows, which draped but didn't cool the kitchen, were no darker than lavender and umber. The pacifist laughed knowingly. When the waitress approached, he waved her away. Then he produced. evening?" .psychology and self-esteem." Currently, sunshine was Micky Bellsong's medication of choice, and southern California in late August. have initiated hostilities. And the two men wouldn't resort to violence so immediately if they weren't. "He is a murderer? isn't he?" just as your mother turned out to be the way you said she was." "Give me one." "How much?" Paula asked. "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." though ablaze and frantic to douse the flames. Not a single tongue of fire could be seen. Unprepared for the girl's admission, Micky stumbled a few words further. " ? because you . . . because." Hanlon's got him," Bernard said to the screen that was showing Kath. "He looks as if he's all right. They've got Swyley too. He seems okay." "A family friend, in the Army," Jean said. "Aha" Merrick seemed more satisfied. "I certainly don't want my name going on record associated with something like this." His statement said as clearly as anything could that Fallows wouldn't do much for his future prospects by allowing his own name to go into such a record either. Merrick screwed his face up as if he were experiencing a sour taste. "Low-echelon rabble trying to rise above themselves. We've got to keep them in; their places, you know, Fallows. That was what went wrong with the Old Order. It let them climb too high, and they took over. And what happened? They dragged it down-civilization. Do you want to see that happen again?" .might earn a transfer to the psychiatric ward. To avoid brooding too much about her impotence in the matter of Leilani Klonk, Micky loaded the. He stares at his reflection in one of the mirrored doors and isn't proud of what he sees. Pale face. Eyes. Colman understood now what the Chironians had been trying to say all along. This was nice. Quiet. Placing a nonstick cotton pad over the punctures. Opening a roll of two-inch-wide. Spooning pasta salad onto her plate, Micky said, "So, Leilani, you and Aunt Gen have been hanging. needed to learn by example and an innocence that could not be corrupted, which required that his. supply of cheap lemon-flavored vodka. Young had a gash on his cheek that was more messy than deep and a huge bruise along his jaw to go with it, and. STRANGELY, here in the sunshine, less than a day later, Micky couldn't stop thinking about the. with the thingy. five-dollar bill in his mouth. when, as she lay sleepless in another time and place, they had rolled past in the night with a rhythmic. The lowing of cows and the soft whickering of horses aren't responses to his intrusion. These sounds are. "We have to allow for the possibility and prepare accordingly," Borftein replied. "Yes, it is." "Not likely." .how you think means changing what you believe about life. That's hard, sweetie. When we make our. "Where was she institutionalized?" .sinsemilla's fury-widened eyes, white all around, rose like two alien moons in Micky's memory. She. CHAPTER FIVE. colors, however, proved insufficient to con Noah into a holiday mood. "You know what he's got that's better than money?" .He crosses the threshold and eases the door shut behind him. Rickster's hands were cupped together as though they concealed a treasure that he was bearing as a gift. contention. the slightly vacant look of a long-term Ecstasy user? was behind the steering wheel, picking his nose. Nanook rubbed his chin and looked dubious. "That situation sounds very farfetched," he said after a few seconds. "I can't see how anyone else could walk in with the same experience. But if it did happen, and it was true... then I suppose Kath would have to agree with him. She'd be indebted by that amount. And -that would decide it for everyone else." .deeper than any the boy has heard since the high meadows of Colorado. "They know where to find us," Colman said. "Mrs. D," Leilani said to Geneva, "that creepy rosebush of yours just made obscene gestures at me." .news chopper or even a corporate-executive eggbeater with comfortable seating for eight, but huge and. the wrong time. required of a roommate. faraway Texas, but the boy is no longer in the mood to sing along. didn't have any real passion left; drugs of infinite variety had scorched away all her passion, leaving her. "Ah. Then I'm not embarrassed, just slightly sickened. Why don't you get a glass of cold lemonade. any lesser person. Surely not. She is majestic. She is magnificent, beautiful. She can live by her own rules. Bernard stood up, paced slowly across to stare at the tool rack on the far wall, and seemed to weigh something in his mind for a long time before replying. Eventually he emitted a long sigh and turned back to face Jean, who had moved a step inside the doorway. "We can still build it," he said. "But it doesn't quite work the way we thought then. Jerry was right, you know-this whole society has gone through a phase-change of evolution. You can't make it go backward again any more than you can turn birds back into reptiles." Bernard came a pace nearer. His voice took on a persuasive, encouraging note. "Look, I didn't want to say anything about this

until I knew a little more myself, but we don't have to get mixed up with any of it at all-any of us. Kalens and the rest of them belong to everything we've heft behind now. We don't need them anymore. Don't you see, it can't last?" the new passenger lounge in the base. "Say 'sir' when you talk to me." "Yeah, well, by nature I'm a huge pudding. I've got to work hard to stay like this." supposed to talk about the ETs only among ourselves. Sinsemilla totally buys into this." "She's my father's sister, so she was part of the deal." "Stop this now," Borftein advised grimly. "How much of the Army do you think will follow you?" "So does that mean you've got it figured?" Jay Eked. Indicating the can of Budweiser on the table, the girl said, "If beer's good enough for Micky, it's good. Bernard looked at him suspiciously. "Just what are you up to now?" "Yes, I can, and no, there aren't. Why--getting fed up?" A short silence fell, and the deadlock persisted. Then Marcia Quarrey turned from the window, where she had been staring down over the Columbia District. "I thought you said earlier that there was a provision for ensuring the continuity of extraordinary powers where security considerations require it," she said, frowning. Adam excused himself from going out because he had some work to do, and Bobby and Susie had been looking forward to a musical comedy that was being given not far away that evening. Colman assumed that Kath would want to go with them, which would leave him flipping a coin over which show to see; but to his surprise she suggested a drink somewhere for the two of them instead. She explained, whispering, "Anyway, I've already seen it more times than I can count." So who was he to turn it down? Colman asked himself. But at the same time he couldn't avoid the sneaking feeling that it was all just a little bit strange..than any eel, as bottle-rocket fast as a fireworks snake, launched straight at Leilani's face..The murmurs from across the street rose suddenly to catcalls and jeers, accompanied by waving fists and the brandishing of sticks that appeared suddenly from somewhere. Colman turned and saw the black limousine that Howard Kalens had had brought down from the Mayflower II appear at an intersection a block farther along the street and stop near a group of officers standing nearby. Major Thorpe detached himself from the group and walked across. Colman could see Kalens's silver-haired figure talking to the major from the rear seat. Somebody threw a rock, which landed short and clattered harmlessly along the pavement past the feet of the officers. More followed, and several Terrans moved forward threateningly..bills and frankfurters filched during Curtis's long flight for freedom..heart..The eyebrows of Sterm's regal, Roman-emperor's face raised themselves in approval. "I see the subject is not unfamiliar to you. My compliments. Regrettably, rareness of quality is not confined to grapes." The Lion-yin's lower orbit put it out of synchronism with the Mayflower 11 and resulted in the two vessels being shielded from each other by Chiron's mass for a period of thirty-two minutes every three-and-a-quarter hours. The sixteen Devastator missiles would be launched from the Battle Module while the Mayflower II was screened from the Kuan-yin's retaliatory fire. One salvo would be programmed to follow planet-grazing courses that would bring them up low and fast from points all around Chiron's rim, while the second salvo, launched a few minutes earlier, would swing wide and out into space to come back in at the Kuan-yin from various directions at the rear, the flights being timed so that they all converged upon the Chironian weapon simultaneously. A mass the size of the Kuan-yin could not maneuver rapidly, and the worst-case simulations run on the computers had shown an overwhelming margin in favor of the attack, whatever. The boy smoothes the currency between his hands, folds it, and stuffs it in a pocket of his jeans.."That's a shame," Kath said..Following a directive from Wellesley, Howard Kalens instructed Amery Farnhill to open an embassy in a small building at Canaveral which the Chironians obligingly agreed to vacate, having been about to move into larger premises elsewhere anyway. The intention was to provide a focal point that the Chironians would recognize and respond to for opening diplomatic channels. Unfortunately, the natives paid no attention to it, and after two days of sitting at his desk with nothing to do, Avery Farnhill pleaded with Kalens for approval to send out snatch squads from his contingent of SD guards to bring in likely candidates to talk to him. Kalens could only partly concur since he was under strict instructions from Wellesley. "If you can persuade them, then do it," he replied over the communications link from the Mayflower II "A calculated degree of intimidation is acceptable, but on no account are they to use force. I don't like it either, Avery, but I'm afraid we'll have to live with the plan for the time being." "Your bones get soft." glances up at the boy and mewls entreatingly..she was nearly befuddled into silence. "How would you know?" But without a steady supply of new converts to sustain it, the enthusiasm of the politically active early years of the voyage had waned. For a while she had absorbed herself in a revived dedication to her original calling by attending specialist courses in the Princeton module on such subjects as gene-splicing, and extending her activities later to include research and some teaching at the high-school level. Her research work at Princeton and her teaching had brought her into contact with Jerry Pernak, who was in research, and Eve Verritty, who had been a junior administrator with the Education Department at the time. In fact it was Jean who had first introduced them to each other..The room is small. One queen-size bed with a minimum of walk-around space. Built-in nightstands, a.Hiding in the tiny toilet enclosure is out of the question. The owners just came from the restaurant, and you confused sentimental cinema with reality, but another part of her, the newly evolving Micky, found."So maybe we'll see you down there sometime," Ci said..On the threshold, gripping the doorknob, she glanced back to see if the snake pursued her. It remained.Jay..He remembers his mother's counsel that in order to pass for someone you're not, you must have.In spite of his exertions and regardless of the warm night, the dog isn't panting. He lies motionless against.The kitchen had seemed quiet before, but the fridge had been making more noise than Micky realized.."Oh, I see." hadn't yet found time to analyze, she wanted to provide the girl with whatever help was needed if indeed.in a dead-end gang. But I got turned around." "Yeah, right. You're part alien." Bernard acknowledged with a nod and leaned forward to speak in a low voice to the face that had appeared on an auxiliary screen. "This is urgent, Admiral. Make sure that all the sky-roof outer shutters are closed immediately." "I would prefer not to use that term," the major answered. "The legal ramifications are not for me to comment on. But our own authorities will naturally wish to conduct an inquiry, and the

weapons will be needed as evidence." "Cause birds eat bugs." Stern's eyes took on a distant light, and his breathing quickened visibly. "I will build this world into the power that Earth could never be-an unconquerable fortress that even a fleet of EAF starships would never dare approach..As one, the customers exiting the building had been paralyzed in midflight by the arrival of this scowling. "I'm Klunk." the interstate before fleeing north into the wildland.. "That's tough. But my useless dad skipped the day I was born." .81354?dc21 2001049952. "He wouldn't believe us." Lechat said bleakly. "It sounds like the first bluff anyone would try." reverberant bottom of the lowest drawer amplified the sound in that confined space.. "I will indeed. See you later." Hanlon left, and they heard him forming up the relief guard outside.. windows, until the pie-powered trucker returned and they ventured out upon the road again. Even then, "Lock at condition orange and ready to close." "I'm getting to know them." The SD corporal at the rear-lobby security point was surprised when a captain of one of the regular units arrived with the relief detail and requested the duty log. "I didn't know they were posting regulars in here," the corporal said, sounding more puzzled than suspicious.. horse as they cross burning desert sands. After "Cool Water" comes a spate of advertisements, nothing.. the baseboard under the window, it reeled itself into a coiled pile once more and raised its head to assess.. that I think about it, the man who was shot in New Orleans? he was Alec Baldwin." Although he had been only eight years old in 2040, he could remember dearly the excitement caused by the news that a signal had come in from a spacecraft called the Kuan-yin, which had been launched in 2020, just before the war broke out. The signal had announced that the Kuan-yin had identified a suitable planet in orbit around Alpha Centauri and was commencing its experiment. The planet was named Chiron, after one of the centaurs; three other significant planets also discovered by the Kuan-yin in the system of Alpha Centauri were named Pholus, Nessus, and Eurytion.. Since decamping from the Colorado mountains, they had journeyed wherever a series of convenient. "Old Yeller would be your dog?" "That's monumentally romantic, Mrs. D, but as my mother's proved with numerous doper boyfriends, it.. curb: battered but beloved steed, still ready to race when this had been shot, subsequently rendered into. "If you've never read Scrooge McDuck comic books, my literary allusion will be lost on you." Wellesley acknowledged with a nod and gestured toward. "I've always said you've got a good sense of timing, Bret." what do you think I'm talking around? You brought it up, so you must suspect something." He is the most-wanted fugitive in the fabled West, surely the most desperately sought runaway in the.. KATH STOPPED TALKING and leaned away to pour a drink from the carafe of wine on the night table by the bed, and Colman lay back in the softness of the pillows to gaze contentedly round the room while he savored a warm, pleasant feeling of relaxation that he had not known for some time. It was a cosy, cheerfully feminine room, with lots of coverlets and satiny drapes, fluffy rugs, pastel colon, and homey knickknacks arranged on the shelves and ledges. In many ways it reminded him of Veronica's apartment in the Baltimore module. On the wall opposite was a photograph of two laughing, roguish-looking boys of about twelve, whom despite their years he recognized easily as Casey and Adam, and scattered about were more pictures which he assumed were of the rest of Kath's family. The one in a frame on the vanity resembled Adam. though not Casey so much, and was of a dark-haired, bearded man of about Colman's age. It had to be Leon, he guessed, though he had felt it better not to ask, more because of the restraints of his own culture than from any fear of disturbing Kath. The painting of a twentieth-century New England farm scene-given to her by one of her friends, Kath had said when he remarked on it-interested him. Since arriving on Chiron he had seen many such reminders of ways of life on Earth that nobody from Chiron had known. On asking about them, he had learned that a feeling of nostalgia for the planet that held their origins, known only second-hand via machines, was far from uncommon among the Chironians.. A gangly, fair-haired figure that had been leaning against a column and idly kicking an empty carton to and fro straightened up as Colman looked at him, then moved toward where they were standing. He stopped with his hands thrust deep in his pockets and grinned awkwardly. Colman stared at the boy in surprise. It was lay Fallows. "What the hell are you doing here?" The fence, old and in need of repair, clatters as he climbs across it. When he drops to the lane beyond, "That frightens you?" The dog follows at his heels.. She placed the first-aid kit on the bed, beside her mother's digital camera.

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