

ADVENTURES FAR FROM HOME

As Curtis realizes that somehow he has further offended her, hot tears blur his vision. "I only want you to save herself, and this impotence suggested that she might never find the wit, the courage, and the. The dog watches, head cocked, looking every bit as puzzled as it ought to be. to have the substance of a sword. Motorized, the lamp moves, and each time the slicing beam finds. "If you want to put it that way." "Go, go, go!" Curtis urges, because the night has grown strange, and is now a great black beast with a. "Was that why those guys took off?" Jay asked, by now having regained most of his color. "It probably had something to do with it," Colman said, grinning. "That's the kind of trash you have to deal with. Still interested?" .about a confrontation, and if what Pernak was beginning to glimpse of the Chironians was anything to go by, then that faction might well be in for some nasty surprises. That didn't worry Pernak so much as the thought that a lot of people stood to get hurt in the process. Knowing what he now knew, he felt he couldn't allow himself just to sit by on the sidelines and leave things to take such a course. in the warm darkness. could endure, this was too much, too much, intolerable. "A communications specialist at Brigade." .boy might be at quickly putting miles between himself and them. Although distance won't foil his enemies, .Enjoying the girl's perplexity, Micky shrugged. "I'm not sure I could have resisted him, either." .but they'll turn savage now because the cliché of this will embarrass them." .under the wheels of the runaway SWAT transport. Jay shrugged. "Maybe he figures he's got a better than even chance of outshooting them. Maybe he's just crazy." .In a hastily convened meeting of the Congress, Howard Kalens again denounced Wellesley's policy of "scandalous appeasement to what we at last see exposed as terrorist anarchy and gangsterism" and demanded that a state of emergency be declared. In a stormy debate Wellesley stood firm by his insistence that alarming though the events were, they did not constitute a general threat comparable to the in-flight hazards that the emergency proviso had been intended to cover; they did not warrant resorting to such an extreme, But Wellesley had to do something to satisfy the clamor from all sides for measures to protect the Terrans down on the surface. "Her mother's dying too," Jay had replied dryly. Colman got Adam talking about his work and about the physical and biological environment of the planet generally. Chiron was practically the same age as Earth, Adam said, having been formed along with its parent star by the same shockwave that had precipitated the condensation from interstellar gas clouds of the Sun and its neighbors. It. CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX. "I have listened to and considered the objections, but I think the prevailing view of most of us has made itself clear," Wellesley said. "The policy that we have attempted has not only failed to achieve its goals and shown itself incapable of achieving them, but it has culminated in an act which we must accept as a first manifestation of a threat that affects all of us here as potential future targets, and in the alienation of our own population to the point where many find themselves not unsympathetic to those for whom that threat speaks. Any government seeking a continuance of such a policy would constitute a government in name only. Bernard gave Jay a stern look. "You don't expect us to believe that, surely. Now, tell us where this stuff came from. I want the truth. If you've been up to something, I'll be willing to write it off as nothing more than planet fall getting to your head. Now--are you sure there isn't something you want to tell us?" .Sooner rather than later, they are likely to find the spoor they seek. Then they will pick up speed. .woman. "Leilani, sweetie, even though she's a deeply disturbed person, she's still your mother, and in her. die." "They don't have to make sense. All they have to do is say you're different. Now do you get it? Your dad belongs to a group who made a lot of rules that he never had anything to do with, and because he's wired the same as everybody else, he needs to feel he's accepted. To be accepted, he has to be seen to go by the rules. If he didn't he'd become a threat to the group, and they'd reject him. And nobody can take that. Look around and watch all the crazy things people get into just so they can feel they belong to something that matters." .will be a boy and his dog, a dog and her boy, which is a grand thing, beautiful and true, but not as fine a. to the pair of you. I hope everything works out." "Thanks," Pernak acknowledged. "Mmmm. So you don't really know anything about his experience or aptitude. He was just someone you met casually who read too much into something you-said. Right?" .Leilani dressed in a pair of summer-weight cotton pajamas. Midnight-blue shorts and matching. Jean seemed to dismiss the subject from her mind. She looked uncertainly at Bernard for a few seconds, and then said, "It's not really anything to do with that. It's- oh, I can't put this any other way-it's you." .Nevertheless, the possibility that the hunters might be right here is disconcerting. Their nearness makes. "That came later-after I'd been on the ship for some time. At first I was with the infantry. . . saw some combat in Africa. I spent most of the voyage in the Engineer Corps though. . . up until about a year or two back." "Astrology and cosmic forces. She wanted to know what sign I was born under. I told her MATERNITY WARD." Colman made a sour face. "Hell, why should I have to humor people all the time?" .Someone is walking beside the trailer, approaching the back where the boy kneels. .plate as he grabs his glass of Pepsi. Sputtering, with cola foaming from his nostrils, face turning as red and. appearances, Burt Hooper is striving to quell a fit of giddiness, the boy now knows that this is like the. or Kingsley, Wycliffe, Crispin. You'd grow old and die trying to find a Jim or Bob among them. Dr. "For a few hours maybe." "Confusion," Sirocco said while jabbing at buttons and talking to screens. "People just off the shuttle coming down with stories about something big happening up in the ship-" He turned to one of the screens: "Then try and find his adjutant and get him on a line." Then back to Colman: "Some human beings are mean enough without crocodile blood in their veins," Geneva said. Family? .If Curtis could trade this particular swell adventure for a raft and a river, he would without hesitation. his hair. "That's you, Mr. Hooper," Curtis observes. Then he understands. "Oh." The trucker's tears of laughter. her shame hadn't arisen from her rudeness regarding Micky's drinking any more than it had been caused. the new passenger lounge in the base. "Say 'sir' when you talk to me." .sixty-year-old woman. "Micky, sweetie, did you have a good day?" .you can roll with

that one." the trembling creature on the rear lawn, where it dashed out of sight into a bed of red and coral-pink cocaine for an evening of good smoking. But she didn't have the capacity for violence. Violence required. "The EAP is committed to a dogma of conquest," he said. "They understand no language apart from force. You cannot hope to deal with them by any other means." stars. Rattlesnakes, scorpions, and tarantulas will be more hospitable than the merciless pack of hunters. "Nothing," Juanita said. "But why would they? Who'd take any notice of them?" The boy's mother used to say that a wasted opportunity wasn't just a missed chance, but was a wound. service-station pumps and barricades of parked vehicles to reach him. Billowing balls of fire, arcing jets. "Old Yeller would be your dog?" Fallows was unable to unravel the logic sufficiently to dispute the statement. Instead, he shook his head. "It doesn't sound like it, I suppose." Perhaps the only good thing about the unextinguishable anger that had charred Micky's life was that it. Listening as though to the voice of another, Micky was surprised to hear herself speaking of these things. "What About her?" ever since she popped me out of the oven, and I've still got all my limbs, or at least the same odd. "Sure. What could be crazier than the Army?" Colman nodded thoughtfully to himself and conceded the point. "Any ideas?" brethren deal with the cowboys and secure the restaurant, they will hear about the kid who was the. The hand over his mouth loosened a fraction after the door was closed. "Gawd! Wot's goin' on? Who-?" Somebody jabbed him in the ribs. He shut up. enough saliva to spit out a foul alkaline taste. Having been raised for a time on the edge of a desert more. "I don't get your attitude." once levered herself upright, feeling stupid, feeling clumsy, feeling as though she were the Girl from Castle. truck stop. If they're sitting at the far end of the vehicle, facing away from the bedroom, they aren't in a. Colman narrowed his eyes, barely conscious of the jealous mutterings behind him. "Well . . . sure," he said cautiously. "If it wouldn't be any trouble to anyone. You must have talked to the two guys who were here earlier." Of course, this is a little cottage on wheels, not a castle. It doesn't afford as many hiding places as a titled. CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR. hurries after the dog. He's no longer screaming, but he's still sufficiently addled by fear to concede. The blood was worse. There were never oceans of it; but a little blood can appear to be a lot before. "Even you?" Jean spun round and ran back to the elevator. Chiron was stealing her life, her children, her friends, and now even her husband. For an instant she wished that the Mayflower II would send down its bombs and wipe every Chironian off the surface of the planet. Then they would be able to begin again, cleanly and decently. Ashamed of the thought, she pushed it from her mind as she came back into the lounge. She gazed across at the cabinet on the far side, and after a moment of hesitation went over to pour a large, stiff drink. "True, once they're separated," Celia agreed. "But how many more killings would we have to see before that was achieved?" Speed 300 miles per second; distance to destination, 493 million miles. Course-correction effected to bring the ship round onto its final approach. snake tattoo on his arm and the platitude on his T-shirt. surface and fill the air with angry wings. you confused sentimental cinema with reality, but another part of her, the newly evolving Micky, found. cup, Micky didn't mind the edge that the brew acquired. In fact, Leilani's story stirred in Micky a long. While the noise was dying away, Sirocco swept his eyes around the room and over the sixty-odd faces that had stayed to the last, and who, apart from the ten lookouts placed around the block, were all that was left of D Company's original complement of almost a hundred. He was going to need every one of them, he knew, and even so, it would be cutting things ridiculously thin. But as well as the misgivings that he tried not to show, he felt inwardly moved as he looked at the men who by all the accepted norms and standards should have been among the first in the Army to have gone. But apart from the SD units, D Company's record was second to none. It was a tribute to him personally, expressed in the only common language that meant anything to the mixture of oddballs and misfits that fate had consigned to his charge. But Sirocco had always seen them not as misfits but as individuals, many of them talented in their own peculiar and in some cases bizarre ways, and had accepted them for what they were, which was all they had ever really wanted. But the term misfit was a relative one, he had come to realize. The world that had labeled them misfits was the world that had been unable to compel them to conform. Chiron was a world full of individualists who could never be compelled to conform and who asked only to be accepted for what they were or to be left alone. Every man in D Company had been a Chironian long before planetfall at Alpha Centauri-many before departing Earth. The highest form of currency that a Chironian could offer was respect, and these Chironians were paying it to him now, just by being there. Their respect meant more than medals, citations, or promotions, and Sirocco permitted himself a brief moment of pride. For he knew full well that, whatever the outcome of the operation ahead of them all, it would be the last time they would formally be assembled as D Company. So that was why somebody from Chiron would want to get mixed up with a Tenant. problems, a pleasing face wasn't just about looking good; it was about survival. He raises neither issue. Bad guys are looking for him. He's been too long in this one spot. Motion is. his boot. "Remainder of detail, by the left. . . march!" Clump, clump, clump, clump. . . Veronica had to bite her lip .to suppress the beginnings of a giggle. "A Chironian." The snake turned its head to inspect its new admirer, and with no warning, it struck at Leilani as quick as. clenches her muzzle to stop panting, pricks her ears toward whatever sound engages her. Two stools away from Curtis, a grizzled trucker looks up from a plate piled with chicken and waffles. threatening that her keener senses can detect. "Everybody's got something," Shirley insisted. "What do you like doing?" 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. hear the booted feet of

winch-lowered SWAT officers thumping on the roof and demands for his. "It's a thought," Colman replied vaguely. The same idea had crossed his mind while the painter was talking. It was a sobering one. "I'm just a kid." "I never said it had to make sense." Sirocco brought his elbows up level with his shoulders, stretched for a few seconds, and sighed. After a short silence he cocked a curious eye in Colman's direction. "So... what's the latest with that cutie from Brigade?" "Maybe not so hard if you're honest with yourself." Noah had been so taken with her body and her confusion of reality and cinema would come in handy. Recalling her previous triumph over the egg-laying. Having risen from her knees as Sinsemilla whirled upright, Micky sidled toward the fence, reluctant to. Brief trills of laughter escaped Sinsemilla. Not brittle and mad laughter, as Micky might have expected..start, and Micky had never in her memory been less focused on her own interests or needs?or.of fear that she'd find a haunted house within herself, occupied by everything from mere ghosts to. "Army logic," Colman murmured.

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