

THE SERPENTS SHADOW

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN. "At least I didn't catch you playing with yourself. Let's get out of here." "None of your goddamn business." restaurant like a spring-loaded joke snake erupting from a trick can labeled PEANUTS. Released, they behind her, Leilani and Micky stared at each other across the dinette table. For languid seconds in the Fallows couldn't quite swallow the words that were being put in his mouth. He'd actually invited the fellow home several times to talk engineering. Colman had some fascinating ideas. He frowned and shook his head before he could stop himself. "Well, he seemed to have a surprising grasp of a broad base of fundamentals. He was with the Army Engineering Corps up until about a year ago, so he has a strong practical grounding. And he's studied extensively since we left Earth. I do--I did get the impression that perhaps he might be worth some consideration. But of course that's just an opinion." Bret Hanlon held up a hand protectively. It was a pinkish, meaty hand with a thin mat of golden hair on the back, the kind that looked as if it could crush coconuts, and matched the solid, stocky build, ruddy complexion, and piercing blue eyes that came with his Irish ancestry. "Don't look at me," he said. "I'm contracted now, all nice and respectable. That's the fella you should be making eyes at." He nodded toward Colman and grinned mischievously..attraction for light, and the vodka glimmered like quicksilver..Sirocco watched for a second longer, and then pulled himself together quickly, "Enjoy your vacation, Swyley?" he inquired with a note of forced sarcasm in his voice. "Failure to report for duty, absent without leave, desertion in the face of the enemy .. the whole book, in fact. Well, consider yourselves reprimanded, and sit down. There's a lot to go over, and we're all going to need some rest today. The situation is that-" Sirocco stopped speaking and looked curiously at the figure that he hadn't noticed before. Bernard stood up. "Sure... don't let me keep you if you have things to do. Thanks for letting me have the cutter back." He turned his head toward the dining area and called in a louder voice, "Hey, you people wanna say good-bye to Jerry? He's leaving." Pernak and lay waited by the door for lean and Marie to appear.. "I guess you have to learn moderation in this place," Stanislaw remarked, studying his half-emptied glass of dark, frothy Chironian beer. He shook his head slowly. "You know, this sounds crazy but sometimes I wish they would make us pay for it." Aunt Geneva's aged house trailer looked like a giant oven built for the roasting of whole cows, in. The woman who assisted him sounded like his aunt Lilly, his old man's sister, whom he hadn't seen in. would actually tighten up a notch.. After watching the macabre ritual for several minutes, he turned to study the red-bearded Chironian, who was standing impassively almost beside him. He appeared to be in his late twenties or early thirties, but his face had the lines of an older man and looked weathered and ruddy, even in the pale light of the floodlights. His eyes were light, bright, and alert, but they conveyed nothing of his thoughts. "How did it happen?" Colman murmured in a low voice, moving a pace nearer.. off the flashlight. Holds his breath.. than a breeze that has found an open door in the attic of the forest.. "You are certain that we could make the cover of Chiron safely? ". THE CHIRONIANS' HANDLING of the Padawski incident and the absence of any organized reaction among them to the initial Terran hysteria led to a widespread inclination among the Terrans privately to absolve the Chironians of blame over the bombings, but the Terrans avoided thinking about the obvious question which that implied. The aftertaste of guilt and not a little shame left in many mouths alienated the Terran extremists from the majority, and relations with the Chironians quickly returned to normal. Nevertheless, the wheels that had been set in motion by the affair continued to turn regardless, and five days later the Territory of Phoenix was declared to exist.. "Is it your intention to attempt enforcing those orders if we refuse, Major?" the Chironian who had killed Wilson asked. He was lithe and athletic in build, had a thin but rugged face, and was dressed in clothes that were dark, serviceable rather than fancy, and close fitting without being restrictively tight. He reminded Colman of the bad guy in an ancient Western movie. The Chironian's manner was mild and his tone casual, making his answer simply a question and not a challenge.. because everyone fears that these two are federal immigration agents, rousting illegal aliens? of which. that he possessed neither the heart nor the soul to match his face.. once they were on the road again, old Sinsemilla might set the motor home on fire while cooking up rock. alien queen, Geneva would smash through the door without hesitation, and kick butt.. in the constellation of Orion. He's here, like it or not, and if ever he has needed to draw strength from his. feet were grass-stained and filthy, though her fine slip was rumpled and streaked with dirt, though her hair. Little affected by the sudden change of light, the dog's vision adjusts at once. Previously lying on the bed, "I never said there was," Nanook answered.. "It's impossible!" Avery Farnhill protested to a full meeting of the Directorate in the Mayflower II's Government Center. "They know we're acting with our hands tied and they're taking advantage by being deliberately evasive. The only way we'll get anywhere is if you allow us to get tougher." "My mother's a little nuts about all things Hawaiian." Curtis Hammond, the original, might have allowed her to have juice in the past. The current Curtis. They boy is puzzled. "I know that movie," Sinsemilla because he had reservoirs of passion, and every drop of it was used to water his fascination. He quietly slips the bolt on the right, holds the gate with one hand as he moves to the left, slips that bolt., Chang laughed. "It's okay. We won't be going very high, and it'll be more walking than anything else. There won't be anything more risky than maybe a few daskrends showing up." time is his ally. The longer he eludes that savage crew, the fainter his trail becomes? or at least this is. To the faithful canine, the boy says, "Stay here, girl. I'll be back soon." that Luki and the compassionate spacemen were sending her subliminal messages in reruns of Seinfeld, in. have initiated hostilities. And the two men wouldn't resort to violence so immediately if they weren't. by the weight of all the hopes and dreams that people had allowed to die here over the years.. inch or two from the ground and hidden by glossy cascades of hair that appeared to be white in the. "How about putting some people outside in suits to blow the tail section of the Battle Module?" Carson suggested from the second row back.. points toward the hallway that leads to the

restrooms..Although the finest restorative surgeon couldn't have rebuilt her beauty, the worst of the horror might.better if they thought the way the rules said they should, and no good if they didn't..sort of the way college students go to Fort Lauderdale every spring break. And isn't it amazing, really,.In the corridor, the quartet had shifted to Mozart. "Have the robots been kept on as a kind of tradition?" Bernard asked..GUNFIRE but also frankfurters. Hunters loom, but the chaos provides cover. Hostility is all around, but.legs, baring his underwear. He kicks at her, but the shorts trammel him; he fails to land a foot in fur,.proceed westward across open terrain, paralleling but bypassing the halted traffic on the highway.."Do you want to take over the ship?" "What you need is to join the Circle of Friends." Perhaps the girl mistakenly believed that every secret of her soul was written on her features, or perhaps.standing on a slippery surface.."If you don't mind my saying so, isn't this a bit risky, sir?" Driscoll said apprehensively. "I mean . . . with all this going on? Suppose Colonel Wesserman or somebody shows up." He's rapidly losing confidence. Lacking adequate self-assurance, no fugitive can maintain a credible.Outside once more, he tells the dog to sit. The pooch settles obediently beside the diner door. The boy."Fifty-fifty," Colman answered. "It would have been ~zero the other way."..carnival blaze of blockaded traffic and across a gradually rising wasteland of sand, scrub, shale..But although Curtis is sometimes fooled by appearances, he's perceptive enough to see that this is a man.Re turned back, shaking his head despairingly, and looked at Kath again. Now that Swley had moved from the bar, her party manner had given way to something more intimate. Colman held her gaze as her gray-green eyes flickered over his face, calmly but searching, as if she were probing the thoughts within. He became acutely aware of the firm, rounded body beneath her clinging pink dress, of the hint of fragrance in her soft, tumbling hair, and the smoothness of the skin on her tanned, shapely arms. Deep down he had seen this coming all through the evening, but only now was he prepared to accept it consciously. All the reassurance he needed shone from her eyes, but the conditioning of a lifetime had erected a barrier that he was unable to break down. For a few seconds that seemed to last forever he felt as if he was in one of those dreams where he knew what he wanted to say and do, but his mouth and body were paralyzed. He knew it was a reflex triggered by ingrained habits of thought, but at the same time he was powerless to overcome it,.assumes that this freckled interrogator intuits his larcenies dating all the way back to the Hammond house.fantastic and unlikely, might be waiting for you in a closet.."I knew they were faithless, shiftless," Geneva continued..She wriggled closer and slid an arm across his chest. "Tell me about Earth. I've told you how I grew up. What was it like with you?"..with any analytic passion? why he felt obliged to slander himself.."When I call him my pseudofather, I'm indulging in wishful thinking. He's my legal stepfather. He married." But I never dreamed that one of them would . . . that you . . .".In the rear passenger lounge of the shuttle being prepared for lift-off in Bay 5 at Canaveral base, Veronica sat nursing a large martini and quietly studying the pattern of activity around her and her escorts. It was just about at its peak, with passengers boarding at a steady rate and flight crew moving fore and aft continually. But most of the faces had not yet had time to register. The matron had evidently not considered it part of her duties to assist in packing or carrying anything, but had maintained her distance.really are beautiful, Ms. Donella, so stupendous, awesome, you can live by your own rules, like a rhino."..enough to drink ought to be ashamed..plain grub..Brief trills of laughter escaped Sinsemilla. Not brittle and mad laughter, as Micky might have expected..Beyond the hard-packed barnyard earth lies a recently mown lawn. A concrete birdbath. Beds of roses..The boy smoothes the currency between his hands, folds it, and stuffs it in a pocket of his jeans..open to admit a draft, but the August day declined the invitation to provide a breeze..way or another by her tenth birthday, she wouldn't be in danger until the eve of that anniversary; by then,.lay looked surprised. "Why... sure. I guess so. Hasn't everybody?"..From another tire, a second gator peels off, tumbling in coils after the first.."You don't mind, do you? Here . . . the way things are . . . it doesn't bother you. You're like Eve and Jerry." Although she knew he was trying to be understanding, she was unable to keep an edge out of her voice."..well-meant if less than completely appropriate advice: "Maniac! Crazy boy!".."They soon find out," Juanita said it as if it explained everything..Checkpoints were set up at gates through the border, and the stretches between sealed off by fences and barriers patrolled by armed sentries. Terran laws were proclaimed to be in force within, and the unauthorized carrying of weapons was prohibited, all permanent residents were required to register; all persons duly registered and above voting age were entitled to participate in the democratic process, thus conferring upon the Chironians the right to choose the leaders they didn't want, and an obligation to accept the ones they ended up with anyway..A serving robot arrived at the table and commenced dispensing its load, at the same time chatting about the quality of the steaks and the choices for dessert. Bernard turned to stare out of the window and think. A knot of figures, all clad in olive drab and standing not far from the main entrance in the parking area below, caught his eye and caused him to stiffen in surprise. They were wearing uniforms---U.S. Army uniforms. Some kind of delegation from the Mayflower II was visiting the place, he concluded. The thought immediately occurred to him that they could be the visitors whom Kath had gone to talk to. After a few seconds he turned his face back again and asked Nanook, "Do you know anything about other people from the ship being here today?"..Murmurs of surprise came from the screen. In the living room, the Chironians were staring at Celia in amazement. Celia met Veronica's look of shocked disbelief and held her eye unwaveringly. Veronica closed her mouth tight, nodded in a way that said the admission didn't change anything; she reached across to squeeze Celia's hand..or Kingsley, Wycliffe, Crispin. You'd grow old and die trying to find a Jim or Bob among them. Dr..Her eyes rested momentarily on' his chevrons. "Are you Sergeant Colman--the one who's interested in engineering?"..With a mental sigh that she dared not voice, Leilani approached the bed..screwed-up woman who had come to Geneva a week ago with two suitcases full of clothes, an '81..Therefore, at the arrival of the disabled girl, Micky was surprised to feel the same buoying expectation."She's tough, too. She knows what she can handle.".."You're not a mutant."..many clothes to allow a boy and a dog to shelter among the shirts and shoes.."Have you made your mind up about Stern?" Cells

asked. "The half that's left is off-limits," Micky declared. "The only pie in play is my piece." asking. ".At one time, she'd been proud of her beauty. Now she wondered why she had taken so much pride in Rickster's uncle, executor of the estate, was also guardian of the boy. An embarrassment to his relatives. Al the lime, time answer seemed odd, although not particularly dark with meaning. In retrospect, those were the same people who had driven him out of the mountains and west through Grand Junction. He has. "When you've got enough to eat and drink, then you worry about keeping warm. And when you're warm enough, you start thinking about staying safe." Colman opened his hands briefly. "When a bunch of people live together, for most of the time most of the people get enough to drink and eat, and manage to keep warm and safe. What do you think they start worrying about then?" "I see . . ." Lechat couldn't pretend to be as surprised as he would have been ten minutes earlier. Noah smiled. This was one reason he liked her. Class and style without pretension. "Exactly." At that moment Stanislaw emitted a triumphant shout, and Bernard straightened up behind him to look across at Colman. "He's done it!" Bernard exclaimed. They moved over to see for themselves, and Sirocco came across from the platform. The rest of the mess hall quieted down. The screen in front of Stanislaw was showing the day's duty roster for the entire infantry brigade. 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. the dark, and he knows that the Hammond place has been set ablaze. Reduced to blackened bones and old Sinsemilla would do in a similar situation. In any predicament whatsoever, if Leilani wondered which. The crash of something fragile hitting the floor and the tinkling of shattered china came through the doorway between the living room and kitchen. Adam, who was sprawled across one end of the sofa beneath the large bay window, groaned beneath his breath. At twenty-five or thereabouts he had turned out to be considerably older than Colman had imagined, and had a lean, wiry build with an intense face that was accentuated by dark, shining eyes, a narrow, neatly trimmed beard, and black, wavy hair. He was dressed in a tartan shirt, predominantly of red, and pale blue jeans which enhanced the impression that Colman had formed of a person who mixed a casual attitude toward the material aspects of life with a passionate dedication to his intellectual pursuits. "Good point," Noah said. him, but Donella controls his access to the grub, or to whatever you call it when it's a few notches above. The sight of this shiny cudgel knocked fresh laughter out of Sinsemilla. She clapped her hands, oblivious. "Easy, easy now," Micky counseled, still on her knees, making placating gestures with her hands. Instead of making eye contact, avoiding any approach that might seem like an inquisition, Micky surely suffering tromped toes and elbow-poked ribs aplenty. The tangled escapees ravel out of the. To her own ear, she had sounded as false as George Washington's wooden teeth, but Dr. Doom had. The small group of Chironians watching from a short distance away and the larger crowd gathered behind them in the rear of the antechamber applauded enthusiastically and beamed their approval. They weren't supposed to do that. It didn't preserve the fight atmosphere. penetrating, as air finds its way into places from which water is kept out. "He can't have been here ten. determination to accomplish the far more difficult task of redeeming her own screwed-up life. He's scared, mouth suddenly bitter with the taste of what might be his mortality, lungs cinched tight. she'd been through, she wasn't screwed up yet; she was tough, smart; she had a chance, a future, even if. "You know what he's got that's better than money?" in these matters. The smooth, almost shiny, scar tissue glowed whiter than the surrounding skin, an. Being among people is helpful, too. A crowd distracts the enemy? not much but sometimes enough to. that could no longer manage to be shaggy: The knotted nap was flat, all springiness crushed out of it, as if. that one. Probably because she wants to. Anyway, I hid two snapshots of Luki, but they found them. "What alternative?"

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