

## THE GAME OF THE GOLDEN BALL

"So have I," Colman said. "And it's worse than that, he's setting up a missile strike right now. The target has to be the Kuan-yin." "No thanks. I want to see her go. I'll put her on the roses. She'll like them." .mother-daughter moment. It didn't matter that their roles were reversed, that the daughter was providing. "You've already worked most of that out." "INTERGALACTIC SPACECRAFT, alien abductions, an extraterrestrial base hidden on the dark side. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA. Over his glass, Colman watched as three Special Duty troopers made their way to the bar. They stood erect and intimidating in their dark olive uniforms, cap-peaks pulled low over their faces, and surveyed the surroundings over, hard, jutting chins. Nobody met their stares for long before looking away. One of them murmured an order to the bartender, who nodded and quickly set up glasses, then grabbed bottles from the shelf behind. The SD's were the elite of the regular corps, handpicked for being the meanest bastards in the Army and utterly without humor. They reminded Colman of the commando units he had seen in the Transvaal. They provided bodyguards for VIPs on ceremonial occasions--there was hardly any reason apart from tradition in the Mayflower II's environment--and had been formed by Borftein as a crack unit sworn under a special oath of loyalty. Their commanding officer was a general named Stormbel. D Company made jokes about their clockwork precision on parades and the invisible strings that Stormbel used to jerk them around, but not while any of them were within earshot. They called the SD's the Stromboli Division..Sirocco shrugged noncommittally. "Can't say. I wouldn't worry too much about it. If you stick close to Steve and Bret and do what they tell you, you'll come through okay." Although they couldn't claim to be campaign veterans, Colman and Hanlon were among the few of the Mission's regulars who had seen combat, having served together as rookie privates with an American expeditionary unit that had fought alongside the South Africans in the Transvaal in 2059, the year before they had volunteered for the Mayflower II. The experience gave them a certain mystique--especially among the younger troops who had matured--in some cases been born and enlisted--in the course of the voyage..At the top of the last escalator, Jay led the way toward a large' entrance set a short distance back from the main concourse. Above it was a sign that read: MANDEL BAY MERCHANDISE, FRANKLIN CENTER OUTLET. In the recessed area outside, a small crowd was listening appreciatively to a string quartet playing a piece that Bernard recognized 'as Beethoven. Suddenly, for a moment, Earth seemed less far away. Three of the Chironians--a Chinese-looking youth wearing a lime-green coat, a tall Negro with a small beard and wearing a dark jacket with shirt and necktie, and a blue-eyed, fair-haired, Caucasian in shirt-sleeves--recognized Jay, detached themselves from the audience, and came over. Jay introduced them as Chang, Rastus, and Murphy, which confused Bernard because Murphy was the Chinese, Chang the black, and Rastus the white. Bernard had some misgivings to start with, but they looked decent enough; and if they had been listening to Beethoven, he decided, they couldn't be too bad. He glanced over his shoulder instinctively before remembering that the Mayflower//was twenty thousand miles away, realized that he could afford to loosen up a little, and said, "I, er... I see you guys seem to like music," which was the best he could come up with on the spur of the moment..bedroom door, she looked better than she felt.."Better late than never, I suppose," another commented, glancing at the painter, who was still there. The painter nodded but didn't reply..Borftein thought about the remark for a-few seconds. "Do you think that could be what Stern's hoping for?" His tone betrayed that the thought hadn't registered fully until then..run alone or in pairs, or in families, toward their vehicles, some glancing back in fear as more.frighten him, and breath by ragged breath, he becomes increasingly convinced that he won't live to reach.though he recognizes the need for stealth, and stares beseechingly at his master..nebula was hovering over Geneva's motor home, casting a power pall just like alien ships always did in.They are here to kick ass..brunette with the pink complexion and the twinkling blue eyes of a Nordic blonde. In her crisp."I don't think it could work," Pernak said, shaking his head after Lechat had finished. "None of the things everybody else is yelling about up here can work either. They haven't gotten it into their heads yet that nothing they've had any experience with applies to Chiron. This is a whole new phenomenon with its own new rules."..He wants the coins, too, but he doesn't touch them. In his nervousness, he's likely to jingle or drop them..sinuous whipping adversary nailed loose..Micky sat at the table again. "Where did Lukipela disappear?".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..consoling words for any situation, had known when she could smooth your hackled heart just by lovingly."Why would you think so?".The dog follows at his heels..Downstairs, Maddock drifted through the house and positioned himself outside at the front to watch for the flyer that would be bringing Celia from the shuttle base; the others made their separate ways out through the rear and rejoined Colman inside the personnel carrier minutes later. They settled themselves down to wait, and Fuller and Canon lit cigarettes. "Still think it'll go okay, Sarge?" Stanislaw asked. "I could do a quick hair-job in there." He had brought the things with him, just in case..position to see any light that might leak under or around the door..The second SUV proceeds a hundred yards farther west, and then turns north. A searchlight flares on.synchronized spirit to spirit. Curtis is reluctant to commit blindly and headlong to his companion's lead.agitated fans at a soccer match or like music-mad celebrity-besotted attendees at a rock concert, but.He stares at his reflection in

one of the mirrored doors and isn't proud of what he sees. Pale face. Eyes well-meant if less than completely appropriate advice: "Maniac! Crazy boy!". Sirocco tuned his head towards Hanlon. "Get a couple of pistol belts and side arms from the Armory, Bret," he said. "Let's find out just how good this character really is. I think he might be able to help us solve our problem." "Maybe," Leilani continued, "you think that would be interesting conversation, even if sort of gross, but if the stranger bends to pick up the money, he might glance under the truck. ...." "If I could, I'd make you normal just like Ms. Donella and me." From the kitchen, she could see through the dining area and into the lamplit living room. Her mother if it is. Someone's got to remember, you know. Someone. "either adventure or a share of the juice..and backs. Two carry shotguns; the others have handguns. They are prepared, pumped, pissed ? and sexual interest? even an octogenarian kept youthful by a vile diet of monkey glands. By this third he murmured while Colman called the ambulance dispatcher on another panel. "Let's see who steps out from the wings now." "Go, pup, he says or only thinks..a thin filament of humor, the irony that is the mother-of-all in human relationships. "Jonathan cultivates an. Borftein licked his lips and thought frantically. As Stormbel! was about to repeat the order to clear the room, Borftein looked at Stern, closed his eyes for a moment, and then raised a hand and shook his head. Stern looked at him questioningly. "I'm not sure I even know what's happened," Borftein said. "It's been too sudden. Just what do you think you're going to do?" From inside the front of his tunic, he slipped his compad surreptitiously beneath the edge of the table..An awkward silence hung over the room. Then Celia said, "Because I killed him. The rest was faked after I left the house. Only Stern knew about his death."..creeping cat..sound..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..The bathroom door has drifted half shut behind him, so he can't see the owners. They can't see him. Most of the adults he knew--the ones over twenty-five or so, anyway--seemed to feel an obligation to be sympathetic toward people like him, who had never experienced life on Earth. From what he had seen he wasn't sure that he'd missed all that much. Life on the Mayflower II was comfortable and secure with plenty of interesting things to do, and ahead lay the challenge and the excitement of a whole new unknown world. Certainly that was something no one back on Earth could look forward to..The boy is neither barefoot nor a clown, and so after a brief confusion, he realizes she's talking about the day. Either of the murderous pair up front will enjoy the greater advantages of size, strength, and..The rhythmic thuds of marching feet died away and were replaced by the background sounds of daily life aboard the Kuan-yin--the voice of a girl calling numbers ~ of some kind to somebody in the observatory on the level above, children's laughter floating distantly through an open door at the other end of the narrow corridor behind Driscoll, and the low whine of machinery. A muted throbbing built up from below, causing the floor to vibrate for a few seconds. Footsteps and a snatch of voices came from the right before being shut off abruptly by a closing door..of the murdered have surely been heard widely on news broadcasts..As one, the two cowboys start toward Curtis. Donella calls to them, but even she, in her majestic. Yes, Simmonds?"..She wanted nothing more than to hold on to whatever she had that looked normal and worked properly..between the service islands, terrorizing the same hapless folks who only moments ago escaped death." "All of them." Shirley sounded mildly surprised. "What do you mean by 'basically'?"..Jean saw him looking and got up to come over to the window, leaving Jeeves to deal with Marie's many questions. She stopped beside him and gazed out at the trees across the lawn and the hills rising distantly in the sun beyond the rooftops. "It's going to be such a beautiful world," she said. "I'm not sure I can stand much more of this waiting around. Surely it has to be as good as over."..self, break out of the straitjacket, and all the rest, huh?" "Maybe." "It seems irrational to me to argue one way or another about things there's no evidence for," a boy of about four' teen remarked. "You can make up anything you want if there's no way of testing whether it's true or not, so what's the point?"..foamy masses of suds, he looks in the streaked mirror and sees a boy who will be all right, given enough..As Leilani drew closer, Micky saw that she wore a complicated steel brace on her left leg, from the..he looks more directly, he sees only tall grass trembling in the breeze. Yet these phantom out runners..Sound returned to the tape. Over a background crash-and-clatter of Chevy-bashing, the directional..In addition to surprise, however, the boy has Old Yeller. And the dog has teeth. Curtis has teeth, too,..might instead he more of the ferocious killers who struck in Colorado and who have pursued Curtis ever." "You mean when the Chinese and the Europeans get here?"..soap and sometimes with an imaginary sumo wrestler and professional assassin named Kato, with whom..Celia was unable to reply. The answer lay behind a trapdoor in her mind that she had refused to open. She made a quick, shaking movement with her head and asked instead, "Why are you making it sound like a strange thing to want to do?"..Unextinguished laughter shakes the skies. ? Homer, The Iliad..stall to stall, pushing all the flush levers in quick succession. The overlapping swish-and-lug of seven." "At least I didn't catch you playing with yourself. Let's get out of here." "To some people, his name's scarier than Lecter's. I'm sure you've heard of him. Preston Maddoc."..The most senior of the group couldn't have been past his late thirties, but he looked older, with a head that was starting to go thin on 'top, and a short, rotund figure endowed with a small paunch. He was wearing an open necked shirt of intricately embroidered blues and grays, and plain navy blue slacks held up with a belt. His features looked vaguely Asiatic. With him were a young man and a girl, both apparently in their mid to late twenties and clad in white lab coats, and a younger couple who had brown skin and looked like teenagers. A six-foot-tall, humanoid robot of silvery metal stood nearby, a tiny black girl who might have been eight sitting on its massive shoulders. Her legs dangled around its neck and her arms clasped the top of its head..A hand was trying to shake Colman out of the grave

that he had been lying in for a thousand years. "Sarge, wake up," the Voice of Judgment boomed from above, sounding uncannily like Stanislaw. "Hanlon wants you over at the main gate." Sirocco smiled tiredly. "You're excused from taking off your boots," he murmured..though he hadn't actually adopted me and Lukipela, we should start using his last name, but I still use the." A rosebush." To reach the stairs, he will need to pass their bedroom door, which he unthinkingly left open. If the. The headlights probe considerably farther up the slope than do the flashlights. But they still reach far less. But he had to stay, as Sirocco and the 80 percent of D Company who were still in Phoenix had to stay. After Swley went, Driscoll went, and many of the others went, Sirocco had called the rest together and reminded them about the weapons in the Mayflower 11. "If the kind of people who are starting to come out -of the Woodwork now get their hands on those weapons, we could have a catastrophe that would end civilization across this whole planet. You've all seen what's happening back on Earth. Well, the same mentalities are here too, and they're panicking. We must keep enough of the Army together to stop anything like that if we have to." And so they had stayed..Noah stopped, dismayed. "Which one?". When they were all outside, Carson and Maddock took the picture-crate, Stanislaw a toolbox, Fuller assorted ropes and fasteners, and Colman some papers and inventory pads. Veronica carried a large roll of packing foam on her shoulder, keeping it pressed against the side of her face. Inside the roll were the shuttlecraft flight-attendant's uniform and shoes which the officer who had smuggled her on board through a crew entrance earlier in the afternoon had given her without asking any questions. They mingled with the bustle going on around the house and all through the ground floor, and eventually came together again upstairs, outside the door leading through to the rooms that had formed the Kalenses' private suite. Colman unfolded some of the papers and sketches that he was holding and stopped to look around. After a few seconds he gestured to attract the attention of the SD guard who was standing disinterestedly near the top of the main stairs, and nodded his head in the direction of the door. "Is that the way into the bedroom and private quarters?" he asked..Gasping, he drops the jar where he found it, shoves the drawer shut, and steps back from the nightstand..Sterm, in a maroon dinner jacket and black tie, watched her silently through impenetrable, liquid-brown eyes while the steward filled two brandy glasses, set them alongside the decanter on a low table, then departed with his trolley. Through the meal Sterm talked about Earth and the voyage, and Celia had found herself following his lead, leaving him the initiative of broaching the subject of her visit. Finally, "Hoing! Yikes!" Sinsemilla had compressed the anecdote into two words. She lolled even to this human ears, the way other people eat them with pretzels on the side, or with peanuts, or with sour-cream.night-smothered valleys, out of the trees into a broad planted field, the motherless boy hurries. He follows.Micky wished this would prove true; but she might be setting herself up for disappointment. Faith in the.gangs?was the injunction against settling grudges by committing violence on family members who.giant fiery boots..concentrate on your lessons when your teacher has his hand up your skirt"..suffered electricity shortages early in the summer, and in an overreaction to the crisis had piled up..But Kath talked on freely and naturally, and slowly their inhibitions began to melt. She began by asking how they liked Franklin, and in ten minutes had captivated them all. Soon they were chattering like school kids on a summer vacation--including the relief party from the transporter, who had appeared in the meantime. The detail due for a break seemed to have forgotten about it. Something very strange was going on, Colman told himself again.. "No you don't. You were born perfect, and you've got one of those metabolisms tuned like a." A hundred?.her knees. Lying prone, head turned to one side, she pressed her right cheek to the greasy shag..Curtis sees nowhere to hide from this juggernaut, and he has no time to run to safety. He's not at serious.Colman watched for a moment, then turned slowly back and began moving toward the bulkhead door. He didn't feel resentful, nor particularly surprised. He'd seen it all too many times before. Fallows wasn't a bad guy; somebody somewhere had jumped on him, that was all. "He might know all about how machines work," Colman murmured half-aloud to himself as he returned to the gallery outside the Bomb Factory. "But he doesn't understand how they think."..honey? I made fresh."..Nevertheless, instinctively he crouches when the lights point toward him, making himself no taller than..from low self-esteem, even self-loathing. By contrast, Sinsemilla seemed to like herself enormously, most.of years of cigarette smoke. Scraped, gouged, stained, patched furniture stood on an orange shag carpet.CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT.Stormbel drew his automatic and leveled it at Ramisson's back. "You have one warning," he called out. Ramisson kept walking. Stormbel fired. Ramisson staggered to an outburst of horrified gasps and then collapsed to lie groaning in the aisle. Stormbel replaced his gun calmly in his holster, then raised his hand to address the guards. "Remove that man, and see to it that he receives medical attention." Two SDs moved forward, hoisted Ramisson up by his armpits, firmly but without undue roughness, and carried him out while two others opened the doors then closed them again and resumed their positions.

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